

**Translator: A V**

# 1.Proud

Book - KISS

Author - SIIX

Translate - A V

.

.

.

"Hello," said the man in uniform sitting behind the counter as he took the documents from my hand and greeted me.

"Hello," I replied politely, offering a small smile.

He glanced down at the papers, then at the computer screen in front of him for a moment, before stamping my passport and handing it back.

"**Welcome to Korea**," he said with a friendly smile as I thanked him.

I adjusted the small backpack on my shoulder and walked at a steady pace past **Korean immigration,** heading towards the baggage claim area. But just as I was about to step onto the escalator, a familiar voice—one I hadn’t heard in a while—suddenly rang out, hitting my eardrums like a gong.

**“Rinnnnnn!!!!!”**I turned toward the voice. “This is really Rin.

The excited voice came from a girl with sweet, bright eyes and a beaming smile. Her eyes curved into crescents, and her perfectly shaped lips were full of pure joy that couldn’t be hidden.

"I'm with her! I came with that girl!" Her slender finger pointed straight at me.

Before I even had time to notice what was happening—before I realized the trouble heading my way—**two uniformed officers** followed the direction of her finger and started walking right toward me.

"Excuse me, please come with us."

**Proud**—*the girl with the sparkling eyes and that cheerful crescent-shaped smile—was none other than Proud, my childhood friend from kindergarten.*

Can we still call each other friends, though, when our families basically hate each other?

The truth is, Proud and I were neighbors. Our houses were so close we basically shared a wall. My dad, **Somsak**, and her dad, **Pakorn**, were best friends back in their younger days. They bought houses in the same neighborhood, sent us to the same school starting from kindergarten.

But everything went downhill when I was in middle school. Our dads had a huge falling out—so bad that it completely destroyed their friendship. After that, if Somsak was somewhere, Pakorn couldn’t be.

At first, Proud and I still talked like normal. We were just kids—we didn’t understand grown-up problems. But eventually, things got worse. My dad banned me from playing with her altogether. I wasn’t even allowed to go to her house anymore—a place I used to walk in and out of like it was my own. That was it. We drifted apart, to the point that we didn’t even seem friendly anymore.

Then during the summer break in grade 10, our family coconut farm in the countryside ran into big trouble. A jealous rival sabotaged the place and infected the trees with a disease. So, Dad had to move back to the country to take care of everything himself. I ended up transferring to a rural school out of the blue.

That was the final blow. Our families’ relationship completely collapsed—right along with all those dying coconut trees.

And us? Me and Proud? We became unwilling heirs to that family feud.

A couple of years later, my family moved back to Bangkok. But by then, I had ended up studying in the North.

I hadn’t seen Proud since 10th grade. I went on to finish university in Chiang Mai and only recently moved back to Bangkok for work. Even so, we still hadn’t met each other… until last month.

We finally met again at the retirement party of Teacher **Sree-nuan**, who’s **Bua** mom—Bua being another childhood friend of ours who still keeps in touch with me regularly.

That night, at the party, was the first time in years that I saw Proud again. I arrived, handed a red gift box tied with a gold ribbon to Teacher Sree-nuan, and then Bua walked me over to the table reserved for old friends…

It turned out that the only old friend who showed up at the event that day was **Proud Passachon.** I had to sit with her at the same table for hours—just the two of us—while we both acted like the other didn’t exist. It wasn’t until Bua finally came to sit with us that the atmosphere became a little less suffocating. By then, Cream had almost left.

.

. .

And today… What even is today? Why did Proud have to bring misfortune, an ice-cold room, and a Korean man with poreless skin and not a hint of a smile into my life—even though that day, we were still pretending we didn’t even know each other?

I was pulled aside for an interview and detained in that freezing room for two or maybe even three hours—I wasn’t sure anymore. I just knew it felt like forever. I was starving, and I was furious at the wide-eyed Thai woman sitting next to me, who stuck to me like glue. I was so annoyed I wanted to rip her apart.

Proud was called in by immigration officers for reasons I couldn’t even guess. At first, I was ready to tell them straight out that I wasn’t with her. But then she looked at me—with fear in her eyes and tears welling up—and I froze.

"Don’t leave me, Rin."

And just like that, with that ridiculous line, my life spiraled into chaos.

I had to obediently follow the officers into the room and hand over every document I had with me.

**I’m an architect.** I design homes and buildings for XXXX company. As a hobby, I run a **travel** **page**. I had to show them my portfolio and explain everything in detail, which took quite a while. In the end, I had to tell the officers that Proud and I were traveling together. That beauty queen hadn’t even booked a place to stay, and she almost got deported because she couldn’t answer basic questions about accommodation. So I had to step in and claim I was the one who handled all the bookings, and that Proud had no idea because I took care of everything.

We were held for a while longer and questioned a bit more before the officers finally let us both go.

“Hey,” I continued dragging my suitcase forward without acknowledging the voice calling out behind me. “Hey, Khun Darin!”

It was almost midnight, and the last train was about to leave. I scanned my card at the subway entrance just as the last wave of passengers passed through. I was irritated, and of course, the annoying neighbor—my so-called rival—was still trailing me.

“Thanks,” she said. I didn’t even glance at her as she rushed to catch up, her suitcase rattling noisily behind her. “Hey! I said thank you for helping me.”

“…Mm.”

“Where are you staying?” she asked. She got on the same subway car as me and even yelled over the head of an Aunty dragging a purple suitcase with a giant seal sticker on it just to talk to me.

“Are you traveling alone?”

“....”

I sighed and turned away. I didn’t want anyone to know we knew each other.

. .

Once the train reached the city, I had to get off at Seoul Station and transfer lines to get to Myeong-dong, where my hotel was.

As I stood up to get off at Seoul Station, I noticed Proud was following me. She got off at the same stop. But after I turned down a different corridor to transfer trains, she disappeared. Finally shaken off.

I walked out of the subway and into the open air. The biting cold—minus eight degrees Celsius—hit my face instantly, so sharp that even my breath turned to mist.

As I inhaled deeply and took in the surroundings, I felt a strange sense of calm and peace. I couldn’t explain it. I just… loved it.

I looked around at the young couples walking past and wondered, how many times have I been here now? To this country that somehow never—

I don’t know what it is, but I keep wanting to come back here again and again.

I took my camera out of my shoulder bag to take a few photos and record a short video clip to edit and upload to my page. Then I picked up my smartphone to check the map for the hotel I had booked.

The night lights were still glowing. The pojangmacha—street stalls set up with tents to block the cold—were still open, with several middle-aged vendors selling food. I was genuinely hungry. If I hadn’t been stuck at immigration with Proud for three hours, I would probably be comfortably resting at the hotel by now.

I decided it would be best to take my suitcase to the hotel first and then head out again to find something to eat.

But just as I was walking peacefully along the sidewalk on the way to my hotel, something made me turn around and look behind me.

...That nosy Proud! She was walking about ten meters behind me, pulling her four-wheeled suitcase. When I turned to look back, she didn’t even glance my way. Her eyes were fixed on the brick path under her feet.

Is Proud staying around here too? Probably. This is a popular area where many Thai people like to stay. It wouldn’t be surprising if she were heading this way as well.

Still, something about it felt off. I picked up my pace. The sound of my suitcase wheels echoed loudly along the quiet, chilly buildings.

I looked back at Proud again. She was still walking in the same direction—and keeping exactly the same distance, even though I had sped up. What did that mean?

I started to feel uneasy as I glanced back at her two or three more times before I finally made up my mind.

…Run!!!

I had a backpack on, a large suitcase in my left hand, and I was running away from that nosy girl with everything I had. The screech of my suitcase wheels was loud enough to make passersby turn to look. The hood of my coat, which I had pulled over my head, slipped off and landed on my shoulders from the jolt of running.

But what really sent a chill down my spine was when I looked back one more time—

**Proud Passachon**, my next-door **nemesis**, was running after me at the same speed—maybe even faster.

*Oh. My. God!!!!!*

The sound of her suitcase wheels was even more horrifying than mine. It pierced straight into my heart, as if it were a warning sign…

*That my life in Korea was not going to be peaceful anymore*.

# 2. Just One Night

“No!”

“Just one night.” Proud managed to stop me right in front of the hotel entrance.

“Not even for one night!” I repeated firmly.

“It’s really late now, Rin, and I didn’t book a room... Please, let me stay with you tonight,” she said, her sorrowful eyes looking up at me. “We’re neighbors, after all.”

I raised an eyebrow at her. “No,” I replied plainly, grabbed the handle of my suitcase, and walked through the hotel’s automatic sliding doors.

I headed straight to the reception desk. The male staff member, who looked to be no older than thirty, handed me a form to fill in my name while glancing out the front entrance a couple of times.

“Is she with you?” he asked, looking toward the door.

I smiled at him politely. “She’ll be leaving soon.”

When I turned back to glance at the door again, I saw Proud still standing there, typing something on her phone while peeking inside. Then she turned away and looked toward the street.

“But you booked a king-sized bed for two people.”

“Yes, I wanted a large bed... By the way, do you have any other available rooms for tonight?”

Why am I even trying to help her?

“I’m very sorry, but we’re fully booked at the moment.”

“That’s all right.”

A porter came to take my suitcase and led me toward the elevator. Yet again, I couldn’t help but look back—Proud was still standing there.

No! I’m not getting involved. I can’t let sympathy drag me into trouble.

I went up to my room, feeling slightly uneasy, but I pushed the feeling aside and pretended not to care.

Once inside, I began unpacking and getting ready to rest, completely forgetting about Proud.

.

.

**Knock knock knock**

I walked over to the door and looked through the peephole. A room service staff member was standing outside, so I unlocked the door and opened it slightly—only to see someone step out from behind him.

The staff quietly stepped away, keeping a respectful distance as I sighed and looked at the woman standing before me. Her sweet face was flushed and tear-streaked. She looked at me with the desperate eyes of a starving child from Ethiopia, silently pleading for even a crumb of compassion.

The image sent my thoughts spiraling.

“Go find another hotel, Proud. Crying here won’t help. I will never let you stay with me.”

I don’t like sharing a bed with anyone—ever.

“Just for tonight, okay? I’ll leave early in the morning. I won’t bother you, won’t argue, won’t do anything to annoy you,”

Her big innocent eyes, with those ridiculously long lashes and teary look, were seriously making me soft.

I let out another sigh. “I’m really sorry, Proud.” I started to close the door.

“Rin... I’m scared.”

I didn’t even wait for her to finish. I shut the door right in her face.

Ughhh... I hate myself. I’m seriously dragging myself into drama again. Come on, it’s just one night. She’ll be gone in the morning. It’s already late. This is Korea—letting her wander around in the middle of the night isn’t safe...

Ever argue with yourself like that? Yeah, that’s where I was.

I let out a big sigh and opened the door again—but no one was there anymore.

So I grabbed my key and walked down the hallway... and there she was.

Sitting on the floor next to the elevator, hugging her knees with her head down. Her silver suitcase was next to her.

Wow. The fierce, sassy Proud was gone. She looked like a sad little puppy that got left behind.

“Hey.” I nudged her with my foot. Proud looked up at me.

“Just one night,” I said and turned around to walk back.

But she didn’t follow.

“If you’re gonna act like I’m such a burden, I’ll just sleep somewhere else,” she muttered from behind.

“I’m starving, and I’m not gonna be nice twice.”

That was all I had to say—right after that, I heard footsteps and the sound of a suitcase rolling behind me.

Figures.

I opened the door so she could drop her stuff, then headed out again to find something to eat.

.

We walked together—well, not side by side exactly, just kind of in the same direction—back out to the street. We found a street food tent that looked decent and went inside.

It was warm and cozy inside, totally different from the freezing night outside. There was a big heater in one corner, kinda looked like a huge fan with red-hot wires glowing inside, slowly turning to spread the heat around the place.

We ordered a few dishes and just sat there eating in silence.

“Hey… thanks for letting me stay,” she said.

Or maybe I was the only one trying to keep quiet.

I kept eating my spicy pork stir-fry with hot rice without saying a word.

“Are you mute or deaf or something?” she said, giving me a wide-eyed look. “I said thanks.”

“I heard you.”

“So, what are you doing here? Just on vacation?”

She looked straight at me, all curious and sparkly-eyed. Those same eyes that were crying just half an hour ago were now all bright and bouncy again.

“Yeah.”

“How long are you staying?”

Her cheeks puffed up as she chewed.

I let out a big sigh.

“I was just asking! Geez, you’re so grumpy. You used to be way cuter when we were kids.”

“And you used to be way less annoying.”

“Rude! That attitude totally doesn’t match your pretty face.”

I reached for my wallet to pay, but—

“Nope! Don’t. I’m paying for this one. It’s the least I can do—for the room and… everything else.”

She handed some Korean won to the stall owner, and we stepped out of the tent back onto the street.

There were still a few people around.

Some parts of the street were still lively. A few shopfronts still had their lights on and were serving customers.

“Hey, have you ever seen the moon? I mean… the moon in Korea.”

I hadn’t even realized when Proud came to walk beside me.

Her calm, pretty face was such a contrast to her usual chaotic behavior.

“Keep your distance.”

“Geez, you’re so unfriendly,” she said, slowing her pace to walk just behind me.

We walked back to the room while my mind kept circling around what she said about the moon in Korea.

Come to think of it, this was my third time here, and not once had I looked up to see the moon.

The bright lights of the big city had always drawn my eyes so much that I forgot there was even a moon above me.

When we reached the room, yet another headache hit me.

I’d let Proud stay the night and completely forgotten that most hotel bathrooms in Korea are made of glass.

I mean, the walls—every single side—and even the door were made of transparent material.

Now, can you imagine how awkward it would be for me to stand there completely naked, washing myself in a see-through bathroom… while that girl sat outside, staring at me wide-eyed?

“Tomorrow, you need to be out of my room early,” I reminded her once again, as I stepped out of the bathroom after brushing my teeth and washing my face.

“Yeah, yeah,” Proud replied, walking toward the bed and flopping down.“Which side are you sleeping on?”

“I’m sleeping in the middle. You’re sleeping on the floor,” I said, glancing at her lying spread out on the bed, then pointed at the spot where she was supposed to sleep.

“Rin! I’m a girl too, you know! And there’s only one blanket! How am I supposed to sleep like this? What if I get a fever tomorrow and can’t walk? Then you’ll have to go through all the trouble of taking me to the hospital!” “Then sleep in your clothes. If you get sick, I’ll just ask the hotel to send a car to take you to the hospital. So you’re really not my problem at all.”

Proud suddenly sat up.

“Why are you so heartless? You’ve got a beautiful face, great figure, lovely name, flawless skin,” she said, reaching out to stroke my arm—only to have me slap her hand away.

“You’re smart, your hair’s all silky and shiny... I know you wouldn’t actually be that cold-hearted.”

“I don’t like sharing a bed with anyone. Your spot is down there. Or sleep somewhere else.”

I laid down the law.

Then I saw those big, beautiful eyes start to well up with tears again.

“I promise I won’t bother you. I won’t move, not even a little. I’ll sleep right on the edge, won’t fidget, won’t disturb you at all.

Please let me sleep on the bed.”

There it was again—sad face, pitiful tone.

And here I was again—giving in.

I hated myself just about as much as I hated her face right now.

“Fine. But tomorrow, you have to be out of my room early. Got it?”

I frowned, repeating myself for the third time. I didn’t even feel like arguing anymore—I just wanted to sleep.

“Okay! First thing in the morning, I swear. Want to shower first?”

The tears from a moment ago had magically disappeared. She was back to her mischievous self.

“No.”

I was skipping the shower tonight.

Proud looked toward the bathroom and grimaced.

“Good thing the glass is at least frosted.”

My temporary roommate grabbed her clothes and walked into the bathroom.

Through the frosted glass, I could faintly see her trying to hang a towel up to block the view—unsuccessfully, it seemed.

Eventually, she gave up and dropped the towel back into the basket.

Not long after, she stepped out of the bathroom and started looking around for something.

“Why are you carrying the fire extinguisher?”

She was cradling the small red fire extinguisher in her arms as she headed back to the bathroom.

“The door doesn’t have a lock… it keeps swinging open,” she said, then disappeared back into the bathroom.

Well—disappeared might be a stretch, considering I could still clearly see her walking around and doing stuff behind that frosted glass wall.

. .

The sound of water hitting the floor echoed softly through the glass-walled bathroom. A faint silhouette of a woman’s bare figure moved inside, tending to her personal business. Although the frosted glass blurred the details, the outline was clear enough to stir certain feelings—just enough to trace the curves of her body and let the imagination wander.

…I’m not made of stone, and I’m a woman who’s attracted to women. Even though I wasn’t actively thinking anything inappropriate, the fact remained: I was alone in a room with a woman who looked like she could win beauty pageants. My mind said no, but my body—well, it reacted like any normal person would. I’m sure you get what I mean.

And I’m not exaggerating when I say “beauty pageants.” Proud had swept through quite a few, from the local Loy Krathong beauty queen and Miss Teen of the Province, to Miss BBV and even the national-level Miss Thailand competition. She didn’t win the crown that year, but honestly, when I saw her on TV, I was secretly rooting for her to take the title.

Proud had always had a radiant smile, even as a child. Anyone who saw those big bright eyes and her perfectly rounded forehead would fall for her charm. Her parents had been dressing her up and sending her to pageants since she was young, all the way to the moment I saw her on the television screen.

“Oh? You already changed into your pajamas?” Proud raised an eyebrow. “Aren’t you going to take a shower?” The curious girl stepped out of the bathroom in a long-sleeved, knee-length nightdress printed with Minions. “Do you smell something?” she added, sniffing the air with her sharp little nose.

“Smell what?” I replied, already annoyed, not knowing what kind of game she was up to now.

“Like a smell…” Proud crawled onto the bed and started sniffing around me like a dog on the scent trail.

“Proud,” I said firmly, lowering my voice. “Do you want to change hotels?”

“Haha! I don’t know what smell it is. Maybe it drifted in from outside.”

The window wasn’t even open… She backed away, leaving behind a faint sweet scent that lingered around me.

“Were you spying on me just now?” she teased.

“…” I sighed, rolled over, turned my back to her, and pulled the blanket over my head. “Turn off the lights, okay?”

But then came a rustling sound that made me open my eyes again.

“Why are you hanging your clothes, Proud? You have to leave early tomorrow, remember?” I frowned, exhausted by her antics.

“I know, I know. I just don’t like wrinkled clothes. I’ll pack them up quickly in the morning.”

“Ugh…” I was tired. I just wanted to sleep. We could deal with it all tomorrow.

# 3. Just One More Night

*A beauty queen ?*

I shook my head and laughed. Do beauty queens really look like this when they sleep?

The girl, dressed in Minions-print pajamas, lay with her hair completely tousled and unkempt, so much so that it nearly covered her entire face. Her beautiful eyes were shut tight, and her full red lips were slightly parted. She sprawled across the bed with her arms stretched out, the blanket crumpled in disarray. Her head wasn’t even resting on the pillow. The hem of her skirt had ridden up, revealing her smooth legs—almost to the point of exposing her underwear.

Wasn’t she the one who said she would sleep at the edge of the bed, stay still, and not bother me?

“Hey!” I stood at the foot of the bed and grabbed Proud’s ankle to shake her, but she jerked it away before turning over and curling up on her side with one leg bent.

At that moment, I felt like I couldn’t breathe properly. Her fair skin peeked out from underneath her light-colored, strawberry-patterned underwear, as if it were saying “Good morning” to me. I stared for a brief moment before mentally saying “Goodbye” to it—but my wandering eyes had already fixated on the strawberries between her thighs instead.

Oh no. I shouldn’t be thinking like this. Get a hold of yourself!

I pressed my warm cheeks with my palms, then hastily threw a blanket over the strawberries and pulled Proud’s leg again.

“Proud.”

“Mm…” she groaned in irritation.

“Proud,” I said again, shaking her leg.

“I said I’m not playing,” Proud muttered, pulling the blanket to her chest and curling up like a child. A slight smile appeared on her lips, as if she were perfectly content.

This time, I climbed onto the bed and sat beside her. Leaning down, I whispered in her ear,

“I’m not **Tongdee**, I’m an immigration officer. I’m deporting you home back, Get up now, Proud!”

That did the trick. Proud sat bolt upright, her face tense as she looked around nervously. When she saw me, I made a sulky face.

“I just had a nightmare… immigration was going to send me home,” she said, covering her face with both hands and letting out a deep sigh, followed by a strange whimpering noise:

“Huuuuh…”

I laughed as I lay back down on the bed.

“There’s no immigration officer coming to send you back to Thailand. But today, you really do need to leave my room.”

Proud turned to me with wide eyes.

“Get up! Pack your bags!”

“It’s way too early, Rin,” she mumbled, frowning, “You really woke me up just to kick me out? Is that what Thai kindness looks like?”

“You said you’d leave early. Who was it that promised me that yesterday?” I asked, tilting my head.

She let out a huff, then glared at me before stomping off to the bathroom.

20 minutes...

.

.

30 minutes...

.

.

40 minutes…

I lay on the bed staring at the clock, feeling more and more annoyed, before getting up and walking to the bathroom door.

“Proud, are you taking a shower or training for the world swimming championship?”

“Just a little bit more! Almost done!”

I looked down at the bottom of the door and noticed a red fire extinguisher wedged behind it from the inside, keeping it shut tight.

“You have five minutes. That’s it. If you’re not out by then, I’m moving the fire extinguisher and taking over the bathroom myself.”

“You’re so mean!” her sweet voice shouted back immediately.

Not even five minutes later, Proud came out in a white bathrobe. She walked slowly over to sit in front of the mirror and started applying cream to her face, arms, and legs. Then she gently unwrapped the towel on her head, letting her long hair fall smoothly over her shoulders. With elegant fingers, she picked up the hairdryer and started blow-drying her damp hair.

I sat on the bed with my arms crossed, watching her every graceful, slow-motion movement with a growing sense of irritation. Honestly, I was pretty sure she was stalling.

“I think I’ll just move out and let you stay here instead.”

Proud turned to look at me instantly, her wide eyes showing surprise—not happiness, but shock.

“What? Why would you move out?” She paused in the middle of folding her clothes into her suitcase—still in her usual slow-motion style—and walked over to stand in front of me.

“I thought maybe you were stalling because you didn’t want to go find a new hotel. So fine, you can have the room. I’ll go stay somewhere else.”

“You really want me out that badly?” Her shoulders drooped.

Here we go again. The sad face. The dramatic guilt trip. Am I really that bad for wanting to sleep alone? Was it wrong of me to let her crash here just for one night because she didn’t manage to book a room in time? So now I’m the bad guy?

Her eyes—usually sparkling when she smiles—started blinking rapidly, like she was trying to stop tears from spilling. Her soft pink lips parted as she spoke.

“I was stalling. But not because I want you to leave. I just…”

Proud covered her face with both hands for a second, took a deep breath, then swept her hair back and let her hands fall to her sides. “I had a nightmare last night about immigration. It really scared me. I don’t want to be alone tonight.”

I stared at her quietly. What was she trying to say?

Now her eyes were starting to tear up. Blinking wasn’t working anymore—those tears were about to fall.

“I can’t let you stay with me the entire trip,” I said, feeling my resolve start to weaken.

“Just one more night. Please, just one more night, Rin. I think everything will feel better tomorrow.”

I looked at her clean, honest face, struggling with my thoughts. Her delicate eyebrows curved upward, as if begging for sympathy. Proud looked at me, hoping I’d give in.

“Are you here for vacation, Proud?”

“No.”

“Then why didn’t you book a hotel ahead of time?”

“Well, I…” There it was again—those teary eyes about to overflow. “I thought I could just book something once I got here. I didn’t expect there’d be problems at the airport.”

I looked at her, thinking it over. “And why’d you come alone?”

“You too came alone too, didn’t you?”

“ I didn’t.” I snapped, waving my hand toward Proud in frustration. “Unlike you,

I have a purpose. I know what I’m doing and where I’m going. What about you? Tell me—what exactly is your plan? Where are you even going?”

“...”

For just a split second, I thought I saw something flicker behind those tear-filled eyes—

And then suddenly—

“Oh god…”

She burst into tears. Just like that.

“Okay, okay! I won’t ask anymore. You can stay. But just for tonight, alright?”

“You’re really letting me stay?” Ugh, I hated this girl.

I just nodded quickly in response. “Yeah, yeah, whatever.”

The moment I said that, Proud turned around and practically sprinted to her suitcase, pulling everything she’d just packed out again and putting it all back around the room like a tornado. All that slow-motion drama from earlier? Gone in a flash.

“Thank you! Just give me five minutes to get dressed!” she beamed, then disappeared into the bathroom.

“Why do I even have to wait?” I muttered suspiciously.

“So we can go out together!” she said again.

That gave me instant goosebumps. I rushed to pack my small shoulder bag with essentials for the day, grabbed my coat, and quickly moved toward the door.

“Where are you going?” A cold voice cut through from behind just as I grabbed the doorknob. Her hand pulled me back into the room with the strength of a pageant queen.

“I’m not going sightseeing with you,” I said calmly. “We’re not going out together.”

“As you wish.” Proud let go of my arm and allowed me to walk out.

How strange. Was it really that easy? No drama? No arguments? I stepped into the elevator, smiling in relief. Finally, I’d escaped—without a single beauty queen ghost haunting my trail.

But just as the elevator doors were about to close, a golden high-heeled boot slid into the tiny gap left, forcing the doors to open again. I looked up from the shoe.

A tall girl with long legs in fitted black pants lifted her hand to adjust her silver mirrored Ray-Ban aviator sunglasses perched on her nose. She stepped gracefully into the elevator. Her gray knitted sweater was layered beneath a long designer coat from the latest collection. On her shoulder hung a rare small Chanel bag in metallic gold, currently priced like it was made of solid gold. A soft-colored scarf was wrapped around her elegant neck. Her long brown hair fell past her shoulders and gave off a faint fragrance as she stepped in to stand beside me.

“Are you heading to a fashion show or something?”

“You just don’t understand fashion, do you?”

I let out a quiet laugh, imagining the deadly glare she was probably giving me from behind those Ray-Bans.

.

. .

I left the apartment, walking through the cold but beautiful morning air, cutting across the streets toward the nearest subway station. I planned to head to the Hongdae area, hoping to enjoy a big Korean BBQ meal and then relax with some desserts in a cozy café.

Thud..Thud..Thud..Thud

It was only now that my senses picked up on something odd—a sound that had been following me the entire time since I entered the subway station. I’d been too distracted by the city atmosphere to notice.

Thud...Thud..Thud

I bit my lip, hesitating, before slowly turning to look behind me.

*Ohhhhh my fuckingggg god!!!!!!\**

People were walking past—men, women, the elderly, children—but the only person I could focus on was the one behind me.

I froze, locking eyes with the source of that eerie sound, before quickly turning back around. And that’s when my black Nike sneakers started moving—automatically—breaking into a run all on their own…

# 4. She Wrestled Me

Thump, thump, thump...

No matter how fast I ran, that sound didn’t fade. In fact, it kept getting closer and closer until—

“Rin! Why are you running?!”

“Then why are you following me?”

She caught up to me. I was out of breath. I wanted to scream, but I was too winded to let out a sound.

“I wasn’t following you!”

“Then why were you running?”

I couldn’t come up with a good reason why my Nike sneakers lost to her three-inch high-heeled boots.

“I just happened to be going this way.”

I adjusted my shirt. “Which way is that, Proud?”

I was trying to get her to say which direction she was heading so I could go the opposite way.

“Um…”

Proud hesitated. She raised her hand as if to point, then pulled it back and crossed her arms.

“Why should I tell you? You can go wherever you want, and I’ll go wherever I want. It’s none of your business.”

“Don’t follow me.”

The train arrived just then, so I stepped inside.

“I said don’t follow me!”

But it's too late. And telling her not to follow me didn’t work. Proud stepped onto the train gracefully.

And of course, she just happened to get off at the same station as me. She walked in exactly the same direction. No matter how many times I turned left, right, or entered a shop, Proud would always be right behind me—without leaving any distance between us.

She wasn’t “following” me. It was just a coincidence that we were going the same way.

I couldn’t take it anymore.

“Proud, what do you actually want?”

“Nothing! You’re walking around, and so am I. I’m not bothering you.”She gave me a sweet smile and reached out to link arms with me.

“....”

I stared at her in silence. I wasn’t going along with it.

“Okay,” Proud said, pouting. “Can I just come along with you? I’ll walk a little behind and won’t bother you.”

“Everything you’ve done today has been bothering me. I don’t like it.”

I said firmly, hoping she wouldn’t start being dramatic again.

“I’ve never been to Korea before, and I came alone. I’m afraid I’ll get lost. I’m still shaken up about the immigration stuff. Please let me tag along.”

“Give me your phone.”

She looked confused but opened her bag, took out her smartphone, and handed it to me. I took it and added my number to both phones.

“Now I have your number, and you have mine. I already added you on Line. If you get lost or have any problems, just call me—I’ll come get you.”

I handed her phone back.

“But from now on, let’s go our separate ways.”

Proud stood there, stunned. I took the chance to slip away, aiming for the Korean barbecue restaurant with the glass window up ahead.

“Wait!”

That sad face again.

“Just for today, please. I’m moving out of your place tomorrow anyway.”

"Ughhh! I hate you! Fine, follow me if you want!"

And just like always, the sad face vanished, leaving behind nothing but a sweet, innocent smile and a playful glint in her eyes.

That entire day, Proud trailed behind me at a distance. Whenever we passed a shop she wanted to go into, she'd come over and tap me, asking me to wait, then cautiously slip inside—constantly glancing back through the window, afraid I might run off.

If the store looked closed-off or dimly lit, she'd come tug on the hem of my shirt and ask me to go in with her. At first, I resisted. Later, I just got tired of saying no and ended up walking in ahead of her without needing an invitation. Because even if I refused, she'd always find a hundred ways to get me to go with her anyway.

And every time we finished a savory meal, Proud had to end it with something sweet. Or if she saw a cake shop she liked, she'd come up to me with that straight-faced look, gently poke my back with a slender finger, and invite me to sit and enjoy dessert with her.

By the evening, we were going from one shop to another, having fun shopping together. I started to feel like having Proud walking beside me wasn’t so bad after all.

Have you ever heard the stories about nightclubs in Korea?

They say the music there is wild—so much so that there are online threads titled "*You have to go at least once before you die."*

But I’ve never made it to one myself. Mostly because those same threads also mention things like “Korean guys are full of themselves,” “*Korean guys have octopus hands,*” and “*Korean guys get very touchy.”*

But tonight felt like the perfect before-you-die kind of moment, since I had Proud with me.

If I did end up getting dragged off by some octopus-handed guy, at least I’d have Proud’s butt to hang on to and get pulled back to shore… Or maybe I was trusting her a bit too much?

We both walked through the door, past the bouncers, into the thumping chaos.

**Flashing lights.**

**A crush of people.**

**Laughter**.

**Pounding dance music.**

The mixed scents of alcohol and perfume swirling in the air.

The sweet face of a woman in three-inch boots under flickering dim lights.

All of it—scattered, flickering images—burned themselves into the memory vault of my brain and into my dreams.

.

.

. .

My eyelids, heavy with sleep, slowly blinked open and closed, adjusting to the light.

My body, still sluggish, didn’t want to move from the soft spring mattress.

One bare arm reached out, groping lazily for my phone to check the time.

Where was it?

As my senses returned, I squinted around the room.

The plain-colored walls still held the same 42-inch flat-screen TV from the first day I checked in.

I turned onto my back, staring at the window curtain that had been drawn halfway open, letting the outside light stream in through the glass.

Was it snowing outside?

I slid one leg out from under the blanket to let my toes feel the cold, then slowly pushed myself up into a sitting position.

The blanket that was covering me had slipped down and was now bunched around my thighs, leaving my upper body cold—so I looked down.

And… I was naked. Completely.

I quickly used my left hand to cover my chest and reached down with my right to feel around my lower half.

“Holy shit! Why the hell am I not wearing anything?!”

While I was still freaking out, something moved beside me on the left—and then came a sleepy voice:

“You're awake? If you don’t cover up, you’re gonna catch a cold.”

“Aaaaahhhhhhhhhhh!!!”

A soft hand from the thing—no, person—next to me flew over and clamped over my mouth before she sat up and straddled me.

I froze in place, and the blanket slipped even more. Part of it landed on the floor, the rest barely hanging on around my waist, like it could fall off at any second.

Her pretty face leaned in so close our noses almost touched. Her lips parted.

“If you keep squirming, you're seriously gonna show me your body more than you thought , Rin.”

There was amusement in her eyes.

Right now, I was pretty much naked. The blanket had hiked up to my upper thighs—only one part of me was still barely hidden under the soft fabric.

If I could see my face reflected in her eyes, it would probably be bright red—half from embarrassment, half from anger.

I took a deep breath, covered my chest with one hand, and pushed at her forehead with the other.

“Get off.”

I glared at her, annoyed and embarrassed.

She grabbed my wrist and pinned it down while her other hand was still covering my mouth so I couldn’t scream.

“Don’t scream again. What if the people in the next room hear?” She sounded half-serious.

I was pissed. She had the upper hand and was totally calm about it.

So, I licked her hand.

She flinched and almost pulled it away—but that was all I needed. I bit down on it.

“Oh! What the hell, Rin?! Are you a rabid dog?!”

She yanked her hand back and pushed my shoulders flat onto the bed.

And that’s when I messed up. I had moved my hand from covering my chest to push her off. Now both of my hands were in front of me, trying to shove her away. My legs kicked around wildly.

We struggled like that until she finally managed to grab both my wrists and hold them down.

I was breathing hard, chest rising and falling—well, my bare chest—rising and falling.

The blanket that had been covering me was now on the floor at the foot of the bed. And Proud? She was sitting right on top of me. Like, right where she shouldn’t be.

“Let me gooo!”

My face was burning hot. I was completely naked.

Not to mention, just earlier, my lower body had rubbed up against her soft body while we were struggling.

Thankfully, her gray panties were still there between us.

Unfortunately for me, I was totally naked… and she was fully dressed.

She finally let go of my hands, then ran her fingers through her messy dark brown hair, looking super awkward. She stood up quickly, and I immediately pulled the blanket over myself.

“Um… I’m gonna go to the bathroom.”

She mumbled with a bright red face and practically ran out.

Wait—she's embarrassed?

Why? I'm the one who should be mortified, not her!

While she was in the bathroom for ten whole minutes, I sat there trying to figure out what the heck had happened last night.

We went to the club together. I drank, but Proud was with me, so I felt safe.

But after that… how did I end up in bed like this?

“What happened last night?”

I asked her as I sat there, fully dressed now, waiting for her to come out—still totally shaken by everything that just happened.

"You don’t remember?"

She looked a little surprised, though there was a strange sparkle in her eyes.

"I just remember having a few drinks at the club," I replied.

