

Carpe Diem

By Mia Corazon Aureus

‘Have to stop here. Can’t go any more, lah,’ the Chinese cab driver told Julie, as he pulled over in front of the orange blocks barricading Keong Saik Road in Singapore’s busy Chinatown. *So this is where the madness begins*, Julie thought, as she watched people slip through the gap between the barriers and join the crowd amassing at the centre of the street. Red paper lanterns hung outside the shop houses and lit up the night. Busy stalls lured throngs of people with savoury delicacies like curry puffs and grilled chicken wings. The sight reminded Julie of the ants that crawled over the cookie crumbs she failed to wipe off her desk at home. It was a Saturday and Julie wished she was sitting in her room instead, working on her lesson plans while listening to a Mozart playlist. But Ben, her friend and former colleague from Cat’s Schoolhouse in Novena, was in town and wanted to catch up. He had gone back to London two years ago when his father was diagnosed with stage-three prostate cancer.

‘Four dollars, eighty cents,’ the driver said. ‘Where you from?’

‘Manila.’

‘Wah. You This is not the complete story. To read further, please either
Julie shook her head. register as a new reader or login now if already registered

‘But Filipinos are slow, what?’

Julie sighed and handed the driver a five-dollar bill. ‘Thanks, uncle. Keep the change.’ She should have just walked from the MRT station and saved her cash. But a five-minute walk for her could take half an hour, even with Google Maps. A good sense of direction never ran in her family.

Stifling humid air embraced Julie as she stepped out of the taxi and wound her way around the plastic pedestrian barriers. The mixed smell of spices and grilled mutton and pork overwhelmed her. Ben had texted her that morning to meet him at eight thirty. She checked her watch. Right on the dot.

‘I’m here. Where are you?’ Julie asked on WhatsApp.

‘Jiak Chuan Road. Just walk straight.’

‘Ok.’

Julie tied her hair in a high pony tail and looked at the sea of people stretched out before her. Ben sure had a knack for picking the most awkward places. She would have declined coming, especially since it was Valentine’s Day, but she missed her friend. Of