

### Emily Sarid's Short Story Review Rough Draft

*Jeff's general notes: very strong. Closer to a final draft than most. The first body paragraph is very long, and the rest are shorter. Perhaps break up first para into two. Potentially make some other paras longer. But, overall, this is a thoughtful and very well-written draft.*

Shobha Rao's "Kavitha and Mustafa" is a **thought-provoking** short story that explores the subjects of identity, trust and the power of restricted emotions. The story takes place in a tiny train on the way to Pakistan where the protagonist, Kavitha, along with her husband, Vinod, and 9 other people are victims to a violent robbery. Kavitha continually shifts between describing her failed marriage and the suspenseful robbery occurring in the present moment. Rao writes with a **distinct** style and uses contrast to convey the main idea that **when confronted with a situation of great intensity, one's true nature and desires surface.**

**Commented [JG1]:** Can you use a more precise word?

**Commented [JG2]:** Can you use a more precise word?

**Commented [JG3]:** Thesis is nicely phrased. Clear. Simple. Strong.

The use of contrast by the author is an extremely important element of this story as it truly highlights the essence of the theme. The readers were exposed to two fronts of Kavitha's identity: that in which she portrayed for her marriage as well as the brave and fearless self she displayed in the berth. These were continually juxtaposed throughout the story as the narrator integrated pieces of her marriage during the suspenseful journey on the train. **Kavitha's true thoughts regarding her marriage were expressed in this passage where she uses language such as "it was out of habit", "He'd seemed handsome enough" and "Just be happy he doesn't beat you"** (262). These phrases allow the reader to recognize the fact that Kavitha had accepted the mediocrity and comfort of her marriage. However, we also learn about her thirst for excitement and something more: "but she secretly wondered if perhaps **that** is what it would take to bring his gaze to life: violence" (262). I felt both frustrated and confused reading this, as it's as though she

**Commented [JG4]:** This sentence says the exact same thing as the sentence before it.

**Commented [JG5]:** You haven't quite given us the context for these quotes.

**Commented [JG6]:** What is "that"? Context?

says the word “violence” with a sense of hope, wishing to see more life in her husband.

Similarly, her desperation to be in touch with, and subsequently act on her feelings become extremely prevalent on the train ride: “Vinod, who was sitting next to Kavitha, reached over and patted her hand, as if to calm her, but she was already strangely calm. Even with one of the guards standing right next to her, on the other side of the door, close enough to touch, so close that his metal rod was within Kavitha’s arm’s reach” (267). This passage provides a similar understanding of Kavitha’s desperation to escape. Vinod attempts to comfort her, however she realizes that she doesn’t need him as she’s already calm, highlighting the disconnection in which she feels. The word “strangely” makes me understand that this sense of independence is new to her. The emptiness portrayed in that moment of her marriage is immediately contrasted by her yearn to act on this sense of assurance and reach out for the guard’s rod, symbolizing her desire to escape. Additionally, the guard’s “rod” can be seen as a phallic symbol, once again

**Commented [JG7]:** Really nice.

underlining the contrast between her two situations. At home, she expressed her disinterest in having sex with her husband, attributing it to the loss of their child. However, with this subtle comment regarding the guard, I question whether her sexual desires were repressed due to the fact that she didn’t love her husband, or if this is how she truly felt. With the presence of the men around her, she may be reminded of an aspect of her life in which she’s been deprived of for a long time. Kavitha’s internal conflict was conspicuous to her striking decision on the train to grab the young boys hand rather than her husbands. In a moment of such intensity, her husband simply held her hand, which she ultimately accepted at the time as it was what she expected of him. However, the boy’s fearless actions and strong will to escape contrasted the husband’s insipidness. Kavitha mapped out a plan to escape the berth, and used this opportunity to also escape her marriage. At home, Kavitha settled for her submissive self and feelings of numbness

**Commented [JG8]:** Great.

**Commented [JG9]:** Yes. Nice.

but on the train, she proved herself to be swift, smart and decisive. This passage is filled with a sense of uncertainty in Kavitha's desires and we gain a sense of the very unfulfilling atmosphere at home. This creates a dissimilarity from the rest of the story, in which action, suspense and passion are all prevalent on the train.

