

PROLOGUE

I smiled cheerfully even though I was covered in sweat. Strands of sweaty hair stuck to my face as the morning wind greeted me. I was still feeling dizzy. Very dizzy. Finally, I reached the last step.

I immediately sat on a vacant bench and looked at the timer. The train would arrive in fifteen minutes.

I still have time to remove my shoes and save my sorry feet from hell.

Why on earth did I forget to wear my flat shoes kasi? I took the train daily, so I really couldn't understand kung bakit heels ang isinuot ko ngayon. Wait. Now that I think about it... where the hell did I sleep last night?

I racked my brains.

Okay, Raya. Calm down. This is the train station. And next to the train station is...

I gulped when I saw the hotel's huge sign.

Oh, no. Shit. Not again.

So I woke up in a hotel room alone, realized that

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it was already eight in the morning, washed my face, brushed my teeth, took a quick bath, wore the same clothes I wore the day before—thank heavens for uniforms, no one would notice the difference—put on my shoes, and fled from the hotel.

And here I am, waiting for the train.

Okay. Calm down. Everything is perfect, so calm down.

Everything's perfect.

Not.

I panicked as I tried to remember the night before. I couldn't. And it was not the tequila's fault.

It's mine. I have a very short memory.

Okay. No need to panic. I rubbed my foot. My stockings got ripped, so did the skin near my heel.

Eew. Blood.

I rummaged through my bag. Nasaan ang panyo ko?

Before I could panic further, a hand holding a handkerchief appeared in front of me. I looked up and saw a guy in jeans and collared white shirt.

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I blinked. He gestured for me to get the handkerchief. I reluctantly got it from his hand and mumbled my thanks.

So what did just happen?

A spark of hope emerged. The white horse! I mean... the prince on a white horse!

Finally, he has arrived to save me from this deep shit of hell!

I was about to stand up and follow him when a girl about my height came into view and held on to his arm. My jaw dropped, but I managed to close my mouth at once.

Oops.

I sighed.

Not again.

I thought it might be him.

1

“Hiraya del Sena!”

“OMG, Reese, kailangang nakasigaw?” I asked, looking to my left, then to my right. My gosh. Baka may makapansin sa amin dito.

“Kasi nakaka-frustrate ka! Where did you go na naman ba kagabi?” she asked, sitting on a chair in front of me.

“I went home,” I lied.

“Leche,” she muttered, glaring at me.

I sighed. “Fine. I slept at *Unicorn*,” I said, giving up.

“I know you did. Fritz told me,” she said, rolling her eyes. “I’m talking about where you went before you went to *Unicorn*.”

“Oh, that?” I asked, laughing nervously.

She gritted her teeth. “Alam mo, Raya, ewan ko sa ’yo. Bahala ka na. Tatal, buhay at matris mo naman ’yan, eh.”

I blinked. “Hey, hey, it’s not like that!” I said

defensively.

She sighed. “So what’s Boy Toy #23 like? Wait, don’t tell me. Iniisip ko pa lang ang mga kalaswaang—”

“Reese! My gosh! Mahalay lang akong mag-isip, pero... pero hanggang isip lang ’yun!”

She smirked. “So inamin mo ring mahalay kang mag-isip?”

I cleared my throat. “I’m just open-minded. Malayo ang nararating ng utak ko. Ganoon talaga kapag matalino.”

“Not really. Matalino rin naman ako, ah? Pero hindi ako ganyan mag-isip. Don’t make palusot. You’re very green-minded.”

“Hey, I’m not *Shrek*! I’m *Princess Fiona*! Pero... ang gandang *Fiona* ko naman.”

“You know what? Nalilihis ang usapan.”

I sighed. “I told you, Reese, I’m not sleeping around. I’m just experimenting.”

“Experimenting with carnal pleasure?”

“Reese! Alam mo ikaw, hindi ka nga *Shrek*, pero wala kang censor sa bunganga mo!” I hissed, glancing around again.

She rolled her eyes at me. “Well, I don’t see the point of using a substitute word if you can understand completely naman the word.”

“Basta! I’m just experimenting.”

“Huh. Kaka-experiment mo, baka di mo na malaman kung sino ang ama ng ipagbubuntis mo.”

“Reese! Why are you so bitchy?”

“Kasi timang ka. Kung ayaw mo rin lang sabihin kung ano ’yang experiment mo—”

“I told you, I’m just testing them.”

“Testing them? In what way ba?”

“Basta! Mahirap ipaliwanag!”

She shook her head. “Diyan ka na nga. Oh, by the way, have you thought about my proposal? May bakante sa *Axis Bank*. Sa kabilang department lang. You want to apply?”

“Marami bang lalaki doon?”

“Leche.”

I wrinkled my nose. “As long as may—”

“There are plenty of males there, pero ngayon pa lang, I’m telling you off na. Don’t you dare create

a scandal there.”

“Wow, maka-scandal naman ’to—”

“So, ano? Are you going to apply or what?”

“Fine,” I said, shrugging. I’m pretty bored lately, so I guess it would be nice to try another ocean to catch *the* fish.

Months had already passed since I accepted Reese dela Vega’s invitation to be part of the Finance Team of *Axis Bank*.

Pero hindi ko pa rin siya nakikita.

Ang prince charming ko on a white horse.

Naubos na ba ang mga lalaki sa mundo? So unfair.

“Oh, why the long face?” Reese asked when she reached our usual spot in *Café del Sueño*. “You didn’t get to sleep last night? Wild ba?”

I rolled my eyes. Hindi niya talaga ako pinaniniwalaang I’m not sleeping around nga. I’m experimenting. And that kind of experiment eh ayokong ipaliwanag pa sa kanya dahil uulanan niya lang ako ng kanyang lectures. Tama nang alam ni

Fritz Samonte—ang general manager ng *Unicorn Tower*—ang dapat niyang gawin everytime papasok ako sa loob ng hotel at may kasamang lalaki.

I sighed. I've been experimenting for months—no, years—but to no avail. Kung ibang babae siguro, matagal nang sumuko, pero ako? No, hindi ako susuko. I will stand by my belief.

“Wild. Wild na wild,” I muttered, referring to how Fritz and his guards in black suits almost erased the face of the man whose name I didn't even bother remembering. Bakit pa eh he was a failed experiment subject naman just like those before him?

Reese dropped her jaw. “Oh, my gosh. I'm really speechless,” she muttered, shaking her head. “So, ano? Are you ready for your automation project?”

I shrugged. “Does it make difference if I'm ready or not eh scheduled naman 'yun tomorrow?”

“Good. Ayokong mapahiya tayo sa IT Group, ha.”

I rolled my eyes kasi umiiral na naman ang pagiging bossy workaholic ni Reese.

“We won't. Just trust me.”

“I trust you. It's your hormones I don't trust.”

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I rolled my eyes. “Thank you, ha. So I’ll be at the *Stripes* later. Samahan mo ako.”

“I’m busy.”

“Fine. Maglalaslas ako at mumultuhin na lang kita after.”

“Go. Leche, diyan ka na nga. I’ll go ahead.”

I waved my hand at her. She rolled her eyes and left.

I saw a guy enter the café, but I couldn’t see his face kasi he was wearing a hoodie and the hood was up.

Guwapo kaya? Puwede ko kayang landiin?

I stood up, but before I could even approach him, a girl entered the shop and put an arm around the guy’s waist.

I wrinkled my nose. Naunahan ako. Sayang.

Oh, well. I guess it might not be him.

Not my prince charming.

“I’m here nga! And if you don’t appear in thirty minutes, I’m gonna kill myself!”

“Ang suicidal mo! Stop moping and get a life!”

“Life?” I laughed. “My life’s with him!”

“Shut up, Raya, and go home!”

I sniffed and bawled my eyes out. “No! I’m going to wait for him!” Wala akong pakialam kung ngumangawa na ako at pinagtitinginan na ng mga tao sa *Stripes*. I’m a regular here kaya huwag silang epal.

“Wala kang hinihintay! Ano ba, Raya! Move on!”

“I can’t! I can’t do it alone!”

I could hear her mutter various curses. I managed a laugh.

“Why are you laughing? Are you insane?”

“Yeah, I am! Kaya appear in front of me in thirty minutes! Otherwise, you’ll see your best friend hit the headlines tomorrow!”

“Raya! Just—”

I ended the call and smirked while wiping the tears from my eyes. Pupunta siya. She’d never let me be alone and miserable.

I drank another glass of *mojito*. It was my sixth. I already finished three shots of *kamikazee*. Huh. My

alcohol tolerance is high, so I'm not worried.

Pero para kasing... shit. Mahina yata ang resistensya ko tonight. Medyo natatamaan na ako, eh. Pagkatapos wala pa si Reese. My bad.

I'm not messing up my life. In fact, I'm trying to build it nga, eh. But what can I do? Hindi ko yata kayang mag-isa ito. I need him. I need Harold.

I stood up. I almost lost my balance, but I managed to grab the back of a chair for support. Huh. Ako pa. Hindi ako basta-basta...

"Oh, shit!" I found my butt on the floor. Leche. My sexy butt. Ang lakas ng bagsak ko. Ganoon na ba ako kabigat? Baka mabaog ako nito.

I was about to stand up when a pair of strong hands pulled me up. I glanced at the owner of those hands and blinked. I couldn't see his face clearly, pero... ang bango niya. My gosh. Gusto ko siyang amuyin magdamag.

"Are you okay, Miss?"

"I'm not. I'm dizzy. I need something to smell," I replied.

"May maitutulong ba ako? Kailangan mo ba ng mint?"

“No, kailangan kita. I mean, ’yung amoy mo.”

“Huh?”

I shook my head. “Sabi ko ’yung amoy kasi dito nakakahilo.”

I narrowed my eyes, trying to see his face better, pero wala, eh. Madilim at nahihilo na ako sa antok. I tried to sit again, but I fell on my butt again.

“Ouch, shit,” I complained. I almost wanted to cry. Pati ba naman itong sahig, nakikiepal? Gusto pa akong agawin para sa kanya na lang ako ma-fall?

“Miss...” The guy tried to help me up again.

I smiled at him. “Ba’t ang bait mo?”

Oh, wait. He could be my subject for tonight.

“Miss, wala ka bang kasama rito?”

“May nakikita ka bang kasama ko?” I asked back.
“Wala, so samahan mo na lang ako.”

“Pero, Miss—”

I immediately flung myself at him.

“Miss, teka lang—”

I smirked.

Caught you.

I heard him sigh. “Saan ka ba puwedeng ihatid?”

I smirked again.

Caught you, times two.

“*Unicorn Tower*. I have a room there.”

He didn’t say anything and led me outside.

