

"In the end, loneliness is a friend. It will be there for you when you are alone. No matter what the problem is, it will be in your heart. Don't fight loneliness, learn to love it. And you will not fall into your doom."

Celestine closed the book that she was reading. A pang of pain was present in her chest. The tears that fell in her cheeks somehow, dried up but her eyes fell another set of tears.

Without a second, she wiped her tears and held out a sob. She put the book back in her bag and lean into the trunk of a mango tree. The pants she wore was now full of dust because of the ground. But she did not care less, as long as she was comfortable in her sitting position, it was fine.

"Oh my... There's the slut out there," a stinging voice of a girl exclaimed.

Tin just closed her eyes. She knew who that was, a girl who had a big hate of her, a girl who was once her best friend. A girl who was once she spilled secrets into and a girl who was once she shared happy moments together.

It was Aivy.

She did not look at their direction. It will just provoke them and can cause trouble.

"Aivy, let's go. We are not going to approach that kind of girl," said Leyla.

Leyla was the girl they used to hate but now, she was the one being hated. She smiled but it did not reach her eyes.

The sun shone brightly even if it was 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It was opposite of what she felt. Her insides were dark clouds, thunder and lightning. It was a stormy night in her heart.

It was still vivid in her memory on how she and Aivy became friends.

It was raining hard back then and Tin was on the waiting shed near the gates of her school. She did not bring an umbrella so she was waiting for the rain to stop.

The drops of water bounced in her black shoes and it was annoying her; another thing to clean. Her socks had dots of mud brought by the water that tapped her shoes.

The wind blew in her direction bringing the rain to her face. Her school uniform slowly got wet. She turned her back and wiped her face.

Suddenly the pinking of the rain in her back stopped. Did the rain stopped? But she heard the sound of the rain on the roof of the shed. She faced what happened and then find a girl that in pigtails shielding them together from the rain using her umbrella.

The girl smiled to her. "Hi," she said in a cheerful way. As if the rain can not stop her from smiling.

Tin smiled also. Thinking that she would give back the smile the girl had given to her.

"I'm Aivy," she said and extended her hand for a shake. Aivy's other hand was holding the umbrella.

"I'm T-Tin. C-Celestine," she replied and held the Aivy's hand. They shook it together and shared a giggle.

That was the start of them being best of friends. But it lasted for only two years and three months.

Now, she was alone hugging the loneliness in her heart. Like a dry leaf under the starless night that was not sure of what it will become, she was not also sure of what she will be tomorrow.

Celestine decided to get off from the tree that she was sitting. She stayed there for 2 hours and it was starting to get dark.

Those who played football were gone. The whole field was quiet. Only the birds singing and the waves of the leaves of trees were giving music to the whole place.

Her phone vibrated and she fished it out of her bag. The hairs on her nape stood up when she read the text message.

"Celestine, u r way past ur curfew."

Her round eyes got bigger. It was from her mother. She looked at the clock at her phone.

It was 6:13 in the evening and she was supposed to be home at 6 o'clock. Her heart raced as she took a running steps towards the gate of their school.

She wondered what will be her punishment for today. Will her mother put her inside the sack and hang on a tree again? Will she be knelt on a pile of salt again?

She tapped her head in anger. She just forgot the time. It was not intentional.

Her curfew was always 6 o'clock in the evening. Because of that, she was not able to help any activities in their class passing 6 o'clock. Nobody knew about that and that was why many of their classmates hate her.

It was okay to take in the punishment if she will break the rule to help them but what she feared the most was not being able to go to school forever.

She remembered one time when she and Aivy were best of friends. Just three weeks and two days ago.

"C'mon, Tin. Help me with my project. I'm always giving you consideration but please, just this time."

Celestine sighed and look at what Aivy was holding. It was an illustration board with some neon papers in it. Yes, she was always giving her consideration to her excuses. Maybe, it will be done fast since the two of them will work together.

She glanced a little at her watch. It was 5:15 in the afternoon. They can do it.

She was a bit reluctant to help her but in the name of their friendship, she will do it.

"Okay," she said in finality.

"Really?" Aivy's face beamed with a smile and hugged her tightly.

She smiled a little and nodded. "Yeah."

"Yehey! Thank you," Aivy said.

They sat on the chair and laid the things on the table. They started working and by the time they finished, the moon was already out.

"Wah, thank you so much, Tin!"

"N-No worries," she replied. Just in time her phone beeped and nervousness crept her heart.

It was her mom texted her to come home.

"I have to go, Aiv!"

Aivynodded and waved her hand at her. "Thank you and tomorrow, can you please help me again? I'll treat you a snack."

Tin just smiled and nod before turning her back on Aivy. Little did she knew, that moment was the last time of them being friends.

