

PROLOGUE

He could hear a siren screaming from afar.

Nanunuot ang mainit na usok sa kanyang ilong. Sinubukan niyang igalaw ang mga binti pero may nakadagan doon. Iminulat niya ang mga mata pero wala siyang makita maliban sa lumalangoy na mga kulay at sa gumagapang na kadiliman sa gilid ng kanyang paningin.

Muli siyang pumikit.

What the hell happened? Where was—

Parang may pumupukpok na martilyo sa likod ng kanyang sentido.

Christ, it hurts.

Pinilit niyang gumalaw kahit tila dinudurog ang bawat buto niya sa bawat paghinga.

He had to go somewhere. It was important.

He had to call someone. He had to reach her. He had to—

May sumigaw sa labas pero parang galing iyon sa likod ng isang makapal na kumpol ng bulak.

Shattered Memories - Dior Madrigal

Sinubukan niya ulit dumilat, pero tila nahuhulog siya.

Palayo nang palayo ang liwanag. Sinubukan niyang abutin ang maninipis na hibla ng ilaw, pero sumayaw ang mga iyon palayo sa kanya.

Ikinuyom niya ang palad, nagngangalit ang mga ngipin.

Blood. There was so much blood on his hands.

No. He didn't want that. He couldn't be like that. He would never be like that.

Blood, coating his hands.

No. No.

He didn't want to see it. Didn't want to remember it.

May gusto siyang makita. Pero sino? *Sino?* Hindi siya sigurado.

“Sir, ilalabas po namin kayo,” sigaw ng kung sino.

Tuluyan siyang nahulog sa kadiliman.

1

Stop! Stop!

Ayaw nitong tumigil. Suminghal ito sa kanyang tainga para patigilin siya. Naramdaman niya ang isang nagliliyab na sakit sa kanyang braso at sumigaw siya. Nasa buong katawan niya ang mga kamay nito, sa buhok niya, sa mukha, dinidiinan ang nabaling buto sa kanyang braso. Pilit niya itong nilabanan.

“Inigo? Inigo?”

May tumatawag sa kanya. Pamilyar ang boses. Madalas niya iyong naririnig nitong mga nakaraang araw. Maging sa gabi. Hindi niya sigurado.

The nightmare wouldn't end.

Nanatiling umiihip ang mainit na paghinga sa kanyang tainga.

God, he hated him. He hated him.

Blood. God, there was so much blood. On his face, in his mouth, on his hands.

Someone laughed. Feminine, throaty, and like a blast of light, it tore through the thick darkness

surrounding him.

Bumilis ang tibok ng kanyang puso, at umigkas ang ulo niya sa pinanggalingan niyon. Dahan-dahan, pumusyaw ang dilim, nawala ang sakit. Nawala ang bigat na nakadagan sa kanya. Pumusyaw ang dugo at tuluyang nawala.

Jerk, someone said. And he couldn't help but smile.

“Inigo? Inigo?”

Iminulat niya ang mga mata, mabibigat ang mga talukap.

Blurry colors surrounded him. Cream walls, soft lights, a worried face.

“Oh, God! You're awake!”

Pumikit ulit siya at maingat na huminga. Muli niyang iminulat ang mga mata at unti-unting tumingkad ang malalabong kulay.

Natalie's watery brown eyes stood out from her pale face. Her lips trembled, and tears slid down her cheeks.

“Thank God, you're awake.”

Lumibot ang paningin niya sa paligid.

“The doctor’s coming. Your mom, too. She’s just taking a call. Oh, God, you’re awake. You’re awake...”

Rinig niya ang pag-iyak nito, ang paulit-ulit na pagtawag sa kanyang pangalan. Gusto niyang sabihing tumahan ito, pero mabilis ang pagtibok ng kanyang puso. Patuloy ang pagsuyod ng mga mata niya sa paligid.

“Water? You want water? Here.” Inalalayan siya nito para makainom mula sa straw na nasa baso pero ipinilig ni Inigo ang ulo.

Pinilit niyang umupo pero pinigilan siya nito.

“Don’t move, you’re not—”

“I’m fine.”

Boses ba niya iyon? It felt like someone had poured scorching sand down his throat.

“Inigo—”

Bumukas ang pinto at humahangos na pumasok ang kanyang ina.

“Oh, God, Inigo!”

In a flutter of silk and the scent of *Chanel Number Five*, Mariella Azcona crumbled on the chair beside his bed. “You’re awake! Thank God, you’re awake!”

Nalusaw ito sa mga luha.

Natuon ang mga mata niya sa pinto.

“Inigo? What’s wrong? Does it hurt anywhere?”

Sinakop ng palad ni Natalie ang kanyang pisngi, pilit ibinabalik ang tingin niya rito.

Namumula ang mga mata nitong puno ng luha. She was beautiful even in her distress. Wala nang bago roon. Natalie would look beautiful even in dirty rags.

Umiling siya. “I’m okay.”

Inabot niya ang tubig mula kay Natalie at pinilit uminom. The water soothed his parched throat.

“What happened?” Parang kinarit pa rin ang kanyang lalamunan sa sakit. “Why am I here?”

“You don’t remember?” Maingat na pinunasan ng ina ang luha para hindi magambala ang perpekto nitong makeup. “You were in a car accident.”

Bumukas muli ang pinto at matalas na umangat ang mukha niya roon. Pumasok ang isang doktor at nurse.

“Check his vitals,” utos ng doktor.

Sumara ang pinto pero nanatili ang mga mata niya roon.

He could feel his heart hammering inside his chest, could feel a ball of anxiety hardening in his gut.

The doctor and the nurse fussed around him, checking the beeping monitors and the IV tree beside his bed. But his gaze remained fixed on the door.

“Everything’s stable. We weren’t expecting you to be conscious until tonight. Mahilig ka talagang manggulat. It’s good to have you back though, Inigo.”

Pinilit niyang iiwas ang titig sa pinto at ibinaling iyon sa kaibigang doktor. Malapad ang ngiti ni Carlo sa kanya.

“What happened?” Magaspang pa rin ang kanyang boses.

“He doesn’t remember about the accident, Doc,” untag ng kanyang ina.

Tumango ang kaibigan sa nurse at tinanggap ang clip board na ibinigay nito.

“That’s not uncommon. Kagigising lang niya at medyo disoriented pa ang utak niya.”

“I’m here. Why don’t you explain it directly to

me?”

Halos mapunit sa isang malaking ngiti ang pisngi ni Carlo. “See? There’s our Inigo! Still all tough and grumpy.”

In another time and place, he would have made an equally trite response. But he was too disoriented, too edgy to find humor in the situation. “Give it to me straight, Carlo. What happened to me?”

Dahil si Carlo ay si Carlo, nakangiti nitong tinanggap ang init ng kanyang ulo at umupo sa gilid ng kanyang kama.

“What do you remember?”

Kailangan niyang tumitig nang madiin sa puting kubrekama bago niya masagot ang tanong. Wala sa sariling napatitig siyang muli sa pinto, ipinilig ang ulo at sandaling pumikit.

“A meeting. A special Board of Directors’ meeting to approve the acquisition of the total issued and outstanding capital stock of *Metal Dredging, Inc.* and its nominees. We’ve already finalized the deal. The remaining capital stock of *Metal Dredging, Inc.* should be offered to *Centralport 700, Inc.* and to the other subs—”

“Okay, that’s pretty detailed,” Carlo interrupted. “That’s good. But that’s three months ago, Inigo. Nabasa ko ’yan sa *Businessweek* n’ung January. What else do you remember?” Inilapit nito ang mukha sa kanya. “You remember me, don’t you?”

Itinulak niya ito sa balikat at tumawa ito.

“Ano’ng ibig sabihin n’un, Doc? Is it serious?” Mukhang mapupunit ng ina ang panyo nito sa paglamukos nito roon.

“Let’s hope not. Your last PET scan showed reduced swelling in your brain as expected. The medically induced coma helped you heal quite nicely. You’ll undergo another scan tonight. How are you feeling?”

Tiim-bagang siyang napatitig ulit sa pinto. Nanatili iyong sarado. The ball of anxiety remained heavy in his gut.

