

PROLOGUE

May Day Eve

“Dandelia!”

I was really happy when I saw my Lolo Luis enter the living room. He was as goodlooking as ever! Sabi ni Mom, kamukha daw ni Lolo ang Dad ko kaya para ko na rin daw nakikita si Dad pag tinitingnan ko si Lolo. My dad passed away when I was very young. I actually didn't remember him much. All I knew was that he used to hold me really tight and sing to me until I fall asleep.

Proud Lolo's girl ako. Sobrang mahal ko si Lolo at alam ko naman na mahal na mahal niya rin ako. As a matter of fact, I'd visit him every summer and he'd never fail to tell me the story of how he met my Lola Clarinda.

“Tell me that story again, Lolo,” sabi ko sa kanya. Unang gabi ng bakasyon ko sa bahay niya at naroon kami sa living room. He looked at me and smiled.

“I wanna hear the story of how you met Lola...” I said again. Lolo looked at me again, this time, nostalgia was in his face. Huminga muna siya nang malalim saka ako inakbayan.

“It all started when I was twenty-five years old. Your Lola Clarinda was only eighteen back then and she looked just like you...”

“Only difference is I'm sixteen and Lola was eighteen back then,” nakangiting dugtong ko. Hindi ko pa rin mapigilan na maging excited kahit ilang beses ko nang narinig ang love story nila.

“It was midnight and that clock was ticking like crazy,” sabi niya sabay turo sa antique grandfather clock sa bandang kaliwa namin. “I saw your Lola standing there,” turo niya sa kanan kung nasaan nakasabit ang isang antigong salamin. “She was standing in front of the mirror, holding a lighted candle in her right hand. Her eyes were closed and she was chanting—”

“Mirror of destiny, please show me the man I will love until eternity.” Ako na ang nagsabi ng chant. I knew it by heart. Na-excite na naman ako. The excitement was still the same as when I first heard it when I was eight years old.

“Right, that chant.” He smiled. “I approached her and stood behind her. She slowly opened her eyes and looked in the mirror. And when she saw me standing behind her, on the right side, she smiled and said—”

“You are my eternity,” pagpapatuloy ko sa kuwento. “After that, Lola Clarinda fell in love with you and you fell for her, too. Years later, you married her and Dad was born three years after...”

“Saulo na ng apo ako!” sabi ni Lolo. He was laughing so hard. Gusto ko na naririnig na tumatawa siya para hindi siya malungkot. Alam ko naman na hindi totoo ‘yun kasi namatay na si Lola Clarinda one year ago. She was his one true and great love.

“Do you miss her?” tanong ko. Lolo’s smile faded. He just stared at me.

“I do miss her, but I know, wherever she is right now, she’s happy. At saka apo, hindi naman magtatagal, I’ll be able to see her again...”

It was my turn to be sad. Hindi ko gusto pag napupunta na doon ang topic namin. I moved closer to him and hugged him. I didn’t want to lose my lolo. Mahal na mahal ko siya.

“It’s time to go to bed,” sabi na lang niya.

“Lolo, ‘yung first time mo na-meet si Lola, di ba it happened on the first day of May?”

“Yes, apo...”

“So, fourteen minutes from now, May 1 na.”

“Yup,” sagot niya.

“So thirty-seven years ago na iyon... Do you think it still works, Lolo?”

“The mirror ritual?”

I just smiled.

“You wanna try it?” tanong niya. Ngumiti lang ako. “You are still young, Dandelia. Matulog ka na.” Tumayo ako at naglakad na papuntang bedroom ko. Nakita ko si Lolo na pumasok na sa silid niya. Something in me made me turn around and head to the kitchen to look for a candle and lighter. Nang may mahanap ako, bumalik ako sa living room. I checked the time on the grandfather clock. Five minutes before midnight, five minutes before May 1.

