

# Chapter One



Vincent shook his head as he watched Gareth lick the salt off a pretty girl's navel and took a shot of tequila. At imbis na lime ang sipsipin nito ay sa mga labi ng parehong babae nagtungo ang bibig ng kapatid. His eyes went heavenwards before he took a sip of his own drink.

Kung alam lang niyang naririto rin pala si Gareth sa bar na ito ay hindi na sana siya nagpapilit kay Steven na magpunta pa rito. They were in *Mugs 'n Bottles*, a popular bar in Malate and known for having young and classy people as patrons. The place was now filled with cigarette smoke, the dizzying laser lights dancing everywhere and the music was playing loudly.

"Bro, isn't that Gareth?" pasigaw na tanong ni Steven sa kanya. They were seated in front of the bar counter and on the side of it was where Gareth and a bunch of his friends were drinking their guts out. "Damn, look at those girls!" tukoy pa nito sa mga babaeng halos makita na ang kaluluwa sa mga suot na maiiksing dresses. "They're having quite a party in there!"

"He has probably already started his birthday celebration. It's his birthday tomorrow..." maikli niyang sagot. "Let's go someplace else, Steve."

"Oh, for God's sake!" Nakita niya ang pag-ikot ng mga mata ng kasama. "Hindi pa rin ba kayo nagkakasundo? How long has it been? Five years? Haven't you said your sorry to him yet?"

“I did nothing wrong to him so there’s no point in apologizing in the first place,” he said matter-of-factly. “Mas gusto niya ang ganitong buhay. Party and booze is his way of living so it was only right for Dad to pick me to manage the company.”

“Where does he get his money from?” Steven finished his shot. “At tingnan mo kung ilan sila, if this is his party, he’s probably paying for all of them, too. Now that’s gotta be a fortune.”

He smirked. “He may not be working, but he’s getting more money than our plant managers each month. Dad gave him access to all our accounts and he’s free to spend money on whatever he wants.”

“Lucky bastard!”

Once again, Vincent winced when he saw Gareth kissing the same girl like no one was watching them. It was a deep torrid kiss at kulang na lang ay maghubad ang mga ito.

“Kilala ko ’yang babaeng kahalikan niya; that’s Darlene Flores, a ramp and commercial model. Pete told me he dumped her after a few bed sessions, he said she was shit,” natatawang saad ni Steven at napailing. “So if I were Gareth, I’d stick with Lolita, she’s a catch.” Tumingin ito sa kanya at napakunot-noo. “What?”

Vincent was looking at him like his friend suddenly grew horns. “How the f\*ck do you know all these things?”

“Pete talks,” defensive nitong tukoy sa isa pa nilang kaibigan na ngayon ay nasa Hong Kong para sa isang business meeting. “And everybody knows Lolita. She’s the only daughter of Cristiano Hernandez, CEO of—”

“I know Cristiano,” putol niya rito. “He’s the CEO of

*Hernandez Food Corporation*, we're one of their suppliers. I know he's got a daughter, but I don't know who she is or what she does. I didn't even know Gareth is dating her."

"That's because you're in your own world, you're all business. Nothing else concerns you but your company. You know every detail of the factory's conveyors, the processing plant, and you know just exactly how many workers you have, pero kahit among activity ng kapatid mo ay wala kang alam."

There goes Steven again, a couple of shots and he wouldn't stop running his mouth. At ngayon, gusto niyang mas lakasan pa ng DJ ang tugtog para tuluyang matabunan niyon ang pinagsasabi ng kaibigan.

"I know it's his birthday tomorrow," Vincent blurted out. "And I also know that he'll be getting the latest *Lamborghini* model as his present. I know that that would cost approximately ten million pesos, ang pinagsama-samang annual income ng forty-one to forty-two average Filipino workers. Or a lifetime income of one average Filipino employeee.

"And you should know that I currently have exactly three thousand, six hundred and twenty-three employees that are depending on the company. So forgive me, if all my attention is fixed on them instead of my brother's escapades and dates," tuloy-tuloy na niyang litanya.

Natawa nang maiksi si Steven habang napapailing. "You need to get laid... It's terrifying how you're slowly becoming a geek."

This time, Vincent couldn't help but grin. "F\*ck, don't make me throw some numbers on that, too." Siguro nga ay sa trabaho lang umiikot ang mundo niya, pero hindi

ibig sabihin niyon ay wala na siyang panahon para sa pisikal niyang pangangailangan. He is a twenty-nine-year-old, fit and testosterone-filled man. And he was never the one to deprive himself of his sexual cravings. The only problem he had with girls was getting rid of them.

