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I am going bald

Aubrey Amila

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Culture is me. I can look out my window for that mourning dove, sighing *when is it going to stop making those cacophonous ominous noises?* Culture. I can intertwine my hands and blow between my thumbs, just like my grandfather taught me, to sound somewhat like mourning doves. Culture. I can run the water a minute longer when I am washing the dishes at 1 A.M., feeling the warmth that I've been secretly aching. Culture. I can browse over the internet for cute Valentine things such as chocolates and "I love you" cards, only to be reminded that I am yet to find my other half, or never at all. Culture is me, but most importantly, culture is my hair falling out without my permission. How rude! But when I think about it Pacific Ocean deep, my hair marks where I have been, how I have been, and who I have been in places I've walked, sulked, ducked, slouched, touched, hated, and loved.

In the initial zero Aubrey time, I was a bottle-sized baby coming out from my mother's sweet home uterus. People thought I was not going to survive because I was so petite, but I did. I grew up in Bohol, Philippines, the country where my mother tongue resides. I learned to only speak and understand the dialect *Visaya*. I became part of Villa Garcia and Canlangit's community where I was encouraged to mingle out there with kids and their mothers. That is when I learned about people's boundaries— to be soft or to be harsh, to control my tongue or to let it loose like a turkey running around in a field of yellow wildflowers. I learned those things, not because I made my peers cry and return to their mothers, but it is actually the other way around. I was as soft and sensitive as a keloid scar. They made me cry and return to my mother. However, my mother

pushed me away and told me it is my fault for being weak. I should not be weak. I cried again, but dared not to argue; for doing so is asking to be whipped with a broom or a belt, marking my side hip and leg for a moment that lasts forever.

Forever, it seemed like forever when I first arrived here in the United States. It was nine years ago. All I can say is that I was fortuitous to have a diligent family who pushed immigration to the land of the free. It's the type of family who uplifts me to speak and understand the English language, but binds me to promise not to lose my roots, accents, and language as I venture out. I told them I will not. *Dili lagi ko makalimut sa akong pagstorya, saad ko.*

So many things have happened... and I am still in between those cultures. Sometimes I am glad that I have both sides in me. Sometimes, I do not; for I feel like I do not belong to either, which would sometimes elevate me to a depressive state of thought: I don't belong in this world at all.

But I do...

because I *hope* I do.

Although I was unconsciously taught by my mother to hold my tongue, to keep all what I have to feel, I still hold this space of matter, of gratefulness, of greatness. This space that I take is only temporary and also may be nothing compared to the overall population as everything changes in a span of a microsecond. Everything stays just where I left them, but everything changes, too. People. Places. Humors. Attitudes. Songs. All melodious, all melancholic, shifting into one silent dance—a dance with tears in my eyes. Hair falls one by one, step by step. Pulling and pulling. Culture is my words unspoken. Culture is me.