

Prologue



The first of many nights...

Caitlin's sharp, manicured fingers grabbed onto the bedspread as Jake rammed into her.

There were no thoughts in her head, just sensations. Kasabay ng ritmo ng paggalaw nila ay ang tila pagkabuhay at pag-ikot ng woven patterns sa malambot na tela ng bedspread na halos lamukusin na ng dalaga. Malalim at marahas ang bawat paghinga niya, at nakikipagsabayan iyon sa mabilis na tibok ng kanyang puso na tila musikang sinusundan nila ni Jake. Hirap na siyang panatilihing bukas ang mga mata dahil nais na lang niyang damhin ang lahat pero nagawa pa rin ni Caitlin na ilingon ang ulo at tingnan ang nasa likuran niya.

She looked up at him—at the man she met only a few hours ago but already knew her body like an expert lover—and that was all it took for this position to turn from that of a man dominating a woman in an equal act of sex, to him being almost at the brink

and her body being able to get him there.

Oh God, she was doing it, she was taking him there.

Before this night, she hadn't taken herself this far.

She held on as he began a rapid fire succession toward his release. She didn't think she had it in her, especially after she climaxed just minutes ago, but her body was wound tight. It knew what she needed. Apparently so did Jake, because he reached around her hip toward her throbbing center and swiped a finger across her still very sensitive nub.

They groaned in unison and their bodies exploded together.

"Damn," he sighed, his hips stilling as he rode out his release. "Holy sh*t."

Mahigpit pa rin ang hawak sa bedspread, napadapa si Caitlin sa kama bago hinila ang kumot at itinakip iyon sa katawan habang pahiga, paharap muli sa gawi ni Jake na hindi niya alam kung paano nakayang magpunta pa sa kalapit na bathroom.

Dala nito ang pouch ng wet wipes at tissue box nang magbalik, at wala man lang pag-aalinlangan na hinila ang kumot ng dalaga. Nanlaki ang mga mata ni Caitlin nang walang anumang hawakan siya nito sa baywang at sinimulang dampian siya

ng wet wipes.

“Jake, stop! I’ll do it.” Itinukod niya ang mga siko sa kama at sinubukang ibangon ang sarili. She wasn’t exactly hurting but she felt tender.

She felt thoroughly f*cked and hoped he did, too. The sight of his toned body, hard everywhere, and his d*ck sticking out and still erect, told her that much.

“God...” she said with a half-laugh and gave him an approving smile. Higit pa sa anumang inaasahan niya ang nangyari ngayong gabi. Hindi pa niya muling nakikita ang sarili sa salamin pero base sa mainit pa ring pakiramdam, tiyak na namumula siya.

And man, now she knew what it felt to be sated. Satisfied. But still wanting more. *Sh*t, Caitlin! Naadik ka agad! Kalma!*

“You wouldn’t want a wet spot on the bed. May extra sheets ba dito? Ako na ang magpapalit.”

Goodness, is this guy for real?

“Okay pa, Jake. Wala namang gaano...” Napangiwi ang babae nang ma-realize kung ano ang pinag-uusapan nila. “Really, okay lang ako.”

He slowly nodded. “Okay. Do you need anything?”

“Just the robe.” Tumango siya sa direksyon

ng pinto ng bathroom. Jake immediately got it. Sinamantala niya ang pagkawala nito para mabilisang punasan ang sarili. She was gingerly bending over to reach for the small trash bin beside the nighstand when he came back with the bathrobe.

“I’m taking a shower. Gusto mong sumabay?”

Napaubo siya sa narinig. Again, it was so casual, like they had been taking showers together for years.

Umiling si Caitlin at tinanggap ang robe. “I’m fine. Matutulog na lang muna ako.” Isinuot niya iyon at napasinghap siya sa pagkapagal ng katawan. Not even her 20- to 36-hour shifts made her feel this sore... and yet so alive.

“Alright.” Humakbang ito palapit at marahang inihiga siya sa kama. *Did he forget that he’s still naked and... alive?* “I’ll leave after. I’ll lock the door.” He bent to kiss the top of her head, then rubbed his nose to hers, before he stepped away. “Good night.” Dinampot nito ang mga nahubad na damit.

“Jake...” tawag niya nang papasok na sana ito sa banyo.

“Yeah?” Takang lumingon ito.

“Leave your number.” Iniabot niya ang cellphone. “Just in case...” *Just in case what, Caitlin?*

Ilang segundong nakatitig lang sa kanya si Jake

at may nagdaang samu't saring emosyon sa mukha nito. He seemed to hesitate, then, finally took the phone with an unreadable expression. He quietly keyed in and saved his number, gently laid it on the bed, before he wordlessly walked back to the bathroom.

Matapos niyang i-check ang na-save na number ng binata ay parang may puwersang humila sa kanya at muli siyang nakatulog.

Hindi na niya namalayan nang umalis si Jake, pero nang magising kinabukasan ay agad niyang napansin ang isang maliit na pahabang kahon at note na may logo ng hotel. In a messy block print, he wrote:

From a favorite artisan shop in Knightsbridge, these are hand-made and only a few are produced per design. These were supposedly for someone but she can't appreciate them anymore. Here's hoping you would. Happy Birthday!

Medyo nanginginig ang kamay na binuksan ni Caitlin ang kahon. Inside was a vintage glass blown bookmark of the Big Ben in London, and a phonebooth keychain that was also antique-looking and glass blown. Both looked like tiny art pieces and must be expensive.

Muli niyang binalikan ang note at napansing may nakasulat sa likod niyon.

I don't know what 'just in case' means but I gave you my personal number. I don't know what else you'll need me for but just in case, you know how to reach me. J.



*E*arly July

“Oh, hey, Sam! Ang aga mo! Okay ka na? How’s Mia and Dannika?”

Tumango at ngumiti si Sam sa apat na naabutan sa meeting room—mga agents-in-charge sa tatlong magkakaibang division na sina Derek, Lucienne, Calloway, at si Tempest na siyang bumati sa kanya.

“They’re good.” Ibinaba niya sa mesa ang dalang kahon bago dumerecho sa coffee machine at nagtimpla ng inumin. “Kasama ko sila, actually. Nasa lounge muna si Dannika para i-check ni Dr. Dax habang naghatid muna ng orders sa cafeteria si Mia.” He pointed at the box. “Walnut oatmeal chocolate revel bars. Kuha na.” Naupo siya sa tabi ni Lucienne.

“Last Saturday lumabas ng hospital si Dannika. Balik-school siya mamayang nine.” He took a sip from his coffee.

Maganda ang panahon sa labas, maaliwalas

ang atmosphere sa lobby pa lang ng regional headquarters ng international law enforcement organization na pinagtatrabahuhan niya, at kasama niya ngayon ang ilan sa malalapit na kaibigan sa trabaho. Sa kabila ng halos irregular na niyang pagtupad sa tungkulin bilang isa sa mga top agents at behavioral analysts ng ahensya sa loob ng nakalipas na lampas apat na taon ay nananatiling napaka-supportive at maunawain ng mga ito sa kanya.

“That’s good, then. At ikaw, kumusta? Mukhang nakapagpahinga ka,” pansin ni Derek sabay abot sa kanya ng isang folder. His tone was light but his eyes, and the others’, belied their concern.

They all knew that no matter how much rest or sleep he had, things were not likely to be completely okay. Kahit gaano pa kalaki ang kakayahan ni Sam na dalhin sa pinakamagagandang hospital na may pinaka-advanced na treatment facilities ay hindi pa rin niyon magagawang baguhin ang lahat sa buhay ng nag-iisang natitira niyang pamilya.

Dannika would still be gone soon, it was just a matter of time. Hindi nga nila inaasahang aabot ito sa edad nito ngayon, gayong six months old pa lang ay tila nasentensyahan na ang buhay nito. Her condition, a genetic disorder that has no known

source or cure, was also what changed Sam's life over the past years.

All his work colleagues who were also like family to him, knew it.

"I'm sorry we might have to make you spend less time with her, Sam. Alam naming hindi madali pero kailangan namin ng tulong mo."

Nag-angat siya ng tingin mula sa paghahalo ng kape at sinalubong ang mga mata ni Agent Calloway Ilustre, ang isa sa pinakamagagaling nilang profilers at kadalasan ay kasama niyang namumuno sa ilang task force.

"No, please don't apologize. Trabaho ito, responsibilidad kong gampanan nang maayos. I'm surprised the organization still kept me," malungkot na tugon niya.

True. He loved his job, and it loved him back. Nagsilbi si Sam sa satellite offices ng *United Intelligence Network* sa Europe at North America bago siya nagpadestino na lang sa bansa five years ago.

"Okay." Tumango si Agent Illustre. "I assume you already have some background on the case."

"Yes." Sumulyap siya kina Derek at Tempest. "They told me. Ipinadala sa akin ni Escalier ang

resulta ng preliminary probe habang binigyan naman ako ni Villonco ng update nang ipaalam niya sa akin ang tungkol dito sa meeting kahapon.”

“Good. We’re just waiting for the Assistant Director and the others who will be in the task force.” Agent Illustre shook his head. “I hope you’re up to a couple of nights out every week until we catch the perp.”

Napakurap si Sam bago nagpalipat-lipat ang tingin sa mga kasama.

“We need seasoned, experienced agents for the undercover work. Actually, may team na bumuo ng shortlist ng sa tingin namin ay sasakto sa profile na maaaring maipang-trap sa perp,” depensa agad ni Lucienne na alanganin ang ngiti.

“Yep. Seasoned, experienced, and uh...” Tempest smiled sheepishly, “devastatingly gorgeous.”

What the...? Nangungunot ang noong nakatingin si Sam sa dalawang babae bago bumaling kina Calloway at Derek na halos sabay pang resigned na nagtaas ng dalawang kamay.

Base sa nature ng kaso, parang alam na ni Sam kung ano ang magiging papel nila sa imbestigasyon. His suspicions were confirmed when Assistant Director Lee arrived. There appeared to be a serial

killer among the clients of a male escort service provided by *Provocateur*, an exclusive, upscale ‘pleasure club.’

Pawang sa magagarbong suite ng five-star hotels naganap ang mga pagpaslang. Sa kabila ng tulong ng CCTVs at records sa mga hotel, hindi pa rin matukoy ang identity ng perpetrator. Lumalabas na peke rin ang mga IDs na ipinrisinta nito sa pagbu-book ng ‘appointments’ na ginagawa online or by phone. The suspect also paid in cash. At base sa CCTV footage, nag-iiba-iba rin ang itsura at porma nito.

Provocateur’s professional escort service was less regulated than its main business, which caters to its clients’ risque sexual deviations. Noong isang taon lang ay isang serye ng krimen din ang kinasangkutan ng naturang club, na ang *UIN* din ang lumutas. Hangga’t maaari, alam niyang ayaw ng organisasyon na ma-involve sa ganitong mga kaso pero dahil malalaking tao, maiimpluwensya, at mayayaman ang clientele ng *Provocateur* ay sinasamantala din nila iyon alang-alang sa tulong na alam nilang maibibigay ng mga ito na magagamit ng *UIN* para ipagpatuloy ang talagang misyon nito: katarungan para sa lahat.

He didn’t really need the good money that his job

was paying him for. He had not even really touched his trust fund, and his late father left him enough properties in two different countries. He could always pack up and just live it up and enjoy, but he found fulfillment and satisfaction in living his life for others—for Dannika, for his father, and every loved one he had lost for the past decade.

Hanggang sa mga sandaling ito ay hindi pa tapos ang pakikipaglaban ni Sam para mabigyan ng hustisya ang pamilyang nawala sa kanya, pero ayaw niyang sayangin ang buhay sa pagpapakasaya o pagpipilit makalimot. Ito ang buhay niya ngayon, ang subukang iligtas o bigyan ng dignidad at katarungan ang buhay na sapilitang kinuha mula sa iba, kahit pa anumang oras ay nakatakda ring kuhanin ito sa kanya.

He had an idea how escort services work, and a part of him would never understand why people resort to it apart from the money. He always thought there is a better option. Pero sino siya para humusga? Tatlong buhay na ang nawala, tatlong pamilya na ang inalisan ng pagkakataong makasama pa ng mahal nila, gaya ng ginawa sa kanila ni Dannika.

There was no way he would allow another sick, evil person to continue committing these crimes.

“So, Agent De Lara, should we expect to see you at the briefing this afternoon?”

