



THE GIRL WITH A WOVEN BAG

by: DAPHEEN S. LAMOGRAR

In a busy city of Manila, modern students carrying colorful backpacks and trendy shoes were the norm in this day and age. Maya roamed the corridors of her Junior High School carrying a handwoven bag called a *banig* bag, one that had been created by her grandmother in their isolated village in Kalinga.

The whispers began not long thereafter

"Is that a rice sack?" one classmate giggled

"Why does she always have a scent of mountain herbs?" another sneered.

Maya smiled tight, words that were like cold rain on bare skin. She is homesick — for the clamor of the *gangsá*, the pre-dawn chants, the stories her Lola whispered as she wove traditional cloth. Here in Manila, there seemed to be no home for her culture. It seemed backward, primitive — like a fossil in a museum.

She was timid in the classroom. She can't be friends with anyone because she thinks no one likes her because apparently for them she's different. But when Maya's Araling Panlipunan teacher assigned a special project, "Show and Tell: A piece of your culture that defines you," Maya realized this was her chance. Still, doubt gnawed at her.

"What if they laugh again?"

But then she recalled what her Lola had said: "Anak, our weaving speaks what no book can hold. Wear them with pride."

On the day of her presentation, classmates arrived with shiny charts, PowerPoint presentations and food from spots that claimed the label "authentic." Maya, in a humble Kalinga wrap skirt and a beaded cord, stepped up.

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“I bring to you the story of my people,” she said, her voice firm. She held up her *banig* bag.
“This is not just a bag. Each hair was handwoven with symbols — of mountains, rivers, the moon. Each design tells our history, our future, our survival, our soul.

She passed it around. The bag had the scent of fresh bamboo and mountain air. Students edged closer. The giggles disappeared.

Then she produced a brief video: her grandmother, sitting by a clay lamp and weaving, humming a lullaby in their own language. The class fell silent.

By the time Maya was done, even the teacher’s eyes were misting. A classmate who had once teased her raised her hand.

“Maya ... Can we go to your province sometime? I want to learn how to weave as well.”

Maya had her first real smile then.

At the end of the week, her project went viral on the school’s social media page. Some students donned cultural attire for the following culture day. The school that laughed at her heritage previously was now the same school celebrating it.

Maya not only got the highest grade in the class — she won respect.

Importantly, she showed them a lesson that no textbook can: You should not hide your culture — you must carry it proudly, like a woven story across your back.

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