

Hi Nay Episode 2 - Ginaw

["Hi Nay" opening theme, "Ili Ili Tulog Anay", plays on kalimba]

[Low chilling atmospheric sound]

Motzie Dapul:

You're listening to "Hi Nay," by Motzie Dapul. Episode Two: Ginaw.

[Atmospheric sound stops]

[Phone ringing]

[Phone ringing stops]

Mari:

Hi Nay!

Gosh, Canada's cold.

I know I've said I love the cold, and I don't exactly revel in the high 20s when summer actually gets going, but right now I just wish summer proper would come already. It's uhm... *[sigh]* it's been a tough day.

So remember the thing I mentioned in my last call? The, ugh, rotting thing? Well Detective Donner asked me to help him follow up over the weekend.

He technically wasn't supposed to be on duty, but I get the feeling he's got a lot more riding on this than just the need to embody a model detective of the police force.

I have no real stake in this but... here I am. Risking my life anyway.

So... what happened. It's hard to talk about it so fresh, but I can't leave it for later or I'll forget the details. *[Subtle atmospheric horror sound]* And...the details are important. Knowing what I know now. And for what I expect to know later *[Horror sound stops]*.

It was Saturday and I met Donner up at an old apartment above a Korean chicken place in Chinatown. The lady living there, Ms. Kim, got this whole setup selling vintage items over Instagram, had a few million followers, really did well for herself. Halmeoni Vintage. Apparently used to be in the antiques business before the millennial killed that industry, but she adapted, got online, and got a following.

Donner had been watching the window like a hawk when I arrived, and I made a joke about the old lady running off if she realised we suspected something. Judging from the look on Donner's face, it didn't land.

As we were making our way up the stairs and I was shedding my coat, Donner asked me about

the thing around my neck. My anting-anting and my lingling-o on the same black string, clicking together as I walked. I told him they were my... good luck charms.

He said something about considering bringing his own, but couldn't really explain away carrying loose ginger in his pocket.

"You could carry it in a bag. But don't worry," I'd said. "I'll protect you."

"Who kept getting who from getting eaten by a sludge monster?" he'd shot back.

We eventually arrived in front of an apartment door that bore not only an old number, but what looked to be a logo for the lady's flourishing business.

Ms. Kim was gracious when she welcomed us into her home, if a little snippy about being asked to answer questions. Little old Korean lady, stylish as hell, dyed hair, painted nails, the whole nine yards. While Donner sat her down to go over a few details, I walked around the room, getting a feel of the well-cared for items in her stuffed shelves. There was an old Chanel purse set that smelled of betrayal and greed, and a ruby necklace I was pretty sure still had the blood stains hiding underneath the polished surface, but nothing so wrong as the buttons Laura bought for her dress. The usual things. A jasperware set in a propped open wood cabinet felt loved, and a little sad, and a beautiful porcelain doll carried laughter that bubbled up softly from my throat when I stroked her painted cheek with one finger.

I could hear the discussion Donner was having with the old lady, his tone firm in resolve but well-mannered, the tone of a lawman warring with the man who had a grandmother or aunt he knew not to cross.

It was endearing, really, and I would've carried that warmth with me for longer than a second, had I not put my hand down on a visibly empty space on one of the woman's shelves and felt immediately like gagging.

[Chilling atmospheric horror sound]

"What was here?" I asked, interrupting Donner mid-sentence. I sent him an apologetic look and when he saw my spooked expression his annoyance transformed into the same determination he wore back when we were investigating Laura's flat together.

I had to repeat the question for Ms. Kim, who came over to look at the spot with an adjustment of her round spectacles. *[In an impression of an old woman]* "Baby bottle. Old, very old. Got it from a collector who was practically giving it away," she'd said. "Didn't look like any you'd see around now. I'd have to dig around to find who bought it. Is that part of your case?"

