

PROLOGUE

“I’ve heard that excuse from you before, Philip. And how many months was it since you said you’d give me proof?”

Helpless na minasdan ni Philip si Nova, na kanina pa niya gustong hilahin at dalhin sa kung saan mas makakapag-usap sila nang hindi nakikita o naririnig ng best friend nitong si Anya. Lalo tuloy siyang nagdududa na may kinalaman ito sa gulong nangyayari sa kanila.

“You know, I’m a big girl. You can be honest with me. I can handle the truth. Just... just tell me what it is.” Her expression softened, and her voice was almost in a whisper.

Lalo tuloy na-frustrate si Philip dahil kita namang mahirap nang baguhin ang pinaniniwalaan nito. Hindi niya iyon matanggap. She’d seen pictures. She knew he had two brothers, one looked so much like him, the other not so. Alam ni Nova na nag-aaral sila ng mga kapatid niya sa magkakaibang university at minsanan lang magkita. At alam din nito na hinding-hindi niya ito sasaktan o ipagpapalit sa iba. Kaya bakit ipinipilit pa rin nitong may iba siyang babae dahil lang sa dalawang beses di-umano siya nitong nahuli? That was his brother Simon, who, incidentally, had to be in Germany right now for an exchange program.

“I stand by what I said, Nova,” mahinang sabi niya. “The

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one you saw at the *Comic Con* last July wasn't me, but my brother and his girlfriend Piper! He turned and looked scared when you called him because he was always paranoid about these things, us being mistaken for another. If you had approached him, you would have known it wasn't me." Minasdan lang siya ng babae, nakaarko ang isang kilay. "And again, that was Simon and Piper you saw at the beach last week. He was back for a few days for her birthday. I was really in L.A. that time with my other brother. You can ask Drew," he sighed. Paulit-ulit na lang sila. Kinausap pa niya ang mga kapatid para tulungan siyang magpaliwanag kay Nova, pero hindi pa rin ito kumbinsido.

"I know what I saw, Philip," giit nito.

"What you saw wasn't what you think it was," balik niya.

"You said you would introduce me to Simon."

"I would. But he's in Germany and during the times he was here, you always had things to do."

"You're blaming me now?"

"Hell, no!" His shoulders slumped. "Nova... we can call him again. You two can talk. I can even call Piper."

Napailing ito. "I don't know," she sighed.

"Tell me what I can do for us to be really okay, Nova. Please," pakiusap niya.

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“I only wanted the truth from you, Philip.” Mataman siya nitong minasdan.

“Apparently, the truth I have isn’t the one you wanted to hear,” napapagod nang sabi niya.

Hindi nagsalita si Nova, ilang sandaling nakatingin lang sila sa isa’t isa, bago siya nito tinapik sa braso. “I should go. Clearly, this isn’t going to work, and it’s best to let go.”

“It would work if you trusted me more, instead of what you think you saw or what you hear from people who clearly have no idea.”

Tumaas lang ang isang kilay nito. “See you around, Philip.” Tinalikuran na siya nito at naglakad papunta kay Anya, na tila nakakaloko pa ang tingin sa kanya. He met the other girl’s eyes. Gusto niyang tanungin kung ano ang problema nito, kung bakit ganoon na lang ang kagustuhan nitong paghiwalayin sila ni Nova. Pero duda siyang may magagawa iyon para mabago ang sitwasyon. Tumalikod na rin siya at naglakad pabalik sa kanyang sasakyan.

Derecho ang tingin ng binata, pilit inaalis sa isip na nasasaktan siya, na gusto pa niya uling sumubok para maayos ang lahat... kahit alam niyang ganoon pa rin ang sagot na matatanggap niya. He should give up, maybe Nova wasn’t the one.

But damn it! She was the first woman he’d ever really loved, and now she’s gone.