When she arrived home, her mother was very angry and made her kneel on a pile of salt. She was also not able to go to school the next day because her mother locked the door of her room.

It takes two days to convince her mom that she would not do it again. When she was finally able to go to school, everything in there changed. Aivy was with Leyla and she was being verbally bullied by them.

Like a dry leaf under the starless night, she was not sure if it will rain hard and destroy her sensitive heart.

Celestine closed her eyes and sighed. Her heart beats faster than normal. She was standing in front of their door. Her toes curled for she can not afford to knock and open the door of their house.

Cold sweat ran down her forehead as she repeatedly wiped them with the back of her hands.

She took a long deep breath before she gained strength holding the knob and pushing the door open.

Before she can enter, she took a step back when she felt something hit her forehead.

"Aw," then she hissed in pain.

Next was the breaking of glasses on the floor. She looked what that was.

It was a vase. A broken vase. She closed her eyes when she felt a hot liquid oozed on her temple.

"I thought you won't do it again, Celestine!" Her mother shouted and veins almost popped in her neck.

With a shaky hand, she touched her forehead and hissed again when she felt pain. Her eyes started to water as she sobbed slowly.

She can not look at her mother and bowed her head, instead. Her knees were shaky and her hair scattered all over her face.

"I-I'm sorry, mom!" That was all she could say because she knew whatever her reason was, her mother won't accept nor listen to it.

"Sorry? Sorry is for one time only, Celestine!"

The tears that she was trying to hold flowed freely on her cheeks. She didn't understand her mother. She was confused to why she would require her to go home at 6 o'clock. She didn't even explain it to her.

Tears and blood from her forehead mixed as it drops to the collar of her shirt.

"Go to your room and don't come out until I said so!"

'Mom, why are you doing this? Why are you making my life unbearable? Why me? I don't understand.'

She wanted to shout what has been ringing on her head for years. She wanted to confront her mother but she can't bring herself into it.

She nodded and slowly walked towards her room. In there, she didn't bother to change her clothes. She slammed her body in the bed and cover her eyes with a pillow.

It was too much for to handle. Everywhere was hell, at school and at home. Aivy was the only friend she had and it turned out bad. Her mom was the only family she had but she treated her like a mad dog.

She sat at the bed and threw her pillow at the corner of the room. Anger replaced sadness in her heart. For sure, she will be kneeled again in a pile of salt or not getting any food or not being able to go to school.

She furiously stood up and wiped her tears on her cheeks. She wanted to end all of this. She didn't want to be treated like this. She wanted to be valued, to be cared for and to be loved. Everyone deserves a life like that.

In the left side of her room, there was a small vanity table. In blurry vision, she went over it.

She went over it to find something. Something that is sharp, something that can cut and something that can kill.

Yes, she was planning on ending her life. What was the use of living when she was being useless.

She cried as she opened drawers and saw a scissor. Her heart was in so much pain. She has been living 18 years and she was suffering over and over again.

Her hand trembled as she hold the scissor. She stared at it for a couple of minutes. Can she really do it? Can the scissor really do it?

Her knees were weak and she let herself sprawled on the floor.

'Sorry mom for having a child like me. Sorry for not making you proud. Sorry for being a useless daughter. Sorry for coming home late and sorry for doing this. I see you always suffer reprimanding me. I don't want you to suffer. I know you've been holding the life you wanted because of me. So, when I am gone, please be happy and live your life to the fullest. Don't mind me, mom! Be happy.'

If only she could write a suicide note. She did not want her mom to hold grudge on her staring at a note that she will leave.

She didn't want to leave a trace. She wanted to be gone silently. She wanted to decay into this four-walled cell.

Without having a second thought, with the rest of her strength, she sliced her wrist on the sharp edge of the scissor.

She winced in pain but the pain she felt in her wrist was nothing compared to the pain of her soul.

She was weak, unable to move. She made a hearty laugh and lie down on the cold floor of her room. Her vision started to blur. Not from the tears that fell but from the exhaustion that she felt.

She held the scissor tightly, not wanting to let go. As if it was her comrade, her companion, her friend, her family for the last minute of her life.

"Mom, I am sorry!"

That was the last four words she uttered before everything went black.

Like a dry leaf under the starless night, being stepped on by the passersby. Not wanting to let go of its dear life but decided to go with nature and perish forever.

She slowly opened her eyes. At first, it was blurry but then it became clear when seconds passed.

She was on the room with white ceiling and white wall. She smelled the scent of alcohol and medicine.

There was an IV fluid connected in her wrist. Then, her other hand had a bandage. She recalled what happened. Oh right, she attempted to commit suicide and she was on the hospital right now.

She turned her head slowly as she heard a woman sobbing. It turned out that it was her mother.

"M-Mom," she said in a hoarse voice. Her throat was dry. She needed water.

