

# 1

Jaiden's breath was caught in mid-air when he saw that ethereal vision emerge from the entrance of *Zephyr*.

Maganda ang babae at napaka-sexy. She was wearing a tank top which appeared like a corset, jeans that hung low on her hips and strappy high-heeled sandals. The woman was a vamp! He shifted on his seat when he felt his body reacting.

“She's beautiful, isn't she?” Napatingin siya sa bar counter nang marinig ang tinig na iyon ni Lance. Ito ang may-ari ng *Zephyr* at isa sa matalik niyang kaibigan.

“Yes,” sagot niya. “Madalas ba siya dito?” Tumango si Lance. “Do you know her?”

“Hindi mo ba siya nakikilala?” balik-tanong nito.

Tumingin siya sa direksyon ng babae. She was surrounded by a group of male and happily chatting with them. Kumunot ang noo niya. Parang pamilyar nga ang mukha nito, pero hindi niya maisip kung saan niya iyon unang nakita. “Should I know her?”

“Therese Keisha ‘Trisha’ Remulla.”

Hindi makapaniwalang muli niyang ibinalik ang tingin sa babae habang pinipilit na komfirmahin ang sinabi ni Lance. Malabong maging iisa si Trisha at ang babaeng nakikita niya ngayon. Magkaibang-magkaiba ang katauhan ng mga ito.

Trisha was the simple, silent type and plain-looking girl he met in college.

*Trisha was the girl you messed up with in college,* paalala ng isip niya.

Lumingon sa kanya ang dalaga at noon niya nakilala ang pamilyar na brown eyes nito. She was indeed Trisha Remulla!

Trisha felt someone was watching her the moment she entered *Zephyr*. Binalewala niya iyon nang lapitan siya ng ilang kakilala na karamihan ay lalaki. She was used to the kind of attention she was getting from the opposite sex. Sanay na siyang makarinig ng mga papuri mula sa mga ito, ngunit hindi siya nagpapadala doon. She had learned her lessons—the hard way. Hindi mapagkakatiwalaan ang salita ng mga lalaki. Sasabihin nila ang lahat ng magagandang salita, makuha lamang ang gusto.

Minsan na siyang nagkamali at hindi na iyon

maulit pa. She once gave her heart to a man and he broke it, shattered it to pieces. Now she has learned to play their games. Noong masaktan siya ay lumayo siya upang makalimot. Ilang buwan din niyang ipinagluksa ang kamatayan ng kanyang puso at isang umaga, nagising siya na may pangako na wala nang lalaki mananakit sa kanyang puso. She would learn to play their games. Nagpa-make over siya and reinvented herself. Mabilis na nag-transform siya mula sa isang plain-looking girl to a sophisticated vamp.

Hindi na siya ang Trisha na madaling lokohin at utuin. The man who broke her heart brought out the best and worst in her. Dahil sa panloloko at panggagamit nito sa kanya ay natuto siyang lumaban at maglaro. She never gave her heart to anyone again. Commitment, loyalty and faithfulness ay wala na rin sa bokabularyo niya. Alam niyang maraming nagtataas ng kilay sa kanya, pero wala siyang pakialam sa sasabihin ng iba. Buhay niya ito at papatakbuhan niya ito sa paraang gusto niya.

Napatingin siya sa mga lalaking nakapalibot sa kanya. The topic was starting to bore her. Nagpapaligsahan lamang ang mga ito sa pagkuha ng kanyang atensyon. Muli niyang iginala ang paningin sa paligid. The world seemed to have stopped when

her eyes met those familiar corn-blue eyes.

*So he's back.* Jaiden Nicholas Fillan, the blue-eyed devil who broke her heart.

---

*Seven years ago...*

Napaangat ng tingin si Trisha nang maramdaman niya ang pag-upo ng kung sino sa bakanteng upuan sa pandalawahang mesang inookupa niya sa school canteen.

“May naka—” Nabitin sa kanyang lalamunan ang iba pa niyang sasabihin nang mapagsino niya ang lalaking nakaupo sa kanyang harapan. It was Jaiden Fillan, the team captain of the university’s basketball varsity team.

“You were saying?” nakangiting tanong ng lalaki, his corn blue eyes sparkling.

“M-may nakaupo diyan,” mahinang sabi niya saka yumuko.

“I don’t see anyone occupying the seat,” he said matter-of-factly.

“I... I’m saving it for my friend,” tukoy niya kay Ashley.

“Ako ba ang kinakausap mo o ang libro mo?”  
There was amusement in his voice.

Ayaw niyang tumingin dito dahil natatakot siyang mahalata nito ang kanyang nararamdaman. She had a huge crush on him and even thought she was in love. Hindi niya alam kung paano nangyari iyon pero na-realize na lang niya isang araw na mahal na niya ito.

He was handsome—with those corn-blue eyes, perfectly pointed nose and thin lips. He was rich and famous but he was not perfect. Ang sabi-sabi ay may kayabangan itong taglay, pero hindi niya iyon nakikita. He was just confident. May karapatan itong magyabang dahil may ipagyayabang naman ito. He was also notorious with women. Kung magpalit ito ng girlfriend ay para lamang itong nagpapalit ng underwear. Marahil ay nai-date na nito ang lahat ng magagandang babae sa campus. Who could ever resist his charm?

Nagulat siya nang pumitik ito. “Nakatulog ka na ba?” natatawang tanong nito.

She knew she was blushing. Lakas-loob na sinalubong niya ang tingin nito. “P-please, go,” mahinang sabi niya.

“Inuutusan mo ba ako?” tanong nito, nakataas ang mga kilay, waring naghahamon.

“H-hindi. N-nakikiusap lang ako.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” anitong sumandal pa sa backrest ng upuan at pinagsiklop ang mga braso sa tapat ng dibdib habang matamang nakatingin sa kanya.

He was stubborn, she concluded. Inisip niyang siya na lang ang aalis. Iginala niya ang tingin sa paligid. Wala nang vacant table at lahat ng mga naroroon ay nakatingin sa kanilang dalawa. Her blush intensified. She wanted to stand up and flee but her legs seemed to have lost their strength. “P-please, umalis ka na. Pinagtitinginan na tayo dito.”

Napamulagat siya at awtomatikong napaatras nang ilapit nito ang mukha nito sa kanya.

