



## HER WILD AMERICAN SELF

It's like my family's stuck somewhere on the Philippine Islands. My grandmother, *Lola Mona*, says that I'm as wild as *Tita Augustina*. That I have that same look in my eye. A stubbornness. And if I'm not careful I will be more trouble than she ever was. She says her daughter was a hard-headed *Americana* who never learned how to obey, never listened. Like me, she says. My family believes that telling her story will act as some kind of warning, that I might learn from her mistakes.

When she was young, Augustina wanted to be chosen. Maybe it was all those movies about Teresa and Bernadette, flying off to heaven, but she imagined she would be a modern-day saint from Chicago's North Side. Sitting at her window before bedtime, she'd divide the night into decades and mysteries. The moon was a candle offering and she surrendered prayers to Mary by that light.

When she was eleven, Augustina wanted to be an altar girl. In a red robe and white gown, she dreamed of carrying the crucifix down the aisle. Her mother wouldn't hear of it. "God loves your devotion, *hija*," she'd say. "He loves you whether or not you carry Him down the aisle at church."

To rebel, Augustina stopped going to Mass with the family.

"God loves me," she'd tell her mom. "Whether or not I show up on Sundays."

Augustina's dad, Ricardo, clenched his jaw tight, spitting words through the space of his gold-capped teeth. "How can you do this to your mother?" he demanded. He gestured a bony brown finger at his wife who was collapsed on the living room sofa sobbing.

"How will this look?" she cried. "My own daughter missing Sunday Mass. People will talk."

Augustina tried bargaining with them. "Let me be an altar girl, let me keep playing baseball with the neighborhood kids and I'll keep going."

Mona let out a little scream. "Even worse!" she said. "Your reputation, *anak!*" Mona dramatically curled her palm into a tight little fist, and pounded her chest, keeping time with the painful beat of her heart.

Ricardo placed Augustina into the back seat of the car, threatening to send her to the Philippines for lessons in obedience. The threats meant nothing to her. She sat in the car all during Mass, making faces at the people who'd stare into the windshield. Next Sunday, her parents let her stay home alone.

This did not sit well with the family. When Mona and Ricardo moved to America, they brought with them a trunk full of ideas—land of opportunity, home of democracy, and equality—but God forbid we should ever be like those Americans—loose, loud-mouthed, disrespectful children. Augustina was already acting wild, and stubborn, opinionated too. To tame her, they sent Augustina to all-girl Catholic schools.

On her first day at Holy Angels, she walked into the cafeteria with her cold lunch—a tupperware of leftover rice and fish. There was a long table of girls sitting near the window. Recognizing some of them from class that morning, Augustina walked over to a space at the end of the table and as she got nearer, their voices grew silent. She greeted the girls and they smiled at her, they nodded. "Mind if I sit here?" she asked. They stared at her as if

Mary Mother of God had swiped their voices. They just stared. Augustina sat with them anyway. Then Colleen Donahue said, "This school's getting cramped." She was talking to the girl across from her.

"Yeah," the girl answered. "What *is* that smell?"

"God," Colleen said. "It's like dead fish."

Augustina scanned the table—the girls were eating oranges and apples. Some sat with nothing in front of them. She was the only one with a tupperware of food. Then she said to the girl sitting next to her, "What kind of lipstick is that? It's wild." But the girl turned her back on Augustina as if Our Lady had plagued her.

"I think it's coming from her," said the girl as she held her nose.

Augustina looked down the row of milk-white faces, faces so pure and fresh, it was hard to tell if they were born that way, or if they'd simply scrubbed the color out of them. She looked down at her hands, at the red nail polish peeling, at her fingers stretched out stiff in front of her. She had never noticed how brown her skin was until then. She would never have a single girlfriend among them. In fact, they say that Augustina's only real friend was her cousin Gabriel.

When Augustina got home that first day, she begged her mother to let her transfer to the neighborhood school, but her mother wouldn't listen. Instead she sat Augustina down on her bed, brushing the hair from out of her face and told her, "Your father and I work very hard to keep you in that school. It's the best, *hija*," she told her. "You'll see."

So she started hanging out with her cousin Gabriel in places they'd find disturbing. We have pictures that Gabriel took of Augustina dancing among tombs and statues of beautiful women saints at Grace Cemetery. In many of the photos, her image is like a ghost's. There's the snow-covered hills and Augustina's shock of black hair, her elephant-leg hip-huggers, moccasin-fringed vests and midriff tops, the scarves that sailed from the top

of her head, the loose beads and bangle earrings flipping in the wind. They say her cousin Gabriel was in love with her, that he was what made her wild.

