

A New Beginning

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“Five, four, three, two, one! Happy New Year!” shouted the Gonzales family.

Boom, boom, crackle, whoosh.

“Sit down. Let us pray before having our meal,” called Mrs. Gonzales.

The family took their respective places at the dining table. Everyone is smiling at each other. Lola is wearing her polka dot dress for good luck just like the rest of the family. After the prayer, Lola started narrating the history of the dishes on the dining table.

“Did you know that the *kakanin* there is a family recipe passed down by my grandmother? She said we should always eat a piece every New Year because its stickiness symbolizes the tight bond we have as a family.”

“Really Lola? I thought it was just for dessert,” said six-year-old Carmela.

“You always think of your tummy,” answered Patrick, the oldest of the two siblings.

“No, I do not,” pouted Carmela.

Everybody laughed.

“Lola, I thought only the *pansit* and the fruits have meaning here. I read that the *pansit* is for long life, while the round fruits are for good luck,” said Patrick.

“Oh, you are correct,” said Lola.

“Mommy, when is Daddy coming home?” asked Carmela.

“Oh, wait. I forgot the juice,” answered Mrs. Gonzales.

“Lina, sit down and have some *pansit*. You are too tense. I am sure Ben is just busy at the hospital. Isn’t it the same as last year when the pandemic peaked? Doctors like him do not own their time,” said Lola.

Lola hands the *kakanin* to Mrs. Gonzales, but she refuses, stands up, and heads to the refrigerator. She opens a bottle of red wine and takes a sip. The rest of the family watches her.

Lola stands up and asks Mrs. Gonzales to accompany her to the living room to get her shawl.

Mrs. Gonzales reluctantly goes with her.

Ring, ring, ring.

“Take the call. Your phone is ringing,” said Lola.

“I can’t,” answered Mrs. Gonzales.

“Lina,” uttered Lola.

Mrs. Gonzales takes a deep breath and takes the call.

“Hello, Lina. This is Dr. Fred. I am sorry, really. We did everything. Lina, Lina are you still there? Hello?”

Mrs. Gonzales falls to the sofa. The phone slips to her side. “It’s just a cough and sore throat,” she repeatedly mutters to herself in between sobs.

Outside are the sounds of honks, crackles, and merry screams, while in the dining room is the laughter of Carmela and Patrick. Lola sits beside Lina and clutches her hands. ❀