

Bugis

Alfian Sa'at

Salmah is wearing her tudung again.

For those who don't know, the tudung is this scarf that good Muslim girls wear. People like Salmah just want to action, act like good girl; but later in school, she will meet her boyfriend, and hold hands with him. This wearing tudung also, I don't know who teach her or where she learn. Last month she never used to wear, her hair was always tied at the back with a red scrungee. She would often take it off to wear at her wrist, like a bracelet.

Just one month and Salmah has found God.

I never saw her hair after that. Maybe it's now permed or dyed pink or itching with kutu, but if I know about most girls who wear tudung, it's that they don't care about their hair. They just care about looking like good girls and kissing their mother's hand at the front door and winning their mother's trust so they can later hold their boyfriend's hand in school. I have seen Salmah do it, and I have also seen her punch Sazalie's chest playfully. Action manja. Sazalie is her boyfriend, quite cute, but he cannot pronounce his r's properly. He says 'argh' instead and when I hear him talk I tell myself I must get a boyfriend whose tongue is not so short.

So here we are in the MRT on the way to the poly. Salmah is trying to revise her notes, using a pink highlighter that is almost dried up. I usually don't study in the MRT, so what I do is fan

myself with a copy of *The New Paper* in my hands. (The headline today is: 'Will She Strip Again?') I do it not because it is hot, but because I want to ask Salmah if she is not hot wearing her tudung in the afternoon like this, but without opening my mouth. I don't know if she is getting the hint, but she is looking down at the opened file on her lap and mumbling to herself.

Salmah and Sazalie. They sound like a happy couple, the names would look good on a wedding invitation card, but I have seen them fight before. Salmah is terrible when they fight. She will make her blackest face, and turn it away from Sazalie. Her lips will pout. When Sazalie looks at her right, she will look left. When he looks to her left, she will look right. Their faces will be the two like poles on two magnets. That is why I think that all this girlfriend boyfriend business should start only after you finish school. So young, and wanting to find romance: my mother calls it 'cinta monyet' or 'monkeys in love'. I have tried talking to Salmah about it, but she will always ask me back, 'Why you so kaypoh? If I want to have a boyfriend, or ten boyfriends, it's my own business.' This coming from a girl who wears a tudung to school.

Suddenly I go, 'Yesterday my grandma made trouble again.'

Salmah looks up from her Particle Mechanics lecture notes. 'What did she do?' she asks.

'Don't know lah.' I always go 'don't know lah' before I start off telling a long story. I'm not sure where I picked the habit up from, but it has been pointed out to me by who else, but my best friend since primary school. For those who don't know, it's Salmah.

Then I continue, 'Yesterday, I was at the void deck with the guys. And then when I went up, that old woman started scolding me for nothing. She said I was grown up already, shouldn't be mixing so freely with guys, what will people say?'

'Who were you with?' Salmah asked.

'You know lah, the usual void deck people. Hisham, Firdaus, Omar.' Hisham is this really fat guy who wears baggy Cross

