

1

*H*indi ko namalayan na lumampas na pala kami sa Boni Station, kung saan dapat ako bumaba. Di ko kasi mapigilang tumitig sa lalaking nakaupo. Nakapikit ang mga mata niya, pero nai-imagine ko kung gaano kaganda ang mga iyon. *Chinito*.

My gaze traveled through the rest of his face. Matangos ang kanyang ilong at cute ang lips. Unconsciously, napakagat-labi ako. Nagulat na lang ako nang napangiti siya. Sa pagtingin ko ulit sa mga mata niya'y nakadilat na siya at nakatitig sa 'kin. I can feel the blood rushing to my cheeks. Buti na lamang at paparating na kami sa susunod na station. Dali-dali akong naglakad patungong exit. I started walking away, pero hindi ko napigilang lumingon. I looked around, pero di ko na siya matagpuan.

That was the first time I saw him. Or... was it? Para kasing namumukhaan ko siya, eh.

Hay naku, Angela! Ang aga-aga, nagkakasala ka na.



Naisipan ko tuloy na dumaan muna sa simbahan para magdasal.

Kalilipat ko lang dito sa Mandaluyong a couple of months ago. The thing that drew me to this place was the fact na malapit ito sa San Felipe Neri Church, which was built way back in the 1860's. Being a history buff, I liked the idea of walking through pews and sculptures that had been here for hundreds of years. I'd always felt that I was an old soul. Kaya siguro, mayro'ng mga instances in my life that I find weird. Parang laging déjà vu.

Isa na dito 'yong unang beses na napuntahan ko ang simbahan. Nasa third year college ako n'on, and we visited the church on one of our onsite field trips. We were supposed to do perspective drawings of old buildings. Nakaupo ako sa bangkô na nakaharap sa section ng simbahan na napili kong iguhit. Looking down at the blank page, I started visualizing how this place must have looked like hundreds of years ago. Noong iginuguhit ko na ito, I felt as if I were in a trance. This place looked so familiar. With my mind taking over, I could feel my hand glide effortlessly through the page. Minutes passed. Then an hour... then two. When I was

finally out of the trance, I looked at the image I drew. I didn't know how it happened but it was not a building, but a portrait of a man that I saw in one of my dreams.

I suddenly felt that someone was looking at me, so I turned to look at a silhouette of a guy who was sitting inside the church. I strained my eyes to get a better image, pero bigla na lang itong nawala.

“Kala ko ba old buildings ang pinapagawa sa ‘tin? Eh sino ‘yan?”

The voice came from behind me. *Si AJ.*

Napalington ako, habang mabilis na itinago ang sketch pad.

“Wala,” sabi ko. “Assignment ko ‘to para bukas sa Portraits 101.”

“Sino’ng niloloko mo? Patingin nga ulit,” aniya habang pilit na kinukuha sa ‘kin ang sketch pad.

“H’wag ka sabing makulit. Tara na,” I said, then I turned to leave.

That was roughly five years ago.

Snapping out of my daydream, I found myself at that exact spot. But things had changed now. Noon, best friends lang kami ni AJ. Ngayon, we’re already thinking of getting



married.

I'd never thought I would be romantically involved with him, but the reality was that we were good for each other. Or so, 'yon ang sabi ng lahat. Bata pa kami ay magkakilala na kami ni AJ. We had a lot in common. 'Yun nga siguro ang problema. We were so much alike, that I found him so predictable.

I made my way through the rows of pews, at naupo sa may bandang likuran. I looked towards the altar at sa harapan ng mga rebulto ng mga santo, I prayed. Afterwhich, I headed towards the exit and walked to an orange-colored building fronting the church. Umakyat ako sa pangalawang palapag kung saan naroon ang apartment ko. Kahit maliit, my apartment had everything I needed. Swerte nga ako na ang kuwarto ko ay nakaharap sa simbahan at sa kalsada kung saan, mula sa bintana ng silid ko, masarap mag-people-watching.

I walked towards my bed, plopped down on my pillows, and closed my eyes. I thought I fell asleep and was dreaming.