Mona used to complain to her husband, "Why does she always have to go to that place? Play among those dead people? Maybe we should have sent her to public school after all, Ricardo, or maybe we should have encouraged her friendships with those children, those boys next door." Her father, a hardworking surgeon, denied there was anything wrong. "Nonsense," he'd say, "She's a girl and she should act like one."

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One night, when Augustina was sixteen, she locked the door to her bedroom, hid away from everyone. Her room was a sanctuary where Gabriel's photos plastered the walls, a row of votive candles lined her window ledge, and post cards of Lourdes and Fatima decorated her bedpost. She had built an altar of rocks from the beach up on Montrose, a tiny indoor grotto where she burned incense. She put on an old forty-five. Years later, Augustina would sing that song—about Mother Mary and troubled times and letting it go, or was that *be?* whatever—at parties and weddings and funerals and any event where she could bring her twelve-string guitar.

Lighting a cigarette, Augustina waved a match into the air. Then she slipped a hand underneath her pillow, pulling out a fine silver chain. At the end of the chain was a small medallion, oval like a misshapen moon and blue like the sky. From the center of the pendant rose a statue of the Virgin Mary, intricate and smooth like an ivory cameo. Augustina had taken the necklace out of her mother's jewelry box and kept it for herself. She believed it was her lucky charm.

She held the necklace between her fingers, rubbing its coolness into her skin, begging the Virgin to hear her. You were young, she whispered. You know what it's like to love a boy. She imagined her mother's swollen heart bursting and water spilling out, cas-

see p. 81

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cading down her tired body, mourning as though her daughter were dead. She'd never forgive her. After all the trouble her parents went through to keep her away from the bad crowd, the boys, and lust in general, Augustina still managed to fall in love.

Her mom stood at the door, knocking loudly, but Augustina pretended not to hear. She took another drag of her cigarette, then snuffed it out in the cradle of a votive candle. Reaching to the side of the table, she lit a stick of incense, disguised the smoke with the scent of roses. She slipped the pendant under her pillow and held a picture of her sitting on the rocks at Montrose Harbor. She was wrapped in the cave of Gabriel's chest, curling her body tightly into his. The waves were high and one could see a spray of water falling onto them. Her mother would die if she saw that picture. "Augustina," her mother said. "Open up, *hija*, I want to know what's bothering you."

"Nothing, Mama," she answered. "I'm just tired."

Her mother jiggled the door. "Open up. Let me look at you, you were pale at dinner." She waited another moment and then asked, "Why don't you talk to me, Ina? Let me know what's wrong."

Talking to her mother was like talking to the house plants. With good intentions, she would sit, gladly nodding, smiling, but she wouldn't hear. Like the time Augustina tried to tell her mother about the nuns, how they pointed her out in class, saying things like, "Thanks be to God, Augustina, the Church risked life and limb to save your people, civilize them. Thank God, there were the Spanish and later the Americans." All her mother said was, "She meant well, *hija*. Try to be more patient."

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The next morning Sister Nora gave her annual lecture to the sophomore class. Standing against a screen, a giant projection of the world splattered across her face and the gym at large, she waved a long pointer in the air, gestured at the map. "There are cultures," she said, "that go to great lengths to keep their daugh-

ters chaste." Augustina envisioned a large needle and thread stitching its way around the world, gathering young girls' innocence into the caves of their bodies, holding it there like the stuffing in a Thanksgiving turkey. She had to excuse herself.

The heat in the building was too much, too suffocating. Every time she closed her eyes she saw her mother's image on the screen before her or she'd picture the girls in South Africa, their stitches bursting wide open. Augustina ran out. She sat on the curb, cupping her hands against the wind, her thin legs sprawled out in front of her. She slipped a cigarette between her lips and listened to the girls' voices wafting out of the building. She hated everyone at that school.

A low riding vehicle, brown and rusted, snaked its way along Holy Angel's driveway. Augustina took another drag from her cigarette. As she rose and moved away from them, she could hear the girls howling.

"It's her sexy cousin," yelled one girl. "The Filipino house boy."  
"You'll get caught," Colleen said plainly.  
As she climbed into Gabriel's Mustang, Augustina swore under her breath, asked, "Yeah, so what's it to you?"

