





# **Under the False Heaven**

## **The Scam of Superstition**

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In the peaceful village of Balete, where banana trees whispered and the sun danced on sparkling rice fields, lived Isabela, a young woman with a heart full of dreams. Her family was warm, close-knit, and proud of their traditions.....90

**Isabela’s Wedding Plans** Isabela and her fiancé, Marco, were busy preparing for their big day. The scent of fresh sampaguita flowers filled the house, and colorful decorations hung everywhere. But Isabela’s mother, Aling Teresa, watched with a worried look. “Isabela,” she said seriously, “you and your sister Lucia must not marry in the same year. That’s what we call *sukob* – a curse that can bring misfortune to our family.” Isabela frowned. She had heard the word before but didn’t fully understand its meaning.....90

What is Sukob?.....91

Aling Teresa explained, “*Sukob* means that if two siblings marry within the same calendar year, it can cause bad luck: illness, loss, or even death. It is a warning passed down from our ancestors.” Isabela felt a chill. Her sister Lucia was indeed engaged, and her wedding was planned for a few months away.....91

**Ominous Signs** Slowly, her mother’s stories seemed to come true. First, the family’s old dog fell ill, then a small fire broke out in the kitchen just before dinner. A trusted neighbor fell off his bicycle and was injured. The villagers whispered that these were signs of *sukob* – a warning that misfortune was near. ...91

**Help from Mang Ramon, the Albularyo** In desperation, Isabela and her mother turned to Mang Ramon, the village

*albularyo* (traditional healer). He listened carefully and gave them a small pouch of herbs and an old *anting-anting*, a talisman that protected against evil spirits. "We can break the curse," he said softly but firmly. "We will perform a ritual of cleansing and protection to call on the power of our ancestors." .....

**The Cleansing Ritual** The night before Isabela's wedding, family and friends gathered around the altar in the house. Smoke from burning *sambong* and sage filled the room while Mang Ramon recited ancient prayers. Everyone held hands and sang softly, a deep sense of unity hanging in the air. Isabela wore the antique amulet close to her heart and felt a warm strength surround her. Slowly, the dark cloud of *sukob* seemed to lift, banished by the power of faith and love. ....92

**The Grand Wedding** The next day, Isabela shone, surrounded by family and friends. The celebration was a lively feast of love, with music, dancing, and abundant food. The villagers were grateful that the misfortune had passed. ....93

**Preparing for Lucia's Wedding** Months later, Lucia's wedding approached. This time, the preparations were different. Remembering Isabela's experience, the family chose to be cautious. Lucia's wedding was planned for the new year, safely outside the dangerous period of *sukob*. ....93

**New Rituals** Before the ceremony, Lucia and her mother visited Mang Ramon, who led a special ritual. They again used herbs, incense, and wore protective *anting-anting*. A new altar was set up with flowers and traditional offerings like rice,

oranges, and sweet tamarind – symbols of prosperity and protection. ....	93
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## Prologue – Beneath a False Sky

There are moments in life that set everything in motion. One glance. One voice. One message. And suddenly the future no longer seems a straight line, but an open horizon full of promise. That's how it began for Hans. Not with thunder or lightning, but with a soft touch of

hope. A woman, a smile, a few words on a screen – and the dormant longing to begin again awoke with a force even he hadn't expected.

Love took Hans to the other side of the world. To the sun-drenched streets of the Philippines, where life seemed brighter, simpler, more sincere. Where each sunset promised something, he had lost in the Netherlands: connection, warmth, a sense of coming home. He sold his possessions, ended his lease, said farewell to his routines – and leapt.

What he found there was, at first, everything he had hoped for. A woman who admired him. Who embraced him. Days filled with closeness, shared plans, gentle attention. For the first time in years, he felt seen. Loved. He wanted to believe – and he did. With all his heart.

But behind the smile, something else hid. Something that only revealed itself when it was too late to return without consequence. Small untruths became bigger lies. Money vanished without explanation. Sincerity gave way to distance. And slowly, the dream began to unravel – like a beautiful fabric coming apart, thread by thread.