

fault lines



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	1
Odile and O'death by Vi Palmares	2
something Among us by Jean Cho Sarino	4
Harmony of the Past by Dom Ballelos	19
Mom's Home by Tasha Baquir	25
Mom is Enough by Alyssa Casiño	30
About the Authors	37



PREFACE

In the depths of our struggles, we often uncover the raw materials for our greatest transformations.

When we first set out on this journey to create "Fault Lines," we felt a need to explore the beauty of human experiences shaped by conflict, growth, and recovery. Each story in this collection is a reflection of our own struggles and triumphs, showcasing the moments that can either leave us shattered or bring us into a new realm of growth. The title itself speaks to the essence of our shared experiences—those fault lines in our lives that can either fracture us or become the foundation for something beautiful.

We've all encountered moments that test our resilience, where vulnerability seems to overshadow hope. In these pages, you will meet characters who mirror our own battles—those times when we felt lost, broken, or at the brink of despair. Yet, through their journeys, we have sought to capture the essence of what it means to rise from the ashes—to have stitched together our broken pieces into something greater than ever.

Our hope is that "Fault Lines" becomes more than just a collection of stories. We want it to be a source of inspiration for anyone who has ever felt like they were on the edge of breaking. We want you to know that you are not alone in your struggles. We want you to feel the heartaches and triumphs of these characters as if they were your own. Each story is infused with the hope that comes from recognizing that breaking does not mean you remain broken. Instead, it is an invitation to embrace the possibility of transformation. When we allow ourselves to confront our vulnerabilities, we open the door to healing and resilience.

This book is for anyone who has ever felt the weight of the world pressing down on them. It is a reminder that growth often emerges from the most difficult of circumstances and that the journey of recovery is a path worth taking. So, we encourage you to reflect on your own experiences. What are the fault lines in your life? How have they shaped you? We hope that through these stories, you will find comfort, inspiration, and the courage to face your own challenges. Remember, every fracture can lead to a new beginning, and every story has the potential to inspire change.

As you explore these stories, we invite you to find a piece of yourself within them. Let them remind you that even in our darkest times, there is always a path to healing and growth. Thank you for joining us on this journey. We hope these stories resonate with you as deeply as they have with us.

Welcome to Fault Lines.

Odile and O'death

by Vi Palmares

I was once told that birth guaranteed
my death — so I jumped, wanting to
escape, and believing I would fly.

Perfection is the mother of death.
She watches silently as I attempt my *pirouettes*.

So I turn again, and again, and again,
And I fall time and time again.

I shudder when I see Odile staring
back at me in the mirror.
I ask myself, *Why is my clone
haunting me?*

She can jete higher than my potential,
And carry herself better on her toes —
so why?

There's that pit in my stomach again.
I tell myself it is nothing — but it hurts.

It's like waking up to find Odile curled
beside me.
I jolt awake, asking, "Why are you here?."

Then, thinking she isn't real, talks back to me:
"Because you invited me in."

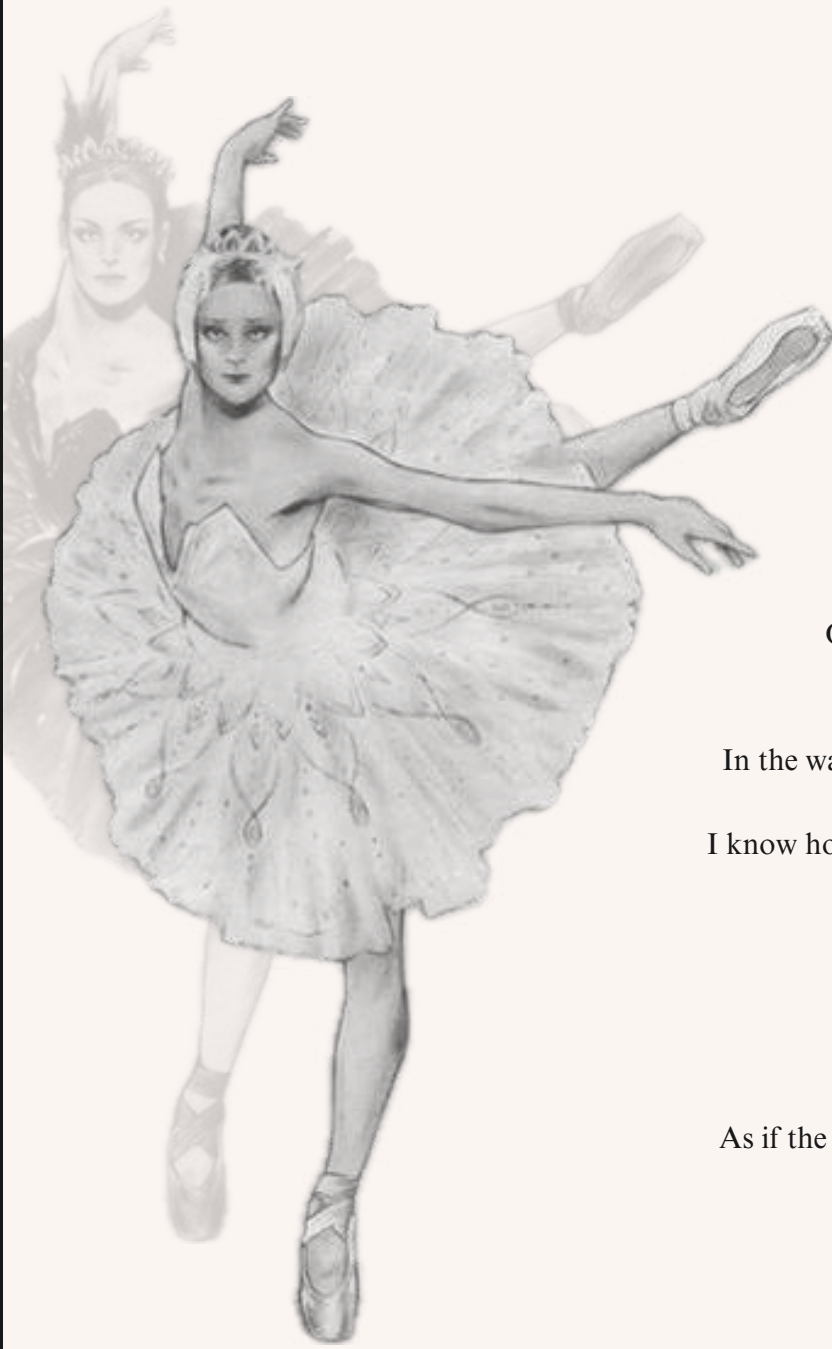
*If she is my clone, why is she unattainable?
Do I need to be cloned, to separate imperfection?*

Wait! my breath is running away from me now,
I can't catch up to it, it's tiring me out!

I lay awake talking to the Sky for days,
But it is so far up, unreachable.

Just before I plummet to my slumber,
Droplets fall on my skin.

The Sky finally pours its emotions with me,
And like my tears, they taste like salt and regret.



I walk in the rain,
Now my ballet shoes are soaked.

I take them off and dance barefoot,
Without any fear of slipping.

The Trees start to dance with me,
And for once making mistakes
feels like surrender.

It is quiet now, but the Trees stand still,
Reminding me that I am not alone.

It is not only the Trees watching me;
Odile's gaze is burning the back of my neck

But for a brief moment, I feel hope,
In the way the clouds part to make way for the sun.

I know how it feels to be suffocated by your passion,
At some point, ballet became a chore.

