

Research Log 1. I guess.

*(Sigh)* No need to the theatrics, I know. This is not some big production, and this may not even be the sort of research you want to hear about, but like... the second I hit send on that last recording, I felt terrible about it. I had no intention of scaring you because of something my family is dealing with. I don't know what I was thinking. And no, I'm not going to rehash all that old stuff. I mean, maybe I could have just worded everything differently. Like, saying 'hey my uncle went with us, and he's a super tough guy, so we were going to be safe, but regardless, oh no, people got angry.'

*(Sigh)* We were always going to be okay. Hurt and somewhat unsettled but okay. Actually, it might depend on your definition of okay but physically we were always going to be fine. Fine. Just fine.

After I sent that recording, I went around to check if anyone was up. Nothing that special. No spy rolling into rooms. I just pressed my ear against a bunch of door cracks. And all I heard was snoring, which I'm now guessing is a family trait. And now I'm going to be really insecure about sleeping around other people. I'll deal with that later.

Anyway, I went back to my laptop for that research, and I'm kind of lucky because the resort's WiFi doesn't cut off at night. That might not make sense. It's a pretty common thing here, from what I've seen, that the internet connection will shut off at about nine. Or later. Whatever the de facto bedtime is. Or maybe that's just my luck. But like, it could be a way of keeping social order. By keeping young people from getting addicted or something. Or a way to handle data caps which definitely are an established thing here. But maybe it's because the resort is so used to tourists that they keep it open season. So to the internet.

And apparently, get this, Mount Makiling is a dormant volcano. Which is not what that cousin--in air quotes--meant when he said I should not go up there, I know. It just feels weird giving anything he said that much weight, you know? Like, a woman on that mountain who would have been up there when my grandfather was alive is just logistically and factually impossible. That is not a thing that could ever happen. Well... I guess if she were a small child back then and now you would have a slightly older woman there, but that is not what he said or meant. Like, he meant there was a legit adult woman on that mountain back then and now. She was there when my grandfather was up there, and she may be up there now, so do not go up there.

Never mind that living on a mountain like that alone would probably be difficult. Or so I imagine. I never did the whole Girl Scouts thing. Also never mind that people go up on that mountain all the time, so people would have seen her and maybe brought her down. Never mind a lot of details. You have to just believe some things for this to make sense.

There os no way there is a woman on that mountain, and I'm dumb for taking him seriously. Old wives' tales are just stories we tell small children. And only those small children actually believe them.

(Pause) Is calling it an old wives' tale actually a pun... because woman and the passing of time since my grandparents.

No, not the point. It's easier to think about puns, though. Puns can be fun, certainly more fun than whatever this is.

Anyway, I kept researching after the dormant volcano sign, and yes there is a legend about a woman on that mountain. They call her Maria Makiling, but like... Maria,

I thought to myself. Seriously? This country is now super Catholic, but she is not a part of that canon. No way that's what she's supposed to go by. In fact, before the Spanish came, she had a legit goddess name: Dayang Masalanta. I think. Maybe. Dayang Masalanta. I'm doing my best.

I guess missionaries required a rebranding of her image, but it's weird she's been able to stick around at all, never mind adapted. Weird because it's unexpected. Don't missionaries like to rid the world of all things pagan, whether they're supposed to or not, she says, giving herself some gray area in case she's wrong. I might be wrong. That being said, I probably should know more about missionaries and the rules they may or may not have historically stuck to. Probably a part of responsible historical knowledge and all that.

Regardless, she went from goddess to mountain guardian, along with a few other goddesses on other mountains. All Marias, so I guess there are so many Mary's and/or Maria's in Catholicism, you can sneak in a few more without anyone noticing. That might have been a little inappropriate, but you know what I mean.

Basically, Maria... Frick I'm doing it too. (*softer*) Least I can say that name. (*Sigh and at normal volume*) Maria Makiling supposedly lives on that mountain. And she never ages, so that checkbox gets explained. And in addition to not aging, which is a major advantage on the looks front, Maria Makiling is supposedly incredibly beautiful, kind of like the view from the mountain is. Or was. Let's be real about how nature's been treated lately.

There's actually a lot about her for being such an old myth. Or an old myth of a culture that got to meet Spain's war ships. Once again my perception, maybe.

Apparently, some legends say she used to live amongst the people around here but then fled to live on the mountain. And I'm getting the impression that she's a really humble goddess or guardian because first it was life with the people and then it was life on the mountain but in a small hut. And here's where the story gets super interesting. Remember how I said the story was that Grandpa had another woman on the mountain that he may or may not have preferred over Lola. Well, apparently, there's a couple different stories where Maria falls in love with a man and brings him to her home. In fact, they say it was a heartbreak that caused Maria to completely disappear from sight. Which... Mood. Sometimes mood anyway. I get it. I feel that.

But there's still superstitions about her. Mostly they're about how she punishes people for being jerks to nature. But anyway, people still disappear on that mountain. And it's her doing. Or not officially her doing. You can't put 'Mountain Guardian' on an official report. It's just what everyone will assume happened to you. It's how they make peace with you being gone.

It used to be mostly men who went away because romance. But I guess this disappearing thing is more gender neutral now. The one time you wouldn't want something to be, maybe?

Oh, what am I saying? Obviously there's no one up there. This is a dumb superstition. Why am I even humoring this? I don't want to be super self-centered or holier than thou, but realistically, I should know better than my cousin, right? I have a better education, so I don't need to depend on things like this to feel okay or to be okay with what happens in my life. I know there's no such thing as a mountain guardian or anything of the like. And this is not even my strained Catholicism talking.

Rationally speaking, there's no one up there. I know this. But the way my cousin was reacting? I don't... I don't know why I want to believe him. Like, I get it. The look on his face could have been from everything falling apart. He could have been messing with me. I know. I know. I know all those things. But you know what else I know? Lolo loved folktales. Who knows why? I don't know why. Maybe I'm just being dramatic, but I can't help but think it's related somehow.

*(Pause. Music fades in)*

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