

(Ambient sound of a college campus. Door shuts)

Okay. Wait, hang on. (Keyboard typing)

So, Professor, this audio file will be me answering the reflection questions you sent with the assignment description. To the best of my ability, of course. I still don't quite know what you want me to do, and--well, I'm not trying to be combative here--but I could have done with some more guidance. Saying 'talking without guidance is the point of the assignment' is not as helpful as you might think it is.

I don't know. I know I shouldn't be defensive. Or like this... I mean, (sigh) I should be grateful because this assignment means my parents will let me go on this trip. And I really want to go on this trip. I guess.

But anyway. (Paper flip). Oh that's the first question. "How excited are you to go on this trip?"

I know the expected answer and maybe the correct answer would be "very excited." Unabashedly excited. Because, like, it's a trip to the Philippines, and I get to skip my class. My literal only class this semester. I get to see family and have a lot of fun and go to the beach--maybe--instead of studying, and it's cold here but it will be nice and tropical there. And... yeah. There's a lot of reasons to be excited.

But on the other hand, my grandma hasn't... (sigh). My grandma especially has not really seen me since the accident. She doesn't really participate in our family video chats, and in those chats, I've moved in the background of my mom's camera, so I think some of my other relatives have seen how... how limited my movements can be now. And maybe Mom told them about all the phone calls she had to make to the airlines to get my accommodations in order.

But on the other hand, I've noticed that Mom isn't really forthcoming about the not great things that happen.

Like when I first got into university, my old university, I had the option of trying out for our school's basketball team. It wasn't a scholarship situation. I mean, I had one, once, but I also had an academic one, and it was a better offer. But all the same, and maybe I don't need to tell you this, when a school wants you on a team, they let you try again, and it's almost treated like a formality. You're essentially already part of the team. They just need to prove it to other people.

The basketball coach was emailing me constantly ahead of the tryouts, encouraging me, making sure I had everything I needed, telling me about all the perks, you know. But I didn't go. I just... I don't know why I didn't go. I just didn't want to be a basketball player anymore. I wanted more freedom, more time. I... I was a chemistry major. And I heard horror stories about organic chemistry, and I wanted to focus more on that. My mom and dad didn't say anything when I told them I wasn't trying out, and we kind of just left it at that. But when I transferred to this school, my cousin asked me if my basketball scholarship was going to carry over, and on one hand, that doesn't make sense, but it was the premise of it that hurt me. Like, he thought I had one at all and that I was using it. I mean, maybe he was confused or mistaken. Maybe he wasn't paying attention before, but I don't know. It was... It was just odd.

So even the family that do have a chance of knowing what's going on might not know the truth. And I really don't want to explain it all to them.

But I have to, I guess. Because we always do a lot of activities together as a family. The favorite one being to tour various churches across the island. And long car rides are almost always hard for me. There's just no way to position my hip so that it doesn't hurt unbearably

after the third hour or so. No, I... (sigh) Oh I don't want to deal with the questions. That's the part that will ruin the trip for me.

(Pause)

Question 2. "What are you most looking forward to?"

Seeing my grandma. Definitely. And the food. Always the food. Okay but family too, but like... rewind the file, I guess?

I love my family. I just don't always love the obligations that come with it.

(Pause)

Question 3. "How are you feeling today?"

Not great, to be honest. I had to meet with my academic advisor today. And that's always a needlessly painful exercise. She's just such a... (hum) Probably shouldn't swear on this assignment. And I probably also should not spend it trash talking one of your colleagues. But you know how she can be right? I've told you about the problems I've been having with her, and so have other students. A lot of us find her unbearable. But for me, (sigh) she just doesn't seem to understand that after the car accident, my life has to move at a different pace. For many reasons but hopefully partially because I'm still recovering.

Okay, I know it's been a few years, and I know some things are just set to be how they are. I know I can't expect to be what I used to be. I can't expect everything to go back to normal, but I just want things to be a little bit better. Why can't things be a bit more bearable? Like that I don't have the car ride issue or that I can walk a few extra feet or that I don't have a slow burn type pain literally all the time.

Or that my counselor could be a little bit more understanding. You know, every time the car accident comes up, she just tells me that I should have been more careful and personal responsibility. But it was a hit and run. I was walking and the driver sped around the corner and flew up onto the sidewalk. The police proved it, so why is this my fault?

And then she'll just tell me that I'm just acting like a victim despite the fact that I literally was the victim and I still feel it in my hip. And she knows she has that awful office furniture. She complains about it all the time, but apparently, I can't complain about this.

I'm sorry. I was having such a great day before meeting with her. And it's weird because you are also the professor I can talk to about anything. You're the only sort of advocate I have here. And it's hard to not let that aspect seep into this assignment. But maybe that was your point? "Talking without guidance" could also mean to also talk without the guidance of expectation. Or that's how I'm going to interpret it.

I just hate how much she can pull me down. Despite her job literally being to help students graduate. So what if it takes me a little longer than everyone else? That's what I can do, Does she want me to drop out? What makes her look worse because I would honestly consider that.

(Pause)

Question 4. "What sorts of things are you going to pack?"

You're... You're kind of... (sigh and hum) That doesn't feel like a fair question, even though I know it is. Basically, I don't do my own packing, and I never have.

When you go to the Philippines, each person gets two suitcases for free, maximum of fifty pounds each. And we always bring a lot of gifts and supplies to our family, and it's a big

family. So it's a lot of stuff in a little space, but my mom's a packing wizard, so she'll take care of it. I just set out the sort of clothes I want to bring. Which she may or may not pack. Depends on how she feels about it.

I know she never packs my makeup because she does not like me using it. You would think she'd learn after she decided to not pack my acne face wash, and I got the WORST breakout of my life. But this is still something we fight about.

I (exhale) I guess, this is probably about activities, right? We're going to church. A lot. My grandma does a lot of work with the other... (sigh) Okay, my mom calls them the Senior Ladies, which may not be accurate or inoffensive, but Grandma does love to show me off when I'm there. I don't know if she will this time, though.

Question 5. "Do you know that I care about you? And if you need someone to talk to while you're there, I'm just an email away."

Thank you, Professor. Thank you.

(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.