“Nakakahinga ka pa ba? Pulang-pula na ang mukha mo,” amused na sabi nito habang titig na titig sa kanyang mukha.

“I-iwan mo na ako, utang na loob.”

“Okay, let’s have a deal.”

Napakunot-noo siya. “What deal?”

“Go out with me tonight.”

“W-what!” gulat na aniya. Tama ba ang dinig niya?

“I’m asking you out.”

Nalilito pa rin siya. “B-bakit ako?”

“Bakit hindi?”

“Hindi ako tulad ng iba—”

“I like your being different. So what do you say?”

Napatingin siya sa entrance ng canteen. Papasok na roon ang best friend na si Ashley. Ayaw niyang makita nitong kasama niya si Jaiden sa table at malamang ay hindi na ito lumapit pa. Nahagip din ng tingin niya ang upuan ng mga ‘in’ girls. They were a bunch of pretty but mean girls. The girl who acted as their leader was throwing her dagger looks.

“Umalis ka na, please,” pakiusap niya muli kay Jaiden.

“I won’t go until you say yes.” He settled on his seat.

“O-okay, okay. Just go, please.”

Ngumiti ito—ngiti ng tagumpay. “I’ll see you

later,” anito saka umalis.

Pag-alis nito ay napabuga siya ng hangin. She realized she had been holding her breath since the first time he spoke to her. Then it dawned on her, she was going out with Jaiden.

---

“Talagang hindi ka nagsasayang ng oras, Pare,” pahayag ng pinakamatalik niyang kaibigan na si Jason nang dumating niya sa tambayan ng kanilang barkada. Nagtatanong ang tingin na tumingin siya rito. “I heard you already asked ‘Plain Jane’ out,” Jason said.

Napangiti siya nang maalala ang babaeng tinutukoy nito. It was Trisha Remulla, the object of their latest ‘dare’. In the spirit of fun, mayroon silang monthly dare at isa sa kanila ang pipiliin nilang magsasagawa niyon. It was his turn this month and the dare was a test of charm. The dare was to woo a girl who was out of their league and make her fall in love with him. They were deliberating on who the lucky girl was when they saw Trisha passing by. His friends shared a knowing look and despite his complaints, it was agreed that Trisha was the lucky woman.



Kahit ayaw niya, walang siyang nagawa and so he made the move. He blackmailed her into going out with him. Ang kailangan na lang niyang gawin ay umipon ng pasensya para ma-endure ang isang buwang taning na kasama si Trisha. Hopefully, mas maiksi sa isang buwan niyang matatapos ang misyon niya.

“And she agreed, Dude. Ihanda n’yo na ang mga pitaka n’yo at sigurado akong malalagasan kayo ng malalaking halaga before the month ends,” mayabang na pahayag niya.

“Hindi ba masyado pang maaga para magsalita, Bro?” tanong ni Lance.

“I know a conquest when I see one, Dude.”

“I bet my 1966 *Ferrari 275 GTS*, ni hindi ka aabot ng homerun, Dude,” nakangising pahayag ni Matt.

Bigla siyang na-excite. Ilang buwan na niyang nililigawan si Matt para ibenta sa kanya ang vintage car na tinutukoy nito. Kasama ang kotseng iyon sa manang natanggap nito mula sa namayapa nitong abuelo. “This is getting really exciting. You’re on, Man,” aniya.

“If you lose, I get to have your Jordan shoes collections?”

Ngumisi rin siya. Those shoes were his most prized possessions. “Hindi mangyayari iyon. I’m sure I’m gonna nail Trisha Remulla.”

---

Naglalakad sina Trisha at Ashley nang magulat sila sa biglang paghinto ng magarang sasakyang kilalang-kilala ni Trisha. Bumukas ang pinto ng driver’s side at mula doon ay lumabas si Jaiden. “Tatakasan mo ba ako?” nakangiting tanong nito.

“Ha? H-hindi,” sagot niya.

“I went to your classroom to fetch you, pero nakaalis ka na daw. Didn’t I tell you susunduin kita?”

“Kasi....” Hindi niya matagpuan ang tamang salitang sasabihin. Ramdam niya ang nagtatanong na mga mata ng kaibigan na nakatutok sa kanya. “Ah, Ash, Jaiden. Jaiden, si Ashley, best friend ko.”

“Hey, Ash,” he said cheerfully.

“Hi,” kiming sagot ng kanyang best friend bago siya binalingan. “Sasabay ka ba sa akin, Trish? Nasa parking lot na daw si Manong Pete.” She knew Ashley wanted to get away fast. Masyado talaga itong mahiyain at hindi nito sanay nakikipag-usap sa mga taong halos hindi naman nito kakilala.

“Ah, Ash mauna ka na. May pag-uusapan lang kami,” sagot niyang hindi makatingin nang derecho sa kaibigan. She knew her friend wanted to ask her questions, pero hindi pa siya handa na sagutin ang mga iyon. Alam niyang sooner or later ay kailangan din niyang magpaliwanag. “I’ll call you later.” There was a promise in her statement.

Tumango si Ashley. “Mauna na ako,” anito.

“Nice meeting you, Ashley,” nakangiting sabi ni Jaiden. Kiming nginitian ni Ashley ang lalaki bago naglakad palayo sa kanila.

---

Lulan ng kotse ni Jaiden, hindi magawang magsalita ni Trisha. It was like she was reliving a dream. Madalas niyang pangarapin ang ganitong eksena, kasama si Jaiden. Hindi man nito hawak ang kanyang kamay ay masaya na rin siya. Ang makalapit lang ito ay sobra-sobrang kaligayahan na ang dulot sa kanya.

Jaiden was tapping his fingers on the steering wheel while he was humming along with the song playing in his car’s music player. Nag-init ang kanyang mukha nang bigla itong lumingon at nahuli siyang nakatitig.

She saw his lips form a knowing smile. “May dumì ba ako sa mukha?” he asked.

Umiling siya. *Your face is just so handsome for my own peace of mind*, anang isip niya.

“Thank you,” anito sa pagitan ng pagtawa.

She blushed some more when she realized she just said her thoughts out loud. Sa kahihiyan ay tinakpan niya ng mga palad ang mukha. “Hey, don’t do that,” sabi nito habang tinatanggal ng isang kamay nito ang kanyang kamay sa sariling mukha.

“Nakakahiya!”

