

GERTRUDE



Gertrude was the executive secretary in our office. She had looks and smarts that could have made her win in prestigious beauty contests had she tried joining.

She was already there before the company hired me as IT personnel. We talked with each other very often for even if it was not included in my job description I would encode all letters and other documents for our boss. It was supposed to be Gertrude's job but she would come to my cubicle to ask for assistance. With her charm and sweetness it was so difficult to say no.

I could not forget the first time she asked me a favor. I was working on my desk doing some paperwork when she came to ask if I could encode the report that our boss asked her to finish. While we were talking she stooped so close to me that her breast was pressed against my left shoulder. I could smell her scent. I saw how her lips moved. When I said I would do it, to my surprise, she kissed her lips against my cheek. She smiled at me before leaving.

Since then she became a regular visitor in my cubicle we talked often and admittedly I wanted to see her all the time. I noticed though that while I craved for her presence, the other gentlemen in the office seemed to be ignoring her. Some were even obviously avoiding her.

Questions propped out in my mind. Was Gertrude a thorn in their flesh? That could be unlikely. Gertrude's seemingly sweet and friendly. Could it be that they consider her too dominating to handle? Or they were spurned suitors of Gertrude? Her relationship with the women in the office was just normal except for some who were obviously envious lady officemates who grudgingly could not accept being second fiddle to Gertrude's wit and beauty.

The very nature of our jobs drew Gertrude and I closer together, it practically made us inseparable. After barely a week together, I realized that I like Gertrude. Admittedly, I have fallen to her charms. It was not an ordinary admiration I had for her, it was love.

I was pretty certain at that time that I was in love with Gertrude. Every single moment she was in mind, my longing for her grew stronger each day. It was almost a year since my previous lover left for abroad to pursue a lucrative career in medicine. Not a word from her since then. It was high time for me to have another relationship, and what an opportune time it was.

Braving the great hesitation and fear of being turned down, I invited Gertrude to dinner in my apartment that Friday. Lady luck smiled at me for without second thoughts, she accepted my invitation.

Into my apartment, we went for a dinner that night. Just the two of us. I was surprised with what seemed to be a good chemistry between us. It was as if we have been together for so long. She volunteered to cook and fix everything for dinner telling me just to sit down and relax. I politely declined reiterating that I was the host. But she insisted. Like a king she escorted me to the sala and told me just to wait while she struts her wares in the kitchen.

Admittedly, I started imagining things. What else will I think, how else would I feel, I have under my roof, right in my turf, a lovely lady, and it's just the two of us. I was not a saint. However, I did not intend to be presumptuous. Not because she accepted my invitation for dinner that I should think she liked me. Nevertheless, I thought it would be very fine should she end up liking me. I really liked her very much. And with me getting older I thought I needed to settle down and raise a family. I thought she would be a perfect wife and hopefully a good mother too. I promised myself that just in case, she would be the last woman I would love.

While dining, we started intruding into each other's private lives. Gertrude revealed to me many things. Her family, educational attainment, likes and dislikes – she told me everything. Her being the sole bread winner in the family, her being highly-liberated a woman and how she was misunderstood for being so, her being ardently wooed by our boss, and her break-up with her 12th boyfriend. That did not surprise me, I even welcomed the idea of becoming the 13th man in her life. Anyway, I have had just as many relationships.

We went to the sala after the sumptuous dinner. She uncorked the brandy she brought for the occasion. I admitted to her that I could consume only half a glass of that wine stressing my having an allergy to the substance. Gertrude told me that she would have the rest.

No doubt, she was a drinker for while I would slowly sipped the half-a glass wine, she could gulped down as much so easily. When the bottle became half-empty, her skin turned beautifully red and all the more that her eyes became tantalizing. I resolved that before she gets drunk I would reveal to her my feelings. I braved all hesitations. I thought she may not like what I would be doing.

After a while, with the courage summoned from the highest of heavens I sat down right beside her. I held her right hand and pressed it gently. She looked at me. I was about to tell her of my feelings, when suddenly she held me by the neck and kissed me in the lips. It was pleasant surprise. I got a little rattled with the turn of events. Then she kissed me again and wouldn't let go of my lips.

