



### Abstract

I wanted to explore the parameters of bisexual and polyamorous relationships in this piece, the romantic as well as the sexual. The pandemic served as a backdrop to how these unique relationships might continue; the reality of forced distance and forced proximity. In the end, love is truly infinite.

### Keywords

Bisexuality,  
polyamory,  
LGBTQ literature,  
pandemic,  
lockdown

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# EXCEPTIONS

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**THE PROPOSAL HAD** shocked Cine. She and Gianni had been dating for two years already, but they had only seen each other six times since meeting on a week-long trip to Siargao. The atmosphere of the island encouraged cross-cultural relations and Cine's companion slash "casual" girlfriend of six months Ella had been into mingling with the white guys. Cine never imagined becoming so attached to any of the dudes that were practically begging for one-night stands from the sun-kissed Filipinas. Gianni, however, ended up being an exception and kept her admittedly short attention span for men. He was half-Italian who grew up in the UK which meant he could tan without going red. He seemed genuinely interested in their conversations. Of course, he had an accent; one that he insisted wasn't of the London variety.

"I'm from Devon," he proudly declared. "Plymouth born and raised." Cine had nodded, half-drunk and not having a single clue what it meant. What mattered at the time was Gianni's dark curls that fell over his eyes and whether he would eat her out that night (he did). Ella had looked on at

them with amusement, preoccupied with some sunburnt “mate” who was desperate to be doing as well as his friends. She ended up turning him down, giving Cine a silent eyebrow nod that signified she could do what she wanted with Gianni.

“Where are you going to sleep?” Cine asked her.

“Eh, I’ll find a bunk. Wait for me in the morning after he sneaks out.” She gave her a wink.

But Gianni stayed. He was still there when Ella crept into their little rented bungalow. Cine had given her an apologetic look, but all Ella did was jump in the bed and cuddle Cine on her other side. When Gianni woke up, he offered to buy both of them breakfast.

It would be like that for the rest of the trip. Cine and Ella mingled with Gianni’s mates since the “lads” didn’t mind sharing their booze. It was still a budgeted vacation, after all, and it felt like a huge relief to the girls. All they had to do was flirt a bit and play along. Most of them only wanted to make small talk or fake deep talk when the drinks were flowing, in an attempt to bang. Except Gianni. He was constantly inviting them to go swimming, learn surfing, join every meal. It was clear he wanted Cine but knew Ella would come too. Cine wondered if he had an idea what their actual relationship was.

“Are you gonna tell him, or should I?” Ella said during a rare Gianni-free moment. They were getting ready for their last night on the island. Cine looked at her to see if she was serious. She made a habit of reading faces. Ella was putting on her favorite lip gloss (distinct cherry flavor Cine had tasted a hundred times), straight black hair resting on her shoulders in a grown-out bob. She looked the opposite of Cine who liked to keep her hair long and dyed brown. Even their bodies contrasted, Ella with her perfect tan and skinny frame to Cine’s curvy hips and light complexion. It was this difference that had drawn Cine to Ella from the start. They would never be able to share foundation but least they were the same medium height and shoe size. They also spoke Bisaya, Cine coming from Cebu and Ella from Cagayan de Oro.

Ella’s face was preoccupied as the makeup went on. Cine bit her lip as she stared at her in the mirror. Finally, lips shining with gloss, Ella smiled.

“I’m just playing. But you could have at least invited me to a threesome.”

Cine let go of her bated breath in a snort. “He’s not your type. Although, I doubt he’d decline...”

Ella rolled her eyes. “You’re right, he’s not my type. None of these *lads* really do it for me and one is trying to steal you away...” Her voice faded. She turned back to the mirror, examining her eyeliner.

Cine looked at the back of her head. Her hair shined in the yellow, fluorescent lights of their nipa homestead. Cine waited but Ella didn’t say anything more. When they started dating, Ella had mentioned that she wasn’t into complete commitment. Cine wanted to stay with her so badly she didn’t care at the time. Whenever Ella went out with someone else, she’d always remind Cine that she was free to date other people too, but it had never happened. Until now.

“Look,” Cine began. “I kind of like Gianni. He’s goofy and surprisingly good in bed for a straight guy.” She hadn’t expected to feel this excited about someone else. Cine had always thought she was a serial monogamist.

Ella scoffed. “I can barely understand a word he says. Where the hell is Devon, anyway? Sounds like my cousin’s newborn.” She mimicked the way Gianni said it, rolling her eyes.

Cine could tell Ella was doing this on purpose.

