

Day 6 of 18. Maybe.

Or it technically is, but it doesn't feel like. It is super early, and I have not slept. It's still dark out in fact, but Lola went to morning mass, so it has to be morning. Just an unpopular morning hour.

My cousin was the one to take her to the sunrise service, and when they were leaving, I snuck out into what could be called the maid's quarters to record this. And no, I did not kick the maid out for this. First of all, there are two rooms. One that she uses and the other that's just for miscellaneous storage. I'm in the miscellaneous storage room that just happens to have a bed for reasons I don't quite understand, but it is convenient for me right now.

Grandma's domestic helper keeps her stuff in the other room. And I should be clear about this. She does help Grandma with cleaning, yes, but because Lola is a diabetic, this woman also helps her with medication, so I-- I don't know what you would refer to her as. It's kind of... Well, maybe it isn't complicated, but it can feel like it when you're trying to come up with a word.

Anyway this whole two room thing is a weird architectural choice that makes me think this place was built out of pre-made plans that didn't really suit the family at all. I mean, Lola does not even like having one helper; I don't know when she would have ever considered having a second.

But also that domestic helper is on vacation for a while. I know more of the details than I should know, but for some decency's sake I'm going to try and keep it vague here.

But basically, she left last week or so for a multi-week vacation because that's how it works around here. She lives in another province and takes decently sized windows of time off, so she can have good chunks to spend with her family. It's the same thing we do. But my mom was saying that it would have made more sense to have her around when I was here because you know why. I know why. Everyone knows why. But nobody wanted to say it, which was the dumbest part of that whole conversation.

(Sigh) So anyway, I am recording this in a room that's always unoccupied because my grandma only has one helper and... And well, this wall might be super thick, and it looks super thick but might not be because I don't know how buildings are made here. Like specifically in the province. I have a suspicion that the walls in Manila apartments are pretty thin just to save space and effort because (inhales) because that's just how it can be. Or, like it makes sense.

Manila is in a very different place in its history. It's a growing city. It's a city that's growing to the point that growing pains are starting to show not just be felt. And while it might not have it as bad as some other cities, it's still a quicker paced life than what you see here. And maybe that's good thing. There's plenty of jobs opening up. And that just means there's going to be high demand for housing. And maybe some other cities around the Philippines are feeling the same thing. Or would if there was a major airport there.

And that's--that's what makes Manila a sort of gateway to the rest of the world. And culture seeps in on both sides. Though maybe that's being pretentious. I (sigh) I

like being in the province. I like how calm it can be. I like how family is always around. I like that there are a lot of random parties and get-togethers. It's just hard for me. It's hard for me to get there. That's where improvement should be made, I guess. Not in the way we live just the details.

Like, I don't need a wheelchair, yet. Or most of the time. But if I do, having a paved road or a more leveled road would be great. It would be great for me to walk on too. Sometimes my feet don't land right or I can't spread the weight right or...

Manila was pretty good for that. Especially out by the airport. And I remember the Mall of Asia, which isn't really in Manila it's more south, being kind of... Well, if I could go now, it would feel like a paradise just by how much easier it would be for me to move around. And yes, its placement is... Well, it's in this spot which is incredibly scenic which might have been why it was there, but I sometimes think of it as a--a sprawling of sorts. Like the growth just burst out. Like it's a frenzy that can't easily be contained.

(Pause)

But I'm dodging a point, aren't I? (Sigh) I--Okay, I'm tired. I am very, very tired. So yeah, let's blame it on that.

Basically, I was up reading through the book from... the book my uncle handed me. I looked through all the mountain ranges and read through all the descriptions. I even managed pull up some maps on my phone because no one else was using the WiFi at night. And I could say that's why I pulled an all-nighter to look at this, but really, we both know that wasn't why. We both know it's because this book was from my

grandfather, and I guess I could have gone back and looked at some of the other books. Maybe he left more for me, but I tend to fixate on what's right in front of me.

