My mom was here

She stayed two nights and now I can't find a single thing in my kitchen.

My mom came to visit this weekend. First time she's stayed over since I moved into the loft. She's been in the city before, for a lunch, a day trip, but this was two full nights, and I spent the whole week before cleaning like I was getting inspected. Which I was.

I picked her up at Penn Station on Friday at noon. She came up the escalator with a rolling suitcase and two tote bags and a cooler. A cooler. I asked what was in it. She said "just a few things." I carried it all the way to the subway. It was not a few things.

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The first thing she did when she walked into the loft was stand in the middle of it and look up at the ceiling for a really long time. It's high, like fourteen feet, with the old pipes still showing. She said "it's very big." Then she said "is it warm in the winter?" Then she said "where do you keep your coats?" I said on the chair. She didn't say anything. She just nodded slowly, like she was writing it down somewhere.

Then she opened the cooler. Two containers of her stuffed peppers. A lasagna, frozen solid. A bag of the oranges she likes. A whole roast chicken, already cooked, wrapped in foil. A loaf of bread from the bakery near her house, because she doesn't trust bread in New York for some reason. And a jar of pickles she made herself, with a label that just said PICKLES in her handwriting, which made me laugh for some reason.

She put it all in my fridge. Then she looked at my fridge. That was the beginning of the end.

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I want to be fair. My kitchen was not perfect. I'm one guy. I have a system. The system is that things go where there's space.

My mom does not believe in this system.

By Friday night she'd thrown out three bottles of hot sauce that she said were "expired" and I said "hot sauce doesn't expire" and she held one up to the light and I saw something floating in it and I said okay, fair. She also threw away a container of rice from, honestly, I don't know when. I didn't fight her on that one.

Saturday morning I woke up at like nine, which for me is late, and she'd already been up since six. Every cabinet door in the kitchen was open. She was standing on a chair. All my mugs were on the counter in rows, sorted by size. She said "good morning, honey, where do you usually keep the colander?" I said I don't have a colander. She looked at me like I'd said I don't have a liver.

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We went to the hardware store on Bedford together. She bought me a colander. Also a dish rack, because mine was "rusty" and "sad." Also a set of those clear plastic containers for the pantry, so you can see what's inside. Also a label maker. I didn't know she owned a label maker. Apparently she's had one for years, she just didn't bring it, so she bought me my own.

Then she went home and labeled everything. RICE. PASTA. OATS. COFFEE. COFFEE, BACKUP. She found the drawer where I keep all the takeout soy sauce packets and chopsticks, and she labeled it

TAKEOUT, like she was disappointed but trying to be supportive.

The spices went in alphabetical order. I have eleven spices. They're on a little shelf now, all facing forward, like a choir.

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It wasn't all organizing, to be fair. Saturday afternoon I took her around the neighborhood. We walked down to Domino Park and sat by the water and watched the ferries go by. She held my arm the whole time like we were on a date, which honestly kind of felt nice. I took her to the coffee place on Bedford and she said the latte was "too big" and finished all of it. She said the city "smells like a lot of things." She liked the park. She liked the water. She didn't like the guy who skateboarded past really close, and she told him so.

Saturday night she made dinner, obviously. In my kitchen, with my new colander. Pasta with her tomato sauce, the one from when I was a kid, the one I've tried to make like twenty times and never gotten right. I watched her the whole time this time. She puts a little sugar in it. A little. I never knew. She said "you didn't know that?" like I'd been doing it wrong on purpose for ten years.

We ate at the kitchen table. She sat where I usually sit at night. She said "this table wobbles." I said I know, there's a matchbook. She found it and looked at it and put it back exactly where it was without saying anything. I appreciated that a lot.

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The big questions came on Sunday morning. Over coffee. Am I eating. Yes. Am I sleeping. Kind of. Do I have health insurance. Yes,

Mom. Am I seeing anyone. I said no. She said "nobody?" I said there was a girl I went on a date with in July but it didn't really go anywhere. She said "why not?" I said I don't know, we didn't really click. She said "you have to give people a chance, you're too picky." Then she said "you're too handsome to be alone, it's a waste." Which is the kind of thing only a mom can say and get away with.

She also moved the lamp on the kitchen table. My lamp. She moved it to the other end because she said it was "in the way." I didn't say anything. I'll talk about the lamp another time.

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I took her back to Penn on Sunday afternoon. She hugged me at the top of the escalator for a really long time. Long enough that people had to go around us. She said "call me more." I said I call you every week. She said "more."

When I got home the loft was so quiet. Everything was clean and labeled and in rows. I stood in the kitchen and opened a cabinet and didn't know where anything was.

She called that night to say she got home okay. Then she said "the colander's in the cabinet to the left of the sink, by the way." I said I know, Mom. I didn't know.

I moved the lamp back. Everything else I'm keeping. Don't tell her.

– Shay

Thanks for reading. There are more of these on my site, one every couple of weeks.