```
sed my eyes an
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          But that was
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       expats who m
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       n from it. tast
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      ht think was
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     easy: a gree
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      ns-filled sou
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    p, spicy tomat
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    had been dis
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     auised. In the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    ggest, widest
                        rorker drove us up to the fish park, its central tiled building glowing blue-white with floodlights in the night. Patio furniture j
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   umbled arou
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     dark. We sat in the shadows. "They've started putting in better lighting since the bombs,
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  ere to explo
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   de: maybe ta
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     ke cover in t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ormer perso
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   e I would ha
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   ve realized it. By the time I would have been missing a limb, or been reduced to droplets or
                              There were many nights in the fish park after that. It's where we'd go to relax after work, to celebrate spec
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 to linger wi
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  th Sunday n
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   aht beers aft
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                to arrive. I'd
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  see the you
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  na men dow
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                r as bats circled the minarets. I kept spraying myself with insec t repellent because I had sto ould they sound like a pop or a bang?" Then much, much later, a young man would set down
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  the nearby
                                                                                                                                                                                                                              y else think
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ing about th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                e bombs? W
                                                                                                                                                                                                                             s sides with
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                onions and
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ass-burning
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 fect against the beer and the deep night and the bug spray. On e of these fish park nights was
                                                                                                                                                                                                                            burning pe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             ppers and c
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                hips, so pei
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             on next to h
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               im toasted
                                                                                                                                                                                                                           he insisted
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             on coming
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              with me wh
                                                                                                                                                                                                                          t into a car
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            with a local
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              BBC stringe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                         t. How cou
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           ld I turn any
                                                                                                                                                                                                                        hen now, t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          hough, it's j
                                                                                                                                                                                                                        r gate will
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         notice me t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            hrowing so
                                                                                                                                                                                                                      nto a shall
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        ow bowl, pi
                                                                                                                                                                                                                     fe and hac
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       k into the fi
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           sh's face.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                     A sense m
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         m because
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      here, so thi
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      st to eat the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        m. really c
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 t of things
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        d cook wa
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        Once, wh
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  ed that. Sh
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     as a turke
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   n health.
                                                                                                                                                                                      d raw mea
                                                                                                                                                                                 ow sparkli
 Either way, not cooking made sense-as my due date approached, people told my husband and me
                                                                                                                                                                                                                       vantage of
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   ghts to eat out. Go to restaurants, go to the movies, go on vacation. This was the advice given to us most frequently, as it
                       hings would be possible post-baby. Rather than question it, we followed the advice
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               still be we
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          baby in my belly, her rou nd head, her spindly body, and felt reassured. So Charleston was a welcome break
                                                                                                                                                                                                                     sound we'd
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              seen the
we slept in, we went to those beaches, we ate out. While the restaurant meals were all wonderful
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ctually in a restaur ant. We'd driven to Savannah for a day trip, but before heading back to Charleston we
                                                                                                                                                                           , the one I
                                                                                                                                                                                                                     keep retur
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             ning to wa
                                                                                                                                                                         one of So
                                                                                                                                                                                                                  uth Carolin
