



A DANCE OF ONE

by: KRISTINE NICOLLE SANTIAGO

As she sent the message, she felt a sense of freedom. It felt like a bunch of weight was lifted off her shoulders. She wasn't sad, nor was she feeling any regret. She was just... finally happy again.

October 2023 marked the beginning of their story. Initially just acquaintances sharing the same social circle, they grew closer over the next two months, with him pursuing her as a romantic interest. Indigo, typically reserved and solitary, surprised herself by forming a friendship with him. Having been focused on personal healing, she hadn't envisioned another relationship. In contrast, Gavin was outgoing and easily made friends.

They were opposites from the start.

When Indigo found out Gavin liked her, she tried to push him away. She was scared she needed more time to heal herself. She always thought you couldn't love someone else until you loved yourself first. From September to November, she tried to keep Gavin at arm's length. Even though they hung out, she tried to put some distance between them. But Gavin was really into her. He did stuff for her, listened to her, and always wanted to hang out, even though he lived far away. Seeing how determined he was, Indigo started to wonder if she was overthinking things. Maybe he could be different from her last boyfriend. Slowly, she started to let him in and warm up to him.

The hike up Mount Ulap showed Indigo just how much Gavin cared. She'd forgotten to do laundry and didn't have any warm clothes, but Gavin said not to worry, he'd take care of it. He kept an eye on her the whole hike, making sure she was okay. After walking nine tiring kilometers, Indigo, a city girl, started to feel sick. By the next day, she had a high fever and could barely stand. That's when Gavin texted her, saying he was on his way over to take care of her.

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"Wow, the effort," Indigo thought to herself

Indigo was usually the one taking care of everyone else, so she was surprised when Gavin just showed up to look after her. He stayed the night, making sure she was comfy and her fever was going down. He kept putting a cold cloth on her forehead and tucking her in. Seeing how much effort he put in after she'd been pushing him away made her heart melt. She started wondering what she'd miss out on if she didn't let him in. Slowly, she let him get closer, but because they were friends, they kept it a secret. One night, they told their whole group what was going on. From September to December, Gavin was always there for her. He took care of her, made sure she was okay, and always tried to make her feel comfortable.

Indigo had to go back to her province for the holidays, right after Christmas. It was a bummer, but she had to. The day after Christmas, while she was there, Gavin asked her to be his girlfriend. He did it over chat, which was kind of weird, but still sweet. After thinking about it, she said yes. He'd been so good to her, and she figured, why not give it a shot?

Two months later, in February, everything went downhill. They had this huge fight. Gavin read her private messages on her phone. She was so mad. It felt like a total invasion of privacy.

Even though she was upset she still tried talking to him about it but he refused. That was the first red flag but Indigo let it slide.

Their friends had no clue about their big fight. They'd promised each other to sort things out on their own, you know, the whole 'adulting' thing. For a while, things were okay. Like, really okay. But then Indigo started to notice something was off. Gavin wasn't his usual chatty self. He'd get quiet, like a storm cloud. And when she'd ask what was wrong, he'd just smile and say, "Wala, okay lang ako." But she knew better. It was like pulling teeth to get anything out of him.

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Indigo felt like she was always the one fixing their problems. It was exhausting. She'd end up begging him to talk, saying stuff like, "Sige na, please. Usap tayo." But he'd just nod and change the topic. It was like he didn't trust her enough to tell her what was bothering him.

Things were okay for a while. Like, they were good. They'd go out, watch movies, and just hang out. But there were still those little bumps in the road. Arguments about the smallest things, and Gavin would clam up again. Indigo was starting to get tired of being the only one trying to fix things.

Then May happened. It was like a bomb went off. She found messages between him and another girl. Her heart sank. She knew she had to talk to him, but she was scared. When she finally did, he got defensive. "She's just a friend," he said. "I've always been close to girls." Another red flag. But she didn't want to make things worse, so she just let it go.

She decided to turn the tables on him. "What if I was the one with the messages? What would you do?" She asked. He just stared at her, like a deer caught in headlights. She knew she had a point. "You don't have to stop talking to them," she said, "but you need to know your limits. Respect me, and respect our relationship."

This was already too much for Indigo but since she loved Gavin she constantly tried to understand him and even though she was still upset she let it go again.

Indigo was tired. Really tired. She was tired of being the strong one, the one who always had to understand, to forgive. She loved him, she really did. All the memories they made, the laughter, the little things – they were all starting to blur. It was like watching a favorite movie, but the ending was getting worse and worse.

