

Karinderya Love Songs Excerpt [Chapter 1]

I knew I had a problem when I couldn't have sex with the first person I met on Bumble.

My bio fired a two-line pun that I first tested with friends, and they laughed, with eyes rolling, sure, but they still laughed so it must be funny somehow. Profile icons said I was a runner, drinker, reader, and a big-time Avicii (bless his soul) and Joji stan. But she ignored those and opened with a hello GIF instead. Maybe reading bios takes too much effort. GIF hellos are so typical.

But unless you're super hot that your selfies go viral, you must make an effort in dating apps. So I scrolled through her profile, read her bio ("*I don't know why I'm here XD*"), and squeezed my creativity for a conversation opener. I was lucky. Unlike most bikini girls on Bumble, her photos were artsier. There was something to comment on.

I eyed her third photo: A retro-styled selfie taken from a film camera or an app that simulates the effect. She flourished an oversized shirt, maybe Uniqlo or some niche-designed H&M, thick-rimmed glasses, and fashionable, wavy-messy hair. She looked handsome but feminine. I browsed her other photos, all portraying a collegiate, maybe sophomore, vibe. And well-off. A kid who can afford to be drip without slaving for some corporation.

Nice retro photos, I chatted. Thanks, she said. Inspiration? I asked. Chungking Express, she replied. We chatted photography for a bit, then movies, then music; swapping guilty pleasure songs on Spotify. We swapped pronouns too ("they/ them").

Then I mentioned something that got them curious, said my app notifications are off so I might not see their chats, and suggested they message me here instead: +63 945145xxxx – easier. Smile emoji. They texted my number and we moved our chat outside the app.

"There's this new, indie cafe in *Maginhawa*," I said later. "Wanna check it out?"

"Sure."

So we met around seven, the following evening. We sipped overpriced lattes, signed small business petitions, then hopped to a sports bar for beers after an hour. Three bottles later, at a little past ten, we snuck into the UP-Diliman campus and strolled the Academic Oval: a 2.3-kilometer road loop of joggers, bikers, lovers, and loners.

It was a pretty night. Quiet, after an evening of moderate rain. Orange street lamps shone against the pavement. Trees swayed along the sidewalk. A handful of drones blinked above, dotting the clear, star-less sky.

For a moment, you'd think Metro Manila isn't so bad and humid after all.

Beyond the Vargas Hall, there's a huge tree. They and I hid behind it and kissed. I kissed a bit harder. They kissed harder back. I dialed up, little by little, like a music volume. They sang as high as I dialed.

We took a cab in Katipunan and headed for my condo.

But we couldn't do it. My penis stood hard, and I'd put on a condom and it would deflate like a sad balloon. I figured the condom desensitized me. I asked their body count (two, both are exes) and figured they probably had no STDs.

So we kissed, teased, prolonged our foreplay. Then I threw the condom on the floor, all dramatic-like, and growled, "I want to do you raw," with intense, unsmiling eyes. Like how a billionaire or a vampire or a Korean doctor might do in women's erotic fiction.

They were silent. Then they said yes.

Condom off, I got hard again and got inside them and we had sex. But two minutes in and I'm soft again. I was angry. I wished my rage flowed to my penis instead. But all the hot, raging blood boiled in my head and ignored my shrinking dick.

I stopped and lay beside them. They didn't ask what was wrong. They seemed intuitive that way. We grabbed some beers from the fridge and talked about constellations for the rest of the night. Maybe I'm just tired, I thought. No big deal, happens to everyone.

We had a second date, a third, then a fourth. Every date ended in my condo, in my bed. In my failure. They never complained and they continued to see me. But I felt concerned.

I considered whether they didn't turn me on enough? But they stepped out of the shower wearing only my shirt and I quickly crossed that out. Maybe I'm not sleeping

enough? Eating healthy? But I ate better and slept more after our disastrous first night. So I crossed those out too.

It wasn't them. It wasn't my health. I had one more item on the list. But I wanted to be one hundred percent sure.

I googled and found that doctors who treat penis problems are called "andrologists," but I couldn't find any andrologists nearby. Urologists treat those problems too, and I know a couple of clinics in Loyola Heights, where I lived. But I don't want to bump into my urologist while shopping for groceries or eating fried chicken at a 7-11.

