

I know you're not going to like this, so I should probably just get to the point. It's better than making you wait for the revelation, right? No hee-ing and haa-ing about it. Just right to the point. *(Pause)* I almost said dagger to the heart, which is not a great metaphor right now. Nope. Not at all.

But um... the things is that... Lola thinks we need to go back to the mountain. Or I specifically need to go back, but I can't do it on my own. And with the investigation done and no official order barring us from going, well, in theory that's possible. There's no external reason why we can't, assuming you call logic an internal one, which I think I might, but... Um... Even if we knew exactly what happened, even taking the logical version of events at face value, we shouldn't go back there. I'm well aware. Because clearly I can't handle it for whatever reason. Whether it was some pain I wasn't fully aware of or something in the air or elevation issues--yeah, yeah, I've been thinking about the logical side of this for quite a bit--but there was something incompatible between me and Mount Makiling, let's put it that way. And it doesn't matter what it was exactly. It's still there.

But Lola doesn't believe it was like that. And I'm the one that brought it up. When I asked her about Lolo's disappearance, she immediately knew why I was asking. And she told me, honestly, when I disappeared, she assumed that's where I was, wherever he had been. Which could have been an extra reason to panic because he had to come back on his own accord, which may or may not be something I could have done. No one knew. But also, she didn't fully understand his disappearances or him really.

The way my mom tells it--to other people not just me, mind you--her parents didn't have the best marriage, but divorce isn't fully legal in the Philippines. If you can

get an annulment, that's your best bet, but those are hard to come by. Other than that, you have to make it work, which they did try to do. They did their best, but apparently Lola never fully understood Lolo. And it bothered her. Because to not understand him meant not understanding why he chose to stay with her and the baby--which then became babies--when there were so many reasons for him to leave. And maybe it was silly to want the affirmation that came from knowing, but she wanted it. And I get it.

When she was telling me that, for the first time, I really felt like she and I understood each other because I too sometimes want a comical amount of affirmation that people want to be around me. I don't have a husband or wife or partner that serious but I guess if I did, it would be especially true with regards to that person. And the stakes for me would not even be as high as they were for her. I don't have children. Don't even fully know if that's a possibility for me. Never mind that the social stigma of single motherhood is not what it was, especially where I live.

For her, it should have been a relief when he came to live with her, and it was. It just wasn't only that. Emotions tend to be more complicated than that. And so she was left wondering. His reasoning, as far as he told her, was never that great.

"Did he say a woman on the mountain told him to come back?" I asked her.

She was surprised that I knew about it, but she didn't deny it. That's what Lolo had told her. It didn't make sense, and he didn't go into details, but the details wouldn't have helped her at all. She never would have understood. It was just an ongoing thing between them: he believed in the old beliefs, and she didn't fully understand them nor did she want to. My grandma is super Catholic in the sense that pre-Catholic beliefs are

just as a general rule, written off as incompatible. And so they never talked about it. And that was their version of a good marriage.

“What if...” I started.

But she already knew that I was going to tell her that I thought I saw the woman too. But I didn't have some big life lesson or takeaway though. Beyond her recognizing me, I guess, which felt important, but I somehow doubt that it was. And it was all my fault on that front; I didn't want to talk to her about what she wanted to talk to me about, which is why Lola wants me to go back. She thinks I need to finish the conversation.

And surprise, surprise, pretty much no one agrees. To say it was a certain kind of storm when Lola told my mom would be an understatement. It turned out that was mom's breaking point. All the frustration she had carried from the way our family operates just came pouring out. It feel great to be the straw that broke the camel's back, you know? And now the whole street is eerily quiet. It's hardly ever quiet at all with so many kids about, but they're reading the proverbial room, as it were. There's no conversation to be had. Mom doesn't want to budge. Lola doesn't want to budge. And no one wants to tick either of them off further.

And not that anyone has bothered to get my opinion, but I do want to go back. As ill-advised as it is. I think going back is some sort of closure. Seeing for a fact that it isn't a supernatural sort of place, so I can stop wondering about it. Or seeing that it was and finishing that conversation.

*(Pause)* I... I keep saying I'll be blunt and then I'm not. But for now, the thing I didn't want to talk about with her was my injury. Whether or not a pagan goddess understands how cars work, she knew my condition was directly inflicted on me. She

knew I wasn't used to it. She knew that I was upset about it. And that's what she wanted me to answer for. Or not answer for. I... It was uncomfortable and hard to explain. She wanted me to go into a thing I did not want to go into, so I kept shutting down. And finally, I told her I needed to go, and that's the last thing I remember saying to her. That I need to go. So she let me go.

But I almost regret it. I really want to know what she was going to say. Hypothetically, of course. Um... I.. I mean... Um... I... I don't know what I mean anymore.

*(Knocking. 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.