

# 1



## Hello, Hank

**N**apaigtad sa kinauupuan si Stella nang punuin ng tunog ng doorbell ang malawak na fully furnished condotel unit na apat na araw na niyang nirentahan. Napatingin siya sa nakabukas na TV, kinuha ang remote control sa coffee table at pinindot ang *1* para makita niya ang imaheng nakakuha ng naka-connect na camera sa labas. Lumakas ang kabog ng dibdib niya nang makitang iyon na mismo ang hinihintay niya.

She checked her watch. It's twenty-five minutes past midnight. It had been almost three hours since she handed him that receipt with her temporary address. What took him so long?

Base sa nakikita niya ngayon ay hindi mukhang lasing si Hank. He actually looked like he just came from the shower, although he still wore his trademark outfit. Ilang dark grey shirt, perfectly faded blue jeans at *Doc Martens* shoes kaya ang pag-aari nito?

May nakasampay na jacket sa isang balikat nito at nakahawak ang isang kamay roon, habang ang isa ay nakasukok sa back pocket ng jeans nito. The infamous

Hank Montiel—award-winning, best-selling author and notorious womanizer extraordinaire—actually looked a bit nervous.

He was absently biting and wetting his lower lip. Ilang sandaling na-mesmerize si Stella sa ginagawa nito bago muling napaigtad dahil tumunog uli ang doorbell.

*Not the most patient guy, I see.* Tumayo na siya at pinagpag ang suot—a long-sleeved button-down silk blouse in the lightest shade of blue, tucked in coal grey pencil skirt. Itim na four-inch heeled pumps ang suot niya sa paa, na marahan niyang inilakad papunta sa pinto habang panay ang hinga nang malalim.

This was the bravest, craziest, and perhaps even the most foolish thing she was about to do. It was also dangerous, but she had to do it.

This would be her one time, big time opportunity to celebrate a new life and an exciting career ahead, and her way of saying goodbye to normal existence.

Nakatakda niyang tuparin ang maraming pangarap. Simula bukas ay tuluy-tuloy na ang magiging buhay niya at wala siyang balak huminto o lumihis ng daan palayo sa kanyang mga plano.

This night was also part of her plan, she just didn't expect she would reach the age of twenty-four with her virginity still intact and an embarrassing member of that sordid club called NBSB.

She needed to get rid of her V-card, as soon as possible,

or she would have that irritating perpetual naïve and innocent look in her eyes that could be a disadvantage in her chosen career.

Pero dahil wala siyang boyfriend, kailangan niyang dumiskarte. At dahil first time ni Stella, kailangan sigurado siyang expert naman at halatang magaling ang makakasama niya.

He should also be easy on the eyes.

She did her research. This man was the one.

Inalis ng dalaga ang double locks at hinawakan ang door handle. Huminga siya nang malalim, itinukod ang isang kamay sa dingding, at hinila pabukas ang pinto. Hank stood outside with his right hand poised as if to press the doorbell again. Napangiti ito nang makita siya. Niluwangan niya ang bukas ng pinto at hinayaan itong makapasok.

He almost never took his eyes off her as he walked slowly inside, as he watched her close and lock the door again. Mukhang hindi ito makapaniwala, at namamangha sa kanya.

“Nice.” Minasdan siya nito mula ulo hanggang paa at pabalik. “Wish granted.” His gaze settled on her face.

She did the same on his long lean form, stopping a bit to deliberately linger at his crotch, then settled on his incredible hazel eyes.

*Grabe, mas nakakatunaw pala sa malapitan!* “Likewise.” Lihim siyang nagpasalamat sa dalawang baso ng alak na nainom niya dahil tumapang ang kanyang dila. Iniabot niya

ang kamay rito. "I'm Stella."

His handshake was firm. "That's your real name?"

Tumango siya. "Of course." Binawi niya ang kamay.

"Stella, what?" he cocked his head to one side.

"Just Stella." She lifted her brow.

Marahang tumango ito. "Okay..." he smiled. "I'm Hank."

"I know," she breathed.

"I wonder what else you know."

Napailing siya. "Pakitaas ang mga kamay, please."

Napakurap ito. "Whoa, what? Ganito na ba ang modus ng mga hold-upper ngayon?" Pero itinaas naman ni Hank ang dalawang kamay. Nalaglag ang jacket nito sa couch.

Nilapitan niya ang lalaki at kinapkapan. Her hands skimmed his front pockets, which only contained a cellphone, then his hips down to his ankles. There were no guns, no other concealed weapons. "Turn around."

"*Bright eyes...*" he sang, then snickered.

"What the...?" Pero nakuha naman niya ang joke. *God, he also knows one of the cheesiest and grammatically incorrect songs ever written!*

"*Every now and then I fall apart...*" patuloy pa nito.

