

# **BAYANI**

## **by Zoe Rola**

One last balikbayan box remained. Eleanor was in charge of cleaning out lolo's attic for the open house tomorrow; it was quick considering the funeral had only been last week. She remembered it vividly—relatives sobbing and heartbroken while she stood awkwardly, unaffected by the loss.

The box was creased and wrapped in silver duct tape for stability. Opening it revealed a world of newspaper cutouts and old keepsakes, to Eleanor's curiosity.

Her lolo was never her favorite grandparent. In fact, she struggled to have any affection at all. Relatives spoke of him with reverence and adoration. Yet, with his dementia, all Eleanor knew were awkward and distant reintroductions each time she came to visit his lonely residence..

She dug through the components, which mostly consisted of newspaper clippings of a war long ago that her lolo had served in. She skimmed through them, noticing headlines like "*war hero*" and "*miracle*." Eleanor searched for her lolo's name, until finally, there it was, clear as day: Bayani Gutierrez. She picked it up and sat down, immersed in the article.

*"Bayani Gutierrez was a man of courage in times of peril. Through his determination and sheer strength, he led his platoon to safety during an ambush, significantly minimizing casualties. For this, he has been awarded a medal of valor."*

No one had really mentioned much of Lobo's time in the war; his memory was simply vague snippets here and there of his lifetime. She dug through the box to find a tarnished gold medal strung on a red ribbon. She studied its details, wondering why she hadn't known of her lolo's courage. Eagerly, Eleanor dug through the rest of the box, trying to piece together the life of a man she barely knew. She discovered a handwritten letter amongst the sea of newspaper clippings.

**'Kuya Ani (short for Bayani),**

**I will never forget your sacrifice. I have a million thanks, but I could never even start to tell you how grateful I am to you for going back for me.**

**You insisted I owe you everything Kuya Ani I know it's not enough but thank you.**

**Sincerely,  
Augustus Ang'**

Eleanor gasped. Augustus Ang was her father, and suddenly her mind was swirling with questions. She raced downstairs searching for answers.

"Dad!" she called. She spotted him talking to her mother. He looked up from the conversation. She handed him the letter to read, studying his expressions expectantly.

When he finished reading, his eyes were wistful with memories. "Your grandfather saved me that day; he saved my life. When I went to thank him after the war, that's when I met your mother. He's always been good to me. Did you know Bayani means hero in Tagalog?"

"Thank you, dad," she spoke, trying to steady her voice as she took back the letter.

Eleanor stumbled up the stairs, shocked; her eyes glassy. She clutched the letter gently to her chest.