

# Essay on a Farewell Party

When I was in Form 2, we had a temporary science teacher. His name was Mr. Tan. He taught us for a couple of months before he obtained a place in a university to further his studies. We found out that he was leaving us just one day before the day he was supposed to leave. He did not tell us. Another teacher did. As we liked very much, we got together and planned a farewell party for him. The girls agreed to make some titbits and the boys agreed to prepare the drinks. It was to be a small party as we did not have enough time to plan a bigger one.

The next day, we sat through two study periods early in the morning before Mr. Tan entered the class for our science lesson. We had our food and drinks discreetly covered at one corner of the class. So when Mr. Tan entered he did not notice anything different in the class. We wanted to surprise him, and we did.

As he was opening his book to begin his final lesson, everybody stood up. Mr. Tan looked at us in surprise and asked us to sit down. When nobody complied he gave us a puzzled frown, closed his book and stood at his desk, arms akimbo and chin thrust forward enquiringly.

*"What's the matter?" he asked.*

*We looked at one another.*

Our monitor answered, "Sir, we wish to congratulate you on your admission to the university. We have prepared some "makan" and drinks (a classmate removed the sheets covering the food) and we would like you to have something to eat before you leave us."

All eyes were on Mr. Tan. His gaze alternated between the food and

us. He tried to speak but no words came out. Slowly we could see his eyes misting over and we realized that he was in tears. Good Lord, there was Mr. Tan, the muscle-bound he-man that we knew him to be, actually shedding tears of joy (or was it sadness). Anyway, it was good to know that he was human.

Gradually he regained his composure and our monitor led him by the hand toward the food. Everybody clapped.

For the next half-hour, we mingled around eating the titbits and drinking the too-sweet syrup. It was not a good idea to have the boys prepare the drinks. They did not know how much syrup to use. Still, we had a good time chatting and asking Mr. Tan all sorts of questions. He happily answered everything we threw at him.

Then from the corner of my eye, I saw a figure at the doorway. I turned my head to have a better look. I froze. It was the headmaster! He had one foot and his head inside the classroom. His eyes darted quickly around and I realized that we were caught red-handed having a party without his permission. We were also making too much noise.

I looked at my fellow classmates. Nobody was aware that our headmaster was right next to us. I was about to call the class to attention when our headmaster stopped me by putting a finger against his lips the universal sign for silence. He winked at me and the next moment he was striding down the corridor.

I was flabbergasted! Bless our headmaster. He must have realized that we were simply giving Mr. Tan a farewell treat and left us to carry on. What an understanding man our headmaster was.

Soon the food and drinks were all finished and our monitor asked Mr. Tan to give us a farewell speech. He was reluctant to do so but

finally, he had to give in to our combined insistence. I do not remember what he actually said. All I remember was that when he finished he had to wipe his eyes again and one of the girls had to give him a piece of tissue. It was a very touching scene, a mixture of joy and sadness; joy for being able to enter the university, sadness for having to leave.

Then the bell rang to signal the end of the period. Mr. Tan shook hands with everyone, muttered a few words of thanks and soon we were left with ourselves and a pile of empty cups and plates to clear up before the next teacher arrived.