“It’s okay, sanay na ako, hindi ka naman nag-iisang nagsasabi ng ganoon.” She sensed a smile in his voice, like he was joking.

Medyo gumaan ang pakiramdam niya kaya nag-angat siya ng tingin. “Hindi mo ba alam ang salitang modesty?” tanong niya.

Tumawa ito. “Nagbibiro lang ako. You are refreshing. Madalang lang akong makakita ng babaeng marunong mag-blush.”

“Guess so, kasi sanay ka sa mga babaeng liberated?”

Muli ay tumawa ito. “How come alam mo iyon?”

“Bukang-bibig ka ng halos lahat ng kababaihan sa school at pati na din ang mga babaeng idine-date mo.”

“Wow, I’m that famous, huh?”

“As if you don’t know.” Umismid siya.

Muli ay tumawa ito. “May itinatago ka palang katarayan? How come I don’t know that?”

“Because I’m not type of girl who gets your attention.”

“But you already got my attention. I asked you out on a date, that should mean something, right?”

Kahit bigla siyang kinabahan ay pinilit niyang ikinubli iyon. “I don’t know. This isn’t like you at all. Hindi ako ang tipo mong babae. Why do I have this feeling that there is more to this? Tell me, Jaiden, why?” Hindi niya alam kung saan nanggaling ang lakas ng loob niya para itanong iyon.

Hindi ito sumagot. She couldn’t see his eyes because he was looking directly on the road. Nagmenor ito at ipinasok ang kotse sa parking lot ng isang sikat ng restaurant. He turned the engine off and looked at her. “Back to your question, I asked

you out because I wanna know you better. Yes, you're right, hindi ka katulad ng mga babaeng idine-date ko dati. Not that you are not beautiful; you are, really. Don't get me wrong—”

“I get it. I know what you're saying.”

Tumango ito saka nagpatuloy. “Hindi ba puwedeng magbago ang preference ko? My relationship with the girls I used to date didn't work out. Maybe I needed a change. Maaring nasa iyo ang hinahanap ko, so I tried. I asked you out. Masama ba kung sumubok ako?”

Natigilan siya. Masyado nga ba siyang mapagduda? “H-hindi naman. Sorry for asking. Hindi ko si—”

Ngumiti ito. “It's okay. No harm done. It's your right to ask. Kahit ako siguro ang nasa katayuan mo ay magtataka ako. I know you have more questions but can we talk about it over dinner? I'm starving already and I know you are, too?”

“Okay,” aniya.

Akmang aabutin na niya ang pinto ng kotse nang magsalita ito. “No, wait, let me open the door for you.”

*Make Me Yours - Roma Nympha*

---

Bumaba ito saka lumigid sa passenger side. He opened the door for her. She felt elated, who would not be? She was just Plain Jane and here was a Prince Charming treating her like a princess.

Yes, she was definitely in love with him already.

## 2

“Manonood ka ba ng game namin tomorrow?” tanong ni Jaiden kay Trisha.

Nakaupo sila sa ilalim ng puno sa school grounds. Nakasandal ito sa katawan ng puno samantalang ang kanyang likod ay halos nakadikit sa tagiliran nito. Nakayuko siya at nagsasagot ng mathematical problem sa kanyang notebook.

For two weeks now, Jaiden has been a constant fixture in her life. Kapag parehong bakante ang kanilang schedule ay magkasama sila. Marami siyang mga bulung-bulungan na naririnig. Kesyo hindi sila bagay ni Jaiden, na ano daw ang ipinakain niya sa binata na nag-iilusyon daw siya na seseryosohin siya nito. Hindi na lang niya pinapansin. Ang mahalaga ay masaya siya at walang makakasira ng kaligayahang iyon.

“Gusto ko sana, kaya lang may nauna na akong schedule,” sagot niyang hindi tumitingin dito. Itinalaga niya ang susunod na araw para sa research. Kailangan niyang tapusin ang kanyang term paper.

Bumuntung-hininga ito. “When will I be on your



top priority?” tanong nito.

Napatingin siya rito. His face was unreadable. “Are you serious?” she asked.

“What do you think?” balik-tanong nito.

Binitawan niya ang hawak na ballpen at humarap dito. “You sound different. Bakit ganyan ka magtanong ngayon?” Nakakapagtaka ang ikinikilos nito. He sounded jealous and somewhat possessive. What was happening to him?

“What’s wrong with my question? Can’t you come to my game tomorrow? Is that too much to ask from you?” he said; very irritated.

“Why?”

“Because I need you to be there!” He sounded exasperated.

“Hindi naman ako dating nanonood ng laro ninyo. What difference does it make now kung wala or naroon ako?”

“Because you mean something to me now! God, why are you making this difficult?”

“W-what did you just say?” natigilang tanong niya. Hindi kaya nabingi lang siya? Namali lang kaya

siya ng dinig?

Naihilamos ni Jaideen ang kamay nito sa mukha nito, tanda na nauubusan na ito ng pasensya. Sa dalawang linggong magkasama sila ay napansin niya iyon, masyadong mainitin ang ulo nito. Ngunit hindi niyon nabawasan man lang ang nararamdaman niya para sa binata. She loved everything about him, including his flaws.

“Do I really have to repeat it?” singhal nito. She shrugged. Huminga ito nang malalim pagkatapos ay hinaplos ng kamay nito ang kanyang pisngi. He looked straight into her eyes when he spoke. “You are special to me, Trisha. You know you are. I want you to be there, I *need* you to be there.”

“Pero—”

His hand dropped. May pag-aalinlangan sa mga mata nito. “Don’t you feel the same way? Wala ba akong halaga sa iyo? When will you be mine?”

“Are you pressuring me?” manghang tanong niya. Napatayo siya, patalikod dito. Kinakabahan siya. Bakit bigla naman itong nagmamadali?

She felt his hands on her shoulders. Marahang iniharap siya nito. Hinuli ng mga mata nito ang kanyang paningin. She opened her mouth to say

something but no words came out. He was smiling now, maybe sensing victory. His eyes were doing the tricks. His blue eyes were unnerving.

“Let me help you decide,” bulong nito bago bumaba ang mga labi sa kanya. When she felt his lips on hers, her knees turned jelly. Napahawak siya sa mga braso nito. She didn’t know how to kiss but she found herself responding to his kisses. “The sweetest lips I’ve ever tasted,” he said.

