

Chapter *One*

She should probably be ashamed of herself. Plastered against her office window, peeping through the gap in the curtains, spying on her yummylicious neighbor using opera glasses like she's some hormonal teenager.

Bumungisngis si Natalie at tinutop ang kamay sa bibig.

God, malamang ay kurutin siya sa singit ng mama niya kapag nalaman nito ang kanyang ginagawa. Pero masisisi ba siya? The guy was sex in the flesh! Hard muscles and glowing skin all over. Sigurado siyang may picture ang binata sa tabi ng mga salitang 'masculine,' 'sex,' at 'delicious' sa dictionary.

Natalie bit her lower lip and stifled a groan as she

watched Logan bend on his surfboard, strong muscles rippling beneath sun-kissed skin as he rode the pristine aqua waves.

Logan Salvatore. Pangalan pa lang, ulam na. Just the sound of his name brought sharp images of strong hard muscles, sweaty skin, and hot, dirty, sheet-clawing sex in her mind.

“Whew!” Pinaypayan ni Natalie ang nag-iinit niyang mukha.

Sensory overload. Logan walking shirtless along the beach was better than hardcore porn. Yummy guy.

She should probably stop secretly eye-f*cking him and go back to work. But the man was like triple chocolate cake—sinful, decadent and downright illegal. Hindi niya mapigilang silipin uli ito habang umaahon ang binata sa tubig.

Tumulo ang ilang butil mula sa dulo ng maikli nitong buhok pababa sa malalapad nitong balikat at matigas na dibdib at tiyan.

Six feet and two inches of mouthwatering muscles and golden-bronze skin. Inky black hair, eyes the color of her father’s favorite whisky, strong patrician nose, sculpted jaw line that would make Da Vinci proud, and those abs?

Mamma mia! The guy was a walking wet dream.

He would probably taste great with whipped cream. Or ice cream. He loved her blueberry muffin,

so he'd probably like blueberry ice cream, too. She wondered what he would taste like covered in blueberry syrup. She imagined herself leaning down, darting her tongue out and licking every hard ridge and dip of that scrumptious abdomen.

Bumungisngis ulit si Natalie at umiling sa sarili.

“Stop it!” she admonished herself, giggling. “Go, back to work, you pervert! Stop eye-raping him! Work, girl!”

“Who are you eye-raping?”

Napatili siya at napatalon paharap sa pinanggalingan ng boses. Nakatayo si Matthew sa may pintuan, nakataas ang kilay sa kanya.

Bumungisngis siya at umiling sa kaibigan. “Darn, Matt, at least close the door!” Tumakbo siya palapit sa kaibigan.

Natatawang gumilid ang lalaki habang hinahagilap niya ang seradura ng pinto.

Inilabas niya ang ulo sa may pintuan, at bumaling sa kaliwa at kanan sa labas ng opisina.

May ilang mga customers na nakapila sa cashier, habang ang iba ay tumitingin-tingin sa mga libro sa shelves. Tanaw ang labas ng maliit na bookstore mula sa pinto ng kanyang opisina, at kita ni Natalie ang ilang turista na nakaupo sa benches, umiinom ng kanilang special iced coffee at kumakagat ng muffins.

Walang nakatingin sa kanya na para bang creepy

pervert siya. She snickered and patted herself on the back. *Good job!*

Isinara ni Natalie ang pinto at malawak ang ngiting binalingan ang ex-boyfriend. “You caught me,” she chirped.

“Yeah, as if naman secret ang epic crush mo sa kapitbahay mo,” natatawang sambit nito.

“Well, that’s true. But I still want to keep a bit of my dignity. Kahit konti lang.”

Umiling ang lalaki at bumaling sa bintana. “Hmm. Where is he now? Let’s see... Maybe we should call him over?”

“Shh! Don’t you dare!” Tumakbo si Natalie palapit sa kaibigan at hinila ito palayo sa bintana. “Isang bagay ang tungkol sa crush ko sa kanya, at ibang bagay ang pagsilip sa kanya mula sa office ko!”