“Does it matter? Besides, who was that one who wanted to open our relationship in the first place for some butch she met on Tinder?” The words came tumbling out of Cine’s mouth before she could stop herself. She clapped a hand to her mouth.

Ella had a disgusted smirk on her face. “You have a point,” she said slowly, once again turning to look at herself in the mirror. “But you’re wrong about one thing.” She met Cine’s eyes in the reflection. “Our relationship wasn’t *opened*. It was never closed. Go ahead and suck on your British sausage and I’ll see you on the boat back.”

Later that night as Cine and Gianni snuggled up against each other on the flimsy mattress, she told him about Ella.

“So she’s not just your mate?” he said, eyes bleary from alcohol and having cum twice that night.

“We’re together, but we can date other people too.” It was a something Cine didn’t really know how to describe that well. It still felt new on her end. She waited for his reply. Perhaps this was the end like Ella had predicted. Straight guys never liked to share.

“Does that mean we can stay in touch? She won’t have a fit or nothing?” His voice was less tired; more alert and almost ... hopeful.

“I guess,” Cine replied. “But you understand that I’m still going to be with her, right?”

“S'alrigh'.” He sounded confident, nonchalant. She looked at his face, half-illuminated in the faint light from outside the window. He seemed relaxed. He even chuckled at the confused look on her face.

“It's not like we can be together like, physically. I just want to get to know you more. We'll be getting on with our lives, but I reckon we can still see where it goes.”

She put her head on his chest and nodded before drifting off.

Cine's last moments on the island proved to be a whirlwind. She gave Gianni every possible way to contact her before Ella came in to pack the rest of her stuff. As he was leaving, he ended up meeting Ella at the door and giving her a cheerful “G-mornin'!” Ella nodded without replying and let him pass. Then she directed her eyes at Cine. She almost gulped.

“So, what's the verdict?” Ella quipped. It was as if last night's conversation hadn't been as emotionally charged as Cine thought.

“I told him about us,” Cine started. She waited for Ella's reaction. One raised eyebrow.

“He said he still wants to see where it goes.” Cine looked away, only watching Ella from the corner of her eye. There was a shrug as Ella went to throw her bikinis haphazardly into her carryon.

“How are you already packed?” she asked Cine incredulously.

“He actually helped me earlier.” She said it as a whisper. Ella still caught it and laughed derisively.

“Wow, Prince Charming? Guess there wasn't time for a morning fuck then. Don't I know *that* feeling. Some couple vacation.”

Cine's anger rose in her. “Oh, so we're a couple now?” She was standing, facing Ella who gave a deep breath and closed her eyes.

“We've always been a couple, just not like the rest,” she said in a low voice. She looked at Cine and their eyes met. “I'm sorry. Okay, *gwapa*? I'll be good *na*, promise.” She crossed her throat with her finger and gave her signature pouty face. Relief replaced anger and Cine wrapped her arms around Ella's slender waist. Ella cupped Cine's face and gave her a long kiss. It felt like it had been ages since their last.

Ella pulled away. “As much as I'd love to fuck you right now, *tabangi sa ko*. You know I literally can't afford to miss our flight.”

Perhaps after that last kiss on the island two years ago, both Ella and Cine knew things weren't going to be the same again. They never returned to

Siargao even after many attempts to find the right time. Cine and Ella also kept trying to make plans to visit their hometowns together, but synching schedules was a lot harder than synching periods. Sparing one or two days always seemed a waste and so they opted for staycations in Makati or quick excursions to Boracay or Tagaytay. There just didn't seem to be an opportunity. On top of working as a PR agent in Makati, Cine spent most of her precious vacation days going solo to her family in Cebu or visiting Gianni in the UK. It had taken months just to get her visa approved.

Gianni worked in London which they explored on her first visit, but on her second trip he took her to see Plymouth where he grew up. It was surrounded by saltwater and hills. He even had a favorite cliff where they enjoyed a windy picnic after he showed her the Marine Museum and medieval houses. Gianni's parents had the kind of accent she thought only existed in Harry Potter movies and his two brothers were the same as his "mates" they had met in Siargao. During every visit, Gianni would constantly catch up with her as if self-conscious of his First World country.

"It's not like Siargao," he commented on one of the Plymouth beaches. He said Siargao in a way Ella hated. "But it's home." On Cine's last trip, Gianni mentioned his family was going to visit Italy next summer and she should get some time off to come. They had always split the cost of tickets, but she had visited him twice as much as he had come back to see her. Whenever he did, Ella would go to dinner with them but always opted to stay at someone else's place. Whether it was a friend's or a fling's, she only told Cine in private.

