

THE COFFICE

The coffee shop was deserted, save for a girl seated at the backmost area. The tangerine lights were on low where she was. She glanced at the tall glass windows—an hour before midnight on a Friday evening seemed pretty quiet in the usually bustling streets of Ortigas. She pushed the eyeglasses up her nose.

She was staring at her laptop screen, momentarily typing a few words and deleting some. The page was, for the most part, blank, but no one was rushing her except for the melting ice in her Green Tea Latte.

In this little coffee-office, or coffice, she opened her copy of *Fundamentals of Financial Management* and took out several index cards with neatly written formulas. She took out her old scientific calculator, and got lost in the numbers—figuratively, and literally.

The wet rings around her drink began to flow.

Outside the window, a tear was barely clinging

to a cloud.

It rained.

Then into this little coffee, he walked in.

2 TANGENT LINES

She once read that math tells three of the saddest love stories: Tangent lines who had only one chance to meet and then parted forever; parallel lines who were never meant to meet; and asymptotes who could get closer and closer but would never meet at all.

Will I finally have my love story with Prince Charming? she thought.

She contemplated on the three sad love stories. Among the three, she always thought that a tangent love story sounded the least sad. In this partially deserted coffee shop, the probability of a sad, tangent love story with Prince Charming could go many ways. The scenarios played out in the cinema of her imagination:

Scenario 1:

She would fall in line behind him while he ordered.

She would order a sandwich. Or a waffle. She would do a double-look at him, so as to signify recall of his existence, and say, “Oh, hi, schoolmate!” with a calm, nonchalant but slightly surprised tone, so as to not reflect in her voice that she has loved him since forever.

Scenario 2:

She would go to the restroom the moment he did. She would go out at exactly the same time as he would and—accidentally—bump into him. She would trip a little, he would catch her, and they would live happily ever after.

Scenario 3:

Magpapa-picture siya sa kanya. Autograph na rin.

It was pathetic.

The probability of a love story with Prince Charming, even a sad, tangent love story at that, had always been 0.01. If having such a love story meant doing the first move, willing circumstances her way, no matter how crazy it sounded, then no, her *Maria Clara* ego wasn't having it.

So, naturally, four years after college and a working year later, her love story with Prince Charming, the only boy she has ever loved, remains parallel, if not asymptotical, because really, they're the only kinds of love stories to expect when you fall in love with a celebrity: love stories made of nothing but daydreams, doodles on notebooks, and emotional



fan fiction stories—just like everyone else's.

3 BOY FROM THE COURT

Their love story started, or rather, her love story started five years ago when they were still freshmen at the *Ateneo de Manila University*.

It was the first day of the *Ateneo Freshmen Orientation Seminar*, or *OrSem*, a yearly grand welcoming for the incoming batch of *Ateneans*. The *College Covered Court* was pulsing, the bass of the sound system was taking over the rhythm of her heart, and the viral energy of the *TnT's* (*Talk and Tours*) pumped her up for what she knew would be one heck of a four-year ride. Expectant, wide-eyed, and all smiles, she opened herself up to the romantic notions of college life at *the Ateneo*.

At lunchtime, there was a little commotion from a group of girls not too far away from her and her blockmates. They were whispering, giggling, and all looking at the same direction. A few more girls and boys followed suit, and within a few seconds, a sizable

crowd gathered around a certain someone.

“Who’s that?” she asked her blockmate.

“He’s only the cutest boy in *Ateneo!*”

Intrigued, she and the rest of her blockmates tried to catch a glimpse of the boy everyone was eyeing with interest.

The sun was behind his back. Rays of light peeped through the strands of his dark hair, creating a halo effect, almost rendering him like a flightless angel. Something about his smile was happier and prettier than the colors of the rainbow at its most glorious, than the winking dew drops on the underside of leaves, and the tan of his skin seemed warmer than the comforts of a blanket on a stormy night. From afar, thanks to his towering height, although he looked like the serious type, he appeared to her as someone who seemed very vulnerable to joy.

It only took a matter of seconds before he was completely blocked out of view.

“Grabe! Ang dami niyang fans!” one of her blockmates exclaimed.

“Siyempre,” remarked another. “The whole Philippines will soon know his name now that he’ll be joining the *Ateneo Blue Eagles* in the *UAAP*.”

“Yeah, and when everyone knows him na, we have no more pag-asa na talaga, girl.”

With her blockmate’s last declarative sentence, she thought she heard her heart crashing... dipping... floating somewhere...

Just when she was about to turn away from him, their eyes met.

She held her breath.

Super-charged butterflies appeared in her

stomach, flapping their wings too hard she thought it might cause a *butterfly effect* in London.

Her mind went blank. Or maybe it was on overdrive.

Her heart did somersaults and rapid pirouettes.

The very brief moment they shared seemed to her to have lasted forever. So she did what her fifteen-year-old self knew best: she looked away.



That night, she couldn't sleep. She got out of bed and under the moonlight, collected her thoughts by her bedroom balcony.

She had never seen the boy before, or didn't know he was a famed personality. It was no surprise, really, with libraries or bookstores being the only places she frequented. She found it rather curious that all of a sudden he would come into view, and occupy a space in her mind.

Those microseconds too long when their eyes met were on infinite replay in her head. She liked to believe that they had established some form of connection. Silly as it might seem, she felt a nagging feeling that she could be right.

What if she didn't look away?

He left her confused. What was written in his eyes?

When their eyes met, her imagination took her to the future—their future. She thought that the idea of them made sense. She thought that she would be the happiest and be the best she could ever be with him, and him with her. She thought they would make lovely children and be one of those cute old couples who, throughout the years, still remained deeply and

madly in love. As funny as it might sound, she hoped with all her teenage heart that tomorrow, he would walk toward her and tell her that he saw it all, too. She anticipated his very being, and wanted to experience her firsts and forever with the beautiful Boy from the Court.



It was the second day of OrSem. She scanned the College Covered Courts for her Prince Charming, the Boy from the Court. She saw perhaps everyone from the two thousand something freshmen in her batch except him.

Her blockmate noticed her fervent, stalking, eagle eyes.

“Kanina ka pa may hinahanap. Ano ba ’yun?”

“Wala naman...”

“May inaabangan ka, ano?” her blockmate said in a playful, teasing manner.

“Wala...”

“Sus. If I know, hinahanap mo siya.”

“Sino?”

“Eh, di ’yung pinagkakaguluhan ng lahat kahapon. Nagkatinginan kayo, I saw that!”

“Did you?” she said in disbelief. “Nangyari ba talaga ’yun? Tiningnan niya ba talaga ako? O baka may maganda sa likod ko n’un?”

Her blockmate laughed. “He looked at you! I hate you nga, eh!”

“Look lang naman, eh...”

“Kilig pa rin!”

Kilig. That’s what she felt. She believed in the little moment they shared.

That was enough to put a smile on her face the

entire day.

Although she didn't see him anymore during OrSem, the lingering idea that they went to the same university together meant there were slivers of opportunities to be with him, or at the very least, see him.

Every day of every school day she woke up with a smile, bounced in every step, and added an extra dash of perfume. Under the unforgiving heat that scorched the Ateneo grounds, she sang. She glowed. She lived.

4

SHE AND HIM

Rcherche un copain, she began to write. In English, “Looking for a boyfriend.”

If she had a favorite class in her sophomore year, it would definitely be her French 1 elective. She enjoyed spending many happy hours in her ultimate tambayan, the first floor of the *Matteo Ricci Study Hall*, just practicing her French.

She particularly enjoyed answering this little exercise on adjectives.

The instructions were: Describe 1. yourself and 2. your ideal type of boyfriend/girlfriend.

Of herself, she wrote:

Moi

18 ans, assez grande, un peu ronde, belle (c'est juste pas évident à ce stade de ma vie). Je suis créative, intelligente, optimiste et cultivée. Je suis étudiante en gestion à l'Ateneo. Je suis douce. Je

suis un introverti. J'écris. J'ai six chats. Aussi, je ne fais pas de sport. Je préfère rester à la maison mais j'aime sortir. Je rêve de voyager en Europe parce que c'est très romantique!

A very, very literal French-to-English translation:

Me

18 years old, somewhat tall, a little round, beautiful (it's just not obvious at this point in my life—you know, late bloomer). I am creative, intelligent, optimistic and cultivated (halaman ang peg?). I am a Management student at the Ateneo. I am sweet. I am an introvert. I write. I have six cats. Also, I do not do sports. I prefer to stay at home but I also like going out. I dream of traveling to Europe because it is very romantic!

Her ideal type of boyfriend?

A chair squeaked at the opposite end of her row, momentarily breaking the silence of the room.

Settling himself in his seat, there, only five chairs away from her, was her Prince Charming, the Boy from the Court.

There was her answer. Even after an entire freshman year of meeting all sorts of boys, and even now that she's midway into her sophomore year, her ideal boyfriend was still, no doubt, him.

She wrote:

Lui

Homme, 19 ans, beau, grand, intelligent, et

sportif.

In English:

Him

Male, 19 years old, handsome, tall, intelligent, and athletic.