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He drove uptown, taking side streets, weaving the car about pedestrians. His camera, a thirty-five millimeter he had inherited from his grandfather, was carefully placed next to him on the seat. It was his *lolo's* first possession in the States. Reaching for it, Augustina played with the zoom, slipping it back and forth, in and out like a toy.

"Don't break that," Gabriel warned.

The light from outside framed his profile. She could see the angle of his cheekbones, how they jut from his face, the slope of his nose and the dimples that were set in his half-smile. She snapped a picture of him, click, rewind, click. Snapped another. She pointed the camera out the window and watched the streets through an orange filter. They rode most of the way in silence and

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"Yep," she sighed, "it's all I can think about."

"Me too," he said.

"Maybe we should stop hanging out so much," she said. "Maybe that would help."

But Gabriel shook his head. "That's not right either."

The window was splattered with slush from the streets. Through the view finder, she caught a girl carrying a baby. The infant, dressed in a light blue snowsuit, draped its body across the girl, curled its head into the crook of her neck, slept comfortably amid the winter traffic. Click, she snapped another picture.

Augustina thought the girl carrying the child looked like Emmy Nolando, the daughter of her parents' tennis partners. Apparently, Dr. Nolando refused to give his daughter birth control and when she came home pregnant, the Nolandos sent her to a foster home in town. Disowned her. Augustina's parents milked the story for almost an entire year:

"Can you imagine," her mother whispered as she leaned over her bowl of soup. "The shame of it."

When Augustina asked why Emmy was sent away, her father shook his head, and muttered, "Disgraceful."

Ricardo leapt into a long lecture concerning those loose American girls and their immorality. "She's lucky she's not in the Philippines," he said. "There she'd have that baby and her parents would raise that child as their own." ✓

"That's stupid," Augustina said.

"Oh yes," Mona said. "That baby would never know who his real mommy was. That's how it's done back home. That's how they save the family's reputation." !! 80 to 81

Even though Emmy had spent her pregnancy in a foster home, and even though she gave her baby up for adoption, Augustina was still told not to speak to Emmy. No one did. The Filipino community ignored her. "Better not be wild, better not embarrass the family like that girl. Better not, better not, better not."

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Of all their hangouts, Grace Cemetery was their favorite. At Grace, the sun shattered into a thousand bright icicles, splintering branches into shadows, casting intricate patterns on hills of white. New fallen snow draped the statues of saints and beautiful ladies like white linen robes. They stood at the doors of these tombs and they prayed for souls. They stood guard no matter what—storms or drought. Once a twister ripped across Grace Cemetery and trees broke in half—a couple of tombstones even uprooted. But these women stood strong.

She sat at the foot of St. Bernadette's statue, gathering snow into little heaps. When Bernadette was visited by the Blessed Virgin back in Lourdes, they thought she was crazy. They didn't believe her. But Bernadette didn't give a fuck what they thought. She just kept going up that hill, praying, talking to Holy Mary like it was nobody's business. Augustina ran her hands along the statue's feet, tracing the finely etched toes with the edge of her finger. She listened to the wind winding its voice through the trees like a cool blue ribbon.

Gabriel fiddled with his camera, flipping through filters and lenses. She watched him sitting on a hill, his long body bent over the camera, his hair falling to either side of his face, shining midnight under the hot winter sun. Augustina believed Gabriel was an angel in another life. She could tell by his pictures, black and white photos of the city and its people. He once told her that truth cannot possibly hide in black and white the way it does in color. Colors distort truth, make the ugly something beautiful. She considered him brilliant.

"Bless Gabriel," she told the statue. Augustina looked up at the saint's full cheeks which were round and smooth like the sun. Her eyes were carved into perfectly shaped hazelnuts—so lifelike that from here Augustina could see the definition of her eyelashes.

"Augustina!" Gabriel yelled. "Look up." He jumped up onto someone's tombstone. The light from behind him glared at Augustina, forming a haze of white around his black mane. "This

light's great." "I'm spinning and leaning over Augustina p shivered. "What would we do?" He stared at clouds and sudden offered him a drag her away. Getting up, she that formed an arc paint—skyblue and Augustina walked pa leaned her pelvis into stared at the thick hands. Augustina told She had not meant The Chicago Tribune a photographers. A man with a piece of cardboar woman on Maxwell Str Second prize. The letter about Gabriel's use of li said Gabriel's intuitive ey world. Gabriel should dev When Gabriel showed Uncle Hector blew up. T again, taking risks with hi borhoods and for what? A him. What if something could have been shot from t Somewhere? He could have Hector wanted to know. C shook it over his head like a



light's great," he said. "Your eyes are magnificent."

