

A Novel About Observation, Courage,  
and What It Means to Be Human

A CHILD'S

QUESTION

*to*

KINDNESS

TANZIM REDWAN

# A Child's Question to Kindness

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আরো প্রকাশন

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*"For my sister, Raeeda Redwan—who has taught me more about life than any teacher, scholar, or philosopher ever could."*

## About the Author



**Tanzim Redwan** is a student at Bangladesh Air Force English Medium School based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He is a student of grade 9. He is the founder of a non-profit organization *Project Q2*, an initiative dedicated to democratizing access to scientific research, already having served more than 2000+ high schoolers nationally and worldwide.

Internationally, Tanzim has been recognized as a Global Health Leaders Conference (GHLC) Scholar at Johns Hopkins University (2025) and as a Junior Fellow at the Harvard Undergraduate Microbiology Society (2025).

Growing up in academic spaces, he learned early that the journey is not always easy—particularly for those who are not labeled as “gifted.” This book reflects his effort to explore these challenges with empathy, openness, and lightness.

**Labiba Rana** is a student at Dhaka City College in Dhaka, Bangladesh, with a growing passion for art, literature, and creative storytelling. From sketching in the margins of her notebooks to taking on larger projects, she has steadily developed a unique artistic voice that blends observation with imagination.

*The Kid's Guide to Research* is her first major illustration project, where her drawings play a central role in making abstract ideas and philosophical questions more relatable for young readers. Through her work, Labiba captures emotion, atmosphere, and character in a way that complements and deepens the narrative.

Beyond illustration, she is interested in exploring how creativity can intersect with education and science, and she hopes to continue developing her skills through future collaborations and independent projects. As a young artist still at the beginning of her journey, Labiba sees each illustration not only as an image but as a way to tell a story that words alone cannot fully express.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE BOY WITH THE QUESTION



The question arrived on a Tuesday. The kind of Tuesday that lingered like smoke, thick and sour. The city smelled like burnt bagels, asphalt, and the metallic taste of old subway heat. The air pressed against people's faces. Sirens wailed. A bus wheezed to a stop. A man in a dark coat stepped through a puddle, water splashing against his leg. He did not react. He moved along as though discomfort was normal. That was the rhythm: stay in motion, avoid attachment, survive the next minute before it swallows you.

Steam curled from coffee cups clutched by gloved hands. A dog barked, and another responded with a low growl.

On the sidewalk near a café called Steam and Sprocket, a boy named Cheese stood on a blue plastic crate. He could see the chipped lettering of Steam and Sprocket. Its windows fogged with warmth, its bricks dark with years of rain.

To him, it was less a café than a portal. The crate wobbled, but its few inches lifted him above the crowd - enough to feel apart, to watch instead of belong.

His name *really* was Cheese. It was printed on his birth certificate in plain black letters. His mother once said it had

been a bad joke from his father that became permanent before she had the energy to erase it. Strangers asked if it was short for something. He had stopped reacting. Now he simply said yes and let silence finish the conversation for him.

From the crate, he could see the flow of the street. He was thinking about what had happened that morning. Something that still sat under his ribs, like a bruise.

It had happened behind a sagging chain-link fence, near a neglected garden. Weeds, frozen soil, scattered tools, a KEEP OUT sign leaning to one side. Frost clung to the corners of the ground. Cheese had walked with his mother toward the subway, the wind cutting their faces. He gripped the strap of his backpack tightly because the gusts kept trying to tilt it off his shoulder.

Two boys were there. One bigger, with a puffy coat, hands red at the knuckles. The smaller one had a heavy backpack and wet shoes, toes soggy from a puddle. The tall boy moved with a calm cruelty, as if it were second nature. He shoved noce, deliberately. The smaller boy slammed into the fence. A burst of breath left him. His backpack burst open, papers flying into the cold air. Pages scattered toward puddles, toward gutters, fluttering wildly across the ground like broken birds. The tall boy stepped on one paper, pressing it into the dirt with his shoe. His face was neutral, as if this were a routine matter. People walked around them without stopping. A woman in a red coat passed by. A man with a leather briefcase paused, and walked on. Cheese had frozen. He had thought about stepping forward, even just to hand back one paper. But the tall boy looked at him. Not a glare, more like acknowledgment: I see you, and I see what happens if you move. Cheese looked down and pretended to tie a shoe already tightly knotted. His fingers fumbled uselessly, damp with sweat, the knot blurring as his eyes stung. He waited until the fence stopped rattling and the boys were gone.