All my life, I wanted nothing but to experience an eternal love story that my grandparents had. Ayoko ng love story nina *Romeo* at *Juliet*. Hindi ‘yun romantic. I also didn’t want to be some fairytale princess who’d just sit and wait patiently for her Prince Charming to come. Or some damsel-in-distress waiting to be saved by her knight-in-shining-armor. Hindi ako ‘yun. I, Dandelia Cielo Santos, would want to be the girl who made the right choice; the girl who would wait and fight for my Mr. Right. Ayoko ng king, Prince Charming o knight. I just wanted my Mr. Right.

Kaya gayon, I will take this chance at an eternal love story. Kaya gagayahin ko ang ginawa ni Lola noong May 1, kung kailan nagsimula ang love story nila ni Lolo. Sinindihan ko ang kandilang hawak at tumayo ako sa harap ng salamin. Mayamaya, narinig ko ang pagtunog ng grandfather clock, signaling that it was already

midnight. Huminga ako nang malalim at pumikit. And with all my heart and soul, I chanted, “Mirror of destiny, please show me the man I will love until eternity...”

My heart was beating fast; my body trembling from so much excitement. I opened my eyes slowly to look at the mirror, hoping I’ll see the man who will give me an eternal love—a love that will never fade away, and a love that will stay in my heart, my mind and my soul until eternity.

Bumilis ang tibok ng puso ko nang may maaninag akong lalaki sa likuran ko, sa bandang kanan.

“Siya na ba?” I asked myself. “I-ikaw na ba?” Nanginginig ang kamay ko na hinaplos ang mukha niya sa salamin. Madilim sa buong sala at tanging ang kandilang hawak ko lang ang nagbibigay ng liwanag doon. Hindi ko masyadong mamukhaan ang lalaki, pero ang importante para sa akin ay may nakikita akong lalaki sa salamin.

“Brown out ba, Dandan?” the man said. Kumunot ang noo ko. Tek, bakit parang pamilyar sa akin ang boses niya? Hinarap ko ang ang lalaki at nanlaki ang mga mata ko nang makilala ko siya. What the—?

“Edwardo Miguel Varres!” I screamed. He grinned at me.

“Ano’ng ginagawa mo diyan, Dandan? May papikit-pikit ka pa, may kandila ka pa, hindi naman brownout. Nangangarap ka na naman ng gising, ‘no?’ tukso niya.

“Wala ka talagang ginawa kundi asarin ako!” iritadong sabi ko. “What the hell are you doing here ba? Your house is on the other side of the street! Why are you here in my house!?”

May nagbukas ng ilaw sa sala at nakita ko ang kuya ko na pumasok. Kunot na kunot rin ang noo niya.

“Nag-aaway kayo?” tanong ni Daniel Simone Santos, kuya ko.

Tinitingnan niya ‘ko na parang nasiraan na ako ng bait.

“Oh, I think your little sister is just welcoming me, di ba, Dandan?”

“Where’s Lolo?” tanong ni Kuya sa akin.

“Asleep.” I pouted. “Why are you here? I thought you don’t wanna spend your summer in this place?”

Kuya didn’t answer me. Tuluy-tuloy na siyang umakyat sa taas. I was left with that asshole he called friend—si Edward. Ayoko talaga sa kanya, ang yabang-yabang niya! He would get into my nerves everytime, ‘tapos wala pa siyang ginawa kundi asarin ako.

“I hate you!” nakasimangot kong sabi sa kanya.

Padabog ko siyang iniwan at pumasok na sa kwarto ko. Ini-lock ko ang pinto saka nahiga na sa kama.

“I hate that Edward! Hindi pwedeng siya ang destiny ko! Hindi pwede! Hindi talaga pwede!”

1


Second Try*Edward*

Three failed marriages, two failed engagements and thirty-two flings and yet, I'd never been in love—well, I had, but it was like a dream. Siguro, ganoon talaga. Akala ko mahal ko, pero pag lumalalim na ang relasyon namin, saka ko lang mare-realize na hindi pala ako in love. As I thought about my failed marriages and relationships, I'd say to myself that maybe I was just lost. Hindi rin naman madali ang pinagdaanan ko.

