

Food

By

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Logline: An anthology short film that follows a biracial Chinese/caucasian girl as she struggles to fit in until ultimately accepting herself.

INT. CAFETERIA - LUNCH

JENNIFER (7) walks in with her friends carrying her lunch bag. Her friends are all clearly white, Jennifer is mixed. They all sit at a table together

Her friends pull out sandwiches, pizza, soup, etc. Jennifer pulls out Har Gaw (shrimp dumpling).

MACKENZIE

Ew what's that?

Everyone stops and turns to look at Jennifer and her lunch.

JENNIFER

Um. It's Har Gaw?

MACKENZIE

Ew. It looks so weird.

ALL EXCEPT JENNIFER

EWWWW.

JENNIFER

(quietly)

It-it's just a dumpling.

MACKENZIE

It's gross. I can't believe you eat that.

The table laughs at Jennifer and her meal. She frowns and puts her meal away. She sips on her juice box.

INT. FOYER - AFTERNOON

Jennifer storms into her house and throws her lunch bag on the kitchen counter.

SUSAN (45) walks into the kitchen. She is clearly Chinese, but has no accent.

SUSAN

How was school?

JENNIFER

Fine.

SUSAN
Just fine?

JENNIFER
Yeah.

SUSAN
Sounds fun.

JENNIFER
Not really.

SUSAN
Did you want to come with me to pickup
the Chinese food for dinner?

JENNIFER
Can we have Pizza instead?

SUSAN
Pizza? Really?

JENNIFER
Yeah. I don't feel like Chinese.

SUSAN
Okay. If that's what you want.

Susan grabs Jennifer's lunchbox and takes the thermos out.
She opens it so she can clean it.

SUSAN
How come you didn't eat your lunch?

JENNIFER
I wasn't hungry.

INT. COMPUTER LAB - DAY

30 or so kids sit at their own computers. A survey is up on
everyone's screen.

TEACHER
The school board has asked us to
complete a survey on internet use.
Please answer the questions honestly.

The noise of students clicking away at their answers begins
to fill the air.

Jennifer sits at her computer screen. Not clicking. On her

screen the question, What is your ethnic background? Select the best option. Her mouse hovers over between the caucasian and Chinese option. She finally selects Chinese and moves on.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

JENNIFER (16) rounds the corner with her friends all the same age. Lockers line the hallways. They stop at their lockers, all 5 in a row.

MACKENZIE

Are you coming to the movies tonight?

JENNIFER

No. I got a family thing. It's Chinese New Year.

MACKENZIE

OMG it's Chinese New Year?

JENNIFER

Yeah this weekend.

MACKENZIE

I'm going to ask my dad to make fried rice. OOhh I'm so excited!

JENNIFER

For fried rice?

MACKENZIE

Yeah it's so good.

JENNIFER

It's literally a leftovers dish.

MACKENZIE

Okay but like my dad makes it so good. He adds so many things!

JENNIFER

It's a boring dish.

MACKENZIE

No. Trust my dad makes it so tasty!

Jennifer opens her locker and grabs her laptop charger. MACKENZIE (16) grabs something out of her locker as well.

JENNIFER

Yeah. I'm sure it's amazing. What

would I know? Ready?

MACKENZIE

Yeah.

The two walk off to their next class together.

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

30 kids sit at desks with their laptops or at computers. A website is written on the blackboard.

TEACHER

Okay class. The whole school has been asked to do the drug and alcohol usage survey. Answer honestly, they will throw away the fake answers.

Jennifer types the website into her laptop and begins the quiz. She stops at the ethnic background select which best applies question. Her options are as follows Caucasian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Chinese/East Asian, other. She selects the other category.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The passenger door opens and JENNIFER (20) gets into the car. The car has an uber sticker and the driver's phone is up on the stand.

UBER DRIVER

Fun plans?

JENNIFER

Family dinner.

UBER DRIVER

Nice nice.

JENNIFER

Yup.

UBER DRIVER

Can I ask you a question?

JENNIFER

Uh. Sure.

UBER DRIVER

What are you?

JENNIFER

Uhhhh. A student?

UBER DRIVER

No no. Like what's your background?
You look Spanish or maybe native.

JENNIFER

Oh. I'm mixed.

UBER DRIVER

Oh nice. Mix of what?

JENNIFER

Chinese and white.

UBER DRIVER

That's a good mix.

JENNIFER

Thanks?

They sit in silence for a while until they start to approach a Chinese restaurant. Summit Gardens in English with Chinese writing below it on the sign.

JENNIFER

It's just that one there.

Jennifer gets out of the car somewhat slamming the door behind her.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Jennifer walks into the restaurant. It is a typical traditional Chinese restaurant, with fish and lobster tanks off to the side. A raised platform at the back with larger tables, a red backdrop, and Chinese Characters in gold. Her eyes scan for her family. She spots the blonde hair of a man sitting at a table with 9 others that have black hair or black with some red dye. She walks towards the table.

