

Shameela

By Adele

I couldn't wait to get to school. My hand-me-down shoes shuffled along the pavement as I rushed down the street. I felt so official. Important and sophisticated. But there was still the problem of our money and "home".

My family and I live in a one-room shack with no heating or cooling. The floor is scattered with quilts and blankets. Planks of wood make up the walls, floor and ceiling. I share the room with not only my family, but five others as well. We live in poverty because my mother escaped a town where she describes as "unsafe for my four beautiful children", me included. I lost my father to the military; I don't know much about him other than that.

I pushed that thought out of my head and scrambled into the three-room building. There were other students of various ages chatting together. *Where can I fit in?* There was another girl that looked my age, five. I squeezed through the kids ranging from five to twelve. She saw me and managed to form some sort of a smile. *She must be scared like me with all these people.*

"Hello, my name is Shameela. What's yours?"

"Dao," she replied. "I like your name."

The instructor had entered the room when I started to reply. I followed Dao to a desk and sat next to her. The next few hours went by fast. I listened intently and took some notes to show my older siblings, since they had to work and couldn't go to school.

The instructor dismissed us and I stood up and turned to Dao.

"Where do you live?" I asked as she stood up and brushed off her dress. It looked well used but I didn't mind because I looked the same.

"If you turn left as you exit here it's just down the street," says Dao.

"The shacks?" We started off out the building and were now on the street.

"Yes, second one as you go down the road."

"How have I not seen you? My family and I stay there," I asked, "Did you just move in?"

"Yes."

There was no need to ask more. We traveled down the road and hung a left. Just as the shacks started to appear in our line of sight I struck up conversation.

"Your family? Do you have any siblings or parents?"

"Both parents. I have an older brother also," she explained while playing with the hem of her jacket, "What about you?"

“I have only my mother, for which I’m very grateful for. My dad is away because of the military regime. I also have three older siblings.”

“I’m so sorry Shameela,” Dao said, tears welling in her chocolate brown eyes, “I could never imagine losing a parent.”

“Thank you for your empathy.” We rounded the corner and saw my sister cleaning our area of the little structure we shared with many other people. She was home awfully early. She usually comes at twelve when I’m in bed.

Dao and I ran up and were greeted warmly by my sister and her brother.

“I got a raise! \$1.25 a day!” My sister exclaimed, running over, picking me up, and swinging me around. Dao and I giggled. Sometimes things aren’t as tough as it seems.