Her eyes were still gleaming with mystery before she said,

"Last night, you raped me."

Proud's face turned somber as she looked down at herself.

"No way." I shot back instantly.

There’s no way I’d ever do something like that to a childhood friend. Never.

"Then what do you remember?"

She turned to look at me.

"Do you remember why you were in that state this morning?"

“....”

"Answer me, Proud—if I really assaulted you, then why were you still fully clothed? And you sure didn’t look like someone who just got assaulted."

It was true—I couldn’t remember anything happening between me and Proud last night. But if I had done something like that… surely I’d remember something, right?

My nemesis in the pageant world is way too hot to forget.

"Do you remember coming into the room complaining about how stuffy it was? You started taking off your clothes piece by piece, even though I tried to stop you."

Okay, that part… that part I actually kind of remember.

I vaguely recall undressing and throwing my clothes beside the bed last night.

My eyes slowly shifted toward the gray sofa—yup, the red sheer lace panties I flung off last night were still lying there.

And my bra? Still hanging off the lamp by the bedside table.

Proud followed my gaze before turning to look me in the eyes.

"Wow. You’re wilder than I thought."

A sly smile crept onto her lips.

I quickly rushed over to pick up the scattered items, then came back and demanded,

"So what actually happened last night?"

"You seriously don’t remember how you forced yourself on me?"

Her eyes welled up with tears. That dramatic expression on Proud’s face—it was honestly just too much. Something about this felt off.

"Okay then, tell me. What exactly did I do?" I asked, turning to her.

She opened her mouth like she was ready to spill the tea—but suddenly clamped it shut again.

"You took off your own clothes. I told you not to, but you shoved me onto the bed and tried to grope me. I couldn’t fight you off. Then you looked me in the eye and said, *'Proud, Rin can’t hold back anymore. You’re just too beautiful. Sexy, naughty, bitchy. You’re mine now.'*

And you even licked your lips! Ugh, it was like one of those cursed ghost dramas.Have you ever seen those?And then you..."

She acted out the scene so dramatically, I honestly didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

"Okay, okay! That’s enough!"

What even was this? Did Proud binge-watch too many soap operas on Channel 17?

"Then you ripped off my clothes like some pervy old man—grabbed my boobs and—"

"Hey! I said that’s enough!" I cut her off immediately.

"You need to take responsibility."

"Responsibility for what?"

"Because You slept with me and said I am Yours ,So now, you’re not allowed to dump me. As long as we’re in Korea, you can’t kick me out again."

"We slept but Nobody died. You’re not pregnant. I promise… and if you are, I’ll raise the baby myself."

I bent down to pick up the scarf that had fallen on the floor.

"And” —" I looked back at her.

"Get out of my room.”

# 5: Snowfall and the Debushige Shop

“You slept with me and now you’re not going to take responsibility, Darin?” Proud stood with her arms crossed.

“Proud, we’re both women. What do you expect me to do? I don’t even remember if it actually happened or not.”

“Just because you don’t remember doesn’t mean it didn’t happen.”

“So what now? Do you want us to date? Or should I send my father to ask for your hand from Uncle Pakorn?”

“I’m not hoping for that much,” Proud replied, still with arms crossed, her face thoughtful. “But considering that I gave myself to you,”

I nearly choked on air hearing that line.

“…to comfort me, you have to take me around for the rest of our time in Korea. And you’re not allowed to kick me out of the room again.”

“What does that even have to do with anything? For all you know, you might’ve agreed to it last night. Or maybe you were the one who forced me! I could be the real victim here. Just leave my room, Proud. I’m not going anywhere with you.”

“You’re just going to act like nothing ever happened?” Proud raised an eyebrow, her eyes narrowing in frustration.

“I’m not saying that,” I answered. “I just can’t accept having to be stuck with you the whole time we’re here… **I feel suffocated**”

Proud let out a bitter smile. “...Is being with me really that bad, Rin?”

Something deep down told me I’d gone too far. For the first time, I looked into those brown eyes and genuinely felt guilty.

When I didn’t answer, Proud turned away and began dressing, packing her things into her bag. There was no hesitation, no dragging her feet like the day before. She zipped her suitcase and pulled it toward the door.

“Thanks… for everything here.” That was all she said before walking out.

. .

When Proud was still here, everything felt chaotic—headache-inducing. But now, an odd feeling settled over me. It was like I had lost something. Not enough to feel heartbroken, but enough to feel regretful and deeply uneasy. Shouldn’t I be happy that Proud had finally stopped bothering me? So why did I feel this anxious?

I sat on the couch for a while, frozen in place since the moment she left. I was dazed and couldn’t make sense of the feelings inside me. I told myself it was probably because we had been so close for two whole nights. Maybe I had simply gotten used to having her around.

Shaking off my thoughts, I got up and went to shower. Afterward, I walked out and started putting on lotion at the vanity. That spot used to be cluttered with all of Proud’s personal things. But now I was surprised to see a small brown passport lying there.

...A passport? Did Proud forget her passport?

I quickly grabbed my smartphone and tried calling her, but all I got was the dial tone—again and again, with no answer.

I threw on some clothes, just a coat over my underwear, slipped into shoes without socks, grabbed the room key, the passport, and my phone, and headed out.

The moment the hotel’s automatic glass door slid open, the air around me turned bitingly cold. The chill cut right through my coat—which was the only thing covering me. No sweater, no long johns, no t-shirt or sweatpants beneath it.

I pushed through the gently falling snow, looking left and right for Proud. In my hand, I unlocked my phone to open the app…

**I am your father**: Proud, where are you?

I typed the message and sent it to the contact named PROUD in the chat app.

**I am your father:** You forgot your passport. I brought it with me. (Read)

Not long after, the message I sent on Line was marked as Read, but there was no reply.

**I am your father:** Pick up the phone, Proud. (Read)

I tried calling her again as I walked along, scanning the streets for any sign of her, heading in the general direction of nearby hotels I saw on Google Maps. But, just like before, she didn’t answer.

**I am your father:** Proud, where are you? Just tell me. Your passport is with me. (Read)

The guilt I felt over how I treated Proud must have been what pushed me to keep wandering around in the snow looking for her like this—for over half an hour now. What a mess.

I kept walking, and my body began to shiver. The wind was strong, almost as if it wanted to punish me further for coming out so unprepared. My outfit wasn’t meant for extended time outside in weather like this. My bare hands were so cold I had to stuff them into my coat pockets. My legs, clad in nothing but sweatpants, were starting to go numb. Snowflakes began clinging to my hair.

**I am your father:** Proud—I'm out here wearing only a coat… where are you? (Read)

I stopped in front of a budae jjigae shop—a Korean hot pot place. Through the window, I saw people sitting around round pots placed on the tables, the red broth inside bubbling with a mix of ingredients and seasonings. Steam fogged up the glass like a curtain.

Still, I kept walking, all the way to the end of the road. It was probably time to give up and head back to the hotel. Proud knew where I was staying and had my number. If she really wanted her passport, she’d find a way to reach me.

With a sigh of surrender, I pulled my hat tighter over my head and sent one last message:

**I am your father:** I’ve come pretty far already, you know. (Read)

I dropped my smartphone into my coat pocket and turned to head back the way I came. I took a right turn at the corner near a bakery and passed by the same budae jjigae shop I had stopped at earlier—just as a Korean man pushed open the restaurant door and stepped outside.

Just then, a man carrying a cup of coffee from a well-known brand bumped right into me. Luckily, the hot liquid didn’t spill or drop to the ground, but it did make me stumble backward. The man apologized profusely, forcing me to turn around—and that’s when I saw the person I had been searching for.

Proud was standing in front of the budae jjigae restaurant, holding a rolling suitcase. Her tall, slender frame bent down to pick something up, then froze the moment she saw me.

“I brought your passport,” I said, walking up to her. I reached into my coat pocket and handed her the passport with slightly trembling fingers from the cold.

“Thanks,” Proud said, taking it from me.

Her pale face was flushed, redder than what the cold alone could cause. Her lips were swollen and pink, her eyes glistened at the corners. Had she been crying? Was it because I kicked her out?

“Why didn’t you answer your phone?” I asked flatly, a mix of irritation and relief bubbling inside me now that I’d found her.

Proud quietly looked me over while a man passed by, humming *Elvis Presley’s The Girl of My Best Friend—completely off-key.*

“I searched everywhere for you,” I added.

But it was clear Proud wasn’t listening to a word I said. She was too busy adjusting her scarf.

“You’re just going to—” The words caught in my throat, and I gasped a little when I realized what she was doing.

The scarf she’d been fussing with moments ago was now being wrapped gently around my neck. The warmth still lingered in the fibers, mixed with her clean, familiar scent. It spread through me like a comforting wave.

“What did you say just now?” Proud asked as she leaned in and tightened the scarf slightly. Then she took off her own gloves and pushed them into my hands. “Put these on.”

Her warm hands gently came up to cup both sides of my face. The heat from her palms seeped into my skin.

“Your cheeks are ice cold, Rin.”

I didn’t know how to react.

“I said... you can come back to the hotel with me,” she continued, her soft brown eyes shimmering. “We can go out together too, if you’d like.”

Her gentle hands slowly started to pull away from my face.

“Don’t,” I said quietly, pulling her hands back against my cheeks. “Let them stay there.”

I had no idea why I said that. All I knew was that it felt warm. Was I… smiling?

Snow was still falling. People passed by on the street. And Proud stayed right there, holding my cheeks in her hands, her gaze now resting on the reflection in the **debushige shop** glass window.

“Let’s go,” she said, finally lowering her hands. She took off her wool beanie and placed it on my head. “We need to find you something warmer to wear before you freeze to death out here.”

That silly girl pulled her suitcase and walked side by side with me back to the hotel. And today, for once, the dragging sound of her suitcase wheels wasn’t nearly as annoying as it used to be.

# 6. Not Enough Sleep

“$#$^$37$3€8#€1995€@9€@€”

“$#77$%€€#€@9{{#9[29%€88%€%8”

The loud voices of a man and a woman rang out, sounding more like an argument than a negotiation. Between the two of them sat a beautiful pair of shoes, and I—unable to understand a single word—could only glance left and right, biting my lip and tapping my foot impatiently.

Even though I couldn’t grasp what was being said, it was pretty clear that things ended on a happy note when the slender, elegant woman in a dark, stylish coat flashed a sweet smile at the male shop assistant.

“He gave me a discount,” she said, batting her long lashes before raising her brows at me with an innocent expression. I mean, the look in her eyes was mischievous, even though her face stayed sweet and composed.

“I had no idea you could speak Chinese,” I said, glancing at the shopkeeper who was now packing the shoes into a bag and handing them to Proud with a beaming smile. “He looks smitten with you. What charm spell did you cast on him?”

“I didn’t cast anything! That’s called talent Cutie” She puckered her lips dramatically, adjusted her sunglasses, and strutted out of the store like a pageant (Beauty) queen. I found myself irrationally annoyed with her.

Apparently, many Koreans speak Chinese fluently. Although honestly, I’m not even sure whether they're Koreans who learned Chinese, or Chinese people living in Korea. What I did just learn was that Proud could speak rapid-fire Chinese—and she was a master at bargaining, something I had to humbly admit I couldn’t do nearly as well.

When she opened her mouth and rattled off what sounded like flawless Mandarin—completely incomprehensible to me—she bargained the price of the shoes down from 75,000 won to 52,000 won, using nothing but a flutter of her lashes, a dazzling smile, and a light touch on the seller’s arm. It made me want to drop to my knees and become her disciple.

Shopping with Proud meant I ended up getting things at much cheaper prices, and saving money always puts me in a good mood.

But what was starting to get on my nerves was the fact that, in just three days, Proud had dragged me into the same store—SSS—four times.

“At this point, the staff probably recognize us,” I grumbled. But it was useless. Soon enough, she would flash that innocent sparkle in her eyes and give me a soft little smile, and I’d go weak. And just like always, Proud would end up getting exactly what she wanted.

We wandered through various street food stalls, munching and tasting as we went, our arms gradually filling with bags of clothes and makeup. This brand has good reviews, that one’s trending, this one just launched and some blogger raved about it... That was how she pitched every item.

“I want to go to **Nami Island,**” she suddenly said.

“There’s nothing there but trees and some celebrity statues.”

“I want to take a picture with **Bae Yong Joon.** Want some?” Proud offered me her ice cream as we walked.

I shook my head in refusal. “Who?”

“Bae Yong Joon. You know, the statue.” She kept holding the ice cream out, so I leaned in and took a bite just to get it over with and make her stop.

“You’re a K-drama fangirl, aren’t you?” Truthfully, the ice cream was pretty good. But I barely knew any Korean celebrities, except for Jun Ji Hyun—my ultimate favorite with her sassy, unforgettable charm.

“Well, maybe a little bit. Not completely obsessed... What about you? Who’s your bias?” she asked, taking another bite before offering it to me again. This time I took it without complaint.

“It tastes good, right?” Proud beamed. Her almond-shaped eyes sparkled with genuine delight.

“I’m a fan of **Kim Jong Un**,” I said with a cheeky smile.

.

.

. .

"What is this, military training or something?" she complained, making a face.

"I didn’t force you to come," I replied, shrugging.

"You’re the one who said we have to go to platform 3018," she rolled her eyes dramatically.

"We have to take a boat," I looked at my watch. "We still have time today."

Then, out of nowhere, her thumb reached up to wipe a bit of dessert off the corner of my mouth. I froze. And right after that, she held the cold ice cream up to my lips again.

"Here, last bite. So you’ll get a pretty girlfriend," she said playfully. Her lips were red from the cold and she smiled wide, showing off her perfectly straight teeth.

At that moment, I swear I felt my face heat up. The cold weather couldn't even cool down how warm my cheeks were.

The past few days, we’d been going around to tourist spots we found online. But honestly, when I come to Korea, I prefer just walking around, feeling the breeze, and chilling in random little restaurants or cafes in back alleys. I really like places like Insadong and Hongdae. I’m not even sure why—they just feel good.

A little part of me thought... maybe just once, I should ask Proud to go on a road trip with me. Somewhere far. Having her around like this—honestly, it wasn’t bad at all.

"Hey! Take a photo of me with Bae Yong Joon, quick!" her voice snapped me out of my thoughts. She was striking some ridiculous K-drama heroine pose behind the statue. And just like that, the nice little moment I had in my head was totally ruined.

That night after Nami Island, we made plans to head out of town for skiing the next day. But the next morning, we almost missed the bus—because I overslept. I hadn’t been sleeping well.

The Proud I’d gotten to know on this trip was super chill, not picky, easy to please, funny, and always full of little surprises. But the thing was… she tossed and turned like crazy in her sleep. So much that I kept waking up in the middle of the night. For the past few nights, it had been non-stop light sleep.

"Your eyes look so dark," she said, leaning in to inspect my face while we sat on the bus heading to the ski resort. "Like, really dark."

"I haven’t been sleeping well," I said simply. Her sweet face instantly turned guilty.

"Wait… is it because of me?" she looked worried. "Did I wake you up or something?"

"It’s fine. I’m okay," I replied. All I really wanted was to nap on the bus, but here she was, starting a full-on conversation.

"It’s just... when I sleep somewhere unfamiliar, or I don’t feel safe, I move around a lot. I don’t do this at home, I swear. Sorry..."

"Seriously, it’s fine. Don’t worry about it," I smiled at her.

But suddenly she went quiet, eyes wide, and stared out the window like she’d just remembered something big. What’s up with her?

The bus ride was over 3 hours long before we finally arrived. Proud was practically bouncing with excitement. We rented ski gear, put our stuff in a locker, changed into our outfits, and stepped outside.

In front of us was a snow-covered mountain with long rows of trees. The ski slopes were divided by skill level—from beginner to expert. Each route had its own vibe, from easy and chill to intense and fast.

"Where’d you go just now?" I asked when Proud came over to sit next to me while I was packing up my camera after filming.

"Just went for a little walk," she said, glancing at the camera bag I was zipping up. "Hey... I’ve seen your videos before. On your page."

"Wanna be the star of this trip’s video?" I teased.

"Sure, but just quick clips—don’t show my face, okay?”

. .

“Hey… have you ever skied before, Proud?” I stood up, placed my feet onto the skis, then slammed my heels down at the back to lock them in.

“Nope, never. But I think I can do it.” She pointed toward a guy standing on a snowy slope, surrounded by a bunch of kids. “I secretly listened in while that Chinese guy was teaching the kids,” she giggled like a kid herself.

“What did he say?”

“He said when you wanna stop, do this.” Proud spread her legs and turned her toes inward to show me. “And when you wanna turn, do it like this. Want to go forward? Like this.” I glanced at her little demo. Hmm… cute, I guess. But I had no idea if it’d actually work.

“Let me teach you properly first—put your helmet on.”

“Aww, are you worried about me?” Ugh, that smug face and teasing eyes again.

“I’m worried… you’ll end up crashing into someone and hurting them.” I pulled her closer, brushed some hair off her face, and gently put the helmet on her head.

“You were way cuter when you were little,” Proud muttered and shot me a side-eye before mumbling something under her breath that I couldn’t catch.

I spent a while teaching my old childhood friend how to ski at the bottom of the slope. She picked it up fast—didn’t even need me to explain things more than once. Still cheeky, just like when we were kids.

Once she got the basics down, I let her take the ski lift up to the beginner's slope while I followed from a distance. She actually did really well. Fell a few times, sure, but she was improving nonstop. That was a good sign.

We hung around the ski area until late in the afternoon, then packed up and took the bus back. I was so exhausted from skiing and lack of sleep that I totally passed out on the ride—slept the whole way until we got to Seoul. Proud was the one who gently shook me awake when we arrived.

When I opened my eyes, I realized I had been sleeping all over her. My face was almost buried in her neck. She didn’t say anything while we walked off the bus and into the station, but I saw her stretching the arm I had been lying on—like three or four times.

“So cold…” she muttered, shivering next to me while rubbing her hands together. Her breath came out in little clouds.

It was below freezing outside, so Proud kept hugging herself the whole time. I took out a few hot packs from my bag and handed them to her, then helped her stick them on her body.

“Thanks.”

“Yeah.”

The hot packs helped, and she seemed less cold after that. But I still ended up taking off my wool hat to put it on her.

“If you give that to me, what are you gonna wear?”

I shrugged. “I’m not that cold… Your face is really red, though.” Her ears too. And she wouldn’t even meet my eyes. Probably freezing. I tugged the hat down over her ears for her.

We stopped by a supermarket inside the building and grabbed a few warm things to eat. Took turns having bites—just enough to fill our stomachs and warm up.

Then we headed out to catch the subway, chatting about random stuff the whole way until we reached the station near where we were staying.

And with the delicious smell of food from a roadside pojangmacha (street food tent), we decided to stop before heading back to the hotel. We went into a clear plastic tent, sipping steaming hot soup, taking turns grabbing bites of tteokbokki and other dishes to warm ourselves up. We shared everything, huddled together from the cold—so much so that the shop owner gave us a weird look, like, “You’re both dressed so nicely, but can’t even afford to order your own plates?”

—But who cares what people like that think? We were too busy enjoying the food.

That night, I woke up in the middle of the night again because someone kicked me hard in the stomach while tossing and turning. I was annoyed—not just because of the pain, but also because I’d been waking up like this every single night.

I sat up and stared at her for a moment. Proud didn’t look calm. She kept shifting positions, tossing and turning, moving her legs and arms every five or ten minutes.

The words she’d said earlier on the bus came back to me: “If I sleep somewhere unfamiliar, or if I don’t feel safe, I guess it happens…”

I lay back down, scooted closer to her back, slipped an arm under her neck and gently pulled her into an embrace. My other hand wrapped around her waist, and I pressed my body along her back.

“Mmnnn… What are you doing?” she mumbled sleepily from inside my arms.

“Why are you awake?” I whispered groggily against the back of her neck.

“Because you’re the one hugging me.”

“You keep tossing around.” Proud shifted uncomfortably. “Am I holding you too tightly?” She seemed restless in my arms.

“No…” That was all she said, then she went quiet for a long while.

“So what’s wrong?” I was half-asleep, and ended up resting my face against her neck.

“You’re talking right into my neck—it tickles.”

“I won’t talk anymore. Let’s just sleep, okay?” I pulled her in tighter, snuggled closer, and buried my face in her softly scented hair.

That night, I slept so well. Proud didn’t toss and turn again at all. Now I know how to stop someone from kicking in their sleep. And I’m totally going to do this every night… for the sake of my own sleep quality.

…Seriously.

## 7. Photograph - Ed Sheeran

The next day, we wandered around town causing our usual bit of chaos. Proud had made a new friend—an elderly Korean woman who owned a fruit shop right next to our hotel. She had taken to buying a box of fresh, plump strawberries every day to snack on in our room.

If it were anyone else, they’d probably just buy the fruit and leave. But not my roommate, the ever-friendly Miss Congeniality. She would stand there chatting away with the ajumma (auntie) who ran the shop like they were long-lost relatives.

Back in our room, I let Proud take her shower first. Meanwhile, I sat editing a video clip and some photos—Proud, of course, was the honorary model. I posted them to our page before it was finally my turn to clean up.

The small red fire extinguisher was still being used as a doorstop to keep the glass bathroom door from swinging shut. I set my things down and walked over to fill the bathtub to the brim.

My phone doubled as a speaker, playing **Ed** **Sheeran’s** **Photograph** softly in the background. I closed my eyes and sank into the warm water, feeling the tension in my muscles melt away. The soreness from all the walking and the fatigue from traveling slowly eased.

*We keep this love in a photograph*

*We made these memories for ourselves*

*Where our eyes are never closing*

*Hearts are never broken*

*And time’s forever frozen still*

*So you can keep me*

*Inside the pocket of…*

Rrrrrr….Rrrrrrr….

My moment of bliss was interrupted when the song suddenly

stopped—someone was calling me. I felt a small pang of annoyance but didn’t even think of getting out of the tub to answer. I waited until the call ended on its own.

*…Holding me closer till our eyes meet*

*You won’t ever be alone…*

**Rrrrrrr!!!! Rrrrr!!!**

The sound irritated me. Still, I lay there, motionless, soaking in the warmth, trying to ignore it.

*Loving can heal, loving can mend your soul*

*And it's the only thing that I know, know…*

The song skipped for the third time—

**Rrrrrr!!!**

I was seriously annoyed, but I pushed the frustration way down and got up. Water dripped from my body as I stepped out of the tub. My right leg made it out fine, but as soon as I lifted my left foot, the wet floor made me slip. My arms flailed around, trying to grab onto something. My brain was yelling, Don’t let your head hit anything! I threw my left arm out, and it slammed right into the edge of the tub.

Then—boom—gravity pulled me down hard.

My body hit the floor with a loud thud.

Pain exploded everywhere.

I just lay there on the bathroom tiles, curled up. It felt like something had knocked the wind out of me. My right hip was screaming in pain from taking the hit. But what hurt the most was my left arm—it was this sharp, intense pain I’d never felt before. I actually wondered for a second if it was broken. But I hurt too much to even move and check. And to make things worse, my forehead was starting to throb.

I had no energy left in me, but my eyes and ears were still working. I saw someone move the little red fire extinguisher that had been propping the door open, then Proud came rushing in with a panicked look on her face.

Meanwhile, that stupid phone was still ringing nonstop on the bathroom counter.

She glanced at me quickly, then dropped down to her knees beside me.

“Rin!!! Are you okay?!!!”

She held my face in her hands like she was scared I was going to fall apart. Her eyes were darting all over me, checking for injuries.

“Barely,” I muttered, eyes still shut, hurting all over.

“Can you get up?” she asked, her hands gently checking my arms and body.

“Let me just lie here for a sec,” I said in a raspy voice.

She stood up and grabbed a white towel from the rack, then gently wrapped it around my totally naked, wrecked body. After waiting a bit for me to catch my breath, she helped me sit up on the edge of the tub.

“Where does it hurt?”

“My arm,” I said with a wince as I tried to move it. “Is it broken?”

She gently felt my upper arm and shook her head.

“No, it’s not broken. Just really badly bruised. Can you move it at all?”

“It’s this sharp pain near my shoulder.”

She felt around my shoulder.

“It’s not dislocated. Probably sprained or slightly out of place. But your forehead is swelling too.”

She poked the spot gently above my eyebrow.

“Are you feeling a bit better now? Come on, rinse off first. I’ll help.”

She started to pull the towel off me, but I grabbed it tight with my good arm.

“No need. I can do it myself.”

By then I could move pretty normally again—except my hip hurt, my forehead throbbed, and my left arm was basically useless.

“Yeah right. You almost broke your arm, and now you’re trying to be a hero? I’m helping.”

“I said I can do it.”

Now that I wasn’t in so much pain, the embarrassment started kicking in. She’d seen me completely naked.

“What are you so shy about? I’ve already seen everything. That night, you literally jumped me. It was way more than just seeing.”

I looked away. “I can handle it.”

“I’m not going to take advantage of you, okay?”

Her worried, caring eyes actually made me feel warm inside. Slowly, I let go of the towel and allowed her to take it off without putting up a fight.

She helped me into the shower, both of us squeezing into a space that honestly felt way too small for two people.

Warm water from the showerhead poured over my shoulders while I stood facing the corner, with my back to the one who had so kindly offered to help me bathe.

Then I felt her soft hand touch my back, slowly running over my skin with the slickness of soap bubbles. Her hands moved up from my arms to wrap gently around my neck, then slid back down my back. That warm touch followed the curve of my waist before slipping to the front—brushing lightly over my stomach and barely grazing my chest, just enough to make my heart skip a beat—then moved lower, gently rubbing my hips.

“Wow… your hips are all bruised, Rin,” she said, her fingers softly tracing the marks.

“Can you just finish this already, Proud?” I said, still not turning around. I was going crazy. If only—if only I hated her more, or if she wasn’t so good-looking. If she were rude, mean, or not so gentle and warm in the way that makes you want to lean into her… maybe I wouldn’t feel this twisted up inside. Maybe my chest wouldn’t be pounding like this.

“Spread your legs a bit.”

Oh god, I’m seriously gonna die.

Her hand was slowly gliding up from my ankle to the top of my thigh, and my brain just completely short-circuited.

She hadn’t even touched anything that should’ve made me feel this way, but somehow my whole body felt like it was burning. I even bit my lip without realizing it.

I couldn’t take it anymore—I reached out blindly for the faucet and turned the water on full blast to rinse off quickly. Water poured down over both of us from the rain shower, and I heard her let out a small squeak from the cold. That made me turn around on instinct.

Her face was so close. Those pretty eyes I’d been avoiding the whole time in here were now just inches away from mine. We were standing way too close.

“Turn off the water,” Proud said softly, a little out of breath.

The water stopped, but we didn’t move. Her silky wet hair clung to her smooth face. Water dripped down her cheek, along her chin. Her lips were red and soft and just... so tempting.

“You’re all wet now,” I said, even though honestly, I should’ve been more worried about myself—naked, soaked, and with a sore arm. But all I could think about was her, fully dressed but soaked on top.

“You rinse off. I’ll go get a towel,” Proud said quickly, stepping out of the shower. She came back with a towel and handed it to me without even looking my way.

Damn it. Damn it… damn it.

## 8. The Music and the Conductor

We went our separate ways to get dressed after leaving the bathroom, both of us awkward and unsure. She told me to wait.

I sat on the edge of the bed, picked up my smartphone, and checked to see who had made me get out of the bathtub just to answer a call—one that nearly led to me slipping and getting seriously injured.

Proud rummaged through her suitcase for a while, producing the sounds of zippers and clothes shifting. Then she walked over and stopped right in front of me, holding a tube of unopened ointment in her hand.

And I was feeling a solid 7.8 on the Richter scale of frustration when I found seven missed calls and a short message that said, “Who's the girl in the photo Rin uploaded to her page?”

—**From Pat, my ex-girlfriend… and yes, I had only just recently added the “ex” to that title.**

“Does it still hurt?” Proud knelt beside me, gently squeezing the gel from the tube and softly applying the clear ointment to the bruised area above my elbow.

“I can move my arm now. It doesn’t hurt—unless someone touches it,” I replied. Her soft fingers lightly traced over the deep red bruise on my upper arm.

“Your hip is bruised too... want me to put some on it?”

“No, it’s okay. I’ll do it myself.”

—I was afraid I’d get carried away.

Er, I mean... I thought it might be inappropriate.

Okay, okay, fine. I admit it: just imagining her smooth hands caressing my backside was enough to make my thoughts spiral.

My makeshift medic straightened up and looked down at me, then leaned in and placed her fingers gently on my face, sliding them up to my temple.

“Your skull’s not cracked, right? Do I need to take you to a doctor?”

I tilted my head away. “Don’t press too hard. It still hurts.”

“It’s still red. Kind of swollen too.” Proud leaned in until our faces were level.

“Do you have a headache? Any blurred vision? Slurred speech? Can you move properly? Show me.”

Because she looked genuinely concerned, I followed her instructions without resistance.

“I’m fine, Proud. My brain’s still working.”

She gave me a small smile and moved in even closer. As she squeezed more gel from the tube, she blew warm air onto the bruise, then gently spread the gel onto my forehead with her slender fingers.

...Something inside me stirred.

The clean scent of her clothes, the faint fragrance of her damp hair—it all drifted to my nose. Our faces were way too close. The pheromones she was giving off were making me lose control. I lowered my eyes, trying not to look into hers, but her smooth thigh brushing softly against mine as she shifted only made things worse. My self-restraint was crumbling to dust.

I could feel my breathing become uneven. The emotions stirred in the bathroom were reigniting in full force.

I accidentally clenched my teeth, swallowed hard, and dug my nails into my palm just to try and keep still. But the hand resting on my lap was refusing to obey. The friction of resisting temptation only made the desire crashing around my stomach feel more intense. Slowly, hesitantly, I moved my hand—reaching out until my fingers lightly touched the smooth, gleaming skin of her thigh.

Everything froze.

The hand applying the ointment stopped moving. I looked up at Proud, my fingers still resting where they landed. The eyes that met mine were filled with confusion—mixed with surprise.

For a split second, I panicked at what I had just done. But something in the sweetness of her gaze seemed to give me permission to continue. My five fingers moved hesitantly at first, testing the waters, before slowly sliding upward. My short hand brushed along her pale thigh, which was gradually revealed as her skirt lifted with the movement of my fingers.

The smoothness of the skin on her inner thigh, beneath the hem of her nightdress, nearly drove me mad. Yet Proud gently shifted her leg toward my hand, as if welcoming the touch.

The higher I moved, the harder my heart pounded. The closer I came to my destination, the more our breathing trembled.

Proud held her breath, then exhaled slowly, closing her eyes as she tilted her chin into the air. Her head leaned slightly, moved by the wave of emotion, just as my fingertips gently brushed her most sensitive spot through the thin fabric—slowly and carefully.

Her right hand, resting on my left shoulder, gave a light squeeze before relaxing again. Then, I pulled her gently, guiding her to sit astride my lap.

Her brown eyes met mine, the sweetness in them holding me still while I slowly unbuttoned her nightgown, one button at a time. I carefully opened the fabric. A rush of nerves swirled in my stomach. Her soft, radiant skin and full, shapely chest made me lean down to press a kiss on her, while my hands moved instinctively to massage her slender waist.

She wrapped her arms around my neck as I embraced her waist and lifted her gently, laying her down in the center of the soft bed. I nuzzled her warm neck, intoxicated by her sweet scent, which clouded the part of my mind responsible for restraint.

But because we’d been friends for so long, everything felt strangely complicated. It wasn’t purely sweet, and it wasn’t exactly casual either. At this moment, I was just sleeping with a friend, and I didn’t know how to behave. I kept telling myself it was just sex—just physical desire.

“Are you nervous?”

Proud didn’t respond, only gazing at me with glossy, trembling eyes. Her cheeks were flushed, and her body tensed slightly as I pressed kisses along her skin.

“Were you this tense the first time we slept together?” I asked softly, lifting my good hand to brush her bangs away from her face.

She averted her eyes. “Rin…”

I looked at her silently.

“I lied that day. We never actually slept together.”

I sat up straight, brushing my loose hair back over my shoulder before leaning forward again, straddling her soft hips.

“I know.”

“You… know?” Proud stiffened as I traced slow circles across her lower stomach with my finger.

“Don’t give me those innocent eyes,” I said with a faint smile. “I’ve known you since we were kids. Don’t try to trick me with a story just because I can’t remember. You’ve had that raspy voice ever since we were little.”

Her stomach tensed even more as my fingers, once gentle, began kneading with firmer pressure.

“Then why did you let me help you shower?” she asked, guiding both my hands to rest on her thighs. Her gentle touch matched the emotions she was trying to contain.

“I was cramping… and sore,” I murmured, tracing my index finger along the edge of her bra. My breathing became shallow, and a soft sigh escaped my lips.

“Does your arm still hurt?”

I lifted my injured left arm and deliberately ran my finger slowly across her skin as I reached to unclasp the front of her bra—

Proud loosened her grip and placed both hands on the bed, leaning in toward me until our faces were only inches apart. Then, in a soft voice, she murmured,

"It seems to work..."

I lowered my head to her chest, tracing my tongue gently along the soft curve before tugging at one side of her bra with my teeth. But before I could see anything, Proud’s hand quickly came up to cover herself.

“Turn off the light,” she said, her clear skin flushed with warmth.

“I won’t,” I whispered, pressing a light kiss to the back of her shy hand that was shielding her chest. “Move your hand,” I coaxed, hoping to ease her nervousness—but instead, her cheeks turned an even deeper shade of red.

“Rin, please... turn off the light.” Her hand remained firmly in place.

I kissed her hand again, then offered a gentle smile as I slowly removed my shirt, leaving only a bra covering my upper body.

“I’m shy too,” I told her softly.

"……" She lovely lips pressed together.

Leaning in, I placed a kiss on her red ear and whispered huskily, “Then I’ll go first. Help me take off my bra.”

She reached around behind me with the hand that wasn’t covering her chest, trying to unhook the clasp with one hand—but failed. I let her keep trying while I teasingly nibbled her earlobe.

“Mmhh…” a soft moan escaped her throat as I kissed and nuzzled her there.

“You like that?” I whispered, feeling her lean closer. I traced my nose along her skin and blew a warm breath by her ear. “You like it when I do this, don’t you?” My lips brushed over her ear again, teeth grazing the soft cartilage before my tongue flicked over it once more.

Proud’s hand trembled, still unable to undo the clasp. “Are you ever going to get it open, Proud? Use both hands,” I chuckled against her skin.

When she finally let go of covering herself to help remove my bra, I immediately leaned down and kissed the soft peak I had longed to taste.

Her heartbeat was pounding so strongly I could feel it beneath my lips.

“Ah…” she gasped, flinching slightly, but not pulling away—letting me explore with my tongue until her body began to stir.

