

# Mother

*by Alfred Lau*

I snapped my eyes shut, allowing my mind to wander. In the murky darkness, I could see her palms.

Those fair, smooth palms.

A macabre sense of urging washed over my mind as I rapidly opened my eyes. My surroundings suddenly blurred and faded away, melting into a familiar nightmare, that which had silently stalked me in the dead of the nights, reminding me of the ghosts of Christmas past. I thought I could hear the faint cackle of the ghosts, the demons.

They dance around me, them ghosts, circling my soul and chanting in their demonic voices, threatening to cloud my senses and break my will into their bidding.

I was back in my old house's bedroom. A familiar yet foreign bedroom, one that had housed me for near twenty years before I finally escaped from its menacing grasp. The pastel coloured walls seemed far too pristine and innocent for the demons that house within, the oak brown door seemed too fragile to contain such dread that I nursed, but it was all true.

I saw my mother rushing out of the house, ever so eager to get to work. It was a familiar sight - she never seemed to have enough time for me.

I remembered when I was small and naive, I tried to buy an hour of her with the little savings that I had, hoping for her to spare me a few moments of her precious, precious time, to accompany me like how a loving mother should. I could still remember her brown eyes, sparkling with little droplets of tears. I could still hear her guilty sobbing, still feel her warmth as she hugged me and promised me that she would spend more time with me.

For a while it seemed like she had changed, like she had seen the errors of her actions. She would accompany me to the playgrounds, bring me to the fast-food outlets, spend more time reading books to me.

Then slowly, she went back to her old ways, a constant never ending circle of promises made and promises broken. My memories of her since then had consisted of mostly two things - her shutting the door of the house behind her quietly, and her putting my allowance on my study table.

I suspect she thought I was asleep and did not want to wake me up, but that only showed how little she knew. Each time she absentmindedly put my allowance on my table, my heart ached. In the darkness of the room I would silently weep. Her skin was fair and smooth, like beautiful pearls glistening in the dark. In the dark of my room, that was the only sparkle of light and of warmth.

Mother...

I shook my head violently, trying to force the images of the past out of my mind. Mother is gone now.

Mother is gone! She's gone! She had abandoned you, once again. She had never bothered to care for you, never bothered to know you, you who is her son.

No... No! NO!

I leaped off my bed and, with rapid strides, sprinted to my fridge. I saw my face in the array of knives hanging on the kitchen wall, but it barely registered in my mind. I closed my eyes as I opened the door, the icy chill rushing out to hug me like a warm mother's embrace.

I slowly opened my eyes, reveling in the moment, as the images of my mother flashed through my mind's eye in quick succession, like the stop motion films of the olden days. Through the slit of my semi-opened eyes I could see the blurred outlines of the objects in my fridge.

No, I corrected myself, not objects... It is Mother.

Morning darling, was school fun today?

I love you darling, be careful when you're alone at home!

Darling, have your dinner on your own all right? I have urgent matters today.

Sorry darling, I totally forgot about our lunch date. Next time I promise!

Mother...

My eyes were completely opened now, my mind saturated with the snippets of my past. I saw the clean knife at the side, and retrieved it out.

I smiled - it seemed like a simple knife, an innocent tool you use to prepare your vegetables or meat, yet as they always say, looks are deceiving. Certainly this one was.

As the icy chill from the fridge continued to brush gently against my body, instead in my heart a dark fury burned strongly and brightly.

Mother is gone now, but her, she looked so much like her.

She was exactly like Mother - the same black silky straight hair with a faint scent from her shampoo, the same fair and smooth skin, and the same long slender fingers, graceful like a swam on water.

Her palms were so much like Mother's, so much.

I carefully placed the knife back to its original position and, with poorly contained excitement, retrieved a palm from the fridge. It was slightly wrinkled, but it was just as fair as the rest of the pristine white in the fridge. It felt warm to my hands, though I knew it wasn't. How could it be, when it had been inside the fridge for so long?

Yet it was.

Mother.

After several moments, I replaced the palm in its original pedestal and closed my eyes again, a new obsession burning passionately inside me, outshining even my sorrows and pain.

Nicole.

She was a newcomer, barely four months into working at my company. As one of the department heads, I had to guide her through her orientation in the company.

Her long silky hair, fair skin, mole above the right corner of her lips, and her palms. Those fair palms.

I could never forgot our first encounter - I walked past her while she was at the company for her interview. Even then she had caught my attention, her resemblance between her and Mother too striking.

After she was posted to my department, my mentoring role meant that we had a lot of interaction. At first she was quiet, but after awhile we began to talk more often. About her life and mine.

I painted lies, of course. Beautiful lies about the fabulous family I had, about how my parents are spending their retirement overseas.

As we continued with our lunch dates, I found myself getting increasingly obsessed with her and her fair palms.

Soon in my mind was a plot. It developed without my knowing, a deliberate plan which aims were to kill her and cut off her palms, like I had with many other ladies.

But unlike the others, I hesitated the execution of my plan. I spent my nights struggling against the voices, fighting the devils in my heart.

Stop it, David. Stop it. She looks like Mother, but she is not her! Stop while you still can! You fell in love with her, didn't you? Then why would you want to kill her?

