

Chapter One

Every Saturday, Shu-Li worked at her parents' shop, the Yum Yum Chinese Deli. They told her to keep the serving counter clean and to take the empty dishes off the tables.

Shu-Li stopped and looked out the front window when the ice-cream boy pedalled by on his cart ringing his bell. Children were playing tag on Commercial Drive, laughing and shouting under the blue sky. Shoppers hurried by with shopping bags and cake boxes. Tyrone, a boy from Shu-Li's class at school, swung by on his skateboard.



Shu-Li sighed and wished she could stop work and race outside. She loved living near the Drive. When she arrived at her new school, her teacher, Mr. Ortega, said, “You’re lucky to be living there! It’s full of neat stores and nice parks. It’s a fun neighbourhood.”

Six months ago, Shu-Li’s family moved out of her uncle’s house in Richmond. She became so busy with schoolwork, piano and the deli that she didn’t have time to explore her new neighbourhood.

Before her family came to Canada from China, Shu-Li’s father, Ba, had worked as a chef. Now he ran the deli, cooking dishes such as stir-fried greens, spicy chicken and beef and tofu. The food smelled so good that customers found it hard to choose from the steaming trays. They also fussed over which soup, dessert or sweet bubble tea they might buy.

Sometimes people asked Ba to prepare large

pans of food for parties and celebrations. Shu-Li was happy when that happened, because then there wasn’t any clean-up work for her to do.



All of a sudden three girls trooped in from the park, chattering in loud voices.

“Shu-Li!” exclaimed Hannah. “I didn’t know you worked here.” Hannah was with her friends Shona and Jenna.

Shu-Li’s throat went dry. She was too scared to speak.

The girls were in her grade-four class and wore the trendiest clothing. If you saw one of them, the other two were close by. They did everything together: homework, lunch and class projects. They walked each other to school and called themselves the *Nah-Nah Girls*. Rushing to the counter, they stared at the cookies.

“Welcome you to Yum Yum Deli,” called out Ma.



The girls burst out laughing.

Shu-Li's face reddened. How many times had she told Ma not to use the word *you* in that sentence? But her mother still spoke as if she were translating the ideas directly from Chinese.

“What's that?” Shona pointed.

“Almond,” said Ma.

“And that one?”

“Coconut.” Ma smiled and pointed to Shona's shirt. “I like green colour.”

The girls smirked.

“I like green colour too,” Shona repeated.

The girls giggled loudly.

Shu-Li avoided eye contact with the girls and furiously scrubbed the counter.

Good thing they don't want to be my friends, she thought. I could never make friends with people who laugh at my mother.

After the deli emptied, Shu-Li hurried into

the kitchen. Ba and Ma sat at the table eating Singapore noodles from the lunch menu. Ba scooped some noodles into a dish for her.

Yummy! Shu-Li thought. Singapore noodles were her favourite. Often they were the first thing to be sold out.

“Can I go to the park?” Shu-Li asked in Chinese.

“Who with?” demanded Ba.

“Alone.”

“You can’t go by yourself,” said Ba.

“But you said I could go after I finished cleaning up.”

“Listen to your father, Shu-Li,” said Ma.



Chapter Two



On Monday morning Mr. Ortega asked, "Grade fours, how many more weeks of school are left?"

"Two!" shouted the class.

"Are we ready for this year's school fair?"

"Yes!" yelled everyone.

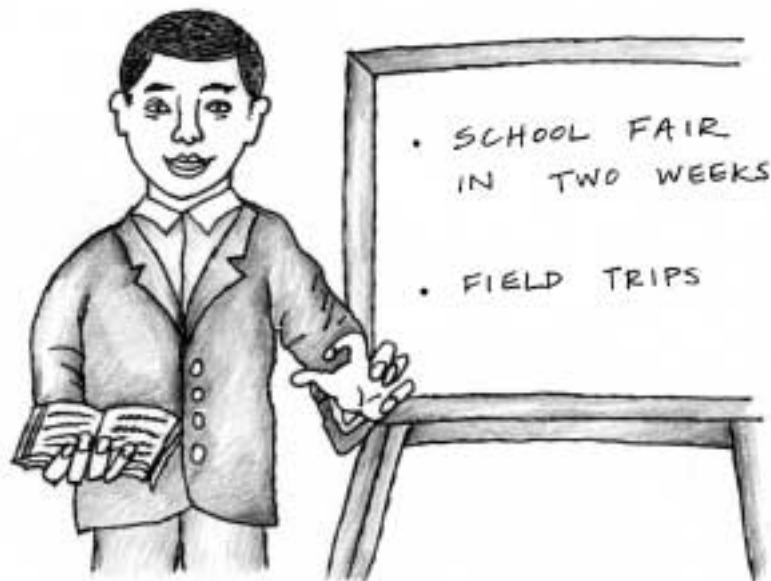
"After the fair we'll spend a week doing field trips."

"Hooray!"

Shu-Li sat quietly at the back. She had enrolled halfway through the term, and it hadn't been easy

for her to make friends. The popular girls sat among themselves, passed notes to each other and told jokes back and forth. The *Nah-Nah Girls* thought they were smarter than anyone else in the class. Joey Zhao sat with his pal Tyrone. Both of them were troublemakers. Mr. Ortega often sent them to see the principal, Ms Kumar.

Joey's parents owned a house in the neighbourhood and rented the upstairs to Shu-Li's family. His family lived on the ground floor.



The parents of both children wanted them to become friends, but that hadn't happened.

"So, boys and girls, where shall we go?" Mr. Ortega asked.

When all the children started shouting at once, Mr. Ortega held up his hands and silenced the class. "Everyone can suggest a place, and all ideas will be taken seriously. So speak up, but one at a time, please."

Joey waved his hand furiously. "The ice-cream factory!" he called out.

The students shouted, "Me too! Free samples!"

"Can we go to Splashdown Water Park?" someone asked.

"Can we go?" pleaded the others. "Please?"

Mr. Ortega frowned. "It's a bit far away, but we'll put it on the list."

"How about IMAX at Science World?"

"How about Play Palace?"

"How about Grouse Mountain?"

"Can we go to the Buddhist temple?" asked Tamara. She had just moved to the neighbourhood.

"No way!" Hannah made a face.

"That's no fun!" Shona exclaimed.

"That's not for kids!" Jenna shouted.

"It's a great idea," Mr. Ortega said. "I'll look into it."

Shu-Li wanted to make a suggestion, but her hands were shaking. They always trembled when she had to speak out.

Mr. Ortega had told her not to be afraid to speak her mind. "Don't worry about being wrong," he had said cheerfully. "That's how we learn."

Ms Kumar once said to her, "In Canada, we want children to speak up in class. You don't need to have the right answer here. We expect everyone to join in the discussions."

Why am I so scared? Shu-Li thought. *Ma isn't afraid to talk to her customers at the deli, even though her English is terrible.*

"How about the Yoga Centre?" Shu-Li finally blurted out.

There was a moment of silence, followed by Joey's loud voice. "That's so dumb. Yoga's for girls."

"No it's not," Shu-Li said, her voice rising. "Yoga's for everyone!"

I'm not dumb, she thought, glaring at Joey. He's the one who's dumb. How could Ma and Ba think Joey and I would ever become friends?

"I'm not going!" Tyrone shouted out.

"I never eat yogurt," added someone else. Everyone laughed loudly.

