

24
Full Circle

Alexa stared at the white and yellow gold ring. Her godfather handed Alexander the ring right after she said yes and he happily slipped the ring onto her finger.

“This ring is my great, great, great grandmother’s and Dad wants you to have it,” he whispered before tenderly kissing her on the lips.

Alexa was a little confused why she’d said yes but when she saw him get down on one knee to propose, her heart readily jumped to her throat and she knew that a NO was out of the question.

“Aminin mo na kasing sobrang gwapo niya,” she said aloud. “Tapos lumuhod pa sa harap mo. Ano ba ’yun, sino ba nama’ng makakahindi d’un?” she added with a sigh.

Pero mahal ko ba talaga siya?

“Sa lagay na ’to ba, hindi pa, Alexa?” she murmured.

There was a soft buzz before her door clicked open and Alexander walked in.

“Tara na, Love, hatid na kita.” He approached her and kissed the top of her head while his arms went around her. “May gusto ka bang kainin? May gusto ka bang ipabili? Pizza lang ang kinain n’yo kagabi, baka magutom ang baby natin n’yan. Nag-breakfast ka ba?” he asked her successively.

Standing to put her arms around his waist, Alexa yawned. “Inaantok ako,” she murmured, nuzzling his neck.

Alexander’s reaction was instantaneous. He cupped her face and greedily claimed her lips. “Sa taas muna tayo,” he whispered.

“Mabilis lang.”

“Na naman?” she asked in disbelief.

“Sige na.”

“Parang hindi tayo nagkita kahapon, ah,” she said.

He pulled her along and they stepped out of her office.

“Kahapon pa ’yun, Love. Almost 24 hours na nga. Alam mo naman pag lampas 24 hours akong hindi nakakapag-refuel, nanghihina ako,” he whispered before biting her ear.

“Alex, ang hilig mo,” she mumbled.

He tilted her face up for a kiss. “Wala tayong magagawa. No matter how hard I try, I really get drawn to you.”

“Like a moth to a flame?” Alexa teased.

“Like Alexander to Alexa,” he said.

She rolled her eyes at him even when she felt her heart skip happily. It was beating out of rhythm and she felt faint. They reached his suite and he discarded her clothes in record time. The foreplay was tender and slow and she was getting frustrated as he lingeringly kissed her neck.

“Alex...” she complained.

“Yes, Love?”

“Ang tagal mo!”

“Nagmamadali ka ba?” he joked, laughing while she glared at him. “Eto na, ’eto na,” he whispered, groaning as he slipped inside her. He closed his eyes as he felt her warmth embrace him. “Oh God, Alexa, I really can’t get enough of you,” he softly hummed and started to move. “Ano ba’ng gagawin ko, Love, at hindi ako magsawa sa ’yo?” he whispered against her lips.

She wrapped her arms around him and moved according to the tempo he set. Their dance was unhurried and Alexa noticed how extra careful he was with her.

“Tamed ka yata ngayon?” she breathlessly asked. She bit his

ear and he gasped. “Bakit ang ingat mo?”

“Yung baby natin baka kasi magising,” he said with a soft smile.

His words jolted Alexa’s heart. She felt hot tears pricking her eyelids.

“I love you, Alex,” she said.

He stopped moving completely and stared at her face. “What did you say, Love?” he asked.

“I love you. I can’t believe I do but I am in love with you,” she replied.

He hugged her tight. “I love you, Alexa. I love you... with or without clothes.”

She laughed softly. “Kailangang’yung I love you may halong kabastusan?” She bent her knees and he sank deeper into her.

They both gasped.

“L...ove, let’s re...sume talking...later,” he brokenly whispered.

She mutely nodded as he drove into her repeatedly. He felt her spasm her release and he continued to thrust until he reached his climax. He was careful not to crush her with his weight and rolled off her immediately. He pulled her close and wrapped his arms around her.

“Okay ka lang ba? Walang masakit?”

“Hindi na ako virgin, almost 2 months ago pa,” Alexa sleepily answered.

He laughed. “Yung baby ba okay lang?” He splayed his palm against her still flat belly.

“I think so,” she answered.

“We should visit an Ob-Gyne soon para ma-check up ka.”

“Okay,” she replied and snuggled closer.

“Love?”

“Yes?”

“Hindi ka naman napilitan lang, di ba, kaya ka pumayag na magpakasal sa akin?” he asked. Alexa opened her eyes to look him. “Di ba mahal mo naman talaga ako?”

“The great Alexander wants to marry for love?” she teased. “Akala ko ba hanggang bedroom negotiations ka lang?” she added.

He turned to look her directly in the eye. “May baby na, Love. And although alam ko namang patay na patay ka sa akin...” He chuckled when her expression changed.

“Patay na patay ako sa 'yo?” she asked.

“Oo kaya. Alam mo bang pag natutulog ka, umiiyak ka? Parati mong sinasabi na 'wag kitang iiwan? You sob in your sleep.”