But then the act of dance,
Became an act of letting go.

I don't get nauseous when I turn anymore,
As if the thing that keeps me steady now, is motion.

I dance now not for the applause,
But for the battles I fight in silence.

We cannot separate our fears from pain,
Just because we are afraid to confess that it hurts.

We are not who we want to be,
We are who we deny ourselves of becoming.

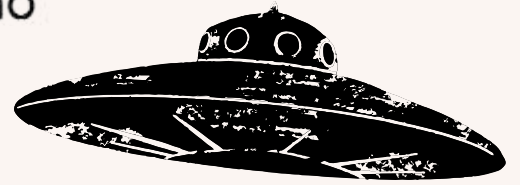
To live fully,
Also means to die a million times.

So it came to me, that when I jumped,
I found my footing in the fall.



something Among us

By Jean Cho Sarino



Somewhere in the vast galaxy...

[T-Minus 96 Hours]

Only 96 hours remain until the spaceship finally lands at planet "Rainbow," the last habitable planet in the galaxy.

"Guys, in around 4 days, we will finally be out of this stupid aircraft!!!" exclaimed Commander Jin in excitement. The charismatic and assertive Jin is essentially the leader of the group. He calls the shots, and gives directives most of the time.

In his usual wary tone, Lt. Ryan frantically mumbles "assuming we don't get eaten alive as soon as we land." Lt. Ryan was a former infantry soldier of Home, who suffers with PTSD due his previous deployments across the galaxy. He specializes in security, and oversees the defense systems in the spaceship.

"Oh come on, don't be such a downer, Lt. Ryan! Dr. Cate! Surely you're as excited to get off this thing?" asks Commander Jin.

"Eh it's alright, I don't know... I might miss this place," Dr. Cate, the environmental specialist replies. Known for her emotional vulnerability and deep connection to nature, Dr. Cate is tasked with analyzing Planet Rainbow's ecosystem for potential habitation.

Captain Diego butts in and says "it's ok Commander Jin, I agree with you. I can't wait to get out of here." Capt. Diego is essentially second in command, who is a skilled operations officer with years of experience in managing spacecraft systems.

Engr. Joseph, the brains of the group, also joins the conversation adding "if my estimations are right, as long as everything runs smoothly, and we land in exactly four days, we will be able to set up communications with Home and make contact, just in time before our energy supply runs out." Engr. Joseph was a prodigy from the Home planet's top university who is excellent at computer engineering and software programming.

In response, Commander Jin said "You're right Engr. Joseph. So team, let's make sure that after tonight's rest, tomorrow, we will check if everything is in order and ensure that we are ready for landing." Afterward, Commander Jin proceeded to delegate tasks to each member of the team.

For the past eighteen months, these five brave volunteers have been traversing through space in order to get to planet Rainbow, the last safe and habitable planet in their galaxy. Ensuring the success of this space expedition is very important and personal to Jin. He dedicated much of his life to the implementation and execution of this project. In fact, he was the one who advocated for this project back at the Home planet, because things aren't going too well over there. Since the year 3420, roughly five years ago, some strange scary aliens started invading the Home planet. No one really knows much about them, or why they chose to enter their peaceful planet. Aside from the fact that they are extremely violent and dangerous, there is barely any available information on these aliens, because no one who encounters an alien survives or makes it back alive to tell the story. People started referring to these creatures as "Thing," for lack of a better name. Back at home, Jin and the other crew members would occasionally hear tragic news about another person being eaten alive by a "Thing." There are several rumors and conspiracies about these Things. Some people think these Things are there for food supply, given that they have been eating people since they arrived. There are also people who think these Things just accidentally stumbled into their planet and are just trying to survive. Others argue that these Things want to get information about the Home planet's technology.

Truth be told, Home is an extremely technologically advanced civilization with some of the best blueprints for organizing and mobilizing society in the universe. It is no wonder these barbaric Things want to follow in the Home planet's footsteps. Regardless of the reason for the invasion, people started advocating for a publicly funded space expedition which would allow them to find another planet to live on, away from these Things. The Home planet had the resources and technology to carry this out easily. Being one of the main advocates for such a project, Jin dedicated many years to lobbying and negotiating with key officials to get the ball rolling for this space exploration. Before talks of this project even began, Jin was a nobody. No one knew who he was, until he started surfacing and appearing publicly advocating for this space exploration. Indeed, he made a name for himself by capitalizing on the threats that were emerging in his planet. Unfortunately, it was difficult to convince everyone to get on board with the idea initially. Some people did not see the need to transfer planets and potentially lose everything just to start all over. They would further justify this saying that they don't even know the true intentions of these Things, or if they are even a significant enough threat to society in the first place. Commander Jin found this stance to be foolish, because to him it was common sense that if these Things are eating people (regardless of how occasional), then there is no doubt that their presence poses a significant risk to society. Eventually, after years of pushing for this project, a favorable decision was made, and five talented professionals were selected to participate in this exploration as a team (Jin automatically being appointed as Commander).

On the first day on ship, they all toured around the facilities and got settled in for the long journey that awaited them. The first few weeks served as the adjustment period, as each crew member familiarized themselves with the various tasks that they had to accomplish to get to their destination safely. The past eighteen months have been routine and boring: same tasks, bland food, mundane leisure activities every single day

Nonetheless, over the course of the trip, the crew got to know each other quite well through all their interactions. And, in just four more days, these five people will finally be able to land, get some fresh air, and proceed to coordinate with Home for the transfer of the rest of society to their new found home planet. The future of everyone at home was depending on them, and Commander Jin was not going to let them down.

[T-Minus 88 Hours]

"Rise and shine team!" shouts Commander Jin in excitement.

In an instant, everyone got up from their sleeping pods and proceeded to do the tasks assigned to them the night before. Capt. Diego walks to the kitchen to prepare food for everyone. Engr. Joseph goes to the command center to monitor the trajectory and speed of the ship. Dr. Cate accompanies Lt. Ryan in checking the water system and parts of the ship on the left wing. Finally, Commander Jin was assigned to oversee the right wing. Hours go by and everything seems to be going fine, until suddenly, all the lights in the ship turned off making everything pitch black dark. Immediately, everyone dropped what they were doing, and ran back to the center of the ship where meetings are usually held, because this has never happened before.

"Is everyone okay?" asks Commander Jin.

Everyone replies ensuring they are safe and okay. Afterward, they all went together to the electrical room where the lights switch is located. Unexpectedly, they found that the switch had been turned off. Rationalizing as usual, Engr. Joseph starts to come up with hypotheses about how the lights switched off on its own.

"Commander Jin, are you sure you did not accidentally turn off the lights? The electrical room is in the right wing of the ship, which you were assigned to; maybe you accidentally bumped the lever and turned the lights off?" asks Engr. Joseph.

"Of course I didn't! Why would I?? It was on when I left" Jin replied.

Fearful as usual, Lt. Ryan asks out loud "then how did the lights turn off? Surely someone had to switch it off!!" The group tries to think about all the possible reasons, but nothing was logical.

Capt. Diego, convinced that it was Commander Jin and that he was just covering up for his mistakes, says "Commander, just admit you accidentally turned it off. We won't take it against you, everyone makes mistakes."

"No, but I swear it was not me," asserts Jin.

"Guys, can we please not argue about this. Let's give each other the benefit of the doubt and move on from this, it's not worth making a fuss over" begs Dr. Cate.

