

Álvaro Magalhães

O ESTRANHÃO 4

HELP, MY MUM
IS BROKEN!

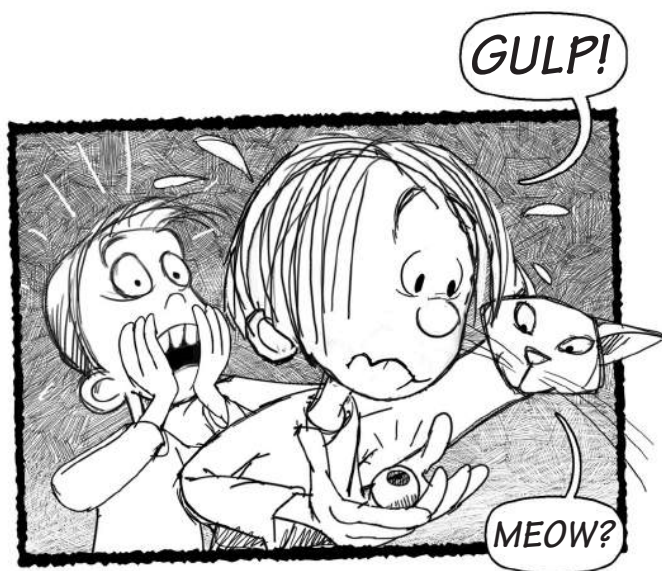


Ilustração de Carlos J. Campos

 Porto
Editora

Help, my mum is broken

My mum is a machine. At seven a.m., she turns on automatically and starts working; she isn't like all the other machines, she's the perfect machine. All these years of work (cooking, doing the laundry, cleaning, ironing, driving children to school and to all the other activities) and she has never broken down.

When people ask me what my mum does, all I feel like answering is



A mum like her has all the jobs in the world just because she is a mum.

When I hurt myself playing football, she was a mum-nurse.



When she took a splinter from my hand with a needle, she was a mum-surgeon.

When she defended me against my dad over the burnt cake, she was a mum-lawyer.



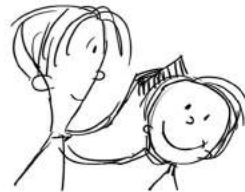
When she took something from my eye, she was a mum-eye doctor.

When she took in my jeans, she was a mum-seamstress.



“Mum, I need you to make an appointment at the dentist!” she is a mum-secretary.

When she gave me a new hair style, she was a mum-hairdresser.



And when she save me from those big dogs, she was a mum-beast tamer.

She is also a mum-driver, mum-chef, mum-washer, mum-waiter, “firemum”, “policemum”, mum-plumber, mum-teacher, mum-electrician, mum-pharmacist, etc. Being a mum is a full-time job. And what do they earn doing that? That’s a good question. All I know is how much a child costs: a lot of money and a lot of work. It’s true, being mum is a job in which you don’t get paid and you work a lot! However, there are lots of people who want this job.

But even the most perfect machines break down at some point, don’t they? A mum like mine rarely breaks down but no one is above that. Everything started on a Thursday afternoon, after my yoga lesson. My mum, who was supposed to pick me up, didn’t show up and she wasn’t answering her phone either. Half an hour went by, then a hour... and still nothing.