"Shut up." Natatawa na siya, pero kinagat ni Stella ang dila. Dumerecho siya ng tayo at ang likod naman nito ang ininspeksyon. Hank Garrett Montiel had the... for lack of a better word, cutest little butt she'd ever seen.

Hindi na tuloy niya napigilan ang sariling tapikin iyon matapos masigurong wallet lang ang nasa kanang bulsa

nito. “Nice ass,” she giggled as she walked toward the small kitchen and took the bottle of wine from the ice bucket.

Hindi makapaniwalang nakatingin lang sa kanya si Hank. “Why am I here, Stella?”

“Because I want you here?” Iniabot niya rito ang isang styro cup na may lamang wine. They raised their cups before she took a sip.

“And you want me here because...?” Sumimsim na rin ito ng alak.

“Because I want you to f\*ck me,” walang kurap na sabi niya habang nakatitig dito.

Nagkandasamid si Hank sa narinig. Ilang segundo itong naubo bago namumulang huminga nang malalim at ibinaba ang cup sa kitchen counter. “You want me to what?”

“You heard me, Hank.” Napangisi siya. “Kung maka-react ka naman, parang virgin ka pa. O hindi ka sanay marinig ang F word?” Nangingiting napailing siya. “You’re supposed to be an expert here.”

Ilang beses na napakurap lang ang kaharap. “Pero hindi natin kilala ang isa’t isa.”

Stella snorted. “As if that ever stopped you from f\*cking around.”

Matamang minasdan siya nito. “So that’s how you know me, huh?”

Napangiti siya. “Don’t worry, Hank. I have read *Messed Up Manhattan, Historical + Hysterical* and my favorite, *The Educated Virgin*,” tukoy niya sa tatlong librong naisulat na

nito. Humakbang siya palapit pa. “You are a very talented writer. I love your way with words. You deserve the awards and the critical acclaim... except that film version of *Educated Virgin!* Geez, no wonder nagkasakit ka pagkatapos ay nag-self-exile sa Iceland.”

Napangiti na rin ito. “So you do know other stuff about me.”

“Dala ko ’yung latest mo, ’yung *Selfie Nation.*” Muli siyang sumimsim ng alak. “But your way with words and your writing talent is not why you’re here.”

“You’re interested in my other... talents?” He waggled his brow.

Tumango siya. “Yes. Plus...” Pinaglandas niya ang hintuturo mula sa collarbone pababa sa dibdib nito. “You’re gorgeous.”

“Uhm...” Napalunok ito bago hinuli ang kamay niya. “I don’t... just...” he hesitated. Halos hindi nito inaalis ang namamanghang tingin sa kanya.

“You don’t just what? You don’t just f\*ck women who come to you?” litong tanong niya bago binawi ang kamay na nakalapat sa matipunong dibdib nito. A realization hit her. *Oh God, this is embarrassing!* Napaatras siya. “Okay, if you don’t find me even remotely attractive, puwede nating patayin ang ilaw at i-imagine mo kung sino man ang dream girl mo. If you really can’t stand how I look, then I’ll just have to—”

Nanlaki ang mga mata ni Hank bago hinagip ang mga

kamay niya. “No! Damn it, how can you think that?” He pulled her closer. “You’re beautiful, Stella. And I am not just saying that, you really are.”

Hindi siya sanay na pinupuri ang hitsura niya. She had always been the smart, serious, no-nonsense girl with a little rebellious streak, but never beautiful. Kaagad nag-init ang mga pisngi niya. Habang nakatingin siya kay Hank ay nararamdaman niyang hindi siya nito binobola.

“Eh, ano pala ang problema? Time is running out, Hank. I need to get this done and over with, or just let you go if you don’t want to.”

“Hindi sa ayaw ko,” mahinahong sabi nito. “And what do you mean by time is running out? May taning ba ang buhay mo? Mamamatay ka na?” He looked stricken.

Umiling siya. “No, silly. Just an early flight tomorrow.”

“To where? You’re leaving for good?”

Minasdan lang niya ito. “Hank, we only have this one night. Bakit ko pa sasabihin kung saan ako pupunta at kung ano ang balak ko? I only want this night.”

He blinked. “Why me and not your boyfriend?”

“Kung may boyfriend ako, eh, di sana siya ang kasama ko dito,” she snorted.

“Bakit wala kang boyfriend?” hindi makapaniwalang tanong pa nito.

“Maybe because of my resting bitch face?”

“Are you f\*cking serious?” Nagsalubong ang mga kilay nito. “You have the face of a... an... an angel.”

Napaubo ang dalaga bago natawa. “Right. Sige na nga, if that will get you in the mood.” She shook her head. “So? Let’s f\*ck?”