Napamulat siya. She was so drawn in the kiss and she didn’t know it had already ended. She felt her cheeks burn in embarrassment. She heard him chuckle.

“Suddenly, turned shy on me, Babe?” He was amused.

Nang maalala niyang nasa pampubliko silang lugar ay sinubukan niyang humiwalay rito. She felt his hands tighten on her waist.

“Let me go, Jaiden,” she said nervously, while scanning the place. Baka may makakita sa kanila sa ganitong kakompromisong tagpo.

“Not until you tell me what I wanna hear,” he said with a triumphant smile on his lips.

“That’s blackmail!” reklamo niya.

“Call it whatever you want, I don’t care. Ano naman sa akin kung may makakita sa ating magkayakap?”

“Gago ka!” asik niya.

“Maybe I am. What now?”

“Okay, fine! I’ll watch the game tomorrow!”

“Great! But you know, that’s not what I want to hear.”

“Ni hindi mo pa ako nililigawan, gusto mo na ng sagot?” reklamo niya.

Tumawa ito. “We have so much time ahead of us. Gusto ko lang makasiguro.”

She sighed in defeat. “Oo na!” He raised his eyebrows. “Sinasagot na kita. Mahal na nga kita.”

He smiled then hugged her. “Now, is that so hard to say?” Happiness obvious in his voice. “Kailangan ka pang daanin sa dahas, aamin ka rin pala,” biro nito.

Pinalo niya ito sa braso. Natatawang humiwalay ito sa kanya. He took her hand. “Wala nang bawian, ha?”

Tumango siya. Nang mag-ring ang bell ay pinulot nila ang kanilang mga gamit at magkahawak-kamay na tinungo ang building. It was one of the happiest days of her life.

---

Trisha thought her happiness would never end. Jaiden was the perfect boyfriend one could ever have. Guwapo ito, mabait at gentleman—or so she thought.

Pumunta siya sa locker room ng team nito matapos ang basketball game para sana sorpresahin ito, nang hindi sinasadyang marinig niya ang pinaguusapan nito at ng mga teammates nito. Para siyang pinagsakluban ng langit at lupa nang marinig niya ang katotohanang palabas lang ang lahat.

“I heard girlfriend mo na si Plain-Jane Trisha. Nailed her yet, Dude?”

“Shut up, Matt,” galit na sagot ni Jaiden.

“Dude, your time is running out,” anang isang kaibigan nito. “Malapit na matapos ang palugit.”

Trisha’s head suddenly felt like it was spinning. Palugit? Biglang nanikip ang dibdib niya.

“Seems like the blue-eyed devil has lost his charm. Have you fallen for her? Is the dare off? Okay

lang naman sa amin kung—”

“No!” dinig niyang mariing tanggi ni Jaiden.

“Dude, your Jordan shoes collections will—”

“I said no. A deal is a deal...”

She was just a bet?

Hindi na niya kaya pang pakinggan ang mga pinag-uusapan ng mga lalaki. Masyado nang masakit ang kanyang dibdib. Patakbong nilisan niya ang lugar na iyon. She was right all along. There was really more to it than what Jaiden made her see. Jordan shoes collections? Mapaklang napangiti siya sa gitna ng pagluha. Jaiden was the most important person in her life. He was her world but sadly, for him, she was no more important than some overpriced pair of shoes!

---

Pinuno muna ni Trisha ng hangin ang kanyang dibdib bago siya bumaba sa taxi na kanyang kinalululanan. Pumunta siya sa condo unit ni Jaiden.

She knew his family had a house somewhere in Makati but he chose to stay in a condo near the school. Kahit minsan ay hindi pa siya nakakarating sa bahay ng mga magulang nito. Noon ay iniisip na

niya ang bagay na iyon, ngayon ay alam na niya kung bakit. Bakit nga naman siya dadalhin at ipapakilala nito sa mga magulang nito when she was just the object of their dare?

Nang maramdaman niya ang pamumuo ng mga luha sa kanyang mga mata ay sinaway niya ang sarili. Tama na ang dalawang araw ng pag-iyak. Tapos na ang pagkaawa niya sa sarili. Ngayong araw na ito ay tutuldukan na niya ang lahat.

Today would be the last day of the dare. She would be giving Jaiden what he wanted. Katangahan mang masasabi ay hindi niya ito kayang biguin. If those shoes would make him happy, she would willingly let him keep those, even at her own expense. Dahil mahal niya ito. For the last time, she wanted to do an act of love for him.

Umakyat siya sa palapag na kinalululanan ng unit nito at nag-doorbell. Nang buksan nito ang pinto ay mahigpit siya nitong niyakap. Muli ay gusto niyang umiyak. Would she live through knowing she will never feel those strong arms around her again?

“Where have you been?” he asked, concern and longing evident in his voice. “Bakit hindi mo sinasagot ang mga tawag at texts ko?”

“Don’t ask,” she said then sought his lips in a fierce kiss.

He answered her kisses with the same intensity. Nang waring makabawi ito ay tinapos nito ang halik. “Babe, what’s happening?” litong tanong nito.

Marahang lumayo siya. Nanginginig ang mga kamay na sinimulan niyang buksan ang butones ng kanyang blusa. Hinawakan ni Jaiden ang kanyang mga kamay.

“What are you doing?” naguguluhang tanong nito.

“Don’t you want me, Jaiden?” she asked softly. Hindi niya alam kung saan nagmula ang lakas ng loob niya. Marahil ay doon sa isang glass ng wine na ininom niya bago pumunta sa condo unit nito.

“It’s not that but—“

“Stop thinking, Jaiden, just feel.” Tuluyang hinubad niya ang suot na blusa. Isinunod niya ang kanyang pantalon. Nakita niyang lumunok ito. When she reached for the clasp of her brassiere, she heard him groan before he reached for her and kissed her senseless.

She did not know how they made it to the



bedroom but somehow they did. When she finally felt the union of their bodies, tears fell freely from her eyes. Halo-halong emosyon ang kanyang naramdaman—happiness, dahil finally ay binigay niya ang lahat sa lalaking mahal niya at sadness dahil ito na marahil ang huling pagkikita nila.

Jaiden hugged her after the act—so tight that had she not known any better, she would think that he loved her, too.