Gavin was changing. The guy she fell for was sweet, and attentive, and made her feel special. Now, it felt like he was taking her for granted. Every try to talk about how she felt was like throwing stones into a lake – they'd make ripples, but nothing more. It was like he was waiting for her to give up.

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Indigo had always prided herself on her rationality. She weighed options, calculated risks, and made decisions with a cool, collected mind. But with Gavin, logic seemed to take a backseat. Her heart, a part of her she usually kept tightly reined, was now the one steering the ship. She clung to hope, a stubborn passenger refusing to disembark. She knew, intellectually, that this was a storm brewing, but the possibility of calm waters ahead kept her from jumping ship.

Summer break came around and Indigo headed back to her province. The quiet of the countryside gave her space to think. Her head was starting to win the battle against her heart. Every time she tried to justify staying with Gavin, a new doubt would pop up. She was tired of fighting for scraps of a relationship.

They had another big fight. This time, she was desperate. She begged him for his time, for his attention. It was embarrassing, but she was drowning and he was her only lifeboat. But then she found out he was still talking to that girl. Her heart shattered into a million pieces. She was done. She tried to talk to him one last time. But he just shut down. It was the final straw.

Indigo was putting on a brave face when Gavin picked her up from the terminal. She was tired of pretending everything was okay. She was tired of being the strong one. The next few days were a blur. Gavin would come over, but it was like he was just there to occupy space. No conversations, no effort. Just sleep.

Alone, she had time to think. To think. She realized she'd been carrying the weight of their relationship on her shoulders for too long. It was like carrying a balikbayan box filled with rocks. It was exhausting.

One morning, the cold air seemed to clear her head. Enough was enough. She typed out the message, her fingers trembling slightly. It was over. Eight months of hoping, of trying, of loving. It was done. With a deep breath, she hit send. It was scary, but it was freeing.

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The moment she hit send, she felt like there was a weight that was lifted off her shoulders. She wasn't sad, nor did she regret ending things between them.

Their relationship was like climbing Mount Ulap. At the start, the ascent was steep, symbolizing the initial challenges of understanding each other. The rocky terrain represented the arguments and misunderstandings that tested their bond. Indigo, always the caretaker, sacrificed her comfort and happiness, much like enduring the harsh elements of the climb.

They had reached a plateau, a point where they thought they'd conquered the mountain. It was as if they'd reached the summit of their relationship, a breathtaking view of what could be. But unlike the real summit, their view was clouded by mistrust and miscommunication. The foggy conditions that often veiled the mountain peak mirrored the uncertainty that lingered between them.

They were both bruised and weary. The journey, once filled with hope and promise, had become a grueling trek through unfamiliar territory. In the end, despite their efforts, they never truly conquered the mountain. The breathtaking view that should have been their reward remained elusive, hidden behind a persistent fog of their own making.

Indigo sat by the window, the soft glow of the setting sun casting long shadows across her room. The balmy breeze carried the scent of the nearby pandan trees, reminiscent of her childhood in the province. It was a scent that always reminded her of simpler times, of the vibrant fiestas and the rhythmic beat of the kulintang that seemed to echo her heartbeat. But now, that heartbeat was heavy, laden with the weight of a decision she knew she had to make.

For as long as she could remember, Indigo had prided herself on her logical thinking. It was a trait she inherited from her Lola, who always used to say, "Ang isip ay gabay ng puso,"—the mind guides the heart. Guided by this, Indigo knew that staying in her current situation was like holding a double-edged sword and pretending it wasn't hurting her. The pain was real, and she could no longer ignore the wounds it was inflicting on her spirit.

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She reflected on the many challenges she had faced in her life. Like the resilient bamboo that bends but does not break. She knew that if she stayed with him, she would be broken down to a point where she might return to a place she never wanted to see herself in again—a place of doubt and self-loathing.

Indigo took a deep breath, the scent of the pandan leaves grounding her. She knew that ending things with him was the best for both of them. It was not just an act of self-preservation but also an act of love, for he too deserved to find his path to happiness.

Indigo had been working hard to build confidence and self-love. She valued herself as much as the beautiful, handmade fabrics of her culture. Each piece was special, carefully made with skill and care. Indigo felt like a unique blend of experiences, dreams, and goals. She knew what she wanted. As the sun began to set, she stood tall, feeling strong and ready. She was excited to start a new day where she could keep growing, thriving, and being true to herself – a wise, strong woman who loved herself.

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