“Fine,” pakli niya.

“You were in a car accident about two weeks ago. Ulo mo ang pinakanatamaan. You had a traumatic brain injury and we had to induce a coma to protect other parts of your brain. You have a hell of a lot of bruises, lacerations and a few bone fractures but they’re all healing nicely. You’ve been out for eleven

days.” Iwinagayway nito sa kanyang mukha ang tatlong daliri nito. “How many fingers am I holding up?”

Impatience frayed his nerves, but he only replied dryly, “Three.”

Tumawa ulit ito. “Okay, hindi naapektuhan ang sense of humor mo. That’s good. You obviously remember us. But your last memory is from three months ago. Naalala mo ang birthday party ni Pete n’ung isang buwan?”

Umiling si Inigo, matamang nakatitig sa kaibigang doktor.

“*Litmus Club*? No?”

Malinaw sa kanya ang *Litmus Club*. Isa iyong exclusive bar and restaurant na itinayo niya limang taon na ang nakakaraan. Madalas sila doon ng mga kaibigan pero hindi niya maalala ang tinutukoy ni Carlo na birthday ni Pete.

Parang usok na umiikot sa kanyang isipan ang ilang mga larawan, mga mukha, ang tawanan, isang matingkad na pulang kulay. Pilit niyang inabot ang mga iyon pero dumulas ang mga imahe sa kanyang pagkakahawak.

Tiim-bagang siyang umiling.

“But you remember Pete, of course?”

It was a medical exam, he reminded himself, and tamped down his impatience. “High school classmate, owner of *Clique*. He just broke up with Jillian.”

“That was four months ago. You don’t remember that he proposed to her last month?”

Muli, tiim-bagang siyang umiling.

“Don’t get frustrated. It’s okay. Kagigising mo lang, disoriented ka pa. So you don’t remember Ol—”

“Doc! Siguro dapat pagpahingahin na muna natin si Inigo.” Tumayo ang ina at ngumiti sa doktor.

Irritation swelled in his gut. “I don’t need to rest. Kagigising ko lang.”

“No, your mom’s right. ’Wag nating biglain ang utak mo. We’ll run more tests tonight. Don’t stress yourself, okay?”

“I said I’m okay. What happened. Where’s Hugo?”

Sandaling natahimik ang mga kasama at bumugso ang kaba sa kanyang mga ugat. Sumaksak sa kanyang isipan ang imahe ng matandang lalaki. Matangkad, matipuno sa pormal na Barong Tagalog

na uniporme nito.

Car accident, they said.

Isa pang imahe ang matingkad na dumingas sa kanyang isipan, ang duguang imahe ng matandang nakahiga sa mga bubog mula sa basag na salamin.

“Where the hell is he?”

Sinubukan niyang tumayo pero maagap siyang hinawakan ni Carlo sa balikat.

“Calm down. He’s okay but he’s not here. He’s recuperating at home. Hindi kasing-lala ng injuries mo ang mga injuries niya. We’ll call him to let him know you’ve woken up.”

Tinapakan ni Inigo ang pagnanais na itulak ang kaibigan at tumakbo sa pinto. Si Hugo. Okay lang ito. The man had been more like a father than a bodyguard or chauffeur to him.

Father.

Umikot ang kanyang sikmura.

Lumangoy ang ilang malalabong imahe sa kanyang isipan. Bitterness and fury coiled in his gut and he didn’t know why.

His father was a rapist and a murderer. Hindi

iyon nabura sa alaala niya. Sapat iyon para kamuhian ito ng kahit na sinong anak nito. But there was something else.

Napatiim-bagang siya at binalingan ulit ang doktor.

“Ba’t di ko maalala ang mga nangyari nitong nakaraang tatlong buwan? Saan ako naaksidente? Bakit? Sino’ng nagpapatakbo sa opisina? I need Francis to report tomorrow morning.”

“But, Inigo—”

“I’m okay, Mom.” Wala sa sariling lumibot ulit ang paningin niya sa paligid. Tumigil muli ang mga mata niya sa nakasarang pinto at kumalat ang pait sa kanyang bibig. “I need my laptop and phone. Dala ko ba sila n’ung naaksidente ako? Nasira ba sila?”

“No, you didn’t have your laptop with you. But you had your phone with you during the accident. Fortunately, it wasn’t damaged.” Binalingan ni Carlo ang kanyang ina. “Auntie, you have his things, yes?”

“But, Doc—”

“It’s okay. His scans were good. And we both know we can’t stop Inigo from doing what he wants.” Matabang na ngumiti ang kaibigan. “You were in an

accident more than two weeks ago. Nabangga kayo ng isa pang sasakyan. Sabi ni Hugo, nag-overtake 'yung sasakyan sa likod ng bus na kasalubong ninyo. Tumakas 'yung driver. The car, it turned out, was stolen.”

“You don’t remember the last three months?”
usal ni Natalie sa tabi niya.

Napatitig si Inigo rito.

Ngayon lang ulit ito nagsalita magmula nang pumasok si Carlo. Maaaninag ang pagod sa mga mata nito pero hindi niyon maikukubli ang ganda ng dalaga. Pale and delicate, she looked like a fragile princess waiting for her knight in shining armor. Iyon din ang unang naisip niya nang una niya itong makita noong nasa college pa sila. His friends used to joke how he was like her perfect prince. That was far from the truth. He had never been a prince, not when they were together, not now years after.

“So it seems,” sagot ni Carlo para sa kanya. “Auntie, Natalie, please step out of the room for a minute. I need to do some tests on Inigo here. Rose Anne,” tawag nito sa nurse.

Tumango ang nurse at inalalayan ang kanyang ina papunta sa pinto. Kahit gusto pa ring magprotesta,

napilitang sumunod ang ina rito.

Inabot nito ang kanyang kamay pero maagap niyang iniwas iyon. Iniwas niya rin ang tingin dito. Tila alalang-alala ito sa kanya. Nasaan ang pag-aalalang iyon noong kailangan niya? Nanikip ang kanyang sikmura at may mabigat na pumintig sa likod ng kanyang mga mata.

Saan nanggaling ang mapait na damdaming iyon?

Natalie gave him one last lingering look before going out of the door.

“She still has the hots for you,” nakangising biro ni Carlo.

Hindi umimik si Inigo. Natagpuan niya ang mga matang nakatuon muli sa pinto.

Three months. He forgot three months of his life. And some parts of his childhood, too. There were gaps, little holes in the fabric of his memory. It was a more common form of retrograde amnesia, his friend explained. Mas madalas daw mangyari na makalimot ang isang pasyente na may traumatic brain injury ng ilang maliliit na bahagi ng buhay nito

kaysa mawala ang lahat ng alaala nito. Mas madalas, ang nalilimutan ay iyong mga alaalang nangyari bago ang aksidente. Pero kasabay niyon, maaari ring kasamang malimutan ang ilang bahagi mula sa kabataan ng pasyente—*niya*.

Inigo went through a series of tests. He was questioned about his family and life to determine what he might have forgotten.

He forgot the last three months prior to the accident. He lost some memories of his childhood, too, particularly his interactions with his father.

It shouldn't worry him, Carlo said. Maaaring maalala niya muli ang mga iyon. Kailangan lang niyang maghintay nang kaunti.

Maganda ang resulta ng scan ni Inigo. Walang nakitang permanenteng pinsala sa kanyang utak. Walang lesion, walang structural damage. May kaunting pamamaga lamang ang ilang bahagi, at maaring iyon ang dahilan ng pagkalimot niya. Pero kung hindi na maibabalik ang ilang mga alaala, hindi raw iyon ganoon kasama. It was just three months, the doctor said. He could easily access files in his office and computer to retrieve the information and update himself about forgotten transactions and meetings. And those little bits of lost childhood

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memories were probably nothing. It was not the end of the world. Losing three months and a couple of childhood memories wouldn't kill him.

His mother wept with relief, and resentment burned in his gut.

Cold, he realized. He felt cold toward his mother.

Why?