Ipinikit niya ang kanyang mga mata at nagkunwaring tulog. Hindi niya kayang makipag-usap dito pagkatapos ng nangyari. She feared that she would break down and she couldn't let that happen. She wanted to walk out of there with a little dignity. She wanted a graceful exit, so they say. Pagkatapos ng huling pabor na ito na ginawa niya para kay Jaiden, lalayo na siya.

Nang maramdaman niya ang pantay na paghinga ng binata tanda na tulog na ito, inabot niya ang cellphone nito at bumuo ng isang text message.

*'Dare's done,'* she typed and sent it to Matt. She knew the message would get to their other friends. Nag-reply ito ng *'We need proof. We're coming over.'*

Hindi na niya sinagot iyon. Inasahan na niya ang

bagay na iyon. Ibinalik niya ang cellphone nito sa dating kinalalagyan at muling bumalik sa pagkakahiga sa paraang nakasubsob ang kanyang mukha sa dibdib ni Jaiden at nakatalikod siya sa pinto. She composed herself and waited for the moment to arrive. Hindi nagtagal ay narinig niya ang pagtunog ng doorbell. Narinig niya ang mahinang pagmumura ni Jaiden. Marahan itong lumayo sa kanya at bumangon. She even felt him kiss the top of her head. Once again, teardrops fell from her eyes.

Ilang minuto pa ay narinig niya ang boses ng mga kaibigan nito. “What are you doing here?” she heard Jaiden’s irritated but controlled voice.

“We have to see,” anang isang tinig. Narinig niyang papalapit ang mga tinig at yabag sa pinto. She could feel the thundering rhythm of her heart. Pilit niyang pinakalma ang sarili.

“You have no business being here!” Galit ang tinig ni Jaiden.

“Don’t be a spoilsport, Dude.” It was then that she heard the door open. Sabay-sabay na napa-‘Ohh’ ang mga kaibigan ng nobyo.

“Get out!” dinig niya ang kontroladong sigaw ng huli bago kinabig ang pinto pasara.

## *Make Me Yours - Roma Nympha*

---

Tears started spilling from her eyes. She was thankful that it took minutes before Jaiden came back in the room. Kontrolado na niya muli ang emosyon noon. Nang mahiga ito sa kama ay muli siya nitong ipinaloob sa mga bisig nito. Faking sleep, she turned away from him so that they were lying spoon-fashion. Baka kasi biglang tumulo ang luha niya at maramdaman nito iyon. It was safer if she had her face turned away from him.

Matapos ang isang oras, napagpasyahan niyang oras na umalis siya. Dahan-dahang tumayo siya at nagbihis. Nang maayos ang sarili, muli siyang lumapit sa natutulog na binata. Yumuko siya at sa huling pagkakataon ay hinalikan ang mga labi nito. Narinig niyang nagsalita ito.

“I love you,” he said or so she thought she heard.

Marahil wishful thinking lang iyon dahil iyon ang gustung-gusto niyang marinig mula sa binata. She wrote him a note and left it on his bedside table.

“Goodbye, Jaiden,” she said then walked out of his room, his house and finally... his life.

---

Nailing na lang si Trisha nang balikan ang nakaraan nila ni Jaiden.

## *Make Me Yours - Roma Nympha*

---

After that night, Trisha went away. Lumabas siya ng bansa at tumira sa kanyang ina sa Melbourne. She stayed there for two years. Doon ay pinilit niyang lumimot at magbago. Pinilit niyang matutunan kung paano mabuhay nang hindi nasasaktan at lumalaban.

Doon, natutunan niya kung paano makibagay sa mga tao, sa mga lalaki. Ang masakit na karanasang dinanas niya ay nagturo sa kanya kung paanong makitungo sa mga ito. She never let anyone in her heart again. She dated men but not exclusively. Men come and go but she never gave herself to anyone. Masyado na niyang mahal ang sarili para ipagkaloob pa ang kanyang katawan sa kahit na sinong lalaki.

Nang mamatay ang kanyang ina sa isang aksidente ay lumipad siya pa-Pilipinas at sa pagbabalik niya ay ibang Trisha na nakilala ng mga tao and the rest as they say, is history.

Naging maayos ang lahat ngunit ngayong bumalik na si Jaiden, makakapagpatuloy pa ba siya?

*Kailangan mong magpatuloy, paalala niya sa sarili. Hindi ang isang Jaiden lang ang makakasira sa lahat ng nabuo na niya para sa sarili niya. She changed because of him. Now show him what you've got. He's just like the other guys. Sa kaisipang iyon ay lumakas ang loob niya. Nginitian niya ito at naglakad*

palapit dito.

“Hi, Jaiden. Long time no see,” bati niya.

Waring natigilan ito. “H-hey, Trisha. You’ve changed.” Parang may disgusto sa tono nito.

Nagkibit-balikat siya. “So they say,” she said. “Hey Lance, a glass of martini, please,” baling niya sa lalaking nasa bar.

“Umiinom ka na din ngayon?” tanong pa ni Jaiden.

“Like you’ve said, I’ve changed.” Nang sumimsim ito ng alak mula sa kopita nito ay napansin niyang wala itong suot na singsing. “Not married yet?” tanong niya.

Ngumiti ito. “Not yet. Still waiting for the right one,” anito habang nakatitig sa kanyang mga mata, his blue eyes boring into her soul.

Suddenly, she felt her heart jump. *What was that?* she asked herself. “Still waiting for the right one or just afraid to settle down?” pagbibiro niya.

Tumawa ito. “Magaling lang talagang magtago ang babaeng hinihintay ko. Pasasaan ba’t makikita ko rin siya,” makahulugang pahayag nito.

*Make Me Yours - Roma Nympha*

---

Napangiwi siya. Tila may kumudlit na bahagi ng puso niya. “Ikaw nga ba ang kakilala kong Jaiden Fillan? You sound corny,” muli ay biro niya. “I don’t think I know you at all.”

He smiled flirtatiously. “How about we get to know each other again?”

Tumawa rin siya. “Are you flirting with me?”

“What if I am?” Tumawa siya. “Now I’m beginning to believe, you’re really the Jaiden Fillan I know.”

Nawala ang ngiti sa mga labi nito. “Trisha, about what happened—”

“Stop there, Jaiden. Let’s not bring up the past, okay?”

“But—”

“Please? Let’s just act like it never happened. Masaya na ako kung ano ako ngayon. Mukha namang masaya ka na din. So let’s leave it behind.”