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            a's well-kn
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      od dishes, an d we'd heard that this shop did a good one. After a short wait the man at the counter l
anded over a sealed aluminum tray. It looked like a reasonable size until I held it and felt the he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            crab, sau sage, corn and potatoes that had been seasoned and boiled together in one pot. It was
                                                                                                                                                                         ft of what
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 was inside:
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             a few pou
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ent to Tybee Beach, which I remembered as being busy, a little touristy, but since it was now late afternoon an ic blanket, opened up the ealuminum tray and started eating. It was all very messy-peeling slippery shrimp, wrestl
oo much food for only two of us, but what could we do other than put the tray in the car and d
                                                                                                                                                                         rive some
d mid-September, the sprawling beach was mostly empty. We laid out the sheet we'd bought
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           s our picn
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ing a dent into the pile of food we didn't speak much. A few days earlier we'd bought a watermelon from a farm stand
ng crab legs. Plastic cutlery wasn't much use so we used our hands and because we were c
                                                                                                                                                                      oncentrat
                                                                                                                                                                                                                ing too ha
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         rd on mak
 but kept forgetting it in the rental car. It was on the backseat floor and whenever one of us
                                                                                                                                                                     would ste
                                                                                                                                                                                                               p too hard
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ke, the sound of it rolling around would alert us to its existence. It got riper and riper in the sun-warmed car until I fin
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               d-red sweet syrup onto the sheet, and then, when we ate slices of it, onto our clothes, down our arms and chins. Whe
ally remembered it that day at Tybee Beach. After my fill of the boil, I cut into the watermelo
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        ked a bloo
n we were finally finished we threw out the remains-the shells, the food we simply couldn't
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 agulls shrieked in the distance and slowly circled the garbage bins. They knew it was their turn. Because we hadn't b
                                                                                                                                                                     eat, the
                                                                                                                                                                                                             watermelo
rought enough napkins, we were a mess, but it was still warm out and the sun was bright,
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  is and went swimming in high tide. The water washed away the dinner stickiness and replaced it with ocean saltines
                                                                                                                                                                     so we p
                                                                                                                                                                                                            ut on our
s instead. Every so often a silvery fish would leap up out of the waves right in front of us.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              ter as well, tracking those fish for their own dinner. Afterward we sat on the sheet until we dried off. We shook the san
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        to the wa
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             my soles as we walked to the car and then drove back to Charleston at dusk. I thought of this meal during my nesting p
d off our feet before putting on our shoes, but it was impossible to get rid of all of it so I
                                                                                                                                                                                                            grittiness
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       against
hase precisely because it had been such a sloppy one. I was compelled to clean, yes, b
                                                                                                                                                                                                          minded m
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              it wasn't such a big deal if I didn't have the time to be so detailed later. I'd reassured myself many times throughout my
                                                                                                                                                                    ut I re
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     yself that
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           ould or if something unexpected popped up-we would just deal with it, forge on. It would be the same after the baby ca
al at the beach in South Carolina, it was often the messy things that I remembered more vividly, after all. The ad hoc clean
that, better than that. Maybe even kind of perfect. Feed The Birds by Vivek Shraya. The most creative school lunches
pregnancy that it was okay if things weren't textbook perfect, if I didn't experience eve
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     ought I w
                                                                                                                                                                                                         ything I th
me, I told myself, even more so since surely unpredictability would be a daily occurren
                                                                                                                                                                                                         ce. But lik
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     that me
 ոսբ done afterward was not always efficient, but it could stíll be good enough, and ma
                                                                                                                                                                                                        ybe even
were made after my parents purchased a sandwich maker. One of my mom's co-work
                                                                                                                                                                                                        ers had r
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           out hers, and my mom took her co-woorkers' raves very seriously. The convenience of the sandwich maker only further
confirmed her faith. Preparing lunch for me and my brother became so much easier
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          ne. Two slices of bread, ketchup, m us tard, and butter smashed together with a surprise filling. One week it was frozer
                                                                                                                                                                                                          with a
hash browns, the next week it was falafel, another it was just sliced cheese. The san
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           was complemented by a morning s nac k, fruit, and a juicebox. The morning snack was either crackers packaged with a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  dwich
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        e fruit was either an apple or an ora nge. I am not an orange person. Oranges are an impractical and exasperating food. of the fruit but not accidentally th umbing into the fruit itself and getting juice sprayed in the eye. Or not peeling in far e
 rectangular red stick and processed cheese spread or the classic granola bar, and
 The first peel is the greatest challenge. Getting in far enough to reach the top layer
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        work of the peeling itself. When you finally get to eat the fruit, you end up biting seeds. Who doesn't love a crunchy fruit?
