

FICTA

Herald-Dauntless-Ace



A compilation of fiction stories written in English and Filipino

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21st Century Literature
Bataan Christian School
S.Y. 2018-2019

Of PLAGUE MASKS and CRIMSON

by Ronielle Vitangcol

UPRIGHT

The Fool stands on a cliff's edge, overlooking the limitless potential of their future.

The Lazaret looked much more dreadful than ever. The sandy planes of the island wasn't just sand anymore. Ash, charred bone, and probably fallen tears. The sky always looked red, crimson. It brings fear for such a beautiful color. The clouds, dark gray as if there was a massive storm approaching. But there was no rain, never. The atmosphere surrounding the island— it felt colder, darker, compared to the others. The cards have spoken. The rows of people falling in line have drastically increased since the last time Xiuli was there.

Everyone is dying; hopeless.

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Sometimes the cards would speak to him, asking him if he thinks he's made the right choice. Xiuli would always tell them, that yes, he did in fact made the right choice to become an apprentice to a plague doctor. That was because he wanted to help. Help the kingdom from outright dying from the devastating Red Plague.



It was, well, is a risky job. Even just the smallest sliver of exposure from the red-infested waters to breathing in the same air as the patients could get you infected in merely a blink of an eye. If my magic isn't strong enough, I might as well lend a hand to the doctors in helping the citizens, he once said, for the sake of convincing that he had a solid reason for why he was doing this.

Though, it sounded more like he was convincing himself.

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Crimson. Red.

The eyes of the victims that have fallen to the plague, the scleras of their eyes, now turned red. Bloodshot. Red eyes were the very first symptom of a person that has caught the Red Plague. The most prominent one.

Beaked masks, leather gloves, bloodied aprons. Ever since the widespread of the epidemic, the palace gates have been open to anyone who dared to find a cure. Clerics, alchemists, magicians, nurses, doctors. So many doctors. So many that the Quaestor had to assign numbers on each one of them. Too many names to remember, numbering bodies are much much easier and very much efficient once they come and go, they said to Xiuli when he had asked.

<><><>

"Oh god." Another day, another patient to experiment on. To an ordinary civilian, this would look extremely brutal with all the operating tools, the amount of blood, and whatnot. But to those who work at the plague research facilities, this is just a normal day. After being around for awhile, the queasy feeling a person gets when they see a gruesome blood spillage has very much faded away. Blood and death were part of work, no big deal.

"Please don't tell me that the patient over there is still alive." Xiuli stares at the commotion at the dissection tables. Usually, the doctors would dissect the corpses of patients (vivisect, as the Quaestor likes to insist, though it was rare for them to open up a living being); see how the plague

affects the insides of its victims. But this, this is something else.

"I'd hate to burst your bubble, Xiu." One of the other apprentices suddenly pops up out of nowhere, startling him. "But yeah, that one certainly is alive." Both of them glance over at the vivisection tables, the commotion has gone louder. The doctors were scrambling to hold down the patient, trying to clasp the leather bounds on the table. But the patient was violently thrashing around, screaming, that is until one of the doctors injected them with something from a suspicious-looking syringe. The patient was now out cold. "Well, not for long.", the other apprentice said, grimacing.

A shiver runs through his spine. Xiuli always thought that it was absolutely sickening to see doctors open up a carcass of what used to be a living, breathing, human being. But with the fact that this patient was still alive, he feels guilty, uneasy. It felt like he was helping in killing this innocent person. Unfortunately for Xiuli, he'd have to assist the doctors in the vivisection process, after all, he was a doctor's apprentice. He signed up for this. Shouldn't expect any less.

His fellow apprentice adjusts the beaked mask resting on their face. "You may want to gear up, bud", they said, giving Xiuli a gentle pat on the shoulder before walking off to the vivisection tables. "We're going to need you."

As disheartening as it is, Xiuli had no choice but to follow. It was better to vivisect than be vivisected. He puts

on his protective mask and apron as he treads towards the rest of the apprentices and doctors, before the patient gains consciousness.

<><><>

REVERSED

The Fool rushes in without guidance, ignoring all the warning signs.

Across the great planes of the ocean, there it stood, in the far off distance away from the kingdom. The Lazaret. The closer one gets to the island, the easier it is to notice the drastic change in atmosphere. From the beautiful summery weather and clear skies of the kingdom, to the chilly winds and stormy clouds of The Lazaret. It was like the epitome of light versus dark, but only with the oceans as the barrier. Life and Death.

The remote island was converted by the Count as a “haven” for the plague victims. This was where they were sent over since the amount of victims were nonstop. They multiplied too rapidly. The dead bodies were piling up. The soon-to-be dead bodies were also piling up. It’s either going through experimentation or being sent to The Lazaret. It’s too late to run.

<><><>

Ashen. Gray.

The first time Xiuli visited The Lazaret, it was quite unforgettable. In a bad way. As soon as their boat settled at the shore of the island, the aura was different. Something seemed off. It felt like he was transported into one of the realms of the Major Arcana; it didn’t feel real, everything about the place, it didn’t sit well with Xiuli. I’m not going back here, never again.

But the cards had other plans.





There he was, looking like he was lost. Xiuli has been following around, observing, the people who were falling in line towards a peculiar-looking building. The crematorium. The people, they were all headed for one place. One reason. They were sent here to cease existing, to “lessen” the numbers of those who were affected. Because that, that was the sole purpose of The Lazaret, to serve as a one way ticket to end suffering for those who had no choice if they didn’t want to end up as chopped meat.

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Pitch. Black.

Whatever was up ahead, Xiuli thought that is was probably the brightest thing he’s ever seen in The Lazaret. The warmth emanating from it, scorching, blazing. So much in contrast with everything here. It felt like the Sun, as if it was trapped inside a cemented chamber; the heat, the light, it stays only within.

That was what he was up against now. The farther he stepped, the closer he’d get engulfed by embers. No turning back now. All Xiuli had to do left was fully submerge himself in the brightness of the flames, never to return. That’s all it takes, no one would even notice. The fire surrounds him, entrapping him, never letting him out. The only way out was further, into the heart of the scorching heat and light; burning, blazing.

“I’m sorry.”

And then the inky black darkness sinks in.

CYBORG

by Veejay Atienza

I woke up with several wires attached to me? Does this mean I am a cyborg now? Does it mean that I can't drink, eat, and get wet. But I can feel things, feel people, think on my own and act on my own. I don't remember anything about my past life being a human. All I remember is waking up with these things attached to me, and seeing someone in front of me, Dr. Newman. I found out that I was created by him for a purpose: to make a certain someone happy. I don't know who he or she is yet.

=09/01/2123=

Dr. Newman told me that I had a wife before and that she's been depressed since I died. I was killed during a war while serving in the military. Good thing, my wife is still alive. We were a young couple. Her name is Maya. Dr. Newman created me to make her daughter happy again as her world was completely shattered in pieces when I was killed a year ago.

I walked to our house, knocked and then entered. Silence encompassed each corner. It is as if there was no one living in it. I thought Maya is home, maybe she just bought something outside. "Get out of here, I know that my father sent you. You are not Ken and you will never be him" a voice came from the bedroom.

I never left the house

until evening because I want to make sure Maya is okay. I know that I am not a good cook, but I cooked something for Maya. "Please eat, it will make you feel better." After that, I went back to Dr. Newman's place so that I can charge myself. It was a wonderful day for me, though I was not able to see her, it felt good just to be near her. I hope that she'll talk to me tomorrow.



=09/02/2123=

The same atmosphere was what I felt today. I heard nothing but the rustling of the wind outside the house. Is Maya home? I went back to the same place where I was waiting, on the tatami mat in front of Maya's room. She still hasn't eaten the food that I cooked yesterday. All the efforts that I gave is now just a spoiled meal. But no, I must bear with her. I know that soon enough she'll open up to me. The same things went on throughout the day; no response heard nor a Maya seen. Just a wall divider in between of us. I went back to Dr. Newman tonight. I feel very disappointed because I am incapable of making her happy.





=09/03/2123=

I had a glimpse of me and Maya together. I don't understand if it is just a dream or my memories are truly slowly coming back. In that moment, she was sewing a shirt for me. I had an idea of wearing the shirt today and also bringing a teddy bear statue that Maya really loved according to Dr. Newman. But how am I supposed to lift a 500-pound statue by myself? Oh yes right, I'm a cyborg. Things like this are just a walk in the park for me. The statue is really high; high enough to be seen by someone on a 2nd floor building.

And just as I thought, Maya saw it from the terraces. I saw her peaking outside the window. As soon as she realized I was there, she came back to her bedroom; trying to hide again from me. I won't waste this moment. She forgot to lock the door this time so I entered the room and said "Maya, I am here for you. Stop running away from me."

"Don't leave me Ken." Tears started dripping from her eyes. She hugged me like I was the man she loved before. Starting from this day, we were always together. We ate whatever we want to eat, went wherever we want to go, and did whatever we want to do. I was so happy at last to see her happy also.

=09/04/2123=

Today is the lantern festival on the riverside. Not only that, it is also Maya's birthday. Me and Maya decided to go together to celebrate the festival and her birthday as well. There will be ceremonies, food, and fireworks. I am so excited to spend another quality time with Maya.

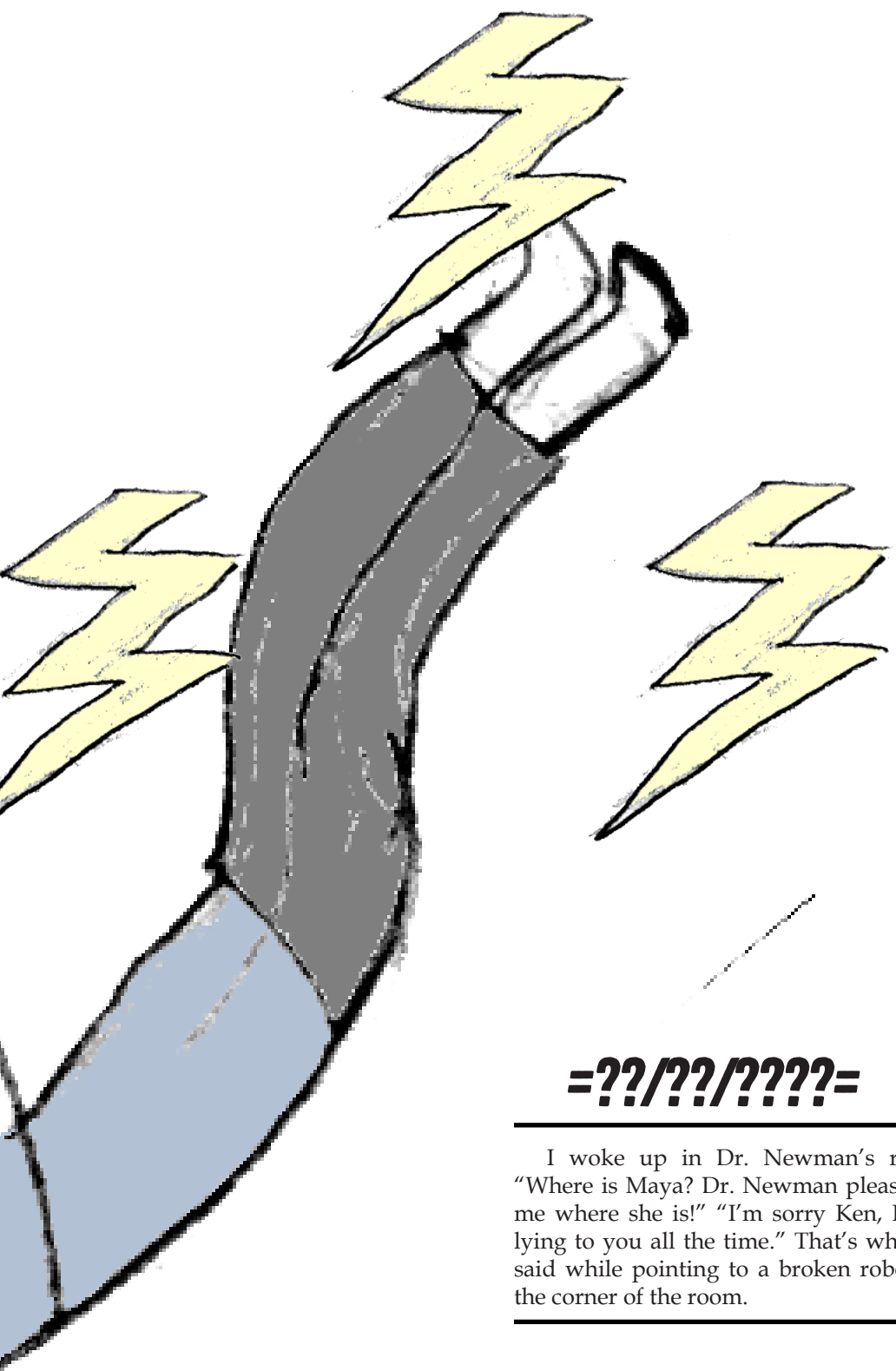
She looks so beautiful tonight in her kimono. I held her tight as we watched the fireworks together. On the way back home with Maya, I felt something strange. I then realized Maya is gone. Where in the world did she go?! I struggled to find her anywhere until I saw a man holding onto her, who I don't even know.

"So it's true that you don't remember a thing Ken. Let me introduce myself to

you. I am Jun, let's just say that you owe me quite a huge amount of money. Now it's time to pay for all or else, I'll kill her." I don't know what to do. I don't have money as well. "Please don't hurt her, I don't have the money now but soon enough I'll give you." "I've been waiting for too long, boys get him!". Several men went on to chase me and beat me up. I received several blows until I decided to let myself just drown in the river.

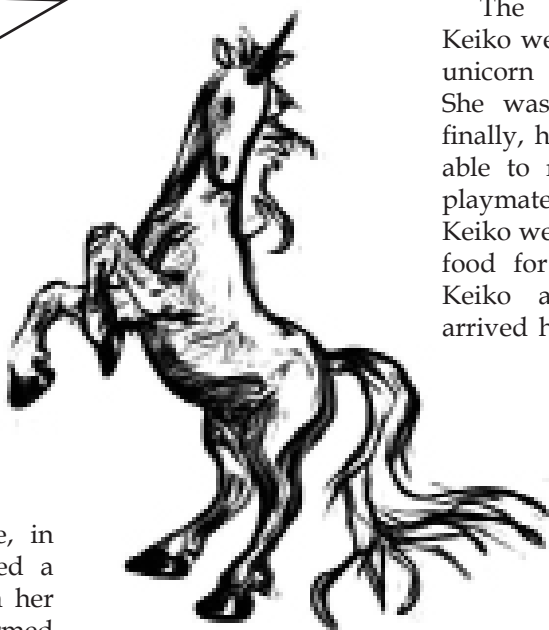
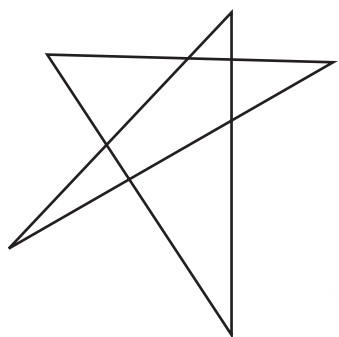
Maybe this is the end Maya. I hope I made you happy even for a little moment. All was already dark; I know that I am nearing my end. Suddenly, a light appeared. I said "No Maya, maybe you'll drown with me. It's too deep in here.





=??/??/????=

I woke up in Dr. Newman's room. "Where is Maya? Dr. Newman please tell me where she is!" "I'm sorry Ken, I was lying to you all the time." That's what he said while pointing to a broken robot on the corner of the room.

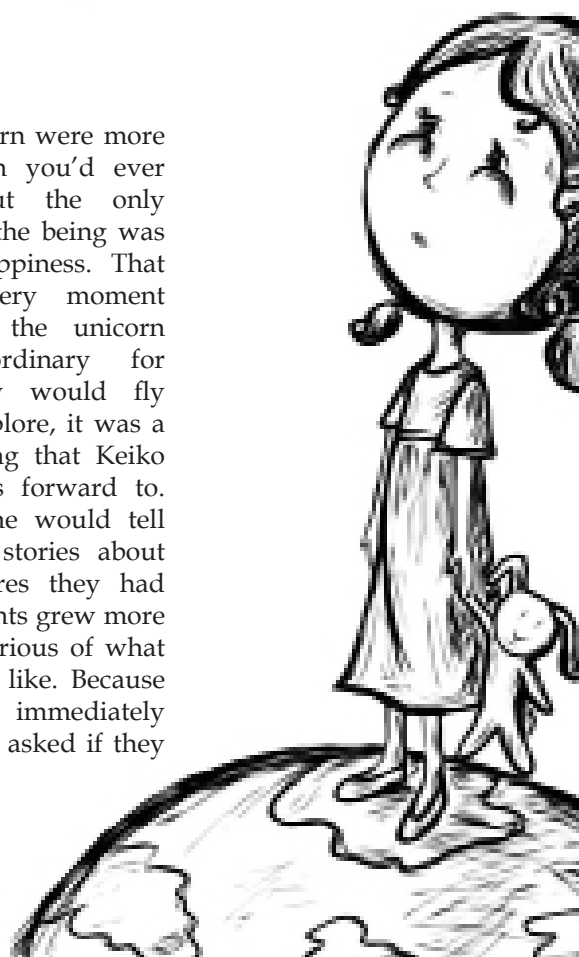


Once upon a time, in a far away land, lived a young little girl. With her cute little face, she charmed everyone and so she was named Keiko, a blessed child. Keiko was filled not only with beauty, but also with grace and talent. She was the only child in the family and so she ended up having no one to play with. Keiko longed for a playmate and it was fulfilled the moment she met a friend in which she dreamt of. It was a horse-like being but is unique for having a pastel-colored hair and skin as white as snow. Keiko saw that the magical being has a horn, looking like one of the curved ends of a crescent. Because of this, she called the being a "unicorn" from the words 'unique' and 'horn'.

The unicorn were more hideous than you'd ever imagine. But the only intention of the being was to share happiness. That is why every moment spent with the unicorn was extraordinary for Keiko. They would fly high and explore, it was a surreal feeling that Keiko always looks forward to. Everyday, she would tell her parents stories about the adventures they had and her parents grew more and more curious of what her friend is like. Because of this, they immediately agreed when asked if they

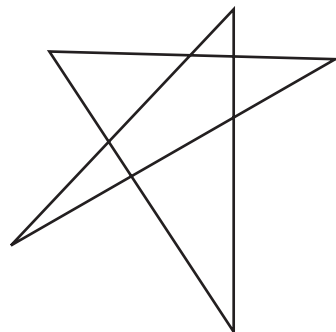
wanted to see her friend.

The following day, Keiko went home with the unicorn along with her. She was ecstatic because finally, her parents will be able to meet her favorite playmate. The parents of Keiko were busy preparing food for the guest when Keiko and the unicorn arrived home. Her parents



has shown up minutes later and saw no one aside from their child, Keiko. They asked where her friend was and she responded by pointing at the empty space beside her. Her mother was terrified but Keiko's father, realizing that her playmate was only fabricated by her imagination, tried to calm her down and told his wife about the situation. They later explained that her friend isn't real and

forbidden their child from playing with it. Keiko did not understand why they were prohibiting her from playing with her friend. She was firm and did not stop believing in the existence of the being. For Keiko, it may seem impossible for the people around her, but she has decided to continue trusting that the relationship she had with the unicorn was real. As time passed by, she started



UNICORN

by Abigail Janina Bustos

to understand what her parents meant about the existence of unicorns but she doesn't regret any of her chosen decisions back then. She was glad how in that moment, she knew how to

stand for what makes her heart truly happy as long as she's not stepping over others. Keiko reflected on her experiences and it helped her learn more about herself.

"The story depicts the reality of life. We are the representation of the little girl, Keiko. And the unicorn portrays the good things that makes us happy. Others may hinder us from achieving happiness but we should not let them stop us from being happy."

HOW DID IT START?

It all started when two people who loved each other so much had to break up. The guy was so heart broken and was so depressed about it he couldn't resist but cut himself 9 times. All he thought about that night was if he could just bring back the past so he could make all things right. He cried and cried until 11:59 pm, the night before his birthday. At exactly 12 am, his mother went to his room and greeted him with a tight hug but then left the room immediately as well. He waited for at least three more people to greet him until 12:10 am before he decides to hang himself. Anxiously waiting, just before the clock turned its last seconds to 12:10, only two more persons wished him a happy birthday. He then gave it another chance and up until 2:30 am, two more persons greeted him. He felt sad and unloved, so at exactly 3 am, he decided to end his life using a rope hanging from the ceiling.

9 THINGS I REALIZED AFTER DEATH



by Hiram Elijah Ramos

Phone ringing He answered his phone. "Hello babe?" Shocked, he was lost for words and couldn't believe what was happening. It was his girlfriend on the phone, waiting for a response. "Babe? You there?" Still shocked he answered excitedly; "Yes, I'm here!" and without hesitation he added "I love you so much." Tears ran down his cheek and he felt the urge to cry, but then he never thought he'd cry so much that his girlfriend started to hear him. "Babe? Are you crying?" his

girlfriend said. "No, I'm not" he replied. "Don't lie to me" she said. "I'm so sorry. I just missed you so much" he cried. "I love you" she answered. "Where are you, Eli? It's already 7:30 AM. School's at 7:40 AM." she added. "Oh. Shoot! I have to go! Bye!" Eli shouted as he rushed. He quickly ran downstairs and saw that his mother was cooking breakfast. His mother saw him and said "Eli, why are you still here so late? I thought you were already at school". "I woke up late. I'm gonna go. Love you!"



BYE!" HE REPLIED.

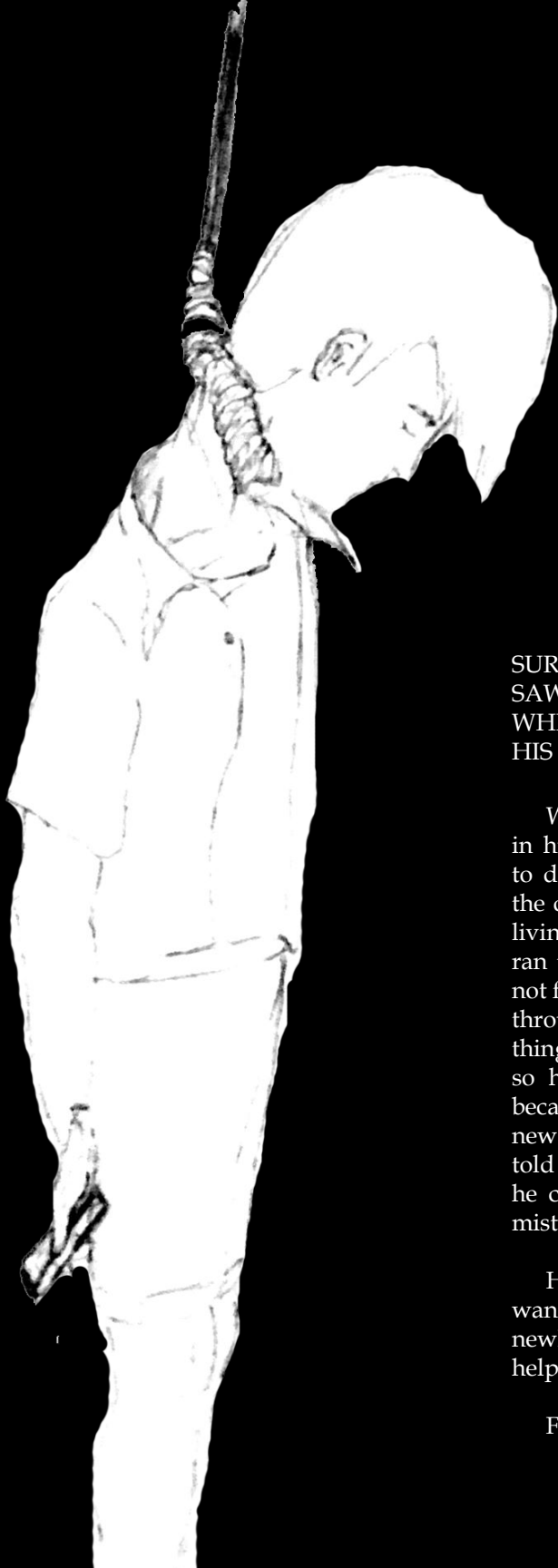
On his way to school, he was still mesmerized with the happenings. Everything he sees already happened for him. He greeted everyone he saw. He smiled to everyone.

The time he arrived, the teacher scolded at him because he was late; his classmates teased him as he felt hurt and bullied. He said sorry to the teacher and had a sit.

The whole time he was at school, he was ignored. His friends, seatmates, and his girlfriend acted as if he did not exist. He clearly was not happy that when his church friends call he will isolate himself more and not answer. The church friend of him told his sister of the happening, so his sister consulted him. She asked "Are you okay? What happened?". "I'm okay. Nothing happened." he replied to his sister. Obviously, he lied. His sister left him.

He has decided to completely end his life but the back of his head, he asks "why am I doing this again?". He cuts himself three times because he felt isolated, did not tell the truth about how he feels, and he thinks he is just keeps on making the same mistake.

THEN HE HANGED HIMSELF.



SURPRISED, HE OPENED HIS EYES AND SAW THAT HE WAS STILL IN HIS BED WHILE THE SUN WAS SHINING FROM HIS WINDOW.

Was it all a dream? Or did he pass out in his bed, scared of what he was about to do? *Phone rings* He did not answer the call. He cried and said "Why do keep living when I want to die?!" He quickly ran to school so he won't be late. He did not forget to smile on the people he passed through. But still, he arrived late, same thing happened, but he stayed strong, so he went to church after classes and became open to the people there. He made new friends that treated him family. He told one of his new friends his story and he committed that he won't make those mistakes again.

He became active to his church. He wanted to go there every day with his newly found friends that he thinks will help him through his problems.

For almost a month, he grew closer to

his friends. What he did not know was his girlfriend is doing something that will hurt him a lot. He was so busy with his new friends that he forgot about his girlfriend. His girlfriend was so mad at him that she talked behind his back and broke his reputation. She said so many hurtful words to him and broke up with him. Continuously, he was being hurt by everyone because another friend of him made stories about him. As a result, he was depressed. He wanted to die, so he decided to hang himself again.

At the back of his head, he asks “what if I don’t live again after this?”; he cuts himself six times because he was not happy

with what he has, he took everything for granted, he felt like he hurt everyone, he thinks he can’t solve his problem anymore, he regrets everything he has done; but was unsure of what might happen if he hangs himself again. Still, he was decided, he cried as he hang himself.

He woke up in the hospital having a hard time breathing. He could not feel his body. Then his church friends, family, best friends, and his girlfriend comes to his hospital room to tell him how important he is. And were very sorry for not doing enough for him. His girlfriend then hugged him as he realizes nine things.

nine things I realized

- Do not isolate yourself; have a friend that can help you with your problems.
- Be true to what you say.
- Do not make mistakes you’ve already done.
- Be happy with what you have.
- Do not take things for granted.
- Consider what others feel.
- Do not waste your life because of the problem you are facing. You have the choice to fix every problem.
- You should accept the fact that you can never change what already happened.
- Do not do things you are not sure of what will happen.

After the realization, Eli tried to follow the nine realizations as his guideline for his life.

He used his life to help others not experience what he experienced.

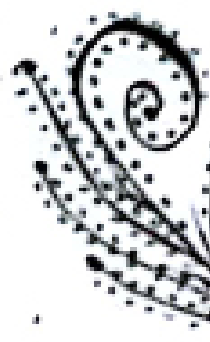
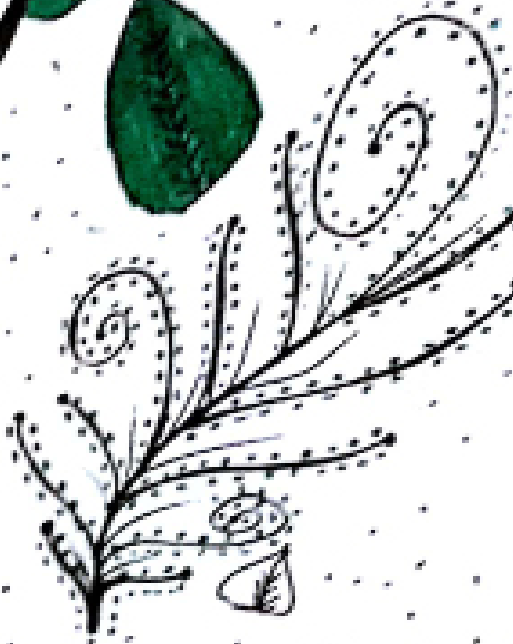


The

CHILD

can

attract



A love that will never end I want you
to spent a time with me right now just an
hour I just want to be with you this time.
Someday you'll gonna realize what you did
to me give me a reason why you left me up
and give a two things that you unwanted
me to do never be an abstract of a person
who will hurt me many times just be what
you are and tell what you want everyone
wanted to be loved by a man that who
will care for me I am andrei whistler the
woman who loved a man who saved me in
the middle of the of an abstract

by Michi Hany Ayessa dela Rosa



GOOD MORNING, AND HELLO TO EVERYONE, I AM HERE TO REPRESENT
TO YOU MY DARLING ANDREI WHISTLER AT HER 18TH BIRTHDAY



I'VE NEVER FEEL, AND IT SUNG IN MY
MIND, THAT I CANNOT BLAME THEM,
I WILL FIGHT FOR THE REST OF MY
LIFE,

IN THE MIDDLE OF AN
ABSTRACT IS THE FEELING
THAT I'VE EVER DREAM I FEEL
I'M NOT ALONE IN THIS HOUSE?
IT IS SOMEONE'S BAD SPIRIT IN
HERE; I HAVE THE WEIRDEST
LIFE ALL OVER THE WORLD, I
LOVE THAT EVERY MORNING I WAKE
I ALWAYS REMEMBER THE THINGS I
LEARN WHEN I WAS IN MY HIGH
SCHOOL DAYS

I WILL NEVER BE AFRAID TO
FIGHT FOR MY LOVE, I AM ANDREI
WHISTLER I WILL SHOW MY LOVE
IN HIM, MY LOVE MATTHEW
THURSDAY

MATTHEW IS MY FIRST LOVE
I AM NOT AFRAID IN HIM, I JUST
FEEL BETTER WHEN HE APPROACHED
ME THAT CAN I BE HIS BEST FRIEND
AFTER THAT SCENARIO IT MAKES ME
LIKE I AM BLESSED PERSON THAT I
NEVER HAD 'MATTHEW IN MY LIFE
HE SAVED ME IN A ACCIDENT, IN
THAT FEELING

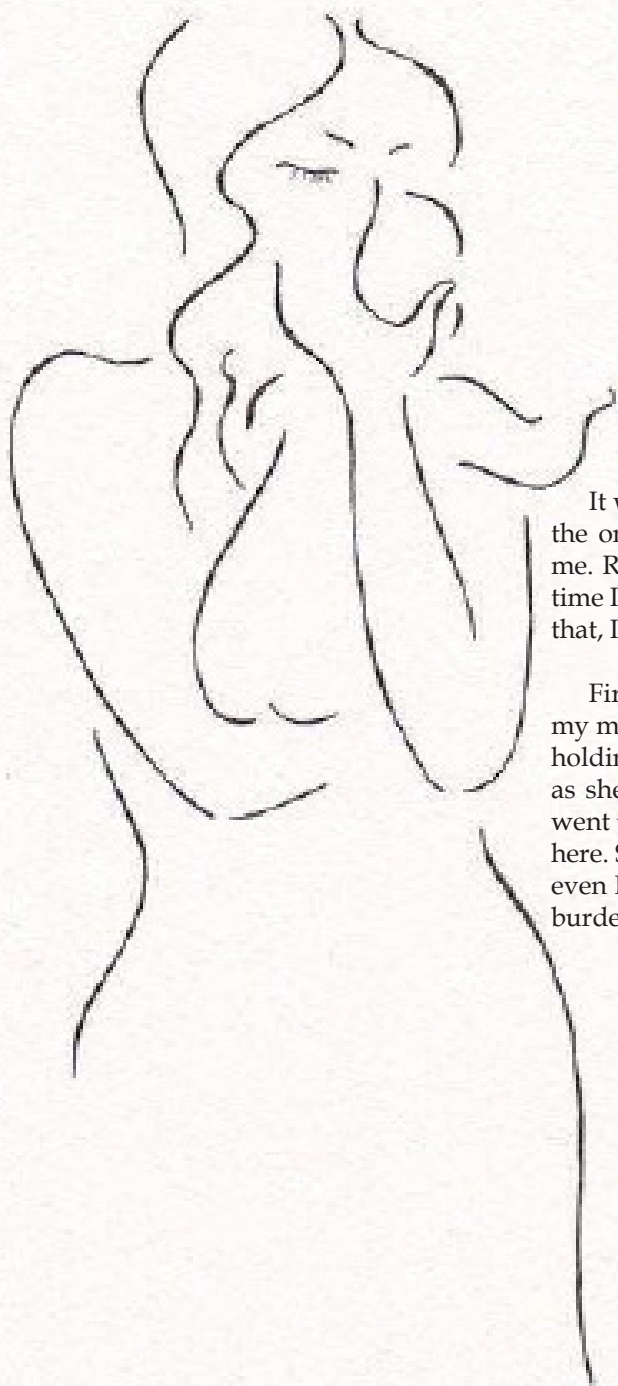
WHEN I WOKE UP IT WAS A
HAPPY DAY I ALWAYS SEE A
BRIGHTNESS IN EVERYWAY I
WALK IN THE WORLD I'VE BEEN
BEFORE IT USE ME LIKE I AM IN THE
DARK SIDE OF BEING A WOMAN I
JUST WALK, ALTHOUGH THEY SHOUT
AT ME, THEY LAUGH AT ME, I JUST
TAKING IT, BUT INSIDE OF ME IT IS
JUST LIKE, I OWE ME AND IT SIMPLY I
THINK I WOKE UP IN THE MIDDLE OF
AN ABSTRACT

ALL OF A SUDDEN, I THINK I'M IN
THE DARKEST NIGHT I DREAMED,
BUT HOW CAN I LEFT IN THIS
SITUATION? IT IS THE WORST LIFE

MATTHEW LOVES ME VERY MUCH
BUT AS A "FRIEND" HOW ABOUT
ME I LOVED HIM I'VE NEVER FELT
IN LOVE BUT THIS IS THE TIME THAT
I WILL NEVER CHANGE MY MIND I
JUST WANT TO BE IN HIS LIFE AS HIS
FRIEND FOREVER I WILL NOT
ASSUME THAT HE LOVES ME I WILL
TAKE IT FOREVER AS A FRIEND AND
IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ABSTRACT.

