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## The Finest Coffee in All the Land

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## The Finest Coffee in All the Land

### **Author Bio**

Lori Atinizian is a Cinema and Media Studies major with a double minor in Writing and English. She loves going to the theaters and watching the Oscar Nominated shorts every year. Films that stimulate her brain and make her question life are particularly interest for her. One of her favorite novels is Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, which she has read many times ever since she first read it in the sixth grade.

## The Finest Coffee in All the Land

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Training began at a young age. My brother made the coffee nightly. He had the honor for a good chunk of time, and I was jealous. My job was to bring the coffee into the living room, where my parents, my aunt, and my uncle sat, watching TV and waiting for their order. It would come in cups neatly lined on a tray, and I was not to spill a single drop from the kitchen to the living room. Hold my body straight and glide. Don't look down. Glide. No coffee would spill. I was itching for the more dangerous task. The kind that made them smile and comment that it was good coffee.

"You can not make the soorj," my mother said to me in Armenian, "because you can not see the soorj on the stove-top."

Mothers are rarely right, but she was right. I could only see the edge of the counter.

My brother didn't rebel. He did as he was told. Instead, he cleverly waited until my age seemed about right to pass on the chores to his little sister.

"Mom," he said, "I think Lori is old enough to learn now."

"You are right," she acknowledged, looking at me, un-phased by my excitement. "Teach her how to do it. We want good soorj after dinner. If it's bad, you start again."

I knew I could make good coffee if I wanted to. I knew I could do better than him if I wanted to. I just needed to learn. He brought me to the stove. Pulled out the tray on the side of the counter, lined up petite saucers for the petite coffee cups to sit on top of them.

"Look," he explained, "they are four people, so four cups. Take one of these cups, fill it with water, and pour it in the chesve." I watched as he emptied out the water into the curvaceous, metal pot, the handle pointing upward, diagonally toward the sky. "Four times," he continued, "Four people equals four cups. Six people equals six cups. Understand?"

Of course I understood. Four equals four. Six equals six.

"Once you have all the water in, you want to boil it."

He put the heat on high. Watching the water made it boil faster.

He pushed me backward. "Don't lean over the water. When it begins to boil, it could hit your face. Your face will melt off. Do you know what it's like for your face to melt off? Don't do that, and you won't find out."

I stepped back, saddened by my break in concentration. It took ages to boil.

He pulled open the silverware drawer and removed a long-handled spoon.

I reached for the tin by the stove. Beneath an image of a bald man sipping coffee were the words *Mehmet Edendi: Türk Kahvesi*. My poor Turkish linguistic skills prevented me from translating it. It must have been one of my father's treasures that he brought from Turkey after his visits.

My brother took the tin from me and opened the lid, explaining, "One loaded spoon for each person," and the fumes of ground, Turkish coffee penetrated my nose. It made me sneeze. He held out the open tin to my face and extended the spoon in the other hand. "Show me how you're going to do it."

I wanted to take a moment to touch the finely ground coffee beans. The smell made me dizzy, but it looked just like the chocolate powder I use to sprinkle over my omelets in the morning. I licked my finger, poked the particles of Turkish dust, and quickly returned it to my tongue. My body went into a coughing fit.

My brother grinned at me and forced the spoon in my hand. “Feeling better now?”

I refused to look at his face and scooped four heaps into the boiling water.

“Now stir.”

And I stirred.

“Good, now stir every few minutes. You know it’s ready when it starts to boil around the rim,” he points toward the edges, “And the outer circle closes in to the very center. If you don’t watch it, it will boil over and spill everywhere. Then you’re going to have to clean it up, and Mom will yell at you.”

I stirred, and I watched for any signs of bubbles.

It started with tiny popping sounds. One after another, the size grew, and a circle of bubbles formed around the rim. The circle grew thicker. Thicker. Thick until it approached the center. My fingers were ready on the knob that controlled the heat on the stove. Just a little longer. A little closer. A little more, and my fingers tightened around the heat control.

My brother’s hands pushed my fingers out of the way, turned off the heat, and lifted the pot up in the air.

“You waited too long, stupid. Get the paper towel. You’re cleaning this up.”

After five minutes of cleaning, we restarted the process. My uncle shouted from the living room, “Is the soorj nearly ready?”

My brother and I looked at each other, and neither of us responded. I stared at the cesve again to make it boil faster, stirring and staring until finally the bubbles just about covered the entire surface, and I shut the heat in time before another mess was made.

“Good, now pour it in the cups slowly.”

One cup filled. Two cups filled. Three cups filled. Four cups filled. A little remained in the cesve. I grabbed a hold of the tray and lifted it up. Stare straight ahead, don’t look down, glide, and arrive in the living room. My uncle was watching soccer on the television while my mother and my aunt crunched on sunflower seeds, talking to each other about the people in my brother’s generation. My father was asleep on another couch.

I smiled proudly as I set the tray on the coffee table. “Turkish coffee isn’t as easy as it looks,” I said in Armenian for my entire family to understand.

“You made the soorj?” my uncle asked.

I nodded enthusiastically while giving him his coffee first.

“Lori, did you say *Turkish* soorj?” my mother’s displeased voice perplexed me.

“Yes. That’s what you wanted. That’s what you drink every night. Did I do something wrong? Did I make it wrong?”

“This is *not* Turkish soorj. It is *Armenian*.”

“But it’s Turkish on the tin.”

“Because the Turks stole it from us. It is originally our coffee. We drink Armenian coffee in this house.” My mother spoke more crossly.

I searched the room for my brother. He stood near the doorway between the kitchen and the living room watching me. We made eye contact, and his head shook in response. I returned my concentration to my mother, who had just taken a sip from her coffee.

“Not enough sugar. Try again.”