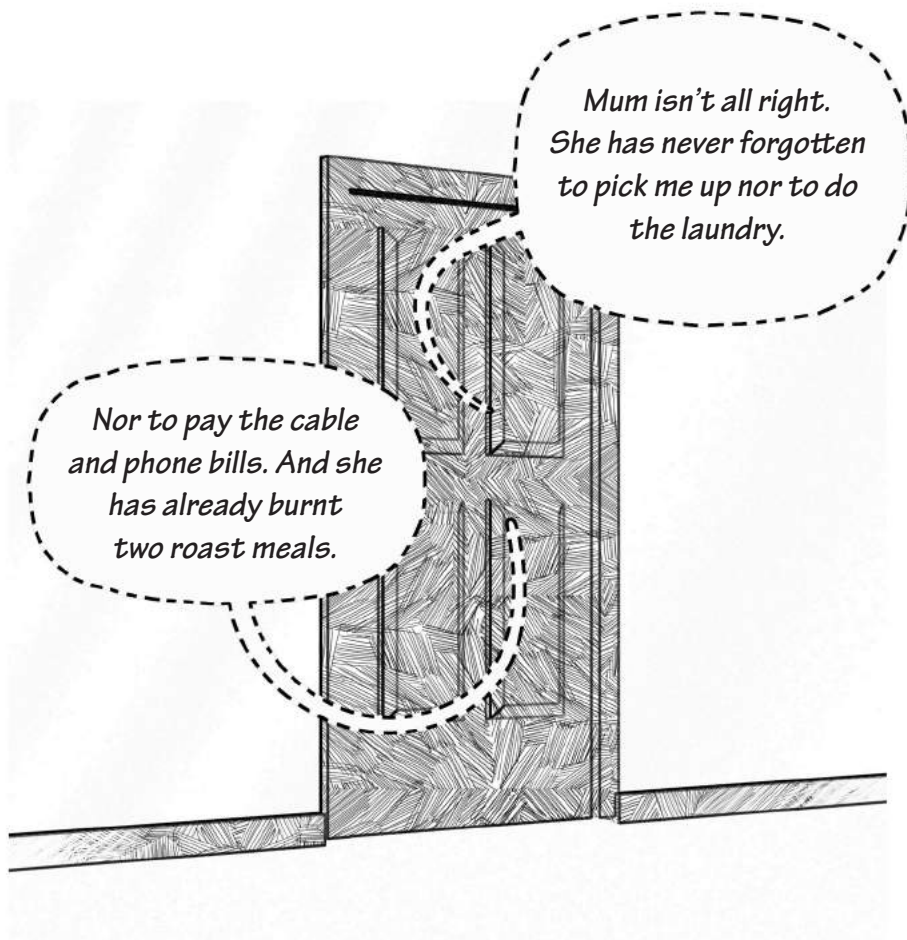
The other mums arrived and soon everybody else left and there was just me there, all by myself. Where was my mum if she couldn't even answer the phone? Twelve times. She didn't pick up twelve times. Tell me that this is something a mum would do. One thing I'm sure about is, not mine!

My phone rang and I thought it was her. It was my sister, who was already waiting in front of the shopping center. We were both on hold, waiting.

Getting increasingly worried, I took a bus home and found my mum sleeping on the couch. She took pills to sleep (even poorly) at night and she would fall asleep during the day as well. She had become a zombie-mum. And when your mum looks like a zombie it's because it really is a horror film.



Was she broken? I panicked. A broken mum is a calamity. When my sister arrived home we had an emergency meeting in my room, behind closed doors.



That was the truth, food had got worse and worse. We were being fed sausages from cans and chips. Fried eggs. Frozen pizzas and lasagnas. Broken mum's food.

In a perfect world, I would have just taken my mum to a shop where they would have fixed her, the problem couldn't have been that big, surely? Maybe just a power problem, like a flat battery?



My sister and I were in great danger. That was the truth. We were so scared we agreed on something for the first time ever and decided to help. Even dad, who wasn't her child, decided to join us because he was out of clean and ironed clothes and the food was awful, etc. as she wasn't his mum, we decided not to let him into our group.



He also never has time for anything, not even at home, where everything is doable.

When he left for work, my sister and I decided it was time to put my plan to work. Each one in his/her own way would try to find out what was wrong with mum.

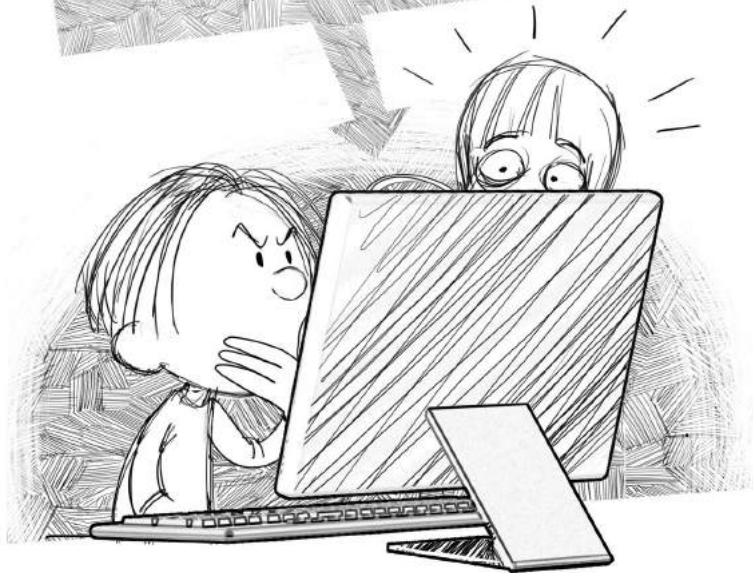
There was a problem in her head, or more than one, and that was a problem that didn't let her get to sleep. If she didn't sleep, she couldn't recharge her batteries. What was the worst problem; the thing in her head or the sleeping problem?