Sandali siyang pumikit at malinaw niyang nakita sa isipan ang pagpatak ng mga luha nito kanina. Parang gusto niyang mapait na tumawa. Sa bawat pag-abot nito sa kanya, hindi niya mapigilang iiwas ang mga kamay rito.

Bumukas ang pinto at umigkas ang ulo ni Inigo sa direksyon niyon. Blood rushed into his head. His heart thudded crazily inside his chest.

Alanganing ngumiti ang nurse nang makita ang titig niya.

Iniwas niya ang tingin dito.

He had to clench his fists to stop himself from breaking something.

What the hell was it? What was he waiting for?
Who the hell was he waiting for?

“Sir, ’yung mga gamit n’yo po.”

Inilapag ng nurse sa breakfast tray ang isang pamilyar na itim na file case at laptop.

Tiim-bagang siyang tumango at sandaling pumikit. “Thank you. You may go.”

Tahimik itong lumabas ng silid.

He turned on the laptop and encoded his password.

Hindi nito tinanggap ang kanyang password.

He smiled grimly.

For protection, nagpapalit siya ng password kada apat na buwan. Ayon sa calculation niya, his loss of memories notwithstanding, sa isang buwan pa siya dapat magpapalit.

Ang phone at tablet ang sunod niyang sinubukan.

Invalid password din ang sagot ng mga ito sa kanya.

“Not important, huh?” pakli niya sa sarili.

Carlo was wrong.

Something important had happened within those three months. He may have forgotten those three

months but he remembered who he was. He knew who he was. He was a man of rigid structure. Hindi niya papalitan ang mga passwords na iyon nang wala sa schedule kung hindi importante.

Inabot ni Inigo ang tablet na iniwan ni Carlo. Naisip nitong baka nakalimutan niya ang kanyang mga passwords kaya iniwan nito ang isang tablet para sa kanya. He didn't bother explaining his routine to his friend for contingency purposes. At tama siya. He hadn't forgotten that about himself, either. He never took chances. He always made sure he got things right.

He typed his name on the search bar of a search engine. Dozens of pictures and business-related articles appeared on the screen. Nilagpasan niya ang mga business articles at pinindot ang picture gallery.

The media had been hounding him for the last ten years, his lifestyle, his non-relationships and the women he dated, the media had been feasting on them like vultures attacking a rotting corpse.

Hindi niya alam kung ano ang hinahanap niya, kung ano ang gusto niyang makita. But he needed impressions, if nothing else.

January ang date ng unang picture. Isa iyong

after-party ng isang fashion show. There was a polite smile on his face for the camera, and Geneva dela Torre, socialite extraordinaire, on his arm. He clicked another picture of him and Geneva. He had dated the hotel heiress for a brief period in January, he remembered that. Isang modelo ang kasama niya sa isang February photo sa isang gala. Isang artista sa sumunod. Isang fashion designer sa isa.

Nagsisimula nang mag-init ang ulo ni Inigo.

Fighting back edginess, he clicked on another picture. And his heart stopped beating. It was a punch to the gut, a blow that had him reeling. He stared, forgetting how to breathe for a moment.

The woman was tall, slim, almost lanky. She was frowning at him in the picture, her brown eyes narrowed and annoyed. He was grinning at her, his arms draped around her shoulders to pull her into an embrace.

He could only stare at her for a moment, his eyes devouring every inch of her face. Deep set eyes, a stubborn chin, pouty lips. He memorized every curve and line, hungry to reclaim the forgotten memory, furious to have lost it for even just one second.

Lumipad ang mga daliri niya para i-click ang

article kung saan nakuha ang picture.

Inigo Azcona's flavor of the month: who is she?

Last week ng March ang article. First week ng January ang huling memorya niya. Bumaba ang mga mata ni Inigo para hagurin ang article at hindi niya napigil ang pagtatagis ng mga ngipin nang walang pangalang binanggit para sa dalaga.

Nag-click siya ng isa pang larawan.

Sila ulit iyon. It was another candid shot. Sa labas iyon ng isang low-cost condominium na pagmamay-ari niya. Nahuli ang dalagang naghihikab sa larawan habang magkahawak ang mga kamay nila. Naka-track pants ito at naka-gym shorts siya. Her messy hair looked like a bird's nest, her eyes droopy from sleep. Puwedeng pasukan ng langaw ang bibig nito sa laki ng paghikab nito.

She was beautiful.

Again, the article didn't give her a name.

Pipindutin na niya ang nurse call button para tawagin si Carlo at ipaluwa rito ang pangalan ng babae nang mahuli ng kanyang mga mata ang isa pang picture.

This time, it was a formal event.

Shattered Memories - Dior Madrigal

Sinunggaban niya ang article na parang pating na nakaamoy ng sariwang dugo.

Awarding ceremony iyon ng *Creative Young Entrepreneur Award* ng *Junior Chamber International*. Noong isang buwan lang iyon, approximately five weeks ago.

She wore a simple black dress designed to torture the male population. The soft material followed her subtle curves, accentuating those high breasts and slim waist. He was in a suit and black tie, his arm around her waist, his lips pressed against her ear as if he was murmuring something.

She was smiling, and f*ck him, it stirred something suspiciously tender in his chest.

Parang tambol na tumitibok ang puso, hindi napigilan ni Inigo na paglandasin ang mga daliri sa larawan ng babae sa screen. Sinundan ng kanyang mga daliri ang kurba ng leeg nito. She had a gorgeous neck, slender and smooth. His mouth watered, his tongue craving to taste that creamy flesh.

If someone asked him a few minutes ago kung ano ang mga nakahuhumaling na parte ng katawan ng babae, hindi lalabas ang leeg sa listahan niya. Hindi na ngayon. He could think of nothing but

sucking the smooth skin of her neck as he buried himself inside her.

Dumaan ang mga daliri niya sa panga nito, sa mapupula nitong labi. Had he touched her like this in real life?

Yes, he decided with fierce certainty. He had.

He ran his eyes over the photo caption and stopped at the woman's name.

Olivia Romero.

Relief, sweet and dizzying in its intensity, rushed through him in waves. His muscles weakened, the heavy coil of anxiety in his gut loosening a fraction.

“Olivia,” he breathed, tasting her name on his tongue, savoring it like exquisite wine.

Tinipa niya ang pangalan nito at ang pangalan niya sa search engine. Ilang larawan ang sumulpot ulit sa screen.

Pinindot ni Inigo ang isang litrato mula sa isa na namang formal event.

They were smiling at each other, their foreheads touching. He found himself grinning like an idiot at the corny sweetness of the image.

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Hindi sweet ang sumunod na larawan. Kuha iyon mula sa malayo, pero naka-zoom in. They were inside his car, their mouths fused in a heated kiss.

Nag-init ang dugo niya at lumalim ang kanyang paghinga.

He could almost taste her on his tongue, could almost feel the texture of her hair wrapped around his fingers. Her scent, her scent, what was it?

Tumiim-bagang si Inigo at pilit inalala ang samyo nito. Sumasayaw iyon sa gilid ng kanyang isipan, tila mga hibla ng liwanag na dumadapo sa kanyang mga daliri. Pero dumudulas iyon sa kanyang palad kahit anong pag-abot ang gawin niya.

Gusto niyang sumigaw at magbasag ng kung ano.

Gritting his teeth, he clicked on another picture. And froze.

“No,” he bit out.

Sila iyon ni Natalie.

Sa isang restaurant iyon, nakataas ang sulok ng kanyang mga labi at nakangiti sa kanya ang dating nobya.

Ang buhol sa kanyang sikmura na lumuwag na

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nang matuklasan niya ang pangalan ni Olivia ay muling bumigat at humigpit sa nakita niya. Bumaba ang kanyang tingin sa date ng larawan.

It was three weeks ago, approximately a week before his accident. He clicked on another picture.

Umahon ang takot at balisa sa kanyang lalamunan.

Si Natalie ulit ang kasama niya.

It was a black tie event, ribbon cutting ceremony ng isang building na kanyang pagmamay-ari. Nakalapat sa likod ng dalaga ang isa niyang palad, malapit sa tainga nito ang kanyang bibig. Nakatawa si Natalie sa kung anuman ang sinabi niya.

It was taken the same week as the last photo.