“Poor Lolita, akala niya kanyang-kanya lang ang atensyon ni Gareth.”

Nagkatinginan sila ni Steven nang marinig nila si Darlene na may kasamang babae. The girls were walking past behind them, aiming for the rest room and they were shouting a bit too loud.

“Well, Lolita would always be the winner hangga’t hindi siya hinihiwalayan ni Gareth at hindi ina-announce na ikaw ang ipinalit,” sagot ng kasama nito.

“It doesn’t matter, darating din kami diyan. For now, it’s good that Gareth is seeing me more and more. It only means na nabo-bore na siya sa babaeng....” At tuluyan nang nilamon ng malakas na tugtog ang sinasabi nito.

Steven was the one who reacted first by laughing. “So he’s two-timing Lolita! That won’t do him good, Lolita is a proper bitch... He wouldn’t wanna mess with her.”

“Ano?” This time Vincent was curious. “Kasasabi mo lang kanina na good catch ang anak ni Cristiano.”

“She is!” mabilis na sagot ng kaibigan. “She’s decent, she’s classy, not to mention, ridiculously hot. But she’s also known for being snob and bitchy. I heard once na muntik na niyang sagasaan ang isang lalaking nambastos sa kanya sa bar. Apparently, she waited at the parking area hanggang sa makalabas ang lalaki, and if it weren’t for her friend who steered the wheel away, that guy would be history or at the very least, invalid.”

“And she would have ended up in prison, too,” he said bitterly. He was hearing a spoiled, good-for-nothing bitch. Vincent was a diplomatic guy and he was completely against uninvited sexual advancement, but to try and kill someone because of it was absurd. There was always a proper way, like a lawsuit.

“Not when you’re as rich as f\*ck,” bale-walang saad ni Steven. “And she is f\*cking rich! Damn, I’d do her even if she were the poorest kid in town, anyway...” dagdag pa nito. “Your brother’s a lucky man.”

Napailing na lang si Vincent habang inuubos ang laman ng kanyang baso. “You’re the one who needs to get laid...” Naglapag siya ng tig-iisang libo sa bar counter. “And I need to go, I have one last stop before getting home.”

“I’ll stay, I got my eyes on someone here,” ngisi nito.

Napapangiting tinapik niya ito sa balikat. “Good luck, buddy...” At tuluyan na siyang lumabas ng bar, nagpapasalamat na hindi na siya nakita pa ng kapatid.



“He needs to get a bigger mirror,” kausap ni Lolita sa sarili habang pilit na sinisipat ang sarili sa maliit na salamin. Nasa loob siya ng bathroom ng kuwarto ng boyfriend na si Gareth, she had to make sure that the sexy lingerie she was wearing was worn perfectly. It was a red loose fitting camisole na pinaresan niya ng itim na may flimsy red lace panties. She used *Velcro* curlers for hair and it was now in big loose waves. Gumamit din siya ng oil mist sa buo niyang katawan, kaya ngayon ay kumikinang ang makinis niyang balat. Kahit hindi niya nakikita ang kabuuan ay natuwa siya sa nakikita sa

salamin.

Her makeup emphasized her big black eyes that was dolled up by her thick, curly lashes. She was wearing a pale pink lip tint, and a light blush-on. The objective was to make her look ready for bed but still irresistibly beautiful. She smiled naughtily. This was the night she had been waiting for. For the first time in her two-year relationship with Gareth, *ibibigay niya ang sarili rito bilang regalo sa kaarawan nito.*

Lolita was very hesitant about this decision before, *pero nitong nakaraan ay nakita niya kung gaanong nadidismaya ang nobyo sa tuwing hindi niya ito pinagbibigyan.* She was up for making out, but whenever he became too hot and persistent, she would instantly turn cold and ask him to stop. And it was putting a strain in their relationship.

Lolita cared for Gareth, she loved him to bits. *Ito lang ang nakakatagal sa mga tantrums niya.* The very few men who managed to date her before didn't even last a week. They said she was bossy, snobby, and self-centered. But Gareth managed to go through it all without giving up. *Ilang ulit din niya itong binasted pero makulit ito.* She came to know him later on as a lovable guy, not to mention very handsome. At ngayon ay mahal na mahal na niya ito.

He was the one for her, she knew it. So there was no point saving herself when she'd already found the right man.

Humugot ng malalim na hininga ang dalaga. Gareth should be home any moment by now. Mabuti na lang at binigyan siya ng nobyo ng susi ng apartment nito.

Lolita stiffened when she heard the front door opening.

