

“Huli”

By Dorothy Tiu

The sound lingers in the air—a sharp, searing buzzing, as the chainsaw shudders and cleaves a section of rock off, chunks of it crashing onto the platform. The boys jump back, laughing, their bodies dusted in powdered alabaster. One sets down the machine and pulls a chisel from his pocket, gingerly leaning into the smooth stone and chipping at the rough grooves on the statue’s face.

“Careful. Esteban, watch your arms.”

Apolinario—Nario—shakes his can of wax, pressing his free hand to the mask on his face and coating the statue’s legs with a cloud of spray. The stone lady’s skin glimmers. Beneath the dim, swaying lights of the workshop, she almost seemed to host the spirit of Justicia herself.

The stone lady, however, was only an interpretation. Unlike the goddess of balance, theirs—fondly named “Huli”—boasts a crown of laurel leaves over long, flowing curls, Flowers sprout from behind her ears. Her arms are stretched out before her, raised heavenward, face hidden partway from behind painstakingly molded fingers.

A timer beeps from somewhere in the room, and both boys’ heads jerk up, their fears doused with prickling jabs of certainty. “Five minutes to time.”

Nario gazes out at the bleak night sky. He could almost see the shadows’ divide, tracing out the arches and sloped roof of the pagoda down the path. Lazaro had been there last Saturday, feeding bits of paper to the wind, his fraternity brothers deep into a practice battle of words.

“Global debate championships coming around,” his friend had said when Nario passed him by. He was declared dead two days later.

The news spread through campus like wildfire, calling out an alleged gang rape. It was Joel’s boys, rumors said. Came at Renato, then Trinidad hopped in to defend him and it was all out from there. Someone punched someone and golden boy Joel, bastard of the lot, came out the the office with a pout and a warning, a few seconds late for debate training. Globals, after all. Lost a boy—Lazaro, gentle one. Innocent. But they say Trini landed the punch on

him, and I'll bet they'll haul him off to juvy soon. Lost his future taking another's, I'll say! Doesn't matter what he calls self-defense.

Say it all now, the administration's handing out freaking contracts. "...to oblige to this call for absolute silence on part of the incident..." Is this not a free country?

Esteban's hands are shaking. They're on schedule with two minutes to spare, but Huli's eyes—violently shut—are far from the standard one would expect in sculpting the face of a god.

Nario carves "mene thecel phares" onto the pedestal.

"Huli."

"The art gallery—"

"She'll stand outside, at the very front. Tall and proud, a helm of justice for years to come. Screw those 'legal' contracts."

Esteban throws a shroud over the lady, planting his hands beneath her feet. Nario rushes to help, together lifting their masterpiece.

"They'll kill us."

"They'll hear us."

For Lazaro. Nario thinks. Trini. Renato.

"Okay, go."