

# HIMAYA

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Gipunit ni Anie ang kahoy sa salog ug gibalik sa butanganan sa blackboard. Pagkahuman migawas siya sa lawak tudloanan unya misugod pag-apas sa mga kaduwa didto sa hawan. "Si Claudio ang buang, ayaw padakop!" singgit sa usa sa mga katapad niya sa clase apan ulahi na. Nagunitan siya sa bukton ug karon si Anie na sab ang kinhangan mogukod sa ubang bata.

Nangaluya sila pagkadugayan ug tagsa-tagsa nga nanglingkod sa balili ubos sa talisalop nga adlaw. Didto sa kilid sa usa ka punoan ang batang babaye nga gipaila-ila sa guidance counselor ganina pagsugod sa clase sa buntag.

"Tan-awa ra gud kana siya," ingon ni Thelma nga milingi sa iyang suwang sa bag-ong bata. "Sukad pagpanggawas dinha ra gayud nagyaka ug nagpunay lang og gunit nianang cellphone." Misabat dayon si Louisa, "Bitaw, pagpasulod ni Miss Quinto kaniya hangtod karon usa ra gayud pa lang ang iyang gisulti, 'Ako si Maria Himaya Peres Guihulngan,' unya pagkahuman nahilom pa sa bato."

"Naulaw pa tingali kanato kay bag-o man siya," paniid ni Anie. Tuod misantop kadiyot sa hunahuna ni Anie nga dihang mipungko si Himaya didto sa katulong laray sa ilang lawak, igo lang kining motando sa mga buot makigtabi kaniya dayon motutok sa atubangan niya. Gawas niini, walay kalahian siyang namatikdan bahin kaniya sa ubang mga babaye ug lalake sa sixto grado.

"Masulob-on ang iyahang kinaiya. Pagpangutana ni guidance counselor kon unsang pangalan sa iyang mga ginikanan namorag kahilakon dayon."

"Greg, himantayon kang dako," pangasaba ni Selda. "Pasagdi lang kana siya karon. Makig-amiga ra lagi nato kana. Ugma kay amigahon kana nako."

Gamay ra ang ilahang tulonghaan nga susama sa kadaghanan anaa nahimutang sa daplin sa dakong dalan. Tulo ka balangay sa ilahang lungsod ang gialagaran niini ug hapit tanang mga nagtuon dinhi nakaila sa usag-usa.

"Maayo pa nang babayehana, dili kahibalo gutomon basta magsige lang og tuslok-tuslok nianang duwaan niya," kadungog si Anie kang Greg samtang nagpadulong kini kang Divina.

Nagpundok man tuod sila sa cantina apan pila ra kanila ang nakapalit og painit. Ang uban kon anaay balon, tagsa ra ka pan.

"Recess niya cellphone," dayong katawa sa katabi ni Selda.

"Ambot lagi Nyang, ako man unta ang kinabuotanang bata sa atong tulonghaan apan di man ganahan makig-amiga nako."

"Ikaw ra ba? Ako man sab gani nga kinamaltidahan dinhi, dili man sab siya bitaw nako."

Wa na moapil si Anie sa estoria ug gihulat na lang ang bagting alang sa Paugnat sa Lawas. Usa ka adlaw sa clase nila sa Pagtulon-an sa Katilingban, ang adviser nilang si Mrs. Castillo ang mipuli sa masakiton nilang maestro.

"Ug kon tun-an ninyo pagmaayo ang kinabuhi sa tawo, wala gayuy pagbati nga makalabaw sa gugma. Walay gahum nga makalabaw sa gugma. Ug ang kinatas-ang gugma sa tanan mao ang gugma nga gihatag ni JesuCristo, atong Ginoo, kanato."

"Dili ba nga ang lalake ug ang babaye anaa say pagbati nga gitawag og gugma?"

"Lahi kana, Claudio, nga matang sa gugma ug masabtan ninyo ang kahulogan niini inig kadako na ninyo. Ikaw Noel, unsa ang gugma alang kanimo?"

"Madam, alang kanako ang gugma mao ang paghigugma pag-ayo ni Himaya sa iyahang cellphone."

"Dili ingon niana ang gugma nga gitudlo ni Cristo kanato. Ang buot nako isulti mao nga walay dapit ang pagpanghinaway sa isig kaingon sa usa nga motuo sa gugma. Usa sa mga gipasabot sa gugma mao ang pagsabot."

"Bitaw, Mam, dili ba kana si Noel maantigo nga maluoy kaniya? Ako ra ang gisultian ni Himaya niini ug aron kamo masayod, pagkawala sa iyahang mama, tinuod gayud nga nawala, atubangan niya nagbarog ra unya kalit lang nahanaw."

