

Canteen Line

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It was 10:48am. Lunch started exactly 22 minutes and 40 seconds ago. 41 now. But who's counting? The school canteen is always stuffed with people. Pungent kids glowing with sweat to be specific. Crowded flushing waves of heads and sprawling hands and elbows baking in the blazing sunshine. Most days I'd rather not go and silently suffer through the discoloured lumps of cold meat my mum packs that calls itself 'beef' but today was a Friday and I had discovered a \$2 rusty coin stuck beneath the table on a piece of still sticky grape gum. Quite the treasure if you ask me.

Goosebumps flushed up my arms just thinking about it. I fixed my gaze from the very interesting glimmering red Coke can, smushed against the concrete, to the mass of the people before me. Or at least attempted to, barely dodging the digging elbows that threatened to puncture my ribs and gouge out my soul. Maybe this wasn't such a great idea. A few bobbing heads near the front caught my wandering eyes, enthusiastically chanting their heads off to the word 'pizza' like they were front row fangirls at a sold-out concert.

Above us, the sun towered over in the wistful blue sky, shooting the scorching heat through the school yard and onto the pounding crown of my head. On days like this I yearned for the bitter, blistering winter and the odd comfort of its crisp pierce of cold that numbed me and bit into my skin.

'Move it!'

The unruly screech of either a dying camel or a teenage boy experiencing puberty dragged me back to the parched heat of the present, and I scooted forward until the candied scent of the girl before me was so heavy, my nostrils flared in discomfort. Honeyed caramel perfume smothered me and peppery tears pinched my eyes, turning them red from the harsh chemicals. I could hear her chewing gum, stretching it between her teeth and gnawing on the pink elastic. Occasionally, there was a loud pop and every single time I would twitch a bit more.

Instinctively, my gaze kept dropping to my feet and I'd find myself inspecting the bricks and pebbles and concrete slabs with little grass stubs poking through, tucked in the tiny cracks of dirt. I had fallen into this habit since grade three, and somehow, I found a weird sense of peace in it. I always found the most wildly gorgeous flowers probing for small fragments of beauty. Easily this became my favourite part of the day. Concealed on the very ground I stood on, wild vines and leaves sprung free from the hard concrete, driving against the concept it's built for.

'Next!'

Once again, pulled from my petty daydreams, I stepped forward, saying the phrase I've been practicing in my head for the past who knows how many minutes.

'I'll have a -'

RINGGGGGGG.