Looking at her work, she felt the irresistible urge to expound on the Him part and be more specific, because apart from the what, she knew exactly who she wanted, but lacked sufficient French vocabulary to continue the description of her Prince Charming.

She let out a sigh. She placed her elbow on the desk, covered the right side of her face, and peered at him through the spaces of her fingers.

He was as focused on the Law book he was reading as he was in his basketball games.

He was so beautiful.

Between her French exercises and stolen glances at Prince Charming, she thought about how lucky she was. He was—literally—within her reach. Whereas other girls would only see him on television, magazines, or billboards, she would see him around school. They both had *Ateneo de Manila University* printed on their ID laces, they entered the *Loyola Schools* through the same gate every morning, they ate at the same college cafeteria, they walked through the same *SEC Walk*, and they studied at the same room at the first floor of the *Matteo Ricci Study Hall*.

Sometimes, she would catch a glimpse of him once a week—twice a week, even, when the universe

was kind. Sometimes, a whole week would pass without a sign of him. Sometimes, she would count months.

But of course; of course the days when she would trade her usual T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers for her favorite dresses (just in case she might bump into him, mahirap na, madaming kaagaw) were the days when she didn't see him, and the days when she would look like a *Plants vs. Zombies* character due to hell days or hell weeks were the days she actually would—days such as today, with her newfound pimple friends on her right cheek, the side he would see if ever he would look up from his book and look at her.

Life has a biting sense of humor, she thought.

She took one last look at Prince Charming.

She thought she saw from her peripheral view that he looked up at her, too.

In her *Starbucks* planner, in dainty handwriting, she wrote:

Time: 2:45 pm

Place: Matteo Ricci :)

Before going to bed that night, she checked his *Twitter* profile. His last update was at 2:47 pm.

It read:

Studying for Law orals here at Macci. :)
#playhardstudyharder

Yes! she thought. Yes, you were! I, your future girlfriend, was there too, silently cheering you on, because I love you, and only you!

She then opened her *Wattpad* and looked at her

ongoing UAAP fan fiction story.

In her story, the Boy from the Court liked her, too. Siyempre, he went by the name of *Boy from Court*, so that her readers would have the liberty to imagine the character of the Boy from the Court as their own respective UAAP Men's Basketball crush. More importantly, she used the said tag for him so that if ever he would stumble upon her story, he wouldn't know that she was referring to him. Why wouldn't she want him to know how she felt about him? Because in fairy tales, the boy woos the girl. And because that's how she loved him—by herself, in secret.

In this chapter of her story, the *Boy from Court* saw her for the first time, and because it was love at first sight, he felt like writing poetry. He wrote, or rather, from his point of view, she wrote:

Matteo Ricci, First Floor

Today the most beautiful girl walked into my
life

She had cinnamon skin and almond-
shaped eyes

She sat by the window, the sun on her face
And studied *Alter Ego* by Annie Berthet

My heart stopped beating when she caught
my eye

My mind turned blank, my mouth went dry
She looked away and began to write
But I just couldn't keep her out of my sight

I love how she stares out the window to

stop and think

And how she furrows her brows when she
couldn't understand something

Inside the room she was all I could see
I've neglected ObliCon and its obligors and
obligees

The first bell rang, she had to go to class
My heart sank as she walked out of the
room very fast

What is her name? Where will she go?
I might as well summon my guts to talk to
her tomorrow

But tomorrow came, where was she?
Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, maybe she'd
return next week

But Monday came and so did Tuesday
And Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Monday...

But I'll keep anticipating
I'll keep hoping
I'll keep waiting until the day she'd once
again walk through the doors
Of *Matteo Ricci*, first floor.

5
FANGIRL

"I read your latest entry last night on Wattpad," her blockmate said in a teasing manner. "Yung Matteo Ricci na poem na ginawa supposedly ni Boy from the Court? Ang cute! Kumbaga sa Psychology, projection kung projection!"

She blushed. "Speaking of which... Bakit kaya hindi na siya pumupunta sa Matteo Ricci?"

"Baka nabasa niya 'yung poem mo."

"Naman!"

The second floor of the college cafeteria slowly emptied itself as the first bell after lunch approached.

"I mean," she continued, "That's our tambayan. He's always supposed to be there."

"Kung maka-'our' ka d'yan," her blockmate retorted. "Baka busy sa basketball practice. Kailangan nilang galingan 'noh para 2-peat ang Ateneo this year!"

She pouted and stabbed her slice of Sbarro's

pizza. “But I miss his face.”

“Girl,” her blockmate sighed in annoyance. “We’ve had this conversation a quadrillion times. Please just stop fangirling over him already.”

“LOL, I’m not a fangirl. I’m his girlfriend.”

Her blockmate rolled her eyes. “That’s it,” her blockmate said, slamming her fork down in a dramatic attempt to make a point. “I don’t want to play the devil’s advocate, but you need some serious enlightenment, my friend.”

This time, she rolled her eyes.

Very carefully, her blockmate said, “Every day since freshman year, you dream that you would get past the exposition in your little love story, but just like your *Wattpad* fan fiction, nandoon pa rin kayo. Hindi umaandar ’yung story. Kailan pa mangyayari ’yung rising action? Climax? Falling action? Resolution? Your love story, in reality and in writing, falls under fiction. He only sees you as a pronoun, a ‘she’ among all the other ‘shes’—another fangirl amidst a sea of fangirls.”

Ang sakit naman, she thought.

Tears started to well in her eyes, but she wasn’t giving in.

“Forgive my folly,” she said coolly, “But if you’re suggesting that I unlearn him, I’m afraid there’s no switch for that.”

“Look,” her blockmate opened her laptop and typed several names on *Facebook*, opening one profile after another on separate browser tabs. “You’ve invested a year—no, almost two years—on this Boy from the Court. Heck, you’ve even invested time and energy on a freaking *Wattpad* story about him.”

“So?”

“B1!” Her blockmate showed her the first *Facebook* profile she opened. “B1 is the perfect example of your boy-next-door. *Gusto mo ’yun, di ba?* He never failed to open doors for you. Or pull out a chair for you. He’s the kind of boy Tita would love to have as your first boyfriend and future husband. To top it all off, he’s totally into you. *Torpe lang*, which adds 50 *pogi* points!”

“I don’t like him,” she said with a poker face.

“B2!”

This girl is totally not giving up.

“Since *type mo ang mga jock*, *ba’t di mo pagbigyan* si B2? *Ilang months ka na rin niyang nililigawan.* I mean, *fencing varsity?* *Sosyal!* How many other boys in the Philippines play the sport? *Tingnan mo, o, he looks like Chris Evans pa!*”

“I don’t like him,” she said again.

“B3! You like them *chinito*, right?”

She thought about it. “It depends on the guy, really...”

“*Chinito, maporma, two-time Candy Cutie... Girl, one of Ateneo’s biggest heartthrobs is making landi to you—and via Twitter pa, ha! Broadcasted na broadcasted!—and you’re just totally ignoring it!*”

“I don’t like him,” she said firmly.

“Or *baka naman itong si B4 ang type mo kasi magka-wavelength kayo? Dean’s Lister, debater... Ikaw nga lang ang pinapakopya niya ng homework sa Accounting, eh! Ganoon ka niya kagusto!*”

“I don’t like him.”

“B5—*si best friend!*” Her blockmate clapped her hands to her mouth. “Oh my... *Ano nga pala’ng*

nangyari? Ano'ng sinabi mo sa kanya?"

"Well..."

She tried to remember the night at the university dorm lobby, the dormitory within Ateneo where her best friend stayed. They were working on a Theology pair report when, all of a sudden, he spilled the beans.

"I think I laughed..."

"Oh my tinapay, you what?" her blockmate said in utter disbelief.

"I wanted to make it light!" she argued. "I played it casual. I think I said, 'Hahaha, you're crazy. Kulang ka pa sa tulog.'"

"How did he take it?"

"Perfectly fine!" she said defensively. "Nagtawanan kami. Nag-dinner pa nga kami pagkatapos sa ZeCaf, eh."

"Akala mo lang 'yun," her blockmate said. "To be friendzoned is every boy's nightmare, and there you are, adding insult to the injury by taking his feelings lightly."

"I'm not as callous as you think I am," she said. "I care for my best friend, and he knows that full well. I'm just really thankful that he's not making anything awkward between us. It's as if nothing happened, really. I still talk to him about the Boy from the Court. He still tells me stories about his exes. Like I said, we're good."

Her blockmate looked at the laptop screen with a few more *Facebook* profiles opened.

"Fine. What about B6? Oh, forget it." Exasperated, her blockmate said, "I just can't believe you. Ang haba-haba ng hair mo, hindi mo naman ginagamit! Heck, if I were you, matagal ko nang sinagot si—"

She interrupted her blockmate. “The Boy from the Court—he’s everything rolled into one. He’s a good-looking, smart, boy-next-door type of basketball player! He’s sweet, funny, maalaga, loyal, honest...”

“He’s everything you’re projecting him to be!”

“You’re impossible.”

“You’re delusional.”

“You don’t understand.”

“You’re such a fangirl.”

Her blockmate had to use the restroom, so she was momentarily left alone with her lunch and thoughts.

You’re such a fangirl.

