

THE GIRL IN GREASE



It was a hot summer evening when I headed to the neighbourhood park.

My friends were playing, flinging sand through the air.

“I would rather build sandcastles,” I said.

Just then I could see a girl from the peering shadows of the bushes. She trotted over the grass and paused silently over the sand watching us. She was dressed in rags and smudged in grease. She kept staring at us uncomfortably.

“Can sandcastles move? My Papa can actually build moving things!” she burst into an unexpected flurry of words.

“Hmpf! actually build, yeah right!” My friend Vidushi’s ridiculing tone stifled her for a brief moment.

But I smiled and nodded.

“Yes! He can build moving things! Do you want to see?” Soon, we were led by the mysterious greasy girl into a small hut just outside the park. Her house looked too small and fragile for accommodating anything, let alone those big ‘moving things’.

Next, she led us into a small dusty shed behind the hut. It was a more like a car workshop barely enough to house a few shelves brandished with dust and smoke where lay several half-filled and empty cans and boxes. Greases, oils, lubricants, chemicals and various other car tools I had never known of. The tools and equipment stood in a stoic silence, awaiting their turn to be picked and played with.

“Bah! These aren’t moving things. Just a couple of boxes stacked into a weird place,” Vidushi scoffed. I gave her a piercing glance to curb the condescending tone.

“Papa says these are the things we use to make the big moving things.” The little girl responded in a frail voice.

“Meena...! Is someone with you?” A heavy masculine voice echoed from a distance.

Meena smiled, exposing her crooked dirty teeth as she identified the voice for us. “That’s Papa!” she said.

I identified him as our car cleaner almost immediately.

In the daft corner of the room, we could see a rusty car gawking at us. Its white paint had gently bristled off as it streaked of sharp edges and cracks. Agonizing crevices patterned the exterior doors revealing the coppery truth of all forms of luxury. Its top lid called a bonnet was open exposing further coppery mess of rust and metal scratches. Gentle fumes of smoke arose while we felt the radiating heat from the ‘infuriated’ car.

Meena’s papa first opened the lid in the car’s bonnet which was called a radiator lid. Then he dived down and placed a bucket beneath and tweaked another lid with his fingers. Almost suddenly, a green stained liquid erupted from the bottom filling the tub to the brim. We watched his spidery fingers spindling the metal. His hands were stained with dark, chalky grease as he tightened and loosened the lids.

He told us the car’s ‘water’ was called a coolant that had to be replaced as it had become ‘acidic’. We watched as he poured a fresh green, minty fluid into both bottles, the liquid slivering like a thin thread of silk into the can. Next, he stacked both bottles in the bonnet, shut the lid and started the car.

The engine roared to life just as we watched the sun dip beneath the window.

Little did we realize that it was getting late for our return back home. We bid goodbye to each other with a promise of meeting every evening.

That night as I lay on my bed thinking about my newfound unusual friend – Meena, a smile kept knocking at my lips in anticipation of the fun evenings...

...with my ‘Girl in Grease’!