“Rin... you're cheating… I…” I slipped off the other side of her bra and gently teased her firm, soft chest. “I haven’t even gotten yours off yet.”

“Proud… are you sure about this?” I asked softly.

She nodded.

“You know… we’re just friends, right?” I searched her dark brown eyes, trying to read her heart. She nodded again—slowly this time.

So I sat up and unclasped my own bra, tossing it aside. She turned her head away, too shy to look. Wanting her attention, I trailed my fingers deliberately across her sensitive skin, circling gently.

A sweet, helpless moan escaped the lips of the friend I once knew so well.

But just as I leaned in to kiss her mouth, she turned away.

**“I don’t kiss friends**,” she whispered, her words freezing me in place. “**We can do Everything, Rin… but not kissing. Not with a friend.”**

But I wanted to kiss her. I wanted to feel her lips part beneath mine when I touched her…

Still, I stopped myself.

Instead, I cupped her face tenderly and kissed her warm cheek, letting my lips trail down her jaw, along her neck, and then her stomach—where I bit gently at her soft muscle, making her tense and twist beneath me.

Then I lowered my lips to the thin fabric between her thighs.

Her whole body trembled as I caressed the inside of her legs, slowly sliding my fingers under the edge of her shorts, brushing over the soft skin beneath…

And all the while, I watched her—memorizing every fleeting expression on her face.

“Rin…” she moaned.

Her underwear was gently pulled aside, revealing what had been hidden. Proud flinched slightly as I pressed a soft kiss to her delicate skin, my tongue teasing lightly, just enough to send a shiver through her. Her body arched, and she let out a sound I never imagined I'd hear—certainly nothing a pageant judge had ever encountered.

The look in her glistening eyes, the way she arched into me, how her body tensed every time my tongue brushed her skin—the breathless sounds, her hands gripping her own chest… This beauty queen was driving me wild.

God, I couldn’t keep going at this slow pace. I’d meant to tease her until she begged, but somehow, it was me who was losing control. She was tempting me—without even trying.

I rose up and quickly pulled off her underwear, then peeled off my own pants in a rush. Spreading her legs gently, I traced my fingers down the soft, sensitive skin between them. Moisture glistened there, a clear sign of desire, making each touch smooth and burning, causing her stomach to rise and fall with the waves of feeling.

My fingers slipped into her slowly, moving inside as my thumb circled gently on the outside. At the same time, I leaned down to kiss and suck at the soft peaks of her chest, sending shivers through her entire body.

One of her hands remained on her chest, the other wrapped around my neck.

Then I realized—her body was Vibrate. Her elegant frame moved with soft grace, as if caught in a rhythm only we could hear… and I was the one conducting it.

**The higher the music (Moans) in our silent room,** the more urgently Proud moved—her flushed face, her quickening breath, her heart pounding in sync with mine. Her nails raked lightly down my back as her moans grew needier, her body trembling until finally she gave in, relaxing slowly in my arms. But our song wasn't over—just a pause before the next movement.

I was no longer leading, but moving with her—her white legs parted to welcome me, our bodies syncing, pressing closer with a deep, aching need.

A silent symphony swelled around us—in the stillness of night, under soft-falling snow beyond the window, skin warm against skin, bare bodies entwined. We were wrapped in music made of breathless gasps and whispered moans.

*And perhaps… this might be the best moment of my trip to Korea.*

*Because all I truly wanted—desperately—was to kiss those glistening red lips.*

# 9. The Neighbor

I had a dream. I dreamed I was lying on a fluffy cloud. It was so soft and smelled so good that I couldn’t help but nuzzle into it. But then the sun popped out from behind the clouds, shining so brightly that it woke me up.

I heard the sound of water hitting the floor just as I opened my eyes. The memories from last night came rushing back—especially the sight of a naked woman’s silhouette behind the foggy shower glass.

…I’m hungry.

I stepped down from the bed and walked—totally naked—toward the sound. Steam covered the glass shower door, but not enough to hide the beautiful body inside.

Then the sliding door opened, and the person inside jumped in surprise when she saw me.

Water was pouring down her stunning figure—my “former” rival—tracing over every curve and angle of her body.

I stepped under the rain shower with her, letting the water soak me from head to toe. It ran over the marks on my back from last night’s fun, making them sting just a little.

“What are you doing in here?!” Proud said, voice low, backing up until she hit the wall, trying to cover herself with her hands and arms.

“My arm hurts. Help me shower,” I said shamelessly. I gently pulled her hands away, then slid my knee between her legs and pressed our bodies close—so close our bare chests touched.

Proud took a long, shaky breath. Her soft red lips, damp from the water, parted slightly—and I couldn’t resist touching them with my fingers.

I brushed her wet brown hair to one side and pressed my lips to her ear, biting and licking a little too eagerly. She reacted instantly—pressing her body against mine, tilting her head back and grabbing onto my hair.

A moan—“Mmm… ahhh”—slipped out of her mouth as she lifted one leg and wrapped it around me, pulling me in tighter.

Proud made that cold water feel like fire—burning, intense, and impossible to put out.

When her knees finally gave way, I held her close. Her body melted into mine, soft and delicate like a clingy little kid, and I just wanted to kiss her all over.

We finally got dressed, ready to go out and explore like we planned yesterday. But before we could even step out the door, we ended up tearing each other’s clothes off again.

From a shy girl yesterday, Proud turned into a total seductress overnight. Her eyes, her movements, her scent, her body—even her soft lips with a light shade of lipstick—everything about her drove me wild. All I could think about was how amazing she looked when we were having sex.

“Are you trying to kill me?” Proud mumbled as we both lay there, panting and exhausted after round after round.“Let’s go eat. I need energy.”

I kissed her temple and pulled her up off the bed.

.

.

**3 p.m.!**

We didn’t end up leaving the room until 3 in the afternoon. We walked around the hotel looking for some quick food—we were way too hungry to go anywhere far.

We were sitting in a restaurant where the waiter was a well-mannered, handsome young Korean man. He was tall and lean, standing by our table like a leading actor from a Korean drama, ready to take our order.

“How long will you be staying in Korea?” Proud asked while placing some vegetables on my plate with her chopsticks.

I answered her question honestly, while also pushing aside the vegetables she had just given me.

“You’re a grown woman now, Rin. You really need to start eating vegetables,” she said as she picked up another piece and held it near my mouth.“They’re good for you.”

I gently pushed her hand away. “They’re fine, just not to my taste.”

“This one’s really easy to eat. I’ll show you,” she said and popped the vegetable into her own mouth. She chewed slowly with a smile, as if to prove just how delicious it was, looking completely content in a way that seemed meant to convince me.

“So? How’s that one? What does it taste like?” I asked while picking up another piece of vegetable and holding it out to her, then another, and another—asking her to demonstrate how to eat them. I ended up smiling despite myself... Proud really was adorable.

“Rin,” she squinted at me, looking suspicious. “You tricked me.”

“Tricked you?” I replied, resting my chin in my hand and gazing at her calmly.

“You tricked me into eating all these vegetables so you wouldn’t have to.” “That’s not true,” I said, still with my chin in my hand, as I picked up an oyster and held it in front of us. “Did you know there's an old folktale that says... **oysters are sacred food—they’re actually plants, vegetables even.**.. So I am eating vegetables, just like you wanted.” I popped the oyster into my mouth and gave her a teasing smile.

She squinted like someone who had just realized she’d been duped, then quietly went back to eating from her own plate.

“Actually,” I said, picking up a carrot from her plate, “carrots aren’t bad.” I put it in my mouth—the taste wasn’t great, but not terrible either. Still, I felt a sense of reluctance while chewing on vegetables.

Proud gave a subtle smile as I raised an eyebrow at her. But the brightness in her eyes said everything—how she really felt.

“So, what’s the plan for the rest of the day?” Proud asked as we sat at the table after a long silence.

Her soft eyes peeked out from beneath long lashes. Her lips were flushed from the spicy curry, and her cheeks were glowing pink—so inviting it made me want to nuzzle them. Her hair gently grazed her shoulders and the nape of her neck—places I had been admiring just an hour before. I couldn’t help but reach out and tuck her hair behind her ear.

She instinctively tilted her head and leaned into my hand. That simple gesture made me want to sweep the dishes off the table, lay her down on it, tear off her clothes, and make love to this beauty queen right there in the middle of the restaurant.

“I don’t Know, Where would you like to go?” I asked vaguely, trying to push away the dirty thoughts swirling in the back of my mind.

“I don’t know, too.” she murmured, biting her lip.

“In that case… why don’t we go back to the room and rest for the day?” I suggested with a sweet, innocent smile.

“You really think so?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay”

“Let’s go back to the room.”

“Sounds good.”

“Should we pick up some snacks to take with us?” I said, absentmindedly playing with her fingers on the table as we waited for the bill. “Just in case… we’re too lazy to come back down later. We can just relax all night and not worry about dinner.”

"Hmm," Proud murmured with a smile, lips pressed together. "We’ll finally get a long break."

A break? That word felt so distant from both my imagination and reality.

I had never once seen the moon while in Korea. From the very first day, Proud and I had been too busy exploring. By the time night fell, we’d be holed up in our room—leaving only her dazzling eyes to be the thing that captured me every night.

.

.

. .

It was another coincidence when we found out we were booked on the same flight back to Thailand.

Each of us dragged a large suitcase full of things we’d bought during the trip. But the real problem was the multiple boxes of Jeju oranges. Proud insisted on carrying them all the way back, despite my repeated warnings that we might exceed our baggage weight limit If not then get charged an expensive fee—or worse, have to abandon something at the airport. But she wouldn’t listen, simply because:

"These oranges are amazing, Rin. They’re like fresh vitamin C being squeezed straight into your mouth. I’m not eating them alone!"

We were lining up to check in at the airport, and it seemed like I was the only one worried about her luggage being over the limit—by ten full kilograms. Proud, on the other hand, looked completely calm, confident, and carefree.

"Oh! I'm sorry," she said, apologizing to a group of three or four young people in front of us in line. She had stumbled into them in a way that even I couldn’t quite understand. It was as if she’d tripped over air—like she’d been shoved by a ghost or something.

"It’s okay," one of the young men replied, turning to face her.

"Are you Thai?" Her bright, cheerful smile beamed.

"Yes," he answered with a shy, polite smile and looked like he was about to turn back to chat with his friends. But...

"I’m so happy to see another Thai here! It’s my first time here and I’m still a bit confused about which gate to go to," she said.

Confused? Just now she was leading me through check-in without a hitch. She never said anything about being confused.

"Oh, well you can walk with us then," he offered. "We’ve been here several times—it’s not hard."

"Wait… Are you DJ Proud?" one of the girls in the group suddenly asked.

"Yes, I am," Proud replied with a soft, charming smile. "You know me? That’s so flattering."

"I listen to your show all the time! Your voice is so beautiful and the program is so funny. I follow you on Instagram too… Can I take a picture with you?"

"Of course!" Proud continued chatting comfortably with her fans while the line slowly moved forward. "So where did you all go during your trip?"

"So many places! Blah blah blah, and then blah blah blah…” I stopped paying attention. I was too lazy to keep listening, so I pulled out my phone to check my email.

"Is that your friend? She's with you, right?"

"Yes, we came together. She’s not a celebrity though."

"But your friend is really pretty."

Proud nudged me to get my attention, and I looked up and smiled at them.

"So it’s just the two of you?" the guy asked.

"Yup, just the two of us. We shopped a lot and forgot to check our luggage weight. And if my friend doesn’t smile much…" Proud poked my cheek, "…it’s not because she’s unfriendly—she’s just stressed about the overweight baggage fee."

Everyone laughed lightly at her comment, while I just smiled and glanced sideways at her.

"You can share some of your stuff with us if you want," the guy offered. "We’ve got plenty of weight allowance left—we didn’t buy much."

"Oh no, that’s okay. I’d feel bad," Proud replied. Her words were polite, but her twinkling eyes sparkled like someone who’d just taken the bait.

" don’t worry about it. We still have some weight allowance left anyway."

"Thank you so much. I’m so lucky to have run into you girls—now my friend can finally smile again."

Ha ha… So, whose overweight luggage was it really? Why am I starting to feel like it’s become mine?

"Thank you," I said sincerely. Not only did they share their baggage allowance with us, but they also helped carry several boxes of oranges that Proud intended to bring on the plane as gifts for her friends. Meanwhile, the mischievous girl turned to wink at me with a sweet, pageant-worthy smile.

“You’re sneaky, Proud.”

.

. .

Once we arrived in Thailand, we each took separate taxis home, but ended up arriving at our houses at the same time. She walked into her house, and I walked into mine. Everything should have ended right there.

I returned to my normal routine: staying at the condo from Monday to Friday since it’s close to work, and going home on weekends to spend time with my parents, just like usual.

But strangely, during the first week after coming back from Korea, I felt unusually eager and restless to return home.

"Oh, Rin, why are you home today?"

"Don’t you want me to come home?" I teased my mom as I put my things down on the table. "What’s for dinner?"

"You usually come back on Saturdays—sometimes not at all. Seeing my daughter show up on a Friday is a bit of a surprise," said my dad, who had just come in from the backyard and was rinsing dirt off his hands.

"What were you planting again, Dad? It’s already dark and you’re just now coming inside. The house is already full of vegetables—you might as well open a shop."

"I’m a Farmer, after all," he said, smirking and shrugging like a teenager.

After dinner, I went up to my room, put my things away, took a shower, and couldn’t help but walk over to the white-framed window. I gently pulled aside the dark curtain to look toward the house next door.

The room directly across from mine—that was Proud’s room.

Back when Dad Somsak and Uncle Pakorn were still close friends, they hired workers to build a connecting awning between the two houses, running along the entire row of windows. They even had plans to take down part of the wall below so we could go back and forth more easily, hang out, and throw small gatherings. They considered making it a garden with a table and chairs.

My dad and Uncle Pakorn were as close as brothers—

Until that Saturday afternoon, back when I was in middle school.

.

.

.

.

"Rin, have you ever done this?"

Thirteen-year-old Proud asked while our parents were outside playing chess in the front yard, leaving the two of us alone watching a Korean drama in her living room.

"Done what?"

I hugged a cushion, lounging with my legs stretched over the coffee table. "Kissed… Have you ever kissed anyone?" she asked, referring to the kiss scene between the lead characters.

"Why are you asking?"

I turned to look at Proud—a sweet, cheerful girl with bright round eyes. Back then, her gaze was innocent—not nearly as expressive as it is now.

"Well… I never have. I’m just curious."

I raised an eyebrow. "Curious about what?"

"I want to know what it feels like to kiss. Why does the heroines in shows always lift her leg like that? When they kissed"

I laughed. "That kind of thing isn’t something you do with a friend.”

“I just want to try it. I mean, if you can teach me other things, why are you being so hesitant about just a kiss?” She frowned slightly. “Teach me now,” the curious one demanded, crawling on top of me, straddling me with both arms planted on either side.

“No,” I said, turning my face away, ignoring her.

“Rin!” Her annoyed expression showed she wasn’t pleased. “If you don’t, I won’t be your guard dog when the juniors flirt with you anymore. And I won’t go to Aunt Jaad’s papaya salad place with you tonight either. And during ballroom dancing class, I won’t be your partner. And—”

“Okay,” I said, cutting her off, putting my hand over her face and gently pushing her away. “Okay.”

Proud may be the activity kid, but I was the one who led our dance team and helped us pass last time. And as for being the guard dog—yes, she did that. But this time, I wasn’t giving in because I was scared of her threats. It was because we were friends. And more importantly… I was annoyed. I just wanted to get it over with so she’d stop running her mouth.

She stared at me with wide eyes as I sat up. I reached out with both hands, gently cupped her face, pulled her closer, and gave her a quick little peck—just enough for our lips to barely touch.

Proud’s mouth hung open. She looked stunned, moving her lips silently. “What was that? That was way too fast. I didn’t even feel anything. Do it again. Properly!” I honestly wanted to knock this cheeky kid on the head, but all I could do was sigh.

This time, I leaned in slowly, placing my arms beside her to support my weight. I tilted my face and pressed my lips softly onto her tender, innocent ones.

It wasn’t a deep kiss—just a sweet, innocent one. Our lips met gently. And yet, it was enough to make Proud freeze like she’d been hit with a spell.

But the moment we pulled away… I was the one who froze.

Uncle Pakorn, who had been standing outside the house, was staring at us through the glass door—his face filled with shock.

After that, our fathers had a huge fight. My dad said it was just kids messing around.

“Teenagers are curious—it’s normal. Calm down. Just watch your child more closely and teach them what’s right. Our daughter’s not a bad kid. She’s not going to ruin herself over something like this,” my dad argued.

“Your kid is perverted! And she’s going to drag my daughter down with her!” Uncle Pakorn shouted furiously.

And with that one word—perverted—he crossed the line. He degraded his own child with a word that came out of the mouth of a man who used to be like a brother to my father.

My dad took me home without saying another word. From that day forward, he strictly forbade me from going to Proud’s house. No visits. No conversations. No friendship. No involvement whatsoever.

The bond between our two families shattered in an instant. The wall between our houses was never taken down to make a shared yard like the adults had once planned. And yet, the shared awning between the houses… it was never removed either.

All it took was one innocent kiss when we were kids—and our fathers were ready to go to war. So if Uncle Pakorn ever finds out how far Proud and I have gone now… what would happen then?

The light from Proud’s room spilled faintly through her pastel curtains, telling me she was still awake. I pushed aside the memories and opened my window. Carefully, I stepped out onto the awning, walking slowly along the narrow steel beam that supported it, until I reached her room.

Knock knock. Knock

I knocked on her window three or four times. Soon, a beautiful face peeked out from behind the curtain, eyes wide in surprise and confusion.

“What the hell are you doing?” Proud opened the window and scolded me in a whisper. “You’re gonna fall and break your neck!”

“Let me come in for a bit,” I said, and without waiting for the room owner’s permission, my long legs climbed onto the window ledge before jumping down onto the shiny white granite floor.

The earth-tone room was neatly arranged, with cute little trinkets placed in every corner, giving the space a bright, cheerful, and warm feeling—just like its owner, without a doubt. “Let me wash my feet first,” I said as I walked into her en suite bathroom out of habit, since I used to come play here often when I was younger.

When I came out of the bathroom, I saw the room’s owner in a collared nightdress, arms folded, leaning against the wall and staring at me. But what really stunned me was the male Pomeranian dog, with orange-brown and white fur, enthusiastically humping Proud’s smooth, fair shin. Thanks. I nudged him away with my foot, feeling a bit awkward.

“Hey! Why are you picking on Thongdee, Rin?” Proud frowned and gave me an annoyed look.

“But… he was doing that!” I grimaced. “Why do you let him do that?” Thongdee the dog immediately went back to humping Proud’s leg, and she didn’t seem bothered at all.

“It’s normal. When he doesn’t have a female, the owner has to take care of him.”

“By letting him hump your leg?”

Proud shrugged, unconcerned. “When you raise a Pomeranian alone, Win… he does this every day.”

“Every day? And you just let him? Ugh.” I nudged Thongdee off Proud’s leg again. This time, Thongdee came toward me instead, so I quickly jumped onto the bed, making Proud burst out laughing.

“So, why are you here?” Proud picked up the dog and moved him away from me.

“Well… um, I brought you a book to read.” I honestly couldn’t think of a better excuse. I didn’t even know why I’d climbed in here to see her.

“So where’s the book?” She held out her hand and put Thongdee down on the floor.

“I forgot to bring it.” Proud raised an eyebrow, suspicious, as Thongdee went back to his bed and started humping a yellow duck plushie in the corner. “You let your dog sleep in your room? That’s dirty.”

“My dog is clean. He gets bathed often.”

“He’s still an animal.”

“Hey! That’s my business. Say what you came to say.”

“Look at you, you smell like dog.” I walked over and sniffed her, making a face at the faint scent of dog shampoo lingering on her clothes.

“It’s my own scent.”

“But I don’t like it. When we were in Korea, you didn’t smell like dog.” Before I realized it, my nose was at her ear.

“And who told you to come sniff me?” Her voice, sharp and annoyed a moment ago, softened. It was always like this whenever my face was near her ear.

“No one told me.” I exhaled hot breath onto her pale neck. “I wanted to.”

At that, Proud wrapped her arms around my neck and jumped up, wrapping her legs around my waist, while Thongdee continued to enjoy himself with the duck. I hugged and carried Proud to the bed, showering her cheeks with kisses—everything happened quickly, urgently.

Days and months passed. Night after night, we’d meet like this. What started as me coming home only on weekends turned into coming home as often as I could. If there was no meeting or work in the morning, I’d find any excuse to come home and climb in through her window again and again.

.

.

.

.

.

Tonight was no different.

Rrrrrrrrrr!!!! Rrrrrrrrr!!!!

“Mm… the phone,” Proud pushed me away as I continued to nibble at her soft chest.

“Forget it.”

“Just answer it.”

Reluctantly, I got up and reached for my smartphone. After glancing at the caller ID, I tossed it back onto the bed and leaned down to kiss her smooth cheek.

“Why didn’t you answer? Who was calling?” I pressed my nose playfully near the corner of her shiny lips. This time, Proud didn’t turn away like she usually did when we got close to kissing. Instead, she met my gaze, lips slightly parted as if waiting for me.

“My ex.” I moved closer, intent on claiming her lips.

But then…

“I don’t kiss friends.” I froze just before our lips touched, and the mood instantly vanished.

Rrrrrrr!!!! Rrrrrrr!!!!

I pulled myself up, grabbed the phone, and answered the call.

“Hello, Pat?”

[Rin, can you come down? Pat’s waiting outside.]

“Win’s at home.”

[Huh? But it’s Wednesday. You’re usually at the condo. Why are you home?] “What is it, Pat? Just tell me.” I saw Proud get up and button her nightdress—buttons I had just undone a few moments ago.

[I Came to pick something up. Can you unlock the door for me?]

“It’s late, Pat.”

[You want to kick me out quickly, don’t you?]

“…Okay, I’ll come out and see you.”

[Can I have the code to come in and wait inside, Rin?]

“No, just wait. I’ll be right there,” I replied, turning to see Proud, who had gotten off the bed and was now playing with Thongdee, ignoring me. “Proud, tonight I have to—”

“Yeah, go ahead.” Before I could finish, Proud cut me off, her eyes empty as she looked at me.

## 10. I don't like with sleeping Anyone

The sweet egg-stuffed rice dumplings I bought from a famous street vendor near the condo entrance were poured into a white ceramic bowl. They looked delicious.

"Make yourself at home, Pat. Your stuff is still where you left it. I haven’t moved anything," I said casually, glancing at her as she walked back and forth in the room without picking anything up—despite saying she’d come to collect her important belongings. "Let me know when you're done packing. I’ll help carry it downstairs."

Honestly, Pat didn’t have much stuff in my apartment. Even while we were dating, I never let her officially move in. She only stayed over occasionally. It was actually me who spent more time at her place. I don’t like people invading my personal space too much.

"Rin…" Here it comes. That tone. I could sense the drama about to unfold,"Can I stay here tonight?"

"No, Pat." I continued eating my dessert, ignoring her and the big bouquet of red roses I had accepted and left sitting on the table.

"Don’t be so cold to me, Rin," she said as she came up behind me and wrapped her arms around me, "Those roses… they represent how sorry I am. I’m really sorry. I won’t do it again. Please don’t be mad."

Pat is beautiful—charming in that way some women are. She knows how to dress, how to act sweet, and she’s a performer. I don’t mean she’s a famous actress or anything. I mean she’s a real-life drama queen. Sometimes, I can’t even tell when she’s acting and when she’s being sincere. Like now, with those tears welling in her eyes—I can’t tell if they're real or just another scene.

"I'm not angry," I said as I stood up to take my now-empty bowl to the sink, forcing her to let go of me. "But we’ve broken up, Pat."

"I haven’t broken up with you," she said, following me to the sofa. “I didn’t do what Bua claimed. I was just chatting with the girl. I never meant anything by it.”

"So you didn’t come here to pick up your stuff, did you, Pat?"

"My stuff is right here," she said, looking directly at me. Then she hiked up her skirt, revealing her pale thighs as she climbed onto my lap, her arms circling my neck. “You’ve got something on your mouth again,” she teased, then leaned in to lick the corner of my lips with her tongue. “I love you, Rin. Only you. Please stop being upset.”

I turned my face away. “Enough, Pat. I’m tired of this.”

I can’t say I felt nothing. My heart still wavered. I still had reactions to my ex. My heart had grown used to loving her. But my mind said no. Pat had already proven that she wasn’t someone I could entrust my heart to—something so precious.

"Rin, give me another chance, please. I messed up. I know that now. I’m sorry. I won’t do it again. I promise," she pleaded as she nuzzled my neck, getting touchy while trying to win me back.

"This isn’t the first time, Pat. You cheated. Then when you got caught, you apologized—with gifts, with flowers, asking for another chance. And I gave it to you. We made up. Then you did it all over again. I’m tired of it.”

“Does my apology mean nothing to you anymore, Rin?” she said, her voice cracking, tears glistening in her eyes—just like I’d seen so many times before in similar situations. The same tired act.

"An apology only means something when behavior changes. But you made your apologies worthless, Pat. I don’t want them anymore.”

“Then I’ll change. I’ll prove that my apology is worth accepting. Just give me one more chance—please,” Pat said, lowering her head to kiss my neck. I could feel her tears begin to dampen my skin. Her apology seemed sincere—her voice pleading, her tone soft, her touch familiar.

I let her hands wander across my body. It always went this way whenever we fought: I got angry, she apologized, we had sex, and then I forgave her—again and again—hoping she would change, hoping we could fix our love together. But it always played out the same, over and over again, like the short, repetitive life cycle of a mosquito.

Pat’s lips on mine were insistent, eager to seize everything. I ran one hand through her hair, the other slipping under her skirt to squeeze her hips—until a voice echoed sharply in my mind:

“I don’t kiss friends.”

That voice struck like a bell at the end of a round. I pushed Pat off of me immediately. She looked stunned, as if she couldn't believe the sudden rejection. To be honest, I was shocked too.

“Go home, Pat.” Proud’s voice—echoing in my memory—shattered the toxic cycle between me and Pat. The cycle that kept dragging my foolish heart back into the same pain, giving chances to someone who never truly valued them.

Pat stood up quickly, flustered, trying to compose herself. “I’ll go now. I’ll give you some space, Rin. Give us both some time.”

“Pat, the reason we broke up wasn’t because of what Bua told me about you texting someone at work. It was because of that fan—that one.”

“Who are you talking about?” The clever actress suddenly lost her composure. Her mask slipped.

“Prem. Our page’s fan. Or more accurately, your superfan. Seems like he knows every corner of your life now.”

“What are you talking about?” Her voice trembled, the expression on her face shifting from pleading to guilt—again. “What else did Bua say?”

“I saw it myself. He brought expensive gifts to you. Then you two went up to your room together.”

“He just dropped by to give me something. That’s what fans do, that’s all.”

“And he left your room at 3:30 in the morning, right, Pat?” She had no response. Her mouth opened, but no words came. “Here’s your key. I’m giving it back.” I handed her the silver key.

“I don’t want it. You’ve misunderstood. You believed Bua and let your imagination run wild.”

“Stop blaming others. As for work, don’t worry. I’m not kicking you off the page. We can still work together—if you don’t interfere in my personal space.”

Pat and I ran a travel page together. She was the face—an internet idol with a loyal following. I was behind the scenes—writing scripts, filming, editing, doing everything else. I rarely appeared on camera. The page was quite popular. Pat had her share of obsessed fans—some who just admired her, and some who wanted more. And Pat… well, she let them get close, depending on how she felt about each one. If someone didn’t meet her standards, she became a completely different person off-camera.

I understood that being charming and friendly to fans was part of her job. But being flirty with everyone? That’s a different story.

“Rin, please. I’m begging you,” her trembling voice said. Maybe it wasn’t an act this time. But my brain didn’t want to hear it. “Keep the key. Just think about us again. Please… I still love you.”

Pat walked out, the door closing softly behind her.

But I just sat there, unmoving. My mind was a storm of confusion. Emotionally, part of me still loved Pat—but everything we’d been through made me not want to love her anymore. That love was slowly fading. And yet… I still had a reaction to everything about her. A reaction I could only wait for time to quiet.

And what about Proud?

She’d managed to sneak into even my thoughts—seriously, that little brat!

That night, I didn’t go back home. I was too mentally exhausted, so I stayed the night at That Place until the following Friday night.

.

. .

In the middle of the night, I silently slipped out through the window—the same window, still unlocked like always.

I crept across the awning roof toward the bedroom of the girl next door.

Her room was dark. Moonlight streaming in through the window revealed the soft silhouette of a peacefully sleeping figure, bundled under the covers on her bed. I crept in quietly, stepping past Thongdee, the dog, who was snoring softly on the floor. I kept my eyes on the serene, harmless face of the girl asleep before slowly climbing onto the bed, careful not to make it shift too much.

But I must not be very good at sneaking around—she stirred and opened her sleepy eyes.

“Hey,” she murmured, voice groggy but with a slight smile.

“Why are you awake?” I crawled on top of her soft body, gently nuzzling my face into her neck, brushing my nose against her warm skin.

At first, she let me snuggle up close, but after a moment, she gently pushed me off.

“Rin… if you already have a girlfriend, I don’t think we should be seeing each other like this.”

“Ex-girlfriend. We broke up,” I said, eyes closed, still refusing to move, even as Proud tensed beneath me. I stayed there, lying on her, wrapped around her like I wasn’t planning to let go.

“But you can’t just come to me whenever you want sex.” Her voice was quiet but firm. That made me open my eyes and look at her—to see how serious she was. Her delicate eyebrows were slightly furrowed, her beautiful eyes focused, intense.

“Do you have a girlfriend?” I asked.

“No.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

She didn’t answer. Just lay there in silence.

“I thought we both agreed to this. I’ve never done anything that made you feel uncomfortable… right?”

“No… I just…”

“Just what?” I leaned in to kiss her cheek, then nuzzled my face back into the curve of her neck. “I didn’t come here to do anything tonight. Just to sleep.”

“You once told me you didn’t like sleeping with anyone,” she said softly.

Right. I don’t like sleeping with anyone.

“When did I say that?”

“In Korea.”

“Well… now I’m in Thailand.”

“Why are you so stubborn?” she muttered, clearly exasperated, which made me laugh. “Come on, get under the blanket properly.” Proud pushed me off gently, lifting the blanket so I could slide in beside her and feel the warmth of her body against mine. Her skin was smooth and soft as I wrapped myself around her, and she pulled me into her embrace.

“Rin, didn’t you say you were just here to sleep?”

“It’s fine, I won’t mind,” I said with a smirk, eyes closed.

“I should be the one saying that! You’re grabbing my boob, you know!”

“I’m not grabbing anything, just resting my hand,” I replied innocently. “This is grabbing—” I cupped her breast more firmly. “And this—”

"This is a massage… and this one’s a flick."

Proud laughed and grabbed my hand. “Okay, okay, that’s enough.”

“I still have a bunch more techniques, you know.”

“Take your hand off.”

“Nope. I’m just placing it right here.” I rested my hand on her soft chest like I’d just finished giving a tutorial on the proper way to place a hand on a boob.“Take it off.” I said.

“Shhh, don’t be loud. You’ll wake up Thongdee.”

“Put it somewhere else,” she said, starting to sound annoyed.

“Why are you so stingy, Proud? If I move it, it won’t be in the right position.

This spot is just right.”

“Then I’m gonna put my hand on your boob too.” Proud slipped her hand under my shirt while I arched up to meet her.

“Go ahead. I don’t mind,” I said completely deadpan.

She pulled her hand back and smacked me hard when I burst out laughing at how I managed to mess with her.

“Rin!”

“Hmm?”

“That wasn’t placed. You would flicking!”

“Oh, sorry!”

“You're sneaky.

I don’t know if I slept smiling the whole night, but that smile definitely turned into panic the next morning.

.

.

.

**Knock, knock, knock!!!**

“Proud!” A man’s voice from outside the door snapped me right out of my half-asleep daze. “Proud, wake up! It’s getting late—Mom wants to go to earn virtue

I sat up in a panic when I recognized Uncle Boonkon’s voice. Thongdee, the dog who had been sleeping by Proud’s feet, was staring at me with big judgy eyes after I’d nudged him off the bed earlier.

“Proud!” I shook her, then got up and walked past Thongdee, heading to the window like I was escaping a crime scene. But just as I was about to climb out, that snitch of a dog started growling like he wanted to alert the whole house that some sneaky cat (aka me) had broken in during the night.

“Thongdee, quiet!”

Hah! Serves you right, mutt. You got scolded by Proud herself. That’ll teach you not to challenge me.

She walked over and picked him up while he wagged his tail, clueless about the scolding he was about to get. “Why are you barking so much? You’re gonna hurt your throat, Thongdee.” She cradled him, petting and even kissing him as she walked toward the door. Then she waved her hand at me to shoo me out. “I’m up, Dad!”

*Wow… she kisses the dog but won’t kiss her friend?*

*Seriously?*

I don’t hate dogs…

But I definitely hate that dog—Thongdee, the drooly, judgy, male, floor-peeing traitor.

### 11. I’m Not a Dog

“Hello.”

[Mm.] The reply on the phone was indifferent.

“Tomorrow is Saturday.”

[I know.]

“Well… I found a review of a restaurant I want to try.” Honestly, I was just looking for an excuse to ask Proud out to eat—trying not to make it obvious that I wanted to go with her.

[And?]

“Are you free tomorrow?” I knew Proud was smart and understood what I wanted, but why did she have to pretend not to know? She only answered my questions curtly, even though, back when we were in Korea, she used to follow me everywhere.

[Yes, I’m free.]

“Never mind,” I sighed, giving up on inviting her.

[If you have something to say, just say it] she quickly replied.

“I want to invite you to that restaurant tomorrow.”

[Aren’t your other friends coming? Is that why you’re asking me? What am I to you?]

“ I haven’t asked anyone else except you.”

The line went silent. No response.

“Proud? Did the call drop?”

[No, I’m still here.]

“So will you go with me?”

[Why are you asking me?]

Sigh.. “Don’t you want to change things up a bit? That way you can’t say I only meet you when I want sex… We should hang out sometimes, like friends do.”

[What restaurant?]

“ABC Restaurant, 6 PM.”

[Alright.]

“Okay.” I was about to hang up.

[Wait, Rin… Aren’t you going home this weekend?]

“I have a lot of work. I’ll go home on Tuesday.”

[Okay.]

“Mm.”

[Just already hung up ,Darin.]

“Why don’t you hang up, Passachon?”

[Hang up!!]

“You hang up first.”

[No, you hang up first.]

“Let’s hang up together.”

[One, two, three—hang up!]

“Why didn’t you hang up? You’re cheating, Proud!”

[You’re the one cheating,]she laughed on the other end.

“How’s Thongdee?”

