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STARSTUDIO
FIRST

THEIR HEARTS' ADVENTURE

They overcame distance and other challenges to their relationship to get to a point where love—their greatest adventure yet—could finally begin. Pulling it off was a challenge, but Cristalle Belo and Justin Pitt found that no distance can keep you apart when true love writes your story

BY MICHELLE ANGELA OROSA CARAG
PHOTOS COURTESY OF CRISTALLE BELO

To Dr. Vicki Belo's daughter Cristalle, it was a day like any other. She was vacationing in the Maldives with her family and boyfriend, Australian hotelier Justin Pitt. They were there to relax and have fun.

So when Justin—who she had been dating for a year—asked her to take part in an *Amazing Race* adventure-inspired treasure hunt, the fun-loving and adventurous Cristalle thought it was a game; she had no clue that it would turn out to be a one-way ticket to marital bliss.

Justin, 37, had been secretly planning the moment for three months. It began with inviting Cristalle to go on holiday to the Per Aquum Resort in the Maldives (an island republic located in the Indian Ocean, the Maldives is an international tourist playground famous for its beaches and coral atolls) but before he did, he talked to her parents Atom and Vicki and got their permission for

what he was about to do. He did that so when she asked them if she could go on a trip to the Maldives, they would be ready for the possibility that her parents would turn it into a family vacation, with everyone tagging along—which is exactly what happened.

Wanting everything to be perfect, Justin planned it all down to the last detail. He had metallic scratch clues and jigsaw puzzles custom-made in Australia for the occasion, and made sure that the most important item on the list—the 3.2 carat solitaire diamond engagement ring, encased by a halo of smaller diamonds on a diamond-studded band for which jeweler Stephen Lloyd, who has a shop at the Peninsula Manila, traveled all the way to Israel to source—was ready to slip on her finger.

Pitching in

The elaborate scheme also required the cooperation of both their families. Cristalle's mom Vicki (of the Belo Medical Group empire) brought a camera crew along to document the proposal, but told her daughter only that they were going to shoot footage to be shown on their *Belo Beauty 101* TV program; her brother Quark, a

noted filmmaker, helped by editing and shooting videos. Justin's family was also present, but stayed on another island so Cristalle wouldn't have a clue that something was afoot.

But before the couple's big moment could take place, Cristalle, 32—who heads Belo Essentials, a subsidiary of the Belo Medical Group, first had to complete a series of activities with the theme "My Greatest Adventure". The activities were divided into four categories: "Communication," "Partnership," "Commitment" and "Lifelong Love". Cristalle finished them all in two hours; but the final one, which happened under the light of a full August moon, stands out in her memory because it was the one that sealed their future together.

"My instructions were to get on a boat, look my best and meet him on an island," recalls Cristalle. "That's when he proposed and asked me to be his wife. He told me that since we enjoy going on adventures together, he was now ready to go on the 'Greatest Adventure' of his life with me."

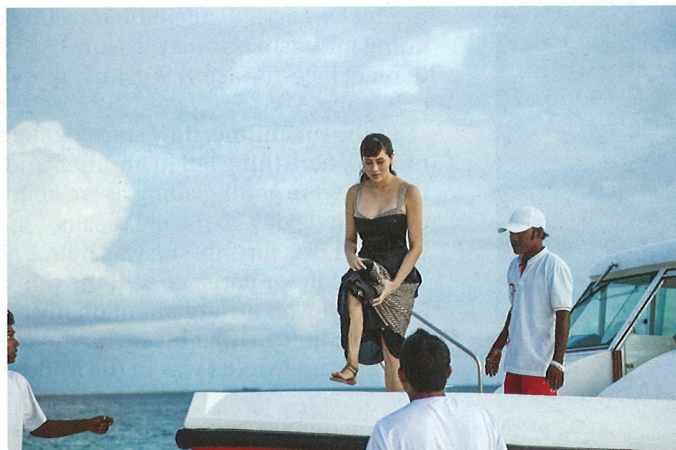
After she said yes, Cristalle and Justin returned to the villa they were staying in to find not just her own family waiting

for her, but Justin's parents as well. The surprise was finally revealed, all in good time.

None of their efforts went to waste. Justin was delighted that his surprise worked; Cristalle, even more so.

"I appreciated every single detail because that wasn't easy to execute," she muses. "It involved scuba divers, puzzles and metallic scratch card clues made in Australia, a cushion-cut diamond from Israel and even a special engagement dinner with our loved ones around. Each dish of the five-course meal represented places where we have shared special moments together: Abu Dhabi, Australia, China, the Philippines and Cambodia."

