**NOT The Tunnel [working title: The Baseline]**

*Storyline by John Pucay*

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An accountant named Elias gets laid-off.

Outside his office building, a group of college-aged girls, wearing colorful, designer summer dresses, passed Elias by. They looked like they were having the time of their lives. Standing in his boring grey suit, without any fun thing to do, Elias realizes that he's not living the life he wants. He became an accountant for the money, and he only worked hard to get promotions and higher pay.

Elias was left with high severance pay since he held a high managerial position. The severance is enough to make him live modestly for six months, without having to work. Plus, he has savings.

Having been raised in a very poor family, this is the first time in Elias' life that he didn’t need to chase money. He recognizes this as an opportunity to do something he truly wants to do - but he doesn't know what that is.

So he asks his friends: "If you can afford to not work for 6 months, what would you do?" Most replied, "travel" or "vacation." And when he asked "After traveling for 6 months, what then?” they would say "get back to work." It was a cycle he didn't want to re-enter.

That night, Elias visits a bar and he talks to a guy drinking beside him. The guy is dressed fashionably, his haircut is sophisticated, and he wears a large jeweled watch. He asks the guy the same question, but the guy answers in a snobbish manner. Drunk and feeling annoyed, Elias fights the guy. The guy fights back. They get thrown out of the bar, and the guy (having cooled down) says he would do anything in those six months so long as it's not selling. "I'm a Marketing Consultant. I sell myself as a seller of sales. I'm tired of selling." he says.

The guy introduces himself as Marlon. After making lots of money as a consultant, he becomes addicted to impractical luxuries like elegant watches, exquisite pens (he has very beautiful handwriting), designer clothes, and boutique perfumes. He can't help but chase money all the time.

Elias and Marlon go drinking at another bar. They share stories of their lives.

Elias reveals that he's always been taking care of his siblings, putting them all through high school and college. Now that he's financially-free, he doesn't know what to do with himself. Elias says he never discovered what he truly wants because he has always been so focused on graduating with high honors, earning a high-paying job, and getting out of poverty.

Marlon reveals that his mom and dad annulled their marriage and that his only sibling (an older sister) chose to be with their mom who married an older, richer man. Marlon's dad suffered Alzheimer's, so Marlon had to take care of him while living in poverty. Compared to Elias though, Marlon was determined to not let his familial responsibilities get in the way of his fun. He lived everyday as if it were his last, and he walked the Earth as if the world would end in exactly 1 hour.

"I intend to die by 40." He says. "After 40, stability and security become a must. It's difficult to be free. All the debts you incurred to have fun: the vices, the wild orgies, the expensive shopping - they're all gonna come after you, demanding their dues. Your body and mind start decaying. It's all downhill from there. "

After seriously pondering Elias' question, Marlon admits that he also doesn't know what he truly wants.

After the bar, each man says he doesn't want to go to his own home. So Marlon suggests a nearby apartment. The place they went to is Donna's house - Marlon's older sister. Marlon immediately collapses in the living room couch and sleeps. Elias talks to Donna over coffee.

Donna reveals that she and her brother haven't spoken in years. Marlon was angry with her when she decided to go with their mother and abandon their father. So she's surprised that her brother suddenly turned up. Elias and Donna exchange stories.

Donna spends her days doing Ikebana, attending yoga sessions, taking piano classes, and baking. She earns some pocket money through her side gig as a stock photo model.

"A stressed teacher, a single mom, a powerful corporate executive - I could be anything in stock photos," she says. But her main source of money is the inheritance that her (now deceased) rich stepfather left. Even her house is an inheritance.

Elias asks her the same question. Donna hasn't seriously worked for 2 years now, living modestly out of her inheritance money. So she ponders on the question's essence. She realizes that she's been going to all those classes and yoga sessions because she doesn't know what to do with her time. She's tried many things, even portrayed many lives as a stock photo model, but she isn't interested nor passionate about anything in particular.

In the morning, Donna reveals that she and Marlon once hiked a mountain as children, when their parents were still together. Their hiking guide was a kind and wise woman. Donna suggests they visit the Woman Guide for hiking and advice. After some reluctance, both Elias and Marlon agree.

At the mountain town, they discover that the Woman Guide (now an old woman) is sick and being cared for by her 17-year old granddaughter. Over night-time, campfire coffee, the Old Woman Guide tells them about The Baseline.

"To know what you truly want, you have to reach and overcome your Baseline first," she says. The Baseline is a state in life where a person's unmet needs as a child and teenager have been fulfilled. The Old Woman Guide explains that many people live their lives chasing what they think is a dream when all they're trying to do is fulfill an unmet need from their youth.

Elias and Marlon say they have reached their Baseline when they finally became financially stable. Donna admits that she might still be working her way towards her Baseline. She reveals that her unmet needs have not yet been fulfilled (much to Marlon's surprise, since she has lived an "easier," richer life).

Early in the morning, the trio goes on a hiking trip, accompanied by the Old Woman Guide's 17-year old granddaughter Regina. The trio, after living sedentary lives in the flatlands of Metro Manila, is having a hard time with the steep climbs and rough terrain of the mountain. Regina is always ahead, cheering for them to follow quickly.

At the peak of the mountain, the trio becomes super tired to the point of delirium. Here, Marlon gushes out all his deeply-buried feelings against Donna. He tells her how hard it was, being the younger sibling, trying to keep the family together. He berates Donna for abandoning him and their father who was sick. Donna apologizes and admits her guilt. The siblings pour out everything to each other, cry and reconcile. Donna has finally reached her Baseline.

Regina and Elias observe the siblings from a distance. Regina tells Elias that if there's one thing the mountains taught her, it was that people have to reach their limit first before they can find and reveal truths about themselves. "I think reaching a personal limit is like reaching a mountain's peak. You suddenly get a full view, and everything becomes clear. But you have to be careful that the exhaustion doesn't get to you." She says.

The four descend the mountain together. Regina tells them her grandmother encourages her to live with her aunt in Metro Manila (both parents are deceased and she was raised by her grandmother). She originally wanted to study there for college. But Regina insisted on staying here to take care of her sick grandma.

That night, the Old Woman Guide dies peacefully in her sleep. The scene ends with the four eating silently and serenely at Regina's dining table. Regina looks at the trio, her eyes swollen from crying. The trio looks at Regina. And they all smile.

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**DESIRE:** He wants to know what direction to take in life, now that he’s laid-off.

**AWARENESS:** He knows he doesn’t want to just get back to working his old job (Accountant)

**POWER:** He can afford to not work for 6 months. Being born poor, he has spent his childhood to adulthood trying to make money. After his last high-paying position at the accounting firm, he is left with a good severance windfall. So he can technically do anything he wants (within reason).

**Narrative:** Cause & Effect; Cause – he gets laid-off; Effect – he embarks on a search for purpose and direction

**Center:** Character-oriented

**Agency:** Active