[Why are you asking about Thongdee? You hate him.]

“I don’t hate him. I just don’t like him.”

[What did the dog ever do to you?]

“He makes you smell like a dog. I feel like I’m hugging and kissing a dog.”

[You’re so cheeky. That’s enough for now.]

“Okay, bye.”

[Bye.]

And then the call ended, leaving only a smile on my face.

Ever since I went to her room that time, I hadn’t seen Proud again because I’d been staying at my condo all week. If it weren’t for rushing to finish designs for a client, I probably would’ve gone home to have some fun with the girl next door, instead of sitting here slaving away at work until I looked like a mess.

The next day, I was still caught up trying to finish my work, and only in the late afternoon did I finally have time to go to the gym. I felt a flutter of excitement at the thought of seeing Proud that evening.

Dinner plans? Nothing else? But I still wanted to see her? I brushed away the confusing thoughts as I went down to the condo lobby after showering and getting ready to head to the restaurant where I’d arranged to meet Proud.

“Rin!”

I turned around and saw my ex-girlfriend sitting in the lobby. “**Pat**.”

“Did you see the project I sent to you?”

“I haven’t seen it yet,” I replied. As soon as I saw who the message was from, I didn’t bother to open it.

“The sponsor wants us to make another clip and include their product.”

“Okay.”

"Rin, can we talk for a moment?"

"I have an appointment."

"It's about work. Just a minute, I promise."

I glanced at the clock — there was still some time. "Alright, go ahead, Pat."

"We might be going on a trip together, and I want to go over some details. Can we talk in your room? I'd like a bit more privacy."

I sighed, about to refuse.

"It’s just work — it won’t take long."

I brought Pat up to my room. We discussed work, and just like she said, it didn’t take long. But then, as always, she shifted the conversation into personal matters, which I found irritating.

"Are you still mad at me, Rin?" Pat reached out and held my hand resting on the table. I pulled it back and folded my arms across my chest.

"Are we done with the work talk, Pat? I need to head out."

"Rin, I’ve stopped seeing other people. It’s only you now. Come back to me. Please, forgive me already." She put on a sad face, shared her story, and — as usual — let the tears fall.

**Ding**.

A notification sound rang out as a message popped up on my phone screen.

**PROUD**: I’ve been here for a while now.

"Pat, I’m not mad at you. But we’ve already broken up."

I picked up my phone, glanced at the message, then set it back on the table.

"That’s not true. I know you still love me."

"It doesn’t matter anymore what I feel, Pat. I’m not going back. Even if I do still love you... I’ll stop loving you."

**Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding...**

Messages kept popping up, making me pick up my phone again. A small smile slipped onto my face.

**PROUD**: Where are you? I’m Waiting.

**PROUD**: You made the plan, and you’re the one who’s late ><0

**PROUD**: You better have a good explanation. I’m hangry now.

**PROUD**: Not reading. Not replying. Seriously. --\*

**PROUD**: You were cuter when you were little, Darin!

"Who is that, Rin?"

When I looked up from my phone, I found Pat’s displeased gaze locked on me.

"That’s not something I need to answer. If we’re done here, I’ll be leaving now," I said calmly.

"Pat asked you a question. Who is it?"

This wasn’t the first time Pat had spoken to me in that entitled, demanding tone — but today, it bothered me more than ever.

"You don’t have the right to ask me that anymore. Please leave. I don’t have all day to sit around talking to you."

My cold, steady gaze made Pat freeze — but only for a moment, before her anger flared even more.

"You’re meeting this person, aren’t you?"

She suddenly lunged for the phone on the table without warning, but I snatched it away just in time.

"Give it to me, Rin!"

Pat rushed toward me, trying to grab the smartphone in my hand. I stumbled back and had to let go of the phone to steady myself — and…Pat took it.

"That's enough, Pat!!" I was truly furious.

"A new girlfriend? Are you dating her? Is she the one from Korea? Where were you two going? Answer me, Rin. Answer me!!!"

I just stared at her silently. There was no point in speaking to someone who clearly wasn’t going to listen.

She hurled my phone to the ground with all her strength. The small rectangular device shattered into pieces, lying lifeless on the floor. Pat’s eyes were red and swollen, her beauty—carefully painted with makeup—completely drowned out by the rage that twisted her face and body into something unrecognizable.

“Get out of my room.”

I didn’t shout. My voice was flat and cold, my eyes emotionless but sharp. I had never spoken to Pat like this before.

Tears began to fall from her eyes again, and this time, I was sure they were real. The pain contorting her face was real, too. She wasn’t pretending.

“I’m sorry, Rin. I’m really sorry. I’ll buy you a new phone,” she stammered, her voice trembling. She lunged forward, trying to hug me, to hold on, but it no longer had the effect it used to.

“Just leave, Pat. That’s all I’m Saying.”

“Please, Rin. I’m begging you... sob... sob... sob…”

I pulled her arms off me, walked her to the door, and shut it behind her—locking it immediately. Her sobbing still echoed through the door and didn’t fade for quite some time.

I stayed in the room, waiting until I was sure she had really left the house. Then I opened the door and rushed out to the place I was supposed to meet someone. But all I found was an empty table and strangers filling the restaurant. Proud had probably already left. I was nearly two hours late—and hadn’t called or replied to any messages. After all, my smartphone was now nothing more than scrap metal worth maybe ten or twenty baht per kg.

I drove home feeling anxious, went straight up to my room, opened the window, and climbed out toward the house next door without hesitation.

But the white-framed window of the neighboring house was locked. It wasn’t left slightly open for me to slip in easily like before.

I knocked on the glass for a long time. Not even a sliver of response from the person inside. The white curtains didn’t stir, didn’t part to show even a glimpse of her face.

I climbed back into my own room, restless all night. I finally fell asleep around 2 a.m. At dawn, I wanted to call her but couldn’t remember the number. I locked the window again, trying to suppress the irritation building up inside me. By evening, I drove out to buy a new phone. After logging into my account and restoring the apps, I tried calling the girl next door—but she didn’t pick up. So I sent her a message instead.

**I am your father:** My phone broke yesterday. I just bought a new one today.

**…Thirty minutes passed. Still no response.**

**I am your father**: Proud?

**I am your father**: I’m sorry.

**I am your father**: Are you home? Can we talk?

**I am your fathe**r: If you keep locking the window, ignoring my calls, pretending not to see my messages… then how am I supposed to explain myself?

**PROUD**: I'm hosting a show right now.

Proud works as a radio host—a DJ, something like that. I’ve also seen her emceeing at various events. It’s surprising she still doesn’t have a boyfriend.

**I am your father:** What time do you finish work?

There was no reply.

**I am your father:** Let’s grab something to eat. Come see me after you're done.

I tapped to send her my location... the destination was my own condo.

I went back and lay on my bed waiting at the condo until 8 p.m., when a message finally Came on my phone screen:

**PROUD**: I’m downstairs.

I glanced at the clock, heart pounding, but forced myself to wait a full five minutes before typing my reply:

**I am your father**: Okay.

Just to pretend I hadn’t been waiting all day for her message. Pretending I wasn’t that happy to know she actually came, just like I’d asked.

Even though I’d grabbed my phone the moment I heard the “ding.”

Even though my heart was pounding so hard it felt like my ribs would break.

Even though I was dying to run downstairs to meet her.

And even though I couldn’t stop smiling like an idiot.

Still, I hid all of that beneath a calm, collected expression the moment the elevator doors opened on the ground floor. I even found myself wondering if my hair was messy, or if my lips looked too pale. I should’ve checked the mirror before coming down.

Proud stood there, her face blank and her eyes strangely unfriendly today. She was beautiful, no doubt, but there was something different about her beauty this time—something that made me nervous. I ran my hand through my hair awkwardly, not knowing what to do with the arm hanging stiffly at my side. Should I stuff it in my pocket? Let it hang loose? Where could I place it so I wouldn’t look so awkward?

"...Do you want to go upstairs first?"

Her sharp, clean-cut face gave a quick, impatient nod.

I led Proud inside. We stood silently in the elevator as I kept sneaking glances at her, wanting to know—What is this grilled-face girl thinking?

This was a space I usually didn’t let anyone into. And yet, now a new presence was standing in the middle of the room, unsure whether to sit down or what to do first.

“I had a bit of trouble yesterday,” I suddenly blurted out. I didn’t want to talk about Pat in front of Proud. “I was going to call and let you know I’d be late, but my phone broke first.”

“Whatever. Weren’t you going to invite me to dinner?”

“I did go to the restaurant yesterday, but you didn’t wait.”

Proud shot me a sharp side glance. “I waited for an hour. For nothing. No call, no message, no reply... So tell me, Rin, should I have waited even longer?” Ah... the volcano was erupting. But if the Japanese can live in a country with

110 active volcanoes, why can’t I handle this one standing right in front of me?

“How was I supposed to know you forgot? Had something else to do? Or were with someone else?”

My heart suddenly trembled out of nowhere. That soft mouth, glossy with red lipstick, moved to speak words laced with bitter sarcasm born from frustration.

All I could think about was how that mouth might taste. But the blood in my body surged wildly because...

“I’m not a dog, Rin. You can’t just show up whenever you feel like it and leave when you don’t.”

...My heart really doesn’t know the right time.

“I’m not going to wag my tail and wait happily for you to come home, Rin...!!!”

Her dark brown eyes widened just as I grabbed the back of the neck of the person who had just declared she wasn’t a dog—and kissed her.

I pressed my lips against that glossy mouth, unable to stop the hum escaping from my throat.

...My body had completely rebelled against the logic of my brain.

Proud tilted her head in response as I gripped her lower lip fiercely. My hand tangled through her long hair that draped over her shoulder, pulling her in even closer. Her soft lips returned the kiss—gentle, but burning with heat. Our tongues brushed, playing a game of hide and seek—teasing, touching, retreating, daring the other to chase.

Her hands pulled me in tightly, pressing our bodies together, but her movement was so forceful it made me stumble backward.

Oh... this heart of mine is so unfaithful.

I pulled away from the kiss, while Proud leaned forward as if not ready to let go. We were both breathless, bodies trembling. My shirt was wrinkled. Her lips were red and swollen. The lipstick had smudged between our mouths, staining each other.

This kiss... was no longer like the ones we shared in our childhood.

“It was my fault yesterday. And no, you’re not a dog—though sometimes, you kinda smell like one... I’m sorry for making you wait.”

My thumb brushed gently against her cheek as I gazed at her flushed lips and leaned in again.

At first, Proud looked like she was going to let me... but then she suddenly pulled away. She lowered her head and rested it on my shoulder.

“I don’t kiss friends,” she said quietly.

That’s when I realized I had misunderstood. Proud hadn’t changed. She was still the same Proud.

The only thing that had changed... was the rhythm of my own heart, which was no longer under my control.

It beat wildly just moments ago—now it had gone so quiet, I could barely hear the sound of life inside me.

"You don't kiss friends," huh...?

But that kiss just now—was so much better than not kissing at all.

I backed away and headed into the kitchen to cook dinner.

Later, we ate together in silence.

The atmosphere... was nothing like what I had imagined.

“Rin,” Proud said, placing her hand over mine.

“Hm?”

“Let’s stop sleeping together... I don’t want to do this with you anymore.”

#### 12. The Fable of the Little Fawn and the Bloodthirsty Wolf

I never thought—truly never thought—that I’d end up sitting here, counting these pointless days every single night. It’s been 22 days since I last saw Proud; 22 days since we last spoke. Twenty-two days! It’s so frustrating.

**Rrrrrrr!!!! Rrrrrrr!!!**

“Hello, Bua.”

[How have you been? You disappeared.]

“I’ve just been busy.”

[I just called because I had some free time. Are you free to talk?]

“Yes, I am. How about you, Bua?”

[The clinic has been busy. Evenings are especially hectic. I’m thinking about opening another branch and hiring another doctor to take over here.]

“Make sure you rest, Bua. Don’t become a doctor who ends up needing another doctor to take care of her,” She laughed at the other end.

[The other day, I ran into Pat. How are you and Pat doing, Rin?]

“We broke up.”

[Are you upset about it?]

“Not too much. Thanks for your concern.”

[If being together only drags you down, it’s better to separate. And Pat hasn’t contacted you at all, Rin?]

“She has, a little,” I didn’t really want to talk about my personal life anymore.

[Rin,I don’t mean to meddle, but the other day I saw Pat… with someone who wasn’t you.] Bua’s voice was cautious.

“That’s Pat’s business, Bua, not mine. Thanks for caring and for the warning, but I’m not interested in Pat’s life anymore.” Honestly, I was more interested in someone else. Where’s Proud? What is she doing? What is she thinking? Does she miss me the way I miss her? Proud has disappeared, never reaching out to me.

[If you say so, I feel better. You deserve someone who loves you more—someone who always cares about you, Rin.] I barely paid attention to what Bua was saying.

Looking back, I was always the one flying out to see her. Proud never once reached out to me first. Why is she so heartless? Doesn’t she know someone misses her? “I don’t kiss your friends” I hate that phrase. Proud is planting doubts in my subconscious.

“Bua, have you seen Proud recently?”

[No, the last time I saw her was at my mom’s retirement party. Why?]

“Just wondering. I haven’t seen Proud around lately.”

[You live next door. If you want to see her, just go over! ] Yes! If I want to see her, I should just go!

“I don’t want to see her, I’m just curious.”

Bua laughed. [I know you two don’t get along.]

I didn’t respond or explain anything further.

[Rin, I'm near your condo right now. I’ll drop by and bring you some snacks.]

"It’s alright, Bua. I’m about to go home. Thank you, ."

Yes! I should go home. I shouldn’t be sitting here foolishly counting the days. I’m all alone.

[But I already bought the snacks—so many of them. I won’t be able to finish them by myself.]

"Okay then, I’ll wait for you."

.

.

.

. .

About twenty minutes later, Bua arrived. I took her upstairs. We ate snacks and chatted casually. It was already 10 PM. I wondered if Proud had gone to bed yet. My thoughts drifted while Bua continued telling me about stocks and investments.

"I’m so sleepy... Can I stay over tonight?" she yawned, glancing at me apologetically.

"I was on night duty yesterday and only got three hours of sleep. I'm still so tired."

"Uh... If you’re too tired to drive, you can stay."

After she said that much, I couldn’t really say no—it’d be too heartless of me as a friend.

"Thanks, Rin. I was only planning to stop by for a little bit, but we ended up chatting for so long," she said with an embarrassed smile.

"It’s fine," I replied. Bua helped me clean up the dishes and the snacks we’d just eaten.

"If you leave tomorrow, just leave the keycard in the room. No need to take it with you. I’ll use the other one."

"Wait, what about you? You’re not staying here tonight?"

"I have to go home. But you can stay."

"Then maybe I’ll just head home too. I’ll go wash my face—it might wake me up."

"Are you sure?" I asked, studying her expression.

"I’m sure. Thank you for being concerned."

Bua had always been a polite, considerate girl. She’d been that way since we were kids—the kind of class president in elementary school who spoke the most properly in the entire grade.

I said goodbye to Bua, then drove home and sat quietly in my room, watching a war unfold between my thoughts and feelings. It was like a midnight battlefield—gunfire and explosions echoing through my head.

One side told me to “go”.

The other side shouted, don’t go, giving a thousand logical reasons.

As I stood by the window, feelings egged me on: Go. Open the door. Run to her. Find Proud. Let it hurt if it must. Don’t be afraid.

But thoughts held me back: Why go to her again? She already made it clear she doesn’t want anything to do with you. Are you really that dense, Rin?

*Go.*

*Don’t go.*

*…Go.*

*Don’t go*.

I paced back and forth. Every war ends with one side defeated. Tonight, it was my thoughts that lost—completely crushed.

I rushed to the window and flung it open—only to jump in shock when the window pane struck something with a loud thud!

A high-pitched scream pierced the air, followed by a crashing sound—like something heavy landing on the roof.

And no, it didn’t sound like a cat.

In front of me sat a pale girl in a light-colored nightgown, awkwardly perched on the dark awning roof. Her hair covered most of her face, making her look like something straight out of a horror movie. She looked up and stared at me, wide-eyed and terrified.

"Proud!!!"

*Oh god—my heart nearly stopped. For a second, I thought a ghost girl had come to steal my virginity...*

*But then I remembered—I lost that so long ago, I can’t even remember when.*

Once Proud had calmed down, I pulled her into the bedroom.

“You opened the window without even looking!” she scolded as she walked into the bathroom to wash the dust off her legs and body. Then she came back out and started ranting at me.

“How was I supposed to know you were standing there?”

What was Proud even doing outside my bedroom window? Just thinking about it in a way that favored me made my stomach feel like a rollercoaster was speeding through it.

She didn’t answer. Instead, she walked up and shoved me so hard I stumbled backward — WTF?!

Once I regained my balance, I shoved her right back. Proud’s mouth dropped open in disbelief as if she were about to bite my head off. Then she lunged at me again and, of course, I pushed her back again.

This time, her beautiful eyes flared with fury as she threw herself at me with full force, knocking me backward until I slammed into the model display shelf.

The sharp pain in my spine wasn’t even the worst part — it was seeing my 18 cm Iron Man model, posed mid-flight on its stand, fall and hit the floor. The head popped off and rolled away. To make it worse, The Joker and the Guardian of the Moon also tumbled down after it.

Furious, I shoved Proud off me — but she climbed right back on and sank her sharp white teeth into my neck.

Ohhhh!!!!”

And just as we were still wrestling like that—

**BANG BANG BANG —** the sound of someone knocking hard on the door.

“Rin! Are you okay, sweetie?!” my dad shouted from the other side. “I heard a loud crash!”

“I’m fine, Dad!” I shouted back through gritted teeth — while Proud still had her jaws locked around my neck like some wild beast.

“But I heard screaming. Open the door for me, please.”

“Hide!” I hissed in a whisper.

Proud let go of me and ran to hide behind the curtain while I rushed over to open the door.

“It’s nothing, Dad. I just dropped one of my model figures.”

Dad’s eyes swept across the display shelf, then carefully scanned the rest of the room.

“Hmm… if there’s nothing wrong, I’ll go to bed then.”

I shut the door and hurried over to the curtain. Yanking the sneaky culprit out from behind it, I snapped—

“Come here! What the hell were you doing? Why’d you bite me?!”

“Then why did you push me?!”

“Who pushed who first?”

“You almost pushed me off the roof!”

“And what were you even doing out there?”

“I… I was just out for a walk. Looking at the star and moon.”

“You were stargazing — on the awning roof?! Seriously?” I raised an eyebrow at her, seeing right through her.

Proud narrowed her eyes at me—and then suddenly leapt at my neck again with another bite.

“Ohhhh!!! Proud, you crazy!!” I tried to push her off, but she locked her legs tightly around my waist.

We ended up in a silent war — scratching, grabbing, fighting and bickering, but all in complete silence, the kind only cats or dogs could probably hear. Eventually, I dropped my weight on her, pinning her down on the bed, planning to squish her flat.

And I would have been the one to win—if Proud hadn’t clamped her teeth firmly on my neck. She bit down harder and harder until, in the end, I had no choice but to raise both hands in surrender while still straddling her body.

“Oh—oh—Ouch Okay, okay! I give up!”

Proud shoved me off, still biting down, and then rolled over to pin me beneath her instead. I was completely cornered, like a helpless little fawn lying sprawled out while a mischievous wolf sunk its teeth into my neck... So embarrassing.

“I said I give up! When are you going to let go, you crazy Wolf?” I snapped, wincing from the sharp pain at my throat.

Once Proud was satisfied that she had won, she finally loosened her jaw and released me. And just before that crazy wolf could lift herself up off me, my hands—moving without my brain's permission—reached out and locked around her waist to keep her from going anywhere.

She froze for a split second... then melted, letting her body sink down to lie even closer against mine than before.

...I just wanted to stay close like this for a little while.

Her face rested silently in the crook of my neck, her breath soft and steady. Our chests were pressed together—I couldn’t even tell whose heartbeat was whose anymore. All I knew was that they were thudding together, fast and tangled.

While I was still trying to puzzle out the rhythm of our hearts, something soft and damp brushed gently against my skin. The wolf was licking the bite mark she’d left on the little fawn’s neck—so lightly, it sent shivers racing through my body. Sparks flared in my chest. Her tongue on my neck... Why did it make my heart feel this way?

Would it be so wrong... if a wayward little fawn like me wanted to tilt her head again and let the wolf bite her once more? To beg her... to end it by licking over that spot again and again, just like this?

“Hngh... I just swore to myself,” I groaned, “that the moment you stopped biting my neck, I was going to get back at you.”

“Oh? And how exactly do you plan to do that?” the bloodthirsty little wolf asked sweetly as she unbuttoned my shirt, her tongue tracing slowly down the line where it parted. Her soft hair brushed against my skin, making it hard to breathe. She pushed her hair out of her face, then looked up with a teasing, taunting grin. “How are you going to take revenge?”

She sure had some nerve—telling me she didn’t want to get involved with me, disappearing for days, only to come back now with that sexy look in her eyes while straddling me, making my heart lurch.

I let her pull off my outer pants, then sat up and threw off my shirt, leaving only two thin layers of underwear. I pushed her back down onto the bed.

“Take off your shirt.”

Proud obeyed without protest. She slowly undid the buttons on her nightshirt, her eyes gleaming with a smug, seductive smile.

Her pale, flawless chest filled the black bra she wore. I flipped her graceful body over onto her stomach and yanked her hips up. My hands roamed and kneaded her smooth, round bottom before I leaned down over her back, gathering her soft hair in one hand as I whispered into her ear:

“This... is how I’m taking revenge.”

My lips found the base of her neck and sank in with a biting kiss. A deep, low moan escaped her lips in pleasure.

*I was going to make this wild, bloodthirsty wolf beg for mercy from the little fawn.*

#### 13. Makha Bucha Day

A small pile of belongings was stacked on the floor as their owner walked off to find a box to pack them in.

“Do you want me to help with anything, Pat?” I asked.

“Can you help by thinking about us, one more time, Rin?”

“Believe me, I’ve thought about us more times than I can count. I started thinking the moment you cheated on me.”

Pat’s eyes looked sad, but she said nothing more. She simply turned to pack her things into the box.

I sat watching Pat quietly as she packed, my mind drifting back to what had happened the other day.

The keycard to her condo had been handed to the girl next door, with the excuse, “*My work's been hectic lately, I might not be home much. But my room* has *great movies, a full home theater system, booming subwoofer—just in case you want to come watch something...”*

All I could do was wonder: Would Proud actually use it?

Two boxes filled with all sorts of things left behind by an ex-lover were stacked in the middle of the room, while their owner stood staring at them in silence.

“Let’s have one last meal together, Rin. My treat. Something I will cook it myself.”

“You’re not planning to poison me, are you?”

She let out a dry laugh. “This is exactly because I love you,Rin.”

“But you don't love me , Pat. You still don’t love me enough.”

Pat gave a faint smile and nodded wearily. Then she walked over to the fridge and started pulling out ingredients—ones she used to cook with when we shared meals together.

**Knock, knock...**

A knock at the door pulled both Pat’s and my attention toward the entrance, just as a stunning, beautiful and elegant woman stepped over the threshold between private and public space.

*Oh my god!!*

The thought mind screamed in my head as I froze, staring at the long, slender legs in fishnet stockings that peeked out from beneath a skirt cut scandalously high above the knee.

Usually, Proud had a soft, clean, and elegant aura—but today she looked like a naughty vixen, a little bitchy even.Still, she radiated warmth and light.

“What?” Proud raised an eyebrow.

“I—I can't stop staring at your legs. I can’t stop imagining what’s under that skirt. Fishnet stockings, fishnets! Are you seriously wearing that outfit just to come watch a movie in my room like I invited you to?”

“Were you just thinking something naughty about me?” she asked, narrowing her sharp, beautiful eyes.“I just came back from an event.” She took off her coat and laid it aside, revealing a dark blue camisole made of expensive fabric, plunging deep into her cleavage and showing off her fair neck and smooth shoulders.

“Aren’t you going to introduce us, Rin?”

Pat cut out conversation sharply, clearly displeased, pulling us both out of our moment.

“Proud, this is Pat. Pat, this is Proud. My... friend.”

The word “friend” slipped out stiffly.And the person I had introduced as a “friend” was now staring at me, silently.

“You give your condo keycard to a friend?” Pat asked with cold suspicion.

“It’s my keycard. I can give it to whoever I want, can’t I?” I replied calmly

"That's strange. Even as I am your girlfriend, I never got one Keycard. She must be a very close 'friend.'"

" Ex-girlfriend, Pat." I corrected

"Uh, should I leave first?" Proud turned to me, looking awkward and uncomfortable.

"Stay and eat with us, Proud. Pat is cooking," I invited, while Pat looked at us with clear displeasure.

"Ugh, this is so awkward," Proud whispered to me.

Pat walked back to the kitchen area, and I followed her.

"Can you make an extra portion for Proud, Pat?" I took a melon out of the fridge, sliced it in half, peeled it, and cut it into bite-sized pieces.

"Is this your way of getting back at Pat, Rin?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Pat. I wouldn't waste my time doing something like that."

"But with me, after all these years together, You never gave me a keycard. Are you trying to spite me, Rin?"

"Pat, whatever I do from now on, please know that you are not the reason. None of this is about you."

"Are you dating her?"

"The food is ready. Let's go eat," I said, cut her question and helping Pat bring the food to the table.

The three of us sat together at the table in an atmosphere so strange it made me feel nauseous—or at least I was the one who wanted to throw up.

**Rrrrrrrrr!!!!!! Rrrrrrr!!!!**

"Hello, **Art**?"

"Khu Rin, are you still at the condo? I brought the design you asked for."

"Where are you, Art?"

"Downstairs."

I glanced at the two women and thought it best not to leave them alone together. "Can you bring it up? I'll call the building staff to let you in."

"What!!! You want me to come upstairs? To your room?"

"Yes."

"Are you messing with me? Usually, whenever I come, you always meet me downstairs. You never let me come up."

"So, are you coming up or not?"

"I'm coming, I'm coming Ma'm. Art Service at your Command!"

" Okay come in room number 619."

"What? 69?"

"Six-one-nine."

"I'll be right up."

"Okay”

I hung up the phone and turned to look at the two of them.

“There’ll be more guests coming.”

I didn’t even know why I said that. Was it to break the silence? To change the atmosphere? Or something else entirely?

“Proud, put on your coat .”

“Why?” she asked, confused.

“There’s going to be a man coming up. Just put it on.” Proud accepted the coat I handed her and put it on.

By the time Art finally knocked on the door, I had nearly finished eating. He said he’d come right away, but then he disappeared for quite a while before finally showing up.

“Art, I thought you were coming alone,” I said.

“I was, at first. But then I called Job and told him that Khun Rin said we could go up to the room. He happened to be nearby, so he drove over right away. Wanted to check out the room of a lady architect.”

If I told Job, who clearly had no business here other than to gawk at my place — to wait outside the door, that might have been too harsh.

“Rin’s got guests, so I’ll head out now,” Pat said.

“Job, help Pat carry her things to the car, will you? You are looking strong and gentlemen.”

Job, one of my staff in the department, was tall and big-built with fair skin. He had a strong Northeastern accent but was good-looking and came from a wealthy family.

“Khun Rin, got a sharp eye. I’ll help!”

The handsome Northeastern guy lifted two boxes of my ex-girlfriend's stuff in one go and carried them out the door.

I continued talking business with Art while Proud wandered around, browsing the bookshelf. Not long after, Job came back upstairs and joined our work discussion for a bit, before breaking off to chat with Proud.

“Khun Rin… I need some cash. Can you borrow 8,000 baht?”

“Art, did you even pay back the 5,000 from last time ?” I asked. I knew something was suspicious the moment I saw him bringing snacks — there had to be a reason.

“If I had the money, I would pay you back”

“It’s been half a year, hasn’t it? And you still haven’t paid me back,” I said calmly.

“But Khun' Rin, you’re from such a rich family! Your coconut Farm is hundreds of acres. Everyone knows it exports all the way to Mars!”

“That’s my family’s property. Not mine.”

“Well, what about the resort in Korat? The one you designed yourself and now rents out to tourists?”

I looked up from the stack of papers in front of me.

“Art, do you have any sons or daughters?”

As a coworker or colleague, Art was decent.

"Yes"

“How old is your Child.?”

As a person and a younger friend, he was helpful and sincere.

“Five years old. Why are you asking, Rin? Are you feel sorry for me because I’m raising a child with more struggle? I knew it. You’re actually a kind person.”

“Then your Child leaves it to me.”

But as a debtor… Art was the worst.

“What?!” Art’s eyes widened.

“I’m telling you that my family’s coconut farm needs workers,” I said dreamily.“If you want to borrow money from me, then leave your son with me as collateral. You can pay it back monthly, and once you finish, I’ll give him back.”

“Come on,Khun Rin! Don’t joke like that! I just want to borrow 8,000

“Art, whether it’s 8,000 baht or 8 baht, if you’re not trustworthy, no one will want to lend you anything. What you do reflects your own value. Don’t be a cheap person. If you’re just asking, that’s one thing. But if you say you want to borrow, that means you have to pay it back.”

“In that case, I’ll just ask for 8,000.”

“Art!” I rolled my eyes, annoyed by his response.

“Khun Rin, does Proud have a boyfriend?” Job came over to ask me while Proud was sitting in front of the TV.

“Why don’t you ask her yourself?” I replied irritably. Was it Makha Bucha Day or something? Why were there so many uninvited guests in my room today?

“I don’t dare ask. I just want to ask her to be my girlfriend.”

“How many minutes have you even known her, Job?”

“Love doesn’t need time, Khun Rin. Haven’t you ever heard that?”

“Go flirt somewhere else.”

“Then I’ll go flirt with Proud. She’s beautiful, kind, sweet, and warm. I wish she could be the mother of my children. Not like someone else around here—pretty, but mean.”

I watched Job and felt annoyed. I didn’t want him to go flirt over there, so I followed him.

“Job, move over. I’m going to sit here.” I pushed myself into the space between Proud and Job.

“There’s plenty of space, Khun Rin, Why do you have to sit right here?”

“Because I want to sit here.”

“I feel like you’re not happy for me, Boss.”

“You’re imagining things.”

“Or is there something going on between you and Proud?” Job pressed his index fingers together, looking suspicious.

Proud crossed her left leg over her right, making me nervous she’d reveal too much. “What are you talking about, Job? Rin and I are just ‘friends’,” Proud replied with a sly smile, intentionally looking at me. Was she hinting at something? Friends, huh? She was right—so why did I feel annoyed? “Here i came because I had a work and Rin just introduced me to her girlfriend “

“Pat is my Ex-girlfriend,” I corrected.

“So, if you and Khun Proud aren’t together, can I see your ID card, Khun Proud?” Job asked.

“Why do you want to see it, Job?” Proud’s question irritated me. Was that her real name or was she just playing along? Job used this line on every woman.

“I want to know if your title is Miss or Angel,” Job replied, putting on a dramatic face. I almost burst out laughing when I saw Proud’s creepy smile.

“Khun Rin, can I borrow this?” Art picked up my **GTO manga**.

“Put **Onizuka Keichi(GTO Manga)** back where you found him, Art. And you two should go home already.” Anything I lent out, I never got back.

“Khun Rin.” Art put the GTO manga back on the shelf and grabbed **Hunter x** **Hunter** before coming to squeeze onto the sofa with us.

“Art, go sit over there. Why are you squeezing in here?” Job’s big hand pushed Art away, but Art still sat down next to us.

“I just want to sit close to Khun Rin,” he said, then leaned over Job to talk to me.”Khun Rin, about what you said, I’ve been thinking… maybe it’s not such a bad idea to pawn my kid with you after all.”

“Are you accepting kids as collateral (Pawn) now?!” Proud looked at me as if I was trafficking children or organs or something.

I nodded. “New business. Just started.”

“Are you serious, Khun Art?” the woman still in her event outfit asked, her eyes wide with disbelief.

“So, what do you say, Khun Rin?” Art leaned in to ask again.

“I feel sorry for the kid.”

“Sorry that he’d have to live on a coconut farm?”

“Sorry that he was born as your son.” I snatched the comic book out of Art’s hands. “And you’re not borrowing this one either, Art. You two should go home now.”

“Oh, come on, Khun Rin!” they both whined in unison. Job looked longingly at Proud, while Art sulked his way out.

Proud turned to me. “Are you really accepting kids as Pawn?”

“I’ll accept anything as a pawn,” I replied with a sly smile. “If you ever run out of money, you can even pawn yourself to me.”

“Be serious, Rin. You’re not actually doing this, right?”

“I wouldn’t do it for just anyone. But if you want to, I will accept.” My rebellious gaze dropped to her soft red lips. “Right now, I want… a kiss.” The word “kiss” slipped out of my mouth in a soft, husky tone, as if to express just how much I meant it.

Proud’s face flushed bright red, making me grin, but she surprised me by swinging her long legs over and straddling my lap.

Her lips, glossy with red lipstick, parted to speak in a sultry voice, “How much are you offering me, Rin?”

“That depends on how good you are.” My fingers were already distracted by the feel of her thighs in those fishnet stockings, but honestly, I wanted to tear them off rather than just touch.

She lifted both arms to wrap around my neck, leaning in so close I could smell her strawberry breath. I wanted to beg her to just kiss me—right now.

“I,” she paused, her thumb brushing my cheek softly as she bit her lip and gazed into my eyes, “have enough for now.”

Even though her face was still bright red, That little tease pulled away, sat down, started flipping through cable channels, and tossed some of the snacks Art had brought into her mouth as if nothing had happened.

—That was it. That was all it took to leave me frustrated for the rest of the day.

I was still annoyed even when Bua called, bringing snacks up to my room and looking so shocked at the sight of Proud like she’d seen a ghost. And what made it worse was that Bua ended up staying to watch movies with us until late, giving me and Proud strange looks the whole time. Proud had even gone to the trouble of wrapping herself up in those heart-stopping fishnets, and all I could do was sit there and watch some ridiculous series.

Bad day, huh? Don’t you think so, too?

#### 14. Four Men

Have you ever had the same dream, over and over, for three nights in a row? The kind of dream that haunts you so much, it leaves you dazed and drifting off in the middle of a work meeting?

Khun Rin, based on the concept you proposed, I think—"

—of those deep red lips in my dream slowly leaning in, before planting a teasing, tender kiss that made me feel like I was floating...

"What do you think?"

—I think I want that kiss.

"KhunRin, are you even listening to me?"

"Huh?" I snapped out of my daydream.

"What do you think about what I just explained?"

Job and Art were staring at me, mouths agape, while the client looked at me expectantly.

"Uh... let’s just go with what Mr. Niwat suggested. I’ll take care of it and send you the updated design."

What did he just say again? I didn’t catch a single word... Ever since that day Proud teased me, I’ve been dreaming about that stupid kiss non-stop—even though we haven’t seen each other since.