Bumuntong-hininga ito. “Okay. So how are you?” he asked.

“Fine, never been better. Having the time of my life. How about you? How many conquests?”

He laughed. “You make it sound like I’m some

kind of a heartless playboy.”

*Hindi nga ba?* she wanted to say but she laughed instead. “I didn’t mean it that way. So how have you been in the past years?” she asked casually.

“Just fine. I’m based in Ireland now. The business there needed my attention. I go home to Pinas whenever I can.”

“Oh, I see. Who manages your business here then?”

“My father and brother.”

“You have a brother?” takang tanong niya. Hindi nito nabanggit noon na may kapatid ito.

“I do. And a sister.”

“How did you end up in Ireland? Bakit ikaw at hindi ang isa sa mga kapatid mo?”

“I volunteered. I needed some time away so I grabbed the chance. Naisip ko, kung nand’un ako, madali akong makakabawi.” He was talking in riddles. What happened five years ago that made him flee to Ireland, voluntarily? “How about you? How come you aren’t married yet?”

“Why settle for one when you can have plenty,

right?” pabirong sagot niya.

Malungkot na tumitig ito sa kanya. “Have I made you like this, Babe?” he softly said, his eyes full of loneliness.

Natigilan siya at pagkatapos ay tumalim ang kanyang mga mata. “Don’t give yourself much credit, Jaiden. I wanted this change. I made this change, not you,” aniya saka umalis.

Habang naglalakad palabas ay nararamdaman niya ang unti-unting pagbabalik ng sakit na pilit niyang itinago at kasabay niyon ang pagtulo ng kanyang luha. Bakit ba nagbalik pa ang lalaking iyon? Nagbalik ba ito para sirain ang lahat ng nasimulan na niya? Akala ba niya ay nakalimot na siya? Bakit nasasaktan na naman siya?



# 3

Jaiden wanted to run after Trisha but he did not think it was the right time. Tinungga niya ang natitirang laman ng kanyang kopita pagkatapos ay pumikit. Muli ay nanariwa ang kahapong nag-iwan ng malaking butas sa kanyang puso.

Alalang-alala siya nang dalawang araw nang hindi pumapasok sa eskuwelahan si Trisha. Ilang beses na niyang tinawagan ang cellphone nito ngunit out-of-coverage area ang cellphone nito. He tried calling her house, pero wala rin ito roon. Kahit ang mga tao sa bahay nito ay hindi alam kung nasaan ito. Even her best friend Ashley had no idea where she was. Ang sabihing nag-aalala siya ay kulang. He was afraid shitless!

Nang may kumatok sa kanyang condo unit at malaman niyang ang dalaga iyon ay dali-dali niyang binuksan ang pinto at niyakap niya ito nang mahigpit.

He was astounded nang bigla itong maghubad. Hindi siya makagalaw. He wanted her, for so long but he respected her too much to do that to her. Aminado siya na noong una ay dala lang ng pustahan kaya lumapit siya rito, pero nang makilala niya ito

## *Make Me Yours - Roma Nympha*

---

ay nagbago ang lahat. She was worth knowing. She was beautiful in and out. Nang minsan tanungin siya ng kanyang mga kaibigan tungkol sa progreso ng kanyang assignment, hindi niya maamin sa mga itong gusto na niyang mag-back-out sa kanilang dare. Sigurado kasi siyang abot-langit ang panunuksong aabutin niya kaya sinabi niyang tuloy pa rin iyon.

The night she gave herself to him was the happiest day of his life. Marami na siyang karanasan sa mga babae ngunit iba ang naging pakiramdam niya nang may mangyari sa kanila ni Trisha. It was like coming home for the first time. When his friends suddenly appeared to check out on her, he was raging mad. Gustung-gusto niyang pagsusuntukin ang mga ito. How he wanted to erase those malicious grins on their faces with his fist. Natatakot siyang baka magising si Trisha at malaman nito ang tungkol sa naging kasunduan niya at ng kanyang mga kaibigan. He was afraid she would get angry and would leave him afterwards. Iyon pala alam na nito ang lahat at tama ang kanyang kinatatakutan. When he woke up, she was no longer there. She left with nothing but a letter and memories. Nang basahin niya ang sulat ay parang may isang malaking kamay na dumaklot sa puso niya at sinakmal iyon hanggang madurog. She knew about the dare and she did everything for him

to win the bet. The letter kept running in his head over and over again...

*It's over long before I thought it began. It wasn't what I thought it was. I knew about the dare. I did what I have to do. Taliwas sa iyo, lahat ng ipinakita ko ay totoo. I have loved you for so long and I see that I have loved the wrong man. I hope you're happy. You get to keep your precious collections anyway. Goodbye, Jaiden. ---Trisha.*

He tried looking for her but she was gone. Walang makapagsabi kung saan ito nagpunta. He couldn't stand the accusations in Ashley's eyes when he asked her where Trisha was. She dropped out of college.

For two years, he looked for her. Pero walang silbi kahit ang mga detective agencies na nai-hire niya. Mahirap nga namang hanapin ang isang taong ayaw magpahanap. When the offer to go Ireland came, he volunteered immediately. Inisip niyang doon sa malayo ay makakalimot siya. Doon kung saan walang alaala ni Trisha ay makakapagsimula siya ulit. Ngunit nagkamali siya dahil hanggang doon ay dala niya ang alaala ng dalaga. Ibinaon niya na lang ang kanyang sarili sa trabaho. Sinisiguro niyang sa kanyang pag-uwi sa bahay ay wala na siyang panahong mag-isip.

For five years, he was like that. He was existing but no longer living.

It was a telephone call from his mom demanding him to come back home that brought him back to where everything started.

He was so deep in his miseries that he failed to see that his family was suffering with him. Napagtanto niyang kahit anong pagpaparusa sa kanyang sarili ang gawin niya ay hindi na maibabalik niyon ang nawala sa kanya. *Let fate do its course*, sabi ng kanyang ina. Siguro kapag nagkita silang muli ay mabibigyan siya ng chance para humingi ng tawad at hopefully at maitama ang lahat.

With a new perspective in life, he filed a month-long vacation and headed home to the Philippines. Who would have thought their paths would cross again too soon. Unang araw pa lang niya roon at nagkita na sila kaagad ni Trish. But things weren't like he expected them to be. Akala niya kapag nagkita sila ng ex-girlfriend ay susumbatan siya nito sa lahat ng kasalanang nagawa niya. He thought he would see anger in her eyes but he was wrong. She was cool, acting like nothing happened. Her eyes were cold, blank and seemed so distant. They were far from those expressive brown eyes that used to gaze

on him with so much love and adoration.