Those words echoed in her head. To her, the way her blockmate said it sounded mocking, ridiculing.

LOL, I’m not a fangirl. I’m his girlfriend.

She laughed at herself.

Was she really a fangirl? She made a mental checklist:

Follows and constantly checks his *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Instagram* accounts? Check. His *YouTube*, *SoundCloud*, *FourSquare*, and *Ask FM* accounts as well, even though he doesn’t use them anymore.

Googles his name every now and then and reads every news article, interview, forum, and fan fiction story about him? Check. *Google* images, too.

Mentally murders every girl he’s with in his pictures? Check. *Kasama na rin ’yung mga nagpapa-picture lang.*

Ladies, keep your paws off of my boy, please.

Acquires material objects related to him? Check. She bought a jersey with his last name and number from the *Loyola Schools Bookstore*. Everyone bought

it, anyway.

Attends all the UAAP Men's Basketball games? Check. She would faithfully wear the jersey she bought during the games.

Cheers for him and only him during the UAAP Men's Basketball games? Check. Siyempre she fist-pumps and yells, "Go, Ateneo!" as well.

Squeals and obsesses over his hair and abs? Check. More of his eyes and smile though. His arms, too. And his deep voice. Lahat na.

Suffers from ovary explosions upon a single glimpse of him, be it in real life or virtual life? Check. Na check.

Yes, she knew, and there was no point in denying it to herself, that she was, truly, a fangirl: fangirl, fan, admirer, enthusiast, devotee, stalker, even—whatever term society dubbed her to be. However, she was convinced that her case was different: She was a fangirl who liked him a little too much, a little more than she should. She was a fangirl with a belief that that the object of her affection, somehow, felt the same way, too.

Her blockmate returned from the restroom.

"I think he's just your crush," her blockmate concluded. "It will pass."

She smiled in reply. *I hope so.*

The first bell rang.

"There goes the bell," she said. "Let's go."

They tidied their tables and gathered their belongings. As they stood up, in a rush to go to their next class before the second bell, her blockmate froze.

"What's the matter?" she asked her blockmate.

“We’d better go,” her blockmate said, grabbing her by the arm and quickly turning her away.

“Hey, what? Why?”

She turned back to face the direction her blockmate shielded her from.

Entering the college cafeteria was the Boy from the Court, her Prince Charming, smiling, holding hands with someone who wasn’t her.

Her blockmate, with a pained expression on her face, rubbed her back vigorously, trying her best to console her friend who was suffering from her first heartache.

“Let’s go,” she said quietly.

She walked ahead of her blockmate.

A tear fell, and another.

6 MOVING ON

"Hey!" her blockmate called after her, trying to keep up with her pace. "Friend! Friend..." Her blockmate's voice trailed away as she sprinted to the restroom at SEC LEC B.

I just wanted to cry. I just wanted to let these tears fall. But no one should see me. Not in this state.

It was a few minutes before the second bell, a few minutes to put herself back together from falling apart.

She stood by the bathroom sink and looked at herself in the mirror.

Tear stains were running down her cheeks.

There's this sickening feeling in my chest. It's as if I'm carrying a heavy burden within me, she thought. Maybe pain is good for me. I don't know.

Look at yourself. Don't you feel sorry for what you see? No one has the license to hurt you this way. No one.

She washed her face a little too hard, a little too fast, all the while engrossed in her little interior monologue.

It's my fault. From the very beginning, I should have thought better. I should have been realistic. I kept the possibilities open. I kept my hopes up. I wanted to believe that what I wanted would come true. I was *Cinderella*—except that the dream I wished didn't come true.

I couldn't forget the day I first saw you. I felt like a child. I wanted to run to you, stare at you like a child would stare at a new toy on display. I wanted to hold you and shake you and tell you that I wanted you to be mine. I didn't.

I hung on to my pride, looked at you as I looked at everyone else around us, and pretended to mind my own business, but somehow, your eyes found mine. You looked at me, and it was enough to make me lose my sense of direction.

You had me.

I dreamt of you. I dreamt of us. And of course, it was all just a dream.

She buried her face in her hands.

"Friend!" Her blockmate finally arrived at her side. "Friend, I'm so sorry."

She was too ashamed to look at her blockmate.

Her blockmate gave way for her silence.

Finally, she spoke. "That awkward moment when you think your crush likes you back, huh?"

Her blockmate gave her an understanding laugh. "More of 'those awkward years.'"

She smiled weakly. "This one's for the books. It's my first heartbreak."

“Heartbreak is good,” her blockmate reassured her. “At the very least, you know it’s in there.”

“That’s just it,” she shook her head. “I gave him my heart. He never took it. It has always just been here. I guess I don’t have the right to call it a heartbreak, after all.”

“Well, it is honestly kind of funny to have your heart broken—oh, I mean—to be upset by someone you never had.”

“Thank you.” She laughed. “I just wish I could go back to the day I saw him and feel nothing. I don’t like this feeling. It’s not sane.”

“You are one heck of a character din, ano?” Her blockmate took out some tissues from the dispenser and handed them to her. “You fell for a boy you never really met. This might sound strange coming from me, but believe me, I do understand the romantic, maddening thrill to long for someone you couldn’t have right now.”

“Shouldn’t your sentence be rephrased to me longing for someone I *would* never have?”

“Of course not!” Her blockmate snapped back.

“Now I see the situation I’m in, and there’s nothing worse than wanting someone you could never have.”

“So now you think that he’s out of your league? That he’s someone? That he’s up there?”

“Isn’t he?” She said quietly. “Apparently, his girlfriend is one of him, too: Tall. Pretty. Someone. Up there. I’m just another teenage girl with good academic and extra-curricular records who has secret feelings and writes fan fiction stories about the UAAP basketball superstar.”

Her blockmate shook her head. “Don’t you see

yourself in the mirror, girl? You can have any boy you want. And yes, you can most certainly have him. But maybe you and him are not meant for each other right now. Maybe he needs to fall in love with her first. Maybe you need to fall in love with yourself first.”

She listened.

Her blockmate continued, “He’s not the prize. You are.” This time, her blockmate held both her shoulders firmly. “You’re not just a ‘she’. You’re Gale Rodriguez, and you’re the best Gale Patricia Ocampo Rodriguez there is.”

“Thanks, Aly.”

“Let’s move on now and we’ll be late for class.” Aly patted her shoulder.

Gale Rodriguez stopped drying her tears and smiled, just in time for the second bell.

@jacobanthonytan: I’m lucky I’m in love with my best friend. :)

Great. Now I have a most hated song.

0.01 milliseconds later, hundreds replied, retweeted, and favorited his tweet.

Wait a minute, Gale thought. Girls actually added that particular tweet to their Favorites?

She shook her head. Who does that? What girl species favorites a tweet of their ultimate crush broadcasting to the world that he has a girlfriend?

If only I could report his tweet, she thought. *It contains offensive content, eh.*

@galerodriguez: @jacobanthonytan I hate you.

Tweet not sent: There was an issue when sending your Tweet. It has been saved to your drafts. Please try again later.

Arte lang. She turned off her WiFi and typed in the tweet. She would never send him hate tweets.

@galerodriguez: @jacobanthonytan </3

Tweet not sent.

Arte lang ulit.

Aly was right. From the very beginning, she was right. It was all just fiction, a beautiful, make-believe story pregnant with possibilities, ignorant of the truth, until truth came like a thief in the night, merciless, and with his dagger, unashamedly pierced through and tore down the walls of her happily-ever-after.

He didn't break her heart. She did.

Gale stared at the screen of her laptop. She was such a mess. Even her *Wattpad* fan fiction story was a hot mess. She needed to write a good update for her story because Girl and Boy from the Court secretly liked each other, just like in reality, or so she thought. It isn't the case anymore. She didn't know what to write next. What was clear to her, though, was that there was a next chapter, and she had to write it.

Processing her own feelings for the girl in her fan fiction story, she wrote:

A Secret Goodbye

I'm hurting but you don't know, and you will never find out. This little from-me-to-you, you might not even read. You might not even care. That's the way our story was written.

It was nice while it lasted. To me, you are amazing. My sun rose and set with you. I looked at no one else but you. I learned to love the scars and the imperfections of you. I knew things about you as if we'd spend hours on end with each other. It has been this way for almost half a thousand days.

They say I put you on a pedestal, that I was blinded. I tell them that's just your effect on me. They ask me if you are the boy I thought you are. I tell them to give me a little more time. But I've already wasted too much time on you.

The heavens brought us together to only bring us apart. They helped me see that I've been reading between the lines that were just mere, plain lines, that I've been playing a game for two by myself, that I've been living on dreams and inventing love stories. I guess that it's time I stop this prolonged foolishness.

Sometimes people come into your life and a part of you wishes they would stay there. But sometimes they're a piece of a puzzle that couldn't fit yours. They will fit someone else's, and that's just the way it's supposed to be. Like they say, there is a reason for everything.