Sukad niatong pagtug-an ni Selda, wala na gayuy gipakigsultian si Himaya bisan usa kanila. Apan bisan kining pagkabutanga wala molungtad.

"Asa bitaw siya, ayaw ko ingna nga nawagtang lang pagdayon?"

"Mao, lagi Selds, motuo ka ug sa dili, nahanaw si Himaya atubangan sa duha nako ka mga mata."

"Nyang, ganina lagi may duha man to nga managtiayon human sa paniudto nga nadunggan nakong may gipangitang bata. Wala kaha nila dagita, simbako ako si Vina ang isunod nila!"

"Dili ba sa wa pa matiwas ang Mathematics, miabot si guidance counselor nga nakigsulti kang Miss Patalinghug?"

"Apan didto pa man siya ganina sa Pinulongang Cebuano, mitubag pa man gani kon unsa pananglitan ang mga pulong nga parehas sa Cebuano ug Español," gipahinumdoman ni Noel ang mga kauban sa clase.

"Unsa kana ang imohang gikuptan, Nyang? Nganong naa nimo ang cellphone ni Himaya?"

"Nalipat ganina siya, Nie, pag-agi nako sa lingkoranan niya ug gipunit nako sa butanganan sa ilawom. Iuli ra man dayon nako human nako pasugton nga di na siya mag-inasyoso nato. Apan ambot, nawagtang dayon siya."

"Bitaw maayo unta ang imong gibuhay aron mausab ang batasan niya kay ngil-ad. Tiaw kanang imbis makigduwa nato sa cellphone man hinoon magduwa."

"Kahibawo ka Selds, karong panahona, daghan na gayud ang nabuang anang cell nga walay pulos."

"Suya lang mo kay wa moy ingon niana," wala makapugong si Alan pagsulti kanilang Vina.

"Panalipdan man nimo, ibog ka niya tingali no? No?"

"Ayaw ko sungoga, Nyang, kon di ka buot nga mag-away ta," pahimangno ni Alan sa ig-agaw niyang babaye.

Gibugkos ni Anie ang duha ka kamot sa iyang dughan. "Ambi kana."

Gipalingkod ni Alma Castillo ang tinun-an tapad sa iyahang talad. Giibot niya ang plug sa kiliran niini.

"Ang gikahibulongan nako kay dili man diay mocarga ang bateria niini."

"Ngano unta, Madam, tawagon nimo ang usa sa mga numero dinha aron mangutana kon hain na si Himaya?"

"Dili, nahibalo na ako daan. Miabot ang tinuod niyang inahan ug namugos nga dad-on si Himaya gilayon."

Wala makatingog si Anie pagkadungog sa gisulti sa magtutudlo.

"Adunay nahitabo sa iyang amahan ug wala madugay gibiyaan siya sa gituohan ni Himaya nga iyahang mama. Iyaha kini sa babaye ug gikuptan kini ni Himaya isip usa ka bililhong handumanan. Mipuyo siya pagbalhin dinhi sa iyaan niya sa atong lungsod. Wala pa siya makadawat sa bag-ong kamatuoran busa ganina pagbiya nila kusog ang pagdagayday sa luha niini sa aping apan wala maglangas bisan gamay."

"Apan nganong mora og kanunay niya kining gamiton kunohay bisan kon guba man diay?"

"Walay nasayod, Stefanie, apan tag-anon ko lang nga ang mga pulong nga iyang gipislit, 'Ma, hain ka na, ayaw intawon ako pasagdi, nahadlok ako mag-inusara sa kalibotan...'"

Nahilom silang duha. Hapit na motabon ang kangitngit sa gawas ug pila na lang kabuok tawo ang nahibilin sa tulonghaan.

"Tana. Dili ko na lang tika pangutan-on kon si kinsa sa imohang mga kauban ang nanghilabot niini. Ikaw ang tinugyanan nako sa clase ug saligan nako nga mapasunod nimo sa matarong ang imong mga kauban. Lahos na lang sa balay ninyo kay agion ko pa kini sa municipio, basin adunay makauli niani ngadto sa tag-iya."



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by Benjie Yballe

Anie picked up the stick on the floor and replaced it in the blackboard. Then she went out of the classroom and started after her playmates in the field. "Claudio is it, don't let him catch you!" shouted one of her seatmates but it was too late. Her shoulder got tapped and now it was her turn to chase the other kids.

They tired after a while and sat down one by one on the grass as sunset drew close. At the side of a tree was the girl introduced by the guidance counselor to them at the start of morning classes.

"Just look at her," Thelma said while pointing her chin on the new girl. "Since dismissal she has been squatting there and done nothing except hold that cellphone." Louisa immediately butted in, "Yeah, from the time Miss Quinto brought her in until now she has only said one thing so far, 'I am Maria Himaya Peres Guihulgan,' and after that she has been quiet as a rock."

