

## **Living Beyond Corpus Delicti**

*By Angelica Narciso Hall*

*(Trigger Warning: Sexual Assault, mental disorder, psychological episodes. Story is based from real life about a real person.)*

Whenever I commute on the streets of Manila on my way to school, I see strangers, each absorbed in their own days. Their own lives. At times, I just perceive them as flesh walking around. Yet, somehow it dawned on me that these strangers may have a story behind them to tell. It may be their own struggle with their own emotions and issues. They may be talking to their friends, or alone staring at their phones; their faces remain blank but their eyes tell everything.

Before I met her, Sophia (not her real name) was just one of these strangers. I didn't know her nor did I care for her. She could have just been one of those who talks so loudly and seemed cheeky. When she smiles, the lines beside her eyes wrinkle. It's a contagious element, and shortly, her friends would be laughing with her.

In class, as we waited for our professor to arrive, I saw her read this book by Mitch Albom. She was deeply engrossed in it, I can tell, as her eyes darted from left to right, and the lines on her face shifted from one emotion to another. I wanted to know her right there and then.

Sophia, I think, is the kind of person who gets along with anybody. After all, she was our class president. She'd be late for class a lot of times, nonetheless our professors find her dependable. She was somebody we look up to and one who we always turn to when we had academic problems. When she talks to us, she never forgets to smile, to joke a bit, and make everything seem better.

She's the Sophia that we know. The cheerful class president. The chatty bookworm who's also a keen writer. The one who loves to listen to Fall Out Boy. The one who loves dogs.

Behind the curtain, however, is the Sophia who battled Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

During her senior high school days, Sophia hid all her scars under the rug. She suffered in silence, staying away from the people in her life, shunning herself out. She wore a happy mask and pretended she was alright.

All the anxieties. The panic attacks. She wanted everything to remain hidden.

The trauma started when someone in her circle of friends forced himself on Sophia multiple times, and left her broken with countless cigarette burns on her body.

Sophia was left helpless and never had the chance to tell anyone what happened to her. Only she knew about it, and she was alone in picking herself up at the time. She tried her best to remain her happy self.

Soon enough, one professor of hers started to notice the odd behaviors she was exhibiting. Sophia repeatedly tried and failed to repress the memories from her mind. However, there were factors in her environment that triggered her pain back to the surface. It was one of her professors who finally noticed she wasn't well, and urged her to get checked by the guidance counselor.

Sophia soon received the help she needed to recover from her trauma. She received counselling, and was referred to the university psychiatrist. She underwent a series of assessment and were told of the programs and medicines she needed to take for PTSD.

At the time of her therapy, her counselor and psychiatrist were really keen on reaching out to her parents, but it didn't work. So instead, they worked with Sophia by having two of her best friends help her through the therapy.

These friends looked out for her no matter what when she needed them the most. They were present at every therapy session whenever they're needed. There were times when she would be alone at home and suddenly experience attacks, and one of her friends who lived nearby would come and help her. They never let Sophia feel sorry and apologize for what she was going through. They were just there, being patient and understanding her.

As time went on, so was Sophia's progress in recovery. She started getting better, and was also starting to go back to her genuinely happy self. It was one difficult journey, but there was hope.

A hope for Sophia to heal. To move forward. To truly start living again.

Before long, Sophia no longer had the need to continue her therapy. The triggers and the attacks from her trauma are more controllable now thanks to the professional help she received. From then on, she doesn't have to deal with the horrors of her mind alone. Because despite of the trauma that may be lingering still, it shouldn't stop her from being a unique and amazing person living her life.

Today, I see her as the Sophia with that glimmer in her eyes when she smiles. The class president and the class clown who confidently tells jokes in class. The one who loves to eat a lot. The one who loves to read books, writes stories and adores her dogs so much. The Sophia who is an environmental advocate and a part-time writer. Somebody who hopes to make a difference in the future.

And to all the strangers out there who feels trapped, helpless and hopeless because of their own traumas, Sophia wants you to know that you shouldn't have to be alone in your pain. She wants you to consider the friends, colleagues, classmates or professors in your life, and let them help you, for they will always be willing to.

Sophia understands what it's like to hide your pain for so long. In fact, she hopes that parents are more physically and emotionally present in times like that, but that's not always the case. However, she wants you to realize that at some point, we have to let go. Otherwise, she

said, “The pain will rot you over and there may come a day when there's more of what ill you than what's left of you.”

Sophia was just a stranger like everyone else, absorbed in her own days and her own life. But she is more than just a flesh: more than her trauma and her problems. Especially more than her mental disorder. She might be a stranger to you but she matters, just like every one of us.