Napatiim-bagang siya at napakuyom ng palad.

He clicked on another picture, and another.

Nagbaga ang mabigat na bola ng frustration sa kanyang sikmura.

“No,” he repeated, his teeth grinding in a mix of frustration and anger.

It was all the same.

Siya at si Natalie sa isang dinner, sa isang sports

event, sa isang charity function. Lahat ng iyon ay kinuha sa linggo bago ang aksidente niya.

Mariin siyang pumikit, nagngalit ang mga ngipin.

Hinagilap ni Inigo ang telepono sa bedside table. Pero bago pa niya ma-dial ang home number ni Hugo, bumukas ang pinto at pumasok ang kanyang bodyguard at chauffeur.

Naka-sling cast ang isang braso nito pero maliban doon, mukhang typical na bodyguard ang hitsura ng may edad na lalaki. The former Scout Ranger looked every bit as intimidating as any hard-ass bouncer in any high-class club.

Pamilyar ang presensya nito, isang tao na alam niyang maasahan niya kahit ano ang mangyari. Ninamnam niya ang pakiramdam na iyon sa loob ng isang segundo.

Hindi siya nagpaliguy-ligoy. “Hugo, you’re just in time. Get me Olivia Romero’s files.”

2

“Stop...”

Marahas ang paghinga nito sa kanyang tainga. Naaamoy niya ang alak at sigarilyo roon.

“Stop...”

Have you been bad, little girl?

“Stop!”

You can't run away from me. You're mine. Mine!

Bumalikwas ng bangon si Olivia sa sofa. Bullets of sweat trickled down her temples, neck, and spine. Sinalubong siya ng matingkad na liwanag ng sala. Itinaboy niyon ang natitirang mga sapot ng kanyang panaginip.

Mariin siyang pumikit at humugot ng hangin. Nanginginig siya, nilalamig, pero alam niyang walang kinalaman iyon sa timpla ng hangin ng AC.

“It’s okay,” she told herself, wrapping her arms tightly around her. “It’s okay.”

Alam niyang hindi totoo iyon.

Sinulyapan niya ang orasan sa taas ng flat screen TV. Alas diez quince pa lang. Naging isang oras ang dapat ay twenty minutes na power nap niya. Nakakalat ang ilang mga programming books sa kanyang coffee table. Inayos niya ang mga gamit, isinara ang laptop, pinipilit ang sariling maging abala para tumigil ang mga ugong sa kanyang isipan.

Tumunog ang phone at nanigas ang kanyang mga daliri.

It shrilled in the silence, an ominous threat amidst her thundering heartbeat. She told herself not to answer it, to just let it keep on ringing. It would go away if she ignored it.

He would go away if she ignored him.

Pero alam niyang kasinungalingan din iyon.

Hinablot niya ang phone sa cradle. “You sick bastard.”

Tumawa ang lalaki sa kabilang linya. Mabigat iyon at magaspang, tila mga bloke ng semento na dumadagan sa kanyang dibdib.

“Dear Olivia, still sweet and delicate.” Kinakaskas ng magaspang nitong boses ang kanyang balat, ang kanyang kaluluwa.

“Call again and I’m calling the cops.”

“Ah, we don’t want that, do we? Ano na lang ang mangyayari sa mommy mo?” His sick taunts had her gritting her teeth.

Calm down, she reminded herself. Hindi makakatulong kung sasabihin niyang wala na itong magagawa sa kanila ng kanyang ina. But the nagging itch to say it was there. Gusto niyang isampal sa pagmumukha ng lalaki na hindi na siya nito matatakot, na hindi na *сила* nito matatakot. She’d been scared of him for more than half of her life. She would be damned if she let him scare her again.

“Go f*ck yourself, dickhead—”

“Don’t forget what I can do, dear Olivia. How’s your little boyfriend?”

Lahat ng natitirang takot ay natunaw sa pagliyah ng poot sa kanyang sikmura. Naging pula ang kanyang paningin at kung naroon lang ang kausap sa harap niya, sigurado siyang nauka na niya ang mukha nito. Magpapahaba siya ng kuko. That would be her lethal weapon.

“Touch him again and I will cut your balls off and feed it to the dogs.”

Malakas itong tumawa at nakikita niya sa isipan ang pagguhit ng aliw sa matanda ngunit guwapo nitong mukha. That face could look respectable and dignified. Sigurado siyang hindi naghihinala ang board of directors at investors nito kung gaano karumi ang kaluluwa sa likod ng mukhang iyon.

“I miss the sweet little girl, but this fiery woman amuses me just the same. Stay away from him, Sweetheart. Don’t make me angry. I don’t want to get angry. You don’t want to make me angry. Be a good girl, Olivia.”

Namatay ang linya sa pagitan nila at umugong sa kanyang tainga ang mahabang beep ng dial tone. Namumutla ang kanyang kamao sa higpit ng hawak niya sa telepono. Pilit niyang niluwagan ang kapit ng mga daliri at ibinalik ang phone sa cradle.

It was his way to control her life, Cedric had said. Hindi na siya ten years old o sixteen years old at hindi na nito kayang kontrolin ang mga desisyon sa buhay niya. So the bastard wanted to keep her scared, to control even just a small part of her emotions.

Fury simmered in her blood but she forced herself to calm down. Matatapos na rin ito, pangako niya sa sarili. He would pay. He would pay for what he did to her, to her mother. To *him*.

Gumuhit ang sakit sa kanyang dibdib at tumarak iyon sa kanyang puso. Bumaon iyon doon na tila ba mga bubog na gawa sa yelo. Idiniin ni Olivia ang palad sa dibdib para tulungan ang sariling huminga. Hot tears prickled her eyes and she blinked them back. No tears.

Bumalik siya sa pag-aayos ng mga gamit.

Kailangan niyang gumising nang maaga bukas. Marami siyang kailangang tapusin. Her mom needed her. Muli, inisip niya kung tama ang pasya niya na huwag sumama rito sa bahay ni Cedric. Pero agad din niyang ipinilig ang ulo sa option na iyon. The bastard would smell their plan if she ditched her apartment. Malalaman nito kung nasaan ang mom niya. Malalaman nitong alam niya kung nasaan ang kanyang ina. Masyado iyong delikado.

May nag-doorbell sa kanyang pinto.

Tumindig ang mga balahibo niya at hinagilap niya ang *Glock* sa tabi ng phone. Dapat ay nakatulong ang bigat at lamig ng baril sa kanyang palad, pero hindi niyon mapawi ang pagragasa ng takot at galit sa kanyang sikmura.

“He wouldn’t,” pakli ni Olivia.

Pero ano ba ang alam niya? The bastard was

Shattered Memories - Dior Madrigal

crazy. Dangerous. Sick. Vile. Kumpadre nito ang mga demonyo sa impyerno. Hindi siya magugulat kung mapagpasyahan nitong dalawin siya at ituloy ang sinimulan nito noong sixteen years old siya.

But she was not sixteen years old anymore.

Hawak ang baril at mabilis ang paghinga, tahimik na tinungo ni Olivia ang pinto.

Hindi siya inalerto ng mga bodyguards na inupahan niya na nagkakampo sa katapat na unit. Ibig sabihin noon ay malabong si Fausto Mendoza o ang mga galamay nito ang nasa labas ng pinto.

Puwedeng delivery boy lang iyon at nagkamali ng address.

Or the slimy bastard could have slipped past the bodyguards.

Humigpit ang hawak niya sa baril at sumilip sa peephole.

Muntik niyang mabitawan ang baril. She sucked in air, her poor heart hammering like crazy inside her chest.

The hard look in the man's eyes told her he knew she was looking at him.

Muli itong nag-doorbell.

Gusto niyang umatras pero tila ipinako sa malamig na sahig ang mga paa niya. Kailangan niyang humawak sa dingding para hindi siya matumba. Muli itong nag-doorbell at sa matalim na titig nito, mukhang nauubusan na ito ng pasensya.

Typical Inigo.

