

Later that evening, as Loida finished her hot bath and was toweling herself dry, she heard footsteps inside her bedroom. They were light and definitely not her husband's. She put on her silk robe and clutched a razor blade; she opened the bathroom door in a flash surprising the person in her room.

Miss Barbara froze in mid-action; surprised by the sudden opening of the door and Loida's appearance.

"What are you doing in my room? What is it in your hand?" Loida asked Miss Barbara, who was bent on the bed with a pearl necklace in her hand. "Aha! You are going to make me look like a thief! Well, you can do that over my dead body!" Loida stepped closer to Barbara and kicked her. Outbalancing the other woman, she quickly, removed the sash of her robe and tied Barbara's hands at the post. She tied her hands with the pearl necklace intact in them. She then took out the curtain sash and tied Barbara's feet with it. All the while, Barbara kept on screaming - "Mrs. Gordon! Help! Help!!"

"Yes, scream all you want! I want everybody to be in this room anyway to see what you are up to. Scream or else, I will kill you!" Loida threatened the woman. She put on her nightgown and sat on the edge of the bed.

"You have pushed me too far, Miss Barbara - you and your Little General. Now, what are you crying at? Don't stop screaming. Scream or you will feel the blade of this razor on your throat."

Barbara screamed hard waking everyone in the house. Mrs. Gordon came in followed by Bertha and the other housemaids who apparently thought it to be a break-in. What Mrs. Gordon saw before her made her gasp.

"Come in all of you. I need your presence to fill this room." Loida ushered everyone in. "And you my dear mother-in-law, I want you to witness everything that is about to happen here, which I think you are already aware of." Loida stood in the middle of the room, "I want everyone in this room to know that I saw this woman - Miss Barbara to all of you, trying to put a pearl necklace under my mattress. I believe that you are wiser than what they think of you and that it is obvious what this woman is trying to do. She wants me to appear as a thief. Like I told her, I am capable of killing anybody but I cannot afford to steal. I may not have grown up in a house as big as this, but my parents taught me well."

"Just the same, you are nothing but a slave in my eyes deprived of material possessions. For all we know, Barbara must have been trying to snoop around here because I told her that my pearl necklace is missing." Mrs. Gordon stepped closer to Barbara and checked the necklace. "Oh my God! This is the necklace that is missing from my drawer! I am glad and relieved that you found it, Barbara. This Filipina is nothing but a thief and I will tell my son about it."

Mrs. Gordon smiled triumphantly while Barbara tried to speak. "Yes, Madam, I was looking for the pearls in this room and I found it here."

Loida laughed out hard.

"What are you laughing at, crazy woman?" Mrs. Gordon demanded.

"You; both of you! You are making it appear to all these people that I am a thief of a pearl necklace?" Loida laughed some more.

She stepped back and got something from her cabinet. It looked like a box made up of dried woven leaves. From the way Loida carried it, it was obviously heavier than it appeared.

"Let me tell you this. From where I come from, we don't buy pearls; we just dive for it. We don't buy gold; we just sieve our sands for it. So why on earth would I steal a pearl necklace - if it's really pearl at all, when I have this?" Loida took off the lid making everybody in the room gasp. Inside the box were strands of pearls, gold earrings and bangles. Loida lit up a matchstick and drew it near one pearl strand. In a second, the pearls turned black. Then Loida wiped it with the edge of her bed cover. After a few rubs, the pearls were back to their original color - as if nothing had happened.

"How about that small pearl necklace? Would you like me to test if it's real, Mother?" Loida uttered the last word heavily.

Mrs. Gordon immediately turned her back and left. The house staff made way for her.

"Mrs. Gordon, how about me?" Barbara wailed.

Mrs. Gordon did not answer back.

"Bertha, it is alright. You may leave now. Sorry for bothering you. I just needed to have this done in front of everybody."

"We understand, Loida. Good thing you thought of calling our attention." Bertha replied and ushered everyone out.

"Hey, don't leave me here!" Barbara fumed.

Once everybody was out, Loida closed the door and locked it. She headed towards Barbara. Barbara tried to scream but her voice was hoarse from all the screaming that she did a while ago. Loida sat on the side of the bed and faced Barbara.

"You know, I have enough of both you and Tony's mother. But don't worry, I will let you go. Unlike your mistress I am compassionate." Loida bent to untie Barbara's hands and let her untie her feet by herself. "About that pearl necklace, as you can see, I have bigger pearls than that. Would you like to have one? You can have it set for a ring or I could even give you two for earrings if you like."

Embarrassed enough, Barbara couldn't even mutter anything. She went out of the room quickly. Once Loida had

*locked her door, she fell down on her knees and after a long time, she made the sign of the cross and prayed. Lord, how long shall I wait for liberation? How long shall it take before I see my son again? All this pain, all these trials, I am going through all of this only for the sake of my son.*