"I'm squinting," she said. He leapt from the side of the tomb, and leaning over her, he tugged at the ends of her hair.

Augustina placed a cold hand on the side of his face and he shivered. "What would your parents say," she asked. "What would we do?"

He stared at the graves. The sun slipped behind a crowd of clouds and suddenly it was cold out. Augustina lit a cigarette and offered him a drag. He buried his face in his hands as he pushed her away.

Getting up, she slipped away, walked underneath the rocks that formed an archway where Mary stood serenely veiled in paint—skyblue and gold. Tossing her cigarette to the ground, Augustina walked past the bench, pushed up against the iron rail, leaned her pelvis into the gate and pulled at one of the rods. She stared at the thick wooden rosary that draped Mary's white hands. Augustina told the Lady, "It feels natural. Why not?"

She had not meant for any of it to happen. A few weeks before, *The Chicago Tribune* awarded ten prizes to the best high school photographers. A manila envelope came to Gabriel's house thick with a piece of cardboard, his prize winning photo of the Rastafari woman on Maxwell Street, and a check for two hundred dollars. Second prize. The letter that came with the announcement talked about Gabriel's use of light, texture and composition. The judge said Gabriel's intuitive eye was not only a gift but a way to see the world. Gabriel should develop his potential.

When Gabriel showed his father the letter and winning photo, Uncle Hector blew up. Told Gabriel he was wasting his time again, taking risks with his life, travelling into dangerous neighborhoods and for what? A picture? "Don't be stupid," Hector told him. What if something would have happened there on the Southside? He could have been mugged or knifed or beaten. He could have been shot from the gun of a passing car. Was he crazy, Hector wanted to know. Grabbing Gabriel's camera, Hector shook it over his head like a preacher with a Bible, its strap cast-

ing shadows on his face. "Enough of this," he said. "Stop wasting your time." As he threw the camera across the kitchen, the lens popped open, came crashing on *Tita* Belina's marble floors and shattered.

That night, Augustina had sat on the rocks at Montrose Harbor, holding Gabriel's head on her lap, brushing the hair from his face, wiping the tears as they rolled from the corners of his eyes. "Count the stars," Augustina whispered. "Forget him." Augustina felt so bad for him, so angry at her uncle. And when Gabriel glanced up at her, she leaned down to meet him and kissed. She let her lips rest there, held onto him, and something in her stirred, some feeling she was not accustomed to. She let go a long sigh, let go that little bit of loneliness.

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Augustina thought she saw the Lady smiling at her, looking right through her. Okay, she whispered, I can't stop thinking about him. Am I bad? At night she imagined the weight of his body pushing down on her, covering her like a giant quilt. She saw his eyes slipping into her, his beautiful face washing over her in the dark. She tried to remember the feel of his hair, how the strands came together, locked around each other. Sometimes she thought she could smell the scent of him, there at the lake, a fragrance of sandalwood, a breeze from Lake Michigan. I'm crazy, okay, she thought. A tramp, if you will. But he loves me, Mary, doesn't that count?

She thought of Sister Nora and the girls whose parents made sure of their virginity. How they'd mutilate them in the name of chastity. And does that operation keep those girls from love, she wondered. Does it keep them from wanting him? Sister Nora would find out and tell everyone. Use her for an example. No, she'd rather die. She imagined her body floating, swelling in the depth of the lake. She imagined herself swimming eternally. Augustina closed her eyes, putting her face to the sky. The sun came out every few seconds, ducking out of the clouds so that

Blessed Virgin Mary appeared hazy and for seconds at a time. "Hail Mary," she grace, the Lord is with thee, so please word for me, Hail Mary." She was so even hear Gabriel sneak up behind her.

"Are you worried?" Gabriel asked.

"A little," she said. He put his arms embraced. Kissed. Slowly fell into their across borders they had never crossed of the day lying under the branches changing sky and waiting for the sun them wanted to go home.

