

(Email notification. Mouse click.)

Oh, an email from you. (Pause) Well, I mean, I already have the software on. And I feel better speaking aloud than trying to write things out. At least right now.

(Mouse clicks)

(Muttering) Have you ever thought of...

(Normal volume) Have I thought about transferring back to my old school? Honestly, not before this trip. But while I'm sitting around waiting for Mom to come back, it has come up. I mean, I don't have much else to do right now. And... well, I don't think I would do it. Not because I can't or because I'm not wanted there. The latter is true. That wasn't the sort of school that liked non-traditional pathways to education. And I'm not just talking about administration and their terrible opinions. It was the students. As they all saw it, you graduated high school and went straight to college. Anything else was low class. That's the attitude they all had. It was the one consistent thing in the student body. Even those who were thinking about enlisting in the military did so through the ROTC program, so they could enlist after graduation. Not before they attended.

It was all super pretentious. And I hate saying it, but I used to be that way too. I used to fit right in before my accident.

In my defense, I hated it. Not that I think it's much of a defense. I don't know how far one's misery can take them in terms of excuses or absolution when they're doing so much to maintain the status quo that creates that misery. I chose to go there, right? And I chose to stay until the choice wasn't really mine anymore.

I cringe at the thought of it all: the thought of the person I once was or could have become had my course not changed. Not to say that the accident was a good thing. I'm not going to take it that far. Also, this cringing is a new thing. Like a development that came in the last couple of days. Since the trip on the mountain. So no, it's not about the injury. It's not about overcoming my circumstances. It's about having someone that... that actually believes in me.

You hold the very distinguished honor of being the first person who ever made their belief in me known. With my family, it tends to get buried underneath a lot of cultural issues and generational trauma. Friends have proven fair weather at best. And other faculty have a hard time talking to me or even knowing how to do it with the giant elephant in the room that is my bad hip. That's when I meet with them, which is not often. So in some ways, you're maybe the only person. And yeah, word choice... put a pin in that. We'll get to it later.

But because you believed in me, I kept going. I tried to find some direction that wasn't just taking random classes and filling up my time. I started fighting for myself even when my advisors were the ones giving me a hard time. That being said, it was like I was just borrowing courage from you. I was borrowing your understanding of my worth while my stock was completely empty. But it was only going to take me so far, right? You only had so much to spare. I only had so much collateral to offer up. That collateral being that I had managed to survive. Which is no small feat. But everyone was so quick to acknowledge that and respond that it wasn't enough.

But I did something stupid, right? I ventured off on my own, as bad of an idea as that was and made it, made it back safely, made it through... I disobeyed my mother's

fear, not so much her--a hair split that might be inaccurate but does keep me sane. And I voiced that I was afraid of being displaced in my grandmother's home now that it's going to be my cousin's. So I've done a lot of things. Realistically, now I have a lot more to anchor my loan or my own production against.

And yet, now we reach the part that I know you don't like: this idea that I can now borrow from someone else, from the goddess, from Maria Makiling, you're worried I'm going to say. But we can agree that I'm borrowing from this picture I have in my head. The mental image of this goddess. Or at least what she represents: a cultural history of survival and... And I don't fully know what else. But I come from a long line of strong women and my grandfather that, well, disregarded family pressure to do what he knew was right.

I used to think self-perception was entirely self-contained. Like, it was just you deciding for yourself what or who you were. Which is both the ideal and only partially true. It can be you pulling pieces together, but you didn't craft those pieces. You find them along the way or people hand them to you. Or maybe throw them at you if it's a bad day.

Long story short, I now have better ones than I used to, and that says a lot in and of itself. So does it matter how? Maybe it was a dream. I'll never know either way. And no, I'm not going to try to capitalize on this. I'm not going to make an investigative podcast or write a conspiracy theory-esque book or anything like that. It's just a lesson I'm going to take to heart. Fictional or not.

*(Sigh)*

But Mom's supposed to come back this morning. And we've booked our tickets back to the US, so in a couple more days... Well, from there, I think... I think I need to reconsider my school situation, like you were indirectly suggesting. I need to look at my options, you know? Because transferring to my old university is a bad idea, but that doesn't mean I have to stay at home. There are other community colleges out there, at least. And I have some savings, and working a part-time job isn't impossible. I've certainly done harder things.

But it does mean that there's going to be a goodbye between us, soon, right? Cross that bridge when we get to it, I guess. Who knows when, but I'm not looking forward to it. You've been an amazing support to me. I couldn't have done any thing that I'm going to do without you, goddess or no.

So if you could go ahead and give me strength now, that would be great. Because I'm not looking forward to this conversation. The one with my mom, I mean. I can't even begin to think of saying goodbye to you right now.

*(Pause. Music fades in)*

The Mountain's Heart is a production of Hugot Podcasting. And this end song comes from the Sounds like an Earful music supply. See you in two weeks. Although, I will point out that the end of this podcast is imminent. Just saying.