At the end of the evening, Cristalle's mom Vicki posted a photo of the couple's moonlight promise to each other on her Instagram account *victoria_belo*, with the following caption: "As a mother, I've always prayed that my children find the right partner. @cristallebelo is blessed to have found @justinpitt77 because he honors and cherishes her like I always wanted for her future husband to. He's smart, kind, believes in commitment and partnership and forever in marriage."



Cristalle in the last of the challenges she presented, which said she had to get on a boat, look my best, and meet him (Justin) on an island". This was the last challenge before Justin presented Cristalle with the engagement ring, a 3.2-carat solitaire diamond sourced from Israel. The couple was planning to tie the knot in Italy in September 2016.



Cristalle, 32 and 37-year-old Justin hugging on the beach on the shores of the Maldives. The elaborate set-up and all the activities were prepared by the groom-to-be months ahead without his intended bride knowing. In fact, she didn't even know it was an engagement, only a family vacation. "The only time I knew it was an engagement," Cristalle would say later, "was when I started watching the video messages from our loved ones."



Even God cooperated by giving them the most beautiful moonlight."

To immortalize their big night, the couple wrote a quote on the sand. It is from Christian author C.S. Lewis's book, *The Last Battle*, from the *Chronicles of Narnia* series. It read: "Now at last, they were beginning chapter one of the great story no one on earth has ever read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Asked if there was a moment she suspected that it was no ordinary treasure hunt, Cristalle answers, "The only time I realized that it was an engagement was when I started watching the video messages from our loved ones after every accomplished sub-theme or challenge. Justin worked with my brother Quark [Henares], a film director, to edit and shoot the videos."

Meeting each other

Cristalle and Justin were introduced to each other by Justin's best friend, Glen Finlayson.

Justin's job as a hotelier (he was then working as Resident Manager at the Qasr Al Sarab, a five-star resort in Abu Dhabi) took him around the region, although he would occasionally come to Manila for R & R. On one of his many trips here, he met Cristalle's best friend Frank Briones, who, like Glen, felt Justin and Cristalle—who shared a love of traveling and adventure—would make a good match if they could only find the time and day to meet.

But with Cristalle based in Manila, and Justin in Abu Dhabi (and all of the traveling both were doing for business and pleasure), getting them to meet face-to-face was clearly going to be a challenge.

In the meantime, they started talking on social media. "One thing led to another, and we realized that we were getting along as we chatted away every single day," Cristalle recalls. "In Justin's words, 'I was flirting, she was not.' A few days before I left for Paris, he sent me this beautiful Mabolo flower arrangement on my birthday to communicate that his invitation to see me and host me while I was in the Middle East was sincere."

Then one day, an opportunity presented itself. Cristalle was flying from Paris back to Manila, and was due to make a stopover in the Middle East. Frank and Glen saw this as the perfect time to introduce them to each other.

Plans were set for them to meet. However, their first meeting—when it finally did happen—turned out to be a little awkward.

"Cristalle received advice on how to tackle our first meeting, which was to give me a gift," Justin reveals. "I did not have anything on hand when we first met, though, so it was a little uncomfortable that she brought small trinkets for me and presented them to me while I had nothing to give in return."

The Belo-Henares clan gave Justin the thumbs-up after seeing the effort he took to plan and execute the proposal. He even gave up a chance to be part of the new *Star Wars* movie just so he could fly to Manila to accept Cristalle's request—to meet his parents. That decision sealed the deal with the family (from left) Justin's dad Atom, mom Vicki, brother Gabe, Cristalle, and Justin.



When Cristalle arrived in Abu Dhabi, Justin had everything ready. He swept her off her feet with camel rides and horseback riding sunset excursions ending at a peak where they watched the sunset while sipping on champagne and eating strawberries, dune bashing, falconry and many other activities.

"We realized that we both enjoyed going on outdoor adventures," Cristalle says. "As a hotelier, he really flexed his muscles and rounded up everyone to show me an amazing three-day experience."

Making a choice

But that was just the start; there was more to come.

Another thing Cristalle didn't know was that at the time they met, Justin was getting ready to play a Stormtrooper in the new *Star Wars* movie, which was filming in the Middle East. The film crew was billeted at his resort, and as a huge fan of the franchise, this was a chance he couldn't pass up.