I opened my heart to you, and it has been left open. It was never wise to hold on to something that wasn't there. But in the end, there's no one to

*blame. I'm still growing up.
I'm tired now.
Au revoir.*

*Love,
Gushing Gaga*

One vote.
Ten votes.
Sixteen votes.
Twenty-one comments.
Amidst the stream of comments, Gale saw that
Aly left a comment, too:

*alydizonnn: Goodbyes are easier said than
done! But buti na lang she decided to move
on na. :) Wag lang niyang masyadong biglain.
Baka magka-withdrawal symptoms pa siya.
Haha! Good job, Ms. Author. :)*

You're right again, Aly.

Gale knew she would move on, but just like everything in life, there is a process in goodbyes. It comes in two simple steps:

Step 1: Cry. It's healthy.

Gale cried. Again. A little. A lot. Then some more.

She took out her iPod and played her Heartbreak Playlist aka Adele. I have a Heartbreak Playlist? God must've known this day was coming.

To intensify the crying session, she listened with her Beats by Dre.

Never mind, I'll find someone like you, Adele

crooned.

Her pillow was soaked.

Step 2: Stop crying. It's unhealthy.

It was 8 pm. Gale allowed herself to mourn until 8:30 pm. Or 11 pm. Or, to be more realistic, after one week, which was by Wednesday of next week. By Wednesday of next week, she would be over him. By Wednesday of next week, she would be too preoccupied with other things in her life that didn't have anything to do with him. Wednesday of next week would be enough time for her to heal.

Gale thought of unfollowing him on *Twitter* and *Instagram*. Isn't that what how-to articles say on how to get over a breakup or your ex? Unfollow. Unfriend. Delete.

No, she thought. It will be the same old set-up. But this time, without the butterflies, this time, without the expectations, because Jacob Anthony Urdaneta Tan, I will always be your biggest fan.

7 HANGOVER

Only sixty seconds remained before the buzzer would signal the end of the second quarter. Star player and UAAP heartthrob Jacob Tan led the *Ateneo Blue Eagles* 52-44 against the *De La Salle Green Archers*.

“Grabe!” Aly exclaimed, her voice drowned out by the deafening cheers from her crowd. “There’s nothing like an *Ateneo-La Salle* game! Di ba, Gale?”

Gale fussed over her *DSLR*, intently focusing and capturing every move of Jacob Tan.

Gale loved how she could easily spot Jacob among the rest of the *Blue Eagles*, even in action. She was sure it was not because of his jersey number or his signature pink *Nike* shoes. Perhaps it was because of his hair, or the shape of his back, or the prominent dimple on his shoulder, or his all too familiar movements. She loved how it was as if her eyes were made to see only him. Perhaps she had

just memorized him by heart.

“Hmm?” she mumbled.

“Ang sabi ko, there’s nothing like an... What are you doing?” Aly eyed Gale.

Gale expertly and simultaneously cheered for Jacob and snapped the camera wildly at his direction as Jacob shot another one of his sweet 3-pointers.

“Will you just please enjoy the game for the rivalry itself?” Aly half-shouted as the crowd went wild. “We’re going for the 3-peat, and against *La Salle* pa!”

Gale zoomed in the camera lens on Jacob.

“Tumigil ka na sa kaka-picture kay Tan!”

“Pang-memories ’to!”

“Nag-move on ka na sa kanya!”

Then it happened all too quickly. From the lower box, Gale and Aly just barely saw the collision between Jacob and one of the *Green Archers*. The buzzer sounded as Jacob crumpled to the floor.

“Jacob!” Gale yelled.

The blue crowd jeered.

“What the heck happened?” Gale yelled at Aly.

“Tinulak niya si Jacob! Foul!”

Jacob crouched in pain and held on to his right shoulder. He lay motionless on the floor as he was immediately helped by the team doctors to the dugout.

“Foul!” Aly jeered once more, this time in unison with the blue crowd.

Gale couldn’t make out the expression of the green crowd opposite the arena.

The alumni surrounding Gale and Aly were furious, loudly swearing at the *Green Archer* and

pouring in their own comments about the incident.

With the gravity of Jacob's fall, everyone was worried that Ateneo might not make the 3-peat—everyone, except Gale. Gale didn't care about the 3-peat. All Gale thought about was the heart-wrenching image of Jacob on the floor. All she thought about were the tears that leaked from his eyes from serious pain. All she really cared about was Jacob.

Please let Jacob be all right, she prayed silently. Please let Jacob be all right.

The minutes seemed like hours as the entire arena waited for the news on Jacob Tan. Gale was restless in her seat.

Finally, the courtside reporter spoke, "Unfortunately for the *Ateneo Blue Eagles*, shooting guard Jacob Tan is forced to bail out of the game due to an injury on his right shoulder..."

Oh, no.

The crowd went abuzz.

"Boo!"

"...his shooting arm..."

"Goodbye, 3-peat..."

"...an intentional push from behind..."

"...tried to prevent a fast break..."

"...a good enough replacement for Tan..."

"...injury might put him out for good..."

Gale shut her ears to the surrounding *Ateneans's* comments. As much as she wanted to run to him in the dugout and nurse him to health, all she could do was continue to fervently pray for his speedy recovery.

Dear Lord, kahit ex-girlfriend lang ang peg ko, I would want nothing more than for Jacob to please

recover from his injury—and fast. Please.

The third quarter resumed.

The *Ateneo Blue Eagles* were clearly affected by the absence of their star player as points quickly piled up for the *De La Salle Green Archers*. The end of the third quarter scores revealed 57-70 in favor of *DLSU*.

“Tambak na tambak...”

“We’re done for...”

“It’s over...”

The blue crowd seemed resigned. *Ateneo* had already lost hope in the game. There was no way they would win the *UAAP* championship. Not with Jacob Tan gone.

The fourth quarter began.

Jacob Tan was back on the court.

The crowd went wild.

“And it looks like Tan is back on the court!” boomed the courtside reporter. “Notwithstanding the advice from the team doctors, Jacob Tan returns for the fourth and final quarter!”

“Jacob!” Gale yelled in shock and utter relief.

“Jacob! Jacob! Jacob!” cried the sea of blue. There was hope.

A part of Gale wished that someone would drag him back to the dugout to let him fully recover. But when she saw the intensity on his face, when she saw that despite his injury, every fiber of his body wanted to win the championship so bad, Gale cheered him on.

She cheered the loudest.

Jacob scored, passed, and did everything he could to close the wide gap between the scores. With their co-captain back, the *Ateneo Blue Eagles* were

back on a roll.

By half-time, the scores tallied 64-72.

“Jacob! Jacob! Jacob!” The crowd cheered him on.

Oh, Jacob, you play your heart out that people forget you are suffering! Gale was having a hard time for him.

The drums from both sides of the arena beat furiously.

“Go, Ateneo! One big fight!”

“Animo, La Salle!”

By this time, every person was at the edge of their seats.

The heated battle for the championship got more physical as the *Ateneo Blue Eagles* scored point after point, dramatically raising the score 70-74.

Twenty-one seconds were left on the clock.

Gale followed Jacob intently.

Jacob for three!

The board flashed 73-75.

Gale held her breath.

It was down to five seconds.

Jacob makes a defensive rebound.

Four seconds.

Jacob runs.

Three seconds.

Jacob aims for a 3-pointer.

Two seconds.

Jacob shoots.

Jacob scores!

The sea of blue exploded in thundering cheers as the *Ateneo Blue Eagles* brought home the *UAAP Men's Basketball Championship* for the third time in a row,

defeating the *De La Salle Green Archers* in a heart-stopping 76-75.

Blue and white confetti showered the arena. *Ateneans* were jumping up and down in uncontainable joy.

“We won! We won!” Gale exclaimed as she and Aly joined in the merriment.

Her eyes found Jacob, his hands raised in the air, beaming at the entire arena. King Eagle Jacob Tan was a picture of pure triumph as he was awarded the Finals MVP.

“Congratulations, King Eagle!” Gale yelled from her seat.

I love you!

The *Ateneo de Manila University Alma Mater* song began to play:

We stand on a hill

Between the earth and sky

Remembering still

How the bright Blue Eagles fly

Together with all the *Ateneans*, with the biggest smile on her face, Gale passionately chanted the *Ateneans'* favorite line of the song:

Win or lose

It's the school we choose

Together with all the *Ateneans*, with radiating pride, Gale passionately fist-pumped in the air.

Ang sarap maging Atenista, she thought. *Thank you, Jacob.*

“Picture tayo!” Aly said.

Gale and Aly stood outside the arena under the open sky where the *Ateneo* crowd excitedly waited for Jacob Tan and the rest of the *Blue Eagles* for a photo-

op and autograph signing. The setting sun tilted at such an angle that created a magical and mythical glow about the entire place.

“One, two, three, smile!”

Aly reviewed their selfie in her *iPhone 5*.

“Wagas ang ngiti mo, ah!” Aly chuckled.

Because every time I smile for a picture, I still and only think of you.

“May hangover pa ako, eh,” Gale smiled.

“Sa game? Or sa kanya?”

Gale craned her neck to see any sign of the *Blue Eagles* in reply.

“So, will you have your picture taken with him?” Aly asked.

“No,” Gale laughed. “I just want a second’s worth glimpse of him. I’ll wait no matter how many minutes or hours it takes.”

“Are you crazy?” Aly snorted. “Aren’t you contented enough to watch him play up close? Nasa lower box na nga tayo, eh.”

