KONYO KID by JOSH DEVERAS - BATCH 25

SEPTEMBER 25, 2020

It is March 2009 - there is a small grade school graduation ceremony going on. A small, scrawny 14-year old JAMES gets his diploma while his family takes pictures and cheers. After the ceremony, JAMES watches in the car ride on the way to dinner his batchmates play together in their graduation uniforms. During dinner, JAMES and his family are talking about JAMES going to Ateneo for high school. In the conversation, a stern voice says he belongs there and nowhere else. JAMES sees that it is his father who said that. Being shy and not wanting to be the center of attention, JAMES excuses himself to the bathroom. He instead goes to the balcony, taking in the view of the neat grassy plains, golf course, small huts and foreign-looking kids playing in a playground with their *yayas* nearby.

It is JAMES’ first day of freshman year of high school. He struggles to wake up early and sleeps. He wakes up and is surprised by the tight, standstill traffic, having never experienced this before. On the way to his classroom in school, he becomes uncomfortable with the students and teachers around him speaking Taglish. Entering his new classroom, MR. BASA, his homeroom adviser, welcomes JAMES to the class. He hears his classmates murmur that he looks like a small American. JAMES becomes uncomfortable and stays quiet for most of his classes. It is Filipino class. A grumpy MRS. SANCHEZ is doing a roll call and asks JAMES in Tagalog to introduce himself. He introduces himself in broken Taglish. She asks if he is an exchange student. JAMES explains he is just not good at speaking Tagalog. Disappointed, MRS. SANCHEZ tells him JAMES will not survive in this world if he cannot speak basic Tagalog. One of his classmates jokes out loud that JAMES must be an American and his accent gave it away. The class laughs. During lunch break, JAMES goes to the library and reads by himself.

It is the second month. JAMES talks about his first few weeks of high school to his mother, saying he does not want to go to school and is discouraged from making friends. Feeling bad, his mother cheers him up, telling him to get a treat from the grocery. She also insists that she herself will give JAMES Tagalog lessons. After going grocery shopping in the village accompanied by his *yaya*, JAMES encounters skateboarders nearby for the first time. He sees someone his size skateboard around with a couple of bigger, older guys. He watches, mesmerized by the skaters. He gathers the courage and goes to ask the skaters if he can try riding a board. The kid his size offers his skateboard and even to help him ride it. JAMES tries to ride but falls down as the skaters and *yaya* check on him. Seemingly not in pain, he gets excited. He wants to start skateboarding. JAMES goes first to his mother for a skateboard. She tells him that he will get a skateboard if he watches Filipino films for a week as part of his lessons. A week later, JAMES and his father go get the skateboard. At home, he skates alone around his street outside the house.

It is midterms. MRS. SANCHEZ announces in class that JAMES and two classmates are failing her class. After a parent-teacher conference, tensions rise between JAMES and his parents after the father scolds him for his failing grades in Filipino class. JAMES unleashes this frustration in his skating, throwing his board around till the skaters he saw last time bump into him and ask him if he wants to go skate with them. They introduce themselves as MATT, TERRENCE and RYAN. JAMES particularly remembers RYAN for being the same size as him and becomes close with him.

It is the start of December 2009. Going home from a Christmas party where he watched his family friends open their gifts, JAMES asks his father for a new PS3, reasoning he deserves it for working hard this year. His father grows frustrated and reveals that he lost his management job not too long ago, saying he spent most of the money on the skateboard. He also reminds JAMES he is failing Filipino class. JAMES feels the burden.

It is the school fair. MR. BASA talks to JAMES about the fight with his classmates after they bullied and called him an “Amerikano”. JAMES told him about his anxiety with the news of his family’s financial state. In class, MR. BASA addresses the fight and tells JAMES’ resentful classmates to move on. At home, JAMES’ FATHER scolds him for the fight and tells him to focus on his studies instead of skateboarding a lot. After the argument, JAMES’ MOTHER cheers up JAMES with ice cream and reassures him that he can still go out with his friends. He was happy till he saw a luxurious gelato store he used to buy from when he was younger, remembering that they are not well-off anymore.

