

Day 10 of 18.

I know I promised you that I would not, under any circumstances, do anything stupid, but I think I might have.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Early morning recording again. There's like a spare room in this suit thing that my family got, and I'm just using that. Really, it's just nice to not be in the room with my mom and dad, even for a short while. Despite them both being asleep, there's still something weird in the air.

Mom's upset, so Dad's upset because she's upset, but whereas his version of upset is just not saying anything. Hers tends to be a lot more variable. And so it's hard for me to understand what she's thinking. Like sometimes, or most of the time, she complains to me about the little things, but when it's something bigger, that's when she tends to go quiet. But it's a disconcerting kind of quiet that feels too much like her giving me the cold shoulder in an attempt to shape my behavior.

Maybe that is what she's doing. Maybe I'm supposed to take the initiative on the whole 'being her personal therapist front.' And I'm not doing that right now, so I'm in the wrong.

*(Sigh)*. Probably not. Maybe I'm just bitter and paranoid. *(Pause)* I am probably bitter and paranoid. That just seems like a safe bet, but I'm throwing that into the universe without personal judgment.

*(Pause)*

I only have a vague understanding of how things went for Mom mostly because I caught a glimpse of how it ended, and it did not end well. I was probably morally bound on some front to pay attention, but I wasn't. I knew this was going to be hard for her. I

said as much aloud, so I can't really play dumb. I don't have that excuse. But I went with her for my own reasons, and... (*softer and more defeated*). And that's not a really good explanation is it?

(*Sigh*). I don't know how to explain the place we went to because the second we got there, it just felt different. It felt different, and I don't how to explain how. But it didn't feel like we were going to see our family or anything that even is home-adjacent. It just wasn't like that. And maybe this is my American upbringing secretly whispering to me because their homes are a lot more... (*inhale*) Okay, well, the homes of my aunts and uncles and cousins, are still made of concrete, right? But it's concrete that doesn't look like concrete because it's been carefully decorated. And most of the other homes in the area are just obvious concrete with the occasional wooden-ish structure in the area. Or not wood. Like it's not as stable as concrete, but I could be wrong about it being wood.

But when we went to their place, it was less concrete and more other building material but none of it with the fancy dressings. No flowers in the garden since flowers can't be eaten, the only dogs in the area looked unwelcomed, like a pack of stray dogs, wandering about, searching for another mean, and in terms of school uniforms, well, okay, I think you get two or three from the school. Maybe you have to buy them. But owning two or three is standard. One to wear and one to be washed per day, I think. Not sure =. But my cousins and their children tend to have extras and spares. And on that, I mean, why not? We can afford it. And also kids will be kids. My eldest godson has gone through seven this academic year. He outgrew a couple and then wrecked the rest of them. Which is not great. The wrecking uniforms bit. No one's upset that he had a pretty intense series of grow spurts for a while. My point is that at those homes you could only

see one of each type of uniform hanging up. And there were several types. Uniforms for boys and girls at different school levels. They have a lot more kids than anyone on our side does.

I read somewhere that when an area is financially stable, families tend to have less kids. There's less risk of losing one, or of one dying, so you don't need to hedge your bets in the same way, or I think that was the logic. But I wasn't really paying attention. I don't like the way discussions like that tend to ignore the innate emotional aspect of living in poverty. I mean, no one wants to lose a kid, after all. And knowing it might happen is just a reason to brace for the worst. Basically, you're putting on a helmet because the odds are against you, and the motorcycle is likely going to crash. But you don't want it to. You want to avoid that. But you aren't the one driving. So there you go, you can't do anything about it, really.

Consequently, I don't know how true that is. Sometimes I don't like reading the academic literature on things like that because it just hurts in some inexplicable way. But I would love to know if a certain observation of mine is true. And that would be, that some of the worst poverty in so-called developing nations happens in the shadow of tourist destinations or resorts. And that might seem counterintuitive based on how much money comes into the area, but what I mean is, I don't think it stays there. Or that it reaches people like them.

Anyway, Mom and I went there in some of our nicer clothes, which might have been a mistake. Uncle came along too, but all the same, the brunt of the responsibility was on Mom because she was the oldest. And yet, the same thing was true with all the resentment. All on her.

Her plan to have me take a bit of the attention didn't entirely work. Some Filipinos don't think having an American-born child is a sign of good fortune because it is a complex issue, but some do. And unfortunately, this side of the family fell on the latter side of the line. Which just gave them something else to be bitter about. None of them have ever been abroad. And who knows if they have the abilities to be able to do so. Overseas Filipino Workers might be a growing group, but it's not something everyone can jump into.

