

## “Loving Hands”

Trudging up the mild sandy slope, I felt the soft breeze intertwining through my hair. As I stopped my climb and stood tall upon the open sand dune, I stared out into the open sea, my mind heavy with thoughts. Running my hands on the intrinsically carved wood, I reached for the buckles that held the box together, gently opening the box and tipping its contents to the world. Black, glittering ashes surrounded me, caressing my hair lovingly before swirling and fluttering into the open sea. I tasted the saltiness on my lips and saw my window of vision transform into one giant blur. I looked down at my hands, stained with tears, and cried even harder knowing that my mother never had the privilege to have such thin and smooth hands.

It was during my third year of secondary school when I witnessed what would change my life forever. I was a troubled child back then, not realizing the importance of education and spent everyday skipping school to go play video games with my friends. The money that funded my video gaming habits came from a metal box that was hidden behind some cardboard boxes on the highest kitchen shelf. It was probably stored away by my mother, hoping that I could not discover the secret stash of money if she hid it away. Little did she know, I was using that money regularly to give me an excuse to shirk my responsibilities and live a carefree instead. I would come home from a day of playing video games, flop on the couch, turn on the television and wait for my mother to come home to make dinner. After dinner, my mother would disappear again, not to be seen again until later in the night. At that time, it never occurred to me to ask her where she was going, never to question about her whereabouts. This cycle repeated for infinity, or so it seemed, until one day I saw my mother come through the door clutching her right hand close to her body.

Like always, my mother had a stone face that could rarely be disrupted. She was wearing her usual old, worn black jacket that covered a slouching back. On most days I saw her, she had her sleeves rolled up, exposing her large, manly hands that looked swollen with thick calluses covering the palms. I was embarrassed by those hands. I did not despise those hands for their physical appearance yet for what they represented. They constantly reminded me of the lack of a prominent male figure in my life. Not in my lifetime has my mother talked about my father and deep inside I knew that lack of communication was what costed our relationship. It disgusted me to think that my mother would try to take on both two parental roles, ultimately failing in both.

I heard the sounds of rushing water and the sharp knife hitting the cutting board. I settled back in the couch and resumed watching the television show, knowing that dinner was going to be finished in a matter of minutes. Suddenly, I hear a piercing scream coming from the kitchen. My breath hitched and felt my gut churning inside. I rushed over to see a pot toppled over and water splattered over the floor. Amid it all, I see my mother clutching her right hand in her left, her back straining towards the center of her body, shaking of tremors. Tears rolled down her eyes yet not a whimper or sound of pain escaped her. She slowly lifted her drooping head, directing her gaze towards me.

“Go...call...the...ambulance...” my mother said between her clenched teeth. Not knowing how to react, I immediately rushed out of the kitchen and called for help. It was only later, with my mother admitted into the hospital, did I find the reason why she was in so much pain. My mother was diagnosed with a rare disease which symptoms involved swollen hands. When I was repulsive of the way that her hands looked and all they represented, she was suffering through pain that ultimately affected her heart. When later asked by the doctor why she didn't come to the hospital sooner, she looked at me with a weary smile on her face

and simply said: “ I never got the chance to get off work.” Tears immediately formed in my eyes.

I finally knew where she went all those nights after dinner. To work long and rough hours where she was not only fighting against fatigue but also against pain. Suffering in order for me to live a more comfortable life.

I cradled her hands in mine and held them to my cheek. Feeling the coarse blisters outlining her hands, I felt tears rapidly rolling down my face. I wanted to tell her that I was sorry, sorry for taking her hard earned money to be used for my own entertainment. I wanted to tell her I was sorry for not trying in school, for skipping whenever I could. Yet, no words came out of me, as I drowned in a sea of regret. Seeing my pain, my mother lifted her hands from mine and gently patted my head, telling me that everything will be okay.

Would I ever meet another person that will be willing to live in pain every day just so she can provide a comfortable life for me? I think not. My selfless mother braced through all the difficulties in her life so she can make mine better. All she received in return was a child that was disgusted by her, a child that resented her for not having a proper family and a child that did not care about his own future.

Mom, I’m sorry that the only time I can tell you this is when you have finally have left me. I realize how much more difficult life is with you gone. Not a single day passes when I don’t regret how I acted in the past. I am thankful that you showed me how a real parent should act and how much sacrifices real parents take for their children. I'm going to carry your bravery and courage for the rest of my life. When it is my turn to have children of my own, I will make sure that they understand the meaning of gratitude and what it means take to not people for granted.