

Day 9 of 18 and this may have to be split up because... Oh my word I have to tell you about this. Or I have to tell someone about this, and like, here you are, receiving these tapes. And it's just... Gaaah. *(Sigh)*

I... I'm not going to pretend that I feel super great about spilling all of this out to you, okay, right? Because you are my professor, and that generally is a relationship that needs to be defined by a sense of boundaries and professionalism, right? Like...

(Inhale) Like *(Sigh)* I, I know I'm overly dependent on you. And that's not fair--

(Softer) Not just to you but to me as well.

(Normal volume after a pause) You know you're the only person who treats me like a person, right? Like even my parents slip up, but then there's you who is still pushing me to be the best I can be. Not just the best student I could be or best at whatever career I go into. Just the best me... Whoever I may be.

And I needed that. I still do.

I... I feel like I can't explain to you how damaging it was to go from the star, golden child to where I am now. Because it feels like such a joke to everyone else. Oh you were the 'gifted' kid who now doesn't know what to do with their life? And it's like yeah, I was the gifted kid in the family because I was born in America. And yeah, I got to go into the special programs for whatever reason that I did. I was tapped to become a *(quote)* 'somebody.' One of those fancy people who shop in the big malls and drive the latest cars. Poorly.

But I never wanted that. I know it came with advantages. I know I had so many lifts upward, but then I got mowed down by a car. And now it feels like everyone's--a

figurative everyone is--mad at me for all the things I'll never do. (*Exhale*) Or maybe just disappointed, I don't know it kind of feels the same to me.

And I, I mean everyone. Like, we went to church a couple times on this trip because of course we did. And... (*Exhale*) And okay, I just didn't want to bring it up because I don't know what your religious affiliation is, and I'm a lot of figurative persons, but I don't also want to be that person that makes everything about converting you to their religion. I don't even really like to talk about my religion because it's a weird topic. I mean, to be Filipino is to be Catholic, you know? You'd think there'd be a line there, but (*sigh*) maybe there isn't, and I don't know what it means to be either of those things anymore. So add that to the concern about being pushy and performative. If I don't know what normal is, how do I know I'm acting out.

But unpopular opinion, I actually like going to mass. It's the predictability of it all. Not that it's a spectacle. That's not the right word, but it approaches my point. Mass, to me, is part of the faith that's easy for me to understand. Yes, you kind of have to know what the liturgy pieces are supposed to represent, which can take a little bit of study. It should be more common knowledge than it actually is, but it's... Okay, I've been dancing around the metaphor, but I'm just going to say it, and if I get struck by lightning, fair enough God.

Mass to me can be like a dance, and what is a dance but a social encounter in which the steps of both parties are known by both parties. They are established and planned for. You're in complete agreement. Minimal opportunities for mistakes.

On the whole, I think that might be that's what a lot of people like about their religions. Maybe it's not their number one reason for being religious or even in the top

ten, but it's a thing about religion that's certainly appealing in many regards. Just a perk; It's not nothing. What I mean is it's nice to see a framework of the universe in which you can predict a critical mass of movements happening, particularly your own. It must be nice to have a vague sense of where you are amidst it all.

Or maybe that's not what other people get from it. I, I wouldn't know. It hasn't been like that for me for a while. Like yeah, all-knowing and all-powerful God, right? So under that model, He knew the accident was going to happen and planned for it. And yeah I said what I said. I've definitely been told that I'm supposed to be bitter that it happened at all, and like, I should have an issue with an omnipresent God, but I'm not and I really don't. Controversial opinion apparently, but I don't hate what happened. I hate the consequences. Especially the ones that involve other people and the ones I don't quite know.

I don't know who I would have been otherwise. And this is where there is so much room for disappointment. Maybe this other version of me who may or may not exist in some other timeline is better than me, is a better version of me, and more productive in whatever way actually matters. Maybe she's more useful to other people, more kind, more intelligent, and maybe she's going to save the world. I don't know, but I know that I'm not. I--I'm not. Right now, I can't. And maybe it's needlessly grandiose to assume one person ever could, but I don't have to meet that person, do I? So I can imagine her to be anything. And my brain always goes to the bad place.