Sinalubong ni Sam ang tingin ng AD. “Yes, Sir.”



Caitlin enjoys and loves mingling and talking to people but not in the kind of atmosphere she was forced to endure now. Wala lang kasi siyang choice kundi maging representative ng immediate boss niya sa hospital na pinapasukan dahil may naka-schedule na itong isasagawang brain surgery. She was supposed to assist her, but Doctor Del Rosario, her boss, asked her to attend this charity function on her behalf instead.

Para sa isang lumaki sa simpleng middle class family at nag-aral sa public schools simula grade one, hinding-hindi yata siya masasanay sa ganitong klase ng environment.

“You barely touched your wine, Doctor Aragon. We have a long night ahead. May program at auction pa.” Tinapik siya sa braso ng asawa ng may-ari ng resort hotel at kilalang philanthropist na si Mrs. Carmen Liu.

“Maybe later, Ma’am. I already had a glass.” To be fair, nearly everyone in their table were nice to her and seemed sincere. Kahit nabu-bore si Caitlin

sa party at minsan ay namamangha sa kung gaano kamahal ang mga suot at naka-display sa katawan ng mga attendees sa party, hindi naman out-of-place ang pakiramdam niya.

“Aw, Tita Carmen. She’s just not used to drinking very expensive wine. Baka nga ni hindi siya sanay sa wine,” matamis ang ngiti pero nang-uuyam ang tingin na sabi ni Crystal Dominguez, isa sa dalawang ka-share nila sa mesa na kanina pa sumusubok sirain ang kanyang gabi. “I heard interns like drinking beer. You know, the cheap, smelly ones?”

Too bad, it takes a lot to make me feel anything. Boredom lang yata ang pinakamadaling pakiramdam para kay Caitlin. “Interns? Hmm, I wouldn’t know. We rarely got breaks when I *was* one.”

“No breaks, really? Poor you. Kaya pala ganyan na lang ang hitsura mo.” Kunwa ay nalulungkot pa ang best friend in Crystal na si Aika, bago makahulugang tumingin sa una.

Kahit tahimik, dama niyang minamasdan at inaabangan ng nakatatandang mga kasama sa mesa ang reaksyon at sasabihin niya. The girls knew exactly where and how to strike: her self-esteem. She had struggled with it over the past four years since her first boyfriend turned fiancé left her. She

got over Edward, but not over the fact that he left because he supposedly found her boring and plain, and that he could no longer stay in a relationship that was not exciting him anymore.

He found a replacement two months after their breakup, and married that woman, Crystal, a year later. Pero kahit kasal na sa ex niya ay naging personal crusade na ng babae na ipaalam sa kanya kung gaano katama ang desisyon ni Edward na iwan siya.

Hindi iyon maiwasan dahil doktor din ang lalaki, at nagme-maintain ng clinic sa Dermatology and Cosmetic Surgery Department ng pinapasukan niyang hospital.

“And what do I look like, Alma?” nakangiting tanong ni Caitlin, bago kumuha ng eclair sa dessert platter at isinubo iyon.

“It’s Aika.” Kumagat naman ang babae sa pang-aasar niya.

“Okay, sorry, Anna. Are you going to answer my question?” Ang truffle naman ang inilagay niya sa bibig.

She heard a slight, unladylike snort from a congressman’s wife on her left. When she turned to look, the woman smiled encouragingly at her.

“It’s Aika, idiot. And you look old and dry and ugly. Look at the lines in your eyes. Your dull hair. Your skin. Sa morgue ka siguro naka-assign at mortician ka talaga at hindi doctor. You look more zombie than human. Lifeless—”

“Whoa, thanks! Di ko alam ‘yun, ah,” kunwa ay nagulat na putol ni Caitlin sa mala-teleseryeng monologue nito. “And considering that this is only the second time we’ve met, I’m flattered you care enough to pay that much attention to me.” Steady, mahinahon at well modulated ang boses niya kahit gusto na niyang mag-sketch sa expertly made-up na mukha nina Aika at Crystal gamit ang scalpel.

“Don’t flatter yourself too much.” Lumapat ang kamay ni Crystal sa braso ni Aika. “You look exactly like someone who hasn’t been laid in a long time. Let me guess, four years? Let me guess again who your last partner was—”

“Your husband. Who doesn’t have much to offer, really.” Agaw muli niya sa mahinang boses. Napasinghap ang mga kasama nila sa mesa. “See this goodie?” She picked up a piece of chocolate-covered cookie stick from the dessert platter. Parang hintuturo lang niya iyon. “The girth and the length was just slightly better than this.” Isinubo din niya

iyon, mabagal na nginuya habang hindi inaalis ang tingin sa dalawang maldita, bago uminom ng wine.

Crystal barely kept her composure. Meanwhile, kulang na lang ay pumalapak ang ibang nasa mesa. Pasalamat ang babae at hindi niya ipinamukha rito kung paanong dalawang beses na sumubok si Edward na gawin siyang kabit nito.

“I know you still want me. How do you explain the fact that you’re still single?”

“Hindi mo iniwan ang Saint Martin kahit alam mong maari tayong magkasalubong araw-araw. You obviously didn’t want to move on.”

The nerve of that a*shole! Single pa rin siya dahil pinili niyang pagtuunan ng pansin ang career bilang doktor na bukod sa nagbibigay ng malaking suweldo at naging fulfilling para sa kanya dahil dalawang beses kada linggo ay nagsisilbi siya sa mga pampublikong hospital o sumasama sa medical missions. She stayed in *Saint Martin’s* because her mentors and closest friends were there. Bakit siya aalis?

She had a blessed, enriching, and fulfilling life over the past years despite her heartbreak. Isang araw, tuluyan din niyang mababawi ang kumpiyansa at hindi na malulungkot o iisiping pangit siya dahil

lang ipinagpalit siya sa mas maganda at bata.

“B*tch. You’re just bitter,” Crystal hissed.

“Ah, bitter? Kaya pala kahit nananahimik ako, palagi mo pa ring sinisigurong alam ko kung gaano ako ka-pangit at ka-boring.” Napailing si Caitlin bago uminom naman ng tubig. Pagkatapos, nag-excuse siya para pumunta sa ladies room.

Napansin niyang patayo sana si Crystal para marahil sundan siya, pero naunahan ito nina Tita Carmen at Senator Ariana Gallego na magre-retouch daw.

Tahimik lang siya habang papunta at nasa ladies’ room, at naririnig niya ang mahinang pag-uusap ng dalawang nakatatandang babae na tila tungkol sa kung anong naka-schedule na event or appointment ng mga ito. Dumerecho lang siya sa isang cubicle. Nang matapos ay ang paghihilamos ang hinarap niya.

Inalis na ni Caitlin ang lahat ng nasa mukha bago minasdan ang sarili sa salamin. Her pale skin was in deep contrast to her maroon dress. The short sleeves showed off her toned arms and the V-neck revealed just a hint of cleavage. She looked okay but compared to nearly everyone in this event—and considering most are older—she looked plain.

Sinuklay niya ng mga daliri ang medyo kulot na hanggang leeg na buhok, pagkatapos ay binuksan ang dalang clutch bag. She shook her head slightly at its contents: a pouch of facial tissue, her cellphone, wallet, car keys, a small tube of perfumed lotion, a roll of mints, a thermometer and pen light. She sighed at the three items of high-end cosmetics: lip and cheek tint, a sample size of loose powder, and a mascara from a brand called *Better Than Sex*.

Ironic.

“Huwag mong paniwalaan ang sinabi ng dalawang iyon. You’re absolutely beautiful... Caitlin. Can we call you Caitlin?” The lady senator stepped closer. Sa sobrang focused niya sa laman ng clutch ay hindi na niya namalayang naroon pa pala ang dalawa.

Funny, because even if they were both nearly two decades older, she knew the two could invite more double takes tonight than she ever could. They both aged gracefully, na alam niyang walang tulong ng siyensya. She should know, she dated a cosmetic surgeon for three years.

“You have near perfect skin, you don’t need to cover your face.” Carmen Liu studied her face. “You have good products here. Just a tint on your cheeks

and lips, a coat of mascara, a dab of powder on your T-zone.”

Napakurap si Caitlin, pero sinunod ang sinabi ng babae. Ibinabalik na niya sa clutch ang mga gamit nang muling magsalita ang senadora.

“Do you have to be somewhere after this, Caitlin?”

Umiling siya. “I’m heading straight to *Saint Martin’s*. May duty ako hanggang alas ocho bukas ng umaga.”

“On a weekend?” Nangunot ang noo nito.

Napangiti ang dalaga. “Ngayon lang. Nag-undertime kasi ako kanina para mag-rest at mag-ayos para dito. Tatapusin ko lang ang natitirang oras ng shift ko.”

“What do you do on your downtime then?” Tita Carmen looked concerned.

Both women looked sincere and genuinely interested in her.

“Um, sleep? Madalas kasi twelve to sixteen hours ang duty ko. I do the laundry, clean the house, read books, and when I feel like it, I try new restaurants sometimes with my mother or my sister-in-law.”

“You live alone?”

“Yes. Nakabase sa Cavite ang pamilya ko.”

“You’re single? Since that one who married that fashion blogger?” tukoy ng senadora kay Crystal.

Napailing si Caitlin. “Yeah. I went out on a few dates with people my mother and some friends introduced to me, pero wala talaga. Walang spark o connection.”

Nagkatinginan ang dalawang ginang.

“Were you going out on these dates hoping to find a boyfriend or husband, though?” Tita Carmen asked.

Minasdan niya ang dalawa. “Honestly? I’m not sure...or actually, no.” Napailing siya muli. “Come to think of it, ang tagal na yata simula noong huli akong lumabas. I’m just not interested in dating. It kind of got boring.”

“Dear, that’s dangerous. Masyado ka pang bata para ma-bore sa isang bagay na dapat ay parte ng buhay mo. How young are you?” curious na tanong ng senadora.

“Not young. I’ll be thirty-one in September.” At unang linggo na ng July ngayon.

“I’m fifty-two and she’s forty-nine.” Umarko ang isang kilay ng hotelier. “We don’t feel old.”

“You don’t look old either,” nakangiting pahayag ni Caitlin. “You two look quite radiant, actually.” It

was true. They were glowing.

The senator smiled mysteriously. “We were supposed to invite you to this place.” Binuksan nito ang dalang clutch. “But we don’t make a habit of keeping anyone from their work, especially one as important as yours.” Inilabas nito ang isang itim na tila credit card. “Here. That’s one of my guest cards. ‘Yung nine-digit code diyan ay puwede mong gamitin to access the website. You may also use that number to call them if you’re interested. Tell them you’re my guest, or Carmen’s.”

Alanganing tinanggap ni Caitlin ang card. Idinerecho niya iyon sa clutch pero nagawang mahagip ng tingin niya ang mga letrang naka-emboss doon: *Provocateur*.

What the hell was that? Takang sumunod siya sa dalawang babae palabas.

“You know what, and just because we like your spunk, if you decide you wanted to avail of a service, we’ll take care of the first one. The next ones will be discounted since you’re a guest of two members.” Carmen Liu winked at her conspiratorially.

Napaawang lang ang mga labi ng dalaga, hindi alam ang sasabihin. *What... service?*

Makahulugan ang ngiti ni Senator Gallego nang

tapikin ang braso niya. “You’ll be fine, Caitlin. You’ll enjoy it. Consider it a birthday gift to yourself.”

2



*F*irst week of September

“Stop congratulating me as if the entire operation worked because of me. ‘Yang si Sam ang batiin ninyo, kung di dahil sa kanya, baka critical na ako ngayon at kulang pa ng isang body part.’” Tinapik siya ni Derek sa balikat habang abala siya sa pagpirma sa release forms.

Dalawang araw na ang nakalilipas nang mahuli nila ang salarin sa pagpatay sa tatlong professional male escorts ng *Provocateur*. It was a former TV network executive who was exacting revenge on every male escort she could get her hands on, because her former lover married one.

Halatang pinlano nito ang bawat pagpatay mula sa pagsisigurong maaprubahan ang membership sa club, sa pagpapalit-palit ng hitsura, at pagtiyak na makakalusot ang mga ginagamit nito sa pagpatay: a stun gun, a swiss army knife and a custom-made samurai.

