

C1:1/2
Title: French Fries
By: Kyongfa Che
From: a food court in Brisbane Central Station

She was casting glimpses at me from a distance. In a food court in Brisbane Central Station. I was having cheap Chinese food; she was sitting at an empty table. She looked around 15 years old. Small. Grimy hair. Shabby clothes. Her dark eyes were somewhat empty, while busily observing people around. “Street kid”, I thought, and paid attention to my bag. What she was after, however, wasn’t bags. She stood up, walked over to the table where people left trays, and ate leftovers. As quietly and quickly as possible, in vain; the emptiness of the space was making her act salient and she was self-conscious. From the way she glimpsed at me, she probably knew that I was watching her.

I looked at my tray. Grease of meat was swimming in the pool of gravy. Imagining her tackling them disgusted me. I didn’t want her to do it to me, in a way. So I stood up to bring my tray to the garbage bin, as quickly as I could, in vain. “Excuse me,” caught my back. “Can I have it?” On the verge of ditching the food, I found no good reason to say no, and barely managed to add a small warning that there was only oily bit left. “It’s OK, it is good to me,” she said in a flat tone, taking the tray and walking over to the nearest table. I saw her seated with her back to me and started eating. I turned my eyes away from her, took a deep breath in stinking air, and headed off to the platform. I didn’t want to pity her or feel disgusted. But I did. I knew the feelings would not go away soon and I didn’t want to carry them with me. I was lost for a while, in the quiet station, and decided to walk back to the food court.

She was still there, aiming at the next tray. I went straight to her and said, trying nonchalantly, “Hey, let me buy you something to eat.” She raised her eyes and looked at me, baffled, so I gave her some lame reasons for my offer. After a moment, she stood up and looked at the self-service restaurants lined up in front of us. But the decision was made quick. Pointing at MacDonald’s, “French fries.” “OK, but that’s it?” “Yeah, I like French fries.” “Anything else? Hamburger or something?” “No.”

I went to the counter and bought a big French fries and orange juice. She was waiting and looking at me from way behind with a small, stiff smile. I gave the bag to her and asked if she wanted any sauce. “No. But thank you. You are nice. What’s your name?” “Kyongfa.” “What?” “K-y-o-n-g-f-a. And your...” “Wow, that’s difficult. How long are you going to stay here?” “Well, actually I’m about to leave... And where’s y...” “So where are you going?” “...Sydney.” “Oh, that’s nice. I’ve been to Sydney once. With my boyfriend. He’s a very nice guy. You know what, he proposed to me last week and of course I said yes, so we are getting married

C1:2/2
Title: French Fries
By: Kyongfa Che
From: a food court in Brisbane Central Station

soon! We are going for honeymoon but we haven't decided where to go. He's sweet. He's going to take care of me, you know..." She went on talking about her boyfriend and their future, to which I could only add silly ahuh-s and that's nice-s, taken aback by her sudden eloquence. It was the kind of eloquence that made me anxious. The more I hear, the deeper I got lost. Lost into somewhere dreamy and sorrow.

I pointed at the big clock and told her I had to run to catch my train. She stopped, as if she'd suddenly forgot what she was talking. With some hesitancy, she gave me her hand and said, "Thanks again." We took off into opposite directions. As I hurried to the platform, I wondered where she was heading. The moment I got onto the train, I realized I didn't even know her name.

+

+