

A Kumquat Enterprise

Elena Turner

It was one of those inevitable January days that no one looks forward to. The air was heavy and still and not much was happening. Ayla sat alone in her room examining the worn butterflies attached to her curtain. Before that she had built, or at least started building, a Lego masterpiece, and had drawn, or at least started drawing, a house. Thinking about what she could possibly do next, she manoeuvred onto the floor and began sluggishly untangling the tassels of her carpet.

The tinny echoes of the mid-day news floated in through one wall, punctuated by the occasional muffled comment from her parents. Ayla could hear the odd toilet flush, dog bark and the obnoxious sound of a motorcyclist in the distance. But apart from that the air was thick like molasses, swallowing most sound waves that would usually make it to her room.

Right as Ayla decided to make a paper chain out of old newspapers, a frantic knock on the door interrupted the midday torpor. After the predictable sequence of clicks and clacks, Ayla's older brother yelled out 'Tash's here'.

Ayla jumped to the door, grateful for any stimuli, and saw a wide-eyed little Tash, with her unruly black curls even frizzier than usual.

'I have an idea' Tash said eagerly. 'We can sell kumquats.'

Ayla's brother scoffed as he walked off, leaving her to ask what on earth a 'kumquat' is. 'It's like a mini orange. Or no, a mandarin. And you can eat the skin, my dad said'.

Without a second thought, Ayla followed Tash off to her place. On the familiar route to Tash's, the two girls passed through the eerily empty township. Usually, the streets would be bustling with people strolling between book shops and cafes. University students would be gathered around tables piled with dog-eared novels, their passionate discussions animated by broad hand gestures. Mothers would be coaxing infants to eat the remaining kids' meal pasta off their plate, while attempting to socialise with other families.

But today the girls didn't have to squeeze through any crowd, and apart from the odd indoor diner, no one was to be seen. They walked past the shoe shop, which had closed for the day, and then the Portuguese restaurant. They briefly stopped to admire the rainbow spools of threads lined up on the clothing repair store window.

Along the concrete footpath, they mercifully leaped every now and then to avoid stepping on cracks. Jenson at school had once told them that if you 'step on a crack, you break your mum's back'.

Around the corner and past the tall white wall with a vine crawling its way up, and then they were there at Tash's.

'So I have a bucket of Kumquats from my tree. And we could sell them for say, \$2 each. And then by the end of the day we could make a few thousand dollars I reckon. Then we could help the cats I saw on TV without tails or eyes.'

Ayla thought of her mum sterilising the remote control as she said; 'but what about the rules? You know, like the cleaning and stuff that they have at supermarkets?'

But Tash was already off finding paper and textas. With her finest block lettering, she wrote 'RSPCA' in the brightest fluorescent green she had—to attract the customers, she said. Ayla was starting to like the idea. And so their shop was created.

Passers by, if there were any, would have seen two zealous young girls standing in front of a kumquat tree, smiling eagerly at them. If they were particularly observant, they would have spotted the A4 poster on the fence promoting 'Tashayla Kumkwots' raising money for the RSPCA.

Tash and Ayla stood there for what seemed like hours, but what in reality was more like several minutes under the blazing Sydney sun.

About two minutes in, an elderly Greek man hobbled out of his house to check the mailbox.

At some point later a twentysomething-year-old pulled up a few houses down and ducked into his flat, carrying a box of the lemonade icy poles that they sometimes got at school.

An orange lady beetle occupied the girls for a few minutes, and then a plane which flew low overhead.

The girls were about to clock off for the day when they saw a figure slowly walking down the other side of the street. As she came closer, they saw it was Mrs Pyke, a teacher they had shared last year. She always wore pointy shoes, every day of the year, which reminded Ayla of Roald Dahl's *The Witches*. She, Tash and Caleb once had a meeting on how they would take off her shoes to see if her toes were square. Her witch status remained undetermined however, she was still wearing a black cardigan and ankle length skirt despite the heat.

Tash and Ayla stretched out their necks to see if red faced Mrs Pyke would notice them. But she just kept ploughing down the street, wheeling one of those trollies that probably contain

groceries. A trickle of water leaked from the bottom, instantly evaporating after landing on the molten cement.

Eventually the girls closed shop and, with a grand revenue of zero dollars and zero cents, Ayla headed home. Back past the white corner wall, threads and deserted shops. As she was turning onto her street Ayla saw the gleam of a gold coin on the ground. This one was extra lucky because it was one of those newly minted coins that look clean, like real gold. She held it tight to her chest and ran home. And so the idea for their next undertaking was spawned; tomorrow Ayla would go back to Tash's as soon as she could. They would then scour the neighbourhood for rogue coins and collect them in Tash's kumquat bucket. Might make a few thousand dollars, Ayla reckoned.

*Often wishing she was born in a long-past era, **Elena Turner** loves reading classics, historical fiction and romances. Some of her favourite authors include Han Kang, Margaret Atwood and Haruki Murakami. She has recently been enjoying Greek Mythology, feasting on modern adaptations like 'The Song of Achilles' by Madeline Miller. She wrote; 'A Kumquat Enterprise' to loosely capture a memory she has of growing up in the inner-west suburbs of Sydney.*