“He’s here,” she whispered, nagsisimula nang kabahan.

Maingat pero mabilis siyang lumabas ng banyo at tumuloy na sa kama nito. She was grinning from ear to ear, Gareth was going to have the surprise of his life when he opens the bedroom door and finds her on his bed. She was laying on her side with her head resting on her palm facing the door.

Muli siyang humugot ng hininga nang marinig ang mga yabag ng paa papalapit sa pinto. Natigilan siya, she wasn’t hearing just a pair of footsteps, and then she heard a giggle. A girl’s giggle. Nanlalaki ang mga matang napaupo siya, saktong bumukas ang pinto at nakita niya ang bulo ng parehang magkayakap at naghahalikan, halos matumba pa ang mga ito dahil hindi man lang tumitingin sa paligid.

Lolita could taste the anger that suddenly filled her whole body. Her body tensed, and she could feel her blood starting to boil.

“You bastard!” sigaw niya at mabilis na tumayo para paghiwalayin ang dalawang naglalampungan.

“Lolita?” sindak na tawag ni Gareth nang makita siyang pasugod na sa mga ito.

“How dare you! How long have you been cheating on me? Huh?” Isang mataginting na sampal ang dumapo sa pisngi nito.

“Lolita, let me explain, it’s not what you think...”

She wasn’t hearing anything, she was too angry. She wasn’t done with Gareth yet, but she had to see the bitch

he took home. Hinarap niya ang babaeng nagmamadaling ayusin ang naibaba nang dress nito. And she felt like a bull seeing flashing red lights when she recognized the woman.

“Darlene, you slut!” she shrieked at sinimulang sugurin ang babaeng hindi napaghandaan ang pagtulak niya rito. Walang kahirap-hirap itong natumba sa sahig. Sumugod siya para sana sabunutan ito. Pero bago pa man niya iyon nagawa ay nahawakan na siya ni Gareth.

Nag-iinit ang ulong pilit niyang iwinasiwas ang mga kamay. “F\*ck’s sake, Lolita, stop it!”

“No, f\*ck you! How could you cheat on me, and with that second-rate bitch!” she squealed and managed to pull her hand from his grip. She made sure her long nails dug deep in his neck before slapping his face again.

“F\*ck!” he grunted at tuluyan na siyang nabitawan dahil nasaktan.

Muling hinarap ng dalaga si Darlene, the social climbing bitch. Unti-unti pa lang itong tumatayo kaya mabilis niyang hinila ang buhok nito at muling itinulak. “You bitch! You do realize na kahit gawin mong career ang agawin sa akin ang lahat ng magiging boyfriend ko, that won’t change the fact that you’re still a socialite wannabe! You will never be as pretty as me and will never get nearly as rich as me! You are nothing! You must hate me so much dahil ako palagi ang pinipili ng mga endorsers over you, well, I don’t blame them. People don’t like you! No one likes you!”

Muli sana niya itong sasampalin, pero nanlaki ang mga mata niya nang maunahan siya nito. Darlene was pulling her hair this time and she cringed at the thought



that she'd have some actual hair pulled out.

“Gareth, stop this bitch! Let me go!” sigaw niya.

“Ang yabang mo! Kung hindi ka naman ipinanganak na mayaman, walang magkakagusto sa 'yo! At least ako, pinaghihirapan ko lahat—”

“Tama na!” Gareth finally snapped back to reality. Mabilis nitong nahawakan ang mga kamay ni Darlene, and he must have done something to make her let go of her hair so easy. “Get off her!” pagkuwan ay bulyaw nito at bahagyang itinulak si Darlene palayo.

Pagkatapos ay hinarap siya ng lalaki, pero sinalubong lang ito ng sampal niya. “Get off me!” Tumaas-baba ang dibdib ni Lolita. F\*cking hell, this was the first time that a girl managed to pull her hair, too and hurt her physically. And of all people si Darlene pa. Of all people, si Darlene pa ang nahuli niyang kalampungan ni Gareth. “I am not done with you both!”

Nanginginig ang mga kamay na pumasok sa banyo si Lolita. She hurriedly grabbed her *Louis Vuitton* bag at walang pakialam na lumabas ng apartment na suot-suot pa rin ang lingerie.

Nasa malapit lang nakahimpil ang kanyang kotse at doon na lang siya magbibihis. She couldn't stand another minute inside that apartment. Patakbo siyang tumawid at muntik pa siyang masagasaan nang may mabilis na sasakyang biglang dumaan. She was so annoyed, she couldn't help but flash a dirty finger to the stupid driver who was now speeding away.