



"So, who's your flavor of the night?"

Lavinia tossed her long, black hair and curved her lips at her friend Carmi. Pagkatapos ay pinagkrus niya ang mga binti at ibinaling ang titig sa dance floor. Hindi mahulugang karayom ang loob ng *La Vida*. Sharp, electric lights and pounding music pulsed across the gyrating bodies in the dance floor. They moved like a single specie, all sensual heat and energy. Lavinia was sure there were at least three couples already having sex in there, but she could be wrong.

She spotted Scott Monteverde and his wife Edwina by the bar. The two looked like dopey teenagers as they grinned at each other. Sumasakit ang ngipin niya sa sobrang sweet ng dalawang iyon.

"It's such a shame Scott's already taken." Bumuntong-hininga si Carmi at sumimsim ng bloody mary nito. "He's just so gorgeous and—"

"There are many other gorgeous men," matabang niyang putol sa kaibigan at lumagok din ng kanyang dry martini. "Stop fantasizing about a married man."

"I know, but still!" giit ng kaibigan.

Nagkibit-balikat siya at pinagpatuloy ang pagsipat sa mga mukha sa maingay na club.

She fantasized about Scott once, too. It was hard not to. The guy was like chocolate sundae and syrup and whip cream. Sinful, decadent, yummy. Pero ancient history na iyon. The guy had always been in a serious relationship, and she had never entertained the thought of a serious relationship since she was... well, since ancient history.

“And the thing is, Lavinia,” patuloy ni Carmi, “most of them are getting married already!” Ibinagsak nito ang baso sa mesa at hinawakan ang dibdib na para bang may malaking utang dito ang mundo. Tumama ang mga ilaw sa kaibigan at parang nag-aapoy ang maikling pulang buhok nito.

“Hindi mo ba napansin? Si Michael, si Nathan, si Kevin, si Nikolas, si Anthony, si Rigo, si Levi, si Iñigo, even Rafe! All the hot guys are getting hitched! What’s wrong with them?”

She huffed and tossed down her martini. F*ck if she knew. Again, her friend had a point. Everyone’s getting married as if it’s the new fad. Umiikli ang listahan ni Lavinia ng possible f*ck buddies dahil sa pagpapakasal ng mga ito. What were single women like her who just wanted to have some fun do now? They’re ruining her list!

“Find other available and hot men, that’s what,” madamdamin niyang saad. “They’re still many, dear. Never lose hope. Marami pang hindi nagko-convert sa ‘dark side.’ Many still see singlehood as the way of life. See there?” Itinuro niya ang isang lalaki sa dance floor. “George Gamboa, that guy’s hung like a bull and f*cks like a stallion, movie star handsome with the body of Channing Tatum, and he’s always game and ready for action.”

“Oooh, that rhymes! What grade will you give him?”

“I don’t grade men’s sexual prowess, Carmi. It’s rude.

See that guy?" Tinuro niya ang isa pang lalaki na nasa may bar at may kalampungang dalawang babae.

Bumuntong-hininga si Carmi at malawak na ngumisi.

"Oh, Bradley's such a good kisser."

"He gives great oral, too."

Bumungisngis ang kaibigan. "I know, right? And he's ultra rich. He's not from old money, but that's okay. I have the pedigree, just a little nudge and maybe I could get him to take me seriously."

Tiningnan niya ang kaibigan na para bang kailangan nito ng shot ng Valium. The girl had delusions. "No shit, girl? Try magically regenerating your hymen instead, why don't you? And while you're at it, look for the tooth fairy, unicorns, mermaids, *The Elder Wand* and *Roarke* from *In Death* series, too. That would be easier than snagging Bradley de la Torre for marriage. Call me when you find *Roarke*, okay?"

Pinalo siya ng kaibigan sa braso at pinandilatan siya. Pero inikot niya lang ang mga mata at umiling.

"Wake up, girl. The guy's great for fun, but husband material? Might as well just bang your head against the wall. Same result, less hassle."

"Si *Aerosmith* ba ang naririnig ko? *You're so, so... jaded!* Have faith in me, Lavinia. And I don't need magic to regenerate my long, lost hymen. I have you for that."

"My clinic doesn't do hymenorrhaphy, walang market. Hymens are overrated. We only do vagina tightening."

"My vagina's still tight, thank you very much. I do Kegel exercises. But fine, I'll go to South Korea then. And we all thought Rigo and the rest aren't husband material, either."