Naroon siya't nakaupo sa bangkô, at may hawak na lapis at isang notebook. Mukha siyang abala, habang nakatingin sa mga halaman na

nakapaligid kung saan siya nakaupo. Nakasuot siya ng puting camisa de chino. Matagal-tagal na din akong nakatitig sa kanya, nang bigla siyang humarap sa akin.

“Ah. Magandang umaga, binibini,” aniya.

Nabigla ako nang kausapin niya, kaya tumango na lamang ako.

“Kung p’wede sana kitang gambalain ng ilang saglit, may itatanong sana ako sa iyo,” dagdag pa niya.

Pinilit kong magsalita, ngunit walang tinig na lumalabas sa aking mga labi, kaya napatango na lang muli ako.

“Maaari mo ba akong tulungan?”

Suddenly, I felt my legs moving. Before I knew it, I was walking towards the bench and sitting down beside him.

Even before I had the chance to speak, ngumiti siya at sinabing, “Kanina pa kasi ako nandito, kailangan kong iguhit ang mga dahon na ‘to para sa isang proyekto. Sa kasamaang palad, simpleng iskolar lang ako. Ang alam ko lang ay magbasa ng libro, hindi ako marunong sa pagguhit.”

Napangiti ako. This was something I definitely knew how to do. Kinuha ko ang



notebook at lapis at nagsimulang mag-drawing. Ilang minuto din 'yon. During this time, I could feel him looking at me. N'ong matapos ako ay ibinalik ko sa kanya ang kanyang mga gamit.

“Salamat,” aniya. “Ako si Caloy.”

Daglian siyang napahawak sa 'king mga daliri nang iniaabot ko ang kanyang notebook. Namumuo ang mga salita sa aking mga labi, pero n'ong mga sandaling iyon, parang umiikot ang buong kapaligiran. I suddenly heard music. Sweet, romantic music, as our fingers touched.

I'll say... Will you marry me?

I swear that I will mean it...

Bigla kong idinilat ang aking mga mata.

The song kept on playing...

Ooh... I'll say... Will you marry me?

I swear that I will mean it...

I came to my senses and realized that it was my phone ringing.

Pinalitan ni AJ ang ringtone ko when I finally said that I would marry him. *Sobrang cheesy.*

Hinayaan ko na lang iyong mag-ring. I wasn't really in the mood to talk to him right now. I thought about my dream and what it meant. I wanted to go back to sleep, but before

I could close my eyes, narinig ko ang sunod-sunod na text notifications.

Bumangon ako at hinanap kung saan nailapag ang bag ko kanina. I fumbled for my phone. May tatlong messages ako galing kay AJ.

Wer ka na, Gelliboo?

Nakauwi na ba'ng angel ko?

Babes, natutulog ka na ba?

To which I replied:

Opo. Natutulog na po ako.

I had hoped that it would be the end of the conversation, but he texted another one.

Hehe. So tulog ka ba talaga, o iniawasan mo lang akong kausapin kasi may kasalanan ka?

Nabigla ako. Sometimes, he could really be so perceptive. Mayamaya pa'y nagri-ring na ulit ang phone ko. I said to myself, *I might as well answer it.*

“So bakit ‘di mo kaagad sinagot phone mo?” aniya.

“Wala man lang bang hello?” sagot ko.

“Hmm... Hello, Gelliboo. So, bakit mo ‘ko iniawasan?”

“Iniiwasan agad-agad? Di ba pwedeng nakatulog lang?” sabi ko. I was trying to sound sweet and a little coy.



“Hmm... Nagpapa-cute ka. Now I know may kasalanan ka talaga. So, out with it.”

“Okay,” sagot ko. “If you must know, mayro’n akong napanaginipang ibang lalaki, and I’m thinking of spending the rest of my life with him.”

There, I said it. I was hoping he would take it as a joke. A couple of seconds passed before he said, “Malamang. Anyway, I’m not that bothered kasi kung sino man siya, he can never have you.” Then in a very tender voice he added, “Sa ‘kin ka kaya naka-assign.”

With this we both laughed. It was sort of a joke between us. These words brought us back to when we first met.

