

Life isn't fair

Ina woke me before the sun rose and I got up slowly, hoping that my brothers had brought back food after I'd gone to bed last night. No such luck. My last meal had been breakfast yesterday and I was starving. But the one I pitied most was Ina. She had to look after seven hungry, working children and Ama had died three years ago. I know she missed him, but she had to forget or suffer the consequences.

Ina often left us after dinner and came back in the mornings crying, but holding 50 Pesos in her hands. I didn't dare ask how she got the money, I had heard too many horrible stories about women so desperate and how they became rich in the night.

"Jaina! You're late!" Triani, my older sister by five years, called from our dusty front yard. "Coming!" I called and ran outside to join her. Triani was lovely, but incredibly impatient. I knew she was hungry, tired and pulled down by many worries, but sometimes she still annoyed me. I didn't act like that and I was feeling the same way. "Life isn't fair" I thought miserably as we walked towards the fields outside our town. "Life just isn't fair"

This harvest I'd been assigned to the rice fields and I was glad to get out of the cramped confines of the packaging hut filled with so many children that we were practically sitting on top of each other. It was hard work and bad for the eyes. The fields at least offered sunlight, even though it was physically hard.

Every morning, about an hour after the sun rose, I would stop work for a few minutes and watch the richer children go to the small schoolhouse on the outskirts of our town. The children mainly came from parents who worked in shops or were taxi drivers in Manila.

Since I could remember, I'd always wanted to go to school, always wanted to live the lives of those children. I wanted to have fun, to not work, to be able to read and write, to be able to not worry about not having enough to eat. I wanted to be free of all my worries.

But with a sinking heart, I realised that I never could be.

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