Oh, well, I caught another boy toy for Fritz and his boys.

We arrived at the *Unicorn Tower*. He had a car. Fritz and his boys greeted us. Fritz gave me a knowing look. I returned it with a signal.

The guy assisted me to the elevator. When we got inside, I waited for him to transform, but he didn’t. Oh, wow. Nagtitimpi? *Is he resisting me?*

I fought the urge to laugh when I remembered how no one could ever resist Hiraya del Sena—the Beauty of Metro.

Pero mukhang matinding pagtitimpi ang ginagawa ni *Boy for Tonight*.

I looked at him closely. He was wearing a white

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shirt. Perfect. My prince on a white horse. He was tall. Hanggang balikat niya lang ako. And he got abs. Oo, iyon talaga ang una kong napansin kahit natatakpan iyon at hindi nakikita. Pero alam kong he got them. Obvious kaya. He had a lean, but muscular built. Messy hair, chinky eyes. Medyo tanned.

Parang nakita ko na siya. At sigurado akong hindi sa panaginip iyon.

When we reached my hotel room, I searched for my access card inside my bag and when I found it, I gave it to him. He didn't say anything and just placed it on the screen. The door opened and we went inside.

I had to blink when I realized he didn't even close the door. OMG, gusto niya ng scandal?

I was surprised when he carried me and placed me on the bed. I closed my eyes and waited, but instead of the *usual* scene, I saw him removing my shoes. I couldn't even feel the presence of Fritz and his boys.

Feet. So he's going to start from there? My feet? OMG. Good thing nagpa-foot spa ako last weekend.

After removing my shoes, he held my left foot. I screamed when he touched a certain part.

He sighed. "I knew it. You sprained your ankle."

I blinked sleepily. "My... what?"

"You were limping earlier. You didn't even feel the pain?"

"Ngayon lang," I replied, not even remembering kung kailan ako na-sprain, but now that he pointed it out, naramdaman kong may masakit sa paa ko.

He started massaging it. I closed my eyes because it felt good. Tagos hanggang sa matris ko ang sarap ng pagmamasaha niya sa paa ko. I was about to lose myself completely in the moment when my phone rang. It was Reese.

Oh, shit. I forgot about her. I answered my phone.

"Leche ka! You said it was a matter of life and death, and that I should be here, and—"

I moaned as his hand moved on to my ankle.

"Hoy, bitch! I'm talking here!"

"Re...ese..." I managed to say.

She ended the call. Problema niya? Never mind her. Ang importante ay sarap na sarap ako sa pagmamasaha ng lalaking ito sa paa ko.

“You use your feet often, don’t you?”

I nodded. How did he know? “Yeah, I do,” I replied sleepily.

He massaged it for another fifteen minutes until I was almost asleep. He placed my feet on the bed.

OMG. Heto na. Heto na.

I waited for him to start the scene and for Fritz and his boys to barge in, but before I could even blink again, he was on his feet.

“Take care, Miss.” He left the room and closed the door behind him.

I sat up on the bed, my drowsiness fleeing. Did he just leave the irresistible Goddess and Beauty of Metro, Hiraya del Sena alone in a hotel room?

Okay... what happened?

Could he be the one I was waiting for?

OMG.

It might be him. It really might be him.

2

“Sa lahat naman ng araw na male-late ka, Raya, ngayon pa!” Reese snapped when she saw me get off of the elevator.

So talagang inabangan niya ako to harass me?
“Wow. Nagsalita ang laging late everyday.”

“I am not late today!”

“Today lang. Ano ba? I told you I had an emergency,” I said, limping.

“Napaano ka?” she asked, raising her eyebrow.
“Ganoon ka-wild to the point na nabali your foot?”

“Sprain, Reese, sprain. Seriously, don’t you read text messages?”

“Whatever. Bilisan mo at hinihintay ka na niya.”

“Ba’t ba atat na atat kang i-impress ang IT? Type mo?”

“Of course not! I need them, so I have to impress them.”

I remember she’s planning to acquire *Axis Bank* in the future. “Fine. Later na lang ako pupunta sa

powder room. Nasaan ba ang IT na naghihintay sa akin?”

“Sa office mo,” she said excitedly. “Basta, ha, dapat makita ng IT kung gaano kagaling ang mga taga-Finance para full support ang ibibigay nila sa atin.”

“I get it, I get it,” I muttered. Nakakaloka. Ang sakit pa rin ng ulo ko. No effect sa akin ang medicine. Naalala ko na naman si Prince Charming on a White Horse. Gusto ko siyang makita ulit. Kahit wala siyang white horse, okay lang. Puwede namang siya lang, eh. Willing naman akong sakyan, I mean tanggapin siya kahit wala siyang white horse.

Reese gave me a final wave before I went inside my office. She was right. May tao na nga sa loob, nakatalikod. Waiting for me.

“Hi, good mo—”

I blinked when he stood and faced me. I couldn't even finish my sentence. His eyes narrowed in recognition.

OMG. Si Prince Charming!

Ganito kabilis? Kanina lang ako nagdasal sa lahat ng puwedeng dasalan para makita ulit siya, eh!

OMG. Bida na ako! Isa na akong bida sa sarili kong Koreanovela kahit hindi ako Koreana!

“Miss—”

“Raya. Hiraya del Sena,” I said and grabbed his outstretched hand to shake it.

He gave me an awkward smile. Shit. Naiihi ako. Dapat talaga dumaan muna ako sa banyo kanina, eh!

“Nice meeting you, Miss Del Sena. I’m Hunter dela Paz.”

“May I call you mine?”

He blinked. “Excuse me?”

I shook my head. “I mean... may I give you a nickname? Hunter is quite mouthful kasi, eh.”

But really, mukha ka namang yummy, so okay lang kahit mouthful ka, I mean ’yung name mo.

He nodded. “That would be fine.”

“Then I’ll call you H,” I said, marking him with a nickname specifically given by me, Hiraya del Sena, Metro’s Epitome of Beauty.

“H?” he asked, smiling awkwardly.

“Ayaw mo?” He shrugged. “Good! And call me

Raya, not Miss Del Sena. Pero you may call me yours if you want.”

He laughed softly.

Shit, bakit ang sexy ng tawa niya? And double shit... bakit naiihi ako!? I swear, I should drink less tea. Ibang tea na lang ang iinumang, I mean iinumang ko.

“Okay, Raya. So... shall we start?”

“Sure. Date and place,” I said.

He blinked. “Excuse me?”

“I mean, let’s jot down the date and place today for formality,” I said.

He nodded. “That’s noted. Start by telling me what exactly it is that you want.”

“Well, I want you,” I answered, staring at him.

“You want me?” he asked, confused.

“Yeah.”

He nodded. “You want me to...?”

I blinked. *Oh, shit! What am I doing? This is the workplace!*

“I want you to listen carefully to me,” I said,

trying to cover up my kahihyan a while ago. I tried to erase all thought of the possible *starts* we could do. We could start slowly or wildly or...

“Raya?” He snapped his fingers.

I blinked as he seemed to penetrate my eyes with his gaze. Shit, puwede bang iba na lang ang i-penetrates niya? I mean, ibang parte na lang ng katawan ko. Puwede namang hindi mata... shit!

What am I thinking?

“I’ll tell you about Finance’s goal with this automation. Will you help me with the proposal para ma-approve iyon ng group head n’yo and finally ng president?”

He nodded. “Sure. Ano ba ang gusto ng department?”

“Bukod sa maraming pera? Makauwi nang maaga. Hence, the automation.”

“I see. I have here some programs for your monthly reports,” he said. “Can you move closer for you to see the screen?”

“Gaano ka-close?” I moved my chair next to him.

He smiled, leaning away from me a little. “Just

enough.”

I almost pouted. Ang hirap namang landiin nito!
Wait! Bakit ko siya nilalandi dito?

Umayos ka, Raya!

He went on explaining about the programs, and I went on smelling his perfume. Or was it his natural scent? Bakit ang bango niya? Anong sabon ang gamit niya? Puwede ba kaming mag-share?

Shit. Dirty thoughts again.

“This one will not only save time. It’s more accurate in generating the reports you need for your monthly submission to the *Central Bank*,” he said, looking at me.

Oops. He caught me staring at him.

He cleared his throat and moved away a little. Okay, fine. A little lang naman, eh. Kering-keri pang lundagin, este tingnan. Magtitinginan lang kami? How boring.

“If you’re not comfortable discussing this right now—”

I pressed a palm to my forehead and acted like I was feeling dizzy.

“Are you okay? You should have stayed at home instead,” he said. “Kumusta ang paa mo?”

OMG, OMG! He remembered me! “My foot is fine,” I said.

My hormones are not.

I’m not a saint. I’m not even conservative. I’m a woman who knows what her hormones want. And they definitely want this man.

“Is it fine if I ask you about last night? I mean, we’re at work and—”

“*Café del Sueño* in thirty minutes. Meet me there,” I said, standing up and leaving him with his mouth open.

I like this guy. It was like at first sight.

“Raya! Where the eff did you go!?”

Reese was screaming at me on the phone, so I held it far from my ear. When she stopped screaming, I spoke again.

“I’m out doing field work.”

“What field work?”

“Basta! Just trust me. H will be arriving in a few minutes, so we’d better hang up.”

“H? Who’s H?”

“That IT guy who was waiting for me inside my office.”

“Hunter dela Paz? Hiraya del Sena, I’m telling you, he’s the—”

“He’s here! Ta!” I said, ending the call.

Hunter dela Paz sat in front of me. “Why do we have to meet here to discuss the project?” He sat down.

“Because I couldn’t concentrate inside the office.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Why? Isn’t the office the most appropriate place for—”

“No. The office is like a cage. I can’t spread my wings there,” I said.

He just gave me an awkward smile. “So...?”

“Are you single?” I asked.

“I’m... excuse me?”

“Hunter dela Paz,” I said, searching the database of employees. “Single. Good.”

He laughed softly. “You’re very...”

“What?”

“Charming.”

I grinned. “Of course, I am.”

He smiled at me. “Sa tingin ko ay hindi tayo mahihirapang makatrabaho ang isa’t-isa.”

Tatrabahuin namin ang isa’t-isa? What a nice idea. Shit, kinikilig ako. Bakit kasi ang guwapo niya?

I was about to take a sip of my coffee when I remembered na baka maihi na naman ako nito.

“So do you like my proposal earlier?”

“Huh? Nag-propose ka na? Ang bilis naman yata. Hindi pa nga tayo eh.”

He looked amused. “You’re funny, Raya.”

I realized that he was talking about the automation project. “I liked it. Let’s use it.”