"And the additions I asked for—do you think they'll cause any structural issues?"

I glanced over at Art and Job... What? The client wants to add something? Remove something?

"I’ll have Art explain the details to you. He’s the expert on this part." I smiled— while poor Art was still sitting there with his jaw practically on the floor.

My watch showed it was almost 7 PM.

And I was still stuck here with three men—none of them bringing me any joy.

Even the food in front of me was tasteless.

Who even picked this restaurant?

**Ding! Ding !**

While Art was in the middle of explaining something to the client, a chat notification popped up on my screen.

**‘PROUD sent you a photo.’**

I quietly picked up my phone and opened the message.

On my phone screen appeared a photo of a sheer lace bra—the kind I vaguely remembered seeing Kendall Jenner wear once, while paparazzi snapped photos of her.

And now it was lying discarded on the floor...

A floor with the exact same pattern as the one in my condo.

Actually—if we’re being honest—that was my condo.

**Ding**!

**‘PROUD sent you a photo**.’

I opened the chat again.

This time, the image showed a woman’s hand draped lazily over the edge of a bathtub.

Her long, slender index finger was hooked around a tiny pair of panties dangling from it.

I quickly turned off my screen and placed my phone face-down on the table.

But then…

**Ding**!

End of the month or not, her messages never failed to keep luring me in. I slowly peeked at my phone again.

**‘PROUD sent a photo’**

Goddammit! Open it? Don’t open it? Should I? Shouldn’t I?

Did she not realize I was in a meeting with a client?!

Well—if we’re being honest—I wasn’t the one talking to the client. Art was. Realizing that, I gave in and tapped the screen to view the message.

The photo showed the lower half of a woman's face down to her neck, resting in a bathtub.

Red, plush lips… and wet strands of hair trailing down her pale skin.

**Ding!**

This time, it was a shot of her long legs submerged in bathwater—dangerously provocative.

The frame started from her toes and ended just at the top of her thighs.

I sat there, holding myself back, for twenty painfully long minutes, until finally—

"Alright, then it’s all agreed. This meal’s on me," Mr. Niwat said with a friendly smile.

Another half hour crawled by before I could finally leave that place.

I drove off like I had wings, shifting into gear and speeding around the bend toward my condo.

Then I had to stand still in the elevator for a torturous two minutes before I could storm into Room 619…

Only to find a single sheer black bra lying in the middle of the floor— its owner nowhere in sight.

I picked it up. That little minx left it there on purpose.

And what did she wear back out? Nothing?

No bra at all?

The thought alone made me want to scream, as I picked up my phone and made a call

[Hello?]

"Where are you?" I asked, voice low and stern.

"Next door to you, of course," came her teasing reply.

.

.

I drove like I was in a race—straight to her house.

Tossed off my shoes, bolted up the stairs to the second floor.

"Huh, Rin! Where are you running off to, honey?" my mom shouted from behind."Have you eaten yet?"

"I have!" I yelled back, already closing the door to my room.

Same old route to get to the girl next door.

I threw open the familiar window—no need to knock. She always left the latch unlocked.

I slipped inside, only to find the room completely empty.

Just a plush toy dog lying on the tiled floor.

Five minutes passed…

Then I heard footsteps approaching the door.

It opened—

and there she was.

The one I’d been waiting for.

Her beautiful eyes met mine with a knowing look.

Click—the sound of her locking the door behind her was like pressing "Start."

We walked straight into each other.

Then I was pushed back until my back hit the wall.

My arms wrapped around her neck as her hands lifted my skirt above my waist.

Proud buried her face into my hair, kissing from my ear down to the base of my neck.

Her hands squeezed, caressed, and wandered lower as she dropped to her knees—

And then...

the last piece of clothing between us slipped away.

—(Camera pans to the innocent golden duck plushie on the floor)—

I woke up a few hours later, still in Proud’s room, completely naked—

which said more than enough about everything we’d just done.

After our little playtime ended, I got up to take a shower, then returned to bed and snuggled up against her slender body until I eventually fell asleep.

I was awakened when the person I had been cuddling with stirred and got up to fetch some water from the kitchen.

Not long after Proud left the room, I heard a loud crash from downstairs, like something had fallen. I couldn’t just lie there any longer. I quickly got up, got dressed, and decided to go check, worried that she might have slipped or something else might have happened.

The white door creaked open as I silently crept down the dark, quiet hallway. After a few steps, my eyes adjusted to the dim light. If I was lucky, I’d find Proud in the kitchen downstairs. If not, I might bump into her father opening the door unexpectedly.

“You idiot, you're going to wake up the whole house,” a hoarse whisper froze me in my tracks right on the stair landing between the upper and lower floors.

“Don't make a sound, or I’ll kill you,” another voice growled, followed by the muffled whimpering of a woman. The sound sent a chill down my spine.

I covered my mouth to keep myself from screaming and tiptoed further down. When I reached the bottom of the stairs, I saw **three men** dressed in black in the kitchen, all wearing ski masks to hide their faces.

One of them was holding a gun. Another, muscular and big, was holding a long, sharp Knife. The third, who was slim and small, was bending down to tie up a crying woman on the floor. Her beautiful face was bruised and red. She was the same woman I had come down to look for—Proud.

Terror surged in my chest, making me stumble back—only to bump into someone. I turned around, eyes wide in shock, just as a large hand reached out to cover my mouth before I could scream.

"Shhh… go back to the room, and don’t come out," Uncle Pakorn whispered so softly it was barely audible as he slowly took his hand away from my face.

Tears streamed down my cheeks as I crept back up to Proud’s room, my heart pounding in fear. The image of Proud, tied up and surrounded by those three men in black, made me tremble. My hands shook as I fumbled to call my father, whose name appeared on my screen.

[Hello?]His voice was groggy from being woken in the middle of the night.

“Dad!” My voice trembled so much that even I was startled to hear it.

[Rin? What’s wrong, sweetheart?]he replied, his voice now full of worry.

“Dad, I’m at Proud’s house. Burglars broke in. Proud’s tied up downstairs,” I forced my voice to stay steady.

[Are you safe, Rin?]

“I’m safe. I’m in a locked room.”

[Do you know how many there are?]

“I saw three.”

[Rin, listen to me carefully,]my dad said, his tone turning serious. [Do not leave the room. Lock the door tightly and stay inside. I’m coming to help. Hang in there, sweetheart.]

“Dad, one of them has a gun. The other two are holding knifes.”

[Rin, tell me—how did you get into Uncle Pakorn’s house?]

“Through the bedroom window.”

[Climb back the same way. I’ll come help Uncle catch them] instructed firmly before I ended the call and immediately phoned the police and the neighborhood’s security office. I also requested an ambulance, just in case anything unexpected happened.

I looked left and right, then grabbed the ukulele from the corner of the room, gripping it tightly like a weapon before quietly creeping back downstairs.

Uncle Pakorn was still standing where he had been, holding a revolver firmly in both hands.

“What the hell are you thinking, getting horny right now? Finish the Work first, then you can deal with her,” the skinny man in black said.

“No! I want her now. The two of you go upstairs and take care of whoever’s up there, then bring down anything valuable,” the one holding the gun replied, placing his firearm on the table in the middle of the room. Then he unfastened his belt and walked toward Proud. “She’s too pretty to pass up.”

I tightened my grip on the ukulele as Uncle Pakorn clenched his teeth. Proud, tied up and gagged on the floor, panicked and scrambled backward until she hit the wall.

The man in black slowly stalked toward Proud, moving farther away from the gun he had left on the table. Seeing the opportunity, Uncle Pakorn suddenly sprang into action, raising his **Smith & Wesson .357 revolver** and aiming it at all three intruders.

“If you touch my daughter, you die!!” His voice was ice-cold and threatening. The three thieves raised their hands in surrender.

“All of you, move over there—slowly,” Uncle Pakorn ordered, signaling for them to group together in one spot.

As the three men began to shuffle into position, Proud, still tied up on the floor, shook her head with tears streaming down her face.

The next second, I understood why she was shaking her head**. A fourth** **Thieve** suddenly emerged from behind Uncle Pakorn—from an angle that I, standing where I was, could only just now see. The long, razor-sharp Knife he carried caught the light as he raised it high.

Uncle Pakorn collapsed to the ground. His shirt was sliced open, revealing a long, gaping wound down his back. Bright red blood poured from the deep slash. Proud screamed at the top of her lungs as she threw herself toward her father—only to be yanked back by the gunman, who pulled her roughly into place.

Frozen with horror at what I’d just witnessed, I saw the fourth intruder stride forward, raising his knife again to finish off Uncle Pakorn.

Without thinking, I leapt out from my hiding spot and swung the ukulele with all my strength straight into the man’s face like I was hitting a home run.

—The ukulele snapped in half.

The fourth man in black dropped to the wood-patterned granite floor, completely unconscious.

A thick, muscular arm suddenly grabbed mine and yanked me with terrifying force. Proud screamed as my body slammed into the dining table, then collapsed to the floor in a daze. I lay crumpled not far from the man I had just taken down.

“You little bitch!” the brute snarled. “How many more of you are there?” He stormed toward me and slapped me hard across the face, the impact numbing half of my head. My mind reeled, and the taste of blood filled my mouth.

A rough hand grabbed my chin and forced my face upward.

“I’m taking this one,” he growled, his vulgar eyes roaming over my body. “Damn, what a figure.” His gruff voice spat out the disgusting words as he turned to the man holding the Knife. “You—go upstairs. See if there’s anyone else. Take care of them and bring down anything worth taking. The two of us will stay here and handle our business.”

At that command, the skinny man with the Knife walked upstairs. The one with the gun turned his attention back to Proud.

“What about him?” the gunman asked, gesturing at Uncle Pakorn.

“Leave him there to bleed out,” the muscular man replied, walking toward me while glancing at Proud’s father, now lying in a pool of blood.

Collapsed, powerless on the floor.

"At first, I thought there were only two people left in the house. No other person was around. So how the hell did this one show up?" The man holding the gun turned to look at me.

"I told you to search the area properly! You said there were just two—only two! So how did this one show up too? …Well, fine. I’ll count her as dessert."

Just as the pressure in my stomach began to ease, the burly man walked in and pinned both my hands to the floor. He leaned down so close that I could feel the foul stench of cigarettes on his breath against my face. Proud started to sob violently as the man climbed on top of me. Her face was frozen in utter shock at the horror unfolding before her eyes.

Suddenly, the gunman shoved Proud down to the floor. She struggled with all her might, just as I did, writhing with every ounce of strength I had.

I had to survive. I had to save Proud and Uncle Pakorn. That fierce determination surged through me—I jerked my head upward, smashing it into the nose of the man on top of me, then sank my teeth hard into his shoulder just as he bent down to assault me.

He screamed in pain. Blood began dripping from his nose. Enraged, he raised his fist and punched me hard in the stomach. The impact sent a wave of pain shooting through my body, making me tremble. My strength drained away. My arms collapsed uselessly to the floor. Tears streamed down my face.

Was this it? Was this really the end?

*Dad… please… help us.*

That final desperate cry echoed only in my heart—just before the thin cotton of my T-shirt was ripped wide open. My exposed shoulder was bitten savagely by the monster above me. I heard his pleased laughter as he greedily licked my neck. Then he pulled off the mask hiding his face, revealing a filthy, cruel grin.

He showed his face. He’s going to kill us.

I turned to look at Proud—my heart aching, completely shattered—as she endured the same fate. I had never felt such disgust, such loathing, such absolute fear in my life.

His filthy hand reached for my chest, then grabbed and tore at the remaining fabric of my thin white shirt—

**BANGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGG!!!!!!!!!!!!**

A deafening gunshot exploded through the air, freezing everything in place.

Bright red blood burst from the center of the man’s chest. His hands clutched the wound. Then his large body collapsed forward, his weight crashing down on top of me. Warm liquid soaked through his black shirt and smeared all over me.

I pushed his trembling, lifeless body off me just as the other thug jerked away from Proud in shock. He scrambled for the gun he'd left on the table and dragged Proud up to use her as a shield.

"You’ve got no one left!"

A cold, commanding voice rang out from the stairs.

"The police are on their way. Let the girl go and run. If you dare take her as a hostage, I swear I’ll hunt you down myself tonight!"

The barrel of a Glock 19, steady in the strong hand of the newcomer, was pointed directly at the thug. A thin trail of gray smoke still rose from the muzzle.

"Rin, can you move, sweetheart? Come to me."

My dad stood at the foot of the stairs, face stern and intense. He must have entered through Proud’s room. And the skinny guy who went upstairs—what had Dad done to him?

The sound of police sirens drew closer. The last remaining thug dragged Proud toward the front door, backing away. He unlocked it, yanked it open, and slipped out into the darkness, leaving Proud and the three injured attackers behind.

Then he vanished into the night at the edge of the neighborhood.

.

Dad ran to check on Uncle Pakorn and gave him first aid as best as he could. I quickly rushed to untie Proud. Then Dad pulled me into a protective hug, checking me over while taking off his own T-shirt and handing it to me to change into, replacing the one I was wearing that was stained with filthy blood, torn and shredded to the point it couldn’t cover anything anymore.

After that, Uncle Pakorn, Proud, and I were taken together in the ambulance, while Dad stayed behind to speak with the police at the house, along with

Mom.

I held Proud close the entire ride to the hospital. She was crying silently, tears streaming down her cheeks. Every time our eyes met, hers conveyed something wordless—sorrow and fear blended together. One of her arms was wrapped tightly around my waist, while the other gripped Uncle Pakorn’s hand without letting go.

Uncle Pakorn was taken straight into the emergency room. As for Proud and me, we were treated for our wounds and given medical checkups. It didn’t take long before we came out and sat together in front of the operating room. Since the incident, neither of us had spoken a word to each other—only eye contact and touch conveyed what we felt. Proud hadn’t let go of my hand, not even while we were getting treated side by side.

Not long after, my parents arrived at the hospital. Mom immediately pulled both me and Proud into her arms. The warmth from her and from Proud gave me a deep sense of comfort. When Dad came in and gently patted my head, it made me feel completely safe. I could only hope that this sense of warmth and safety would reach Proud as well.

“Does anyone have blood type **A or O Group**?” a woman in white asked as she stepped out from the operating room. “The patient has lost a lot of blood. We need a transfusion urgently.”

“I do,” Proud said, her eyes red and swollen from crying.

“Me too, nurse,” my dad added.

“Then please follow me right away,” the nurse said, and Dad and Proud quickly followed her.

“How are you holding up, Rin?” Mom asked, pulling me into a tight hug again.

“I’m okay now,” I said, squeezing her hand gently. Even though I was still in pain, I didn’t want to say much and make anyone worry. “How are things at

Proud’s house, Mom?”

“The police arrested three of the intruders. One got away, but they’re tracking him down.”

“And the one who got shot—how is he?”

“He’s still alive, but seriously injured. As for the one that Nudee knocked down, he woke up just as the police were putting handcuffs on him.”

“What about the other one—the one who went upstairs? What did Dad do to him?”

“He went upstairs and ran straight into your dad, who was hiding and waiting in one of the rooms. The moment he opened the door, your dad knocked him out and tied him to the balcony railing before rushing downstairs and finding you girls,” Mom said, eyes brimming with tears. “It’s all over now, sweetheart.”

“Has **Aunt Orn** heard about any of this yet?” I asked. Aunt Orn is Proud’s mother. She had gone on a trip out of town with her friends two days ago.

“No one’s called her yet. I’ll wait until Proud comes back, then I’ll ask for Orn’s number and call her myself.”

That night felt incredibly long. Uncle Pakorn was declared out of danger and transferred from the emergency room to a private room, with Mom staying to look after him. Dad insisted on taking Proud and me back home to wash up and get some rest. Tomorrow morning, he would bring us both back to the hospital.

Once we were in the bedroom, I don’t even know why—but Proud and I ended up showering together. Our naked bodies bore bruises and marks. The warm water from the shower poured over us, masking the tears on our faces. But our swollen eyes and flushed cheeks revealed just how shaken and scared we really were.

Under the stream of water, with nothing to hide us, we clung to each other more tightly than ever before. Closer, more firmly than any other time. There was no sex, no lust—only the deep bond between us and the comfort that came from mutual care. It was a silent exchange of solace, a raw and heartfelt embrace that spoke louder than words.

That night, Proud kept mumbling in her sleep and woke up startled several times. At one point, she clung to me tightly, sobbing as she lifted my shirt to look at my left shoulder. She pressed her lips repeatedly to the dark bruise left by the bite mark, asking over and over if it hurt a lot.

In the morning, Dad let us sleep in until late. When I finally woke up, I roused Proud as well. Her once beautiful, captivating eyes were now swollen and bruised from all the crying the night before.

We quickly got dressed and returned to the hospital. When we entered the room, we found Aunt Orn sitting with my mother.

We greeted everyone, and then Proud went to hug her mother, tears streaming from her beautiful eyes once again.

“Uncle Pakorn still hasn’t woken up, Mom?” I asked.

“He opened his eyes for just a moment, then fell back asleep,” Mom replied.

“What did the doctor say?” I asked.

“The doctor said he’s out of danger now. He just has some wounds and needs time for his body to recover,” Aunt Orn answered for my mom. “And how are you feeling, Rin?”

“I’m okay now,” I replied, meeting Proud’s gaze to reassure her that I was alright, though her eyes were still filled with sadness.

“Thank you so much, Rin. And thank you ,SomSak, for coming to help us. Otherwise, we would have been in real trouble, And Rin also had to endure all this” Aunt Orn said, her voice trembling as tears rolled down her cheeks. She quickly wiped them away and hugged her daughter.

“It’s really no problem. I’m happy to help,” I replied.

“We’re friends, Orn. Of course I had to help. Don’t worry, the kids are alright,”

Dad said, placing his hand on my shoulder, warmth radiating through my heart. I wanted to act like a little girl again and hug Dad tightly, to have him comfort and protect me.

“Still, I really have to thank everyone, even though we had our differences in the past. You’ve all been so good to us,” Aunt Orn said.

“Let’s not talk about the past, Orn. We’re all friends here. If it were Korn, he’d have helped me too,” Dad replied with a smile.

“Proud, you should thank Uncle SomSak as well,” Proud’s mother prompted.

“Thank you, Uncle Sak,” Proud said softly, giving my dad a respectful wai.

“It’s nothing, Proud. You’re like a daughter to me. I’ve known you since you were a tiny little thing—I used to carry you around all the time. And now, in the blink of an eye, you’ve grown into such a beautiful young woman,” Dad laughed, lightening the mood in the us. “If you’re still scared, you can stay at our house with Rin, or Rin can come stay with you if you’d like.”

“Thank you, Uncle Sak,” Proud replied quietly, turning to meet my eyes.

Does my dad know something ?

#### 15. A New Toy

I’ve always believed that whatever happens, happens for the best. Even in terrible situations, if we look closely enough, we’ll find something good hidden within. It was the same this time. The relationship between my family and Proud’s, which had long been dead, was suddenly revived—like it had been jolted back to life.

But this time, I can’t quite bring myself to say that what happened was a good thing. Because the price of this silver lining was almost Uncle Pakorn’s life—and Proud’s and mine as well. We barely made it out alive.

The truth is, no matter what life throws our way, good or bad, it all depends on how we perceive it, how we think, and what we learn from it. The past can’t be changed, no matter how much we wish it could. All we have is the present, the only place where I can create better memories and move forward with purpose.

The old conflicts between our two families were quietly brushed aside. My father began visiting Uncle Pakorn every day as he recovered at home, sitting and chatting with him for hours—just like when they were still close friends. He also kept us updated on the case. The police had managed to catch all four of the fleeing criminals—contract workers who had been doing construction at the edge of the village.

Some days, Proud’s mom would cook and send over a huge pot of food for us. Often, she’d even invite our whole family over for dinner. Thanks to that, I started slipping through the front door again—almost like when we were kids.

But even though I could now come in through the door, that didn’t stop me from still sneaking glances at her window late at night.

Between Proud and me, there was always something more than just the typical neighborly bond. We were friends, siblings, family—bound together in a way that couldn’t be undone. It had been that way for as long as I could remember.

We never truly hated each other—not once.

What I do know is that that night, I was terrified for her safety just as much as I was for my own. I was worried. I cared. I hurt.

I’d always known that I loved Proud. But it was never in a romantic way. The sex we’d had—it was just an activity we did together. Like playing badminton or basketball.

But now… something had changed. I wanted to be near her all the time. I wanted to see her face every single day, even if sex wasn’t involved at all. I don’t know when exactly it started, but I began to feel possessive. Jealous. Jealous of those lips that pouted slightly whenever she was annoyed—the same lips she used to kiss her dog. I’d get irritated every time she told others that we were "just friends."

I’m not stupid. I knew exactly what those feelings meant.

The problem was—how could I possibly move past the label of “friend” when she kept saying things like:

“I don’t kiss friends,”

even though our clothes had been flung across the floor all the way from the front door of my condo.

“But you kiss your dog,” I argued, already taking it too far.

“That’s a dog, not a friend.”

“Are you seriously doing this? We’ve done everything else, but you won’t even kiss me?”

Yeah, I was the one asking for more than I had any right to.

“Are you mad?” Proud looked into my eyes, like she was searching for something. “You never seemed to care before.”

How could she say that? That I didn’t care? She had no idea.

I pulled away and turned my back to her. Silence settled between us for a while before she finally spoke again.

“Let me keep something, Rin. I’ve already given you everything. Just let me keep something… so I can remind myself who I am.”

“What exactly are we to each other?”I turned back to look at Proud. “Then… should we stop being friends?” The words slipped out before I had a chance to think.

If she knew what I was really thinking—if she didn’t feel the same way—would I still be able to have her close like this?

“Don’t joke about things like that, Rin. If you’re only saying it because you want to win and get a kiss…”

Proud had no idea that I’d spent the last four days glued to my iPad, reading dramatic love stories online, searching for ways to confess your love to a friend without getting rejected.

“I’m not trying to win.”

**Rrrrrr!!! Rrrrrrr!**

Sometimes I just wanted to throw my phone across the room—if only it wasn’t so expensive.

“Hello, Bua?”

[Rin… sob sob sob]

“What’s wrong? Why are you crying?”

[Rin, I have nowhere to go… sob sob]

“What happened? Where are you right now?”

[Can I come to your condo, Rin? I don’t know where else to go…]

“Okay, call me when you get here.”

I hung up and turned to look at Proud.

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. Bua was crying and said she’s coming over.”

Proud started putting her clothes back on.

“We’ll talk later, Proud.”

“Never mind, I’ll go home first.”

“No,” I grabbed her wrist.

“You should stay and talk with Bua. She might need some privacy.”

“But I don’t want you to go.”

“We’ll talk later,” Proud said with a calm smile, picked up her bag, and walked out of the room.

I had no choice but to let her go, even though things between us were still unresolved. Tomorrow, I’d talk to Proud. I couldn’t keep going on like this. It had been too long, meeting each other like this—our bodies had crossed every line, but her heart still wasn’t mine.

I’d send an envoy to negotiate. I wanted “**Proudland**,” and if she agreed, I’d let her share “**Rinland**” with me.

.

. .

Not long after Proud left, Bua arrived. I brought the tearful girl with swollen eyes up to my room. As soon as the door closed, she rushed into my arms, sobbing so hard her whole body shook. All I could do was hug her and comfort her, still unsure what to ask.

Once she’d calmed down, I handed her a towel to dry her face, then sat down beside her and took her hand.

“Can you tell me what happened, Bua?”

“Can I stay with you for a while, Rin? I really don’t have anywhere else to go,” Doctor. Bua said.

I looked at her, feeling conflicted.

“It won’t be long, Rin. Once I’m ready, I’ll tell you everything.”

“You know you can talk to me about anything,” I reassured her. “Have you eaten yet?”

“Not yet.”

“I’ve got some instant noodles. I’ll cook them for you—at least it’ll fill your stomach for now,” I said while walking over to grab some clothes to hand to her. “Go take a shower first. It’ll help you feel better. Then come out and eat.”

She nodded, took the clothes from my hand, and headed to the bathroom.

I poured the cooked noodles into a bowl, separated the broth, and set it aside for my guest tonight. Then, I unlocked my phone with my fingerprint and opened the chat app.

**I am your father**: Are you home yet? (Read)

**PROUD**: Yeah, I’m home.

**PROUD**: How’s Bua?

**I am your father**: We haven’t talked about what’s going on yet. She came here crying. I sent her to take a shower first. (Read)

**PROUD**: Is she going to stay over tonight?

**I am your father**: Yes. (Read)

**PROUD**: Alright.

That was all she wrote before going quiet again.

**I am your father:** What? (Read)

**PROUD**: Nothing.

**I am your father**: Proud, what is it? (Read)

**I am your father**: Bua’s back now. We’ll talk later. (Read)

My guest for the night walked out of the bathroom wearing my pajamas. As she pulled out a chair to sit down, I happened to notice something—and I guess my stare was a bit too obvious, because she spoke up.

“Um… I didn’t bring anything with me, so I thought it’d be weird to wear the same underwear again. You don’t mind, right? If I go… no bra?”

“It’s fine. We’re both women.”

Yes! We’re both women. It's totally fine…

“Go ahead and eat,” I said.

. .

We ended that long night by turning off the lights and lying down in the same bed. But before five minutes had passed, my phone vibrated with a new message.

**PROUD**: Where is Bua sleeping?

**I am your father**: In my room, obviously. (Read)

**PROUD**: I meant… where exactly in the room?

**I am your father**: she is sleeping on my bed. (Read)

**PROUD**: You let her sleep in your bed?

**I am your father**: Well, there’s only one bed. (Read)

**PROUD**: Rin...

**I am your father**: ? (Read)

Our conversation stopped there. The message said "Read," but she didn’t reply.

And after that, things didn’t go so smoothly. I’ve never been someone who likes sharing a bed with others. My senses become hypersensitive to every sound or movement in the room—especially when it’s someone I’m not completely comfortable with.

A soft body shifted against my back, waking me up again. The arm wrapped around my waist felt suffocating, so I moved slightly to ease the discomfort.

“Bua?” I murmured, half-asleep. Her body froze for a moment before a quiet sob followed.

“What’s wrong?”

In the darkness, the sound of her crying and the dampness at the back of my neck made it clear—she was really upset.

“My dad kicked me out of the house.”

I turned toward her. “Do you want to tell me what happened?”

“It’s about my girlfriend... P’Karn. I found out she was seeing someone else. I wanted to break up, but she refused. She even threatened that if I did, she’d expose our relationship to my parents. I didn’t back down, so she went to my house and told my mom and dad everything. My father couldn’t accept that I’m dating a woman. We fought. It got really bad. He told me to get out and find somewhere else to live... Rin, I really have nowhere else to go.”

“Then stay here for now—until you figure out your next step.”

“Thank you so much, Rin.” She shifted closer and hugged me. Her bare chest under the loose T-shirt rubbed against my arm. The way her body moved gave me a strange feeling—not exactly something I liked, but not something I hated either. I wasn’t sure what it was, but it stirred something confusing inside me.

.

. .

In the morning, I woke up to the smell of freshly cooked food in the kitchen. There was a note attached:

‘**Made by Bua — to thank Rin for letting me stay**’.

Day after day passed, and every morning I found different kinds of food in the kitchen. Bua was living here—eating here, sleeping here.

I often saw her with teary eyes after ending phone calls. On some days, she had hospital night shifts and would return late. If I was still awake, she would greet me with a smile and act like everything was fine. But if she thought I was already asleep, she would quietly crawl into bed, wrap her arms around me, and fall asleep like that—leaving me wide awake. I could never sleep well with someone else in the room.

It had been nearly two weeks since I’d been home. Part of the reason was the heavy workload—I didn’t feel like driving back and forth every day. But even on the days I planned to go home, I always ended up turning back toward the condo whenever Bua called, asking me to keep her company.

Or maybe all of this… was just an excuse to delay facing what I’d been avoiding. The important talk I hadn’t had with Proud yet. I missed her. I wanted to see her. But I was afraid of what she might say. Afraid that things between us would never be the same again.

On Friday evening, I sat behind the wheel of my old blue pickup truck, stuck at a red light at a downtown intersection. My destination was home.

My index finger was tapping on the steering wheel to the rhythm of a song by a singer I didn’t know, yet I could sing along to the entire song.

And because my mind was preoccupied with other thoughts, the crowded traffic and the motorcycles squeezing through the narrow gaps beside my car—without caring whether their handlebars or any part of their bikes might scratch my car—didn’t irritate me as they usually did.

After being stuck in traffic for a while, the rain began to pour down relentlessly. By now, Bua was probably heading back to her room. I had called her earlier this afternoon to say that I wouldn’t be returning to the condo today.

I drove on, the rain slowing the procession of cars on the road, in stark contrast to my thoughts, which were spinning in a chaotic storm. What is Proud doing? What is Proud thinking? Does Proud feel the same? Will Proud be able to accept it? And if she can’t, will I be able to fix myself?

**Rrrrrrrrr!!!!!**

[Hello, Rin.]

"Yes Bua"

[Rin, help me! She won’t stop following me!]

“Where are you now, Bua? What happened?”

[P’Karn followed me to the hospital. She made such a scene that I was embarrassed in front of everyone. She lost her Mind and even used force on me.]

“Do you want me to come pick you up?”

[I’ve already driven out of the hospital, but she’s still following me. I’m afraid she’ll find out where I live.]

“You can’t hide from her forever. If she’s determined to follow you, one day she’ll find out.” I turned my car around, heading back toward the condo. “Just drive back to the condo, Bua. She can’t get in. I’ll wait for you there.” Maybe tomorrow will be fine. I can go see Proud tomorrow.

. .

I arrived first and waited for her in the lobby so we could go up together. Not long after, Bua walked in, soaked and looking distressed.

“I managed to lose her at the very last moment,” she said, her face weary.

“Are you okay?” I asked, and she nodded in response. “Let’s go up to the room.” I gently took her hand and led her to the elevator.

Once we were in the room, I grabbed a towel to dry her hair, which was still dripping onto the floor. Bua was trembling all over. There was a red mark on her face, as if she had been struck by something—I guessed it was a hand. I gently applied some ointment to the area.

Bua took off all her wet clothes, leaving only her underwear. As I handed her a large towel to wrap herself in, she didn’t take it. Instead, she threw herself into my arms and began to sob, her face buried in my shoulder. I hugged her back, comforting her with all the sympathy I felt.

But then—I heard the sound of the door opening.

My eyes hadn’t yet turned in that direction, but my senses were instantly on high alert.

Because my mind remembered—there was only one other person I had given the keycard to: Proud.

I looked up and met the eyes of the newcomer. She was beautiful, calm, composed—but there was a fiery intensity in her look.

“Proud,” I whispered, releasing my hold on my half-naked friend, suddenly anxious about a situation that, in my heart, was innocent.

The door closed without a word as I stepped forward to explain. Proud had already left, and I rushed to fling the door open and chased after her, catching up to her at the elevator.

“Proud, please don’t go!” I almost got caught in the closing elevator doors as I reached out to stop her.

“I just came here because you hadn’t gone home… but now I found out… you’ve got a new toy."

She didn’t smile, didn’t pretend. Her expression clearly showed disappointment.

And I was disappointed too.

Is that really how she sees me?

Proud caught my hand off the elevator door, just before it slowly slid shut—like a scene in slow motion…

#### 16. Friends With Benefits

"Did you two have a fight?" Bua, already changed out of her clothes, was waiting for me in the room.

"....."

"Is it because of me?"

"It’s not because of you, Bua. You didn’t do anything." I walked past her and sat quietly on the sofa while she calmly followed and sat down beside me.

“Proud looked angry when she saw us.”

“She wasn’t angry. She probably just thinks I’m a bad person.”

“In what way?” Bua asked gently.

“Just let it go, Bua.” She fell silent for a moment before picking up her phone, tapping something on the screen, and putting it back down.

“Can I ask you something? Are you and Proud in a relationship?”

“Proud and I are just friends. There’s nothing more than that.” As I said it, a strange sadness crept in, as if I was forcing myself to admit something I didn’t want to face. “I don’t kiss my friends”—that line still hurts every time it crosses my mind.

“If you’re really just friends, then why did Proud look so upset when she saw us hugging? Why does she have a keycard that lets her come and go from your room whenever she wants?”

"....." I turned to glare at Bua immediately, annoyed.

“I only asked because I’m worried. If something’s wrong, maybe I can help clear it up. If Proud’s mad at you, she’s probably mad at me too. At the very least, I’d like to know what she’s upset with me about.”

“You can probably guess.”

"....." Her stunned expression said it all.

“What I had with Proud was just a **friends with benefits**, Bua. It's Just sex or desire. She’s not mad at you, she just misunderstood about what she saw today. Don’t hold it against her.”

“Then… I’ll explain everything to her myself.”

“There’s no need. If you’re going to clear anything up, just clear your part. As for me—whatever Proud thinks, let her. I’m angry… or to be honest, I’m hurt. Hurt that she thinks of me this way. She probably thinks I can sleep with just anyone. She thinks Bua is just another FWB to me. That’s why she said I had a new toy. Fine. Let her think whatever she wants. I’m not going to explain something she’s already judged me for.”

Does Proud really think I’m that kind of person?

Time passed, but something felt missing. I wasn’t physically sick, but my heart was uneasy, restless. I wanted to see the girl next door. But my pride wouldn’t let me call. If anyone should apologize—should make the first move—it’s Proud, not me.

“The air is just perfect this evening, dear listeners. You’re still here with Proud and DJ P’ Ood At on **EFN Radio.”**

The familiar voice from the EFN radio studio was now a frequency broadcast into my receiver, playing through the ten-thousand-baht sound system in my beat-up car as I drove through the city, heading straight for my condo—on yet another quiet day.

“We've reached the final part of our show. Today's topic is still about: how to win over a friend you have a crush on. If you've ever experienced heartbreak or disappointment from secretly loving a friend, you can still send us messages, call in to request songs, or share your stories at **02- 0022222**.”

“So, Proud, what’s the longest you’ve ever secretly liked a friend?” her colleague P’ood asked suddenly to her

“What did you say, P’Ood. Sorry, I couldn’t hear you for a moment. Let’s wait for our listeners to call in and share their stories instead,” Proud replied cheerfully, her voice as lively as ever. She probably didn’t feel anything about the distance between us.

“Haha, well, for those who have a little crush on a friend, let’s listen to this song. We’ll be back to play a game in the next segment!”

The music started, and before the lyrics hit me hard—I didn’t want to go back to my room, so I grabbed my smartphone and called Art to meet up at the xxxx restaurant.

I got to the restaurant first, and after a while, Job and Art arrived.

“Have you been here long, Khun Rin?” Art asked as he sat down across from me and picked up the menu.

“Not long.”

“Did you order anything yet?” Job poured drinks into all three glasses.

“I was waiting for you guys. I can eat anything.”

