

eating in

I told her I had already eaten. In the years that I have known her in the capacity of my mother, I have not seen her take a no for an answer. I stop trying and sit down for the lunch she has lovingly spent all morning making. Potatoes fried with their skins still on—just how I like them.

“Let me tell you all about the meeting I had today while I was out shopping and once you are done eating, we can open all the presents I got for you together!”

“I might have to return to the laptop for a quick-”

“Bup bup bup, you can obviously find some time to spare for your dear mommy. I work so hard for you all day, wouldn't you let me see you and watch you smile at the things I have gotten you, can't you find five minutes in your day for your mother? I am getting old, dear, I am sick all the time, do you want to come to regret-”

“I will tell them I would be late to the meeting, family emergency.”

She squealed and clapped tiny claps with her fingertips. Everyone sat around, that is how she likes to do gifts, and watched as I opened my deodorant and a basket—we love organising everything—and the fifth flower painting we have bought this month, my mother loves to support local artists. I never am able to keep awake through the afternoon meetings anyway, and if my mother thinks it is okay for me to be skipping them, what do I know of the world to disagree with her upon?

They threaten disciplinary action and I tell them that I live with my family and I have responsibilities, my mother is getting old.

They tell me all that they need of me by EoD and claim that I am already an hour behind. My mother reassures me from my bed, where she finds rest from her day and watches me slouch in front of my screen. She used to tell me to sit better but has since moved on to other issues with my posture.

Work comes to a close, as it does, for the day and I find my phone ringing. My mother, who had gotten up to make dinner, has opened my door and stands there with her eyes on me, as my friend tells me of a jazz thing where they want to find someone to sleep with tonight. I ask them how long I should think to leave in and

my mother begins to make a sad face.

“I have made fish just the way you like it, I wrapped it in leaves for you! I work so hard for you, can’t we sit together and share a meal, my dear? My sweet child, you know I am getting old, the doctor has told me my eyes are starting to-”

“I don’t think I would be able to make it tonight,” I say to my phone, “work has really been taking it out of me. Hope you find someone pretty to take home.” I watch my mother’s face change.

With the spatula still in her hand, she squeals and claps her little claps. I love a quiet night in, and a fish is better for me than a beer is anyway.

After dinner, we get to watching TV. I love letting my mother pick what we spend our hours on. When I get tired, I get up and stretch a big stretch. I go to my room and by the time I am in bed, she is at my door.

“You would let me sleep in your bed tonight, won’t you? I get so cold and you know my allergies flare up in that room. And the weather is so ruthless, I get so cold and you know then my arthritis starts to act up on me when I get that cold and I just miss you so much when I sleep, you would let me sleep with you tonight, yes?” She asks as she dumps her blanket on my side of the bed.

It isn’t fair that I have a whole room to myself anyway. I could learn to share.

We could all have our own rooms but nobody goes into nani’s. It is how the world works. Daughters must eat their mothers. That is how they get the protein to raise their own daughters. Mumma told me how nani tried to bite her. She still has the scar on her forearm. Nani should have known better, we are born into our places in this world. It is unbecoming to try and believe otherwise, and more so to act on those beliefs.

I wake to find her bosom next to my face. I get up and find it in me to head into a shower. I try to be quiet so as to not wake her, she gets tired.

By the time the shower is over, I am late to my laptop and my mother is in the kitchen. It is lucky we don’t have locks or latches in this house because while in the shower, I could not hear her. She could just pop the door open and check if I wanted eggs for breakfast, because I did.

I clock into work and sit with my laptop at the dining table. She has made me breakfast, the least I could do is honour it. I must be a terrible child because I managed to make her cry anyway, I just had to move my cursor for one second.

“It makes me so sad, your work takes you away from me, I don’t have much longer to be around you, anyway. My age is getting to me, at this age one can never know

what the next day looks like. Who knows maybe one day I would just never wake from sleep-

“I will put the laptop away, fifteen minutes of inactivity isn’t going to make any difference in the money my manager would make this quarter.”

An hour later I get written up. It didn't make a difference to his salary but he is making it make a difference to mine. I can afford it. My time is my real treasure.

At lunch she asks me what I want from the market.

“You should come shopping with me, that way you can pick the colours yourself!” “I might get in trouble at work if I skip any more-”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course, work, work, work! It is all you say anymore. Work is all you think about. You did the same to me at breakfast. We don’t even know how many times of going to the market I have left in me, what with my knees and the doctor saying to change-”

“I will,”

“What if this is the last time we can go to the market together, you might come to regret-”

“I will tell them I am having trouble with my network, that should give us a couple of hours.”