He smiled. “I’ll prepare a draft for the formal proposal. After it has been approved, we can start testing it.”

Test.

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That reminded me. I stared at him as he was typing something on his laptop.

IT siya ng *Axis Bank*. Medyo bawal kasi... well, nasa iisang company kami. So I should control my thoughts about him.

Thoughts na sa kanya lang naging wild nang ganito.

And speaking of wild... was I like this before with Harold? I bit my lip. I was just me. Kung ano ako noon, ganito pa rin ako ngayon. What was wrong with me that Harold turned me down?

Sa dinami-dami ng nagkakandarapa sa akin, tinanggihan ako ni Harold de Vera?

Fine, he was as popular as me even back then. Kaya nga bagay na bagay kami. But he insisted we should just be friends instead na lang. After years of being MU (it's mutual understanding kasi never kaming nagkaroon ng malibog na ugnayan) and landian, akala ko eh papunta na kami sa journey to forever namin. Iyon pala, journey to *never*. Leche.

Mabuti sana kung isang laro lang para sa akin iyon, eh. Kaso hindi. I fell for him. Hard. And I learned my lesson the hard way kasi umalis siya ng bansa, leaving me with questions and not even bothering to

call or send me an e-mail.

Of course need kong mag-move on, di ba? Why? Kasi kahit na nagmahal ako, na-reject, at nasaktan... naniniwala pa rin ako na may true love. I know, I know, I'm a hopeless romantic. Eh sa ganoon ako eh.

Naniniwala pa rin akong may isang tao na para sa akin. At naniniwala akong balang-araw ay makikita ko rin siya.

My name is Hiraya del Sena. Guys approach and surround me everywhere I go. Pero wala, wala talaga. Wala siya roon. Hindi ko siya makita. Kahit naman ganito akong mag-isip (hindi ako ipokrita para itanggi ang friendship namin nina Hormones), naniniwala pa rin ako sa true love.

I believe he's looking for me, too. I want him to find my heart, not just the way to my bra and thong.

“Raya?” Hunter snapped his fingers in front of me. “Bakit tulala ka? Ayos ka lang ba talaga?”

I stared at him. Bakit ganoon? We just met last night and we had just formally introduced ourselves to each other a little while ago, pero feeling ko eh siya na ang soulmate ko? Ni hindi ko pa nga siya love, eh. Like pa lang. Like at first sight nga kagabi, eh. Nadoble kanina.

“Do you believe in soulmates?” I blurted out.

I was surprised when he smiled and said, “I do.”

OMG. Ito na ba? Siya na ba ang hinihintay ko? The one guy who believes in soulmates and destiny? “You do?” I asked, excitement running all the way from my heart to my stomach... to my lingerie.

He nodded. “I’ve found mine.”

I inhaled at sasabog na dapat ang overies ko when he picked up his phone and held it for me to see.

“Iza,” he said, gesturing to the wallpaper of his phone, “my girlfriend.”

3

So ano ang peg ko ngayon? Friendzoned? We weren't even friends yet! Nakakainis!

“Hiraya del Sena!” Reese snapped as she stormed inside my office.

“Ano'ng problema mo?”

She sat down on a chair. “Utang na loob, Raya, not Hunter!”

“Huh? Anong not Hunter ang pinagsasabi mo diyan?”

“Not Hunter! Landiin mo na ang lahat, huwag lang si Hunter dela Paz!”

“Hindi ko siya nilalandi, 'no!” protesta ko.

Well, hindi naman talaga eh. Slight lang.

“Raya—”

“Ba't ba ang wagas mo maka-react? Don't tell me, type mo?” I asked, raising my eyebrow.

“Hindi! Ano ba, Raya!? He's the president's nephew!”

“And so? So? Inaagaw ko ba siya sa tito niya? Bet ko ba siyang maging pamangkin? Bet ko siyang maging boyfriend, not pamangkin.”

“Raya!” she snapped. “May girlfriend si Hunter!”

“Wow,” I said, raising my eyebrow again. “So updated ka yata sa profile niya?”

“Malamang! Because he used to be my IT partner!” she replied. “He’s a nice guy, Raya. And he’s not fit to be a chess piece in one of your games.”

Natatawa ako kay Reese. I mean, hindi ko naman hahalayin si Hunter, eh.

“Listen, Hiraya del Sena,” she said seriously. “Kung gagawa ka ng scandal, bahala ka sa buhay mo, pero piliin mong mabuti ang makaka-partner mo sa scandal mo, puwede?”

“Fine, fine. Kung ’yan lang ang ipinunta mo here, rest assured, I’ll behave,” I said.

Reese looked at me suspiciously. “Sigurado ka, ha? Babalatan kita nang buhay kapag nabalitaan ko na lang na may scandal ka kasama ’yang si Hunter.”

“Huh, iba na lang ang balatan mo.”

“Excuse me?”

“Oh, bakit? Di ba mas kanais-nais balatan ang saging kaysa sa akin?”

She raised her eyebrow. “Dama kong hindi wholesome ang gusto mong iparating.”

I looked at her innocently. “I’m wholesome.”

She rolled her eyes. “Whatever. Basta, I’m warning you. Hands-off kay Hunter dela Paz kung ayaw mong mapatalsik from *Axis Bank*. Leche, idadamay mo pa ako, eh.” Lumabas na siya ng opisina ko.

Hanggang tingin na lang ang mga hormones ko sa kanya.

Ba’t kasi may girlfriend, eh... I mean, I may be liberated, but it’s not in me to make gapang another woman’s man. My gosh, takot ako sa karma. Sayang ang beauty ko kung makakarma lang.

And besides, Hunter dela Paz seemed the loyal type, hence, he could not be one of the subjects of my experiment—no matter how much I drool over him.

*“What the f*ck are you doing there again, ha, Raya?”*

“I met a client!” I shouted over the phone. Ang

ingay, eh. Alangang hindi ako sumigaw? Eh, di hindi ako narinig ni Reese? Maarte pa man din 'yun.

“Client? What client?”

“You know... expanding my networks.”

“I thought you stopped doing that na?”

“I won’t stop expanding my networks,” I said. “Osha, I’d better end this call na. By the way, I got you another contract. Tataba na naman ang portfolio mo bukas.”

“Should I thank you, then?”

“Later, later,” I answered. “Just get off my case.”

“Fine, bahala ka. Just don’t be late tomorrow.”

I heard a click. She had ended the call.

I looked up and saw a man in his late twenties. He greeted me.

“Hi,” I replied, smiling.

“Alone?”

Oh, great, Raya. Alam na this.

My smile grew wider. “Yeah. Unless you join me.”

He smiled back at me. “Shall I sit here, then?”

he asked, gesturing to the empty seat beside me. “By the way, I’m Brent.”

“Raya,” I said, shaking his hand.

He took a sip from his glass of cocktail. I wonder what he was drinking. I was about to ask when he spoke again.

“Palagi kitang nakikita dito,” he said.

I looked at him thoughtfully. “You know what? Ikaw rin.” He was an eye-turner. Tall, dark, and yummy. He gave me a seductive smile.

Sabi ko na, eh. Alam na this, times two.

He moved closer to me and whispered. “Where do you want us to go?”

I bit my lip. “My place.”

“Great.” His eyes moved from my face to my chest.

Like I said, no one can resist Hiraya del Sena.

When he was about to put an arm around my waist, I got to my feet. “Let’s go?”

From the corner of my eye, I saw the bulge between his legs.

I led him to my car.

This is going to be a very entertaining night.

I managed to stop him from pouncing at me when we were inside my car. He kept groaning, but he didn't press on. Bet na bet yata niyang mabitin eh, so lubusin na niya.

We entered the *Unicorn Tower*. Fritz and his boys greeted us. I gave them the usual signal and went inside the elevator. Brent followed me. We were alone in the elevator. He started to make a move on me, but I held a hand and said, "Later."

We entered my room. I closed the door, but didn't lock it. Brent didn't notice because he was too busy removing his shirt and his belt.

I stared at him. Wow. Firm and defined abs. I was right. He's indeed yummy. I wonder how big he is. Do I get to see his glorified sword of pride?

He pushed me on the bed, but before he could jump me, someone pulled him and threw him on the floor. I was expecting to see Fritz and his boys, but...

"Hunter!" I said, shocked.

Brent angrily stood up and was about to attack Hunter when Fritz and his boys appeared. They grabbed Brent.

“Ano ba? Bitiwan n’yo nga ako! Ano ba’ng nangyayari rito, Raya?” Brent shouted.

“Please take him outside,” Hunter told Fritz and his boys.

They dragged Brent outside my room. And I was left alone with Hunter.

I blinked. “Uh... hi?”

“What was that?” Hunter asked, obviously waiting for an explanation.

“That?” I asked, pointing to the door.

“Who is he?” he asked.

“Uhm, my playmate?”

“Playmate? Did you just say *playmate*?”

“I did say playmate,” I confirmed.

He frowned. “Are you saying you’re going to—”

“Have sex?” I asked.

“Miss del Sena!” he snapped, aghast.

“Ay, bakit Miss del Sena? It’s Raya,” I said, pouting.

“I’m confused,” he suddenly said.

“Why don’t you sit here beside me muna?” I asked, patting the bed. “Grabe ka makatingin! Para namang hahalayin kita.”

His face turned red. “Raya—”

“Huwag ka ngang matakot sa kama ko. Walang bed bugs na mangangagat dito.” *Ako lang.*

He sighed and sat beside me. “Sino ba ’yun? Kakilala mo ba ’yun?”

“Well, since we introduced ourselves earlier, I’d say alam ko ang pangalan niya. But to answer your question... no, hindi ko siya kilala.”

“Eh, bakit sabi mo mag-se—uh, never mind.”

“Magse-sex kami?”

“Ganyan ka ba talaga magsalita?”

“Anong ganito ba talaga ako magsalita?”

“Never mind,” he said, standing up. “I guess I butted in the wrong place at the wrong time. Akala ko kasi talaga eh may pinainom sa ’yo ’yung lalaking

iyon.”

“May pinainom? Like what? Wait, did you see us sa *Stripes*?”

He nodded. “I went there with some friends. I was about to approach you and say hi when he joined you.”

“And you thought he put something on my drink?”

“Kaya sinundan ko kayo rito. Hindi ko naman alam na... ano... ah, alam mo na.”

“Na magse-sex nga kami?”

He blushed again.

Simpleng pamumula lang niya, eh, natu-turn on na ako!

“I think I need to apologize to the guy. Baka nand’yan pa—”

“Excuse me? Bakit ka naman magso-sorry sa kanya?”

“I ruined your... er, night.”