Art and Job ordered all the food and drinks while I just sat there, lost in thought. Most people in the restaurant were having fun with their friends. The singer was softly singing, matching the relaxed nighttime vibe of the place. “Khun Rin, is something wrong? Lately, you seem irritable and short-tempered,” Job said.

“I’m just stressed because Art borrowed my money and hasn’t paid me back.”

“Come on, Khun Rin, I don’t think that’s what’s bothering you. Even though you drive an old pickup truck like a farmer,uncle, I am your secret fan, So I know you are not hurting financially” Art said with a laugh. He still hadn’t paid me back and was trying to flatter me.

“I think Khun Rin is heartbroken. She’s acting just like someone who’s been dumped.”

“I don’t think so. Because Khun Rin broke up with Khun Pat a long time ago. It can’t be just hitting her now.”

“Or maybe she’s heartbroken over someone new?”

“Job, just think before you speak. Before she was with Khun Pat for so long, but even when they broke up, she wasn’t this down. How could someone new person make her this gloomy, like a wilted flower?”

“Art, Job, I’m sitting right here.” I crossed my arms, leaned back, and looked at them with annoyance. “I invited you guys out to eat, not to play **CSI** and **analyze** my emotions.”

“Maybe it’s her period. When my wife’s on her period, her mood swings just like this,” Art continued his analysis.

“Hey,Khun Rin, take it easy. If you keep drinking like that, you’ll pass out right here,” Job said, grabbing my hand as I poured amber liquid into my glass.

“See? With you acting so out of character, how can we not worry?”

“If I get drunk, you’ll have to drive me home.”

“Want to come to my place instead? I’ve had a crush on you since I started working here. If you’re okay with it, I’ll even get a boob transplant for you,” Job joked.

“Then might as well shave your **Adam's apple** and go for full gender transplant while you are at it”. Art said with a laugh

“Why are you guys being so perverted?” I said with annoyance.

The two guys laughed. Even though Job sometimes joked around and said some flirty stuff, he never actually crossed the line with me. Apart from his habit of hitting on girls all the time, he really looked after me like a good little brother. As for Art—if we ignore the part where he borrows stuff and money and never gives them back—he’s actually a pretty genuine guy.

“So, what’s got you stressed, Rin?” Art asked while digging into his pocket. “If it’s about money, here—you can have 3,000 first. I’ll get the other 2,000 to you soon.” He handed me the cash across the table.

Of course, I took it. “I’m not stressed about money.”

Right after I said that, Art grabbed my hand and pulled the 3000 baht back. “Oh, if it’s not about money, then I guess I’ll just stay in your debt for now.” I was about to poke him in the eye for that, but my phone buzzled and interrupted us.

**Rrrrrrrrr!!!!**

“Hello, Bua?”

[ Are you coming back yet? I’m at the building now.]

“I’m having dinner with some friends.”

[Let me know when you're heading back so I can wait.]

Ugh. I really don’t like these kinds of words—especially from someone who’s not even my girlfriend. Maybe she’s just being nice or worried, I don’t know. But for someone like me, it just feels uncomfortable and hard to answer.

“You don’t have to wait. I’ve my keycard. I’m going to hang up, Bua. The music’s very loud, I can barely hear.” I hung up and turned to the guys. “Take me home, okay?” Then I lifted my glass and took another drink.

. .

I don’t think I was that drunk—just a bit dizzy, a little wobbly. The room was spinning a bit. And then, for some reason, I started thinking about the guy next door. Ugh, what the heck? I must be losing it. But I mean, everyone always says if you drink, don’t drive. Not just because you might die, but you could drag someone else down with you too.

So yeah, the night ended with Job walking me home like a bodyguard while I stumbled around like a crab. My parents asked a few half-serious questions when I got in, and then I dragged myself up to my room—or actually, my dad carried me up and dropped me straight on the bed.

After he left, I fished around for my phone and sent Proud five cute stickers of a girl popping out of a black hole with sparkly eyes. Don’t even know why—I just felt like bugging her tonight. When I saw she’d read them, I sent more messages.

**I am your father:** Proud (Read)

No reply. She read it instantly but didn’t answer.

**I am your father:** I’m drunk. (Read)

**I am your father:** I feel like I’m dying. (Read)

**I am your father:** Come over. (Read)

**I am your father:** Proud, please come see me. (Read)

**I am your father:** Pretty please? (Read)

That’s as much as I could type before I passed out on the bed, dropping my phone beside me.

Q

I don’t even know how much time went by—if I had just fallen asleep or been out for a while—but I slowly started to wake up because I smelled something… A faint, gentle scent drifted over to me.

“Proud.” The shadowy figure of a woman stood quietly by the bed. If I hadn’t messaged her to come, I would've thought she was a ghost coming to haunt me.

“You’re here already?” I reached out my hand toward her.

Proud took my hand. “You really are very drunk, aren’t you?”

“Mmm.” I sat up weakly and leaned my head against her stomach.

She stroked my hair. “Why did you get this drunk?”

“I was out with friends.”

“Even if you’re with friends, you shouldn’t get this drunk,” she scolded, making me pout.

“It’s because I missed you,” I muttered, annoyed at her for scolding me when she had the nerve to disappear on me.

She pulled away and looked me in the eyes. “What’s wrong?”

“I missed you… Proud, you disappeared,” I said, my face scrunching up as hot tears welled in my eyes.

“When you wake up tomorrow, you won’t remember any of this, will you?” Her soft hand wiped the tears from the corner of my eye. I whispered,

“I’ll remember you, Proud.” My head dropped onto her shoulder, exhausted.

“Go to sleep,” Proud said, gently pushing me to lie down. I didn’t have the strength to resist.

“No, I don’t want to sleep… Don’t disappear, Proud. Stay with me.” I held onto her hand.

“If you weren’t drunk, would you still want me to stay?”

“Proud…”

“You’re drunk.”

“Come drink with me, Proud…”

“How could I do that?” she laughed softly, as if I was talking nonsense.

“I’ve been drinking…”

“So what?” She looked at me like I was a four-year-old child.

I used all my remaining strength to pull her down. “I’ve been drinking…”

She let herself be pulled down until our noses were almost touching. I raised my face, reaching for a kiss, but she always pulled away just before our lips could meet.

“Proud,” I pleaded softly. “Please…”

It felt like a dream… so wonderful it didn’t seem real. I got what I wished for: her warm lips in a sweet kiss, gentle at first but growing more intense until my heart trembled.

“Don’t go anywhere, Proud… don’t leave.”

The song “**You have no idea**” by **Boy** **Peacemaker**, which I’d heard on the bus earlier that evening, echoed in my memory as I drifted off to sleep, reinforcing the longing my subconscious and my heart felt..

You have really no idea Passachon…..

.

.

. .

After I woke up, I still couldn’t figure it out.

Other than the messages in our chat, there was no sign that Proud had actually come over last night.

Did I just type the message and fall asleep, and then dream up the whole thing? Or... did we really kiss?

But how could it have been a dream… when I can still feel the touch of her lips on mine?

#### 17. An Old Friend

1. I’m still mad at Proud.

1. Proud doesn’t seem the least bit bothered that our relationship is falling apart.

1. She’s still cheerful, still living her happy life like nothing’s changed. I must be like a garnish on her plate—pretty, but unnecessary. Whether I’m there or not, the dish still tastes the same.

1. Proud doesn’t kiss her friends. And Proud didn’t kiss me. Which must mean I’ve officially been thrown into the eternal Friend Zone. (Just thinking about it makes me hate Thongdee.)

1. *Forget points 1 through 4*.

**We seriously need to talk**!

That dream I had last night—there’s no way I can just let this go. If Proud made me mad, then she should be the one to fix it. So today, I walked straight to Uncle Pakorn’s house and rang the doorbell. It was her turn to make it up to me. If she apologized, I might even forgive her.

“She went out with some friends. Should be back in evening. Want to come in and chat for a bit.” Uncle Pakorn asked.

“No, thank you. I’ve to do some other work,” I said. The short conversation at the gate, with Uncle Pakorn now fully recovered, left me feeling down the whole day.

I stayed at home, just lounging around until late at night. But Proud never came back.

I even kept watch at her window—but not once did the light come on. Not even a flicker to show that she was home. Eventually, I gave up and went back to my condo.

**The messages I sent her were never read**.

The calls I did—she didn’t pick up. They just rang until the line cut off by itself. Days passed.

When the weekend came and I came home again, I finally saw the light in Proud’s room on. I was about to climb over to her place—but it was like I’d turned into a ghost. No one responded to my knocking. It meant nothing. The window stayed shut, locked, as if it had closed off any path to her... forever.

That’s when it hit me—I’m really about to lose her. And how much I love her.

More than anyone I’ve ever loved.This bond between us is too deep to let go. Proud... She's family to me.

If we end up being nothing more than people who used to know each other, it’s going to take a long, long time for this pain to heal.

But as for whether the feelings will ever go away...

Who knows. That’s something for the future to decide.

*I thought about all of this as the sky started to cry with me—rain pouring down and blending with the tears on my face.*

Raindrops and tears...Ugh, I’m not gonna act like some sad music video heroine.

I just laughed bitterly, stood there in the rain for a while, then turned and walked back inside, soaking wet, leaving a trail of puddles all the way to the bathroom.

That night, I sat quietly in my room.

The next thing I knew, I felt a drop of water fall onto the back of my hand resting on my lap.

I wasn’t crying.The tears just came out on their own… and wouldn’t stop.

My tear ducts, which barely ever get used, were working overtime tonight.

We’ve become people who used to be close.

Proud’s daily messages that used to come here, now haunt me.

Even though I know it’s not her, my heart still skips a beat every time I hear a message notification—only to deflate the moment when I see it’s someone else.

Our usual weekly routine—our closeness, our emotional and physical connection, our friendship as neighbors—It’s all gone now, leaving this giant hole.

And I have no idea how to fill it.

And when I went back to stay at the condo, Bua started acting clingier than ever.

She stuck to me like glue, asking tons of personal questions she never used to— about my schedule, my work, where I go, what I do, when I come back.

And of course, she kept bringing up Proud—she asked about her again and again.

But ever since I accidentally let something slip about Proud that one time, I’ve never mentioned her to Bua again.

Bua’s problems with her family and her Girlfriend were still dragging on with no end in sight. And me, with my so-called leading-lady personality, just couldn’t bring myself to ask her to go stay somewhere else.

**Rrrrrrrr!! Rrrrrrr!!**

Who's calling from this strange number? A client? Or maybe an insurance agent? Doesn’t seem like an insurance call—it doesn’t start with **02**.

“Hello?”

[Rin.]

“Yes? May I know who I’m speaking with?”

"[Take a guess.]"

“…Si? Is that you? You’re back already?” I was surprised, especially since the number was a local one.

[Yeah, I've been back for a month now.]

“Then why haven’t I seen you? We live next door to each other.”

Si had been my friend since fourth grade. Her family bought the house next door from my uncle and aunt, and we ended up studying at the same school. Naturally, we became close.

[I haven’t been home. I’m staying with a friend.]

“Why are you not go home?”

[Have a few issues. I’ll explain later. Let’s meet up instead.]

“Tomorrow? Around 7 p.m. at xxxx café. Want to meet there or should I pick you up?”

[Let’s meet at the café. I know the way.]

“Alright, see you then.”

.

.

. .

I sat on the 15th floor, in the terrace zone—a rooftop area of a club in the heart of Bangkok. A soft breeze blew gently around me. The atmosphere was relaxed, almost like being by the sea, but instead of waves, I was surrounded by tall buildings and city lights at night.

Not long after, the person I was waiting for arrived. walked in, scanning the area until her eyes landed on me.

“Hey,” she greeted as she dropped into the chair across from me.

We hadn’t seen each other in 2–3 years, ever since Si left to study abroad. Now, she looked more mature, charming—and far more stunning than I remembered.

“Hey,” I replied with a smile.

“Hey.” Her long black hair swayed softly, brushing her beautiful face as she tilted her head, teasing me.

“Hey.”

“Hey.” That serious, smug, hard-to-read face—that was so typically Si.

“Hey.”

“Okay, okay, I give up,” she laughed. “You’re still the same old Rin. Still as cheeky as ever—but definitely prettier.”

We both burst out laughing.

“You’ve gotten prettier too,” I said.

“Yeah, I guess too” she replied casually—and we both laughed again.

After some playful banter and catching up, Si started talked about her life—and all the drama, especially her heartbroken love life in Australia.

Her cheerful smile and glowing presence were in stark contrast to the heartbreak she was describing. It was hard to believe both were coming from the same person.

“Is that why you haven’t gone back home yet?”

“Yeah.”

“When are you going back?”

“Probably in a little while,” she said, sipping from her glass with red lips. “Next month I’m going to a friend’s wedding. If you’re free, come with me. I don’t want to deal with it alone.”

"Which day are you going?”

“Next month, on the xxth.”

“Alright.”

“I’ll ask my friend Tam to pick you up at your house, and we’ll meet at the event.” she said.

“Why aren’t we going together?” I asked.

“I need to go pick something up first. I’ll drive over afterwards.”

“I’d really like to see the face of the person who broke your heart.” I said

“She’s beautiful… but cruel,” Si said like it was nothing, but I could tell her feelings were still pretty intense.

“I’ll be your date,” I offered. “If she’s bringing someone new, you bring me as your new girlfriend.” I raised one eyebrow playfully, and my usually expressionless friend responded with elegantly raised her eyebrows.

“But you don’t look so bright today, Rin. Is life not going so well?” She asked with a smiled knowingly.

“Just a little bit.”

“Your face doesn’t say ‘just a little.’ I’ve seen you "sigh" five times already, Darin.”

“Yeah.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Proud.”

“Proud… Passachon?” See raised her eyebrows. “Your partner?”

“What partner?”

“Oh right, she became your rival later on,” See chuckled. “What about Proud?”

"We are not speaking. We’re mad at each other, but I don’t even know why.”

" You two normally talk anyway…” Si was always sharp. She’d catch on soon.“Hmm? Or maybe you and Proud…”

“We made up. Thieves broke into Proud’s house, and I went over to help. So things got better between us again.” I didn’t plan to go into the details of our relationship.

She nodded slowly.

“And then something happened… and now we’re fighting again. Worse than before.” I looked down, feeling disheartened.

“Then talk to her.” she suggested.

“She won’t talk to me.”

“Have you actually tried talking to her? And that’s how you know she won’t talk to her?”

“I went to her house, but she wasn’t there. Then when I saw she was home, I climbed through the window to her room—she still wouldn’t let me in. she treated me like I was invisible. she Left my Line messages unread and wouldn’t pick up my calls.”

“Okay.” Her calm reply was so frustrating for me.

“Not okay!” I said with frustrated

“You climbed through the window to get to her?” she smirked.

“Can we skip that part?”

Why was she smiling like that?

“So, you don’t know why Proud is mad, and you haven’t talked to her yet, right?”

I nodded.

“What happened before that? Tell me everything in detail.”

I told my close friend about Bua staying over at my place, about the moment Proud walked in and mentioned a “new toy.” I told her about how angry I got, how Proud and I stopped talking, and how Bua said she would talk to Proud on my behalf.

“Why would you let someone else talk for you about your own issue?” she said

“Well, at that time, I was mad at her.”

“Then talk to her yourself. Don’t go through someone else,” she said seriously and looked at me.“And this ‘new toy’ thing—what did Proud mean by that?” Her sharp eyes narrowed.“Rin, you and Proud aren't just friends, are you?”

“To Proud, I probably am just a friend.”

“Okay... Why don’t I have this kind of accuracy when I bet twenty baht on the lottery with **Jud**,” she muttered to herself, then turned back to me.“If you like her, just tell her.”

“WHAT!?”

“You like Proud, right? Then why don’t you just say it? Why keep dancing around it like this?”

“I don’t like her.” She stared at me in silence.“Okay, how am I supposed to say it? You don’t understand. You and Ice—” (her ex, the one who broke her heart and she just told me about) “—you didn’t start off as just friends.”

“Well, you have to choose: **either stay friends forever** or **take the risk**. From what you’ve told me, I think Proud likes you too. Otherwise, she wouldn’t be jealous.”

“Sometimes it feels like she likes me... but then she said she doesn’t kiss her friends.”

“Then kiss her. If she slaps you, stop. If she doesn’t, keep going. Take control. At least you’ll know for sure instead of sitting around overthinking it.”

See took a bite of food, chewed with a straight face, then added,“Say something while you still have the chance. Don’t wait until she’s with someone else and you’re stuck regretting it. By then it’ll be too late.”

“I’m scared I’ll lose her if I confess.”

“And aren’t you already losing her now?” she raised an eyebrow.“**There’s only one Proud in the world, Rin.”**

That beautiful, clever woman rested her chin on her hand and stared at me silently.

“I feel bad for Ice, honestly—for leaving you,” I smiled faintly.

“Don’t say that name... it makes me cringe.”

**18. Don’t you want things to go back to how they used to be?**

“Rin, are you free next weekend?”

It was almost **10 PM** when I got home and saw my dad sitting in the living room, casually chatting on his iPad with his group.

“Why?” I paused, waiting for dad's answer.

“Uncle Pakorn and I are planning a beach trip. I want you to come—it’ll be more fun with everyone.”

“The whole family’s going?”

“Of course! Just like the old days.”

“Back in the day, you loved camping in the mountains. When did we ever go to the beach?”

I chuckled, reminiscing.

“Sometimes we’d hike so far up, it felt like death. And we still wouldn’t reach the campsite. I remember Proud complaining the whole way, saying she’d never go mountain camping again.”The memories made me laugh. I started to feel interested and walked over to sit and chat with Dad.“Is Uncle Pakorn's family coming too?”

“Yeah, they’re all in. We already made plans. I even told Uncle to invite Proud so you’d have a friend to go with.”

“....”

After hearing Word "friend" Faded the smile from my face

“Or you can invite another friend too, if you’d like. We’re renting a house with plenty of room.”

I went up to my room and called Art and Job to reschedule our fieldwork trip that was supposed to be next weekend.

[Why are we rescheduling, Khun Rin? If you cancel, I'll have nothing to do. My wife’s not around either.] Art teased.

"I have plans with my family. Let’s move the site visit to Friday instead."

[Wow, so personal life is more important than work now?] Art teased me again.

“Am I leaving my job? No—I moved it to Friday.”

[Yeah, but now I’m free the whole weekend just because of you. I cleared everything because I thought we'd go out.]

Art was getting sulky.

Sigh. “I’m going to the beach with my family. You two want to come? Chill vibes, sea breeze, hanging out with my parents.”

[Yes. Sure. Okay. Absolutely. I’ll bring Job too.]

.

.

. .

By Saturday morning, we were loading up the car with bags, snacks, supplies, and everyone’s activity gear.

Dad decided to take our **7-seater SUV** so we could all ride together.

“Traveling together is more fun than driving separately,” dad said.

Dad drove, with Uncle Pakorn. The two of them seemed to get along well again, chatting and laughing the whole way. Mom and Aunt Orn, sitting in the middle row, joined in the conversation too.

As for the back seat—where I sat, the atmosphere was... different.

I couldn’t see it with my eyes, but I could feel it pressing down on my heart.

The tension hung in the air like plastic wrap, suffocating and thick. I sat on one side of the seat. Proud sat on the other, next to the window. The gap between us was big enough for a toddler ghost to sit in—if we happened to be raising one.

Proud, still the same Proud—bright and warm—but her warmth no longer reached me. She stared out the window almost the entire ride. No talking. No looking at me. And since she didn’t speak, I decided not to either.

. .

When we arrived at the pier, I saw Art and Job already waiting. And if I wasn’t mistaken… The person walking up to Proud was—DJ P’Ood—Whom I’d only ever seen on TV or in social media clips.

“Oh! Rin!” he greeted, sounding like we were old friends. “How have you been? You look even better now than the last time we met!”

But I was absolutely sure—I had never met him before in my life.

“…Yes,” I replied politely, giving a small, awkward smile in return. The tall man had a short military-style haircut, playful eyes, and a sharp goatee. He laughed heartily at his own words.

We took a ferry to the island. Once we arrived, everyone helped unload the luggage and bring it into the accommodation. Dad had booked a house with four bedrooms and three bathrooms.

The original sleeping arrangement was: Dad and Mom in one room, Uncle

Pakorn and Aunt Orn in another, leaving two rooms—one each for me and Proud. But… since we had more guests than expected, Proud and I ended up sharing a room, while the three men shared the last room.

To be honest, I actually wanted to share a room with Proud—even if it would feel like trying to breathe inside a plastic bag all night. I wanted us to make up and be friends again.

We spent some time unpacking and settling in. Then Dad and Uncle Pakorn headed out to the front balcony to enjoy the sea breeze. They brought out a chessboard and immediately got into a match, each refusing to lose to the other.

Mom and my little brother started preparing food and organizing the supplies, with Proud helping them out.

Meanwhile, the guys sat around discussing which pub or club to visit that night.

And me, Well, aside from secretly stealing glances at Proud now and then, I wandered the beach, snapping pictures and recording videos to edit for my page later. Then I took out the book I’d brought and lay down on a sunbed under the shade of a tree to read.

Honestly, the view here was really amazing. Foreign tourists in two-piece swimsuits kept passing by. Maybe I should’ve gone back to the room and changed into a bikini to sunbathe too.

By afternoon, we had a snorkeling trip planned. So I went back to the room and changed into a two-piece like I’d been thinking.

“Whoa! Rin, you’re making my heart race!” I turned to see P’Ood clutching his chest dramatically. What was with him? I wasn’t even dressed that provocatively. Sure, I had a bikini on underneath, but over it, I wore a sheer white shirt and short shorts (okay, really short).

“Is P’Ood suffering from a locked jaw or something?” came a sharp female voice—that same girl who hadn’t spoken a single word to me all day. I had to turn to look.

DJ P’Ood was standing there, mouth agape, staring at me.

“You might want to wipe your drool. It's dripping on the floor,” Proud said coolly, handing him a tissue. P’Ood quickly shut his mouth.

I stepped outside with a heavy sigh. What exactly was Proud so mad at me about? The look she gave me just now clearly showed she was unhappy with me.

At the scheduled time, a boat came to pick us up for snorkeling.

Once Art, Job, P’Ood, Dad, and I had boarded, someone who had firmly refused to snorkel earlier—Proud—suddenly walked on with a sour face and joined us. I’ll admit it again: I am happy. Even if we weren’t speaking, I still wanted to keep her within my sight.

The crystal-clear seawater frothed behind the boat as it sped away from shore. Strong winds hit our faces while the boat rocked and bounced over the waves, sending everyone swaying from side to side.

When we reached the snorkeling point, the captain handed out gear and explained the area, the timing, and all the necessary instructions before everyone started to get off the boat.

I took off my outer shirt, revealing the bikini I had on underneath—and immediately noticed the piercing, jealous look in my direction from the one person who had no intention of snorkeling but insisted on joining the trip anyway.

…Was Proud not okay with me wearing a bikini? Could I hope that maybe—just maybe—she still cared?

Is there ever a time where she feels jealous when others look at me? I just want to feel important. That thought was running through my mind as I put on my snorkel and jumped into the water after my dad.

The water was crystal clear, with beautiful coral reefs scattered here and there. I swam along, capturing images of colorful fish swimming together in the same direction, almost like they were performing in an underwater parade.

After a while, the boat driver brought us some bread to feed the fish. As we broke the bread and dipped it into the water, all the fish swimming nearby rushed over for the food in our hands. Suddenly, I was surrounded by a swarm of fish and their groups.

I wanted to call Proud to come join the fun, but when I looked over, I met her gaze—one I couldn’t quite read. All I knew was that Proud wasn’t enjoying herself; her face showed not a hint of happiness.

In the evening, as the sun began to fade, we returned to our rooms to change clothes. Then, the guys went out to draw lines in the sand in front of our accommodation, getting ready for a game of beach volleyball.

We converted into two teams. My team was me, Dad, and Job. The other team was P’ Ood, Art, and Proud.

At first, we started off just playing around, teasing and joking with each other, laughing in the relaxed atmosphere by the sea, with the scent of salt in the air, the sound of waves, and everyone in high spirits.

Soon, my team took the lead, mostly because P’ Ood seemed to be the weak link in their team. Dad and Job agreed that we should try to send the ball to P’ Ood as much as possible. Dad would receive, I would set, and Job would spike, rotating like this until we got so caught up in the fun that we started cheering loudly. When Job received the ball and set me up for a winning spike, our team erupted in cheers as P’ Ood missed the ball. Then Job ran over, picked me up, and carried me around the court, shouting in celebration. After that, the game got a bit strange—Proud kept aiming her spikes directly at me.

Why was she so angry with me? What did I do to make her so upset? As I couldn’t figure out the reason for her anger, I started to get annoyed myself and began targeting her with my serves as well. By the end, the game turned into a face-off between Proud and me, each of us aiming for the other every chance we got, taunting whenever our team scored. No one else seemed to notice.

As night fell, we all went back to our rooms to shower. The moms had already prepared the food and set up the barbecue grill for dinner.

During all this time, Proud never stayed in the room with me alone. Whenever I walked in, she would walk out. When I left, she would come back in to do her own thing. We kept switching places like this, and honestly, if we weren’t going to clear things up, I was fine with it. I wouldn’t be the one to speak first or ask for things to go back to how they were. Whatever happens, happens.

That night, we all gathered on the balcony until late. We ate, chatted, and Art played the guitar while singing. The scent of barbecue still lingered in the air, even as the embers in the grill began to die down.

I lay stretched out on a bench in one corner of the balcony, not far from where Art and the others were singing. I put my book down on my chest and my thoughts drifting up to the starry black night sky, dotted with twinkling little stars from distant space rocks.

The moon shone brightly, casting a soft glow all around. Was this what the moon looked like in Korea? I thought about the nights we used to walk together- me and that girl who loved that shop in Korea.

I missed Proud, even though she was sitting just a few meters away.

*I hung up the phone tonight*

*Something happened for the first time...*

I turned to look at Job, who was singing softly along to the guitar Art was playing, Then Art chimed in with a smile.

“See, I told you this song works every time.” Art said with a smile.

“It’s true! job added. I’ve seen Rin listen to it on repeat every day. no wonder she can sing along now” two guys joked, smiling at each other. And I smile faintly too.

Job smirked playfully.“This song is dedicated to you, Khun Rin.”

*Do you ever think when you're all alone*

*All that we could be, where could this thing go?*

*Am I crazy or falling in love?*

*Is it real or just another crush?*

*Do you catch your breath when I look at you? Are you holding back, like the way I do?*

*'Cause I've tried and tried to walk away But I know this crush ain't goin' away Goin' away, yeah...*

*Has it ever crossed your mind*

*When we're hangin', spending time, girl Are we just friends? Is there more?*

*Is there more? (Is there more?)*

Proud sat there beside Job. She didn’t sing along. Didn’t join in.

She just looked at me.

And what was I supposed to do… if I couldn’t stop my heart?

“I’m going to bed,” I said, getting up.

“What, Khun ’Rin? Come on.” Job called after me.“I think you struck a nerve. You really shouldn’t have dared me to sing that,” Job’s voice still echoed faintly behind me as I opened the bedroom door.

It must’ve been a little after 1 a.m. when I woke up in the darkness because my bed was shaking. Nothing serious—just my roommate tossing and turning in her sleep. Well, it was a strange place, after all. things like this was bound to happen.

I tried to go back to sleep. But it didn’t last long. The same problem woke me up again.

“Proud,” I whispered, gently shaking her. “Proud.”

“What?”. She mumbled, half asleep.

“Can you stop tossing around? I can’t sleep.”

She seemed frozen for a moment in the dark before muttering,

“If you can’t sleep, go sleep somewhere else.”

“Oh yeah? Well, I have a way to make you stop moving.” I shifted closer.

Immediately, Proud sat up in the darkness.

“Stop. I’ll sleep on the floor.”

She grabbed her pillow and went to lie down on the cold tiled floor next to the bed.

I felt a little disappointed.

But there was no way I’d ever show it.

Fine. You wanna sleep on the floor? It's suits yourself.

But five minutes later, I couldn’t take it. I sat up, gathered my blanket into a lump, and threw it down at her. It landed right on Proud, making her let out a soft, irritated grunt.

After that, we both lay down in silence—apart, but not really.

I didn’t have a blanket, but that was fine. because the tile floor was definitely colder than the mattress. I was worried she’d be get cold. I was Worried Proud would get sick.

. .

But I didn’t expect that the one to wake up with a sore throat and a low fever the next morning… would be me.

"Achooo!"

“You feeling sick, Rin?” Mom asked, and I caught a glimpse of Proud turning to look at me from the corner of my eye.

“It’s nothing serious,” I said.

“Did you sleep with a blanket last night?”

“Probably it was from the sun and sea water yesterday,” I replied, keeping it vague.

We packed our things and left the accommodation. around noon, before taking the boat back to the mainland.

And I returned home with a heart heavier than when I had left for trip—Because the balloon of hope I had carried with me, the one filled with dreams of making up with Proud, had floated away and disappeared into the sky.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

**It’s been a month now**.

But I’ve never gotten used to life without Proud.

Thoughts kept wandering in my head as I sat quietly in the car with Tam, a friend of 'Si' on our way to a wedding. Ever since Proud shut every door on our conversation, I hadn’t tried reaching out again.

“**There’s only one Proud in this world, Rin.”**

‘Si’s voice echoed clearly in my mind, even when we arrived at the wedding Event.

There is no guests had arrived yet—just staff and a few friends helping with final preparations.

The wedding was held at a beachside restaurant with a beautifully sectioned-off area. Fresh flowers and twinkling lights decorated every corner. The food, drinks, and cocktails were set up at one side, not too far off. The sea breeze mixed with gentle music in the background created an easy, relaxed atmosphere. None of the stiffness of a grand, formal Wedding’s.

There was a bit of chaos during the wedding—enough to make our hearts race—but in the end, everything turned out fine. After the party, See and I drove back together late at night.

. .

And when I parted ways with Si, I found myself thinking of Proud again.

Thinking hard—Between my own stupid **pride** and **Proud herself**,

Which one is more important?

*Maybe in the future, I’ll meet someone else.But there won’t be another Proud.* So... if surrendering meant I could have her back, then I’d give in.

I’d tell her now how I feel.

Tell her how much I love her and no matter what happens, I'll accept it.

. .

The curtains in my room were pulled open just enough for me to spy on the house next door. Proud’s light was still on.

So I hiked up the hem of my long, pastel dress—still wearing it from the wedding—and climbed out the window toward hers.

“Proud! Open the window!”

I knocked for a while.But there was no response.

I was frustrated and raised my voice,“Proud, if you don’t open up, I’m going to break the glass—I’m serious!”

Still silence.

So I went back to my room.but returned again at her window—this time, with a baseball bat in hand.

The sound of the bat hitting the glass wasn’t pretty,but it made a hole big enough for me to reach in and unlock the window from the inside.I didn’t care about the barking dogs or the screams of startled neighbors.

After spinning around in circles for what felt like thirty times,, Here I was—finally standing barefoot in her room.

Wearing a frilly pink dress with a torn hem from catching it on the window as I climbed in.

A baseball bat in my left hand.

A shattered window behind me.

And all of it happening to the soundtrack of barking dogs and uncle Pakorn yelling outside the room.

Proud, what was that noise?!”

“It’s nothing, Dad,” Proud replied, glaring at me. “I just threw a rock at the neighbor’s dog and accidentally hit the window instead.”

“Are you sure it’s nothing?”

“It’s nothing.”

“**Achoo! Achoo! Achoo! Achoo**!” I sneezed four times in a row as I walked past Proud to a corner of the room, for no apparent reason—like someone was talking about me or thinking bad thoughts about me.

I grabbed some cleaning supplies and swept all the broken glass into the bin, worried the room’s owner might step on it.

“Why are you avoiding me?” I asked

“I’m not avoiding you,” she replied, hugging Thongdee tightly to her chest.

“You don’t read my messages, you don’t answer my calls, you wouldn’t even open the window when I came and knocked… What do you call that?”

“I call it, I don't want to see you.” Proud said with a frustrated mood.

…It felt like I’d been hit in the face with my own baseball bat. Should I just walk away now, or shamelessly stay?

“Why are you mad at me?” My heart was already shattered. The only thing keeping me standing here were 'Si’ words in my mind: There’s only one Proud in the world. “Can we go back to the way things were, Proud?

She put Thongdee down on the floor.

“What do you want to go back to, Rin? Bed partners? Friends? Or friends you only think of when you’re horney?” She pulled her nightshirt off over her head, leaving only her bra and underwear.

“Move ahead and take what you want,” she said, her eyes shining with tears.“Isn’t this what you want—to go back to how things were?”

I closed my eyes, swallowing the pain before I spoke, my voice trembling. “Is that really all you think there ever was between us, Proud? Was that all we had?” I stepped back toward the window. “I’ll call someone to fix the window tomorrow.”

And just like that, all the words I had prepared to say I couldn't say it.

I walked out of her room, closing the broken window behind me—just like we closed off our relationship.

**Once Friends. Now Strangers**.

#### 19.Passachon- (Proud Point of View)

**Secondary 2. At the school Van :**

“Let me play too!” I said to **Eve**, a tall girl who was my senior at school. She was sitting on the seat opposite me.

“You can’t play,” Eve replied. She was the leader of the group of elementary kids on the school van, and almost everyone was playing a game of drawing lots to find out who would be the “bad guy.”

“Why not?” I frowned, not understanding her irritation. Just this morning, when we rode together, she was friendly enough.

“Because I said so.” No matter how old you are or what group you’re in, politics always finds its way into life. On this van, Eve was the one in charge. And when the leader says “no,” nobody else dares to go against her.

I was completely exiled. But I wasn’t about to let this injustice decide my fate. So I said…

“Is it because of **Adom**?” I glanced at the boy my age sitting to Eve right side—her younger brother.

“No, it's because of yourself" Eve sneered, curling her lip into a mocking smile.

“Hmph. Maybe you should spend more time helping your brother with his homework instead of getting mad at me for not letting Adam copy my answers in exams.”

“No one’s going to talk to you.” Eva Said with an angry mood.

“just on this van,” I said, trying to sound confident, though honestly, I was a little afraid of ending up with no one to play with me.

“From now on, you'll move to the back seat. I’ll have **‘Som’** come sit here instead. Don’t sit opposite me anymore.”

“I’m not moving. This is my seat.”

Eve’s round, goldfish-like eyes glared at me. “You have to move.”

“If you don’t want to sit opposite me, then you move to the back seat yourself.”

And before I could react, Eve tipped her cup of diluted soda and ice right onto my lap. My neatly ironed navy skirt from this morning was now a deep, wet blue as the liquid soaked through to my thighs.

I stared, stunned, at what just happened, while Eve, holding her now-empty cup, smirked at me with satisfaction.