nough and being stuck working against the defensive white rind. Then there is the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      Il that refuses to leave your han ds. You will smell orange for the rest of the day-as you type, when you scratch your fac of Orange vs. Human, you may have trespass ed through the peel, secured the fruit, and even found a way to ignore the a
And just so that you don't forget all that you've endured, there is that orange sme
e, even after you wash your hands with soap. This is a reminder that in the battle
nnoyance of spitting out seeds in the midst of your citrus pleasure-but the orange
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        always emerg es victorious. And what can I say about granola bars? As an adult, it is no
urprise to me that the word granola has now become synonymous for boring or b
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        bars-chocolat e chip-made me wish for chocolate chips on their own. Around Grade 8, I d
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    elf to throw them out in the giant <u>metal garbage</u> bins that lined our school hallways. I had been taught at Sunday school the so provided the sacred solution: w hy throw Go d out when I could feed the birds? The food wouldn't be wasted and I could
ecided that I had had my fill of oranges and granola bars. But I couldn't bring mys
at Food is God. How could I throw God out? It was perhaps Sunday school that a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 Il Serve All). I began stockpiling the orange s and granola bars in brown paper lunch bags under the stack of audaciously sweaters could no longer efficiently con ceal the bumpy shapes the stacked food made, I carried stuffed bags of now mol left them as an offering to the (presumably hungry) winged creatures of the sky. Occasionally, I felt guilty about my moldy offe likely picked around the mold. That's what beaks were for! Besides-mold probably didn't affect birds the way it affected human
eel good about my humanitarian efforts (another Sunday school teaching: Love A
 patterned sweaters I had borrowed from my dad. After a month or two, when the
dy oranges and granola bars to the field in between my school and my home and
  ngs, worrying that perhaps I was poisoning the birds. But I told myself that birds
  One spring, I had a particularly large stock and had to make two deposits. The s
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                now had started to melt and create shallow ponds. I dropped my first bag of food into one of these ponds. If the birds didn't find
 he food in the water, perhaps other wildlife would. Either way, I was comforted kn
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               owing the food wouldn't be wasted. As Neft my house for the second time that afternoon, carrying my second offering, my moth
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           ied the food in my closet. "How was your day?" she asked. (harmless question stay calm) "It was good, Mom!" (it was a good day knows she knows she knows she knows she knows she knows she knows) "Me?" (oh God why is she looking at me I hate when she looks at me when sothing much." (you are SUCH a bad liar she knows she knows she knows) "You looked like you were up to something..." (how doe
er's grey Topaz pulled up into the driveway. I hurried back into the house and rebui
this isn't a lie I have nothing to hide) "What were you doing just now?" (oh God she
he knows) "Yes, you." (you are such a bad liar she knows she knows she knows) "N
s she always know just don't look at her don't say anything) "You had something in y
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          our hand," she continued, "something brown... where were you going?" (how did she see that from her car how does she see every
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    it. There was no other way this could play out. I had never been good at lying, especially not to my mother. I adored her, but I was ten nishments. I also believed she might be moved by my well-intentioned efforts to give back to the planet. So when she asked, "What do randa bars in my closet, how I didn't like them, and how I thought the birds could be my my closet, how I didn't like them, and how I thought the birds could be my my closet, how I didn't like them.
hing she kńows doń't say it don't say it) "Oh. Um. I was going to feed the birds." I said
rified of her too. Her parenting style was fierce-both in the way she loved and in her pu
you mean, you feed the birds?" I told her everything-about the moldy oranges and the g
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               ame home and I heard her filling him in in an even tone. That's when I began to worry. The disappearance of melody from her tone never en I came back into the kitchen. "And bring the food home." "But," I said, "it will be wet from the pond." "That's ok. Just bring it home." The
me to bring to the kitchen the food that was left in my closet. While I was gone, my dad c
boded well. "Can you show your dad where you left the food for the birds?" she asked, wh
en she turned to my dad. "Make sure he brings all of it home," she said, as though she had and I was grateful. When we got to the field, I pointed to the bag. "There it is." He nodded.
                                                                                                                                                                                                        n't just instructed me to do the same. My dad and I walked in silence. This wasn't unusual, but this time the silence felt deliberate on his part reached into the cold, brown water and pulled out the full bag. "Is there anything else?" He questioned the water, ignoring my No. When he se ence. "Did you get it?" my mother asked when we returned. "Yes," we answered in unison. My mom was sitting at her usual chair at the dinner to ke the wet bag from my hand and laid the soaking contents next to the dry ones. "Sit down," she directed. Even tone. I sat and waited for a lecture.

