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"Come on, guys, don't be shy. Tayo-tayo lang naman dito. I can have everyone sign a waiver that whatever happens here, would remain here. Who's brave enough? Who's drunk enough?"

May mga natawa, may mga grupong nagtuturuan, may mga nagtaas ng bote o baso ng inumin, pero kahit ang lasing ay mahahalatang walang may gustong umakyat sa stage.

Ito na ang ikatlong pagkakataong nagtawag ng volunteer ang singer ng banda, at ikatlong beses na walang tumanggap ng hamon. The Wednesday night crowd at *Santino's* was receptive enough, and the band was actually good. The guitarists and percussionist were obviously gifted musicians, which sort of made up for the lead singer who was just... okay.

Nothing special. Her voice was so-so. She sang in a whispery alto and her vibrato needed work. She probably knew it because she'd been making up for the notes she couldn't get right with her moves.

However, he's not even sure if this woman could really dance.

Liam took another sip from his drink, and resumed checking out the woman on stage. Yep, checking out, because what really made up for her not-so-special talent

was the fact that she was kind of hot.

Okay, she's really hot.

She's not stunningly gorgeous or pretty, but she had an interesting face. Hindi niya alam kung dahil iyon sa light beer na kanina pa paunti-unting iniinom ng babae, kasalitan ang tubig—o natural na mapupungay ang mata nito. Mukha namang sadya ang mataray na arko ng mga kilay nito, na kino-complement ng ilong nitong sakto lang ang hugis at labing puwedeng model ng lipstick. Namumula ang mapusyaw nitong balat, at medyo pawisan pa dala ng ilaw sa stage, pero mas naging kaakit-akit itong tingnan.

If it were not for the fact that her big almond eyes lacked sparkle despite her moves, Liam would think she came from a quickie in the car or rest room before she went onstage. Medyo wavy at tila sinadyang magulo kasi ang hanggang balikang nitong buhok na light brown na may dark blonde highlights.

And her body... *Shit!* He had to grip the edge of the bar counter, straighten up on his perch on the stool and hold his glass of screwdriver tighter lest it slip from his hand.

She was now singing a more upbeat, bluesy take on *Fever* and she was swaying her hips as she stood so close to the microphone stand. That trim and toned body with curves in all the right places. Her lips practically kissing the mic, with her eyes either closed or hooded as she sang-whispered certain lines... How it looked more like she was making love to that f*cking mic stand instead of performing.

*Well, f*cking is performing, right?*

Huminga nang malalim ang binata. Hindi niya inaalis ang tingin sa babaeng Lynx daw ang pangalan. She looked like her wildcat namesake, alright. Alluring and feral and holy shit, she had that f*cking mic stand between her legs.

Not close to where he would want to be but damn, he's getting harder by the second. Pathetic.

At age thirty-one, nearly eight months since he got laid, six months since he found out it was not going to happen again with the same woman, five months since he'd been deliberately keeping himself occupied so he wouldn't think too much of how miserable his life had become, he's here, out and alone for the first time in months.

Kasama ni Liam ang cast and crew ng *Supersoldiers*—ang young adult science-fiction series kung saan siya ang head writer, director at isa sa producers—nang huli siyang lumabas at uminom. Itong hawak niya ngayon ay ikalawang baso pa lang niya ng pinaghalong orange juice at vodka, na gaya ng una ay na-dilute na ng nagtubig na yelo dahil nakatunganga siya kay Lynx.

Tatlong beses na napasulyap sa gawi ni Liam ang babae, at hindi niya alam kung nakita ba siya nito at nabistahan. Sa tuwing mangyayari iyon ay parang tumatalon ang puso ni Liam. Para siyang nalulula. Matagal na simula nang huli siyang makaramdam ng ganoon. He was not sure he even felt that giddy with Cathriona. He wouldn't blame the alcohol for his body's response to Lynx. He may have been living a f*cked up existence lately, but he had always trusted his heart.

