

Colby



Inklings Magazine

Volume 3
Issue 1 *Fall* 2016

Article 8

October 2016

Closure

Olivia Balcos

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/inklings>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Balcos, Olivia (2016) "Closure," *Inklings Magazine*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/inklings/vol3/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Inklings Magazine* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.

CLOSURE

olivia balcos

The moment Maria pushed through the mahogany doors of the cathedral, she wondered if she had stepped into some horrible incongruity that invalidated her memories. The lamps with bronze casings hung from the high ceiling and cast a gentle, holy light over the path leading to the wooden casket on the altar. The casket was flanked by an array of white lilies, white roses, and lavender irises that emerged like little angels above their deep green stems and puckered over the body of Maria's mother.

How strange, Maria thought as she looked into the casket. Her mother looked so peaceful in her eternal slumber. The edges of her white dress looked as soft and light as the feathers of an innocent dove, and her makeup added a soft flush that gave a kindly look to her, and her long black hair parted gracefully over her glazed beige shoulders. Maria wanted to ask: Who was this woman who looked like the embodiment of love and grace, whose environment seemed to call tears that she did not plan to shed? Who was this woman?

She was so lost in thought that she did not notice the scraggly old priest who had walked up beside her. He donned black robes and a violet stole around his neck, and he had slanted, round eyes that looked over her mother's body with compassion.

"Every Sunday morning I saw her taking the pile of robes to launder. She would be in the vestry before anyone else. Now she will never be there." He sighed deeply, as if a wave of grief flowed through him that he had to release in one breath. "How are you doing?"

The question hung on the air, and the answers lodged in Maria's throat. There were many, all conflicting, all unpretty. An evil part of her felt relief, but she would not reveal that, and she said something that he expected to hear.

"It doesn't feel real. None of it."

"Death never feels real, yet here she is in the casket so we can face her. A mother's love is an immeasurable loss, like losing the roots that brought you up or the losing the legs that always supported you. Her love for you, her daughter, began from before your birth," he said, touching her elbow and with a gentle voice. "Now, you will learn to live without the love that she had given you from the beginning. It may be the hardest thing you will ever do. Of the many funerals and wakes I have served, the ones held for mothers are the most tragic."

"This is true?" Maria asked.

"Always." His voice spoke of wisdom and of experience and of a universal truth that surrounded mothers and daughters all around the world. Yet, as he bent down on one knee and closed his eyes to pray, and as her mother's loved ones entered the church under the dim light, Maria felt a growing, pervasive awareness of the sadness in the priest's quiet figure and of the grief emanating from those looking upon the casket,

"It doesn't
feel real.
None of it. "

and she felt isolated.

"Sandra gave me these for my birthday, and I thought it would be appropriate for me to wear it," her mother's white friend, Jackie, said. She pointed to the deep blue earrings that she wore. "I'm not sure what I'll do without her."

Jackie broke down then, and Maria held this sobbing woman that she met seldom before while she was still living with her mother. Her mother was not her mother when Jackie would come over. Her mother laughed and listened and was pleased, and Maria would listen from her bedroom in wonder.

When Jackie calmed down, Maria asked what her mother said about her.

"She said that she wished that you didn't move out. You had so much trouble living on your own, and she very much wanted to help you." Jackie then bit her lip. There was a question in her eyes, a hesitance to say what she knew. Maria urged her to say it.

"She was angry when you fought, but-" Jackie said "but" as if she were trying to cover up her own words. "But, I remember I lost my own mother. I had a fight with her and didn't talk to her for days, and then I got the news. Heart attack." Her eyes dimmed. "Sometimes I forgive myself, and sometimes I don't. I just wish she was still here because she just seemed to have all the answers, and I feel lost without her." She put a gentle hand on Maria's shoulder. "I'm rambling. It gets better with time. Your mother was a good woman, and no matter how hard it is, it will get better. You'll learn to forgive yourself."

Maria wanted to ask what exactly her mother said, but instead she allowed Jackie to tell her stories about the nice things her mother did. How she liked to buy little trinkets for Jackie, liked boston cream pie, liked sharing nice quotes from the Bible. Maria wanted to know if there were any dark moments in the friendship: fights, mood swings, passive aggressiveness. But Jackie didn't speak of that, and neither did anyone else. Their stories were like pebbles skipping on the clear surface of a lake, touching only the parts that everyone could see, but never the murky, polluted waters that lurked underground

At the arrival of her Tita, or Aunt, Lydia, Maria nearly grimaced. She avoided contact, but Tita Lydia, with her heels and that short Filipino-bobcat hairstyle that she has had since the eighties, came to her to give her a tight, oppressive hug anyway.

"Anak." *Child.* "I'm so sorry."