Grade 1 ako n’on when I first met AJ. It was also the time when I felt that my life was falling apart. My parents had split up, set up their own new families, and sent me to live with my grandparents.

First day of school ko n’on, medyo awkward kasi wala pa akong uniform. My lola sent me to school wearing a very frilly baby pink dress. My curly hair was secured with a pink hair band. Para akong pupunta sa birthday party. I remembered clutching Teacher May’s hand

while trying somehow to hide behind her skirt. Finally, she guided me to my seat and left. Inilapag ko sa desk ang dala-dalang *Barbie* na lunchbox.

Then from the corner of my eye, I saw this fat kid approaching me. N'ong nasa harapan na siya ng desk ko, sabi niya, "*Bata, ako si AJ. Ako ang pinakasalbahe dito sa school.*"

He looked so menacing. Nakakatakot siya. Iniisip kong baka agawin niya 'yong lunchbox ko. I was in a panic, thinking that I was being bullied on my first day of school, and I really didn't know what to do. Then all of a sudden, he smiled. Mayroon siya n'ong iniabot na box ng *Toblerone* sa 'kin.

"*Mukha ka kasing angel, eh. So malamang, sa akin ka naka-assign,*" sabi niya.

He had this big grin on his face. Ang sarap niyang sapakin. So all this time, he was just pretending to be mean, at mukhang dumidiga pa! Ewan ko kung sobrang relieved lang ako, or if all the feelings I had kept hidden inside started pouring in. Suddenly, I heard myself screaming and I began to cry. He had to spend some time at the principal's office because of that. Pero, from that time on, he was always by

my side, all through elementary, then college.

Napangiti tuloy ako nang maalala ang nakaraan.

“You’re smiling. I can tell,” AJ said over the phone.

“Well, I can always count on you to make me smile,” sagot ko. Then I added, “Ngayon ko lang na-realize na bata pa lang tayo, mahilig ka na sa mga cheesy na pick-up lines.”

“Malamang, that’s why you fell in love with me in the first place,” he said.

To which I answered, “Malamang.”

I’d never really told him I loved him, although at times I felt like saying it. There was always something holding me back.

Not long after we had that onsite field trip at San Felipe, five years ago, I went through the lowest point of my life. My Lola had just become totally senile after being emotionally, and mentally unstable for a couple of years ever since my grandfather passed away. The rest of the family considered me a burden, and I felt it. So I packed whatever belongings I had, and left. Sa panahong iyon, si AJ lang ang hindi tumigil sa paghahanap sa akin.

He found me two years ago. I had just

started working at a call center, and was living in a dormitory in Makati. The day that he saw me again, kauuwi ko lang galing shift. Nakita ko siya sa waiting area, and before I knew it, he was suddenly in front of me. Our eyes met, at nagmadali siyang yakapin ako. I felt a rush of all these emotions coming from him.

I was still on the phone with AJ, pero pareho lang kaming nanahimik. We were both probably thinking of that day. He was saying something but I wasn't really paying attention. I shook myself, and held the phone closer to my ear.

"Anong sabi mo ulit, babes? Sorry," I said, trying hard to shake myself back to the present.

"I asked if I could come over tonight. Off mo, di ba?" aniya. "May surprise ako sa 'yo, eh,' dagdag pa niya.

"Do I have to cook?" tanong ko.

"No. I'll come over at eight and bring some fried chicken and mashed potatoes perhaps," he said.

I thought about it and said, "Make it nine na lang and bring pizza."

"Okay. So I'll come over at nine. Dadalhan ko ng pizza ang angel ko." He paused and sweetly said, "I love you so much."



Hearing this, I wanted to say that I loved him, too. Then, my thoughts went back to the image in my dream. I closed my eyes and whispered, “I love you.”

2

*P*retty ka sana eh, kung 'di lang magulo ang buhok mo.

I was looking at my reflection in the full-length mirror. Nakasuot ako ng kulay teal na mini dress and flat, strappy sandals. I kept on brushing my hair, trying desperately to keep the curls in place.

“Umayos ka naman, please!” I said in exasperation.