I laughed. “OMG, okay lang ’yun, H!” I shook my head. “I’m hungry, pakainin mo ako.”

“Pakainin kita?”

“Ilibre mo ako,” I said.

He smiled. “You’re really weird, Raya.”

Wala man lang siyang ideya na pinagnanasaan ko siya! Ang masama pa, hindi ko maisabuhay ang mga pantasya ko dahil hands-off nga daw. Lecheng morals ito. Kung wala lang sana ito eh di sana wakopake na kay girlfriend niya.

“Samahan mo na akong kumain,” I said.

He looked at his watch. “Fine. Let’s go.”

I immediately stood up and grabbed him by the arm. Hindi ko nga siya puwedeng maging boyfriend, pero puwede ko siyang maging boy friend, right?

“Let’s go, Boy Friend,” I said.

“Boy friend?” he asked, confused.

“Lalaking kaibigan. Friends na tayo, di ba?”

He laughed.

Dyosa ako at hindi nakakatawa. Whatever. So since hindi siya umangal, boy friend ko na siya.

Uy, may difference ’yun, ha. Boy friend, not boyfriend.

4

“I told you not to flirt with Hunter, Raya,” Reese said through gritted teeth.

I rolled my eyes at her. “Chill. I’m just being friendly with him.”

She threw up her hands in surrender. “I give up! Bahala ka na nga!”

I laughed. “Why are you so worried? We’re just friends.”

“Because he is a nice guy.”

“And?”

“And you’re a bitch.”

“Ouch, you’re hurting my feelings.”

“Listen, Hiraya del Sena,” Reese said. “Kung anuman ’yang experiment na ginagawa mo, huwag siya. Iba na lang.”

“Kung hindi ko lang alam na may something kayo ni Sir Renz, iisipin kong may gusto ka kay Hunter.”

“Excuse me? What does that Martian have to

do with anything? FYI, wala akong gusto doon. Kilabutan ka nga. And besides, kapag iyang si Hunter nag-resign nang dahil sa 'yo—”

“Wow, ang haba naman ng buntot ko niyan para mag-resign siya just because of me.”

“Hindi lang buntot mo ang mahaba, kundi pati ang sungay mo.”

Someone knocked on my door.

“Come in,” I said lazily, but sat up straight when Hunter dela Paz entered the room.

“H!” I called, greeting him.

“H?” Reese mouthed at me.

I ignored her. “Pasok ka, pasok ka,” I said to Hunter.

He smiled at me and looked at Reese. “Nandito ka pala. Nakakaistorbo ba ako sa inyo?”

“No, si Reese ang istorbo sa atin,” I said.

“Raya,” Reese snapped. She turned to look at Hunter. “Pagpasensyahan mo na 'yang si Raya, ha. Harmless naman 'yan kahit na may sayad.”

Hunter smiled. Shit, ang ovaries ko, nagpapapansin

na naman.

I cleared my throat. “Ma’am Reese, di ba may meeting ka pa with Sir Renz?” I asked, hinting that she should leave us alone na para puwede na naming landiin ni Hunter ang isa’t isa kahit sa pantasya ko lang.

Reese rolled her eyes at me before leaving my office. Hunter sat on a chair in front of me.

“So what can I do for you, H?” I asked, batting my eyelashes at him.

Eh kaso, ang manhid, ni hindi man lang natinag sa charms ko. He opened his laptop and showed the screen to me. “I need your script,” he said.

“Script? What script?”

“Your requirements to further specify the titles for each column.”

“Oh, that?” Huh, akala ko naman eh script ng love story namin. “I’ll e-mail it to you within the day, okay lang?”

He nodded. “It’s fine. No need to rush. Next week pa naman ang deadline.”

“Ay, hindi pala ’yan rush? Sana pala itinawag mo

na lang. Missed me na agad at nagpunta ka pa talaga dito?” I asked, smiling sweetly at him.

He laughed. Shit, ayan na naman ang mahinang tawa niyang iyan, eh! Nakakaihi!

“I just want to ask a favor.”

“Favor? Okay, what flavor? I mean, what favor?”

“Can you suggest something soft?”

“Bukod sa boobs ko?”

He blinked. “Excuse me?”

Oh, shit, shit, shit! What did I say? “I mean, bukod sa buhok ko,” I amended. “Teka, anong klaseng soft ba ’yan?”

“A gift. Something soft.”

Oh. Gift. How boring. “Pillows. O kung gusto mo bulak,” I replied. “Para kanino?”

“Para sa girlfriend ko. Mahilig kasi siya sa malalambot na bagay. Anniversary namin ngayon at wala pa akong regalo para sa kanya.”

Bumagsak ang mga balikat ko. “Ang dami namang puwedeng malambot na panregalo.”

He scratched his head. “Eh kaso lang halos

naibigay ko na lahat, eh.”

I wrinkled my nose. “Kailangan bang may ibigay ka?”

He gave me a curious look. “Pasensya ka na if I asked you such a non-work related question.”

“No, it’s okay. We’re friends, right? So okay lang ’yun.”

Nagpaalam na rin siya agad.

Nag-undertime ako. Dumerecho ako sa *Stripes*.

I dunno why I was feeling blue. Hindi ko naman naaalala si Harold, pero malungkot talaga ako ngayon. I needed a distraction. Hindi na nga rin ako nakakapag-experiment lately, eh. Paano naging busy ako sa pakikipag-friends kay Hunter. Pakikipag-friends, ha, hindi pakikipaglandian.

We had to spend a lot of time together because of the automation project. Minsan ay ginagabi na kami ng uwi.

I watched the people party on the dance floor. Mabuti pa sila, masaya.

Masaya naman ako. Pero... may kulang. May

kulang talaga.

Career? Nope. Hindi naman ako kapos sa career. Siguro bored lang, pero as long as kumikita ako ng panggastos ko, kerilang kahit bored na ako. Family? Nope. My family loves me kahit palagi akong itinatakwil ng nanay ko. I only have one brother. He dotes on me. I pretty much have the freedom I want, so hindi ako nasasakal or anything sa kanila. Friends? I have those bitches, so that's not what's missing.

Pero may kulang talaga.

Love life.

I sighed. Maganda naman ako. Matalino. Sexy. At sa aming apat, ako ang pinakamabait. Eh, bakit hanggang ngayon ay wala pa ring nai-in love sa akin?

Yeah, right. Maraming nagkakagusto sa akin. Pero hindi sila in love. They are just *in lust*.

I sighed again and I took another sip of my mojito. Reese would probably think I was drowning myself in alcohol again, but was she ever wrong. I usually *don't* drink when I am here at the *Stripes*. I party, but I seldom drink. I mean, paano ako makakapag-experiment kung lasing ako, right?

I just drink on occasions like this. Kapag nasa

higher level ang depression ko.

I don't think I need to see a shrink, though. I guess it's normal for a woman my age to feel this way.

Am I not worth falling for? Is lust the only thing I can find in the eyes of those men when I look at them?

Nakakainis lang kasi na kahit ilang beses akong nag-fail sa experiment ko, hindi pa rin ako sumusuko. Nakakainis.

I leaned against the couch. Since I am a regular here, they gave me this privileged area. Mas nakikita ko ang dance floor and stage at medyo hindi matao ang puwesto ko.

I sighed as I saw a pair of lovers eating each other's mouths. Seriously, they should get a room before I get to watch a live porn scene. I turned to face the other side, but my eyes were greeted by another pair of lovers making out. Really, can't they just get a room? Nang-iinggit, eh. Leche.

My thoughts immediately flew to Hunter. *Leche ka, dela Paz. Nabubuhay ang katawang-lupa ko maisip lang kita.*

I'm not in love with him, my gosh. I'm just attracted to him. Right. Ni hindi ko pa nga kilala much

It Might Be You - MissMnemosyne

iyong tao, eh. I sighed. Now I kinda understand what those men have in mind when they see me.

I feel the same way toward Hunter dela Paz.

I cussed a little too loudly as my thoughts traveled to Greenland where there's a bed and on the bed are Hunter and me, enjoying carnal pleasure like there's no tomorrow.

Shit. Shit this.

I shook my head. This is just so wrong. I should not be thinking this way about him, pero hindi ko kayang magpaka-*santa* para hindi mag-isip ng mga makamundong bagay.

I drank my mojito, grabbed the pitcher and refilled my glass. I finished it again in one gulp. I wanted to erase these horny thoughts I was having.

I fought the urge to touch myself right there and then. Nakakahiya, nasa public place ako. Nasaan na ang natitirang breeding ko? Leche. My gosh, nasosobrahan na ako sa kahalayan. Maybe I do need to see a shrink.

No, maybe I need to get laid.

I tried to stand, but the moment I did, I lost my balance. I was really drunk. Hindi naman totoo iyong

It Might Be You - MissMnemosyne

sinasabi nilang nawawala sa katinuan kapag lasing. Ewan ko sa iba, pero hindi ako ganoon. Naiinitan ako, oo. Nahihilo. Pero alam ko ang ginagawa ko. I tried to stand up again, pero umiikot talaga ang paligid.

Shit, I need to call Reese na. Or if she wasn't available, baka puwede akong magpasundo kay Fritz and his boys.

I tried to search for my phone inside my bag, pero hindi ko mahanap. Nawawala o naiwan ko yata. O baka talagang nahihilo lang ako.

For the third time, I tried to stand. I once again lost my balance, but instead of the couch catching my butt, a pair of strong hands caught me.

I blinked when I saw Hunter's face.

At hindi na ako nag-isip pa. I crashed my lips onto his.

He must have been so shocked because he froze. And because he did, I took that opportunity to kiss him hungrily, trying to get him to open his mouth, but he didn't. He stood still.

I was so frustrated that my hands immediately traveled to his chest and tried undoing the buttons of his shirt.

That was when he snapped out of his shock. I thought he was going to push me away. Well, he did push me away, but gently so.

“Raya,” he said gently, “si Hunter ito.”

I ignored what he said. I tried kissing him again, but he held my arms, trying to stop me.

I wanted to scream. Ang sakit niya sa matris! Sagad na ang sakit ng puso ko at ng best friend kong aminado akong kanina pa naliligo sa sarili niyang liquid. Nakakaleche!

“Raya,” Hunter called gently again.

I didn’t care how many times he tried stopping me. I want him, and I want him now.

I made another move to kiss him again, half-expecting him to stop me. To my surprise, he didn’t. He just stood still and let me kiss him. I moved my body closer to him, not caring if there was someone who could see us.

Raya! Morals!

F*ck them when my hormones are raging.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and started nibbling on his lips, trying to make him part them.

He didn't, but I didn't care. I pulled him closer. Our bodies were already touching.