Jin can't help but wonder what happened, because he is certain that he did not turn off the lights. After a few moments while heading back to the meeting area, Jin offers another wild theory: "guys, what if an alien got on ship without us knowing? It could be hiding anywhere here, this ship is huge!"

Capt. Diego replies "Don't be silly, Commander, we would know if an alien came on board. We have the best security here."

In reaffirmation, Engr. Joseph agrees and tells Jin that it's impossible for a Thing to get on the ship, especially with their advanced security technology. This gave Lt. Ryan some comfort. In the end, they all just decided to shrug it off, and continue doing their duties the following day.

[T-Minus 72 Hours]

After much deserved rest, the crew once again began their day continuing the same repetitive routine.

However, this time they reshuffled the assignments to prevent the same incident from happening again. Jin was stationed at the Left Wing, along with Engr. Joseph. This time, Lt. Ryan was at the command center. Dr. Cate was assigned to food duties. And finally, Capt. Diego was in charge of overseeing the Right Wing. Everything was going smoothly as usual, until suddenly... *LIGHTS OFF*

"COMMANDER! WHERE ARE YOU? ARE YOU OKAY?" shouts Engr. Joseph repeatedly while stumbling in the dark looking for Commander Jin who was last seen somewhere in the Left Wing.

A few moments later, a faint voice replied "I'm over here Joseph, still at the recreation room!"

They found each other in the dark in shock and fright. Both of them could not fathom that the lights went out two days in a row. As standard protocols, everyone immediately proceeded to the meeting area.

"Guys what's going on?" asks Lt. Ryan in terror?

"I don't know, but let's grab the flashlights at the command center, and check out the electrical room again." suggests Capt. Diego in a composed manner.

The crew proceeded as planned, and went to the electrical room. As soon as they entered, silence filled the room and everyone was in utter shock: even Capt. Diego's composed disposition shattered. The engine batteries powering the lights were destroyed, as if something sharp was used to dig it out of the wall.

"What the fuck what the fuck what the fuck" repeats Lt. Ryan while panicking.

"Guys... Is it just me, or does that look like it was bitten off?" asks Jin in confusion.

"BUT THAT MAKES NO SENSE! The batteries are made of the finest and durable materials, it can't just be destroyed that easily" says Lt. Ryan who was clearly fearing for his life.

"Wait guys, let's be rational here" Engr. Joseph tells the crew. "Let's all just collect ourselves, sit by the meeting area, and figure out what the hell is going on" he adds. They proceeded to the meeting area to discuss each person's whereabouts.

"Capt. Diego, you were the only one near that room today" Dr. Cate initiates.

Angrily, Capt. Diego replies, "so what are you trying to accuse me of?"

"Well no one else could have done it, it was most probably you!" Dr. Cate answers back.

The two went on arguing about this Dr. Cate claimed it was Capt. Diego, while he firmly defended himself saying he was nowhere near the room.

"We aren't going to get anywhere by doing this," says Engr. Joseph. So while this back and forth exchange continued, he went on to the command center to try and figure out how to get the emergency lights to work. It was just too dark without the lights in the ship.

Eventually, the emergency backup lights came on, however the ship was still quite eerily dim overall. As Engr. Joseph returned to the meeting area, Capt. Diego immediately redirected the spotlight to him as the crew grew growingly suspicious about Diego.

"Look who's back after disappearing from the meeting," says Capt. Diego.

Lt. Ryan refutes the implied message and claims "wait, but there's no way it was Engr. Joseph though, he was assigned to the Left Wing with Commander Jin the whole time."

Dr. Cate interrupted and asked "Commander Jin, was Engr. Joseph really with you the whole time?"

Hesitantly, "well not really" Commander Jin says. He proceeded to elaborate and told them that they were together at the recreation room at first, but Engr. Joseph had to go check the water systems somewhere else in the Left Wing which made them separate for a while.

"Ha! So it could have been Engr. Joseph!" exclaims Capt. Diego.

Commander Jin defends Engr. Joseph saying "even if Engr. Joseph was gone for a while, there was not enough time for him to go all the way to the electric room at the Right Wing, and back that quickly."

"That's true," says Dr. Cate while nodding her head.

"Oh shut up Dr. Cate, as if you're so innocent. How can you prove that it wasn't you?" says Capt. Diego in an annoyed tone.

Lt. Ryan then butts in clarifying: "actually, while I was at the command center, I was looking through the CCTV, and I did not see anyone going to the Right Wing through the hallway. I highly doubt Dr. Cate went there. I'm sorry, but the only possible explanation is that you broke it, Capt. Diego... No one else was there." Then all fingers pointed toward Capt. Diego.

"Captain, we will give you one last chance to explain yourself. Or else we will have to do something about this" says Commander Jin, whose mind seemed so preoccupied and anxious about the success of this mission.

"Oh yeah? What will you guys do about it if it really were me?" asks Capt. Diego.

The crew discussed briefly, then agreed that they would have to sedate Diego which will keep him unconscious until they arrive at Planet Rainbow where they can decide what to do with him next.

"Oh come on now, you guys can't be serious" exclaims Capt. Diego.

"Sorry Diego, it is what it is. You can't defend yourself, and you lost our trust," Commander Jin says as his main priority and concern is the mission.

"You know what, fuck you guys. Do what you want. I am not the person you are looking for, but if you insist, go ahead, I won't resist," says Diego in disbelief.

The crew then brought Capt. Diego to the infirmary where he would be sedated. Fortunately, Capt. Diego did not make things difficult, and was fully cooperative.

"Sorry it had to be this way. This is for everyone back at the Home planet," affirms Commander Jin.

"There is an imposter among us, and I am telling you now it's not me. Good luck on the rest of your journey assholes, I hope aliens eat you all as soon as we land" he replies as his eyes slowly shut after the injected liquid took effect.

The crew carried the heavy unconscious body and left it securely inside one of the sleeping pods inside the infirmary. Today, a friend was lost. Tired and emotional, the crew decided it was time to rest for the night, and get back on track with work the next day.

[T-Minus 48 Hours]

Upon wake up call, everyone immediately proceeded to do business as usual as the tasks had to be done for the ship to keep flying no matter what happens. Although there were deep emotions of sadness and betrayal among the crew, they were also partially relieved that no one would cause any more problems for the mission as Capt. Diego had already been "taken care of." However, this time, the tasks were a bit harder to accomplish, because it was still quite dark in the whole ship. As such, the team was divided into two to prioritize the completion of tasks in both the Left and Right Wing.

Two people at each Wing would ensure the more important tasks are accomplished they all agreed. Commander Jin and Dr. Cate were at the Left Wing together, while Lt. Ryan and Engr. Joseph was at the Right Wing. While going around the Left Wing, Jin trips over something and immediately calls Dr. Cate's attention.

"Cate! Come check this out, I think I found something" Jin shouts. "It looks like a secret vent," he adds.

Hurrying there, Dr. Cate says upon nearing, "oh I know that vent, I discovered it a few weeks into this trip."

"Why didn't you say anything about this to anyone?" asks Jin.

"Well it was my only personal space in this ship, I would go and stay in the vents when we weren't doing anything important," she replies.

Jin, suspicious, was not buying the story and proceeded to ask more questions. "Where does this even lead to?" he asked.

She replies "this vent is connected to the Right Wing. It's sort of like a shortcut from here to there."

"This information would have been useful before the crew sedated Capt. Diego" thought Jin who couldn't wait to inform the rest of the crew about this new revelation. Then, all of a sudden the spaceship shook violently as though it had crashed into an asteroid.