“That's bullshit. Napakasinungaling mo.”

“Nagsasabi ako ng totoo. During the nights na magkasama tayo parati akong nagigising kasi umiiyak ka and you only calm down when I hug you,” he said.

Alexa ignored the uneasiness that crept into her heart. She used to cry in her sleep when she was a child, wishing for her dad to come back to them. Then she'd wake up with her cheeks wet with tears and her chest hurting. Now it seemed that her fear of being left alone was back, but instead of crying for her dad, she's now pleading for Alex not to leave her.

“Ilang beses nangyari 'yun?” she asked, not looking at him. “At sinasabi ko talaga ang pangalan mo?”

“Dalawang beses pa lang naman, at oo, sinasabi mo ang pangalan ko. Flattered ako, Love, kasi di ko inakalang gan'un mo ako kamahal kaya kahit anong pagtulak mo sa akin palayo hindi ako umaalis kasi alam kong mahal mo ako.”

“Huwag kang assuming. For all you know, umiiyak lang ako sa asar sa 'yo,” she said.

He grinned at her before kissing her thoroughly on the lips. “I'm not going to leave you, Alexa. I promise. 'Wag kang matakot,

okay?” he declared.

She nodded. *Sana nga.*

She was lost the moment Alexander started touching her again.



Alexander wanted to marry her ASAP, but Alexa wanted her father to be there. He was insisting on a grand celebration, but she'd rather have an intimate and simple ceremony.

“Minsan lang tayo ikakasal, Love,” he argued. “Ayoko ng simpleng kasalan lang. I want everyone to be there.”

“Alam ko namang madami kayong kakilala, and I understand the reason behind a grand wedding. But I prefer it's only witnessed by people who are really dear to us. If you like, we can have a grand wedding party the following day. Parang napakapeke lang to say the vows in front of people that I don't even know.”

“Love, ang dami mo pang sinabi, di mo na lang ako deretsahin. Gusto mo lang akong masolo, eh,” he kidded.

She arched a brow at him. “Aba, dapat lang siguro akong gumanti kasi araw-araw mo akong sinosolo,” she joked back.

He laughed. It had been three days since he proposed and they were inside her bedroom, with Alex cuddling up to her in bed.

“Kelan ba naka-schedule tumawag ang daddy mo?” he asked.

She sighed. “Dapat kahapon, pero hindi siya nakatawag. I hope he's okay and I hope he calls soon because Lee Ann is very worried. Di na makakain 'yung bata sa kakaisip.”

“Baka nagkaaberya lang kaya hindi nakatawag. Tatawag 'yun.”

“Oo nga,” she replied.

He looked at her upturned face and gave her a quick kiss. They spent the afternoon talking and Alexa realized that Alexander was capable of deep thoughts and finer feelings. The silliest conversation with him made sense to her. She could even

appreciate his sense of humor. Not to mention that around her, he seemed to know all the right things to say.

Plus, he's very excited about the baby.

"Hindi ba dapat bumili na tayo ng mga gamit mo sa pagbubuntis? 'Wag ka nang mag-pants kasi baka maipit 'yung bata. I should buy you a whole new wardrobe."

"Alex, seven weeks pa lang 'to. Wala pa nga akong tiyan."

"Bakit ang tagal lumaki ng tiyan mo? Gusto ko nang makitang malaki 'yan para alam ng mga taong buntis ka. 'Yung barista sa coffee shop kanina, ngiti nang ngiti sa 'yo. Di ba niya alam na ipinagbubuntis mo ang anak ko?"

"Alam na niya kasi sinabi mo," Alexa answered, remembering how Alexander nearly went berserk while he was telling the barista to keep his eyes off his pregnant wife. "Kung maka-wife naman."

"D'un din naman papunta, 'wag ka nang magreklamo, Love."

"Wala naman akong sinabi kanina, ah. In fact, ngumiti lang ako."

"Tsaka 'wag kang ngingiti pag nagagalit ako, ibang parte na ang nagagalit sa akin pag ngumingiti ka," he kidded, laughing when she glared at him.

"Puro 'yun na lang nasa isip mo."

"Ang sexy mo kasi, feeling ko tuloy sini-seduce mo ako araw-araw."

"Alex, kahit sako lang siguro ang isuot ko feeling mo sexy pa rin ako."

"Oo naman," he readily replied and lovingly looked at her face. "Alexa, I know you'd rather not talk about this pero wala ka bang gustong itanong tungkol sa amin ni Lia? Gusto kong ngayon pa lang plantsado na. I don't want us to have issues later on because you'd rather not talk about it now."

"I actually want to talk about it, but I'm scared about how I

would feel hearing it from you.” She got up and sat on the edge of the bed.

“But we need to talk about it, Love. Ayokong magkaroon tayo ng problema later on because we’re too worried to face it. It’s in the past and I don’t want it to affect our future.” He bolted up and sat beside her.

