

Self Care

It's 2.42pm. I've trimmed the lilies from my partner and put them in a vase. The dishwasher is stacked and humming reassuringly. I have around 40 minutes until my toddler wakes up. I put the kettle on and run a bath. I pour in the rosemary "bath salts" my kid "made" for me at daycare.

I lower myself into the tub spilling a little of the tea from a bright pink mug that says "It's Not Not Wine." I snap a selfie and post it with the hashtag #mothersdayamiright? I think about relaxing. I also think about the run I haven't gone on and the work I haven't done. I pick up a book to read - everyone is young and beautiful living in New York.

I worry that by moving back to the same town I spent my teenage years trying to escape, I've set my child up for a life of suburban mediocrity. The most surprising thing that's happened since we moved was the garbage collector's refusal to take our recycling because we hadn't separated glass from plastic.

There is an absence of possibility here.

I watch my rosemary-covered belly rise through the suds. My period is late but not late enough to be too hopeful. I've been eating like I'm pregnant and drinking like I'm not for the eighth month in a row. My pants are so tight that if it's another false alarm I'll actually have to use that app I haven't canceled that claims it's anti-diet-culture yet still counts calories and promotes daily exercise. The free trial ended months ago.

I check my phone to see who's "liked" my post and end up lazily doom scrolling. I put down my phone. Progress! I decide to try some "mindful" "breathing".

'Let your thoughts wash over you,' a calm voice tells me on another free trial app. I think I have to stop swearing. This morning my toddler said 'fuck' when he couldn't get a box open. I ignored the look from my partner. Earlier while reading the news I'd said 'Fuck, the world is awful.' My toddler looked up at me while shoveling grapes and other choking hazards into his mouth. I wiped his forever runny nose with my sleeve. 'I'm sorry. I wish I could protect you.' He spat a half chewed grape into my lap.

I hear a cry from the next room. I quickly take one more sip of tea, it's already cold. I lift myself out of the bath mildly furious with how little relaxing I achieved.

My phone beeps with a news notification. A barely adult human has murdered small children at school with a weapon designed for war. Even though we're now living on the other side of the world, all the air gets sucked out of my lungs.

My toddler bursts in with a 'Mama!' I wrap my damp arms around his body. It feels both bigger and more fragile than before.

Maybe an ordinary life is enough.

499 words