BENTO BOX

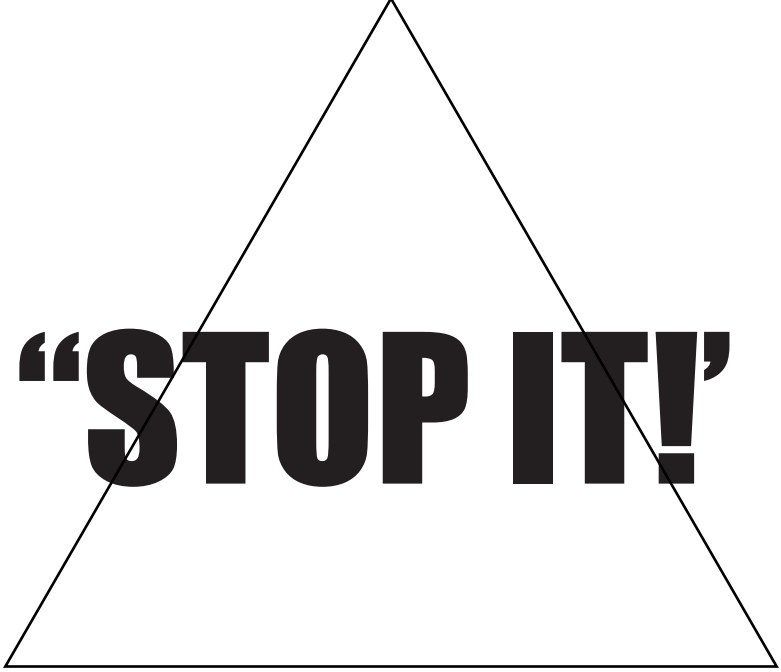
by Joan Salaria



It was back when I was in college; I lost the one and lonely person who cared for me. Regrets still coming back to me every time I close my eyes, I shouldn't have done that, I was stupid, a coward you might say.

First period was finished when I saw my mother wandering around the campus holding a bento box. Her eyes brightened as she saw me. I quickened my pace and went to her. I never really wanted her to be here. She had a burn on the side of her face even I was embarrassed for her. She was a burden.

"Mom, I thought I've already made it clear that you can't come here" I grabbed her hand and whispered angrily at her with a stern look. Then, I shifted my sight to the box she's holding. I instantly swatted the box to the floor. "I don't need you and your food." With that I quickly ran away leaving her picking up the slices of apples. Later that afternoon, I saw her with the same outfit sitting by the bench. I stomped my foot to her and pulled her to the corner, shouted: "Mom! You're being such a pain in the ass! Go home!" I turned around and started walking away she followed, "Darling, my darling"



"STOP IT!"

"But I,"

Without thinking, I pushed her. That's when I realized, we were in a crossroad.

People were circling us, holding their phone videoing, picturing, and calling. I was struck hard; there lies my mother, head full of blood dripping down to the cemented road.

Sirens were heard everywhere.

I was still standing in the position I was in earlier, still can't process what just happened. The ambulance came and took her to the vehicle, I was with her. I see her soulless eyes with droplets of tears coming out. Shaking with all my might, shouting "Mom come on!" She gave me a smile, an assuring smile. How could she give me

that smile when she's dying? The endless streams of my tears kept coming out of my eyes, I feel like falling.

We reached the hospital and she was taken to the ER, I was sitting outside the room praying to God hoping she would be fine. It was one of the most intense prayers I've ever had, "God, please, please save my mother." I was like a man lost in the idle of the sea not knowing what to do, I realized, I was being too selfish, I didn't really appreciated her. It was just hours ago, she was smiling to me and doing just fine.

But God gave me my punishment,

"Always love your mother because you will never get another one."

DAWN GUARD

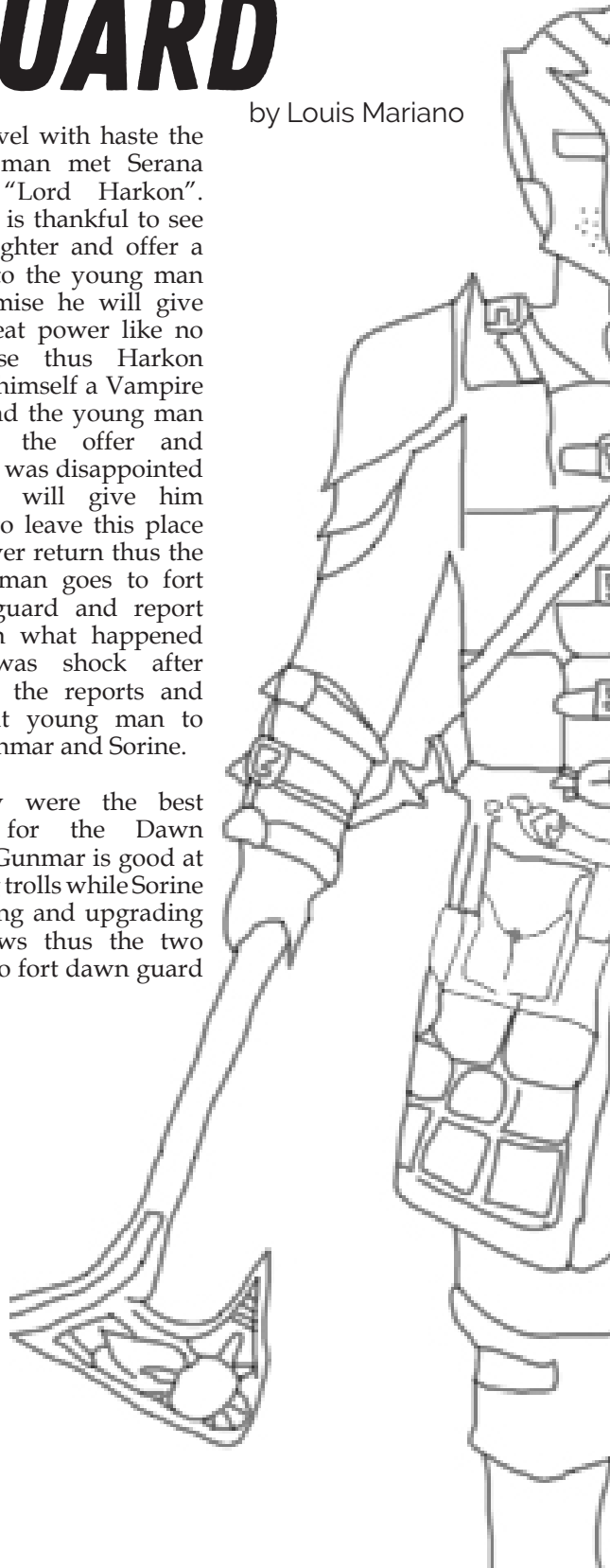
by Louis Mariano

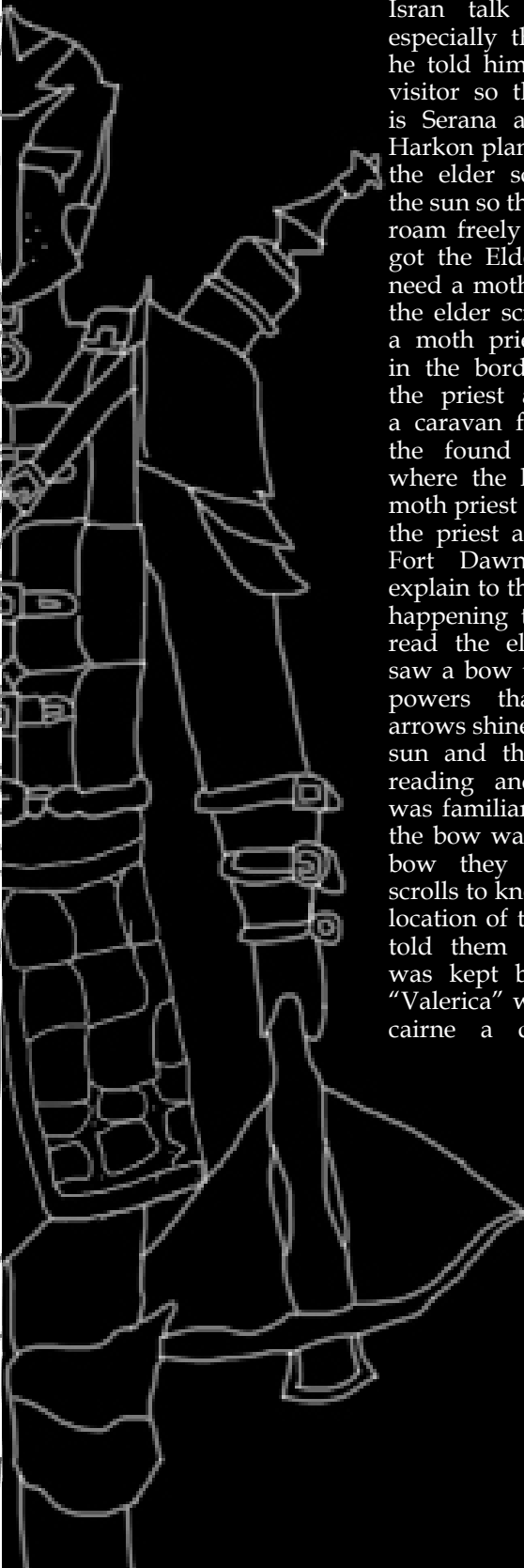
A young man heard a rumour of a vampire hunters and yet he did not believe of such stories one day the young man wandered in the street of Riverwood when a three vampire shows in front of gates the guards tried to attack the blood sucking demons while the guards fighting the vampire a crossbow bolt shot to the chest of the vampire and bled to death the young man was shock and the man who shot the vampire came to him and ask him to join the dawn guards a vampire hunters and the young man accept to join and vampire hunters told him go to fort dawn guard west of "Riften" and so does the young man travel after a long travel the young man speak to the leader of dawn guard "Isran".

He told him to go to a cave there's a report that a vampire activity going on that cave thus the young man travel fearlessly in the depths of the cave he found a girl which is a vampire and has an elder scrolls in her back name "Serana" and she explain that she's a member of a pure blooded vampire and she needed to go to Castle Volkihar north of dawnstar thus the

two travel with haste the young man met Serana father "Lord Harkon". Harkon is thankful to see his daughter and offer a choice to the young man he promise he will give him great power like no one else thus Harkon turned himself a Vampire Lord and the young man refused the offer and Harkon was disappointed but he will give him mercy to leave this place and never return thus the young man goes to fort dawn guard and report to Isran what happened Isran was shock after hearing the reports and ask that young man to talk Gunmar and Sorine.

They were the best assets for the Dawn Guard Gunmar is good at training trolls while Sorine at forging and upgrading crossbows thus the two comes to fort dawn guard





Isran talk to the three especially the young man he told him that there's a visitor so they see which is Serana and talk about Harkon plans they will use the elder scrolls to block the sun so that vampire can roam freely luckily Serana got the Elder Scrolls they need a moth priest to read the elder scrolls Isran saw a moth priest passing by in the borders they track the priest and they saw a caravan full of corpse's the found a not which where the location of the moth priest thus the rescue the priest and go back to Fort Dawn guard they explain to the priest what's happening thus the priest read the elder scrolls he saw a bow that has divine powers that can shoot arrows shine bright like the sun and the priest finish reading and rest Serana was familiar with the bow the bow was called Uriel's bow they need another scrolls to know where's the location of the bow Serana told them the last scroll was kept by her mother "Valerica" which is in soul cairne a daedric world

ruled by Molag Bal daedric prince of Domination and Enslavement of mortals thus they go to the back of castle Volkihar which is they find the portal to Soul cairne and saw Valerica and help Serana and the young man

They finally acquire the scroll and go to fort dawn guard sadly the moth priest was blind it is normal to moth priest to be blind by reading the elder scrolls luckily the moth priest mention a place where you can read the elder scrolls located in the west they travel there swiftly and read the scroll they found the location of the bow and travel and claim it and go back to the fort and ready themselves to battle to Castle Volkihar while Isran and the other battles the vampire the two find lorkan and stop Lorkan to his evil schemes Lorkan is too powerful being a vampire lord thus the use the bow to kill Lorkan the young man draw the bow while Serana distract Lorkan thus the young man fires to the heart of Lorkan and a light explode uppon Lorkan and weakened the fighting was ended and Lorkan talk to the two and turned into anshes the young man told Serana "Im sorry but it has to end" Serana feel relieved and the two must part ways and Serana told the young man if you needed me I'll be at fort Dawn guard thus the young man adventures continues.

What is your name?

by Jestine Saira Villar

"KRRRRRRRR..." cries of my alarm clock filled the room pulling my eyes wide open which signals another day, another battle. Every ring is a reminder of how I can't fight anymore, of how much I just want to lose to it all. "Here goes another day again!" I said to myself while I open the door out of my room. The smell of dried fish that my mother cooks for us every morning for breakfast welcomed me as I stepped out while she was currently quarrelling with my father who, just like he normally does, went home last night drunk. Mom was holding and cradling my baby brother who was crying profusely, just adding to the mind-aching noise already surrounding our small house which makes it even more unbearable. "Good morning to you, too." I

mumbled as I went straight to the bathroom instead of eating breakfast and prepared for my classes at the local college.

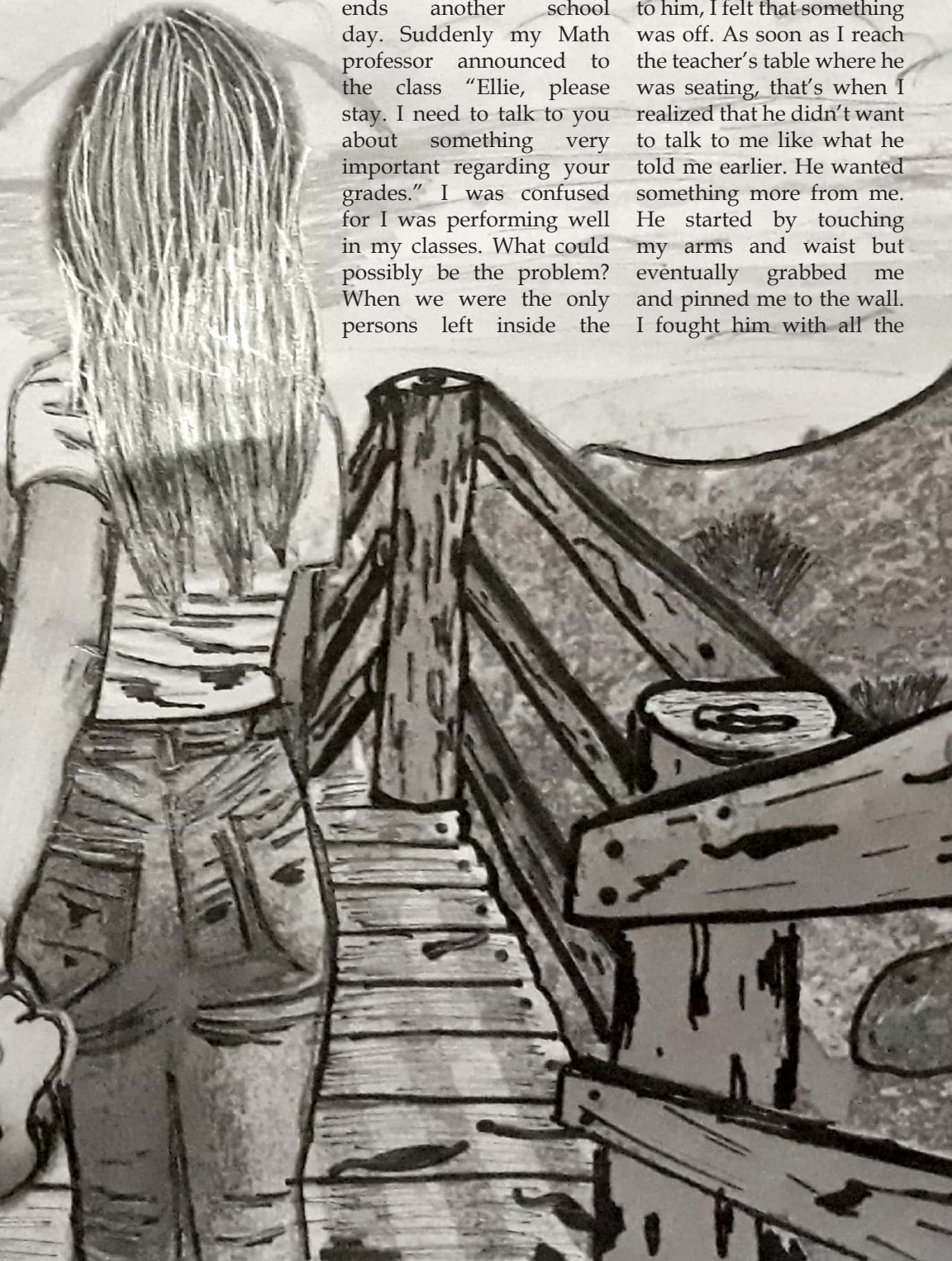
I was already out the front door when I remembered I haven't gotten my allowance for the week so I hurriedly went back to my mother and ask her. But since she was already in a bad mood due to the morning argument with my father, she suddenly snapped and slapped my right cheek. I didn't even care if it was intentional or not. I just wanted to get away immediately. I ran out the door. I can still feel the stinging pain from my mother's hand, not just on my face but my heart as well. No tears were falling from my eyes. "What's new?" I said to myself.



The classes at the college went on as they usually do until my last subject came.

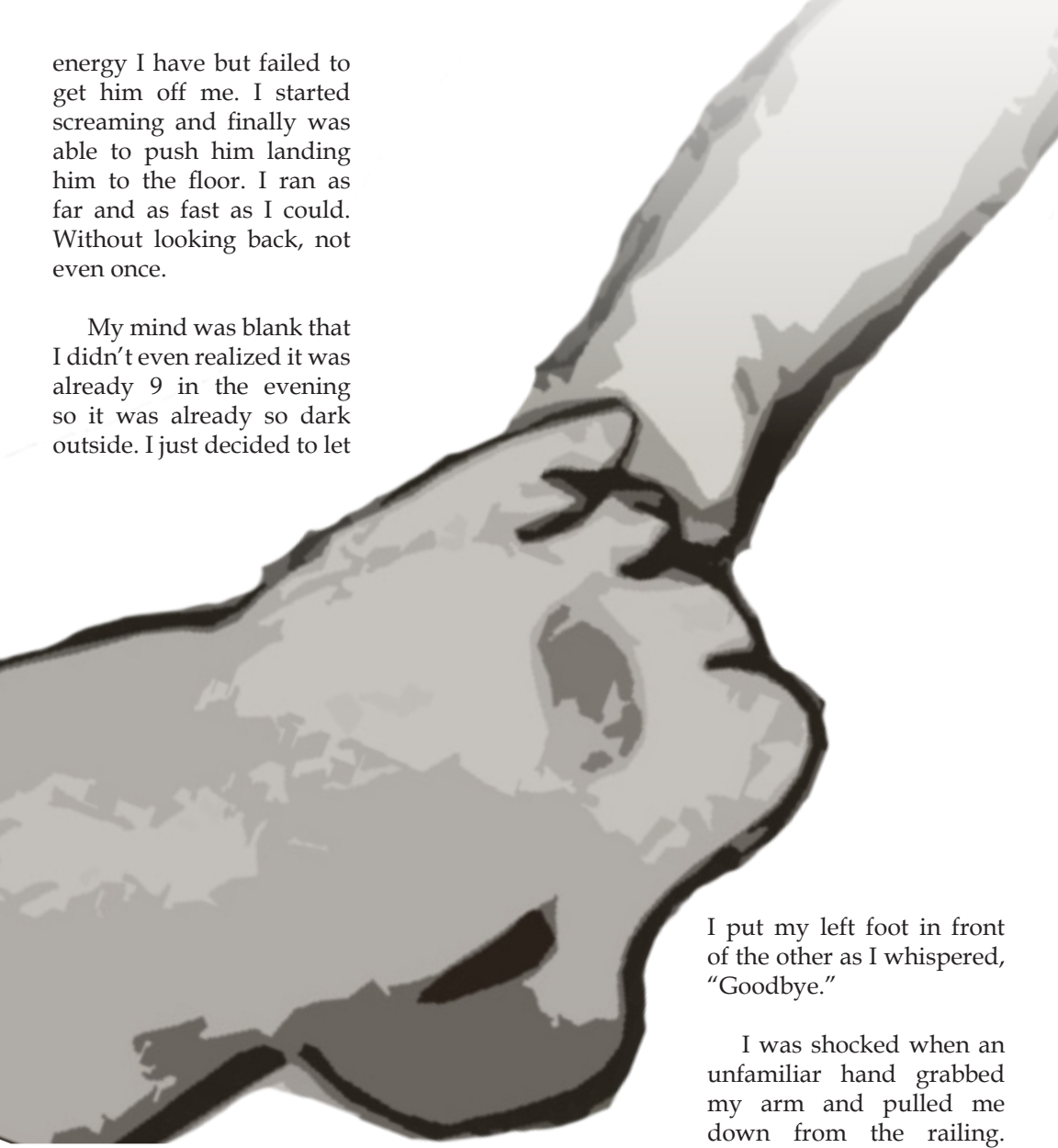
The bell rang which ends another school day. Suddenly my Math professor announced to the class "Ellie, please stay. I need to talk to you about something very important regarding your grades." I was confused for I was performing well in my classes. What could possibly be the problem? When we were the only persons left inside the

room, while I was walking to him, I felt that something was off. As soon as I reach the teacher's table where he was seating, that's when I realized that he didn't want to talk to me like what he told me earlier. He wanted something more from me. He started by touching my arms and waist but eventually grabbed me and pinned me to the wall. I fought him with all the



energy I have but failed to get him off me. I started screaming and finally was able to push him landing him to the floor. I ran as far and as fast as I could. Without looking back, not even once.

My mind was blank that I didn't even realized it was already 9 in the evening so it was already so dark outside. I just decided to let



I put my left foot in front of the other as I whispered, "Goodbye."

I was shocked when an unfamiliar hand grabbed my arm and pulled me down from the railing. As he was helping me get down, I felt all the energy leave my body and started feeling nauseous. I tried hard to get a glimpse of his blurry face but failed because I then lost my consciousness.

'KRRRRR....' Startled, I got up from my bed with my eyes wide open as I hear the familiar sound of my alarm

my feet take me anywhere because my mind was running so fast with so many thoughts, I couldn't keep up. Tears were blurring my vision. "Why does it have to be me? Why can't I have a happy family like the others? Why do I still have to wake up each day just to feel hurt and get swallowed by the pain?"

All these questions were bombarding my head when I hit a bridge post. I looked down and wished that the raging waters under the bridge would take all my problems away. "I am so tired. I'm sorry but I can't take it anymore." I climbed the bridge railing, breathed in and prepared myself to say goodbye to everything.

clock. "Was all that just a dream?" said my confused self. I hurriedly went out of the room hoping to get answers from my mother but a familiar face standing in front of me just added to my confusion. "Have me wet before?" a question

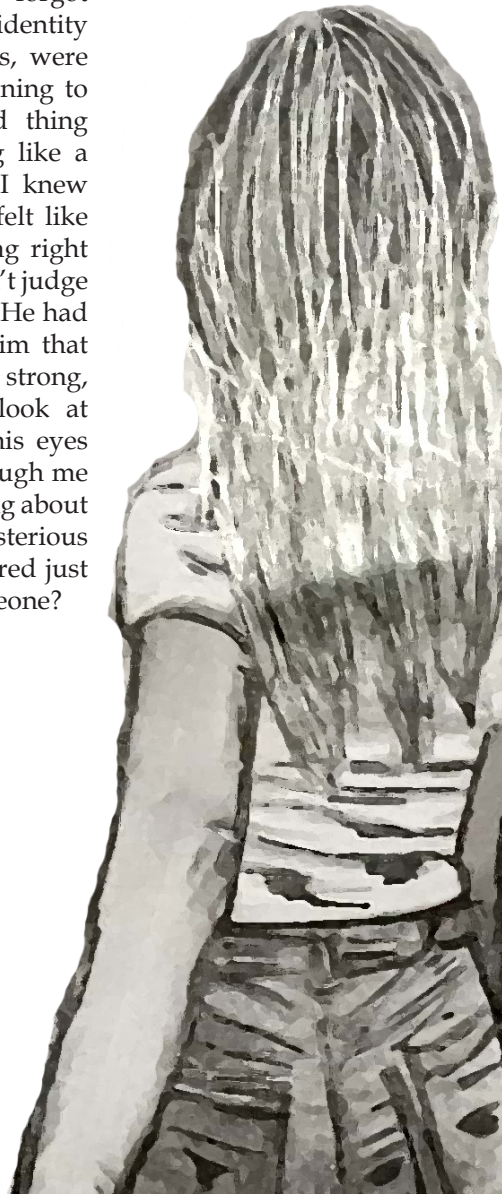
that unconsciously slipped out of my mouth before I can take it back. His eyes were full of concern as he asked me "Are you okay? How are you feeling?" I was scanning his face thoroughly hoping that I would remember who he is

when everything from last night came rushing to me. Every single thing. And my mom uttered as if she was reading what my mind was already telling me, "He saved you last night."

My then surprisingly sober father asked me to sit down with them and talk about what happened last night.

My mom finally asked me the question I was waiting for them to ask me. "Why did you do it?" My tears started falling after trying so hard to keep them in. Where do I start? How do I explain in a way that they can all understand? Can they? But I figured out that I need to tell them. They are my parents, after all. And if anybody can understand me, it's them. So I poured my heart out. Letting all the pain that I've been holding on for so long leave my heart. I was surprised that not even once did they cut me off trying to rationalize their actions. They listened to every word I said as if I was their favourite segment on the radio station they wait for every day. For the very first time, I felt important.

I almost completely forgot that a man, his identity still unknown to us, were sitting with us listening to me. But the weird thing is, he feels nothing like a stranger. It's as if I knew him all my life. It felt like I could say anything right now and he wouldn't judge me. Not even once. He had this aura around him that made you feel safe, strong, loved. He would look at me and feel as if his eyes could see right through me and know everything about me. Who is this mysterious stranger that appeared just when I needed someone?



My mom offered the man to eat dinner with us but he refused because he said he still had something to do back at his house.

So I decided to accompany him to his car parked right outside so that I could personally thank him for saving my life. We went out of the front door and as I opened our old, rusty gate, I finally had the courage to say "Thank you. I wouldn't be here without you. Can I get your number? So I could repay you sometime by treating you to a meal or a coffee maybe?" "Sure!" he answered as he types his digits on my phone. "What's your name again?" I asked as I noticed he forgot to put his name in. "Just use Saviour as my nickname on your phone. The name suits me, doesn't it?" as he winks at me while he steps

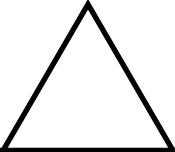
into his car. I waved him goodbye and slept with a happy heart, hoping that tomorrow, finally would be better.

The next few days were surprisingly light and happy. I get up in the morning with excitement for what the day has to offer which was the complete opposite of what felt before. I go through the day with optimism and end it with happiness that I am still with my parents. We're far from a perfect family but things started getting better for all of us. My dad stopped drinking little by little therefore, he seldom

had disagreements with my mom every morning. My mother now had this light aura around her every time despite how tired she is from all the house chores and non-stop taking care of my brother. Started feeling the love that I have been craving for all my life.

A few more days passed and as I was running late for my classes on a Tuesday morning, I screamed as I





bumped into someone standing outside our gate. A familiar set of hands held me steady as I was about to fall flat on my face. I looked up and saw a blurred face as the ray of sun was shining right through my eyes but even then I knew that it was him. It was "Saviour". He pulled me up and I instantly became happy as I looked straight into those eyes. "Did I just save you again?" teasing me. I laughed a little and asked what he was doing here. He answered, "Well you never contacted me so I came here to get that coffee you promised me" while beaming a smile at me. I never noticed this before but he had a face that could calm any storm. He always had that aura around him. "Oh right! Meet me later at the coffee shop near the school and we'll have that coffee." I smiled right back at him. "All right then." I waved goodbye as I went ahead for my classes.



"Later in the afternoon as I was walking out the gate, for some unknown reason, I felt really excited that I was meeting 'Saviour'."