"I think something happened with the engine, we should go check it out," says Dr. Cate.

Jin hesitantly agrees and accompanies Dr. Cate to the Engine room at the Right Wing of the ship. In the room, they found Engr. Joseph who was panicking. "The fuse powering the main engines blew up!" Joseph exclaimed as soon as he saw Jin and Cate.

"Where's Lt. Ryan?" asks Commander Jin who was concerned about the safety of the crew.

"I am not sure, we should go look for him," Joseph responds.

The crew went to the Defense System room where Lt. Ryan was last seen by Joseph. However, upon entering the room, the crew was met with a horrific sight. Lt. Ryan was lying dead on the floor, and the lower half of his body was just gone as though it had been viciously bitten off. With bright red organs on the floor, and fresh blood still oozing out of the dismembered body, it was clear that whatever happened, happened not too long ago. Dr. Cate instantly puked and started crying uncontrollably upon seeing Ryan's lifeless [half] body, and smelling the awful stench from his guts.

"Poor Ryan, he must have been so scared," says Dr. Cate while sobbing.

"Joseph, weren't you just with Ryan the whole time?" asks Jin in a horrified tone.

"Yes I was, but I swear I was not the one behind this," Joseph immediately responds.

"Guys this is serious, I need to know what's going on. No more bullshit," demands Commander Jin in a progressively angry voice; "one of you is lying to me, and trying to sabotage this whole mission."

Both Dr. Cate and Engr. Joseph started defending themselves relentlessly giving detailed accounts of what they were doing during the time of the incident. Needing a break from all of this, Jin leaves the two of them, and devises a plan of his own that would ensure the success of the mission at any cost. Commander Jin goes to the walk-in vault of the ship located at the command center to find an energy gun that was left with them strictly for emergency purposes only. It only has enough stored energy for one shot, but it is lethal enough to immobilize anything of any size, hence its emergency-use function. The whole time, Commander Jin was trying to figure out in his head contemplating who the real imposter was. He couldn't trust anyone on the ship. Then all of a sudden, he heard a loud noise coming from the Vents.

Knowing where the sounds came from, Commander Jin immediately ran to the entrance of the secret Vents he had discovered earlier to find Engr. Joseph and Dr. Cate fighting each other downstairs.

Pointing the gun at both of them who were wrestling on the floor, Commander Jin shouts "STOP! I brought the gun, and I am not afraid to use it; this is an emergency. What's happening here? EXPLAIN YOURSELVES!"

Dr. Cate immediately clarifies that after seeing Lt. Ryan, she had to go to her personal safe place to process what was going on. She was scared and overwhelmed, or so she claims. Engr. Joseph, on the other hand, tells Commander Jin that he had just discovered the Vent as well, and entered to see what was inside. According to Joseph, he saw Cate entering the Vents and followed behind her. Inside the Vents, Joseph said he confronted Cate who he believed to be the lying imposter; this eventually led to the scuffle. In refute, Dr. Cate continued to assert her version of the story, even claiming that Engr. Joseph went inside the Vent to kill her. Cate asserted that Joseph followed her there to make her the next victim, while Commander Jin wasn't around. Joseph, justifying himself, said he only confronted Dr. Cate, because she clearly knew things other people didn't, such as the secret Vents. Confused, Commander Jin was shifting the direction of the gun back and forth between Dr. Cate and Engr. Joseph. Both versions of their stories made sense, but he did not know who to trust.

"Jin, please, you know I wouldn't do anything that could ruin our Home's chance for survival" Engr. Joseph begs. "And besides, I am the only one who knows how to set up our communication system with Home to let them know that they can come to planet Rainbow," Joseph adds, bargaining for his life.

Once again, Dr. Cate claims that she was really at the Vents just to calm and collect herself from the traumatic sight of Lt. Ryan. "I am not the imposter," Dr. Cate says firmly.

Commander Jin knew he had to do something, it was the only chance to stop the imposter from ruining the whole mission. Time was ticking, and the fate of his Home rested on this decision. "who do I shoot," Jin thought to himself. Dr. Cate, who feared that the Commander was not buying her story, knew she had to do something to save herself. In a split second, Dr. Cate charges at the gun, and suddenly *GUN SHOT* Cate instantly drops to the floor completely paralyzed. Engr. Joseph, relieved, burst into tears, thanking the Commander for believing in him, and shooting Cate instead.

"I swear, I just followed Cate to see if she would do anything suspicious," Engr. Joseph exclaims while collecting himself.

"I know, Joseph, I know. Calm down, it's all over now. We can be at peace," affirms Jin who was clearly trembling as well.

[T-Minus 24 Hours]

The last day of the trip was quite uneventful. Commander Jin and Engr. Joseph spent much of the day cleaning up the mess all over the ship, and made sure everything was set for landing. This entailed getting the backup engines running as the main engines had been destroyed the day before. Not many words were said, and it was clear that both Joseph and Jin were still recovering from the horrifying days that they had just gone through.

"I am glad you weren't the imposter," Jin tells Joseph.

"You know me, Commander, I would never do such a thing," Joseph replies.

"I guess we are all set to land," says Jin.

"Yup, we are almost there."

[T-Minus 0 Hours]

The spaceship finally landed on planet Rainbow. With the main engines gone, it was a rough and bumpy landing. However, the spaceship was still intact, and all the equipment they needed for contacting Home was secure. Bright lights and colors flooded the entrance of the ship as soon as the doors opened, revealing Planet Rainbow.

"We are finally here, our new Home," says Jin in complete relief and joy.

"Commander, I'll start setting up the communications system while we still have some of our energy supply," responded Joseph while quickly bringing out needed equipment from inside the command center storage of the ship.

"Let me know if there is anything I can help you with," offers Commander Jin. After a few hours of setting up and establishing a connection with other parts of the galaxy, the communications system was ready for use.

"Commander, we can call Home now," says Joseph in excitement.

"Thank you, for your help, Engr. Joseph. None of this would have been possible without you," Commander Jin acclaims. "But I will take over from here," he adds in a sinister tone with a suspicious smirk.

"What do you mean, Commander Jin?" asks Engr. Joseph.

"I mean, I don't need you anymore, Joseph," Commander Jin explains while moving slowly closer and closer to Joseph.

"No, this can't be. Not you, Commander Jin," exclaims Joseph in complete disbelief.

With each step, Jin slowly opened his mouth wider and wider, to the point that the flesh of his cheeks began to rip apart.

Joseph could see countless blood—stained sharp teeth appearing from the mouth of Jin; viscous slimy liquid dripping from the pointy edges. In that moment, Jin began to morph and shapeshift, transforming into the ugliest looking Thing. While turning into this bright red color, his body started expanding and ripping through the spacesuit he was wearing, revealing his rough skin layer.

Joseph begged "Please, Commander. Please Jin, don't do this."

Without hesitation, Jin opens his mouth as wide as can be, and bites Joseph's head off. Joseph's headless body drops to the ground, knee first, as blood starts squirting everywhere uncontrollably. At that moment, the ground started shaking as thousands of Things started emerging from the ground surrounding Commander Jin who was clearly one of them. Some began to feast on the remainder of Joseph's body, leaving nothing but some broken off pieces of bones, and some dismembered blood vessels on the ground. Other Things went inside the ship to bring out the unconscious bodies of Capt. Diego and Dr. Cate. After bringing the bodies out, the Things did not hesitate to devour them as well. Sounds of munching and crunching filled the air as blood was splattering everywhere on the ground of the colorful planet. After the commotion settled down, Jin with a sinister smile walked up to the computer, adjusted the microphone and pressed a few buttons.