Justin was supposed to attend boot camp to prepare for the role. But since Cristalle wanted him to meet her family in Manila, he had to make a choice: go to boot camp and fulfill his dream of being in the movie, or flying to the Philippines to fulfill Cristalle's request.

In the end, he gave up boot camp and instead chose to fly to the Philippines

two weeks after their rendezvous in Abu Dhabi. For this, the entire Belo-Henares clan gave him the thumbs up. According to Justin, that visit to Manila helped both him and Cristalle to realize that what they had was really special. From that point on, they became fully invested in their relationship.

"The fact she was always on my mind, as well as how I was always taking Cristalle and our relationship into consideration when making plans and thinking of the future let me know that my heart was already sold!"

They had to work hard to keep their long-distance relationship going. Technology was a big help and went a long way toward making things between

the two of them real and lasting. "I knew it was real when we developed a Skype call routine every evening," Cristalle says. "If it were a temporary dating relationship, a guy would not invest that time to seek me out and talk to me every night."

Things progressed quickly, and ended in that magical night, under a full moon, in the Maldives. It was a moment neither of them—or their families—would ever forget.

Forward together
When asked what he loves about his bride-to-be the most, Justin states, "She is such a sweet, kind and caring person. I love her positivity and her passion for life."





Cristalle, meanwhile, loves Justin's go-getter attitude. "Justin knows how to be in charge and he is organized," she says. "He knows what he wants and gets things done. I admire his professionalism. On the other hand, he has that sweet, soft and silly side, which

Flaming torches—and a brilliant August moon—lit up the sky over the Maldives as Justin and Cristalle (who referred to herself in an Instagram post as "The future Mrs. Pitt") had a moment all to themselves. Aside from the Maldives, other places the couple considers special to their story are Abu Dhabi (where Justin used to be based), Australia, China, the Philippines and Cambodia.



only comes out when he's with me. I'm liking that exclusivity!"

But what bonds them the most are their shared interests and passions in life. "We love food and we love experiencing new things," Justin expresses. "Cristalle and I also share a passion for animals—whether it be horseback riding, shark diving, dogs or anything related to the joy of nature. We also have a strong drive to help the less fortunate."

The couple plans to tie the knot in Italy—Justin's most favorite place in the world—in September 2016. They have started scouting venues and locations and are now in the final stages of confirming all the arrangements.

When asked where they plan to settle down, Justin reveals that he is open to moving to the Philippines should the right job come along. "Ideally, the plan is to work in the Philippines eventually—but it all depends if the right opportunity materializes. Meanwhile, somewhere close in Southeast Asia would also be suitable."

On the other hand, Cristalle, has told Justin that she has no problems wherever he chooses to work next, as long as it is relatively close to the Philippines.

Indeed, Cristalle and Justin understand that it is important to see marriage as a partnership where all decisions have to be made together, and

Justin, marking the significant day by writing a quote in the sand. The quote is from the C.S. Lewis book "The Last Battle" from his best-selling Chronicles of Narnia series. "The Last Battle" is the seventh and final book in the series, and is about the fantasy world of Narnia coming to an end. But Cristalle and Justin found a quote that was applicable to them and appropriate for the new beginning they are about to embark on together. It reads: "Now at last, they were beginning chapter one of the great story no one on earth has ever read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before."

they are putting that into practice.

In an interview with the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Justin stated, "Cristalle's the first girl I've dated where I'm not settling on anything. I've been lucky; I've had great girlfriends, but there was always something where maybe they weren't as career-focused or as ambitious as I was. Cristalle is the first relationship I've had where there's no settling, (and) no compromise. She's the type of woman I want to make proud. I love her because she makes me happy, and I feed off her energy. It's the kind of relationship where we kind of add to each other. It's a partnership—we strive to go forward together and get the best out of life that way."

They have experienced so much together, but for Cristalle and Justin, the best is yet to come—because from this point on, they will be spending all their tomorrows together, and they wouldn't have it any other way. ★

A romantic couple is shown in a close embrace on a sandy beach at sunset. The man, wearing a blue t-shirt and light blue shorts, is lifting the woman slightly. The woman, with long dark hair, is wearing a dark dress with a light-colored striped pattern. They are both looking at each other and smiling. The background features a bright, low sun on the horizon, casting a golden glow over the ocean and sky. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. In the distance, some colorful lights are visible on the horizon.

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– *Cristalle, on what
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