With the repetition of that one word, she conveyed the futility of protesting. I knew I could say anything at this point (I have to go to the bathroom... I rd: Eat. started with the dry granola bars. Maybe these we'ren't so bad after all, I thought, prompted by the sight of a dozen moldy oranges waiting to be all inside the drenched wrapping. My mother continued to sit with me, watching me eat. My dad washed the dishes. Eventually, it was the dreaded orange is, would have to enter my mouth, be tasted by my tongue, and pass down my throat. "Can I have some water?" I had been known to swallow whole other foo ater. It had become a running joke even-There he goes again... swallowing... Not this time. What I remember after this is the gagging. Gagging and more gagging. for my body's own water, saliva, which helped me swallow. Being grateful that those awful orange peels were surprisingly water resistant. Being grateful when twel orks hard," she said. "Every day. To feed you. And this is what you do?" "But Mom, you pack the same thing every day," I said, quietly. "So? It's what we can afford." onse, though occasionally a joke is made about how I used to like to feed the birds. She seemed confident her punishment would ensure that I never threw food out agai ack, understanding now just how hard my immigrant parents did work, how much they did to provide for me and my brother (my mom worked a full-time job and went to shool, when I opened my lunch b
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             n't just instructed me to do the same. My dad and I walked in silence. This wasn't unusual, but this time the silence felt deliberate on his part
emed satisfied by not being able to see any more food himself, we walked home. Again, in sil
able. The oranges and granola bars from my closet were now laid out on my placemat. She to
It never came. "Now. Eat." I looked up at her. "But..." "Eat." "...the mold?" "Yes." "But..." "Eat.
was trying to help the environment... What if I get sick?) and her response would be a single wo
consumed. Then I moved to the wet granola bars, which were only slightly more moist than usu
me. I began to peel, knowing that these oranges, largely covered in creamy white and blue bruise
ds I didn't enjoy at dinner (onions, beet roots, cabbage), forcing them down with large gulps of w
My mom watching me gag. Me gagging more. And then, strangely, being grateful. Being grateful
ve moldy oranges became eleven, then ten, and eventually zero. My mother stood up. "Your dad w
 Since that day, my family and I have never discussed me throwing out food, nor my mother's resp
n, and I now had a new story in my arsenal of Crazy Mom Stories to share with friends. Looking b
chool part-time), I almost feel as though her punishment wasn't severe enough. The next day at sc
e lesson I had learned only twelve hours earlier. Then I threw the granola bar and orange into the
                                                                                                                                                                                                        to sit in a grown up chair. My feet swung inches above the floor. My heels smacked against the chair legs. We were in a nutritionist's office, and I was about to embark on my I see in her in a white lab coat. She has long, blonde hair. It's dyed. Her highlights are cheap and chunky. But I can't really remember this. I must have cross-referenced her will
ber brown. Brown walls. Brown filing cabinet. Brown sofa. The office smelled like band-aids. I had
 rery first diet. The nutritionist was neither beautiful nor threatening. When I think of the day now
                                                                                                                                                                                                e image I have of her: blonde hair, manicured tingernails that clicked across the desk, falsely cheery. Up until that point. I had never given any thought at I ate or to we to about myself, but I didn't know what it meant to be overweight. My body was just my body. It was just there. I had never thought of myself as beautiful or ugly, fat or thin. Over much. I ate too much. My body was not a natural, nert thing. It was something I had to control. It was a problem I needed to fix. The nutritionist told my mother and me that if I go She added that her own daughter ate this every day when she got home from school. The next time my mother went to the grocery store, she brought me baby carrots and fat-free ng room and carefully rolled each carrot in the viscous, paper-white dressing. It tasted sweet in an unappealing, vaguely chemical way. I ate my carrots slowly, deliberately. One at So how fat was I when I started dieting? How fat can a four-year-old possibly be? I've forgotten exactly how much I weighed. My pediatric growth charts are lost to history. The only
h some other figure from my murky, early past. Someone else I didn't like. In any case, this is th
hether or not it was "healthy." I probably knew how much I weighed, because I liked to know fac
the course of our meeting with the nutritionist, I gained a whole new perspective. I weighed too
 hungry between meals I should snack on carrots or celery dipped in fat-free ranch dressing.
Hidden Valley ranch. In the afternoons, I sat cross-legged in front of the coffee table in our livi
a time. When the last carrot was gone, I wanted absolutely nothing more than to eat another.