Namimilog ang mga matang naglandas ang tingin ni Olivia rito. A faint pink line ran across his right temple. The wound didn't look so bad now, pero alam niyang iyon ang dahilan kaya kailangan itong ilagay sa coma sa loob ng halos dalawang linggo. But he didn't look like he just came out of a coma. Medically induced or not, a coma was a coma. At ang makita itong walang malay at duguan na itinutulak sa gurney ay isang bangungot na ayaw niyang maalala. She would gladly suffer through all the other nightmares so long as it wasn't that one.

But he looked good now, she thought with sharp relief. Good as ever. No visible bruises, no blood on his aristocratic forehead, no smudge of smoke across the strong lines of his face. His thick dark hair looked casually messy, as if a lover had just ran her fingers through his locks.

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Kumalat sa kanyang isipan ang imahe ni Natalie na isinusuklay ang mga daliri sa buhok ni Inigo.

“Open the door, Olivia.”

Sa pagkakataong iyon ay napaurong na siya.

Narinig niya ang pag-click ng lock at hindi niya napigilang mapapitlag. “Son of a bitch.”

Itinulak nito pabukas ang pinto bago pa niya masipa iyon pasara ulit. Pumasok ito sa loob na para bang constitutional right nito ang pagpasok sa bahay niya.

“Goddammit, Inigo.”

His scent hit her like a physical blow, and she had to brace herself to stop herself from stumbling.

Malamig ang mga mata nito sa kanya. “You forgot that I own the place.”

I’m renting it, dapat niyang ibato rito, pero hindi niya magawa.

She couldn’t take her eyes off him. His golden skin, his chiseled mouth, his piercing eyes. A sweet ache burned in her gut and she was furious to find her eyes stinging with tears again.

She told her heart to stop beating so fast, but it

was futile. It never did stand a chance against him. It flipped and fluttered and spluttered. It was nothing but a pathetic simpering muscle whenever he was around.

“What...what are you doing here?”

Humakbang ang binata palapit kay Olivia nang makita ang pamumula ng mga mata niya. Pero umatras siya.

Anger, resentment, frustration—she wasn’t sure—they flashed across his eyes in a heated flicker. Then they were gone, leaving his eyes flat and cold. Bumaba ang mga mata nito sa kanyang kamay at naningkit. Tumaas ang sulok ng mga labi nito. “You’re planning to use that on me?”

Noon niya naalala ang bigat ng baril sa kanyang kamay.

Itinago niya iyon sa kanyang likod at umatras ulit ng isang hakbang. “What...” Nagngalit ang mga ngipin ni Olivia nang mabasag ang tinig. Sinubukan niya ulit. “What are you doing here?”

His cold hard gaze moved over her face with dangerous calmness. “You didn’t come.”

Lumunok siya, tumalikod at tinungo ang isang

cabinet. Nakita niyang nanginginig ang kanyang mga kamay at pinatatag niya ang mga iyon. Isinaksak niya sa cabinet ang *Glock* at saka ini-lock ang pinto niyon.

“Of course I didn’t.”

Parang ningas ng apoy, naramdaman niya ang init ni Inigo nang maglakad ito papunta sa kanya. Napaharap siya rito at napaurong.

He stalked toward her, a dangerous animal prowling toward its prey. The hard glint in his eyes dared her to run. She wanted to. God, did she want to. But she didn’t. She wouldn’t.

Tumigil ito ilang sentimetro mula sa kanya, ipinatong ang mga kamao sa tuktok ng cabinet sa magkabila niyang gilid. He caged her in, his warmth searing her, stirring an aching sweetness between her legs. Those dark eyes never left her face.

“You never visited me,” he murmured. *Accused.*

Nanunuyo ang mga labi, pinigilan ni Olivia ang pagnanais na basain ang mga iyon ng dila. He was so close. If she let her tongue dart out she would be able to taste his lips.

“Get out, Inigo. You’re just making things worse.”

Itinulak niya ang binata pero hindi ito natinag ni

isang sentimetro. Nanuot ang init nito sa kanyang mga palad, ang matigas nitong dibdib, tila nagbabagang bakal sa ilalim ng mamahalin nitong polo.

“Back off,” she hissed.

But he only stepped closer until her body was flushed against his hard frame. She bit back a gasp. The tips of her breasts hardened as they pressed against his chiseled chest, the warmth between her legs rapidly turning into a desperate heat.

“I...” Nagsimulang malusaw ang mga brain cells niya.

“What the hell happened, Olivia?” Malamyos iyon, pero nasa ilalim niyon ang panganib.

Yumuko siya at lumusot sa ilalim ng braso nito.

F*ck pride. Gamit ang malalaking hakbang, lumayo siya para maglagay ng distansya sa pagitan nila.

“What the hell happened? F*ck you. Wala kang karapatang gawin ’yon. Get out.”

Hinagilap ni Inigo ang braso niya at muli siyang hinila palapit dito. He didn’t bother hiding his anger now. They lit up his eyes, hardened his jaw, and curled his lips. “Oh, what did I do?”

“Itinatanong mo pa? Damn you. How dare you? Don’t act like you don’t know. Get out.”

Muling nagingas ang mga emosyon sa mga mata nito, nagngalit ang mga ngipin. “What did I do?”

Bumuka ang bibig ni Olivia pero sumara rin. May kung ano sa mga mata ng lalaki na nagpatigil sa kanya. The analyst inside her noticed the different tension on his face. Hindi niya magagawa iyon sa iba but she knew Inigo. In the short amount of time that they had been together, she had come to know how to read him.

Iyong galit ngayon sa mukha nito, iyong frustration, hindi iyon righteous anger. He was, she realized, confused.

Dumako ang mga mata niya sa mapusyaw na sugat sa sentido nito. Coma. Traumatic brain injury.

“Ano...ano’ng nangyari sa ’yo?”

Tinakpan ni Inigo ng galit ang frustration. “Oh, hindi nakarating sa ’yo ang balita?”

“Did you...” Nanlamig ang sikmura niya.

What did I do? The tone of frustration and anger.
Oh, God.

“You forgot. You lost your memories.”

The anger simmered, and those dark eyes burned into hers.

Marahil ay natumba si Olivia kung hindi mahigpit ang hawak ng binata sa kanya. Parang umiikot ang mundo sa paligid niya. Nakita niya muli sa isipan si Inigo, duguan sa gurney at itinatakbo sa emergency room. Dugo, ang daming dugo.

Isa pang imahe ang nangibabaw.

Isang matandang lalaki, duguan din at halos wala nang buhay.

It was all your fault!

Mariin siyang pumikit at umiling.

“How bad is it?” pakli niya.

“Now you’re concerned,” pakli rin nito.

Pumiglas ang braso niya at nagtagis ang kanyang mga ngipin. “Cut the crap, Inigo. How bad is it?”

“I’m not an invalid. Don’t use that tone with me.”

“How f*cking bad is—”

“Maybe you should have visited me in the hospital so you would know!”

They would rip each other's throats out if they didn't calm down. Sinubukan niya ang diplomasya at pinababa ang tinig.

“How bad is it?”

“Three months, damn you. I lost the last three f*cking months.”

Muli, muntikan siyang matumba. Relief weakened her knees.

Three months. Not a lifetime of memories like in the movies and TV series. Hindi niyon maapektuhang masyado ang buhay nito. Magagawa nitong mabawi ang mga impormasyon sa three months na iyon sa negosyo at—

It hit her.

Like a bullet to the heart, it hit her.

“You forgot me.”

His lips remained a hard line but the burning frustration in his eyes answered her. Wala sa sariling hinila ni Olivia ang braso pero nanatiling mahigpit ang hawak nito.

“It's okay,” usal niya. “That's okay.”

“It's not. What happened?”

Shattered Memories - Dior Madrigal

Napatitig siya sa mga daliri nitong nakapulupot sa kanyang braso. He had such big hands. They could be rough, they could be gentle. So so gentle.

Itinaas niya ang mga mata sa mga mata ni Inigo. Napakaraming tanong sa mga iyon, napakaraming emosyon. She took them in, memorized them. Maybe this would be the last time she would be close enough to him to be able to see his eyes.

Swallowing hard, she forced herself to gather her scattered thoughts. “We dated for around a month. We broke up a week before your accident.”