“Iba pa rin pag super up close.”

Aly just shook her head.

After a few more minutes, shrieks reverberated from the halls of the arena. The *Blue Eagles* were finally making their way out.

It was 6:29 in the evening when Jacob stepped out. As usual, Gale involuntarily held her breath. While doing so, she managed to count three hammering beats in her chest.

Jacob stood towering above everyone else, but happily and humbly accommodated the crowd’s every whim.

They congratulated him.

They shook his hand.
They had his autograph.
They had selfies with him.
They hugged him.
They smelled him.
They kissed him.
All the while, Gale screamed inside.
Me too, Jacob! I want you!

Gale wanted him badly that she was on the verge of tears. She was overwhelmed with so much feeling for Jacob that she couldn't shake off the unnerving fact that even after ten months since she decided to move on, she was still not over him.

Jacob was completely swarmed by the crowd.

"Let's go!" Aly took her by the arm. "Let's have a picture with them!"

Gale stood rooted on her spot.

"Okay lang. Ikaw na lang. I'm not ready..."

"Not ready' ka d'yan! Let's go!"

Aly didn't need to drag Gale. Gale easily found her way towards Jacob.

Upon nearing Jacob, Gale didn't know what to think. She didn't know what to feel. Any minute now she would be standing so close to him, closer than she had ever imagined possible. The idea was too much to handle.

What will I say? What will I do? she asked herself.

You know what you want to do. Everyone else did it, anyway.

Congratulate him. Congratulate him for leading Ateneo to a 3-peat. Tell him that you admire him for giving so much of himself during the game, despite his injury, and for the past three years. Tell him that

you were never really a fan of basketball until him, that you faithfully watch him play and cheer for him every moment that he is out on the court.

Shake his hand. It's a wonderful, no-malice bonus that comes with the congratulations. Feel his hand. Remember the soft texture of his skin, the warmth, his strong and masculine yet tender grasp, and the electricity that would course through your veins as his fingers would lace around yours.

Get his autograph. Your flushed cheeks would betray you from your brief encounter with his hand, so take out a pen and paper and get his autograph so that he wouldn't see in your face how much you love him.

Take a selfie with him. At this rate, the blush on your cheeks would have subsided. Be sure you use the Camera 360 application so that you would look extra pretty. What's the best way to ask him for a selfie? May I have a picture with you? May I have a picture with you, please? May I please have a picture with you? Picture tayo? Selfie tayo?

Hug him. Wrap your arms around his abs—rather—wrap your arms around him, and give yourself the luxury to temporarily rest your head on his wide chest. Press your ear closer to him. Listen to his heart. Memorize the rhythm. Believe it's beating only for you. Maybe he'd put an arm or two around you, too. *Kalma lang.*

Smell him. While wrapped in the best embrace of your lifetime, take a whiff of his skin. What does he smell like? Does he smell like his favorite brand of perfume, like rugby and crushed roses? Or does he smell like after shower, fresh with the scent of soap

still entangled with the beads of his manly sweat? If only I could capture his scent in a bottle...

Kiss him.

“Jacob!” Aly called, trying to get his attention.

Gale came back to her senses. *What am I thinking?*

“Jacob, picture please! Over here!” Aly called out again from among the unruly crowd.

Gale was so near him, yet so far.

Before Aly could call him again, Jacob and the rest of the *Blue Eagles* were ushered into a van.

“Dang it!” Aly sighed. “It was almost our turn!”

Jacob bid a sheepish goodbye to the crowd as he meekly made his exit.

Kung anu-ano pa ang inisip ko.

Gale just stood there, looking him on as the van sped away.



Gale uploaded the pictures of the basketball championship game from her *DSLR* to the laptop. There were more than two hundred photos, three fourths of which were snapshots of Jacob: Jacob praying, Jacob running, Jacob passing, Jacob doing a layup, Jacob doing a rebound, Jacob doing his signature move, Jacob doing his famous 3-pointers, Jacob in pain on the floor from his shoulder injury, Jacob being awarded Finals MVP... Jacob made such beautiful kinetic art. She couldn't get enough of him. Even her camera loved him so much.

She opened *Adobe Photoshop* and deftly stitched one of her recent photos with one of the pictures she took of him today. As obsessed as she seemed, stitching photos of them was something she used to do, before ten months ago when she decided to

move on from him. She opened the subfolder in her Jacob Tan album that contained their stitched photos over the years.

Gale laughed. She and Jacob looked so different when they were still in their freshman year as compared to how they look like now that they were in their junior year at the university. Gale noticed the clear gap of stitched pictures of them during the ten months that she tried to move on. After ten months, she finally added a new one.

Gale fondly examined their latest picture, and scrolled through their timeline of photos.

Damn, Gale thought. We look so good together.

Then Gale suddenly remembered that she had already moved on from him.

But did she, really?

She tried, hard, for ten months. Her quiet feelings that she uncorked, bottled up, and thrown into the sea many times always found their way back to her. Gale was back at square one, falling for him all over again, especially now that she had some kind of hope—Jacob Tan was no longer with his girlfriend.

What have you done to me, Jacob Tan? Gale closed her eyes. *I was fine already. I was moving on. Pinapaasa mo ako. Heck, pinapaasa ko ang sarili ko sa 'yo!*

No, she shook her head. This is just a hangover. This will be gone by tomorrow.

But Gale looked at the recent picture that she stitched of her and Jacob together. She smiled. How could she deny the fact that they looked so perfect together? She loved Jacob. She loved the feeling of being in love with him.

If this is a hangover, I don't want to recover. Not now.

Gale updated her Wattpad story. From the girl's point of view, she wrote:

The Note

Here's a little note of love masked in nonchalance and stripped of its pulse, written in broken language and hidden in metaphor, words turned inside out and unsure of syntax because you reduce me to inarticulateness and impede my sense of rationality.

I want you to know, but I don't. Yet here I am, human softness and romantic notions overwhelm me to write to you under the temporary sunshine of the moon, in terrible bliss as I contemplate you. I'll tuck this neatly in my drawer of dreams. Maybe someday, somehow you'll stumble upon this and somewhere between these lines I'll make sense to you. For now I'll be content with where we are, but I'll take my hopes higher and higher each day and pray that my prose won't drip in disappointment if it falls.

I perfectly understand that this very note from me to you defeats my objectives.

I tried my best.

Love,
Gushing Gaga

8

BLUE ROSE

It had been four, fast years. Only two months remained before the batch of Ateneans would officially be liberated from the walls of formal schooling.

If there was anyone who was eagerly looking forward to graduation day, it was Gale. Gale was graduating with an honorable mention, which was not a surprise, really, what with her grades ranging from A's and B's (except for her subjects that had anything to do with numbers, which, unfortunately, was her *waterloo*). Besides her good academic standing, Gale left a legacy in her organization as an officer, giving birth to new projects and efficiently and effectively spearheading them. As an added incentive to her list of achievements, Gale became a personality on *Wattpad*, scoring hundreds of thousands of reads, votes, and comments on her fan fiction story, albeit only known under her pseudonym, Gushing Gaga.

Apart from awaiting graduation day, since the start of their last year at the university, Gale, Aly, and the rest of the batch had been anticipating the *Ateneo Blue Roast*. Just as they were welcomed to the *Ateneo* during their freshman year through the *Ateneo Freshman Orientation Seminar*, or OrSem, so would they be given a farewell party as they left the university through the *Ateneo Blue Roast*. One Blue Roast tradition was the giving of the Blue Rose.

“To whom will I give my Blue Rose?” Gale asked as she consciously forked her pesto pasta. She had been trying to avoid eye contact with a boy some three tables away who couldn’t seem to take the hint that she wasn’t interested in him.

“To that yummy guy at ten o’clock who has been eyeballing you.” Aly laughed, her mouth full of mashed potatoes.

Gale shifted uneasily in her seat. She let her hair fall over the side of her left cheek so as to avoid seeing the boy through her peripheral vision.

“Oh, come on!” Aly giggled, clearly against Gale’s hair trick. “He’s hot!”

“Yeah, but he looks like the bad boy type, though.” Gale shook her head. “You know that kind scares me.”

Aly laughed again. “Gale, he’s still looking at you. Flirt back!”

“Hell, no!” A flush of red crept up Gale’s cheeks. But she tucked her hair behind her ear, and looked in the boy’s direction. As if on cue, the boy smiled at her.

God, he’s hot, she thought. But he’s still not Jacob.

She nodded and gave him a little, acknowledging smile then quickly turned to look down at her food.

“Oh, my God, I’m so proud of you!” Aly teased, having witnessed the little scene.

Gale rolled her eyes.

“Finally, nagdadalaga ka na! I don’t have to teach you Flirting 101!”

“Whatever,” Gale retorted. “That’s not called flirting. I was just being polite.”

Aly smiled at her like it was the best male interaction she had ever done in her twenty-one years of existence. “Gale, you have practically everything but a love life. I just want you to have fun, you know?”

“Putting other guys’ hopes up is not my idea of fun whether or not I’m dating—”

Aly’s eyes widened. “O. M. G. You’re already dating someone, and you didn’t even ask for my permission?”