Later in the afternoon as I was walking out the gate, for some unknown reason, I felt really excited that I was meeting "Saviour". I couldn't even focus the whole day because my heart was pumping so loud just by the thought of him. I went inside the coffee shop and looked around searching for that face. And then I saw him. The butterflies inside my stomach multiplied as he waved at me gesturing that I sit with him. He has already ordered coffee for the both of us. "But I thought I was buying you coffee?" I asked him as I was setting down my bag on the chair beside me. "I'm buying today so I could have an excuse to see you more in the future." I could feel my cheeks flush upon hearing his words.

We spent a couple of hours talking about life as if we have been friends since birth. We didn't even notice that it was already dark outside so we decided to head home and continue our chit chat the next time we meet. He was offering to carry my bag for me and he was reaching for it when I saw a scar on the top of his hands. I got curious and asked him as I held them, "Where is this from? How did you get these scars?" He looked shocked that I asked as he answered, "You know. Teenage carelessness." And we went home.

Weeks have passed and Saviour visits our house often, bringing food and snacks for me and my family. We started spending more time together. We texted every minute of the day. We would meet each other and

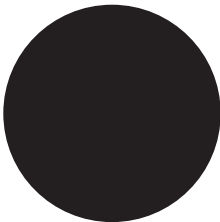
hang out. Being with him always made me feel safe. It's as if nothing bad can happen to me. And there's this thing that he would always tell me randomly, "Always remember that no matter how big or small your mistake is, I will always be able to forgive you. All you have to do is be honest with me and ask for my forgiveness. I will never ever forget you even if you do. I will always be here for you even if you think I'm not. I am who I am". This gets me confused and every time I ask him to explain it to me, he would just smile and shrug.

One Friday, me and my group decided to go over and stay the night at a friend's house to finish a school project that was due next week. So I texted Saviour and asked if we could meet at our favourite coffee shop so he could accompany me to my friend's house since I had to bring a lot of my stuff over that's needed for the project. I was walking as fast as I could as I saw the stoplight signalling pedestrians that we have a few seconds left to cross to the other side of the road where Saviour was standing and is already waiting for me. 10 seconds. I still had 10 seconds to cross so I took bigger and faster steps. I had enough time to reach the other end of the road, I thought to myself. But as I was in the middle of the pedestrian lane, one of the books that we needed the most in our project fell from my bag so I reached down and hurriedly tried to pick it up. 5 seconds. But as I looked up, I was very confused as people were yelling at me but I can't understand a word of what

they're saying. 4 seconds. They look panicked. But then my eyes met Saviour's. Like the other strangers, he was waving his hands at me so hard that it looks like they were about to come off. 3 seconds. He looked at me again but this time, he was running so fast at my direction as if he was trying to reach the finish line at a marathon. 2 seconds. Bright lights flashed at me and that's when I realized that a vehicle was coming at me but it was already too late. 1 second. I looked up as the green light turned red and everything went black.

I opened my eyes and the next thing I knew was I was in a hospital, bandages all over my body and my chest feeling so painful. My vision was still a bit blurry as I see a silhouette of a woman standing over the edge of my bed. A few blinks later, I realized it was my mom. She was crying so hard, she didn't even notice that I'm awake. "Mom?" I could see the relief she felt upon hearing my voice. "You're alive! You're awake!" she says as she walks to my side and lifting her hand to caress my face. "What happened?" "You don't remember?" I tried to recall what happened before I got here and then I remembered about the image of the car coming at me. "Accident?" I asked her. "Yes honey. You got hit by a car as you were crossing the road." "Where's dad?" "He's arranging some paperwork."

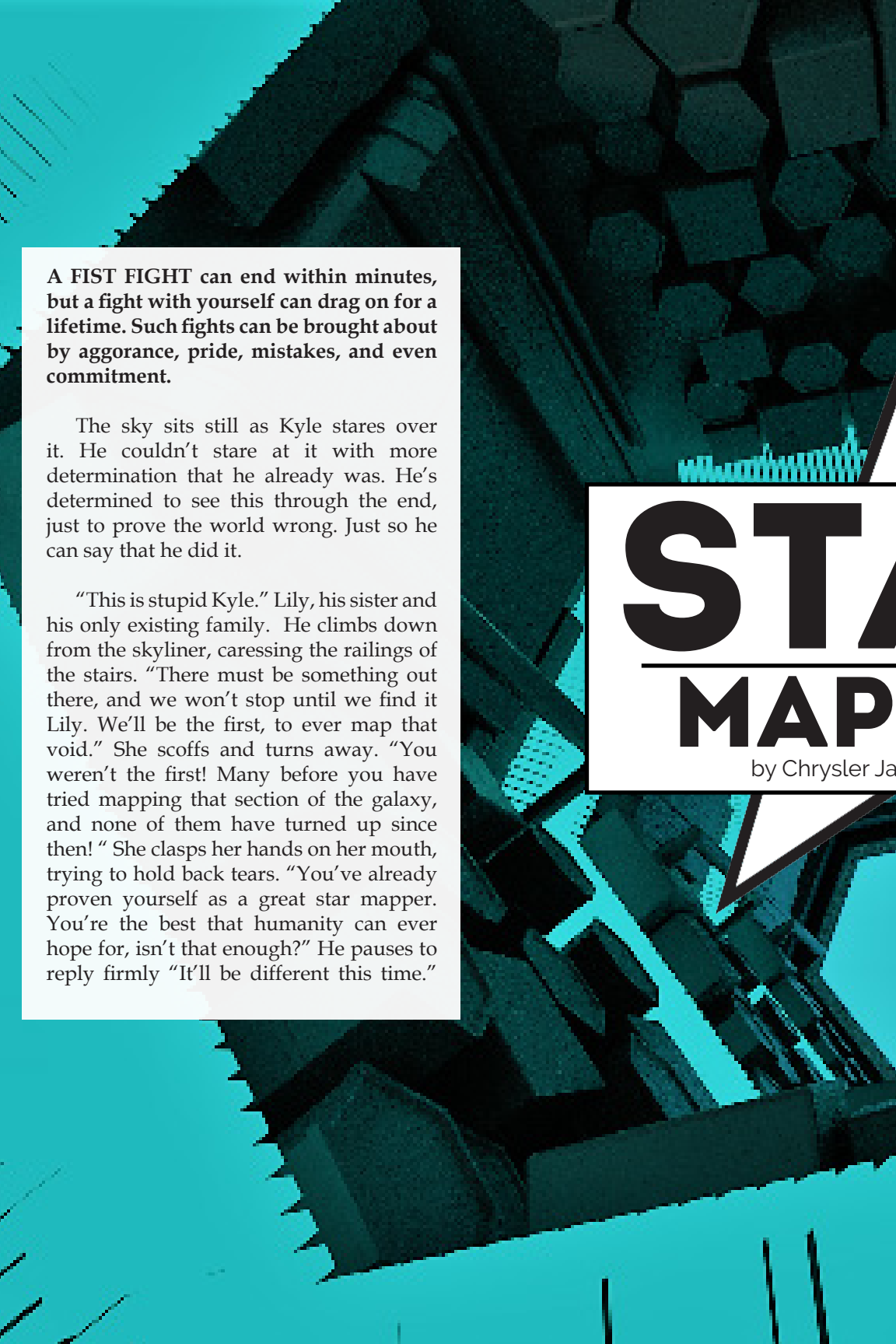
Then I realized who I was supposed to meet. I remembered the look on his face as he rushed towards me to save me. "How about Saviour? I can't wait to tease him about how



"That despite all of your mistakes, your sins, your shortcomings, he will always forgive you and that he will always be with you to watch."

he wasn't able to save me this time." Mom's efforts of hiding the grim look on her face all failed. "Mom, where's Saviour?" No answer. "Mom! Can't you hear me? Where is he? I was about to meet him. Please! Call him and tell him that I'm fine!" I was almost shouting this time but my mom just continued crying. I felt that something was wrong but I didn't what to admit it. "Mom! What's wrong with you? Tell me! Where is he?!" "Ellie, your condition after the incident was so bad that you needed surgery. You needed a heart transplant because if not, you wouldn't make it tonight." my mom explained. "What has that got to do with Saviour? You're not making any sense!" A nurse entered the room as if on cue to give the answers to my questions that my mom couldn't give me. "Mrs. Vergara, I came here to tell you that we already know the name of your daughter's donor. He was the person that brought her here, am I correct?" Tears started falling uncontrollably. "Ellie" my mom said "Saviour gave his heart to you so that you could survive. He told us that he will do anything for you to live even if it meant sacrificing his own life. That despite all of your mistakes, your sins, your shortcomings, he will always forgive you and that he will always be with you to watch you and protect you. And that he hopes you never forget about him and you will always love him as much as he will always love you." The nurse continued, "Upon our research, his name was JESUS CHRIST."

THE END.



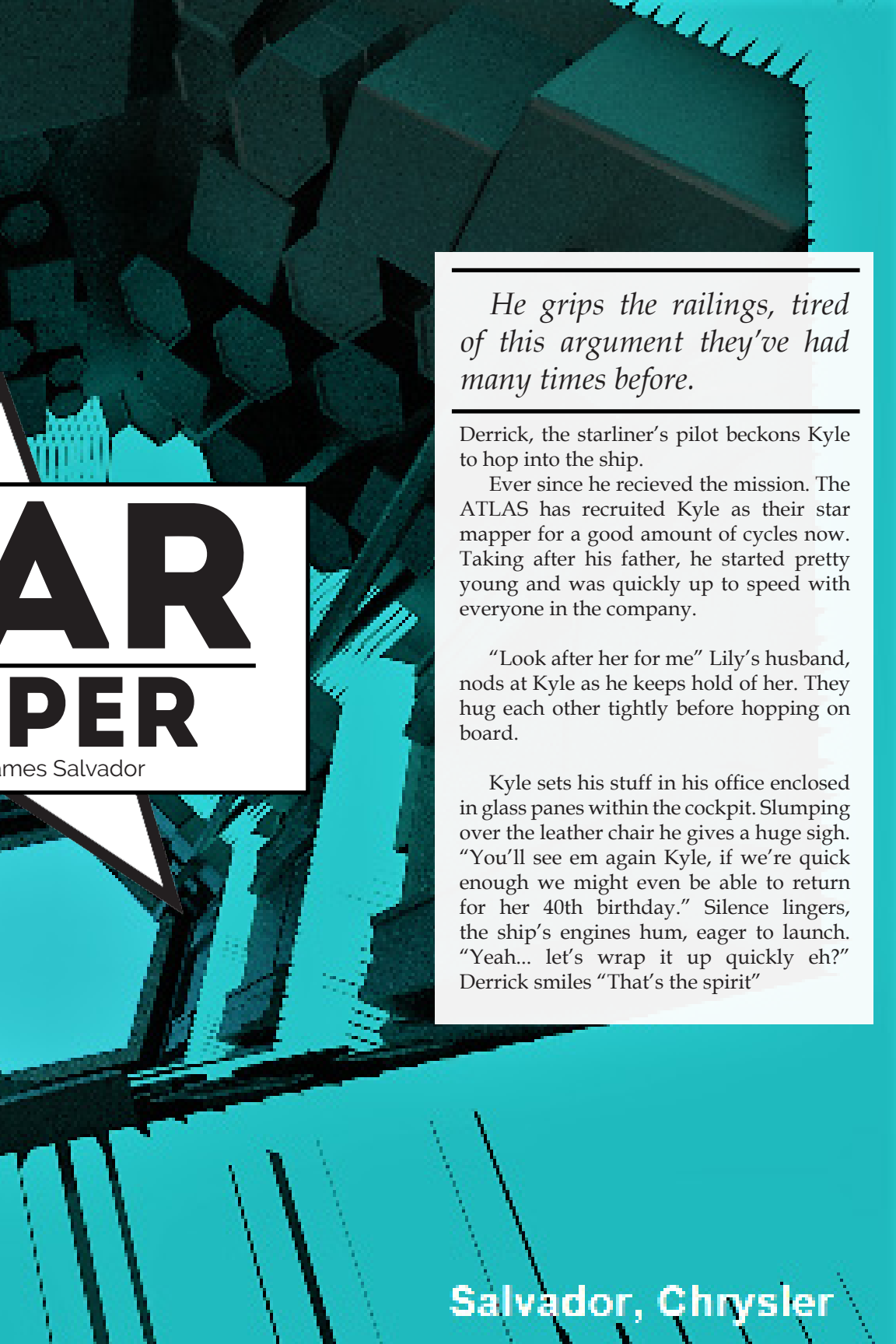
A FIST FIGHT can end within minutes, but a fight with yourself can drag on for a lifetime. Such fights can be brought about by aggorance, pride, mistakes, and even commitment.

The sky sits still as Kyle stares over it. He couldn't stare at it with more determination that he already was. He's determined to see this through the end, just to prove the world wrong. Just so he can say that he did it.

"This is stupid Kyle." Lily, his sister and his only existing family. He climbs down from the skyliner, caressing the railings of the stairs. "There must be something out there, and we won't stop until we find it Lily. We'll be the first, to ever map that void." She scoffs and turns away. "You weren't the first! Many before you have tried mapping that section of the galaxy, and none of them have turned up since then!" She clasps her hands on her mouth, trying to hold back tears. "You've already proven yourself as a great star mapper. You're the best that humanity can ever hope for, isn't that enough?" He pauses to reply firmly "It'll be different this time."

STAR MAP

by Chrysler Ja



STAR MAPPER

James Salvador

He grips the railings, tired of this argument they've had many times before.

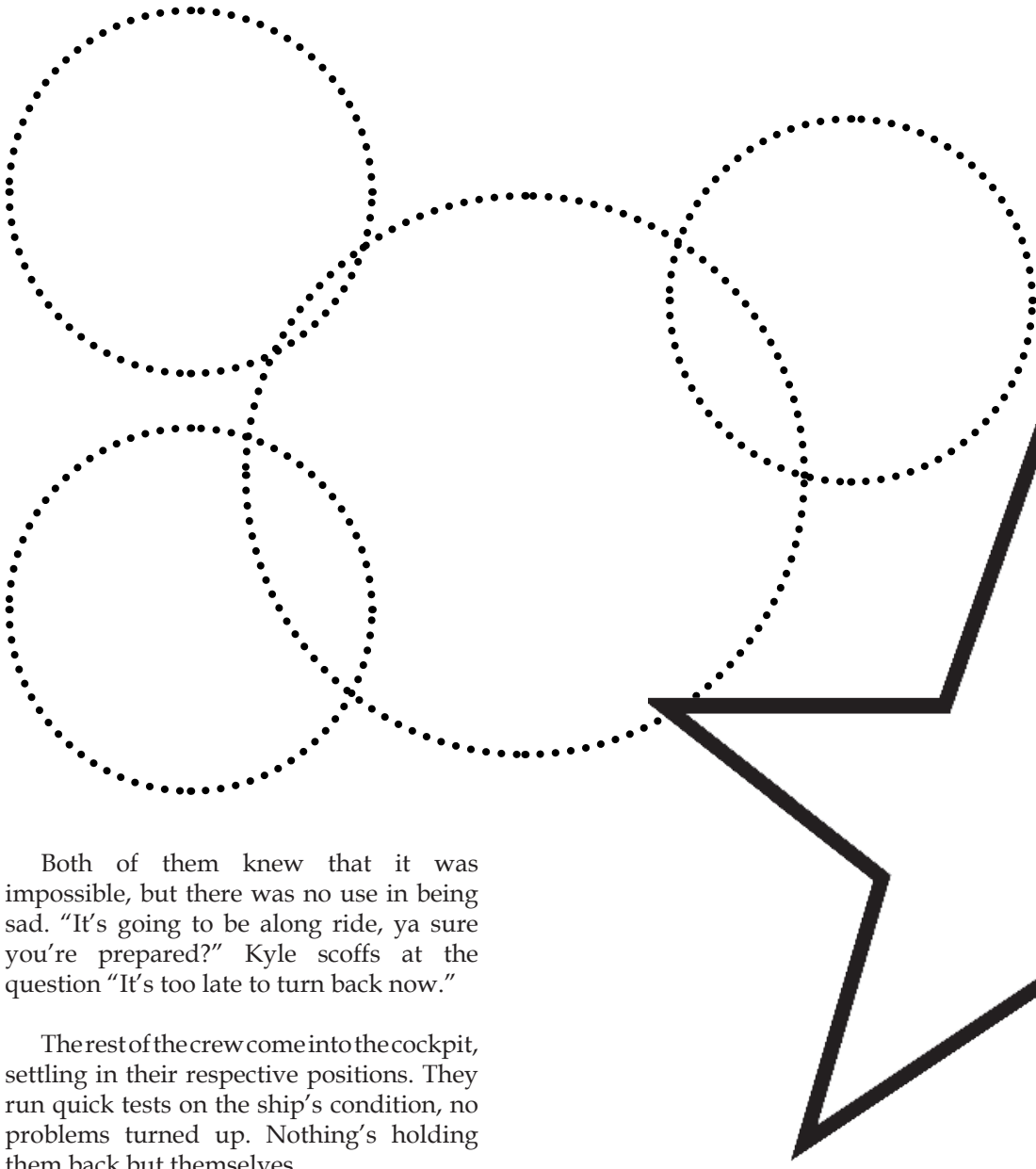
Derrick, the starliner's pilot beckons Kyle to hop into the ship.

Ever since he recieved the mission. The ATLAS has recruited Kyle as their star mapper for a good amount of cycles now. Taking after his father, he started pretty young and was quickly up to speed with everyone in the company.

"Look after her for me" Lily's husband, nods at Kyle as he keeps hold of her. They hug each other tightly before hopping on board.

Kyle sets his stuff in his office enclosed in glass panes within the cockpit. Slumping over the leather chair he gives a huge sigh. "You'll see em again Kyle, if we're quick enough we might even be able to return for her 40th birthday." Silence lingers, the ship's engines hum, eager to launch. "Yeah... let's wrap it up quickly eh?" Derrick smiles "That's the spirit"

Salvador, Chrysler



Both of them knew that it was impossible, but there was no use in being sad. "It's going to be along ride, ya sure you're prepared?" Kyle scoffs at the question "It's too late to turn back now."

The rest of the crew come into the cockpit, settling in their respective positions. They run quick tests on the ship's condition, no problems turned up. Nothing's holding them back but themselves.

The crew turns by the doorway as they hear heavy footsteps. Walking with a gentle but heavy pace, a well built man enters the cockpit. His hair neatly cut, a brave look is painted on his face. His badge says enough of his rank. "Captain Doyle" The picture of a captain is seen in him head to his boots. "This mission is important to humanity gentlemen. Our mission is to map that cold spot. A hologram of a map appears forth, showing a map of stars,

numerous in number except for a blank spot in the middle.

"This void right here has intimidated ATLAS for generations. Untill now, we are not here to fail. We're here to bring back home honor and victory. We'll be accompanied by two skywolves, it probably won't be necessary but you never know at this time of age."

Captain Doyle rests on his chair, provided with a good view of where they

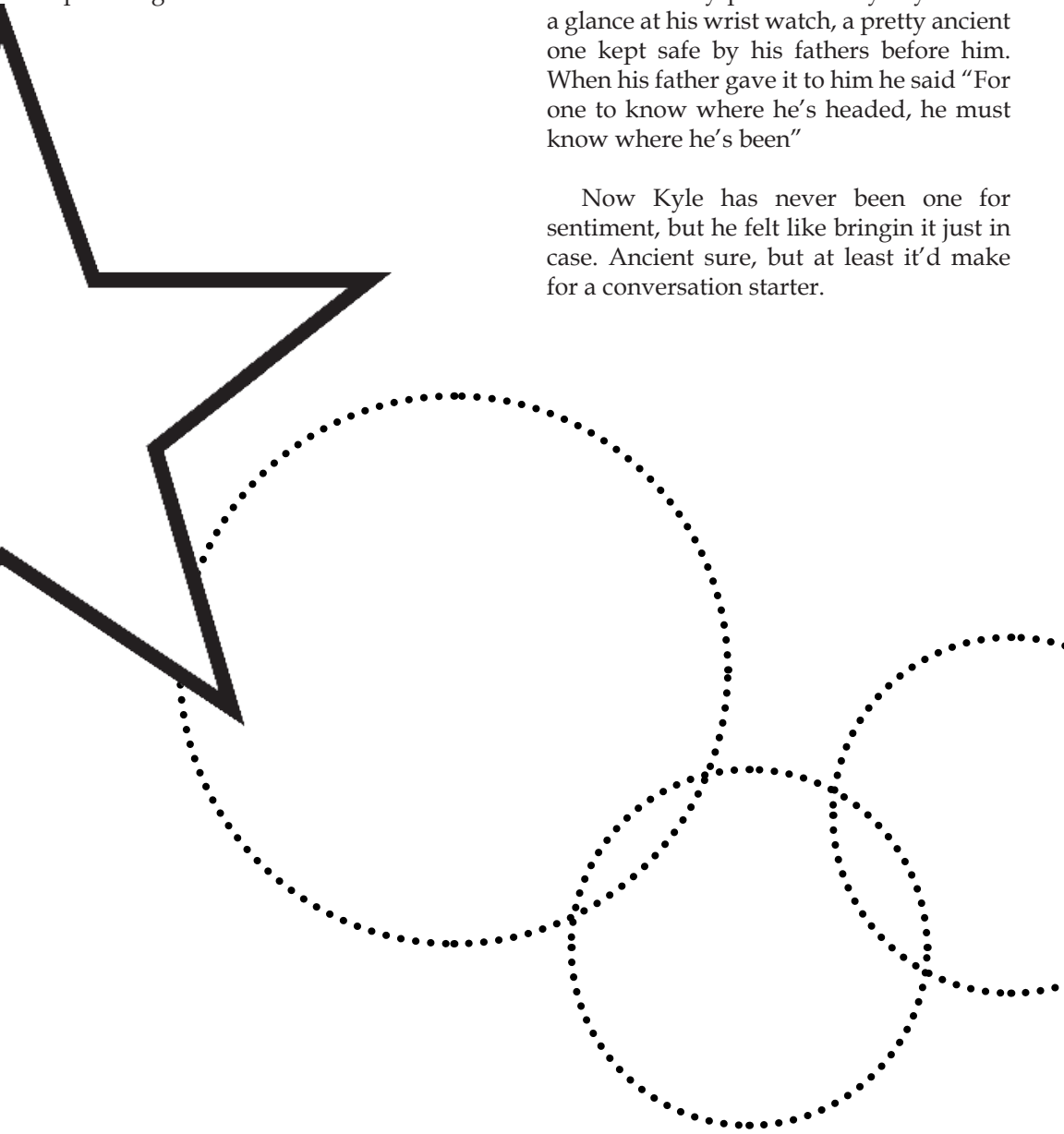
are headed. "Let's just hope we can take it before the others do." Others, so the legends are true? Extra-terrestrial races exist?

Kyle's eyes darts around the crew whom whisper to one another, stopping as Captain Doyle raises a hand. "We won't be delaying any longer. Rowley, how's the engines?" Rowley taps away at the computer. "Everything's optimized for launch sir." Rowley, an obedient space engineer has never been one for

imperfection. Sharp, and quite beautiful as well. She could get herself any man she wanted. Heard Derrik tried on several occasions to catch her attention but never succeeded. "Derrik, how's our course?" Derrik with a smile and a feat, swipes a thumbs up as he replies "All clear, and waitin for your signal."

The Captain turns his look to the beyond. "Commence launch" Slowly the ship whirs into action, undocking from the station they proceed to fly. Kyle takes a glance at his wrist watch, a pretty ancient one kept safe by his fathers before him. When his father gave it to him he said "For one to know where he's headed, he must know where he's been"

Now Kyle has never been one for sentiment, but he felt like bringin it just in case. Ancient sure, but at least it'd make for a conversation starter.



ALL SYSTEMS CHECKED WE ARE ON OUR WAY BOYS

Derrick spins his chair, helping himself to a stretch. "Imma go and get myself some coffee. He exits the cockpit. Kyle sets his hard drive of maps on his desk, and combs his hair with his hands. Desperate for a feeling of relief, he's been pretty stressed as of late. He sighs, then sees the Captain staring his way. A smile on his face. Kyle rests his elbows on his desk to think.

"Master star mapper is it?" Kyle shoots a confused look. "Sorry Captain?" He raises a hand to point. "Your family has quite the reputation. Some even say that aspiring star mappers who aren't of the Newheart family have don't have a chance to be hired by ATLAS.

"Ah... Well that's simply absurd, I'm sure you can find a better star mapper out there who isn't of my family." He turns his head. "If there was, you wouldn't be here now would ye? Star mapping since you was fifteen? I know being humble is one thing, but soldier give yourself and your fathers at least a bit of credit"

The Captain chuckles and Kyle smiles back meekly. Kyle notices Rowley looking their way, she then snaps back at her screen as soon as he does. "Rowley's work also deserves a bit of credit, with all due respect sir. I imagine the space engineering profession to be something more praise worthy than my field." The Captain returns to a straight posture on his chair with a thoughtful face. "Well, we made sure to get the best of the best for this mission. Credits are given to those who deserve it."

Kyle then pardons himself out of the

cockpit, deciding to help himself with some coffee as well as to tour the ship. The ship's interior fits the standard design many of other ATLAS's skyships, with a few exceptions. A room is sealed off from his level of clearance. Usually he's had full access to every room in ATLAS's ships, naturally this has made him curious. He would take a closer look, but the thought of the Captain getting angry at him quickly evaporated his will to do so. He keeps on walking, occasionally greeting some of the workers in the ship.

Finally he reaches the kitchen and sees Derrick with other familiar faces. One in particular stood out of the crowd, a tall black figure stood up and approached Kyle. Towering over him, his face neutral of any emotions. "You owe me." Kyle sighs and places his hands on his hips. "Sorry Vier, on duty right now" Kyle says as he walks over by the coffee machine. "Aw come on Kyle, you always say that when i ask for a game" He turns to Vier with a smirk, cup in hand. "I mean it this time."

"Aren't ye the "top" star-mapper there is this galaxy has ta offer? Surely you have the luxury of playing atleast one game." Kyle scoffs at this as he stares at his cup, whirling it deep in thoughts. "Have you seen the Captain? Wouldn't want him to see me slackin off right as we left the station."

Vier sits back at his spot besides his friends. "Aw you mean Cap'n Doyle? He chill man, been with him since planet Orion." A mission many cycles ago, one where Captain Doyle was still climbing the stair to being a general.

Oddly enough, for a space general he seemed really conservative with his troops this time. For a top general to captain a mission to map the “cold spot” with such little troops really makes you think.

Is he confident enough that we’ll get through this mission without a fleet? The automated doors of the cafeteria gives way to Kyle. Kyle then calls to Vier’s attention, and asked “How do you think this mission will go?” Vier pauses, thumbing his fingers. “Under Cap’n Doyle’s care? I think there’s no safer hands we could be in. The mission will go just fine as long as you do your job.” Kyle then exits the cafeteria and says “You won’t have to worry about me slacking off.” as the automated doors close. Kyle then begins to head for his quarters as he hears that his belonging have been moved there. He swipes his ID by the scanner and is greeted by a dimly lit luxurios bedroom.

The door closes behind him and Kyle places his cup by the tv set. He then lies by the bed and sighs. Unable to shake off ATLAS, the mission’s success, and Lily from his mind. He rubs his face, and stares at the ceiling.

“Aria, display M-9068C6.” A beep sounds off as the tv comes to life with a star map of their course. Still billions of light years away from destination.

Kyle sits upright to analyze the map, drawn by his ancestors. He then stands to approach the screen. He lays his fingers over the cold spot in the map. His thoughts interrupted by beeping. An announcement

being made by the captain. “Our scheduled hyper sleep will be commenced in an hour, prepare what you need.”

Kyle stares at the speaker at the top right side of his room, switching to his luggage.

Kyle scrambles to grab his uniform tailored for hyper sleeps, white in fabric, fits his build nicely. He hears a knock on the door, quickly he moves his luggage in a corner and walks to the door.

Immediately he is greeted by a hover steward, meal in hand. “Dinner is served.” Kyle takes the tray and politely thanks the steward. He helps himself to one last meal before hyper sleep.

Hyper sleeps can be something hard to get used to at first, but since Kyle has been mapping the galaxies since he was young so he doesn’t even bother to think anything of it as he used to. He steps out of his room and begins to head to the hyper sleep room, soon the ship’s interior light begins to dim to a warm yellow light, signifying that the ship has been set to low power consumption mode.

He walks into the room with the cre already inside, some pacing about, some chattering. Kyle stands before his pod, making sure it’s functional like he’s supposed to.

Eventually everybody hops into their pods, sealed tightly they fall into a deep sleep.

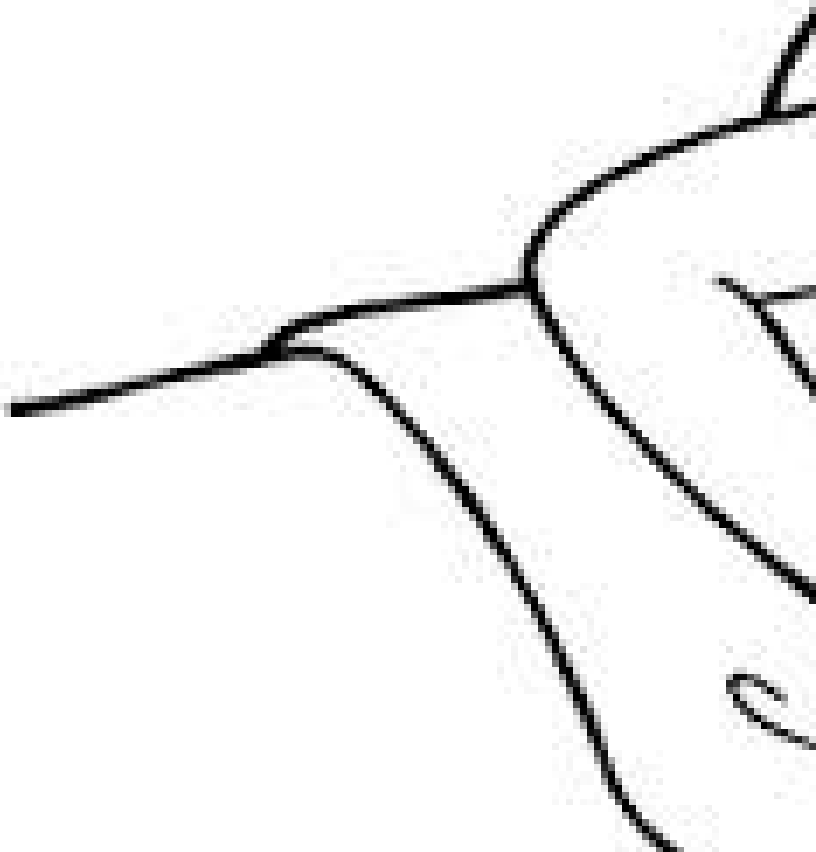


I AM NIKKI, I am a girl that loves to study, read books, listen to music whenever I'm alone. I never had friends for I don't trust people. I have never experienced love even from my parents.

17 years ago Therese gave birth to a beautiful and healthy baby girl the baby was named after Therese's mother Nikki. Therese was a businesswoman she was so busy that she was unable to take care of her own daughter.