“How did you two meet?” Alexa finally asked.

Alexander pulled her to sit on his lap. “Your dad set me up with Lia,” he answered. Alexa frowned at him. “He wanted her to marry either Nickolai or me, but my brother never really liked Lia from the very beginning and he’s quite vocal about it. He told me later on that he caught Lia with one of his friends from Law school. Nickolai was turned off that she doesn’t seem to have any scruples. You see, his friend was married...”

“You knew all that and still went out with her...”

“I did. It never really got serious. We were each other’s go-to dates. She wanted to be a model and a singer and your dad made sure that she got a contract from one of the country’s biggest agencies. Ako naman, I was still in Law school, but every time she’s in town, lumalabas kami.”

“So it did get serious?” Alexa half-stated, starting to feel some discomfort in her belly. The tension spread throughout her body. “Well, it’s not fair to ask you that, right? Considering that you nearly married her.”

“It was staged. Planado ’yun. You see, she was caught in a scandal. Nahuli siyang katalik’yung director ng commercial na ginagawa niya. Mismong iyong asawa ng director ang nakakita sa kanila. And the wife made noise. Your father paid her off but the damage was done. Laman na si Lia ng dyaryo at tabloids. The incident ruined her career.”

“So you decided to be the knight-in-shining armor and asked her to marry you?”

“Your father asked me to marry her,” he clarified. “The plan was to stage a wedding and then she’d leave me at the altar.”

“Okay, now I don’t get it,” Alexa said, facing him. “Hindi ka gan’un kabait, Alex, no matter what you say. Kilala kita, hindi ka gagawa ng isang bagay na wala kang makukuha. I know I’m starting to make you sound like a user and an opportunist, pero that’s the truth. Nag-iisip ka and you know your game.”

“Not all the time. Ano’ng nakuha ko n’ung nagmakaawa ako halos sa’yo na pakasalan mo ako?” he asked.

She smiled naughtily. “Katawan ko?”

“Tama ka, oportunist na ako,” he replied, laughing. And then he grew serious. “You’re actually right, I agreed to your father’s offer because I want your sister off my back. After her scandal, she became clingy and possessive. Hindi naman pormal na naging kami, napaka-casual n’ung sa amin. It was all about sex. But suddenly she became demanding. Dahil siguro she was looking for someone to comfort her that time at ako ang nakita niya. She wanted to make our relationship official but I refused. Pero kakaiba’yung kapatid mo, iskandalosa. She would start a fight with any girl who talked to me. And your father saw it as an opportunity para matakpan’yung past scandal niya kaya kinausap niya ako.”

“I cannot believe Dad would do something like that.”

“You won’t believe what your dad is capable of doing when it comes to his daughters, Alexa. Your dad is very protective. Naiintindihan ko’yun kaya pumayag ako sa offer niya. Lia and I were to act like real lovers for six months and it would end in a pseudo-wedding. Hindi niya ako sisiputin sa araw ng kasal namin. Lia would give me a clean break and we’d part as friends.”

“Is that what happened?” she asked.

Alexander shook his head. “Hindi. Kasi sumipot siya. And that’s when it got ugly. She really wanted us to get married kaya iniwan ko siya sa altar. It was all over the news and for months,

hindi ako kinausap ng daddy mo kasi hindi niya ako mapatawad. He said I should have gone ahead with it, that he'd have found a way to break the marriage eventually pero ayoko. Kahit naman tarantadong tao ako, nirerespeto ko ang kasal."

"Buti napatawad ka ni Dad?"

"Matagal din and it somehow put a strain between his and Dad's friendship. So I thought about it and came up with a plan. I told your father that I'm not going to take something that he treasures more than Lia if he'll forgive me."

"Did it work?" she asked, smiling.

Alexander smiled back. "Like a charm."

"What did you threaten Dad with?"

"You," he answered softly. "I told him that I would make you fall for me and then break your heart," he added as her jaw dropped in surprise. "And here we are years later..." he murmured, cupping her face. "I ended up falling for you and you ended up holding my heart. 'Wag mong basagin ang puso ko, Alexa," he whispered, dipping his head to kiss her lips. "Please."

25
Confrontations

Alexa was in her office reading the latest financial document sent by the accounting department. She heard a knock and she pressed a button under her table to unlock her door. A very tired-looking Alexander walked in and she couldn't hide her smile.

"Bakit kumatok ka pa, parang di mo alam 'yung combination ng office ko, ah?" biro niya.

He stood in front of her with his arms wide open. "Nagpapacute ako sa 'yo. Effective ba?" he answered with a wink.

She laughingly got up from her chair to walk towards him. Immediately, he engulfed her in his embrace.

"I missed you," he murmured, planting a kiss on her cheek. "Naasar ako kasi ang tagal ng oras pag di kita kasama pero pag magkasama tayo ang bilis naman. I feel cheated," he complained.

She laughed. "I missed you, too. How was your day?" She felt his arms tighten around her.