                                                                                                                                                                                          So how fat was I when I started dieting? How fat can a four-year-old possibly be? I've forgotten exactly how much I weighed. My pediatric growth charts are lost to history. The only "is written on the side in permanent marker. My mother's handwriting. Four years old. Marigold hair. Pouting at the breakfast table. Sitting at her father's desk with a ballpoint pen in into the ocean's cold froth, fearless, no hesitation. All these memories I don't remember. A face that's familiar but not exactly my own. So how fat was I? I wasn't fat at all. I was may d-for, loved. I was baby-fat, not fat-fat. One growth spurt away from being thin. By the time I was seven or eight, I'd developed a routine. Every morning, I woke up and promised myse ch dressing when I got home from school. I would not snack before dinner. I would not finish my dinner. I would not snack after dinner. I would go to bed hungry. I would wake up ag e. I ate a classmate's birthday cupcake. My friend's mother bought me ice cream. We were out of baby carrots so I had cheese and crackers instead. I wandered into the kitchen and g sleepwalking. Every day, somehow, I fucked up. I ate the wrong foods. I ate too much. I figured, Well I've blown it for today, so I might as well eat what I want. Tomorrow, I'll be perfect more than exactly one half-cup of vanilla frozen yogurt ever again for the rest of my life. For the rest of my life I'll be good. For the rest of my life I'll be good. I'd good and eat the medically, with purpose, hunched or racted or in another part of the house. I listened for footsteps in the hallway and I always kent one ever on the door so I could make a quick excape. I still got caught. Often, Sometimes
evidence I have is photographic. It sits in an old Nike box underneath my desk. "Jane-photos
 hand, wearing a serious expression. Earnestly shushing her fussing baby brother. Running
be a little bit chubby. But only in the way young children often are. I look well fed, well care
If I would be good. I would eat only half my school lunch. I would have carrot sticks and ran
ain and repeat the process. Every day, I failed. Most days I didn't even make it 'til dinnertim
ot a cookie out of the snack drawer without even really thinking about it. Almost like I was
and then I'll be perfect every day for the rest of my life. I'll never eat cookies or cheese or
eat. This is how I spent most nights when I was a child-slipping in and out of the kitchen
                                                                                                                                                                                       racted or in another part of the house. I listened for footsteps in the hallway and I always kept one eye on the door so I could make a quick escape. I still got caught. Often. Sometimes isappointment. Sometimes she shook her head. Sometimes she got angry. Are you sure you want to eat that? I just bought this, how does it not fit? Why are you still eating? Why don't started to feel like my mother didn't just want me to be skinny; she wanted me to be a totally different person. When I was twenty-seven years old, newly married, at a "normal" weight at on sale at No Frills. I hadn't eaten it in years. I thought, Maybe it's better than I remember? It wasn't. I tried it. My husband tried it. "This tastes so bad, it actually depresses me," he said.
ver the open snack drawer. I only ate when I was alone, when my mother was out or dist
my mother said nothing. She just let her eyebrows drop, a sharp, unmistakable look of d
you just stop eating! I didn't want to be fat, but as much as I tried I couldn't change it. I
                                                                                                                                                                           on sale at No Frills. I hadn't eaten it in years. I thought, Maybe it's better than I remember? It wasn't. I tried it. My husband tried it. "This tastes so bad, it actually depresses me," he said. I ing and I'm usually good about that. At first, this was where I planned to end he story: girl gets married, girl rids herself of fat-free ranch, girl 'dues off into the sunset. But that's not read to panic when my jeans start to feel a little tight, still scan untrition facts and keep a scale at the foot of my bed. Not when there are still three bags of baby carrots sitting in my fridge. I ke'd go to the nutritionist, I'd learn about healthy eating, my weight would drop into the normal