

Title (up to 20 words) - They Said a Girl Can Only Dream

Strapline (up to 40 words) - Take a trip to memory lane with Amal, as she shares her story about life in Pakistan through flashbacks, whilst preparing for a big day at school in her new home. England.

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) -

'Amal, please can you eat your breakfast quickly?', Mama asked me in Punjabi. 'You need to get ready for school or you will be late. Stop dazing around.'

I sighed, looking down at my morning meal, which was already half soggy from its morning swim in cows' milk. Rolling myself off the oak chair, which was embroidered with cheap leather, I stood tall with my empty bowl and spoon, wandering into the kitchen. It felt like I was there for the hundredth time today. I stared at the astonishingly big pile, that slumped itself somehow, into the kitchen sink. Raising a piece of silverware, I started polishing, cleaning away like time itself started to entail.

Strangely, it somehow reminded me of the time I lived in Pakistan. Even though I, a daughter of South Asian parents, had to constantly help around; wash dishes; hang up the laundry; and act as a second mother to my siblings, I still somehow enjoyed everything. I stood for a while thinking to myself about how much I missed my homeland- the smells from my memories still lured, sweetly sticking in my mind, almost like honey on toast.

'Amal, please go and wash your face, I can see crumbs on your cheeks.', complained Mama, who always made sure everything was in its place.

I dragged myself, stuffed with early morning fuel to the sink, which was not filled with piled-up dishes like the kitchen sink. I smiled in my head with that thought; it meant that I did not have to clean another plate that morning. I splashed my face with cold water. It sparked my mind. The cooling sensations of cerulean hit me, gentle yet strong, with the thoughts of the dreams I had dreamed when I was at home. My home. I used to look up every night, stargazing at millions of specs, which seemed like they draped a map of hope across our visions. It made me think. I thought about all the things that hugged me with interest, which gave me the same feeling I get from Mama's cooking. I always dreamt of doing something big, like becoming a nurse or a policewoman. But my aunties in our village would always say that I was dreaming too big, and that it wouldn't happen because I am a girl. They said a girl can only dream but I thought

nothing of their old and not wise words and continued to strive for what I deserve. As I patted my face dry, I smiled at the other me- the one that was standing before me in my reflection.

Startled, I heard the vacuum lurking its way towards me as I was changing into my school uniform. Mama was cleaning again. I wrapped on my tie to my shirt's collar, like a Christmas present with its ribbon bow. After getting ready, I walked downstairs towards the vacuum's echoes. The echoes wailed loudly. I took another step into the living room; it made me pause with a slight feverish feeling, as if they were here again. As if four years back made its way here again.

'Hey, get out of here, or you will be sorry! I want everyone to get out of this room right now or you will get hurt!', yelled the Taliban in our native language.

You are probably wondering who that is. To simplify it down, the Taliban is the villain, the bad guy, the one that ruins everything for everyone.

The room was filled with women and girls of all ages, and suddenly spilled out, becoming desolate and lonely. Empty. No one was there. The Taliban continued to pose a threat to our people, taking our homes. Our joy. And our freedom. It was a painting; it had been washed away so much that there was no colour and life left of it. Our beautiful country was now in the hands of villains, who urged for nothing but wealth. It upset me. I was furious. Mama said that we needed to get away. My heart shattered into millions of shards, stabbing me with sadness, as we had to say goodbye to our home. I hated goodbyes. And I still do now. We left home, to find another, and that other home is England. This is where we are now.

'Amal, you have five minutes and then you need to set off for school. Don't forget your lunch.' Mama mentioned, as she carefully watched the hands of the clock tick forwards.

'No worries, Mama.' I replied whilst trying to pack my backpack.

I grabbed my essentials, one by one, double checking that everything was set.

I remembered when we had to sell my uniform and notebooks onetime. It was very unfortunate, but Mama and Baba were in desperate need- we all were. With the low income for Baba, we had to sacrifice our things in order to live and eat and have a home. I remember when I got told that I didn't need an education, and that it was better for me to help Mama at home. They told me to stay at home, to cook and clean, because that is what a girl does best. Sometimes I thought to myself, why can't I go to school? Why is it that a girl can only dream to do something big? My thoughts broke for a second, as Mama hurried me outside for my journey to school.

I got to class thinking about my life in Pakistan, contemplating on my dreams and the standards that were set, where it seemed like it was a world more fit for a man. And a man only. Women were out of the picture, like the second class, like a background of any picture.

My thought bubble burst. It was time.

‘And now, we have Amal up next to deliver her speech on her chosen topic ‘Education rights for girls.’”

A crowd of classmates applauded for Amal. A girl who they were not ready for.