[Deep voice] "Just looking into all the leads," said Donner. He played along immediately, not missing a beat, for which I was grateful.

[Horror sound stops]

After Donner got what he needed, we ended up sitting in a cute little milk tea café I liked nearby, and he went over the case info with me. Professional, detail-oriented, everything I usually wasn't outside of my editing. The buttons could be traced back to a now-defunct fabrics store on Queen West, but seemed to be a lot older than even that. There weren't many more leads Donner could follow through the usual channels, apparently – whatever those were.

[Deep voice] “What about the bottle?”

[Subtle atmospheric horror sound]

[Normal voice] The question was out of nowhere, and it took me a second to understand what Donner was talking about. He clarified – if I felt the same wrongness on an item on Kim-Halmeoni’s shelf that I did with the buttons that made a 50-something year John Doe go on a rampage, we shouldn’t leave it to chance.

I agreed, but I didn’t really know where to start. Donner assured me that when Kim-Halmeoni dug up those records, we’d be moving forward.

We. As though I was already part of whatever his mission was. Whatever was driving him forward, this– this look of hidden haunting behind his eyes.

It’s a familiar look, Nanay. I know you’d recognise it.

Donner texted me in the middle of the week telling me that he’d gotten a name and address, and I asked him if he wanted me to take a few hours off work to give him... I dunno. Backup or something. It was stupid, since I knew Murphy covered that exact role, but neither of them had my sense for the... unnatural, so I worried that they might run into something they weren’t prepared for.

I didn’t get a response for two days. No matter how much I tried to reason away the worry, I broke and gave Donner a call on the third. I didn’t know what I would’ve done if it’d gone to voicemail, but he picked up on the third ring, demanding to know what was wrong and telling me he’d be there in a minute. [Chuckle] For all that I’d been stewing in anxiety wondering what happened on his end, I couldn’t help laughing at the reversal.

After assuring him that the only threat to my life was some jam that had gone moldy in the back of the cabinet, I asked him whether he got any updates that I could... Assist with.

He seemed reluctant to answer at first but eventually I got him to spill.

He’d been casing the place that Ms. Kim’s info had led him to: An Edwardian Four square that seemed only to house a woman in her thirties who, by Donner’s account, had been stocking up on an eclectic selection of baby-themed items despite, for all intents and purposes, living alone.

He mentioned that the things she had been bringing in had very little practical value in raising a child, and a lot of the pieces looked expensive and way older than was safe for an actual kid. I asked how he knew and turns out living in a tight knit community meant you spent time babysitting everyone else’s kids growing up, and he knew his way around the basics of childcare - something one Ms. Anya Creek didn’t seem familiar with.

She was also very visibly not pregnant nor had there been any sign of any baby living in the house with her.

All of this could be chalked up to a lady with a weird hobby, of course, regardless of what Donner called a “gut feeling” that he claimed never steered him wrong before.

“I’m not stupid,” he’d said. “Takes more evidence than a gut feeling for me to be knocking a lady’s door down to grab a baby bottle from her collection.”

I agreed, but there was something in his voice. I asked him if there was anything else. He was quiet for a while, but I could hear his steady breaths over the phone before he finally answered.

Ms. Creek lived alone, that much he knew. The place was a rental, and from what records Donner could dig up, the house was apparently being paid for by a Mr. Josiah Creek, who lived in Beverly Hills, California with a new family, happy to keep his eldest daughter housed if it could keep her away.

A woman in her thirties living alone in a picturesque house in Toronto off family money. It wasn't the kind of unusual that Donner tended to look into.

That wasn't why he was paying attention. There was nothing that she'd brought into or out of the house that seemed in the least bit suspicious.

There was, however, the unmistakable sound of a baby's laughter coming from the upstairs window.

[Faint baby laughter]

[Chilling atmospheric horror sound. Briefly crescendos before fading out]

This was definitely a bad sign. Reminded me of the last time a baby tried to murder me. I was not eager to repeat that experience.