And that's why I try not to think about my hip, you know? If I do, it's going to lead to a bad spiral because I can't stop myself, so I try to avoid that spiraling. And when I'm focused on something else, if there is a pain in my hip because I'm not sitting properly or I can't sit properly, (sigh) Well, I-- I don't feel it right away, and that is a temporary moment of peace that comes at a steep price afterwards, I know, but it's-- it's not that I don't care. It's that I care about other things more. When I do that, it gives me the perception of control. Control in my life is such a scarcity that of course I go for it, right? That's why I like, but I-- I shouldn't like it, but I do.

Anyway, I stayed up all night looking at these mountains, and I wanted to record my decision as soon as possible because that means I've committed right? I've already committed. I would look really dumb if I said, oh hey professor, we're going to so-and-so, and then we don't go to so-and-so because I chickened out. So I can just tell my uncle what I want to do now. (inhale) Or it would... Or it would be easier to tell him what I want to do. It won't feel so much like a demand when...

Well, I'm tired of making so many demands. And maybe that's not what this is. Maybe that's not what I'm doing, but it feels like it. Take the whole debate around the domestic helper situation. Do you know why she went home when she did? It's her mom's birthday. She wants to see her mom, but apparently her life is supposed to revolve around my needs if my mom is to be believed. And sure, I've fallen before. I've fallen before, and Mom had a hard time getting me up, but she had to do it by yourself

because Dad was... was having his own moment even though my moment was pretty bad.

I just need help for so much. Like the default needs of my daily life are so much higher, so much higher that my very existence feels like a taxing thing or even a burden on everyone around me. And now I want to ask for a day trip? Or even more than a day trip? Like, yes, we've made trips to further places into day trips, but that was before my accident.

And I know if I ask my uncle or my grandma they'll say yes, and they'll happily say yes, but that doesn't mean I should, right? Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should, is what my mom used to tell me when I was a kid and acting up. Just because you can do it, does not mean you should. And there's some wisdom to that mantra.

But maybe the 'should' would be easier to see if I had a reason for wanting to go to... Mount Makiling. Is how I'm pretty sure you say it. But no one would correct me if I was wrong. So there's that.

If I had a reason, I could point to that reason and tell myself that clearly it's okay to ask, right? Especially if this was a... a school assignment. You did say this assignment was whatever I needed it to be. And if it needs to be an excuse, well... Well, it's not a lie. It's just an interpretation of the assignment you gave me that serves an unexpected purpose, right?

(Pause)

I know if I email you, you'll confirm my interpretation because it's what I need you to do. I need to do this. But I wish I could explain why.

I don't know why. And that's the sticking point. That's why I don't want to ask you or Uncle or anyone. Even if a reason doesn't come up in conversation, isn't the assumption that I would have one? Like, yes, Uncle gave me the original idea, but why pick this mountain? Why pick Mount Makiling?

Maybe because it's not that far away from home. It's one of the closet ones that is also open to the public. But it's an outdoor, hiking sort of mountain, and that's not something that's within my list of ideal activities right now.

(Sigh). Look, I know you want to ask, so here's how it went. Really, I'm telling the truth. I was sitting on my bed and looking through the book, and then I hit the page about Mount Makiling. I hit that page, and I was won over. I was stuck. There was no going back, and there was no second-guessing. That was the mountain I wanted to go to. I felt like I needed to be there. Like it was on a to do list, but I can't remember putting it on there. I can't remember ever even hearing about this mountain before. And when would I have? No one in this family is the outdoor type.

Well, my uncle is somewhat is, but he likes fresh air, and there's only so many ways you can get it. Maybe that's why he wants us to do it. He wants me to have some fresh air as if that's going to mean something. Okay, maybe it would mean something just not that important of a something.

So would that be enough of a reason then? I didn't know Mount Makiling was so close when I chose it. But it turns out it is, and that's a great way to approach this, right?

(Pause)

Or that's one way of thinking about it. But I like thinking about my Lolo and him holding this book. And well, it... (inhale) it was like it fell open on this page. When I hold it in my hands and let it fall open on its own, it seemed to fall on Mount Makiling's entry more often than not. Like it was trained to. Like it was constantly opened on that page. Like this was a mountain Lolo liked or thought about a lot.

Maybe... Well, if that's true, Uncle might know. Maybe that's how I need to talk about it. With him. In fact, I think Lolo's side of the family might even be closer to that mountain than we are. Regardless, that's... that's where I want to go. For whatever inexplicable reason.

(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.