Gale nearly choked on her iced tea. “Of course not! Me, dating someone who isn’t Jacob? That’s impossible.”

“Oh.” Aly scowled. “Don’t even get started on Jacob Tan.”

“As I was saying... I’ve been going out with him—in my mind.” Gale couldn’t help but laugh at her own joke.

Because damn it, even after all this time, it’s still you, Jacob.

“Well there you have it, Jacob Tan is the answer to your question,” Aly said.

“What?”

“Give Jacob Tan your Blue Rose.”

Gale was taken aback.

“I dare you,” Aly said. “I dare you to give Jacob Tan your Blue Rose!”

"You know I couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"Because?"

"Just because."

"That's the point of the Blue Rose," Aly said. "To give to your OrSem crush, your significant other, or your special someone. To let them know how you feel, once and for all. Don't you want Jacob Tan to know how you feel about him? Isn't it about time na magpakilala ka?"

"No." Gale shook her head sadly.

"Why not?"

"Because he won't give his Blue Rose to me."

"So?"

"Isn't that just sad? He'll probably go home with a bouquet of Blue Roses from all his fangirls. My rose will just be another rose among the roses. At the end of the day, he wouldn't even remember from whom all those roses came from. And I couldn't even stand to think who would be the lucky one to receive his Blue Rose."

"Well, cheer up, because for sure, you're going home with a rose or two," Aly said. "Here I am, hoping against hope that someone will give me their Blue Rose. 'Will someone give me a Blue Rose?' What a pathetic thought."

Gale felt a pang of guilt for her friend. "I'm sure someone will give you theirs," was all Gale could say.

"It's okay. As they say, 'It's better to give than to receive.'" Aly smiled, and she meant it.

It was one of the many things Gale loved about Aly. She admired how Aly could always see the

brighter side of things, how she could easily let go, and move on...

"Since I'm pretty sure you're not giving your Blue Rose to Jacob," Aly continued, "Maybe we should brainstorm on whom to give our Blue Roses. Uh-oh..."

"What?"

"I think he's coming here."

Gale saw that Mr. Bad Boy was half-standing, tidying up his table, all the while his eyes fixated on her.

They hurriedly finished their lunches. "Let's get out of here before he asks for my number or something," Gale said.

"Wow, assuming ka, ah!" Aly said as she gulped down her drink.

But Aly knew better than to argue.

That's right, Gale thought. I'm loyal to you, Jacob.

There was no need to rush once they had escaped. It was a slow afternoon, and having accomplished all their requirements, the seniors practically loitered around the campus, taking in all the sights and sounds of the Ateneo before they would exit the university for good. Gale and Aly strutted down the *SEC Walk*, laughing to themselves as they observed the students of the lower batches. They were amazed at how four years ago, they were once freshmen.

"Time flies, huh?" Aly said as she watched a girl nervously walk down *SEC Walk*.

"She must be a freshman," Gale said, noting on the girl the common look of freshmen as they walked the endless length of *SEC Walk*, remembering how naked they used to feel with scrutinizing eyes everywhere. They laughed.

“So,” Gale continued as they sat down on one of the SEC Walk benches. “I came up with a mental list of who we could give our Blue Roses to.”

“Shoot. I’m all ears,” Aly encouraged.

Gale took out her laptop. She typed a little list as she and Aly heartily exchanged notes. It read:

The Blue Rose Candidates

1. The Boyfriend - Not applicable.
2. The Professor - Totally cool. No big deal.
3. The Crush

“I could give each of them a blue petal,” Aly joked.

Gale knew that Aly had as much pride as she did and that she wouldn’t give her Blue Rose to her crush. Or rather, crushes.

4. The Celebrity

“May we please skip this item.” Aly sighed.

5. The Best Friend

“You?” Gale and Aly mockingly complained.

6. The Saint

They’ve got St. Ignatius of Loyola to be thankful for the Ateneo, after all. They could simply leave their roses at the foot of the statue.

7. The Self

“Is that even an option?” Aly asked. “That sort of defeats the purpose of the Blue Rose.”

They bickered and laughed about the whole idea of the Blue Rose and the incredible amount of attention it was getting from single, lovelife-less ladies such as themselves. The campus was dark when they finished. The lampposts switched on, and a mellow glow of orange swept the university grounds.

“I conclude,” Gale said as they stood up and leisurely made their way to the North Car Park, “that to whomever I’m giving my Blue Rose, years from now, I won’t look back and regret it.”

“I concur,” Aly said.



It was half past twelve when Gale finished replying to all the comments on her fan fiction story on *Wattpad*. By now, her avid readers and followers knew, and were more than delighted to know, that the famed and mysterious Gushing Gaga was actually among them, and an Atenean of the graduating batch, due to her subtle references to Ateneo traditions and puns on school buildings in her story. Taking hold of the little information they knew about her, the reading statistics vastly increased, with batchmates and students from the lower batches eagerly guessing on who she might be in the comments section. Not surprisingly, there wasn’t a single mention of her name. That was how well she kept her identity, and her secret love for Jacob Tan.

She turned off her laptop and shut the lights. She lay in bed for about an hour when she finally decided to put into writing what had been bothering her since all the talk about the Blue Rose.

The Blue Rose. It was all she ever thought about now. Yes, a part of Gale wanted Jacob Tan to know how she felt about him, but knowing herself, she couldn't do it. Not directly, at least.

She booted her laptop again, and typed:

Dedication

Every note of every lyric of every song I sing is for you.

Every letter of every word of every paragraph of every page of every story I write is for you.

Every shape of every figure of every color of every image I paint is for you.

Every sweat of every inch of every part of my body of every movement I do is for you.

Every second of every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month of every year is for you.

Every me is for you.

The characters in her story retained their elusive names. The girl was still named She, and the boy was still named Boy from the Court—until now. She rewrote the last line of her entry:

Every me is for you, JAUT.

She clicked Save and Publish.

It was the most Gale could do.
There was no turning back now.



The next morning, Gale awoke to an explosion

of votes and comments on her latest *Wattpad* entry. She looked at the figures: eight hundred comments—overnight. It was the most number of comments her fan fiction story had ever received.

JAUT—It's Jacob Anthony Urdaneta Tan!

The Boy from the Court is Jacob Tan!

Headlines: Gushing Gaga Reveals Boy from the Court

Now that we know who the boy is, who are you, Gushing Gaga?

GG, ako na lang, please...

Reveal yourself, Gushing Gaga!

Gushing Gaga “dedicates” her Blue Rose to Jacob Tan!!!

Ms. Gushing Gaga, will you give your Blue Rose to Jacob Tan? Please do! It will be the highlight of the night! We will support you! #nohatejustlove #obsfan

Gale took a deep breath. As if that weren't enough, her social media accounts went wild.

Hundreds of shares on *Facebook*.

Hundreds of tweets on *Twitter*.

Everyone tagging and including Jacob Tan in their mentions.

Suddenly, there was every reason to give her Blue

Rose to Jacob Tan. There was real encouragement. There was a support system. A fan base.

Would she let go of her pseudonym and give Jacob Tan her Blue Rose?

Gale wanted to die.

But it was just then that she noticed the Top Tweet on *Twitter*:

@jacobanthonytan: Wish I could finally meet you, Gushing Gaga. I've been a big fan of yours and Coffee for Two. Will I see you on Blue Roast? :)

9

BLUE ROAST

Gale neatly clipped a bejeweled red rose on the side of her deep black hair. Under the klieg lights that filled the *Bellarmino Field*, the ornament shone as bright as her eyes.

This was the night Gale had probably been anticipating her entire college life. Tonight was dedicated to celebrating the four years that had gone by and life in store for her. Tonight was the night of batch spirit, school pride, merriment, song, dance, nostalgia, and memorabilia. Tonight, she would reveal to her fans on *Wattpad* that she was Gushing Gaga, the person behind the popular fan fiction, *Coffee for Two*. And tonight, she would give Jacob Tan her Blue Rose.

Gale was beautiful this evening as she had always been: radiant, poised, a wonderful concoction of magic and myth. She wore a bodycon pale blue dress—reserved and sophisticated yet playful—

something she believed to be revealing of her personality. Perhaps the color of the dress perfectly complemented her morena skin tone that Gale easily stood out among the crowd. Perhaps this evening, she emanated such an aura that when she and Aly quietly made their way towards the field, all eyes were on her.

A sigh escaped her lips as they strolled toward the beer booth at the end of the field. Gale knew that in the looks department, she definitely had it, but she was never the type who walked around campus to see and be seen. Attention, even from her suitors, made her extremely self-conscious and uncomfortable. Gale was “a beautiful, quiet soul,” as Aly would put it.

“What are we doing in the beer booth?” she asked Aly. “You know I don’t drink.”

“I’m kind of hungry for beer right now,” Aly said. “Besides, don’t be such a prude. At least bago ka mag-graduate, tumikim ka naman ng beer.”

Without asking for her consent, Aly asked for two beers and shoved the other at Gale.

“If you can’t finish it, just remember, I’m here for you,” Aly grinned.

“Whatever,” Gale muttered.