Muli, binigyan niya ng tingin ang kaibigan na para

bang kailangan nito ng trip sa psychiatric ward. “Rigo and the rest have never tried to pretend they could be in a relationship, they didn’t have relationships, they gave you what they could and gave it to you straight. That’s very important. Bradley’s a cheater. Not that I’ve ever f*cked him while he was still in a relationship, but we all know how he cheated on all his girlfriends. You don’t want that as a lifetime partner. Unless you’re in an open marriage, which in my opinion doesn’t really make sense. Kilalanin mo ang strengths and weaknesses ng mga nakapaligid sa ’yo. Hook up with him for a night, that’s his strength.”

“Fine! Mother Superior! Fine!”

And speaking of strengths, she just spotted Lawrence Aragon in the crowd. Tumaas ang sulok ng mga labi ni Lavinia habang pinagmamasdan ang lead singer ng *Eros*. This guy certainly had strength, she thought as her eyes roved over his broad chest and muscular arms. The dark shirt he wore molded his pectorals and abs to perfection. She knew through firsthand experience, pun intended, how hard those slabs of muscles were.

Yum.

She uncrossed her legs and tossed back her hair. “Excuse me, dear, I just saw my flavor of the night.”

Suminghap ang kaibigan at pinandilatan ulit siya. “You’re leaving me already? Whatever happened to chicks before d*cks? Traitor!”

“Stop the drama, you’ll do the same. Tata!”

Lavinia swung her hips and sauntered toward Lawrence. She loved the way her little red dress hugged her curves and clung to her skin. The silky fabric rubbed against her flesh in sensual caress, and she could already feel the tips of her

breasts tightening in delicious heat. She couldn't wait to have his hands molding the swollen globes, couldn't wait to have his mouth suckling the tender bud. F*ck, she's getting soaked down there.

Napadako sa direksyon niya ang tingin ng lalaki, at nakita ni Lavinia na lumawak ang ngiti nito. Happy to see her, eh? If she were him, she'd be happy to see her, too.

She licked her lips and quickened her strides. Pero bago pa siya makalapit sa binata, nahagilap na ng mga mata ni Lavinia ang pagpasok ng isang lalaki sa bar.

Sandali siyang natigilan, at ilang segundong pinagmasdan lang ang tila diyos na bumaba sa lupa. Pagkatapos, tumawa siya at umiling sa sarili. *Well, look at that. Now, change of plans.* Because Enrico Salvatore just walked inside *La Vida*.

Nakita niyang nawala ang ngiti ni Lawrence nang makita nito ang huli. He gave her a pointed look and moved toward her. Pero nag-flying kiss na lang siya rito at tumalikod na.

She liked Lawrence a lot. He f*cked like a gladiator on steroids, but Enrico and her went way back. They were mostly f*ck buddies for more than seven years now. And they had some business together, too. Whoever said pleasure and business shouldn't be mixed together had the maturity of a Middle-earth troll. Ano sila, emo-teenagers? Pareho nilang alam ni Enrico ang gusto at kailangan nila. They knew how to indulge themselves without drama.

And that, in her opinion, made the man as great as *Roarke*.

Napalibutan ng mga babae si Enrico bago pa ito makalapit sa bar. Typical. Parang magnet ang lalaki

pagdating sa mga babae. Pero nagtaas ito ng tingin at nakita siya. Tumaas ang sulok ng mga labi nito at kuminang ang mga mata.

Now, there's her flavor of the night. Pure, dark chocolate.

She grinned at him and lengthened her strides.

Walang hirap na naisiksik ni Lavinia ang sarili sa pagitan ng mga babaeng nakapaligid dito. "Hi, handsome."

He gave her a knowing smile. "Lavinia." A girl could come with just that voice.

Enrico exuded sex like it was his own personal perfume. Tall, dark, and dangerous. He looked lethal in his perfectly tailored three-piece suit.

"Want to get out of here?" she drawled, running her fingertips across his impeccable lapel.

"I just got here."

"Do you have business here?"

"I'm here to unwind."

"I'll help you do that."

Hinila niya ang kamay ng binata at narinig niya itong tumawa. Narinig din niya ang protesta ng mga babaeng nakapalibot dito kanina pero hindi niya pinansin.

