

Extract from: Children of the Pearl

Summary: A young child, Jacob, is victimised by his classmates, teacher and friends and receives the backlash of his mother's mental illness. Developing recurring, detailed nightmares, Jacob navigates his own depression, fears and mental health.

In this extract: Jacob lives through a nightmare based upon his mother's weight-related anxieties that have become too suffocative for him to handle. Next, the first glimpse into the extent of his mother's illness is given.

ACT IScene I

*A bare stage. The conventional chatter of an audience at ease is broken by a sudden plunge into darkness and a deafening scream (MOTHER).*

*Lights up. MOTHER PUPPET is distraught, her hands on her cheeks in shock. She stares at the meagre, skeletal CAT PUPPET who tosses and wails upon a shiny metal table.*

MOTHER PUPPET

Jacob! Jacob!

*Enter JACOB, the only human [non-puppet] in these scenes. He is terrified, sweating and confused.*

MOTHER PUPPET

Jacob, you pest!

JACOB

Yes, Mother?

MOTHER PUPPET

The cat! It's broken!

*JACOB stares at it, unable to think.*

MOTHER PUPPET

It won't catch the flies I pour into its nest! Do something! Just standing there!

JACOB

Yes, Mother!

*Jacob finds a kidney dish and gets to work, retrieving a large butcher's knife and slipping it into the CAT PUPPET's rectum. The CAT PUPPET continues to wail, rocking its head from side to side as Jacob releases the knife and inserts his hand, instead.*

MOTHER PUPPET

How many?

JACOB

One.

MOTHER PUPPET

One?!

JACOB

Yes, Mother. Just one.

MOTHER PUPPET

Look again!

*JACOB quickly removes his hand and places an acorn he has found in its rectum into the dish.*

MOTHER PUPPET

Give it to me!

*He picks it up with his other hand and gives it to her. She shoves it into her mouth and groans with pleasure.*

MOTHER PUPPET

More! More!

JACOB

One more. Two. Three. Four!

*He takes them out one by one and places them on the dish. The CAT PUPPET's crying gets louder.*

JACOB

I think that's it, Mother.

*He picks up the knife again and continues, more frantically this time, as the PUPPET MOTHER grows evermore furious.*

MOTHER PUPPET

Poppycock! There has to be more than that! Look properly!

*She hits him upon his head, and his hand, still holding the knife, slips inside. When he pulls out, an array of organs slide out, too. The CAT PUPPET screams, ear-piercing, and starts to deflate. Blood pours from its rectum and its eyes.*

MOTHER PUPPET

No! What have you done?! You maggot! My diet is ruined!

*She pushes him aside and gorges on the CAT PUPPET's body as it mulches to a mere sack.*

*JACOB, walking backwards, breathing heavily, starts to cry.*

JACOB

I'm sorry, Mother! I didn't mean to! I'm sorry!

*MOTHER PUPPET breaks down and wails.*

MOTHER PUPPET

Get out!

JACOB

Mother—

MOTHER PUPPET

GET OUT, I SAID!

*Exit JACOB, running.*

*Blackout. MOTHER PUPPET's cries fill the dark, slowly accompanied by the rising whistles of a kettle.*

Scene II

*Silence.*

*Lights up.*

*MOTHER's kitchen. MOTHER sits at the table, staring at an empty mug in her hands, and JACOB is turning off the kettle, which has just boiled. He edges slowly towards her. They are both dressed as though they worried long ago about what they looked like but have since lost care and have not changed their clothes.*

JACOB

I need your cup, Mother.

*Nothing.*

JACOB

Mum?

MOTHER

*(Weakly, almost a whisper)*

Take it, then.

*He does so, yet she stays still, staring now at the empty space where her cup used to be. JACOB makes her tea slowly, careful to not make a sound. MOTHER's attention is grabbed by an area of the table. Her eyes drag across it, as though something is moving along.*

MOTHER

This house is a tip.

*JACOB turns to face her.*

JACOB

I can clean it for you if you want?

*She huffs, and then covers her face with her hands in a sigh.*

JACOB

Mother? I could clean it.

MOTHER

You don't know how to clean properly. I can't trust you to do it.

JACOB

I can, Mother.

MOTHER

...You can't, Jacob.

JACOB

I could try.

MOTHER

Shut up. You're not cleaning!

JACOB

Sorry.

MOTHER

God, you're annoying.

JACOB

I made your tea.

*He places it upon the table. She stares at it for a moment before slowly taking it into her hands. The staring continues. JACOB looks on, anxious. Suddenly, she breaks her stare, becoming slightly nervous.*

JACOB

It's OK, Mum. I did it.

MOTHER

Sorry. I didn't mean that.

JACOB

Don't worry. It's OK.

MOTHER

You're not annoying. You know that, don't you?

JACOB

It's OK, Mum.

MOTHER

You're not offended?

JACOB

No. Everything's fine. Don't worry.

MOTHER

... Did you rinse the cup?

JACOB

Mm-hmm.

MOTHER

No. You have to 'yes', otherwise it seems like you're frustrated with me.

JACOB

Sorry, Mum. Yes. I rinsed it.

MOTHER

Promise?

JACOB

Promise.

MOTHER

And you're not frustrated with me?

JACOB

No, Mum.

MOTHER

Promise?

JACOB

Promise.

MOTHER

Sorry. Sorry I'm messy.

JACOB

You're not messy. It's OK.

*She goes to pick up the cup but hesitates.*

MOTHER

You definitely rinsed it?

JACOB

Yeah.

MOTHER

And you're not upset with me?

JACOB

No.

MOTHER

Everything's fine?

JACOB

Everything's fine, Mum.

MOTHER

Thank you. I do trust you.

JACOB

I know.

MOTHER

Just got to check.

JACOB

I know, Mum. It's OK.

MOTHER

I don't have to feel bad?

JACOB

No, Mum. Everything's fine.

*She stares at the cup, rocking only just noticeably. She closes her eyes and leans forward. When she suddenly opens them, she looks over to Jacob. He looks away. Finally, she drinks her tea. Jacob sighs, relieved.*

MOTHER

I love you.

JACOB

I love you, too.