“You shouldn’t talk back to my sister,” Adam said, laughing with satisfaction too.

I clenched my fists, sizing up my opponent. Eve was taller and nearly twice my size. Plus, we were crammed into a van with more than ten kids, most of whom were her minions. If I punched her, there’d be no way to escape.

Still, my impulsive hand raised itself, ready to slap Eve 's face. But before I could act, someone else’s hand grabbed mine—someone I thought had been sleeping the whole time. That person looked at me, silently warning me not to do something I'd regret. Fighting in a tight, crowded van wouldn't look good - especially when I was out of play.

Frustrated , I let my hand drop onto my lap, filled with bitter defeat, as Eve gave me a look of pure contempt - and Rin was the one who stopped me.

Reluctantly, I lowered my hand onto my lap, seething with frustration, while Eve looked at me with utter contempt. And Rin, the person who stopped me, and I just lay back down, closed my eyes, and went back to sleep without saying a word.

But the next day, the same person who had stopped me from doing something foolish yesterday showed up to board the van with a bag containing a red Fanta. She held it in her hand the whole time without even taking a sip. Not until Eve and Adam—two siblings—got on the van. Once the doors shut and the wheels began to roll, the entire bag of red soda that she had been holding so firmly was suddenly poured out—right onto Eve’s perfectly pleated skirt. Must’ve been pretty sticky, I thought.

The senior’s scream pierced through the cramped van. Meanwhile, the one responsible for the soda—Darin—leaned back against her seat, completely relaxed, as if she didn’t care at all about the commotion she’d caused. And everyone else in the van? Some were covering their ears, others were craning their necks forward from the back, eager to see what was going on—everyone except the driver uncle.

“What’s going on back there!?”

“It’s nothing, Uncle San. Just the kids playing around,” Rin replied, her voice calm and expressionless—just like the cold look she gave Eve.

“Why did you do that to me, Rin?” Eve demanded.

“Then why did you do that to Proud yesterday?” Rin said back.

“Proud started it with Adam!”

“Proud has every right to decide whether or not she wants to let someone copy her answers.”

“This is between me and Proud—it’s none of your business, Rin!”

“And what happened between Proud and Adam isn’t any of your business either, Eve.”

“It is my business! Adam is my brother. You’re the one who doesn’t belong in this.”

“Well, Proud is my sister.”

“She’s not!”

“I love Proud like a sister,” Rin said firmly.Adam and I, and everyone else in the van, were staring at the two of them, stunned.“Put yourself in someone else’s shoes, Eve. You don't have the right to talk to Proud, and you don’t have the right to bully her like that. I don’t like it.”

My heart was pounding hard. I wasn’t so weak that I needed someone to stand up for me—but I liked what Rin was doing. She was protecting me.

“And if I want to keep doing it?” Eve challenged.

“I’m warning you next time if you bully her again then You will pay more much than this” Rin said, her face serious, without sounding threatening,

I didn’t know what Rin would do if Eve ever messed with me again. But what I did know, with absolute certainty, was that Rin meant it—and that she had always been on my side.

After that day, whenever we passed Eve’s classroom, there would always be a group of her friends standing just outside, staring us down like they were hoping to start something. The whispers and snide remarks would follow, too:

“Look at the little one. Think she’s very strong or something?”

But when Rin ignored them and walked by without flinching, they would boo:

*“Ugh, guess she’s not strong after all.”*

And during breaks, people began to trail behind us, until rumors started to spread that Rin from Grade - 8 have with problem with senior Eve from Grade -11

Then one afternoon, Eve sent a tall, flamboyant guy as a "peace negotiator" to speak with us. He invited Rin to meet at Eve’s classroom,after school. But Rin declined, giving the messenger a silent, sideways glance.

So Eve suggested the science building cafeteria, which would be empty in the evening.

“Why did you agree to meet her?” I asked as we walked under the Thai language building.

“I didn’t,” she replied coolly. “Wouldn’t want to dirty my hands.”

“Then don’t go. What if they hurt us?”

“Eve’s father is a teacher at another school. He doesn’t like it when his daughter causes trouble or ruined the family’s reputation. If he finds out, Eve will be in big trouble. So, if things get tense, I’ll use that to our advantage,” she said, Pausing for a moment. “Spread the word. Let people know that this evening, Rin from Grade - 8 is meeting Eve from Grade -11 for a ‘clearing up’ at the cafeteria.”

And so the news spread like wildfire.

When we arrived at the cafeteria, we found Eve’s five friends standing in a circle, pressuring us to apologize to her. But before anything could happen, more and more people started pouring into the cafeteria—first one, then three, then ten, twenty, fifty.

Among them were some of Rin fanclub members and admirers, clearly there to intimidate Eve’s group—especially a gang of friends led by **P’Arthit**, the **student council president** and idol of many junior girls.

“What’s going on between you and Rin?” P’Arthit asked as he stepped forward to stand beside us.

“It's none of your business ,” Eve muttered, clearly uncomfortable.

“Then stay away from Rin,” he said firmly.

“Apologize to Eve right now, Rin,” one of Eve’s friends ordered, turning to face her with a smug look.

“Has P’Eve apologized to Proud yet?” Rin asked and only glanced at Eve,which seemed to provoke her even more. Eve strode towards us, hand raised, but Rin stopped her with a cold, steady voice.

“Before you hit me, have you thought about what you’ll tell your dad when you get called into the Principal office?”

“ That's enough, Eve,” after standing there, visible restraining herself, P'Arthit stepped in to Mediate and asked everyone to let it go.

And Eve, trying to save her face, said, “So you’re not going to apologize to me, Rin? Fine. Just remember—P’Arthit won’t always be around to protect you.”

“But we’re still here!” Said a group of younger students—some from Grade 7, some from Grade 10 and 11—stepping up beside us. I’ll admit, a few of them were kids I had paid **fifty baht** each to come stand in a "Supporters"

And that’s how this war ended—Eve walked away quietly, and we never spoke again, even though we still had to ride the same van every day. This whole thing… It started because of me.

And Rin never knew that an innocent Grade 8 girl like me had secretly cracked open her piggy bank to scrape together over 500 baht just to hire those

Rin—was a naturally smart student. She never had to try hard. She often copied homework from others, but somehow still scored higher than everyone else on tests.

Darin is very popular but never cares about her popularity. She is beautiful enough.She could’ve easily won any beauty contest she entered—but she never let anyone put her in one. Not even my mom, who once tried to force us both onto a stage together, ever succeeded.

Rin didn’t care about trends or brands. She always chose what suited her, and somehow, everything she wore looked so effortlessly good it made people envy her.

*She liked driving an old pickup truck—even though her family has a BMW and a Land Rover. I never understood that.*

She once wore a free T-shirt she got from a cement company as pajamas—and still managed to look better than anyone I’d ever seen.

Rin could be blunt—her words were often harsh—but her actions told a different story.

**And Darin is the person... I had secretly liked for a long time.** I didn’t even know when those feelings started. One day, I just realized that I wanted to go to school every day simply because she’d be there. Everything about her pulled me in.

*If only our dads hadn’t had that falling out…*

*If only Rin didn’t have to transfer to another school…*

*What would have happened between us*?

I didn’t know what went wrong in the grown-ups’ relationships. All I knew was that I had become a teenager…

**…From the day I kissed Rin.**

.

. .

Rin was the type who got annoyed easily, but if something wasn’t too serious, she’d usually just let it go. This time, though, no matter what I said, she refused to let me stay with her.

So, after Rin had gone up to her room, I walked up to the hotel lobby, gave them my name, and told the staff that I came with Rin—that we had a little argument. But the staff wouldn’t budge. I then told them to take me to her room, and if Rin said she didn’t know me, I promised not to cause any trouble. Eventually, they gave in and brought me to her.

After that, Rin finally agreed to let me stay—but only for one night. I kept trying to negotiate for more time, little by little, until we ended up going to a club together. Rin drank a lot. I'm not sure what got into her, but she was completely wasted—collapsed and limp in the middle of the club. Luckily, I ran into P’Ood and the DJ crew that night. P’Ood helped me carry her back to the hotel.

As soon as we got to the room, she started shouting that it was too hot and began stripping everything off—her coat, sweater, long johns, even her underwear. I tried to stop her, but she wouldn’t listen. So I stood there, covering my mouth and staring in shock as her pale skin turned red from the alcohol, and she collapsed naked on the bed.

I thought luck was on my side the next morning, because Rin couldn’t remember a thing. I told her she had gotten drunk and tried to seduce me. (Maybe I added a few exaggerated effects, because her face didn’t look convincing.) Of course, none of it was true. I just wanted to buy more time to stay with her. Maybe this was my last chance—to get to know her again. Even if just as friends, I still wanted to keep Rin in my life.

But that morning, what deflated me completely was when Rin said, “I feel Uncomfortable.” That hit me hard. So I made up my mind to pack my things and leave. I Sneakily my passport behind. our lives shouldn't be hopeless right?

After leaving the hotel, I kept hoping like crazy that Rin would come after me. She had to - She just had to! That was my green passport I left behind, after all. I kept trying to reassure myself with that thought as I slowly walked around the buildings nearby. I didn’t go far—just in case Rin came out to find me and couldn’t find me.

And then she actually called.

There was no way I was going to answer right away. I wanted to act hard to get a little.

I let her keep calling and sending messages for a while, while I walked into a hot pot restaurant and sat down on the second floor. I took off my coat and scarf so they wouldn’t absorb the restaurant smell and started enjoying a bowl of Budae-jjigae in peace. My lips turned red from the heat—the soup was level-10 spicy!

Then I saw Rin stop in front of the restaurant. Her hands were shaking as she typed out a message to me, saying she had come out wearing just a few layers. So careless girl. Why didn’t she dress properly?

I stopped playing hard to get because I was worried. I paid the bill, quickly gathered my things, and rushed out. Just then, I saw Rin bump into a guy. She was about to turn and see me. I had to do something—fast—so she wouldn’t realize I’d just finished eating hot pot.

It was all so sudden. My mind went blank, and the only thing I could think to do was pretend to pick up a coin off the ground. Then I looked up and met her eyes, acting like we’d just run into each other.

What I saw was a worried expression on her tall, slender figure, standing among the softly falling snowflakes. Her cheeks were red, and her whole body was trembling. I wanted to say I was sorry. I wanted to hug her. Could I? Would she say something mean again if I did?

Thump thump. Thump thump. Thump thump thumpthump.

If I were a character in a horror movie, I’d have thought an alien embryo was growing inside me—because something inside my chest was pounding against my ribs like crazy.

I was flustered… so much so I couldn’t even look at Rin directly. And then she took my hand and pressed it against her cheek, right there in the falling snow, and whispered, “Don’t take it away just yet…” Oh god… my heart!

After that, everything seemed to get better. Rin started speaking more gently to me. Sometimes, she even smiled. And she no longer acted irritated by my presence.

.

.

And I fell for her again..

She’s always beautiful— always captivating. And me? I fall too easily.

Just one gentle touch from Rin, a small smile, a little attention or affection—my heart just melts, and I’d lose control. That’s how I ended up sleeping with her one night, even though she kept insisting 'we are friends'.

But at that moment, I was too weak to resist my own feelings. I was so close to someone I had known for a long time... someone I’d secretly liked for just as long. I became her 'Friends with benefits partner.’

I was happy being near her—yet miserable every time I was reminded of the role I actually played in her life.

Because on that night, Rin had made it clear again: we were just friends. So ever since then, whenever we came close to kissing, I would always say the same

line: **' I don't kiss friends** ' to her. And Rin would seem irritated that I wouldn’t fully give myself to her. Did she really think I didn’t want to kiss her?

In reality, I want to kiss her so much that it cannot be described in words.

Toward the end of our time together, she suddenly invited me on a spontaneous trip to Jeju Island. Nothing had been planned.

We rented a car and drove around the island, stopping to buy the most delicious oranges in the world from roadside farms. We hiked up hills and wandered along seaside cliffs.

One afternoon, she took me to Black Pork Street for Jeju’s famous black pork. We turned down a small alley to park in front of one of the shopfronts, its doors shut, potted plants lined up outside. Then we went inside and enjoyed our meal in peace.

When we finished, we walked back to the car. Rin got into the driver’s seat, but I had to wait for her to reverse out first—the car was parked tightly against the curb, with a tree blocking the passenger side.

While I stood there waiting, the glass door of the shop we had parked in front of suddenly slammed open. An angry aunty stormed out, yelling loudly and pointing at us. I was so startled I ran to jump into the car the moment Rin backed out far enough to open the door.

“We blocked her shop,” I said, panting.

“Your face looked hilarious while you were standing out there,” Rin laughed out loud, clearly amused—and kind of annoying.

We kept driving until we reached Seongsan Ilchulbong Peak. Rin started narrating like a documentary host, going on and on with so many details. It felt like I was watching an educational travel program with a beautiful host explaining things.

She told me it was a national park with the crater of an extinct volcano. The place is also known as “**Sunrise Peak**” because of its stunning sunrise viewpoint, now registered as a **UNESCO** **World Heritage Site.**

A Sunrise? Who comes all this way just to look at a giant pile of dirt? it definitely wasn't my idea to come here..

“Hey” I said, kicking off my high-heeled boots and slipping on Rin’s sneakers—we happened to be the same shoe size. I dragged my feet up the sloping path beside her, the whole trail flanked by lush greenery. “It’s already evening time, so late—how are we going to see the sunrise?”

“I didn’t bring you here to see the sunrise.” The golden twilight cast a glow across her sharp features, soft shadows falling across her face. Even from the side, she looked flawless. A few loose strands of hair danced in the breeze.

She looked gentle. And warm.

I didn’t take out my camera to capture that moment—but my eyes absorbed it, the image racing through my nerves and lodging itself deep in my brain and heart.

“So what did you bring me here to see?” I asked.

She stepped closer, placed her hands on my shoulders, and turned me around to look behind us.

We had climbed quite high. Spread out in front of me was a panoramic view of the blue sea meeting the dusky sky, with the lights of a distant town just beginning to twinkle in the fading light.

I inhaled deeply, filling my lungs with the fresh, clean air while gazing at the tiny homes below, glowing gently in the oncoming night.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” she asked, smiling softly beside me.

“Beautiful,” I replied.

But what I really meant was **'She is beautiful’**

We stopped for a long while, letting ourselves soak in everything around us. We took photos to capture the atmosphere. In the end, we didn’t make it all the way to the crater at the top of the mountain—because the sky had already begun to darken.

“If we’re lucky, we might get to see the moon from up here. **The moon of** **Korea**,” she said softly, her gentle eyes looking at me as we walked back down the trail toward a café near the parking lot, hoping to find some warm drinks and sweets.

But we weren’t lucky. We didn’t get to see the moon. The sky was overcast, and it got dark so quickly that we had to hurry down and ended up forgetting to even look for it.

But Rin… she didn’t know. I found something far more beautiful than the moon.

I wonder—Is it dangerous for the body if the brain releases too much dopamine? I really have so much fun or happiness whenever I'm with Rin.

.

Oh… I forgot to mention. Rin was so surprised that on our flight back from Korea, we ended up on the same plane. She laughed and said, “Wow, what a crazy coincidence!”

...*Yeah. She didn’t know how much money I had to spend to reschedule my flight at the last minute—just so we could come home together. She had no idea that I, in fact, was the true god of coincidences.*

I thought everything that happened to us in Korea would come to an end once we returned to Thailand. But it turned out to be the opposite. Her long legs kept finding their way to my window again and again.

Except… she already had a girlfriend. And one night, she left me behind in the middle of the night because her girlfriend called. She never came back that night. In fact, she didn’t come back at all that whole week.

I was angry—furious—but my dad once told me, people *should understand their own rights and responsibilities.* And as someone who was just a "Bed Partner"... my only right was to be left behind in silence.

I decided I had to end this kind of relationship. It wasn’t good for the health of my heart. My rational mind told me to stay away. But the moment I saw her face, my brain kept pumping out dopamine non-stop. I was addicted to the moments I had with Rin. She was far too cute for me to ever truly let go.

I tried cutting her off. but she always came back. I cut her off again. And if she hadn’t come back, I would’ve moved on myself. But we’d been through so much together—good and bad. I truly loved Rin. And it hurt so damn much to still be just a 'friend with benefits'.

Lately, Rin had started getting more upset when I told her I don't kiss friends. Well, if she saw me as more than a friend, why wouldn’t she kiss me already?

Then one day, she stopped coming home, just like how things were in the beginning of our… whatever it was. She turned her face away and said that Bua would be staying at the condo with her. I started to worry and overthink. Was she bored of me? Angry that I had conditions? That I was busy with work? Or something else?

That night, I went to her condo without calling ahead. I still had the keycard she’d given me. After unlocking the door, I pushed it open... and found Rin hugging Bua, both of them almost naked.

*I felt numb all over, except for my heart, which hurts so much.*

I drove home with tears streaming down my face, because until then, I thought things between us were developing. I guess it was just my own imagination.

After that, I made the firm decision to end things between Rin and me. We stopped contacting each other and went back to living our own lives.

Until one night, Rin texted me, asking me to come over. It was the middle of the night. She was drunk. And I—still being me—gave in to her just like always. I walked into her room and let her kiss me, even though I’d already set the rule: No. No. No.

*When will I ever stop loving someone who doesn’t love me?*

Or maybe…I should try talking to her properly one more time.

Rin was still asleep when I climbed back into my own room at six in the morning. And there was Thongdee, wagging his tail at the window, waiting for me as always.

My little dog always waited for me.

.

.

.

.

.

. .

That morning, when I picked up my phone from the bedside table, I saw seven missed calls from Bua, along with several messages she had sent me the night before.

**Dr. Bua:** Proud, I need to talk to you. Please pick up the phone.

**Dr. Bua:** I’ve called you many times. If you still won’t answer, I’ll have to say it here.

**Dr. Bua**: I’ll be straightforward—Rin and I are in a relationship.

…My heart pounded wildly as I read through the messages one by one.

**Dr. Bua**: Ever since we started dating, I’ve always known about the FWB relationship between you and Rin.

**Dr. Bua:** Rin has never hidden anything from me.

**Dr. Bua:** What I’m about to say, I want you to read it, understand it, and accept it.

**Dr. Bua:** Rin and I love each other.

**Dr. Bua**: Rin knows that you secretly like her, and it makes her very uncomfortable. But she didn't dare tell you directly because she was afraid of losing your friendship.

**Dr. Bua**: I understand how it feels to love someone who doesn’t love you back.

**Dr. Bua**: And because we’re friends, I want you to be happy with someone who truly loves you. Please stop holding on to Rin.

She knew about everything between Rin and me? Rin must have told her about us. There’s no other explanation.

My heart felt so heavy. I didn’t even realize when the tears started falling. But worse than the messages... **was the voice clip I was listening to—Rin’s voice**.

**Rin**: *What I had with Proud was just a friends with benefits, Bua. It's Just sex or desire.*

I’ve never had anything sharp cut into my heart before, but from how I feel right now, I can't imagine it would hurt any less.

To Rin, I truly meant nothing more than sex partner.

**Note -It was a bit difficult for me to translate this chapter, if I make any mistakes, so ignore them.**

#### 20. Paassachon ||

**Boss**: Have you eaten yet?

Ugh. The moment I saw that notification pop up, I didn’t even want to check my phone anymore. I am so annoyed.

The one who sent that message was Ball, **a guy from the IT department at my** **workplace**. He often wandered near the broadcasting studio whenever I was on air, and he would bring me snacks every single day—even though I’d already told him not to. I’m full. I’m on a diet. I feel awkward. I have so many reasons.

But what really gives me the Scared… is how persistent Boss is with his texts. Every. Single. Day. At least three times a day.

**Boss**: I miss you, Proud (8:00 AM)

**Boss**: Have you had breakfast yet? (10:05 AM)

**Boss**: Have you had lunch yet? (1:38 PM)

**Boss**: Had dinner yet? (7:24 PM)

**Boss**: how was your day today are you tired (9:20 PM)

**Boss**: Sweet dreams. Sleep well. (10:50 PM)

**PROUD**: [Sticker]

And even though I never reply, even though I usually just send back a single emoji before the day ends, he still keeps sending me this full-package set of messages, day after day. Honestly, it feels like I’m texting with a robot—or some kind of automated reply system.

Sigh… The person I want to love me but she doesn't love me, and the one I don't want to love me, he does.

“Proud.”

A familiar, beautiful voice called my name just as I was waiting for my food to be served.

“Si?

A beautiful, composed woman- an old friend - smiled at me. She was just as beautiful as Rin back in school.

“How’ve you been? I haven’t seen you in for long time, even though we live so close.”

“Come sit with me, Si.”

That calm radiance of hers still glowed all around her.“You look even more gorgeous.”

“Are you complimenting me or yourself?” she teased as she pulled out the chair and sat across from me.

“I was complimenting that woman over there,” I said, nodding toward a clean, beautiful and classy-looking woman who had just entered the restaurant.

Si turned to look. “That’s my girlfriend. compliment her all you want, but don’t get any ideas.”

I made a face at her, which made her laugh softly. The so-called “girlfriend” waved at her and walked straight toward our table.

“Ice, this is Proud—my friend.”

“Nice to meet you.”

She said with a friendly smile. “You look really familiar. I feel like I’ve seen you somewhere before.”

“ Ice, do you know DJ Proud?”Si asked

Ice looked at me closely for a moment after her girlfriend said that.

I laughed before leaning down to hug her. “I’m so glad to see you.”

She gently patted my shoulder in return.

.

. .

I drove to Rin’s condo, walked through the lobby, and pressed the elevator button to go up to the designated floor. The entire floor was silent, with only the sound of my footsteps echoing in the corridor, flanked by warm-toned walls.

My trembling hand held the keycard tightly as I stood still in front of room 619, afraid of opening the door and seeing something that would break my heart again.

I took a slow breath while the alien in my chest thrashed wildly. Gripping the stiff, rectangular card tighter, I swiped it through the reader.

**Click**.

The door clicked open. I stepped inside silently. The room was empty—no sign of guests or the owner. I kept walking deeper into the until I reached the bedroom. it too was empty.

There were only a few clothes hanging in Rin’s wardrobe. Several pairs of shoes were missing. The bathroom items were missing, and so were many of the architecture tools that usually occupied her work corner. But what struck me most were the unfamiliar belongings placed around the room—like the small-sized shoes, two or three pairs, about two sizes smaller than Rin shoes.

Rin really hasn’t been staying here… So what about what Bua told me? That they were dating? Did Bua lie? Why? Does she have feelings for Rin? And what about the other things she told me—were they all lies too? What about that voice recording?

I drove back home, thinking things through for a long time before finally picking up the phone and calling Bua.

[Hello?]

"Hi, Doctor Bua.

[Yes]

“Just a quick question.It’s nothing. I just couldn’t get in touch with Rin and wanted to ask—was she staying with you?”

Just then, a blue pickup truck pulled into the house next door. The third person I had just mentioned stepped out, carrying bags as she climbed down from the car.

[So you’re still contacting her? No wonder you’ve been quiet. I told you already, didn’t I? Rin and I are together now. Why are you still interfering in our relationship? Rin doesn’t need to use you as a backup anymore. Why can’t you understand that?]

“So, is Rin there or not? I need to talk to her.” I slightly cracked open the window to glance next door. The lights in the opposite room were now on.

[She’s here. But she’s asleep.]

“You’re lying,” I said quietly—to myself, but also to her. She had been lying all along, about everything.

[Do you want me to send you a photo of Rin sleeping? Show you what she’s wearing? Exactly how her hands are resting on my body?]

I immediately hung up and cursed that delusional Dr. drama queen. It’s not that I couldn’t take it—I just felt it was time to go pay my neighbor a visit.

Wait a second, Rin. I’m climbing over to your window.

But if you break my heart again…

I will try.....love you a little less.

#### 21. Losing All Control

**Rin P.O.V:**

I’m planning to buy a new house or condo. Why? Because my own room has been taken over by someone else.

How many months has Bua been staying at my condo now? One, two, three, or four?

After a month or two, I really started to feel uncomfortable having Bua around. I hardly wanted to go back and see her face in my room. It was so suffocating I thought I would burst, and it looked like she had no intention of leaving anytime soon.

So, I moved the essentials for my work to Sis condo temporarily. She offered and allowed me to use the space whenever I want.

Actually, I only found out later that the condo belonged to Ice. Si had moved in with her girlfriend after everything they’d been through together.

In Ice’s condo, there’s a big sofa that I used as my temporary bed whenever I had nowhere else to go. It was fine—comfortable enough to sleep on. But still...

One morning, I was sitting groggily on the sofa when my dear friend walked out of the bedroom.

"Si"

“Hmm?” she glanced at me.

“Well,” I didn’t know how to say it.There’s something I need to talk to you about.”

“What is it?”

“The Sounds from your bedroom at night… I mean…” I looked down at the floor.“Late at night, there are these sounds…”

She stared at me silently.

“I mean…” I glanced around the room aimlessly.

"...."

"You know, I’m sleeping out here, and I was keep listening to weird sounds.” I pressed my lips together.

A faint blush appeared on her usually calm face before she walked over to the shelves around the room without saying a word. She rummaged around for four or five minutes, then came back and stared at me.

“Rin,” she said, put something in my hand. “Use these. I can control my own noise, but I can’t stop a spring mattress from making sounds.” Then she walked away, completely unbothered.

I looked down at the two small items in my hand—bright blue earplugs. See had given me earplugs.

There was another time I came back to Si’s room in the evening, and the person who opened the door was Ice—uh, Ice in sexy lingerie, no less.

“Ahhhhhhhh" "Ahhhhhhhh"

We both screamed at the same time before I covered my mouth and turned away from her at the door, while Ice run back into the bedroom. See came running down the hallway, with a panicked look.

“What’s going on?” See asked .

“Um... well, Ice came to open the door for me and...then Ice ran straight into the room,” I explained to Si, just as Ice walked back out wearing only a bathrobe, clearly looking embarrassed.

Si gave Ice a long look, then glanced at me, then back at Ice again. “Explain.”

“Well, you said you were coming up to the room, and when someone rang the doorbell, I thought it was you, so I went to open the door... but I just happened to not be properly dressed,” I listened to Ice say this and couldn’t help but let out a snort of laughter. It wasn’t that she accidentally wasn’t dressed properly—she had deliberately dressed like that. A matching set of sexy lingerie.

“How ‘not properly dressed’ are we talking?” Si asked in her usual voice.

“The lingerie set…” Ice murmured so softly her lips barely moved. “The lingerie we bought together that day.”

“Don’t look at me like that. I had nothing to do with it. I didn’t see anything, honestly! I was just startled by the color, didn’t even get a chance to focus on anything.” I wondered if it would be inappropriate for me to burst out laughing right now.

“Next time, at least check before you open the door, Ice.”

“Well, you said you were coming up."

“Still, you should check. What if it wasn’t Me or Rin? What if it was some perverted guy?”

“Then I’d smack him with a frying pan. The one in our kitchen is gold-coated marble. Lightweight, durable, fits perfectly in the hand.”

Si laughed. “Next time, if you forget your keycard again, I’ll knock in Morse code. If it’s not Morse, don’t you dare open the door like that.”

“Are we in the middle of the Vietnam War or something?” I muttered as I walked past the battlefield couple into the room. “Make yourself comfortable. The earplugs You gave me, it's work great—complete silence, like diving underwater. Not even a single explosion or… bed breaking sound from the bedroom ever makes it through.”

Maybe the one being disturbed in the middle of the night isn’t me after all. Maybe it’s the actual owners of the room… I should just secretly buy a new condo and rent out the old one.

.

. .

It’s Friday, but I don’t feel very happy. I had to drive back home. And when I arrived, I instinctively looked up at the bedroom window of the house next door. the orange light was shining through the curtains . The person I’ve been thinking about—what could she be doing right now?

I hauled my stuff out of the car and dragged myself up to my room, feeling heart heavy since the argument with Proud.

I dropped everything in my hands, then headed into the bathroom, hoping the cool water would wash away not just my exhaustion but also the stains of frustration and sorrow from my mind and heart.

“Sigh—” I let out a long breath as I walked out of the bathroom… and screamed in shock when I suddenly saw a woman in white sitting at the end of my bed, head bowed, back turned toward me.

“It’s me!”

“Proud, damn it!!” My heart! The moment I saw her face, my heart leapt out of my chest—like a dog finally seeing its owner return after years away.

“We need to talk,” she said, standing up.

“Then talk,” I said, arms crossed, pulling my bathrobe tight around me.

“That day, when you said we should go back to how we were… I want to know—what did you mean?”

“We can’t go back to exactly what we were,” I replied. “We really can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m not the same person anymore.”

Proud nodded slowly. “I understand.”

“What do you understand?” I asked. Do you misunderstand again, Passachon? Do you think I still see you as a toy?

“I came here because I wanted us to talk again. But I figured you probably don’t care what happens between us anymore.” A soft smile appeared on her beautiful face.

Twelve months ago, I was broke her window for talk to her. but she doesn't care about that time.

“Do you still want to talk now, Rin?” Her voice was gentle.

“I’ve changed. I haven’t been the same for a long time, Proud. Since even before your window broke."

“Forget the past,” she said, shaking her head. “Just tell me now, Rin. Do you want to talk to me—or not? What do you want?”

—Silence floated between us, a pause in our conversation.

“What I want… is for there to be an us.” My vision blurred with tears as I looked at her. “To have you… close to me.”

Proud didn’t look away. She stepped closer.

“Is this close enough?”

“No”

“What about now?” Our noses touched.

“No.”

“I don’t want to be just friends with you anymore.” Her soft voice contrasted with the weight of her words.

“Then don’t be,” I whispered.moving closer until our lips were almost touching.

“I don’t kiss friends,” Proud said, but she didn’t move away.

“I can’t be your friend anymore,” As I whispered those words, everything felt unreal when I leaned in to kiss her. I was scared of what would happen next, I was scared Proud would pull away like before, stop halfway, turn away, and we'd both go back to our separate zones,marked with a sign that said 'Friend zone' leaving only the memory of a kiss on my lips.

But not this time.

This time, we touched gently, before Proud slowly pulled back.

“I’ve been waiting for that kiss for so long,” she whispered against my lips. And then she kissed me again—deeper, stronger.

My arms were still crossed, but she started walking me backward with the force of that kiss.

It was intense—so intense it almost pulled my soul along with it when she finally pulled away. With her, I felt like I was floating out of this world.

“If we’re not friends… then what are we?” I asked, tilting my head to kiss her again, but Proud turned her face away.

“What do you want me to be?”

“I want you to be… whatever you want to be,” I said. I wouldn’t be the first to confess.

“Then… what do you want to be?” she asked.

"Not friends."

"Okay, not friends," her delicate hands slowly loosened the knot on my bathrobe. "What else?"

" Not bed partners too."

" Okay not bed partners too" she replied as she pulled off my hair clip, letting my hair fall down to the middle of my back. As she did, she pressed her lips to my neck, she kissed and sucked then she leaving a mark.

"I want to be..." I paused, my heart fluttering with nervous anticipation.

"You want to be what?" Proud closed her eyes and leaned her forehead against mine, her nose softly brushing on the tip of my nose. Her voice trembled as she whispered, "I miss you so much I feel like I'm going crazy, Rin. Just say something."

**"*Take... my hand***," I reached for her hand, softly humming a tune.

***"Take my whole... life... too..."***

She responded by intertwining her fingers with mine, holding on tightly.

*"****For I can't help... falling in love with you."***

“.....” Proud let out a soft laugh—along with a tear.

I used my thumb to gently wipe it away while cupping her face. "Are you crying because you're got emotional?

"No, it's because... I couldn’t even understand Your LYRICS (Words). And you were totally foolishly.

We leaned into each other, laughing quietly.

And if the kiss from earlier had been one that stole my soul, Then the kiss I received in that moment—was one that gave me life. It was whole, vivid, warm, deep... and burning.

***"I love you too."***

Proud’s first confession came just as she pulled away from my lips—right before she pushed me gently down onto the bed.

She stood at the foot of the bed, her eyes fixed on me as she pulled out her own hair tie, letting her silky hair fall over her shoulders. Slowly, she began to unbutton her pajamas, one by one, with no rush, until they slipped off and pooled on the floor.

The way she crawled onto the bed, straddling me with deliberate grace— That was enough to make my mind go blank.

Her soft hands lifted the hem of my white bathrobe little by little, until it reached my bare hips. Then she gently nudged my legs apart.

"Do you know where I want to kiss you right now, Rin? she said and my eyes got locked.

"I can’t even think..."

Then all my senses were overwhelmed by a delicate, clean scent—her hair, her skin, her expression, and the teasing, fluttering touches... including that one soft, intimate place now grazing my body., lying beneath her, was completely losing control.

"Right there... there..."

Oh my goshhh... I arched my body, digging my nails into my palm hard.

"Proud... ahhh... Proud..."

There was nothing left of me.

I lost…I lost all my controls.

#### 22. Cherry on Whipped Cream

“Darin! What is this on my arm?” Proud held her arm out to show me that morning while still cuddled up against me like a mother hen.

I groggily shifted to take a look. On her pale arm was a message written in bold marker: Reserved.

“I wrote it last night while you were sleeping,” I murmured, burying my face back into the pillow. “**I reserved it.”**

“You just reserved my arm, huh? Great, now I have to wash it off. What kind of marker did you use? The lines are so thick!"

I pulled her arm toward me and kissed it. “I reserved all of you.” I moved my lips slowly over her soft skin. “Every part of you is mine... but for other spots, I think I’ll skip the ink and use my lips as the mark instead.”

Proud’s face turned red. “You’re just like Thongdee—he likes to pee to mark his territory.”

Then suddenly she jumped up. I bounced up quickly and grabbed her arm.

“Where are you going?”

“It’s already 7 a.m. I need to open the door and take Thongdee out. He’s probably been waiting.”

“Nooo... Don’t go yet.” I pulled her back down beside me, wrapping my arms around her and nuzzling in close. “Just 10 more minutes, Please”

Proud placed her hand over her chest. “Rin, you’re making my heart race.”

“What did I do?”

“Don’t act like you want me so much… if you don’t actually feel that way. I can't handle it… if it’s not real.”

“But I do, I want you very much…"

"You really like me, right? It’s not just about… that kind of bed partner or sleep partner.?" Her bright face clouded with uncertainty, her eyes shimmering.

“I’ve loved you… for a long time,” I said, kissing her cheek. “If you hadn’t kept saying you wouldn’t kiss a friend, we might’ve ended up together long ago.”

“Well, if you wanted to be more than friends, then why didn’t you kiss me?”

“Because I thought you didn’t want to kiss me. You kept saying ‘we’re just friends’ again and again… it felt like rejection every time.”

“I wanted you to kiss me! You have no idea how hard it was to stop myself!”

We both fell silent.

“What a waste of time… why did we make it all so difficult?”

“I miss you.”

I pulled Proud into my arms. “I miss you too.”