Calmly, he began speaking into the mic in a deceptive human—sounding voice: "Rainbow to Home. I repeat, Rainbow to Home. The skies are clear, and the sanctuary awaits. Bring everything and everyone, it's paradise here."



Harmony of the Past

By Louise Dominique Ballelos

Emma woke up at 7 o'clock in the morning, fixed her bed, ate breakfast, took a bath, brushed her teeth, and dressed up ready for school. She would usually have classes until 4 o'clock in the afternoon from Mondays to Fridays, and spend the rest of the day locked in her room, all alone. This is what her typical day looked like. She walks to her university, since her grandparents' house is only 10 minutes away from her school. This is the primary reason why she decided to move out of her parents' house and move in with her grandparents' house - the convenience, and well, of course, she'd rather live with her grandparents, than live alone in a dorm far from her family just for college.

Ever since she was young, her parents knew that she had such a huge potential. Emma is perfectly capable of making friends, she excels in her classes, she is talented, she is an achiever. She is always at the top of her class from grade school to high school, where she had a great reputation. Not only is she an academic achiever, but she was also part of their school's volleyball varsity team. Her schedule was busy, but she sure was enjoying her life. Not only that, she also has a good relationship with her family who has always been supportive and proud of her. They were not worried about Emma's future because they knew she is capable of achieving great things because once she puts her mind and heart into something, she is definitely going to stay determined. However, her perseverance is also her weakness. Since she is used to always being on top, she will never settle for anything good enough, anything mediocre.

Because of her background, she passed entrance exams of the universities she applied to, which may be both a blessing and a challenge for some, but it definitely wasn't a challenge for her. She knew which university she wanted to go to even before entering high school, and this moment just made her feel more confident and alive. Although she may have already expected it, she was still full of joy and gratitude. She was extremely excited for what's in store for her - but little did she know, college wasn't going to be as smooth and exciting as she wished it would be.

The university she wanted to go to was an hour drive from their house, so her parents decided to let her stay with her grandparents, since it was only a 10-minute walk from their house to her university, and her grandfather really wanted her to live with them because among all the family members, he was the one Emma was the closest with ever since she was a child. Growing up, Emma would always look for his grandfather and just wanted to be by his side, enjoying his presence and company.

The first few weeks of college were very enjoyable for her because she was able to explore her university by meeting new people and learning new things. However, her life turned upside down when she found out about her grandfather's illness. He had Stage IV lung cancer. Emma's world stopped the moment she found out. At that time, she wanted to drop everything and just take care of her grandfather, but she couldn't. This made her struggle a lot to cope with the adjustments she needed to make in college. All she had was herself. Emma and her friends went to different universities, so it was a challenge for her to adjust and create her new circle of friends, given that she could not really spend a long time getting to know her classmates since she meets different people per class. As time passed by, college has been tough for her because she was surrounded by people who, just like her, are used to being on top, and she was also trying to understand and cope with the condition of her grandfather. In college, she soon realized that she was just an average student, just like everyone else, which was hard for her to accept, given that she was such an overachiever. Because of this, she would spend most of her free time at home studying, locked up in her own room. She would also cancel on her parents, and even refuse to spend time with them and her grandparents because she was too preoccupied with studying because she wanted to excel, not just pass. She also did not want to see her grandfather because she does not have the courage to face him and see the condition he was in. He was definitely not getting any better. College was definitely far from what she was used to in high school, and this changed her. She does not have time for extracurricular activities anymore and she thinks she does not deserve to spend time with other people. She was busy and she was obsessed with the fact that she was one of the best in high school, so she wanted to keep it that way in college, but this only made her world smaller, in terms of having a few friends only in college, and lonelier.

This made her parents and grandparents extremely worried because they did not want Emma to put too much pressure on herself. Ever since the beginning, they just wanted her to enjoy her life, and they don't mind if she was not the best. All they ever wanted was for her to try new things, be happy, and content with what she gets to experience. They knew how much the death of her grandfather was affecting her, but they did not know how to help her.

It was April 1, 2005, the day her heart shattered. She was a second year college student, struggling to keep up with the demands of her course. She was not having the best day, and then she received a call from her father at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, telling her to rush to the hospital. Her father did not tell her what happened, but tears already started to fall from her eyes in the cab on her way to the hospital because she knew something was wrong. Something was wrong with her grandfather.

As she entered the hospital, she saw her mother sitting on the chair, trying to comfort her grandmother who was silently crying. Her father, on the other hand, was walking along the aisle, and that's whom she ran to.

"Dad, what happened? How's grandpa?" Emma said while she was panicking and crying. Her father hugged her and directed her to the chair, trying to calm her down. A few minutes later, her dad said, "Emma, your grandfather couldn't handle it anymore." After hearing what his father had said, she burst into tears to the point wherein she couldn't control it anymore. She didn't know what to do anymore because of all the challenges she had at that time but at that moment, all she cared about was her grandfather. That was the only time she realized that her grandfather was really sick. In that moment, she had to face reality. She hoped she could talk to her grandfather, but unfortunately, she wasn't able to anymore. It was April 1, 2005, the day her grandfather died.

Preparing for the funeral was, at that moment, the lowest point of her life. She felt helpless, lost, and sorrowful. Above all that, she was filled with regrets. Regrets of not spending time with her family, regrets of letting her grandparents see how she's struggling with college, and regrets of not being able to show her love and appreciation towards her grandfather when she still could.

As she was going through her grandfather's things, she opened a box and saw a music box inside with "For My Dearest Emma" written on the bottom of the music box. She also saw an envelope along with the music box. She wiped her tears, and she hurriedly opened the envelope.

"Emma, darling,

I do not know when you will be able to see this, but I hope you will. If you're reading this, then my journey in this life is over and I am in a better place, not suffering anymore, and I hope you are, too. No one can escape death, my Emma. Someday, you'll learn to accept it. I left this music box for you, but you have to be cautious in using this. This music box can only be used once to change your destiny. Play this box, and you will be able to go back to your most cherished moment in the past, and relive it. But there's a twist. If you decide to play this box, you will be able to go back to that cherished moment of yours, and carry the burden of knowing about my illness and death with no one else knowing, and you can't do anything about it. Again, you only have one opportunity to use this, so make it count, my Emma, and do not tell anyone about this, Dear. I miss you and I will always love you. I have always been proud of you, and you should be, too. Please take care of yourself, be happy, and be content, my grandchild.

Always, Grandpa."

She started to shiver because she wasn't expecting that her grandfather would leave something like this. At that point, she was unsure if what was happening was part of reality or a dream, if what she saw was really from her grandfather or not. She kept the music box and the letter inside her closet and decided to look back at it when she could think and understand better and clearly.

After her grandfather's burial, her parents stayed with her and her grandmother at her grandparents house for a few weeks, trying to figure out what their set-up would be now that her grandfather's gone. They didn't want her grandmother to be alone since there's only a few years left before she graduates from college. After the burial, they went home, she proceeded to her room, got the music box and letter, and sat on the floor.

She read the letter over and over again. It was clear to her where she wanted to go back to, what moment she wanted to relive, but something was stopping her. She did not want the consequences of going back to the past. She couldn't handle knowing about her grandfather's death, and not being able to do anything about it, but the desire to go back is stronger than the fear. After a long time of reflection, "I never thought I would believe and try this," Emma said as she was hoping and praying hard that it would actually work, that she could go back to the past.