And right now, his heart was saying *Yes* to his brain, and his dick agreed. He needed to get laid tonight.

He wanted that vixen seducing the mic stand on stage. *Oh, yes.*

“The last song is a request. I hope you're all not afraid to do something naughty or risky every once in a while.” Her voice was soft and seductive, and she ended her spiel with a kissy motion of her lips. Napalunok si Liam, at tuluyan nang

nalimutan ang inumin. Lynx once again got lost in her song, *Naughty Girl*, and her hands alternately slid up and down that very lucky mic stand, and occasionally combing her hair away from her face.

Her forehead, nose and that space above her lips glistened with sweat, and he had to battle imaginary forces to keep himself from going up the stage and falling at her feet, worshipping and begging, telling her his body was hers and she could use it as she pleased instead of that mic stand.

Halos hindi siya kumukurap nang matapos ang kanta at iayos ni Lynx ang mic stand. Nakipag-high-five ito sa mga kabanda at bumaba na sa stage. Panay na ang hinga nang malalim ni Liam at inihahanda ang sarili sa paglapit sa babae, pero may nauna na sa kanya.

At kilala niya ang lalaki. *F*ck, why didn't I notice he was here?* It was Richter, a Fil-German dude who had a recurring role in *Supersoldiers* as one of the alien guards of the main villain. The man was bisexual and slept with some of his cast and crew.

Kilala itong model at product endorser. Naging centerfold din ito sa *Cosmo Bachelors* issue. Isa sa mga tinilian nang rumampa nang naka-underwear lang sa annual fashion event ng isang clothing brand.

And Lynx looked absolutely thrilled that the bastard was giving her that much attention. Panay ang hawak ni Richter sa braso at baywang ng babae. Kung hindi nakainom ay high ang modelo, at kung may planong sumama si Lynx dito ngayong gabi ay hindi niya iyon papayagan.

Kinuha niya ang cellphone at nag-type ng message sa set designer niya na si Kristyn. *Wait five minutes and call Richter. Chat him up. Get him to come over to your place if you want.*

Sa halip na reply ay tawag ang isinagot ni Kristyn. “Sir? Anong meron? Magkasama kayo ni Richter?” takang tanong ng babae.

“Nope. He’s with friends. Ngayon ko lang napansin. He’s making a move on my woman,” he winced. Yes, he’s desperate.

“Your woman?” bulalas ni Kristyn.

“Not Cathriona,” he hissed.

“Oh! About time, Sir!” excited na sabi nito. “Sige, ako’ng bahala kay Richter. Magpaguwapo ka muna, Sir!”

“Kailangan pa ba ’yun?” tudyong niya.

Natawa si Kristyn. “Oo nga naman. Hot ka na twenty-four-seven. Go, Sir Liam!”

Pagkabalik ng cellphone sa bulsa ay uminom muna ng tubig ang binata bago lumapit kina Lynx at Richter na nakapaikot na ang isang braso sa babae. “Exley!” tawag niya gamit ang pangalan nito sa *Supersoldiers*. “Relaxing before we start again tomorrow, huh?” Tinapik niya ito sa likod nang medyo malakas.

Richter didn’t seem to mind. Bumitaw ito kay Lynx at nakangiting hinarap siya. To be fair, the man was a hardworking actor who always wanted to be on his good side. “I won’t get to do much of this once we start filming again.”

“True.” Hantarang pinasadahan niya ng tingin si Lynx, na tinaasan siya ng kilay. Bumaling siya kay Richter na may sasabihin sana pero nag-ring ang cellphone nito. Itinaas nito ang isang kamay bilang pag-excuse, at hindi man lang sumulyap muli kay Lynx nang lumabas ng bar.

