

**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



**Peripheral** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | November 2018

## **Peripheral**

by Mike Bozart

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Halapad nga mga mata. Widely spaced eyes in the Cebuano/Bisaya dialect. She recalled hearing it for the first time when she was just four years old while out playing with other jet-black-haired, tan-skinned girls next to the landmark bell tower in the center of the small coastal town of Siquijor (on the like-named island-province in the Central Visayas of the Philippines). She asked her parents why her eyes were farther apart than the other children, but all her half-Chinese mother would say is that it was God's will. Her one-quarter Malay father never gave an answer; he would just look up at the clouds and begin cursing, using the most indecipherable, though most assuredly vulgar, quasi-words.

During the first week of 1<sup>st</sup> grade, it seemed that all of the students, one after another, asked her: "Lizette, why are your eyes so wide apart?"

She had no answer. Lizette just pursed her lips, shrugged her shoulders, looked down, and almost began to cry. She sincerely wanted to vanish.

By 3<sup>rd</sup> grade it had gotten a little better. The questions about her atypical eye-spacing had now stopped, and she had acquired a friend: a girl with a cleft lip named Angelina. They were soon eating their lunches together, often sharing and swapping food. They played together during recess. They trusted and confided in each other. She finally had someone like herself. Life wasn't quite as harsh with Angelina by her side.

It was in the middle-school grades that Lizette became keenly aware of her ultra-wide-ranging peripheral vision. Whereas most people can only see, or fuzzily perceive, ten

to fifteen degrees behind the outer corners of their eyes, Lizette could visually discern images thirty degrees to the rear of her temples with high acuity. At first this was more of a curse than a blessing, as she caught all of the hushed snickering that the offending preteens thought was out of her sight. She never turned around. She just wondered: *Why me, Lord? Why? What did I do to deserve this fate? What?! No wonder my parents didn't have any more children. Who would want another one of me? I wouldn't.*

In 8<sup>th</sup> grade the other girls started to take a big interest in the boys. Some started to flirt. But, Lizette couldn't imagine any boy liking her. She had already resigned herself to a spouse-less life. A spinster she would surely become. She could already see her singular future.

Just before the start of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, her best friend's family had raised enough money (via remittances from an older sibling residing in the United States) for an operation to correct Angelina's facial deformity. When she learned about it, Lizette told Angelina: "Lucky for you, girl; you will soon look normal. My situation can't be fixed. I'm stuck with my strange appearance for life."

However, the medical procedure went horribly wrong. Angelina was an undiagnosed hemophiliac; she bled to death on the local clinic's makeshift operating table. Her parents were inconsolable. Angelina's father committed suicide by ingesting a poisonous plant eleven days later. Her mother became a brooding recluse.

Lizette became withdrawn. Her only true friend was gone. She actually felt that Angelina caught a most fortunate

break: She no longer had to endure a world of stares, taunts, whispers, and name-calling. *Dhay, nakalikay ka niining impyerno.* [Cebuano/Bisaya for 'Lady, you have escaped this hell.']

In 10<sup>th</sup> grade Lizette was befriended by two normal-looking, though reserved, quite shy, female students: Janith and Josalyn. Though she never became as close to them as she was to Angelina, they were good, noncritical, supportive company. They were boyfriend-less, too.

At the close of the school year, the two young ladies planned to celebrate by taking a ferry to Cebu City to go shopping in the big mall with Lizette. At first Lizette retorted: "No way!" She was very afraid of all the stares, sneers, and giggles in such a large city. But Janith and Josalyn wore her down. After an hour Lizette finally relented and said "Oo." [Yes in Cebuano/Bisaya]

At 5:55 AM sharp on Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup> (2016), newly-seventeen-year-olds Lizette, Janith and Josalyn, along with Janith's nineteen-year-old sister, Jasmine (who would act as a chaperone), boarded the Fast Ferry from the Siquijor mooring pier. The transit along the Cebu Strait would take all of five hours.

The weather was fair. The sea was tranquil. Lizette opted for an outside seat on the bow of the vessel to avoid the longing gazes. The other three girls joined her. They had brought some rice, lechon manok and tubig (spit-roasted chicken and water) for the long journey.

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