I half-wished to feel it—his hardened member, but I didn't. And that made me snap out of it. I pulled away. *He wasn't turned on.* I bit my lip, fighting back tears. I wanted to cry. Was it because of the fact that I, Hiraya del Sena—Beauty Goddess of Metro, didn't even tempt him a bit?

“Are you gay?” I blurted out.

He seemed to know what I was talking about because he didn't look surprised.

He sighed and shook his head. “No, Raya, I'm not gay. I'm just faithful to my girlfriend.”

Faithful.

5

Would anyone believe me if I said I cried? Yes, it's true. The Hiraya del Sena cried. At dinaig pa ang mga panahong iniyakan ko si Harold noon.

Why did I cry? Did I cry because of my ego? Dahil ba tinanggihan niya ako kaya nasaktan ang ego ko? No. It's not about my ego.

I cried because I felt how much he loves his girlfriend. I cried because even if I don't know him that much, I felt the love he has for his girlfriend. Envied her. I cried because it is the love that I want... but the love I cannot have.

I filed a sick leave the day after that incident. I brought this upon myself. I was driven by my hormones and emotions. They took over me and did something I shouldn't have. Looking back, alam kong kasalanan ko iyon. Kaya nga asar na asar ako sa sarili ko.

Pero I never expected that reaction from him. Oo, alam kong may girlfriend siya. I knew that he wasn't like the other guys.

Pero leche, ni hindi man lang siya tinayuan! Ni

hindi man lang tumigas! Wala akong naramdaman! Akala ko sa mga bakla lang nangyayari iyong ganoon, eh—'yung sini-seduce ng mga babae, pero hindi naapektuhan?

Sa lalaki rin pala. Sa mga lalaking katulad ni Hunter dela Paz.

I was about to drown myself further in misery when my phone rang. I grudgingly answered it, knowing the call would probably be from Reese. And I was right. The moment I said hello, she started screaming at me.

“Ngayon pa talaga, Raya, ngayon pa!”

“Naman, Reese, I’m sick, okay?” Heartsick.

“Don’t play with me, Hiraya del Sena. Alam kong may ginawa ka na namang kalokohan. My gosh, Raya! Now pa talaga! We are at a crucial time!”

“I know, I know. Just cover for me today, okay?”

“I won’t! Bahala ka! And I just sent him there!”

After she said that, she ended the call. Ano na naman ba’ng pinagsasabi niya?

Whatever. I pulled the covers up again. I was about to sleep when I decided to eat ice cream

instead. I tied my hair in a high bun and change from my nighties to a loose off-shoulder blouse. I don't wear bra at home because I don't find it comfortable. I don't even wear shorts. Just panties. Besides, ako lang naman ang tao sa loob ng hotel room ko, so why bother?

I went to the kitchen and was about to get ice cream from the fridge when my doorbell rang. I sighed. It was probably Reese. Siya lang naman ang susugod nang walang pasabi rito.

I hurriedly opened the door. When I saw who it was, I immediately decided that not wearing shorts was a really bad idea.

Why?

Kasi nalaglag ang panty ko.

Fine, not literally, but... well.

Before I could speak, he frowned and immediately pushed me gently inside. He closed the door behind him. "Raya," he said in a stern voice.

"Hunter," I mumbled. No more pet names for him.

He cleared his throat and looked away. "Could you please get dressed first?"

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Napatungo ako. I was not wearing a bra! At bakat na bakat ang nipples ko sa suot kong blouse!

Shit. Shit this. He might think I'm seducing him again!

I flew to my room. I was more decent when I returned to the living room.

“Akala ko nagbibiro lang si Reese noong sinabi niyang dito ka talaga nakatira. Akala ko kumuha ka lang noon ng kuwarto sa hotel na ito.”

I gaped at him.

He glanced at me and narrowed his eyes. “Do you always open your door wearing... wearing only that kind of clothing?”

I shrugged sheepishly. “I thought it was Fritz,” I lied.

He frowned. “The hotel general manager? You let him see—”

“No, I mean, I forgot that I wasn't wearing a bra and absent-mindedly opened the door.”

“Wear proper clothes next time, Raya, even when you're alone in your house.”

I wrinkled my nose. “So what brought you here?”

If it's about last night—”

“You were not your best self. Don't worry about it.”

“But, Hunter—”

“Let's not think about what happened last night, Raya. I don't want us to be uncomfortable with each other.”

I bit my lip. So he's really determined to forget everything na lang?

I sighed in surrender. “Fine,” I said, hoping that I didn't sound as gloomy as I felt. “So what brought you here?”

“I need you to sign the user's acceptance testing form.”

“Naman. Rush ba 'yan at pumunta ka pa talaga dito? Puwede mo namang i-fax,” I said.

*Yeah, fax it. Just fax it since you cannot f*ck me.*

Napapikit ako sa inis. *Nag-uumpisa na naman 'tong utak ko!*

He stared at me for a while. “Gusto ko rin kasing malaman kung ayos ka lang ba.”

“I'm good,” I said, shrugging.

“Sigurado ka?”

“Oo naman. Nasaan na ba ’yung form at pipirmahan ko na.”

He handed it to me.

Ibinalik ko iyon sa kanya nang mapirmahan ko.
“I’ll go ahead. Are you sure you’re fine?”

Ay, ang kulit. Kung hindi ko ’to kilala, iisipin kong ayaw niya pang umalis kasi may iba pa siyang balak...

“I’m fine,” I said.

He nodded and started to walk toward the door.

“And, Raya—”

I bumped into him when he suddenly turned to face me.

Shit, shit, ang bango! Shit!

I didn’t realize that I’d closed my eyes and started smelling his chest na sa kasamaang-palad ay tinatakpan ng polo shirt.

“Raya,” he said, trying to push me away.

I stepped back. “Sorry! Anong fabric conditioner ang gamit mo?”

He laughed after a few seconds of confusion. “Hindi ko alam kung anong gamit na fabric conditioner sa laundryshop, eh. Hayaan mo at itatanong ko para sa’yo.”

“Okay,” I said sheepishly. Noon tumunog ang tiyan ko.

Napakunot-noo siya sa akin. “Are you hungry?”

“Maybe. I didn’t eat breakfast yet, eh.”

He glanced at his watch. “Raya, it’s past noon. You should eat.”

“I’ll eat ice cream later.”

He shook his head. “No. Eat a proper meal.” he said, looking at his watch again.

“Sige na, umalis ka na’t baka hinahanap ka na sa office.”

He shook his head. “It’s not that. I’m just counting the hours na nalipasan ka ng gutom. Tara, let’s grab a bite somewhere.”

“Ha? Hindi, okay lang ako here. May pagkain naman ako.”

“I insist. Magbihis ka na’t hihintayin kita dito.”

“Bakit?”

“Let’s eat together.”

Kung hindi lang talaga malinaw ang pandinig ko, iisipin kong ang sinabi niya eh, “Let’s eat each other.”

Sayang, pero hindi eh. Eat together daw eh. Sayang talaga.

“You brought your car?” I asked.

He nodded and opened the passenger door for me. Ay, shit, gentleman. Lalong kinilig ang puwet ko. I got inside the car. He drove until we reached the Central Business District of the Metro. He stopped his car in front of a restaurant.

“Dito?” I asked, looking at the signboard of *Écarlate*. “Mahilig ka sa French cuisine?”

He nodded, leading me inside. When we got seated, he asked what I wanted to order. Magpapakipot pa ba ako eh grasya na nga ang lumalapit? When we finished ordering, he started asking me some boring personal details.

“Favorite color?” he asked.

“Huh? Oh. Pastel and earth colors,” I replied. “You?”

“Black.”

It Might Be You - MissMnemosyne

Okay, Raya, take note of that. Black. Don't forget to collect black lingerie from now on.

I blinked and shook my head. Leche, tanghaling-tapat, pantulog na kaagad ang iniisip ko. "I see."

When our food arrived, we ate in silence until we were done. Before leaving the restaurant, he told me he wanted to walk in the park on the main street.

I have been to this park a lot of times, pero mabilisan lang. It was either mapapadaan lang kasi may pinuntahang malapit dito o may imi-meet akong client. Ito ang unang beses na nagpunta ako dito for the purpose of... well, ano nga ba ang purpose kung bakit nandito ako? Wala lang, trip lang kasi ng kasama kong pumunta dito.

We walked alongside the trees with red and green leaves. I love nature, but because of my busy and hectic lifestyle, I could seldom stop and appreciate its beauty.

We didn't talk much. We walked in silence. I was dying to know what he was thinking.

I glanced at him, trying to comprehend kung anong meron sa lalaking ito at tinamaan nang sagad ang hormones ko. Well, hindi lang ang hormones. Gusto ko siya. Gustong-gusto ko siya. Siya ang

lalaking hinahanap ko.

Tiningnan ko ulit siya nang palihim. Guwapo. So? I'm Hiraya del Sena. Hindi bago sa akin ang mga guwapo dahil maraming ganoong nakapaligid sa akin. Hot? Yummy? Huh. Maraming ganoon sa *Stripes*. Matalino? Excuse me lang, pero sa department pa lang ni Reese, eh, nag-uumapaw na ang mga lalaking matatalino.

Could it be because I felt how much he loves his girlfriend at gusto ko ng ganoong klaseng lalaki? Is it because I wanted to be loved that way? Sweetly. Loyally. Faithfully.

I bit my lip. He had stopped walking and was now smiling shyly at me. "Kung anuman ang problema mo, Raya, tandaan mo, hindi ka nag-iisa."

I blinked. "Ha?"

"I like you, Raya. A lot. I want us to be friends. And as your friend, I want you to know that I'm here for you."

Spell nganga?

Hiraya del Sena.

6

I thought it might be him. I wanted it to be him. But it wasn't. And so I'm back to my experiment.

I headed to a vacant bench. The train would be arriving in a few minutes. Na-delay lang daw sabi ng isang staff. Mabuti na lang at walang masyadong tao dahil maaga pa.

I sat on the bench and put on the earphones. I clicked my latest playlist.

♪ *Time... I've been passing time,
watching trains go by...* ♪

I sighed, remembering once again the look on Hunter's face when he said those words to me.

"I like you, Raya. A lot. I want us to be friends. And as your friend, I want you to know that I'm here for you."

Would anyone believe me if I said that was the first time someone sincerely told me that? Truth is hindi ko alam kung ano ang mararamdaman o nararamdaman ko. It's like the feeling was foreign

It Might Be You - MissMnemosyne

to my system, unheard of by my soul, and could not be comprehended by my mind.

I bit my lip. Hunter is a nice guy. Siguro nga kahit sino, maa-attract sa kanya.