She was far from the sweet, simple girl he once knew. Iba na ito. Kung hindi lang niya ito nakausap ay hindi siya maniniwalang ito nga ang Trisha na kakilala niya. Nang subukan niyang buksan ang paksa ng nakaraan ay nakita niya ang pagdaan ng galit at hinanakit sa mga mata ng dalaga. Doon ay nakahinga siya kahit papaano nang maluwag. Kung siya man ang may kagagawan ng pagbabagong iyon sa dalaga, baka sakali siya rin ang magbabalik na dating Trisha na kilala niya.

Ang pagwo-walk-out nito ay patunay na hindi tuluyang nawala ang Trisha na nakilala at minahal niya noon. Napangiti siya. There was still hope after all.

---

Muntik nang mapatalon si Trisha mula sa pagkakahiga sa kama nang biglang tumunog ang kanyang cellphone. Lately ay parang lagi siyang nawawawala sa kanyang sarili.

*You've been thinking so much about him,* sita ng isip niya.

She sighed in resignation. Yeah, her mind was so full of Jaiden. Magmula nang huli silang magkita

dalawang araw na ang nakakaraan ay hindi na mawaglit ang binata sa kanyang isip. His memories seemed to haunt her. Was he making his way into her heart again? In love pa rin ba siya rito? After all this time?

“Of course not!” mariing tanggi niya. “Attracted lang ako sa kanya. Sino ba naman ang hindi maa-attract kay Jaiden Fillan? Guwapo, mayaman at edukado. “*A heartbreaker, too. Pareho kayo; bagay kayo*, tukso pa ng isang bahagi ng isip niya.

Something flickered in her mind. Ngayong alam na niya kung paano makipaglaro sa mga lalaki, maybe Jaiden wouldn't be an exemption. Siguro naman, kakayanin na din niyang makipaglaro dito. No emotions and strings attached. Napangiti siya. Maybe, in that way, kagaya ng mga nangyayari noon sa kanya sa ibang lalaki, mawawalan din siya ng gana. Kapag nagsawa na siya sa company ni Jaiden, matatanggal na niya ito tuluyan sa kanyang sistema. Kapag nangyari iyon, magbabalik na sa dati ang lahat. Pagkatapos niyang makagawa ng desisyon ay saka niya tiningnan ang kanyang cellphone. Tatlong missed calls mula sa isang di-kilalang numero. It was not long when it started ringing again.

Nag-atubili siya sa pagsagot. It was that same

unidentified number again. Medyo nadala na siya sa pagsagot sa mga tawag na unidentified ang numero. There was a time kasi na pagsagot niya sa telepono ay hinga lang ng hinga ang nasa kabilang linya. Nangilabot siya sa takot at pagkairita. Sino ba naman kasi ang taong nasa matinong pag-iisip ang tatawag at hihingahan lang ang tinatawagan? That person must be a psycho. Minsan naman ay isang babae ang tumawag at inaway siya. Dahil umano sa kanya ay hiniwalayan ito ng boyfriend niya.

Inaamin niya na marami na siyang naka-date, pero hinding-hindi siya sumasama sa mga lalaking alam niyang attached na, either asawa o girlfriend man. Ayaw niyang manira ng relasyon ng may relasyon. She wanted to have fun but not in a way na makakasira siya ng kaligayahan ng iba.

Nang halos matapos na ang kantang siyang ringtone ng cellphone niya, saka lang siya nagdesisyong sagutin iyon.

“Hello,” bungad niya.

“Hi, Trish,” came that familiar voice of the man who have been the constant subject of her dreams—tulog man siya o gising.

“Who’s this?” kunwa ay tanong niyang pigil ang

excitement na nadarama.

“It’s Jaiden.” So she was right. It was the blue-eyed Jaiden Fillan himself.

“How’d you know my number?”

He chuckled. “I knew you’d be asking that. Got it from a friend.”

“Yeah, from a friend who happened to own *Zephyr*?” tukoy niya kay Lance.

“No, not from him. I didn’t even know he had your number.” Parang may kahalong inis sa boses nito.

“I dated him once,” turan niya.

“Do you like him?”

“Si Lance?”

“Yes.”

“He’s handsome, he’s nice—yeah, I like him. He’s a charmer.” May pagkapalikero si Lance, pero mabait naman ito. She did not take it against him kahit kasama ito noon sa mga gumawa ng dare noon patungkol sa kanya. Gaya nga ng sabi niya, nakaraan na iyon. There was no use in bringing it up again.



“So gusto mo talaga siya?” There was a tinge of regret in his voice.

“Yeah, he’s a friend.”

“Friend lang?” Hope was back in his voice.

“Yes, friend. If not, I’d still be dating him until now,” natatawang sagot niya. Narinig niya ang pagbuntong-hininga mula sa kabilang linya. “What’s the sigh for?”

“Just another way to express ‘thank goodness’,” natatawang sagot nito.

Natawa rin siya. Tulad ng dati, prangka pa rin ito at walang kiyeme. “Bakit ka nga pala napatawag?” she asked.

“Can I ask you out on a date?”

“Talagang straight to the point ha. Walang ligoy,” komento niya.

“Well?”

“Okay,” pagpayag niya. There was no point in turning him down since she really wanted to go out on a date with him anyway.

“Shall I pick you up after thirty minutes?”

“Ngayon na? As in now?” di-makapaniwalang tanong niya.

“Yeah. As a matter of fact, I’m on my way to your place.”

She smiled again. “So you were that sure I would go out on a date with you tonight, huh?”

Tumawa ito. “I was hoping for it so hard, I knew it would happen.”

“Nicely delivered line, Mr. Fillan. Ilan na kaming nagamitan mo ng linyang iyon?”

Muli niyang narinig ang tawa nito. “A few, actually,” sagot nito. Birong-totoo, alam niya.

“And it always worked?”

“Ah yes, most of the time,” amin nito.

She liked this honesty. Maybe this time around, he would no longer pretend to be someone he was not. “And it worked again this time, Mister. Just ask the guard to call me up once you arrive at the ground floor, okay? Magkita na lang tayo sa lobby para hindi ka na umakyat pa.”