Hindi naging madali sa task force na matunton nila kung saang kuwarto sa isang upscale condotel dinala ng salarin si Derek. Apparently, the perpetrator booked three rooms under different names because she got wind that she was already wanted. Labimpitong palapag ang condotel, at walang ideya maging si Derek kung anong alias ang ginamit ng babae sa kuwartong pinagdalan dito.

They also had to make sure that even if they were trying to look for the perp, no other client of the condotel knew so as not to disrupt the operation.

Derek was blindfolded in the elevator and his mouth was sealed with a duct tape. Mabuti at hindi nagalaw sa puwesto ang maliliit na communication device na nasa tainga at kuwintas nito.

“Naku, allergic naman sa papuri si Sam. Kaya sa ‘yo na lang ang lahat ng credit, since ikaw ang ginawang canvas ang katawan gamit ang kutsilyo.”

Nailing na napatingin na siya sa isa sa mga division heads na si Henry. Sumaludo ito sa kanya bago tumingin kay Derek na alam niyang sa ilalim ng suit ay nababalot ng benda sa balikat, braso, dibdib, at hita.

“Derek is the hero, man,” simpleng sagot ni Sam.

“But you saved my life, bro,” madamdaming

turan ng binanggit niya. “Kung hindi ka mabilis mag-isip at magtahi ng clues, baka victim number four na ‘ko.”

He shook his head, then gathered the papers in front of him and handed them to their AD’s secretary. Nasa malaking conference room sila at ine-enjoy ang libreng pizza at ice cream para sa mga naging bahagi ng task force na kinuha mula sa iba’t ibang division.

“It was, essentially, a group effort.” Sam smiled as he took a huge cup of ice cream to take back to his office. Nagpaalam na siya dahil may iba pang kaso siyang dapat asikasuhin.

Pagdating sa sariling opisina sa Behavioral Science Unit ay nag-ring agad ang kanyang telepono. It was their operator, asking if he would take a call from Miss Antoinette Carrasco. Nangunot ang noo niya, pero ipinakonekta din ang tawag. “Miss Carrasco? It’s Sam. Good afternoon.”

“Oh, Jake! I mean, Agent Sam! Thank heavens I got hold of you!” The woman on the other line did sound relieved.

Ito ang client relations officer sa male escort service sa *Provocateur*, ang nag-aayos ng appointments sa mga ie-escort.

For the past two months that he was undercover, he had only gone out with *Provocateur's* clients seven times. Escort service lang talaga ang ibinigay nila, bagaman may option ang bawat escort na magbigay ng iba pang serbisyo para sa mas malaking kita.

He had been propositioned four times, at lahat ay tinanggihan niya. The clients assigned to him were either bored, rich wives of politicians and tycoons, or old ladies who simply wanted a date to events. He took them to dancing, talked to them through sleep-inducing speeches and kept them company while their husbands got busy making more money.

It was pretty lucrative, and even if he did not offer *extra* services, he received generous tips. Ang mga kinita nilang mga undercover ay ibinabalik nila sa *Provocateur* para ipandagdag sa suweldo ng mga tunay na escort, tapos iyong iba ay nai-donate sa Community Service and Rehabilitation Fund ng UIN.

Sumandal si Sam sa kinauupuan. “Is it about the case, Ma’am? We would send you copies of the complete report by tomorrow.”

“Oh no, I know that, dear. Pero hindi ito tungkol sa kaso. Um, I know you guys simply went undercover but um... your services are still needed.”

“But... I can’t do that anymore.”

*Sh*t*, why was he not removed from the male escort database? Did someone accidentally set an appointment and had access to his fake profile on the website?

“Your profile was erased only this morning but one of our clients managed to schedule an appointment while it was still up last night. Hindi para sa kanya, kundi bilang regalo sa isang guest niya. That client specifically requested for you, dahil ayon sa kanya, ikaw lang daw ang sa tingin niya ay maaaring pagkatiwalaan. She said her guest is young and hasn’t used any service of this sort before, but our client felt and knew she needed this experience.”

This is mad. What am I supposed to do with an escort service newbie?

Inalala ni Sam kung sinu-sino ang naging mga kliyente. Sino sa kanila? Gusto niyang itanong kung sino, pero alam niyang matindi ang pagpapahalaga ng *Provocateur* sa confidentiality clause ng bawat appointment.

“When is this... meeting, er... appointment?”
Damn, he’s not agreeing, wasn’t he? *No!*

“This Friday, eight in the evening at *Spin*, ground floor of the *Manila Hilton*.”

Spin? *An upscale yuppie bar?*

“Just how young is this guest? Ma’am, I’m thirty-two, I’m not going to be seen drinking with an eighteen-year-old—”

Natawa si Miss Carrasco. “No, not a debutante.”

“A bride-to-be then?” he asked, incredulous.

“No. Not a bride. Listen, I do not know either. Ang s’abi lang sa akin, iba daw ito sa kahit sinong naging kliyente mo. Sa tingin ko, safe naman. Hindi ka mapapahamak. At malamang, isang beses lang ito. The guest was supposed to be a very busy person.”

“Can you at least give me the name?” he sighed.

Alright, isang beses lang. He probably could use the diversion. Dannika has been doing well and there’s Mia to take care of her, anyway.

“Her name is Caitlin. That’s all that was given to me.”

“Fine. This Friday, then.” Napailing si Sam.

“I’ll let our client know you agreed. Thank you... *Jake*,” sambit ng kausap sa alias niya bilang male escort, bago nagpaalam.

He stared at the computer screen, at the icon shortcut to the specialized search engine that helps them track and narrow down lists when trying to pin a perpetrator.

He wondered how many Caitlins would show up given the very vague description he had so far.



“Another glass, Ma’am?” nakangiting tanong ng magandang bartender nang mapansin siyang itinaas ang wala nang lamang baso ng red wine.

*Huh, look at me, drinking expensive French red in a f*cking bar where everyone else held some fancy beer or some cocktail concoction with a racy name.*

“Yes, please.”

Ano ngayon kung naiiba ako? And this was among the most expensive wines in the list. It’s also my birthday, damn it. I can do whatever the hell I want, including the reason I am here.

Pinagmasdan niya ang pagsalin ng wine sa kanyang baso. The smooth, rich red liquid swirled invitingly as it gushed from the bottle to her glass. The bartender placed another small dish of dark chocolate truffles to go with it. Napangiwi si Caitlin nang mapansing naubos na pala niya ang nasa naunang lalagyan.

Alas dos ng hapon natapos ang duty niya ngayong araw. Hindi na siya nagtagal pa sa *Saint Martin’s* at iniwan na ang mga kapwa doctor, nurses, at staff sa department sa treat niyang pizza at cake sa

mga ito. She went straight to this hotel with her new dress and overnight bag, slept for two hours, had an early dinner, showered, then got ready.

Seven thirty pa lang ay nandito na si Caitlin. Baka sakaling kapag na-expose siya sa atmosphere ng bar ay mas makapag-isip at makapagdesisyon siya nang maayos. She felt bad that she considered backing out after all the trouble Senator Gallego and her friends went through to arrange this night.

“It’s a gift, Caitlin. You know you don’t have to worry about anything. Isang beses lang naman. And we got hold of the man’s very recent medical records. He’s clean. And he is highly recommended... by who, I won’t tell you but I have seen and met him. He’s gorgeous, and... well, I’d let you find out the rest pero wala sa apat na kilala kong naging escort siya ang binigyan niya ng extra service. He never gave his reasons, but he was so charming my amigas didn’t hold it against him. You might change his mind when he sees you. We heard he’s new. You don’t have to tell us whether he said yes or not. We’d probably see it in your eyes.” Natawa ang senadora.

Matapos ang charity function kung saan una silang nagkakilala ay tatlong beses pa niya itong nakita, si Mrs. Liu at iba pang kaibigan ng mga

ito. Panay mga official functions iyon. They all seemed to genuinely like her and even volunteered sponsorships for her projects in public hospitals.

Napagkikita pa rin niya si Crystal sa tuwing dumadalaw ito sa *Saint Martin's*. Tila lalo pang nainis ito dahil sa magandang pakikitungo sa kanya ng ilan sa mga prominenteng babae sa circle na tila matagal na nitong gustong kabilangan. Kahit kasi galing sa mayamang Filipino-Chinese family ay tila may insecurities pa rin ang babae sa social status nito, bagay na halos walang kahirap-hirap na nakuha ni Caitlin sa kabila ng pagiging jologs at self-made niya.

“Oh, they’ll soon drop you once they realize you don’t really belong in their circle,” sabi ni Crystal isang beses na makasabay niya ito sa elevator.

She just rolled her eyes. Wala siyang paki at panahon sa opinyon nito.

*“When was the last time you got some, Caitlin? Ooohh, let me guess, four years ago, right? With Edward? Because, honey, you look so dry the last time you were f*cked couldn’t be recent.”*

She was right. Si Edward nga ang huli niya pero debatable kung saktong four years ago iyon. Hindi siya nagbibiro o nang-iinis nang okrayin niya ang

size ng dating nobyo. It really was not much. In the two times that they did it, she did not even have an orgasm.

“I was right, wasn’t I?”

She did not even dignify that insinuation with an answer, however accurate it was. Nang bumukas ang elevator sa ground floor ay dere-derecho siyang lumabas.

Crystal must have been furious. She didn’t care.

That was ten days ago, and that night, she received a call from Tita Carmen who insisted that she accept her birthday gift. Nasa harap siya ng salamin sa kanyang banyo at kalalagay lang ng anti-wrinkle cream kahit wala naman siyang wrinkles.

She still felt old, though. And it had been awhile. She *does* need, and wanted to experience that kind of pleasure for a change. The better if she wouldn’t be bound by commitments and expectations.

When Senator Gallego checked on her ‘decision’ on Monday, she said ‘yes.’

Kaya heto ngayon si Caitlin at hawak ang ikalawang baso ng wine na iniinom niya in between bites of the truffles. Dumerecho siya ng upo, paminsan-minsan ay pumipihit sa puwesto sa dulo ng bar at sinisigurong madaling makikita ang

kuwintas niyang may blue green teardrop pendant. Hinahawi din niya ang buhok para pansin din ang katerno niyong earrings.

She looked around, wondering if she was over dressed. She hadn't gone out in ages. A quick perusal of the Friday night crowd reassured her she shouldn't worry. Medyo overdressed lang siguro siya in the sense na siya lang yata ang hindi ganoon ka-revealing ang suot.

Her midnight blue and blood red striped dress fell just above her knees. The soft fabric hugged her curves and revealed just a hint of cleavage and highlighted her toned arms. Three inches ang takong ng itim na peep toe shoes na suot niya, na sana ay hindi siya bigyan ng aksidente mamaya.

Her blue green accessories were what her 'date' was supposed to look for. Her 'fairy godmothers' did not even give a hint of what their 'gift' looked like. She only knew his name was Jake. He doubt that was his real name.

Caitlin sighed, popped another truffle in her mouth, allowed it to melt, then took another sip from her wine. She closed her eyes, savoured the rich mix of flavors, then felt that unmistakable prickle on her nape. Heat seemed to slowly rise from her toes.

She was being watched.

Kahit nagsisimulang kumabog ang dibdib ay bumaling si Caitlin sa kanan kung saan isang matangkad na lalaki ang palapit sa kanya at hindi inaalis ang tingin sa kanya. He was lean, had broad shoulders, and nice biceps that were evident in the blue grey dress shirt with its rolled up sleeves and tucked in black trousers. Both items of clothing worshipped his body by clinging to it. He held a black jacket in one arm. He wore *Doc Martens* instead of polished wing tips, giving his outfit an edgy vibe.

And that was just his body, and the stuff that covered it. Hindi na niya maalís ang tingin sa lalaki na nakapako rin ang mga mata sa kanya.

Oh. My. God. Is this Jake? My Jake?

Muli siyang napainom ng wine habang hindi inaalis ang tingin sa lalaki. May kung anong nagdaan sa mukha nito, parang magkahalong pagtataka na may kaunting... *galit? Panghuhusga?* Hindi sigurado ang dalaga dahil agad din iyong naglaho nang muling salubungin ng lalaki ang tingin niya.

He was a few steps closer now, and she was becoming more enthralled by the second. She was used to seeing goodlooking men, but she had not

met anyone this magnetic.

