

Dead can eat

I grew up in Africa, in the suburbs of a town who seemed never to sleep. Like any other teenager, I used to fight my parents over silly things such as whether I would tidy my room or do the washing-up.

One evening after dinner, my Dad wanted me to clean up the table and wash the dishes. I had plans of my own which didn't include rubbing the plates, but I wanted to use his feelings to gain time, and maybe get rid of this recurrent request for ever. I said, 'Dad, we must leave the dirty dishes for the dead.' With a startled stare, he asked 'For what reason should we do this?'

An aunt had told me many years before that dead could eat too, and that we could show them signs of respect and reminiscence by leaving the dishes unwashed during the night so they could share our meals too. While I explained this to my father, he didn't seem surprised at all, but I could see the fight between his sense of modernity and his concern for our education and health against the call of tradition. Finally, he gave me a strict look and uttered a cold 'Wash the dishes.'

My scheme had failed. Leaning by the sink, I watched the night cover the city. Generally after dinner, we would sit on the terrace and wait for the time to go to sleep. As the air became cooler, the wind itself started coughing, and by the time we were in our beds, the trees were dancing to celebrate the upcoming storm. We turned off the light, and I soon fell asleep.

An eerie sound awoke me in the middle of the night, but it was only the wind blowing through the nacos. In order to shut them, I rose from my bed and went to the window. It was raining softly, drops clapping on the terrace on the

rhythm of the ill of the sick wind. The nacos were cold when I touched them. All of a sudden, a lightening lit up the sky, and I gasped as I caught the sight of a figure in front of the window. Stepping back as I shivered, I had still had the time to notice the details of the sad face that seemed to be looking at me though the nacos. The face looked like my old aunt. It took me some time to recollect myself after the vision disappeared but I safely found my way back to my bed. There was only one fact that kept me awake until dawn: my old aunt had died two years before.

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