The house was locked when she got for the key she wore around her neck the symphony from her father's speaker waves on Montrose beach. Music from she called out to her mother, her voice

Mona stood at the stove, her foot hand on her hip and the other stuck snuck up behind her and kissed her Mommy," she whispered. Mona c beating the sides of the frying pan of sweat formed at her temples as to set the table?" Augustina asked.

already set. Four large plates, a speaker napkin, a water glass. "Okay," Augustina wash up and I'll help you put the head in and waved at him. "Hi, D the paper and when he kissed her knee. "Sweetheart," he said. "Is dinner

"Yeah, Dad. In a minute."

Blessed Virgin Mary appeared hazy and kind of aglow—but only for seconds at a time. “Hail Mary,” she said. “Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee, so please, please, please, put in a word for me, Hail Mary.” She was so deep in prayer, she didn’t even hear Gabriel sneak up behind her.

“Are you worried?” Gabriel asked.

“A little.” she said. He put his arm around her and they embraced. Kissed. Slowly fell into that long black funnel, slipping across borders they had never crossed till now. They spent the rest of the day lying under the branches of the grotto, watching the changing sky and waiting for the sun to sleep. Neither one of them wanted to go home.

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The house was locked when she got there, so Augustina fumbled for the key she wore around her neck. When she opened the door, the symphony from her father’s speakers rushed out to her like waves on Montrose beach. Music filled the house so that when she called out to her mother, her voice was lost and small.

Mona stood at the stove, her feet planted firmly apart, one hand on her hip and the other stirring vegetables. Augustina snuck up behind her and kissed her softly on the cheek. “Hi, Mommy,” she whispered. Mona continued to mix the stir fry, beating the sides of the frying pan with quick movements. Beads of sweat formed at her temples as she worked. “Do you want me to set the table?” Augustina asked. Turning, she saw the table was already set. Four large plates, a spoon and fork at each setting, a napkin, a water glass. “Okay,” Augustina sang. “Well maybe I’ll wash up and I’ll help you put the food out.”

The music was blasting in her father’s room. She popped her head in and waved at him. “Hi, Dad!” she called. He was reading the paper and when he didn’t look up she tapped him on the knee. Leaning over, she kissed him.

“Sweetheart,” he said. “Is dinner almost ready?”

“Yeah, Dad. In a minute.”

She felt as though she had been up all night. Her body ached, was covered with dirt from the cemetery. Gabriel's cologne had seeped into her skin, and she was afraid that her mother had sensed it. So instead of simply washing her hands, she bathed.

The cool water, rushing down her body, washed away the cigarette smoke, the cologne, the dirt. She could almost feel the water coursing through her, washing over her mind, cleaning out her tummy, circling about her heart.

When she got back to the kitchen, she found she was too late. Her mother had placed a huge bowl of rice on the table, a plate of beef and vegetables and a tureen of soup. "Sorry, Ma," she said, as she grabbed a cold pitcher of water. "I just needed a shower."

"Is that all, Augustina?" her mother asked as she looked up from the sink. "What did you do today? Ha? Where were you?"

She felt her face burning bright red. "At school," she answered, "Where else? Then Gabriel and I went to the mall."

"School?" she whispered. "They were looking for you at school." Augustina stared at the table, ran her fingers around the edge of the water pitcher. It was cold and moisture shivered from the pitcher's mouth and ran down its sides. Her mother's voice was low and angry. "How many times do we have to go through this, *hija*? Why can't you just stay in school?"

"But I was feeling sick," Augustina said.

"So you had Gabriel pick you up and the both of you were absent?" Her mother threw a dish rag on the counter. "You were at the cemetery again?" She pulled Augustina close to her. "Do you want your father to send you to the Philippines? Maybe that would teach you how to behave." Her parents often threatened to send her there, to all-girl convent schools, where nuns pretended to be mothers. "If you think the rules are strict here, wait till you have to live there."

"Sorry, Mom," Augustina whispered. "But the truth is that Gabriel had another fight with Uncle Hector and he was upset. He came to get me so we could talk."

"Still, *hija*, that's no reason to be absent from school." As

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Mona brushed the hair out of her face, and kissed the top of her forehead, Augustina's father stepped into the kitchen.

"*Ano ba,*" he asked. "What's going on?"

Mona tucked her hair behind her ears and told him, "Nothing, nothing, Ricardo. Dinner is ready. Come sit. Ina, call your brother."