"It was gloomy earlier because we were not together, but I'm fine and horny now," he answered.

She burst out laughing. "Horny ka na naman?"

"Horny and tired."

"Which do you want me to satisfy first, the Alexander who's horny or the Alexander who's tired?" she joked.

He grinned and leaned back to look at her face. "Pwedeng both?"

"At paano ko naman daw 'yun gagawin?" she asked.

He smiled playfully. "I need a full body massage. I need you to massage my body using your naked hotness."

“You are such a perv!” Alexa replied, laughing. He hugged her again. “Gusto mo ba talaga ng massage?” she asked after nearly a minute.

“Hindi na. Papagurin pa ba naman kita? Gusto ko lang ng yakap,” he said. “Umupo tayo at baka mapagod ka. Are you wearing high heels? Di ba sabi ng Ob-Gyne mo ’wag ka nang nagsusuot n’yan?” he said, guiding her to the sofa located at the other end of the room.

He pushed the center table to the left before he sat down and pulled her to sit on his lap.

“One inch lang. Di ako sanay ng walang takong. Feeling ko hindi ako sophisticated,” she said and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Love, kahit magtsinelas ka lang, sophisticated ka pa rin. Ayoko lang namang mapagod ka. Didn’t I buy eight pairs of maternity shoes for you?”

“Hindi pa naman malaki tiyan ko, so hindi ko pa kailangan n’un. When my feet are all swollen and ugly, I’ll wear those maternity shoes.”

“I will never find your feet ugly. Kahit magmukhang paa ng elepante pa ’yan.”

“Anong paa ng elepante?!” Alexa snapped.

He laughed. “Binibiro lang kita. Sabi ng doctor mo, di ba, kailangan mag-maternity shoes ka para hindi masyadong strained ’yung legs mo at mas comfortable ka? Bakit ba ang tigas ng ulo nitong baby na ’to?”

“Alex, applicable ’yun sa mga buntis na nasa second trimester na.”

“Ang tigas ng ulo,” Alexander reprimanded gently as he pinched her nose. “Itong baby ko sobrang tigas ng ulo.”

“Alex...” Alexa whined.

“Bakit?” he asked, grinning. “Gusto mong paligayahin kita?”

Magsabi ka lang, willing na willing ako. Nagkakandarapa pa,” he kidded and was surprised when Alexa nodded. “Parang mas naging hot ka n’ung nagbuntis ka, Love. Dapat pala buntis ka taun-taon,” he whispered against her neck.

She clung to him. “Hindi ko rin alam bakit parang mas mabilis akong ma-excite ngayon,” she murmured.

He gently bit her lower lip. “Kung ano man ang rason n’yan, magpapasalamat ako.”

She laughed.

“Akyat tayo sa taas,” he whispered, but Alexa suddenly started kissing him. “Huwag na pala tayong umakyat sa taas,” he murmured as he groped under her blouse to unclasp her bra. She was unbuttoning her blouse when they heard a knock. “Ignore it,” he said.

She shook her head and smiled at him. “Baka importante.” She tried to stand but he wrapped his arms around her waist.

“Love, maawa ka naman sa akin. Bitin ako,” he whined.

She laughed softly. “I’ll make you a happy man... later,” she teased, cupping his face with her hands and kissing him squarely on the lips.

“Promise?”

“Oo,” she said with a wink before straightening up and buttoning her blouse. She walked towards the door to open it and was surprised to see Lia.

“Hello, dear sister,” Lia greeted with a smirk. “Bakit ang tagal mong buksan ang pinto? Siguro may lalaki kang tinatago sa loob, ano? Sabi ko na, ’yung pagiging mahinhin mo is just for show at ang totoo malandi kang talaga. Nagkunwari ka pang demure when in fact, malantod ka.”

“Don’t worry, Lia dearest, ’yung landi ko sa katawan wala pa sa kalingkingan ng landi mo,” Alexa retorted.

Lia stared at her in surprise before laughing. “Iba ka rin, ano?”

Akala mo kung sinong santa—”

“Ano’ng kailangan mo, Lia?” Alexa cut her off.

Lia sneered as she arched her brow. “Hindi mo ba ako papapasukin? Don’t tell me dito lang tayo mag-uusap sa labas ng opisina mo? Wala bang manners na tinuturo sa *Harvard*?” she remarked, baiting Alexa.

She smiled. “I don’t know. If coming to my office unannounced is your idea of manners, siguro nga di ako naturuan n’un sa *Harvard*.”

“Love?” Alexa heard Alexander say behind her and she opened the door wide before turning her head to look at him. “Bakit ang tagal mo?”

“Love, sandali lang at nandito si Lia,” she nonchalantly announced and felt Alexander protectively pull her to his side.

“Are you okay?” he asked. She nodded.

“Well, well, well,” Lia drawled, her eyes glinting with anger. “Look who we have here,” she said maliciously. “Ang ex ko at ang kapatid ko? Pwede nating gawing movie itong eksenang ito.”

