**Title: The Great Mess Tea Sabotage**

**Theme: Camaraderie**

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If you’ve ever been in the Air Force, you know there are two things that run any station: the

ATC tower and the tea in the mess. If either fails, the whole base grinds to a halt.

This story happened in 2018 at a base in the South. I was a relatively new Squadron Leader, posted with a mix of young trainees and salty veterans who’d seen more airfields than my generation had seen WhatsApp forwards.

One evening, after a long sortie debrief, we all gathered in the mess. Our mess had this

legendary chai — strong enough to wake the dead, sweet enough to ruin your dental plan.

The cook, Subramaniam, guarded that tea recipe like it was the nation’s last defence secret.

But one day, the chai was terrible. Watery. Sad. Rumour spread that Subramaniam was on leave and someone else was making the tea — and failing spectacularly. The whole mess was up in arms. Pilots can fly through storms but bad chai? Mutiny.

So, we came up with a plan. The youngest officer, Flying Officer Mishra — full of rookie

enthusiasm — was sent on a covert mission to “rescue” the tea. He sneaked into the pantry, found Subramaniam’s spice box, and tried to replicate the secret blend.

Let’s just say we should stick to flying aircraft.

The next morning’s chai was so spicy, the Station Commander nearly ordered a full inquiry. Mishra was summoned like he’d crashed a fighter jet. The mess committee had an emergency meeting. And Subramaniam was urgently recalled from leave — a hero’s

welcome.

That evening, over perfect cups of the restored tea, the Station Commander raised his cup and declared: *“Gentlemen and ladies, let’s never mess with a good thing again.”*

Years later, whenever we meet at reunions, someone always asks Mishra if he wants to

make the chai. He just shakes his head and orders coffee instead.

Why I Shared This?

Not every story is about heroics in the sky. Sometimes it’s about how the smallest traditions — like a good cup of tea — bring us together, make us laugh, and remind us that uniform or not, we’re human first.

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