

THE CORNER STORE

By

Ellie

The store on the corner of Roy Street and Carter Avenue has been known forever as Martin's Confectionary. It is likely that sometime in the past it was owned by the Martin family but that is not a part of my memory. For as long as I have lived in this neighbourhood it has been operated by an Asian family who emigrated here in the hope of a better life for their children. You see it in the determination in their face this desire for an education for their children, higher than what they have. They speak of their children with great pride and so they should. I see the son outside the store, sweeping or picking up garbage or inside the store, working between classes at the local university. He is always polite and friendly. He has been well taught by his parents. Or he may have inherited this demeanour from his parents for they are both exactly like him: extremely helpful. His English is impeccable. The younger daughter also speaks excellent English. Their parents' English is much better than my Vietnamese, but just good enough to have scratched out a living. They have managed to continue operating the store despite two robberies and the arrival of a franchise rival just down the street.

It is the cordiality that brings me here on this dreadfully stormy morning when it would have been shorter to walk to the franchise. I am here to purchase an emergency supply of a female hygiene product.

I am at a lost to explain why I have been caught unprepared: I am as regular as the monthly phone bill. Also, people tell me I am the most organized person they have ever met. At work I ensure the office runs unhindered by shortages of stationery products or coffee supplies. And at home I keep the household well stocked with all matter of condiments and pharmaceutical products. And yet, this

morning, when I went to get a tampon out of the box in the bathroom cabinet, my hand reached into an empty box. There must be an explanation for this oversight, but I cannot afford the professional help which could help me dig down into my psyche to find out what that might be. It may be that I want to forget that I am a woman for one or two months. Nature refuses to grant me my wish.

Another thing about me that needs to be known is that once I buy a product I like, I stick to it. There is no trying this or that new product even if I am given a free sample. Therefore, I am here this morning at this corner store to purchase my brand and no other.

I do not see it on offer. There are other brands on the shelf but not mine. I am completely baffled because I am convinced that my brand is one of the best, the most popular and perhaps the oldest brand. It is my honest belief that they have the product but they have it somewhere else, perhaps in the back in inventory, and they have not yet stocked the shelf with the product.

I go to the front counter where today the father is at the helm.

“May I help you?” he asks in his eager voice, smiling broadly.

“Do you have any Tampax?” I ask.

“Tampax?” he repeats. I can see he is mulling the word over, scanning the limited English dictionary in his brain.

I am not inclined to explain this word or to try to mime it like I would if it were another type of product. If I were here to purchase salt, for instance, I would communicate with him by acting out sprinkling motions. There is no way to create a picture in the air between us for what I am here to buy. So, I repeat the word.

“Tampax.”

And he repeats it also. "Tampax?"

Now I am regretting not grabbing one of the other brands to get me through until I could get to the drug store where there is a full row of feminine products. But I can see in his face that he cannot bear to watch me leave an unsatisfied customer. So, I repeat the word one more time in the hopes that he will point to the row where the feminine products are located and I will choose another product.

To my utter relief his face brightens with comprehension.

"Yes," he says "Tampax." He points a finger in the air in a hallelujah of sudden comprehension, and off he goes in his joyful pursuit through the store. He returns and plops down a tiny plastic box in front of me.

"Thumb Tacks," he says. He is so pleased with himself that I cannot bear to disappoint him.

"Thank you so much," I say as if he has found exactly what I wanted.

And he smiles a self-satisfied smile because he is so proud that he has managed to serve me well.

-The End -