Donner was, understandably, extremely confused when I mentioned the baby thing, but I just said "Remind me to tell you later," after we resolved what I suspected was going to be another eventful day trying not to get murdered or get anyone else killed because some absolute human garbage left a dangerous and stomach-churning artifact lying around where any schmuck could buy it off of someone for a few dollars.

[Sign] Donner asked if I was willing to try something off the record. Since I was the one who had a built-in evil radar – his words, not mine – I should pay Ms. Creek a visit. Pretend to be a similarly inclined antiques enthusiast, ask her about the baby bottle, see if she didn't have an actual baby that Donner missed any trace of.

Yeah I had to wonder if any of this was illegal. Not exactly eager to risk my permanent residence on the lady catching on. Donner pointed out there was nothing illegal about asking to be invited to someone's house to bond over Victorian era antiques, and it wasn't like preemptively saving a woman from death by evil magic could go in a police report.

It was how I found myself standing on Anya Creek's porch on a warm Saturday afternoon, welcomed into the home by a sunny woman who seemed more than happy to talk to anyone for any reason. I'd called ahead, and she didn't hesitate to invite me over when I mentioned I was interested in taking a look at her collection.

She seemed nice enough. A bit frazzled, a bit like that Tolkien quote about too little butter spread over too much bread.

Her home seemed a bit sterile apart from the little glass shelves of sweet-looking knickknacks, clearly well-cared for, presented to a lonely audience of one. They reminded me a little bit of my elderly Aunt and Uncle's home back in the Philippines. Shelves lined with tiny porcelain pasalubong – souvenirs from their own travels or ones they got from family members.

The difference was that it was clear Anya had never owned any of the things she was presenting. The images of warm, well-traveled, sentimental little families preserved in memorabilia not her own. The distinct absence of family photos in the hall as she invited me up the stairs to view her latest collection only emphasised that lack.

The second floor felt... surprisingly cold for the warmth of encroaching summer.

[Ongoing atmospheric horror sound]

I commented on her air-conditioning working up here, but her eyes seemed to glaze over when I said it. She led me over to her special “nursery”, as she called it, without ever acknowledging I said a word.

This room was colder than the rest, despite the bright rays lighting the entire room from the old window. In my mind I knew it made sense for a room presenting the tableau of a perfectly preserved old nursery to be this cold, but it wasn't just the temperature that chilled me as I stepped inside.

Nothing about this room felt warm.

The beautiful, meticulously crafted crib in the middle of the room looked forbidding and sharp, and the bottle placed in the centre of its lace-white cushion, somehow moreso.

Anya asked, in a quiet voice, for me not to touch it. I really didn't want to, for many reasons, not least of which was that I didn't want to upchuck my breakfast all over this nice woman's collection.

I turned her attention to the hand-painted wall, asking where she got the designs, and put my hand as close to the bottle I could without touching it or the crib. My hand flinched away pretty much immediately, not just for the sense of nausea I felt hovering at the back of my throat, but also for what felt like getting too close to dry ice.

I had to warm my hand under my other arm to get the feeling back as Anya told me she painted the walls herself.

[Soft, dazed voice] “It's the kind of room wanted my baby to have”, she said.

I asked if she was planning to have any in the future. She clearly had an amazing talent, pouring her warmth into a frigid room where her hopes seemed to live.

She looked at me, and it was like she was staring right through me.

[Horror sound crescendos]

And then she asked me if I wanted any coffee.

Once, I could chalk it up to an absent mind. Twice was suspicious, in the very least.

I asked again. And this time, she actually looked at me.

“That's a silly question,” she'd said. “The baby's right there.”

She gestured to the bed. And I felt... enraged.

I looked up and around as I shouted. “Whoever you are, whatever you are, leave this poor woman alone!”

