<center>**"Five More Minutes, Please!"**</center>

Five more minutes, please!

This is a phrase I am sure moms around the world know like the back of their hands. Not a school day goes by when I do not take the chance to beg my mom for an extra couple of minutes of sweet, sweet sleep. Once I am awake, she never fails to tell us how difficult it is to wake me and my brothers in the morning. I drag myself out of bed and into the same routine I have been doing since on-campus classes started. It is crazy to think how two years ago, all I had to do to attend classes was get out of bed, brush my hair, open my laptop, join a meeting, and that was it; I was now in class. But that was almost a year ago.

Time Perst!

Now and then, I would look back on how moments in my life just flew by as if time were just a made-up concept. I remember how I would be ecstatic yet nervous that I was about to start high school. I could still picture in the back of my mind how seventh grade me would bite her nails down to the quick as she looked at her curriculum for the year, as the concept of a big science school felt quite new to her.

I am officially done with ninth grade now, and I spend most of my nights wondering what lies ahead of me. "Would being a doctor fit me? A stethoscope could finish a look. What other courses could I list down?" Most of those nights ended up with me killing my train of thought. Dear universe, may I ask for a "Time Perst" like in a game of Patintero?

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I'm the problem, it's me.

One thing I hate that people constantly overlook is how everyone just sort of moved on. Time went by too fast, and it shocks me how far I am now. Worrying about what career path I should take had never crossed my mind before. During the pandemic, I developed some issues I never really thought I would experience. I became anxious and was in distress most of the time. Being isolated inside my house grew some sort of black hole inside my head, sucking in all the negativity it could take. I had transformed into a self-destructive teenage mess.

Connection is what brings us together.

I do believe that the people around us, or the absence of them, can truly affect our behavior. Parents and guardians serve the purpose of guiding us. It saddens me how some kids my age had only themselves to depend on to overcome disorders they developed or had exacerbated during the pandemic. Most kids I know view school as an escape from their abusive and neglectful families. They found comfort in the friends they made, and with the pandemic, they were stuck in a place that never felt like home. On the other hand, some kids are currently facing social struggles now that the school gates have reopened. All we need is support from the people around us, whether it be our parents, guardians, relatives, peers, or schools. The government should task schools with being more proactive about addressing mental health and family issues among students. Advocate for awareness concerning the well-being of the younger generation. Invest in projects that promote the development and growth of youth not only in schools but within households and communities. We must encourage one another and address

what needs to be addressed. Walking around on eggshells and refusing to acknowledge a disorder with someone could make someone feel like they are too fragile. A Twitter thread concerning what we "can" do, what we "could" do, and what we "should" do with the same suggestions will not help the youth recover from their mental struggles. How will society progress if we do not act on issues such as this?

No man is an island.

As cliché as it may sound, I truly stand by this saying. I would like to give whoever said that quotation a kiss in the brain for putting it in *such* a brilliant way. Though I know most of us like to take full credit for everything, none of us can strive on our own. Even when you reach the age of 30, you will find yourself yearning for a shoulder to cry on, to lean on, and to cling to. Humanity must work together for things to, well, work. Though, admittedly, I liked to keep my time to myself. I filled most of my time with the love of my life—books! Reading had become my main coping mechanism for overcoming the feeling of loneliness. Others spent their time on social media platforms, joining the bandwagon of never-ending trends. Our differences led to us coping in several ways, ways that can divert our minds from tearing ourselves apart.

Bungad sa umaga.

At the time of the pandemic, millions of people lost their jobs due to the economic fallout. Many also dealt with lower incomes, and families struggled with finances. Families around my area dealt with the mourning of their loved ones. I remember two years ago when I

would open Twitter and see numerous articles surrounding the lives lost each day. Reading about such a heavy topic was definitely not a good way to start the morning. Newscasts reported the deaths of hundreds of people in just a day. Turning off the television, I watch my dad exit our house door to buy food and house supplies that could cover two weeks. A fear grew in me that one day this deadly virus would seek me and my family as its next victims.

"Kaka-selpon mo 'yan."

"Who are the bad guys?" I used to ask myself in the middle of the night, like some protagonist in a sci-fi thriller movie. Was it the virus that took millions of lives, including those dearest to us? Was it the people who have not stood by us, making us feel lonely on the coldest nights? Was it ourselves who built the facade of being the bravest soldiers? Something tells me I get these thoughts from all the online books I have been reading. Late nights could bring out a much more vulnerable side of ourselves. It is natural for humans to blame others for something that has occurred. Sort of like knowing the cause of something washes relief onto us.

Kuya, stop the car!

The truth is, it is not as easy as people make it seem to be. It is not simple to just stop a feeling that we spent nights, days, months, and years trying to defeat. We do not have to forget to move on. Some events will leave scars, and that is okay. Let these experiences serve as a reminder of how we overcame and survived such issues. Time will pass us by, making us unaware of what we have lost along the way. Looking back, there had been one saying that

planted itself inside my brain: *"You never know what you've got till it's gone."* I have learned to never take things for granted; we will never know what could happen 24 hours from now. And after all is done, all you can do is ask the universe for "Five more minutes, please!"