“Ano’ng kailangan mo, Lia?” Alexander asked, not bothering to hide his displeasure. “Kung wala kang kailangan, I suggest you leave.”

“Gan’un ka kadesperadong gantihan ako, Alex? Talagang’yung kapatid ko pa ang ginamit mo para saktan ako?!”

“Walang desperado, walang nanggamit at walang gumaganti,” Alexander uttered.

Lia laughed shrilly. “P*ta ka, wala kang delicadeza!” she hissed, glaring at Alexa. “Manang-mana ka sa nanay mo!” she spat.

Alexa’s temper flared. “Considering na ikaw ang anak sa labas, may lakas ng loob ka pa talagang idamay ang Mommy ko na pinakasalan ng Daddy ko?”

“Ate?” they heard Lee Ann say. The teenager was with Nickolai

and her frightened eyes darted from Lia to Alexa.

She and Alex were supposed to go shopping for baby clothes and Lee Ann had eagerly volunteered to go with them.

“Halika dito, baby,” Alexa said, her protectiveness kicking in as she moved forward and pulled Lee Ann to her side.

“Ano’ng meron dito?” Nickolai asked.

Lia glowered at him. “Nagsama-sama na ang lahat ng bwisit sa buhay ko!” she contemptuously said before giving Alexa another death glare. “I need money. Five hundred fifty thousand. I need it deposited to my bank account tomorrow before 11 AM.”

“I don’t remember na meron kang pinatabing five hundred fifty thousand sa akin, so this is a little awkward,” Alexa answered.

Nickolai laughed.

Alexander remained quiet, feeling wary.

“Kinukuha ko lang ang parte ko sa yaman ng Daddy! Ano ’to, kayong dalawa lang ng anak ng p*tang ’yan ang makikinabang?” she yelled. Lee Ann visibly trembled. “Bwisit kayong lahat. Lahat kayo nakinabang sa yaman ng Daddy tapos ako—”

“Ate, tama na po,” Lee Ann whispered, gripping Alexa’s hand tight. “Tama na po.”

“Shut up, you stupid daughter of a French whore!” Lia spat. Lee Ann’s eyes started to water. “Mana ka rin sa nanay mo, eh!” she scoffed.

Alexa decided she’d had enough. “Shut up, Lia!”

“Bakit, ano’ng gagawin mo? Kakasuhan mo ako kasi big shot lawyer ka kuno? Alam mo ikaw, Lianna, insecure ka sa akin. Siguro galit na galit ka n’ung nalaman mong sikat ako at ikaw hindi!”

“Tama na ’yan. Halika na, Love,” Alexander said and wrapped an arm around Alexa’s waist.

“You’re pitiful, Lia,” Alexa spoke. “You don’t even have the right to be called a model and you have not proven yourself

as a singer either. You're famous only in your head. I know a good psychiatrist. Gusto mo i-recommend kita? Because you've obviously lost your mind."

"Hanggang d'yan ka lang naman, sa mga insultong ibinabato mo, but you can't actually touch me!" Lia taunted with a leer.

Alexa turned to smile at Alexander. "Love, pakikuha nga ng phone ko," she said.

He walked to her table and got Alexa's phone. Alexander gave it to her.

Alexa dialed a number. She smiled at Lia before speaking over the phone. "Hello? Yes, this is Alexa Carbonel. Suspend all credit card accounts in Lia Carbonel and her mother's names. I also need their bank accounts closed ASAP and I want the cars loaned to them by this company reclaimed."

"What?!" Lia exclaimed as Alexa ended the call. "Ano'ng karapatan mong—"

"Obviously I have rights that you will never have!" she replied. "Don't try me, Lia. I can ruin your life with one phone call."

"P*tang—"

"And stop cussing in front of my baby sister at baka pati 'yang suot mo bawiin ko."

"Sino ka at ano'ng karapatan mo?!" Lia screamed.

Alexa arched her brow. "Darling, I am Lianna Alexa Carbonel and I am this company's heiress. Get out of my sight, I have spoken."

"Bwisit ka, pagbabayaran mo 'to!"

"Bayad na ako sa 'yo. Wag mong hintaying ako ang maningil."

"Paano ako uuwi kung wala akong kotse?!"

"Problema mo na 'yun," Alexa replied and closed the door in Lia's face. And then she realized that Nickolai was outside so she opened it again. "Nick, get inside," she invited before turning to

Lia. “And you, get lost.”

Lia hurled more insults at Alexa before turning on her heel.

“Talagang pina-close mo ang credit cards at bank accounts nila, Ate?” Lee Ann asked.

Alexa smiled. “Baby, kahit baliw ’yun, she’s still our sister.”

“But you said—”

“Lee, learn this from me: know how to bluff,” she answered.



Alexa was restless. She felt that Lia was in a fix but she’s of two minds about giving her sister the money. She heard her phone ring and answered it.

