

After lunch one day, Mr. Ramsey introduced me to George, a new student from China.

"Since you are so smart, Emmie, I am going to let you help George. You can tell him what he needs to know. Plus, he lives very close to you."

George sat next to me and I pointed to the pages in his book. I showed him the right book to use and even turned the page since he didn't know the numbers in English. I walked him home after school.

"What's your last name, George?"

He looked at me with those big black eyes.

"George, what is your last name?"

He still stared at me, so I took a piece of paper and wrote my name "Emmie O'Brien."

"Look! Emmie is my first name and O'Brien is my last name. Now what is yours?"

I pointed to myself and then pointed to the name on the paper. I did this back and forth a few times. Then George's eyes opened up even bigger and he seemed to understand me. We had our history books with us and he turned to the page where there was a story of the first president of the United States.

"You're George Washington? But you're from China! Oh well, I guess you can be named George Washington if you want to."

George's grandmother was waiting on the front steps for him. She was tiny and wore sandals even though it was the first of October. I thought I could fit into her shirt, but her short black pants looked funny. She bowed her waist to me and said something in Chinese.

"Yo yo yo yo yo"

I think she said to come and get George in the morning, but I wasn't sure.

"Bye George! Bye Grandma!"

Janey was with us and I led her home.

One Sunday, I saw George and his grandma walking down Alabama Street carrying a metal bucket and a cloth bag. They stopped in front of my house and waved to me on the front steps. George's grandma said something to me in Chinese.

"What did she say George?"

He stuttered. "You go. We go to water."

George couldn't speak English very well but he was learning a few words. When he pointed to the bucket, I understood. They wanted to do something by the water-maybe collect rocks or leaves. Mommy said that I could go with them to Fall Creek. It was the only water anywhere near our neighborhood. We walked all the way to Fall Creek Boulevard near Central and Meridian. We climbed down the banks to the water. The sun was shining, and it was warm for October. Grandma sat the bucket down and spread out her sweater for a tablecloth. We ate eggrolls with pieces of fish and mushrooms. George poured me a cup of warm tea from a glass jar. It was green tea, a little bitter but sweet at the same time. Together, we watched the water flowing in front of us. Squirrels gathered acorns from the ground around us and ran back up the trees. A family of crows nested under the bridge, the father crow trying to catch some of the carp that swam in the creek. A turtle slowly crossed a log from one side of the bank to the other. Downstream, two old fishermen cast their poles out into the water. Two blue herons sat on a stump and looked all around.

Grandma fell asleep with her arm across her eyes. She had rolled up her sweater into a pillow and turned over on her side. Then George and I began to hunt for money. We found two dimes and a gold bracelet. I put the bracelet on my arm. George picked up a black rock that was shaped like an egg. It was smooth and shiny. We searched the creek banks, but we couldn't find

any more like it. When Grandma woke up, she joined us in the water. She took off her sandals so she could stand up in the water and rolled her pants above her knees. She laughed and looked very young then. We did what she did. When Grandma reached down and scooped up a little crawdad with her hands, we scooped one up also. The three of us piled them in the bucket until it was full. They kept trying to crawl out of our fingers, but we dumped them fast into the bucket. Grandma poured water on top of them with her tea jar. Then she placed her sweater on top.

We walked all the way home with that heavy bucket, stopping to rest now and then. George invited me in to their house when we got to the door. They had birds in cages in all the rooms-blue birds, yellow birds, white birds and a singing green bird with feathers sticking straight up out of his head. One of the birds got loose and flew over to me. It flew around my head and landed on my shoulder. He was talking and poking at my head with his beak. George took the bird, and put it in his hands. I had never seen anyone own birds as pets. And the birds understood Chinese.

Grandma told us to come into the kitchen. She washed the crawdads and dumped them all into a big kettle of boiling water. I watched as she opened all her little jars of spices and added a pinch of each to the pot. With a long handled spoon, she stirred the crawdads. Steam was getting thick in the room. She chopped something green and added it into the kettle. When she dropped turnips into the liquid, I turned to George.

“What is it?”

“Soup. Eat Soup.”

I was scared then. Not of George or Grandma, I was scared of the crawdads. I knew how crunchy they sounded when they landed in the bucket, and how their pincers caught hold of your skin. My mother never cooked soup with crawdads. I began to look at the door. Then George's parents walked in. I had never met them. George's father spoke English very well.

“We have a guest in our home. Please join us for a meal.”

George's mother bowed to me just like Grandma. All four of them smiled at me, so I said okay. They gave me some vegetables and sauce, cold like a salad. The noodles were delicious. But when Grandma placed the bowl of soup in front of me, I was glad it only had one crawdad. I ate the turnip first, and then the green leaves. I sipped most of the broth. That crawdad kept looking up at me with his tiny eyes. That's when George's father smiled at me.

“Dear guest, you appear to be finished.”

Then he spoke Chinese very fast to Grandma. She removed my bowl with the crawdad away from me. I sat there while they all crunched their crawdads and sipped broth from the bowl. Everyone turned their bowls up and drank it without their spoons. George's father even asked for another bowl of soup with extra crawdads. I was happy when Grandma served dessert--dried fruit in a bowl. I picked mine up like the rest of the family did with their hands. The pineapple was my favorite.

It was almost dark, and Mommy would be worried about me. She asked me what I ate at George's house.

“Crawdad soup and turnips.”

“Oh, Emmie. You're always meeting the strangest people!”

Mommy hugged me and said she missed me all day long. She was drinking coffee and writing letters to all her relatives in Tennessee. I would buy her some stamps after school the next day and go mail them for her.

“George's grandma taught me how to catch crawdads.”

I knew I would never cook them in soup. I went to sleep seeing those eyes staring up at me, their little black bodies floating around in the kettle.