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## HARVEST OF GRACE

by: EMERLYN C. ABRENICA

In the heart of Batangas, where sugarcane fields stretched like woven carpets of green, a girl named Grasya stood quietly, watching her parents toil under the sun. The air was thick with heat and the scent of molasses. Their hands were calloused, skin burnt by seasons, but their hope was clear as morning light: "Edukasyon lang ang tanging kayamanang hindi mananakaw."

So, they sent Grasya to the city.

Armed with medals and a bag full of hope, she entered the gates of the university as a scholar. For a semester, she soared. Until one subject, one single failure, pulled her down—dragging her scholarship with it.

She stared at her phone. Messages from home flooded in: "Kaya mo 'yan, anak." They never knew she had already failed. Behind each word of encouragement was a father who traded rest for extra work, a mother who sold ice candy under the noon sun. How could she tell them she wasn't enough?

But faith is stitched into every Filipino heart. "Nasa Diyos ang awa, nasa tao ang gawa." So she worked. Found academic support. Pulled herself up. By the next semester, she was back in the scholar's list.

Years passed. Her name was finally called. Diploma in hand, she stood at the edge of the stage, and there they were—her family—barefoot in borrowed shoes, awed by the tall buildings and fast lights of the city. For the first time, the ones who labored in silence celebrated in loud joy. Her success wasn't hers alone—it was their harvest.

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It was her time to give back.

She worked in the city. Sent money home. Supported them in any way. But then came the pandemic, sweeping jobs like leaves in a storm. She went back home, unsure, but still hopeful.

With a beating heart, she applied to the public school that once nurtured her. A chance to serve where she was once served. But the wait dragged on—days into months.

Then came a call. From a friend named Biyaya. A teaching opportunity abroad. Grasya hesitated. She gathered documents in silence. It was only when she needed help that she told her family. As she feared, they opposed it.

"You're leaving again?"

"Why so far?"

"What if it doesn't work?"

She wept that night.

But she waited.

Explained.

Prayed.

Until finally, they agreed—hesitant, but trusting. She borrowed money from relatives, vowing to repay every centavo.

And one morning, her feet touched the soil of another land.

Not the land of sugarcane,

but the Land of the Free.

She taught with passion, yes—but more than lessons, she shared culture.

She told stories of a country nestled in the sea.

Of elders blessing hands with *mano po*.

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# INSTABRIGHT e-GAZETTE

ISSN: 2704-3010

Volume VII, Issue I

August 2025

Available online at <https://www.instabrightgazette.com>



Of bayanihan, where neighbors lift houses and hearts together.

Of islands she hadn't even seen but longed to visit.

She brought adobo to school and watched her students taste the memory of home she carried.

She missed her country.

Every single day.

But her homesickness turned into purpose.

She never forgot the school that once shaped her. With her earnings, she started a small scholarship—just enough to help one student, then two, then more.

It wasn't grand. But it was something. A seed, planted in gratitude.

Grasya never became a teacher in her old school. But she became a servant in a larger world. And in that quiet way, she returned everything she had been given.

Not all dreams bloom the way we imagine.

Some take root in faraway lands, watered by sacrifice, and carried by grace.

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