"T-Tin? You a-awake? Oh, thank God!" Her mom stood up. Being startled and not knowing what to do.

"W-Water."

She quickly gave her a glass of water but not before assisting her to slightly lift up her body.



After drinking, Tin didn't find herself talking about what happened. She was ashamed on what she did.

She was about to say sorry when her mom hugged her and cried. She wanted to wipe her mom's tears but she can't move.

"Celestine, I am sorry! I am not aware that I am being too much on you – too much!"

Her mom caressed her forehead. Oh! It was her long-time wish that she will be touched like this by her mother.

Her mom continues, "Do you want to know why I badly want you to be at home after 6 o'clock?"

Tin slowly nodded. At last! She will hear the answers of the questions that were pasted in her mind.

It felt like there are thousand of knives that pierced through her heart when she was looking at mom crying in front of her.

Maybe she was not ready to tell her yet. Tin was in between of not knowing and the eagerness of being informed. She wanted to stop her if she was not ready to tell her, yet. But she can't find her voice to do that.

"B-Because..." more tears from her mother's eyes fell, "because I – I was..." Her mom sobbed hysterically.

Tin's tears started to fall, too. If only she could wipe her tears. If only she could move her arms and hug her back.

"I was raped, Celestine!" Her mom told her in a straight voice.

Her whole body froze. Even her eyeballs refuse to move. She only stared at her mother whose tears were unstoppable.

"I was in fourth year college back then. On the second semester, there were a lot of projects at school, so I went home late. At exactly six o'clock in the evening, I was assaulted by a man who was obsessed with me."

Her mom smiled, "I didn't have feelings for him but decided to let go and forget what he did. I didn't report him on the police. Besides, he was ashamed on what he did that was why he vowed to never show in front of me, ever again."

So, she was the result of her mother's suffering in the past. Poor, Celestine!

"And I decided to have you," then her mom kissed her on the forehead. "I want you to be at home early because I don't want to happen to you what had happened to me."

"S-Sorry, mom!" She said in a low voice but enough to be heard by her mom.

"Shh, I am the one that should be sorry. I love you, Celestine!"

"I love you too, mom!" She smiled and closed her eyes to sleep.

Like a dry leaf under the starless night, picked up by a child, took it home, and preserved it to make it a beautiful decor.

Celestine smiled when she saw the gates of her school. At last! She was able to attend classes.

Her doctor made her rest for two weeks. She looked at her wrist. It only had the horizontal scar. The scar which made her and her mother alright. The scar which made her understand everything.

She decided not to regret everything that happened. The scar was already a part of her.

When she reached the classroom, the situation was just the same. She had been ignored. She saw Aivy and Leyla sat together and laugh when they saw her.

She checked her heart. There was no pain like she always felt when they did that to her.

She also realized that there were no permanent things in this world. If Aivy did not like her, so be it. She won't force her to like and be friend with her.

Time will come, Tin and Aivy will talk about their friendship. But maybe, not now. She will give space at her. She will understand first her frustrations.

The class ended well and she decided to go to their cafeteria. She was not hungry but needed a place to stay in.

She sat at the usual seat where a loner like her would definitely suit in. In front of her was a burger and coke.

Her phone beeped. She immediately look to know who it was. She smiled when she the message was from her mom

"Celestine, make sure u 8 ursnak!"

She giggled at her mother's text. She still had curfew but it will be two hours later that the previous.

"I'll sit here," said a husky voice that came from a man in front of her. He laid his plate with a spaghetti in it and started to eat.

Tin can't help but stare. He had a black raven hair. His muscles flexed every time he raised his arm to eat. He had a pointy nose, reddish lips and his eyelashes were long and black, too. His eyebrows nearly met one another. Making him look like a man that was always angry.

Is he a transferee in their school? Because this is the first time Celestine saw him.

"I'm Gavin Fortalejo. No need to stare at me like that!" He said without looking at her.

Tin held her breath. Shocked about what just happened. Startled, she immediately picked up her burger and coke. She stood up and ran outside the cafeteria as fast as she can.

'God! That was embarrassing!'

She decided to go back to the classroom. There was no one in the room except Aivy who had her snack in there.

Their eyes met. Tin smiled first and went over to her.

"H-Hi," said Aivy.

Maybe, the time that they will talk about their friendship came sooner than she expected.

"I'm Celestine," she said and jokingly stretched out her arms for a handshake.

Aivy giggled and held her hand. "I'm Aivy," then shook it gently.

Hopefully, this time, they will settle all of their misunderstandings and Tin will tell Aivy what was the truth.

"I miss you," they said simultaneously. Then, they shared a good laugh.

Truly, life is beautiful. She was once a dry leaf under the starless night and it made her realized that life is truly beautiful and it was worth living for.