Kahit ganito akong mag-isip at umasta, naniniwala pa rin ako sa fairy tales. For me it is not about the fantasy, but the reality. For me it's about... magic. And true love.

Girls are usually attracted to bad boys. The cold type, the gangster peg, the casanova. Kahit ako ay aminadong ganoon ang mga tipo kong lalaki. Kaya nga nagtataka ako kung bakit ang lakas ng magnet ng hormones ko kay Hunter, eh. He's a nice guy. In fact, he's like a nerd na pumogi nang sampung paligo, pero still a nerd whose interests involved computers and Information Technology. Pero ewan ko ba. Everytime I see him, I got this raging fire in my blood.

Lust? I don't think so. Kung lust lang, maraming lalaking higit pa sa kanya, I'm sure. Pero hindi, eh. There's something more to him than what meets the eye.

Honestly, I have been confused for days until I realized that maybe I was just attracted to the fact that I really wanted to be loved the way he loves his

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girlfriend. Maybe that's why I want him. Masyado akong nahumaling na meron pa palang katulad niyang hindi lang tapat magmahal kundi tapat ang katawan sa minamahal.

Sa tuwing naaalala ko talaga iyong nangyari, nahihiya ako sa sarili ko. Sinubukan ko siyang i-seduce, pero ni hindi man lang siya tinayuan at wala man lang tumigas.

It was my first time doing that, truth be told. It was my first time seducing someone. I failed. Nakakahiya talaga. He was nice enough to forget it and to even want to be my friend even after what I did.

♪ *Something's telling me it might be you...* ♪

I sighed again as people started arriving at the train station. Sobrang delayed na ang train. Sana pala I brought my car na lang, pero I didn't want to get stuck in traffic. I didn't want to drive. Iba ang gusto kong sakyan.

I shook my head again. Umagang-umaga, heto na naman ako. Shit this brain of mine na pinaliguan yata ng mga berdeng dahon.

Pinanood ko ang mga commuters na nasa paligid.

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Some of them were students. Some of them appeared to be employees like me. And most of them have someone standing beside them, holding their hands.

♪ *Looking back as lovers go walking past...* ♪

I got to my feet when I heard the train advisory. And I bumped into a couple.

“Raya?”

I blinked when I saw Hunter holding hands with a very sophisticated girl. “Hunter,” I greeted him, “good morning.”

He smiled at me and turned to the girl beside him. “Iza, this is Raya del Sena, my friend and current partner in an automation project.”

The girl he introduced as Iza gave me a guarded smile. I knew that smile. Ilang beses na ba akong nginitian ng mga babae nang ganyan?

“Hi,” I said.

Iza just smiled thinly again at me, and turned her attention to Hunter. “Honey, gusto kong mag-CR. Samahan mo ’ko.”

I almost rolled my eyes. Hindi naman sa pwede

siyang samahan ni Hunter sa loob ng public restroom lalo't pambabae.

I grew cold, thinking of the possibilities na nagagawa sa loob ng CR. Leche. Nakakapikon! Ke-aga aga, iyon ang naiisip ko?

Hunter looked at me. "Sige, Raya, mauna ka na pala sa office. Sasamahan ko pa si Iza."

"Sure, no problem." I turned my back on them na bago pa nila ma-sight ang bitterness sa face ko.

Yes, bitterness. Hindi ako ipokrita para itangging nabi-bitterella ako sa kanilang dalawa. And I dunno why, but the scene looked familiar. Has it happened before? In this train station?

It was like *déjà vu*.

I sighed as I entered the train.

Bakit nga ba walang lalaking nagkakagusto sa akin for being what I am instead of my taglay na aphrodisiac? So... unfair.

I arrived at *Axis Tower* in less than thirty minutes. Binilisan ko talaga ang paglakad ko para ma-distract. Dumaan muna ako sa powder room before I went to my office. To my surprise, Hunter was already there.

“Raya,” he said, holding out a brown paper bag.

“Hunter? Ano’ng ginagawa mo dito? At ano ito?”
I asked, receiving the brown paper bag.

“Agahan mo.”

“Huh?”

“You didn’t eat, did you?”

“Paano mo nalaman?”

“Matamlay ka kasi kanina.”

I wrinkled my nose.

Kaya ako matamlay eh dahil sa ’yo, manhid. Dahil sa inyo ng girlfriend mo.

At sa totoo lang, nawala ang gutom ko dahil nabusog na ako sa ampalaya dahil sa sobrang pagkabitterella.

“Thank you,” I said. Alangang tanggihan ko, di ba? I have manners. Besides, hindi pa nga ako kumakain. “Share tayo?”

“Kumain na ako,” he replied. He sat on a chair in front of me. “Nakagawa na nga pala ako ng script, Raya. We can proceed with the testing.”

I nodded. I couldn’t help staring at his lips,

especially when he licked his lower lip. Nakakainis talaga itong lalaking 'to! Can't he see what he's doing to me? He's torturing me and my hormones!

At dahil nawiwindang na ako, hindi ko namalayang I was holding the sandwich next to his mouth na pala and saying, "Tikman mo, masarap."

He was about to protest, but I put the sandwich closer to his mouth. He shook his head and smiled, but he took a bite of the sandwich.

Agad akong kumagat sa sandwich. Leche. Just thinking about how we just had an indirect kiss made me feel something in my stomach.

... and down there.

I reprimanded myself silently. My gosh! Aga-aga, Raya, eh!

I finished my sandwich while he started with the testing. "Masarap, 'no?"

He nodded. "It's my preferred sandwich. Glad you liked it."

"Oh, bet mo pala ito? Pinatikim ko sa 'yo kasi akala ko, eh, hindi mo pa nata-try ito."

"What made you think that?" he asked, smiling

a little.

I just shrugged. Aba, eh, ano'ng ipapalusot ko? Na kaya ko lang pinatikim sa kanya 'yung sandwich ko, eh, dahil ayaw niya akong tikman, este masyadong magalaw ang lips niya at nadi-distract ako?

“Can you come closer? I have something to show you.”

Oh, shit, madali akong kausap. I quickly leaned, but he suddenly cleared his throat.

“What?” I asked.

“Your...” He pointed at something near my chest.

“What?”

He rose from the chair. “Your neckline is too low. Can you put on your blazer?”

I rolled my eyes at him. “Why are you so sensitive about seeing my boobs eh hindi ka naman tinayuan—” I bit my lip. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to bring it up.”

“It’s fine,” he suddenly said. “It’s fine.”

Silence filled the room as we looked at opposite directions.

“Raya,” he finally said, “let’s continue later.”

I nodded, and he left.

I decided to stop liking him. Right. Friends daw, eh. Di hanggang friends na lang kami. Sabi ko nga, I'm back to my experiment.

“Wow, you don't drink much, pero bet mo yatang magpakalunod sa vodka ngayon? I never knew you like vodka,” I commented, amused at Reese. Ewan ko kung bakit umiinom ito ngayon, eh, alam naman niyang mahina ang tolerance niya sa alcohol. Isa pa bigla na lang siyang maiinitan nang sagad at maghuhubad.

“I never knew you talked so much when we both know you're itching na makipaglandian na ngayon sa dance floor,” she shot back.

“Wow, ha. Concerned nga ako kaya kita sinamahan dito. Oh, well, since sa 'yo na rin naman nanggaling 'yan, I'll enjoy the night. Ta!” I said, waving at her.

Umalis na ako at nagpunta sa dance floor na malapit nang maging porn sight dahil sa sobrang daming naghihipuan at naglalaplang mga nilalang.

Hindi ko bet makisali. Gusto ko lang talagang sumayaw. I danced until I felt a pair of hands around

my waist.

I glanced up.

Pogi!

I smiled seductively as he started dancing with me. It took a while when he started moving closer to me.

“Touch me,” he whispered huskily.

I shook my index finger at him and bit my lip seductively. He smirked, but didn’t make a move. We continued dancing until his hand went to touch my hair.

He moved even closer and dropped his arms to my waist. That was when I felt his thing on my stomach.

So... hard.

I am ready for another experiment.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and whispered into his ear, “Meet me outside.”

As soon as we met outside, we rode together in my car and went to *Unicorn Tower*. Like a ritual, Fritz and his boys greeted me. I nodded and led the guy into the elevator.

Shit, I don't even know his name!

Before we could even enter my room, he'd grabbed me by the shoulders and pushed me on the wall.

OMG, the CCTV cameras!

I was in a panic, but before I could shove him, someone had pulled him away from me and threw him on the floor. I was about to react when the newcomer opened the door to my room and pushed me inside, locking the door behind him.

“Ano na naman ba ito, ha, Raya?” he snarled at me.

I blinked. I was so shocked to see him like this. Whatever happened to the calm and composed Hunter dela Paz?

“What?” I shot back.

He sighed heavily. “Sinabi ko naman sa 'yo na kung may problema ka, huwag mong solohin. Para saan pa't naging magkaibigan tayo kung wala man lang akong maitutulong sa 'yo?”

“Wala nga akong problema!”

“Alam kong meron at alam mo rin 'yan! Bakit mo ba ginagawa ito? Raya, it was a different man the other night. Ngayon ay iba na naman. Alam kong hindi ka katulad ng mga babaeng—”

“What if I told you that I am *that* kind of girl?”

“You aren’t,” he snapped firmly. “You’re not that kind of girl.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Sigurado ka? Bakit, Hunter, gaano mo na ba ako kakilala? It was barely six months since we met.”

“Wala sa tagal iyon. Alam kong hindi ka ganoong tipo ng babae. Raya, ano ba’ng problema?”

“Wala nga sabing problema. I’m just experimenting.”

He frowned deeply. “Experimenting?”

“Never mind,” I said, stepping closer to him.

He narrowed his eyes, but he didn’t move. “Raya—”

“You ruined my experiment, so you’d better take responsibility.”

“What kind of responsibility?”

I smirked. Instead of answering, I suddenly wrapped my arms around his neck and pressed my lips to his. Just like before, he didn’t respond. He didn’t even move, but I didn’t stop.

I closed my eyes and continued kissing him,

teasing his lower lip with my tongue. I opened my mouth and sucked his lips while my hands traced his skin from his neck to his ears. I touched his nape. I scratched it softly, hoping for a reaction, but to no avail.

My hands started undoing the buttons of his shirt. He didn't stop me, so I managed to remove it. I traveled my hands on his well-defined chest until they moved to his abs.

Shit these. For nights I have longed to touch these...

I moved my body closer to him, hoping to feel his member. I started moving, grinding against him. I was frustrated by his lack of reaction, so I growled and pushed him to my bed. I sprawled on top of him. I started removing my blouse.