Anya looked startled, blinking back shock as she tucked her hands under her arms, the first sign I could see that she even felt the cold – if at all. She seemed to shrink into herself, like watching the time lapse of a withering flower.

I couldn’t stand another second of it. I reached out over the crib’s wooden frame to grab at the bottle, the contents of my stomach be damned, when I felt the freezer burn grip of a long-fingered hand on my wrist, right before I touched the cursed object.

And I looked up, right into the empty eyes of a long-dead... man, I think, [Feint sound of a man chuckling darkly] his snarl the last thing I saw before the world went dark.

[Horror sound fades out]

What happened next...

Donner had to tell me, because a lot of it, I couldn’t remember myself. Even the bits I was there for, I was so out of my mind and weighed down by the freezing cold that I didn’t even know what was going on until we were near the end.

Donner told me about how I’d been in the house for a lot longer than anticipated, and he decided to give me a ring to check on my progress. Nothing had changed from the outside looking in, but when he gave me a call, it went straight to voicemail – and since I’m the kind of person for whom voicemail is a Canadian concept that I’ve thoroughly refused to acknowledge exists in my own life – he was rightly worried.

Had a whole plan to fake picking up a friend, or whatever excuse he could come up with by the time he was knocking on the door. Nobody answered, and he tried a couple more times, ringing the doorbell and all, but nobody was coming, and he couldn’t hear anyone moving around in the house. Went around the back, tried to test the doors and a few windows, but it was all pretty secure, it seemed.

And though he claimed he wasn’t entirely sure what he saw, it wasn’t a mystery who he saw glaring down at him from the back window. [Brief low horror note] An out-of-place strange man with *[Deep voice]* “eyes like he’d kill me if I tried anything.”

I could tell he was trying to downplay the worry – at least, I hope he was, otherwise he’s just the kind of man who thinks trying to kick down someone’s front door is a reasonable course of action. It was the right one, this time, but still.

He walked in, ready for just about everything except the door slamming shut behind him and the windows darkening as though covered in snow, locking him in strange, otherworldly darkness.

He didn’t say if there were a few more attempts at breaking the door down, but he did say there was no way out, and his phone still worked, but completely cut off. So in one hand, he held the phone up, shining its flashlight over the first floor hall, and in the other, he eased the safety off his gun.

[Subtle atmospheric eerie note]

He noticed the cold pretty much immediately, but he only realised it was getting worse as he checked every room on the first floor and started seeing his own breath clouding up in front of him. He startled when he heard the same baby's laughter coming from the upper floors, and as he crept up the stairs, he saw something on the top floor that had him on high alert, shadowed and buried in what looked like a pile of freshly fallen snow.

He said he could feel the cold, winter wind gust in his face and see the snowflakes drift down from nothing, and he realised, as soon as he saw the sandal hanging loosely off one of my feet, that I was the strange shape at the very top of the steps.

He touched my arm, claimed it felt like the dead, and looked gray and pale in the white light. His hand went right for my neck to check my pulse, under my nose to feel if I was breathing. You might have guessed by now that I'm still alive, but you wouldn't have known it by how few and far in-between my breaths came until Donner propped me up against the wall and wrapped his light coat around me in an attempt to warm life back into my frozen body.

This was the part I remember - when I gasped awake [Sudden background gasp and then shuddering. Eerie background sound continues] to a deeper chill than I'd ever felt, my only point of reference the time I spent outside in negative 30 windchill and my eyelashes froze to my face. I couldn't say I was fully there, but I could hear Donner telling me to count the fingers he was squeezing rhythmically to get the blood flowing again, and I counted as he blew against them to warm them up faster.

My clearest thought was wondering why I'd be wearing sandals in the middle of winter.

Donner kept trying to wake me up, pay attention. Patted my face a few times with warm hands growing colder, and I remember complaining when he took his hands away.

He was so warm, compared to the place I had just been, and the man I had just seen.