She needed to get laid. Halos isang buwan na siyang hindi pa nakakatulog nang maayos dahil sa research nila sa laboratory. Natapos na nila ang first stage ng testing ng bagong drug na dini-develop nila para sa isang epektibong paraan ng paggamot sa mga keloid scars. Marami nang paraan para gamutin ang mga ganoong uri ng peklat, pero madalas ay mahal at kailangan pa ng clinical supervision. *Montoya Clinic's* main goal is to develop a simple, affordable, and best of all, highly effective treatment for patients to

self-treat keloid scars. Makapagsisimula na sila sa second stage ng testing sa isang linggo, but by God, she needed a break. All work and no play made her cranky.

Hinagilap ni Enrico ang baywang niya at idinikit ang mga labi sa kanyang tainga. Dumampi ang mainit nitong hininga sa kanyang balat at gumapang ang mumunting boltahe ng kuryente sa mga ugat niya.

“Always direct and unapologetic,” anas nito sa kanyang tainga. “Your place or mine?”

“Your office upstairs is closer.”

Co-owner ng *La Vida* si Enrico kasama ni Scott, kaya may opisina ito sa itaas ng club.

Hinila niya ito sa leeg at siniil ng mapusok na halik nang makarating sila sa tuktok ng spiral staircase. He groaned and buried his hand in her hair as his other hand grabbed the door knob. She already had her hand inside his expensive pants by the time they got inside.

“Hard and fast, I see,” he murmured against her neck.

Sandali siyang nagmulat at malabong rumehistro sa kanyang paningin ang opisina ni Enrico. Black, white, and metallic. The colors were masculine, cold, and classic like the man himself. Tanging ang makulay na abstract painting sa isang dingding ang hindi tumutugma sa personalidad ng lalaki. Ayon sa binata, regalo iyon ng mama nito. Mrs. Priscilla Elodia Salvatore was an art connoisseur. Gawa ng isang sikat na Pilipinong pintor ang abstract painting. *A. Evans* kung hindi siya nagkakamali. Splashes of gold, brilliant red, dusky ochre, and jeweled blue seemed to pulsate through the canvass. It looked like day dream. It was too pretty for her taste.

Enrico sank his teeth into her shoulder and she arched

her back in response. His hand was beneath her short skirt, his fingers already pushing aside the scrap of lace between her thighs.

Searing heat pierced her flesh as those wicked fingers stroked the swollen, creamy folds of her sex. God, she needed this. The heat and the fire, the toe curling pleasure and—

I see trees of green, red roses too

I see them bloom for me and you

And I think to myself, what a wonderful world...

Goddamn it. Who the f*ck was that?

“That’s your phone, Lavinia.”

Isinandal niya ang noo sa balikat ng binata. Binalot siya ng init nito at ng malamig na samyo ng pabango nito.

Patuloy ang pagdaloy ng magaspang na boses ni Louis Armstrong sa loob ng opisina ni Enrico, at pinilit niyang pabagalin ang pagtambol ng kanyang puso.

“Turn it off,” he grunted as his fingers curled inside her drenched heat.

Her walls trembled and the need to tear at his clothes clawed at her skin. She bit her lip hard and moaned. “I can’t... I have to get that. That’s my Lola.” She pulled his fingers out of her, and they both groaned from the loss of contact.

Sheesh. Talk about bad timing.

Dinukot niya ang phone sa kanyang bag. “Lola?”

“Lavinia, si Manang Precie ito! Naaksidente ang lola mo!”

Lahat ng suya niya ay nawalang parang bula. “What?”

“Nasa *St. Luke’s* kami, pumunta ka dito, dalian mo!”

“Bakit? Ano? Paano—”

“Car accident! Pumunta ka na! Sandali, lumabas na ’yung doctor, mamaya na lang ulit.” Binabaan siya ng phone ni Manang Precie, at agad niyang hinagilap ang kanyang bag.

“What’s wrong? What happened?” usisa ni Enrico.

“I need to go, I’m sorry. My Lola had an accident, I have to—”

“I’ll drive you.”

“No, it’s alright, I have my car—”

“You’re not fit to drive. I’ll drive you. Nasaan sila?”

Kahit kailan ay hindi siya naging pakipot kaya hindi na siya nakipagtalo at inayos ang buhok at damit. “*St. Luke’s*. Thanks, Enrico.”

“Friends with benefits, Lavinia. I believe this is the *friends* part.”

Sa kabila ng lahat ay nagawa niyang tumawa nang mahina. Friends with benefits. Yeah, she liked that.

Who needed marriage and other complicated romantic relationships when she already have something like this? This is the best kind of deal.