“Did we now?” The softness of his voice was more dangerous than a gunshot.

Bumigat ang kanyang paghinga at umatras siya. Humakbang lang ito para sundan siya.

“We broke up,” aniya, mas pinatatag ang tinig. “It was just a fling. It was just for fun. Ba’t ka ’andito?”

“Ba’t nga kaya?”

Natalisod siya at bumagsak ang puwitan niya sa sofa.

Ikinulong siya ni Inigo roon bago pa siya makatayo. He blocked the light, the air, and it was only him around her. Her blood hummed and, to her

horror, she felt the heat between her legs pulse in excitement.

“What the hell are you doing, Inigo? Get out of—”

“Don’t insult my intelligence. I lost a few memories, not a few IQ points. What happened?”

His fingertips touched her cheek, and licks of fire seemed to shoot out of them. The heat spread across her nerves, wisps of flame searing her flesh. She bit her lip hard, afraid a moan would escape her throat. Inilapat ni Olivia ang mga palad sa matipuno nitong dibdib pero wala siyang lakas para itulak ito.

“Don’t—”

“What happened, Olivia?” His hot, fragrant breath brushed her lips, teased her senses. They parted, greedy to taste him, to feel him.

“We...we broke up.”

“Try again.” His tongue darted out and licked her lower lip.

Napaigtad siya. Ilang boltahe ng kuryente ang umarko sa kanyang likod. Napakuyom ang mga palad niya sa dibdib nito.

“Inigo—”

He nibbled on her lower lip, gently drawing the soft flesh inside his mouth. It was enough to make her traitorous body arch toward him.

“We didn’t break up.” Pumulupot ang braso nito sa kanyang baywang, hinihila siya hanggang sa maglapat ang kanilang mga dibdib.

Her thin night shirt couldn’t ward off his heat. It seeped through the cotton material, drenching her until her muscles melted against him. She felt his warm hand inside her shirt, his rough palm splaying across her abdomen.

“We didn’t break up.”

His tongue slid inside her mouth, and his potent taste spread over her tongue. Napaungol si Olivia, napakapit dito. Heat rushed into her head, drowning all her protests. Male. That was the only thing in her mind. From the moment she first saw Inigo and spilled coffee on his twenty-thousand-peso shirt, that was the first adjective she had used to describe him.

Umakyat ang mga braso niya para pumulupot sa leeg nito. Ang mga daliri niya ay bumaon sa madulas nitong buhok. He groaned in her mouth, a feral sound of male lust that had her toes curling and her sex

clenching.

“I’ve missed you.” Need roughened his voice, rasped at her flesh. Naramdaman niya ang paghila ng binata pataas ng kanyang nightshirt.

She had to stop him. Had to stop herself. Pero nasa ilalim na ng kamiseta nito ang mga kamay niya. Warm, hard flesh, she could feel the ridges of his sculpted abdomen beneath her palms.

Nahubad nito ang kanyang pang-taas at hilo niyang iminulat ang mga mata.

His dark eyes roved over her body with pure male possessiveness. He unclasped her bra with barely contained impatience. Cold air hit her heated skin, making her gasp. The tips felt so tender and tight, if he so much as brush his knuckles over them she would—

He cupped the mounds, his fingers rolling and tugging the painfully hard tips. She arched, whimpered, the world around her bleeding into hazy colors.

His mouth covered one tip, his soft warm lips sucking greedily. With every fast pull, a corresponding nerve pulsed between her thighs. Bumaon ang mga daliri niya sa buhok ni Inigo.

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She felt him tugging at her shorts, felt him rolling down her underwear. Her own need made her dizzy.

Half mad with impatience and need, her fingers clawed at the button of his jeans. “Hurry, hurry.”

He growled, softly bit the bruised tip of her breast. Then helped her shove his jeans and boxers down. Hinila niya pataas ang shirt nito at itinapon iyon sa kung saan.

The sight of him, male, strong and primal, weakened whatever defenses she had left. She melted and throbbed, her muscles clenching in spasms. She felt him between her legs, hard and heavy and scalding. Her core throbbed, wept, greedy to have him buried inside her.

“No playing, now...now.”

She lifted her hips, pressed her aching sex against his throbbing length. The wide head of his arousal parted her swollen folds, teased her clenching slit with shallow thrusts.

“Don’t be a bastard! Now!” She bit his shoulder and dug her fingers into the muscles of his ass.

He growled, gripped her hips, and plunged deep.

She gasped for air, her fingers digging into his

muscled back.

His mouth fused with hers as he steadily pushed inside her to the hilt. Her walls rippled around him, greedily sucking him with her.

“F*ck,” he grunted, his fingers digging into her buttocks as he lifted her hips to bury himself even deeper. He slid in with difficulty, her tightening muscles making him work harder to push inside her.

She threw her head back and panted.

Through the haze of lust, Olivia watched him. Golden warm and lean, his taut abdominal muscles rippled as he thrust between her legs. His eyes never left her face.

The feel of him moving inside her brought dizzying shocks of heat across her flesh. The scent of his skin had gone stronger, thicker, like the ocean mist before a storm.

Sinapo ng malaki nitong kamay ang panga niya at diniinan ng hinlalaki nito ang pang-ibaba niyang labi. “Look at me.”

Hindi niya magagawang iiwas ang tingin kahit gusto niya.

It made her feel vulnerable, the way Inigo

watched her face as he moved inside her.

Their eyes remained locked even as fire shattered her soul. She couldn't close her eyes even as her body tightened and rippled with bliss. He let go then, his mouth crashing down on hers as he raced for his own release.

"I'm your first," he whispered into her ear when they could finally catch their breaths. "I was your first."

Nahihilo niyang iminulat ang mga mata.
"What...?"

"Your first time. It's...it was in a cramped space. A car. F*cking A. Bakit sa kotse pa?"

Itinaas ni Inigo ang mukha mula sa kanyang leeg at matalim siyang tinitigan. He looked dangerous, with his faint scar, dark scowl and rippling muscles, he could pass for a pissed off devil.

"I was pissed then, too. Why the hell was it in a f*cking car?"

Pinigilan niya ang pagnanais na iikot ang mga mata.

Totoo iyon. He had been pissed like hell too when he found out it was her first time.

Shattered Memories - Dior Madrigal

At iyon din ang reklamo nito noon: bakit sa kotse? Bakit hindi sa isang disenteng pad o hotel room?

Hell. As if naman pinilit niya ito. Well, siguro medyo pinilit nga niya. Siya ang nagsimula, pero naging cooperative naman ang binata.

“I don’t know. I was drunk. I was feeling festive. Let’s change the topic.”

Sinubukan niyang itulak si Inigo pero hindi man lang ito natinag. Instead, he rolled his hips, rubbed his thick length along her tender walls. She gasped, her body clamping tight around his hardness. Napaungol siya at napaarko ang kanyang likod.

Olivia hated how easily he could arouse her. She should have been sated by now. But as he slowly drew his length out of her clinging depths, the rush of heady need flared between her legs again. Siniil nito ng halik ang kanyang mga labi.

3

Hindi pa sumisilip ang unang sinag ng araw nang magmulat si Olivia. Wala si Inigo sa kama, pero ramdam niya ang mga mata nito sa kanya. Ibiniling niya ang mukha sa kanan at nakita itong nakaupo sa tabi ng bintana.

He sat there, shirtless and looking f*ckable with his messy hair and long, powerful legs stretched out in front of him. Nakabukas ang lampshade sa tabi ng kama. Pinapaigting ng malamyos niyong liwanag ang ginintuang kulay ng balat ng binata. His broad shoulders and hard rock muscles were prominent even in the dim light. He could have been a god masquerading as a human.

Nakatuon ang titig sa kanya, itinuro ng daliri nito ang suot nitong silk drawstring pants. “This is mine.”

She knew she should have given his stuff to charity last week.

Pumikit siya at inutusan ang sariling bumangon. “Is it?”

The soreness between her thighs made her hiss. She could still feel him inside her, thick and brutally

hard as he moved in and out of her. Naghagilap siya ng unan para itakip sa sarili.

