

From *100 Grams of Rice* by Katherine Stewart

Paramita glided down the stairs. Tall and thin, she had perfect posture and poise. Her skin glistened like creamy carnelian, her lips were touched with a hint of pink lipstick, and a carefully coiffured pageboy framed her face like a medieval helmet. Gold chains, pearl earrings, and polished finger nails all complemented the white silk blouse that gathered at her neck. Black palazzo trousers rippled around her ankles as she walked. Her clothes were a fashion plate of modern 1970s England, her perfume French, and her demeanor a remnant of her proper education. But her style was singed at the edges by a frown and deep lines between her eyes.

“Follow me,” she said, walking past. They rounded the house and reaching the back door, Paramita halted.

“You’ve come at an awkward time. Important guests will soon arrive for dinner,” Paramita said, her tone tense and exacting.

Before Amisha could voice her gratitude, the older woman opened the door and pushed Amisha into the kitchen. Once inside, her mouth flooded with saliva at the sight of food. Freshly-cut vegetables were piled on a chopping block, baked *naan* and *samosas* wrapped in clean linen towels, and buttered chicken simmered in a large cast-iron pot. She inhaled the aromas as if this was her last breath. Before she could beg for a handful of cashews, Amisha felt Paramita’s fingertips press into her lower back like the barrel of a small hand gun and she was marched to a tiled shower room.