When I woke up that Saturday morning, she was no longer in bed, she was nowhere in the house to be found. Several questions ran in my mind. Why didn't she wake me up? Why didn't she leave a note? Gertrude was gone. I wanted to call her but I forgot to secure her mobile number, not even her address.

Back to the bed I went. Then I remembered that Friday night. How I wished that I could have those passionate moments frozen in time and let it burn throughout eternity.

It was the first working day the following week. Waiting for Gertrude made me anxious and excited. I was so distracted that morning that I could not seem to focus on the program the Boss asked me to complete that day. I kept on looking at the front door of our office waiting for her to enter. I was missing her terribly. Such a thing happened to me for the first time. I have had several girlfriends before and none of them made me feel the way Gertrude did. She was driving me nuts.

Noontime. I was having lunch at the canteen when two of my officemates came and had a chat with me. They first apologized for they told me they would unnecessarily intrude in to the privacy of my life. When I told them I wouldn't mind, they started to open up. They told me terrible things about Gertrude. That she was a "gold digging whore" was the bottom-line of the invectives they were throwing against the woman I just installed in the apex of adoration. That, according to them, was the very reason that men in the office were avoiding Gertrude. The angelic charm she had was her weapon to lure unsuspecting prey into her demonic schemes – that both of them became "willing victims" too – and that she and our Boss were having an affair.

I was so bewildered with what my officemates said. I refused to accept it.

I stayed glued on my seat in utter disbelief. Was Gertrude really a "gold-digging whore"? I wanted to think that my officemates were just "sour grapping." Perhaps they were the spurned suitors I thought of. Were they just jealous of me so they were trying to say bad things about my girl.

When I went back to the office, there was Gertrude sitting on my chair. Whatever doubts I had in mind disappeared when she lovingly smiled and help me tightly by the hand. A reluctant "hello" was all I could utter. She left my chair without a response, only the naughty gaze and smile. Then I noticed the a message on my monitor; "I love you dear. I'll be in your apartment at 9:00 tonight."

My officemates' revelations were buried in oblivion. I threw all cautions to the air and looked forward to another "night of passion" with my beloved Gertrude.

Indeed, we shared that night drowned in the quicksand of passion.

Gertrude was perhaps so exhausted that night for while I was still awake she was already past asleep. Even with her eyes closed, she still looked very lovely. She was there in my bed, lying without anything on. I really would like her to be my wife. I wouldn't let go of Gertrude anymore. I would do everything to convince her to marry me.

She was there seated just beside me when I woke up the following day. I gently held her hand. She looked at me. The usual glow in her eyes was conspicuously absent. Obviously, something was bothering her. She was hesitant to inform me about it but I insisted.

Gertrude asked if I could lend her P10, 000, for the overdue monthly payment for their family's housing loan. Despite my officemates' warning still perilously hanging in my mind like Damocles' sword, I gave Gertrude my ATM card. I still had P11, 000.00 in that account. My instruction was for her to withdraw all the amount for I was already closing that ATM account.

She was visibly happy. She promised to pay at the end of the month but I told her not to bother, that I would feel insulted should she return the money. She embraced me tightly after hearing that.

Though exhausted, I worked all day with so much enthusiasm. Gertrude did not report to office that day. I thought that she was perhaps busy attending to her problems.

The following day, she came to the office wearing a "micro mini." I saw how the gentlemen in the office looked at her lustfully. She used to do that but that day I felt irritated. But what was I supposed to do. Gertrude lovingly touched my cheek when she passed by my table. Then she entered into our Boss' office.

She perhaps noticed my disagreement for her attire. I intended to talk to her about the matter but she did not come out for break time, not even for lunch. I thought that perhaps the Boss asked her to do a lot of things. Jealousy crept slowly into my system especially when I saw a delivery boy bringing into the office a box of Pizza pie and bottles of drinks. The company cashier brought it into the boss' office.