Nikki's father bailed on them after he knew that he got her mother pregnant. That's why Therese entrusted Nikki to a maid named Helen. Helen took care of Nikki since she's 1 week old. Helen didn't

even take a good care of Nikki she often ignores her whenever she cries and just talk to his boyfriend on her cellphone. It's so sad to know that Nikki cries herself to sleep every night. Therese goes to work at 6:00 in the morning then go home 8:00 in the evening. Therese doesn't even check her daughter, once she got home he goes directly to his office and do paperworks and reports without even checking her baby.



the
LIFE

I dreamt of

by Joshua Pajarin



5

5 years after she was born her mother enrolled her to Blazing Light School, a private school few blocks away from their home. Nikki was so scared to attend school thinking that her teachers and classmates will do the same thing that Helen did to her. But the first day of school came, Nikki can't do anything but to attend her class. Nikki has attended her class, then suddenly the teacher pointed onto her and asked her to introduce herself in front. Nikki stood up and gone to the front of her classmates beside her teacher, " Good morning classmates Good morning Ma'am my name is Nikki" she was shaking as she introduces herself then the teacher asked " Why are you shaking ? Is there anything to be afraid of ? " said the teacher , Nikki was astounded with what teacher said and answered " Nothing Ma'am".

After the class, Helen went to fetch Nikki from school. Once they got home, Helen went directly to her room without helping Nikki to change her clothes and do her homework. After an hour Helen prepared dinner for Nikki and left her alone on the dining table. Another day at school, Helen brought lunch for Nikki.

As Nikki eats her lunch, she sees her classmates fed by their parents. After classes Nikki went home with Helen. Nikki went to her room and lie down her bed thinking about what she saw earlier at the canteen, she asked herself why her parents were not like her classmates' parents. Nikki was crying, longing for a father's love and yearning

for a mother's care. Once again she cried herself to sleep. As she was sleeping, she dreamt of her mother brushing her hair, helping her do her schoolworks and her father driving her to school. Nikki was so happy not knowing that It was just a dream. After she woke up she felt a pressure in her chest, knowing that it was just a dream.

But overtime, Nikki discovered that she has an ability to control her dreams. so for her to feel the warmth of a parents' love , every time she's in her room she sleep and sleep for her to feel loved and cared for. But Nikki keeps feeling sad after she wake up from each sleep so she planned to sleep and never wake up again and live in her dream as if it was her life. And then it happened she slept and never woke up again. She's now living the life that she's been dreaming of. As Nikki was living a life that's full of love and happiness, Helen informed Therese that Nikki haven't gone out of her room for 5 days already. Therese rushed home to check on her daughter but as she tries to open the door of Nikki's room, it's locked. She rushed to her office to get the key for Nikki's room, as she opened the door she saw her daughter lifeless lying in bed smiling as if she was sleeping and dreaming of something. She tried to wake her up but Nikki won't. Therese cried as if it was the end of everything, blaming herself that she didn't take care of her and she should've given her attention and love she needed. But it's too late, Nikki is now happy in her life in her dreams



LOST SOUL

by Kailyn del Rosario

I have Necrophobia. It's the fear of seeing dead people which is a very uncommon kind of fear. It all started when I was nine, when my best friend, Lizzy, died because of a car accident that happened right before my eyes. Since then, I never visited the hospital or any funerals and it has been five years already since Lizzy died but I've never get over her death. I was traumatized and I blame myself for something I didn't even do.

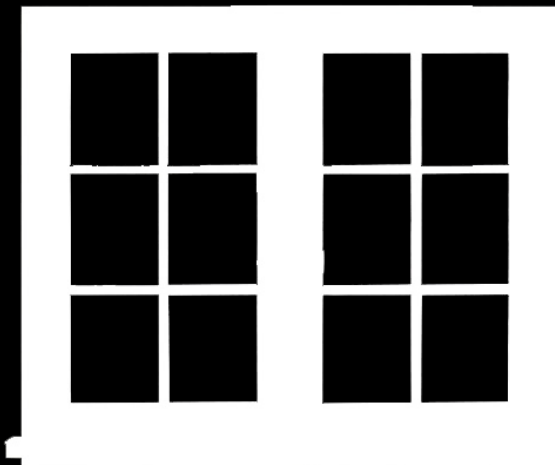
I've been alone and sad for five years, but this night everything will change. I looked at the small picture frame containing a picture of me and Lizzy. A little smile formed into my lips, "We'll be together now, Lizzy." I whispered, as I doze myself to sleep.

A couple of hours passed and my room was conquered with silence. Then all of a sudden, a strong gush of wind blew

open my window. I sighed as I felt the temperature of my room starting to get colder. I stood up, my eyes still closed, and started taking a step away from my bed to close my window but I stopped midway when I felt something strange and different with my body condition. I felt lighter as if I was weightless like a ghost, and my body temperature seemed to be odd because I'm freezing and I feel numb. I am already five

steps away from my bed when I decided to look back. My eyes gaze widely open to my bed, staring at it with fear. I gasped. My hands are shaking, terrified with what I'm seeing.

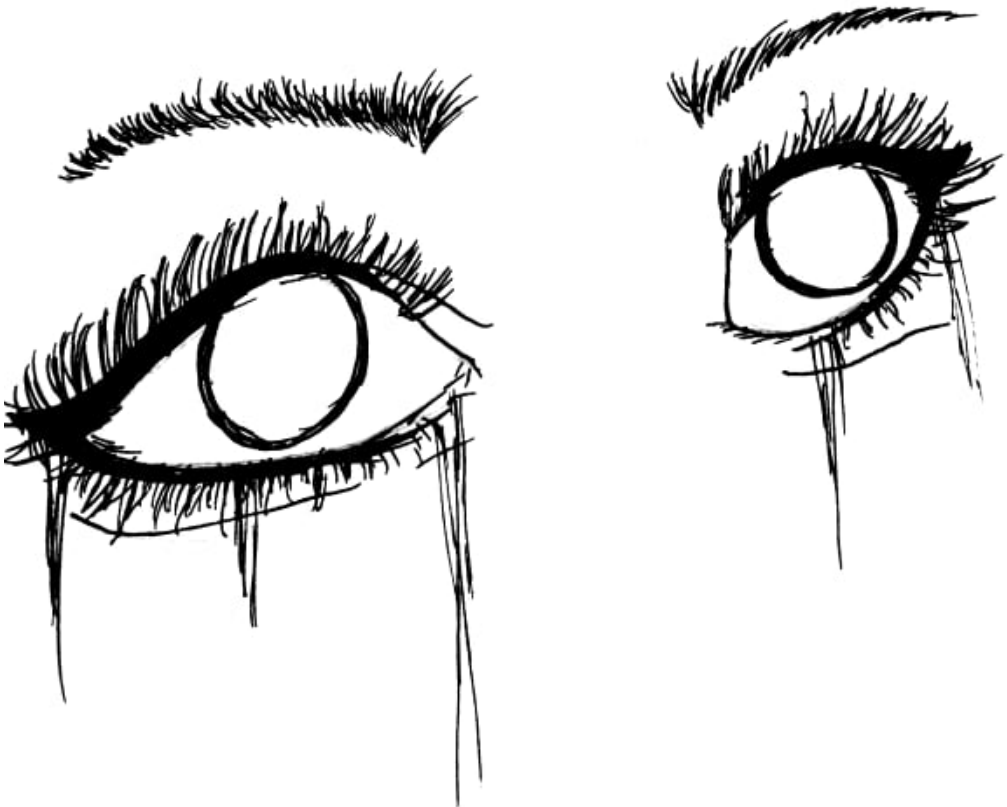
I saw myself. My body is still lying in my bed, hugging my favorite teddy bear, with her eyes still closed. I felt paralyze in the moment, unable to understand my current situation and still shaking



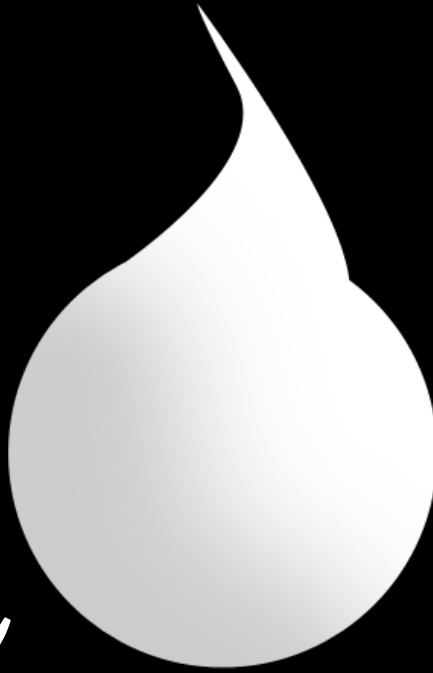
in fear. "How is this possible?" I whispered. I looked at my hands and started pinching myself, but I felt nothing. I then stepped forward to check myself in the mirror, but I see no reflection causing me to shiver in fear.

The situation I am in felt so real and I've never been this scared. Time passed and it's already morning and all I did was to convince myself that I am just dreaming or hallucinating. However, not one of my chosen ideal situations fits my real state or condition. My mother entered my room, calling out my name, "Kierra?" My door opened, revealing my mother. She went closer to my bed and patted my shoulders, "Honey..." She whispered, "It's time to wake up." However, my body weren't giving any responses at all.

"Honey..." She called out again yet still there are no responses from my body. She pressed her palm in my forehead, probably checking my temperature. She gasped in horror as she had contact with my pale skin. She immediately runs outside my room, calling out for my grandmother, asking her to call the hospital. All this scene were just happening right in front of me and it all felt unreal; however, this is not a dream.



Lost



I am separated with my own body and it took me long enough to accept that I am now just a soul or probably a ghost. My mom was sobbing, crying for help as she hugs my lifeless body. "How could you?" She sobbed even more, holding a medicine bottle in her hand and crying even more while I stood there, unable to speak, unable to move, unable to cry in this heart breaking situation. How could I've not seen this happening? How could I've not even consider my family's feelings?

Yes, I, Kierra Laffeur, died. I wanted to, but I was scared and I didn't know that it will work. I sighed and closed my eyes as a flashback of me taking seven pills in my mouth, crying alone in my room last night, as I doze myself to sleep.

"It worked." I whispered before

collapsing on the corner of my room. The window was still open and the cold breeze enters my room. I looked at it and the world outside my room looks pretty much the same, with or without me. I stood up and walked closer towards my window to see more of the city outside, to see what the world would be even if I'm gone. Will it really just be the same as I expected it would be?

"Have you ever been that curious in what will happen in the world without you in it?" I gasped as an auburn haired boy appeared in front of me.

"Who are you?" I whispered. He was able to see me, read my thoughts and talked to me and he seemed to be nice and he must be just like me. "Are you dead, too?"

Acceptance

I am separated with my own body and it took me long enough to accept that I am now just a soul or probably a ghost. My mom was sobbing, crying for help as she hugs my lifeless body. "How could you?" She sobbed even more, holding a medicine bottle in her hand and crying even more while I stood there, unable to speak, unable to move, unable to cry in this heart breaking situation. How could I've not seen this happening? How could I've not even consider my family's feelings?

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"I'm not dead." He chuckled. "Well, physically, I am but I'm also not." He snickered and looked at me directly in the eyes, making me hypnotize with his beautiful emerald eyes. But all my admirations about him disappeared when he hit me in my forehead, causing me to stumble in the floor. "Stop staring!" He hissed. "Look, little girl, you're dead, I'm not, so you have to listen to me. All you have to do is answer my questions and be a good girl." He instructed.

I glared at him but I nodded in response even though I am still a bit puzzled with his sudden appearance. He then asked me several questions like my name, age and some other details that personally belong to me.

"Last question..." He said. "Why did you kill yourself?"

"I was curious." I bluntly answered. He then looked at me with a baffled expression. He probably didn't expect my answer but it is half the truth. "I killed myself because I was curious of something." I continued.

"You just wasted your life then." He muttered.

“I DID NOT”

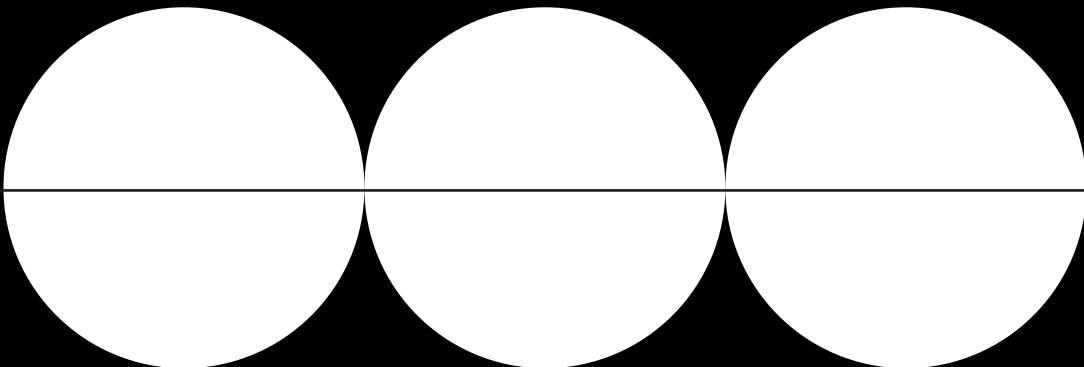
I whispered, trying to defend myself. He looked at me. His emotions were not visible and his arrogant attitude is not even appearing, so I decided to continue. “I was curious if the world will change if I die, if my presence has an effect in the world outside this room of mine.”

“You know...” He brushed his hair with his fingers and went closer to me. “I like you.” He smirked and patted my head gently like I’m a good dog that learned how to play fetch for the first time. “I like your curiosity.” He continued, “However, curiosity kills.”

He stood up and held my hands and pulled me in my room. “Look at your mom.” He pointed to my mother who was still weeping and sobbing alongside with my grandmother. “Your mom works all day in a shoe factory, inhaling toxic and smoke every day while you study in a prestigious all-girls school. Your grandmother has been with you since you were born and she treats you more than a granddaughter.”

“What’s your point?” I asked.

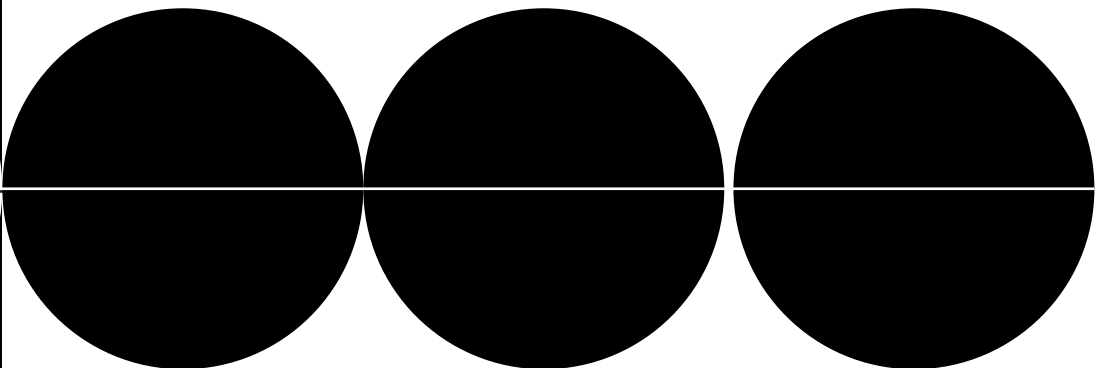
“My point is – you don’t need to be curious about what will happen to the world if you’re gone. You should’ve been curious on what will happen inside you household once you’re gone because the world will always be the world. It will go on with or without you in it.” He stated.



"I KNOW THAT..."

But you don't fully understand what my situation is so it's easy for you to say that to me." I countered. "I've been alone for so long, suffering on my own, blaming myself for something I felt responsible with even though it's obviously not my fault that my best friend died. I was supposed to be the one to get hit by the car, but she pushed me and took the impact instead of me." I sobbed. "Everyone was so affected by her death while they look at me as if it was my fault that she died. I just want to know if for once my presence means something more than what I thought. I just want to know if people would care for me just like what they did to Lizzy when she died. Will they even remember me as the girl who reads a hundred of books every month? Or will they remember me as the girl who should've died instead of her best friend?"

"None of those matter once you die, Kierra." He uttered and sat down beside my cabinet, resting his head on it. "Your presence only affects the world once you made an impact – good or bad – it doesn't matter as long as it was broadcasted in the world and people know you for something you did. Are you well-known?" He looked at me with a smirk plastered in his face. "You're not. There are only few people that know your existence and they would be more likely to be affected of your death. Some people will remember you as the girl who killed herself to sleep, some will remember you as that





girl who reads all the books in the city library, but none of that matter once you're dead. Their opinions don't matter to you anymore."

I looked at him, amused with his words. He doesn't look much of a talker when it comes to things like this. "Who are you?" I asked. "Are you an angel?"

He smiled a genuine one. "I wish I am an angel, however, angels have wings and all I could do is pass through walls, be invisible and talk to souls like you.." I giggled on his response, lightening up the mood between us.

"So you've talked to my best friend?" I asked.

He nodded in response. "I saw her in the hospital and she was following you all

around. I approached her but she didn't want to talk to me. Before her time finally ends, she told me to look over for you."

"You've been watching over me?" I asked with a small smile. "What are you if you're not an angel?"

"I'm a lost soul. God couldn't determine what my will is, whether I should stay here on Earth or be with Him in Heaven so I'm in between life and death. I'm still alive but my life is supported with machines and medicines." He looked at me with a smile, but his eyes tell a different story that I wish to unlock. "I'd love to chat more with you Kierra." He said, "But your time is up..." He paused and smiled at me. "You must go to Heaven."

I smiled a bit, confused in what he just said. "What do you mean by that?"

"You have a limited time here on Earth once you become a soul. When your time is up, it means it's time for you to join the others in Heaven with God." He stood up and held my hand once again but I let go of his grip and shook my head with confusion.

"How am I supposed to go to Heaven when I committed an unforgivable sin?" I smiled nervously. "I killed myself and that's suicide and I believe most people who committed this kind of sins ended up going to Hell!"

He laughed and playfully grabbed my hand and tightened his grip to it. He then smiled and said, "I really like you Kierra, but there's no such thing as Hell, my sweetheart." I looked at him with a bemused expression, bewildered by the words he said. He then tugged some strand of my hair behind my ear and cupped my cheeks with his left hand, "God forgives everyone once they die, be it accidental or intentional. Each one of us is a sinner which means we're not so different after all. We all suffered here on Earth as well and God sees our pain and suffering, so why would He let us suffer in the afterlife?"



His words struck my heart in that very moment, leaving me lost in my own thoughts. He's right. He may not be an angel but he is my angel, continuously guiding me towards the light. I gave him my sweetest smile and kissed him in the cheek causing him to almost lose his balance and making him blush. "I want to remember you." I whispered. "What's your name?" He was still a bit startled and shy with my sudden move but he managed to whisper back his name.

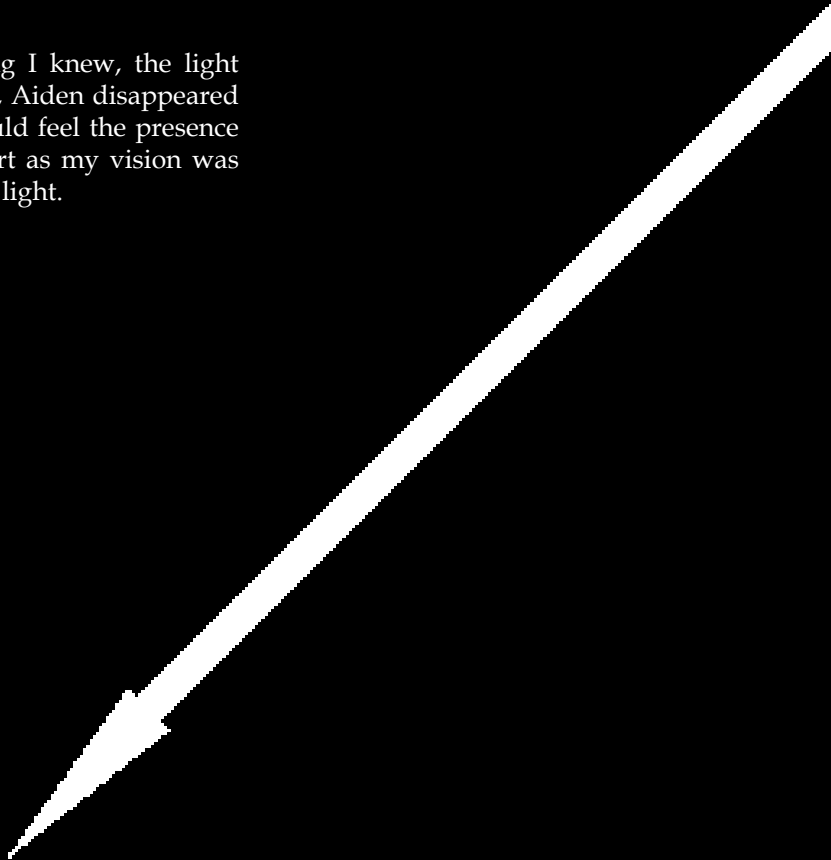
"Aiden Ezekiel." He whispered softly. "And Kierra, it's not your fault that your best friend died. It's her time, no one is at fault. So forgive yourself, because I know she doesn't want you feeling that way."

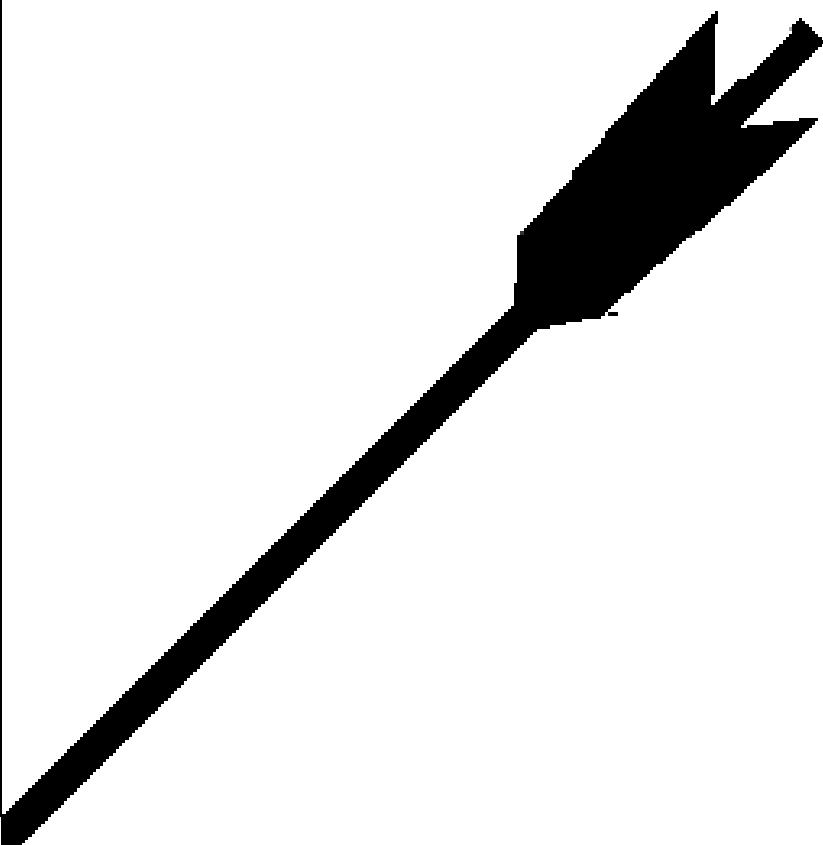
"I won't forget you, Aiden." I smiled back.

And the next thing I knew, the light starts to surround me, Aiden disappeared in my sight, and I could feel the presence of Heaven in my heart as my vision was completely filled with light.

... And I was back in my bed room. It's already morning and the sun is shining bright. I looked at my hands and slightly tap my cheeks, just to make sure that this is no longer a dream. I looked at the window and it was closed and nothing really changed. I breathed a sigh of relief as I realize that I was just dreaming all this time.

"Honey...?" My mom called out, peeking into my bed room. I looked at her, relieved that she is able to see me. "That was all just a dream, Kierra." I whispered to myself. I then gestured my mom to come in. She entered, smiling brightly, with a small tray in her hands containing my favorite bacon toast sandwich and a tall glass of orange juice. "Breakfast is ready."





I smiled and pointed to my desk, letting my mom know to put the tray down.

"Did you have a good night sleep?" She asked, just like she always does every morning when I wake up. I nodded in response. She sat beside me and wrapped her arms around me, "What's the problem?"

"I had a bizarre dream, Mom." I said. "It felt utterly real. In my dream, I killed myself and you can't see me or hear me. You were crying really hard in there, mother." I giggled and hugged her tight. "I met a boy in my dream, too, Mom. He's my angel."

"What's his name?" My mom asked.

I smiled as I remember his green eyes, "Aiden Ezekiel." I answered with a small smile.

My mother let go of our hug and looked at me with confusion. "Do you mean Aiden Ezekiel from the Whinston Household?"

I gasped, "Does he really exists?"

"Well, he's the only son of Mr. Whinston but he got himself into an accident and the doctors announced him a brain dead patient." My mom answered.

"He was comatose?" I asked and my mom nodded in response.

"He was comatose for almost seven years now, I guess." My mom said, recalling when she last heard of the Whinston's heir.

"Where is he?" I popped another question.

"He's admitted to the St. Augustin's Hospital that is owned by Lizzy's parents." My mom answered.



I looked at my mom with a huge smile plastered in my face. "Can I go and visit him?" I asked. Though I am not asking for permission, it was more like a question to inform my mom that I am going to visit him. My mom seemed to be amused with my sudden interest. I'm sure she hasn't seen me like this for years already. She also knew I was afraid of going to the hospital, but she allowed me still, for it is probably the light for me to free myself from my fear.

That afternoon, though I am very nervous and still scared, I build my strength and will to enter the hospital just to meet him – if that's really him. The nurse guided me towards his room that is located on the sixth floor of the building and told me details about Aiden.

I am now standing outside his room, calming myself. I am very nervous in that moment but I suddenly had the courage to enter his room. I opened his door and heaved a deep sigh before proceeding inside. And there I saw an auburn haired guy, surrounded by machines that are connected to his body as he sleeps peacefully. I examined his features and he looked exactly like the same guy that

helped me out in my dream though his hair is longer and he looks pale.

I walked closer towards him and held his pale hand and whispered, "Thank you for coming into my dream last night." I said. "I hope you'd wake up sooner so we could talk and be friends. You need to stay here and live because you gave me a realization and a will to continue living and I'm sure you can help a lot of people, Aiden. So you must find yours, too." I smiled sincerely.

I slowly let go of his hands, satisfied with my visit to him and decided to visit him some other time to slowly decrease my fear in visiting hospitals. To be honest, I am really terrified right now but I had to do this. I glanced at him once again and slowly walked out the room, but before I fully closed the door, the electrocardiogram produced a continuous beeping sound, causing me to look back at him. I immediately walked back to check up on him, however, I was shocked and surprised to see a movement from his fingers. It twitched a little followed by the slowly blinking of his eyes.



I gasped as he opened his eyes and slowly locked it into mine. He looked at me with happiness reflecting on his beautiful emerald eyes. No words could describe how happy I was to experience this miracle from Above. I broke eye contact with him the moment I snap out of my senses and rushed outside his room and called the first doctor I've seen to check on him.

The doctors and nurses rushed into his room to check him and they were all shocked to see him fully recovered and awake. All I could do in that very moment was to thank God for this blessing. Aiden and I don't have much relation with each other but I am relieved to see him awake from his seven years of being a lost soul. I'm glad that he was able to find his light just like me.

**“GOD MUST’VE DETERMINED YOUR
WILL TO STAY.” I LOOKED AT AIDEN
WITH A SMALL SMILE BEFORE LEAVING
HIS ROOM WITH A HAPPY HEART.**

AL JOUR



TOTO'S JOURNEY

by Kurt Harvey Loreto



CHAPTER I

ALTO

This stew is starting to smell really good. Thank goodness mother left her special recipe for me, it'll probably be the only thing I have to remember her by. It's got a whole lot of stuff in it; quinoa, some bits of ch'arki, sweet potatoes, yucca, uqalok'a, and some mashwa. It's a little weird, really, how all these ingredients don't really seem to come together well but end up making such a tasty meal. A bowl of delightful flavors with a hint of bitter longing. Thanks again for this, mama.



I've just finished cooking my stew when I hear distant yelling from outside my hut. "Alto! Alto! What's taking you so long?!" Oh, man. Did I really take that long? Maya comes into my hut with sweat running down her face. I stare at her with a sense of surprise, not budging. "Well?" I look at my hot, tasty stew then back at her. "I haven't had lunch yet." Her frown turns into a concerned look, she then starts opening my drawers. "If that's the case, let's just have this packed, then you can eat after our tourney."

"R-right... Do you think the other villagers are gonna interfere again this month?" She stops packing for a moment then gives me this smug grin. "There's not really much we can do, we're Quechuan, we're not supposed to be snowboarding on the thirty-seven *huge* mountains that we have here in Peru. Why? Tradition. And that can jump right off one of those peaks." She gestures with her fingers as if they jumped off a cliff. "Let the people of Huaraz judge us all they want, if they wanna stay on the ground let 'em. We'll be flying in the skies." "Hopefully not falling onto the hard, rocky ground." Maya suddenly bursts into laughter. "The only who'll be doing that this month is you, Alto."



She finishes packing and pats me on the shoulder. "Now go get suited up, it's cold out there." She leaves the hut to wait for me. I open up my drawers, take my outfit out, put on my coat, pants, boots, gloves, and my poncho. Not necessarily in that order. But I always leave my toque and my scarf last. I've had this toque since I was a little boy. The other special thing I've gotten from mama. I could say that I even grew into this hat. It may not look like much, but it is what it is. A memento.

My scarf— scarves rather, are a whole different story. They were gifts from my father, at least that's what the village elders say. There were five of them, so when I grew a little older, I had given out three of them to Maya, Paz, and Izel. But the big thing about them is that whenever my friends and I do something extraordinary, the scarves would grow longer. We were all eager to know more about them so we kept wearing them on our tourneys and casual sessions.

It was only a few months later that Maya's scarf grew to about FIFTY FEET in length. None of us could believe it. None of us except Maya herself. She's amazing at doing backflips over even the smallest

jumps. There's no doubt that she was able to make it grow that long. But at that very moment, both her scarf and Quechua hat glowed with a white aura- as white as the snow that fell down from the sky. With that glow, she seemed to have become faster than anything we've ever seen. We reckon that the speed of five horses combined couldn't beat her. It was out of this world. Since then, we've all learned how to get to that level. Now we're just looking for what could have embedded this "magic" into my scarves.

I put on my toque and wrap my scarf around my neck. I then grab my snowboard and head out of the hut into the cold, cold outdoors. Despite it being noon time where the sun is right above our heads, it still feels like it's freezing. Having said that, I'd actually call this a good day. I've gotten used to it anyway. "Paz and Izel are probably gonna be ice sculptures by the time we get there on foot." Maya tries to pull off begging eyes like a kitten would do. She actually looks pretty cu— funny. "You look ridiculous, Maya. You didn't have to, you know?" I take off my right glove and whistle with my fingers putting pressure on my curled tongue.



The sound of my whistle emanates throughout the whole village, getting the attention of some of the villagers. Then I hear a distinct sigh coming from behind me. It's elder Jonto. "Children... You can still reconsider the path you tread on, before any of you get hurt badly or worse, death by the evil spirits that wander the Huascarán." Maya scoffs at him and says "Come on, old man. We've been doing this for years now! We haven't *once* seen anything weird on those mountains. Unlike you all, we don't believe in the senseless superstition that the Quechuan put so close to their hearts." I grab her shoulder and whisper in her ear. "Come on now, Maya. We don't need to listen to him." She lets me drag her away from elder Jonto. "Very well, then. I pray that your father's fate does not fall upon you as well."