So I took the train, stepped out at Anonas station, and slipped into a clinic in World Citi Med. A soft-spoken, discreet-looking male assistant accommodated me. A couple of patients were there, all men, mostly middle-aged. No one spoke.

The assistant asked me to fill out a couple of forms. For the "purpose of visit," I wrote, "Potential Erectile Dysfunction." I handed the form to the assistant.

"YOU'RE ONLY 23?!" The assistant screamed.

He didn't actually scream. But everyone spoke in hushed tones; a normal voice might as well have been a scream. The assistant asked again, more discreetly, if I really was 23 years old. It was January 2020; I was born August 1996.

Were 23-year-olds with erection problems not that common after all? I expected (and hoped) the assistant would take my case like it is business as usual. Yeah, sure, we get 23-year-olds here all the time, some even younger. But I guess not.

The assistant studied my form in a daze. Then he said, "A different urologist is in right now. But I suggest you see Doctor Elizarde."

"Why is that?"

"Doc Eli is... more considerate of younger patients. He'll be in at two later this afternoon."

I nodded. "I wouldn't have to line up again later, would I?"

"No. But don't be late."

"I won't be late. Thanks."

I met Doctor Elizarde at 1:59 pm. The assistant kept his word and ushered me immediately into the doctor's clinic.

Doc Eli is in his early forties and looked like he'd seen and heard all the bullshit in the world. An infinite number of lines were carved against his forehead as if counting each time a man lied to him about their reproductive organs.

I recounted my story: Met someone on Bumble, tried to have sex with them several times but I couldn't keep it hard –

“It won't go up?”

“No, doc. It would go up and get hard. But in the middle of the act, it keeps getting soft.”

He nodded. Then in a delicate voice betraying his skeptical manner, he asked if they were *really* my type. I showed him a photo from my phone; a full-body photo a bar server took of us on our fourth date.

“Huh. Nice legs. Pretty too.”

Doc Eli asked if I had a health card. I said I did. He called his assistant, gave him a list of tests, swiped my health card, and sent me off. I took the tests, went home, and returned in three days.

“You are very healthy,” Doc Eli proclaimed.

I nodded.

“I need to know this to be sure. It's for your own safety. Do you use any substances? For recreation? This is not an official question.”

I shook my head. I don't even smoke weed, I said.

Doc Eli clicked his tongue. “It's common for people to hit something at parties or clubs. So it helps to pop a bluey now and then. It happens more often than you think.”

I politely insisted I don't get high or go on mushroom or acid trips. “I tried, some time ago. But only once.” I paused. “What does ‘popping a bluey’ mean?”

“In some countries, the blue pill Viagra can be bought over the counter,” he explained. “That isn't legal here. So people order Viagra from Shopee instead.”

The doc shook his head. "I don't recommend buying meds online. Too risky. Go to a doctor and get a prescription. If the urologist is judgmental, go find another. Pick a rock, throw it at any hospital, and you'll hit a urologist somewhere."

He wrote a Viagra prescription to help me "get the momentum going." 4 pcs Viagra, 50mg, take ONE pill only, 1-hour before intercourse, the prescription said. He wrote it legibly, he said, so I'd understand. Then, if I still had trouble after four, separate, bluey-enhanced sessions, I can return.

"But your tests are clear," he concluded. "Your problem is *psychological*."

I nodded. I wasn't surprised. Doc Eli looked like he was going to say more. So I waited.

"Non-casual sex between couples nowadays is all about the woman's pleasure," the doc started.

"Men have to be great lovers, experts in women's bodies and fantasies, always unpredictable and long-lasting. Or they'll get cuckolded and accused of *neglect*. So if you want to get what you want, you have to pay for it."

He sighed. "We always pay for what we want. That's why we're so obsessed with money."

The doc scribbled a separate note. An address and a phone number. His wedding band shone as he handed the note and prescription. "I'm not going to pretend I'm a saint. But this place helped me when I had... psychological problems."

I nodded solemnly. "Thank you very much, doctor."