My first marriage ended right before my eyes. I knew my first wife Clarissa was cheating on me, but I didn't care because like her, I was having extra-marital affairs, too. Nang mahuli ko siyang nakikipag-sex sa isang pizza delivery boy, doon lang ako nakipaghiwalay sa kanya. Ni hindi nga ako nasaktan. Nalungkot lang ako kasi boto sa kanya ang mommy ko.

I got married for the second time three years after I got divorced from my first. I met Sam in Los Angeles. She was an intern like me. She was a breath of fresh air. We had a whirlwind romance and ended up getting married in Vegas. We were together for two years and in those years, I felt nothing but bliss. But then, Sam... she fell out of love. Nagulat na lang ako nang mag-file siya ng divorce. Tiningnan ko siya at nakita ko na wala na siyang pagmamahal sa akin. Ganoon lang. So pinirmahan ko ang divorce papers at umalis din nang gabing iyon. I hadn't seen or spoken to her ever since,

The third one's name was Mikaela and she was my patient. Alam kong hindi ako dapat ma-involve sa kanya kasi nga pasyente ko siya. Added to that, she was diagnosed with a terminal disease and her days were numbered. Pero isang gabi, naabutan ko siyang umiiyak sa room niya. Tinanong ko siya at sinabi niyang hindi siya takot mamatay. What scared her most was leaving this world without knowing how to fall in love, how to be in a relationship. Hindi ko alam, pero parang may pumiga sa puso ko nang marinig iyon. Kaya nang yakapin ko siya, alam ko, hindi ko siya papakawalan pa.

After three weeks of dating, we got married immediately. Alam kong mabilis, pero wala na kaming panahon pa. I really did fall in love with her. She was just the sweetest and most caring person. Our marriage was very different from the past two failed marriages. Alam kong mahal na mahal niya ako. Pero dumating din ang panahon na kailangan na niya akong iwan. Alam ko naman na bilang na ang araw niya sa mundo, pero nasaktan pa rin ako nang mamatay siya.

Minahal ko talaga si Mikaela. It was my first time to experience unconditional and unselfish love. I had loved her with all my heart and soul. After Mikaela, I told myself that I will never love anyone as much as I'd loved her. Iba ang pagmamahal na meron ako para sa kanya. Baka iyon na ang sinasabi nilang eternal love.

After she died, women would just come and go in my life. I became this womanizer asshole jerk that I was once before. But in my heart, I knew I wasn't that. Defense mechanism lang siguro kasi ayoko nang maging vulnerable. I didn't want to feel the pain of losing a loved one again....

Kaya siguro ngayon, ako ang palaging nang-iiwan...

Women would call me Edward ‘the heartless douchebag’ Varres.

Baka nga tama sila.

Dandelia

Moving on...

People would often say that moving on is easy. Parang gusto kong hunting-ngin ‘yung nagsabi ng kasinungalingan na ‘yun. Moving on was never easy. Ano ba iyong lagi nilang sinasabi? Forgetting someone is like trying to remember someone you’ve never met. Hindi naman talaga madali ang mag-move on. Iyong tipong para kang aatakehin sa puso sa tuwing susubukan mong kalimutan ‘yung nagpapasaya sa ‘yo.

In my case, I *almost* had a heart attack.

I thought that I had found my Mr. Right... but he turned out to be someone else’s Prince Charming. I wanted to fight for him; I loved him with all my heart, but then....

Ako na ang nagkusang lumayo kasi alam ko naman na sila talaga ang para sa isa’t isa. Mula noong nakilala ko siya, alam ko ang tungkol sa babaeng mahal niya. Hindi naman niya itinago sa akin ang bagay na iyon. Still, I fell for him... and I fell hard. Hindi naman kasi siya mahirap mahalín. He was just so perfect. He was a bit rugged; tough on the outside but deep inside, he’s very sweet and caring. He took care of me for five years and did nothing but to make me happy. Akala ko kami na nga hanggang sa huli, but then the one he truly loved came back. Doon na nagbago ang lahat.