Hours later, he stood on the crate outside the cafe replaying it. Inside, his mother worked behind the counter. She moved

steadily, wiping surfaces. She smiled at a customer, but the smile stayed far from her eyes. When she looked out the window and saw Cheese, she gave a small wave. He lifted his hand too, but she had already turned back to work. He did not blame her. There was no space in her day to carry what he carried.

He shifted his feet on the crate. Cold crept under his socks. The city's noise rose and fell. The question pressed on his chest. It had been echoing in his skull since morning. A rule he had read somewhere about the strong surviving and the weak fading. If survival was everything... why help?

He stepped off the crate and went inside. Warm air welcomed him, along with the smell of bread and coffee. His mother saw him and tilted her head. "You are early," she said. "Grab a roll in the back."

He nodded, went to the storage room, and sat on a crate with a warm roll in his hands. He ate slowly, heat lifting from the bread like a small comfort. He kept seeing the boy alone picking up wet papers. He remembered how no one else helped. Aeron appeared in the doorway. "You look like someone stepped on your brain," he said. Cheese told him about the garden incident. Aeron listened quietly, then said, "You freezing once does not make you bad. Everyone stops sometimes. What matters is what you do after." Cheese asked, "But why did he do it?"

Aeron shrugged. "Because the world rewards power more than kindness."

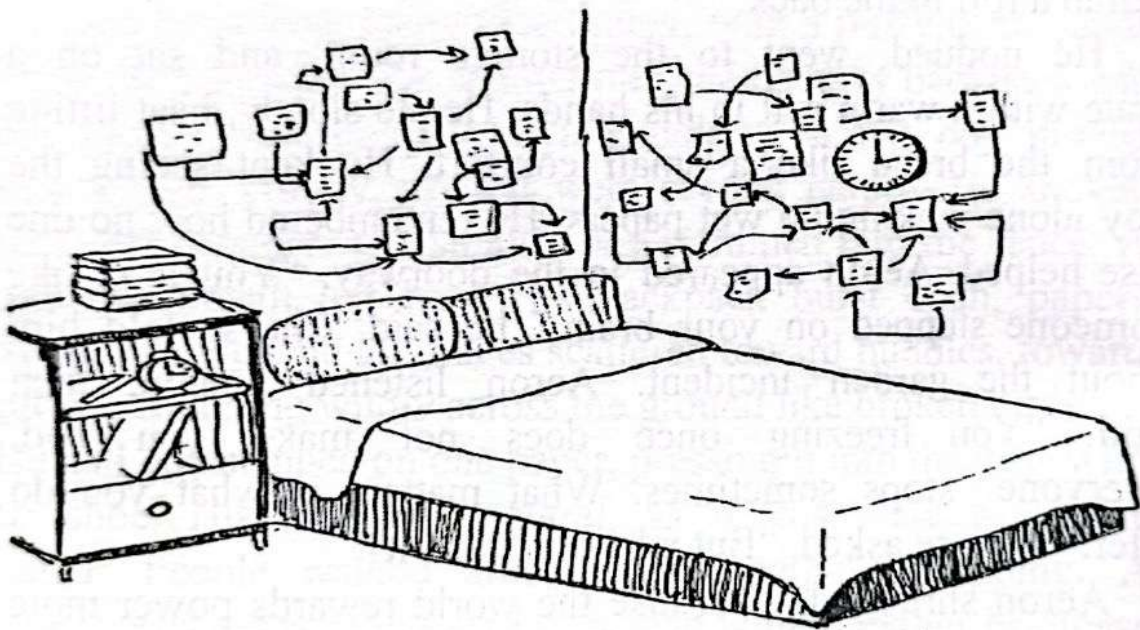
Cheese frowned. "So, survival is all that matters."

