

Chapter

One

*N*amamalikmata ba si Dominica, o namamalikmata ba siya? Si Luka Fernando de Villa ba ang nakikita niyang nakaupo sa isang sulok ng kanyang bar and club?

Napatingin siya sa paligid, sa mga babaeng naka-thong at miniscule bikini top, na nagsasayaw sa entablado. Malakas ang mga sipol at palakpakan ng mga lalaki na nakapuwesto sa harapan ng stage. Marami roon ay mga turista na nagbabakasyon sa mala-paraisong beach ng Sariaya, Quezon. Pero may mga locals ding nakahalo roon. Because no matter how many of these old aristocratic families loathed and scoffed at the upstart Riveras, no one could deny that they knew how to entertain people.

Malamang ay naghihintay ang ilan sa mga lalaki na hubarin ng nagagandahang dancers nila ang thong at bikini top ng mga ito. Well, sorry na lang ang mga hombre. No more stripping in *Heaven Bar and Club*. Lehitimo na ang lahat ng negosyo nila ngayon.

Ibinalik ni Dominica ang tingin sa lalaking nakaupo sa kanang sulok ng club. Manaka-naka itong natatapanan ng bumubugsong ilaw mula sa entablado, sinisinagan ang guwapo nitong mukha. Mag-isa ang binata roon, walang Guest Relations Officer na kasama, at may ilang bote ng vodka sa mesa nito.

She clucked her tongue and planted her hands on her hips. Even from where she stood, she could make out the masculine perfection of his features: chiseled cheekbones, sharp angular jaw, proud nose. He had a face made for romantic paintings and epic poetry. An angel wallowing in the den of sinful creatures.

Pak! Pang-Dante's *Inferno*. Uma-*aura*. Panalo.

Laughing to herself, Dominica ran her palms down the sides of her lilac mini-dress and sauntered toward Luka in her four-inch heels.

What? Lalapitan niya lang ang binata, ano ang masama roon? She partly-owned the club for heaven's sake. Kung gusto niyang guluhin ang isa sa mga kliyente nila, karapatan niya iyon.

Ngumisi siya at nilakihan ang mga hakbang.

Malakas ang centralized air conditioning ng club, pero sa dami ng tao ay medyo mainit pa rin doon. She could feel sweat sliding down her nape to her naked back. Nakadikit din ang ilang hibla ng maikli at kulot niyang buhok sa kanyang batok dahil sa pawis.

Halos lahat ng lalaking nadaanan ni Dominica ay ilang beses napalingson sa kanya. What could she say? She may not be as classically beautiful as the mestiza hacienaderas of their town, but she knew how to rock what she got.

Her clear sun-kissed skin looked soft and radiant thanks to regular spa treatments and countless creams. Her breasts were neither small nor large, but they were full, high, and firm, the size just right for her slim frame and five feet and four inches height.

Pero ibang usapan ang kanyang puwitan. She's got Jennifer Lopez buttocks, baby, and she loved flaunting it. The back of her short dress dipped low to reveal the upper swell of her ass, the slinky material stretching tight across her rounded buttocks.

And her legs, oh, she loved her legs. They were long, and toned and smooth, perfect for wrapping around a man's waist as he pumped heavily between her thighs.

Nadaanan niya si Drake, a.k.a. Darla, ang manager ng club nila. Pasimple nitong itinuro ang direksyon

ni Luka, at pinamilog ang namimigat sa double fake eyelashes na mga mata.

“I know, right?” she mouthed as she continued stroding toward Luka’s table.

Nagtaas ng tingin ang lalaki, at bahagyang nagsalubong ang maiitim nitong mga kilay nang makita siya.

Lumapad ang kanyang ngisi.

He didn’t look pleased to see her. He probably wanted to be left alone while he drowned his misery in alcohol.

Poor thing.

Oh, well. She supposed may dahilan ito, with his cancelled wedding and all.

Umupo siya sa tabi ni Luka kahit walang permiso. Lalong lumalim ang simangot ng binata, at tumigas ang linya ng guwapong mukha nito.

“Alcohol poisoning isn’t as rare as some people would like to think,” magaan niyang komento habang pinapasadahan ng tingin ang mga bote ng alak sa mesa.

“Says the woman who sells liquor.”

Oooh. She wanted to purr. Damn voice. The guy would be great for phone sex. Low, rough and raspy. She imagined him groaning in her ear as he f*cked her raw.

Gusto niyang humalakhak. Dominica had become so dirty.

She grinned at him and grabbed an open bottle of vodka. Uminom siya direkta sa bote habang nakatitig sa binata. Gumuhit ang init sa lalamunan niya, lalong pinapataas ang temperatura ng kanyang katawan.