JENNIFER

Hey guys!

AUNT SOPHIE

Just in time!

Jennifer sits down next to her dad. Their blonde and medium brown hair stands out amongst the black.

A waitress brings over another place setting. She places the plate, bowl, asian spoon, teacup, and a fork. Then walks away quickly.

A waiter brings over plates of noodles, roast chicken, lobster cooked in ginger and garlic. Jennifer tries to get his attention.

JENNIFER

Uh. Excuse me.

He walks away without looking at her.

SUSAN

What's wrong?

JENNIFER

They gave me a fork.

SUSAN

Oh that's not a big deal.

JENNIFER

Yeah, but I'd prefer to use chopsticks.

AUNT SOPHIE

What's wrong?

JENNIFER

Nothing. They just gave me a fork.

The table laughs together, excluding Jennifer and her dad.

SUSAN

They must have thought you were white.

AUNT SOPHIE

Can't blame them. We'll get you some chopsticks.

Susan makes eye contact with the waiter and motions him over. He comes immediately. She asks the waiter in Cantonese for chopsticks. He walks away and comes back right away with chopsticks.

JENNIFER

Thank you.

As the dinner carries on, Jennifer exclusively uses her chopsticks to eat. She struggles to pick up a slippery piece

of broccoli.

AUNT SOPHIE

Why don't you use your fork?

JENNIFER

No I got it.

Jennifer struggles a little longer until finally picking up the piece of broccoli. She eats the piece with a smile on her face.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Jennifer and her parents walk into the foyer through their front door.

JENNIFER

I can't believe they gave me a fork!

SUSAN

They couldn't tell.

JENNIFER

It's just insulting! I'm clearly not white.

SUSAN

They probably just couldn't see you were Chinese.

JENNIFER

I'm clearly mixed though. Sitting with you guys it should be obvious I'm Chinese.

SUSAN

It's okay Jen.

JENNIFER

No it's not okay. It's like I don't fit in anywhere!

SUSAN

You're the best of both worlds.

JENNIFER

Yeah. Sure.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - LATE NIGHT

Jennifer exits a cab and stands to look for her friends. She sees them in line and walks over.

MACKENZIE

Wow you just made it

JENNIFER

Yeah sorry. I had a family dinner. It's Chinese New Year.

The guy in line behind them, ERIC (20), looks toward Jennifer when she mentions it. He looks mixed race as well.

ERIC

Are you mixed?

JENNIFER

Yeah! Are you mixed too?

ERIC

Yeah! Chinese and White.

JENNIFER

Yeah me too!

ERIC

I'm Eric by the way

JENNIFER

Jennifer.

Eric and Jennifer stand next to each other to continue the conversation.

JENNIFER

So... Did you celebrate Chinese New Years tonight too?

ERIC

Yeah. Had the whole 8 course dinner with the fam.

JENNIFER

Same. The waitress thought I was white though.

ERIC

Did she ignore you when you tried to call her over?

JENNIFER

No- Not this time at least. She brought me a fork to eat with.

ERIC

(laughing)

Oh no! I hate when that happens.

JENNIFER

I know! It's like, excuse me? I'm clearly Chinese!

ERIC

Yeah exactly! I didn't get made fun of in elementary school just to get mistaken for white.

JENNIFER

Exactly!

ERIC

Do all of your friends claim to love sushi and all other asian food now?

JENNIFER

Yeah! They act as if it's this crazy exotic thing when it's the plainest thing.

ERIC

Or even worse they say they love Chinese food and then claim chicken balls are their favourite!

MACKENZIE

Hey!

JENNIFER

Kenz. Remember when you were excited for fried rice?

MACKENZIE

(Quietly)

But fried rice is good.

JENNIFER

Not as good as sticky rice.

ERIC

Oh I love sticky rice!

JENNIFER

Me too! I love Dim Sum!

The line continues to move forward. Eric and Jennifer walk inside together.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

The doorbell rings. GUNG GUNG walks into the house and down to the kitchen.

JENNIFER

Hi Gung Gung!

GUNG GUNG

(Thick Chinese accent)

Hello. Hello.

SUSAN

Hi Dad!

Susan begins to talk to Gung Gung, in a dialect of cantonese. Jennifer sits at the end of the island. Not understanding what is being said.

SUSAN

You ready to make dumplings?

JENNIFER

Yup!

SUSAN

Okay dad. What do we need to do?

Susan and Jennifer watch as Gung Gung gets to work on preparing the ingredients. He cuts up the Chinese sausage, removing the casing and mincing it. He rehydrates the dried shrimp and then minces it. He boils the pork. Once it is cooked he takes it and minces the pork. He finely chops green onions. In small portions he pours some of each into the wok with some oil. He adds soy sauce, oyster sauce, and a white powder, probably salt. He puts the now ready filling into a bowl and makes another batch.

Jennifer watches his motions carefully. They work in silence.

