

Day 9 of 18. Again. Because it turns out that I had more time on my hands than I first thought.

*(Sigh)* Not my first time making that mistake. I'm not accustomed to the way of doing things around here, I guess. But the kids are currently napping. Which means the adults are also napping because naps are great and we all need naps. But I guess I'm too hyped up to sleep, so I'm in another room making a recording. I might regret this later but whatever.

Anyway... Anyway... *(Sigh)*. Okay, I've... I should explain that last record. I've been on the other side of an emotional dumping, which is why I'm so insecure about my tendency to do it. You see, my mom... Well, I love her, I'll say that right away, and she has cut back on this since the accident, but Mom tends to unload everything that's wrong onto me. No, bad word choice. Um... Mom confides in me like I'm her friend. That's what I mean, but within limits, I should add. *(Sigh)* O-okay, maybe I'm being dramatic, and this isn't actually a big deal, but Mom loves to go on and on to me about certain dramas. Like her dramas at work. Like when her supervisor is being unreasonable. And it's just like... What do you want me to do? I reported him to the labor department once, but apparently that was the wrong move. And yeah, cue the charge of me being dramatic, but it just sounded like he was being needlessly hostile, and I thought that's the sort of thing that's illegal. And I made the report anonymously, partially because I was just shy of my 18th birthday and legality.

It's all stressful, as I'm sure you can imagine. Like I didn't really know what the line is, and to a great extent, I still don't. I don't think that's the sort of thing you can dump on a kid. It just makes me feel scared, you know? Like, call me a hypocrite, okay,

because I put a lot on you, which isn't your responsibility, and it isn't something you can help me with. But you offered, right? Whereas, I got the job from process of elimination. Because, yeah, Dad's not great at this sort of thing. So that left me, right? I'm the one that has to help her.

And when it comes to helping parents, fair enough when it comes to the dishes or the cooking or something like that. That's clear and has a set parameters, and it isn't emotionally taxing. Which okay, is why Dad can't deal with it, but it's not something the kid should have to, right?

I promise I try not to be resentful, but I am resentful because it's not fair to me. Or I don't think that it is. Even if Dad isn't great at it, why can't it be someone else's job, right? Like my mom's friends or sisters.

*(Sigh)* But I know if I say that then I'm going to be the bad guy. Because if it's a family thing, then she can't talk to her friends about it, and it puts her sisters in a bad position. And apparently those considerations are oh so much more important than me.

Anyway, Mom isn't exactly thrilled about this outing, and she let me know, which wasn't great of her to do, but she did tell me why. Apparently, the story about Grandpa that we all know is... lacking in some ways. Specifically in ways that were meant to make us think we knew what had happened, but it wasn't what had happened. I mean, Lolo didn't lose contact with his family because of the pregnancy.

Okay, well, that didn't help things, but it was more complicated than that. Apparently, Grandpa agreed with his parents that he should run. Or not exactly run. He had the opportunity to work abroad, and they wanted him to take it but not tell the mother of his new child. He was convinced the baby was his, but his family wasn't sure

it mattered all that much. He couldn't take care of them, and Lola has multiple siblings. There were people around her that were willing to help with the baby. But what could Lolo do? He was relatively useless, all things considered. It would be better for him to work abroad, they said, and if that woman, as they called Grandma, proved herself, and no, they didn't go into how, then when he started earning money, he could consider--yes consider--taking her back.

And yeah, I had a lot of asides in that sentence, so let me rehash it. They thought that since Grandpa wasn't established anyway, then he had an excuse to run from his responsibilities. In theory, Grandma could find someone better to play dad, but if she didn't he could take her and the baby back, It's just that his family was hoping that he wouldn't.

And for a while, he was willing to play ball, thinking of the money issue. A job abroad is a good opportunity, after all. And he could send them some money, which presumably would have to go through his parents, and you know, that has some logistic problems if there ever was any.

But then, apparently, he went for a walk towards Mount Makiling. He might have even gone to climb the mountain, maybe. Apparently he likes the outdoors, and the convenient mountain was convenient. I told you he grew up around here. It made sense, and his family wasn't exactly concerned. But then, he didn't come back, for a couple days. His parents sent out a search party, but after more days of no luck, that's when they went to Lola to ask her if she had seen him. And she hadn't. Cue a bad confrontation because they were already inclined to hate her, but it didn't change the fact that he wasn't there. She didn't know where he was. No one did.

Missing persons cases are challenging even under the best of circumstances, but once the police were involved... Well, it was just that... he had walked off on his own accord, and he wasn't on the mountain. No one found him... Or a body. Or any sign that he was in distress. Maybe he just left, officials thought. He was young and wanted to run from his responsibilities, which is what his parents were telling him to do anyway. Well not exactly, they might have wanted to say, but it was what it was.

He came home after about a week and wouldn't speak to his parents beyond saying that he wasn't going to abandon his new family, that he knew what he needed to do, and they could accept that or not. But it was set. His mind was made up, and there was no room for debate at all.

And yeah, there normally isn't a debate, but that's because you listen to your parents here, which he wasn't willing to do. He said he was going to his new wife and his child. His parents didn't want him to, and he pretty much told them that he didn't care what they thought. He was still going. So his parents did what I know my mom does: give him the cold shoulder to try and deter him and make him come around. But he didn't come around. Every so often, he would try to half-heartedly reach out, but he wasn't bothered when they didn't reciprocate.

After awhile, everyone started to pretend that this whole disagreement didn't happen, but it did happen. So everyone started to acknowledge it in ways that were not direct. Cue the various wedding fiascos. Cue a lot of things.

Like how Mom has to go greet his family because we're in the area, and she really doesn't want to. She has to go and bring them some gifts despite knowing what they wanted her dad to do to her and her mom. And I get it, that's going to be hard on

her. It just worked out that I needed this information for my own sake. So, yeah. One win for a thousand losses.

Mom asked if--or told me to--go with her when she brings the stuff. They don't know about my accident, yet, but because I'm the American grandchild, I'm somewhat exotic and of interest. We can talk about me and not everything else. And yeah, I see what she's getting at. I understand that I'm being used. But once again, this kind of works out for me. It's not why I was asked, but I do want to go. I want to see them for the sake of seeing them.

Because there has to be more to the story, right? I tried to push Mom if maybe Grandpa was lost or confused, and that's why he was gone for so long, and she said that no one thought he was. He came straight to Lola's province after he appeared. It was late, and he wasn't going to wait to start his new life. He wasn't going to deal with his family, in other words. Apparently when he went to Lola he was fine. He wasn't dehydrated or starving or whatever else you would think someone lost in the wilderness for a week would be. It was like he was only gone for an hour or two tops. So Lola wasn't inclined to believe his family's story.

But Mom did, apparently, so obviously I asked why. She didn't answer well. She just said that it was also what her dad said. That he was gone for a week, but he found his answers on the mountain, and he knew what he needed to do. She didn't have anything else to tell me. But someone else does, right? Maybe another cousin of mine.

*(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.