I said so. Donner got that look on his face again. The same one he had in the basement, when we destroyed the Rotting Thing. He asked me about the man. Asked what he could do to stop it.

Through dry, stiff lips, I told him of the thing that pretended to be what a warm woman wanted, *[Brief sound of blizzard wind. Eerie note crescendos into nearly a whistle]* and the stranger behind it. The stranger that brought winter with him, a man out of time holding onto objects of power, full of chilling rage and the need to devour a living being's warmth.

[Deep voice] "I guess shooting it isn't gonna help, huh?" Donner said, sounding exactly as awkward as I imagined a joke from Donner would sound, but I understood.

[Weak voice] "If we destroy it now, she'll die too," *[Normal voice]* I'd said, firm in my resolve not to let that happen.

"But if we don't, you'll die," Donner said, frustrated. I grabbed his hand to try and explain, a sound of distress escaping me when I realised his warmth was seeping away.

That, more than anything, brought clarity back to me as I pulled my anting-anting out of my shirt. It was as cold as metal would be, but I held on, letting my focus take over and gesturing for Donner to follow me to the nursery.

I really wanted a hand to hold through this. For warmth, if nothing else, but Donner had to keep both light and weapon trained on what might pop up in front of me, and I wrapped his coat

tighter around myself as I crept forward.

I closed my eyes and... saw, in a way, the strange epicentre of cold behind my eyelids, and I tried to ward it away with memories of hot Filipino summers, the sun beating down on my head in the high 40s, tracing the tan lines I got from my sandals.

[Eerie sound is becoming stronger]

[Sound of blizzard wind, stronger this time than the first]

It helped a little, but the cold was so strong as I walked through the open door of the nursery. The rage caused sharp, painful prickles to erupt across my skin, and I opened my eyes to a sight that hurt more than it terrified.

There she was – Anya Creek, sitting in a corner chair and rocking back and forth, cooing at a bundle cradled in her arms

[Happy baby noises]

[Ongoing blizzard sound]

I could see the frost that had formed over her, could feel nothing of the warmth that I knew she was giving to the lie that represented unattainable dreams, and a family she couldn't claim for herself.

I closed my eyes again and I saw him clear as a beacon of bright, blue light in a midnight blizzard.

"Who are you?" I asked again, and he looked up from where he had his hands on Anya's shoulders. I heard the sound of a baby fussing when he did, and Anya trying to soothe it quiet.

I could hear his voice like the sound of winter blowing through eaves and pipes, too close to human but not quite there.

[Low, nearly inhuman voice] "Meddle not in another's business, little girl. Lest you find your fingers snapped and toes chopped off, eyes shrivelled and soul torn asunder in the deepest chills of winter."

[Normal voice] "I don't understand. Is it the baby bottle? Are you trapped here?"

I stepped toward the crib that separated us, opened my eyes and found the bottle where I'd last seen it, cradled like a child while an aspiring mother froze to death in the corner.

"I could free you!" I'd said, and Donner asked me who I was talking to, his eyes trained on where Anya sat motionless.

"I wish not freedom, but vengeance. And I will let no foreign chit sunder me from what is rightfully mine."

"None of this is yours. And you've overstayed your welcome." *[Brief soft whispering in the background]*

I grabbed the bottle and felt like I'd dunked my hand in liquid nitrogen. It hurt, and my hand

wouldn't let go once it clamped on. *[Brief sound of steam hiss]*

[Intensifying blizzard sound]

[Echoing laughter of the man]

I could hear the strange, chilling laughter echo through the room so loud I knew Donner could hear it too, but as dependable as always, Donner grabbed me by the wrist and used the butt of his gun to knock the bottle right out of my grip, sending it crashing to the floor *[Glass breaking]*.

I heard the laugh transform into a yowl of rage *[man screaming]*, and I looked up and saw the dead man's face right in front of mine once again, hand on my arm and a deep freeze emanating from where he touched.