“Wait, Nat, I wanna see. ’Asan na ba ’yon? There’s the blonde foreigner, the red hair—ooh... There he is! Your half-Brazilian yummy neighbor with eight-pack abs, sharp cheekbones, and killer smile.”

“Oh my God, shut up!” Natatawa niya itong sinakal habang halos pumasan na siya rito.

Tumatawang pilit nitong kinalas ang pagsakal niya. “Aw, Nat, come on! Bakit ba ayaw mo pang sabihin kay Mr. Killer Abs?”

“I can’t believe you just said ‘killer abs.’ And ‘yummy neighbor’? Do guys use words like that to

describe other guys? Umamin ka, may crush ka rin sa kanya, ano?”

“W-what?” Halos mabilaukan ang dati niyang nobyo. “You—what—I’m—of course not!”

Bumungisngis ang dalaga at tinapik sa ulo ang kaibigan. “Aw, come on, Matty, don’t be shy. We’ve seen each other naked plenty of times! You can share your secret with me!”

“S-sh-shut up!”

Inis itong pumitlag para ilaglag siya mula sa likuran nito. Tumatawa siyang bumagsak sa malapit na couch.

Matalim siyang tinapunan ng tingin ng lalaki. “What the f*ck are you talking about?” singhal nito.

Tumawa si Natalie at nag-beautiful eyes sa kausap. “Ooooh. Matty’s angry! Come on, buddy. Tell Mama the secret!”

“There’s no secret! Shut up!”

Tumatawa pa rin, umiling siya rito. “Relax, Matt, I’m just kidding.” Inayos niya ang mahabang buhok. Kumawala iyon sa kanyang maluwag na tirintas kaya tuluyan na niyang kinalas ang tali. “God, Matty, look at your face! I was just kidding! Ito naman, ang sensitive!”

“I’m not sensitive!”

“Hmm. Yeah.”

Tumayo siya at hinagilap ang opera glasses na

bumagsak sa sahig. Valuable spying instrument niya iyon. Spying on a wet and shirtless Logan while he's strolling along the beach were one of the highlights of her day, so she had better keep this important spying opera glasses safe. Ipinasok niya iyon sa drawer, at hindi niya mapigilang sumilip ulit sa uwang sa kurtina.

Bummer. Mukhang bumalik na sa surfing at souvenir shop nito si Logan.

“You should just ask him out, you know,” banat ni Matthew. “It's the twenty-first century, uso na na ang babae ang nag-aalok ng date sa lalaki.”

“And get my poor fragile heart rejected? No, thanks.”

Umiling si Matthew sa kanya at isinuklay ang mga daliri sa maikli nitong buhok.

Unlike Logan, her ex-boyfriend's hair was a bit brownish. Ayon dito ay natural daw iyon. Sa tingin ni Natalie ay totoo iyon. Nakilala niya ito noong high school at noon pa ay brownish na ang buhok ng lalaki.

Matthew was cute in a guy-next-door, Chinese mestizo way. They dated from high school up until about one and a half years ago.

Bakit sila naghiwalay? Wala siyang masabing malaking dahilan. There was no drama and only minimal heartache was involved. They just kissed one night and felt weird about it. Like they were kissing a brother or a sister. They decided to call it quits.

“I know you have a crush on him since college,” punto ng kaibigan sa kanya.

Madamdamin niyang inilapat ang kamay sa dibdib. “Of course I have a crush on him since college! I’m a girl, Matty, at lahat ng babae sa school may crush kay Logan Salvatore n’ung college. Duh!”

She checked her reflection on a mirror on a wall, and ran her fingers through her long hair. Naglagay rin siya ng coral pink lip gloss sa kanyang mga labi. Bagay iyon sa kanyang balat. Hindi siya maputi, pero hindi rin siya matatawag na morena. Medium lang ang kulay niya.

That’s probably the story of her life: medium height, medium built, medium IQ, medium attractiveness yada yada yada. The only thing special about her was probably her baking skills. But then again, maybe not. Mahilig siyang mag-bake at masarap din iyon, pero hindi iyon award-winning.

