

Working Title: "**See You Babe**" (Short)

Author: Carl Velasco

Batch 25 Group 4

"The other never waits. Sometimes I want to play the part of the one who doesn't wait; I try to busy myself elsewhere, to arrive late; but I always lose at this game: whatever I do, I find myself there, with nothing to do, punctual, even ahead of time. The lover's fatal identity is precisely: I am the one who waits."

Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*

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Stephen can't wait. Darating siya sa napaka-posh at eleganteng mansion ng boyfriend niya far from the city. They're supposed to spend several weeks together, totally alone and away from everyone. It's something na 'di na nila nagagawa lately, kasi his boyfriend is a big-shot movie star na laging busy, and, more importantly, hindi out of the closet. Everything in secret; the kind of love that comes with precautions.

Tagal nang naka-plan nito. Sobrang excited si Stephen. Instructions sa kanya ay, *Stay at the house and wait until I come. See you, babe.*

The mansion? Grabe – sa laki nito, para siyang alikabok. Sobrang opulent at sosyal. Wide-eyed si Stephen sa lahat ng makikita, parang nasa amusement park, lahat gusto i-try. Bawat sulok pupuntahan, totally charmed. In the years they've been together, he's never been here. They're always in hotels or Airbnbs. In general, places that expire. Also, his boyfriend isn't the kind of person na kung sino-sino lang ang dinadala sa bahay niya, so him being there is a big deal. Although instructions sa kanya ay, *Try not to touch anything, and you can stay in the guest room downstairs.*

Stephen tries to make the guest room homey. He cuts flowers from the garden and puts it in the vase, that kind of nesting. Mapapangiti siya habang ini-imagine ang kanilang mga gagawin, free and alone at last. But for now, he waits.

Magpapakasasa si Stephen na para bang isang bata na nakawala sa candy store. *Richie Rich* at *Home Alone* ang peg. Iba-blast ang kanyang music at magfe-feeling royalty sa loob ng mansyon, para bang nasa isang music video. At since boyfriend niya naman, papakielaman niya lahat. It's fun.

His boyfriend calls: In just 24 hours daw, darating na siya. Thrilled, mamimili si Stephen ng groceries para makapaghanda ng bonggang dinner. Then a day passes. The boyfriend doesn't arrive. Hindi naman na ito shocking; his boyfriend is almost always delayed. He calls. Tama nga: May mga biglaang snafus daw sa shooting, so he can't come home yet. Siguro mga isang week pa. Kahit disappointed, Stephen asks if it's better for him to go back home and for them to just reschedule – he's adaptable like that. Pero instructions sa kanya ay, *Just wait for me. See you, babe.*

With another week to go, being alone suddenly doesn't seem as fun. To cure his boredom, Stephen decides to clean. As in lilinisin niya 'yung mansyon. Para lang may magawa siyang useful. Sa storage room kung saan nakatago ang mga cleaning equipment, he spots a box marked, *to be thrown out*. Sa loob nito, may nakasiksik na framed picture by Carolyne Drake. Isang isda na almost sardinas na sa liit ng aquarium niya. May tubig, pero kulang, just enough for it to breathe. He doesn't know why, but he takes it to the guest room and hangs it.

Habang naglilinis ay mapapansin niya na halos walang items sa loob ng bahay na personal. As in, walang photo albums, or journals, or even vinyl records. 'Yung mga bagay na may istorya kung bakit andon; objects with history and identity. As beautiful as it is, para bang model home ang mansyon ni boyfie.

Dahil wala pa ring magawa, papanoorin niya 'yung movies ng boyfriend niya, at magseselos sa mga kapareha nitong babae. He'll imagine it's him being kissed. Being chased. Being desired. Being loved out in the open. And then he'll fall asleep alone. Way, way before pa, instructions sa kanya ay, *This has to be a secret.*

A week passes by. Finally, darating na rin si boyfriend. Stephen is thrilled. But then he calls again. Says sorry. May delays na naman, and now he's not sure when he'll make it.

Stephen heads out for a run, to let his frustrations thaw. He meets a fellow runner, Angelo, and they introduce themselves and hit it off. Angelo invites him to his place. Missing company, Stephen says yes. The night falls on them like a lukewarm blanket, and their conversations turn cozy. Stephen tells him his situationship, leaving out names.

Angelo, ever the troublemaker, thinks of something: What if they pretend, just for one night, that's he's the boyfriend?

Stephen dismisses the idea. Anong kabaliwan 'yan? But then he relents, because tuwing kelan ba na may ma-meet kang stranger willing to roleplay

with you just for shits and giggles? Stephen is mesmerized by the twisted whimsicality of it. So, they roleplay. And it's elaborate. Stephen actually finds Angelo's commitment unsettling: The minute he steps inside the mansion, he's in character. He is the boyfriend, through and through.

They have dinner. Angelo (as the boyfriend) tells him affirmations: I love you. I've missed you. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. I'm sorry for always making you the one who waits. Hard to believe, but it's the most loved Stephen has felt lately. They go to bed together, lulling themselves to sleep with silly stories. Amazingly, Angelo is still playing the boyfriend.

The next morning, Stephen's actual boyfriend calls. This time, he says he'll be delayed for two more weeks because something unexpected came up. He doesn't elaborate. Instructions sa kanya ay, *Can you wait a little longer for me?*

Stephen tells Angelo this. And Angelo suddenly has an idea: They should just run away together. Figures. Match naman sila. May mutual understanding, medyo malalim na kahit kaka-meet pa lang nila. Maybe this thing with Angelo could work. And he's not a movie star, just a regular guy. He'll always be there. *Let's run away*, says Angelo. *I'll go get my car*. Stephen decides to run away with Angelo. Wheeling his luggage and about to leave, magagawi ang tingin ni Stephen sa framed photograph ng fish. He stares. And stares. And stares. Then he leaves the mansion. But he doesn't wait for Angelo to arrive.

He rides a tricycle. Nakasakay siya sa likod ni mamang driver. And sa loob ng tricycle, the fish sits, being whisked away. Once waiting inside the storage room, it's now out in the open.

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