It is January 2010. JAMES nervously asks to hang out, not skate, for the first time with RYAN. RYAN says that he, MATT and TERRENCE plan to go to a skate spot in the village. They skate the spot. After watching RYAN and the others land their tricks, JAMES is nervous, constantly failing on landing a certain trick he’s been learning for weeks. During a water break, JAMES asks RYAN how they can skate so well. RYAN tells him that he can learn by himself, but without skating with MATT and TERRENCE, he wouldn’t be as good as he is now. After the session, JAMES overhears RYAN planning a sleepover with MATT and TERRENCE and asks if he can come. RYAN reluctantly says yes. At home, JAMES begs his mother to go to the sleepover. He can go only if he scores high in his next Filipino quiz. A week later, MRS. SANCHEZ announces that JAMES was one of the top scorers for the quiz. She is sarcastic that a “conyo” can do well. On the car ride to the sleepover, JAMES’ MOTHER asks if JAMES is okay but he stays silent.

It is the day of the sleepover. In RYAN’s house, JAMES looks at the PS3, remembering he asked his dad for one. RYAN and JAMES play on the PS3 while MATT and TERRENCE watch them. RYAN and JAMES get into a fight after JAMES accidentally breaks the controller while playing. MATT and TERRENCE try to calm them both down, but RYAN blurts out how JAMES is not even close friends with the group. He and JAMES don’t talk throughout the sleepover. During the ride home, JAMES’ MOTHER scolds JAMES after RYAN’S MOTHER told her about the fight. JAMES breaks down, revealing that he feels like a burden. Both stay quiet throughout the ride home. Several days later, JAMES goes to the skate spot, but he sees RYAN, MATT and TERRENCE, and avoids them. Later that day, JAMES’ father talks to JAMES about the fight with the mother. JAMES’ MOTHER comes in and apologies to JAMES.

It is March 2010. During a study session, JAMES’ MOTHER reveals that they are moving out to a house they rented in Quezon City soon since they are struggling financially, and it would be closer to school for JAMES. After the session, he goes outside with his skateboard and looks at the house. He looks at his phone. On the spot, RYAN, MATT and TERRENCE show up and meet JAMES there. JAMES makes up with RYAN, MATT and TERRENCE. They all go out again and decide to go even outside their village for a skate spot. As the others land their tricks, JAMES musters up all his strength and focus to finally land the trick he’s been learning. As they celebrate, they get chased down by the security kicking them out.

It is the last day of school. JAMES is alone while his classmates and their parents are celebrating in a *salu-salo*. JAMES sees his classmates having fun together. He is then approached by MR. BASA, and MR. BASA congratulates and then tells him in Tagalog that JAMES did better than expected despite everything. JAMES smiles, understanding beyond the words MR. BASA said.

It is JAMES’ birthday. He and his friends skate together one last time. After the session, JAMES says goodbye to them. Before he leaves, RYAN asks JAMES that he should learn the trick he is learning now. On the way to his new house, JAMES’ FATHER stops by a Persian restaurant for dinner. He tells everyone that he wanted to celebrate JAMES’ birthday and for surviving a year of high school. JAMES is pleasantly surprised and shows his dad a timid smile. When he finally arrives at the small house, JAMES goes out to skate on the new spots but is having a harder time than when he skated in his old village.

It is the first day of JAMES’ 2nd year in the same high school. JAMES’ MOTHER forces JAMES to commute to and from school by himself. JAMES sees groups of friends while commuting. In the classroom, JAMES is surrounded by classmates that may be jocks, theater kids and gamers. The introductions begin and when it’s JAMES’ turn, he introduces himself in Taglish. Introductions continue normally, and JAMES is silently relieved. During lunch break, JAMES is approached by some of his classmates and is asked to join them. While eating, JAMES is quiet till MJ, one of his new classmates, breaks the ice and tells him that he knew JAMES because MR. BASA told him JAMES skates. His classmates get interested and ask JAMES more about skateboarding. JAMES smiles and talks about it. On the way home, he walks with his new friends till they separate at the tricycle station. He takes a trike to the gate of his village when it begins to rain. JAMES runs to his house with no umbrella when he remembers what RYAN told him to do. As the rain starts to weaken to a light drizzle, JAMES goes out and skates, trying to learn the trick. He then falls. Laying down on the ground, he reminisces about his grade school mates playing together and wished for something like that. Then he remembers his first time riding a skateboard in his life, thinking about how RYAN, MATT and TERRENCE accepted him and made him feel like he belonged. As it rained harder, JAMES skates, stumbles and then gets back up to run home with the skateboard over his head, never feeling freer than ever.