The filling is now done and Gung Gung brings the bowl to the table. He boils some water and adds rice flour and corn starch to a large bowl. He slowly adds the boiling water using a wooden spoon at first to mix, and then his hands.

GUNG GUNG
 (Thick Chinese accent)
 Too hot. I'll do this part.

JENNIFER
 Are you sure Gung Gung? I can do it!

GUNG GUNG
 (Thick Chinese accent)
 Yeah. You'd hurt your hands.

The mixture slowly begins to turn into a white dough. Once it no longer sticks to the bowl he takes a small portion out and shows Jennifer.

GUNG GUNG
 (Thick Chinese accent)
 Only use this much.

He rolls it into a small ball and then uses the press to press it into a thin circle. He then spoons in some filling and pinches the dumpling closed. He places it into the steamer basket.

Jennifer repeats this along with her mother Susan, filling steamer basket after steamer basket. Some look like perfect replica's of Gung Gung's others need some work. While she is filling up the last of the baskets her father comes and takes a picture.

They steam the dumplings. As they open to reveal the first batch, some have split open at the top.

GUNG GUNG
 (Thick Chinese accent)
 Wha?

JENNIFER
 Sorry Gung Gung. I guess I need more practice.

Gung Gung grabs the broken dumpling and stuffs it into his mouth.

GUNG GUNG
 (With food in mouth and a thick Chinese accent)
 Still tasty. Still tasty.

Jennifer smiles.

GUNG GUNG
 (Thick Chinese accent)
 Good job. You did a good job.

Jennifer grabs a plate of dumplings herself. Mixed between the perfect and broken dumplings. She eats the entire plate.

SUSAN
 Jen?

JENNIFER
 Yeah?

SUSAN
 Did you apply for that summer job yet?

JENNIFER
 Oh yeah. I need to submit the application.

Jennifer walks towards her backpack and grabs her laptop. She pulls up the application. Her mother is packing up the dumplings to freeze while her father starts dinner. A pot roast.

Jennifer goes through the application questions and sees a question about race. Her options are, Caucasian, Latino/Spanish, Chinese/East Asian, African American, Mixed Race, or Prefer Not to Answer. She selects the Mixed Race option and hits submit.

Revision Notes:

The largest piece of revision was adding an additional scene to my short film. The main critique that I heard was that Jennifer's acceptance of her mixed-race heritage felt too rushed, which as a result made it unclear. I chose to add a scene where Jennifer meets another mixed-race person and their bond over their shared experiences. I worried this might feel too coincidental, but as a similar experience has happened I ultimately decided to add it to help develop her acceptance further. Another comment was that the food Jennifer is made fun of in elementary school didn't feel like it would garner the teasing as originally it was only fried rice. Because rice does appear in other cultures diets it seems odd that she would be made fun of for such a basic thing. While the fried rice is truer to life, as the scene had happened, I agreed that for a contemporary audience fried rice probably wouldn't be as understandable as a different looking dish. While it was suggested to go with something a lot more out there, like chicken's feet, I originally wanted

to tie back what she is made fun of as the dish that her white friends are ecstatic about later and could not picture them ever eating chicken feet. I ultimately went with a shrimp dumpling. This specific dish has been described to me once as looking like ballsack, so I imagine that it is weird enough, and also not common to things they have seen before, that a child would make fun of it.

I chose to not have the teenager version of Mackenzie get excited for dumplings, and kept it to fried rice, as fried rice is a lot plainer of a dish, and makes the exotification of the dish more realistic, also dumplings can be a rather personal and familial dish to make, that didn't feel right for her character to know how to make. I did bring the dumplings back up when they are all in line and Jennifer meets Eric, the other mixed-race person.

An element that was unclear during the proposal stage was what each individual story in the anthology would be about, so during the writing stage I tried to make it clear that Jennifer always felt as other or different than her peers, but in wanting to connect with them lets things go rather than pushes the issue, but as she ages and grows to accept herself she pushes the issue more.

A short film that really inspired me was Bao. It is about a Chinese mother and her son-that is also a dumpling, and more than the movie it was also my experience seeing the film that inspired me. I connected a lot with many of the scenes in the movie, especially the food scene where her son leaves without even eating any of the food his mother made for him. While I loved the film, and found it heartfelt and emotional, in the theatre, of predominantly white viewers, they often laughed and were very confused. It bothered me that they laughed so hard at something I connected to and made me realize the lack of representation there is for Chinese families and stories. This is why I also wanted to focus on being biracial because there are not a lot of stories that are told about being biracial either. I would get to tackle two underrepresented categories while telling my story.

The other short film that inspired me was Night by Joosje Duk's and how it explores subtle forms of racism. She explores these subtle everyday forms of racism but has them happen to a white woman instead which showcases how uncomfortable and racist it actually sounds when it happens to someone that usually does not experience that. For instance when a black man walks up to her and says "I'm not really into your type." It's said in the same way men might say "I'm not really into black girls" and shows how weird it is to discount someone solely based on race. While my story

focuses on Chinese culture, it acted as inspiration.