My sister listened to her phone calls with friends and to conversations with dad in the bedroom too, behind closed doors. I went online and checked her visits to websites. They were mostly sites with tips on cooking. I was about to give up searching when I found an appointment with a psychologist and counsellor from a blog called:

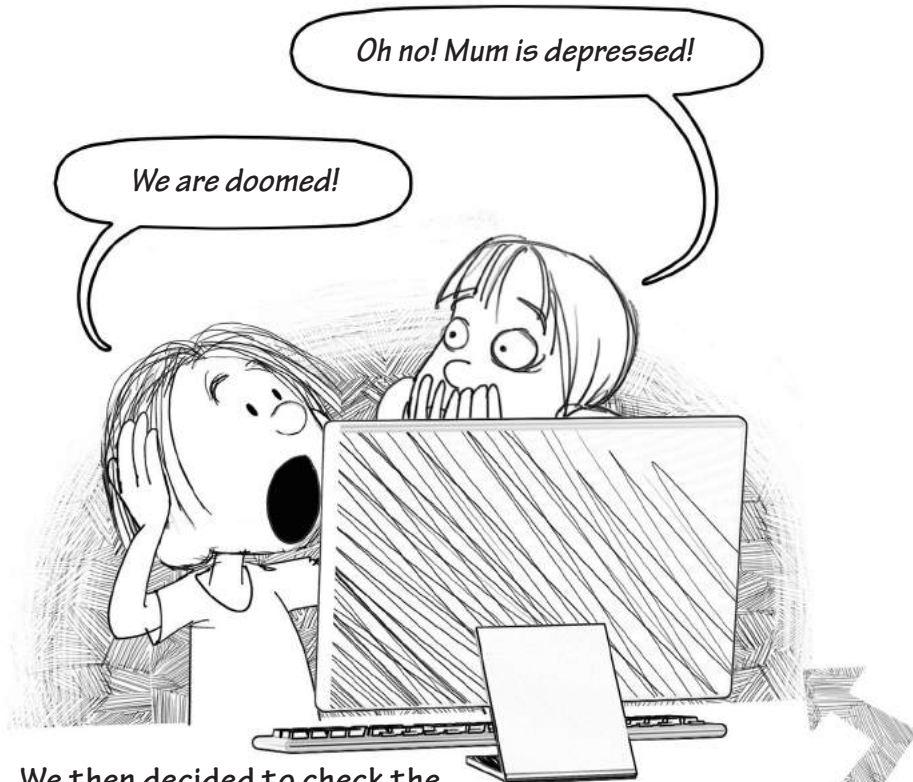


I called my sister and we read her contact:

"I'm one more desperate mum who doesn't know what to do or rather, knows what to do, but doesn't have the energy to get it done. My husband owns a coffee shop and he is always struggling. I work part-time in a supermarket where people are fired everyday. We have two children, 11 and 15 years old, but I'm the one who takes care of them. So, there is never enough money, not enough time and I am only able to do half of what I have to do. This is all just a burden I can't handle anymore. I'm always forgetting what I have to do and so I don't do them. I've lost my appetite, I sleep badly, I care about nothing and nothing seems to interest me anymore. What should I do?"



My sister put his hands on her head.



We then decided to check the psychologist's answer:

"My dear, I think you are about to have a meltdown. Check out the advice on my blog. If you don't tackle the problem as soon as possible, you may get depressed."

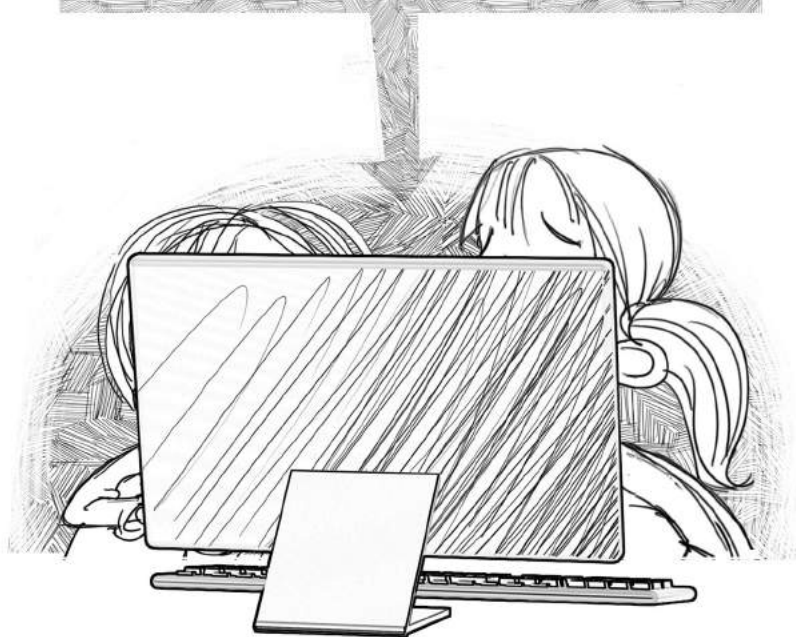
So, it was a serious illness after all. A meltdown can last months, even years to fix; and it can become a depression, which is the same as your car engine breaking down.