(Pause)

There was some grieving to do after the accident, you know? And it happened in all of these weird ways. Like one thing I had to grieve was this bracelet I had my whole

life. One of my godmothers had sent me this beautiful golden bracelet when I was about five, but she was never all that good at shopping for kids, so of course this was an adult's bracelet. And I couldn't wear it for years, but my mom let me keep it in my bedroom drawer until it did fit me.

And once it did, I was about fourteen, I never took it off. And I was so careful with it. But it got lost after the accident. Not to be anticlimactic, but I don't know how else to explain it. I don't know what happened to it. It wasn't recovered at the scene of the accident. The hospital did not log it amongst my belongings, but for some reason they did log the pack of hair ties that fell out of my pocket. The cynic would say that somebody stole it, and the optimist wouldn't want to think about that situation at all.

Not that it would have made a difference, but the insurance company wouldn't pay us for it. Not because they didn't believe I had it on me at the time but because we couldn't prove what the bracelet was worth. My godmother didn't have the original receipt because of course she didn't, it had been over a decade. And it wasn't the sort of jewelry that would have ever been appraised. It might have been expensive, but its destiny was to be worn out to nothingness not hoarded for its value.

My godmother replaced the bracelet, but apparently that wasn't enough for the insurance company, so they didn't pay her back. I think they tried arguing that the original might have been a fake, but I don't know. They had some weird justification from what I can remember, but then again, it could have been that we maxed out on my medical bills or the pain and suffering money. *(With a sigh)* Who knows anymore.

The replacement bracelet is actually the one I wear all the time now, but even though it serves a similar purpose, it's not the same. It's a very close visual match, but

still, it's not the same. It doesn't have the same aura the old one did, the one that came from all the years I was admiring it and dreaming of the day I could wear it.

Some things just aren't replaceable. It's not typically a material thing. It's what came with it. And I don't know how much of that applies to me. But I'm worried it's a lot. I'm worried there are elements of me that matter beyond me but are long gone. Some aura of grace or whatever that I can't get back. Or destiny of mine that now I can't fulfill. I can't get them back. I can't fix this. Or me.

And I feel like I'm letting everyone down. Not just my family, sometimes even God. It gets complicated and messy and... And it feels so much more relevant when I'm with my family. When I'm not alone, I should say. It's something I'm always struggling with.

But you know, I was... I was supposed to make things better for my family. The gifted kid is supposed to do so much for the world, right? Maybe that whole thing is slanted, and the idea of 'better' has no meaning in that context, but you know what I'm trying to say. I kept hearing about some sort of ambiguous value that's gone now. It was wiped away in the accident.

And I don't know how to cope with that, but I just want to scream. Because that's the only idea I have. It's just screaming because I don't want to sit with this. But I can't. I can't tell anyone that I'm struggling because their understanding of my struggling is... Well, it's mean. It makes me feel less than. To so many people, my life is worth less because of what happened to me.

I don't want to feed into that. And being an unfeeling robot is the only way I can't. But then again, when a Roomba's having some difficulties, it often does not get thrown

out or replaced because we pack bonded with it. I'm literally worse off than a Roomba.
And...

(More emotional with a sigh) Just because my emotions and fears are going to be used against me, well, I have to pretend I don't have them. But that's not accurate. I do have them. I still want to cry myself to sleep sometimes.

But then there you are. And I can tell you these things, even if I shouldn't. And I know you're not going to use them against me, so... that means a lot. *(Inhale)* I know you shouldn't be the one pressure valve I have in my life, but right now, that's where we are. And *(inhale)* And I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.

(Sigh)

Okay, I know it doesn't always seem like it, but I was paying attention. And I'm trying to take all your little pep talks to heart. But it's... hard to do, you know? This is my reality, and you aren't always here to give me a pep talk. And I should be able to do that for myself, but that's not something that's true.

(With a sigh) And I got majorly side-tracked. I made this recording all about me, and now I need to figure out where everyone else is and for how long so I can find a window to say everything I probably should have said here without them listening because they can't listen and... *(sigh)*

We all made it to the resort safely despite road rules being suggestions for the most part. I told you, we make it work.

We all made it. We're here. The kids are probably going to go swimming, so I'll find another time to fill you in. Pools are generally a good idea for me, so I'll probably jump in the water with them.

But thank you for listening, Professor. I appreciate it.

(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.