“Touch me,” I demanded.

He just looked at me blankly. I was so frustrated that my mouth found his again. I held his hand, trying to get them to touch my chest, but they remained where they were.

“I said touch me,” I demanded again.

When he didn't answer, my hands found their way to his pants. I started removing his belt, then changed my mind. I kissed him again instead. I kissed him

until I realized that tears were falling from my eyes.

I got off him. I sat on the bed, facing the window with my back to him. Before I knew it, I was sobbing silently.

I was rejected again.

I continued sobbing until a warm blanket was draped over my shoulders. He sat next to me. I stared at him. He gently pulled me closer to his chest and gave me a warm embrace.

“Don’t cry, Raya. I’m here.”

I cried louder. I wanted to tell him I was sorry. I wanted to apologize for taking advantage of him. Ano na lang talaga ang magiging tingin niya sa akin? Isang pokpok na hinahagis ang katawan sa kanya? Isang p*ta na pumapatong sa isang lalaking ayaw naman sa kanya?

“I’m sorry!” I blurted out. “Hunter, I’m sorry!”

“Shh, Raya, calm down. It’s okay,” he said gently, patting my back.

“No, it’s not okay. I just... I just sexually harassed you,” I said, crying.

“You had your reasons.”

“No! F*ck those reasons!”

“Raya—”

“I’m sorry! I’m really sorry!”

“It’s okay. Please stop crying.”

“Hunter, listen to me. I’m just—”

“No, Raya, you listen to me. I don’t know what game this is that you’re playing or what that experiment of yours is all about. But you have to stop it now because you don’t need them. I’m here. I’m already here.”

“Huh?”

“I will help you, Raya. In every way that I can, I will help you.”

“Help me?”

He nodded, hugging me tighter. “When I said I wanted to be your friend, I was serious. And I won’t leave you, Raya. Ever.”

I closed my eyes.

After that fateful day, I thought it would be the start of our friendship. I never expected that it would be the start of something else.

7

I just came from a meeting with another division. Kasama ko si Reese. At ewan ko ba, pero parang may kakaiba kay Reese lately. Meron na akong idea, pero I still want na manggaling sa kanya iyon.

“Alam mo, may napapansin ako,” I started.

“What?” she asked.

I gave her a meaningful look. “Tell me the truth, Reese, may boyfriend ka na ba?”

“What kind of question is that?”

“Matinong tanong.”

“Hindi halatang matino,” she snapped.

“Ang sungit nito. Seriously, may boyfriend ka na ba?”

“Ano ba, Raya? Are you timang? Do you think may lugar pa sa buhay ko para diyan sa tinatanong mo?”

I raised my eyebrow. “Wow, ha. Ang harsh mo ever. Pero, no, I don’t believe na wala ka pang boyfriend. My gosh, it hurts, hindi mo man lang

sinasabi sa akin.”

Inirapan niya ako. “Wala tayo sa teatro.”

Teatro? “Teatro. Oh, that reminds me. We’re having a reunion daw sa theatre. Let’s go?”

“Ayoko,” sabi niya.

“Bakit? Di ka papayagan ng boyfriend mo?”

“Wala nga sabi akong boyfriend!”

“I really don’t believe you. You know me, expert ako sa mga ganyan.”

“Expert? Expert ba ’yung walang tumatagal na relasyon? The longest relationship you’ve been in lasted two weeks! Leche.”

OMG, two weeks!? Okay lang siya? One night lang kaya ang longest time allotted ko for my boy toys. At anong relationship? NBSB here kaya.

“Aminin mo na kasi. May boyfriend ka, right? May nagbago. You seem... different. Parang nagkaka-emosyon ka na.”

“Are you saying I don’t have emotions?”

“Hindi naman sa ganoon. It’s just that... dati para kang dingding na gawa sa yelo.”

“Sa pagkakaalam ko kasi, ang dingding eh walang curves. And I have a 36-24-36 body.”

“Did I just I hear Miss dela Vega declare that she got the perfect body?”

Napalingon kami ni Reese sa nagsalita at nakitang papalapit si Sir Renz Sy, ang guwapong controller namin. Ewan ko ba dito kay Reese. Crush ko nga si Sir Renz, eh. Kung hindi ko lang talaga napapansing may something siya kay Reese, baka dinakma ko na siya kahit pa boss ko siya.

“Eavesdropping, are we?” Reese asked Renz sarcastically.

He shook his head. “No. Besides, I don’t need to eavesdrop since I already saw—”

Tinakpan na ni Reese ang bibig ni Sir Renz.

OMG. Sabi ko na, eh. Sabi ko na talaga. Leche, mauunahan pa yata akong magka-love life ng babaeng singlamig ng yelo.

I looked at them. Kunwari wala akong nahalata. Baka kasi lalong hindi umamin si Reese.

“Excuse us, Raya, please,” Reese said.

Bago pa ako nakapagsalita ay kinaladkad na niya

papalayo si Sir Renz. I sighed. Itong si Reese na Ice Queen, meron nang love life. Ako itong mabait, zero. Why do men love bitches?

I entered my office and found Hunter inside. Shit, heto na naman si Torture, uumpisahan na namang torture-in ang puso ko.

“Raya, hi,” bati niya.

“Hi, Hunter. Ano’ng sadya mo? Miss mo na ako kaagad?”

“Oo. Hindi ka kasi nagre-reply sa texts ko.”

Masyado niya talagang pinaninindigan ang friendship namin. Leche. “Sorry, I have a meeting earlier, eh. Alam mo naman si Reese, ayaw ng may istorbo, so ipina-off niya lahat ng phones.”

“Ganoon ba? Naka-on na ngayon?”

“Hindi pa, pero ito na, io-on ko na.”

Tumango siya. “Good. But since I’m here and the messages are already expired, I’ll invite you personally to lunch.”

“So text ka nang text sa akin kasi gusto mong sabay tayong mag-lunch?”

“Hmm,” he said, nodding.

Ay, ang torture. “Sure. Libre mo?”

“Oo naman. Ano ba’ng gusto mong kainin? Why don’t we go to that French restaurant?”

“French food na naman?”

“Ayaw mo ng French food?”

“Gusto ko French Kiss, eh.”

He laughed softly. “I like it that you say what’s on your mind. Friends should be able to tell other things.”

“Yeah, but there are still limitations to what we should disclose, Hunter. We need to keep some secrets to ourselves,” I said. “Especially dirty little secrets.”

He brushed a strand of hair away from my face. Inipit niya iyon sa likod ng tainga ko... and my ovaries just exploded. Yeah, just like that. Just with that simple gesture.

I fanned myself and leaned back on my chair. “Stop. Are you trying to seduce me? Kasi it’s working, so you’d better stop kasi mabibitin lang ako.”

He looked amused. “I’m not seducing you. I’m just being your friend.”

Leche, may friend bang ganoon ang gesture?

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I swear, ang sakit niya sa bangs kahit wala akong bangs. Makapagpa-bangs na nga bago ko pa siya ma-bang.

He went to the door and opened it. “Meet you at *Écarlate*.”

At nakisabay pa talaga ang lecheng ulan sa irritation ko. Dapat talaga ay sa *Stripes* na lang ako dumerecho imbes na dito sa train station. Kung bakit naman kasi naisipan kong umuwi nang maaga. Wala pa man din akong dalang sasakyan.

Basang sisiw ang peg ko dahil wala rin akong dalang payong.

I ran into the train station. At ang bongga lang dahil sobrang ganda ng balitang naabutan ko sa train station. Sa sobrang ganda eh parang gusto ko nang magwala sa inis.

Cancelled lahat ng train trips dahil sobrang lakas ng ulan.

Leche.

I really should have stayed at the office o sa *Stripes* na lang sana talaga ako pumunta.

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Asar akong umalis mula sa train station. Babalik na lang ako sa office.

I was walking when a car stopped in front of me. Lumabas si Hunter na may dalang payong. Great. Just great. My Prince in his white horse, este car.

“Raya! Bakit ka nagpapaulan?”

“Hindi ako nagpapaulan. Sinong tangang magpapaulan? Wala akong payong.”

“Hindi ka talaga nagbabasa ng texts, ano?”

“Nag-text ka? Miss mo na naman ako?”

He sighed. “Sabi ko sa text, hintayin mo ako at sabay tayong uuwi. Ihahatid kita sa hotel. Ba’t nauna ka?”

“Arte mo. Kung umasta ka, parang boyfriend, ha. Sakit mo sa mattress.”

“I’m your boy friend. Kaibigang lalaki,” he insisted.

“Fine, fine. Ihatid mo na ako kung ihahatid mo ako,” sabi ko.

“The routes to your hotel are blocked. Baha na daw kasi sa mga lugar malapit doon kaya isinara na rin nila ang mga kalapit na daan.”

Leche. I should have gotten a place in a flood-free area! I sighed. “Fine. Drop me at Reese’s condo.”

“May lakad si Reese ngayon. Hindi niya ba nabanggit sa ’yo?”

“Then ihatid mo ako sa kahit saang hotel! O motel pa kung walang hotel!”

He shook his head. “No. My condo is nearer.”

Oh, shit this.

His place was a typical bachelor’s pad. I have been to some dahil may mga friends akong lalaki. Hindi ako tulad ni Reese na anti-social, so malamang game ako kapag may mga invitation to party sa mga condo units ng friends kong guys.

“Nice place,” I commented.

“Please sit while I get you dry clothes,” he said.

“Kaninong damit ang ipapahiram mo sa akin?”
I called after him.

He didn’t answer. Hindi yata ako narinig, eh. Paglabas niya galing sa kuwarto niya, may dala siyang T-shirt at shorts.

I gaped at him. “Are you making me wear these?”

He nodded. “Hindi ka komportable?”

“Eh paano ’yung panty ko? Bra? Basa na kanina pa. Wala ka bang dryer or blower or whatever na pantuyo?”

He shook his head and I rolled my eyes.

“Other clothes aside from these? I mean, ang laki, o. Wala kang pambabae? ’Yung sa girlfriend mo? Hindi naman niya malalaman na hiniram ko ang damit niya, eh.”

He gave me a funny look. “Walang damit ang girlfriend ko dito.”

I raised my eyebrow. “Oh, really? Hindi siya nag-iwan ng damit niya dito?”

“Bakit naman siya mag-iwan ng damit niya dito?”

“Well, it’s convenient. Para kapag pumupunta siya rito ay may damit na siya,” I answered. Ano ba naman itong lalaking ito? Saang kuweba ba galing ito at kailangan ko pang i-explain ang mga ganoong bagay sa kanya?

“Hindi pumupunta ang girlfriend ko dito.”

I gaped at him. “Excuse me?”

