



# FLIP

## SHAMMA

Sohel heaved a sigh of relief.

He had managed to get to the bus stop just in time to hop onto the university bus. He managed to catch the bus at 7:40 in the morning. He had barely made it in time, plus he was lucky that the bus was late today.

Sohel wondered what time it was now. He checked his phone. It was 9. Half-an-hour before his International Economics class starts. He had to skip his breakfast to get to the campus in time, added to the fact that he was tired as he barely managed to get 4 hours of sleep today.

"Can't the classes start a little late?" he mumbled to himself.

His tired mind craved for a little kick. He'd at least have to be able to keep his eyes open, if not his attention and mind to the 'plethora of knowledge the world of Economics has to offer', bestowed upon him and classmates so gratuitously by Mr. Manna.

Sohel would love to know a lot more about the world of economics. And he would've been actively trying too, if he wasn't shot down with a condescending air of superiority that seemed to radiate out of Mr. Manna's bald scalp, and treated like a bleating lamb whenever Sohel felt confused about how the Indifference Curve works.

But Sohel had come to terms that he'd have to endure through this for just another month, and hopefully he wouldn't have to face Mr. Manna's bloodshot stare again during class. Besides, he had better things to worry about now. He had to fill his stomach with something. He could feel his gut churning, as if it was going to start devouring itself to quell the hunger.

Luckily enough, the little tea stall of Raju bhai's was open by now. Sohel was both tired and hungry, a bad combination. He direly needed refreshments. So he decided he would have a couple of bread cakes and a cup of tea to revive himself.

"Bhai, get me a cup of raw tea, no sugar," Sohel blurted out, as he got busy taking out bread cakes from the plastic packet hanging by a hook on the bamboo supports of the stall.

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Raju had opened his stall at 8:30 in the morning. He has been selling tea in front of the business faculty building for the past 11 years. Not a day has passed when Raju didn't keep his stall open, even on the government holidays. He knows that there will always be people around his stall, always willing to take a long sip out of the elixir Bangladeshis consider tea to be.

Running a tea stall in front of a university business faculty building isn't exactly everyone's dream business. And it definitely wasn't Raju's dream business either. He al-

ways wished that his parents would let him finish his HSC instead of sending him to Dhaka to bring them money, pulling him out of school when he was in 7th grade.

He tried selling newspapers on the streets, working as an errands boy in an auto-repairs shop, rickshaw-pulling and what not. But Raju found selling tea to be the most comfortable job he could manage to operate with his money and his level of education.

Raju felt a little envious seeing the kids come out of their faculty buildings, always ready for a cup of tea to help them feel revitalised. But obviously, he can't blame the kids for his misfortune. It's not their fault that he has to do a job he doesn't enjoy day after day. Besides, they bring him money, so why complain?

Raju sees new faces come to his stall every year, and old familiar ones that would always greet him with a jolly "Raju bhai!". He loved that. And he especially loved it when the graduated students would sit at his stall, sip at his tea and talk to him about how their lives are going after their student lives were over.

Raju has always had competition. But there was something special about his tea that everyone liked more. Probably the fact that he experimented with kali jeera, and found out it makes the tea taste better. His competitors lacked something compared to his tea. Was it the propor-

tions? Raju didn't know. And he didn't care either.

Raju also kept a large baton he wood-crafted from a large fallen tree branch years ago. He keeps it away to shoo away trouble-makers. He also kept a combat knife one of his favorite customers had gifted him. He keeps it with him to be safe.

Raju feels like his troublesome days are behind him. Business is going well, he manages to make enough money to feed his family, and ever since his wife started helping him out in the stall, he was glad to have an extra pair of hands working in the stall. But he said no when he was asked to include their only daughter to help in running their stall. He dreams of seeing her get enrolled into a reputable university someday.

Raju was making a fresh new batch of tea when all of a sudden, he heard "Bhai, get me a cup of raw tea, no sugar". The voice sounded familiar.

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Sohel didn't feel full after the snack, but it was enough to keep him going for an hour or two. He quickly paid Raju bhai his bill.

"He seems to enjoy this... does he enjoy this?" Sohel wondered, looking at Raju bhai's warm smile.

He didn't have time to ponder over that question. He has to hurry his way to Mr. Manna's class now.