Ilang minuto na lang, darating na si AJ. I wanted to look presentable for him, at least. My gaze went to the image in front of me. A lot of people would say that I look very feminine. I had a small face, framed with long, curly hair. Long lashes lined my eyes, that were slightly slanted like that of a cat's. The short dress complimented my petite stature, and its color highlighted the fairness of my skin. I was still in front of the mirror, when my phone rang. It was AJ, calling to say na nasa tapat na siya ng building. Reluctantly, ibinaba ko na ang

hairbrush, and rushed to the door to meet him. When I saw him, he was with two men, and they were carrying, what looked like a big box covered with a tarp.

“Tabi ka muna, Boo,” he said.

I went inside the apartment para makadaan sila. They set the box against the wall near the window. He closed the door when they left, and then he looked at me with a big grin on his face. I looked at him, and I thought, ang layo ng hitsura niya kumpara n’ong una kaming nagkakilala.

The fat kid was gone, and in his place was a man with broad shoulders. His chest and arms were buffed. He was just wearing his undershirt, tucked in his jeans. Hinubad na niya kanina ang suot na polo shirt when he was busy lifting his present for me, and was using it as a towel to wipe the sweat from his neck and shoulders. His light brown hair was a little darker now, since it was damp. Hindi siya gaanong matangkad. Probably around 5’10”, more or less. His image clearly showed his heritage, which was half-American and half-Filipino. I stared at his pleasant face. His thick eyebrows and deep-set eyes never came off as

overpowering, since his brown eyes always looked so gentle. He walked towards me and gave me a playful kiss on the cheek.

“Tara, buksan na natin ang surprise ko sa ‘yo,” aniya.

Sobrang saya ko when he lifted the tarp. Underneath it was the antique desk that I saw n’ung naglibot kami sa Binondo, a couple of weeks ago.

It was, what you can call, a manly desk, kasi sobrang laki niya. It was made of kamagong, with a couple of brass hinges and handles. It had intricate carvings of Chinese monks in their robes, at iba’t iba pang sceneries with birds and foliage all around. I wanted this desk the moment I saw it. That was the time when I went around the city with AJ. Avid collector kasi siya ng mga vintage toys at may nakapagsabi sa kanya na mayroong antique shop sa may likod ng Binondo Church.

He was rummaging through the old toys sa counter at sa likod ng mga estante, nakita ko ang desk. It was as if I was drawn to it. Nagtungo ako doon, to take a closer look. I ran my fingers through the old wood. The top cover was rolled up and there were several

drawers and little shelves. Napatingin ako sa drawer na nasa lower right hand corner ng desk. Instinctively, I opened it. Pinasok ko and aking kamay, touching the corners and edges, na parang may hinahanap. My fingers felt a small carving in one corner of the drawer. Parang initials. I bent over to see if I can decipher what it was.

J.C.D.

Nabigla ako when I heard someone say,

“Hindi po ‘yan for sale.”

I looked back at nakita ko ‘yong owner ng store, with AJ following closely behind.

“I’m sorry.” I said. “Di ko po sinasadyang pakialaman, ‘kala ko kasi for sale.”

As I walked away, I heard AJ talking to the owner. Nag-uusap siguro sila tungkol sa presyo ng mga pinamiling toys.

Hindi ko inakalang napansin ni AJ how much I wanted the desk. Now that it was in the apartment, sobrang saya ko, and I was so grateful. I rushed towards AJ, and put my arms around him, hugging him tight.

I felt him hugging me back, when he said, “Dahil ganyan kahigpit ang yakap mo sa akin, sobrang worth it ang pagbuhat ko d’yan. Ang

bigat kaya niyan.”

I lifted my head so I can give him a little kiss on the lips. Just a little smack. He was staring at my face so intently, and at that point, alam kong balak niya akong halikan.

I pulled away and said, “Since nakikita kong wala kang dalang pizza, but you brought me something better, I’ll cook for you.” I smiled and asked him, “Seafood pasta?”

I heard him let out a sigh, then he just nodded.

