



Saya looked around at the bare room.

Just last week, she was at home, surrounded by her own colorful belongings, dreaming of a better life.

This was certainly not what she had had in mind.

*Remember, her mother's voice rang through her ears. Whatever happens is only temporary. Everything passes. Even if we spend some time apart, I will see you again soon.*

That was three days ago. And though those three days had felt like an eternity, Saya knew that many kids here had waited much longer before seeing their parents again. The three girls she shared a room with had already been here for two weeks, with no sign of leaving.

"I've kind of gotten used to it," one of them had shrugged.



"I haven't," another said. "And I don't think I will. Does that make me...weak?"

"Of course not," Saya said immediately. "My mom always said that people react to tough situations differently. No way is right, and no way is wrong, either."

"How do you feel, Saya?" they had asked her.

She tried her best to explain her feelings. "Sometimes...I feel numb. Other times I feel so sad, I feel an actual pain in my chest. And then, sometimes, I feel...hopeful. Only for a bit, though," she admitted. "I don't see how I am ever going to get out of here."

*Don't say that, her mother's voice came again. You are your own hope. If you give up hope, how can you expect it to not give up on you?*

What was her mother really saying now, she wondered, now that they were stuck, and separated, and powerless?

Saya chuckled despite herself. She would still be hopeful, she knew. Probably sharing recipes and stories with her roommates, and making plans for when they got out. Never *if*. Always *when*.

Still, weeks passed. Saya counted the days on a scrap of paper, making tallies for each day that passed. Six. Then ten. Then fourteen.

On the fifteenth day of living in the cold, bare room, a knock came on the door.

Saya opened it to a man holding a piece of paper. He read off of it.

"Saya?" he said.

"Yes," Saya answered, "that's me."

"Come with me. Bring your things."



Saya's heart leapt. Could today be the day?

She grabbed her small duffel bag, all that she had, and hurried out the door behind the man.

They walked quickly down the now familiar hallways, past dozens of rooms filled with unhappy occupants just waiting for their turn to leave this place.

They went down some stairs and out of the building, through a locked chain-link gate rimmed with barbed wire, and into an office-type room Saya had never been to before.

In the room sat her mother.

Saya gasped. "Mama!" she called running to her.

Her mother stood hurriedly and caught her in a tight hug.

"Saya, my darling," she said lovingly. "It is so good to see you!"

"You, too," Saya said, squeezing her tightly. "What is happening?"

"We are leaving!" her mother said excitedly. "We are leaving at last!"

She held Saya back at arms length. "Did you keep hope?" she asked seriously.

"I tried, Mama," Saya admitted. "But it wasn't easy.

"Of course it wasn't easy," her mother said with a short laugh. "No one said keeping hope would ever be easy. But it will always carry you through to the other side. Keeping your hope alive, feeding it and nurturing it; it is the best way to live."

Saya knew she was right. "You're right, Mama," she said. "I will keep practicing feeding my hope."



"It is a living thing, you know," her mother said. "It needs care and attention just as much as we do. Now," she said, thrilled, "let's go to our home!"

Saya and her mother left the office arms linked, and were led through a series of gates that were opened for them.

Saya took a deep breath of air. Though the day was cloudy, she had never seen a more beautiful sky than on this day. And she knew why. It was her hope. Her hope had come back to her, and it showed her the beauty of the world around her. From that day forward, she vowed to never give up on her hope again.

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