Gertrude came out only 15 minutes before the close of office hours. I asked if I could bring her home but she just handed me a note telling me that we will just see each other on Saturday night in my apartment. She left hurriedly.

Gertrude did not appear in the office from Thursday to Friday. According to an officemate she accompanied the Boss to a conference in Cebu. I was terribly jealous. Negative thoughts about them tormented me no end. I tried to dismiss those silly thoughts and just consoled myself with the fact that we would be seeing each other that Saturday. After some very serious thoughts, I resolved that I would ask her to marry me.

The most awaited Saturday came. Before lunch time, I decided to go to a nearby mall while waiting for nightfall. At a jewelry emporium, I saw a diamond ring. The gem seemed so perfectly cut and masterfully mounted on that equally gorgeous ring. The diamond was like Gertrude's angelic face delicately mounted on so curvaceous a body that's painstakingly whittled into perfection by a master sculptor.

The diamond was very expensive but for Gertrude I would give anything – even my own life. That much I loved her. I used my credit card to buy what would be the ring that will symbolize her commitment to me. These things I have never done to any woman with who I have had relationships. I had never been so affected by a woman, had never longed for the presence and attention of someone. I didn't know what's with Gertrude that made madly in love.

Then Saturday came. I decided to watch a movie. It was 2:00 in the afternoon, only few moviegoers were inside. The uppermost part of the balcony was my favorite section. It was not the movie that first caught my attention but a man and a woman seated right on my lower front. It was a torrid kissing and petting that I accidentally saw. I noticed that some of the other moviegoers were watching not the movie but the scandalous act unfolding before their eyes. No longer was I "culture-shocked," that was just an ordinary thing inside movie houses. But what those two were doing was too much. Society has indeed become too permissive. I just concentrated on the movie but would look at the "kissing couple" once in a while. How I wished that Gertrude was with me.

Several moment passed. Sensing perhaps that the movie was drawing to an end the couple stopped kissing and had themselves fixed. The lights went on. The man stood and walked towards the rest room. I recognized the man. He was our Boss. So they already arrived, I would definitely be seeing Gertrude that night. I got pretty excited.

An officemate informed me once that our Boss was a happily married man. Could the woman be his wife? But only insensible husbands would do such a thing to their wives in such a place. Out of curiosity, I bent forward and looked at the woman. Then I had the greatest shock in my life... that woman was GERTRUDE!!! She could not be Gertrude. I might have thought too much of Gertrude that her beautiful face got permanently etched in my mind so much so that whenever I looked at lovely faces I would think that it was her. I called her name just to make sure. She looked back. Yes, it was Gertrude, the woman who swore only a few nights back that I would be the only man in her life from then on. The woman I loved and worshipped, was the woman I saw torridly kissing another man. The woman whom I wanted to marry was indeed a gold-digging whore.

I was so bewildered and dumbfounded. Those moments were the most difficult times in my life. Why at that time that I intended to be serious with a woman and was even thinking of marriage? Never have I felt so betrayed and so confused. I remembered making fun with my past relationships, I did not really considered love a serious matter in the past. Could this be what others call "karma"? I have finally met my match. I struggled to maintain my composure. Blood started to surge to my head. So angry have I become, and who wouldn't be. But before I could have committed an act I might have regretted, I stood up and left the equally bewildered and dumbfounded Gertrude.

I embarked in a journey of contemplation as I walked aimlessly in the mall. If only I had given my officemates the slightest benefit of the doubts? For the first time that my heart experienced true love and Gertrude responded with unfaithfulness. Society taught me that only the men were capable of committing such an act of infidelity. Gertrude proved me wrong. Beasts abound in both the masculine and feminine genders.

From my pocket, I brought out the ring for Gertrude. "Diamond is forever" but Gertrude's love was not. The diamond in the ring was real but Gertrude was fake. So easy to get, and yes, easy to lose. But just like the diamond ring, Gertrude was expensive. I have spent not just money but so much emotions.

Before going back home, I dropped by the department store and bought several cans of beer.

- *madligaya*