

### I never knew when I was hungry - Starting line

(Play many conversations over in your head, like how you do IRL)

My body knew fatigue, emptiness and worry and I ate constantly or not at all. When I paused to wonder at my dissatisfaction, it was my avoidance of something very necessary. I opened the fridge and it was bare of sumptuousness, bottles of expired jalapenos when I thought I liked them for toppings, mouldy cheese that I could no longer eat and allowed it to grow old and ferment passed its prime in my fridge, as a token to my older self that could once digest cheese. I missed cheese, thinking of cheese toast caused my mouth to salivate and a self-loathing desire filled me with rage at my body's inability to process anything.

I yanked a tray of the freezer open, and pulled out one of the small, reused mash and gravy containers that my mother had labeled: \*herbs\*

This is what I wanted, \*herbs\*, \*dhal\*, and \*kitchari\*. I was sick of the curry people made here, it was chockfull of the ready-mixed spices you could find at the pick and pay or checkers and produced a synthetic flavour that made you believe that you could make curry, I know this cause I thought I could cook curry as well. Until my mother listed the ingredients she put into her butter chicken curry, I took off my imaginary chef's hat and ate my apron of pride so that I couldn't fool myself again.

It's been 5 years since I left that town, but it's only been a year since I started missing my mother's food. When I lived in Durban, I maintained a pescatarian diet. I was different and exotic, a persona of the food I allowed myself to swallow. I ate a few spiced foods, the fish curry with floating brinjals, and the cholesterol filled prawn curry that was the taste of luxury in so many Indian homes. I ate cheese on cut rolls stuffed with viennas, and potato baked with cream and mushroom.

I didn't know taste, I don't think. My favourite meal was spaghetti and chutney. That's all I knew that I thoroughly craved. Each slurp burned the sides of my mouth and I devoured glass after glass of water with it, I was always left panting afterwards but I'd felt full and lumpy, the good kind of lumpy. My taste then, was the desire of pleasure and richness of bite, the privilege of youth eating to their contentment, regardless of the significance behind it.

just

Using a knife I separated the frozen sides of the sides from the plastic and chugged it into a bowl, the circular block of herbs didn't look like anything divine as yet, but very soon will. Into the microwave it went, on quick defrost as I got to work separating the mushroom and the kitchari.

They were all soon steamy and inviting, I pulled out the deadly red chillies that my mother often left in for the burning flavour to seep deep into it. I tasted a forkfull of each one individually before spooning a bit of each into one bowl. Vegetable curries should be eaten together, they complement well in taste and texture. Leafy and somewhat slimy, herbs roll around in your mouth with a garden taste of nature weeds, they taste well enough on their own but with

mushroom abiding the chard, the compounding taste is magnanimous. The fungi curry is wild, tangy and sour and I dare not eat it alone.

**\*\*Go through each curry describing how they go with each other\*\***

We cherish rituals, routines that trigger willingness to embrace mundane (activities), bedtime traditions that allow us to sleep with less anxiety ridden dreams. And the weekly rituals that reset our system from the shock of the work week. Sharing a meal from the remoteness of my balcony was a ritual reserved for the reset. Crossed legged, I sat solemn and watched as the steam rose from bowl in grey wisps, it burned my thigh through the thin material of the pink shorts I had slept in. The bowl was hot enough for me to bear it with an oven mit in hand. The sky returned my gaze with it's cirrus clouds, birds sat on the telephone wires (what wires are these? not sure if these are really telephone wires?), and then nothing a while before monkey's strolled across the line then, absurd and rude they mocked the on-goers vehemently. Taunting the dogs that growled and barked after them.

This land, quaint and queer as it is. Once ruled by the aggressive monkeys that trail the poles and wires and remaining tall trees. I believe them to still be the sardonic kings of the night time. They succeeded in placing an irrevocable fear in me, much earlier on. And as they teased my old dog, I cursed them silently with equal resentment and marched back into the house, into the kitchen. An odour shocked my senses, holding my breath instinctively, I found my mother amongst the mixing smoke and steam that the extractor failed to absorb (how do extractors work?)

"mummy, what's that?"

"I'm boiling bawty and making the dogs food"

"and the chunks?"

"it's almost finished and I thought, we had some of left overs so I'm making it with mielie meal for them"

"does it always smell like that?"

"and the trotters, it's the tripe"

"oh....."

I wondered how I'd missed that smell in all my years in this house, a distinct stink doesn't go unacknowledged. Humans are particular about odour, the careful success of the perfume market is centered around this.

"are you gonna have some?"

I barely made out her words over the noise of the extractor.

"no"

"why?"

"I'm not eating that stuff"

"you used to like it"

"the last time i ate it, i couldn't chew it. It was so rubbery"

I missed the downcast motion in her eye, she looked away at the pot.

"anyway i'm not eating meat. Remember?"

"okay, I made green beans curry. You can have some with the bread."

"...."

I shuffled and hung my head, eye roll after eye roll. I was annoyed at the smoke, the humidity and the town. Everything.

"I'm just gonna have toast"

"okay, then"

Without pressing me further, she faced the stove and continued stirring. Her coat was stained and looked soaked in the steam itself.

"Do you remember sharing your green beans sandwich with me when i was small?"

"yes. do YOU remember?"

"ofcourse, i pretended to like it"

"but why did you do that?"

"cause you liked it, it looked like a delicacy in your hands, the way you'd go on about it"

"I like it, I still do. I dunno... I'm just different"

"yeah, i felt pressured almost to like it. Cause you did"

"but why!"

"I wanted to make you happy, anyway, it didn't work. Nothing did."

"why are you going back there?"

"nevermind "

Antagonised, I returned again after supper was done. I wanted to silently make my toast and escape upstairs. Waiting against the counter, I day dreamed and entertained infinite possibilities and courses that waited in my head. The kettle switch brought me to, and I found her, in her baggy, coconut lime green pajamas. My mother untwined the packet of alban, pulled out two slices of white bread and placed them quietly on a wide, blue rimmed saucer, she meticulously spooned the green beans curry onto one slice and sealed it perfectly with the other.

I stared further, passed her hands onto the pale rimmed eyes that seemed to be withdrawn from their usual piercing glare. Withdrawn and solemn. A bone protruding wrist and fingers with skin bleached dry from cleaning agents held up the sandwich, little cradling the bread for it was not cut and would seem like a precarious bundle to eat untrained. The green shapes stuck out, and summoned a mixture of broken voices that were unfamiliar to me.

I had a lump in my throat as I said,

"must i make your coffee for you?"

She looked back at me.

"Thanks, that would be nice"

The scars from the previous day were still present, as she ate, the plush of the veg filled out the lines that had been left behind and they hid now behind an array of sweetly curved lines.

"May I have some of that?"

"HAHAHA, again?"

"for real this time!"

There was a well of water rising inside me, my mouth closed on the corner of the sandwich and the piquancy shot through my palate with levels of immersing flavour and poignance alike.

"haa-kaa-kaaa"

A flock of wild haadeedaas flew over head, and I swallowed the spoonful of herbs, and the provoking, fleeting moment. The green and garden pungence lingered strong and still on the linings of my cheeks, the underneath of my rolling tongue and the aftertaste with the lump in my throat that swelled with the presence of significant bites.

Stillness hung in the cluttered room; I washed the bowl, warm, quiet and fed.

Onto the couch the couch this time, with a sigh of relief.

I dialed a number,

"Mom?"

"yes, darling"

"thank you."