

Day 8 of 18.

Early morning recordings are where it's at, am I right? Okay, well it's practically a thing. We're going to be driving out today, so hopefully, I can prep this recording on the road and send it to you when we get there.

It turns out the internet is everywhere. Truly. And I guess it was really presumptuous of me to think that there wasn't going to be. Fair enough. I recognize my mistake, and I hope to move past it. It probably also didn't help that I'm... *(inhale)* Well, I've got a bunch of nerves, I guess. But I feel better knowing that the more-adult-than-me-adults have a plan for how this trip is going to go.

The thing about Mount Makiling, that I didn't anticipate, is that it's actually a pretty famous landmark. It's no Mt. Everest, which is an entire social climate I have strong opinions about but time and place, but Mount Makiling has the right amount of touristy touches to have some resorts for us to stay in, rather than spending the couple days with Grandpa's family. As a concept, this makes sense, but I did think we were going to stay with his family because that's what we always do, but I guess that too was based on an assumption.

Here's the thing that I didn't fully realize until yesterday. We never see this side of the family outside of the occasional wedding. And I truly mean, occasional. *(Sigh)* This is going to get confusing. For the sake of this explanation, even though Grandpa's nieces and nephews and their kids are also family, let's say they aren't because now that I think about it, I don't even know the names of my cousins. Like the people my age.

My aunts and uncles, eh-- (sigh in defeat) I am not playing the cousins removed game. My parents' cousins, I think I know their names but not confidently. I think I know. So yeah, let's just pick the linguistic framework that makes this conversation easy. For the sake of argument, the people in our province are family, and the other group in the other province is not.

In theory, everyone in both groups should be at all the weddings. Like every time it's one of my cousins or one of their cousins, there would be an invitation all around. We should all at least be making an appearance at the reception. A stop by and eat sort of thing. Which might be rude in the US, but it's completely normal for us. No need for a value judgment on that. I mean, I know if I... If I ever were to get married, there's a whole category of people I am content to feed but not entertain for an extended period of time. It's a valid preference.

But my point is that we don't even do that for each other. My mom said we have a nasty habit, or it's a series of unfortunate accidents that leads to a lot of, double booking wedding days between this side and that, so Grandpa's siblings and their kids can't always make the weddings that happen in our province and then we can't really go out that way.

But doesn't... (exhale) I don't know. Doesn't communication prevent that sort of thing? Like I know there's only so many days to have a wedding around here, but couldn't you call dibs?

Come to think of it, I don't remember ever greeting anyone on that side of the family for a birthday or the like. It just didn't happen.

My cousins and I were talking last night after dinner when our parents were doing their own travel prep, and that's been true for them too. They don't really know Lolo's family much either. And--like--it makes sense for me to not know them but not for them too.

But then Kuya Benny sa-- Sorry. My cousin Benedicto who is older than me so his honorific is Kuya, and he likes to go by Benny, so Kuya Benny said that they never came around for visits, and he's the oldest, so he would definitely remember if one had ever happened.

But I mentioned to you how my mom was conceived out of wedlock and then shotgun wedding that changed my grandpa's life. And that's probably relevant in all this. Well, yes, it changed Grandma's too, but I'm about to talk about a family schism, and clearly hers came to terms with what happened, even if it wasn't ideal. But Kuya Benny was saying that everyone in this province had assumed that Lolo had to leave his family after that because of... Not so much a scandal but because this drastically changed the course of his life in the financial sense. Now he had a wife and child to support not his parents or siblings. And this would have been especially true if he were the oldest, but we realized while we were talking that none of us knew if he was the oldest, but we all knew not to ask.

Kuya Benny was pretty sure he was the only boy, but if there was a brother, he would have been much younger. And some parts of the Philippines do play that male-heir game and some don't.

We don't. Maybe they do. But we don't know.

It's part of the family habit of not really talking about problems. And I get it, it's awkward, but now there's an entire chunk of our family history that just doesn't make sense. And how is that okay? I guess... I guess we were never going to see them anyway. Which raises a lot of questions about how the next few days are going to go.

*(Pause)*

It was a nice conversation to have with my cousins, though. It was an odd bonding moment to revisit some of the dark parts of our family history because it's something we all share by virtue of being a part of this family. It doesn't matter where we were raised or how: this is still part of our inheritance.

Also it was the sort of grown up subject matter that we couldn't have talked about before. Like in having this conversation, we were all acknowledging that we were adults and shared in this aspect of adulthood.

But it also made me miss my Lolo even more, which--okay--yeah, it--he might have seen more like a person after that conversation because, you know, character development but also, it wasn't just that.

I feel like he would... he would know a lot about disappointment. He would know a lot about how it feels to be a disappointment. To do the absolute best you can with a given situation and still come up short because there was no way to please everyone. Yes, he did the right thing for his new wife and child but apparently not to the rest of his family. And yeah, I did the right thing by pulling through, and I hate it when people assume that a life with any sort of inconvenience, particularly a physical inconvenience, is not one worth living because that's nonsense. If they could shove that attitude up their

tails, my life would vastly improve, so if they're so concerned with value, that's a great starting point.

But it doesn't feel like enough. And I wonder if Lolo felt like that when holidays rolled around, and his family didn't come out here or he had to realize that his new little family definitely wasn't welcome over there. I wonder if he was ever homesick for the province that raised him. Honestly, I wonder a lot of things.

Most obviously right now, I wonder if we're going to be able to see them at all. His family. Apparently we're going to a resort that's somewhat close to them, and we're going to stay for a few days in the area. We aren't just running up there and running home, so there is a possibility. But the kids also want to go swimming, and there's a pool at the resort, so that's another day accounted for.

Speaking of the kids, my godson still seems hesitant to get close to me. Well, if his dad tells him to, then he will, but I'm waiting for him to approach me on his own accord. I'd like a hug that's not coached, you know? I want a small bit of affirmation that even if he doesn't understand what happened to me, he knows this is still me.

I did give him some money for candies at the little shop on the corner, and he smiled at me when I did that. Oh, and I brought him fruit snacks from America. They aren't too common here. I mean, you can get them at the big grocery store in the city, but somehow those never make it onto the shopping list when the family does go there. But I already told Lola that needs to change. Yep, pulled out the big guns. I'm that kind of Ninang--Godmother. I'm that kind of Godmother.

*(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.