But when he tried to reach for my heart, hand about to pass into my chest, it seemed to burn away. I still had my other hand on my anting-anting, whispering, chanting, driving him away.

[Whispering, but louder this time] "Alis, alis, malamiging banyaga, wala kang karapatan sa mga anak ni Lakampating mahabagin."

Already, he seemed to be disappearing, his rage taken by confusion and his own terror, watching himself fade away. I could feel the cold ebb, the warmth return. I could hear the baby crying *[Crying baby]*, and I could hear Anya Creek begging for it to stop.

"Who did this to you?" I asked, as the figure of freezing blue melted away like snow in encroaching spring.

He looked at me with his empty eyes and smiled with all his teeth.

[Old man's voice] "An enemy you have now yourself made," he said, laughing merrily as even his teeth melted away, and his eyes, until there was nothing but a puddle of melted ice on the floor, and the scattered pieces of the old bottle.

Anya sobbed wordlessly in the corner as warmth returned to the room and circulation returned to my limbs *[Woman sobbing in background]*. The dark of the window sloughed off to reveal sunlight, and I sighed with relief. I tried to take a step forward, but my legs about failed me, and I nearly fell to the floor.

But Donner was there. So. I didn't.

[All background noises fade out]

I didn't think Anya Creek would be particularly grateful. I didn't know exactly what she saw when she was under the power of that... that man, but when she tried to throw a weak punch and screamed at us for taking her baby away, I knew she wasn't happy with us for breaking her out of it.

We brought her to the hospital to treat her for symptoms of frostbite, and whatever physical weakness she suffered from being pulled out of a long dream. Well, Donner did, and I stayed in the car, warming my hands against the heater. I was still wearing his coat. It reminded me a bit of a comic book character, what with his khaki trench coat and penchant for getting involved with the supernatural.

I don't know if I could've made this call if he hadn't come when he did.

I knew it would be dangerous. I knew that. I know that.

I know you wouldn't want me to... but you were always the same way. If someone was hurting, you'd never let it stay that way, and you taught me too well.

[Sigh]

But at least we know I've got someone to watch my back.

I'll be okay, Nay. I love you.

[Click of call ending]

[Phone ringing]

[Ringing stops as phone gets picked up]

Donner:

Mari? You alright? What's going on?

Mari:

Nothing's going on, mom. Just wanted to check on you.

Donner:

Uh-huh....

Mari:

What? I can't be worried that you retained the effects of supernatural corruption?

Donner:

Wait, really? Is that a danger?

Mari:

Pfft, no. Just messing with you. Though if you do wake up and find that your toes have all fallen off, feel free to give me a call.

Donner:

Don't even joke about that. If you are joking. Can't really tell, what with all the shit I've seen since we've met.

Mari:

I'm joking, yes. But now that I think about it, I remember promising you a story. Now's as good a time as any to tell it.

Donner:

Story? What are you.... No way.

Mari:

Mmm hmm.

Donner:

That wasn't a joke?

Mari:

Oh no. Buckle in, Donner, and let me tell you about the time a baby tried to murder me.

[Click end of audio]

["Hi Nay" opening theme, "Ili Ili Tulog Anay", plays on kalimba]

Motzie Dapul:

You're listening to "Hi Nay," by Motzie Dapul.

[Music stops]

Reg Geli:

Hi everyone, this Reg Geli, co-creator and co-producer of Hi Nay. Hi Nay is a podcast produced by me and Motzie Dapul and licensed under a creative commons attribution noncommercial sharealike 4.0 international license. Today's episode was written and directed by Motzie Dapul, who also plays the role of Mari Datuin. The role of Donner was played by Leon Johnson.

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Full episodes will be released every other week on Saturdays, 9pm, Philippine time or Saturdays, 8am Eastern Standard Time. We will, however, be releasing a special mini episode on December 12, so make sure to check us out then. Once again, thank you for all your support and thanks for listening.