The sound of hooves overpowers the old man's voice behind us. "Felipe!" Maya blurts out with joy as she embraces my llama's neck. He's the last piece of treasure from my parents that I hold dear. He's been around for as long as I can remember. He's also saved me from a lot of injuries that I could've gotten from snowboarding.

How? Well, somehow, he had gotten hold of my snowboard when he was still a cria and he *somehow* learned how to ride and do some sick tricks. I... I really don't know how to explain. Maybe he's got some magic in him too? At this point, we don't really have any other reasonable explanations besides that. Father used to get a whole

bunch of weird stuff from his trips. Most especially my scarves, one of which I also put on Felipe a while after he started snowboarding. Regardless of whether or not he's imbued with magic, he's still a valuable friend to me; not just any pet.

"Let's head out, wouldn't wanna keep Paz and Izel waiting for us."



Maya gets on the saddle and reaches her hand out to me. "Wait, aren't I supposed to be riding Felipe?" She doesn't seem to be budging. "I never get a turn." She gives me that smug grin of hers again. "Alright, fine. Just make sure we don't ride into a tree or something. Just because you're a prodigy

at snowboarding doesn't mean you're good at riding llamas too." I oughta learn how to say no to Maya one day, seriously. "And that's where you're wrong. Plus, isn't Felipe smart enough for that? You'll see. Hop on!" I grab her outstretched hand and get on the saddle. She turns her head back

to me and asks "Well? I'm waiting." "Um, waiting for what?" What is it this time? "You plan on falling off? Hang on to me." Is she actually serious? I've been riding Felipe my whole life and I'm not about to fall off now. "No thanks, I'm alright." "Heh, alright then. Suit yourself."

Maya nudges Felipe with her heels and we set forth to Huascarán to meet up with Paz and Izel.

As we head towards the exit, I take in the brief view I had of the village. Huaraz still looks the same as it has always been; just some wooden houses made of oakwood, with snow constantly falling onto the rooves and melting, with stone paths that get buried

by heaps of snow, with signposts that are barely readable. The only things that seem to be lively are the tepee campfires that warm up us villagers. That's another thing too. The villagers. Even with this monochromatic environment, they never really seem down. Somehow, they find a way to be lively in such a place. Maybe because they've gotten used to it? Maybe because they haven't had a taste of adventure and the things outside of tradition? I don't quite know what it is, but I feel like it's a win-win situation. For one thing, they're content with what they've got. The fires that they set up also emanates within them. On the other hand, they're missing out on the thrill of danger and

the speed of life outside the traditions that they stick to. That's my kind of fire.

We arrive at the peak of the Huascarán, seeing our friends at a distance; Paz with his huge snowboard on his back and his toque with a silly pompom dangling around, Izel with whatever gizmo-device-thing she's got on her back and her signature goggles. Maya turns her head and smiles. "Silly Izel, jumping around like that, she must be really excited." "Well, it has been a month. We always wait for a week like this to come up every month." Maya shakes her head. "It's not that. It's how Izel always seems like this is the first time we've ever done something like this; like she hasn't gotten used to it yet. It must be great."



CHAPTER 2

PAZ

“I CAN’T WAIT, I CAN’T WAIT, I CAN’T WAIT!!!”

Izel jumps around like a little kid. Despite being the master inventor that she is, she’s still the most childish out of all of us. Everything about her is just... ecstatic. From the outfit, to the gadgets she makes. She’s made all sorts of things. Magnets that attract shiny pieces of treasure that we happen to find on the Huascarán, Feathers for our snowboards that *occasionally* help us at hovering over rocks, a llama horn that’ll attract any stray llamas, a wooden helmet to save us from getting grievously injured if we fall on our heads or crash head-on into rocks, and a pickaxe if we fall into a chasm.

Sure, she still sells it to us, but with a pretty reasonable discount, heh. One thing she’s said she’d never put for sale was her rocket-powered

snowboard. It was an absolutely crazy idea that worked out so well. In most cases, she goes much faster than Maya, especially when her scarf gets into its full length. She hides behind the excuse that it’s still a prototype, but I respect that. All of her gadgets are her innovations and she should actually have all the right to keep them for herself.

Alto and Maya dismount Felipe, Izel rushes toward Maya and gives her a bearhug. Alto comes over to me and offers a high-five, to which I accept. “Nice to see you, man. You took quite a while.” Alto gives me an apologetic look. “Sorry, I was cooking some stew for lunch and had lost track of time. By the time I finished, Maya came over to my hut and had me pack it for after our tournament.” I



pat him on the shoulder. "Hey, it's alright. I've got an idea." He looks up at me, curious. "Huh? What're you talking about?" I clap to get Izel and Maya's attention. "Listen up everybody, since Alto's got his legendary stew packed and brought to this here tournament, that shall be our new prize for whoever wins this month's tourney."

I can see Alto clench his fist with a disgruntled look on his face, "You don't have a right!" Maya points toward Izel behind her and says "You're the one at fault for making Izel all excited and jumpy over here."

"Alright, but prepare to be humiliated. My hunger is a forest fire that knows no bounds." Alto seems to get serious, which he almost never does. "AAAAAALRIGHT! LET'S GET IT ON!" Izel puts her goggles on, and sets her rocket up. Maya silently fixes her scarf then exhales deeply. "Alright, let's do this." The flag on the stick we had set down continues to wave from the cold, roaring winds of the snowy mountain. I gather everyone in front of me and explain. "Remember, guys. This is an endurance tourney, we all go one direction, and it's not about getting to the finish line, it's about getting as far as you can, WITHOUT crashing. Ever since we got those scarves, we've all become faster

than humanly possible. To say that you've gone through the whole mountain range without crashing is to say that you have mastered the scarves. The only one who's done that so far is Alto himself."

"Yeah, it's about time we break his nine-month winning spree." Maya points at Alto with a challenging look, making Izel even more excited and jumpy. "Yeah, you're going down, Alto! Dethroning Alto and winning his stew? What incentives!" Everyone gets their boards and whatever gear they have all set. We all align near the edge of the steep slope we've been riding across for years. It takes me back to our younger years, as if nothing ever changed since then. I sure am glad that I had met these three. There's just a certain feeling to being up here rather than being down there.



The thrill, the realization of the expanse of the world around us. It's an unusual feeling for us Quechuan; traversing the mountains like this. To most of us, traversing the mountains in such a way is considered as a desecration to the spirit of the mountain, of nature itself. We don't see it that way, though. To us, riding on these mountains with such speed and grace just allows us to become immersed with nature, to be one with the mountain. Most would disagree, but I suppose we're the lucky ones.

"On your marks." The gusts of wind continue to blow across the Huascarán, the trees and snow submitting to it. "Get set." And for a brief moment, the snow stops blowing, the flag stops waving, and then comes silence almost deafening. I let out a deep breath. "GO!" Everyone sets down the slope, with huge smiles across their faces. "WHOOOOOOOOOOO! YEAH!" Izel yells out with an even bigger smile than the rest of us, reaching from ear to ear. Maya, with the look of a daredevil, and Alto, for some reason, bearing a more serious face than he usually would in most of our tourneys. I wonder if he's that desperate to protect his rank... or his food.

Maya takes advantage of her scarf and does all sorts of tricks with her snowboard. She nollies onto a bunting line, and grinds through the whole line before doing a backflip and landing upright, making the scarf grow a few feet longer and her a little faster, taking the lead. Despite seeing Maya taking the lead, Izel doesn't back down. She's always got a little something under her sleeve that she could pull out against us. Last thing she's told me about was having her rockets react much better to her tricks so she wouldn't have to go through the trouble of turning them on manually. Izel goes over an inclined mound of snow and does a 'chicken salad', which is when the rear hand reaches between the legs and grabs the heel edge between the bindings while the front leg is boned.

Her rockets activate and her scarf lengthens, giving her a huge lead on me and Alto, but being short of a few meters to beating Maya. Alto quickly passes me by though, with just a few tricks, the mute, the nose grab, the roast beef. Yeah, I know. We have some pretty weird names for these tricks, but we didn't know how else to name 'em. Point is, Alto's scarf lengthens and leaves me back her in last place. I won't let down, though. I may be the biggest guy in the crowd, but I've got a few tricks under my sleeve as well. I



go off with a slow start almost all the time, but when momentum is at my side, absolutely nothing can stop me.

I'm only limited to a bunch of simple moves and I almost never do flips because it takes me quite a while to get back upright while in mid-air. I haven't mastered air maneuvers as well as the others have. Because of that, I just take advantage of the bunting lines that I could get onto and grind on, as well as the little patches of ice that I could slide on for even more momentum. Luckily, these trigger the scarves to grow longer as well, giving me even more speed that I could take advantage of. Here comes another steep slope. I get close to the edge of the slope and jump, attempting a backflip. I get a little nervous, with a single drop of sweat dripping across my face. I nail the landing and get a huge boost.

This is what I ride for. The wind blowing against my face and my whole body, the pine trees and the stone houses around us becoming only a blur to me. I get overly carried away by the thrill that I don't notice the huge rock in front of me. I don't have the time to jump over or bank to either side. Luckily with that recent boost I just got, I could easily — SMASH! Welp, not the first time I've done that. Kinda hurts my hands just taking that rock down. I could have just forfeited and let myself crash, but I ain't losin' just for that.

I eventually get past Alto, looking shocked and disgruntled, then Izel, who looked amazed and got a little bit more excited, then Maya, who looked genuinely impressed. I can't actually believe I might get there first. All I have to do now is keep my speed constant and I absolutely must not crash. As soon as I think that, the ground beneath me shakes intensely, exponentially stronger than we would usually feel down in Huaraz. "EARTHQUAKE!" I hear Alto yell at the top of his lungs from afar. The earthquake starts to feel even stronger that I start losing my balance, but I keep myself composed. I look back at them and everyone but Alto was still riding, the other two had stopped, possibly out of fear. Alto's eyes suddenly widen and he points in front of me. "L-LOOK OUT!" I turn my head back to a newly-opened CHASM. We don't have a ramp set up. I'm going way too fast. I make a hard turn, which eventually propels me near the end of the chasm, my body continues to involuntarily slide towards the chasm. I can't stop. I fall.



CHAPTER 3

IZEL

Oh God. What happened to Paz? All I can see now is Alto rushing to the chasm on his snowboard and Maya running there. I run there as quickly as I can and find the both of them trying to pull Paz up as he tries to keep his grip on the surface. "Guys, I don't think I can hold on for much longer." I see the fear in Paz's eyes as his arms shake and tremble. I never thought I'd ever see such a big man make a face like that. It scares me too. Maya turns back to me and yells "WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING, IZEL? HELP US OUT!" I rush to them but at the very moment that I get a hold of Paz's arms, he falls.

"PAZ, NO!" We all yell out with varying degrees of volume. Our hearts sink at that very second. Then the most fortunate ledge happens to be situated underneath Paz, he hits his head on the stone rubble underneath him, almost instantly knocking him out. All three of us collapse and sit on the snow near the edge of that deep, dark chasm. We all take

quick, deep breaths. Alto pants and almost breaks into tears. "We could've lost Paz." Maya takes off her hat and covers her face, looking as though she had already broken down. I stand up, crouch in between them, and pat them in the shoulders. "We still haven't gotten him yet. Now get on your feet and let's save our friend." They look up at me and both nod with a confident look on their faces.

I take out my gear and I explain to the two of them. "I've got this whole bunch of rope and this pole. We'll have to set down this pole into the ground really well, I'll head down there and tie this end of the rope on him, you'll be tying the rope around the pole for a sort of pulley mechanism, and at your end of the rope, you'll have to get Felipe to help you pull the rope. And for our last resort, if absolutely necessary, you'll have to turn on this rocket that I'll be tying in front of you guys so that you wouldn't have to let go for long. Use it only if you have to, it could possibly

burn the rope and ruin everything." They sit there almost speechless. "You don't have to do this, Izel." Maya suggests. "Let me do it." Alto says assertively.

"Out of all of us here, I'm the only one who's actually fallen into a chasm. Don't worry, I can handle it." It can't be that hard. I just gotta leave it to Lady Luck. Alto hammers the pole down into the ground while I tie the rocket onto the rope. Maya makes a tiny, ladder out of a few sturdy sticks and rope that she got out of the pine trees nearby. Alto then whistles, calling for Felipe. I wrap the rope around the pole and secure it. The ladder is finished. Felipe arrives. "Alright, guys. Looks like we're all set. Remember, only use the rocket if I tell you to or if the situation begs for it." Maya puts her thumb up and says "You got it, Izel."

I put the pickaxe into my pack and I set the ladder down onto the ledge that Paz lies on. I climb down the ladder, which starts getting a little wobbly, but I end up perfectly fine on

the ledge. I kneel down to check on Paz. He's got bruises and cuts on his arms. I don't quite know how his back is right now, but we'll have to see later on when we bring him back to Huaraz. I tie the rope around him, making sure that it's completely secure. "Alright, guys. Are you read-" The end of the ledge that's attached to the side of the chasm starts to shatter and crack. "Are you alright down there?!" Maya yells out with audible anxiety. "Pull him out now!" I yell back at them. The rope shows some visible tension. I try to help by pushing Paz upwards. It works a little, until the ledge starts cracking a little more. Out of panic, I push Paz even stronger and yell out "TURN THE ROCKET ON!"

Paz seems to be halfway there now. I just gotta push even harder to— The ledge beneath me completely falls. My feet struggle to get a firm jump off of the ledge, whilst I try to reach for my pickaxe. I manage to get one, two steps off and jump towards the sharp, rocky, wall. My pickaxe manages to get into the wall perfectly. "IZEL! ARE YOU OKAY DOWN THERE?!" I hear Alto yell out. "I'm alright, just keep pulling."



I hear loud snaps from the surface. “IZEL! THE ROPE IS ABOUT TO BREAK COMPLETELY!” This triggers a strong reflex as I take one hand off of the wall and try to push Paz upwards. All my weight is dependent on this pickaxe right here. Don’t lose your grip, don’t lose your grip, don’t lose your grip. Just a few inches left and I seem to be at the verge of slipping right off. A little bit more. SNAP! The rope completely snaps and Paz’s weight depends on my arm. The other hand starts to slip off the pickaxe even more. My feet start to lose their grip on the rocks. “NO, NO, NO!” I can hear the shuffles of their feet rushing to Paz. At this point, I can’t even speak. I’m just struggling to keep everything in shape. I’m at the end of the rope here.

Alto, Maya, and Felipe look down the chasm and immediately take hold of Paz. They pull harder and harder, giving me the chance to adjust my footing and my grip. It takes a few moments but at last. Paz is finally back on the surface. I now focus all my strength on getting back up. One step after another, I get my hand onto the surface, being aided by Alto and Maya. I finally get back up. Both of them cheer, I try to smile but everything is starting to go dark, I tumble, I don’t feel so good. The expressions on their faces start to change as I start to fall into the snow face-first.

Everything’s dark now. I’m just relieved that everything was resolved. I could open my eyes a little bit sometimes. Paz and I are on Felipe. Alto and Maya are walking us back to Huaraz, I assume. It’s all dark again. All I feel are my aching muscles, the cuts on my hands, and overall exhaustion. My eyes start to open up more, and I find myself in my hut. Candles lit, I’m all wrapped up in my blanket. The feeling of the Peruvian fabric makes me feel much warmer. It’s nighttime, huh. I get up from my bed and leave my hut to look for Alto, Maya, and especially Paz. The village seems to be a bit more active, I see a crowd trying to peek through Paz’s hut. I get worried and limp towards the crowd immediately. How is he?

Several voices murmuring and gossiping about Paz go around. “Is he dead?” “That’s



what he gets for snowboarding." God, these people make me sick. As soon as one person catches sight of me, she whispers to the people around her, causing them to turn back at me. They clear a path. I enter the hut. I see Maya standing on the side of the bed, and I see the silhouettes of one of the village elders talking to Alto in the next room. Paz lies there still unconscious. Maya sees me. "Izel! I'm so glad you're awake. Are you feeling good?" I don't quite have enough strength to spare so I just smile and nod. Maya drags me and sits me down on the wooden chair next to Paz's bed. "Have some stew." This'll get my spirits up for sure.

"How's Paz doing?" I ask Maya. "Elder Jun'ko tells us that he might never wake up, and that if he does, his legs would remain useless because a part of his spine was cracked." I drop the wooden spoon in my hand. This can't be. Is this because I of those few seconds that I just stared watching? Is this my fault? "Oh God, what've I done?" Tears start rolling down my eyes. Maya embraces me. "I'm so sorry that I was so straightforward, but there's no other way I could put it." My tears are wiped away by the fabric on Maya's coat. "Shh, it's okay. Don't you worry. We found a way." I look up at Maya who has a confident smile on her face. "W-what?"

Alto leaves the room he was in. "Maya!" Elder Jun'ko behind him moves towards the doorway exiting the hut. "W-wait!" I beg the elder. "Hmm? What it be, little lady?" He turns to me. "You said you found a way to heal Paz? How?" The elder nods. "It's not a guarantee. If anything, it's more of a hunch. Your friends shall be travelling to the southern side of the Huascarán. To the tundra with the blizzard that never ends. You may be asking why, but a gang of youngsters from our time ventured to that area once. Out of five, only two came back; bearing items imbued with magic. They both left without a word, leaving their only son here in Huaraz." "Are you talking about Alto? Why've you kept it to yourselves until now?" "Because we didn't want him venturing out there for no reason. Now he has a perfect reason to seek out the magic in the tundra." Alright. If that's how things are gonna go. We'll do it for Paz.



CHAPTER 4

MAYA

Break of dawn. All suited up, all gear ready. “We’re really sorry that you can’t come with us, Izel.” She jokingly punches me in the arm and says “Hey, it’s more of a win-win situation for me. If I came, it would’ve been a lotta fun, and now that I’m not coming, I don’t have to worry about freezing and possibly even dying. I’m sure you guys could do it though. I’ve got faith in you.” She gives me a smile then calls out to Alto. “Alto! Come over here, I’ve got something you two are gonna be interested in.”



She brings us over to the back of her workshop, filled with all sorts of inventions we have never seen before. “I know they must look interesting, but don’t touch anything, please.” She pulls out two bags from on top of one of the shelves. “These are some prototypes I’ve been keeping and working on for months. These are wingsuits.” Alto and I freak out. “What?! WINGSUITS?!” She puts on a smug grin on her face. “Yeah, yeah, I know. I’m cool like that. Anyway, you have to get your scarves to maximum length to get the fully optimal speed to use these wingsuits. That way you can project yourselves off the ground and get a good start. You’ll get the hang of it, I’m sure.” I pat her on the back and tell her. “Thanks for this, Izel.” She smirks and says. “You got it. Now good luck. Come back safely.”

Alto and I set out, waving back to Izel as we leave Huaraz. We get on Felipe and ride to the southern side of the Huascarán. I sense a feeling of dread in Alto. I feel a tear drop onto my arms that's wrapped around him. "Hey, what's up?" I put my head on one of Alto's shoulders. "I feel kind of regretful. All these years, living in the same village as the people who knew where my parents were. Yet I've wondered and asked for years now." His grip on the reigns tighten. "And the fact that we've been venturing out so close to where they could be, without even having a clue. It's as if it was right in front of my face this whole time. But we didn't go out there because we know there's always a blizzard there. This whole time we've been afraid of going out there despite of all that we've been through.

I hug him tightly. "I know it's been years, but I'm sure we'll find some clues as to where your parents are. And

remember, you've got the three of us to help you out. We're always here for you." He turns to me and gives me a big smile. "Thanks, Maya. If anything; you guys have been my family." Felipe continues to tread towards the middle of the mountain. We see the mist covering the area as it has always looked since we were kids, but the difference now is that we aren't afraid of it. We're diving straight in. For Paz.

Felipe enters the misty field of whiteness. "Thank goodness Izel had some extra goggles." I say as I wear my pair. "They do look kind of silly on you, though." Alto chuckles. The howling wind and snow was blasting across our faces, making it hard to see anything. "What are we even out here to look for?" I ask Alto. He looks back at me with a sort of worried look. "Honestly, I don't quite know. The old man just told me to look for a sign. Something extraordinary." I strike his nape and yell. "Seriously? How can we see anything in this mess?" I can't believe

how naïve he's being right now. "Trust me. You and I both know that magic is real. The fact that this place has never stopped being this way is in itself a work of magic." "Well. I trust you. But I don't wanna die here." "We won't."

The same thing goes for maybe half an hour. Or maybe an hour. Two? Three? I don't know how long we've been here. I can't see the sun. All I see is white. All I see is the snow wherever I turn. I don't even know where we are anymore. Are we even still on the Huascarán? Can we find home? Are we still alive? I'm freezing. My body shivers and aches. My fingers feel numb. I'm starting to lose a little bit of hope here. "Alto? Can we please turn back now?" He looks back at me with fear in his eyes. "I'm afraid that even if we do, we won't be able to get back. I don't even know where we are anymore. I don't know how long we've been here." All hope seemed to be lost. Until Alto's scarf glowed, and pointed to his right.

"Huh? Felipe, turn right!" Alto hastily turns the reigns and makes Felipe gallop towards that direction. We don't know what's there. Whether it's good, bad, or possibly nothing. A few seconds come by as Felipe sprints at top speed and somehow... The mist in front of us dissipates in an unusual way. "Whoa, whoa. Slow down now, Felipe." Alto stops Felipe. I can't quite grasp the words to explain this strange place. The sun shines above, snowy ground, but with some signs of plant life. Some pine trees. And it seems as though all of the mist is gone. Even behind us. Are we in heaven?

Alto and I grab our snowboards off of Felipe's packs. We continue to walk onwards, not really sure where we're going and what we're doing. We walk on until we find... a hut? A hut in a place like this? Alto and I look at each other. "I sure hope we're not dreaming." He says with nervous laughter. We walk towards this hut until we see a silhouette of what looks like a person carrying logs. "HEY!" Alto runs toward the entity, and so do I. The silhouette was alerted and ran into its hut. Alto bursts inside along with me. The interior looking grim and dark, filled with scribbled notes on papers, with candles, and things that look like seals.

We stop for a moment to look around and take in the environment. "What the hell is all this?" Alto says with intense confusion. We hear the sound of quick footsteps from a room, and the sound of something like a blanket being waved around. We rush to the room and find that the entity jumped out of the window, and with a snowboard too? "QUICK! WE GOTTA GO!" Alto jumps out with his snowboard and rides after it. I follow along ride behind him. "If we're gonna catch it, we gotta get faster! Get some tricks done!" He tells me as he attempts a few moves himself. Gosh, this thing is fast. What even is it? It looks as if it's wearing some sort of red poncho and a black robe underneath it. It's also got a red Quechuan hat. But what's it doing on a snowboard?

"It looks like he's got a scarf too! Alto, we gotta catch up quickly!" I do as many moves as I can in the shortest amount of time I could. The scarf grows longer and longer. I start



to lose sight of Alto from behind me, but I start to see the mysterious figure a lot clearer. Wait, what? He's doing flips almost exactly like how I do it. He's going as fast as Paz with that momentum! And he's even got Alto's distinct stance! It's almost as if he's a combination of all of us, except for Izel. The mysterious figure pulls out a tube-like stick from his back. He kneels even lower to place it next to his board.

WHAT?! HE'S GOT SOMETHING LIKE A ROCKET TOO! Whoever this guy is, he's way too fast! I gotta do something about this. I rush to do more flips than I ever would. The scarf finally grows to its full length. I think for a moment that I'm catching up to him, but he somehow keeps his distance. He's got a scarf too! At this rate, I can't get him. But wait. I pull push the little button on the right side of my back. The wingsuit deploys. I instantly get lifted into the sky. Shoot, I gotta get the angle right. My board gets left behind on the ground, I guess I'll have to tackle him from up here. But this...

This is an incredible view. I never thought I could actually be up here in the sky. The huge pine trees just seem like insignificant specks now. I feel like a god now. Oops, I don't wanna end up like Icarus now. Just gotta stick not too low, not too high. Surprisingly, I'm closing the gap between us really quick. Just a few meters more... Here we go! I dive like a hawk with a prey in sight. I close in on the target. This speed actually makes me quite anxious, but somehow, I've already gotten the hang of this thing. I aim right for the man's head.

CRASH! I tackle him head-first. He falls down into the snow, me along with him. I roll for a moment, trying to regain my footing. I stand firmly. Weirdly enough, the man hasn't stood up yet. He remains still, lying in the ground. Alto arrives from out of the woods, eager to talk to the man. He jumps off of his snowboard and maintains a steady pace as he walks towards us. The man stands up slowly, as if having a difficulty, despite being a skilled snowboarder. "There's no way out now! Now tell us who you are!"



CHAPTER 5

TUPA

"I must say, I am quite impressed that you children have managed to catch up to a snowboarder as skilled as I, better yet; tackling me." The voice under his mask sounds like that of an old man. He chuckles. "My name is Tupa. Protector of Huaraz and guardian of the Huascarán mountain." The old man takes off his mask, showing the face of a handsome, Peruvian man, with a thick, well-groomed beard riddled with gray hair. I see Maya behind him looking as shocked as I was after hearing his name.

"F-father?" I tread slowly towards him. He gives me a confused look. "Excuse me, perhaps you've mistaken me for another man." But I'm certain that it really is him. The style of his beard, the shape of his nose, and those eyes. The scar on his left eye that my father got from getting his face cut by a sharp rock on one of his snowboarding ventures. It's the exact same one. I come even closer towards him. He takes a step back. "It can't possibly be you, Alto?" He seems shocked. It's understandable for a man who hasn't seen his son after twenty years.

"Elder Tupa! We have an urgent request to make of you!" Maya abruptly interrupts our

conversation. I suppose it's for the better cause. We came here for Paz. I should remember that. "Seeing that you possess magical qualities, we kindly ask you to please heal a friend of ours who is in need." He turns toward her and exclaims. "Why of course! I am the protector of Huaraz, and it is my duty to aid the people of my village. Now shall we head back to the village? I've been out here for quite some time already." Maya's got his complete attention. Maybe his age has done something to his memory or attention span or something.

I whistle for Felipe. Only a few moments pass before he arrives. Father gives Felipe a strange look with a hint of confusion. The



three of us get on Felipe and we set off to leave this silent area of the southern side of the Huascarán. We end up at the boundary of the still and silent place and the harsh blizzard. Maya lets out a deep sigh, hesitating to follow through. "Fret not, young one. Neblina, desipar." Father speaks out a charm like a mage would. The mist and the blizzard dissipate completely and almost in an instant. This power of his is truly amazing. What boundaries does it have?

We traverse the Huascarán. All of this travelling done with barely a word spoken. I'm aching to ask all sorts of questions and so is Maya. But we have to get Paz looked at immediately. As for father... I don't quite know what he's thinking right now. Maybe all those years out there have taken a toll on his social skills. I don't understand, though. Felipe takes a few more steps to get on a particular mound of snow. Alas, we see Huaraz in the horizon. Maya lets out a sigh of relief, as do I. Father also gives a smile and says. "It's good to be back home."

Felipe continues on to the village. Getting through the main gate, father doesn't give much of an expression and just says "Welp. Home hasn't changed one bit since I was last here." I can't quite argue with that... The villagers pass us by and I hear more of their incessant whispering and gossiping. "Who is that old man that they brought here?" "Did

they really just bring a random stranger after all this time to heal a case like Paz's?! They must be desperate!" "That man does look quite charming, though." People these days. How pathetic.

"Hmm. I don't quite recognize these people, though. Strange." Father says with that same confused look on his face like an hour ago. We arrive at Paz's hut, the three of us get off of Felipe and enter the hut. Izel sits on the chair, asleep. I knock on the wood at the doorway. "We're home, Izel." She opens her eyes partly. "Huh?? OH! YOU GUYS ARE BACK! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR SO LONG!" She jolts out of her seat and gives Maya and I a huge, warm hug. She turns to my father and asks. "You here to help, sir?"



"Yes, I am indeed. Is this the friend of yours that requires my aid?" He points towards Paz. "Yes, mister elder. That's him. Can you do anything? Special medicine or something?" She asks eagerly. "Now, now, young one. I need no potions or medicine of the sorts. All it takes is a simple charm and incantation." Izel gives a suspicious look. "Riiight, uh huh." She walks towards us slowly and whispers. "Are you guys serious?! After all this time, all you bring us is this wacko old man?!" Maya nods her head upwards towards Izel. "Hey, you're talking about Alto's father here." Her mouth gapes wide open and yells under her breath. "WHAT?! HOW?! IT'S BEEN YEARS!!!"

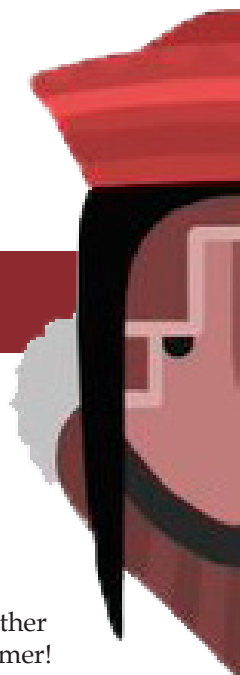
Father's incantation interrupts our conversation as it fills the whole room with a certain feeling; interest and intrigue. "Escaneo de cuerpo complete. Columna vertebral, reparación. Mente, despierta!" A gust of wind is blown from his vicinity outwards, tipping over small objects in the room. What happened? Did he do it? The three of us stare at my father who still has his hand held upright above Paz's head. Elder Jun'ko enters the hut with some firewood in his arms. "Oh, children. You're back at last!" He had more to say but he pauses, and takes a good look at father. "T-Tupa? Is that you?" Father gets a little bit closer towards him to get a better look.

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"Jun'ko? Is that really you? W-why do you look so frail and old?" Father looks genuinely shocked and confused. "Look who's talking, old timer! Come, let's have some drinks as we talk." Elder Jun'ko brings father into the next room. We all hear a faint, but strong voice. "G-guys?" We turn our heads back and we see Paz opening his eyes a little bit. "PAZ! YOU'RE BACK!" We all shouted in unison and hugged our big, fuzzy friend. He seems to be quite muddled and groggy, he asks "What happened? I thought I would've died when I fell off the cliff." I explain to him. "Well pal, by the luck from the gods, there was fortunately a ledge that caught your fall, but you hit your head and got knocked out. Long story short, we found my father over at the southern side of the Huascarán and he used magic to wake you."

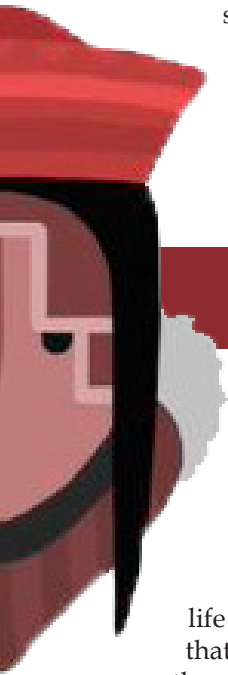
"Whoa... Your father? I'm really happy for you, Alto." He offers me a high-five to which I accept with a sense of dread in my heart, for up until now, he still hasn't acknowledged the fact yet. "By the way, how long was I out?" Paz asks. Maya replies "Maybe a day and a ha-" "A month." What? I'm sorry, what? I look towards Maya and



she gives me the same dumbfounded look. "A month?! We weren't even there for that long! We didn't eat nor sleep! What the hell are you talking about, Izel?!" I yell at her with a distraught look on my face. It can't be. It's impossible. Oh no. Wait. I look towards Maya, who also seems to be having a crisis. "Maya... the mist!" It sparked in her head, immediately. That means...