Hank let go of her hand. “Stop... saying that.” Napabuga ito ng hangin.

Namaywang siya. “Fine. Let’s have sex.”

Umiling si Hank. “I wouldn’t touch you if you’re drunk.” Inilapit nito ang mukha at suminghot-singhot. “Hindi ka amoy nakainom, pero namumula ka na.”

“That’s because you said I’m beautiful. That’s a rare compliment,” she wryly quipped, then tugged at his shirt again. “Take this off.”

“Nakailang shot ka kanina sa bar? Nakailang baso ka ng wine bago ako dumating?” pangungulit pa nito.

She rolled her eyes. “Hank Montiel, mataas ang alcohol tolerance ko. Four years of law school taught me the fine art of drinking without getting drunk, or at the very least, being able to control my faculties when I had more than enough. I’m fine. Ni hindi pa ako nagkaka-hangover. Ako lagi ang... *Oh shit!*” Napaiwas siya ng tingin, gusto nang batukan ang sarili. Hindi nga siya nakainom, pero defensive naman masyado.

There goes trying to be the enigmatic Stella who wanted a night of blissful f\*ckery with Hank Montiel.

“*Oh shit*, indeed.” Nakangisi na ang kaharap niya. “So, you were a law student, and I assume, one of those who got the good news today?”



She kept her expression neutral. Malay ba niyang updated ito sa balita at alam na kaninang alas siete ng gabi lumabas ang resulta ng nakaraang bar exams?

She didn't even have anyone else to celebrate it with, save for her brothers and sisters in her law school's academic confraternity.

"Wow... congratulations, Attorney Stella!" Hank looked impressed, and really happy for her.

She sighed. "Take off your shirt, Hank."

"How about you do it for me, Attorney?" naghahamong sabi nito.

Tinaasan niya ito ng kilay. "Love to." At walang babalang hinagip niya ang laylayan ng kamiseta nito. Her fingers grazed the skin of his abdomen, and it made him gasp. She gave him a feral look before she lifted his shirt. Slowly. Her body inched closer as her fingers made sure they linger on his skin.

Hindi niya inaalis ang tingin kay Hank habang patuloy na itinataas ang shirt nito. "Arms up," she said in a lower register. He quietly lifted his arms as his eyes remained on hers. She heard him sigh when the shirt went over his head and covered his face. His hair was mussed when she finally got the shirt off and threw it on the floor.

Tikom ang mga labi pero nakangiti pa ring bumaba ang tingin niya sa na-expose na katawan ng kaharap. She really wasn't expecting much. Baka exaggerated lang ang research niya. Alam niyang nagpa-participate sa triathlon si Hank at

nasa tennis varsity team ito noong college. Pero napasipol pa rin nang mahina si Stella nang mamasdan ito.

He was lean, trim, toned and muscular. His body wasn't exactly the V-shaped type that had a narrow waist. His was almost straight but ripped. She wondered how it would feel like to run her palm over those... *Oh, what the heck! Just do it, Stella!*

Ipinatong niya ang mga kamay sa magkabilang balikat ni Hank bago iyon marahang pinaglandas pababa sa dibdib nito at palapit na sana sa tiyan kung hindi lang nito hinuli muli ang mga kamay niya.

"My turn," he whispered as he gently placed her hands on her sides.

Napakurap lang ang babae bago tumango. Kaagad ang pagbilis ng tibok ng puso niya nang dumako ang mga daliri nito sa kanyang leeg, pababa sa kanyang collarbone, at sa butones ng silk long-sleeved blouse niya na sinimulan nitong alisin.

Their eyes were locked, but his fingers still managed to expertly undo the buttons of her top, and mimicked the way her fingers grazed his skin earlier. She bit her tongue at the contact, from the valley between and the sides of her breasts to her tummy, then finally stopping to circle her belly button.

"You feel so good." His eyes darkened as he stood closer to carefully pull her blouse off her arms, then threw it to join his shirt on the floor.

Nag-aapoy na siguro ang mga pisngi niya ngayon, at gusto na niyang iiwas ang mukha dahil tiyak na kitang-kita iyon ni Hank. Pero hindi rin niya maalis ang tingin dito, at ayaw niya.

She liked the way he was looking at her, how those eyes seemed to roam all over her body and send tiny electric shocks through her even if his eyes barely left her face. Her skin prickled as her breasts grazed his chest. She gasped when his fingers splayed on her lower back.

His brows furrowed. “You haven’t done this before, haven’t you?”

Napalunok siya. “No... not yet. You’re the first stranger I approached and gave my ad—”

“You haven’t undressed anyone. You haven’t even stood this close.” He lowered his face so his lips hovered over hers. “This. Close.” Dumampi ang mga labi nito sa kanya, at hindi na niya mapigilang mapapikit.