range on the growth charts, and then I'd gow up and forget. If only time worked differently. If hean, my finger down my throat. If she could have seen me at seventeen, drunk, skirt hiked up in a stairwell, straddling a guy! bare! knew, just for the sake of feeling wanted. If she could house, and ate alone, in bed, late at night, when I could be sure no one was watching. If only. Maybe. What if, Might have been. This is the great tragedy of raising a child; you don't get to c st, the long drives when you laughed until your teeth hurt, the picking of flowers in the fragrant heat of late summer, toes curled into the soil. These memories are dull for her. Half-remember office. She can still see you standing in the kitchen, an empty cracker box in your hand. "Did really you eat this whole thing." Really? That's disgusting." Those are the words she remembers s. I'm done trying to lose those last twenty pounds. I don't throw up or starve myself. I will never fall for another fad die. But I can't deny that some part of me is still waiting to become the gir eats carrots and fat-free ranch every day, who sits down for her precise, healthy snack, and then clears the table. It is the food away. I'm still waiting to become the girl who can say that's en Razavi. As I walk through the restaurant door, I am overwhelmed by the sensations of home. I ha
er a final, finally successful diet in my early twenties, I bought a bottle of fat free ranch
agreed. I threw the bottle in the trash, still full. I didn't bother cleaning it out for recycl
how it ends. Not when I still spend money I don't have on spin classes, still feel a wav
now it's unfair to blame my mother. She thought she was helping me. She thought we
only she could have looked into the future and seen me at fourteen, bent over a tras
ave seen me at twenty-two, when I weighed 240 pounds, when I dreaded leaving the
hoose the memories that stick. All those nights your daughter curled into your che
ed dreams. But she can still hear her feet smack into the chair at the nutritionist's
verbatim, while so much tenderness is lost. It's true, now, that I'm better than I wa
I my mother wanted, the girl she probably wanted to become herself. The girl who
ough, who doesn't want seconds, who finally feels full. Pomegranates by Lauren
e waiter in broken Farsi and ask for a table. The taste of the foreign words on my
Shepherd's Bush, to spend the evening at a Persian restaurant. I'm fidgety with
 Illies and tuck their napkins into their collars. They're well-dressed and a little b
eans, "Screw you, you old jokers." When the food arrives, our new friends wan
                                                                                                                                                                           ow me back a decade or two. It's the fragrance of a Persian kitchen at rest. Just a whiff tells me the dish that's been simmering there all day. My mind conjures the image of fluffy Persian rice, gar ull of fresh herbs and fat butter beans. Ghormeh sabzi. It's the kind of dish that a Persian won't serve up unless it's been stewing over a flame for hours. I'd like to be able to say that Iranians, and
nd a black spiral staircase to the basement. The scent is strong enough to thr
nished with strands of saffron and huge dollops of butter, and a meaty stew
                                                                                                                                                                        I of the country, casually dropped into a West London restaurant. But the truth is I don't know. My understanding of Iran, its culture and its people, its made up only of my experiences in the expat y years ago. I ache to know this place, Iran, and for my ponderings and observations to be made up of more substance than a night like this. "You're doing it wrong." At fourteen years old, hearing o cause tears. It's a stage of life where I'm constantly temperamental, and Dad and I struggle to negotiate each other. My primary concerns at this time are music, boys and friends-in that order. I'm eenage girls. It's the weekend, and he has, daringly, decided to embark on a cooking lesson with me. I don't cry this time, though. I'm focused on the task at hand, because it's at this age I've begun
their cuisine in Iran, are the same as all this, that this is an accurate portraya
community-and most Iranian expats I've met left their country twenty or thirt
these words from my father-whatever the reason for them-has a tendency t
an only child, and my dad has limited experience in dealing with Western t
flirting with my Persian heritage as a fascinating sideline to the everyday.