“Hello, Love.”

“Alex. Bakit ka napatawag?”

“Papunta ako d’yan,” Alexander said, not answering her question, and Alexa laughed. “Huwag mo naman akong tawanan, ako nga ’tong sobrang naka-miss sa ’yo ’tapos tatawanan mo pa ako. Ano pala’ng ginagawa ng baby ko?”

“Nag-iisip,” Alexa answered with a sigh.

“Tungkol saan?”

“Hindi ko alam kung bakit kailangan ni Lia ng gan’un kalaking halaga. I checked her bank accounts at wala nang laman lahat. She’s broke. Hindi ko lang alam kung saan niya ginastos.”

“May kaso siya, breach of contract. It’s all over the news. I think it’s the reason why she needs money.”

“Breach of contract? Dahil?”

“May engagements siyang hindi niya sinisipot,” Alexander answered. “Love, I don’t want you to meddle in her affairs. Magulo ang buhay ni Lia, ’wag ka nang makigulo. Ayoko ring nag-iisip ka kasi baka mamaya mapaano kayo ng baby natin.”

“Okay,” Alexa replied, smiling to herself at his concern.

“Malapit ka na dito?”

“In less than twenty minutes,” he said.

“Okay. I’ll call the guard para abangan niya ang pagdating mo. Mag-ingat ka.”

“Okay. I love you.”

“I love you, too,” Alexa answered and ended the phone call. She lay down on her bed and stared at the ceiling. She got up again and went to her desk to power her laptop on. She typed Lia’s name in the search bar. News articles about Lia began loading and she clicked on a piece dated two days ago.

Model/Actress Lia Carbonel faces breach of contract suit...

Alexa’s frown deepened as she read the news.

Ito lang ang anak ng abogado na ang tanga pagdating sa kontrata, she thought.

Lia must have signed a contract with a new agency without her father’s knowledge. Leandro Carbonel would have advised his daughter to reject the offer.

Alexa heard someone knock and she went to the door to open it.

“Hi, Love,” Alexander said. She let him carry her to the bed. “Dapat nagsasama na tayo sa bahay,” he whispered as he lay her down.

“Bakit, nagsasawa ka na bang pakiligin ako?” she teased.

He chuckled. “Kinikilig ka ba pag pinupuntahan kita?” he asked huskily. Alexa nodded. “Kung gan’un gabi-gabi kitang pupuntahan,” he whispered and started unbuttoning her pajama top as his mouth descended on hers.

Alexa’s phone rang again and she groped for it. “Teka lang, Alex.” She kissed his cheek before taking the call.

“Hello, Alexa Carbonel speaking...”

“Anak.”

“Dad?” Alexa answered excitedly. “Teka po, tawagin ko si Lee

Ann!”

“Huwag na, Anak. Tatawag na lang ako ulit para kausapin si Lee Ann.”

“Ano po 'yun, Dad? May sasabihin po ba kayo?”

“I'll be home in two weeks,” her father answered. “Let me speak to Alexander.”

26
Past

Alexa's gaze swiveled to Alexander and she handed the phone to him. He looked baffled but took the phone.

"It's Dad," she mouthed.

He nodded. "Good evening po, Atty. Carbonel." His formal greeting was answered with a sigh.

"Alexander, what have you done?" he heard Alexa's father say. "Haven't we talked about this? Bakit ang anak ko pa? You could get any woman you want. Why does it have to be my Alexa?"

"Sir..."

"I am disappointed in you, Alex. Alexa is an innocent girl, hindi niya kakayanin ang mga laro mo. She's very fragile and she won't be able to withstand the heartbreak when you finally get tired of her. Hindi si Alexa ang tipo ng babaeng iniwan, Alex, tulad ng ginagawa mo sa iba mong babae matapos mong pagsawaan. You could have just spared my daughter."

"Mahal ko po siya, Atty. Carbonel," he declared, and went to stand near the windows. "And no matter what you say, nothing will change how I feel towards Alexa."

"Alex, matanda na ako at wala akong ibang hangad kundi ang sumaya ang mga anak ko. I remember you promising me that you will not lay a hand on Alexa. I remember you saying that you'll leave her alone. And now she's pregnant. What do you expect me to feel?"

"Sir, I did not expect to fall for Alexa. I didn't plan on it. It just happened. Yes, she's pregnant with my baby and I've asked her to marry me. She said yes and I hope you'll give us your blessing."

"Alex—"

“Sir, seryoso po ako sa anak ninyo. Mahal ko po siya at balak ko po siyang pakasalan. Sana naman po ’wag n’yong pagdudahan ’yung intentions ko sa kanya. I know my youth was filled with folly but I’m a grown man now, and I’m madly in love with your daughter.”

