

Our father often invites his friends over for dinner. Our mother doesn't like their wives, we don't like their children. They fill our apartment with the heat of their bodies and their loud chatter and unruly laughter at their inside jokes. In the summer, they complain about how hot the place is without air conditioning, and in the winter, they complain about how cold the place is and that we should purchase some space heaters. They are never comfortable in our home but they come anyway because our father invites them and we have no say in it. If I say anything, it will be a circus show, our mother says. Sometimes, our mother can find humour in the cruelty of her life but we are incapable of such dignity.

One weekend, they come late and stay past midnight. At 1 am, we are still washing the dishes when all we want to do is to collapse on our beds. One of us soaps, the other rinses. We leave the drinking glasses for last. They're tall and narrow and our knuckles squeeze as we shove our hands into each one and scrub the inside. There are twelve of them and no more space on the dish rack but we don't have the energy to dry anything and put it away first. We start stacking the glasses and perch them on top of upturned bowls and upside-down tea cups. They're precariously placed, but we keep going, pile them up any which way they fit. One of us twists the tap and the water comes out too hot. We yelp, flinging our hands back. Huda's elbow knocks into the dish rack. Before we can steady it or shield it with our bodies, the glasses come crashing down, a giant explosion of crystal, shards of glass skidding all over the kitchen floor. We hear the sound of the TV being muted, hear the thud of our father's footsteps and the hiss of anger on his breath before he walks into the kitchen. A volley of insults come raining down on us. We bend down to start cleaning up the mess. We pick up the largest pieces first, their edges sharp and jagged, collect them in the palms of our hands. The broken glass clinks and scrapes against the floor while our father's insults continue, his voice loud and hoarse, wafting above our bent bodies, covered on the floor.

The next time our father invites his friends, it is on the first Saturday of Ramadan. The day before the party, our mother tells him he needs to buy drinking glasses. She reminds him that all the glasses broke. We are grateful she uses the passive voice – the glasses broke, as if they self-imploded, the pressure of being a glass, of holding its own shape, simply too much to bear.