



Fish Soup Man

[Agnes Lam](#)

Opposite the old New World
Amusement Park is a coffee shop,
the smell of tang ho, yam,
fried fish head, boiling soup,
a hundred people, thirty-odd tables,
spilling onto pavements
and parking lots.

In one corner stands the fish soup man,
a stove, two tables on twelve square feet:
in-table — raw fish heads, out-table — milky soup.

Every three minutes, out one steamboat of soup —
between soup-making, burning coal fill steamboat trays —
between tray-filling, more coal for the wok burner —
between coal-pushing, shouts for more soup stock —
knocks four times on a ready tray —
fries oysters with left hand —
pours soup with right.

Around him, two strong fans blow —
one on the wok against the noisy fire,
the other to keep him cool.

Fish soup
man has
no time to scheme,
no time to gossip,
no time to sell himself,
no time,
but to serve.

If his wife screams at him at night,
I wouldn't be surprised
if he beats her up.

*13 July 1989, Serangoon Road,
Singapore*

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