It was probably his eyes. She was not sure what color they were—green or gold? Both? They were heavy lidded and deep-set, adorned with thick long lashes, and complemented by the subtle slant of his brows. Those incredible eyes sort of softened the sharp, near-perfect angles of his face—from the prominent Roman nose to the high cheekbones to his killer jawline.

And his lips, those plump, soft-looking lips that slightly pursed along with the slight furrow of his brow, as if he now hesitated taking another step when he was already so close.

No man had made her feel as if her heart and pulse and blood fought for their presence and excitement to be felt. Sumagi sa isip ni Caitlin na baka dahil sa wine lang iyon, o nasasabik at kinakabahan lang siya dahil una, ngayon lang uli siya lumabas para sa isang date. Pangalawa, dahil sa ina-anticipate niyang kahihinatnan ng date na ito, at pangatlo, dahil wala siyang alam sa lalaking ito maliban sa trabaho at highly recommended ito ng ilan sa pinaka-makapangyarihang babae sa bansa.

“Dewar’s twelve, please,” he softly said to the bartender. His tone was polite, a tad imploring, but

the sound of that lazy, slightly scratchy baritone made her insides flip. It was the perfect bedroom voice if she ever heard one.

“On the rocks. Thanks.” Naupo ito sa tabi niya.

Halos mapapikit si Caitlin nang sandaling magdikit ang kanilang mga braso. His skin was hot, in stark contrast to hers. He also smelled... delicious.

Bumaling ang lalaki sa kanya, may pag-aalinlangan sa mga mata pero bahagyang ngumiti. Humigpit ang pagkakahawak ng isa niyang kamay sa gilid ng counter. Kung posibleng matunaw ang puso dahil sa isang ngiti, iyon marahil ang nangyayari ngayon. His smile was boyish, goofy, and a little innocent.

“Caitlin...” He blinked. “Hi.”

She nodded. “Hi... Jake.”

Relief washed over his features. “I’m sorry for being late. I was caught in tr—”

“No, no... it’s okay.” Her hand let go of the counter and slightly tapped his arm. “Really. I don’t mind. I needed the time to myself while here, anyway.”

He nodded once at the bartender who placed his clear caramel-colored drink in front of him, then turned to her fully. “You needed time to think if it was okay to be here.” Mataman ang tingin ng

kaharap.

“I already thought of that a few days ago and since I’ve already booked a room here, that means I have decided.” She took another sip of wine.

He tilted his head to the right. “You’re seeing someone after this, then?”

Nangunot ang noo ng dalaga. “No. Why would I do that? Ikaw ang kasama ko.”

Pinagmasdan siya ni Jake na parang may hindi naintindihan sa sinabi niya. “Alright.” He sighed, then nodded at her glass. “Pang-ilan mo na ‘yan?” He reached in for his wallet.

“Pangalawa pa lang.” Umangat ang isang kilay niya nang iabot ng estranghero ang tatlong five-hundred peso bills sa bartender. “Keep the change.” Kinuha nito ang halos hindi pa nababawasang baso ng whisky pati ang wine ni Caitlin at iniabot sa isang wait staff na agad lumapit. “Come on, d’un tayo.” Sumulyap ito sa isang loveseat sa sulok.

She carefully slid off the barstool, then gasped when she felt his hand on her lower back while another held her arm. “T-thanks,” she mumbled as she allowed him to hold her. Jake did not let go until they were both seated and their drinks were on the table in front of them.

“You’re cold. Ayos ka lang ba?” Iniabot ng lalaki ang wine bago kinuha ang sariling inumin.

“I’m fine. Medyo OA lang ang lamig dito.” Why were they still here anyway? Hindi ba dapat ay sa kuwarta ito nagyayaya?

“I could ask them to adjust the settings a bit.” He gently rubbed her arm.

Umiling si Caitlin. “No, huwag na.” Hinuli niya ang tingin ng kausap. “Mainit ka naman.” Then, she promptly inched closer until they were touching from shoulders to knees.

He blinked. He somewhat looked unsure before he placed his jacket on his lap. “So, how was your birthday so far?”

Are we really going to talk first?

“It’s been nice. Last weekend pa ako nagse-celebrate actually. Lunch date kasama ang nanay ko at pamilya ng kuya ko. They left for a vacation in Singapore where my older sister and her family is based, kaya solo ako ngayon.”

Oh, God. Too much information, Cai!

“Bakit hindi ka kasama?”

“My work is quite demanding. I can’t just go on vacations.”

Jake smiled, as if in understanding. “Mine’s

the same. I rarely had time to travel for the past few years. I always had to either attend to a c...” Napahinto ito bago napailing.

“Attend to a what?” Hindi niya inaalis ang tingin sa lalaki. Base sa paraan ng pagsasalita, halatang may pinag-aralan ito. Kapansin-pansin ang accent nito kapag nagsasalita ng Ingles. Clipped, distinguished, and even if he tend to mumble sometimes, it was obvious he either grew up or was educated in the West.

“We’re supposed to relax, right? At birthday mo ngayon, hindi tamang trabaho ang pinag-uusapan.” He gently shook his glass of whiskey then, took a sip.

Halatang sanay itong uminom, pero kaya ring kontrolin ang sarili o kaya ay mataas ang alcohol tolerance. His eyes hooded a bit and he breathed deeply as he set the glass back on the table.

“I need to know something, Caitlin,” tanong ni Jake nang muling magtama ang mga mata nila.

Bumalik agad ang kaba niya. “What’s that?”

A corner of his lips turned up. “Would you like to dance?” He held out his hand. “With me?”

Napakurap ang dalaga. “H-hindi ako sanay...”

“It’s not like we’re participating in a dance sport competition, Caitlin.”

It was only the second time he mentioned her name, but she already loved the sound of it and the way his lips moved when he said it. “Jake, no. Let’s just... um, hang-out.”

P’unta na lang tayo sa room ko, please.

“How about... if you dance with me, you’ll get a prize later? A reward?”

Umangat ang isang kilay ng babae. “Reward? Do I look like your dog, Jake?”

His eyes widened for a second before he let out a hearty laugh. Even the way he laughed had a sensual quality to it. “I’m sorry.” Napailing ito.

“Hindi ako nagpapatawa,” she said, mock serious.

“You’re funny, anyway. At hindi ka mukhang aso. Bakit ba ‘yun agad ang naisip mo?” He leaned in so that their faces were level with each other. “You’re beautiful, and smart, and you just made me laugh. Hindi ko maintindihan kung bakit mag-isa ka lang dito sa gabi ng birthday mo, at ako pa ang kasama mo.”

She rolled her eyes. “Most of my friends can’t be bothered on a Friday night because they prefer to spend it with their significant others, spouses or kids. ‘Yung mga puwede kong mahila, wala naman dito

sa Pinas. I already celebrated with colleagues earlier. Hindi sila puwede dahil sa toxic at hectic naming trabaho.” Bumuntong-hininga si Caitlin. “I know it must sound pathetic that I have to resort to this pero ikaw na ang nagsabi, it’s my birthday. I have every right to relax and enjoy.” Bahagyang pumungay ang mga mata niya, kasabay ng marahang paglalandas ng isang hintuturo mula sa kamay ni Jake paakyat sa braso nito.

Kulang, rather wala siyang practice sa paglandi. Hindi naman siya naging interesado sa ibang lalaki simula nang maghiwalay sila ni Edward. Not that she was not over him, but more because she just couldn’t find any connection, or spark from the men she dated over the last four years or so.

She had not even been really attracted to anyone.

“I don’t think it’s pathetic.” Hinuli ni Jake ang kamay niya. His big, semi-rough hand covered hers, and his long fingers twined with hers. She felt her stomach dip, and she did not know how she still managed to reach for her glass and downed the remaining wine.

It was just his hand covering hers and it already felt fire licking at her fingertips. If his entire naked body covered hers, she wondered if she would be

engulfed in flames.

“But since we’re already here, we have to make the most of it.” Hinawakan ni Jake ang isang braso niya bago marahan siyang hinila patayo. “Surely you remember how to slowdance?”

Her breath hitched as his hand slid from her back to circle her waist, as Jake led them to the dancefloor where couples have gathered.

Lumamlam ang mga ilaw at wala na siyang nagawa nang hapitin siya ng lalaki sa katawan nito.

Damn, this feels so good! He felt and smelled wonderful and was now making sure she wouldn’t step on anyone’s toes.

The song was some track filled with profanity from *The Weeknd*. It was not an ideal song for a first date, but this was allowing her to be this close to Jake.

Isinampay ni Caitlin ang mga braso sa balikat ng lalaki at pinagsalikop ang mga kamay sa batok nito. Thankfully, the wine was slowly kicking in and lowering her inhibitions.

She looked up at him, who had his eyes on her but seemed to be in deep thought.

“Hey...” bulong niya, sabay tingkayad at inilapat ang mga labi sa gilid ng labi nito.

He gasped. “What...”

“Niyaya mo akong sumayaw ‘tapos may ibang nilalakbay na ‘yang diwa mo.”

“I’m sorry.” He does look repentant. Medyo namula pa nga ang lalaki. “I’m here now.”

“I don’t easily forgive, Jake.” She sniffed, then touched her nose to the side of his neck, before meeting his gaze again.

His eyes narrowed. “Yeah? What can I do to make it up to you, Caitlin?”

Ginaya niya ang paniningkit ng mga mata nito bago inilapit muli ang mukha at walang babalang hinagkan si Jake sa mga labi. Saglit lang iyon, mamaya niya susulitin.

Sinalubong niya ang mga mata nitong ngayon ay nanlalaki na. *Scared, lover boy?*

“Let’s go to my room, Jake. Now.”

3



After that call from *Provocateur's* client relations officer three days ago, Sam never had time to do prior research about Caitlin. He only had a name and her birthday, but as he wrapped up the call, he already thought of ways to find out anything about this date.

Hindi na ito parte ng trabaho ni Sam, at gagawin niya lang bilang isang pabor sa kung sinuman ang nagrekomenda sa kanya. He sat on his chair already working out how he would go about his 'research' when another call came in.

He was asked to report back to the Assistant Director's office. Once there, he forgot all about Friday night. Kapag umuuwi si Sam ay ginugugol niya kay Dannika ang oras. Kagabi lang siya muling nakatulog nang matagal. At nang dumating sa opisina ay tatlong klase ng report at dalawang meeting naman ang kanyang hinarap.

At four in the afternoon, someone from

Provocateur called again to remind him of his 'date.' He said he would be there, but it was only after meeting with newbie agents for a Behavioral Science refresher that it totally sunk in that he had a *date*.

He ran for the overnight bag he always kept in his car, ran back to the office, to the men's room where he took a quick shower before changing back into his work pants and a fresh, crisp shirt.

Sa daan na siya naghapunan, at inabot nang lampas isang oras bago nakarating sa hotel. He did not know why he was nervous when he got here. Kumakabog ang kanyang dibdib nang dumaan sa men's room, at parang execution chamber ang pinasok nang itulak pabukas ang smoked glass double doors ng bar.

Blue green teardrop earrings and matching necklace, he recited in his head as he scanned the half-filled room. Agad niyang nakita ang babaeng nasa sulok ng bar at nakatitig sa baso ng wine. Ito lang ang may suot ng mga hinahanap niya, at ayaw pa sana niyang paniwalaan kung hindi pa ito pumihit at napatingin sa gawi niya.

Four meters away, it was already obvious that she was expecting someone. Saglit na nangunot ang noo ng babae, bago medyo nanlaki ang mga mata.

He expected someone either shy or completely indifferent. Or no one at all. It was really fine if his ‘date’ backed out. Real escorts told him during their operations that some clients actually tend to do that.

He was not quite ready for a first-time client who confidently looked him in the eyes, in an appraising manner at that. Kung kanina ay hindi malaman ni Sam ang dahilan kung bakit siya kinakabahan, ngayon ay lumilina na sa kanya kung bakit.

Wala sa inaasahan, plano at gusto niya ang mangyayari ngayong gabi. Hindi na mahalaga kung first time ng babaeng ito na makipag-date sa isang escort, dahil kita namang hindi nito iyon ikinahihiya.

She maybe a little awkward, but she knew what she was doing. It could be the wine talking, but she sounded so sober that he doubt the alcohol had anything to do with it.

“Jake? Did you hear me?”

He blinked. Masyadong malapit ang mukha ni Caitlin. Ilang pulgada lang ang pagitan ng mga labi nila.