The heady scent of sex and Inigo hit her in the gut. Nag-init ang kanyang dugo at nagkagulo ang mga brain cells niya.

SYSTEM FAILURE

Nagbi-blip iyon sa kanyang paningin.

Pinigilan niya ang sariling ibaon ang mukha sa unan at sumigaw roon. Sa sulok ng kanyang mata, nahagilap ng kanyang paningin ang pagtama ng sinag ng lampshade sa kung anong hawak ni Inigo. Matalim siyang tumigin doon. Pinaglalaro ng binata ang hinlalaki nito sa hawak na cellphone. His eyes never left her face.

“Alam mo ba ang password ko?”

Lumunok si Olivia, sinamo ang galit at iritasyon. “You forgot that, too?”

Hindi ito tinablan ng sarcasm. “Apparently.”

“Pax,” aniya, pilit na di pinapansin ang paghalik ng ilaw sa inukit na mga muscles ng binata sa tiyan at dibdib. “Pax and Caeli. PaxCaeli, I think that’s Latin for—”

“Peace and Heaven.” Tumaas ang sulok ng labi nito. “You knew.”

“Sinabi mo n’ung hiniram ko ’yung tablet mo. That’s so freaking corny.”

He only grinned. “I actually remembered that just this morning.”

Damn, that smile was a panty dropper.

Lumunok ulit siya. “Oh?”

His eyes seemed to soften in the dim light. “Uh-huh.”

Ipinilig niya ang ulo. What the hell were they doing discussing the corniness of his password? Sinuong niya ang mas pressing issue sa pagitan nila. “We need to talk, Inigo.”

Tumango ito, nawala ang ngiti sa labi. “I was going to say that.”

Yakap pa rin ang unan, tumayo siya at nilapitan ang dresser. Nag-angat ito ng kilay.

“I’ve seen everything last night, Olivia. And this morning.”

“Shut up.” Naghanap siya ng malaking T-shirt at isinuot iyon. Kumuha na rin siya ng shorts at

underwear. Sinamo niya ang natitirang dignidad sa katawan at isinuot din ang mga iyon. “Let me get this straight. We already broke up. Whatever happened last night shouldn’t and wouldn’t happen again.”

Nasa likuran na niya si Inigo bago pa niya tuluyang mai-zipper ang shorts. Sinakop ng malalaki nitong palad ang magkabila niyang balakang at hinila siya sa katawan nito. His scent, his warmth, the familiar solid wall of his body, they jarred her senses into overdrive. The familiar wet heat gathered between her legs and she trembled in his arms.

He dipped his head, nuzzled the side of her neck. “Morning.”

His rough jaw prickled her skin, sending shivers across her flesh. Napahawak siya sa dresser para suportahan ang sarili.

“Stop,” usal niya. But she was already melting into him.

He was hard, the clothes between them a pathetic barrier for her melting heat and his throbbing hardness. She could feel the shape of him, could feel his thickness and length rubbing leisurely between the cheeks of her ass. Hot cream slickened her sex and soaked her underwear. He tilted her hips so that

Shattered Memories - Dior Madrigal

he was rubbing against her slit and she cried out. She couldn't stop her hips from rocking against him. If he pulled her shorts down and plunged into her, she knew she wouldn't be able to do anything but spread her legs and moan.

Ang tunog ng alarm clock ang nagpapitlag sa kanya.

Marahas niyang itinulak ang sarili palayo sa dresser at palayo sa binata. Halos madapa siya sa pagtakbo sa kabilang side ng kuwarto.

“Stay there!” Itinuro niya ang couch na inuupuan ni Inigo kanina.

Marahas din ang paghinga nito kagaya niya. A faint flush tinted his strong cheekbones and his dark eyes had gone opaque with lust.

Nakatiim-bagang, pinagkrus nito ang mga braso sa dibdib nito. The muscles of his biceps bunched and coiled. His hardness was a distracting bulge between his powerful thighs.

He looked like a sex god.

A pissed off sex god.

“And if I don't?”

Maingat siyang huminga. “Look, Inigo. Hindi ko alam kung gaano kalala ang naging damage sa memory mo.” Guilt clawed at her insides but she shook her head. “I’m sorry about the accident. I’m glad you seem okay now.”

“Why didn’t you visit me?”

Humugot ulit ng hangin si Olivia. Obviously, hindi kasama sa tatlong buwang nabura sa alaala nito ang pagiging nakakainis nito. He could still be more irritating than the most annoying computer bug.

“I already told you. We broke up a month ago and now you’re dating Natalie.”

Hindi niya kailangang pekein ang sakit. Malinaw sa kanyang isipan ang mga larawan nito kasama ang dati nitong nobya. Nakalapat ang palad nito sa likod ng babae, malapit ang bibig sa tainga ng dalaga. He looked like a god and Natalie looked like a goddess. Parang mga piraso ng puzzle ang mga ito na binubuo ang isa’t isa. It ripped her apart when she first saw the photos three weeks ago. It tore her apart now.

Sa loob ng tatlong malalaking hakbang ay nasa harapan na niya ang binata. Sinakop ng mga palad nito ang magkabila niyang pisngi at inangat nito ang kanyang mukha para magtama ang kanilang mga

mata.

Those dark eyes pierced her deep. “I’ve hurt you.”

Itinulak niya ito pero sinapo ng palad nito ang kanyang batok.

“I’m sorry.” Idinikit ni Inigo ang noo sa kanya. “I’m sorry.”

Nag-init ang kanyang mga mata pero mabilis siyang kumurap. Kumuyom ang mga palad ni Olivia sa dibdib nito. Ramdam niya ang pagtibok ng puso nito sa ilalim ng kanyang kamao.

Thud. Thud. Thud. It was strong and soothing. The fierce relief she felt when she saw him last night outside her door came back like a thundering wave.

“It’s okay, Inigo. It’s okay. No hard feelings. Tapos na ’yon. It wasn’t your fault. It was...” Humugot siya ng hangin at lakas ng loob. “You saw me kissing another man.”

Nanigas ang buong katawan nito.

Pumikit siya at nagpatuloy. “It was my fault. I’m sorry. We broke up because of that. Sorry hindi ako nakabisita sa ospital. It didn’t seem right. Natalie was there and we hadn’t been in friendly terms before the accident.”

“Are you done?”

Tumayo ang mga balahibo ni Olivia sa lamig ng boses nito. Dumilat siya. Tila mga itim na yelo ang mga mata ng binata.

His thumb softly rubbed her lower lip as if he was wiping off something distasteful on her mouth.

“That was an interesting story.”

Gumapang ang kulay sa kanyang mga pisngi at itinulak niya ito. Nanatiling mahigpit ang hawak ni Inigo sa kanya.

“Hindi ’yon kuwento. That’s the truth.”

“And I’m a candidate for Papacy. What are you hiding from me?”

Napapitlag si Olivia na parang nakahawak ng live wire. Napaatras siya pero hinila siya nito pabalik.

“What are you talking about?”

Those cold eyes flickered with heat. “What is it, Olivia?”

“Hindi ko alam ang sinasabi mo. We broke up. Look it up. Nasa Internet ang ebidensya. You’re with Natalie now.”

Shattered Memories - Dior Madrigal

Nagtiim-bagang ito, tumigas lalo ang panga.
“Hindi ’yon totoo.”

“You’re dating her. Iyon ’yon.”

“Stop lying. It’s pissing me off.”

“You’re pissing me off!”

Itinulak niya si Inigo pero pumulupot ang mga braso nito sa kanyang baywang. He gripped her hips, anchoring her to him until her breasts were flushed tight against his sculpted pectorals and her lower body meshed with his.

“Missing memories or not, I’m sure of one thing, Olivia. I’ve never let go of you.”

The fierce certainty in his tone made her eyes prickle with tears and her heart splutter in pathetic beats.

Ibiniling niya ang mukha para itago ang pamumula ng kanyang mga mata. “Well you did. You let me go.”

He nuzzled her neck, inhaled her scent. “You’re not going to tell me the truth, are you?”

“Hindi ko alam ang sinasabi mo.”

