



AFRAID

Afraid, I'm afraid...

I'm sitting in the corner, my body hunched.

I'm afraid, I can't open my eyes.

I can hear other Filipino girls talking.

But I can't speak, I can't move my mouth.

I feel something wet and warm sticking to my back. It's the wee of the girl next to me. I don't know how much time has passed since I was last able to stretch my legs, move, stand up and open my eyes. I see only darkness and shadows. I stretch my hands out and touch someone who jumps with fright, like me.

A door opens, a torch lights up the 'place' and I see that there are lots of us. In the middle of the floor are pots with foot, and someone orders us to "eat; dead people can't work!" They close the door and we gradually begin to cry; first one, then another, until everyone, including me, is crying.

One girl starts to say that we have to escape, and I just want to die right then. I hear the girl ask how many of us there are. And everyone starts to say a number. There are 18 of us. The same girl gets up and tells us that there's rice, chicken and water. She says that we have to eat to have the strength to escape.

The hours pass and the door opens. With the torch shining its light on us, they choose four girls and me; they take me by the hand and drag me away. They take us to a garden to wash. While they put water on my head, I hear a discussion; one of the girls is on her period and blood is dripping down her legs. They take her away and bring someone else.

Then they put me in a small room with a mattress on the floor, and that's where I lay down, and I felt three men enter my body. I didn't have the strength to fight. I thought they were killing me. How many times had I heard stories about women who are tricked and end up being forced into prostitution?

I slept, or I fainted; I don't know. When I woke up, I was on the floor with my head laying on a girl's legs. She was stroking my hair and saying, "don't worry, it'll be over soon." One of the girls asked if anyone had a mobile phone; they'd taken them away from us. But I had one that my brother had hidden in my clothes. I took courage and said that I had one hidden away. And then I was struck with fear that I'd be found out and they'd beat me for it.

I found the phone and turned it on; the blue light that shone from it got the girls' spirits up. The only place where there might be cover was the bathroom. My turn came to go to the bathroom. The girl next to me helped me stand up. In the bathroom, I managed to send a message to my brother:

"they tricked us, I don't know where we are, we're trapped in a dark place." And I turned the phone off. The idea that my brother had seen the message filled me with strength and I ate.

They took other girls, and when they came back, one of them said that a man had dropped a bill with the name of a hotel. Another girl said that a man had told her that girls in Manila were very pretty. Finally, we knew where we were. I managed to send another message to say that we were in Manila, and the name of the hotel the men came from. I also wrote that we were in a blue house, very big and with walls. My brother had written a message that said, "don't worry, I'm going to talk to an NGO."

The next day, the police, an ambulance, my brother and two women from an NGO arrived. When they opened the door and saw us, we saw on their faces the same horror that we had on ours. They couldn't believe their eyes. We started to cry; some of the girls needed oxygen. They took us out of there and explained what they had done to find us. I kept quiet; I just cried with my brother.

"Two years have passed, and she is living the same life she led before she was kidnapped, supposedly to "work as a waitress in Japan". And I ask, astonished: "I don't understand why you didn't report those people?" "Because of my family's honour." The tone of her reply makes my question naïve".

(2008)