

THE TEA STALL

ANNAPURNA CHOWDHURY

In the bustling action of the capital, the worker of a huge corporation stopped by a tea stall for a cup of tea. His name is Rafiq. He was wearing his normal attire of a blue shirt, black tie and held a briefcase by his side. He patiently waited as the head of the tea stall, a little boy, prepared his cup of tea. The boy was around eight to ten. He made the cup of tea and slowly took it to Rafiq. As he got his cup of tea, Rafiq smiled at him.

"What's your name, boy?" asked Rafiq.

"I don't have any in particular. People call me whatever they want to. But most of them call me Kamal."

Rafiq laughed with utter amusement as he said, "So I'll call you that too."

The little boy, now with a name, went away to work on the tea orders that were piling up. After all, it was quite a busy weekday. Rafiq continued sipping the cup of perfectly hot tea and munching on his heap of biscuits, while observing the little boy. Rafiq felt nothing but pity for Kamal, he thought to himself that the poor young soul should have been in school at that moment, but instead he is sweating himself off for strangers' tea. He felt sorry but could not do anything about it. With such thoughts, he looked at Kamal going



from one shop to another with a full crate of tea cups, still with a smile on his young malnourished face. Rafiq finished his tea, which he actually loved a lot. He got up with his cup of tea and his briefcase. He walked towards Kamal.

"How much do I owe you Kamal?" asked Rafiq.

"15 taka sir."

Rafiq handed him the money and told him, "The tea was really delicious. I'll come by here more often now, okay?" He walked away after squeezing the little boy's cheek as Kamal smiled back at him. As Rafiq walked further away, the thoughts of Kamal grew smaller and smaller. Just then, a voice behind him screamed with all the force in the word.

"Sir, Sir, Sir!" Kamal yelled his lungs out. Finally, that effort paid off when Rafiq looked over his shoulders to see him.

"What happened?" Rafiq asked in complete confusion.

"Sir, you left your... this... your file."

Kamal showed Rafiq's file to him and he knelt while trying to gather enough oxygen for himself. Rafiq was perplexed but more than anything he was amazed by the little boy's honesty as that file had money in it that was untouched.

Rafiq looked at the boy with a proud gleam and said, "Do you want to work at my office? It won't be a hard job. But it pays well." He said so while pointing at the building in front.

Kamal had nothing to say. With eyes full of tears, he nodded his head just to say, "Yes sir. This job doesn't pay me anything. Boss takes all the money away. I hardly have anything for food." That statement was obvious with the malnourished state of his body. He had been dirty, hungry and completely without hope. Now there was a chance of a new life. A chance he longed for.

"Thank you, sir. I'll try to work my best," Kamal said.

The writer is a class VIII student at Sunbeams School.

Cabbage Soup

WAMIAH AHMED

At exactly five past twelve, on a rainy autumn night, an old woman was humming a sweet melody, putting on a pot of soup as she had done for her kids and grandkids in years past. You could hear faint strikes of thunder and bike bells as they zoomed by every once in a while. She takes the pot off the stove and gently ladles some into a bowl. You can hear the quiet clanking of the cutlery as the old woman takes out a soup spoon and a small glass from a cabinet. The tap turns on with a loud "fssssssh" and the old woman puts the half-filled glass beside her bowl of soup.

Now this soup was no ordinary soup. The whole neighbourhood knew of the famous granny down the road. She and her soup were beloved by all the neighbours, even the naughty little boy down the street who ran away every time his mom made carrot stew could not resist her cabbage soup. Her own grandkids were unable to visit, unfortunately, so she loved to spend time with the little boy.

It was raining even harder now, as you could hear the pitter-patter on the tin roof. The soup's aroma was starting to waft throughout the whole house overtaking the smell of the wet earth outside. She blew away the hot air and picked up her spoon to take a sip when –

DING DONG

The doorbell rang repeatedly. The old woman smiled ear to ear. The boy from down the street had come to visit knowing that the old woman only made soup on days with rainy weather. The woman opened the door to find a grinning 7-year-old who was wet from head to toe from running in the rain. The boy quickly ran to sit down at the table and poured himself an overflowing bowl of soup. The old woman started making conversation with the boy as she sat down, and they began to eat.

On the wall behind the little boy's seat, there were two pictures framed on the wall. Her grandsons, who looked the same age as the boy (in the picture), who enjoyed the same soup as the boy. They would come over on rainy days just like the boy but one day the rain caused their car to skid and took them to the heavens. The woman's heart became heavy at the thought. They were no less adorable than him, the same toothy grin and the simple joy they brought to her.

"Hey!" the boy said happily, "Your soup's getting cold!" He gave a smile so big you could see all the gaps where his teeth had fallen. Her heart soared and she gave a nod. There were seconds all around.

The writer is a middle school student at Jesse Ketchum Public School, Toronto, Canada.