Habang naglalakad ako papuntang kusina to prepare his meal, I felt guilty. For some reason, everytime AJ would try to be intimate with me, I’d pull away. I knew in my mind that I loved him, but something was still holding me back. In the kitchen, I boiled some water to cook the pasta in. While waiting for it to boil, I started peeling the shrimps. As I was removing the shells, I was imagining na kinukurot ko rin ang aking sarili, at sinasabing, *Umayos ka nga, Angela.*

Right then, I resolved to make it up with AJ. I will love him the way he should be loved. I went back to what I was doing. I heated some olive oil in a skillet, added the shrimps,

herbs and cheese, at syempre ang paborito ni AJ, na taba ng talangka. Sinilip ko siya, na noon ay nakaupo lang sa couch. Napansin ko na nakasimangot pa rin siya. Naghanap ako sa fridge kung ano pang mairadagdag ko. May nakita akong pan de lemon kaso medyo matigas na. I decided to just hollow it out, then nagluto ako ng instant mushroom soup, put it in the hollowed bread bowl, topped with cheese, at ininit sa toaster oven. I set it all in small table near the couch.

“Ayan, for my special fiancé. I prepared seafood linguine with cream of mushroom soup in a bread bowl,” I said cheerfully.

I watched AJ’s face as it began to light up as he smiled. I sat down and tried my best to serve him. Diyan mo naman maaasahan si AJ, eh. Kahit nagtatampo, malakas pa rin siyang kumain. We cleared the plates when we finished eating. Nagko-coffee na kami sa couch, when he decided to talk to me about our future.

“Kailangan na nating ayusin ang date ng kasal,” he said.

He reached for my hand and started playing with the engagement ring he had given me. It was a beautiful ring. The diamond was emerald

cut and set in white gold, at mayroon pang tig-tatlong maliliit na round diamonds, arranged to look like a heart on each side. Inside the band was the inscription, *To the Angel assigned to me forever... Love, AJ*

“How about before Christmas?” he asked.

Tiningnan ko siya, he was looking straight into my eyes, nakikita kong he was almost begging me to say yes.

I answered, “A few days na lang, October na. Do you think we still have time to prepare?”

He took both of my hands in his and said, “Oo naman. We can get a wedding coordinator, and let’s just make it a simple wedding.”

Inilapit niya ang mga kamay ko sa kanyang labi, and kissed it. Then he looked at me tenderly and added, “Gusto ko lang na maging official, that you’ll be mine forever.”

I tried to find the words to match what he just said, pero wala akong maisip. Kaya, I just moved my face closer to his, and kissed him on the lips. He was quick to respond. Soon enough, his hand was at the back of my neck as he pulled me closer. This time, I let him kiss me.

He was kissing me slowly at first, then I can feel his kisses becoming more urgent. I felt his

tongue trying to part my lips, and I did what he wanted.

Nakayakap pa rin siya nang mahigpit, when I heard the church bells ring. I suddenly pulled away and said, “It’s getting late.”

AJ reluctantly loosened his embrace. He kissed me on the cheek as he was carressing my face.

“Yeah. I probably should get going,” aniya.

We both stood up from the couch. In the open doorway, he held me again. Nakatitig siya sa ‘king mga mata.

“Mahal na mahal kita.”

I raised my head so I could kiss him goodnight. When our lips finally parted, I said, “Same here.”

It took me another day to finally concentrate on the desk and explored its contents.

Pinanindigan ko kasi ang pagiging best girlfriend, kaya tinulungan ko muna si AJ sa mga tasks niya sa advertising agency, where he was working as an executive. Naayos ko na ang kanyang itinerary for an upcoming business trip to Singapore. Now, I sat down in front of the desk, at binuksan ang top cover niyon. Kakaibang excitement ang naramdaman ko as

I ran my hand through the wooden panels and brass accessories. I was deliberately avoiding the drawer, dahil medyo natatakot ako kung ano ang aking madidiskubre ko. When I couldn't bear the suspense anymore, I decided to just get it over with, and open the damn thing. Napalakas yata ang paghatak ko, so the drawer suddenly slipped my hand and fell to the floor. I picked it up and noticed that the inside panel was loose. I looked closer and saw that there was still something inside. Nagmadali akong tanggalin ang manipis na kahoy and saw that inside it was a little compartment. Doon ay nakita ko ang isang kulay brown na notebook. It was weathered with age, but I could see that it was still intact. I think it's a diary of some sort, and though faded, I could still see the initials engraved in gold.