He smiled at me. “I don’t bring my girlfriend here, Raya. In fact, you’re the first woman I brought here.”

“OMG. Familiar ito, eh. Nababasa ko ito sa mga novellas. Yung nag-iisang girl na dinala ng isang guy sa condo niya? Don’t tell me may pagnanasa ka na sa—”

“Dahil walang malisya.”

“Huh?”

“Hindi ko dinadala ang girlfriend ko dito kasi may malisya.”

“Malisya?”

“May malisya dahil may relasyon kami.”

“Eh, anong tawag mo sa akin? Walang malisya sa ’yo?” I snarled at him.

He smiled gently at me. Nakakainis dahil hindi ko magawang magalit sa ngiti niyang iyon. Napaka-genuine kasi.

“Wala akong malisya sa ’yo, Raya,” he emphasized.

8

I angrily grabbed the clothes and was about to storm to the bathroom when I remembered hindi ko nga pala alam kung nasaan ang banyo.

“Second door to the left,” he said, answering my unspoken question.

I marched angrily, ignoring him. Kahit nakakainis siya, hindi naman ako timang para umalis habang bumabagyo sa labas.

Pagpasok ko sa loob ng banyo, agad akong naghubad. Nilabhan ko ang panty at bra ko at isinampay ang mga iyon sa shower. Eh, saan ko isasampay?

I turned on the shower and indulged in a warm bath. Malamang nakigamit na rin ako ng shampoo at sabon niya. Huh. Bakit walang conditioner? Hindi ba nagko-conditioner ang mga lalaki? Mabuti na lang at natural na silky ang buhok ko.

Seriously, I’m pissed off. Nakakainis na siya. Pati confidence ko nagfa-falter na rin eh.

Fine, maayos ang pagkakasabi niya. Hindi siya

bastos magsalita. Pero leche, parang mas trip ko pang pabalang niyang sinabi sa akin iyon o kaya binara niya ako para at least may reason ako to hate him. Kaso hindi, eh. He's nice and that's even more irritating.

I turned off the shower. Isa lang ang tuwalya na nasa loob ng bathroom niya, so malamang iyon ang ginamit ko. Nakigamit na rin lang ako ng mga gamit niya, lulubusin ko na. After drying myself, I put on his shirt. Ang laki at hanggang hita ko na kaya I didn't bother wearing the shorts. I didn't even think about the fact na wala akong suot na undergarments. Eh sa wala nga raw malisya sa kanya eh, di ba? At kahit na dinakma ko na nga siya nang ilang beses, ni hindi nga siya tinayuan o tinigasan man lang. Kahit siguro maghubad ako sa harapan niya eh walang epekto iyon sa kanya.

Pero, shit, may epekto sa akin. Just thinking about those evil little green things I could do to him while I wasn't wearing my undies actually made me start getting wet down there. Leche. Wala akong thong, so kailangan kong maghinay-hinay sa mga pinag-iisip dahil baka kapag umupo ako sa sofa niya ay mabasa iyon.

I went out of the bathroom and saw him sitting

on a couch. He glanced up and smiled at me.

Ni hindi man lang niya napansin ang obvious na obvious kong nipples na kanina pa bumabakat sa shirt na suot ko. Leche talaga, nakakatuyo ng matris. Nalulusaw na ang ego ko. I just rolled my eyes at him.

“Gutom ka na ba? Saglit lang, ha, maliligo muna’ko.”

I didn’t answer. He took that as a yes and went inside his room. Paglabas niya, dumerecho agad siya sa banyo.

I explored his place. I even went inside his room. Eh, bakit ba? Hindi naman iyon naka-lock and wala rin siyang sinabing huwag akong pumasok doon. I got irritated with the first thing that greeted me inside his room.

Picture nila ni Iza, girlfriend niya.

Nakakagigil. Dahil ginapang ako ng kamalditahan, I grabbed the picture frame and threw it into the bin.

I know, I know, ang bad ko. Well, kasalanan niya. Alam naman niyang may gusto ako sa kanya pagkatapos tino-toture niya pa ako nang ganito.

Wait.

May gusto ako sa kanya?

Shit.

Wala siyang gusto sa akin.

Double shit.

I sat down on his bed. I'm in a damn mess. No, hindi ito puwede. Fine, type na type ko siya. Gustong-gusto ko siya. Pero hindi kaya lust lang iyon? Tama. Lust lang iyon. Kasalanan niya. Yummy kasi siya, eh. Sino ba kasi'ng nagsabing... leche, magpakabait siya sa 'kin?

The door opened and he seemed a little surprised to see me in the room.

“O, bakit? Nagulat ka? Bawal ba akong pumasok dito?”

He smiled. “Hindi naman. Nagugutom ka ba?”

I shook my head. “Inaantok na ako. Dito ba ako matutulog? Unless sa couch mo ako patutulugin—”

He laughed. “Bakit naman kita patutulugin sa couch? Dito ka na matulog.”

“Eh ikaw?”

“Doon ako sa sala.”

I raised my eyebrow. “Eh bakit hindi na lang tayo tabi eh ang laki naman nitong kama mo?”

He shook his head. “Hindi naman tama iyon, Raya.”

“O, akala ko ba walang malisya sa ’yo?”

“Oo nga, pero—”

“Natatakot kang may gawin ako sa ’yo? My gosh, Hunter, ang liit-liit ko. Puwedeng-puwede mo akong itapon.”

He gave me an amused smile. “Bakit ko naman gagawin iyon?”

I cursed under my breath. “Let’s stop this, Hunter.”

“Stop what?”

“Our so-called friendship.”

“Bakit?”

“Manhid ka talaga eh, ano?” I asked, glowering at him.

“Raya—”

“Alam mo nang may gusto ako sa ’yo, lapit ka pa rin nang lapit sa akin. Mabuti sana kung gusto mo rin ako eh kaso hindi!”

“Raya, please calm down.”

I sighed heavily. “Fine. Matutulog na ako. Thank

you sa hospitality. Hindi ko tatanggihan at lulubusin ko na,” I said, lying on the bed, my back to him.

I felt him sit on the bed.

Shit. Lumayo ka sa akin, Hunter! Baka hindi ako makapagpigil!

He pulled the covers up to my legs and patted my head. Leche. Ano ako, bata!?

“Good night, Raya,” he said softly.

“Hunter?”

“May kailangan ka pa?”

I sat on the bed and looked at him. “Ikaw. Ikaw ang kailangan ko.” I wrapped my arms around his neck. I pressed my lips to his.

I found myself sitting on his lap, teasing his lips with my tongue. I wanted him to open his mouth, but he didn’t. I bit his lower lip softly and touched his nape, trying to arouse him.

I moved my lips from his lips to his ear. I licked and bit it lightly while rubbing my chest to his chest. I cupped his face with both of my hands and kissed him passionately.

“Touch me,” I whispered. He didn’t answer. He

just sat still. I groaned, trying to remove his white polo shirt. Why on earth was he wearing polo in the evening?

I successfully removed his polo, my hands roam freely on his chest.

“Touch me,” I demanded again. “I am not wearing anything under this shirt. You won’t have anything to take off.”

He just sighed and ignored me. That did it. I got out of the bed and stood before him. His eyes were on me. I slowly removed my shirt.

I pushed him kaya napahiga siya. I straddled him, sitting on his bare stomach. I bent down to kiss his neck. My kisses went down to his chest. I nibbled his nipples and licked them. My mouth reached the waistband of his shorts. I looked at him and bit my lip. I bit the garter and tried removing it with my teeth when I realized that he wasn’t a bit... aroused.

I stopped kissing him.

Sobra na. Sobra na talaga.

I knew that he could feel my wetness on his skin because I was naked and he was half-naked. But he still wasn’t aroused. I knew because his member

didn't even twitch.

I got off him and grabbed my shirt. I put it on and lay on the bed next to him, but not facing him.

And then I cried. I felt him embrace me from behind. "Ano'ng kulang sa akin, Hunter?"

"You're almost perfect, Raya."

"Then why? Why can't I even get you aroused? Dahil ba may girlfriend ka? Bullshit, Hunter! Lalaki ka pa rin!"

"Yes, I'm a man, but it doesn't mean I have to be aroused everytime I am seduced by a woman."

Before I could speak, he spoke again.

"Raya, hindi ako ipokrito, pero hindi lahat ng lalaki ay ganoon. 'Yung sinasabi nilang lalaki lang sila at nadala lang ng temtasyon? Hindi lahat ng lalaki ay ganoon, Raya."

"Are you saying you're different?"

"Hindi iyon ang punto ko. Hindi ko sinasabing iba ako."

"Eh, bakit—"

"Sinasabi ko lang na hindi iyon ang rason para

isipin mong porket lalaki kami ay makakaramdam na kami ng ganoon.”

“Eh, ano pala?”

“Mahal ko ang girlfriend ko.”

I cried harder. Leche. Leche talaga. “Tama na,” I said. “Manhid ka ba? Kailangan mo ba talagang ipamukha iyon sa akin?”

“Hindi sa ganoon, Raya.”

I faced him. “Eh ano pala? Why are you doing this to me? You let me do whatever I want to you, pero hindi ka man lang naapektuhan kahit kaunti! Alam mo bang nakakainsulto iyon sa pagkababae ko?”

He bit his lip. “I’m sorry, Raya, if you felt like I’ve insulted you. It’s never my intention to hurt your feelings.”

“Eh, ano ba kasi’ng intention mo!?”

“Maybe I just want to teach you how to control yourself.”

I gaped at him. “Excuse me?”

He sighed. “Women have urges, too. I’m aware of that. The truth is I don’t really care what women do with their bodies, but with you... I’ve come to care

a lot about you, Raya.”

“Hunter—”

“I want you to stop your experiment.”

“My experiment? Why? What do you know about my experiment?”

He stared at me for a long time. “I have an idea. That’s why I’m worried. Anything could happen to you in that experiment of yours. What if Fritz and his boys are not around? What if I’m not around?”

I rolled my eyes. “I’m not so stupid as to conduct an experiment without first knowing that Fritz and his boys would be there.”

He sighed. “Raya, anything could happen.”

“And so?”

“I don’t want you to lose your virginity in that experiment.”

My eyes widened. I sat up on the bed. “How did you know I’m still a... a virgin?”

He smiled at me. “Because of your experiment.”

“My experiment?”

“You do that experiment because you are

searching for true love.”

My jaw dropped. How on earth did he know?

“Hunter? How did—”

“So please remain a virgin until you find the one worthy of your virginity... until you find the one you truly love. Even if you don’t know if you two will end up together, at least while you’re making love with him... you’re doing it because you love him.”