Oh, and her hair. She loved her hair. It’s dark and long and thick and shiny. She had diva hair.

And her personality. She had a giant personality!

Bumungisngis si Natalie at nag-hair flip sa harapan ng salamin. Pero napasinghap siya at napabaling kay Matthew.

“Wait, you’re not angry about that, right?” kambiyo niya. “I mean, na may crush ako kay Logan n’ung tayo pa? You’re not...”

Iwinasiwas nito ang kamay para itaboy ang pagpaliwanag niya. “Ano’ng tingin mo sa ’kin, mababaw? Of course not. Anyway, I should probably go. May dinaanan lang ako sa bahay ni Auntie Melissa kaya dumaan na rin ako dito.”

“Have you tried our chocolate cheesecake? Masarap siya.”

“Kabibili ko lang.” Tumayo ang lalaki at dinampot ang isang box na ngayon lang niya napansing nakapatong sa coffee table.

“You’ll like it. I’m going to try caramel cake tonight. Dadalhan kita sa inyo.”

“I’ll wait for that.”

Nakangiti niyang kinawit ang mga braso sa braso ng kaibigan, at sabay silang lumabas ng opisina.

“Mukhang malakas ang business mo, ah,” komento nito.

“It’s good. People like to read sometimes while they’re on the beach. And everybody loves cakes and muffins and iced coffee and tropical juices wherever they are. Oh, Matty, ba’t parang ang ganda ng skin mo ngayon? Glowing ka, ha. Ano’ng moisturizer ang gamit mo, ha?”

“It’s my superior Chinese genes, sweetie. It’s *au naturel*.”

Bumungisngis siya at tinapik-tapik ang glowing skin ng kaibigan. “No, seriously, bakit parang mas

makinis ka pa....”

Tumunog ang wooden wind chimes sa may pinto, at nakangiti siyang napatingin sa entrance ng kanyang bookstore.

Pero agad kumabog ang dibdib ni Natalie, at parang nakagat ng pusa ang kanyang dila. Damn, the guy should come with a warning label: *‘Hotness overload: not for the faint of heart.’*

Logan walked inside her small bookstore, and the heavens opened, golden columns of light poured down from the sky, and the angels chanted *‘Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Halleluuujaaaaah!’*

Viva! The walking sex dream has arrived!

Goddamn movie-star face and porn-star body.

Nakasuot na ng tuyong board shorts at kamiseta si Logan, pero basa pa rin ang buhok nito. The tips of his damp hair curled around his collar, the simple white shirt stretching across his broad shoulders. Thick pheromones seemed to saturate the air around him, making every woman’s ovaries within a fifty-meter radius wished they could have his babies.

Nagtaas ito ng tingin at nagtama ang kanilang mga mata. A slow, panty-dropping smile curved his lips, and she almost jumped around and squealed.

GAHD!

Humakbang ang binata palapit sa kanya, at parang mangingisay siya sa kilig. But she had managed to

control herself.

Napatigil ang lalaki nang mapatingin sa kanyang katabi. His gorgeous smile frayed at the edges, and it was probably just her imagination, but his muscles seemed to have tensed just a *tiny* little bit.

“Logan!” bati niya rito.

She rushed toward him like a lovestruck fan girl but she didn’t care. Sanay na ang binata roon.

Ibinalik ni Logan ang tingin sa kanya, at naroon ulit ang magaan na ngiti sa mga labi nito.

“Hey,” bati ng lalaki.

Hot damn. Gusto niyang mag-moment para namnamin ang magaspang at mababang timbre ng boses ng binata.

Hey. Eargasm.

Ngumisi si Natalie na parang baliw sa binata.

Naramdaman niyang idinikit ni Matthew ang bibig sa kanyang tainga. “Nat, stop eye-f*cking him.”

“Shut up,” usal niya at pasimple itong siniko.

Logan frowned at them, his amber gaze flicking to Matthew’s arm linked with hers.

“Hey, man,” bati rito ng kanyang katabi.

Itinaas nito ang tingin sa kaibigan niya, at magaan na tumango sa lalaki. “Matthew.”