The Italy trip had been cancelled though, because of COVID-19. This was the most continuous time Ella and Cine had spent together since when they first moved into their low-end condo and couldn't stop fucking each other. Ella had remarked how it was the first time she had ever moved in with anyone she was dating. She worked as a content creator for a beauty and lifestyle website and preferred living independently. Both she and Cine had to set up cohesive workspaces, designating certain areas for themselves. Gianni had just started work at a new software company when London declared a complete lockdown. He FaceTimed with Cine as they clapped for health workers, seven hours behind her time zone.

Pre-quarantine, she would only stay up late to talk with him when Ella was spending the night with someone else. He was understanding given

his own work schedule. They would talk more during his lunchbreak or send each other videos on their day. Before Gianni, Cine would preoccupy herself with a new novel or maybe Netflix when she was left alone, trying hard not to feel resentful. It wasn't as if Ella didn't sleep in their bed on most nights, although she couldn't help but feel grateful that Gianni provided a filler. At the onset of quarantine, she and Ella found themselves making adjustments. Whenever Cine and Gianni were talking, Ella would rarely be in the same room, claiming she hated how he sounded. She always stayed within earshot, however, leading Cine to expect she was listening more than she let on.

"I can't believe it's gone on this long," Gianni lamented through Cine's laptop during the week they were supposed to meetup.

"Hey, you're lucky you guys can already move around a bit." Her vacation days were worthless at this point. It was a small miracle they didn't only have clients from ABS-CBN, and she was able to keep her job. "Who knows when our cases will go down? The government seems to be waging a war on actual scientists."

Gianni snorted. "They're spuddling, innit?" He'd heard it all before. Suddenly, his face went thoughtful. Cine was used to seeing it by now. Sometimes it meant something serious, other times he would ask a question like "Do you think birds are real?" She waited to see which one it would be.

Ella was doing her nightly yoga routine in the living room. From their first night she had shown Cine how flexible she was, but her yoga music of choice was less spa and more Ariana Grande. Cine could hear the whistle notes of "Imagine" through the thin walls.

"Cine," Gianni started.

"Yes, babe?" She was only half listening, her brain caught on the song's melody.

"I think we should get married."

She blinked at him. The song was ending. They were both waiting for the other to speak.

After a while, he broke the silence. "Did you hear me? I think we should get married. You know, as soon as we can see each other again."

"Are you ... actually proposing to me right now?" She searched his face just like she always did.

"I mean, I wish I could have done it in a more romantic way, sure. We were supposed to be in Italy at this moment, you might recall. But yeah.

This whole thing has made me realize I want you by my side in times like these. And all times ..." He said the last part quietly.

Cine stared at him, half-aware that the music had completely stopped. She couldn't hear Ella's usual after-yoga movements in the kitchen and had a feeling she was listening.

"What do you think?" Gianni's eyes were earnest. He really wanted this.

"When could we even—?" Cine struggled with the words.

"It doesn't matter," he interrupted. "I just want to know if there's a future in this. Just something to look forward to during this absolute shite of a year."

A pause. Finally, Cine responded. "I need to think about it, okay?" She was whispering for some reason. "I need to ask Ella."

She could tell he was trying to hide his hurt. He was growing out his facial hair and his beard twitched as he eventually gave a half-smile.

"Course," he said. "Let me know, alright? I know our situation hasn't been the most normal. But I've just been imagining a whole life with you and I'm ready."

"Love you," Cine told him as a send-off. He replied the same.

Finally, she heard the clanging of pots in the kitchen. Stepping out of their shared room, Cine saw Ella prepare some instant ramen packets.

"Want some?" she asked Cine as she loaded their biggest pot with mineral water.

"Some health buff you are," Cine teased as she helped open a second packet. Ella stuck out her tongue. Cine did the same and Ella quickly lunged to touch it with her own. They kissed as the pot started heating up. Cine pulled away, frowning.

"What's up? Always thought I was tastier than that." She didn't meet Cine's eyes, however, and preoccupied herself with loading the ramen powder into the pot. Cine kept quiet as Ella ducked into the fridge for the sugar and placed two spoonfuls in the water.

"Did you hear what Gianni and I were talking about?" Cine was trying to be as cautious as possible. Since this whole thing had started in a Siargao bungalow, it always felt like it had never truly been settled.

"You mean about the government and scientists? Roque is a joke." She smirked. Her hair was longer now than it was two years ago—now past her shoulders, although she had kept it black.