I could’ve fought for him, but I chose not to. Nakita ko kung gaano niya kamahal ‘yung babae. Wala akong laban sa mala-fairytale nilang kuwento. Bago pa man, alam ko nang hindi siya sa

akin. When we made love, I knew he was thinking of her. Masakit, pero tinanggap ko na lang. Inisip ko na lang na mahal ko siya at kakayanin ko ang lahat. Pero hindi pala sapat ang pagmamahal ko para hindi niya ako iwanan.

Akala ko wala na akong iluluha pa, pero heto at naiiyak na naman ako. I was trying to move on... but moving on sucked big time. I was hurting all the time. How the hell can I move on if the only person I wanted to forget was the same person I wanted to have? How can I stop thinking about him if he's constantly on my mind? How? I couldn't seem to move on. Feeling ko talaga, hindi na ako makaka-move on. I didn't want to be stuck in this situation forever, but I couldn't seem to drag myself away from it either.

The pain is just too much...



*"Baby, you light up my world like nobody else,
The way that you flip your hair gets me overwhelmed
But when you smile at the ground, it ain't hard to tell you don't
know oh oh,
You don't know you're beautiful..."*

I hated this song, but I still chose to listen to it. Why? Because this was the only song in my playlist which didn't remind me of my broken heart. Nagmamaneho ako sa highway, pinipilit maging masaya. Nasa Sagada ako noong isang buwan at may nakilala akong isang lalaki na tulad ko rin ay sinusubukang mag-move on from a failed relationship. He taught me to be grateful and to be happy with the things around me in order to forget the scars of yesterday.

"I am grateful for the sun, for the moon, for the stars, and for the

earth. I am grateful for the life I have—grateful!”

Iyon ang mantra na tinuro niya sa akin na kung tatanungin ako ay parang hindi naman effective. After Sagada, I went to Pagudpod and stayed there for three weeks. I tried to have fun while I was there. Umaasa ako na ‘yung lugar will help me move on. Pero, hindi pa rin. Sunod kong pinuntahan ang Baguio, but the cold there only reminded me of the steamy nights I shared with the one that got away. After two days, umalis na ako doon at ngayon ay nagda-drive papunta sa ancestral house ni Lolo. Ang tagal ko na rin na hindi nakakapunta roon. Twelve years, to be exact. Naging busy kasi ako sa college, tapos sa work, and so many other things.

Pero ngayon excited na akong makita ulit si Lolo. Mula highway, kumaliwa ako at nakita ko na ang arch ng villa. Nag-drive ako papasok at ini-park ko ang kotse sa harap at bumaba na roon. Humahangos na sinalubong ako ng mga loyal na kasama sa bahay—sina Yaya Meding at Ate Minda.

“Dandan!” they both said in glee. I smiled. It had been a while since someone called me by that nickname and it felt good to hear it from the people I grew up with.

“Ate Minda, Yaya Meding!” I ran toward them and hugged them both. “I’ve missed you!”

After the hugs and the welcome-back kwentuhan, I asked them where my Lolo was. I didn’t even have to look for him because I immediately saw him standing near the asotea. He was looking at me with so much happiness written all over his face. Tumakbo ako papunta sa kanya at sinalubong niya ako with a bear hug. Ganoon pa rin si Lolo, malakas pa rin siya although he’s not getting any younger. Lagi niyang sinasabi na kalabaw lang daw ang tumatanda.

“Dandelia, how are you?” he asked after hugging me. I just smiled.

“I’m good! I’ve missed you!” I wanted so much to tell him about my broken heart situation but decided against it. I didn’t want to upset him. Alam kong kapag sinabi ko, he’ll be worried sick. Isa pa, okay naman ako. I was coping with the pain. Hopeful ako na I would recover from this heartache soon. Lalo na ngayon na nandito ako kay Lolo.

“Come, you must be starving, apo. Kumain na tayo, pinaluto ko ang paborito mo.”