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Augustina spent the next two days locked up in her room, blasting her record. The needle slipped over that old forty-five, bumped along the grooves and scratches, whispering a mantra. "Mother Mary," she sang along. "Comes to me." An old church organ cranked a sacrilegious funk, a honky tonk, that seemed to fade into the slow rise of the electric guitar's bridge. She played around with Gabriel's photos. She mounted them on cardboard and painted borders around them—daisies and rainbows and splotches of love and peace and kiss drawn in giant bubble letters. Her mother stood at the door, knocking, forever knocking, but she pretended not to hear. "I'm not feeling well," she had told her mother. "I don't want to go to school." Bile rose up her throat, churned in her stomach, swamped up against the cavern in her chest.

Her family came to the door one by one. First her mother, then Dad. Even Auntie Belina, her cousin Ofelia and Uncle Hector came knocking, but the door was locked and there was no opening it. When Gabriel stood at the door, she whispered through a crack, "I'm sorry, I can't let you in. They can't know."

When Augustina finally went to school, Sister Nora stood in front of the classroom, whacking her giant pointer stick across the blackboard. "There has been disgraceful conduct. Sin, sin, sin. Apparently, the story of the young girls and their experience with genital mutilation has not taught you anything. You girls must be punished."

Augustina thought the nun knew, was about to expose her when Sister ordered the girls who attended Kat O'Donel's slumber party to step forward. Apparently the sisters found a video

tape of "Marlin the Magnificent" dancing in his elephant mask—and that was all he wore—a mask. The tape was found lying in the Cathedral—second to the last pew, across from the confessional. Fran Guncheon, class librarian, and Augustina were the only ones not in attendance, so they were given permission to leave. Augustina took this opportunity to run to Grace cemetery.

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The clouds drifted north, slipped by fast like the second hand in her grandmother's wristwatch. Her body was numb, frozen like the Ladies in the court. She thought they had grown sad. Her constellation of saints, like everyone else in her life, had stopped listening to her. Snow melted around St. Bernadette; the sun burned holes in the ice underneath her. Augustina smelled the earth, seeping through the slush. It was sweet and fertile. A trickle, a tear, maybe the melting snow, slipped down Bernadette's face. Inside Augustina, something grumbled, roared. She had stopped praying weeks ago. God confused her.

Augustina looked up from the statue and saw her mother climbing over the hill. The sun shrouded her in light. She wore her off-white cashmere coat, the one that fell to her ankles because she was so short. She wrapped her black hair in a white chiffon scarf that trailed past her shoulders, followed the wind. There was a cloud of white smoke trailing from her breath, rising up and floating away from her. When she came near, her mother said, "She's beautiful."

"She's strong," Augustina answered.

"So this is where you go." She tugged at Augustina's braids, examined her face, kissed the top of her forehead. Then, pulling the chain from Augustina's neck, she said, "Where did you get this, *hija*?"

"Isn't it my baby necklace? I found it in your jewelry box."

Her mother shook her head. "I got this from my godmother. You shouldn't have taken it without asking."

Slipping her head onto her mother's shoulder, Augustina felt

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her body soften, the energy draining from her. She considered telling her mom about Gabriel. Would she understand? She closed her eyes and fell in time to her mother's breathing. Maybe, she thought. Her mother embraced her and told her, "Whatever is troubling you, *hija*, don't worry. Family is family."

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Of course, *Lola Mona* never tells me that part of it. The story goes that *Tita Augustina* went to the Philippines six months later. Some of the relatives say it was to have a baby, others say it was to discipline her wild American self. Still stuck back on the islands, they tell me, "You're next. Watch out." Even my mother <sup>is</sup> thinks her older sister was a bad girl. <sup>the daughter?</sup>

"How do you know?" I ask her. "You weren't even born when she left. You hardly knew her." My mother always shrugs her shoulders, says she just knows.

Last time I went to see *Tita Ina*, she held out her tiny fist, wrinkled and lined with blue veins, and slipped me the Blessed Virgin dangling from the end of a fine silver chain. "Here, *hija*," she said, "take this." I placed the necklace up to the light. The paint was fading and chipping from its sky blue center, but still there was something about Her. The way Her skirts seemed to flow, the way Her body was sculpted into miniature curves, the way the tiny rosary was etched onto the metal plate.

*Mangar Inas?*

Speaker's mother is  
A's daughter

∴ A = her grandma  
*Lola Mona* = great grandma