And she just kissed him. It was just the corner of his mouth but still so close. He did not—*oh, sh*t!*

Dumako ang mga kamay ni Sam sa magkabilang

braso ng dalaga at maingat na inilayo ito habang mabagal na umaatras sila palayo sa dancefloor.

“May problema ba, Jake?” Nangunot ang noo nito.

Umiling si Sam. “Wala... uh, the song is over.”

Damn it, what is going on? Bakit siya natetensyon? Bakit hindi na niya maalala ang mga delaying and diversionary tactics dati para hindi siya ma-trap para sa ‘additional service’? Sam was a freakin’ triathlete! Why wasn’t he running yet? He had at least sixty pounds more on this woman, why couldn’t he pull away from her yet?

“Let’s go to my room, then.” Her voice was steady and serious, low hypnotic, and seemed to slowly seeped into him.

“Past nine pa lang, Caitlin.” Napalunok si Sam. Bakit hindi niya maalalis ang tingin dito? “We can still—”

“You like it here?” Iginala nito ang tingin sa kinaroroonan nila. Men and women, couples and groups of friends clad in expensive clothing with their pricey fancy drinks. Music that was all bass and whiney singing.

Nope, this wasn’t his scene.

“Mas exciting pa ang trabaho ko dito.” She

scoffed. “Araw-araw, o minsan oras-oras, may bago.”

What does she do? He wondered. Nasa law enforcement din ba ito? Field reporter? Abogado? Doktor?

“I didn’t say I like it here.”

She smirked. “Pero bagay ka dito.” Dumako ang kamay ni Caitlin sa lapel ng kanyang jacket. “You look so f*cking expensive. And I don’t just mean your price at your... uh, place of work.” Umakyat ang kamay na iyon sa leeg niya, sa panga. “Medyo may ini-expect na akong tipo ng mga nasa linya mo. Guwapo pero generic. Pero ikaw...”

“Um, Caitlin, maybe we should sit first.” He could feel heat rising to his cheek.

“You’re just... so devastatingly goodlooking I kind of have to check if you’re real.”

“Caitlin, you’re drunk.” Napangiwi si Sam.

Natawa ang babae. “Mukha ba akong lasing? Maybe less inhibited, my tongue is a bit loose.” The tip of her tongue darted out to lick across her lower lip as her heavy-lidded gaze remained on him.

Damn it. His stomach was in knots now, as the sight went straight to his groin.

“Trust me, I can probably beat you in drinking contests.” She leaned closer, searching his face. “Are

you shy, Jake? Embarrassed? I was told bago ka lang daw.”

Lalong gusto niyang malaman kung sino ang nagrekomenda sa kanya. “And I was told it’s your first time to... do something like this.”

Kumurap ang dalaga, nagliliwanag sa amusement ang mga mata. “We haven’t done anything, Jake.”

Why must you be so beautiful that I couldn’t tear my eyes off you? Why do you have to smell so good I just had to stay close? Why does it have to feel so amazing to hold you, to be held by you that I couldn’t break away?

“We’ve talked. We danced,” he lamely said. “We can talk some more.”

Caitlin’s gaze was taunting. “Talk? What are we supposed to do, Jake? Get to know each other when I most likely won’t see you again after this?”

Hindi niya alam kung ano ang sasabihin. Hindi rin niya ito mabitawan.

“Talking ruins everything, Jake,” she almost whispered. “Pero kung ayaw mo, sabihin mo lang habang maaga para makapag-request ako ng kapalit mo.” Kasabay ng pagbitaw ng babae ay ang paglayo nito.

*Holy sh*t.* “No... sandali lang.” Hinagip niya ang

braso nito. Damn, she could be bluffing. This woman was clearly an expert in bossing people around and getting what she wanted. But he couldn't do this!

Kakausapin na lang niya ang mga taga-*Provocateur* para i-refund sa dalaga o sa sponsor nito ang bayad sa sandaling makumbinsi niya ang babae na manatili sila rito sa bar.

“Jake, I don't want to waste any more time waiting. *Provocateur* is just a couple of streets away. Madali lang sigurong mag-request ng—”

“Why are you doing this, Caitlin?”

“What?” takang tanong nito.

“Why hire someone to keep you company on your birthday? You're beautiful. You could easily have any man you want, nang walang bayad.”

She sighed. “I don't want what I could easily have. Gulo at sakit ng ulo lang ang dala niyon. Expectations, demands, disappointments... who wants those? Why pay for a date? So I am reminded that this is just an obligation, a service, something I can easily just file away as an expense, guilt and pressure free.”

Hindi makapaniwalang napatitig lang siya kay Caitlin. Whatever made her want to be this cold and detached?

“Hindi ako namimilit ng ayaw, Jake. Naiintindihan kong bago ka at siguro hindi mo pa matanggap na kailangan mong gawin ang ganitong trabaho.” She shook her head. “But I was anticipating this night and I wanted more out of this, so if you’ll excuse me, I need to make a ca—”

Her words were stilled by his mouth on hers, as he pulled her close and trapped her in his arms. He did not know why he couldn’t bear the thought of her getting another man, but screw his little fake escort principles.

He had made up his mind. If Caitlin said she wanted him, then he was all hers.

“I’m sorry,” he managed to whisper as he came up for air. *God, that was some kiss.* He gently led her towards the door. “I’m staying.”



Caitlin might have been a bit buzzed, but she could still practically see and hear the wheels turning in his head. Maaaring sinabi lang ni Jake na payag na ito sa gusto niya pero posibleng umiisip pa rin ito ng paraan para mapagbago ang kanyang isip.

Sisiguruhin niyang hindi ito magtatagumpay.

Because the man had been stirring sensations within her that she had not been aware of in ages...

Or ever.

That kiss earlier? That was... all-consuming. His mouth and a bit of his tongue meeting hers lasted for only several seconds but already felt as if he took and gave, and she was now somehow changed.

Yes, she was definitely bluffing earlier when she said she would call for another man from *Provocateur*. Ang totoo, gumuguhong muli ang marupok na niyang self-esteem. Ni hindi man lang ba nagandahan sa kanya si Jake? Matanda na ba talaga siyang tingnan at walang dating? Sa lahat ng nasa bar kanina, wala ni isa mang nakatingin sa gawi niya kahit hindi sadya. Hindi ba talaga siya pansinin?

“What floor, Caitlin?”

She gasped when he spoke, his voice low and soft; his tone seemingly resigned.

Bumitaw ang kamay ni Jake sa likod niya at iminuwestrang pumasok siya sa elevator. Tahimik na umatras siya pasandal sa isang dingding. “Eleventh.” she placed her hands behind her back to hold onto the railing.

He nodded, pressed a few buttons on the panel and walked to stand beside her as the doors closed.

Huminga siya nang malalim. “I was already told this isn’t your thing, Jake. May oras pa para

umatras ka at hayaan akong humanap ng kapalit mo.” Napalunok si Caitlin. “I don’t want a reluctant... partner.”

“No, I’m staying.” Sumulyap ito sa kanya.

Napabuga siya ng hangin. “It’s pretty obvious you don’t want to be here. Alam kong hindi ang isang gaya ko ang inaasahan mo.”

He shook his head. “No, it’s not that.”

“If you think I can’t afford you, well... Let me tell you I have a decent, fulfilling albeit, stressful job that pays—”

“Caitlin... No.” Muli siyang tiningnan ni Jake. Iyong tingin na parang nagtatakang naa-amuse na medyo iniisip ding nababaliw na siya.

Well... perhaps a little.

“You probably think I’m crazy... desperate...” Nanatili ang tingin niya sa pinto ng elevator, at muntik mapasigaw nang humarang sa paningin niya si Jake, na mataman siyang minamasdan.

He put his hands on either side of her waist on the rail. “No...”

“A loser then. An unattractive one at that.” She bravely met his eyes, her heart pounded in her chest.

Jake leaned his head down and brushed his lips against hers. “No...”

Her breath was now coming out in short pants. “There’s still time, Jake. Don’t do this if you d—”

Jake kissed her lightly but there was nothing chaste about it. His lips covered her bottom lip and lingered there as his body was flush against hers.

“I’m here now, Caitlin. I said I’m staying. You don’t need to call for a replacement unless...” he replied, his voice low and kissed her again.

Her mouth opened to his and his tongue darted in to taste her. Her full lips massaged his while her tongue played against his and he pressed the evidence of his want for her against her belly.

“Oh!” she cried, breaking the kiss. Suddenly, Caitlin knew exactly what he was doing.

Jake was trying to be deliberately crude and forward, perhaps thinking she would come to her senses, realize this was very impulsive of her and maybe consider this a mistake but...

No. Sorry, Jake, but you’re a terrible actor. You’re a fantastic kisser, though. You think giving me a taste of your tongue would make me kick you in the balls but man, why would I deny myself of something that feels and tastes this good?

Too bad, Jake. Your plans backfired several seconds ago. I felt you. I’m not revolted. Not scared. I

want what I felt. I want you in me.

Caitlin half-wished Jake could hear her thoughts. Pero okay lang na hindi dahil tutok ito sa paghalik sa kanya. Mas mainit na ngayon, mas mapaghanap. Bumitaw ang mga kamay niya sa rails at ipinaikot ang isa sa leeg ni Jake habang ang isa ay dumako sa buhok nitong kanina pa niya gustong damhin, dahilan para bumitaw ito sa halik at pakatitigan siya.

“Hello, stranger,” she softly said, her eyes taunting.

His response was his heavy breathing and on the next moment, his hands were everywhere on her. One sliding up her torso to her breast and the other snaking under her dress between her legs while he kissed and nipped his way down her neck.

Nawala ang mapanukso niyang ngiti at naghahamong tingin. Nanaig ang pagka-professional kuno ni Caitlin. “We’re in an elevator,” she breathed, her fingers clenching around the material of his shirt. His hand started to tug on the filmy, seamless silk panties that she was wearing and she patted his chest nervously with the pads of her fingers. “Jake..”

One deft finger found its way inside her slick walls and nimbly moved the moisture from inside her to her folds.

“Oh god...” She breathed and her hands wrapped around his biceps.

Sh*t, hindi niya inaasahang ganito ang gagawin ni Jake. Para ano? Para ipaalam sa kanyang tigilan na niya ito? Na mali ang ginagawa niya? Seriously? But they weren't going to f*ck in an elevator, were they?

His other hand left her breast and moved under her skirt to tear at her panties. Before he could rip them, they fell to the floor and she closed her eyes when he kissed her again.

“We have to stop,” anas ni Caitlin, sabay tulak sa lalaki.

He looked at her with those stormy eyes. “No?” His hands were still under her skirt and one finger took a swipe across her sex. *Oh, god.* No one had really touched her there.

“Not here.” Tinampal niya ang mga kamay ni Jake na napangisi lang. Lumayo ito nang bahagya nang itulak niya. Inaayos pa niya ang damit nang bumukas ang elevator sa floor niya.

Jake motioned for her to go ahead and step out, before he dipped down and picked up her underwear, and hid it away in his jeans' pocket. “You can have these back after class, Miss Caitlin.”



“This isn’t going to be your first, right?”

Napapikit si Caitlin nang maramdaman ang pagdami at paggalaw ng mga labi ni Jake sa kanyang tainga. Nauuna siyang maglakad dito papunta sa kanyang kuwarto sa dulo ng hallway. The dim lighting and the fact that it was just the two of them in that floor did not make her feel less conscious of the fact that she had been walking for the past several seconds without her underwear.

Subconsciously, binagalan niya ang paglalakad habang pinaglalapit ang mga hita. The throbbing and heat between her legs was making her restless.

“You seem to be an expert. What do you think?” Pinatatag ni Caitlin ang boses kahit parang bumubuway na ang lakad. Nakahawak si Jake sa balikat at braso niya mula sa kanyang likod. Salitan nitong hinahagkan ang buhok niya at marahang kinakagat ang kanyang tainga.

*F*ck, this is unfair!*

Napabuga siya ng hangin. She was supposed to be the one in control here. This man was her gift. She was to unwrap him and do whatever she pleases with him, not the other way around.

“I think you’ve done this before but it was lousy.” His hand moved to cup her left breast and gently

kneaded.

She bit her lip. Her hand fumbled with the magnetic snap closure of her wristlet to retrieve the keycard.

“Let me,” buong ni Jake sabay bitiw sa balikat niya at kinuha ang keycard para ito na ang mag-swipe niyon sa slot sa pinto. Napapikit siyang muli nang mapasandal sa dibdib ng lalaki.

