

## Cookie tale

This short anecdote appeared somewhere on the Internet a long time back. A good tale is easily remembered, but the details may change once we start telling it to others. Throughout the history of folklore, we often have different versions of the story of a certain hero.

So, here's my excuse for re-telling this wonderful story – I've forgotten the exact words, but I know the feeling that the story gives me – so this is what I hope to invoke in you. Of course, with profound apologies to the original author or teller of the story of the "pack of cookies." Let's imagine that we (you) are the protagonist of the story.

One beautiful morning, in the Singapore Botanic Gardens, I was sitting on a bench overlooking a beautiful lake with a couple of swans and ducks in them. I had brought a pack of chocolate milk cookies in my shoulder pouch to munch as I watch the swans gracefully and effortlessly glided over the water followed by the ducks paddling in a row. My eyes were already on the ducks as soon as I sat down on the concrete steps of the lake.

It was a public holiday, so the garden was streaming with more people than usual. In fact, almost as soon as I sat down, there was another big gruff man sitting right near me. I kept on watching the majestic parade of swans and ducks, even carps and terrapins, and they were swimming towards me. Then, I remember my cookies, which were right beside me.

So I took a cookie and ate it. Then, to my horror, I noticed the gruff man beside me nonchalantly taking a cookie, too, and calmly eating it without saying a word! He was a very big man, so I thought just to let things be.

When the swans came near, he took another cookie from my pack ... and gave it to the swans. The cookie broke into pieces and fell in the water. Then, the ducks, too, swam in like synchronized dancers and dove at the floating pieces of cookies.

Then, I took another cookie, and he took another one, too, without as much as looking at me, or even thanking me. "Oh, it's just cookies," I told myself, "Let him have what he wants. He probably couldn't afford to buy his own, anyway."

Now, I was down to my last cookie. With a flow of Buddhist generosity from my heart, I broke the last cookie in half, and left him have the other half. After taking it, he finally turned and glanced at me with a slight nod of his head. "Okay," I thought, "He must be dumb or deaf! Poor man."

Before I knew it, he was already up and had walked away. The cookie wrapper was also gone. Well, at least, he was courteous enough to clear the refuse himself. After spending enough time at the lake, I decided to move on to another favourite spot in the Gardens.

I decided to look at the holy fig tree (which is the same species as the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha sat). As I stood and gazed at the tree, I reached into my shoulder pouch for my bottle of water, and felt a slight crackling of plastic wrapper. It was my unopened pack of cookies!

If my pack of chocolate milk cookies was still with me, then whose cookies did I eat at the lake a while ago? Goosebumps reared up on my arms and my face felt warm. I had eaten the gruff man's cookies, and he did not even mind. And I thought they were my cookies, and that man was rude and rough!

Happy lunar new year, may goodness surprise us throughout the year.

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