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Of Prom and Revolution

Kristen Justice D. Palado

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Revolution of 1985

WHERE is that photo?! I frantically scroll through my camera roll, trying to search for this elusive picture. I scroll and scroll and scroll, my anxiety reaching its peak with every scroll. At last, I find the picture.

"Ma! I have the picture!"

I rush out to the garage, like a child running to the Christmas tree to unwrap presents, to find my mother taking out some Christmas decorations. I approach her.

"A-Are you ready, ma?" I ask, not wanting to interrupt her.

I get her approval through a nod. We sit on the couch in the garage as my curiosity grows. My mind longs to know more about my mother. I show her the image. The anticipation builds as she takes a long, deep breath.

"JS Prom. That's my senior-junior prom. I was a senior there."

I earnestly listen to her, thinking to myself that, even though she is my flesh and blood, I still do not know her as well as I thought I had. She continues, telling me the story of her first love.

"His name was Ruell Ciball, and that gown that I used was customly made for me. I picked the design and everything."

Ruell Ciball was a guy that my mother had met during that prom. He had asked her to dance and she obliged. After that prom night, he had developed feelings for her. She had only found out about his wish to court her from a friend, and soon enough they were dating. Their relationship was short lived however when he broke up with her due to losing interest in her. I look back at the picture and take in every detail, from the pixelated background to my mother and her dress. The Philippines was still considered a third world country in that era. It was a place where every Filipino, whether they be a child, an adult, a male, or female, dreamt of getting away from their hometown and to

begin anew in the States. The States was a place where Filipinos thought that they could start a new life, fresh and slates clean. I see every pixel of the photo as a Filipino individual who has big dreams of starting a new life. Each individual pixel represents an individual dream and a link to my mother's past, as well as the past of the Philippines.

"That was taken at the Manila Hotel in the Philippines."

The Manila Hotel was, at that time, the best hotel in the Philippines. My mother told me that it was and still is a five-star hotel. The Manila Hotel "is the heart and memory of a city" that had its fair share of celebrities walk through its grandiose halls (Escasa).

"So, were Lola and Lolo with you? If so, what were they doing?"

"They stayed in the hotel lobby."

I was intrigued, wondering why they stayed and waited for my mother. Ever since I was a little girl, I remember my mother always being so protective over me. She would follow me wherever I went, whether it would be for a school field trip or even just going with me to my wax appointments. She is still protective over me to this day. I had thought that this would go away in due time however it just increased. I have always thought that my mother was so protective of me due to the reason of me being the only child after she had lost her firstborn, but I was completely wrong.

Before I was born, my mother and father were supposed to have another child. At first, everything was going smoothly. However, complications soon arose. I do not know exactly what happened or what caused things to go so wrong, but my mother had a miscarriage. She had gone to the bathroom one day and all that came out was blood. I don't know what happened after that. But what I do know is that both my mother and father were devastated. I can't



Figure 1: Marisa Palado

imagine what emotions they felt. However, they picked themselves up off of the ground and started over again.

My mother always tells me that she had to take a certain medication just to have me. Their wish for a child after that first loss didn't lose its hopeful gleam as the medication worked. My mother was pregnant again. Once again, my parents were ecstatic, though also very nervous. My due date was not supposed to be until December, however my mother went into labor a month earlier. After hours of excruciating pain and tearing her vocal chords out, I was born on the fourteenth of November at exactly five forty-five in the morning. I was born premature, which ended up causing some issues. I came into the world, but the second I was out I had immediately turned blue due to the lack of oxygen in my lungs. I was sent into the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) to my parents' horror. I stayed there in the NICU for approximately five days, which shocked my parents. That meant five agonizing days of nervousness for my parents. During one of those days, mother was setting up the crib in the apartment, eagerly awaiting the day that she could finally take care of me, when my father walked in. He saw the crib and collapsed to the floor, gripping the crib in tears. My father isn't much of a crier, so this was the first time that my mother ever saw my father cry.

After the five days spent in the NICU, they finally got to take me home. My mother tells me this story every so often and every time I can't help but tear up. She had to go through so much pain and sorrow before having me. She was traumatized after the miscarriage and my NICU stay. The fact that she had to take medication just to have a baby, to have me, makes me tear up. She had so much hope in her. She never gave up. She was determined to have a family with my father. She endured pain and suffering just to have me and I admire her for that. My mother has been protective of me ever since that day and, though at times it can get a little on my nerves, I think that it is endearing and she has every good reason to be that way with me. I am, and always will be, her precious baby.

"Just like I am with you, I am very protective of you. Wherever you go, I'm with you," I nod, earnestly listening to her as she continues, "That's the same thing that they did at that time. So, they stayed in the hotel lobby until prom ended at around eleven or ten at night."

I have finally gotten my answer but many more questions began to arise in my head. *What happened within the Philippines during that photo? How was the state of the economy and the government of the Philippines? What year was*

this photo taken? My curiosity reaches its breaking point and I finally explode, the words beginning to fly quickly out of my mouth. "What occurred during that time period? Like, what were some major events that happened? Were there any wars that happened? Any natural disasters?"

I teetered in my place as she stole a glance at the ceiling with a pondering glint in her eyes. After what felt like five minutes of painful waiting, she spoke at last.

"Okay. That time I was a high school senior, so that was around 1986 or 1987. Nothing really special happened, except around 1985 when we had the People Power Revolution in the Philippines."

