

I was still half asleep when I felt a tug at my arm. Mama was trying to pull down the short sleeves of a wool sweater she had slipped on me underneath my cotton dress. I rubbed my eyes and looked around. The bright kitchen light gave the room a warm glow. My sisters and brothers were all moving about getting ready for school. Mama handed me a glass of milk to drink while she packed our white bread mayonnaise sandwiches.

As Mama helped us with our coats, she handed each of us a small red packet reciting the words, "Lei-see Ai Keat." \* I carefully unfolded my packet to find a shiny new dime. I asked, "What am I supposed to do with this dime Mama?" She replied, "Just bring it to school for Lei-see Ai Keat." I wasn't sure what that meant, but I folded the dime back up in the red paper and held it tightly in my fist.

We went out the kitchen door and hurried along the sidewalks covered with pepper tree leaves and the little pink peppers. When we got to the corner, the crossing guard lady was waiting for us. She had soft white hair, wore a red jacket and a white cap with a black shiny visor. "You're late again," she said good-naturedly. "Since you're the last ones, I'd better take you in my car." We all piled into her old green jalopy that lurched everytime she changed gears.

When I walked into the classroom, Miss Stevenson, my second grade teacher, was standing by her desk. She had a full face with soft features and thick pepper gray hair. When she saw me she said, "There's my cute China doll! And what a lovely dress! I can't believe your mother made this one. Let me check the button holes."

As she was examining my dress, I remembered my dime. I showed Miss Stevenson the dime. I told her I was supposed to bring it to school. Miss Stevenson wasn't sure what it was for either, but said she would keep it in her desk for me until the end of class.

When I came home with my dime, I realized what it was for. Mama had put up oranges and tangerines all over the house -- on the fireplace mantle, on top of the T.V., on the bookshelves, and on all the tables. I could see Mama in the

kitchen kneading the dough for the tay-doys. There was a freshly baked chicken complete with its head on the table.

It was Chinese New Year and my dime was lucky money!

I rushed into the kitchen to help Mama make the tay-doys. Her hands were magical in shaping the little balls with their small tapered points. My sister and I squished, flattened, rolled, and shaped the dough into miniature animals. We stuffed the dumplings with a peanut butter paste and sprinkled sesame seeds over them. We couldn't wait to see how they would turn out. When mama dropped them into the sizzling oil, her tay-doys ballooned into perfect tangerine size balls. To our disappointment, our cute little animals grew into bloated, shapeless blobs. But whether they were blobs, or balls they all had that delicious crunchy chewy taste.

That night I put my lucky money away. I would think about how to spend it tomorrow.

\* "Lei-see Ai Keat" means Good Luck Abound, or literally, Good Luck Big Tangerine.