JCD

Kapareho ng initials na nasa drawer.

I was about to open it, pero natigilan ako nang may mapansing isang kapisirang papel na naroon pa sa compartment. Pinulot ko iyon at nakitang isa iyong larawan. Like the diary, it was also weathered with age. It was a black and white portrait of a man. Although, may bakas

ng kalumaan ang litrato, his face looked so fresh and attractive. He had beautiful, chinky eyes. It was a photograph of Caloy. Dali-dali kong binuksan ang diary, and there, written in a very neat handwriting was a name and a date.

Juan Carlos Dychangco

1895

I read the words over and over. Sinigurado kong I was reading the date correctly. Imposibleng 1895 iyong date dahil nakita ko pa lang siya sa MRT noong isang araw.

How can a person I've just seen exist in the past?

I decided to read the last entry in the diary, it was dated September 25. That was the other day, kung iuugnay mo ito sa ating panahon.

Ika-5 ng Setyembre

Nagsimula ang araw na hindi maayos ang aking pakiramdam. Dahil dito'y napagpasiyahan ni Manang Soledad na bawalan akong umalis. Pinilit niya akong dumito lamang sa aking silid. May ilang sandali akong nakaidlip, at sa aking panaginip ay nakita ko siya.

Hindi ko alam kung nasaan ako n'on. Ang napansin ko lamang ay napakabilis ng mga kilos

at galaw sa aking paligid. Hindi ko maalis ang aking pagkatitig sa kanyang maamong mukha, na mistulang isang anghel. Pinagmasdan ko ang kanyang magagandang mata, at napatingin sa kanyang mga labi. Bakas ang pagkabigla sa kanyang mukha nang mapansin niyang ako'y nakatingin, kaya nagmadali siyang umalis. Tumayo ako para sundan siya, ngunit dumagsa ang maraming tao, at sa gitna ng kaguluhan, ay bigla akong nagising.

Naisip ko na ilang taon na rin 'yon noong una ko siyang makita. Subalit bakit tumitindi ang nararamdaman ko sa kanya, gayong hindi ko naman siya kilala?

Bahagya ko lang siya n'ong nasulyapan sa simbahan, ngunit tila hindi siya mawala sa aking ulirat. Lalo pang tumindi ang aking pagnanasang makilala siya, noong dumito ako sa simbahan upang maging iskolar ni Padre Leon. Walang araw na dumaan na hindi ko ginustong makasalubong siya.

Sa aking pagkagising ay hindi na ako mapakali. Ilang minuto din akong palakad-lakad lamang sa aking silid. Muli kong naramdaman ang pagkahina ng aking katawan, dahil na rin siguro sa namumuong lagnat.

Nahiga ako at nagbakasakaling sa aking pagtulog muli ay mapanaginipan siya.

Napahinto ako sa pagbasa. Alam kong tinutukoy niya ang araw na nakita ko siya sa MRT at malamang pati na ang kaganapan sa San Felipe ilang taon nang nakalilipas. I wanted to know more about him.

Ang sumunod na pangyayari ay tila higit pa sa isang panaginip.

Nakaupo ako sa may simbahan at abala sa pagguhit ng mga dahon. Nang makita ko siya ay mabilis akong nag-isip ng paraan upang palapitin siya sa akin. Ginawa kong dahilan ang paghingi ng tulong sa pagguhit.

Nagkaroon ako ng pagkakataong pagmasdan siya nang malapitan habang siya'y nakaupo sa aking tabi. Sa pag-abot niya sa akin ng aking kuwaderno ay daglian kong nahawakan ang kanyang kamay. Tila tumigil ang pag-ikot ng mundo n'ong mga sandaling 'yon. Nais kong patagalin ang oras na kami'y magkasama, ngunit bigla siyang naglaho kasabay ng aking paggising.