His skin felt hot even through the fabric of their clothes and his hand continued its slow, sensuous movement over her breast, and then it was gone.

What the...? Napadilat si Caitlin, kasunod ang marahang pagtulak sa kanya papasok ng kuwarto. Si Jake na ang nagbukas ng ilang ilaw doon, at ang naglapag ng wristlet niya sa coffee table sa maliit na sala ng suite.

“You’re beautiful and you feel good, and from what I heard so far, you’re probably a good daughter and friend. Hindi ko alam kung ano eksakto ang trabaho mo, but I assume you’re in some sort of public service and you’re devoted to it.” Jake stood a meter away from her, his eyes dark and imploring.

Taas-noong sinalubong niya ang tingin ng kaharap. “Are you about to give me a lecture on propriety, Jake? Because I don’t think you’re in the

position to do so.” She blatantly eyed his erection with a smirk, then looked up at him again.

His eyes narrowed a bit, but his ears were red.

“I’m not about to do that. Sinasabi ko lang na puwede ka namang maghintay. Puwedeng hindi ka na lang magbayad para dito. I don’t—”

“Are you judging me now?” Humakbang si Caitlin palapit. Hindi niya alam kung saan napunta ang inhibitions niya. It was either the wine or she just really wanted to let loose for a night.

Umiling si Jake. “No. Jeez, Caitlin. But you’re... drunk.”

“I am not!” Namaywang na siya. “Look, Jake. Do you want this or not? Are you not comfortable? Your fingers were pretty cozy back in the elevator. And may I remind you that you have my favorite *La Perla* in your pocket? And oh...” She glanced at the bulge in his pants. “Do you happen to have a gun in there or are you just excited to see me?” Kasabay ng isa pang hakbang ay ang paglapat ng kamay pagkatapos ang mapanuksong paglalandas ng mga daliri niya sa dibdib ng lalaki. *My, is he hard everywhere?*

“Caitlin...” he breathed. “I don’t really do this...”

“Sasapakin kita kapag sinabi mong lalaki din ang gusto mo.” Kumuyom ang kamao niya sa dibdib ni

Jake. “I got to taste you, and feel you.” She leaned in to sniff at his neck. *Sh*t, ang bango din!* “I want more.”

He breathed deeply, then placed a hand on the small of her back. Caitlin pressed her body closer. The hardest part of his body poked at her belly. He hissed.

“When was the last time you got some, Jake?” She nipped at his neck.

He groaned. “None of your business.”

Natawa ang dalaga. Nangingislap ang mga matang tiningnan niyang muli ang mukha nito.

His brows furrowed a bit. His eyes flashed and his jaw was set. He looked exquisite in his quiet fury and the palpable desire he was still trying to mask.

Hindi niya alam kung maiinis o hahanga sa pagpipilit pa rin nitong kumapit sa resolba.

“So, matagal na ’yung huli? Nag-aalala ka bang ma-disappoint ako sa performance mo?”

Nanatiling makatingin lang sa kanya, pero halatang natatalo na ng natural na reaksyon ng katawan at pangangailangan ang kung anumang issue ni Jake sa pagpayag.

“Don’t worry, I’m clean. I got a box of condoms on the night stand, a stock of morning-after pills in my purse, and... hmm, perhaps a little extra for

you if you're good." She promptly rubbed her body against his.

She held back a giggle when she felt him twitch. Sino ang mag-aakalang kaya niyang lumandi nang ganito? Hindi siya naging ganito kay Edward dati. She never wanted her ex this way before.

"And if you're worried about your skills, maybe this..." Her hand slid to cup his raging hardness through his pants. *Oh my...* "...will make up for it."

Sh*t! Nakahawak talaga siya d'un! OMG, bakit di niya mabitawan?

Jake was panting now and his hands seized her by her a*s to lift her up. "Wasn't it you who said talking just ruins everything?" he rasped as his mouth moved right over hers. "So shut up."

In seconds, his tongue was in her mouth, her hands were in his hair, and they were rubbing and pressing against each other while they struggled to get rid of their clothes.

4



Whoa, okay. Let me focus here... Ooohh my... that was good... Anyway, I'm in bed. This king-size bed in one of the honeymoon suites of the Manila Hilton, eleven floors up, with two walls of it offering different... ooohh yes, yes... different views: one of the city skyline and another of the bay. This bed with the softest, silkiest sheets I've ever encountered and with the... umngh, oh god... his hands, his mouth, his tongue... so hot, so... good! And they're everywhere!

Was he aiming for a thorough exploration? Parang gusto niyang hawakan, halikan at tikman lahat. Ganito siguro ang pakiramdam ng buffet table na parang... Goodddd... Ooohh... what the...?

Napadilat si Caitlin, kasabay ang pag-angat ng ulo mula sa pagkakaunan sa kaliwang braso ni Jake. Kaninang paglapat ng likod niya sa kama pa siya nakapikit kaya hindi niya napansing malapit pa rin pala ang mukha ng lalaking nakatunghay sa kanya.

Nagtama ang mga noo nila bago pa man ito

nakaiwas, kasabay ang pagdiin ng kamay nito sa kanyang baywang.

“Oww! What the...?” Hindi makapaniwalang nakatingin si Jake sa kanya.

Nakagat niya ang labi. “Sorry, nagulat lang.” She felt her cheeks tingling. God, this was embarrassing. She’s not a virgin! She had done this before, but apparently, with nothing to show for it.

“Saan ka nagulat?” Bumahid ang concern sa mga mata ni Jake. “You’ve done this before, right?” Marahang naglandas ang mga kamay ng lalaki paakyat sa gilid ng kanyang dibdib pababa muli sa baywang.

Good Lord, his hand! So big and warm and just a bit rough and—

“Ooohh... S-some, not all,” she purred as that hand slid to her a*s and gently squeezed.

“What the f*ck does that mean?” His tone was soft despite the expletive. Jake began nibbling at her earlobe again, then that sweet spot on the side of her neck.

“It means we didn’t do much before the main event.” Bumuntong-hininga si Caitlin. “Hindi ito ang una pero hindi ako pamilyar sa ibang... ginagawa. Sh*t.” Iniiwas niya ang tingin. “I’m not like, innocent,

okay? Just do your thing. Huwag mong intindihin kung paano ako mag-react.”

“I like the sounds you make, Caitlin, believe me. Pero ayokong nagkasakitan tayo.” His mouth quirked.

“Fine. I’ll be careful.” Tiningnan niya muli si Jake at itinaas ang kamay para damhin ang noo nito. “No bump.”

He smiled, then leaned in to touch her forehead using his soft lips. “None here, too.” Nakangiti pa rin ito nang muling magtama ang mga mata nila. “How about you keep your eyes open, Caitlin?”

Napakurap siya. “Ahh... what?”

“Watch me,” bulong nito nang ilapat muli ang labi sa gilid ng kanyang mukha. “See if I’m doing things right.” He nipped at that spot below her ear again, which was what made her bump her forehead with his earlier.

“And you’ll watch me.”

“Yes.” Namumungay ang mga mata ng kaniig nang muli siyang tingnan.

And so it began again. He would touch her—her neck, her collarbone, her shoulders, her breasts and all the spaces around and between them, then replaced his hand with his mouth and tongue. He

licked and nipped and sucked. She arched and writhed underneath him. She struggled to keep her eyes open as she nearly got lost in the sensations.

Para maiwasang mapapikit ay inaalala niya ang medical terms para sa bawat parteng dinadaan ng hawak at halik ni Jake. It was so not sexy but if she didn't do anything her eyes would slip shut against her will.

Humerus, detoid, sternum... Ooohhh god, his lingulus is so... Nasabi na ba niya kung paanong sa bawat bagong pinagtutuunan ng atensyon ni Jake ay halos hindi nito inaalalis ang tingin sa kanya? Parang laging humihingi ng permiso, ng assurance na tama ang ginagawa nito, o talagang curious lang sa reaksyon niya.

Goodness, those eyes! They were intent, and replete with arousal and undisguised lust. She could feel the evidence poking at her hip. That hard evidence.

Isa pa yata iyon sa nagpapakaba sa kanya—ang dahilan ng marahas na niyang paghinga at ang mga kamay na hindi na niya alam kung saan ihahawak. Iyong isa ay palipat-lipat sa unan at bedspread, habang iyong isa ay naroon ng ikapit niya sa batok o halos isabunot kay Jake. Sana hindi ito nasasaktan.

With the way he looked at her though, she's sure 'pain' had escaped his vocabulary. Jake looked hungry, and he eyed her like she was a delicious feast.

His hand skimmed her waist, then moved across her belly. He drew circles around her navel, slowly and purposefully. He gently drummed then kneaded, as he kept his gaze on her. And it was then that he leaned in to claim her lips again that she realized where those fingers were headed.

He caught her lips, swallowed her gasps and whimpers as his fingers parted her folds, then rubbed her cl*t. *Ohgodohgod...*

*This is too much, and soooo... good. Sh*t.* Naubusan agad siya ng adjectives. Lalong naging marahas ang paghinga ni Caitlin, dahilan para huminto si Jake sa ginagawa kasabay ng paglayo ng labi nito sa kanya.

"Caitlin, look at me please."

Napadilat siya. Damn, bakit ba siya pumikit?

"We're okay, right? Itutuloy pa natin 'to?" Ngayon ay nakalapat na muli sa tiyan niya ang kamay ng kasuyo.

She could feel the wetness from his fingers clinging to her skin. Or did that come from her? She closed her legs to check. Sh*t, it was her! She's wet!

She probably should be embarrassed but shouldn't this man be flattered that he's doing this to her? This ridiculously goodlooking, strangely smart, and apparent sex god in her bed? And god, he's big! No wonder he was highly recommended. Those powerful ladies he *dated* must have noticed.

"Jake..." Nakagat niya muli ang labi, nagpipigil mangiti. "I'm naked, you're naked. You're hard and I'm wet..." Nag-init ang mga pisngi niya. "For you, Jake. I want you." Sinalubong niya ang tingin nito. "Hindi ako virgin, okay? Huwag kang praning d'yan at huwag mo na uling subukang baguhin ang isip ko. My experience, if you can even call it that, is pretty limited though. So you know what? Just do whatever..." Ikinumpas niya ang kamay. "Don't ask anymore. I trust you."

Ilang sandaling nakatitig lang ang lalaki sa kanya bago sinabing, "Thank you."

Nagsalubong ang mga kilay ng dalaga. *Ano daw?*

"I mean..." He absentmindedly scratched his head. Damn, how could she stay annoyed with someone this adorable? "Thank you for trusting me enough to explore this part of your sexuality."

Napakurap lang si Caitlin. Medyo nakakalito na. A disgustingly handsome pro escort who speaks

good English and a twang-y Filipino, who obviously knows his way with women and with an impressive size at that, was suddenly being all sensitive and politically correct on her? Joke ba ito?

Pero kagagahan na kung palalampasin niya ang pagkakataong ito. “You know what, since talking ruins everything, can we just f*cking—pun intended—get it on—pun intended again—please?”



Jake still wondered how he got here, naked and hard, on a gazing match with a beautiful, slightly strange woman he met less than two hours ago. Hell, he was not even supposed to kiss her, if only he had a way to tell her he wasn't about to let her call another man to have for the night.

Hindi niya alam kung dahil nasaling ba ang ego niya, na-challenge, o hindi lang niya matanggap na ganoon kadali para kay Caitlin na magdeklarang kukuha na lang ito ng iba. How could she so easily say that when she looked at him like she wanted him to f*ck her by the bar just minutes ago? When it was so easy for her to tell him things even if it was obvious she was more sober than a brain surgeon before an operation?

Dumagdag pa marahil doon ang protective

instinct niya. Hindi sa duda siya sa mga tunay na 'escort' pero sa kanya ipinagkatiwala si Caitlin ng kung sinumang naging kliyente niya noong undercover pa siya. He was apparently highly recommended, and even if he never even became remotely intimate with his former clients, he had to live up to whatever Caitlin expected of him. Damn it, he had to make sure this would be good for her.

Even if it had probably been a year since he f*cked anyone. Hindi na niya gaanong maalala ang detalye, maging ang mukha o pangalan ng babae. Some TV star slash model, a messy bedroom, the woman's loud noise filling the air as he rammed himself into her over and over. It was just another form of release after an exhausting case, but probably not very satisfying.