Aeron shrugged. "Survival of the fittest does not mean survival of the cruel. The fittest can mean those who adapt, those who think. You can still choose what kind of person you want to be. Also, all I am is your brother, not a professor so that's all I know or thought up to. But I guess you have deeper questions lil' fella." He leaned in and tossed Cheese's hair gently, and tied on his apron.

The words helped a little. After helping with customers for the rest of the day, Cheese walked home alone. Cold wind chased scraps of newspaper along the sidewalk. He picked one up and dropped it into a trash can. It felt like a tiny correction, though he did not know why.

At home, he opened his notebook and wrote: *Saw a bully. I did nothing. Why did I stay still? If survival is the only rule, why do I still care?* He wrote one more line: *I need to understand why anyone helps.*

In his room, the corner wall was crowded with sticky notes and scraps of paper, lines and arrows drawn between them. Questions about survival, kindness, and power sprawled across the plaster like a map of a country he hadn't learned to navigate.



He closed the notebook, but the question remained. Far across the city, in a place Cheese would never imagine, another man was awake. A suit, a window, a file open beneath his hand on a desk. The name at the top: CHEESE CARTER. The man read the notes with interest. *The subject shows increased introspection. Moral agitation.* The man tapped the page. He looked out at the city. A curious mind could become a threat. Not the violent kind, but the kind that notices too much.

Cheese woke before dawn, heart still heavy. He made tea in a chipped cup and stared out the window. People were already unlocking gates, jogging past puddles. He would go back into that world with the question still walking beside him. He stepped out. The smell of damp street and exhaust filled his lungs. But somewhere, hidden in the cold air, was a faint warmth—a memory of something worth holding. And with that, the question moved with him, not as a weight but as a guide.

Cheese reached the subway entrance and paused. The stairs led down into a cacophony of noise and movement. He took one breath, feeling the cold of the railing against his palm. His father used to take him down these same steps long ago. He remembered the sound of his father's boots, the way his father spoke about choices even when he had so few. That memory flickered, sharp and distant. His father had left without a note, without explanation. Some said he chased work. Cheese had heard whispers that his father had once stood up to the wrong men, and the consequence had followed him. His mother never explained. She only said, "Some people disappear even while they are still alive."

Cheese stepped forward, the noise of the underground rushing around him. He kept moving. The question in his head was no longer just about bullies in a playground. It was about his father, who might have once tried to do the right thing and paid a price. It was about the cost of helping.

He reached the platform and watched people crowd toward the edge. The thought came again: *If being kind can get you hurt, is it still worth doing?* He did not yet have an answer. But for the first time, it felt like a path, not a wall.

The train roared in, lights flickering through the tunnel. As the doors opened, he stepped inside. He looked at the faces around him. Some tired, some guarded. He clutched his notebook. He would write everything down. He would collect clues until a pattern appeared. And one day, he would know why some people walk away and others stay.

On the train, Cheese turned a page from his notebook and scrawled another question. His handwriting slanted with the rhythm of the tracks: *If survival is everything, why does kindness ache when ignored?*

He paused, tapping the pen against the page. The man seated beside him— middle-aged, gray at the temples, briefcase resting on his knees— glanced at the words. His eyes lingered a second too long.

Cheese felt the familiar instinct to cover the notebook, to shrink into the seat and let the question remain his alone. But something pressed back against that instinct, the same weight that had been building since the garden fence. For the first time, he didn't fold the paper shut. He lifted it, almost timidly, and let the stranger see.

The man raised an eyebrow. "That's... not what most kids at your age write down," he said, voice caught between amusement and unease.

Cheese swallowed, the words pushing through his throat like a door being forced open. "Do you think helping is worth it," he asked quietly, "even if it hurts?"



The question hung in the stale air of the subway car, louder to Cheese than the roar of the tracks. He had no idea what answer would come, or if one would come at all. But asking— speaking the thought aloud— felt like a step across an unseen line.

The man blinked, caught off guard. His mouth opened as though to answer. "Sometimes—" But the train lurched, and the noise swallowed the rest.

For a heartbeat, Cheese wasn't sure if he had heard anything at all. It didn't matter. The question was out there now, carried on the rattling air between strangers.