A mum like that is never a mum again. And if she had to go to a psychiatrist, she would be broken forever.

“Calm down! It’s not the end of the world.” “She is burned out, for now.”

We checked the advice given on the blog:

- *Limit your activities to one a week.*
- *Set rules and make your children follow schedules and tidy their rooms.*
- *Give them housework to do regularly.*
- *Try to get your social life back and do some of your old activities.*



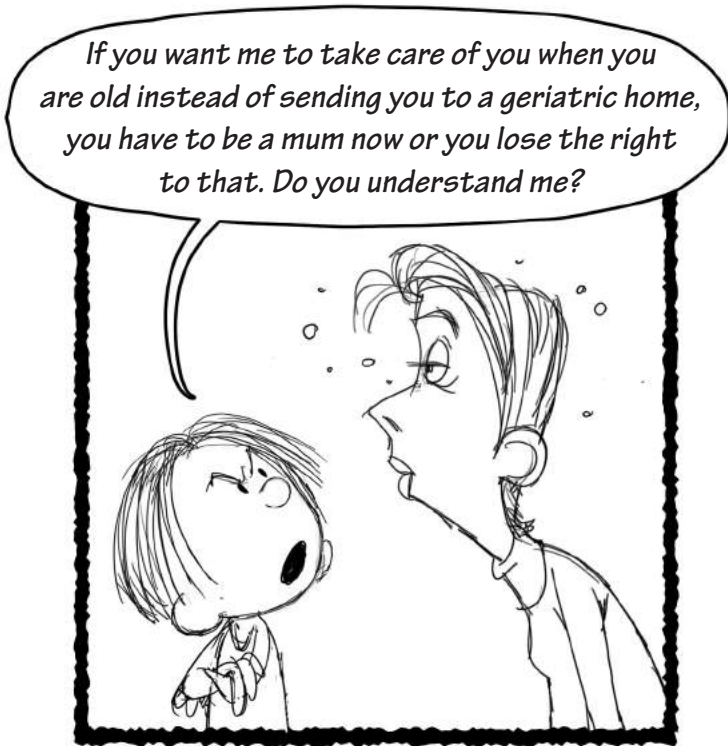
We couldn't see mum following any of the advice so we decided to take things into our own hands. We investigated her social life and found out that before being a mum she would go to the theatre, bowling, clubs and go for long walks. We took her to the theatre to see a film on her birthday. We then went bowling, a ridiculous game in which we must use a ball bigger and heavier than us. Mum didn't even react. She would smile but she wasn't there at all. She was definitely broken.

My sister and I were more and more united. We gave up our activities, started tidying our rooms and taking turns at doing the dishes at dinner. My mum looked on, smiled and said.



But she was still broken.

We also decided to try emotional blackmail and we came up with non-serious medical conditions such as the flu and stomach aches. She told us to call our dad and tell him to go to the chemist's. Nothing worked. So I started threatening her.



She understood but remained broken. She wasn't cooperating at all.

Mum was longer all there, that's the truth of the matter. And without one around nothing works. Our family was falling apart. I thought of hypnosis, hydrotherapy and other things like that, but all out of the reach of my pocket.

The only chance, probably our last chance, was to scare the hell out of her. Scaring a mum, even a broken one, isn't that hard. We went to a phone booth and called home. My sister disguised her voice.



Good afternoon. I'm Elvira Martins, from Abandoned Children's Association. Your children, Frederico and Sara, have signed up for a support programme. It seems their mum is having a meltdown. Poor thing.

I am the mother and I'm not having a meltdown.

The problem is that now the process has started, we've got to follow the normal procedures.



“I’m only tired, with no energy or patience. But this will all go away.” Said mum getting gaining vitality as she spoke. It was working. I never thought my sister could be so convincing.

“In these cases, we try to find a family to adopt the children, we have many families on hold...” my sister insisted. It was the final push my mum needed to get on track.

*My children? Are you kidding me? This can't be true, I'm just a little stressed out and not having much sleep of course. But it's over.
I'm well now.*



"I'm well now" she said. Those were magic words.



Yes, it was like a magic trick. Mum was back on track again, running perfectly. And life around her as well.

"Mum, I hurt my knee." I said and there came the mum-nurse.

"Mum, drive me to my appointment at the dermatologist's." my sister said. And the mum-driver was ready.

"Have you washed my blue T-shirt?" I asked. "It's in your closet drawer" answered the mum-washer smiling.

"What's for dinner?" I asked. "Roast beef" answer the mum-chef before leaving.

Marvelous! We were back to being children, that we hadn't been for a while. There is nothing better in life. But if our mum is broken, it's when we miss her the most.

