

NEW KID IN TOWN

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People who don't add sugar in their tea or coffee always seem to come off a bit proud about it, don't they? There is a certain aura to when they say "sugar-free" or "Oh... No sugar, please" as they order away. Cutting down sugar, proving themselves to be the superior kind while chugging cups of strong, bitter caffeine they cannot function without? Not so amazing, after all.

But to Mariah, sugar is everything. Not just sugar but anything sweet. Two teaspoons of white crystals are a default for anything she drinks. These days, the trashcan in her bedroom is flooded with candy wrappers; diabetes is not a legitimate concern. Come what may, her fitness routine is truly unbeatable. To her, daily workouts will keep bad diseases at bay whatever the diet. Combine that with regular detox drinks and Pilates.

She enters the café, welcomed by the thick aroma of coffee that hung in the air and the metallic cling of a bronze

bell that hung in the brick-laid entrance. Sarah is on duty today, filling in for the newbie on leave. She sees her coming.

That's a new jacket. Must be a birthday present from last week.

"One frappé for the lady? Strawberry?" she asked as she swiped the counter top dry.

"Need a change. Hot chocolate, please," Mariah quickly answered not looking up to greet, too caught up on the phone.

Not too hot, sweet with foam on top and a drizzle of caramel, chocolate syrup, no whipped cream, Sarah makes a mental note as she places the order.

Mariah is craving for a brownie. But this month has been particularly hard on her. She is guilty of the large cup ordered already. Typical student problems: tortured souls always running low on cash, sleep, stamina, will to live and basically everything.

The WiFi auto-connects to her phone and soon she indulges herself in a clip of pregnant cats getting an ultrasound scan.

Strange discovery. Who knew cats need it too?

Café 95 Degrees! is busier than usual at the moment; her order is running late. The name is pretty wicked for a fact that a barista's lucky number is 95 — the perfect brewing temperature for coffee beans. Celsius, of course.

A group of tweens reeking of popcorn walks by.

"Add me up, will ya? @ameerashid07," a girl dressed in pastel chimed in. She had a unicorn horn sticking out of her hair band. She clearly fancied glitter; the eyes sparkled revealingly. Her sneakers desperately needed to be tied up again.

"Yeah, you with the flower crown. Gotcha!" replied one of her girlfriends.

"That filter needs to come back, big time!"

There are no cute cat videos left to binge on. Bored, she looks up the name on Instagram. A public account for, what, a 13-year-old? You could

tell she is 13 because "07", duh. Just like millennials used to put their birth year in usernames. But there is more to the kid's feed. Mariah knows her. A few years ago, she used to babysit her and help her with homework.

1137 posts. Too much activity. 6.7K followers. Wow, okay. A lot of likes too. Popular much? Food, food, food, selfie, feet, beach day, random guy, oh, family. Mrs Rashid never ages. Closet vampire. Looks like they are a bigger family now. New twins. Muneera and Abeera. With two 3-year-olds in the picture, they would need help now, more than ever.

They recently moved to the city. To her city. Thanks to highlights. Cherry on top, their new house is a roughly seven-minute walk from the dorm. And as she sipped her hot chocolate, she sensed the prospect of... a new job, and... more brownies.

Hiya loves food that you hate by norm-broccoli, pineapple pizza and Bounty bars. Find her at hiyaislam.11@gmail.com