“Drowning your sorrow in alcohol, big guy?” usisa niya pagkababa sa alak. “What would your parents say?”

Luka tipped his head back, strands of his midnight black hair grazing his brow.

“Are you here to mock me?” sambit ng binata.

Namilog ang kanyang mga mata saka dramatikong inilapat ang isang kamay sa sariling dibdib. “Mock you? Who? Me? What made you say that? Of course not!” Malutong siyang humalakhak at umiling sa lalaki. “Of course I’m here to mock you, Luka. Why else would I be here? I’m here for gossip, baby. And trust me, half of the people who ask you what happened just wanted gossip from you, too.”

Dumampot si Dominica ng spicy buffalo wings sa plato sa mesa at kinagatan iyon.

Nanatiling nakatitig lang sa kanya ang lalaki habang ngumunguya siya. Malamang ay iniisip na nitong sumibat ng club dahil sa pang-eepal niya. Mature, distinguished Luka Fernando de Villa

had no time to waste on lowly, petty, troublesome, unimportant people like her. Boo-hoo! The mighty de Villas never mingled with the Riveras if they could help it, after all.

Pero imbis na tumayo, hinagip ng lalaki ang boteng hawak ni Dominica at direktang tumungga rin doon ng alak. He watched her over the rim of the bottle, the sharp lights from the stage reflecting in his dark gaze. And f*ck it, she felt her nipples tightening as his sculpted lips wrapped around the bottle's mouth. Her very own lips had been wrapped around that bottle just few seconds ago, and whew, had it just gotten hotter in here?

Tumaas ang sulok ng kanyang mga labi. "You must be really drunk," she drawled, licking spicy sauce from her fingertips. "Or really depressed to endure my company. You want me to call your driver and bodyguard for you, baby?"

"Your spitefulness is exemplary."

Muling humalakhak si Dominica. "Oooh, you're really drunk. You're showing claws. Cool and composed Luka is showing irritation. Rawr. *Winona!*"

"What?"

"*Winona*. Panalo."

Luka grunted and took another swig of vodka, his chiseled features tightening into hard lines.

Ngumiti siya at kumagat ulit sa chicken. Sobra na ba ang panggugulo niya sa lalaki? Oh, well. Hindi niya mapigilan. Mocking the members of the elite and oh-so-perfect families of *San Martin* gave her mini-orgasms. It was a constant part of her short-term goals. Bongga!

“You can’t blame us, big guy,” patuloy niyang pang-iimbiyerna. “You and Princess Margarita are—”

“Princess what?” he barked.

She smiled sweetly at Luka. “No need to pretend with me, baby. No need to act humble. Luka Fernando de Villa and Margarita Antonia Rodriguez, the prince and princess of our small town. Your families are ancient. Kahit mga pangalan n’yo pang-Mexican soap opera—”

“So is yours.”

Tumango si Dominica at muling kinagatan ang hawak na chicken wings. Sumandal si Luka sa likuran ng upuan nito, nakatuon ang mga mata sa kanyang bibig.

Was she just imagining it? Or were his lids getting heavy as he followed the movement of her lips?

Tumawa siya at umiling sa sarili. The guy was piss drunk; of course his lids were getting heavy. There was nothing sexual about it.

“Alam mo naman ang pamilya ko,” aniya habang

pinupunasan ang mga daliri gamit ang paper napkin, “mga social climbers. Gusto naming makisabay sa mga hacenderos at hacenderas ng Candelarya at Sariaya. Kami ang kings at queens ng mga trying hard. Kaya si Mudra at Pudra, binigyan kami ng mala-Kastilang mga pangalan. Dominica Georgina at Katriona Santana. Saan ka pa? *Pashala*—”

“*Pashala?*”

“Pasosyal.”

“What f*cking language are you speaking?”

“Oooh, talagang bangenge ka na. Nagmumura ka sa harap ng iba,” tukso niya. “It’s Bekimon, baby. Gay lingo. It’s not my mother tongue, but it’s part of the club’s *lingua franca*. Anyway, back to our names. We don’t want to feel left out by the *Churchill* of San Martin—”

“Churchill what?”

“High society. Kaya pasosyal din ang mga pangalan namin.”

He dragged his gaze from her full lips up to her eyes, a frown touching the corners of his hard mouth.

She took the bottle from him and took another swallow of alcohol. “Come on now, let’s not pretend like you don’t know what I’m talking about. We both know your family doesn’t like my family,” ani Dominica. “Anyway, is it true? S’abi sa chismis, the day

of your wedding, you just stormed out of Margarita's hotel suite looking murderous. Then, you jumped into your *Benz* and drove away. No explanation whatsoever. Isang linggo ang nakaraan bago ka bumalik. Ano'ng nangyari?"

