

Mother

By Jalian Jiang, age 15, Coquitlam

My mother is kind.

Whenever I'm cold, I climb into her arms. Her long, jet-black hair acts like a blanket, shielding me from the winter gales blowing from the windows and apertures in the walls.

Her lullabies echo throughout the room, the faint warbles of the indistinct melody so soft I think I'm imagining it. The stories she tells are the same, though the haunting narratives are hardly vague.

My mother is patient; she listens to my stories without complaint, silent as I retell my adventures on repeat.

"Mother, I saw something behind the door."

"Mother, I think I saw Father today."

Her spectral figure is always watching, always listening. Sometimes I think I can feel her keen eyes watching me behind her curtain of hair.

My mother is playful. She likes to set up games around the house when I'm not watching. Every day, I find a new present under a cupboard, in a drawer, or behind a desk. They're usually bags of small colorful rocks and candies, and I keep them in my treasure box in my room or put them on display. They smell strange so I don't eat them, but I always look at my collection from the view on my bed. A display of pride for winning her games.

My mother is neat. The house is spotless, and everything stays in the same place, so there is no chance of error. However, I do catch occasional splotches of ichor, from the bugs that become trapped inside and fly headfirst into the windowsill. I use damp towels to wipe the mess, but I'm running out of clean ones. The laundry basket has piled to the roof, and I don't know how to operate the washing machine. I asked my mother, but she didn't say anything.

My mother is humorous. We have a game where I'm the pirate and she's the sea monster. An awfully still sea monster, I like to joke. I tell her to chase me, to chase me. But she never does. A pirate with no enemies, just how I like it. Nothing to stand in the way of greatness.

My mother is quiet.

"Mother, where is father?"

"Mother, why can't I open the front door?"

Either she likes keeping her mouth shut or I'm the problem.

"Sorry, mother. I won't ask that again."

I've learned not to inquire about such foolish subjects.

My mother is lonely. I lie next to her when she's sleeping, her face a mask of peace. She looks happier than I've ever seen when she's resting. Her lips are baby pink, and her nose is dusty. I comb her hair, brushing it like a doll's so her slick pelt is behind her back.

I talk to her every day before I sleep.

"Mother," I whispered one night, curled lips almost touching her ear, hand cupping the side of her face.

"You are dead."