



THE SOUND OF SILENCE

by: JOHN DREXCHELE GUMANGAN ABAD

The bulletin board outside Room 204 had always been a place for announcements.

Deadlines.

Scholarship opportunities.

Seminar invitations.

Poetry contests.

On a rainy Monday morning, however, someone had pinned a single sheet of paper in the center of the board.

It contained only one question.

"When does silence become part of the problem?"

By lunchtime, almost everyone in the College of Teacher Education had stopped to read it.

Some nodded.

Some ignored it.

Some laughed.

By afternoon, the paper was gone.

No one knew who removed it.

No one admitted putting it there.

But everyone remembered the question.

Ethan Morales was a third-year Social Studies major.

He was not the loudest student in class.

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He was not a campus activist.

He had never joined a protest or delivered speeches before crowds.

He simply loved asking questions.

His professors admired his curiosity.

His classmates often found it inconvenient.

"Why do you always ask difficult questions?" one of them once joked.

"Because history began with questions," Ethan replied with a smile.

One Thursday afternoon, Professor Reyes entered the classroom carrying a stack of newspapers.

He placed them on every table.

"Today's lesson," he announced, "is democracy."

The students expected another lecture.

Instead, the professor asked them to compare headlines from different newspapers.

Each reported the same event.

Each described it differently.

Some emphasized conflict.

Others highlighted success.

Some left out important details.

Professor Reyes folded his arms.

"Facts matter," he said quietly.

"But so does the courage to seek them."

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The room became unusually silent.

For their midterm project, the class was instructed to write an essay answering one question:

"What is the responsibility of an educated citizen?"

Most students wrote what they believed their professor wanted to hear.

Vote wisely.

Respect the law.

Participate in community service.

Ethan wrote something different.

He ended his essay with a single sentence.

"A democracy weakens not only when people lie, but also when honest people become afraid to speak."

Professor Reyes wrote only one comment beneath it.

Keep asking.

Weeks later, the college announced its annual Student Voices Forum.

Students were invited to present speeches about issues affecting education and society.

Ethan volunteered.

His speech never mentioned names.

It accused no political party.

It praised no public official.

Instead, he spoke about fear.

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He told the story of a classroom where students stopped asking questions because they feared being laughed at.

He compared that classroom to a nation where citizens slowly stopped expressing concern because they feared being misunderstood, judged, or silenced.

"The greatest danger," he said, "is not disagreement."

"It is when fear becomes louder than truth."

The audience applauded.

Not everyone.

A few remained seated.

Others exchanged uneasy glances.

That evening, Ethan's speech spread across social media.

Many praised it.

Some criticized it.

Others claimed he was attacking the government.

He reread his speech several times.

He had never mentioned the government.

He had only spoken about the importance of asking questions.

Still, messages began arriving.

"Delete the video."

"Stay out of politics."

"You're only a student."

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"Focus on your studies."

One anonymous message read,

"Silence will keep you safe."

For the first time, Ethan hesitated.

He wondered if education had limits.

Was critical thinking welcome only inside classrooms?

Could questions become dangerous once they reached beyond school walls?

The following morning, he arrived on campus earlier than usual.

The bulletin board outside Room 204 was empty.

Without thinking too much, he took a piece of paper from his notebook.

He wrote another question.

"If students stop asking questions today, what kind of leaders will they become tomorrow?"

He pinned it quietly before walking away.

By noon, the paper had disappeared.

Again.

But this time something unexpected happened.

Another question appeared on the board.

Different handwriting.

"Can education exist without curiosity?"

The next day, another.

"Is disagreement the same as disrespect?"

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Then another.

"Who benefits when everyone remains silent?"

Soon the bulletin board was filled—not with accusations, but with questions.

No signatures.

No arguments.

Only conversations waiting to begin.

Students gathered between classes to read them.

Some answered on sticky notes.

Others debated respectfully.

Professors occasionally paused to read before entering their classrooms.

The board became the busiest place in the college.

Not because it provided answers.

But because it encouraged people to think.

One afternoon, Professor Reyes found Ethan standing before the board.

Neither of them spoke for a while.

Finally, the professor smiled.

"Do you know why history keeps repeating itself?"

Ethan shook his head.

"Because every generation must decide whether it will remain silent."

The words lingered long after the conversation ended.

Years later, Ethan returned to the same college—not as a student, but as a teacher.

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The old bulletin board was still there.

Its paint had faded.

Its corners had rusted.

Yet students continued pinning questions upon it.

On his first day of teaching, one freshman asked,

"Sir, do questions really change anything?"

Ethan looked toward the bulletin board.

Then toward the classroom filled with future teachers.

He smiled.

"They change people."

"And people change nations."

Outside, the wind gently lifted the edges of the papers pinned to the board.

They made no sound loud enough to shake buildings.

No speeches echoed across the campus.

No banners filled the hallways.

Only questions.

Yet history had taught Ethan that every society transformed by justice first began with

ordinary people who found the courage to ask what others were afraid to say.

Sometimes, the strongest voice is not the one that shouts.

It is the one that refuses to disappear into silence.

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