Napabuntung-hininga ang babae bago naiiling na nagtungo sa bar. Sinundan niya ito ng tingin. Parang resigned na malungkot na ewan. Para ring sanay na itong

mabale-wala. Pumuwesto ito sa dulo ng bar at itinuro sa bartender ang order sa hawak na menu card. Nang lapitan ito ng mga kabanda para magpaalam ay nakangiting tumango lang si Lynx, pero hindi iyon abot sa mga mata nito.

Isang pareha lang bukod kay Lynx ang nasa bar, at nasa kabilang dulo ang dalawa. He never took his eyes off her as he approached, and sat beside her just as her drinks were served.

Kinapa ni Liam ang wallet, kumuha ng one thousand peso bill, at ibinigay iyon sa babaeng bartender. “For earlier, plus her Screaming Orgasm is on me. Keep the change.”

Makahulugan ang ngiti at tingin ng bartender na nagpasalamat bago siya muling binigyan ng isang baso ng malamig na tubig, at inasikaso na ang ibang o-order.

“I can pay for my drink. Thank you.” Aktong may kukunin sa sling bag nito si Lynx, pero pinigilan niya ang kamay ng babae.

“Keep your money. I’m happy to do it.” He eyed her drink that looked like a yummy sundae. “For real.”

Nagsalubong ang mga kilay nito. “Are you crazy?”

“No, just horny.” Inilapit niya ang mukha rito. “And so are you. Nakita ko kung paano mo tingnan si Richter kanina...”

“Sinong Richter?” Nangunot ang noo nito.

Man, she’s even hotter when she’s pissed, he thought.

“Yung kausap mo kanina. ’Yung tinawag kong ‘Exley’...” medyo nalito ring tugon niya bago napagtanto kung ano ang nangyari. “His name is Richter Klum. What name did he give you?”

“Adam,” sagot ni Lynx bago niyuko ang inumin. Mahinang napamura ito.

“Bastard,” he muttered. “If you must know, he’s probably talking to one of the many he regularly sleeps with. Kung plano mong sumama sa kanya kanina, well... medyo unhygienic ’yun. You don’t know where his dick has been last night, or before he got here.”

Nag-angat muli ito ng tingin. “That is one gross imagery, Mister—”

“Liam.” Iniabot niya ang kamay rito. “William Dryden Ascon Barrett III. That’s my real name, too. May ID ako dito.” Inilabas niya ang driver’s license.

Napakurap lang ang babae bago tiningnan saglit ang ID niya nang hindi iyon hinahawakan.

“You need to be careful with these things, Lynx. If you want to sleep around—”

“I do not sleep around. Tonight was the first time I even remotely entertained that thought, thank you very much.” Muli nitong niyuko ang inumin, na parang iniisip kung ano ang gagawin doon.

“You haven’t had a screaming orgasm?”

Lalo itong namula. “None of your business.”

“Hindi ako nagbibiro kanina. I can pay for that, and give you the real deal, too.”

“What...?” Her lovely mouth opened and closed, her eyes now fixed on him. “Sino ka ba?”

“William Dryden Asc—”

“What do you want from me?” Tumaas na ang timbre ng boses nito, bagaman halos pabulong pa rin sa kanya.

Liam reached in to pat her upper arm. Her skin was soft and warm. Marahang pinaglandas niya ang mga daliri pababa sa braso nito. “You.”

Lynx shivered. She looked at him for several seconds before letting out a bitter laugh. “And you had the gall to call

Richter a bastard.”

“He’s a dirty bastard who f*cks anyone with a hole, drinks like it’s *Oktoberfest* everyday, and smokes weed just for the heck of it. I have not slept with any woman for eight months. My last executive checkup was two months ago and I am clean.

“Hindi ako palainom, at bago ’yung isa’t kalahating baso ng diluted screwdriver kanina ay two months ago pa din ang huling inom ko. Vodka seven. I only smoke light menthol tar-free cigarettes when under a lot of stress, which is probably once a month. A couple of sticks, tops.

