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## A Moment of Despair, Fortitude, and Guilt

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“Waray ko hira matabangi! Waray ko hira masalbar han delubyo!” (I failed to help them. I failed to save them from the deluge), I told Ms Juliet Calda, then instructor of Leyte Normal University in Tacloban City, Leyte, the Philippines. The faces of my younger brother and sister are still vivid in my memory. It took time and courage for me to forgive myself and that <sup>1</sup>super typhoon that killed them and thousands more. This drawing is a testament of how helpless we are in times of natural disasters. Until now, the loud screams and throbbing sobs of my younger siblings still reverberate in my ears, and, as a big sister, it always pains me that I could not do anything about it, that I could not be there to save them from drowning. For a while, I lived in grief, longing, and anger, and such weight of emotions seems to linger in my consciousness, at times inundating my sense of being. I was desperate for help, too. I was hopeless. I didn’t know if I could endure those ravaging waters, the violent winds, and the biting cold while I was tightly hugging that coconut tree just so I could save myself. And then I saw their faces no more. I heard their cries no more. It was total darkness. The wind was so vehement it could carry me to my death. After almost three hours of prayer and mental fortitude, the wind and waves subsided, and I could see thousands of dead bodies in my naked eyes. I was tramping the shorelines of San Jose hoping that I could find my two younger siblings, but I couldn’t. I was hungry and thirsty. I was shivering. My feet were bleeding from debris scattered on the muddy grounds. I cried so hard in a corner even blaming God for our misery, and for taking my younger brother and sister too early by sending that typhoon to punish us. Tacloban was total madness. And I was asking myself repeatedly: Why am I angry with what happened? Why am I angry with God and the death of my siblings? Why am I angry with the world? I realised that this anger that has grown immensely inside of me is symbolic of something bigger: guilt. I was guilty for not being able to save my brother and sister. I was guilty of my little acts of polluting the seas of Tacloban. I was guilty that I did not contribute to the mangrove plantation movement in our community in San Jose Bay. I was guilty for not being able to really say a proper goodbye to my poor brother and sister, and this memory always crushes my heart and soul. Always. Perhaps, in time, I will be able to overcome this guilt. And when I get there, perhaps I already have the courage to forgive myself. For now, I would like to carry this guilt with me for as long as I can.

**Acknowledgement and Editorial Notice**

The Editors of *Simbolismo* acknowledge the help of Ms Juliet Calda for keeping this drawing with a corresponding written text (in dialogue format) and sharing this with one of the editors who kept the drawing and the text in his archives. The Editors decided to translate the written text in Waray-Waray to English, transform it into a coherent piece, and included it in this maiden issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to Haiyan or Yolanda