Pinagmasdan lang siya ng kausap. "You don't honestly expect me to tell you, do you?"

Inosente siyang kumurap. "I was hoping you're drunk enough."

"I'm not."

"Bummer."

Tumiim-bagang ang lalaki at kumuyom ang mga palad. Veins stood out from his brawny arm, and she could see a muscle ticking at his jaw. Perfect and composed Luka was gorgeous. Disheveled and furious Luka? *Mmm*.

Pinadaan niya muli ang tingin sa kabuuan ng binata. His dark hair was a little messy, the top buttons of his navy blue polo undone. She could see light dusting of dark hair over his muscular chest, making her wonder what it would feel like to rub her swollen breast against that chiseled perfection.

What? Lahat ng babae sa kanilang bayan ay may R-rated fantasy kung saan si Luka ang bida. She was no different. No harm there. It was nothing personal. *Keri bells* lang.

“Yon pa rin ang pinag-uusapan ng mga tao rito hanggang ngayon?” mababang pakli ng binata.

Humalakhak siya. “Ano’ng inaasahan mo? Halos kambal na kayo ni Margarita. Inaabangan na ng mga tao ang babies n’yo. ’Tapos sa araw pa mismo ng kasal n’yo, umurong ka? *Kalurkey!*”

“Puwede bang hintayin mo muna ’kong tumalikod bago mo ’ko pagtawanan? Hindi ba kasama ’yon sa good morals and right conduct? Ngayon, harapan na ang bastusan.”

Muli ay hindi napigilan ni Dominica na tumawa. “Come on, Luka. At least, hindi ako plastic. At least I’m not gossiping behind your back, I’m doing it in front of you! And you can’t blame us. The high and mighty de Villas and Rodriguezes having a fallout? Bring out the f*cking popcorn.”

Wala siya noong nangyari ang naunsiyaming kasal dahil inaasikaso ng dalaga ang ilang negosyo ng pamilya niya sa Manila. It was disappointing, really. She would’ve wanted front row seats! Pero sa kabutihang palad, pagbalik ni Dominica nitong nakaraang linggo, iyon pa rin ang tampukan ng chismis kahit tatlong buwan na ang nakakaraan mula noon. It was a favorite topic of hers.

Luka’s gaze narrowed. “What have we ever done to you? Why this animosity?”

“Animosity?” Umiling si Dominica at tinapik ang maskuladong braso ng binata. Pasimpleng hipo? Shh! “Luka, don’t get me wrong. I don’t hate you. I just find this highly entertaining. And no, you’ve done nothing really bad. You just basically ignored us and made us feel like we’re beneath you. It’s quite subtle, really. Magaling kayo r’on, eh. So yes, we’re having fun now that the whole town’s gossiping about your family. It’s a shallow resentment, Luka, nothing deep. Totally harmless. And yes, I can be petty that way.”

Smiling, she crossed her legs and leaned back in the chair, the hem of her short skirt riding up her thighs.

Mabagal na bumaba ang tingin ni Luka mula sa mukha niya patungo sa kanyang nakalantad na mga hita. Kahit sa dilim ng paligid, nakita niya ang pagdaloy ng init sa mga mata ng lalaki.

Namilog ang mga mata ni Dominica, at naramdaman niya ang paggapang ng init sa kanyang balat.

Well, well, well.

Muling tumaas ang sulok ng kanyang mga labi. “Pagchi-chismisan ka lalo ng mga tao bukas,” magaan niyang hayag habang mabagal na pinapadaan ang mga daliri sa katawan ng isang malamig na bote. “Ikaw, nandito sa club namin. You’re soiling your family

name, Luka.”

“My cancelled wedding already did that,” he said, his voice gruff.

“True. So why are you really here, Luka?”

Ipinatong niya ang isang braso sa mesa, pagkatapos ay bahagyang dumukwang.

This close to him, she could smell the minty cold scent of his aftershave, could discern the musky scent of his skin. The low neck of her dress dipped even lower, giving the man in front of her an ample view of her creamy cleavage.

“Are you here just to get drunk, or are you looking for something else?” makahulugang untag niya.

His dark gaze drifted down to the upper curve of her breasts, his lips parting, his jaw clenching. Itinaas nito muli ang titig sa kanyang mga mata. Heat had flushed across his sculpted cheekbones, his eyes gleaming like polished obsidians.

“Are you offering?” paos nitong tanong.

Lumapad ang kanyang ngiti. *Oooh. This was getting better and better! Winnie Monsod! Winner!*

“Are you asking?” balik ni Dominica.