She squeals and claps her little claps. We leave as soon as she finds those sandals she likes. I am glad to see her find her energy.

It is evening and my mother has gotten taken by another pair of underwear, inspecting it at the store. My friend calls me and tells me of a techno thing where they want to find someone to sleep with tonight. I tell them I will find them there in an hour.

“I could just leave from here, I don’t need to return home, it just makes sense,” I tell her.

“So you want me to go home alone? Have dinner alone?”

“That is not how it is, I just want to make it on time; I have promised my friend.”

“You should bring your friend over! We could all hang out together. That way I would still get to spend an evening with you,” I know where this is going. I love her but I do think that an evening of dancing could do me well.

“I have just given my word, you have taught me better than to lie. I promise I will be back home in no time.”

“Would you be back in time to tuck me in?”

“I will be back in time to tuck you in, I promise.”

“Don’t you go and find yourself someone else to keep you busy,” her chuckle is dry, “I barely get any of you anymore!”

I get home and she is curled up in my bed. I guess I can use her blanket tonight.

I wake to find her bosom next to my face. I get up and find it in me to head into a shower. I try to be quiet so as to not wake her, she gets tired.

By the time the shower is over, I am late to my laptop and my mother is in the kitchen. It is lucky we don’t have locks or latches in this house because while in the shower, I could not hear her. She could just pop the door open and check if I wanted pancakes for breakfast, because I did.

I sit with my pancakes and wait for her at the dining table. I have clocked into work and made it a point to keep the laptop discreet. She has work to do—she works so hard to keep the house in order—I couldn’t start eating without her.

Three hours later I am glad to not have had that much sugar for my breakfast anyway. She tells me I should have gone ahead and eaten them but I would rather just have lunch now. She tells me lunch might be a little while since the phone call took all her morning. I am glad she has friends, even if they are in other cities.

She tells me to finish work early so we could just go out for lunch. I tell them I would not be able to work a minute past 5 PM today, my mother was kind enough to agree to a lunch that late.

We go to that place that serves crab the way she likes it. While she is talking to the waiter trying to get him to reveal the recipe to her, my phone rings and I pick it up to my friend telling me of a live band thing where they want to find someone to sleep with tonight. I ask them how long I should begin to leave in.

“You want to leave me alone for another evening? What has gotten into you? You think I am some sort of a burden, don’t you? Your old mother who isn’t good enough for you to spend your time with and you need to get away from, I am too sick for you to have fun with, I am so exhausting to be around,”

“I just made a promise, I really don’t want for them to think I-”

“Your friend clearly does not understand what it means to be a loving child to a loving parent. If they are a good friend, they will understand. This will teach you the meaning of friendship.” She makes a face at me which I know is supposed to mean she is mad. Her scrunched-up face is so endearing, she is such a good mother that she is terrible at being angry at me.

“It is not just them, someone I met yesterday is also joining us, someone I would really like to meet again, can I please go?”

“You really should have felt a lot more shame asking that of me. You will come home with me at once!”

“But I-”

“Not a word out of you!” She is a little too loud for one of her favourite restaurants. I am sorry to have made her behave this way and see how she is right to ask what she is.

At home I ask her for a hug.

“I can’t get up now. Why don’t you come and give me a hug? Why don’t you come and get the hug you want so much? It’s not a job, giving a hug is not a job.” She glares at me.

I move to give her a hug and she turns in her bed.

“You want to come to bed with me?”

“I am sure you have found someone else to fill your bed with,” she scorns, the back of her head unmoving.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Don’t you play dumb with me, you know exactly what I am talking about. Here I am sick, and old, and working every day to provide for you so you don’t ever have to worry about a thing, you could just be, I just want you to not have a thing to worry about, and you are out there, bed-hopping, looking for someone you could leave me for,”

“What are these words you are saying? What is making you think these things?”

“I know your type, ungrateful little vermin like you, you have bled me dry and now you have no care for the fact that I am old and so exhausted all the time, you know my back, my spine, my hips are all literally broken raising you and you are willing to abandon me for the first whore who would have you.”

“Mumma-”

“No!” I have never seen eyes this big. She doesn't bother with the teeth and swallows me whole.

“You may come out when you have learned how to be a loving daughter,” she tells me. I can hear how her voice sounds to the inside of her. I remember the sound of this voice, the first ever to speak to me. The one that speaks to me now is nothing like it, the one that speaks to me now is everything like it.

I don't have her womb to keep me from the acid this time around.