

What the Empty Gun Taught Me

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I remember the day I desperately looked for my father's gun. I was 16 back then.

I was not thinking clearly. I was not thinking at all. I was just a teenager drowning in feelings too big for my chest — rage, longing, the unbearable sense that nobody truly understood me. I wanted the pain to stop. I wanted to make them feel it. I wanted to disappear just long enough to matter.

I searched. My hands were shaking. My heart was pounding.

There were no bullets.

To this day, I do not know if that was luck, or magic, or simply the universe refusing to let me make the worst decision of my life. But something — something greater than my pain — stopped me that day.

And now, standing on this side of that moment, I am overwhelmed by what I almost threw away.

I almost missed my first salary — that two hundred pesos a day that felt like a million. I almost missed the quiet pride of becoming a teacher, of standing in front of young faces and realizing that my story was not a burden but a lantern I could hold up for others. I almost missed every laugh we shared in that small Batangas kitchen where we burned rice and called it dinner. I almost missed the phone calls with my mother that now feel like coming home, no matter where in the world I am.

And I have been in many places in this world.

I almost missed the passport — the one sitting in my drawer right now, thick with stamps from countries that sixteen-year-old me could only dream about. I almost missed the moment I unboxed my first Apple product with money I earned myself, holding it with hands that once shook, reaching for a gun. I almost missed



the airports, the new skylines, the feeling of arriving somewhere foreign and realizing you are no longer afraid of the unknown.

I almost missed becoming someone.

An AACCCUP Accreditor. A DepEd Evaluator. A member of the RQAT Team. A TEC Assessor. Titles that mean nothing to a grieving teenager but everything to the woman who clawed her way, step by patient step, to a life worth living.

What if I had found the bullets?

The question still makes me tremble.

But I did not. And so I lived. And living, I have learned, is the greatest revenge against despair — not the dramatic kind, but the quiet, daily, stubborn kind. The kind that wakes up every morning and chooses to stay.

To every teenager standing in a dark room looking for something to end the pain — please, put it down. Walk away. The bullets you are looking for are not in that room. But the life you are about to miss? It is enormous. It is waiting. And it is so, unbearably worth it.



Ink and Insights by Vidia Nala (四月)

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