As she began to play the music box, she said, "I wish I could go back to the time before I entered college. The time I should've been content with my accomplishments, the time wherein I could give my family more of my time, the time when my grandfather was still healthy and well."

"This could not be real!" Emma shockingly said. She was brought back to the moment she was packing to move to her grandparents house and as they arrived at their house, she was anxious. Extremely anxious. The most important person she was looking forward to seeing was her grandfather, and there he was, alive and healthy. She bursted into tears, but everyone was so bewildered. *"Oh what has happened to you, my Emma?"* asked Grandpa. *"Nothing Grandpa, it just felt like I haven't seen you in such a long time. I am just happy to be here with you right now."* Her grandfather smiled, and their family spent the rest of the day unpacking her things, getting her settled in.

Emma was sitting there, appreciating the opportunity that was given to her by her grandfather and by that little music box. She was thinking about how she would learn to accept that she couldn't always be the best and that every life has its end. At this moment, she realized that her priorities are different now. Instead of wanting to be the best, she wanted to simply just make her family proud and put less pressure on herself. She wanted to prioritize her family and make sure that she spends enough time with his grandfather before he passes. She knew her family would be proud of her regardless of what she has achieved. Now, she actually wanted to experience living life. While they were all in her grandparents' house, she was continuously reminding her parents to always come visit during the weekend or whenever they want to, so they could spend time together. She promised to always make time for them, while still ensuring that she will study hard and not let them down.

At that moment, she realized that family was important over anything and everything. Even though her parents had no idea of what happened to her, that they were in that situation because of Emma's late realizations, Emma still wanted to make it up to them by continuously expressing her love and gratitude for them, and assuring them that she will make them proud.

Before they went home, grandpa approached Emma, hugged her again, and whispered to her, "*Finally, you saw the music box.*"

Mom's Home

by Tasha Baquir

“Please clean up your mess before I get back from work. Also, Tita Kats is coming over. Love you.” – Mom

Mom was usually out working long hours, and I eagerly anticipated her return home each day. Those moments when she walked through the door were special to me; they marked the end of the day and the beginning of our time together. We would bond over dinner, where she would cook our favorite meals, filling the house with the comforting aroma of home-cooked dishes. So, when I read Mom's message, I quickly got to work. I swept the floor, mopped the tiles, and arranged the cushions on the couch. I didn't want to face my mother's wrath or her scolding for not taking care of the house. The doorbell rang. They were here. I opened the door, a wide smile spreading across my face. “Welcome home, Mom, Tita Kats!” I greeted, pulling them both into a warm embrace.

My mother had a friend whom she kept bringing to our house—Tita Kats. She would arrive with food, laughter, and an infectious energy that filled our home. There was something about her that drew me in—her warm smile and the way she could light up a room with her stories. I never thought much of it; my mom invited friends over all the time. But deep inside, I knew there was something different in the air when she was around. I just didn't know why or how.

My mother and Tita Kats met back in their college days. They were both psychology majors, drawn to the same classes and late-night study sessions. A shared love for their field pulled them together almost immediately. They spent countless hours in the library, books spread out between them, before going straight to the nearest billiards place to play. They would plan summer vacations during class hours, getting scolded by professors for not listening to the lectures. Their friendship was effortless. Tita Kats was always the one to bring laughter into the room, joking about anything and everything even when the atmosphere was dead serious.

I remember a time when Mom was locked in a heated argument with a co-worker during dinner at home. The tension hung thick in the air. I exchanged a glance with my brother; our silent communication was clear: we both wanted to escape this suffocating atmosphere. My heart raced as I wished for a distraction—anything to pull us away from the conflict unfolding at the table. I hated arguments, debates, or anything that could lead to fights. It stressed me out. I turned to find Tita Kats playing with her food, tossing fried mashed potato balls in the air and trying to shoot them into her mouth.

I laughed.

I laughed so hard that I caught my mom and her co-worker's attention. I pointed to Tita Kats, and they both looked over at her. "Seriously?" my mom said. "Seriously?!" Tita Kats mocked her in a higher voice, then proceeded to throw a fried mashed potato ball toward her. My mom caught it with her mouth and looked so proud of herself. Her co-worker laughed, probably forgetting what they were arguing about in the first place. Then and there, I wanted dinner to last a little longer.

My mom, in turn, found Tita Kats to be her confidante—someone who understood her in a way few others did. They supported each other through college and up to now. The way they interacted, with an easy familiarity and mutual respect, showed how much they had seen each other through different stages of their lives. To be honest, I had never seen my mom so happy in another's company as much as she was with Tita Kats—not even with my father when they were still together.

After my parents divorced over a decade ago, my mother dedicated herself to my brother and me. I can still remember the battles they fought, the tension that loomed over our house like a storm cloud. They tried to shield us from the worst of it, but it eventually became impossible to ignore. I was seven when I first heard them arguing late one night. I crept down the stairs, heart pounding, and looked into the living room. The scene was chaotic—shattered furniture and raised voices.

They were fighting about a woman from my dad's work, and in that moment, I could see the hurt etched on my mother's face. Anger flashed in her eyes, but beneath it all lay a deeper pain.

My mom filed for an annulment after she caught my dad cheating on her with someone from work. They took separate paths. Mom focused on work, drove us to school, and cooked meals—doing everything by herself for us. I saw Dad on the weekends. He eventually remarried the woman he met at work—the same woman he had cheated on with my mom. Years passed, and my mother remained single. I often asked if she'd ever consider remarrying or finding someone new to love, assuring her I would support her decision. "My priority is you two," she would reply, her voice laced with love. "I'm happy when you are happy."

Tita Kats continued to visit regularly, bringing us treats and sharing movie nights that became our weekend tradition. I loved her stories about her travels and the way she turned even mundane evenings into something special. She was the only friend of my mom's that I genuinely liked having over. I often caught my mother looking at Tita Kats with a softness I hadn't seen since the divorce. It made me wonder if there was more to their friendship than I had realized. Then one day, I stumbled upon a post on Facebook that changed everything. It was a picture of my mom and Tita Kats, arms wrapped around each other, my mother holding her favorite pink carnations. The caption read, "Thank you for showing me what love is."

"Thank you for showing me what love is."

A wave of emotions flooded me—shock, confusion, and a deep-seated fear. I wanted to cry, to scream, to demand answers. Why hadn't she told me? Why now? Why did I feel so ashamed? Luckily, it was the weekend. I would stay with my dad. He had seen the post too and was surprisingly supportive. The man who once battled my mother now seemed to wish her happiness. "She deserves to be happy after everything that happened," he said. If he could accept it, why couldn't I?

Whispers began to creep into my ears—comments from my dad’s relatives during a family gathering, asking how my mom was. Their voices were coated with judgment. “She’s too old to explore,” they’d say. “What about her children?” “Why is she with a woman?” The shame twisted inside me, a conflict between societal expectations and my desire to love my mother unconditionally. What would my other relatives think of her? Of our family? The thoughts of other people and their potential judgment stung like a bitter reminder of the world we lived in.