He wanted *this* to be satisfying. He wanted to make sure he would come at least once, wanted to see her lose control as she reaches her peak, at least twice.

Caitlin seemed to be the kind who's used to being in control. He was guessing she's used to ordering people around and having her way and yet, she just handed him the reins. She wanted to be dominated. That excited and unnerved him at the same time.

Minasdan ni Sam ang babae, na nakamasid din sa kanya, namumungay ang mga mata.

“You look so beautiful,” mahinang sabi niya habang hinahagod ng tingin ang katawan nito.

“Thank you.” Parang nagtaka pa ang dalaga sa narinig.

Mabagal at magaan na pinaglandas niya ang kamay mula sa balikat nito pababa sa baywang. “Spread your legs for me, Caitlin,” bulong ni Sam, na ginawa naman nito. He could smell her arousal from his place above her. He leaned down to kiss her mouth again, he loved her mouth. He eventually moved from her lips to her jaw, nipping and leaving little bites, until he’s at her neck.

Her hips bucked up as soon as his lips touched again that one spot on her neck that drove her crazy, and when he used his teeth she arched her back, as she groaned.

He licked down to her breasts, his mouth closing around one nipple while his hand played and pinched the other one.

“Jake,” she moaned, her breathing shallow.

He scraped his teeth on her nipple, not too hard, but enough for her to hiss and for another groan to break free from that mouth of hers.

After switching to her other breast and doing the same, he licked down the flat plane of her stomach, nipping along the muscle there. Napapaigtad si Caitlin sa tuwing medyo mapapadiin ang labi niya sa balat nito, at humihigpit ang hawak sa kamay niya. She liked it, so he did it again. And again.

Then he was there, licking and biting and scratching at her thighs. He licked her cl*t once before his lips closed around it, then he sucked, and he felt her fingers dig into the back of his hand.

“Ayos ka lang?” tanong ni Sam, nangingislap ang mga matang tiningnan si Caitlin mula sa puwesto niya ngayon sa pagitan ng mga hita nito.

“Okay pa ’ko,” nagawa nitong sabihin pasinghap. “Keep going. Please.”

He chuckled and brought his middle finger to her opening, gathered enough wetness so that it won't hurt when he first slid it in. And it didn't, he thought, since her head pushed into the pillows and she bit down on her lower lip. He added his index finger and started moving them both slowly within her.

“Jaaaakke,” she whined, “please.”

“Please what, Caitlin?” he asked, a grin spread across his face. He moved his fingers faster, just as

she tried to answer.

“Mouth, use your mouth.”

Hinagkan niya ito sa tiyan. Ang bangu-bango at ang lambot ng balat ng dalaga. “Parang ganito?” he mumbled into her skin, enjoyed how her muscles tense beneath his lips. He curled his fingers and began to f*ck her in earnest.

“Hindi diyan! Lower,” singhap nito.

Sa hita niya ito hinagkan. “Here?”

“Right above where your fingers are right now!” tila nauubusan ng pasensyang sabi ni Caitlin. Lalo siyang napangisi. Ang ganda nito kahit parang gusto na siyang sipain. “F*ck, make me come.” He looked at her in mild surprise and her words go straight to his erection. “Please, Jake. Please.”

Paano siya tatanggi?

His mouth wrapped around her cl*t one more time, except this time he sucked her with the intention of getting her off. He pressed against the nub and as soon as he rubbed a little harder, she came, his name tumbling out of her mouth.

She was panting by the time he withdrew his fingers and moved up to kiss her on the mouth. Mahigpit na humawak ito sa magkabilang braso niya.

“Want to rest first?”

“No.” Umiling ang babae.

He nodded and moved in between her legs again, kissed her on the mouth and sank into her without warning.

“Jake! God,” she growled, her voice so throaty that his hips drove forward on their own.

He set a pace, steady but not so fast because it obviously must have been a long time ago since her last. Damn it, she was so tight, and hot, and so good around him.

At hindi niya alam kung bakit kanina pa niya halos hindi maialis ang tingin kay Caitlin. Ngayong gabi lang sila magkakasama, at hindi na importanteng tandaan pa niya ang mga detalye pero pakiramdam ni Sam ay hindi na niya ito makakalimutan, lalo na ngayon.

*Sh*t, mali ito. Maling-mali.*

But as he kept moving above her and she rose to meet his thrusts, her eyes were glassed over, gorgeous and dark; her full lips open the slightest fraction and red from his kisses. Her eyes locked with his and she bit down on her bottom lip, the barest hint of a smile quirking her mouth.

He slowed down a bit, teasing her, his fingers

tweaking her nipples to attention.

“Faster,” she ordered.

He moved a bit faster, and it had her meeting him thrust for thrust.

“Faster,” she repeated. “Harder.”

He complied, because he might be enjoying this, enjoying her, but he was a man and there’s only so much he could take. Especially when she’s gazing up at him with that look in her eyes, the one that told him she’s so close. He could not wait to see her break apart under him.

“Jake,” bulong ni Caitlin, kasabay ang pag-angat ng likod nito sa kama at halos pagbaon ng mga kuko sa braso niya.

She came around him, squeezed and tightened around him, her head in the pillows, and her hair making a halo around her head.

He thrust harder as she rode out her climax, wanting her to get every bit of pleasure, and once he was sure she had been sated, he came with a groan. He waited a moment, his nose on her neck as he brought himself down to rest on her.

“That was great,” she breathed into his hair.

Tumango lang si Sam bago maingat na lumayo para pumuwesto sa tabi ng dalaga habang makapaikot

pa rin ang isang braso sa baywang nito. Ang isang kamay niya ay umakyat sa mukha ni Caitlin at marahang hinaplos ang gilid niyon, pababa sa leeg.

“We didn’t use protection,” nag-aalalang sabi ni Sam sabay sulyap sa direksyon ng kahon ng condoms.

“It’s okay. Safe day ko naman at regular din akong nagte-take ng pills for my bad cramps during periods.” Bahagya itong natawa. “Sorry, too much information.”

He smiled as he sniffed her hair. “Okay lang.” Hinaplos niya ang tiyan nito. “I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

“No,” she said with finality. “Okay ka nga, eh. You still waited for my go ahead before you did anything. I knew I picked the right man.” Nakangiting tiningnan siya nito.

His heart fluttered, he’s not sure how or why, and it almost felt automatic when he kissed her forehead. Napahinto at napakurap siya matapos gawin iyon, at nakatingin din si Caitlin sa kanya.

Napalunok si Sam. “I can’t wait to do that again.” She laughed, her voice breathy. “Me, too.”

And that was all the assurance he needed before he threw her left leg over and entered her again as

she lay on her side. Napahawak si Caitlin sa braso niya habang ang isang kamay ay napalamukos sa bedsheet.

Her eyes were wild as she looked up at him, over her left shoulder. “Oh, god...” She managed before he bent to claim her lips for a searing kiss.

“Is this okay?” he breathed as he pushed into her.

“F*ck, yesss...” she hissed.

He kissed her shoulder, then he pulled his member out from her and stood on the floor. Quietly, he pulled her up, and moved her legs to kneel on the bed.

Caitlin turned her head to look at him, a mix of alarm and arousal in her eyes. Tila may nagaganap na pagtatalo sa isip nito.

Was she thinking this was too primal? Too submissive? But apart from wanting another release, he wanted her to feel it this way. It was clear from how she looked at him now that she hadn't been taken like this, and yet she was willing to try. She's ready.

She tossed her head, jerked her chin, and her eyes were feral as she nodded at him.

*Sh*t*, he had never wanted to f*ck someone so badly the way he did now. Sam tried not to stare

but the sight of this woman, bent over with her a*s exposed to him was almost enough to make him come again. His hands shook but as he smoothed them over her sides and hips, then he thrust into her again.

5



Seven months later...

“Yes, yes yes yes, oh please.”

She had expected it to be pretty good. She'd assumed it to be a given. She was paying for the service and hoped that she was going to get a good deal in return.

“Yeah, right there. Ohhhh.” Alam ni Caitlin sa umpisa pa lang na hindi niya pagsisisihan ang desisyong muling makipagkita kay Jake, pero higit pa sa inaasahan niya ang natatanggap sa loob ng nakalipas na pitong buwan. Kung bibigyan niya ng report card ang bawat gabing nakakasama niya ito, siguradong puro A plus, Exceeds Expectations at perfect ten ang marka nito.

“Oh, look at you, Caitlin dear. I gather things went well?” nagniningning ang mga matang bati ni Senator Gallego nang makipag-meeting siya sa opisina nito para ma-finalize ang mga detalye ng medical mission sa San Miguel, Bulacan na sponsored nito.

That was two weeks after her night with Jake. She hadn't contacted him since but she knew everyone could see the changes in her. Maisip lang niya ang mga ginawa nila ay nag-iinit na ang mga pisngi niya. Parang nararamdaman pa rin niya ang halik at hawak nito at nakakagat na lang niya ang dila para hindi mapangiti at mapagkamalang nababaliw sa oras ng trabaho.

*But she couldn't stop the delicious shivers that coursed through her whenever she remembered how Jake kept those soulful green eyes glued to hers as he f*cked her hard and deep, how his sensual mouth quirked in appreciation whenever she moaned, how his hands touched places she never realized could bring her pleasure, and how he always hit all the right spot with every move of his c*ck inside her. That long, thick, perfectly ridged—*

*Oh god, why was she having these thoughts in a senator's office? Sh*t.*

“Blooming ka, my dear,” naaaliw na komento ng senadora. “Matutuwa sila Carmen kapag nalaman ito.”

“Senator naman...” she pouted. “Nakakahiya.”

Tumaas ang isang kilay nito. “Ano'ng nakakahiya? Dear, you work very hard and you're very good at

what you do. Naglalaan ka pa ng oras na tumulong sa nangangailangan nang walang bayad at reklamo. I'm not squandering public funds, just my rich husband's." Natawa ito. *Isang shipping magnate ang esposo ng senadora. "We deserve the break, and the awesome sex once in a while... or every chance we get."* She grinned. *"So, are you seeing him again? We're making you an official guest if you are, so you can enjoy a bigger discount."* Makahulugang tiningnan siya nito. *"He's big, isn't he? Jake looks like he's probably seven or eight inches."*

Oh, my god. Nasapo ni Caitlin ang noo, hindi alam kung matatawa o maiiyak. Yes, from her estimate as a surgeon, Jake was most likely seven and a half inches. Damn.

At that time, pinag-iisipan na niya talagang tawagan ang binata. Three days after her birthday, she got her period, which was surprisingly almost painless. Karaniwan nang nag-a-undertime siya sa hospital kung hindi man nag-a-absent kapag inaatake ng dysmenorrhea.

She knew sex and orgasms could help ease menstrual cramps. Her period would be due again in two weeks. Part of her wanted to find out if good sex could really make her periods more manageable, and

*another part just wanted Jake—his mouth, his tongue, his hands all over her. His big c*ck in her.*

Nanginginig pa ang kamay ni Caitlin nang tawagan si Jake sampung araw matapos ang pakikipag-usap niya sa senadora. Kauupo pa lang niya sa driver's seat ng kanyang SUV nang sa wakas ay mag-ring sa kabilang linya. Pasado alas ocho ng gabi on a Wednesday at pauwi na siya mula sa labing-anim na oras na shift. Three days ago ay nakapagdesisyon na rin siya.

She had no time for a relationship anyway, nor the energy to maintain one. But she was a woman in her prime, in a highly stressful job and needed to stay healthy. Wala siyang bisyo, magana siyang kumain at nagsu-swimming o nagdya-jog siya kapag may oras.

But she wanted something that was not just healthy but satisfying as well. She never thought sex would do it for her. She thought she could do without it. One night with Jake changed everything though, and she wanted more since that morning she woke up to that delicious, intoxicating scent he left on her sheets.

“Hello? Who is this, please?” His soothing, throaty baritone pulled Caitlin from her thoughts. That sexy clipped accent did things to her.

“Hi, Jake,” pilit niyang pinakaswal ang tono. “It’s Caitlin.”

Dinig niya ang mahinang tila pagtipa sa keyboard, at ang hum ng printer. “Caitlin,” ulit nito sa pangalan nya. “Hi, what’s up?” he sounded cautious.

