

A dose of Malaysiana: *When you're reading this novel, bear in mind that I have tried to Malaysian-ize the tone and style of speaking a little so that you'll get a taste of what Mangrish (Malaysian + English) is really like. :-) Frankly, Malaysian people are very economical with our words...whatever we can say in five words, we say it in three!*

Example:

I would like a cup of tea. (Tea, please)

That was utterly rude of you (Damn rude, you)

Can I borrow your pen? (Borrow, can?)

Tomorrow, you should head over to Cynthia's house. We will have a nice session of drinking and get blinking drunk (Tomorrow happening in Cynthia's house, ok? We sure get plastered one!)

Therefore, if you find this novella frighteningly strange, don't worry, you're normal.

SUPPORT CREATIVITY

Please support creativity by **NOT** violating the laws of copyright. The author spent many days and nights toiling over this book (sometimes she forgets to feed her kids their meals) and she has made an effort to make this book as enjoyable and affordable as possible for all readers. Hence, she would sincerely appreciate it if you would, instead of emailing digital copies of the story to your friends, refer them to www.marshamaung.com instead.

Thanking you sincerely,
Marsha Maung

"Oh, Nell. The baby is lovely. She's beautiful...the prettiest little tyke I've ever seen in my life", coo-ed Nell's best friend as she neared her hospital bed. The tears began welling up in Nell's eyes again when her friend approached the baby's temporary crib beside her bed. The dark room in the hospital was perfect for her confused mood.

The nurse had pushed the baby into her room twenty minutes ago, encouraging Nell to pick the baby up and feeding her but Nell couldn't find it in herself to do that. She didn't want to see **that** hand. When the baby was born, Nell remembered feeling the elation of finally being able to meet her perfect little newborn baby. Instead, the doctor whisked the baby off to a corner of the room and announced to her that there was something wrong with the baby's hands.

Anxiety struck and she started shivering in the cold of the delivery room, crying and wailing for her baby as the doctor stitched her up. Nine pounds. A healthy baby. But something wrong with her hand.

"I'm sorry, Miss Chin. It appears as though your daughter's right hand is deformed, she's got two fingers on her right hand and the rest of her hand is left in a stump. But with corrective surgery and technology, I'm very sure that there's something to be done about it", Dr. Chandra said with a pretentious smile designed for parents of kids with problems. A lone tear had run down her cheeks as she held back the sobs. Kah Hoong should be here to see this...it's his fault too. Why is it that he's off somewhere having fun with another girl when I am here stuck with this baby?

In the meantime, even the Dr's explanation of 'something to be done about it' was as convincing as telling her that her stitches didn't hurt and she didn't just push a nine pound baby out of the small opening of her vagina.

An imperfect baby...God never prepares human beings for imperfect beings. And now, she has to find it in her to take care and raise one.

Nell sighed and tried to smile at Jess who was cooing at the sleeping baby. The baby was wrapped up and her hands cannot be seen. And Jess does not know about the baby's deformity. *The less she knows, the better*, Nell thought. Jess would eventually find out, anyway, but now is not the time. Nell turned away because she didn't know how to deal with that right now. In fact, she's not even seen the baby's hand. What shocked her even more was that she has not seen the baby's face for more than 5 minutes.

That was when the baby started crying and the world started changing for Nell who thought she didn't have the strength and courage to deal with a deformed child.

The baby whimpered, Jess looked up at Nell with questions flashing in her eyes.

"What? You're not going to pick her up?"

Nell smiled softly and nod, "I'm just not too good at these things yet"

"You'll be a Pro in a month. You've got to feed the baby, check the diapers and stuff like that...things that mothers do. I'll leave you with that while I go check out the other babies in the nursery" she said, waving her arms around and in the direction she was heading. She stopped and turned around before heading out and bounced her shoulders up and down for effect, "Babies are ssssooooo cute, aren't they?"

Then it was just Nell and Elaine. Yes, Elaine. That would be her name.

Slowly, following the instructions that she had read in some parenting books, Nell placed both my hands under the bawling baby, one under her bum and another at the base of her neck and lifted her. Nell made the 'ssshhh' sound as she got the baby out.

And from that moment on, Nell could see her world change. Literally, see it.

*** **

Elaine had been crying for ages now and Nell felt like her world was spinning out of control. She picked the baby up and shuffled around the house bouncing while waiting for the kettle to boil. At times like this, she wished Kah Hoong hadn't left. She wished that there was someone who could help her shoulder the responsibility of caring for a baby and household chores. She's got a job to go back to in less than two weeks and she'd have to leave baby care to her aging mother.

Her relationship with her own mother had been far from perfect. They've not spoken for 2 years because an incident connected to Kah Hoong's gambling behavior – and although Kah Hoong is no longer with Nell, the relationship remains strained.

Two years of silence. And the first thing she asks of her mother is to care for her daughter.

The good thing is that Nell's got a good career as an accountant for a large company, Hi Sun Systems Sdn. Bhd. They pay good and she's been working there for the past six years. A promotion is due so, even if without Kah Hoong's salary, they will survive, she thought still bouncing. She decides to pay her mother some 'pocket money' for her efforts and time. Then Elaine decided to do a wet one on her.

Nell put her baby down on the changing mat and then heard the kettle screech. She ran into the kitchen and while reaching for the kettle, she heard a crash and then loud crying.

She'd left Elaine on top of the changing table and frantically ran back into the living room, ignoring the urgent calls of the boiling kettle! Nell picked her baby up, cuddled her while checking broken bones. There were none despite Elaine's frantic cries. Nell held tightly to Elaine's body and felt that the baby has bundled her muscles up in anger. A look at her face proves how angry Elaine is at being left alone on the changing table, and there was a rising bump on her forehead too.

Chastising herself, Nell, with Elaine all bundled up in her arms with wet diaper, ran back into the kitchen to douse the tame the screaming kettle.

As she changed Elaine's diaper, she wonders if this is what life is all about from now on.

*** **

"I heard about your daughter, what a pity. Are you OK? Is she OK? Is she going to go for some surgery? I heard that the doctors at SJMC are really good at these things, you know. Imagine, it's her right hand and she's not going to be able to do a lot of things normally...", Hsiao Wei, one of the credit collection department clerk, went on without realizing that she's hit the wrong nerve.

Hsiao Wei was rewarded with a poisonous glare from Nell. The younger woman disappeared in a heart beat knowing that she made a big boo-boo.

Jess, who overheard the conversation, sauntered over and stroked Nell's back. "Don't you get yourself all worked up about Ah-Wei. She's like that all the time....she doesn't think before she talks, ok? Elaine's going to be fine. And besides, she'll learn how to use her left hand in no time and she's going to be like a normal left-hander, that's all! I mean, do you even consider left-handers handicapped?"

Nell sighed heavily at the mention of the word 'handicap'. Jess widened her eyes when she realized that she, herself, had used the wrong word. "It's OK, Jess. I've got to deal with this sooner or later. Elaine is beautiful and she's healthy. She'll learn how to use her left hand, she can get a job, find a good man, get married and have perfectly PERFECT kids"

It was Jess' turn to heave a sigh of relief. "That's the spirit, girl!" Jess slapped Nell gently over the back which yielded a tight small smile from Nell. "Now, how about some shopping?" When Nell looked over at her best friend, Jess was rubbing her hands together gleefully like a little girl eyeing a tub of ice-cream.

*** **