"She's just being shy since she is still new here," Anie observed. Then a recollection flashed to Anie of how after Himaya took her seat on the third row, she would merely nod at those who tried talking to her then she would resume staring at her front. Aside from this, she did not notice anything that made her different from the other girls and boys of the sixth grade.

"She is one sad personality. When guidance counselor asked the names of her parents, she nearly cried."

"Greg, you are just too nosy," Selda scolded. "Leave her alone for now. She is surely going to befriend us. Tomorrow I'll make that one my friend."

Their school was rather small and like most schools was located by the main road. It served three villages of the town and almost everyone who studied here knew one another.

"That girl is better off than us, she probably does not feel hunger as long as she keeps on pressing the keypad of her plaything," Anie overheard Greg while moving towards Divina.

Though they were gathered around the canteen, only a few of them could afford to buy snacks. Those who brought something from home had one small piece of bread at most.

"For recess she has her cellphone," laughed the girl Selda was talking to.

"I just don't know, Nyang, I might be the nicest girl in our school but she doesn't want to make friends at all."

"Is it just you? I am the nastiest one here alright, she doesn't want to with me too."

Anie did not join their conversation and waited instead for the bell for Physical Education. One day in their Social Studies Class, their adviser, Mrs. Castillo, took over their male teacher who had been sick.

"And if we were to carefully study the life of man, nothing but nothing can be found to be greater than love. No power is greater than love. And love that is the greatest of all is the love given by Jesus Christ, our Lord, to us."

"Isn't it that man and woman also have this feeling called love?"

"That one, Claudio, is a different kind of love and you will understand what it means when you have already grown up. You Noel, what is love to you?"

"Madam, for me love is the way that Himaya loves her cellphone so much."

"The love that Christ taught us is not like that. What I mean is that being critical of others has no place in one who believes in love. One of the meanings of love is to understand."

"That's it, Mam, doesn't Noel have any pity for her? I am the only one Himaya has told about this and so that you will know, when she lost her mother, she truly disappeared, there she was right in front of her and then she just disappeared."

From then on, after what Selda revealed, Himaya completely stopped talking to anyone of them. But not even this was going to last.

"Where is she really, don't tell me she vanished just like that?"

"It really is, Selds, believe me or not, Himaya disappeared right in front of my eyes."

"Nyang, there was a married couple right after lunch that I overheard were looking for a child. Couldn't they have abducted her, cross my heart if I, Vina, will be the one they'll go after next!"

"Wasn't it before the end of the period for Mathematics, guidance counselor came in to speak to Miss Patalinghug?"

"But she was still there during Cebuano Language class, even answering what words are the same in Cebuano and Español," Noel reminded her classmates.

"What is that you're holding, Nyang? Why do you have Himaya's cellphone?"

"She got distracted back then, Nie, when I passed by her seat I picked it up from where it was placed below. I was going to return it anyway after making her agree not to be snotty with us anymore. But I just don't know, all of a sudden she's gone."

"Yeah, that thing you did might have been good just to change that ugly personality of hers. It's a joke that instead of playing with us, she plays with her cellphone instead."

"You know, Selds, lots of people have become excessively attached to those useless cellphones nowadays."

"You're just envious because you don't have one," Alan could not resist blurting to the group of Vina.

"You're siding with her, you have got a crush on her? No?"

"Don't tease me, Nyang, if you don't want us quarreling," Alan warned the girl who was his cousin.

At this point Anie crossed her arms . "Give me that."

Alma Castillo asked her student to be seated beside her table. She then pulled the plug at the other side.

"It is strange that this battery no longer charges."

"Were you planning, Madam, to call one of the numbers there and ask where Himaya is?"

"No, I already know that. Her real mother came here and insisted on taking Himaya with her right away."

Anie was at a loss for words after hearing what the teacher said.

"Something had happened to her father and not long after that, the woman that Himaya thought was her mother left her. This belonged to the woman and Himaya just held on to this as if it were a priceless memento. She moved to our town to live with her aunt. I don't think she has accepted her new situation as tears were flowing heavily on her cheeks when they were leaving though you couldn't hear anything coming from her."

"But why did it look like she was always using this when in the first place it no longer worked?"

"No one knows, Stefanie, but I can guess what words she had been pressing all the time, 'Ma, where are you, please don't leave me alone, it scares me to have no one in this world...'"  
Silence gripped them. Outside it was already dusk and only a few people were still around in the school.

"Let's go. I am no longer going to ask you who among your classmates took this. I had put you in charge of the class and you are responsible for the proper behavior of your classmates. Go straight to your home, I'll see if someone in the town hall can help return this to its owner."

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