

## Mom's Recipe by Alec Kissoondyal

### Chicken Curry

*Just like your mom used to make. She learned how to cook in Guyana, squatting over an open flame. Years later, she taught you how to cook the same dish on an electric stove in middle-class America. The times you spent cooking with her over the years have been some of your fondest memories, and you continue to think of her every time you use this recipe. That's been a problem ever since she died of cancer a year ago.*

### Ingredients

- 1 ½ lb. chicken breasts
- 4 medium potatoes
- 1 bottle El Dorado rum (to drink while cooking)
- 1 medium onion chopped
- 6 cloves of garlic chopped
- 4 tbsp. oil

### Curry Paste

- 1 tbsp. of curry powder
- ½ tbsp. garam masala
- ¼ tbsp. geera
- ¼ tbsp. turmeric
- ½ cup water
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 cardamom seeds
- 1 cinnamon stick

### Instructions

1. Dice and salt chicken breasts. Set aside.
2. In a small bowl, combine curry powder, geera, garam masala, turmeric, and water. Set aside.
3. Think of Mom, drain a glass of El Dorado in one gulp.
4. In a pot, heat oil over medium-high heat.

5. Add onion and garlic – cook until golden brown.
6. Add curry mixture to pot, stir for 2 to 3 minutes.
7. The smell brings more memories of Mom; down another glass El Dorado, then another. Attempt to set aside. Cry instead.
8. Drink more.
9. Get too sauced to continue; turn off the stove, put everything away except the rum.
10. Stumble to the living room, sort through the pile of papers on the coffee table until you find the brochure your grief counselor gave you. It's from a company called Elysian Industries, the pioneers of an experimental form of therapy where clients can pay to interact with AI generated replicas of their dead loved ones.
11. Pull out your phone, scan the QR code on the back of the brochure. A video appears onscreen, featuring a girl embracing an android version of what looks to be her deceased mother while a woman's soft, disembodied voice says, "Elysian Industries: Creating closure by opening hearts."
12. Drink more rum straight from the bottle.
13. Grab your credit card and visit the Elysian website while you're still drunk enough to avoid second-guessing yourself.

## **Mother AI**

*Elysian Industries provides clients with another chance to interact with their loved ones. The client must simply upload at least 10 gigabytes worth of photos and video footage, which are then processed through Elysian Industries' state of the art AI and downloaded onto a fully autonomous android body. The android, which can accurately reproduce voice, speech patterns, and mannerisms, also coats itself in a holographic image of the dearly departed to provide the client with an immersive experience.*

## **Ingredients**

608 photos, most of them from Mom's last few healthy years before the cancer carved her into an 80-pound shell of herself.

13 ½ hours of filmed footage from weddings, birthday parties, family reunions, and *pujas*.

200 pages of paperwork you don't read before accepting the terms and conditions

1 Android, rented from Elysian Industries

## Instructions

1. Mom shows up on your doorstep at 6 PM sharp, dropped off by a self-driving delivery truck with 'ELYSIAN INDUSTRIES' painted on the side of the trailer. She's wearing a red and green *sari*, which she rarely did when she was alive — she preferred large t-shirts and jeans. But the AI has constructed a composite image of her from what you've sent the company, and most of the photos and videos were from formal events. A minor hiccup. Set aside.
2. Hug her. Feel metallic coolness against your cheek.
3. Head to the kitchen where the ingredients for chicken curry are laid out on the counter.
4. Mix the curry paste while she dices the chicken. Set aside.
5. Listen to her sing Jim Reeves' "This World Is Not My Home" as she peels the potatoes. It was her favorite song; the last time you heard it was at her funeral.
6. Tell her what you've been up to lately. She smiles and says she's proud of you. The voice and accent are spot on, but the words don't belong to your mom, who would have scolded you for not being further along in your career or for wearing your shoes indoors.
7. Boil rice while the curry cooks. Mom stirs the curry, and the light above the stove disrupts the hologram. Grey, mechanical finger joints shimmer through brown holographic skin.
8. Scoop the curry and rice into two bowls. She can't eat, but you serve it to her anyway. Sit across from her. She starts talking, but this time, you don't hear what she's saying; you're too busy realizing the *sari* isn't the only thing off about her appearance. Every time she moves and gestures, you notice something different — one ear is lower than the other; her eyes are too far apart; her hair doesn't move or catch the light.
9. Finish your meal and realize that you can't remember if it tasted the way she used to make it; realize that you've forgotten more than you can ever hope to remember.
10. Say "No" when the android, still using your mom's voice, tells you the session is over and encourages you to extend your time for an additional fee.
11. Watch the likeness of your mom fade away to reveal the faceless metal mannequin underneath.

12. Follow the android to the front door. The Elysian Industries truck is already waiting by the curb. The android climbs into the trailer and the truck drives off, leaving you feeling emptier than before.
13. Sit alone at the kitchen table with the El Dorado bottle, staring at the empty chair where the ghost of your mom sat. The superstitious part of you that still prays to Ganesh and Hanuman says you've crossed a line.
14. Finish the bottle. Set aside.