“Okay.”

“You still know your way to my place?”

“Sure.”

“So why don’t we put the phones down at mag-aayos pa ’ko? Medyo napaka-inconsiderate din kasi ng ka-date ko that he asked me out on such a short notice,” pabirong saad niya.

Tumawa ito. “Sorry, ’bout that, Babe. ’Bye. See you.”

“See you,” sagot niya saka ibinaba ang telepono.

He called her ‘Babe’ again like the way he used to seven years ago. Bakit may naramdaman siyang kilig?

---

Kasalukuyan siyang nagbibihis nang tumunog ang doorbell. Wala pa siyang tsinelas na suot nang lumabas ng kuwarto upang sinuhin ang kanyang bisita. Without bothering to know who the visitor was, binuksan niya ang pinto.

“Hi, Babe,” nakangiti ngunit medyo bothered na bati ni Jaiden.

Nakatupi hanggang siko ang sleeves ng suot nitong mamahaling polo, na naka-tuck-in naman sa slacks nitong kulay dark gray.

*He looked delicious enough to be my dessert,* anang pilyang isip niya.

“Hi,” ganting bati niya. Pinapasok niya ito sa loob ng bahay. “Please take a seat.” Iminuwestra ang upuan sa sala. “Anything to drink?”

“No, thanks,” anito saka umupo.

“Akala ko, magkikita na lang tayo sa ‘baba?’” tanong niya.

“Oo nga, kaya lang naisip ko na baka hindi ka pa tapos mag-ayos dahil, sabi mo nga, short notice ang binigay ko.”

“Ah, okay. Medyo hindi pa nga ako tapos. Would you mind if I make you wait for a couple of minutes more?”

“No, of course not. Take your time, Babe.”

“Thanks. Excuse me,” paalam niya bago humakbang patungo sa kanyang silid.

“Nice place, by the way,” narinig niyang anito.

“Thanks.”

“And, Babe?”

“Yes?”

“Next time, please look through the peephole first before opening the door, okay? You have to be careful. Marami nang loko sa panahon ngayon.”

His voice was filled with concern that it warmed her heart. Tumango siya. One million pogi points ang idinagdag niya sa score card ng binata.

---

Jaiden felt giddy knowing he would again be going out with Trisha. It was like going out on a date for the first time. Medyo kinakabahan siya. Ang yayain itong lumabas ay isa na yata sa pinakamahirap na task na ginawa niya. Nakaramdam siya ng takot na baka kapag nalaman nitong siya ang nasa kabilang linya ay babaan siya nito ng telepono. Ilang araw na niyang pinag-iisipan ang mga hakbang na gagawin para muling makapasok sa buhay ng dalaga. Hindi biro ang dinaanan niya para lang makuha ang numero ng cellphone nito. Kinailangan pa niya ang tulong ng kapatid na babae para makuha iyon and asking for his sister's help did not come cheap. Ilang libo rin ang nabawas sa credit limit ng credit card niya dahil doon.

Nang sa wakas ay makuha niya ang cellphone number ni Trisha ay nag-ipon pa siya ng lakas ng loob para tawagan ito. Hindi biro ang laki ng kasalanan

niya rito para basta na lang siya kausapin. Bukod pa roon, sa manner ng paghihiwalay nila dalawang linggo na ang nakakaraan, hindi siya magtataka kung hindi nito gustuhing makita siya. Nang magkaroon na siya ng sapat na lakas ng loob ay tinawagan niya ito. After three missed calls, sa wakas ay sumagot ito. Nang makausap na niya ito ay ibayong saya ang nadama niya na dagli ding nawala nang parang wala man lang bakas ng naging pagtatalo nila noong isang gabi. Parang walang nangyari. She was back to the playful, unfeeling Trisha that he saw at the bar. Medyo nalungkot siya, pero lalo siyang nagkaroon ng drive na ibalik ang dating Trisha. When she said she liked Lance, nakadama siya ng selos. It was an ugly feeling and it was directed toward his friend. Was he too late?

Mabuti na lang sinabi nitong isang kaibigan lamang ang tingin nito kay Lance. He was suddenly relieved. He was being possessive, he knew, but what could he do?

Matagal na niyang alam na sa dinami-dami ng babaeng dumaan sa buhay niya, no one suited him better than Trisha. Kailangan lang niyang ipa-realize sa dalaga na siya ang lalaking para rito. Na kung ano man ang sakit na idinulot niya rito noon ay handa siyang burahin ang mga iyon sa kahit anong paraang

alam niya.

Nang yayain niya itong lumabas at pumayag ito ay bigla siyang na-excite. So excited that he even went up to her unit contrary to what they had agreed on.

Nang buksan nito ang pinto ay para siyang na-lovestruck. Napakaganda pa rin nito kahit medyo wala pa sa ayos ang buhok nito at wala itong suot na sapin sa paa. Medyo nag-alala nga lang siya nang bigla nitong buksan ang pinto nang hindi sinisino ang kumakatok. He suddenly felt so protective of her kaya hindi niya naiwasang pagsabihan ito.

He turned his head to the bedroom's door when he heard it open. Napatayo siya. He held his breath when he saw how beautiful she was, clad in a thin-strapped black dress that barely reached her knees. Her hair was tied in a ponytail and some tendrils of hair were falling freely, shaping her heart-shaped face. Nag-apply rin ito ng very light makeup.

“You’re beautiful,” puri niya.

He saw her blush. Napangiti siya. How he missed the sight of it.

“Thanks.” Ngumiti ito na tila nahihiya. “You don’t look so bad yourself.”

“Talagang not so bad, huh,” he said, nagawa niyang magbiro kahit dinig niya ang malakas na kabog ng kanyang dibdib.

Tumawa ito na mas lalo pang nakadagdag sa kagandahan nito. “It was a softer way to say na puwede ka nang pagtiyagaang kasama,” balik-biro nito.

“I look that bad, huh?”

Muli itong tumawa. “Of course not, alam mong biro lang iyon. You’re gorgeous, Jaiden, and you always knew that.”

“Of course, I knew it, Babe. There’s really no use stating the obvious,” pagmamayabang niya.

“Oh, how modest!”

“So shall we, Babe?” Inalok niya rito ang kanyang braso.

Umabrisiete ito sa kanya. “Let’s go.”