Anyway, after that song and dance was over, I ended up disappearing with someone who I guess would be considered a cousin. It was his idea. He was shocked to be talking to an American, I guess. He kept asking me if I really was one. And I thought it was--to keep it brief--a skin tone issue, but I don't know. Maybe it was a lot of things because he also asked me if I was really Raphael's granddaughter. And yeah, I am.

He was kind and smiled a lot. His face just naturally is set that way, and it's surprisingly easy to like people who have faces like that. And so I asked him what else he wanted to know about me. I don't even remember how I did it. That sort of thing just feels like it could land the wrong way. But I needed to get some answers from him and broken ice is broken ice.

Anyway, to cut to the chase, he did know that I wanted to go to Mount Makiling, and he didn't really seem to get it. To be fair, I didn't really understand it, so I wasn't about to explain it to him. I just said that I heard--when I was in the US, you know--that it was a really beautiful mountain, so of course I wanted to see it.

Yes, we have beautiful mountains in the US, but it's such a big country that sometimes you can hedge your bets that other people might not realize it, and you can get away with saying things like that.

I can't tell if he believed me or not. He just did not like the answer though. And instead he told me about this rumor he had heard about my grandfather and that mountain. Specifically about why he was gone for so long. Which--hello--gold mine of information, that was entirely why I wanted to come, so I was happy. And then I wasn't.

He said that Kuya Raphael had told one of his sisters that he spoke to someone on that mountain. Specifically a woman.

Now I wanted to ask him more about it. But at some point, that wasn't going to work. My mom's in her fifties. That's how much time has passed. Whatever the story actually had been is not the story I was going to get. And sure enough, everyone assumes there was another woman Grandpa was in love with, waiting for him on the mountain, and when that didn't work out--like she didn't agree to run away with him or something like that--then he went to Lola. To be fair, Lola being a consolation prize is something his family would think just because it's a subtle insult, and that's their game.

But I guess it was for that reason that I wouldn't like that story. But still, I tried to keep somewhat of an open mind about it. And I asked if they all knew of a woman missing around that time. Like was the search operation looking for two people. And that's how I worded it, which is important because he raised an eyebrow at that. I got the impression he had never heard that part of the story. His version of the story minimizes the time Grandpa was gone, and it wasn't that distressing of a time. But the

end was the same, Grandpa went to Grandma without a word to his family. He didn't seek their approval and never showed any remorse for it.

As if on cue, when we got to that point, we started to hear arguments inside. Then a beer bottle shattered. And... Well... Us going there was a bad idea. We overstayed our welcome by stepping foot on that property. Then again, they would have pissed off if they knew we were in the area and did not show them reverence. So we lost either way. At least this way Mom would be able to hold her head up as being the bigger person, we all thought. But then we were all wrong.

My cousin-ish and I were just out on the porch, and when we made it back into the front room, my uncle was yelling in someone's face, and my mom was to get in between them while standing above a pile of broken glass that definitely was not from one bottle.

When she saw me, she yelled at me to go to the car, and at that point, I was not going to object. My uncle wasn't the type of person to get mad. I don't even know what would set him off. But I had the sense to not ask anything about it.

I started towards the car, and my cousin-ish followed, to my horror. I really didn't want to be around anyone I didn't know right then, but apparently he had one more thing to say to me. He took my arm, and... And he told me not to go to the mountain.

My mind was raising, and maybe you can see where my brain jumped to. Like they were going to meet us there and hurt us, and he didn't want me hurt. But when I accused him, his face widened with horror, and he swore that wasn't what he meant.

For what it's worth, I believe it. But I also believe I might not be the best judge of these things.

He said... He said there was someone on the mountain, yes. Someone who doesn't always let people come home. Everyone thought that she--and yes gendered pronouns aren't entirely a thing in Tagalog but the rest of the context said woman--everyone thought that she had Kuya Raphael. That's why they did not go searching. There was no point in looking for him. It would just be endangering some other people.

But I didn't believe him, and I stammered something about no person being above the law, which I get it, is not entirely accurate, but I just really wanted him to let me go. Then he said that it wasn't a person.

At that point, the yelling grew even louder, and he quickly whispered to me, 'online.' 'Online,' he said, 'when you get back to the resort, search online.'

And that was it, that was all he said to me before I ripped my arm away. And at that point, Uncle had unlocked the car remotely, so I jumped inside and locked my door.

*(Pause)* I still haven't done that online search yet. *(With a Sigh)*. I know I need to. Let me check that everyone is still asleep, and then I'll do that. Maybe I'll be able to make another recording before everyone gets up. I know I should sleep. I need rest, but also I need to not do that right now. Just right now. If that makes sense. I need to sort through this.

*(Pause. Music fades in)*

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