They arrived at the field early, so they were still able to reserve chairs for themselves at a table near the stage, which was a good thing, since, with her dress, Gale couldn’t afford to sit in the grass like everyone else. The people who occupied the table ahead of them were a fun bunch from the *Ateneo Blue Repertory*, the premier musical theatre organization of the university. They all seemed like clones of Aly—noisy, carefree, and musically talented. It was no

wonder that within a few seconds of exchanging pleasantries, Aly joined the group in lighthearted singing of *Disney* medleys. Gale wondered how Aly was able to put up with her quietness throughout the years.

Thanks to their seats, Gale was able to witness up close the different performances that graced the event. Popular bands and her batchmates from the different Performing Arts organizations, including those with whom she shared the table, all gave their one hundred and one percent during their last performances for the batch. Sponsors were raffling out thousands worth of gift certificates, as well as *Apple* gadgets. Gale and Aly laughed their heads off at the *Blue Roast Awards*, an awarding ceremony wherein the batch nominates and votes for their batchmates in categories such as *BS Org*, *Crush ang Bayan*, *Manyak Cum Laude*, and *Conyo Kid*. Gale was surprised to see so many people from her batch for the first time as they were awarded on stage. Maybe she camped at the *Matteo Ricci Study Hall* too much.

The night went by. Every now and then, Gale searched for Jacob Tan in the crowd. Looking for him was like a reflex action: involuntary, almost automatic. It became a part of Gale's very system that not a day would go by in her college life that she wouldn't scan the crowd in the hopes of a glimpse of him. She was getting uneasy. The hour before the exchanging of the *Blue Rose* was fast approaching yet he was still nowhere to be found.

"I don't see him anywhere, Aly!" Gale said impatiently as she and Aly strolled around the perimeter of the field. They arrived at the *Blue Rose*

booth and stood in the long line of seniors who were claiming their roses. It was difficult to distinguish who was who at this rate—almost a thousand seniors were buzzing about that the field literally became a sea of nameless faces.

“You’ll find him. He’ll find you,” Aly said reassuringly. “It will only be a matter of time. Just you wait.”

The wait seemed forever as the line inched slowly and still, there was no sign of him. They finally collected their roses when the host boomed, “Seniors, hang in there! The giving of the Blue Rose will start in ten minutes!”

An intense wave of excitement swept the *Bellarmino Field*.

It was 11:11 pm when Gale looked up at the sky. Tonight the moon was a smile and a star so bright just above it was a winking eye. Or was it a planet? Perhaps two celestial bodies waltzed in the sky in an attempt to distract her with unexpected wonder, even just for a while. Everyone else took heed and soon, they all stood underneath the evening sky, all smiles, pointing at the beautiful scene. Gale wondered if Jacob saw it, too.

“Seniors!” The host suddenly cried in unmasked excitement, shattering Gale’s momentary trance. She tore her eyes away from the sky. Her pulse quickened once again. The mellow intro to a favorite song of hers began to play in a solo, acoustic guitar. Gale held her breath.

“This is it, the moment you’ve all been waiting for!” bellowed the host as he rocked up and down the soles of his feet. The crowd grew uncontainable.

“You’ve waited long enough. Now the time has finally come!”

It was then that Gale noticed that everyone was already positioned. It was as if she could see invisible lines connecting boy to girl and girl to boy. Some lines were short and others were yards long. Everyone knew and found their someone. It was just a matter of crossing the line.

“You may now give your Blue Rose!”

The lights dimmed. Soft blue light flooded the field as the performer began to croon the chorus of Ryan Cabrera’s “True”:

*I've waited all my life to cross this line to the only
thing that's true*

*So I will not hide, it's time to try anything to be with
you*

All my life I've waited, this is true

Gale watched as everyone around her found their way to one other. There were lines that went askew, and lines that were crossed more than once. There were lines that weren’t crossed at all. The sight of it all was bittersweet. Gale realized that tonight, everyone was a love story: some were at the beginning, and some, at the end.

“H-h-hi, Gale,” a boy’s voice said.

Gale spun around. It was Enrique, her torpe boy-next-door suitor. He finally mustered up the courage to court her when they were in their junior year. Enrique smiled nervously. “For you,” he said shyly as he handed her his Blue Rose.

Gale flushed as she looked into his puppy brown

eyes. Enrique was ever so polite, decent, and good, Gale often thought why she never fell for him instead. She often hoped she did.

“Thank you, Enrique,” she said softly and smiled as she reached out for his rose.

Enrique opened his mouth to say something, but just then, Carlos, Gale’s long-time fencing varsity suitor, appeared by her side. Carlos was mestizo, tall, and muscular that he could pass as a local version of *Superman*. Throughout the years, he habitually and randomly appeared by her side, especially when she needed help with anything, which Gale found highly amusing. He was almost like her personal superhero.

“Hey.” Carlos beamed at Gale. He then became aware of his abrupt intrusion. “Oh, I’m sorry,” he said apologetically. “Did I —”

“It’s cool.” Enrique shook his head. “Gale.” Enrique said as he smiled his timid but megawatt smile. “Bro,” he acknowledged Carlos and they did a little fist bump. Enrique smiled at Gale for one last time before he slowly walked away. Gale looked on at him until she could no longer make out his outline.

“I guess I didn’t make it on time,” Carlos said after a few moments, nudging at the rose Enrique gave her. “I may have been your second rose, but you have my only one,” he grinned.

“Ikaw talaga!” Gale laughed as she received Carlos’s rose. “Thank you, Carlos.”

“Anything for you,” he said as he looked at her fondly. “Always.” Gale knew that he meant what he had always told her, and she believed him. She felt lucky to have someone like Carlos vying for her affection. Sometimes she just wished that she weren’t

the lucky girl that he chose to sweep off her feet and save. Someone else deserved him, and it wasn't her.

Sounds of panting grew nearer. It was Lee, one of the batch's resident heartthrobs, coolly jogging his way toward Gale. He looked like a ramp model in his long-sleeved red polo and trademark boat shoes. "I found you, finally!" he said as he let out a sigh of relief. He inched closer to Gale until she could almost smell his perfume. "My Blue Rose is for you, Gale Rodriguez."

Several envious eyes silently scrutinized Gale who was sandwiched between two insanely goodlooking boys. Some girls nearby scoffed when they saw Gale accept Lee's Blue Rose.

Gale's knees went weak. It had always been difficult to resist Lee's alluring chinito charm. Lee always made her feel special, especially when he would publicly declare via *Twitter* and other social media accounts that he looked at no other girl but her. She felt an addicting, secret pride every time he carried her books and walked her to her next class, amidst all the Lee-lovers slash Gale-haters. She felt bad, too, knowing that there were girls who would want nothing more than to be in her position with Lee, just as she would with Jacob.

"T-thank you, Lee," Gale stammered. She was visibly self-conscious of the small distance between them and all the preying eyes. Lee seemed beyond satisfied and casually nodded at Carlos, who tried very hard to look like he wasn't jealous. But Carlos was very transparent, which made Lee feel like he'd already won. An awkward silence hung in the air as the two boys mentally sized up each other. Gale

didn't know what to do.

"Gale!" Aly called out from across the field.
"Emergency!"

Thank God! Gale thought.

"I'm sorry I have to—"

"No, go ahead!" the boys said in chorus.

"Thank you," Gale smiled sweetly at the two. They both flashed their best smiles at her in reply. Gale turned away and lightly sprinted toward Aly, who mouthed several "Sorrays" at the boys before ushering Gale out of their sight.

"What is it?" Gale asked as they passed by a bespectacled boy who looked like he was going to faint from confessing his feelings to a Fil-Am girl.

"You looked like you wanted to die. You'd better thank me," Aly laughed.

Gale knew it. She laughed along. "Actually, I was dying of kilig back there!" she said, her voice dreamy and her eyes bright with giddiness. "Except for the last bit when they were doing a stare down..."

It was no sooner that Marco, a Dean's Lister slash award-winning member of the *Ateneo Debate Society* walked up to her and gave her his Blue Rose, followed by none other than Daniel, her best college male friend.

As soon as Daniel momentarily left to buy them some shawarma, Gale noticed that Aly looked happier than her usual happy self. She saw that Aly was holding two roses—Aly did receive a rose after all. Gale looked at the roses in her own hand and became aware that she was holding six roses. She realized that she still hadn't given away her Blue Rose.

Panic crept up once again as Gale stalked the

crowd for Jacob. All around her, people were still giving away their roses. It wasn't too late.

Gale briskly walked around the field with Aly supportively trailing behind. Daniel would probably understand their sudden disappearance.

She overheard secrets being spilled and hearts being broken as she traversed one corner to the next.

"I loved you ever since..."

"I'm sorry but I..."

"I know you don't know me, but..."

"..."

She could feel cold sweat running down the length of her back. She then realized she had been everywhere but at the middle of the *Bellarmino Field*.

The smiling moon and the star above it beat down brightly at the center of the field. It was almost like a compass. Gale took slower, shorter strides as she made her way through the crowd with the spectacle above as her guide. Her hair was in disarray and her ballerina flats were dirtied, but it didn't matter. She waited long enough. In her mind, Jacob Tan was probably waiting for her, too.

