

Her Story

Adelaide Umali

God you are so infuriating! It's one bad score, so what?!

So what? How dare you! I spend so much on your education, your extra classes and materials, and all I ask of you is to pass the damn subject! It's your phone, isn't it? Or is it your friends that are distracting you?

No! Stop it mum! It's not any of that. Stop obsessing over me!

I am your mother! It is my job to obsess over you!

But you're suffocating me!

The sharp shrill of a school bell jolted me awake. My eyes squinted as I adjusted them to the rays of light shining across the classroom. Students bustled around me, chatting and joking around. *Where am I?* But suddenly the room quietened down, and the students returned to their seats as a teacher guided a young girl to the front. "Students, please congratulate..." the teacher then presented a medal before the young girl as the whole class cheered. *I didn't catch her name. Weird.* I tried to take a look at the girl's face, but I couldn't make out anything. It's like there was a permanent blurring effect stuck on her face. Soon students started to head out and before I knew it, my body had lifted itself off the desk and my feet shuffled out the door.

It felt like I was floating on a cloud; my head felt light as I travelled down the hall. I noticed that I was behind the girl who received the award. Her gold medal shone like a beacon around her neck as she was stopped by other students who congratulated her; the confidence practically oozed out of her as she was greeted left and right. *Woah, smart and popular? I could never.* I hadn't realised I'd followed her home until we reached a street full of houses. We started to slow down and, on my left stood the impressive doorway of a magnificent mansion. But before I could gape in amazement any longer, she took a sharp right turn and ran towards a wooden shack.

Was this her house? Their "living room" was barely the size of an average disabled toilet, and all it took were three steps until I reached the kitchen. It looked like a dumpster next to that splendid, glorious mansion across the road. I stood in bewilderment at this pathetic excuse for a house as the girl headed towards an old man smoking a cigarette on the side of the couch. He looked so fragile that I was afraid a wind too strong could lead him to his

doom. The girl presented her medal, but instead of her head being held high and the glowing joy I expected, her posture was hunched while her head hung low. None of that pride I saw hours before could be seen in this timid girl. But the man gave no attention to her or her shiny medal, just a dismissive nod before he puffed out a big smoke and returned to staring into the distance. She stood still for a few moments, and I almost thought she was about to yell in annoyance, but she just dropped her trembling hands to her sides before she stepped away and walked upstairs.

The silence at the dinner table was unbearable, even a table of strangers wouldn't have this much tension, but finally the old man broke the silence, "We cannot afford your college tuition anymore, but it'll be fine. After all, both your brothers were dropouts, and I doubt you will turn out any different anyway." And just like that, this girl's future was robbed from her in single breath, by this deteriorating man. I was ready for the outraged scream, the tears from such betrayal. A father was supposed to protect and keep his little girl safe from the evils of this world, but this man had just abandoned her without a care. Suddenly the sharp scrape of the girl's chair filled the silence and she walked across the table to her mother. She then dropped to her knees, "Ma, please help me... I need to go to school, I- I promise I will not turn out like them, I promise..." her head was bowed to the floor and her tears puddled on the tiles as she begged. But no one gave her any heed, and all I could do was watch her sob her heart out, each cry pulling at my heartstrings more and more till my chest ached and tears brimmed in my eyes. Until, without warning, everything became clear.

Her olive-toned face was streaked with tears whilst blood smeared her rosy lips. She weakly tugged at her mother's sleeve, exhausted from the crying but still, she couldn't give up. After a few minutes, one by one, each person left the table until the only ones left were me, her and her mother. Her eyes slowly lifted up and I could see within those brown orbs her implorations, her final cry for help for her mother to save her, to be the protector she vowed to be once she gave birth to this girl. But the mother said nothing and instead, like the others, slowly stood and walked away. This is how I watched my mother, at the sweet young age of 17, completely forsaken by those who were supposed to never leave her side.

I slowly crawled towards her weeping figure and although I knew she couldn't see, feel nor hear me, I wrapped my arms around her lithe figure like she always had done for me, on those days when I felt like the whole world was against me. But none of my experiences could ever be compared to this. I whisper softly, *"Please don't let go mum, I know it's incredibly hard, but this is just a setback. You got over this. Your future is so bright so please, please stay strong. From your daughter that will, and forever, love you."*

Adelaide Umali attends Suzanne Cory High School and is currently finishing her last year of VCE. She has lived in Melbourne for most of her life and is a proud Filipino. She enjoys spending her free time with her family, playing piano or travelling. English is her favourite subject because she enjoys having discussions with my peers that go beyond the perimeters of the text that they are studying, how it reflects history, relationships, societal values and many other interesting ideas. After she graduates high school, she would like to pursue a career that involves creating solutions to global issues, as well as to inspire others to do the same, however they can, and better our society.