“Tuloy ang jogging natin ngayong gabi?” masigla niyang singit. She couldn’t stop herself from jumping a bit, too. “Where’s Percy?” tukoy niya sa German

Shepherd nito.

“Natutulog sa bahay.” Tumatawang hinawakan nito ang kanyang balikat. “Stop jumping. Yes, tuloy ang jogging natin mamaya. You’re going out?”

Isinuksok ng binata ang mga kamay sa bulsa nito, at hindi niya napigilang pasadahan ng tingin ang maskulado nitong mga braso. Thick, brawny, veiny arms with light dusting of dark hair.

Mmmm... mmmm... mmmm...

“Hmm?” she asked dreamily.

“Hindi,” sagot ni Matthew. “Ihahatid niya lang ako sa labas. Sige, Logan. Nat, I’ll wait for that caramel cake.”

Magaan siyang hinagkan sa sentido ng kaibigan at doon siya nahimasmasan nang kaunti.

She smiled sheepishly and hugged him around the waist. “Okay, ingat sa pag-drive. See you!”

Ngumiti ang lalaki at ginulo ang kanyang buhok bago lumabas ng bookstore.

Binalingan niya ulit si Logan, at nakitang nakamasid pa rin ito kay Matthew, nakakunot-noo.

“Want some iced coffee?” masigla niyang untag.

Ibinalik ng lalaki ang atensyon sa kanya, bahagyang magkasalubong pa rin ang mga kilay.

Gahd. He’s too darn cute when he’s scowling.

Tumango ang binata, at muling tumaas ang sulok ng tila nililok na mga labi nito.

Air. Air. Whew. That smile!

“Yeah. Sure.”

Lumusot siya sa ilalim ng counter para siya mismo ang kumuha ng iced coffee ng binata.

Natapos sa pagsukli sa isang customer si Annie, ang isa sa kasamahan niya sa store. Malawak na ngumiti ang babae sa binata.

“Hi, Logan!” bati nito.

“Hi, Annie. Ikaw lang mag-isa ngayon? Nas’an si Manang Ditas?” tukoy ni Logan sa isa pang kasama niya sa store.

“Nasa stockroom. May kinukuha lang na mga libro.”

Pasimpleng sinulyapan ng isang babaeng customer si Logan, pagkatapos ay bumungisngis sa kasama nito. He had that effect on females. He could turn her specie into giggling idiots.

“Kumusta ang surfing lesson?” usisa ni Natalie.

She knew how it went. Well, not completely. Pero alam niyang mga Koreano ang tinuruan nito kanina dahil nga sa pag-iSPIYA niya.

Ano kaya ang sasabihin ng kapitbahay niya kapag nalamang nag-iSPIYA siya rito tuwing nagsu-surf ito?

She snickered to herself. He’d probably call her crazy.

“Dalawang Koreano ang tinuruan ko. They already have a bit of experience, but they wanted someone to

guide them a bit.”

Ipinatong ni Logan ang mga braso sa countertop, at bahagyang dumapi sa pang-amoy niya ang mainit nitong bango. Earth and sultry sea breeze.

Inner squeal galore!

“And you?” untag ng lalaki. “Ayaw mo talagang matutong mag-surf? Pitong buwan ka na dito, wala ka pa ring tiwala sa ’kin? I won’t drown you and hide your body in the ocean.”

Tumawa si Natalie at nilagyan ng takip ang to-go cup ng iced coffee ng kausap. “I’m cool. Masaya na ’kong mag-swimming-swimming. I know myself. My sense of balance is nonexistent. Hindi nga ako marunong mag-bike, magbalanse pa sa tubig? No, thanks.”

“Aw, now. Hindi ka marunong magbisikleta? That’s just wrong. I’ll teach you. Nakatago pa ata ’yung bike ko sa bahay namin.”

“Sa bahay ng parents mo?”

“Yeah.”

Umiling siya. “Nah. Let’s stick to running, shall we?” She punched in the order on the cash register. “Muffins?”

His grin was pure heaven. “Blueberry.”

Tsk. Blueberry syrup.

She sighed dreamily and took his money.