We rushed to the room where elder Jun'ko and my father were. I can see my father sobbing and in tears. "Twenty years?! It can't be. So much must have gone by. So many friends who're dead or dying." He pulls out his mask from his robe. "If it weren't for this godforsaken mask, I wouldn't have wasted TWENTY YEARS of my life! If it had not had its magical properties and not fooled me into trapping myself in my own spell, this wouldn't have happened! No, no. If I hadn't been an absolute fool for taking this treasure, things would have been better." He stops speaking when he sees me at the doorway. He breaks into even more tears when he runs to me with open arms.

We embrace. He rubs my head like he used to when I was three. "I am so sorry, my son. I've left you with a burden that's harder for most to bear. A



3

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life without a father. But I swear to you, Alto, I had no intention of leaving for that long. I had just been convinced by this dreadful mask that I was staying there in isolation for the sake of the village for a month. I only wanted to keep you all safe." At this point, I didn't even care anymore. I was just happy to have my father back. He takes a good look at the mask in his hand. He throws it down on the floor, and stomps on it, breaking it. "There goes my magic. But also, my guilt and greed. A good trade, I'd say." I look up at him and say "Yeah... By the way, where exactly is mama?" He cracks his knuckles and smiles. "Oh, Sumara? She's going through the same dilemma as I did, in Atacama Desert, also in Peru. We'll get her, son." I've got my friends and my wise father. We will.

THE END

ISANG PANAGINIP

ni Ashleigh Mae Ongoco

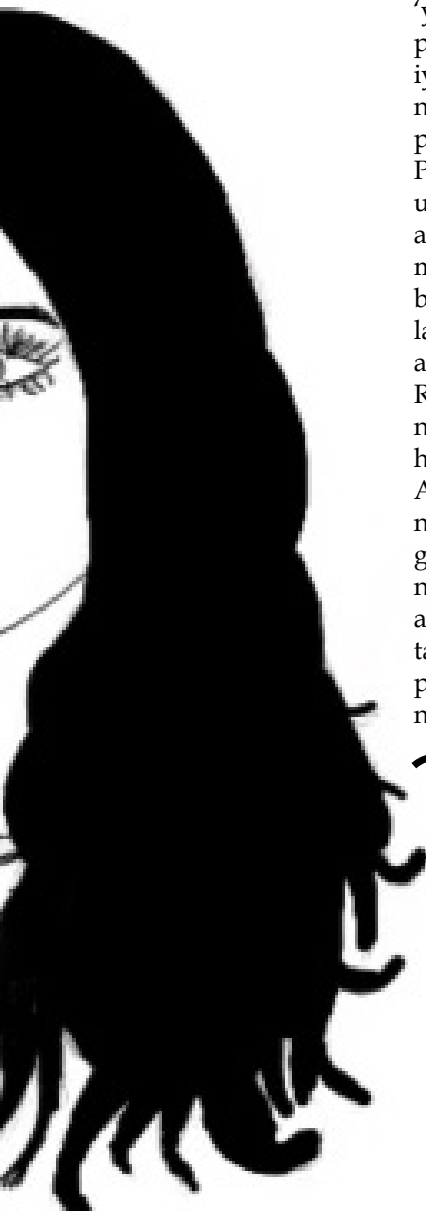
Ako ay isang mayaman, maganda, may mapupulang mga labi at hinahangaan ng lahat. Ako nga pala si Patricia Caparaz,¹⁷ taong gulang at ako ay nakatira sa isang palasyo kasama ang aking mga magulang. Akala ng lahat ay isa akong perpektong tao ngunit hindi nila alam na may isang katangian akong tinatago. Ayokong may mas maganda, mayaman o mas mataas saakin kaya naman ay kapag nalaman ko ito ay pinapatumba ko sila. Kagaya na lamang ng aking kaibigan noon ay nagalit ako sakanya kaya sinabihan ko ang aking lahat ng kaklase na siya ay isang magnanakaw. Lahat ng tao ay nagalit sakanya at sakadahilanan nito ay lumipat siya ng school. Ang bait ko, diba? Sa isang pagbukas lang ng aking mapupulang mga labi ay naniniwala na sila lahat.

Isang araw ay nagising ako ngunit parang may iba. Tumayo ako at naghilamos ngunit pagtingin ko sa aming salamin ay wala ang aking mapupulang labi. Sinampal ko ang aking mukha upang magising ako sa aking panaginip ngunit hindi! BAKIT HINDI AKO NAGIGISING? Tumakbo ako sa aking magulang at ginising ko sila. Sa kanilang pagdilat ng mata ay makikita mo ang gulat na nabuo sa kanilang mga mukha. "Patricia, anong nangyari sa iyo?" tanong ng aking ama habang ang aking ina ay walang nasabi. Kaagad kaming nagpunta sa doctor ngunit walang masabi ang doctor kung anong nangyari sa akin. Nag punta na rin kami sa mga manghuhula at ang albularyo at gaya ng doctor, sila walang masabi kung ano ang pinag mulan at ang lunas nito.

Sa aking pag uwi ay takot ang aking nadarama kaya't sa kwarto ng aking magulang ako natulog.



Pagkadilat ko ng aking mata ay may isang babaeng nakatalikod na may mahabang buhok, matatalim ang kuko at may hawak siyang isang maliit na manika. Humarap siya at ako ay nangilabot hindi lamang dahil sa kanyang mukha kundi dahil na rin sa manika na hawak niya na walang labi. Tumulo ang aking mga luha sabay ng kanyang pagtawa. Hindi ko alam kung nasaan ako at hindi ako makahingi ng tulong dahil wala akong mga labi.



Bigla siyang nagsalita “Narapat lang sayo ‘yan dahil hindi mo pinapahalagahan ang iyong labi, puno ka ng kasinungalingan at panlalait” sambit niya. Pumikit ako habang umiiyak at sa aking pagdilat ay katabi ko ang aking magulang. “Lahat lamang ba iyon ay panaginip lang?” ito ay ang tanong sa aking isipan ngunit hindi. Ramdam ko ang lahat ng nangyari at alam kong ito’y hindi lamang panaginip. Ako ay nagsisi sa lahat ng aking kasalanang ginawa at gumawa ako ng paraan upang masabi ang katotohanan sa mga taong nagkamali ako. Sa pagtagal ng panahon ay natuto akong magpahalaga

at magmahal ng tao. Nagising ako at bigla na lamang naramdaman ko ang aking labi. Labis akong nagpapasalamat na ito’y nabalik na ngunit ang pinakamagandang regalo na nakuha ko ay hindi ang aking labi kundi ang pagkatuto ko gumawa ng tama.

Lahat tayo ay may pagkakataong baguhin ang ating sarili at humingi ng tawad sa mga taong nagawan natin ng mali. Hanggat hindi pa huli ang lahat ay gumawa na tayo ng hakbang upang mapabuti ang ating buhay. Lagi nating tandaan na tayo ay ginawa ng Diyos upang mahalin ang ating kapwa.

WAKAS

Litrato

ni Reenah Hernandez

“Lolo”, tawag sakanya ng isang binata, “kamusta na po kayo tanong nito sakanya. Ang mga batang ito ay buwanang dumadalaw sakanila, sya si Lindon, nasa isang home dor the aged 65 years old

Nalaglag mula sa kamay nya ang dalawang litrato “ Oh lolo, sino po itong lalaki sa larawan?” tanong ng binata, “ Ako yan”, sagot nya. “ Wow lolo ang gwapo mo pala”, sabat ng kasama nitong dalaga,” Eh lolo sino po itong babae sa isang litrato tanong ng dalaga. “ Sya, sya ang nag iisang babae minahal ko”

(49 years before)

“ Lindon!” tawag sakanya ng isa niyang kaibigan, “ Bakit na naman?” naiiritang tanong nya, S-si Piiiig,” natatawang sabi nito. Mula sa malayo nakita nyang



papalapit sakanya si Pola Inocencio Gregorio, kunin ang mga initials ng mga pangalan nito at mabubuo ang salitang P-I-G. Isa ito sa mga pinagtatawanan ng mga kaibigan nya sa school dahil bagay na bagay daw ang pangalan nito, dito bilugan kasi ang katawan nito, sa madaling salita, mataba kung may isang bagay na ikakaganda ito sa mata ng mga kaibigan nya, yun ang buhok, sabi nila, maganda daw ito kapag nakatalikod huwag na lang daw haharap. Maganda kasi ang buhok ni pola, hindi na kailangan i-rebond pa natural na kumbaga. Sabi ng mga kaibigan nya, Bagay daw sila, Beauty and the Pig nga lang, sya ang Beauty at ito ang Pig. Iniwan na sya ng mga kaibigan nya paglapit ni Pola sa grupo " nila H- hi! lindon," nakangiting bati nito sakanya,

Hello, Pola," bati niya dito. Inabot nito sakanya ang isang sobre," Mamaya mo na lang basahin Lindon, bye," paalam nito. Tiyak niyang aasarin na naman sya ng mga kaibigan kapag nakitang binabasa nya ang sulat na galing kay, Pola, kaya namn agad nya iyong itinago sa bag nya. Pag dating nya sa classroom wala pa ang terror teacher nila, agad syang nilapitan ng isang kaibigan, " Hi Lindon," pang aasar nito, ginaya pa nito kung pano magsalita si Pola at kung pano ito lumapit sakanya, halos lahat naman daw may gusto sakanya dahil nga daw sya ang beauty king ng campus nila





Isang araw, may isang pamilya na bagong lipat ng bahay. Ang kanilang nilipatan ay isang payapang lugar at malayo sa siyudad. Ang pamilyang ito ay may isang anak na lalaki na nagngangalang Peicer. Siya ay mabait, matulungin at may busilak na puso.

ang ni Jamine Piper Gaita
DIWATA
sa tagong lagusan

Dahil salabis na kainipan ni Peicer sa kanilang bahay, napagpasiyahan nitong lumabas upang makapaglibot-libot at makalanghap ng sariwang hangin. Sa kanyang paglilibot sa kanilang bakuran, siya'y napadpad sa magubat na bahagi nito. Kung saan may sangay-sangay ng mga dahon at bulaklak. Ito ay kanyang agad na hinawi at may natuklasan siyang kakaiba. Sa kanyang paghawit rito, siya'y nakakita ng liwanag kaya't siya'y napapikit. Sa pagmulat ng kanyang mga mata ay siya'y nasilaw sa kagandahan ng lugar. Kakaiba ang lugar na

ito, kung saan may mga naninirahan na hindi pangkaraniwan tulad ng mga higante, duwende at iba pang mga engkanto. Sagana rin sa mga bulaklak at iba't ibang uri ng mga puno na hitik sa bunga ang iyong matutunghayan sa lugar na ito. Ang lahat ng mga bagay na naririto ay ginto at humahalimuyak sa bango ang lugar na iyon. Tuluyan niyang pinasok ang lugar dahil sa labis na kamanghaan. Sa kanyang paglilibot rito, siya'y napahinto, sapagkat siya'y nakakita ng isang babae. Ang babaeng ito ay saksakan ng ganda, siya'y si Reyna Malistika. Siya ang

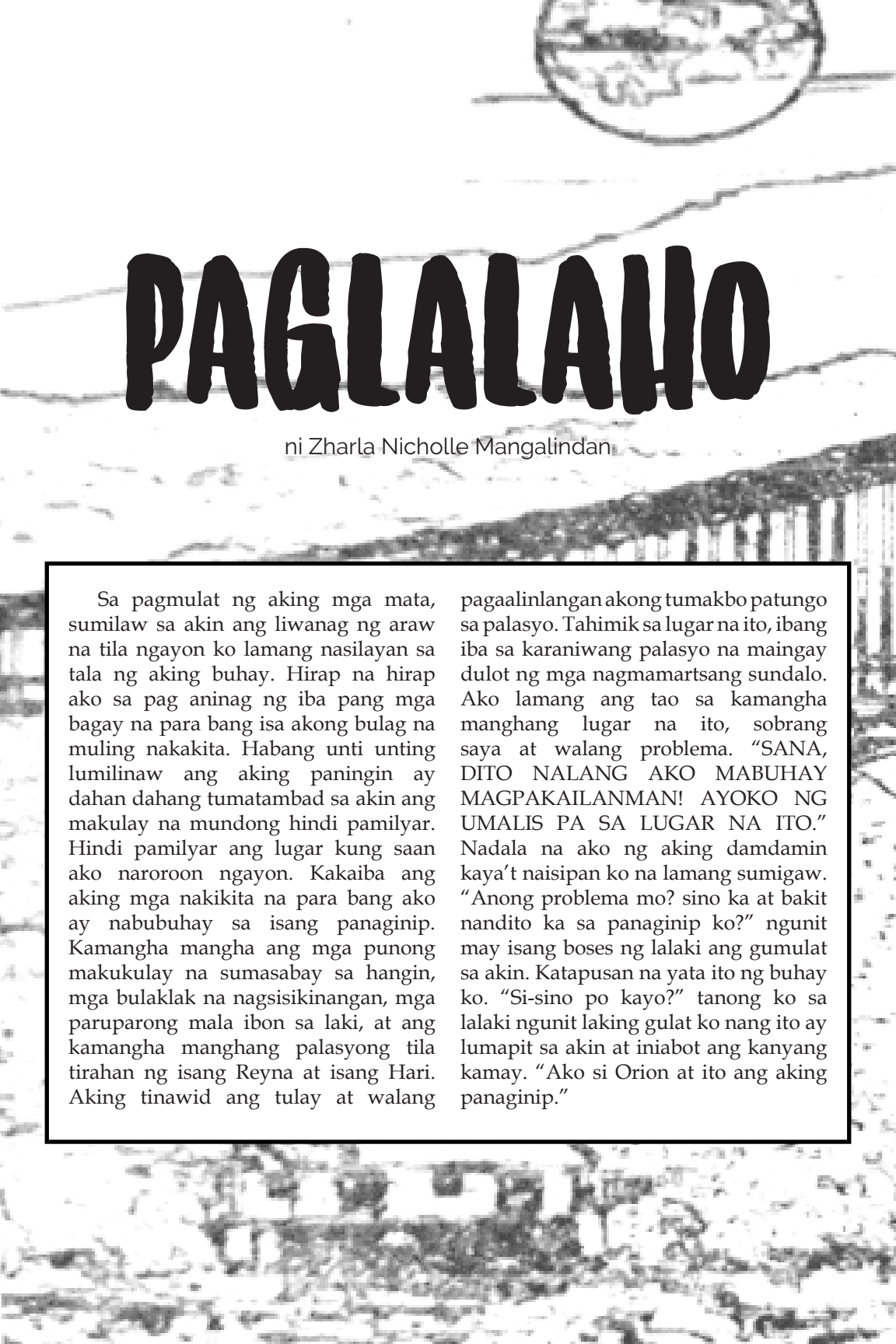
reyna at siyang namumuno at namamahala sa lugar na iyon. Siya ay maganda, mabait at nakakabasa ng nilalaman ng iyong puso at isipan.

Kinausap niya si Peicer at sinabing dahil sa busilak nitong puso, ay siya'y hahayaan na magpabalik-balik sa lugar. Ngunit ito ay may kondisyon, hindi niya maaaring ipagsabi ang lugar na iyon sapagkat maaaring may mga taong magsamantala rito at ito'y masira at mawala. Pumayag si Peicer sa kasunduang iyon at nangakong hindi ito ipagsabi sa kahit na sino man.

Nagpabalik-balik si Peicer sa lugar na iyon dahil na din sa siya'y sumasaya sa bawat pagpunta dito. Nakakalimutan niya ang kanyang mga problema at nagkaroon siya ng mga bagong kaibigan. Iba't ibang lugar at pakikipagsapalaran ang kanyang naranasan dito, tulad ng pagsakay sa mga higante upang malibot ang lugar at makasisid sa kailaliman ng karagatan kasama ang mga diwata.

Sa pagpapabalik-balik ni Peicer sa lugar na ito, may lalaking nakasunod sa kanya ng hindi niya namamalayan. Natuklasan ng lalaki ang lahat ng mga bagay na naririto kung saan nagkaroon ito ng maitim na plano. Sa sumunod na araw, nag-hikayat pa ang lalaki ng ibang makakasama sa pagpitas ng mga halaman at pagputol ng puno rito upang magkaroon ng maraming kayamanan. Sa patuloy na pagkasira ng lugar, nagalit si Reyna Malistika. Pinarusahan niya ang mga lalaki sa paraan na hindi na ito muling makakakita pa. Gayun din si Peicer na nakabigo sa kanyang pangako, ang parusa sa kanya ay panghabang-buhay na hindi na makapagsasalita. Dahil sa pangyayaring ito'y, tuluyan ng nawala at naglaho ang lugar. Magpasahanggang ngayo'y wala ng sino mang muli ang nakakita sa sinasabing tagong lagusan.





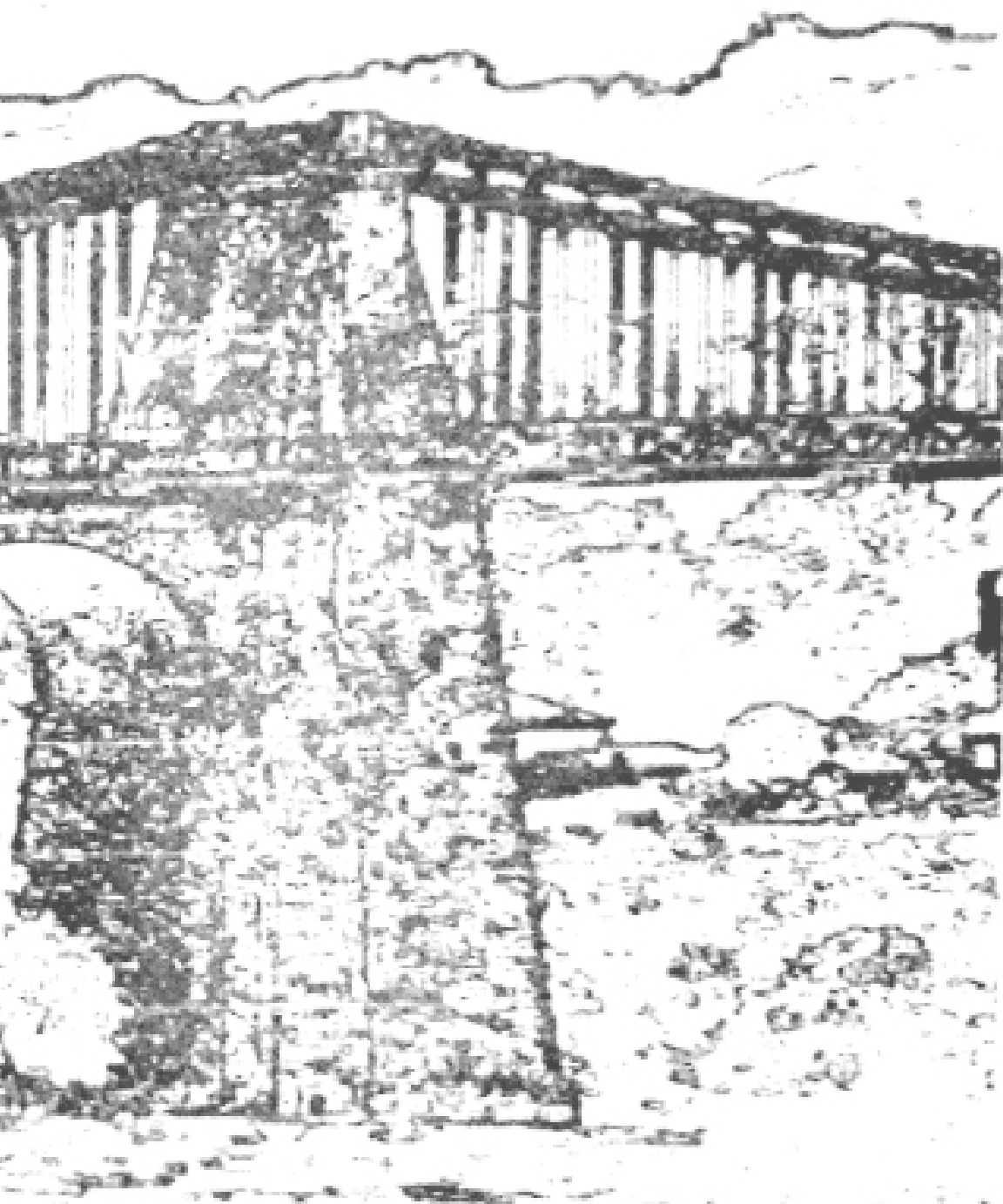
PAGLALAHO

ni Zharla Nicholle Mangalindan

Sa pagmulat ng aking mga mata, sumilaw sa akin ang liwanag ng araw na tila ngayon ko lamang nasilayan sa tala ng aking buhay. Hirap na hirap ako sa pag aninag ng iba pang mga bagay na para bang isa akong bulag na muling nakakita. Habang unti unting lumilinaw ang aking paningin ay dahan dahang tumatambad sa akin ang makulay na mundong hindi pamilyar. Hindi pamilyar ang lugar kung saan ako naroroon ngayon. Kakaiba ang aking mga nakikita na para bang ako ay nabubuhay sa isang panaginip. Kamangha mangha ang mga punong makukulay na sumasabay sa hangin, mga bulaklak na nagsisikinangan, mga paruparong mala ibon sa laki, at ang kamangha manghang palasyong tila tirahan ng isang Reyna at isang Hari. Aking tinawid ang tulay at walang

pagaalinlangan akong tumakbo patungo sa palasyo. Tahimik sa lugar na ito, ibang iba sa karaniwang palasyo na maingay dulot ng mga nagmamartsang sundalo. Ako lamang ang tao sa kamangha manghang lugar na ito, sobrang saya at walang problema. "SANA, DITO NALANG AKO MABUHAY MAGPAKAILANMAN! AYOKO NG UMALIS PA SA LUGAR NA ITO." Nadala na ako ng aking damdamin kaya't naisipan ko na lamang sumigaw. "Anong problema mo? sino ka at bakit nandito ka sa panaginip ko?" ngunit may isang boses ng lalaki ang gumulat sa akin. Katapusan na yata ito ng buhay ko. "Si-sino po kayo?" tanong ko sa lalaki ngunit laking gulat ko nang ito ay lumapit sa akin at iniabot ang kanyang kamay. "Ako si Orion at ito ang aking panaginip."

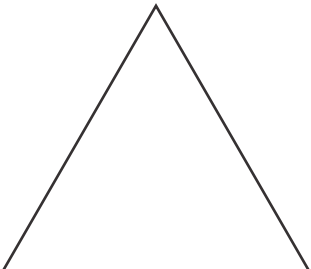
Mula noon ay naging magkaibigan kami ni Orion. Marami siyang bagay na ipinakita sa akin at ako ay sobrang naaliw sa mga ito. Dinadala nya ako sa iba't ibang magagandang lugar na bago lamang sa paningin ko.



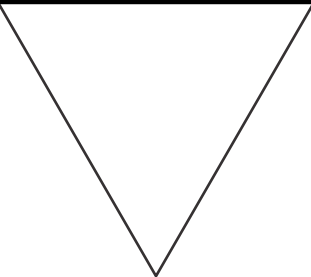
Sa kanyang panaginip, ang buhay ko ay nagmistulang Fantasia na puno ng mahika. "Paano mo nga ba nagagawang lumikha ng mga kakaibang bagay at dalhin ako sa mga hindi pamilyar na lugar na para bang ikaw ay isang makapangyarihang diwata?" napatanong nalang ako kay Orion habang kami ay nakaupo sa pagitan ng dalawang naglalakihang puno. "Luna, lahat ng iyon ay dulot ng aking imahinasyon. Dito na ako nakatira sa panaginip at ito ang aking buhay. Lahat ng aking gustuhin ay nagaganap." paliwanag sakín ni Orion. Sobra akong humanga sa kanyang paliwanag. Matagal narin akong namamalagi sa kanyang panaginip ngunit ngayon ko lamang nadinig ang mga ganitong salita mula sa kanya. "Sana katulad mo rin ako na nakukuha ang lahat ng gusto. Sana namumuhay rin ako sa isang panaginip." Tumulo ang aking luha ngunit agad naman itong pinunasan ni Orion. "Malungkot sa lugar na ito Luna, nakukuha ko nga ang mga bagay na gusto ko ngunit wala naman akong nararamdamang pagmamahal. Maganda ang riyalidad mo Luna, maghintay ka lamang. Palagi mong tatandaan na ang buhay ay hindi puro kasiyahan lang, maraming mga pagsubok ang dapat mong labanan. Ngayon, Luna, kailangan mo ng harapin ang mga ito.

Masaya ako at nakilala kita. Sana, huwag mo ng uulitin ang lahat ng mga pagkakamaling nagawa mo at huwag ka na muling babalik sa mundong ito. Tandaan mo lang palagi na maganda ang riyalidad mo. Paalam Luna, hanggang sa muli."

Napansin ko na lamang na unti unting naglalaho si Orion sa aking paningin. Hagulgol ako ng hagulgol habang padilim ng padilim ang paligid. Patuloy ako sa pagtakbo habang tinatakan ang mga pagkakamaling aking nagawa. Dulot ito ng mundong sa akin ay naging sobrang sama. Sa pagtungo ko sa tulay, nung gabing iyon ay wala na akong ibang mapuntahan. Wala rin naman ang aking mga magulang dahil sila ay abala sa trabaho, gayundin ang aking mga kapatid na walang pakialam sa buhay ko, at mga kaibigan na nandiyan lamang kapag kailangan nila ako. Tanging ang tulay na lang ang aking matataguan sa paghabol sa akin ng mga taong nagawan ko ng masama ngunit nang ako ay mapatingin sa madilim na tubig ng ilog ay tuluyan na akong naubusan ng pagasa. Nilamon na ako ng kalungkutan at takot habang dahan dahang lumulubog ang aking katawan at sa aking pagbitiw ng hininga, tanging liwanag ng buwan ang aking huling natanaw. Sa pagmulat ng aking mga mata, sumilaw sa akin ang liwanag ng araw na tila ngayon ko lamang nasilayan sa tala ng aking buhay. Hirap na hirap ako sa pag aninag ng iba pang mga bagay na para bang isa akong bulag na muling nakakita. Habang unti unting lumilina ang aking paningin ay dahan dahang tumambad sa akin ang makulay na mundong hindi pamilyar. Hindi pamilyar sa akin ang lugar kung saan ako naroroon ngayon. Kakaiba ang aking mga nakikita na para bang ako ay nabubuhay sa isang panaginip. "Maganda ang riyalidad mo Luna" naalala ko nanaman ang paulit ulit na katagang binibitawan sa akin ni Orion.



Nilibot ko ang aking paningin at nakita ko sa tabi ko ang aking Mama, Papa, mga kapatid, at mga kaibigan. Maraming mga puno sa paligid at umuulan ng niyebe. Birthday ko nga pala ngayon kaya't kami ay nangibambansa upang magsaya. Lahat ng ito ay nagagawa ko dahil ako ay nakatapos na nang pagaaral. Anim na taon narin ang lumipas mula nung nalunod ako sa isang ilog dahil sa depresyon na kumain sa aking buhay ngunit dahil din sa depresyong ito kaya ko nakilala si Orion, ang lalaking nakasama ko sa isang paraiso nung mga sandaling oras na ako ay lumulubog sa tubig habang ang buwan ay nagdidilim. Kaya sa tuwing nangungulila ako kay Orion, tumitingin na lamang ako sa buwan at inaalala ang lahat ng pangyayaring iyon. "Tama ka Orion, maganda nga ang riyalidad ko pero mas gaganda ito kung kasama kita rito. Sana totoo ka Orion, sana makita kitang nabubuhay sa mundo ko at hindi lang sa mundo mong Panaginip.



wakas

NOONG UNANG PANAHOON SA PROBINSYA NG BICOL, ANG MGA KATUTUBO AY NABIGYAN NG ILAW MULA SA PITONG BUWAN NA NILIKHA NI BATHALA. ANG MGA BUWAN AY NAGSILBING ILAW SA MADILIM NA GABI AT NAGING GABAY SA MGA MANGINGISDA SA KARAGATAN. ANG MGA KATUTUBO AY MASAYANG NAMUMUHAY. MASAGANA, MALUSOG, AT TULOY-TULOY ANG PAMUMUHAY SA PROBINSYA.

SI RAJAH BHATAN, ANG PINUNO NG TRIBO, AY PINULONG ANG KANIYANG MGA KATRIBO UPANG PAG USAPAN ANG KANILANG PAGLALAKBAY PATUNGO SA ISLA TERMOKOBA. SINABIHAN NI RAJAH BHATAN NA MAGHANDA AT DALIN LAHAT NG KAILANGAN PARA TATLONG ARAW NA PAG LALAYAG. WIKA NI RAJAH BHATAN "MAGHANDA DAHIL AALIS TAYO SA GANAP NA PAG LUBOG NG ARAW. AT INI ANGAT ANG LAYAG SINIMULANG HAMPASIN ANG TAMBOL HABANG ANG IBANG MANDIRIGMA AY SUMAGWAN PALAYO SA KANILANG ISLA.

ANG MGA BUWAN AY MALIWANAG

PA SA MGA BITUIN AT ANUMANG URI NG ILAW. NAMANGHA SI RAJAH BHATAN SA GANDA NG MGA ITO, PUMIKITA ANG RAJAH AT NAG DASAL NG PABULONG "BATHALA, MARAMING SALAMAT SA BIYAYA MO. O DIYOS NG KALIKASAN AKO'Y NAGPAPASALAMAT SA IYO." PAYAPA ANG DAGAT AT TILA BA WALANG ANUMANG DELUBYO O BAGYONG DARATING..... HABANG NASA GITNA NG KARAGATAN AT TAHIMIK ANG LAHAT, NAGISING ANG RAJAH DAHIL SA ISANG PAG GALAW NG TUBIG. ANG RAJAH AY NAGHINALA AT NAALALA ANG KWENTO NG KANIYANG INA TUNGKOL SA HALIMAW NG KARAGATAN NA KUNG TAWAGIN AY "BAKUNAWA."



ANG BAKUNAWA AY ISANG MAHABANG AHAS NA NAHAHAWIG SA ISANG DRAGON, NABANGGIT NG KANIYANG INA NA ANG HALIMAW AY TINANGKANG KAININ ANG PITONG BUWAN NA NILIKHA NI BATHALA.

SI RAJAH BHATAN AY NAG BANTAY AT NAKIRAMDAM SA AGOS NG TUBIG..... HABANG PATULOY ANG PAG LALAYAG NG KANILANG MGA BALANGAY, NANGYARI ANG HINDI INAASAHANG PANGYAYARI

UMAHON ANG ISANG MAHABANG HALIMAW
MULA SA KARAGATAN AT SINIMULANG SIRAIN
ANG MGA BALANGAY AT KINAIN ANG IBANG
MANDIRIGMA NA SAKAY NITO.