Hinagkan nito ang kanyang leeg, bahagyang

inilayo ang mukha para titigan siya. Hinagod nito ng tingin ang kanyang mukha, tila hinahanap doon ang sagot sa mga tanong nito. Nang hindi makita ni Inigo ang mga kasagutan doon, tiim-bagang itong tumango.

“Fine. I’ll find out on my own, anyway.”

May nag-beep na alarm sa kanyang sala.

“Sa ’kin ’yon.” Pinakawalan siya nito at tinungo ang closet. Naglabas ito ng isang navy blue towel.

Kay Inigo ulit iyon, isa ulit sa mga gamit nito na hindi niya nagawang tanggalin sa bahay niya. Sa ipinukol na tingin sa kanya ng binata, alam din nito iyon.

“I need to go into the office today.”

“Good for you. I’m serious, Inigo. We broke up. Hindi mo maalala ngayon pero ’yon ang totoo. Hindi ko alam kung ba’t ganito ang nararamdaman mo ngayon. It’s probably a side effect of your memory loss. But we’re over. And we’re not getting back together.”

Kalmado nitong isinampay sa balikat nito ang tuwalya at isinara ang closet niya. Naglakad ito papunta sa kanya at pinigilan niya ang sariling

umatras. His icy calmness was more dangerous than his violent rage. Huminto ito sa tapat ni Olivia at itinaas ang isang kamay.

Nanigas ang mga kalamnan niya at sandali niyang nakalimutang huminga. His fingertips traced the line of her jaw, her cheekbone, her brow. His touch jolted her nerve endings, prickling them with a flicker of heat.

“Do you know what I first did when I woke up?” usal nito, pinaglalandas ang dulo ng mga daliri sa kanyang pisngi. Hindi siya makapagsalita. His gentleness weakened her as much as his fierce passion did. “I looked around the room. I didn’t know why.” His fingertips traced her lower lip, tickling her senses, igniting a subtle need.

“Laging lumilibot ang tingin ko sa kuwarto. Sa tuwing bumubukas ’yung pinto, napapaligon ako. Sa tuwing may papasok—nurse, doctor, kahit sino—parang may sumasaksak sa sikmura ko.”

Nanginginig niyang hinawakan ang pupulsuhan nito. “Inigo—”

“I didn’t know what I was looking for. I didn’t know what I was waiting for. All I knew was that I was waiting for something, for someone to come in

through the f*cking door.”

Gusto niyang sabihing tumigil na ito, pero nakabara ang bola ng emosyon sa kanyang lalamunan. His frustration and pain seeped through her pores. It mixed with her blood, burned in her lungs, and shot to her heart.

“Then I saw your face on the computer screen.”

Isinandal nito ang noo kay Olivia at malalim na huminga. Malalim din ang kanyang paghinga habang nag-iinit ang kanyang mga mata.

“And I knew it was you I’ve been waiting for since I woke up.”

Dumaloy ang ilang luha sa kanyang mga pisngi at marahas siyang kumurap. Gusto niyang pahirin ang mga iyon pero wala siyang ibang magawa kundi ang mariing kagatin ang pang-ibabang labi.

“I may have lost my memories of you but there are some things more powerful than memories, Olivia.”

Nagmulat ito, tunitig sa kanya. Hindi niya magawang umiwas. Hindi niya magawang umatras. Nanatiling malabo ang mga mata niyang nakatitig kay Inigo.

“So stop the bullshit about Natalie. I don’t know what happened there. But I’m going to find out. And we’re sticking together.”

Hinagkan nito ang kanyang noo at pinunasan ang kanyang mga luha. Umiling siya at itinulak ito.

Bumuntong-hininga si Inigo pero hinayaan siyang umatras dito.

“You’re so stubborn.”

Nakataas ang sulok ng mga labi, lumabas ito ng silid at tinungo ang banyo.

Tila gawa sa goma ang mga tuhod, nanginginig siyang naglakad patungo sa kama. Napaupo roon si Olivia na parang manikang naputulan ng mga paa. Tila may nagniningas pa ring apoy sa kanyang dibdib. Hinawakan niya iyon at diniinan.

Tumunog ang kanyang phone.

Tumarak ang takot sa kanyang mga ugat. Kuyom-palad siyang tumitig sa telepono. Mag-a-alas-seis pa lang. Hindi ganito ang oras ng tawag ni Fausto.

Hinagilap niya ang phone. “Yes?”

“Olivia?” May pag-aakusa sa tono ng babae sa kabilang linya.

Nakilala niya agad ito. Ilang beses lang silang personal na nagkaharap ni Mrs. Mariella Azcona, pero makikilala niya kahit saan ang tinig nito. The woman wore elegance like a subtle perfume. It clung to her skin, oozed through her pores. Sa tingin niya, kahit nagmumura na ito na parang batang kalye, puwede pa rin itong ihilera kay Queen Elizabeth at Duchess Katherine.

“Mrs. Azcona.”

“Si Inigo. And’yan ba si Inigo?” Nakabuhol ang panic sa boses ng ina ng binata.

Napatitig si Olivia sa pinto. Hindi rinig ang tunog ng shower sa silid pero sigurado siyang nasa loob na ang binata. Isang segundo siyang nag-alangan, pero itinulak din iyon sa dulo ng kanyang isipan. Maaaring hindi mag-best friends ang mag-ina, pero ina pa rin nito ang babae.

“Yes, ’andito po siya.”

“Bakit ’andyan siya? Ano’ng ginagawa niya d’yan?” The soft lilting voice remained exquisite despite the touch of hysteria. “He shouldn’t remember you!”

“He doesn’t.”

“Push him away, Olivia. Please.” Rinig niya ang mahinang pag-iyak ng matandang babae.

Nakita niya sa isipan ang ginang. Perpekto ang makeup, tumutulo ang diamonds at sapphires mula sa mga tainga at leeg, naka-French twist ang buhok. Her petite body would be covered in pale silk and satin. She would look breakable—a high class socialite, as fragile as an expensive crystal glass.

“I will.”

“You can’t do this to him. Don’t do this to him. You have to let him go. Please... please!”

“I will, Mrs. Azcona. Don’t worry.”

“He forgot pieces of his childhood...”

Whatever heat left in her stomach fizzled out like a weak candle flame. “Oh.”

“Carlo, Inigo’s doctor, thinks that the slight swelling in my son’s brain is the main cause of his memory loss. You see, Carlo knows a bit about Inigo’s strained relationship with his father.”

Gumapang ang lamig sa kanyang sikmura, at tuluyang namuo at namigat sa kanyang kaibuturan. Napahawak siya sa kanyang tiyan.

“Carlo suspects that Inigo is unconsciously blocking some of his childhood memories. Hindi mo ba naiintindihan? Those are all awful memories for him, and this accident is his way of forgetting them! Inigo may not know it consciously, but this is what he wants. He wants to forget. Maybe he wants to forget you, too.”

“I guess you’re right,” usal ni Olivia, nakatitig sa kanyang mga paa. “That’s probably true.”

“I don’t want my son to remember. Maybe it’s better if he never remembers. Carlo said if Inigo would be around things and people related to the memories he has forgotten, it would be easier for him to remember. He would remember them if he’s with you. Don’t do this to him. This is his chance to forget, to let go. Alam mong kailangan niya ’yon. He wants that. He needs that.”

“Of course,” usal niya. “Of course.”

“It’s your fault he got into that accident. You know it’s your fault. Do this for him. You have to do this for him.”

“I know, Mrs. Azcona.”

Narinig niya ang pagbukas at pagsara ng pinto ng banyo.

Shattered Memories - Dior Madrigal

Parang laging Olympic competition sa binata ang pagsa-shower. Sigurado siyang may world record na ito kung may category ng pabilisan mag-shower.

“Don’t worry, Mrs. Azcona. I know.” Ibinaba niya ang phone sakto sa pagpasok ni Inigo sa silid.

Nag-angat ito ng kilay at nagtatanong ang mga mata. Halata ang pag-aalala nito. Mabilis itong lumapit sa kanya. “What’s wrong?”

She let everything else drain out of her face. Tumaas ang sulok ng mga labi ni Olivia. “Nothing,” aniya. “Nothing.”