Gale reached the heart of the field. Just as she imagined it, standing in front of her, a few meters away, was the Boy from the Court, her Prince Charming—Jacob Tan.

The cliché was true. Time stood still. Everyone around them faded away. It was exactly how the books and movies depicted two strangers standing across each other with their heart on their sleeves: they looked completely vulnerable, hopelessly hopeful, and perfectly alive.

They stared at each other for what seemed like the

shortest longest time, both with a Blue Rose clutched to their chests. Jacob gazed at her expectantly, his chinito eyes wide and lips slightly parted. Gale took a little step forward, and Jacob's lips curled upwards into a genuine, sheepish smile. Gale and Jacob smiled into each other's faces.

Jacob slowly took two steps forward, never taking his eyes off Gale. Gale's heart was out of sync. Every step towards her felt like a lifetime. Every step toward her felt like a dream come true. This moment—this was the moment Gale waited for her entire college life.

"Jacob!"

Their perfect moment crumbled too soon.

Evidently distracted, they turned to see who it was. A pretty girl with fair skin skipped her way towards Jacob, her skater skirt flowing in time to her long brown hair.

"Hi, Jacob!" she said in her sing-song, high-pitched voice.

"Hi," he said.

She giggled. "I saw your tweet," she continued as she smoothed the ends of her hair. "I'm Gushing Gaga, the author of *Coffee for Two*."

Gale was stunned. She couldn't believe what she just heard.

Jacob met Gale's eyes. He looked confused.

"Every me is for you, JAUT," the girl quoted as she handed him her Blue Rose.

Jacob looked down at her rose, then into her eyes. It took a few seconds before he took the rose from her hand. "Hi," he said again. "It's you." This time, he smiled.

Was this really happening?

“What the f*ck!” Aly said as she grabbed Gale by the arm. Gale forgot that Aly had been behind her the whole time. “Tell him that’s not true, Gale! Come on!” Aly tugged at her arm forcibly, dragging her toward Jacob.

Gale saw that they were already engaged in conversation. She couldn’t move.

“F*ck, Gale!” Aly hissed. “The lying b*tch wh*re’s stealing your identity! Do something!”

The more they laughed together, the more Gale died inside. That could’ve been her. That should’ve been her.

She watched how Jacob’s eyes sparkled, and knew that she couldn’t blame him. Of course, she should’ve thought ahead of time that anyone could walk up to him and claim that they were her. There was no evidence to prove or disprove it, except Aly. But if Gale walked up to them and invalidated the girl’s claim, she would make a scene. She would risk the girl looking stupid, and worse, herself looking desperate.

Gale looked at Aly miserably, and Aly knew. Aly held her hand tight. Gale saw that Aly was fighting back tears, and tried to control her own.

Then it happened. Jacob gave the girl his Blue Rose.

Fireworks exploded in the sky and everyone rejoiced at the glorious display of lights and sounds to cap off the Blue Roast. It was midnight: couples were kissing, strangers were holding hands, and Gale’s heart was broken beyond repair.

Gale took one last look at Jacob. She was caught

off guard when she saw that he was already looking at her as everyone else gaped at the sky. She held his gaze, shook her head, and walked away.



Gale, Aly, and Daniel spent the early hours of the morning at the rooftop of Daniel's condominium across Ateneo. Surrounded by pizza, chips, and a couple of beers, they lay down on blankets under the midnight sky.

"You should've seen that lying bitch whore, Daniel," Aly said as she sipped her *San Mig* beer. "If only I could pull out the strands of her hair one by one, and tear out her eyeballs, and cut out her evil tongue, and skin her alive..."

Gale and Daniel were laughing hysterically. Gale drank her very first beer, a *San Mig Light*, in one go. She was so red, and undeniably drunk.

"You're the only one I know who gets drunk over a single *San Mig Light*," Daniel said amusedly as he watched Gale hiccup and laugh uncontrollably. "How can you be so cute?"

"First time niya kasi!" Aly said in between bites of her *Yellow Cab* pizza. "Bakit ako, Danny? Hindi ba ako cute pag lasing?"

"I don't want to argue," Daniel joked as he expertly played his guitar and belted out *Alone by Heart* in his *sintunado* voice:

"You don't know how long I have waited and I was gonna tell you tonight

But the secret is still my own

And my love for you is still unknown

Alone"

"Shut up and just play!" Gale mocked as she

punched Daniel on the arm.

Without a care in the world, the three friends sang their hearts out:

*“Til now I always got by on my own
I never really cared until I met you
And now it chills me to the bone
How do I get you alone”*

Gale, Aly, and Daniel talked and laughed the night away. It was almost 2 am in the morning when they parted.

Gale and Aly ended up exchanging their Blue Roses in the end.

10

PROLOGUE

She eats adjectives for breakfast and digests Webster for lunch. She takes verbs for medicine and gulps them down with adverbs. She uses the finest pen for lipstick, and dresses like *Times New Roman*. She listens to Austen, Wilde, Tolstoy, Murakami, and Palahniuk, and sings enjambments, hyperboles, metaphors, and paradoxes. She spends a lot of time with Grammar, criticking run-on sentences, mixed constructions, and dangling modifiers. She thinks in sonnets, limericks, parables, and fairy tales. She flirts like a question mark in red ink. She loves the Boy from the Court. She dreams that they would get past the exposition and write their love story, because their story falls under fiction, for the Boy from the Court only sees She as a pronoun.

But before words and literature, She fell in love with him first. She inked her love for him in every keystroke, her personal love story as a basis on

which She typed her fan fiction, a chapter to a hundred-something pages long of mere soliloquy and emotional diarrhea—plotless—characters falling in love in secret, alone, sitting at coffee shops, never to have coffee for two.

Every morning She went to the local coffee shop, sat at her usual table at the backmost area, and ordered coffee for two.

Every night the Boy from the Court went to the local coffee shop, sat at his usual table at the backmost area, and ordered coffee for two.

There, in the local coffee shop, they waited for their love story to happen, only to return and wait there tomorrow, and the next night, and the next...

Too many words had been said, and unsaid.

This was their love story. And this was the end.

–*Coffee for Two*
by *Gushing Gaga*

Gale hit the Publish button. She sighed a mixture of exasperation and relief as she typed the last words of her fan fiction, *Coffee for Two*. She yawned.

It was a long day—she had hopped from one post-graduation party to the next, albeit unwillingly, with prior knowledge that parties of the kind meant booze, booze, booze. Since her first taste of beer during that ill-fated Blue Roast night, Gale swore she would never have any semblance of alcohol enter her bloodstream. If she needed her high, there was coffee. It didn't take long before she loved and embraced coffee as a necessity in her daily life.

It was beyond her bedtime; the caffeine was

wearing off. Drifting off to sleep, she thought of her own Boy from the Court, Jacob Tan.

She tried to remember how her universe was the day before she saw him. Untargeted by love's deranged arrows, her heart was just what it was ought to be—safe. Wasn't it amazing how everything in the universe had led her to him and him to her? But the universe could be cruel and play its cruel games, because as quickly as it could make people come, so could it quickly command people to go—playing with them like tangent lines that are meant to meet and then part forever.

Now that they graduated from the university, all hope of a love story with Jacob Tan was gone. There was no common ground. Gale pursued entrepreneurship—she dreamed of putting up her own coffee shop. Jacob Tan, on the other hand, pursued his career in professional basketball. Right after graduation, he immediately applied and was successfully drafted into the PBA or the *Philippine Basketball Association*.

With her *Wattpad* fan fiction's plot solely based on her near-encounters with Jacob Tan over the course of four college years, it made all sense to end it. She knew, though, that she wasn't being fair to her readers who eagerly waited for Gushing Gaga to write the chapter where She and the Boy from the Court would finally meet. But how could Gale write a beautiful ending if her own love story wasn't being fair to her?

Then I'm not a real writer, she thought, because real writers can separate their personal lives from their work.

But how could she? For four years, all Gale wrote

about was her feelings for Jacob Tan. For four years, she immersed herself in the beauty of the English language because she loved reliving all the feelings she had for him in beautiful prose in every chapter she had written.

Now, the story was over and it was online for the entire world to see. If there was any consolation to all this, she thought, it would be that Gushing Gaga was still a mystery—even to Jacob Tan. Gale found out that there wasn't only one, but many lying b*tch wh*res who walked up to Jacob Tan that night claiming they were her. She laughed at the absurdity of it. She always wondered how Jacob handled that night.

That night, Gale slept too much. And dreamt too much. Dreaming got tiring so she decided to wake up.

Gale awoke the next day feeling like a different person. Fresh out of college, she felt like a real grown-up—confused but ready for the world. And for the first time in her life since knowing Jacob Tan, she felt a drought in her words and feelings. Was she finally able to unfeel everything? No, unfeeling was impossible. But she knew that creating new memories to replace old ones in the hopes of eventually forgetting wasn't, though it would take time. Gale was still young, and her life was just beginning. She had much of her adult life to forget.

Maybe she would cross paths with him again sometime, somewhere, somehow, but for now she was thankful she knew him, and she hoped life would treat him well. Because maybe, she thought, maybe this chapter of her life—this ending—was not an epilogue, but a prologue to something new.