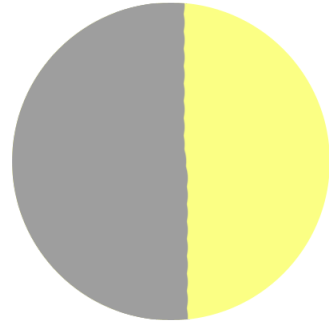
NA-ALARMA SI RAJAH BHATAN
ANG KANIYANG MGA MANDIRIGMA,
PUNO NG TAKOT AT KABA ANG
LAHAT NGUNIT HINDI NAWALAN
NG PAG-ASA ANG LAHAT. SUMIGAW
ANG RAJAH " WALANG AATRAS!!!
PATAYIN ANG HALIMAW!!!" WALANG
NAGAWA ANG LAHAT DAHIL SA
LAKI AT LAKAS NG BAKUNAWA.

ang
HALIMAW
at ang mga
BUWAN

ni Alejandro Jose Joaquin

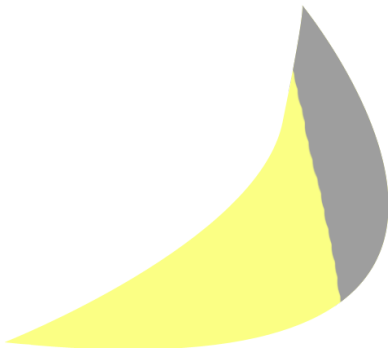
LUMUBOG AT MARAMI NG
PATAY SA MGA MANDIRIGMA NI
RAJAH BHATAN..... NGUNIT ANG
ATENSIYON NG BAKUNAWA AY NA
PUKAW SA MGA MALILIWANAG
NA BUWAN SA KALANGITAN.
NABIGHANI ANG HALIMAW DITO
AT SINIMULANG KAININ ISA-ISA
ANG MGA BUWAN. NAALALA NG
RAJAH NA UPANG MAITABOY ANG
HALIMAW AY KAILANGAN LUMIKHA
NGINGAY NA MAG PAPALAYAS DITO,
SUBALIT, SA KAHINAAN AT KULANG
SA KAGAMITAN NA NASIRA SILA AY
NABIGO.

SINIMULANG KAININ NG
HALIMAW ANG MGA BUWAN AT
NAKITANGRAJAHANGUNTI-UNTING
PAG DILIM NG KALANGITAN. TULOY-
TULOY SA PAGKAIN ANG BAKUNAWA
HANGGANG ISA NALAMANG BUWAN
ANG NATIRA. SI RAJAH AY HINDI
PARIN NAWAWALAN NG PAG-ASA
NA MAPIPIGILAN AT MATATALO
ANG BAKUNAWA. TUMINGIN SA



KALANGITAN SI RAJAH BHATAN
AT NAG DASAL KAY BATHALA. “
OH AMING BATHALA, DIYOS NG
MGA DIYOS AT NG LAHAT!!!! KAMI’Y
IYONG TULUNGAN, LUPIGIN MO ANG
BAKUNAWA ILIGTAS MO KAMI AT
ANG IYONG MGA BUWAN!!!!”

HINDI NABIGO SI RAHAJ BHATAN,
ANG KANIYAN PANALANGIN AY
NARINIG NI BATHALA, LUMIWANAG
ANG BUONG PALIGID AT ANG
HALIMAW AY NABIGLA. NAG AAPOY
SA GALIT AT POOT SI BATHLA NANG
NAKITA NIYANG ISA NA LAMANG
ANG NATIRA SA PITONG BUWAN
NA KANIYAN NILIKHA. WIKA NI



BATHALA, “ LAPASTANGAN KA
BAKUNAWA!!!

NARARAPATLAMANGNAIKAWAY
AKING PARUSAHAN.... KAILANMAN
AY HINDI KANA MULING MAKAKA-
AHON AT MAKIKITA,TULUYAN
KANG MAWAWALA SA
MUNDONG ITO DAHIL SA IYONG
KALAPASTANGANAN SA AKIN AT SA
KALIKASAN!!!!!!”

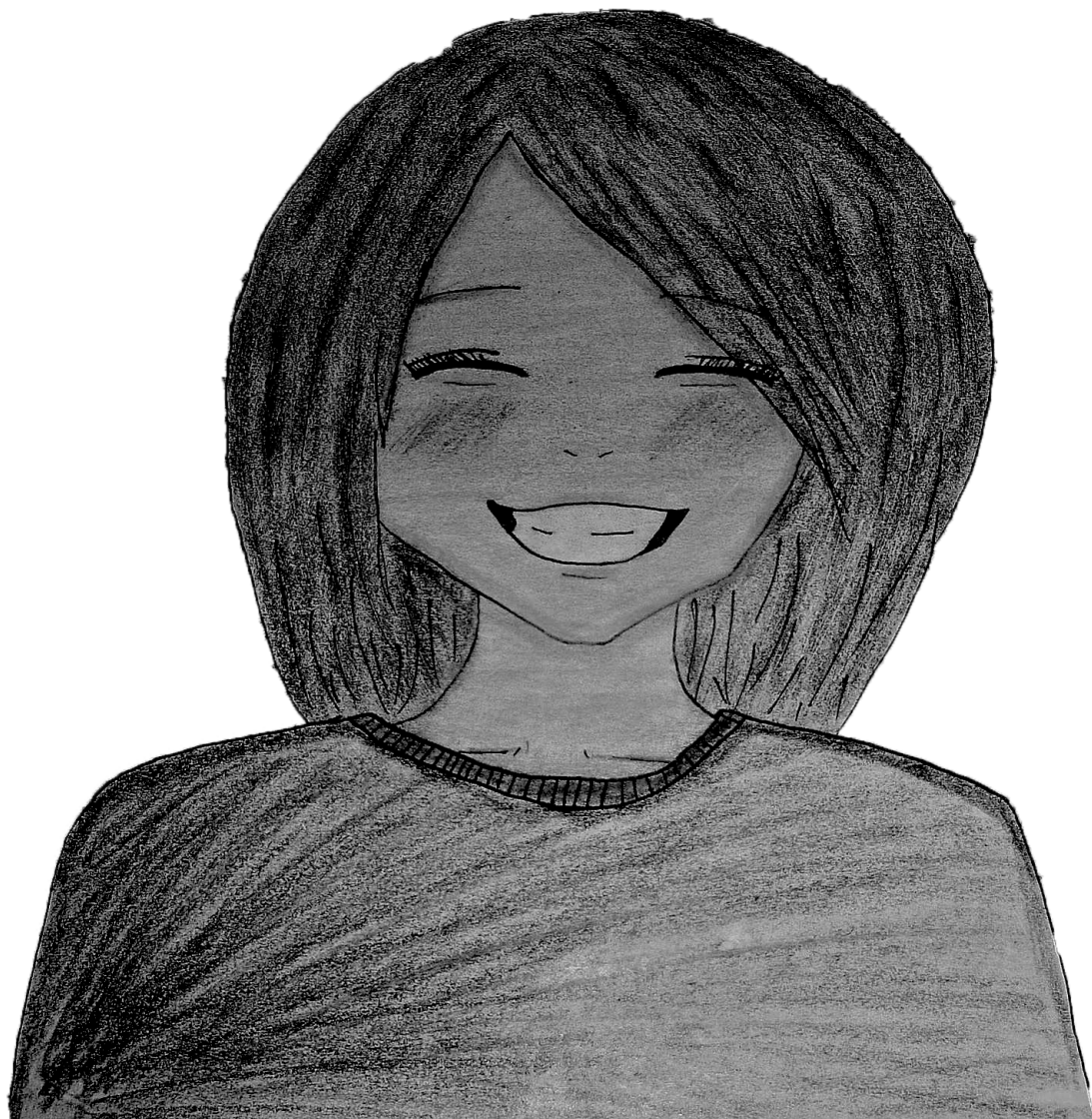
.....AT NAGLAHO ANG
BAKUNAWA, NAG TAGUMPAY SI
RAJAH BHATAN AT ANG KANYANG
MGA NATITIRANG MANDIRIGMGA.
ILANG ARAW NAG PALUTANG-
LUTAN SA KARAGATAN SILA RAHAJ
BHATAN HANGGANG DUMATING
ANG TULONG AT SILA AY NAIUWI. SI
RAJAH BAHATAN AY INALALA ANG
KANYANG MGA MANDIRIGMANG
NAMATAY AT KINIWENTO ANG
NANGYARI SA BUONG TRIBO.

TUWING SASAPIT ANG GABI,
NAALALA SI RAHAJ BHATAN
ANG BAKUNAWA NA KUMAIN
SA MGA BUWAN. AT ITO, AY
KAILANMA'Y HINDING HINDI NIYA
MALILIMUTAN.....

CRISELDA

ni Dianne Perez

criselda



Sabi nga nila, ugaliing sumunod sa magulang upang tayo ay mapabuti at hindi maligaw ng landas. Pero dahil naging suwail ako, heto ako ngayon, nagsisisi, nahihirapan, at umaasang panaginip lang ang lahat. Kung sana lang ay nakinig ako sakanila ay siguro hindi ako mapapasama sa ganoong klase ng mga kaibigan at hindi ako mapapahamak. Masyado akong nagpakasarp sa buhay na hindi ko namamalayang nasa panganib na pala ang buhay ko.

Nagkaroon kase ng isang katuwaan kaming magkakabarkada at iyon ang pagpunta sa isang bar house. Siyempre ano pa ba ang gagawin namin doon? Edi nag-inuman at nagwal-wal. Nang magsawa kaming lahat at lasing na, nagkayayaan ng umuwi. Si Patrick, isa sa mga kabarkada ko, ang nag-iisang medyo maayos-ayos pa ang dating kaya siya nalang ang nagmaneho ng sasakyan pauwi. Pero dahil may tama narin siya, ay naikabig niya bigla ang manibela at doon kami sumalpok sa isang pader na ginagawa palang. At

Hello!

Uy!

Hi!

Ummm.. Annyeong? Ni hao? Konnichiwa?

Ikaw? Ikaw lang naman kase ang tao dito.

Eh sa wala kase akong magawa eh.. Tsaka minsan na nga lang ako may makausap kaya pagbigyan mo na.

dahil ako ang nasa harapan, isa ako sa mas napuruhan bukod sa kaniya. May ilang galos na nakuha ang mga taong nasa likod ng kotse pero wala namang namatay saamin. Yun nga lang, ng mangyari iyon ay iniwan nila kaming dalawa ni Patrick sa kotse at hindi man lang tinulungan. Laking pasalamat nalang namin ng may nakakita saamin at dinala kami dito sa ospital. Pero bago pa man nila kami madala sa ospital ay tuluyan na akong nabulag. Nawaglit ako sa pag-alala sa nangyari ng may narinig akong nagsalita.

boses babae siya pero hindi ko nalang pinansin.

napakunot noo ako ng marinig ko parin ang boses na iyon.

Sino bang kausap mo?

iritadong tanong ko dito. Sa pagkakaalam ko ay ako lang mag-isa dito sa kwartong kinalalagyan ko.

psh, kung nakikita ko lang siya ay mababatukan ko siya.

At bakit ka naandito? Kuwarto ko ito, at hindi kita kilala.

tanong ko sakaniya kung saan man siya.

Eh bakit sa kuwarto ko pa?

Nakita kase kitang malungkot kaya naman pinuntahan nalang kita..

Oi! Di kita nilapitan dahil sa gwapo ka ha! Malungkot ka kase, masakit sa mga mata ko ang nakakakita ng taong malungkot.

Ang init naman ng ulo mo. Pero sensya ka, dito muna ako. Bleh!

Hahahahaha.. Para kang ewan, wala kase diyan yung cellphone mo, nasa unahan mo lang

Hindi ka ba nakakakita?

Mukha nga.. Nasa gallery na yung pinipindot mo eh.

S.sorry na..Hindi ko sinasadyang ma-offend ka. Ano kase, gusto ko lang ng makakausap.. Tsaka, pasensya na rin kung puro tanong ako. Ngayon lang ako may nakausap eh. Tsaka, masama bang magtanong? Sorry na talaga

sabi niya. Psh, sa umpisa lang ganyan pero sa huli iiwanan ka rin.. Tsk.

pagdidepensa niya pa.

Di ko tinatanong at hindi ko kailangan ng kasama.. Kaya umalis ka nalang.

sabi ko bago kinapa sa gilid ang aking cellphone.. Magpapatugtog nalang ako, masyado kaseng maraming satsat ang babaeng ito.

hindi ko nalang siya pinansin at nagpatuloy parin sa pagkapa ng phone ko. Pero kahit anong kapa ko sa table na nasa gilid ko ay wala akong maramdamang cellphone.

sabi niya. Ramdam ko ang pagpula ng pisng ko sa pagkapahiya..Pero kaagad ko ring iwinaglit ito. Hindi ko nalang siya pinansin at kinuha nalang ang cellphone ko at sinimulang magkalikot dito.. Tsk.. Bakit ba kase nakalimutan ko ng hindi na nga pala ako makakita.

tanong niya pero hindi ko pinansin.

Hindi ko alam pero nainis ako bigla sa sinabi niya. Oo, bulag nga ako. Pero anong magagawa ko? Eh sa nangyari na eh.

Oo na! Hindi na ako nakakakita!! Masaya ka na, na nasagot na yung tanong mo?!

inis kong singhal sakaniya.

sabi niya saakin. Di ko nalang siya inintindi at bumalik nalang sa pagkakahiga. Tsk, makulit na babae.

Yah! Hindi ako makulit no. Tsaka, huwag ka ngang bumulong diyan, rinig na rinig ka naman.

pagdependa niya nanaman. Kailan ba ako patatahimikin ng babaeng ito?

Bumalik ka nalang sa kwarto mo baka hanapin ka pa.

mahinahong sambit ko. Naghihintay ako ng sagot mula sa kaniya pero mukhang umalis na nga siya dahil nainis na saakin. Mas gusto ko kase munang mapag-isa.

Ayaw ko nga!

pero mukhang hindi pa pala. Haayzzz..

● Ang Simula ●

Magmula ang araw na iyon, nagsimula na siyang magpunta dito sa kwartong ito. Minsan nga ay nagugulat nalang ako sa pagdating niya. Wala man lang kaseng kabakas-bakas na ingay na maririnig sakaniya kaya talagang nakakagulat. Minsan nga eh nagsalita siya habang nainom ako ng gamot, kaya naman bigla ko iyong nailuwa. Buti nalang talaga at nasa unahan lang iyon ng kama ko. Masyado na siyang nakakaabala saakin, pero may mga araw rin na hinahap-hanap ko siya dahil na rin siguro nakasanayan ko na ang kakulitan niya. Wala naman

siyang ibang pinagsasabi kundi ang pagkukumpara sa mundo ngayon at noon. At kung paano umasta ang kabataan sa panahon noo at ngayon. Di ko nga alam kung bakit lahat ng iyan pati narin ang ekonomiya ng Pilipinas ay prinoproblema na na hindi naman dapat. Masyado siyang madada, at maingay. Pero mapapansin na hindi siya nagkukwento tungkol sa buhay niya. Madaldal man pero malihim. Panigurado kapag nakuha na nito ang gusto nito saakin ay iiwan at iiwan niya rin ako sa huli.

Usapan

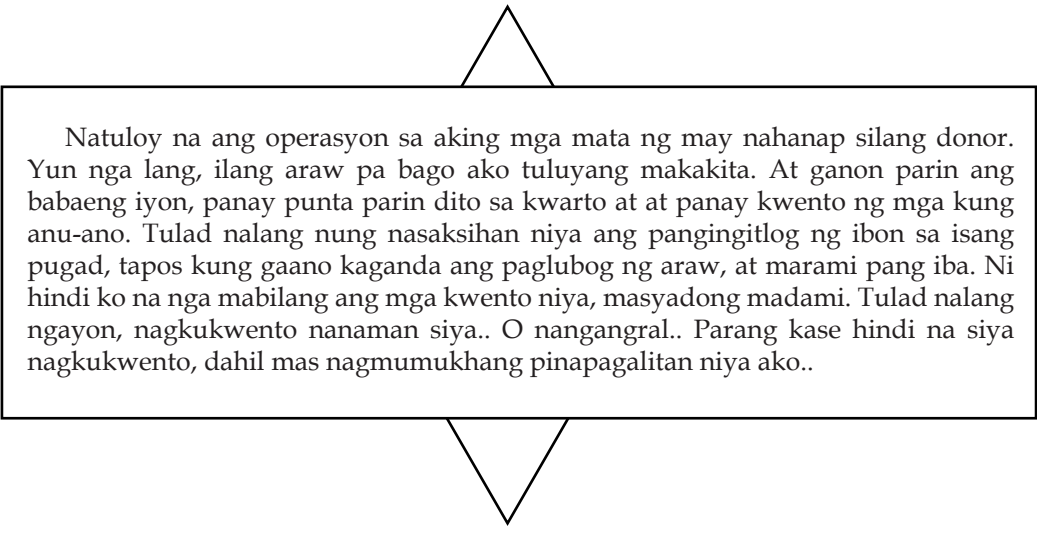
“Oi babae!! Ikaw naman ang magkwento. Kanina pa ako dada ng dada dito pero ni isa ay wala ka namang komento.. Ay! Ang galing! Rhyme yung sinambit ko!” diba? Napakaingay niya? Buti na nga lang at hindi siya nakakagalitan ng mga nurse eh.

“Manahimik ka na nga lang. Puro paru-paro lang naman ang pinagkukwento mo.” sita ko sakaniya.

“Hahahahaha.. Maganda naman ah! Pero alam mo mas mabibigyan mo ng kahalagahan ang mga bagay na nasa paligid mo kapag unti-unti na silang nawawala saiyo. Hay-naku.. Tama na nga, baka magdrama naman ako dito.. Ayaw ko ng drama.. Sawa na ako diyan. Nga pala Martin mag-iikot muna ako ha! Gusto kong pumunta sa rooftop.” tsk.. makapagsabi na ayaw raw magdrama eh lagi naman siyang nagdadrama.. Pero teka.. Magrurooftop raw siya ah.

“Oi! Sama ako!” sabi ko sakaniya.. Sana naan diyan pa siya.

“Huwag na, magpahinga ka na lang muna diyan. Baka may mangyaring di maganda saiyo.. Huwag kang mag-alala, dadalhin kita sa rooftop sa tamang oras.” sabi nito at umalis na... siguro.. Hindi ko naman marinig ang kilos niya eh.. Masyadong tahimik.



Natuloy na ang operasyon sa aking mga mata ng may nahanap silang donor. Yun nga lang, ilang araw pa bago ako tuluyang makakita. At ganon parin ang babaeng iyon, panay punta parin dito sa kwarto at at panay kwento ng mga kung anu-ano. Tulad nalang nung nasaksihan niya ang pangingitlog ng ibon sa isang pugad, tapos kung gaano kaganda ang paglubog ng araw, at marami pang iba. Ni hindi ko na nga mabilang ang mga kwento niya, masyadong madami. Tulad nalang ngayon, nagkukwento nanaman siya.. O nangangral.. Parang kase hindi na siya nagkukwento, dahil mas nagmumukhang pinapagalitan niya ako..

Matapos ang Operasyon

“Yan kase! Inom pa more! Para bye bye mata ulit! Bakit ba kase ang mga kabataan ngayon kakaiba na? Hindi man lang matutong makuntento kung anong meron sila. Masyadong pasarap sa buhay kaya naman madaming problema ang nahahanap. Kabuang!” giit pa niya. Nanunuod kase siya ng news sa T.V. dito sa kwarto ko.. At ayun, may nabalitang isang kabataan raw namatay dahil sa nagdrive ng lasing. Ito namang babaeng ito, maka-react ay wagas.

“Huy! Manahamik ka nga! Nakakahiya ka.” naiiling na sambit ko. May narinig ako binulong niya pero hindi malinaw.

“Anong sabi mo?” tanong ko sakaniya.

“Wala! Ang ganda mo kako! Nga pala, kailan tatanggalin yang benda sa mata mo?” pag-iiba niya ng usapan.

“Next week pa.. Bakit mo naitanong?”

“Ummm... Wala lang... Nagtatanong lang masama? Pero bruh! Paglabas mo dito ay ayusin mo na ang buhay mo ha. Huwag na huwag mo na ulit gagawin ang mga ginawa mo ok? Hindi kase maganda yun eh. Makinig ka na ng maayos sa magulang mo para mas maayos ang buhay mo.” sabi nito. Psh, ayang nanaman ang masyadong parangal niya. Nakakaimbyerna na.

“Alam mo, iwanan mo nalang muna ako.. Kung gusto mong magdrama, huwag mo akong idamay diyan.. Maghanap ka ng kausap mo.” inis na sambit ko. Alam ko narin naman ang mali ko.. Pero wag lang paulit-ulitin.. Nakaraan na iyon! Iba ang ngayon!

“Hahahahaha... Nagsasabi lang.. Sige na nga, una na ako. Mag-ingat ka palagi ha! Babush!!” sambit niya at umalis na muli..Nailing nalang ako sa inasta ng babaeng iyon. Minsan man ay may sense ang sinasabi nya at talagang isinasabuhay ko ang ilang advice niya saakin. Pero hindi ko lang pinapahalata dahil baka asarin niya lang ako.. Kakaiba rin mag-isip ang babaeng iyon.

Nang dumating na ang araw ng pagtanggap ng aking benda sa mata, ni hindi man lang ako kinausap ng babaeng iyon. Hindi ko nalang siya inalala at hinintay ang doktor ng tanggalin ito.

Pagmulat

"Handa ka na ba iha?" tanong saakin ng doktor kaya naman tinanguan ko nalang siya bilang sagot. Ramdam ko naman ang dahan-dahang pagtanggap ng benda saaking mata hanggang sa may naaaninag na akong liwanag. At nang tuluyan ng mawala ang benda sa aking mga mata ay dahan-dahan kong idinilat ang aking mga mata.

"Ano martin, nakikita mo na ba kami?" tanong ni mama saakin.

"Opo..Malinaw na malinaw po." nakangiting sambit ko. Napangiti rin sina mama at papa, ganon din ang doktor. Iginala ko ang aking paningin pero hindi ko siya nakita.

"Ma, wala po ba dito yung kaibigan ko?" tanong ko kay mama.

"Sino sina Patrick? Hindi sila dumalaw dito anak." tsk, hindi naman kase sila.

"Wala po iyon. Kalimutan niyo nalang po." sabi ko nalang.

Matapos iyon, ay kinausap nina mama ang doktor tungkol sa mga bagay na pwede saakin at hindi. Kaya naman naisipan ko munang lumabas sandali.

"Ma, labas lang ho ako." pagpapaalam ko. Lumington muna ako muli sakanila at tinignan ang mga masasayang mukha ng magulang ko bago tuluyang lumabas. Sa rooftop lang naman ako pupunta eh.

Sa ilang buwan ko sa dilim, masaya akong nakakita na rin ako ng liwanag sa wakas. Siguro kahit noong hindi pa ako bulag ay naglalakad parin ako sa dilim dahil sa mga bagay na ginagawa kong hindi nakakabuti saakin. Pero naging aral narin ito saakin na huwag na muli magsasama sa ganiyang klaseng gawain ng barkada. Dahil walang magandang maitutulong ito saakin. Naging tulong narin siguro saakin ang mga advice ni babae saakin. Simula kase noong kinausap niya ako ay parang nagkaroon

na rin ako ng kaibigan kahit na alam kong hindi rin naman magtatagal.

Pagkabukas ko ng pintuan dito sa rooftop,kaagad na sumalubong saakin ang sinag ng araw bago ko pa makita ang isang babaeng nakatalikod saakin, pero alam ng damdamin ko na siya yung babaeng laging napunta sa kwarto ko at ang babaeng walang ibang ginawa kundi magdada ng magdada. Gulat siyang napaligon sa gawi ko. Naguguluhan at nagtataka.

Ang Pagkikita

"Na...nakikita mo a..ako?" gulat na tanong niya. Nailing nalang ako sa inasta ng babaeng ito.

"Psh, natural ano bang akala mo saakin, bulag parin ako?" dahan-dahan akong lumapit sakaniya at tinignan siya sa mata. Hindi pa pala ako huli at nakita ko parin siya. Pero mukhang ngayon lang niya naintindihan ang sinabi ko dahil sa panlalaki ng mga mata niya.

"Nakikita mo talaga ako??? Tsaka paano mo nalamang ako iyon???" sunod-sunod na tanong niya saakin.

"Hindi ka man kilala ng mata ko pero kilala ka ng tainga ko. " nakangiting sagot ko. "Nga pala, nakalimutan kong magpakilala saiyo, akong nga pala si Criselda. Ikaw, sino ka?"

"Ummm.. Ako nga pala si Angla. Ikinagagalak kong makilala ka Criselda." sabi ni Angla saakin.

"Ako rin. Salamat rin pala sa pagtulong mo saakin Angla. Maari mang naging masungit ako saiyo, pero na-appreciate ko lahat ng advice na sinasabi mo. Bukod doon, ang pagpaparamdam ng hindi ako nag-iisa sa lahat ng pagkakataon, maraming salamat rin pala doon." nakangiting sambit ko sakaniya.

"Walang anuman Criselda, nais ko mang magtagal pero marami pa akong dapat na asikasuhin. Kaya mauuna na ako." sabi niya pero bago pa man siya umalis ay nagsalita muna ako.

"Nga pala, alam ko ang tungkol sa misyon mo. Hindi ako nagpapasalamat sa trahedyang binigay mo saakin pero yung mga aral oo. Mag-ingat ka sa susunod mong misyon. Sana ay hindi mo na magawa ang pagkakamaling nagawa mo." nanlalaking mata siyang napalingon saakin.

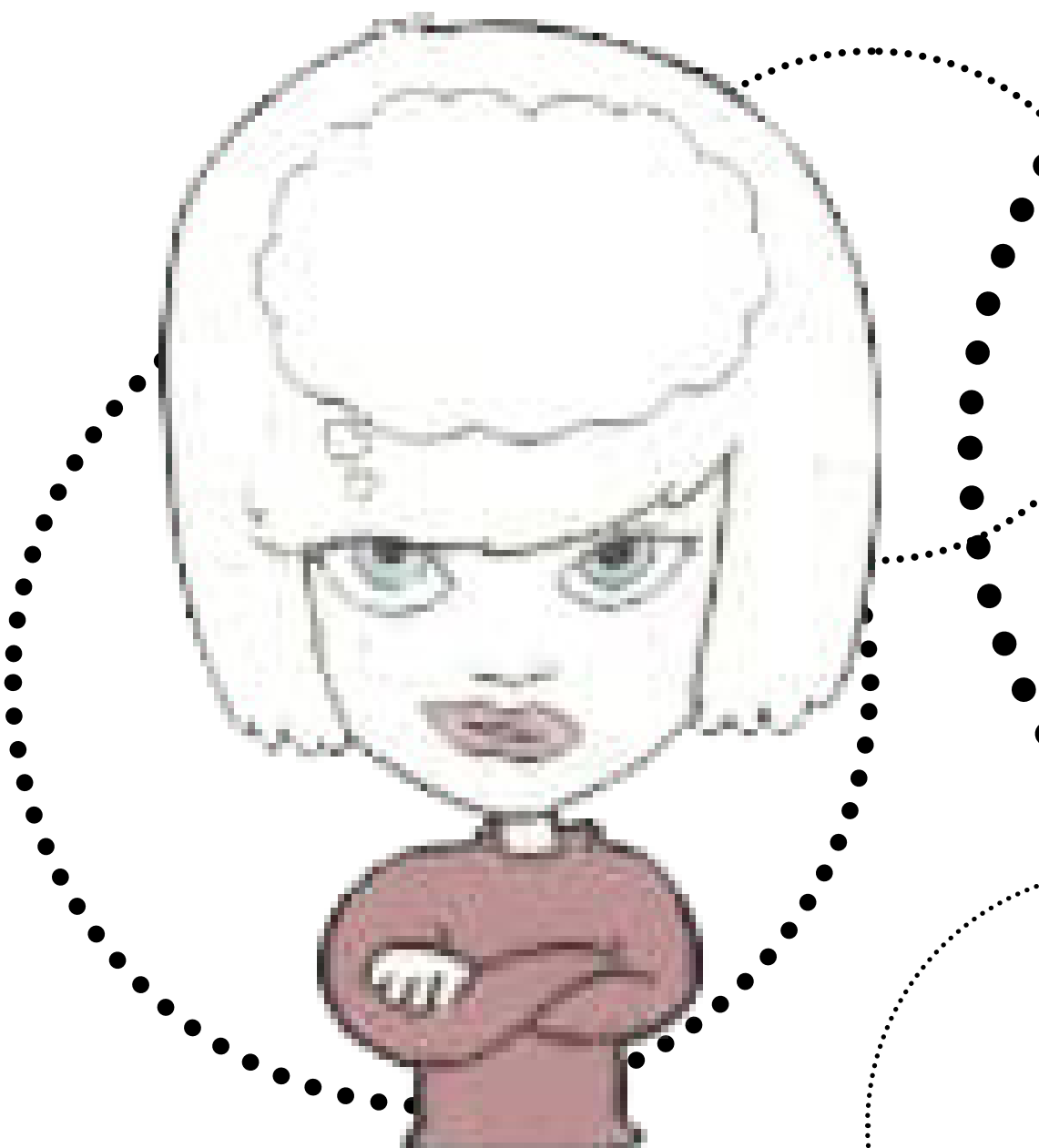
"Pa..paano mo nalaman ang tungkol doon?" tanong niya.

"Simple lang.. Kung ikaw ay ang misyon mo ay tulungang mapatino ang tao.. Meron rin ako.. Ang tulungan kayo sa bawat misyon na gagawin niyo. Kita-kits nalang sa susunod Angla! Paalam!" sabi ko bago tuluyang maglaho sa harapan niya.

Ang Wakas.

Ako nga pala si Hannah. Isa lang akong simpleng babae. Noong bata pa ako, mahilig akong magbasa ng mga libro na may kinalaman sa agham. Mga storya tungkol sa paglalakabay sa iba't ibang panahon gamit lamang ang isang makinarya o kung ano man ang tawag nila doon, mga supernatural na kakayahan ng isang tao at kung ano ano pa. Lagi rin akong binabasahan ng aking lola dahil parehas kaming mahilig sa mga ganitong storya, ngunit noong ako pa lamang ay

limang taong gulang, siya ay pumanaw na. Noon, pinangarap ko na magkaroon ng isang kakayahan kung saan maaari kong makita at mabasa ang iniisip ng isang tao sa pamamagitan lamang ng pagtitig sa kanilang mga mata. Oo alam kong imposible iyon, pero mukhang magandang magkaroon ng ganong kakayahan diba? Akala ko noon hanggang pangarap na lamang iyon, pero nagbago ang lahat noong tumungtong ako ng highschool...