Ibinaba ko ang diary. Ang mga tanong na ninais kong masagutan ay lalo pang nadagdagan. *How can this be possible? Why do I have the same dream as someone who existed in the past?*

My curiosity urged me to read the remaining lines of the diary entry.

Alam kong panaginip lamang iyon at sa aking pakiwari'y doon ko lamang siya makikita. Namuo ang aking pagdududa kung talagang totoo siyang nilalang, o bunga lamang ng aking imahinasyon. Kung mamarapatin ng Panginoon, ay nais ko siyang makapiling. Sana ay naririto lamang siya.

I kept hearing this last line over and over in my head.

Sana ay naririto lamang siya....

Just then the church bells began to ring.

Ding... dong.... Sana ay naririto lamang siya....

Bigla akong nahilo. Everything started spinning. Sumasabay ang pag-ikot ng paligid sa bawat pagtunog ng kampana. Ipinikit ko ang mga mata ko upang mawala ang pagkahilo. Mga ilang saglit din iyon, at sa pagdilal ko, nagulat ako sa aking nakita.

I was no longer in my apartment.

Bigla akong nataranta dahil hindi ko alam kung saan ako naroroon. Pinagmasdan ko ang aking paligid. I was sitting on wooden floors, at napansing maalikabok saan man ako tumingin. Marahil ay nasa isang bodega ako, dahil may nakikita akong mga lumang baul at aparador sa isang gilid ng silid. Maliban doon, patong-patong din ang mga sakong nakapaligid. I stood up, and had to steady myself n'ong mapansing nasa ikalawang palapag ako. Muntikan na akong mahulog dahil wala man lang kahit dingding na nagsisilbing harang pababa sa unang palapag. Wala ring matatawag na hagdan, kundi ang makitid na akyatang gawa lamang sa manipis na kahoy. This place reminded me of the old houses in Pampanga. Parang iyong mga tinatawag na bahay na bato. But by the looks of it, I was not in the main house, but a section that they'd use for storing grain and their horses. *Parang kamalig.* It was a little dark, but there was some light coming into the room from the slightly opened windows, na gawa sa kahoy at capiz. Naglakad ako papunta sa mga bintana, at sa pagbukas ko niyo'y tumambad sa aking paningin ang simbahan ng San

Felipe. Maliban sa anyo ng silid, pagdungaw ko sa bintana ay napansin kong marami rin ang nagbago. Wala akong makitang power or telephone lines na nakasabit at buhol-buhol sa mga poste. Everything seemed more quiet, dahil wala ang mga tricycle at jeep na biyaheng Kalentong, na karaniwan ay dumadaan dito. It was only the church that looked familiar, although, it also looked very different. I looked at the people below. They were dressed differently, they looked vintage. Marami sa kanila ay palabas ng simbahan, ang iba naman ay nakasakay sa mga ilang kalesang dumaraan. Pinagtuunan ko ng pansin ang mga mukha ng dumaraang tao.

I scanned their faces, hoping to find someone in the crowd. My heart stopped when I saw him.

Kausap niya n'on ang isang tindero ng diyaryo, at tila bigla niyang naramdaman ang aking pagkatitig. He suddenly raised his head to where I was, and then he was looking straight at me. I was breathing heavily as my heart started beating fast. Sa sobrang lakas ng pintig ng puso ko, parang sasabog na ito.

“Caloy,” I whispered his name.



He then raised his hand and waved at me. Itinaas ko ang aking kamay to wave back. Nakita ko na noo'y papalakad na siya para puntahan ako. I was still waving, and as I was doing so, a ray of sunlight hit the ring that I was wearing. The diamond glittered, and I suddenly felt dazed and confused. Bigla kong naalala si AJ.

Tila muling umikot ang aking paligid. Everything around me was spinning, as I tried desperately to find him again. Pero hindi ko makayanan ang pagkahilo at ang patuloy na pag-ikot ng aking paningin.

I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, I was looking out of my second floor window. Nakita ko ang mga na buhol-buhol kable ng kuryente, at pati na ang barberya sa tabi ng simbahan. Tumambad na rin sa 'king pandining ang ingay ng mga sasakyan.

Everything was the way it was.