“Mag-usap tayo when I get there, Alex. I’m too old and too tired to get angry, but I want to talk to you in person, man to man. I’ve known you since you were in diapers, Alex, at alam ko ang karakas mo pagdating sa babae. Sana totoong mahal mo ang anak ko kasi kung hindi at naglalaro ka lang, ’yun na ang pagkakataong maghihiwalay ng landas ang mga pamilya natin. I already told your father about this and he advised me to talk to you and hold my judgment until then.”

“I will wait for you to return, Sir. I—” Alexander refrained from talking when Atty. Carbonel started wheezing. “Sir? Are you okay?” He anxiously waited for the old man to reply.

“Tell Alexa that I’ll call again,” Atty. Carbonel said.

Alexander furrowed his brows in worry. *Hindi pa ba siya magaling?*

He pasted a smile on his face before turning to face Alexa.

“What happened?” she asked, looking eagerly at him and taking the phone from his hand. Putting the phone against her ear, she asked, “Hello, Dad?”

“Tatawag na lang daw siya ulit,” Alexander replied, smiling at her as he pulled her into his embrace.

“Hindi man lang kami nakapag-usap,” Alexa sadly murmured, her shoulders drooping. He tightened his hug. “Bakit siya nagmamadali? May sinabi ba siya? If he’s coming home that means he’s getting better, right?”

“Let’s hope so,” Alexander replied. “Nagmadali siya kasi bawal nga yata siyang tumawag. Narinig ko someone was telling him to end the call, could be his doctor. Alam mo naman kapag ganyang under strict medical regimen, pati ’yung activities nila monitored

din.” Lying to Alexa made him feel very uneasy.

“Ano ba naman kasing klase ’yang mga doctors niya, di ba nila naisip that he has a family who look forward to hearing from him?”

“Bayaan mo na, Love,” he murmured against her hair. “He’s coming home, right? Makakasama mo na siya.”

Alexa nodded. He pulled her towards the bed to lie down and he immediately wrapped his arms around her again. He had a feeling that Atty. Leandro Carbonel was still very sick, and Alexander feared that Alexa’s worrying would affect her well-being. “Love.”

“Yes?” she asked, tilting up her face to look at him.

“I’m always here for you,” he whispered.

She frowned. “That one-liner just took my breath away, but in a bad way,” she said. “What is it?” she inquired.

He smiled. “Wala. Gusto ko lang magpa-cute sa ’yo. Baka sakaling ngayon ay di mo na ako bibitinin,” he reasoned.

She laughed. “Sorry, kasi dalawang beses ka nang nabitin. Unintentional naman both counts, your honor,” she said

Cupping Alexa’s face, he chuckled and stared at her.

“Bakit?” she asked when he still didn’t say anything. He shook his head. “Naku, Alex, kinakabahan ako sa mga inaasta mo ngayon. Is there something you want to tell me?” she queried.

He shook his head again. “Wala naman, I just get tongue-tied looking at you.”

She arched her brow. “Are you sure it has something to do with my face and not the fact that your hand is inside my top and fondling my breast?”

“That too,” he answered as his hand travelled lower. He gave her a lopsided grin when she began to pant.

“Alex, what are you doing?” she gasped when his fingers started to move. “Alex!”

“Shh...” he whispered and continued touching her. “Gusto

lang kitang panoorin,” he murmured as Alexa’s breathing became ragged.

His movement quickened and she cried out in rapture. He swooped down and captured her mouth to swallow her scream, and she wrapped her arms around him.

“Pagod ka na?” he asked after a minute.

She nodded.

“Ang bilis naman,” he said with a pout, pulling her pajama bottoms off her. He discarded the rest of her clothes and stripped off his clothing. “Tulog ka lang,” he whispered as he sank into her. “Kung makakatulog ka,” he added with a boyish grin as he started to move.

“Gising na ako,” Alexa replied.

He gasped as she moved against him.



Lia jumped when her phone rang, uttering a curse under her breath when she saw the name that registered on the screen. She was tempted to ignore the caller but knew she’d be in bigger trouble if she did. Clearing her throat, she swiped the screen to answer the call.

“Marcus darling,” she greeted the legal representative of *Elite Women Management*, the agency that handled her assignments. “To what do I owe the pleasure? Don’t worry, I’ll pay for the damages. I’m just waiting for the money. I’m sure dadating ’yun, natagalan lang yata or baka offline ang bank.”

“Lia, we will be forced to pursue legal actions against you kung hindi ka magbabayad. It is bad enough that the reputation of my client’s company has been stained because of the ruckus you created,” Marcus Mendoza stated.

Lia gritted her teeth. “Marcus, there’s no reputation to taint. Pipitsuging agency lang naman kayo at sa kasamaang palad ay lasing lang ako kaya n’yo ako napapirma ng kontrata. I could drag this to court, too; but unlike you I have a family name to protect.

So don't push your luck, darling, dahil baka mag-init ang ulo ko at pare-pareho tayong pulutin sa kangkungan.”

“You signed the contract so it is legal.”