Although Kavitha continually addresses her dissatisfaction in her marriage, she also demonstrates that she doesn't need much to be happy. She was envious of the simple yet admirable tenderness that the couple across from her apartment shared, in which she desperately craved. She describes their love for one and another not by physical affection, but by mutual and reciprocated sweetness. For example, the wife's effort to change into a nice dress to impress her husband, and the thoughtfulness of his simple gesture of bringing biscuits (264). The author makes it seem as though Kavitha is daydreaming by interrupting her anecdote with the harsh voice of a guard: "Your jewels", ultimately contrasting the two situations and giving insight into the mindset she's in (264). Kavitha mentally escapes the conflict on the train by thinking about her neighbor's marriage rather than her own, which she fails to seek comfort in. Similarly, when the brother on the train simply reaches out for the woman who is being touched inappropriately by the guard, Kavitha views this as an immense and heroic gesture. This further demonstrates Kavitha's displeasure in her marriage, as she never describes her husband with this sense of astonishment.

With the use of imagery, the author further encapsulates the contrast between Vinod and Mustafa's characters, ultimately providing us with a stronger idea of the reasoning behind her final decision. When describing her husband, Kavitha focuses on the "dullness in his eyes" and Rao uses repetition to highlight the persistence in the husband's dreariness (262). When Kavitha glances at the boy, she quickly recognizes the "intention in his glaze" (266). It's as though she

**Commented [JG10]:** Super para. Maybe a bit long. Divide in two? The last bit is great, but you have a long stretch with no citation. Perhaps contrast the moment you're discussing with another citation?

**Commented [JG11]:** Great relation to thesis. More contrast/desire.

**Commented [JG12]:** Absolutely. I'm buying what you're selling here.

**Commented [JG13]:** This refers to the author, in the way you've written this sentence. Also, maybe a bit of a long sentence. Simplify?

**Commented [JG14]:** Great contrast to quote above. Quote contains a typo.

saw more hope looking into someone's unfamiliar eyes rather than her own husband's. She communicated with Mustafa by simply looking at him, symbolizing the powerful connection that they shared. Over the course of a train ride, Kavitha built a more meaningful and exhilarating relationship with this young boy than she had with her husband in the span of a 10-year marriage. Although her husband is sitting right next to her, she focuses her attention on the boy who seems to offer more of a comfort. This is further symbolized in terms of materials, when the boy hands her his belongings: "Again, nothing was quite clear in her mind, but never had two rocks and a piece of twine seemed to hold so much promise. The contents of her shoes – a necklace, some rings and a set of matching bracelets – held none" (269). Jewelry is most typically associated with sentimental worth and is viewed as highly valuable. Here, Kavitha attributes no worth to her necklace and is more intrigued by a simple piece of twine that belonged to the young boy. She in fact feels a sense of pleasure and relief when the guard takes away her possessions as it symbolizes that she is no longer attached to or held back by her marriage to Vinod.

When reading this story for a second time I noticed an aspect of the author's writing that I was completely oblivious of at first. Rao guides our thoughts in a particular direction and very slyly foreshadows the final outcome by the way and order in which she presents Kavitha's thoughts. As soon as Kavitha seems to be having some sort of revelation, Rao follows this what seems to be a distracted or different thought but can also be seen as a close association. After failing to think of a way out of the berth, she says "The answer must lie in the body, in its unquenchable will to live", which is immediately followed by: "Her gaze fell on the little boy's feet" (269). This connects the boy's body, which is currently suffering to live, with the answer she claims she is looking for. Rao eloquently does this again near the end of the story as Kavitha

**Commented [JG15]:** Great connection between two quotes.

Sarid 5

courageously stands up to go to the washroom as part of her plan to escape, and is “thinking only of the little boy” (270). This thought directly transitions into the subject of her stillbirth, in which we are hearing about for the first time. Subconsciously, I associated the young boy with Kavitha’s stillbirth, leading to the idea that the boy fills a void for Kavitha that she has been longing for so long. When Kavitha describes the stillbirth, she states: “I wanted to love the child that way, without a name”, which makes me reflect upon the fact that she doesn’t even know Mustafa’s name, yet is in part entrusting him with her future (271).

**Commented [JG16]:** Yes. More great connections.