"Anything else?" She wasn't playing along. Cine knew Ella had sharp hearing when it came to her and Gianni's video calls.

“I don’t know, you tell me.” Ella looked defiantly at Cine and waited. Cine remembered the first time Ella had said “I love you” to her, as if posing a challenge. At the time, Cine had risen to it. She wasn’t sure if she could this time.

“Gianni asked me marry him.” The words stuck in her throat. It was real now.

“And what are you gonna do?” Ella asked in the same tone as moments before.

“I told him I had to tell you first.” It was almost like she was protecting herself.

Ella wasn’t having it. “But *what are you going to do?*” She said each word with emphasis. Cine watched as Ella desperately tried to mask her emotions. A mixture of fear and bitterness rippled across her thin face as she tried to keep herself level.

Cine didn’t know how to respond. She was terrified at the answer behind her lips. She avoided a direct answer.

“We don’t even know when this is going to end,” she said before realizing what it sounded like.

Ella raised her chin and looked down at Cine. The pot was already bubbling. Ella took the lid off and dunked in the two squares of noodles. Cine watched as Ella used a pair of chopsticks to lift the noodles up like how they had seen in a Korean instant ramen tutorial in the early days of quarantine. After a couple of minutes, she turned off the stove, not bothering to put the lid back on.

Ella faced Cine again. This time, she looked defeated. “Why didn’t we ever go back to Siargao?”

Cine was taken aback. “What do you mean? We were busy—”

“You know we could have. These past two years I’ve been imagining what it might have been like to go back there and just redo things.”

Cine tried guessing at what things she meant. They had been open for months before going to Siargao, but it had always been Ella going off on dates with other people. Gianni was the first person who had managed to pull Cine’s attention away from Ella.

“You know what scared me the most about Gianni?” Ella said with pleading eyes. “With him you almost seemed like how you were with me. It terrified me. I guess I was right.”

Tears started welling in her eyes. Cine held her arms out immediately. Ella wasn’t the type to cry; now they were both letting it out. They held



each other close. It felt like this was closer than they had ever been since that week in Siargao.

Ella pulled away first. She grabbed a nearby towel and wiped her nose quickly. Cine let her tears continue to fall.

“I don’t have to,” Cine started. Ella interrupted her.

“But I know you want to. It’s who you are, Cine. And you’d never get that from me. Hell, I didn’t even expect us to last this long. There was just something about you that made me want to stay.”

Cine couldn’t hold back the sobs. This time Ella enveloped her arms around her and sobbed as well.

“Look,” Ella said, pulling away again. “It’s not like we didn’t love each other. It’s not like we didn’t give everything.” She was wiping the tears from Cine’s eyes. She could feel her conference call eyeliner get smudged off. Cine nodded. It was true. They had been the best to each other as well as the worst. But it was never going to be just the two of them, even without Gianni. Ella also made it clear that she didn’t do long distance. Cine had agreed to it years ago, just wanting to be in Ella’s presence. She never imagined she would be the one to leave.

“Say yes to him, Cine. And we’ll just love the fuck out of each other until it’s time for you to go.” Ella said the words in a rush, as if she might stop herself if she didn’t get them all out. “And still love each other when you do. I can make exceptions. I know you’ve been making them for me since day one.”

Cine hugged Ella again, burying herself in her shoulder. She smelled like how she did when she woke up, just raw body. Ella’s arms gripped Cine’s waist. Her hand grabbed a butt cheek and squeezed, making Cine jump. They smiled at each other.

“I’ll miss you doing that,” Cine said, her lips inches away from Ella’s.

“I’m sure Gianni knows how to grab a thick ass,” Ella replied sarcastically.

“Yeah, but I’m used to you.” Cine kissed her lightly. They stood there, holding each other for a while longer until Ella glanced over at the stove.

“*Giatay*,” she swore. “Guess it’s cold ramen for us.” She started fetching the bowls from the dishrack. Cine watched Ella carefully spoon the soup in each bowl, giving herself the bigger portion. She had always loved instant ramen a lot more than Cine.

Ella offered Cine her bowl and started slurping up the noodles rapidly. Cine went to the fridge and got herself a slice of cheese. She offered half to Ella.

“Why do I always forget the cheese.” She mixed it into her own bowl. They transferred to the couch, putting on some local news that was discussing, as usual, the corona virus.

“When do you think this will end?” Ella said suddenly, not looking up from the TV.

Cine gave a deep sigh. “I can’t imagine.”