Tita Lydia was the aunt that talked too loud and too fast. Maria could barely get a word in her she went from story to story from their youth in the Philippines, their college days, their immigration to America. Maria politely nodded, following Tita Lydia's words only sometimes. There was no correlation between her stories, but suddenly her tone shifted. She told a story of how the two rebelled against their mother many times, but when the two grew older, they learned obedience, respect. "In the Philippines, we learned to respect our mother because they clothed and fed us, and when Sandra became a mother, she did the same to you as well."

It became increasingly prevalent where this was going. Tita Lydia would look at her with a face that said that she had something to say but did not want to say it directly. Tita Lydia fidgeted, her voice became louder as she arrived to the final question: "Why did you fight?"

Maria was taken aback, sputtered something unintelligible that angered Tita Lydia even more.

"You ran away once, but that was as a teenager, and teenagers always fight, but I thought that you matured, that you learned to listen. And then Sandra called me and said that you called her a... a," she grew silent, but was still angered. "Bakit ba? Hah? Why? Why are you still angry?"

Tita Lydia gripped Maria's arm so hard that it was beginning to hurt. So Maria shook her hand off. Maria wanted to speak, but Tita Lydia was speaking even faster, even angrier, until the anger building up within Maria burst.

"Don't ask why when you won't let me say why. Just get out."

The corner of the church that heard her grew silent. Jackie and the priest looked at her in horror, but Maria did not care. She spun on her heel and walked out to take a breath of fresh air, leaving Tita Lydia with her mouth wide open with offense. Maria walked down the steps and sat over the small-bricked wall that surrounded a modest garden. Her blood was boiling now, and she was feeling antsy so she took out a cigarette to smoke. As she tried to light it up, a shadow crept up in front of her, and when she looked up, she saw the man in front of her.

It was her Tito Lito.

He had aged the last time they talked. On the days she wasn't comfortable at home, she would come to his house to chat on the porch. He was youthful then: full of vibrant energy and exaggerated hand movements. He was the sort of happy, energetic guy that anyone in the family wanted to get close to. Now, his hair was turning gray, and his brown skin sagged over his forehead and chin, and his veins bulged out of his hands.

"Why are you outside?" he asked. Maria shifted uncomfortably. She wanted to go back inside than talk to him, but her Tita Lydia was still inside, so she stayed put.

"The atmosphere in there is too much to bear."

He nodded, picked at something in his pockets, before saying, "You should come back to our house sometime to visit. My wife asks why you don't come anymore, even though that was years ago. She'll feel a little less lonely with Sandra gone if you visit."

She would have been more graceful with her answer if she was not upset and angry, but she said, "No thanks."

"You're still angry about that then." Maria didn't answer. "You didn't have to call the police."

"You didn't help me when I asked for help. I didn't know what else to do." Tito Lito's jaw stiffened. "You should not have called the police. You should have talked to your mother if you had an issue."

"Like talking worked so well with you."

"What was I supposed to do? Rip you apart from her? Break up the family, cause fights? What good would that do?"

"I just wanted acknowledgement. I didn't want you to save me. I just thought I could trust you." Maria was standing up now, hands waving in fists. She was making a scene in front of strangers passing by but she didn't care. Tito Lito was avoiding her gaze now, and he was about to turn to leave, but Maria stepped in front of him. "No. No, you don't get to leave every time I need to tell you something, because even

though you ignore what happened to me, I have to deal with it for the rest of my life.”

Tito Lito was visibly uncomfortable now and red in the face. “She never even hit you.”

“No, she just fucked me up with words, because that’s so much better. Thank God, she didn’t fuck up my bones, she just fucked up who I am.”

Tito Lito shook his head. “She’s gone. Let it go. Look I’m sorry you’re still mad and that your mother isn’t perfect. I just wish you wouldn’t let that affect the family.” He gave one last look at Maria before he entered the church, leaving Maria on the bricked wall, fighting back tears.

She came back into the church when everyone left and asked the priest to give her a moment of time alone with her mother. She emerged through the shadows under the light that was even dimmer than and stood before this casket of a lie. The flowers, the holy light, the pure, white dress, the kindly expression on her mother’s face mocked her like her mother mocked her for ever wanting more. Her mother liked to remind her who paid the bills and her education so she could have the right to tell Maria how ugly, how fat, how stupid she was. Her mother looked through Maria’s diaries without her permission, scrambled through her drawers, because she wanted to make sure that she wasn’t doing anything wrong. And when Maria would call her out on that, her mother would tell her that she was tired from working three jobs, that Maria was ungrateful and if her mother wasn’t needed, she would just abandon her. When Maria finally moved out, her mother went ballistic, mocked Maria for thinking that she was too good to live with her own mother.

She didn’t know the person in the casket, nor did she know the person who everyone else cried about. She just knew that this woman who might belong in heaven raised hell at home, and that no one but her would accept what she was like behind closed doors when she had power over someone who had no authority to speak. Her mother, this wake, her family, the world had denied her her right to be angry, and so she threw her rage in one final motion.

She held onto the lid of the casket, and slammed it shut.