

Maybe this goes without saying, but I don't want to be a bad person. And sometimes I don't think that I am, but there are other days when it seems like the most obvious conclusion. I'm surrounded by people, there are constantly problems, I'm the common denominator, so I have to be the problem, right?

This isn't out of the blue, I promise. My uncle came into my room while I was recording before, so I had to cut the last file short. I knew it had to be important. He's normally really good about giving me the space I need when I'm making these files. Like I said, this is technically a school assignment as far as anyone knows, and school is the most important thing. So I knew it was important, and I guess it was.

True to form my uncle was the one to take the time to figure out what it was I wanted to do. He came in and asked me, 'Did I want to go back to Mount Makiling?'

It was a matter of fact, point blank sort of question. And I did. I did, so I told him that. "I want to go," I said.

I didn't bother to tell him why. Maybe I should have in the name of fairness and all that. But then again, my uncle did not let me get much of a word in. I said yes, and he went out into the main room and told my mom that I was going. He and Lola were taking me, and there was nothing she could do about.

Obviously, she tried to put her foot down and reminded him that she was the oldest child and what she said goes, but for the first time, he didn't accept that. Apparently pushing back against her was something he could do, (*sharp inhale*) and she did not take it well. This was the one perk that came from being the oldest, which wasn't a great status in this family. Growing up, she had to take on so many responsibilities that never should have been hers. Mom's told me stories of things that

would seemingly classify as parentification nowadays, but no one ever wants to talk about that. I don't even mean just in this family because that's not really a concept here. For a family as broke as ours was, everyone has to pitch in. There's no choice; (*inhale*) it's about survival. A childhood is a luxury you can try to give your own kids.

Maybe I am grossly simplifying things, but in the US, parentification is fine to talk about when it's middle class or upper middle class parents neglecting their kids but not getting a nanny to take on the slack, leaving a kid to do it. Heck, you might even find people willing to admit this is a thing that happens in lower middle class families. Because in those contexts, it's seemingly a choice the parents' made. But when it comes to poverty, it's often a matter of necessity, and no one ever wants to talk about necessity.

But hey, put me in that camp, I guess, because I didn't think of my mom as being parentified long before her time. But she must have been, and the respect that came with being the proverbial leader of her siblings was all she had to show for her troubles. It was some sort of control, yes, but it wasn't control for the sake of control. It was just a really bad coping mechanism. And that doesn't make it right, but... I don't know. That isn't not the sort of sentence that SHOULD be followed with a 'but.' I just feel guilty.

I peered my head out of the room in time to see Mom's breakdown. When she saw me, she asked me if I really wanted to go, and that wasn't technically a question. Or I mean, there was definitely a right answer. She definitely wanted me to say a certain thing. But I was like, yeah, I do want to go. Because I did and because I was tired of playing a game with her that I never win anyway.

Okay, I... You know, as part of my ounce of self awareness, I knew this was a problem. When I first got to my other university, something simple like my roommate asking me whether or not I wanted the door to our room open when she left for class was beyond me. I always like, 'Whatever is fine.' But whatever wasn't fine. It might have been our room, but she was leaving. And I wasn't making a decision on the permanent state of our door.

I was a hot mess at my first university. I honestly was, and it was because of this. I was so used to making myself as small as I could, and I was good at it. I was so good at it that I lost track of where I was. And to have my injury or even disability, let's use the word I really want to avoid, means that I can't do that anymore. With my body being what it is, to be small is to be nonexistent. (*Inhale*) I have to be visible to get the help I need. So maybe the timing wasn't ideal, but it wasn't something I had a choice in.

I only got better about issuing demands, if you can call them that, when I got hurt, which is a time in my life that Mom doesn't want to think about, so I can understand why she's suddenly shocked that I can do it. But isn't this what she, as my parent, was supposed to want in the first place? To grow up is to get bigger and to take up more space. To grow up means to have a voice. (*Inhale*) And isn't your kid supposed to grow up.

Maybe it was my timing or my tone. I don't know, but she shut down. Instead of yelling, she just got really quiet. It's not even the silent treatment; I know the difference. Mom knows I'm there, but she doesn't have anything to say to me. She doesn't recognize me fully. Lola's taken over some of the caregiving responsibilities for me as a

result, and some times I like to think she's paying Mom back for all the childcare Mom provided growing up. Probably not, but it's a nice thought.

*(Pause)*

I know you're going to tell me I have nothing to apologize for, but I can't help it. I guess I lament the miseries that my mother has endured and perpetuated, but there's no good phrase for that. Collectively, we just use 'I'm sorry,' but that's not ideal. It's just that once 'I'm sorry for your loss' became the go-to at funerals, we were kind of stuck, right? I can't even tell if I'm joking anymore.

*(Pause)*

I asked Mom if she wanted to go to Lolo's grave with me and Lola because I did. Lola has to meet with the grave cleaner to pay for her services for the next couple of months, and it's easiest to meet her at the cemetery, apparently. I don't know all the details, but that makes sense to me.

Mom said she didn't want to go, and I think I can see why. I never noticed the weird relationship she has with Lolo's memory. It's not just about the 'conceived out of wedlock' thing, although that didn't help. I know she points out his old drinking friends as they walk by the property. And there's one she still gives money to when he comes by. She tells me over and over again that he was the friend who always made sure Lolo got home safely after a night of drinking, which is a loaded designation if there ever was one.

And I hate that I never noticed these things about her. And that is my fault. It's been there. I could have seen it. I should have known not to ask for anything. Why couldn't I have just wanted more food trips? Those always went fine. Everything was

simpler when I did that. It's wanting things that always causes trouble, specifically with my mom.

Maybe I should be better about taking care of myself and standing up for myself, but I don't want to hurt her, you know? And it really feels like that's the trade off.

*(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.