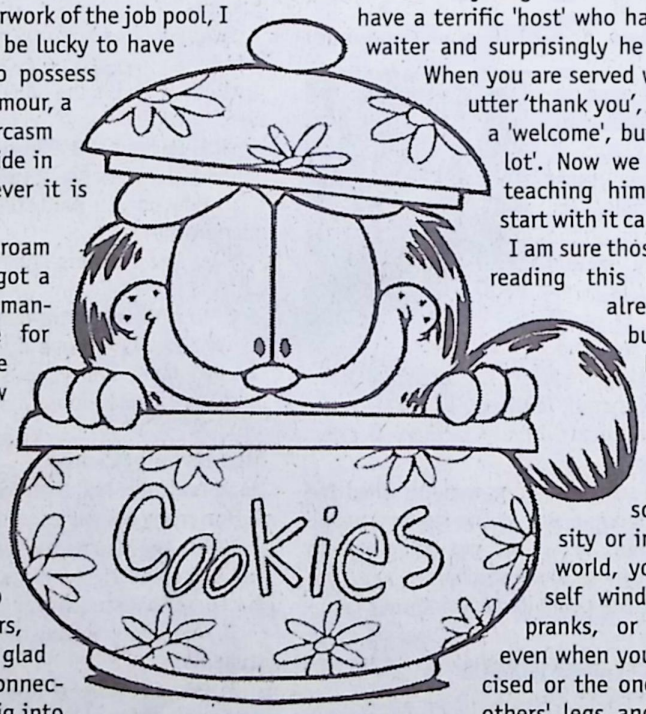
Of munchies and what not

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I remember, back in my undergrad days, my friends and I used to spend a whole lot of time in the university canteen, where the main gossip would circle around music, fashion, assignments. And for the girls, usual shop talk and which faculty they found cute. As life moved on and I drowned myself in paperwork of the job pool, I can consider myself to be lucky to have few colleagues who do possess an amazing sense of humour, a sheer knowledge of sarcasm and the potential to slide in a fantasy world whenever it is necessary.



The canteen that I roam around nowadays has got a different aura but I did manage to find a niche for myself. The gossip here is a bit different on how to meet deadlines, where to go for a vacation, how to manage kids and some advice, and the list goes on. But few who deny the fact of aging, who ignore the grey hairs, surround me and I am glad there could still be a connection. Although we all dig into the rice and the chicken (which tastes the same every month), it is the topic of conversations that makes each day one to be remembered. Just the other day when we were talking about childhood memories, one shared an incident of kicking chickens like soccer balls and it was not hard for the rest of the gang to fathom where it landed. Then there are stories of mango trees and relationship issues, to which the munching increases. There are also arguments about the economic situations and the solutions to it, to which everyone gives pause but concentrate on the curry as they claim the moment as "food for thought". We even imagine ourselves as different characters once we are in that room. Some are 'lazy', one is a 'stand-up comedian', the other is a 'trying-my-best guitarist', and we got a lady who goes on giving names to the rest. All in all it is a perfect crew to start a lunchtime drama which eventually drags on for an hour or so. We do have a terrific 'host' who happens to be the waiter and surprisingly he speaks English! When you are served with tea and you utter 'thank you', the return is not a 'welcome', but it is 'thanks-a-lot'. Now we are thinking of teaching him French and to start with it can be 'merci'.

I am sure those of you who are reading this right now, are already having a bubble above your head, picturing your canteen days and how much fun it was. Be it in school, or university or in the blue-collar world, you do find yourself winding up in silly pranks, or having giggles even when you are being criticised or the one who is pulling others' legs and also having a glimpse of that particular someone in that room, over another person's shoulder, with beating heart and held up breath; the person who matters to you. Yes, it all happens in this very place. Canteen days are just too random; you see laughter, you see tears, you see weariness and also a sight of frustration. In that small room, all these expressions of human life are tied in a knot and it is so vividly clear that we call it, in one word, 'emotions'. As I prepare myself for the drama to begin and what character to play today I am certain that you all will play your part sometime. Or who knows? You are already into it!