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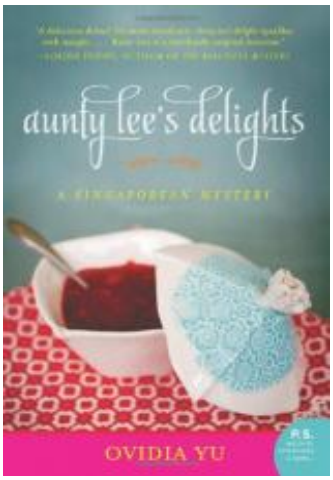
Aunty Lee's Delights

by Ovidia Yu



About the Book

This delectable and witty mystery introduces Rosie "Aunty" Lee, feisty widow, amateur sleuth, and proprietor of Singapore's best-loved home-cooking restaurant

After losing her husband, Rosie Lee could have become one of Singapore's "tai tai," an idle rich lady. Instead she is building a culinary empire from her restaurant, Aunty Lee's Delights, where spicy Singaporean meals are graciously served to locals and tourists alike. But when a body is found in one of Singapore's tourist havens and one of her guests fails to show at a dinner party, Aunty Lee knows that the two events are likely connected.

The murder and disappearance throws together Aunty Lee's henpecked stepson, Mark, his social-climbing wife, Selina, a gay couple whose love is still illegal in Singapore, and an elderly Australian tourist couple whose visit may mask a deeper purpose. Investigating the murder are Police Commissioner Raja and Senior Staff Sergeant Salim, who quickly discover that Aunty Lee's sharp nose for intrigue can sniff out clues that elude law enforcers.

Wise, witty, and charming, AUNTY LEE'S DELIGHTS is a spicy mystery about love, friendship, and food in Singapore, where money flows freely and people of many religions and ethnicities coexist peacefully, but where tensions lurk just below the surface, sometimes with deadly consequences.

Discussion Guide

1. When her wealthy husband died, Rosie Lee could have settled for live as a Tai-Tai: ?wearing designer clothes and going for manicures and overseas holidays.? Why do you think she decided to open AUNTY LEE'S DELIGHTS instead?

2. How would you describe Aunty Lee?s relationship with her stepson, Mark, and his wife Selina? What?s her motive for keeping them close? And what is theirs for staying close?

3. ?To Aunty Lee, comfort meant being dressed for the job. It was obvious to her that getting the upper hand in an interview with a police officer required a different outfit from supervising the cleaning of bean sprouts.? What do you think of Aunty Lee?s deliberate change of clothing? Do we tend to change how we present ourselves depending on who we?re dealing with?

4. How women dress is frequently commented upon in **Aunty Lee?s Delights**, from Aunty Lee?s changes of clothing to Selina?s belief that ?how women talked, dressed and behaved was to blame for unwanted male attention? to Frank Cunningham?s proclamation that that ?short haired women in pants?it?s just not right.? How do these views reveal things about the characters who hold them? How do the different women in the novel?Selina, Carla, and Nina, for example?deal with expectations about how they should look and behave?

5. When Aunty Lee goes to visit SSS Salim at his office, she makes sure to take along an assortment of her best snacks, which are so delicious that the previously wary Salim ?looked across at Aunty Lee with something like devotion in his eyes.? Give other examples of Aunty Lee using her culinary powers to influence people. Is there a special food guaranteed to earn your devotion?

6. Aunty Lee says that she is personally invested in finding Laura and Marianne?s killer because ?The two girls who died both came to eat in my restaurant. If they ate my cooking, they are my guests and they are my family.? Later she tells Carla that ?I feel responsible for the people I feed. Once my food has gone into them and become part of them and their lives, I become part of their lives.? Do you believe her? Are there other reasons for her sleuthing?

7. The characters in **Aunty Lee?s Delights** come from the many ethnic communities who live in Singapore, including Indian, Australian, Filipino, and Peranakan (people of mixed Malay and Chinese descent like Aunty Lee and the novel?s author, Ovidia Yu.) Do the characters still fit into a kind of social hierarchy or are they all treated equally in Singaporean culture? Can you detect positives and negatives about this mix of ethnicities?

8. Aunty Lee reflects that ?People ought to go through the ideas they carried around in their heads regularly as they turned out their store cupboards. No matter how wisely you shopped, there would be things in the depths that were pas their expiry dates or gone damp and mouldy?or that had been picked up on impulse and were no longer relevant. Aunty Lee believed everything inside a head or cupboard could affect everything else in it by going bad, or just taking up more space than it was worth.? Which characters have ideas that might need to be updated or discarded? Which have a few bad ideas that might be spoiling everything else in their lives?

9. Rosie Lee?s late husband, ML Lee, described her as ?em zhai se?not afraid to die? which describes how ?Aunty Lee drove everyone around her through frustration to despair as she pursued some triviality that no one else could see any point in.? What do you make of this description of Aunty Lee? By the end of the novel, how has her em zhai se personality made a difference?

Author Bio

Ovidia Yu is one of Singapore's best-known and most acclaimed writers. She has had more than 30 plays produced and is also the author of a number of mysteries. She received a Fulbright Fellowship to the University of Iowa's International Writers Program and has been a writing fellow at the National University of Singapore.

Critical Praise

"A delicious debut! AUNTY LEE?S DELIGHTS is no mere whodunnit---it sparkles with insight into the traditions and moral complexities of modern Singapore. Rosie Lee is a terrifically original heroine."

? Louise Penny, author OF THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY

"Engaging . . . Fans of Alexandar McCall Smith?s No.1 Ladies? Detective Agency series will find a lot to like."

? *Publishers Weekly*

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