“Kare-kare?” Namilog pa ang mga mata ko.

Tumango siya at naglakad na kami pababa ng hagdan habang nagkwekwentuhan. Natigilan ako nang mapansin ko ang antique mirror na nasa sala.

“Lola’s mirror of love,” I whispered. “It’s still here...”

“Yes, apo, so is the antique grandfather clock. Do you still want to try it?”

I didn’t answer. Kung alam lang ni Lolo na sinubukan ko na ‘yun dati, pero hindi naging maganda ang resulta. I could still remember that night... oh! Bwiset talagang lalaking iyon!

Pero wala naman na akong balita sa kanya, so sigurado akong hindi talaga siya ang lalaking magbibigay sa akin ng eternal love affair or eternal love story. Edward Varres. Oh, how I loathed him! He’s not even a Mr. Right material. Mr. Wrong siya, at ang babaeng mag-iisip na Mr. Right material siya ay nasisiraan na ng bait.

Teka, ang tagal ko na siyang hindi nakikita so bakit kaya naiisip ko na naman siya?

“Siya nga pala, apo,” tawag-pansin sa akin ni Lolo. Tumingin

ako sa kanya. “Magkakaroon ng party mamaya dito sa villa natin.”

“Why? What’s the occasion, Lolo?” I asked. I sat on the chair in front of him.

“Today is the villa’s 37th anniversary that’s why I’m throwing a party.”

“Great! I’m excited,” I said.

“And tomorrow is the first day of May...” Lolo said knowingly. I smiled. I knew what he was saying. First day of May was always a big thing for him. I sighed; I just hoped by midnight, I would finally be over my supposed-to-be Mr. Right. But who was I kidding? Alam ng lahat na hindi ganoon kadali ang paglimot.



Nasa asotea ako at pinapanood ang mga nag-e-enjoy na guests sa party ni Lolo. He was a very good host. The guests were all laughing with him as he told them funny stories. I could see some familiar faces and some new ones whom Lolo had introduced to me a while ago. Pinakilala rin niya ako sa mga anak at apo ng mga kaibigan niya. I sighed. I had a feeling that he was trying to play kupido tonight. Pinagmamalaki niya sa akin kung gaano katalino ang mga binatang anak ng mga kaibigan. It’s not that I didn’t care about them. It’s just that... I didn’t want to date anyone... not when I was still mending my broken heart.

Hindi ko nga alam kung kailan ba ako makakaalis sa getting-over stage na ito. Sa totoo lang ay naiinip na ako. I so wanted to reach the finish line kung saan okay na ako at naka-move on na. Kung totoo lang ang magical universal remote control, matagal ko na sanang hinanap iyon at binili para mai-forward ko na sa moment na wala na iyong masakit na part sa puso ko.

Hanggang ngayon kasi, nasasaktan ako.

I realized, hindi ganoon kadali ang lumimot. How was it

possible for a person to forget the one who had made them happy? Lalo na ako, I had so many memories of him. We had shared so many memories together. The last five years of my life revolved around him.

Pakiramdam ko tuloy ngayon, isa akong comatose patient na inalisang life support at unti-unting namamatay.

My heart was slowly dying—not of pain—but from so much longing. I wanted to see him. Nag-aalala ako sa kanya. Bago ako umalis ng Manila, nasa hospital siya at nasa coma stage. Gustung-gusto kong makibalita pero alam kong kapag ginawa ko iyon, ako lang din ang masasaktan. Maybe my only consolation was the knowledge that the one he chose to love will never leave his side. Mahal siya niyon—kahit walang ginawa ang babaeng iyon kundi ang saktan siya.

Hay... bitter pa rin ako. Dapat hindi ako nag-iisip ng masama tungkol sa babaeng mahal ng mahal ko. Alam kong hindi siya niyon iiwan kahit na ano'ng mangyari. Alam kong magiging masaya sila. Pipiliin ko na lang din ang maging masaya para sa kanilang dalawa kahit kapalit noon ang katotohanan na unti-unti at dahan-dahang namamatay ang puso ko sa sakit.