“I don’t smoke pot. I don’t do drugs. I am just very horny right now, and you know what?” His face was now centimeters away from hers. “I would have stayed celibate but then I saw you, and damn it, Lynx, I don’t usually do this but you have been doing things to me that I haven’t felt in ages and I want more, with you. I won’t force myself to you kung ayaw mo. Pero kailangan kong subukan.” Hinawakan niya ang kamay nito.

“I need to be inside you soon, f*ck you against the wall then in my bed then in the shower, and make you scream as you come, at least twice. I want to kiss every inch of you and taste you... If you’d let me...” His eyelids dropped midway to focus on her lips. Her lips that opened just a fraction before the tip of her tongue slipped out to wet the surface. *Damn!*

“I’m so hard right now, Lynx. I want you. I promise you won’t regret it. Pero kung ayaw mo, ayan...” Tinapik ni Liam ang tuhod ng dalaga. “Sakto na ’yang posisyon mo. One upward aim of that knee and I’d be down on the floor, howling and cupping my balls and maybe coming to my senses and begging for you to forgive me.”

He paused. Saan nanggagaling ang pinagsasabi niya?

Ganoon na ba siya katigang? Sobrang desperado na? “Just yes or no.” Napapikit siya.

Sandaling katahimikan ang namagitan sa kanila bago nagsalita si Lynx. “You have some nerve.”

Pagdilat niya ay hawak na ng kausap ang inumin nito, at napangalahati na. Mayroon pang kaunting cream at ilang patak ng tila caramel liqueur sa labi nito.

“So, I assume sinadya mong layasan ako ni Richter kanina?” nakataas ang isang kilay nito.

He was sheepish. “Yes. Uhm... we work together. I’m sort of his boss so he can’t exactly mess with me.”

She snorted. “God...” Napailing ito bago mataman siyang minasdan. “Naisip mo agad kanina na papayag ako sakaling intensyon nga ni Richter na iuwi ako?” Her voice was low and soft, but Liam detected sadness in it.

“Uhm...” He blinked. “I... I didn’t think you’re easy, or that you looked slutty. I just want you, Lynx. Hindi ko mapigilan. Gusto kong subukan. Baka puwede kasi...” He swallowed. “I want you, but it’s your choice.”

Muli ay pareho silang natahimik. Muling sumimsim si Lynx sa inumin nito bago sinalubong ang tingin niya.

“Are you good, Liam?” tanong nito.

Napakurap siya. *Holy shit, is she about to say yes?*

“I need sa sample. A taste.” She licked her lips.

“H-here?” di-makapaniwalang tanong niya.

“Kung magaling ka talaga, magagawan mo ng paraan na hindi tayo magmumukhang obscene.” Naghahamon ang tingin nito.

Naningkit ang mga mata ng binata habang nakamasid din sa babae. *Oh, but you don’t just challenge a horny, desperate man with a f*cking tent in his pants right now, Lynx.* A corner of his lips turned up as he leaned closer and quietly

commanded her to focus. Bumaba ang isang kamay niya sa hita nito habang ang isa ay dumako sa buhok ng babae.

His fingers splayed on her thigh as it slowly crawled up. His hand gently combed through her hair as he came closer to capture her lips.

Her gasp, and the way her eyes slipped shut drove him mad. He swiped his tongue across her lips to take the remaining thick cream and liqueur into his mouth. He pried hers open and slipped his tongue inside, as a hand slid to the side of her butt before moving up to feel the skin underneath her shirt.

Napakapit si Lynx sa balikat niya kasabay ang pagtugon sa ginagawa niya. Their tongues dueled as she arched and squirmed against the slow circular strokes of his hand on her lower back. Her grip on his shoulder tightened before he felt her pushing him away as she broke from the kiss, panting.

His heart was pounding against his ear. His blood sang as he tried to focus on what Lynx was telling him.

“Where the hell can we continue this, Liam?” she breathed. “I don’t usually do this, but... yes.”