“I’d like to see you.” Hindi na siya nagpasakalye pa. “Room 507, Midtown Suites. This Friday at around eight or nine in the evening.”

Ilang sandaling natahimik si Jake. Narinig niya sa background ang tila pagbubuklat ng pahina, bago ito huminga nang malalim. “I can make it at nine.”

Napahawak siya sa dibdib sa relief. “Okay, good. I’ll see you.” At tinapos na niya ang tawag.

She wore her work clothes that Friday night. Slate grey pencil skirt minus the matching jacket, and a cap sleeved light pink wrap blouse.

Quarter to nine nang makatanggap siya ng text mula kay Jake na nasa hotel na ito at paakyat na. Magkahalo ang kaba at excitement niya nang i-check ang sarili sa salamin. Nag-shower na siya at hindi na amoy-hospital. She didn’t wear any perfume, just the lotion she had on last time that Jake seemed to love.

Napasinghap pa si Caitlin nang tumunog ang mahinang alarm bell na tanda na may nakatayo sa harap ng pinto ng hotel room niya. Huminga siya

nang malalim bago i-unlock iyon at hilahin ang handle pabukas.

*Sh*t, he's so freaking hot! Nakagat niya ang labi nang isenyas kay Jake na pumasok na.*

"Hi," he said awkwardly as he stepped in. May sukbit itong backpack at hawak na jacket na inilapag nito sa kalapit na wing chair.

"Hi," she breathed as she took him.

He smelled of mild soap and fabric conditioner. Mukhang nagpagupit ito recently at medyo nakakapanghina ang five o'clock shadow nito. Damn, he was so yummy! And he looked amazing in those snug fitting dark jeans, and that faded red shirt with the word 'tomato' printed across the front. He still wore his Doc Marten's, and a black rubber strapped watch.

"Kanina ka pa?" Parang naiilang si Jake sa ginagawa niyang pagmamasid.

"Hindi naman. Galing din kasi ako sa work. I don't mind waiting." Makahulugan ang tingin niya sabay hakbang palapit. "You? Saan ka galing?"

"Work." His eyes now fixed on hers, as if really seeing her for the first time. Appreciative ang paghagod nito ng tingin sa kanya.

"You look too fresh to have gone straight from work." Tumaas ang isang kilay niya.

“I always carry some extra stuff with me. Sa office ako nag-shower. Well, not in the office office but at the m—”

Talking is irrelevant. Jake’s lips looked so soft and inviting that they seemed to beg for a kiss, and she wasn’t about to say no. Nakulong na sa halik niya ang anumang sasabihin nito, habang marahan niya itong itinutulak sa direksyon ng love seat. Both her hands were on his biceps while his hands pulled at her blouse from her skirt. Soon she was on his lap and fumbling for the zipper of his jeans while he groaned at the discovery that she wore nothing under her no nonsense attire.

*She came hard, thrice—when she rode him in the couch, when he f*cked her from behind as she gripped the bed post and finally, when he went down on her as she lay with her legs dangling on the side of the bed.*

“God, Jake... this is the best decision...” she panted, “I’ve ever made.” She finally was able to catch her breath and allowed him to gently carry her so she was positioned on the center of the bed.

“Best decision?” Umarko ang kilay ng lalaki. Naupo si Jake sa gilid ng kama matapos pulutin at ayusin sa kalapit na upuan ang mga damit nila.

“Yes, I meant calling you.” Tinapik niya ang

espasyo sa tabi. "For this."

"Nagulat nga ako n'ung tumawag ka." Napailing ito bago tumabi sa kanya. Bumaba ang tingin ni Jake sa itaas ng kanang dibdib niya na may namumulang marka. "Sorry about this." Pumunta ang daliri nito sa gilid ng leeg niya. "And this." Pababa uli sa balikat. "This, too." Then, he sniffed her hair. "Ang bango mo kasi. Tapos..." Nangunot ang noo nito. "Are you wearing edible lotion?"

"Nope. I have it in my bag. Gusto mo?" she teased.

"Nah. It probably smells and tastes better on your skin anyway." Kinuha nito ang kamay niya at hinagkan iyon.

"Does that mean I can see you again?" mahinang tanong ni Caitlin. Ngalay pa ang mga muscles niya pero nag-iisip na siya ng kasunod? Nakaka-addict naman kasi ang isang 'to!

He blinked. "Ah... I guess. Kung gusto mo."

She rolled her eyes. Hindi ba obvious?

Four weeks later, they met again in the same hotel. Soon after, she was no longer content with their once-a-month trysts. She started setting up 'meetings' with Jake every two weeks.

Sa ikalimang pagkikita nila ay sa condo na niya ito pinapunta. Mahigpit ang security doon at hindi

basta nakakaakyat unless may go signal mula sa kanya o nasa guest list niya na tanging ang nanay lang niya ang naka-register.

They always met on Friday nights, and she had never looked forward to the weekend the way she did these past seven months.

Just last month, she began seeing Jake every week. People have started to notice the changes in her a couple of months ago. Karamihan ay nagsususpetsang in love siya at may boyfriend. Maging si Crystal ay curious, bagaman patuloy ang mga pasaring nitong ngayon ay wala nang epekto sa kanya.

The senator and her socialite friends met her for dinners nearly every month since her birthday last year. Hindi nila tahasang pinag-uusapan pero obvious na aware ang mga ito sa arrangement nila ni Jake.

“It is your life, Caitlin. Desisyon mo iyan at natutuwa kami dahil nakikita naming masaya at kontento ka. Pero huwag mo sanang kalimutan na at some point, you might want to settle down. We hope this is just paid sex that really satisfies you and you’re not getting attached to him. He’s gorgeous and charming, but we don’t really know him well. You

have to be careful.”

Attached? The only attachment she had was with his d*ck! She assured her older friends that she would be fine.

She was sooo fine, in fact. Who wouldn't be? She had the best deal in town.

Jake seemed uncomfortable talking about money. Sa account ng *Provocateur* pa rin niya idine-deposit ang bayad. Balewala sa kanya ang maglabas ng pera dahil afford naman niya, pero si Jake na ang nagsabi na ang escort fees lang ang sagutin niya.

“I don't really do this, anyway. And you hardly ever need me as an escort,” he said wryly. “Kaya huwag mo nang ipilit 'yang pera mo dahil ibabalik ko lang 'yan sa susunod na magkita tayo.” He warned.

“Oh-kay. S'abi mo, eh.” Matamang tiningnan niya ang binata. “Am I the only one you do this with, Jake?”

Hindi ito sumagot, sa halip ay sinimulan lang siyang muling hagkan sa leeg, pababa sa dibdib habang naglalakbay ang mga kamay nito sa kanyang kabuuan.

Hindi na niya muling inalam ang detalyeng iyon. It was none of her business anyway. Nag-uusap at nagdidiskusyon sila ni Jake sa samu't saring

mga topic pero bihira silang mag-usap tungkol sa personal nilang buhay. Parang may unwritten rule sila na bawal iyong pag-usapan, na okay lang naman kay Caitlin. Theirs was one strange relationship, and she knew it was bound to end at some point. For now though, she preferred to live in the moment, enjoy every moment that she's with him.

Dahil walang demands, walang expectations pero palaging sigurado na nakukuha niya ang gusto niya.

“Oohh god, oh yes... yes... Jake!”

And this was what she wanted right now.

This man whose real name she didn't even know, this man who f*cked her with abandon and made sure she came at least twice, and that he would leave her sore and sated every time.

She didn't know much about Jake, except for the fact that his c*ck was thick and long; he was beautiful and tanned; he liked it best from behind (a happy coincidence mistakenly revealed when she expressed her enjoyment of being taken in that primal way); his blood work was clean; he probably swam or ran to have such taut stomach and back muscles, and that he was born for sex.

It was his talent and he shared it. God had not

wasted such a gift on him.

His skill and the way that when he came, his mouth opened and his eyes were the most beautiful thing she had ever seen had her addicted to him.

Looking back, she was glad she accepted her new friends' birthday gift, and allowed herself to really enjoy it. Hindi niya inakalang sa pagiging hectic at palaging toxic ng schedule ay mabibigyan niya ito ng oras. Hindi niya naisip dati na posible ito, na pakakawalan niya ang mga inhibitions at hahayaan ang sarili na mag-enjoy.

She truly have it all now. She had her own life and privacy, a family, friends, a cat named Fowley, and mind-blowing f*ck whenever she wanted.



Agad na ini-start ni Sam ang sasakyan at nagmaniobra paalis sa parking slot niyon bago kinapa sa loob ng katabing backpack ang cellphone niya na kanina pa nagri-ring. It had been a long day, and he was not even sure it's about to wrap up soon.

May sampung segundo na sigurong huminto ang pagri-ring ng cellphone niya nang sa wakas ay mahugot niya iyon. Three missed calls and three messages, all from Caitlin. Nangunot ang kanyang noo. Binasa niya muna ang messages.

*I know it's Thursday but can you make it tonight?
Major crisis, Jake. ;)*

Where are you? Na-receive mo ba ibang texts ko?

Napailing si Sam. Twenty-five minutes ago pa ang huling message. God, if it weren't for the fact that he only saw her every Friday, he'd say the woman was insatiable.

Naiiling na binuksan niya ang call log at ibinalik ang tawag. Caitlin picked up after three rings and the mere sound of her heavy breathing on the other line was enough to send bolts of electricity between his legs. Sh*t.

“Ngayon ko lang nabasa ang texts mo. Crisis over already, I assume.”

“No, in desperate need of attention. Gaano katagal bago ka makarating dito?” Hindi sanay magpaliguy-ligoy si Caitlin. Kahit sa mas mababa sa normal at mapang-akit na boses ay all-business ito.

It was a f*cking booty call but she sounded like they were about to face a state of emergency.

Too bad he was about to meet a task force for a stake out tonight. Mas importanteng makumpirma nila ang lokasyon ng itinuturong designer drugs laboratory sa Commonwealth kaysa sa tawag ng laman.

His d*ck believed otherwise. He was already hard and in need of a good f*ck but... *nah*. “Not now. Tomorrow night, when you’ve scheduled already.”

“What? No, now!”

“No, hindi talaga puwede ngayon, Cai.”

He was emphatic but she sounded a little ticked off, and far more than a little horny.

“You’re touching yourself now, aren’t you?” tanong ni Sam habang inaalis ang top button ng pantalon. Medyo masikip na kasi, hindi sa waistline kundi sa ibaba pa niyon.

“Yeah,” sagot ni Caitlin, tila hirap sa paghinga. “I need you,” she breathed.

God, he loved it when she says that. She must be flushed and heaving right now. He could already imagine how beautiful she is.

“God, Cai...”

Parang mas dapat na siya ang magpasalamat?

“Jake, please. Come over tonight.”

“I have other... commitments.” He winced. Dapat ay nasa daan na siya by now.

“Break them,” simpleng utos ni Caitlin. *Sh*t*, he liked that tone of hers. It’s making him hard.

“I’m coming tomorrow night and so will you,” he teased.

“Tonight,” giit ng babae.

“No,” pinal na sagot ni Sam.

“Paghihintayin mo talaga ’ko nang more than twenty-four hours?” dismayadong saad nito sa tonong tiyak na nagiging dahilan para siguro halos magkandarapa ang mga tauhan nito.

Wala siyang alam kung ano ang trabaho ni Caitlin, pero sigurado siyang may mga tao itong pinapasunod.

“I want your c*ck inside me tonight. I need it. Now!”

Natawa si Sam. Paano pa ba niya tatanggihan ang babaeng ito? Sa kabila ng kakaibang sitwasyon nila at sa kawalan niya ng kakayahang makipag-commit, palagi niyang natatagpuan ang sariling nais itong sundin at tuparin kahit ang mumunting mga pangako.

Pero may trabaho pa siya! “No, I uhh...”

“Gan’on, Jake? *No* talaga? Alam mo ’yung nandito lang ako sa kama ko at iniisip ka buong gabi? That’s cruel, man.”

His c*ck twitched at the images she suggested. *Sh*t. Alam mo rin ’yung ikaw ang mas malupit, Cai?* He let out an agonized groan. “Masyadong late na ’kong makakarating.”

“Gising pa ’ko n’un. I’ll be waiting.”

Parang nakikita na niya ang ‘ngiting tagumpay’
ng dalaga. “Alright, see you.”

He heard a soft giggle on the other line before
the call got disconnected.