

Day 7 of 18.

I can't help but think we've done nothing on this trip, and you know whose fault that is? Well, okay, we haven't done nothing. Things are just a little slower than what I'm used to, and I'm grateful for that. I'm grateful that there was some time just for a couple celebrations, but that things could move a lot slower than they normally do when we try to visit, typically in December, around Christmas.

There's this... I don't know if you can call it a part of Filipino culture, but because so many Filipinos work overseas and come home for Christmas, a bunch of celebrations have to be crammed into the window around Christmas... And I think I've said that before, but I don't want to check right now. But because of that, in the past when we've visited, it's been nonstop, weddings, baptisms, and everything in between.

But now that we've come for an off-season visit, the family can take things a little slower. Because we're all here just to be here. And no one knew for a while if or how I'd be able to make the trip, so that delayed some planning. But you know, we've, we've charged through that bit.

Anyway, today we took the kids to the mall today. Yes, there are malls here, like you might remember from the 90s. Giant shopping centers with a wonderfully high amount of AC. But they're only in certain cities, and there's a city with one just down the way on the new highway. Well within my being able to sit in a car distance. And also there's fast food there. I love my grandma's cooking, but I also love Filipino fast food, so I should just have multiple lunches everyday when I'm here, right? That's what my

grandma thinks. Totally agree. Love her. Love being her granddaughter. And love being the one who is definitely the most like her. Special treatment and all that.

But of course, she has to balance this devotion to me with her devotion to my godson whose kind of my equivalent in his generation. Maybe if I had kids they would take that spot, but I'm on the younger side of both the kids-having-window and of my generation, so that did not happen. My godson is the second oldest of his line, but his family lives two doors down from my grandma, meaning he is physically the closest one. He goes over to her house every day and helps her with chores. Add to that, he's a sweet boy who reminds everyone of my grandpa. In fact, we used to call him by Grandpa's name for a while just for fun, kind of as a joke, but that seemed to upset Grandma, so we stopped doing that.

*(Pause)*

In no small part, he was the reason we went to the mall today. I mean, yes, we needed to grab some things for this excursion to Mount Makiling because surprisingly we really are going to try that trip, and that's what they told me this shopping endeavor was all about. And yeah, we needed some supplies, but my godson loves going to the mall. Because there Lola buys him whatever he wants, and the life of a kid and all that. However, yesterday, with the storm. I... *(Sigh)*

I know he was disappointed. He thought I was going to come out and play after I got my schoolwork done. And I did go out. I just could not play.

*(Pause)*

The thing about my family--and maybe other Filipino families are like this--is that, well, when you fall out or get pulled out of your mother's womb, you are showered with unconditional love, but we all seem to struggle in terms of going with the flow of life. Like, you can have the best intentions of loving and supporting someone as they are, but circumstances will surprise you. They'll come up and they'll change. And things happen, and more things change. Which is a hurdle that's just hard for all of us to get over.

*(Pause)*

My Lola kept telling my mom to pray for me shortly after the accident. Not immediately shortly. Shortly after it was very clear I wasn't going to die, and I wouldn't have complained if it was that because when the stakes are that high--like, fair enough, man do what you gotta do to feel okay--but I was already going to live. That was established.

This was about praying for my full recovery. This was about having almost daily masses at the local church for me to get better. There were healing oils and blessings and all that. Because suddenly, living wasn't enough.

And I get it. Or it would be hypocritical of me to not. I've been complaining about my current state, right? So I'm not inclined to disagree about this whole thing being kind of awful sometimes. I want to be able to travel without that sense of agony, but at some point, things were going to be what they were, and maybe some of that energy could have been devoted to accepting that. To figuring out what life was going to look like. To talking to the kids. To my godson.

*(Pause)*

People change after they're born. It's not just that you get to know them, which is a part of it. But people can change. Accidents happen. Literally or otherwise. And loving someone means meeting them wherever life throws them. Not just trying to make things easier. Because sometimes you can't. And...

And I should have told him, I know. I should have explained this to my godson and made his disappointment into a teachable moment, but I really couldn't. It's not the whole 'it's not my son' thing because godparents are a pretty critical part of a kid's life in this culture. In reality, I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how to start a conversation that really should have been started before I even got here. And like... *(inhale)* Okay now I've had some time to think it over, and I still don't know what I would have said. That I love him still? That I haven't really changed? Because that part is a lie. I have changed. I've become a lot more jaded than I was.

*(Sigh)* I really don't know.

He didn't even want to get in the car next to me. Which might not have been about me. He wanted to sit upfront, and he's seven, so that makes sense. He wants to be upfront where the cool older people get to sit.

I was in the back with his parents. The ride was short enough that we thought I could do it easily from back there, and we were right. But I don't know if that created a greater dissonance in his mind. That yesterday I wasn't okay, super not okay, because well boy the storm didn't do me any favors as it got closer to us. But today I was pretty much fine. I stumbled a bit in a pretty big store. And I have some scarring on my foot

that freaked out the attendant of more than one shoe department, but he wasn't around when that happened. Blessing or not.

*(Pause)*

I... *(Exhale)* I have no clue what we're going to do exactly when we go to the mountain, and I think my family doesn't know either. Also if any of my recordings are late, I beg your pardon. I... I do want to go on this trip, though, so I will be very quiet about the school work aspect of it. So if I have to ask for Wi-Fi, I'm not going to ask. I hope you can forgive me, but I think you will.

And okay if I don't make it down from that mountain, I will ask my cousin to let you know. I mean my mom or some government official will probably have to tell the school, but this way you can have a more personal disclosure. Or it will be whatever my family can muster, but I'm sure it's fine. I-- I promise I'll avoid the edge and I'll stay close to my uncle.

And anyway, we aren't going up the mountain right away. I was right, Grandpa has some family in the area, and we're going to see them. For the first time. *(Inhale)* We have always been super close to Lola's side of the family for like... ever, but family's... family. Even if you don't talk to them?

And yeah, that hurt to say. But at least this side of the family won't know what to expect from me. They'll see me as I am. And that's surprisingly comforting. Like how can you disappoint someone who has no expectations, am I right?

I mean, I really don't know if I was joking right then.

*(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.