PANGITAIN

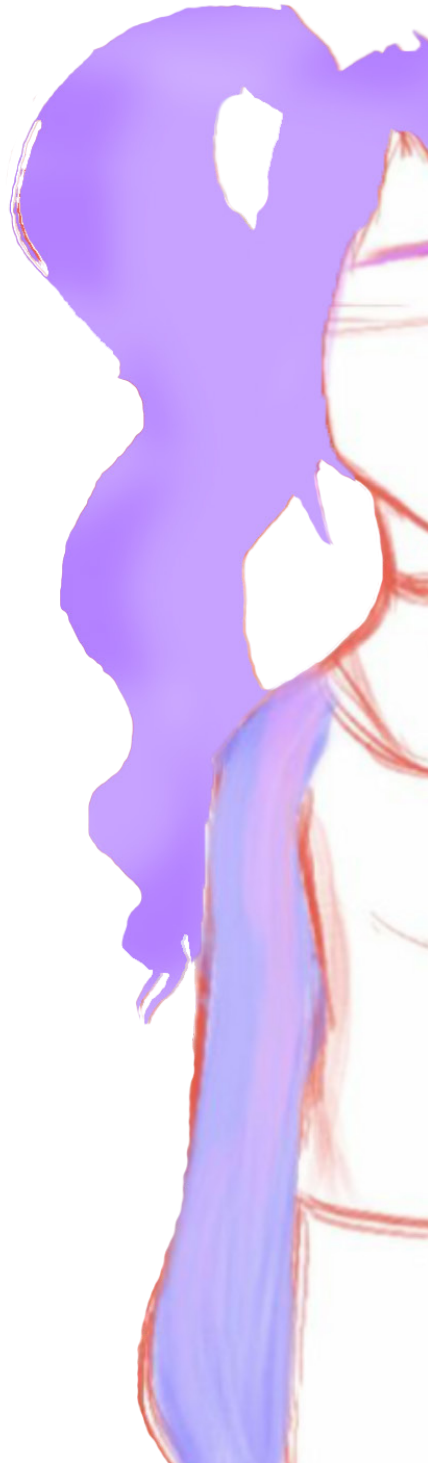
ni Kylah de Guzman

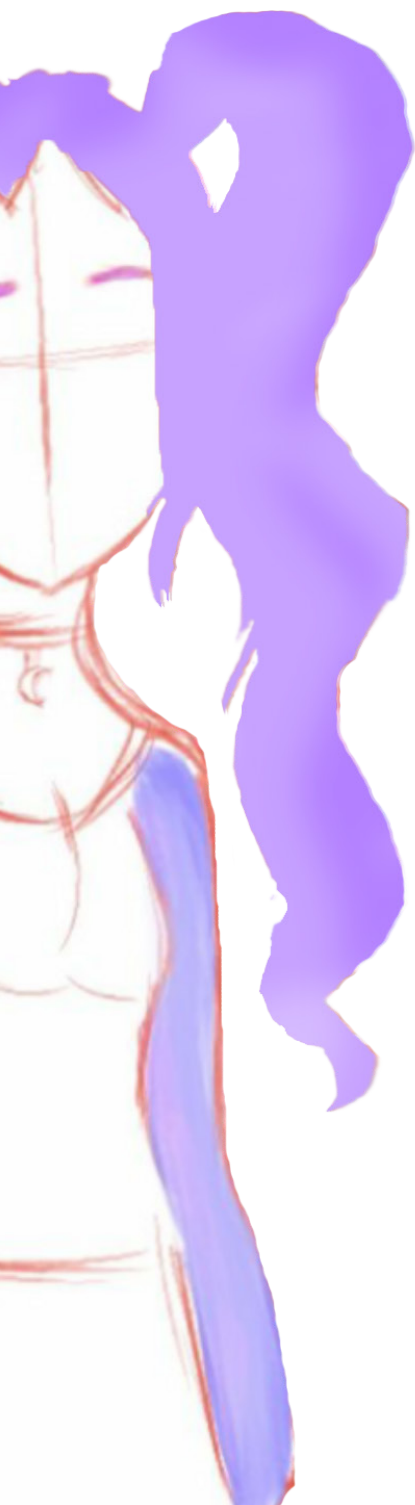
Unang araw ng eskwela, sabay sabay kaming pumasok ng aking mga kaibigan. Sabik na sabik kaming makakilala ng mga bagong tao, mga bagong kaklase. Hanggang sa lumipas ang isang buwan, mayroong pangyayari ang hindi ko inaasahan... Mayroon kaming isang kaklase, ang pangalan niya ay Lucas. Kilala siya sa aming eskwelahan dahil isa siyang gwapo, matangkad at maputi na lalaki ngunit hindi lamang dahil rito kaya siya sikat, kilala rin siya bilang isang “dakilang” mambubully. Sikat na sikat siya dahil sa dami ng kaniyang nabiktima na nabalita sa buong eskwelahan, kaya halos lahat ng estudyante ay takot sakaniya. Isang araw, bigla siyang dumaan sa aking harapan. Napatitig ako sa kaniyang mga mata at bigla nalang akong nagulat nang tumigil ang lahat ng nangyayari sa aking paligid at sa pagtigil na ito, doon ko nakita ang paglalagay ni Lucas ng kahon ng sigarilyo sa bag ng aking kaklase na mahigpit na pinagbabawal sa aming eskwelahan.

Pagkatapos nito ay bumalik ang lahat sa dati at makaraan lamang ang ilang minute, laking gulat ko ng mangyari lahat ng nakita ko noong tumitig ako sa mata ni Lucas. Biglang pinatawag ng aming professor ang aking kaklase at dito niya nakita na mayroon itong kahon ng sigarilyo sa kaniyang bag. Tumingin ako kay Lucas at nakita ko ang pasimpleng pag ngiti niya sa pangyayaring iyon. Paguwi ko sa aming bahay, ako’y napaisip “Ano bang nangyayari sa akin kanina? Totoo ba yung nakita ko o sadyang nagkataon lang talaga na nangyari yung ginawa ni Lucas? Hay baka mamaya sa sobrang pagod ko lang yon, hayaan ko na nga.”

KINABUKASAN

Kinabukasan, habang ako ay papasok sa aking eskwelahan, mayroon akong nakasalubong na isang lalaking nagmamadali, habang siya ay tumatakbo, nagtagpo an gaming mga mata at biglang tumigil ang paligid at nakita ko ang isang pangyayari kung saan nasagasaan ang lalaki. Bumalik sa dati ang paligid at matapos nito, biglang dumating ang isang sasakyan at nasagasaan ng tuluyan ang lalaki. Napasigaw ako sa aking kinatatayuan at dali dali akong tumakbo papasok ng aming eskwelahan, nanginginig at puno ng takot. Dito ko napatunayan na tunay ngang nakikita ko ang mga mangyayari sa isang tao gaya ng pinangarap ko noon at sa bawat araw na dumaraan, iba't ibang pangyayari ang aking nakikita sa mga tao. Mayroong masaya, malungkot, takot, trahedya, ngunit sa kabila ng lahat ng ito, natakot akong tumulong at sabihin sa mga tao ang nakikita ko dahil baka isipin lamang nila na isa akong baliw o nasisiraan ng ulo. "Ayoko na ng ganito, maging ang mga bagay na hindi ko gugustuhing makita ay nakikita ko. Paano ba ito mawawala? Ayoko na pagod na ako" wika ko sa aking sarili.





Nagulat ako ng may bumagsak sa ilalim ng aking lamesa. Isang libro, pagkabukas ko ay mayroon papel na nahulog mula dito. “Hannah, narito ang mga sagot sa lahat ng katanungan mo. Sana’y mabasa mo ito.” Pamilyar ang itsura ng librong iyon dahil minsan ay nakita kong hawak ito ng aking lola. Dali dali kong binuksan ang libro, nakita ko ang mga litrato ng aking lola at dito’y nabasa ko ang isang kwento tungkol sa isang babaeng may kakayahang makakita at makabasa ng iniisip ng mga tao kagaya ng kondisyon ko. Biglang nanlaki ang aking mga mata at dali dali kong binasa ang kwento. Sa huli, nakita kong nakasulat ang lunas upang matuldukan ito. “Nararapat lamang na ikaw ay makatulong sa limang tao ng hindi nila nalalaman ang kakayahan mo at kung ikaw ay mabigo, habang buhay ng mananatili sa iyo ang kakayahang ito.” Sa kadahilanang baka ito rin ang maka tanggal sa aking kakayahan, dali dali kong ginawa ang lunas na nakasaad sa libro...

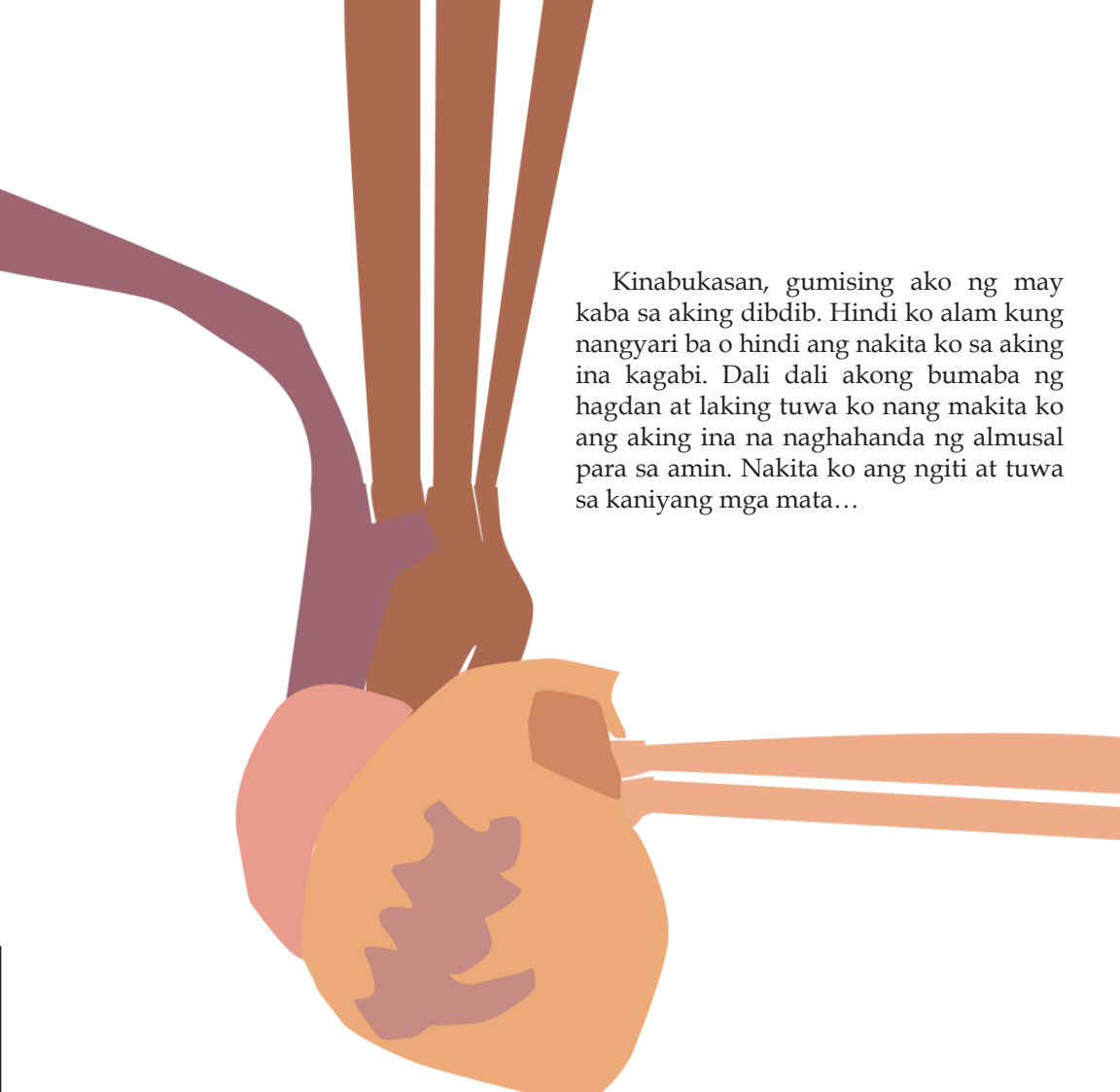
NAGULAT

Umuwi ako ng aming bahay na pagod na pagod galing sa aming eskwelahan. "Hay, mabuti nalang at nakatulong na ako sa apat na tao, isang tao nalang ang kulang at matatapos na din ang lahat ng ito, konting tyaga pa" wika ko sa aking sarili. Sa aking paguwi nakita ko ang aking nanay sa aming kusina. "Ma, nandito na po ako" , tumingin siya sa aking mga mata at sinabing "Halika rito anak, mag meryenda ka muna." Sa kaniyang mga mata, laking gulat ko ng makita ko ang kaniyang sasapitin. Nakita ko ang aking ina, nakahandusay sa sahig, walang malay kasama ang mga tabletang nagkalat sa kaniyang mga kamay. Ako ay napaupo sabay ng pagtulo ng luha sa aking mga mata. "Hannah! Anong nangyari sayo?" wika ng aking ina. Yumakap ako ng mahigpit sa kaniya at sinabing "Ma, bakit? Anong problema? Sabihin mo sa akin

ma, bakit?" wika ko sa aking ina kasabay ang walang tigil na pagpatak ng aking mga luha. "Ma, alam kong nahihirapan kang itaguyod kaming magkakapatid ng magisa, pero diba sabi natin lalaban tayo kahit wala si papa? Hinding hindi mo kami pababayaan at hiding hindi ka din naman pababayaan ma." "Anak, hirap na hirap na ako. Ayokong nakikita kayong nahihirapan ng dahil sa sitwasyon natin. Ang tatay mo, hindi na tayo sinusustentuhan at nalaman kong mayroon na siyang ibang pamilya." Sa pagpatak ng bawat luha ng aking ina, nakita ko ang pagod, hirap at kung gaano niya tinititi lahat ng sakit para lang sa amin. Ginawa ko ang lahat upang hindi mangyari ang nakita ko sakaniya. "Ma, lalaban tayo ha? Hindi ka namin iiwan at malalagpasan natin ang lahat ng ito ng magkakasama."



**NIYAKAP LAMANG AKO NG MAHIGPIT
NG AKING INA...**

An illustration showing the lower half of a person in a dynamic, possibly dancing or athletic pose. The legs are extended upwards and outwards, with the feet pointing towards the top of the frame. The feet are depicted with orange and brown tones, and the legs are in shades of brown and purple. The background is plain white.

Kinabukasan, gumising ako ng may kaba sa aking dibdib. Hindi ko alam kung nangyari ba o hindi ang nakita ko sa aking ina kagabi. Dali dali akong bumaba ng hagdan at laking tuwa ko nang makita ko ang aking ina na naghahanda ng almusal para sa amin. Nakita ko ang ngiti at tuwa sa kaniyang mga mata...

Habang papasok ako sa aking eskwelahan, umiiwas akong tumingin sa mga mata ng ibang tao sa kadahilanang baka hindi parin nawawala ang aking kakayahan ko, ngunit noong aking sinubukan, laking gulat ko hindi dahil sa nakakakita padin ako ng mangyayari sa isang tao kundi dahil sa nakita ko si Lucas na ubod kong kinaiinisan. Dire direktso akong naglakad ng may ngiti at gaan sa aking loob. Nagbalik ang mga alaala na tila ba tulad noong unang araw ko sa eskwela.



BUHAY

NA HINDI KO
inaasahan

ni Ishie Fernandez

Isang araw may isang babaeng nangangalang Scarlett Jorge Delos Santos pero ang tawag sa kanya ng kanyang magulang ay Carla. Ang pangalan naman ng kaniyang nanay ay si Mrs. Rose Delos Santos at ang tatay nya ay si Mr. Randy Delos Santos. Maagang namatayan ng tatay si Carla dahilan ng cancer. Mahal na mahal siya ng kanyang tatay kaya't hindi matanggap ni Carla ang pagkamatay ng kanyang tatay dahil mahal na mahal niya ito.

“Anak, halika dito” sabi ng kanyang nanay.

“Bakit po?” ang tanong naman ni Carla

“ito na ang tamang panahon na sabihin sayo ang totoo.....”

(Nakatahimik lamang si Carla habang nakaramdam ng kaba)

“anak hindi ka namin totoong anak ng tatay mo at nakuha ka lang namin ng tatay mo sa kagubatan at doon nakasulat ang iyong pangalan kaya’t napag desisyunan namin na kupkupin ka.”

Nalungkot si Carla na parang hindi na nya kayang sumaya pa kaya’t naisipan nyang lumisan ng kanyang bahay upang mag isip muna. Pangarap ni Carla na maging abogado upang maigpaglaban nya ang mga taong may karapatan. Habang naglalakad sya, nakakita sya ng nag aaway na mga lalaki kaya’t tinulungan niya ang

isang lalaki na pinagtutulungan ng limang lalaki. At kahit na babae sya ay kinaya nya ang limang lalaki na yon at nagulat na lang siya bigla, at tinignan nya lamang ang kanyang mga kamay dahil kahit kalian ay hindi pa naman sya sumuntok ng malakas lalo na’t hindi naman sya marunong makipag-away.

Usapan

“Hoy! Kaya ko naman labanan yung mga yon ah. Bakit sumingit ka pa?” mayabang na sinabi ng lalaki.

“O talaga lang ha? Bugbog na bugbog nga yang muka mo eh HAHHAHA” natatawang sinabi ni Carla.

“Tama ka, ako nga pala si Paulo, kasali ako sa fraternity... O wag kang matakot maganda intensiyon namin ha” aniya ni Paulo.

“Ahh hehe ganon ba?” mahiyang sinabi ni Carla.

“Pede kang sumali dun basta matapang ka, tumutulong din kami sa mga nangangailangan ng tulong. Tulad nga ng sabi ko kailangan matapang ka dahil kailangan natin ipagtanggol ang mga taong binubugbog ng mga tao dahil alam mo naman yung mga tao ngayon. Masagi mo lang eh galit na sayo HAHHAHA sali ka na, trust me worth it yun.” Masayang sabi ni Paulo.

“Sige na nga HAHHAHAHA” sabi ni Paula.

Kaya’t inaya siya ni Paulo sa fraternity na kanyang sinalihan na kung saan ito ay nasa sa liblib na lugar at ipinakilala niya ito sa mga miyembro nito.

“Meron nga pala kaming activity bukas na gaganapin sa dagat. Di pwede ang hindi sasama kaya kailangan mong sumama understood?” ang sabi ng leader nila kay Carla.

Naisip ni Carla na hindi pa sya nakapupunta o nakaligo man lang sa dagat kaya’t pumayag sya ng hindi nagpaalam sa kanyang nanay. Umuwi si Carla at nakita siya ng nanay niya na alalang alala sa kanya at mangiyak ngiyak sa sobrang alala.

“Saan ka ba nanggaling bata ka? Nag-alala ako sayo. Kumain ka na ba?” pagalit na sinabi ng nanay ni Carla.

“Ayos lang po ako. Tara po kumain na tayo.”

Habang kumakain sila ay nagpaalam si

Carla “uhmm mama bukas po pala ay may pupuntahan lang akong lugar. Safe po yun saka overnight.” Sabi ni Carla

Hindi na sinabi ni Carla ang kanyang pupuntahan dahil baka hindi sya payagan ng kanyang nanay. Kinabukasan ay nakapunta na sya sa kanyang destinasyon kasama si Paulo. Hindi alam ni Carla na nahulog na pala ang loob sa kanya ni Paulo kaya’t inaya agad ni Paulo si Carla na sumama sa kanyang maglakad lakad muna. Habang naglalakad sila ay napahinto na lamang sila at nagtapat si Paulo ng kanyang nararamdaman.

Ang pagtatapat

“Carla may sasabihin ako sayo, hindi ko alam kung alam mo na ‘to pero nung niligtas moko sa mga lalaking nambubugbog sakín, parang naramdaman kong ikaw na, ikaw na yung para sakín HAHAAHA tawa mo pa nga lang nakuha mo na ako eh. Matagal na talaga akong may gusto sayo simula nung bata pa lang tayo. Ang kaso lang di tayo magkakilala. Palagi kasi kitang nakikita kaya parang feeling ko pinagtagpo tayo ng tadhana HAHAAHA. Di man pareho ng nararamdaman ko sayo ang nararamdaman mo sakín pero Carla mahal kita.” Masayang sinabi ni Paulo “HAHAHAHAHAHA ang corny mo” natatawang sinabi ni Carla

SA SOBRANG TAWA NYA AY BIGLA NA LANG SYANG NAHULOG SA MALALIM NA PARTE NG DAGAT

na kung saan hindi kaya ni Carla na abutin yun. Biglang gulat na lang nya na binalot ng kaliskis ang mula bewang hanggang paa niya. Nauubusan na rin siya ng hininga at laking gulat na naman nya nang makahinga sya sa tubig na para bang may hangin na dumadaloy sa kanya. Sa takot nya, biglang gumalaw ang kanyang binti na may kaliskis at inihaon siya sa tubig. Nakita siya ni Paulo at kitang kita ni Carla ang mga mga nanlalaking mata ni Paulo sa gulat. Totoo ba 'tong nakikita ko?

Mga tanong na nasa isip ni Paulo. Pati si Carla ay natatakot din.

"C'Carla anong nangyai sayo? Bakit? Serena ka?!" natatakot na pagkakasabi ni Paulo

"Hindi ko rin alam. Kaya pala simula bata pa ako, hindi na ako pinalapit ng nanay ko sa dagat" umiiyak na sinabi ni Carla.



Habang naguusap ang dalawa ay may biglang humablot na parang halimaw kay Carla at dinala siya sa kanilang kaharian. Sa sobrang lalim at madilim na parte ng karagatan. Naiwan si Paulo at biglang tumakbo upang humingi ng tulong sa mga kasamahan.

“Kamusta Carla, matagal ka na naming hinihintay” nakakatakot na sinabi ng halimaw

“Sino ba kayo? Anong biro ito?” naguguluhang sinabi ni Carla

“Kami ang mga kaaway nyo at ikaw na lamang ang natitirang sirena sa buong karagatan kaya’t ikaw ay papatayin namin upang kami na ang mamuno sa buong karagatan WAHAHAHA” dugtong ng

halimaw.

“Mga kawal patayin nyo na yan!” malakas na sinabi ng halimaw

“Bitawan ninyo ako at hindi ninyo ako kayang patayin.”

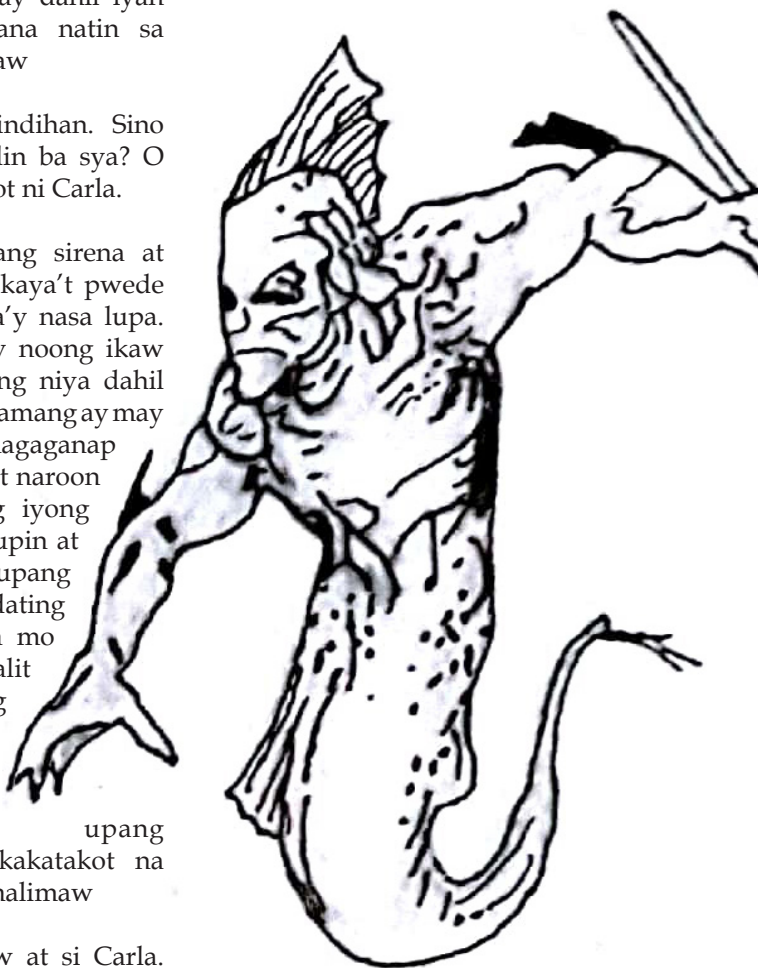
Biglang kumalas si Carla sa mga kawal at galit na galit sya. Ang kanyang mata ay naging pula at lumabas ang kapangyarihan nyang kalakasan at tubig. Lahat ng kawal ay tinalo niya kaya’t natira ang haring halimaw at sila ang nagtuos. Pero hindi alam ni Carla na ang hari na iyon ay kasing lakas niya rin at sa di pagkakaalam ni Carla ay magkapatid pala sila sa ibang tatay.



"Hoy bata, Hindi mo ba alam na magkapatid tayo? Kaya ka may kapangyarihan na ganyan ay dahil iyan ang kapangyarihang namana natin sa ating nanay." Sabi ng halimaw

"Teka, hindi ko maintindihan. Sino ba ang nanay ko? Sirena din ba sya? O katulad mo?" nalilitong sagot ni Carla.

"Ang nanay mo ay isang sirena at ang tatay mo ay isang tao kaya't pwede kang maging tao kapag ika'y nasa lupa. Ang nanay mo ay namatay noong ikaw ay ipinapanganak pa lamang niya dahil noong ipinapanganak ka pa lamang ay may pagsalakay ng mga tao na nagaganap sa kaharian ng mga sirena at naroon ako kaya't napagisipan ng iyong tatay na huwag kang kupkupin at iwan na lamang sa gubat upang ikaw ang maging reyna pagdating ng tamang panahon. Alam mo aking kapatid, galit na galit ako sa mga tao dahil sila ang pumatay sa aking nanay at tatay na iyong nanay rin. At ngayon! Ikaw naman ang papatayin ko upang makaganti HAHAAHA (nakakatakot na tawa ng halimaw)" sabi ng halimaw



At nagtuos ang halimaw at si Carla. Kung tutuusin ay mas lumakas ang halimaw dahil ng kanyag paghihiganti

kaya't nawawalan na ng lakas si Carla at napahiga na lamang siya at sasaksakin na sya ng halimaw... pero hindi natuloy ang pagsaksak nito kay Carla dahil biglang dumating si Paulo at sinalo niya ang saksak na dapat para kay Carla. Si Paulo ay nasaksak sa puso at siya ay namatay. Umiiyak si Carla at nagdilim ang paningin sa halimaw at sa di niya pagkakaalam ay mayroon palang kapangyarihan ang malaking tinidor na sinaksak kay Paulo at iyon pala ang makakatalo sa halimaw at iyon ang nagpanalo kay Carla pero nabigo sya dahil siya ay namatayan na naman at iyon ay ang mahal nya ring lalaki na si Paulo.

Simula ng nangyari iyon ay kinalimutan na ni Carla ang mga nangyari. Umalis sya sa fraternity at hindi na bumalik pa sa karagatan. Pagdating ng sampung taon, si Carla ay naging magaling na doktor at hindi ang pangarap nyang magig abogado. Pinili nya ang maging doktor upang gamutin ang mga taong may sakit at bigyan ng panibagong buhay ang mga taong naaksidente

Pag-ibig o Kamatayan

ni Trixie Anne Bagtas



Mga panaginip na hindi mo alam kung saan galling. Mga panaginip na iba't iba ang kahahantungan: may nagtatapos nang masaya, may nagtatapos nang malungkot at mayroong ibang hindi na nagawang tapusin. Ngunit iba ang mga panaginip ni Rubini. Si Rubini ay isang kolehiyalang mayroong mga matitinding panaginip at sa kanyang panaginip, lahat ay nagkatototoo.

Isang gabi, nakita niya sa kanyang panaginip ang walang buhay niyang aso. Nagising si Rubining umiiyak at dali dali pumunta sa bakuran upang tiyaking buhay pa ang kanyang alaga. Napanatag si Rubini at tumuloy sa pag aayos para sa kanyang pagpasok sa paaralan. Nang matapos na siyang mag-ayos, muli niyang sinulyapan ang kanyang aso. Lumapit ito sa kanya na tila bang naghahanap ng laro. Ngumiti si Rubini at umalis na ng bahay. Di niya namalayang naiwan niyang bukas ang gate at hinabol siya ng kanyang alaga. Ngunit, sa di kalayuan ay may truck na paparating at boom! Nabunggo ang aso. Narinig ni Rubini ang malakas na busina ng truck at sa kanyang paglingon,

nakita niya ang walang buhay niyang alaga.

Ayaw niya nang managinip. Kanyang iniisip na sa bawat pagtulog niya ay ilang buhay pa ba ang mawawala. Ilang pangyayari pa ba ang hindi niya kayang baguhin. Nakatulog sa pag-iyak si Rubini at sa kanyang panaginip, nakita niya ang lalaking naglalagay ng mga sulat sa kanyang upuan. Nakita niya kung paano sila naging masaya sa piling ng isat isa. Nakita niya ang pag-ibig na matagal na niyang pinanalangin. Nagising si Rubini sa bilis ng tibok ng kanyang puso. Sinabi niya sa kanyang sarili, "Sa wakas, paparating na 'yung binigay ni Lord! Magiging masaya na ako." Masayang

bumangon ang dalaga at sa unang pagkakataon, nag-ayos siya ng mukha. Sa kanyang pagpasok, alam niyang magiging maganda ang araw na to.

Lumipas ang buong maghapon, walang natanggap na sulat si Rubini. Ngunit hindi siya nawalan ng pag-asa. Kinabukasan, nag-ayos ulit siya ng mukha at pumasok nang may ngiti sa mga labi. Hindi hinayaan ang kaba na mangibabaw sa kanyang maghapon. Dumating ang uwian, wala pa ring mga sulat. Inulit niya nang inulit ang kanyang mga ginagawa kahit na sa uwian alam niya nang walang mga sulat ang makikita sa kanyang upuan.

Umasa si Rubini sa lalaking may bigay ng mga sulat. Umasa si Rubini sa pag-ibig na parating. Ngunit binigo siya ng kanyang panaginip. At sa gabing iyon, nanaginip ulit siya at sa pagkakataong to hindi naging maganda ang kinalabasan. Isang panaginip na hindi na dapat nasimulan. Isang panaginip na kanyang kinakatakutan. At dito ay nakita niya ang kanyang pagkamatay. Luhaang nagising ang dalaga. Hindi niya alam kung ano bang dapat niyang gawin. Pinagmasdan niya ang kanyang kwarto, "Hindi maari. Hindi pa ako handing mamatay."

Bumangon at pumasok sa unibersidad si Rubini kahit nasa ulap ang kanyang isip. Hindi niya malaman kung anong kadahilanan ng kanyang pagkamatay. Hindi niya alam kung pano ito babaguhin. Lumipas ang maghapon, nakita niya na ang sulat sa kanyang upuan. Natahimik si Rubini. "Ano pa ba ang saysay ng bagong pag-ibig kung mamamatay rin naman ako. Matatanggap niya bang may taning na ang buhay ko? Sa tingin ko hindi."

Tinago ni Rubini ang sulat sa kanyang aparador nang hindi man lang binubuksan. Takot ang dalaga na mahulog sa mga salita ng binata. Takot siyang sumubok sapagkat paparating na ang kanyang katapusan. Dumating ang mga araw, at parami nang parami ang mga sulat. Parami rin ng parami ang laman ng kanyang aparador. Isang araw, huminto ang mga sulat kasabay ng paghintay ng mundo ni Rubini. Naiyak na lamang siya sa pagkawala ng inaasam niyang pag-ibig at naghintay na lamang araw araw sa kanyang pagkamatay.

Ilang taon na ang lumipas, nakapagtapos na siya ng pag-aaral. Walang pag-ibig na dumating, walang ring aksidente ang nangyari sa dalaga. Dumaan ang maraming trabaho, tumanda nang tumanda ang dating dalaga. Lumukot ang dating makinis na mukha at hindi na muling nakita ang kanyang mga ngiti. Unti unting pumuti ang kanyang buhok at isang hapon, siya'y nagpahinga sa tabi ng bintana. Bigla siyang naiyak na tila ba'y naliwanagan. Ang pagtangi niya sa pag-ibig ang nagpabago sa kanyang kapalaran. Ano nga ba ang dapat niyang pinili? Ang pag-ibig at saya sa maikling panahon o habang buhay na lungkot at paghihintay sa kamatayan?

Wakas

