

Dear Maria,

You know, there's a song by that name, a modern one. And I probably did not need to bring that up because it is not relevant here. Also, that's probably not the way I'm supposed to address you. But we never talked about that, so I'm going to plead ignorance on that one. I hope you can forgive me.

I know you will, as terrible and conceited as that is to say. But yeah, you care about me. You care enough to overlook my non-malicious mistakes. Like not getting to the point in this letter, which is that I'm leaving the Philippines to go back to the US. For now, I want to add. But it's hard adding that when you don't know when you're coming back.

It's not that I'm consciously going to stay away. It's that I have a lot of work to do. It's like... Well, say you gave me a house, right? That is super generous, and I appreciate it, but now comes the practical side of things: like getting it painted, furnished, getting the garden in order, and utilities. I hope you understood that. I mean everything but utilities, but I mean is that you gave me a place to have a home, and now I need to make it one.

In a more literal sense, you pointed out that I didn't need to carve out a figurative space for myself or wait for someone else to do it; it was already there. And I just had to take it.

I still remember the feeling of my hands in yours when you told me that, when you told me to seize my fortunes. At that, I was scared, and you reminded me that I was strong. Like my mother. And like my grandfather before her. You reminded me that this was a family trait: this ability to understand that duty and destiny don't always play into

social norms and that the social scripts written for us were written by human hands inclined to err. We had to go our own way, but we each had an explorer's heart, passed down through the bloodline.

And I tried to explain that to my mother, but those words fell flat coming out of my lips. I hope they were just hanging in the air around her head and will land in due time. Or that you'll find some way to tell her. Or that someone will. I won't be there to see it, though, I'm sure, but I'll still reap the benefits all the same. I'll finally have a better relationship with her, which was one of the two things she didn't give me that I feel like I was owed. The other was the launching point, the nest from which to fly from.

And now, I'm taking off really late. Maybe I shouldn't care about that, but it feels like I'm so late to this party, you know? And I hate being late. I'm late to this banquet of life, and consequently, I probably missed out on some things. I missed out on some gags, some memorable moments, some conversations... I don't even know. But I can't play the what-if game, right? I have to keep going.

And thank you for that, for that reminder, for everything that comes after. Thank you for pushing me forward right now. We all need that sometimes, right? If you use a wheelchair it just happens to be a bit literal. But you get shamed for one and not the other. Not that it's your problem. It's not, and I won't let it be mine anymore.

But I promise you, I will have a good life. Not a selfish one. Not a covetous one. But I will have what is mine, and I will have it happily. I will do things that make me happy. I will do things that are responsible. I wish I could give you a better plan, but when I come back, when I come home, I'll have tales of what that plan turned out to be. And that's not nothing.

Salamat po. Sa susunod na lang, po

*(Pause. Music fades in)*

This has been The Mountain's Heart, a production of Hugot Podcasting. And this end song comes from the Sounds like an Earful music supply. Thanks for coming on this adventure with me.