

BEATA

by Mariya Lim (Batch 25 – Group 4)

A technophobic religious old lady is a regular church volunteer (“beata”), collecting offerings during mass. She is unpopular in what is surprisingly a cliquish group of should-be virtuous old ladies like herself. Her usual routine involves a bike ride through a natural avenue of giant trees in small town Tuburan, Northern Cebu. She lives in a time capsule of a tiny home with only the necessities. Gifts of modern kitchen equipment gather dust in unopened boxes.

Upon receiving a phone call from her hospital-confined son, she ends up moving to the city. On the city-bound bus ride, she brings a native Christmas belen decoration. It is almost crushed by a standing passenger as they pass through a sharp bend in the highway. However, when she arrives at the condo, it is already decorated with a lavish Santa-Snowman Christmas tree. Waiting for her is her socially distant granddaughter.

The next day, she starts front desk work at her son’s light specialty store. Business isn’t really booming. Their competition across the road is far brighter, more stylish. Modern life disorients our lead. The sights, the sounds, the sentiments. She joins a mass inside a mall, but it distracts her. She accidentally joins a sacrilegious sex-themed art show, believing it is a religious exhibit. The noise from the ongoing construction and the next-door neighbors push her to bring a banig to the light store to sleep there instead.

Strange things happen inside the light store—some explainable, others not quite. The lights flickering on and off, the shelves shaking when the city outside is still. Figures on the CCTV footage. A superstitious security guard witnesses all these with her and he comes to work in fear, convinced the compound is haunted.

The odd events culminate in a portal that opens up between the tunnel of lamps. As she walks into it, the lights slowly switch off. It leads back to her hometown, in a mystical area called Marmol Cliff with its canyons and shallow creek. She finds a biblically accurate angel waiting at the end. It is a terrifying thing to see, but after the initial shock, a calm joy sets in. She calls her son on the smartphone he lent her to say that everything is fine, there is nothing to fear, and finally—she has been called home.