Apparently, she participated in that peaceful revolution. She had walked from her house to the camp where the protest was to be held. The government and the economy of the Philippines was failing at this time and there were more poor than rich people due to this failure. The revolution first began after a tyrant named Ferdinand Marcos assassinated the former Filipino senator and father of famous actress Kris Aquino, Benigno Aquino Jr. On the twenty-first of August in 1983 after a long exile from the Philippines, Benigno Aquino Jr. flew back to his homeland. His flight had just landed and he walked into the airport, surrounded by his guards. Suddenly, shots rang out and Benigno Aquino Jr. fell face first to the floor, dead. My mother said that his body was riddled with bullet wounds and his face was bruised and mangled. News of his death reached the whole area and rage ensued.

"When his funeral was held, the family didn't even put new clothes or makeup on him."

"Why's that?"

"It was to show the world how brutal his death was. They dressed him up in the exact same clothes that he wore when he died and left each wound untouched to send a message to all Filipinos."

"What was that message?"

"That Benigno Aquino was assassinated by a jealous and corrupt president."

That message reached the entirety of the Philippines. This corruption occurred long before Benigno Aquino Jr. was assassinated. Citizens of the Philippines still had hope that President Marcos would stop his corruption. However, his successful assassination attempt was the breaking point for all citizens of the Philippines, as well as the downhill climb of Ferdinand Marcos' tyrannical rule. It took two long and painful years of being under the rule of a corrupt government to start and initiate the revolution. Many wanted to fight and go

to war to enact revenge. However, the people had a different idea in mind.

From the 22nd to 25th of February, Filipino citizens knelt down, hand-in-hand in solemn prayer, surrounding military tanks within Camp Aguinaldo. They stood along a long stretch of highway named Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, known back then to be one of the longest highways in the Philippines, blocking the road. Bishops, priests, nuns, and the whole clergy took part in this protest to overthrow a corrupt regime. They gave flowers to military soldiers who were there wanting to instigate a war. According to my mother, there were two pilots that were planning to drop a bomb in that very location. However, one of the pilots had thought of his family and friends, who could have very well been participating in the protest, and gave the order to land inside the camp. They were soon greeted by a group of nuns who gave them flowers, a sign of gratitude and peace, and they too joined the protesters.

"If those two pilots had dropped that bomb, your dad and I would not be here talking to you right now."

In my head, I see the chain of events unfold differently. I see chaos and destruction; death and blood everywhere; a flood of sadness; a wave of dead bodies; families torn apart; my parents injured and on the floor, bleeding, dying. I feel hot tears come to my eyes, making my vision blurry, but I hold them back, thanking God in my head repeatedly for providing a miracle to happen during those four protesting days in 1985.

The revolution lasted only four days in the month of February and went down in Philippines history, being named one of the most successful nonviolent protests and dubbed thusly as the EDSA (Epifanio de los Santos Avenue) Revolution or the People Power Revolution of 1985 (Astorga). Former president Ferdinand Marcos was soon exiled to Hawaii and the Philippines was then finally rid of a corrupt regime. I think to myself, *so much blood would have been spilled if the bomb was dropped that day. If ma and dad died on that day, that would mean that I would not be sitting here listening to her tell me this. Thank you God for helping to change the pilots' minds.*

I did not expect my mother to tell me about this story. It was a life or death situation and yet, by some odd miracle, she survived and lived to tell the tale! I lean back into the soft, orange couch cushion, speechless and at a loss for words. I still cannot help but see the alternate outcome if the bomb had been dropped that day, and the various emotions that probably would have permeated the air, the atmosphere, the very same cement at Camp Aguinaldo. I sit there silent as the tension in the air rises. I look back down at the picture, staring at my

seventeen year old mother sitting in that giant, basket-weaved chair smiling. She was only seventeen when that revolution happened. God truly was there, watching over His people, providing aid in their time of need. The killing of a Christian would have been considered a mortal sin, according to my mother.

“Maybe that’s why the one pilot decided not to drop the bomb.”

Filipinos are born and raised into the Catholic and Christian faith. They grow up being faithful to God and to the Church. Being raised in the Catholic faith myself, I know all too well how stringent Filipino parents can be around the subject of Church, faith, and Catholicism. Every Filipino family observed and went to Church for every feast day or holy day of obligation; every Filipino family received the Holy Eucharist; every Filipino received and completed the Seven Holy Sacraments (Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Matrimony, Anointing of the Sick, and Holy Orders); every Filipino went to confession; every Filipino attended mass every Sunday; every Filipino family prayed and recited a novena — worship for nine consecutive days — before eating a meal. That list could go on and on but I’d be here for ages.

“It is believed,” my mother tells me, “that the strong belief and faith and all of the prayers in that moment made a miracle happen and saved thousands of lives.”

I believe my mother when she says that a miracle happened that day. If a miracle didn’t happen that day, my parents would not exist, I would not exist, and Ferdinand Marcos would still be in power. My mother was so proud of her participation in the revolution and I could see why. She was part of something big that had changed the fate of her homeland and something that has now gone down in history and as a result of her contribution, she has become a part of that history as well.

All in all, I’ve learned so much more about my mother and the history of the Philippines. The People Power Revolution, if it did not occur, would have kept the Philippines under a corrupt government and many lives would have been lost if that bomb was dropped. But, I think the one take away that I learned from my mother is that having a strong faith can truly create miracles. Having hope and staying determined can lead to happiness and change. Hearing my mother’s stories and reliving the past with her was amazing and it gave me more knowledge about my mother.

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