Eventually, I returned home, determined to confront the truth. My mother was in the living room, absorbed in “The Notebook,” our comfort movie. She paused it as I entered, her expression shifting from casual to concerned. “Mom,” I began, my voice wavering as I struggled to find the right words. The silence between us felt heavy, burdened with the weight of unspoken truths. It felt as if the air itself was charged with our fears and uncertainties, and I could see the flicker of vulnerability in her eyes. “I know you saw the post,” she said softly. I nodded. “Why didn’t you tell me?” I managed to ask, my voice trembling. “This is new for me, too,” she replied, her voice barely above a whisper. It was new for her too.

I began to understand why Mom decided to post before telling me. As always, her actions spoke louder than words—she was never good with words. She would never tell us how she felt; she would show us in the best way she could. Like the way she gave me the last piece of her favorite chocolate, knowing how much I loved sweets, or how she drove me to my favorite art museums, even when she hated long drives. It triggered something in me. At that moment, I remembered all the times my mom put me first before her own happiness.

I realized that this was the first time she had actually done something for herself, and I felt ashamed that I was the one bringing her down now. I once told her that I would support her decision in finding love because God knows she deserves it, and this was the time that she was finally allowing herself to embrace that love.

I remembered the warmth of Tita Kats—how her laughter felt like a cure for my mother’s scars. Tita Kats had made my mom smile in a way I hadn’t seen in years. It struck me then—this wasn’t just about her relationship with Tita Kats. It was about my mother reclaiming her identity, her right to love.

As I looked into her eyes, I realized my feelings of shame were misplaced. This was the woman who raised me, the woman I had looked up to for years, the woman who deserved the world and so much more. I had to let go of the fear that had held me captive. This fear of mine was so small compared to the love I had for my mother. I didn’t understand everything completely, but I didn’t have to. I just needed to support my mother, who had always supported me. I thought my family was already dysfunctional as it was, but the beauty of dysfunction lies in the love we have for each other despite every little thing that should have kept us apart.

I wrapped my arms around my mom, feeling the warmth of her presence after our time apart. As she wiped a tear from her cheek, a gesture too slow to hide her vulnerability, I offered her a reassuring smile and tightened my embrace. I wanted her to know without words that everything would be okay. The silence embraced us in a way that didn’t feel tense or heavy; it was surprisingly comforting. Warm, even. I felt the familiar warmth of our home wrapping around us, a sanctuary where our memories of laughter and love filled the air. We were stepping into a new chapter, and in this one, I was ready to stand by her side.

Mom’s finally home.

Mom is Enough

By Alyssa Dominique Casiño

When I see my mom cry, I feel a different type of pain.

I knew mom always dreamt of having her own family, and our living room conversations served as my avenue to get to know her in this light.

Growing up, mom said their family of five (later would be six) lived in a three-room bungalow. For the longest time, lolo's two jobs required him to go home at midnight and wear polos and suits on weekends. The economic downfall of the Philippines during the Marcos regime even caused their family to lose their only source of income at one point, despite lolo's efforts to financially provide for his family. On the other hand, lola was a Bicolana housewife who cooked plenty of meals from scratch and served as the village's resident seamstress. Mom would have a grin on her face whenever she told me her classmates always wanted to exchange food with her or she would always have the best projects in home economics. Aside from her parents, she also had two older brothers who studied at Don Bosco Technical Institute Makati, and she studied at Colegio de Santa Rosa Makati—all of them riding a school bus in the morning and at dismissal. Throughout mom's life, she only had her eyes set on one thing: her education.

Mom was skillful in juggling her academics and extracurriculars. During her elementary years, mom was the youngest member of their campus publication at 10 years old, while having consistent line of 9 grades until high school. Transitioning to college was a piece of cake too as she succeeded in following her brothers' footsteps in her dream of bleeding green and white. Coming from batch ID 91, mom decided to be a double degree major pursuing BS Marketing Management and AB Psychology.

Little did my mom know, her life would change when she crossed paths with dad. He ended up being the first and only one to win my mom's heart. They would talk for hours on end using their home telephones, and dad would accompany mom from La Salle to her house in Parañaque despite studying at a different university. But truth to be told, life only becomes more challenging over the years.

It becomes difficult to adapt to these abrupt changes as growing up entails more and heavier responsibilities. Mom failed one of her marketing subjects in her 3rd year, making her an irregular and delayed student. From getting straight line of 9s to not being eligible for Latin honors, I could only imagine how devastated mom was at the time not only because of the shattered expectations for herself but also the ones from her parents that she let down in the process. Mom refused to be overcome by these hardships, however, and finished just one term late of her expected graduation time, but dad barely crossed the finish line as he dropped out of college in his 3rd year after mom graduated college. Eventually, they both found their place in the workforce, thinking then that their future was bound to be stable because of their present. Just shy of their 10th anniversary, they decided to get married in 2002.

It was just the beginning, and they could only afford to stay in a one-bedroom apartment.

But the two badly wanted to have a child of their own, especially mom. When her period would be a few days late, mom would take a test expectant to see two lines. However most of the time, dad would wake up to the sight of mom's red eyes as she returned to their bedroom. After a year of trying, they resorted to extremes to conceive a child—reaching as far as doctor consultations, medication, and even attending fertilization festivals in the country.

One Saturday morning, mom took a test without expecting much, yet for the first time two lines appeared on the small screen. Out of excitement, Dad ran to his parents' house across the street to tell them the news. The day was one for the books for everyone, but most especially for my parents—February 14, 2004.

I finally came into the world on October 5, 2004, and our little family was complete. We ended up staying in a house owned by my paternal grandparents while my parents saved up for our own house. Mom worked full-time at a bank, and dad was the one who took care of me. The situation provided for them in the present, but reality would soon hit as they realized that it would be best for dad to work abroad for a couple of years. I would be entering school soon, and my parents wanted to save up for a house. It was impossible to reach that goal with the life they had at the time. We would inevitably move to the house of my maternal grandparents so mom could still work. But despite the challenges of money and distance, they were happy. Like mom said, “We didn’t have money, but we were happy with what we had.” The thought is sweet but begs the question: Is love really enough?

The years that followed allowed my parents to afford financial freedom. My parents finally saved up enough money in 2010 to build their own house, while mom was tied to a loan for our lot for the next fifteen years. Lucky for me, I always got the opportunity to eat plenty of Kinder Bueno and Smarties chocolate and own a PS3 and Nintendo DS. And after years of trying, mom fell pregnant with my only baby sister. My childhood was amazing—I knew I had everything I could ever ask for and more. And I knew my parents also felt the same way with the way the trajectory of our life was heading.

However, our life has been at a complete 360 for the past decade after dad’s contract with his job expired a year after my sister was born. I saw him actively try to find a new source of income after being unemployed, but it would never be enough. He tried to work in multiple call centers and set up businesses such as a flavored chicken restaurant. Mom was supportive in all his endeavors to find a source—providing him with gas allowance for transportation to and from work (while mom rode the UV going home from Makati), investing in his business ideas, doing the chores on weekends when dad would be working a shift or resting, and so much more. During this time, I also did my part by taking care of my younger sister as our maid left after dad stayed in the country for good.

Dad's shifts would begin in the afternoon and end past midnight, so only my sister and I would be left at home when I got home from school. And when summer came around, I was the one who took my 2-year-old sister to daycare. I bathed, fed, and accompanied her on my own at age 11. Yet after years of trying, none of dad's attempts would be successful enough to bring our old life back.

