

## The December I Don't Want to Remember

By Janine Maika D. Alderete

Everyone was designing their own cards and rehearsing their jingles—no doubt that Christmas was nearing. But something felt odd; the Christmas wind and night felt so foreign that I almost didn't realize it was already December.

I couldn't find a single child making drums out of cans. Where were the young ones who usually started the caroling? Why were only the adults rehearsing the jingles?

Well, maybe this is how the modern generation celebrates Christmas now. Maybe I'm just being old-fashioned, longing for the traditions I grew up with. But I'm sure the market was still very busy for Christmas.

The moment I arrived at the market, I was right—it was as busy as ever. But again, something was really off. I couldn't deny it. I could see it in everyone's eyes—the anger. Aren't these people here to buy their Christmas needs, to prepare for what should be a joyful occasion? Why was there such a heavy sense of madness in the air?

I was too hesitant to approach anyone—until I noticed everyone's buy-list paper. The ₱500 budget for Noche Buena was supposed to be enough for a family. And suddenly, it all made sense. Parents went back and forth between the shelves, holding packs of spaghetti only to put them back, staring at price tags as if waiting for a miracle. Was the ₱500 budget some kind of joke? The tension, the frustration, the quiet anger—it all became clear.

But something felt even more wrong. I stepped back out to the street. Everyone was still there—creating their own cards, rehearsing their jingles out loud. And then I realized what was truly strange: this wasn't for Christmas.

They were writing their messages on giant cards, not holiday greetings. They were rehearsing jingles—not for the season, but for the government officials to hear. No one was here to decorate a Christmas tree. Everyone had gathered for a single wish: justice.

If the government refuses to give the people the gift of accountability before Christmas Eve, then this is the December I don't want to remember.