

Day I don't know out of... I really don't know.

I can't do the time tracking anymore, which kind of sucks because I did kind of find it comforting. But basically, everything is up in the air. I've lost track of time, and the US embassy wants us to wait to leave the Philippines until everything has been sorted out twice over. Luckily, my parents and I are eligible for super lax visas just because of the way they do citizenship here, so we can actually stay for up to a year without problems. Even me. Even with my bum hip and leg, which was surprising because immigration laws tend to be kind of... *(sigh)* Well they--they tend to kick me while I'm done. Not every place would let me stay for so long. *(with a slight mocking tone)* Because what if I don't leave? Then I'd be a public charge.

Whatever, I-- We're all back at home. Back in the province. The people from the US embassy just left, and when they were here, we just went over the story again. The version of the story I'm okay with them knowing.

Oh but before I forget, I got your email about my absence from the university. Thanks for telling admin that we would work something out. Your class is the only one I have this semester, so I'm pretty sure everything will be okay. Or at least, no one at the administration office will care enough to cause me any trouble. I mean, after all, what could I matter to them? I take one class a semester. Not much room for error or for much money to get paid out. Relatively speaking.

I also got the article you sent me about setting boundaries, and I know you're right. I get it; there's a lot wrong with... Well, with everything. And I know you weren't mad about the phone call. You would want to know if something did happen to me but

eah, going through my phone might have been too far given the circumstances, but it definitely is too far as a habit, which it is.

But sometimes I think... or I remember that physically I need her help a lot. I'm not outright dependent on her, but pointing that out just feels a little bit more than a hair split. And we don't know what the future holds for me. There is always a chance I could get worse and hardly a chance I could ever get any better.

But I--I hear you. I still have rights and reasonable expectations, but none of those feels relevant all the time. Sometimes, the priority is getting through the current moment.

I know my family hasn't always had it as well as they do now. Even though she doesn't like to tell them, my grandmother still remembers her mother's stories about the Japanese occupation, and sometimes they slip out. It has to be classified as some sort of inherited trauma at this point. And there's probably a lot of that in the family, but because I was the first one to be raised abroad, that line stopped with me. And it's not like I can't look back and somewhat understand it, understand the panic and this seeming need for control: control because it gives you half a chance to make things right. But in reality, it's just a bit more complicated than that. Obviously because I'm not an object that can be controlled.

Also, it was always like this. Even before the accident. Maybe it would be more acceptable if this was clearly a trauma response to what happened to me, but I can rationally say that it's not.

But--in a rather perverse way--I kind of don't want to fight her on this. Or maybe this isn't perverse. I mean... *(Sigh)* Admittedly, there are times when I want her to be

overbearing. Like, it would have been nice if she had invited herself into the interview. They didn't explicitly say she couldn't be there, and I have a feeling if I had played up the disability, they would have let her stay. Not that doing so wouldn't have created other problems, but sometimes you only worry about bridges when you have to cross them.

Anyway, I wasn't technically in trouble for anything. They just wanted to know what happened, so they could be sure that other people didn't need to be in trouble for anything. So I told them the version of the story that I was comfortable with, the one that I know actually makes sense: I saw something I wanted to take a picture of for my school project--and they didn't know we had agreed on largely audio recordings but that's neither here nor there--but apparently when I stepped, I must have hit the landing wrong or on a bad angle because there was a sharp and debilitating pain, which led me to stumble off completely unaware of where I was going. I must have kept walking and walking and then fallen into the small crevice where they found me, I said.

But you were facing upwards, the embassy worker pointed out.

Yeah, a self-preservation impulse. This isn't my body's first rodeo, I replied. Once I brought up the accident even if it was only tangentially related, they did back down a bit.

Then came the same question asked nine different ways: did you see someone there? Did you meet with someone? Did someone approach you? Has anyone approached you? Your mother said there was some tension in the family, which might sound different but then segues into the same question but asked in a very pointed way. Did one of your estranged family members approach you? Did someone approach you?

And it's technically a no because I--'cause I know rationally, it was a hallucination not a person. And I did the approaching

*(Exhale then pause)*

I thought there was a woman in the distance, okay? We were all taking a break on the hike. A preemptive break because there was a somewhat large rest that we could use and--you know--I shouldn't be squandering opportunities for that. So we were all standing about, and conversation circles started to form without me, as is common. And that's when I heard the woman: the woman saying my name.

At first, common sense prevailed, and I did not approach her, I just turned my head, and she was looking at me, and she started saying my name again. Like an old friend would. It's like she was happy to say it, to acknowledge me, to reach out to me. And that's why I started walking towards her and why I didn't question why no one else was around. Why no one else in my family heard her. To me, she seemed so loud. But at the same time, I didn't--I didn't care about that. I was... It was nice to hear my name said that way. It was nice to see someone smiling when they said it, and she was genuinely beautiful. Truly and utterly beautiful, but in a way that you couldn't even be jealous of her because she also seemed really nice and warm and comforting. She was just beautiful. And as I got closer, she told me that she had been waiting for me.

Which red flag, right? Like, was I dying.

"For me," I asked her.

"For Raphael's granddaughter," she said.

And I, I don't what I'm thinking. What I was thinking. I'm sorry. I know this is crazy. I know. I know. I know. *(Sigh)* I don't know what's going on.

*(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.