Sayang kasi...

If I had known that we will end like this, sana pala nagtabi ako ng pagmamahal para sa sarili ko, para noong iwan niya ako para piliin ang mahal niya, hindi sana masyadong naging masakit.

“Dandan, ano'ng ginagawa mo dito? Baka hinahanap ka ng lolo mo.”

Natigil ang pagmumuni-muni ko nang marinig ko ang tinig ni Ate Meding. I faced her. Katabi ko na pala, hindi ko man lang namalayan. Siguro, masyado lang malalim ang iniisip ko kanina kaya hindi ko napansin ang pagdating niya.

“Nagpaalam na ako, Ate Meding. Napapagod na po kasi ako,” sabi ko sa kanya.

“Ayos ka lang ba? Mukhang malalim ang iniisip mo.”

“Okay lang po ako. Salamat po.” Pinilit kong ngumiti. I had lost the will to smile these past few days. Nakaka-miss rin palang maging masaya.

“Buti pa matulog ka na, malapit nang maghatinggabi,” sabi pa niya sa akin. My lips parted. I looked at my wristwatch and saw that it was almost midnight.

“May 1,” I said while looking at my watch. Three minutes na lang May 1 na. Tiningnan ko si Ate Meding, mukhang nagtataka siya sa akin. “May candle tayo?”

“Sa ‘baba. Aanhin mo?”

I will try Lola’s mirror ritual again. I wanted to see the face of the man whom I’d share an eternal love with. Nagmadali akong bumaba. Hindi naman ako nahirapang hanapin ang candle at lighter. Pagkatapos, dumerecho na ako sa sala at pinatay ang ilaw. Pumwesto ako sa tapat ng salamin ni Lola.

My heart was beating fast.

All my life, I wanted nothing but to find my Mr. Right. The first time I tried this ritual, hindi naging maganda ang resulta. I saw Edward Varres’ face in the mirror. I hated that guy. Mabait naman si Edward, pero lagi niya akong inaasar noong mga bata pa kami so I taught myself to hate him, and until now, hindi ko pa rin siya gusto. Saka isa pa, hindi counted ang mukha niya. Buo sa isipan ko na hindi siya ang Mr. Right ko.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

I heard the clock strike at twelve. I took a deep breath and looked at the mirror.

“Mirror of destiny, show me the face of the man I will love till eternity...”

I closed my eyes. I prayed, hoped, and wished that this time, the mirror will show me the right man, the one that I will love and who will love me back, the one man that can take all the pain away, that man who can make me happy. *Iyong lalaking hindi na ako iiwan. Siguro nga naloloka na ako*, but at the back of my mind, I was wishing that he—the man who had hurt me—will be the one I’d see on the mirror. *Siguro nga hanggang ngayon umaasa ako na pwede kaming dalawa kahit na alam kong hindi tama... na hindi na pwede...*

After a while, I opened my eyes, *inaninag ko ang salamin...*

I saw a shadow; it was standing behind me, on my right side. I sighed. *Itinaas ko ang kandila upang ilawan iyon, unti-unti ay lumiwanag ang paligid, dahan-dahang luminaw ang mukha ng lalaking nakatayo sa likuran ko.*

I saw a pair of familiar eyes. I knew that I had seen those before, *pero saan?* The man standing behind me had a very unique face. Besides his powerful eyes, his nose was a bit aristocratic, his lips were—I don’t know... was it red or pink? It’s very unusual for a man to have pinkish lips but his lips were pink. He was also taller than me.

My heart beat faster. It was as if I was having a moment.

“Who are you?” I asked him.

“Dandan?” he said. *Napakunot pa ang noo ko. He called me ‘Dandan’—wait! Kilala niya ‘ko?! Pero sino siya? Bakit parang hindi ko siya makilala?*

“Dandan, *brownout ba?*” he said. He had this amusing look on his face and right there and then, I knew who he was.

“Edward Varres!”