

**Title:** Dinner, about Nisha (*from The Round Table*)

**Prompt:** Cues, 11-3-05. "An awkward conversation" in 45 minutes.

**Notes/Warnings:** Boring. As hell.

She is playing with her food, just like she always does when she is sitting at the dinner table, surrounded by the rest of her family. Dena is to her right, and her parents are across the table. She tries not to pay attention to the way they are all patently ignoring Ash, who has been sitting at Nisha's left for the entirety of the meal, almost too close for comfort. Their heads are together in a way that she and Dena have never done, closer as brother and sister than is considered normal. He is not talking about much, just how classes are going and his plans for the near future, should things go according to plan. He laughs a little too loudly, and draws their parents' attention in the way that Nisha had been praying would not happen.

Mr. Sacarias' face is drawn in a frown of disapproval, bushy eyebrows pulled tight and low across his forehead. He clears his throat in that way that has always been an indicator of the mistakes of youth, and both Nisha and Ashley pull apart and sit up straight, the training deeply ingrained. For a moment, all that can be heard is breathing, and the clink of fork on china. Nisha cuts her eyes across to her brother, his presence still a comfort, though she cannot really tell him so.

"What did you do today, Nisha?" her mother finally asks, breaking the silence with cool small talk. Nisha sees the quick exchange of glares between her parents, a silent argument she has grown used to over the years. She ignores it, another piece of her training as she grew up: ignoring the obvious tension.

She swirls her fork idly in the vegetables on her plate, not hungry anymore. "Not much. I had lunch with Megan again, after she got out of her chemistry class."

"Megan?" her father asks gruffly, a frown settling in the space between his eyes like it is coming home. "I swear to you, Shanti," he waves his fork in the general direction of her mother, punctuating his words, "she is spending too much time with that girl." He grumbles something under his breath that Nisha cannot catch, but worries her all the same.

"What do you mean, Dad?" she asks, voice trembling on the edge of incredulity and indignance.

He puts his fork down on the table hard, rattling the dishes nearby. "I mean, young lady, that I will not have you turning into some kind of... of..." he starts turning red as he stumbles over the word.

"Some kind of *what*, Dad?" Ash asks, calmly accusing his father of wrong thoughts.

"Do not start this again, Ashley," their mother interjects, her eyes flashing a dark warning

to the pair of them.

“I want to know, Mom,” Nisha speaks up again, rushing headlong onward. “What, *Dad*? She is just my friend.”

“First, you are spending all of your time with that filthy cousin of yours. Now you expect me to just think that this Megan girl is just your friend. I will not have you turn into your cousin, Nisha Louise. I forbid it.” His voice escalates until he is nearly bellowing across the table. “I forbid it!”

“Dammit, she is just my friend! If anything, her brother Red is the hot one and if I really wanted to get laid, he is a hell of a lot easier too.” *If I wanted a fucking cock, that is*, Nisha thought to herself as she began to realize what she had said.

“I will drink to that,” Ash joked quietly to Nisha.

Silence settled on the table, Dena left as the only one with an appetite and nothing to say. Ashley had the good grace to blush lightly as Nisha raised an eyebrow at him and their parents looked on, flabbergasted. Nisha wanted to press him for more, but she could not be sure what had been heard at the table or not. The silence stretched for an eternity before Ash took away both his and Nisha’s plate.

“Nisha and I had plans tonight, though. So we thought we would head out now, before it gets too dark and traffic gets too heavy. We will be back soon, promise.” He gave Nisha a quick shove, enough to jolt her into a nod and disappearing outside to await his explanation in the car.

Because, God knows, he had a lot of explaining to do.