As the devils started their dance yet again, the familiar dance used to consume my conscience and cloud my judgement with devilry, I found myself fighting the dark silhouettes, instead of dancing along.

Sitting on my chair in the kitchen, my thoughts were once again directed back to the clean knife I had in my fridge.

How long had it been since I last killed?

As my past victims' faces flashed through my mind, I found myself looking at an image repeated again and again. I could not remember any of their faces, but their long silky hair and fair skin they were incised in my mind.

Yet all of them did not bear a closer resemblance than her. As I stared at the closed fridge, I made my decision.

A decision that made the devils dance with glee.

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As the sky darkened, I broke myself away from what I was doing, and walked calmly to my kitchen. My adrenaline was pumping, and I found myself shaking with excitement due to the sheer anticipation of what I was about to commit.

Nicole.

I barely noticed what I was doing, as I unlocked my car and sat down. I buckled my seatbelts, turning the ignition key. The roar of the engine echoed through the car park as I tightly gripped the steering wheel, the whites of my hands showing. I was rehearsing the undone deed in my mind.

Nicole.

As I drove out of my estate, I saw a couple of police cruisers driving past. I wondered if they were here to arrest me, but I was surprised at how little I cared about that.

I didn't care.

As I drove to the office, I switched on the radio. The deejay's voice resonated inside the vehicle: "The Police had discovered a new floating corpse at Macritchie Reservoir this afternoon. Due to the degree of degeneration, the corpse had rotted beyond recognition. Any public with information should immediately come forward to the Police at 1900-112-6568."

I grinned at the tasty irony of the situation before me - how twisted fate must be, that the police would drive past the very man they were looking for the whole time without knowing.

Nicole.

As I reached the company, I parked my vehicle at the side of the road - there would be no more need for my observing of road regulations. I crossed the road quickly, the knife safely inside my leather bag.

I pushed the glass door open, putting on my usual polite smile for the security guards. I slipped through without them suspecting a thing - after all, why would they?

I entered the elevator and punched the button for my destination level. The beep woke my adrenaline, as I felt my heart pumping faster than it had ever done. My eye flared with renewed vigour as the numbers of the LED screen jumped, indicating the rise of the elevator.

Then at last, the door opened with a loud thud.

Nicole.

I tried to calm myself as I walked through the dark alleyway. It was after hours, and most of the desks were empty. Most of the lights were out, leaving only the ones luminating the walkway. My footstep made no sound on the carpeted floor as I marched on, the demons in my heart drumming a new song of danger and death.

I felt like a limbo, my body seemed out of my control. It moved without my instructions and every step seemed unlike my own. It was as if a demon had possessed me, or a puppeteer had controlled me with invisible red threads.

I retrieved the carefully wrapped knife from my bag, dropping the bag just as I reached my destination - the glass door to my department.

I saw my reflection on the door, and hesitated - I could still redeem myself, I could still stop now. Here was a man which had so much, yet so little. My own reflection seemed to mock me as it showed me my face, full of morose and purpose.

Nicole.

Then from the corner of my eyes I saw people approaching. I heard shouts, incomprehensible they were, but I knew exactly who these people were and their purpose for being here.

It was for me. I knew who they were, because I called them. I was the one who called the police, the one who tipped them about the palms in my fridge. I knew, at that very moment I chose to collaborate with the demons, that my decision would be both my demise and hers.

But it mattered surprisingly little to me - I am tired, tired or pretending who I am not, tired of all the lies I've done, all the sins I've committed. I seek not redemption, merely escape.

There was nothing left for me in this world since a very long time ago - I should have left then.

I quickly grabbed the handle, opened the door and locked it behind me. I smiled at the sole human presence in the entire office.

Nicole.

Her evident joy of seeing me was quickly extinguished by the look of my face. Her eyes widened as she stared at my dangerous smile.

I held my smile as I walked towards her, trying to contain my anticipation for what was about to happen next.

Her intimidated eyes flashed many questions, questions that I did not have time for.

I raised my hand, letting the newspaper drop to the floor as I revealed the knife concealed within, innocent it might be. My dangerous smile widened as she screamed with such fear, throwing documents at me in an attempt to slow me down.

As if she could stop me.

I dodged her projectiles, and quickly grabbed both her fragile hands with my left, staring straight at her face as I held her palms up.

My eyes burned as I saw her palms, such familiar palms they were.

"Good bye, Nicole," I whispered as I slowly swung my knife down towards her chest, knowing that it was the only thing that could possibly prompt the police to do the sole thing I wanted them to.

Nicole.

Then it happened. A loud gunshot echoed through the entire office, shattering the glass as it went through the door and pierced me from behind. I opened my mouth in shock - it was more painful than I thought it would be, but I knew I deserved it.

I crumbled to the ground beside Nicole, who immediately scrambled up her feet and ran to the policemen. I turned my head weakly, as a warm sticky fluid started to stain my shirt. I knew it was blood.

For a moment our eyes locked, a moment of final intimacy between both of us. The pain was spreading to other parts of my body, and I knew my end was nigh.

As I blinked, still looking at her beautiful face, she disappeared before my eyes. Instead in her place was Mother. The mother who would read bedtime stories to me, who would bring me the Mcdonalds'.

The loving mother with a beautiful smile, and a warm embrace. I smiled at her.

Mother.