                                                                                                                                                                      Moments of insight into my father's life before my birth are rare, and I've already learned to appreciate them. He doesn't like to talk about the past, about his upbringing or what he remembers of Iran
 But food is the thing that always prompts those rare conversations. His m
                                                                                                                                                                      emories of food are the ones he deems safe, the ones he doesn't mind sharing with his teenage daughter. "You have to cut off the stems just where they begin," he says, elbowing me out of the way
to chop the spring onions himself. "Otherwise, you end up with stringy bi
                                                                                                                                                                     ts in the stew." It occurs to me that there are worse things than having stringy bits in ghormen sabzi. Then I realize that I've never found any stringy bits in any Persian dish I've ever eaten. It's in that
                                                                                                                                                                    places I've visited during my years of travelling the world as a writer-from the tourist hot-spots to the borrowed countryside homes-I have never found another culture that takes quite as much pride
realization that my understanding of Persian food truly begins. In all the
n its food as the Persian one does. Choosing the right produce, sinking i
                                                                                                                                                                    nto the rituals of preparation, decorating the family table and, finally, serving a gargantuan meal with dazzling hospitality; these are time-honoured Iranian specialities. Every dish is a celebration of th
e country's rich history and culture. Every breakfast, lunch, and dinner i
                                                                                                                                                                   s a painstakingly wrought ceremony, allowed to be nothing less than perfect. A place's food can evoke the symptoms of its culture-and this is especially true of Iran. Iranians are hospitable guests an
d remarkable hosts, and such reputations are not a matter of class. The
                                                                                                                                                                    poorest families in the slums of Tehran and Mashhad fall over themselves to serve their best meal on their finest crockery, even for an uninvited guest. This is part of the bend-over-backwards form o
f hospitality called tarof, a tradition that is followed without question by
                                                                                                                                                                    those raised in an Iranian environment. It's so ingrained that it took me until my twenties to learn there was a dedicated word for it. Tarof requires a special brand of attentiveness and observation. Acc
urate judgments of a person's reaction to a situation are crucial. When
                                                                                                                                                                  I was young, my Iranian cousins and I, although all raised in the West, joked about the secret formula of how much to eat during dinners with Iranians. Too little, and they're convinced you didn't like the
e dish and will race for the kitchen to cook you something else. Too m
                                                                                                                                                                uch, and they'll keep loading up your plate until there's no more food. Then the empty plates present a reason to make more food, because clearly you must still be hungry. It's impossible. A first or sec
                                                                                                                                                               u get to the third or fourth rejection-if handled with the appropriate measure of delicacy-they'll think about believing you. The ability to navigate Persian hospitality requires some fine-tuning if you're use
ond no is considered polite banter and will have no impact. When yo
d to the self-conscious stylings of British food culture. It's commonp
                                                                                                                                                              lace to cater for double the number of guests attending for a meal. This happens daily in Iranian households across the world, and it's a habit that reveals the most fundamental components of Persian I
                                                                                                                                                              ood appears on the table, always, just in case an unexpected visitor drops in at dinner time. Quality and variety are just as important as quantity. A typical Persian dinner spread will feature an oversized
ospitality: kindness, warmth and, well, gluttony. More than enough f
plate of rice, a meat dish balanced with just the right mix of herbs a
                                                                                                                                                             nd spices, a pile of flat-breads, an overflowing bowl of maast-o khiar (Greek-style yoghurt brimming with diced cucumber, fresh mint, salt, and pepper), and a simple salad, often made in the Shirazi way
                                                                                                                                                            nians don't make meals, they make feasts. The dinner table in a Persian home is the place that defines it best. My memories of childhood are defined by my heritage. My father was born in Iran and is the
iced cucumber, tomato and onion-hold the lettuce). In essence, Ira
oungest of seven children. He and his brothers and sisters are no
                                                                                                                                                           w spread out across the world, but no matter where you are, to be part of this culture is to hold two vital components in particularly high esteem: food and family. I was raised in Britain, but throughout my
ife my relatives have infused me with the importance of these con
                                                                                                                                                          cepts. My dedication to them lets me know that I am Iranian at my core. No matter which other connections to Iran may have been lost for my father and me, food, like family, is not one of them. We still hav
e the appetites of true Persians. My parents have come over for d
                                                                                                                                                           inner, and my father is lurking in the kitchen, as he always does. Whenever I make Persian food, it's his unspoken duty to shuffle around uncomfortably, peering across the tabletops to supervise my work.
Any attempt at conversation is punctuated with his practical, wel
                                                                                                                                                          l-meaning interjections. "Stop, don't put the coriander in yet. Wait until it boils." "Don't add too much water, let me see." I protest like a grown-up daughter should, but, truthfully, I love having him here in my
                                                                                                                                                       he few ways he openly honours his Iranian heritage. And mine. Out of the corner of my eye, I see him pick up a pomegranate from the fruit bowl. He holds it in his palm for a second, delicately, then gives it a and frowns slightly. The look on his face tells me he's thinking of Iran, remembering something. "Are you okay, baba?" I ask. He nods, slowly, without looking up, and pauses a second before speaking. "Do y
kitchen. This typically Persian interference over food is one of t
hard squeeze. He runs his fingers over its tough, pink-red skin
```