



*Goodbye, Love*

I awake to a beautiful, Saturday morning. Having entered the cool month of October, the streets of NPC Housing Compound smell of damp soil, ripening avocado and fragrant santan bushes. My eyes flutter open, the sun beams through the window panes, birds chirp in the background, and my sister sobs.

I roll onto my side, peek from under the blanket, and observe Ate Jade's agitated, flustered movements. Ate towers by the foot of her bed, tucks her blanket under her thin mattress and piles her pillows on top of each other. She wears her black Superman shirt, beige knee shorts, and white fluffy house slippers. Ate pauses, straightens her stance, and eyes me. I raise my eyebrows at her. At age ten, I've long accepted and expected my fourteen-year-old sister Jodelle Anne, otherwise known as Jade, to weave in and out of wild, hormonal, emotional fits.

Her lips twist into a frown. Her eyebrows furrow. Her forehead creases. Tears spill. Her voice breaks. She says, "Love is dead."

Love was Ate Jade's best friend.

Since I was born, we had lived in Baranggay Grotto. In our group of fifteen kids, Ate Jade and Love became the best of friends.

Our band of fifteen collapsed in 1998 when Jimboy's family moved to Baranggay Tres, J.D.'s family left NPC altogether, Vin's family stayed in Manila City, and her family sent Love to Baguio City for high school. With miles between them, and new friends to keep them occupied, Ate Jade and Love drifted from each other.

Rumors followed Love's departure that she also drifted from the 'right path'. Love skipped classes, Love shoplifted, Love lost her virginity at fifteen, Love did drugs, Love drank, Love partied. Ate Jade wanted no association with Love.

Love came back two years later at the end of her second year. Our group of friends reunited but we resented Love.

On October 4, Limay held its fiesta in honour of its patron, St. Peter. The day after, Ate Jade and I lounged in our living room still exhausted from the festivities. Ate stretched her body on the nara couch, her head propped up on the armrest. I sat on the coffee table in front of the television set, my knees curled against my chest. "Je-rry!