He gripped the pole tighter, pulse loud in his ears. Whatever came next, he was no longer the boy who only watched and stayed silent. He had crossed into something new, though he couldn't name it yet.

Outside the window, the city blurred into streaks of light and shadow. Somewhere in its depths, behind an office door no one noticed, a man in a suit underlined a sentence in a file marked CHEESE CARTER.

**"Subject vocalized first external question."**

The man tapped his pen against the page, once, twice.

On the train, Cheese held his notebook close. The question still lived in him— but now it also lived in the world.

## CHAPTER TWO

### UNDERSTANDING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The walk from the subway to the library stretched longer than it really was. The street felt heavy with a kind of weight that was not just weather. Midtown moved with a damp, exhausted energy. The pavement glimmered with remnants of rain. Water dripped from scaffolding, tapping like a slow clock.

Cheese's mother walked ahead with brisk, deliberate steps. She did not speak much. Her words had been thin all morning careful and brief, like she was saving energy for something else. She had taken a day off work, a day she could not really afford to lose. She had not complained.

She glanced at her phone again and again—the same work message, the same demand she could not answer. Every silence between pings carried a cost she could not afford. Her tote bag swung hard against her side with each stride. Cheese hesitated once, wanting to apologize for making her come, but the words crumbled before they reached his tongue. The memory of yesterday still pressed into his chest. Fear, regret, and anger at himself and the question.

They passed a man shouting scripture to no one in particular, his voice cracking with raw force. Behind that was the drill of construction, each sound colliding rather than layering. The noise of the city felt like chaos wearing a mask of routine.

Cheese lifted his eyes toward the buildings. Somewhere above, office workers typed behind glass, and somewhere below, others mopped floors and hauled boxes in basement corridors. The library stood somewhere in between those layers of the city, a place that felt like a shrine to questions, at least in his imagination.

Then the stone face of the main library rose ahead, pale and tall. It looked like something built to last beyond comfort or warmth. Words carved above the entrance looked solemn from this distance, unreadable yet heavy. The steps were broad like a public altar, and at each side of those stairs stood the lions.

He stopped at the bottom. The lions were massive. Stone faces worn by time, mouths slightly open in either warning or judgment. They had seen a century of people walk by, some entering, many turning away. They looked less like guardians and more like watchers, measuring who dared climb the steps.

His mother stopped halfway up and turned. "You coming?" She had not meant it to sound sharp, but it did. She motioned upward with a slight tilt of her head. He felt his throat tighten. One lion seemed to look directly at him.

He forced himself up the steps. Each footfall felt like a test. The lions watched but said nothing.

Inside, the air shifted. It was colder, drier, and full of echoes. Every footstep sounded larger. Marble columns rose around him like pillars meant to hold up judgment itself. The ceiling arched above, its colors faded, as if light were not welcome to be too bright.

Two guards stood near the entrance. Their eyes scanned each person. One of them frowned when he looked at Cheese, as though deciding if he belonged.

Cheese's mother leaned closer and whispered, "Stay close," not with fear, but with caution.

They passed the main desk. The staff there wore polite expressions that never reached their eyes. His mother straightened her shoulders as though bracing for questions or instructions. But they turned down a hallway before anyone stopped them. There was a meeting to attend. A woman named Ms. Patel.

Ms. Patel appeared from around a corner as though she had been waiting. Her navy sari shimmered slightly with silver embroidery. She looked directly at Cheese first, not at Shay. Her eyes were sharp, calm, almost knowing.



**Cheese Carter does not shout.**

**He does not fight.**

**He watches.**

With a notebook and a set of quiet codes, Cheese spends his recess observing the small, unnoticed moments of human behavior—acts of kindness, silence, and cruelty that most people ignore. Writing gives him control in a world that feels unpredictable. It gives him purpose.

But when his notes begin to attract attention—from classmates, teachers, and unseen watchers—his simple project turns dangerous.

As pressure grows and lines blur between protection and surveillance, Cheese must confront questions no child should have to face:

**Who decides which voices matter?**

**What does kindness cost?**

**And what happens when asking becomes a threat?**

Blending psychological tension with emotional depth, *A Child's Question to Kindness* is a haunting coming-of-age novel about courage, truth, and the quiet power of refusing to disappear.