Dad's employment opportunities were all short-lived because he was either cut from the call center trainees or he lost interest in the business he was trying to build up. My teenage years exposed me to the reality that dad easily got discouraged after being faced with adversity. After a work opportunity of his would fail, dad always fell into a state of sleeping and eating, while mom and I had to fill in the gaps of his absence. Mom, baby sister, and I thought it was the lowest point we could reach, but dad would resort to extreme ways to get his hands on money. He would borrow money from multiple loaning applications, steal money from mom's wallet, and even go as far as to get from the piggy bank in a 12-year-old's closet and wallet—all without us knowing what he was doing behind our backs. When confronted, he would deny it and say that we would always put the blame on him. Other times he would ask, but if rejected, he would call us selfish and tell us we're boastful just because he doesn't have a job.

A few months after graduating grade school, mom knocked on my door at night and asked me if I had seen her wallet. I told her that I was clueless, and both of us stayed up wondering what could have happened to her cards, cash, and IDs. Dad returned home with the wallet a few hours before sunrise only to find out that he had been threatened to be killed if he did not pay his debts, so his solution was to steal from his own wife. He begged on his knees not to tell his parents about what he had done, but we were family after all, so mom helped him with his problem. I thought that was the last of it and dad would change, but until now he still lives his similar ways. Dad slowly stopped exerting effort to find a source of income of his own, and now just sleeps, eats, and drives mom and sister to and from work or school.

There are times he would lash out at his family because of his life frustrations, nitpicking every mistake we make and wanting us to move lightning fast thinking he is perfect. He would even stop feeding our dog Milo just because he didn't go near him when called. Sometimes there are days he would work endlessly, but that time only comes when mom gives him money when she gets her salary. Now that I am older, I know that love isn't enough after all when my own dad's love feels conditional.

Mom has been the person we've all been leaning on. She has been working at the same company for 15 years now, but all of her salary has been spent providing for her family's needs.

A few weeks ago, mom, sister, and I were together in the living room after dad complained and smashed the plates while washing the dishes. Dad was having an episode that day, and one small mistake could lead to a screaming match again. Nothing new, but we could never numb ourselves from his outbursts. These past few days left us more quiet than usual, but mom broke the silence and said, "Do you remember when you were telling me the other day that you felt like your peers had the privilege to have it easier than you? I feel the same way." Tears began falling from her eyes, and mom's eyes turned red. I noticed she was crying, so I scooted closer and hugged her, while my sister followed my lead. There was no conversation taking place because all I could think of was how mom deserved better.

Most, if not all, of my dreams had mom and sister in it. For one, I've always wanted to travel the world. A few years ago, lolo and one of my ninongs from my mother's side rode a cruise that toured countries in Europe. When talking about it, mom said, "I wish we could also afford to go to Europe." I knew it was lighthearted, but I responded, "In 20 years mom, I will be the one to bring Audrey and you to Europe." Mom just giggled and said, "Wow! You don't have to do though that since it's not your responsibility to take care of me." Since that conversation, Europe has become one of my travel destinations. Of course, I also dream of getting that film degree here in UP and earning money to provide for myself.

Mom has always been supportive of my dream, but she worries about my sister's future because she had my sister when she was 40 years old. When mom retires at 60, my sister will only be in her second year of college. Add the fact that my sister wants to study architecture at Benilde, mom's pension will not suffice to cover the 100k pesos tuition per term. It is also difficult to save knowing that mom is the only financial provider in our family. Mom jokes by saying, "When you're [Audrey] already in your third or fourth year of college, your older sister will be the one to pay for your tuition." She never obliged me to give back to them, but the sacrifices she has made for us are enough for me to dream to lighten the worry for my sister's education. I don't want to hold my sister back from studying at an expensive university since mom never deprived me of the chance to study at DLSU SHS and even allowed me to pursue Communication Arts at DLSU or Film at Benilde for college despite the tuition fee. So, I want to give her the freedom to choose too just like the choice mom gave to me.

Mom often tells me she feels left behind by her peers. There are many things she still wants to do and attain, but it is as if time is running out. I know she still dreams of traveling and adding another floor to our bungalow house. I find it sad but admirable that mom has not once made her children feel like a burden. "But my priority is your and your sister's needs," mom says when I tell her to buy more things for herself after she bought herself new rubber shoes after not having a pair for the longest time. I know mom relies on me too because she tells me her struggles. We are partners in letting my sister know she is loved, after all. Once we were having a heart-to-heart talk and she said, "I'm not worried about your future and who you will turn out to be anymore because it is only a few years until you graduate and move out."

I am thankful that she trusts me not only as her daughter but also as a person, but UP also gives me doubts about myself. Am I really tough enough to conquer UP? Life has left me to learn how to cope since I was 10 years old. The struggles my family has been through since my dad lost his job left me scarred one way or another. I used to be able to pull myself together in times of setbacks, capable of completing homework in my room even if my parents were arguing about money outside my door.

But now that I am 20 years old, studying at UP, and have more freedom, I find myself on the verge of tears late at night trying to find the motivation to work. How do I move forward when I know I need to come to terms with my past?

Admittedly, this story has challenged me to find a conclusion to my own recurring situation. I try to rack my brain out for the answer, but then I realize the answer has been the conflict of my story all along.

It hurts me to see my mom cry. I hate it because that means she is in pain even when all she did was try to be a good mom to me. That is more than enough of a motivation for me to help myself and those around me.

I have to conquer the past and present because it is the only way to break free in the future.

Time is running. I have to do it. *I need to.*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

VI PALMARES

is a second-year Electronics Engineering student at the University of the Philippines - Diliman. As a passionate ballet dancer, she channels her love for movement and art into writing, blending both in her confessional poem, "Odile and O'death." Inspired by the haunting beauty of the Ballet, Swan Lake, her work explores themes of identity, perfection, and healing. Through her writing, she highlights the rawness of emotions and brings to light the complexities of the human condition.

JEAN CHO SARINO

is a fourth-year student taking up political science at the University of the Philippines Diliman. As someone who enjoys video games, he wrote the story "something Among us" as a tribute to the popular game Among Us. The story delves into the theme of betrayal, an idea deeply tied to his studies in political science, where concepts like negotiation, conflicting interests, and the complexities of trust often take center stage. With this narrative, Sarino combines his passion for storytelling and gaming with his academic learnings, offering readers an engaging and thought-provoking exploration of survival, leadership, and moral ambiguity in high-stakes situations. His work reflects a unique ability to intertwine leisure interests with critical academic ideas, creating a compelling story that resonates beyond its surface-level inspiration.

DOM BALLELOS

is a first-year Business Administration and Accountancy student at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. As a student, she authored a story titled "Harmony of the Past", which delves into some of the struggles students face in their lives. Driven by her deep love for her family, the story emphasizes that family remains a cornerstone of support, regardless of life's challenges or the different stages people go through. Through her narrative, she highlights themes of second chances, regret, and the importance of appreciating both one's family and oneself.

TASHA BAQUIR

is a second-year journalism student at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Driven to amplify the voices of those who deserve to be heard, she advocates for greater representation and understanding. Her heartfelt story, "Mom's Home," explores the transformative power of love and acceptance despite societal judgment. More than anything, she hopes that her writing will help people feel seen, understood, and appreciated for who they are. This young author has an ambition – to shatter the barriers that divide us, and awaken the shared humanity that binds us together.

ALYSSA CASIÑO

is a second-year film student from the University of the Philippines, Diliman. In 2023, she wrote the script and directed Teatro Lasalyano's musical, "Awit ng Dakong Silangan." During her free time, she likes to summon her artistic energy by conceptualizing film ideas, taking pictures, and editing.

