

STATEMENT - OF - INTENT

This narrative writing piece is aimed at portraying the harsh reality of losing a loved one while focusing on the importance of receiving a homemade hot lunch which is usually taken for granted. This can be viewed both, through a literal and metaphorical lens. In this case, the lens will be through that of Sharnah, a particularly empowered Indian woman, whose busy life permits her from taking a single break and eating the tenderly packed lunches her mother makes for her. The Coursework looks above and beyond the reality of the moment and instead spotlights the vulnerability and sense of belonging that the kitchen offers to Sharnah, a mystical connection between Sharnah and her mother. With the help of complex sentences using vivid imagery and vocabulary as well as figurative language, we hope to highlight the positivity and raw simplicity (with fresh hints of tranquility) that Sharnah feels as she deeply regrets the lunches her mother cooked for her. The simple sentences and one worded exclamation show the deep regret and touched nature of Sharnah's voice as she recalls the love with which her mother packed her lunches. The piece talks about themes of female empowerment and gratitude and respect for those who have helped us reach where we are.

FILTER COFFEE

S H A R N A H

Throughout her office's canteen, teacups clink against their saucers with the same careful precision an assassin might use when swiping a blade across a throat. She tunes out of the senseless gossip and stares down at the Styrofoam cup she clutches in her hands, brimming with filter coffee, loose tendrils of steam gracefully curling into the air.

Sitting there amidst the chaos of the canteen, she can hear the tick of the clock, the bubbling of the aquarium, and the disturbing, yet oddly pacifying hums of the cars zooming by the low windows of the office. The impatient boredom radiating off the idle journalists that line the flimsy plastic chairs, including her, is almost palpable.

Even though it's lunchtime, ticking pens have replaced their spoons, laptops, their food trays, and cups of cheaply brewed filter coffee are precariously balanced at the edges of their tables.

She punches through the keys on her laptop, finishing the last few words of the article that had been pushing an invisible weight on her already slumping shoulders, forgetting about the lovingly packed hot lunch box kept aside in a dark forlorn corner of her cubicle.

Just like she forgot yesterday.

And the day before that.

Somehow, quite fascinatingly, she involuntarily finds herself clutching onto a flimsy cup of filter coffee, the artificial taste of the styrofoam leaving a bitter aftertaste. What she should have in her hands instead, is one of those several steel spoons her mother packed for her in her eccentrically colorful lunch bag. Instead of sipping on the bland concoction, she should be eating the vegetables of every color under the sun with gravies as thick as the glasses that rest precariously on her nose. Instead of the lingering taste of styrofoam, she should have her taste buds tingling with a burst of marsala chili powders, and burning excitedly with the aftertaste of cardamom.

But even so, she chooses the more convenient one.

The less time-consuming option.

Because it is always about the time crunch, no time for feelings.

A M M A - J I

She sits by the window of her kitchen, waiting for the pressure cooker to let out one last shrill cry so that she could cook fried rice, her daughter's favorite dish. She makes the rice in hopes that the buzzing turmeric will renew her daughter's senses and that the prickling pepper will rejuvenate her daughter's overworked facial features that once seemed to glow with a radiant light, which is now usually replaced by the artificial luminesce of the blaring laptop screen.

She hums as she chops an onion, crocodile tears smudging the kohl that lines her eyes. Her bangles clink together, and glint in the rays of undappled delirious sunlight that streams down in rivulets from the window she sits by.

She hopes against hope that her daughter will finally give a moment to herself and eat a proper meal-

A sudden jolt flings her into the present.

It feels as if a thousand-pound mammoth is hammering down on her chest, never letting her grasp a breath. She coughs violently, tasting the salty tears in her mouth.

She falls to the ground, crumpling into a tangle of silken red satin sari cloth, gold bangles, and silvery speckled hair, gasping for breath. She grasps for a glass of cold water with her grotesquely blue-ish hand to wash away the pain. Stumbling on the edge of the living and the dead, constantly hanging by a single thread between the two realms, she fights for a single breath.

With her blackening vision, she can only see the penetrating shadows that seem to grow with every passing second, she almost wants to let go of the pain. The ringing in her ears intensifies and she chokes on the kitchen floors, frantically flailing for her cell phone.

Anything to reach her daughter, the embodiment of regularity, perfection, love, refuge, and safety.

Right hand, clenching her chest, she makes a final attempt to stabilize herself on the newly wiped checkered floors.

It's yet another failed attempt.

Her sight darkens to the color of Indian ink, and her mind clouds over.

But this time, she welcomes the darkness.

S H A R N A H

Alone, she sits in the waiting room, staring at the walls that are a dark shade of gray. The ambient lighting is set to blue because it was supposed to calm the relatives of the patients waiting there. But all she can feel is a sense of uneasiness wash over her as she finally closes her tired eyes. The gray reminds her of her mother's silvery salt-and-pepper hair, once a sleek luscious curtain of black that cascaded down her back. Her skull hammers a tattoo on the inside edge of her head, she cannot sit idle, doing absolutely nothing, while her mother fights death in the opposite room.

Tears stream down her face, tears she never knew she was holding in.

Her head is swamped with the fragility of the moment. She tries to walk the tightrope – maintaining her balance cautiously– being hopeful, yet not completely oblivious.

Faithful that her mother will make it out alive, yet not completely wrapped up in a blissful bubble of false hope.

What she yearns for right now, is the comfort of regularity.

What she needs right now is a strong dose of caffeine, yes, a cup of filter coffee is the solution. She looks through her bag, frantically searching for her chapstick. Putting on a layer of gloss makes her feel like she isn't falling apart.

But she's cheating herself.

Because she is falling apart.

She stumbles down the corridor to look for a coffee machine, but she can't spot one.

She hopelessly moves back to the waiting room. Like an angel dressed in paisley patterns, she sees her lunch box, filled with the lunch that she never ate. Grabbing for its threaded body with limp hands, she snaps open her lunch box, only to be greeted by the overwhelming smell of crushed coriander powder and black pepper.

For a minute, she is transferred into her kitchen back at home.

She's no longer Sharnah, the busy budding business journalist, she's five-year-old Sharnah, helping her mother out in the kitchen and soaking in the smell of a thousand spices all at once.

For a long minute, she's no longer in a foreign hospital waiting room, she's back in the comfort of her mother's kitchen.

For a second of solace, she's not yearning for her mother's presence, she's wrapped up tightly in her mother's embrace that smells of fresh garden spring rolls and apple pie baked just right.

She's safe.

The disturbing rustle of clipboards and lab coats snaps her out of her stupor.

It's the doctors who operated on her mother.

"How is she?"

"Mrs. Gupta made it."

And then, just for a single ethereal moment, she forgets what filter coffee tastes like.