“And I'm a Carbonel in case you've forgotten,” Lia said.

She heard Marcus sigh. “Lia, let's not make this difficult for both parties. You signed a contract, ayaw mo 'yung project at naglabas na ng pera ang kliyente ko para sa project na 'yun. We're only after the damages and—”

“As far as I know, I signed up as a model and not as a porn actress!” she spat.

“We'll take this to court, Lia, kung hindi mo ma-settle. I'm sure your father will be unhappy if he learns that his daughter—”

“F*ck you! Do not drag my father into this at baka 'yung non-existent balls mo ay tanggalin ko at isaksak sa bunganga mo!” she yelled and ended the call at once.

She glanced at her watch as she took a puff on her cigarette. She thought Lianna would easily give in to her demands but she was wrong.

“P*ta!” she hissed. “Walang silbing kapatid!” she muttered angrily.

Lia looked around the posh condominium unit her father had bought for her. Unfortunately, the property was not under her name. She thought Lianna would really instruct the banks to block her accounts and disable all her credit cards' services. Even so, she wouldn't really mind.

Wala namang laman ang bangko ko at maxed out na ang credit cards ko. Gaga, 'yun pa talaga'ng pinanakot mo sa akin!

She was tempted to call her mother, but Lia knew she'd only get an irritating earful from Carissa. She'd be blamed for everything including her mother's break-up with her latest boyfriend.

“Happy Birthday, Lia,” she greeted herself with a bitter laugh and cursed when she felt her eyes well up with tears. “P*ta, kapag

tumatanda ka talaga..." she sobbed, wiping her tears with the back of her hand.

She heard her phone ring and frowned upon seeing the unregistered number. "Sino 'to?" she asked without preamble.

"The money's been deposited," the female voice from the other line said.

Lia looked at her phone screen before pressing the gadget to her ear once more. "P*ta, wala ako sa mood makipagbiruan sa 'yo. 'Wag mo akong pagtripan, leche! Sa lahat ng araw na pwede mo akong bwisitin ngayon pa talaga ang napili mo, hayop ka—"

"This is Alexa Carbonel," the caller said, cutting Lia off. "Before you sign any contract, I need you to send it over to my office so that I can review it for you. Tumawag nga pala si Daddy kahapon at sabi niya uuwi siya in two weeks. 'Yun lang ang sasabihin ko. Goodbye," she heard her sister say before the line got disconnected.

"Bwisit! Akala mo kung sino!" she mumbled angrily as tears ran down her face again. "Nagkukunwari pang mabait 'to! I'm sure you're gloating that my life's a mess, hoping that I'll beg for your help! Hindi ko 'yun gagawin! Never akong magmamakaawa sa 'yo! Bwisit kang babae ka!" she screamed, crying.

She picked up a vase up and hurled it to the floor. She suddenly felt tired—of her life, of the fact that she didn't know what she wanted, of the truth that she's one big mess. Her right hand tightly gripping her phone, Lia wearily walked towards her bedroom and plopped down on the bed. She scrolled through her contacts and called her closest friend.

"Lia girl! Gaga ka! Ano na naman 'tong nabasa kong article na may kaso ka daw na breach of contract?" Elena screeched in greeting.

Lia laughed softly. "Alam mo naman ako, habulin ng mga lalaki at ng iskandalo," she replied, and wiped her face with the hem of her shirt. "Manood tayo ng sine, libre kita," she said, trying

to sound cheerful. “I heard maganda daw ’yung—”

“Hindi ako pwede ngayon! May date ako! Naalala mo si Nelson? ’Yung manager ng bangko na kapitbahay namin sa Laguna? ’Ayun, nag-pay off na din ang pag-uwi uwi ko d’un at niyaya niya akong lumabas!”

“Ngayon kayo lalabas?”

“Bukas pa pero ayokong magpagod at kailangan ko ng beauty rest! At saka mas important itong lovelife ko kesa panonood natin ng sine, ano! Some other time na lang, girl! Bye!”

“Tek, Elena, birthday ko kasi ngay—” She swallowed the rest of her sentence when she realized that her friend had already ended the call. Sighing, she stood and walked towards her closet. “Ano naman kung mag-isa akong lumabas?” she said while choosing an outfit to wear. “Nasaan nga ba ’yung sapatos na bagay dito?” she asked herself as she tiptoed to pull shoeboxes from the overhead cabinet. A shoebox fell. “P*ta!” she exclaimed, slightly bending her knees to gather the items on the floor.

She saw an old photograph and she picked it up. It was a picture of two girls wearing identical clothes, identical ribbons on their hairs and identical smiles. The taller girl had her arms around the younger one who was holding a lollipop in her hand. She flipped over the picture and read the childish scrawl on the back. It was dated July 27, sixteen years ago.

Ate Lia,

Happy Birthday! I promise I will always be here for you and I promise to love you until pigs learn to fly. I love you very, very much, Ate!

Your baby sister forever,
Lianna