“But I really have to take Thongdee out to Pee now or my dog might get bladder stones,” she said, standing and giving me a quick kiss on the forehead.

… I hated that dog.

Me and Proud?

We’d changed our status. Our relationship had shifted into something else—and sometimes it still felt strange—

Because before all this, I’d never thought of her that way before. We used to argue all the time—over the smallest, most pointless things. So it still felt a little awkward whenever I wanted to show her affection. But I knew... I’d learn to do it naturally in time.

“Rin, what’s the plan with Bua? How long is she going to stay at your condo?” my new girlfriend asked while steering the wheel to make a U-turn onto the overpass. “Which lane do I need?”

“Right lane onto the bridge first, then left at the junction.”

“Is this left here?”

“Yes, this left. Want me to drive instead?”

“I can handle it. I’m just not familiar with this road. And your gearshift is so damn stiff. Anyway, back to Bua—what are you going to do about her?”

“Bua’s a friend. She said she’s having problems with her girlfriend… and her family.”

“Well, if she’s planning to stay this long, she should find her own place. You can’t just let her stay at your place for a month—or three! Right, Rin?”

I shrugged. “You want me to just throw her out? I’d feel terrible. Bua is in bad situation.”

“She likes you, you know that, right?”

“I know. But she’s struggling.”

“So you’re being kind to a friend… while making yourself sleep somewhere else?”

Why was Proud suddenly starting to sound more and more like my mom?

“I don’t even stay with her at my condo that much anymore. I come to see you.”

“But I don’t like random women—or men—staying in my girlfriend’s apartment,” she said, her voice sharp.“What are you smiling at? I want you to tell her to leave.”

“Okay, I’ll talk to Bua.”

Proud looked satisfied with that answer.

“Which way now?” she asked. We were stopped at a red light in the middle of a busy intersection.

“Straight ahead. You’re in the wrong lane. We need the center lane. We’ve come this way so many times—how do you still not remember?”

“There are like five intersections and eight lanes! It’s confusing. A taxi was in this lane just now and it went straight too!”

And when the light turned green, Proud shifted the gear with a jerk and drove straight ahead. But as soon as we passed through the intersection, a man in uniform suddenly appeared from a hidden corner, waving for us to pull over.

“Hello, Miss” Proud, lowering the window just as the officer approached.

“Hello,” My beauty Queen replied with a smile.

“You were driving in the wrong lane,” the officer said.

“I was?” My beauty queen of a girlfriend feigned confusion with such natural grace.

“Yes, miss. You’re supposed to be in the center lane if you’re going straight. I’ll need to issue a ticket.”

“Can’t you just give me a warning? It’s my first time driving through here. There were so many turns, I got confused. I just followed the taxi because it went straight too,” she explained sweetly.(Not like this was your first time here...)

“ I can’t. You’ll need to pay the fine at the station.”

“Oh no, I’m in a hurry. Officer, is there any way you can help?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean… what can you do to help, sir?”

“I don’t really know… What do you want me to do?”

"Can I just pay here?"

"If you insist, sure."

"How much is it?"

"A hundred baht."

"Can I pay you fifty baht?"

" Okay fifty's baht fine too."

Raindrops fell gently in a fine mist. Just as I was about to open my wallet to hand over the money to Proud, she reached out and stopped me. Then, she pulled a tiny coin purse from her handbag and, with delicate fingers, slowly counted out a mix of five- and ten-baht coins until it totally fifty baht.

The uniformed officer looked frustrated, glancing around, then said, "Go on, just go. No fine."

"Oh—thank you!" Proud said. As soon as the car window rolled up, Proud turned to me with a steady gaze.

"I’ve changed my mind," she said.

"About what?"

"I’ll handle the Bua matter myself."

Sometimes I felt there are still so many things about proud that I need to get to know better.

We drove into the parking lot of a supermarket known for its radio ads boasting about 24-hour air conditioning—perfect for keeping chocolate and other perishable food fresh.

One by one, we dropped various food items into our shopping cart as we walked through the aisles.

"So, Bua didn’t go home because her parents couldn’t accept that She likes women, right?"

"Something like that," I replied, Kept looking for things I needed.

"And her ex is still harassing her?" Proud frowned thoughtfully. "Do you know the name of her ex?"

"Her name’s Karn. She works at 888 Company," I answered while holding aWhipped cream in one hand and chocolate in other. "Which one do you like better?"

Proud rolled her eyes at the two items in my hands. "Both... Do you even know how to make desserts?" she asked, turning to me with mild suspicion.

"No." I casually dropped both containers into the cart as I answered.

"Then why are you buying them?"

I pressed my lips together, glancing sideways at this nosy woman, especially as we were surrounded by shelves full of desserts and butter.

"Ugh, Rin. That’s going to get messy..."

"You always think dirty, Proud. I’m just going to spread it on bread."

"And where’s the bread?" she asked, gesturing toward our cart.

"Everyone's definition of 'bread' might be different" I replied, striking a mock-scholarly tone.

"Your definition of bread must be shady," Proud shook her head. "Just seeing your flirty eyes, I already know—that whipped cream isn’t for bread."

"Then what do you think I’m going to do with it?" I stopped in the fruit section and turned to her with a mischievous smile.

Proud narrowed her eyes. "Go ahead, keep playing word games. You’ll end up confessing by begging me to join you."

"Passachon, you clever woman... I know you like sweets.” I said with a sly grin.

Proud placed a plastic box filled with deep red, juicy cherries into the shopping cart.

"And I like it," she said, her red-lipsticked lips brushing close to my ear as she whispered,"when there's a cherry on top of the whipped cream."

Then she grabbed another bottle of red wine from the shelf and walked ahead toward the cashier.

After she asked me to explain why Bua had to stay overnight at the condo, Proud didn’t mentioned her name again—until two weeks later.

“Rin, tonight you're staying at the condo.”

“Why? I was planning to go home with you.”

“Come on, I’ll be staying at the condo with you too.”

“What are you planning, Proud?”

“I’m going to chase away Ghost Cat. See you tonight, darling. Chu-boo.”

That was all she gave me information.

And that last line—it wasn’t sweet or romantic like something a lover might say.

Proud was just teasing—playing around... so why would I get annoyed?

I got back to the condo around 7 p.m.

The moment I opened the door, I was surprised by how much it had changed.

It used to be simply decorated—just books, toys, personal stuff, and a few models.

But now, the place was filled with cute little knick-knacks that clearly weren’t mine, scattered throughout the room.

There were unfamiliar items—like shoes in my size sitting on the rack, toiletries in the bathroom, and even clothes in the wardrobe.

Not to mention the soft scent in the air and the cozy warmth that reminded me of the girl-next-door’s room, now blending into my own minimalist space.

I smiled to myself as I picked up the phone to call that Beauty Queen.

“I’m here. Where are you?”

[Almost there. Are you miss me that much, Couldn’t you wait to see me, huh Rin?]

“I just want to know what you’re playing at. Wouldn’t it have been enough to just tell her to move out, Proud?”

[That’s not enough. Even if she moves out, she won’t stop bothering you.]

“I’m not involved with her anymore. What could she possibly do?"

[You’re too soft-hearted. She’ll find a way to make you feel sorry for him again.]

“Okaaay, fine… So when did you move all this stuff in?”

[Tell me you missed me first, and I’ll answer.]

“No.”

[Playing hard to get? Not cute at all.]

“Drive safe. But hurry up.”

[Just say You missed me. Why are you making it difficult?]

I couldn’t help but smile."I’m hungry. Let’s cook something when you get here.”

[Has Bua come back yet?]

“Not yet.”

[If she gets back there before me, you better protect your body. Don’t let her touch you inappropriately.]

“Nonsense,” I scolded.

[Don’t let anyone hug you, Rin. The only thing I’m more possessive of than food—is you.]

“Hurry up, Proud. You’re the one I want to see more than Kim Jong Un.”

[You’re so rude!]

#### 23. Passachon III

What have I been doing over the past week, If you ask? Aside from hosting my radio show, attending events, hanging out with friends, online shopping, playing with Thongdee, working out with Rin, going to the mall with Rin, eating with Rin, spending quality time with Rin, playing games with Rin, and doing various other things with Rin... I’ve also been secretly stalking Bua’s Facebook.

I found a woman named Karn—just as Rin had told me about. She had lots of photos with Bua. From the captions and comments on the photos, as well as how close they appeared in the pictures, it was clear they were more than just close friends. They were definitely in a relationship. However, all those pictures had been posted over a year ago.

After that, I clicked into Karn’s Facebook profile. She still worked at BBB company, just like Rin had told me. But what caught my attention was that most of the content she had made public featured another woman—not Bua. The most recent photo with that woman was posted just three days ago. The caption under the photo overflowed love:

“*Thank you, Pupu, for understanding everything. This year, I’ll love myself as much as I love you. Miw bmuan maew maew.”*

And it was tagged: “*My love of the year.”*

What does that mean?

I kept stalking “My love of the year” next, and found out that this year, Karn and “**Pupu**” are definitely together. So what’s this about Bua claiming Karn is still harassing her? I think I found the big lie.

I sent Karn a message, asking to meet her in private. Giving the reason that,

“Your girlfriend is causing problems between me and my girlfriend.”

Karn agreed to meet. When I told her the person causing issues in my relationship was Bua, she told me she and Bua had broken up a long time ago—almost a year ago. but it didn't end well. I didn't asked why, but karn explained anyway.

She said she caught Bua being unfaithful\_not physically, but Bua had someone else in her heart. Karn didn’t know who that person was, but she knew Bua had tried to break up that person’s relationship... and succeeded. After knowing Karn couldn’t accept that, especially while still being in a relationship with Bua, so she decided to break up.

“If I’m not mistaken, Proud... your girlfriend might be the same person Bua’s been carrying in her heart all along,” Karn said with a confident smile and unwavering eyes.

.

. .

As for the rumor that Karn had been harassing Bua out of jealousy but karn flatly denied it. She said she’d stopped all contact with Bua months ago. And the part about confronting Bua’s parents Even more nonsense. Both her parents had been well aware of their relationship. They even knew their daughter was dating a woman. Karn had visited Bua’s home frequently and had always been accepted by the family.

I sincerely thanked Karn for everything she shared with me. But I wasn’t ready to fully believe it yet. So I went to visit Ms. Srinuan—Bua’s mother and my old Thai teacher.

.

“Hello, teacher. Do you remember me?” I asked as I got out of the car, my arms full of gifts, and greeted the teacher from my childhood days.

“Of course I do, dear,” she replied, returning my wai. “Come on in. What’s all this you’ve brought?”

“I brought you some things,” I said, placing the items on the table after entering the house.

“Thank you so much! But next time, there’s no need to bring so much. I’m already happy just to see you.”

“How have you been, teacher? I haven’t visited in such a long time... Are you here alone? Where are Bua and Uncle?”

“I’m doing well. Uncle isn’t home yet, and Bua’s probably still on shift,” she replied as I casually glanced around the house.

“And have you eaten yet, Proud?!Why not stay and have dinner with me?”

“I really want to stay and have dinner with you but I have something else to do,” I said with a smile. “You doesn’t it get lonely when Bua doesn’t come home like this, teacher?”

“She comes home almost every day, dear. Just popping in and out. Sometimes she eats with us, sometimes she stays over with friends, or has night shifts at the hospital. It depends on what’s convenient for her. If you’d stayed for dinner today, you probably would’ve seen her.”

So she comes home often, huh? And she was told to Rin her dad kicked her out. She used cheap thinking, I feel sorry for Rin.

“Well then, I’ll visit Bua another time. I came today mainly to see you, teacher.” I picked up a framed photo from the shelf. It was a picture of Bua with her group of friends in white coats.“She’s a good doctor, isn’t she?”

“That was taken just after she graduated,” Ms. Srinuan said with a proudly smile.

“And this is P’Karn, right? You know her too?”

I deliberately picked up a photo that showed Bua’s father, Ms. Srinuan, Bua, Karn, and what seemed to be two other friends, all sitting together at a pavilion in front of the house.

Ms. Srinuan burst out laughing. “That’s my daughter’s ex-girlfriend.”

I feigned surprise just enough to not make it too dramatic. “I thought you only had one daughter?”

“You little tease! Of course Bua is my only child,” she replied with a smile.

“So bua and P'karn both used to date each other?"

“Bua is a good girl.she never went on the wrong path. that is the only thing makes me happy as a mother. And who she loves or likes is her own business.

“Yes, Teacher” I smiled politely.

“And what about you? Do you have a boyfriend? You have to be careful these days. Men nowadays are so hard to trust. You need to watch out...(Infinite teachings)”

“My girlfriend is lovely, teacher. And you can forget about the ‘men are hard to trust’ thing… because she’s a woman.”

I talked with Ms. Srinuan a little while longer before politely excusing myself. I was heading back to meet the one I love—the one who likes to peek at me through the window—and to reflect on everything that had happened, all while Thongdee was finally getting closer to Rin because she brought sweets every day for him.

And now that everything was clear, it was finally time for me to take back my girlfriend’s condo.

She’s a doctor, so she should stay among doctors.

She has no right to be involved with my girlfriend.

That afternoon, I packed some of my things and a few clothes into my suitcase and drove over to the condo.

I slid the keycard Rin had given me into the reader and I walked through the door into the bright, airy room. Everything was still the same as the last time I came in.

Time to begin Operation: **Mark My Territory.**

First, I placed my shoes in the cabinet.

Then, I scattered a few decorations around the room—just enough to make sure that no matter where she looked, she would see evidence(Traces)of me. After that, I put my personal items in the bathroom and neatly hung my clothes in the wardrobe.

I would make sure Bua know that: **She is just guest here..**

When the mission was complete, I went about my day as usual, heading off to work. Later that evening, after finishing my radio show...

. .

[I’m here. Where are you? ] Rin called me that day when I was driving to reach her condo

"Almost there. Are you miss me that much? Couldn't you wait to see me, huh Rin?

[I just want to know what you’re playing at. Wouldn’t it have been enough to just tell her to move out, Proud?]

“That’s not enough. Even if she moves out, she won’t stop bothering you"

Has she ever wondered what lies that doctor has told her?

[I’m not involved with her anymore. What could she possibly do?]

“You’re too soft-hearted. She’ll find a way to make you feel sorry for her again." [Okaaay, fine… So when did you move all this stuff in?]

“Tell me you missed me first, and I’ll answer.”

[No.]

“Playing hard to get? Not cute at all.”

[Drive safe, but hurry up.]

“If you want to see me, just say you missed me. Why are you making it difficult?

[I’m hungry. Let’s eat something together when you arrive.]

“Has bua come back yet?”

[Not yet]

“If she gets back there before me, you better protect your body. Don’t let her touch you inappropriately.”

[Nonsense ]She said, and I caught the sound of her laugh through the speaker.

“Don’t let anyone hug you, Rin. The only thing I’m more possessive of than food—is you.”

[Hurry up, Proud. You’re the one I want to see more than Kim Jong Un.]

My girlfriend’s sweet and polite to everyone… except me.

“Ugh! Your attitude!” I said with little frustrated

And then I finally arrived at the condo, happily discovering that Rin’s body was still untouched—pure and unclaimed—because I arrived.here before anyone else could.

I helped Rin carry the food she’d prepared on the table, arranging everything nicely before we sat down together.

“I think I forgot something,” I said aloud, finally realizing what had been nagging at me since I walked in.

“What did you forget?”

“My iPad. I left it in the car,” I said, abruptly standing up.

“Eat first. You can go get it later,” Rin suggested while scooping rice into her mouth.

“No, I need to get it now. Bua will come soon,—I don’t want to leave the salmon alone with the cat.”

“I can go down with you, then.”

“You’re hungry, so eat. I’ll be right back.”

I left Room 619, took the elevator down, went to the car, and grabbed the forgotten iPad. Then I headed straight back, not stopping anywhere along the way.

But as soon as I cracked open the door of Room 619, I stopped dead in my tracks at the scene before me.

The cat I’d been so worried about stealing **my salmon…** was sitting in my spot.

**Note -’ Ghost - Ca’t Means ‘Bua’, and ‘Salmon’ Means ‘Rin’**

The plate(Rice bowl) Rin had just served me was missing two or three bites. And what really set my brain on fire—what made my blood boil—was this:

The two of them were talking about something, and Rin’s hand… was being held by the ghost-cat-girl.

Both of them turned to look at me.

Rin’s face looked a bit guilty, and Bua’s eyes gleamed with hidden malice. And I? I radiated pure fury.

The queen Ghost cat took slow, deliberate steps before stopping at the chair across from the two of us.

" We have another guest, Rin,” she said with a gentle smile, though her eyes gleamed with challenge. “I'll serve you some rice, Proud.”

A guest? Since when did I become the guest?

I stood face-to-face with Bua. “Thanks, Bua,” I said as I accepted the plate of rice she handed me. At the same time, we locked eyes—sending imaginary killing intent at each other, a fierce battle playing out in our minds.

—And what about Rin? why she don't move over to sit beside me?

I flicked my eyes to Rin before starting to eat. She seemed to understand, picking up a plate and some water and sitting down next to me.

We ate quietly, not saying much, until it was time to clear the table and plates.

“I’ll help Rin with the dishes,” said the ghost-cat woman as she followed my girlfriend into the kitchen.

"I can wash them myself" Rin said

“Rin can handle it herself,” I said as I stepped in between and politely took the dishes from her hands.

“You’re a guest, Bua.

“Guest? What guest?” she replied with a wicked smile. “I’ve been living here for months. And it’s already late. You should go home, it is not safe to stay outside for so long”.

“Didn’t Rin tell you? I am staying over tonight here” I said, smiled. softly at the Ghost cat, whose face paled by about 10%

“Why don’t you two just go sit down or do whatever it is you need to do. I’ll wash up myself,” Rin interrupted with a bored voice, cutting right through the cold war between me and Bua.

I returned to sit in front of the TV, flicking through the remote to find a drama, but my mind was occupied—thinking of how to deal with this ghost-cat girl.

“Want to shower together?” I whispered quietly to Rin.

“Proud, there’s someone else in the house.”

“I don’t want to take my eyes off you. I can’t leave you alone with Bua while I’m in the shower.”

“I promise, I’ll keep my virginity safe,,” my little salmon teased. “Just get her to move out, and all this would be over. I don’t even get what you’re trying to do.”

“You are at fault too, letting her hold your hand\_your so-called virginity that doesn't even exist.” I grumbled. Yet, ironically, I still wouldn’t let her hold my hand properly either. I just didn’t trust it.

“ Go shower. You smell like Thongdee.” She said

“Liar. I haven’t even picked up the dog today,” I said, wrapping my arms around Rin's waist. “Come shower with me,” I added quickly, I had just seen Bua walk out of the bedroom.

“Umm,” said the cat who took the bait. I quickly let go of Rin and pretended to distance myself.

“Um, I just wanted to ask how we’re sleeping tonight?” Bua asked.

“All three of us together on the bed,” I answered immediately, smiling innocently like a child with a pure heart.

Have you ever been to a fresh market? There’s always a stall with little steamed mackerels, big ones and small ones, all squished together in a basket. Right now, that was us—three steamed mackerels, side by side, on a king-size bed. Bua was the left-side fish, Rin was the one in the middle, and I was the right-side fish.

I didn’t mind sleeping on the edge—no complaints there—but once my head hit the pillow, I began tossing and turning. Can you guess what happened?

“Can’t sleep?” murmured my salmon... “ come here... you’ll be food for a polar bear like me anyway.”

Win moved closer, slipped his arm around me and hugged tight until the polar bear was weak, trembling. He left a space on the bed between Rin and the sly cat as a wedge. Damn it! My Salmon, Why are you so cute?

Actually, I had deliberately made her sleep in the middle — to remind Bua that Rin belonged to me.

And things like that kept happening again and again, day and night. I wanted to drive the point home, to make Bua see that she didn’t matter. If Rin had to be the middle person, Rin would always side with me. But by the sixth night, I was getting irritated because Bua still hadn’t left.

I walked out of the bedroom and laid on the sofa in the middle of the apartment, mindlessly flipping through TV channels. I trusted Rin, and I was truly fed up with sharing a bed between three people. Watching a series to cool down for one day wouldn't hurt anything.

Not long after, I heard the bedroom door open. My salmon girl walked out, then lay down, throwing her weight on me.

“Why are you out here in the dark without turning on the lights?”

“ For watching something,” I said, the screen light flickered. “I like it dark.”

“That's bad for your eyes, you know?” I ran my fingers through her long hair as Rin nuzzled her nose gently into my neck.

“Why did you leave me in there with her?”

“And why did you take so long to come out?”

“I thought you would come back soon"

“I’m tired of it. She still won't leave."

Rin bit my chin as she looked up and said. “Stop playing around. I will talk to Bua.”

“I just want her to accept that you don’t love her and leave quietly — without coming back to stab us in the back again.” I slipped my hand under her shirt, tracing her smooth back.

“*People are different in their thoughts, and thoughts create behavior, status, and society. We can’t make everyone think or understand as we want, Proud. If they don’t understand, then they don’t understand. Different people have different hearts, but if we can live together without disturbing each other, that’s enough.”*

"What if she gets annoyed and mess with us?”

“If she’s just being annoying for the sake of it, ignore her. The more we react, the more fun it is for her. So don’t give her that satisfaction. Sooner or later, she’ll get tired and stop. If you and I know each other well and trust each other enough, then no one can come between us.”

“She almost did once,” I said as I picked up my phone, opened the chat between Bua and me, and handed it to her.

The voice clip played again.

**Bua**: “*What I had with Proud was just a friends with benefits, Bua. It's Just sex or desire.*

Rin nodded. “Other than my voice, there’s nothing true in that message. Is this why you stopped talking to me?”

“Back then… was that really all I was to you?” I looked her in the eyes. The series playing on the TV didn’t matter anymore. Even if the heroine died a tragic death right now, I wouldn’t turn my head to watch.

“I lied. Even Bua knew I was lying. That’s why she recorded it and sent it to you,” Rin said softly, resting on me like a child.

“Because I never thought you’d feel that way.”

“Sometimes,” she said, slowly lifting herself to kiss me gently, “you need to stop **‘thinking’…** and start **feeling** proud.”

She savored each touch as if tasting a dessert. “And I don't just like you\_I love you.”

Did Darin even realize what she had said?

“Rin…”

“...Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I want to have sex,” I said, eyes blazing with desire. “Right now.”

“There’s someone else in the room,” Rin whispered anxiously.

“You don’t have to take your clothes off,” I said, wrapping my arms around her.

“No, Proud!”

I didn’t care what Rin had to say—because I had already slipped her hand into my pants.

“Do it.”

I felt like I was haunted by a ghost.

.

. .

…It was heavy, tight, and I couldn’t move.

… footsteps circling around me.

…The sounds of anger echoed from clattering dishes and other objects.

…And the sounds of jealousy\_hissing and slapping \_that were loud enough to wake my sleeping senses.

Was I being punished by a condo ghost for doing something indecent with Rin in the middle of the living room last night?

As soon as I came to my senses, the pressure holding me down shifted slightly before a groggy voice mumbled beside my ear:

“What’s that sound?"

All night long, we’d been tangled together. As the weight lifted, I opened my eyes to see Rin getting up. My body was completely numb from her sleeping on top of me.

I glanced at the wall clock. The short hand pointed to 5, the long hand to 12. The sky was still dark. The TV—still playing that same scene where the heroine and the villain had been chasing and killing each other all night—still flickered. The angry hissing sounds began coming closer.

“Who vacuums at five in the morning, Bua?” Rin muttered irritably.

“I woke up early to go to the hospital, but I wanted to help you do housework first,” Bua replied,Judging by her expression, Bua was probably upset seeing Rin and me cuddled on the sofa and took it out on the appliances to make us separate.

Rin let out a weary sigh, while I walked past Bua, leaning in to whisper so only she could hear,

“It was just a night game. You have to understand.” I said it with the expression and tone of Mentor on my face.

Protecting ourselves, I went back to sleep in the bedroom. I didn’t have to do anything about this—I could tell by Bua's expression that she had angry or upset.

#### 24. Passachon IV

Once again, that evening, the three of us sat down to eat dinner together at the dining table in our sleek, elegantly decorated condo.

I could sense it clearly—Bua was angry ever since she saw me and Rin together on the sofa that morning.

This dinner had originally been meant for just Rin and me. I had planned to order in and enjoy a quiet meal with her alone. But the ghostly cat had to show up and interrupt, so out of politeness, we invited her to join us.

Halfway through the meal, Rin excused herself to take a work call from Art in the bedroom, leaving me alone to share the same air with this ghostly cat. Maybe I should’ve brought a protective amulet too.

The sound of silverware being gathered drew my attention before the person across from me spoke in a tense voice:

“Why don’t you go home, Proud? Why are you sleeping over here every day?”

“I’m not just sleeping over,” I replied, sitting my spoon down too. “I’ve moved in.”

These dishes were expensive, by the way. I shouldn’t have to rush through dinner just because of this nonsense. “What about you, Bua? Why don’t you go home?”

“I have my own reasons to stay here with Rin.”

“I dropped by to visit Khru Srinuan the other day,” I said casually.

The eyes of the person sitting across from me instantly gleamed with hostility. “She told me all about her brilliant daughter. She was so proud—said she was a good kid. Before I left, she even invited me to stay for dinner. teacher srinuan said if I did, I might get to see Bua.”

Bua stood up. Her eyes burned with fury. If looks could kill, I’d be a corpse.

“You crossed the line, proud.”

“You crossed the line too,” I said, shaking my head. “You’ve lied to everyone—lied to Rin, lied to me, lied about everything. Even about your ex. You lied about her too.”

“My ex?” she hissed like a cat, stepping closer. “What did you talk to her about?”

“I know everything now. Just how fake you really are. Stop it Bua. Rin will never see you that way.”

If Bua were a real cat, her fur would’ve been standing on end by now. Her back legs looked ready to pounce on me.

“Rin doesn’t see you that way either! You’re just a bed partner to her, Proud. She just broke up with her girlfriend—she’s just confused and disturbed. If you weren’t so easy, Rin wouldn’t even look at you. She would hate you.”

She looked me up and down with utter contempt.

I was trembling, ears ringing with rage. That ghost cat had struck exactly where it hurt the most.

“You’ve been living here for what, two—three months now? Moved in just to seduce her, huh? Did it finally work? Got her watching TV with you yet?” But I believe in Rin. I trust only what I see in Rin’s eyes."At least I get to share her bed. And you? You’re just some freeloader who’s made Rin so uncomfortable she doesn’t even want to come back to her own condo.”

As soon as I finished speaking, a deep red wine that had been in the tall glass on the table suddenly splashed all over my face. The sharp, fruity scent of fermented grapes soaked into the shirt I had just bought—an expensive one, mind you—and had only worn once.

I got very angry with her behavior

I grabbed the wine glass in front of me, ready to return the favor. But I froze. When someone’s hand gripped my wrist, holding me back.

I turned to look. A serious gaze met mine as Rin shook her head and took the wineglass gently from my hand.

I was so blinded by anger I hadn’t even realized she’d come back. Meanwhile, Bua smirked from across the table, lips curling in mockery.

“Rin leave me, I will throw this wine on her”

"That wine is expensive, Proud," Rin said as she lifted the glass and drank it all. "What a waste."

"And what about her splashing it on me!". At that moment, I wanted to tear Rin apart even more than that ghost-cat doctor.

" Calm down, proud. Let it go and move on."

I stared at Rin, full of disappointment. I felt humiliated—and furious. I started lunging toward Bua again, but Rin stopped me.

"Listen Bua, if you don't have a reason to stay here , then go back home," Rin said calmly, like she was talking about the weather. "It doesn’t have to be tonight, but as soon as you're ready."

"What do you mean? Are you kicking me out, Rin? You believe what Proud said?"

If Bua really were a cat, I bet her fluffy fur would be standing straight up right now.

Rin didn’t say she believed me, but she was clearly saying she no longer felt comfortable with Bua staying here.

Rin couldn’t keep letting her stay—because she and I wanted time alone together. So she was asking Bua to start thinking about finding another place.

"If you can’t find it anywhere, I’ll help you," Rin added. "But it can’t be here anymore."but now you can't stay here for long

"So you don’t see me as a friend anymore?" Bua’s voice trembled more than I expected.

"I’ve always seen you as a friend. That’s never changed."

Tears didn’t fall, but they glistened—held tightly in those red-rimmed eyes.

I understood Bua. I knew what it felt like to love someone who didn’t love you back.

But my father once taught me: people have the freedom to feel and like or dislike. But no one has the right to use those feelings as an excuse to cut, steal, or destroy someone else’s flowers.

Our good intentions—or our bad intentions—should never become someone else’s burden. If something isn’t ours, we should step back. Because it simply has nothing to do with us.

"I’m taking you to clean up," Rin said, gently wrapping her long fingers around my wrist and pulling me toward the bathroom.

Once she had me inside, she started trying to take my shirt off while I squirmed and resisted.

"Stand still and take deep breaths, Proud."

"Aren’t you even mad?" I snapped, shoving her hands away. "She disrespected me—splashed wine right in my face! Don’t you even care?"

"Shhh…"She placed a hand on the center of my chest just as she pulled the shirt over my head."Can you hear your own heartbeat?" Her voice was too calm—so calm that it drew me back from the edge."You’re angry."

My heart was pounding hard from my anger.

"I know I’m angry!" I practically screamed in her face, glaring as hard as I could.

"You feel the anger, but you don’t realize what it’s doing to you."

"That shirt was expensive! And she completely disrespected me. Do you have any idea what she said to me?"

"Was any of it true?" Rin’s cool tone drained the heat from me faster than I expected.

"No." I said.

Her lips curled into a small smile.

The rain shower poured down over us.

"Is the water too cold?"

I shook my head.

"Your heartbeat’s slowing down now."

"I’m still angry."

"Try to let it go… now do you feel better?”

"No."

“Then why are you angry? Is she really worth letting yourself get angry over?” Rin looked at me steadily. Her clothes were soaked, clung tightly to her body, emphasizing her curves without caring who was watching. As for me, all I had left on was a short skirt above the knee and a bra.

“Why did you stop me? Letting me get a bit of revenge would’ve at least made me feel better.”

“I didn’t want you to throw yourself away like that... I don’t care what happens to her. I care about you. You need to know your own worth. Don’t trade something valuable for something you don’t even value… When you smile, you shine so much brighter than when you’re angry. I don’t want to lose that girl to this furious version of you.”

“...”

I stood there in silence, soaking wet. even under the big showerhead water could tell how much I loved Rin.

“Why so quiet? Not arguing back? That’s not like you.”

"Let’s go home,” I said softly, leaning against Rin and resting my chin on her shoulder. “You don’t have to stay here tonight. I just want to be with you.”

“Are you having dirty thoughts?”

“Not as dirty as you.”

“You mean dirtier than mine?” My mischievous salmon teased back.

“Just a little.”

She stripped off the rest of my clothes and began washing me. And yes, I mean she was actually bathing me.

What are you guys imagining? Keep your minds out of the gutter!

#### Epilogue

Two days later, Bua returned the keycard to me along with a thank-you gift and an apology for all the trouble she had caused. Personally, I wasn’t angry or resentful toward her—but if you ask whether I could go back to being friends with her like before, I’d have to say not yet. Not now.

And Proud? I don’t think she’s really angry at Bua either—not that much, anyway.

"Where are you taking the bed sheets?" I asked. The bed sheets, pillowcases, and blanket from my condo had all been stripped off and bundled into a big pile in Proud’s arms. She was taking a break from her usual radio shows and work for the day.

"To throw them out."

"Wait!!!" I rushed over to stop her. "Why are you throwing them away?!"

She said to me an annoyed glare. "I already bought a new set. I don’t like sleeping on anything that has someone else’s mark on it.

"But I already washed them! WTF?!"

"Dararin," she sighed, looking sad again. "This kind of thing affects me emotionally. We nearly stopped talking because of her, you know."

"But it has nothing to do with the bed sheets!"

"She had been sleeping in your room for months. On your bed.

"So what?"

Proud shook her head. "I hate it. I don’t want it in this room. I won’t sleep on anything Bua rolled around on for months—and neither should you." She was bargaining now, in that way I couldn’t say no to. "I will never sleep on those sheets again."

"Are we really going to argue over this?"

Proud’s expression said clearly: "That’s up to you."

"I don’t want to argue with you, darling."

“What did you just say?” The pile of sheets she was holding slipped from her arms and fell to the floor as her eyes widened and her mouth dropped open.“What Did you just call me...?”

“ I Called you Proud,” I said casually.

“No, not that.”

I walked away. “ Take them and throw them away. The bed's stained anyway.”

“What did you call me just now , Darin? Don't change subject”

I reached the fridge and proud followed me, still trying to argue about something I didn't want to reply.

I wasn’t going to say it again.

.

.

. .

“Dad, why are you called the repairmen?”

I asked one morning in mid-September after hearing loud hammering and banging sounds coming from outside. I stepped out of the house to find out.

“I didn’t call them. Uncle Pakorn did,” Dad replied, gesturing toward Uncle, who was standing and chatting with the construction foreman on his side of the house. Meanwhile, three or four workers were busy dismantling the roof over the connecting roof extension (Canopy ) between my house and proud house.

I was shocked but tried to keep my expression neutral. “What are they here for?”

“They’re removing the roof extension ,” Dad said with a faint smile. “Why don’t you go ask Uncle yourself why they’re removing it?”

“Why remove it though, Dad? I think it provides good shade. And everything’s fine between our families now, right?”

“Uncle Pakorn said it’s too close to his daughter’s room. He’s worried someone might climb over.”

We’ve lived like this for years—what kind of climber are they worried about now?

Anxious, I went back to my room and grabbed my phone to call Proud. Meanwhile, I peeked through the window to watch what was happening outside.

“Proud, when are you coming home?” I asked, barely containing my urgency.

[Yes, yes, why are you talking like that? What’s going on?]

“Your dad is roof extension removing.” I stood there, watching the roof I’d used to sneak over to see Proud for years being dismantled. How will I supposed to see her now?

[The Roof extension? Ours?.] Her voice was just as shocked as mine.

“Yes! The earliest you can get back is... what, 5 p.m.? Can you call your dad and stop them? Say anything—just get him to change his mind!”

[Okay, I’ll call him right now.]

And then Proud disappeared for the rest of the day without contacting me again—until 8 p.m., when she showed up at my house and rang the doorbell.

“They took off the whole roof above our rooms,” I said flatly as she stepped through the gate and into the house.

“Can I stay at your place tonight?”

“Of course, come in”

Proud came in and greeted my parents politely before we both headed upstairs.

“So now how am I supposed to climb over to your place?” I began, irritation clear in my voice.

“Dad told me to temporarily move out of my old room.”

“What? What does that mean? Does Uncle Find out about us?” I started to worry about the trouble it might cause. Were our dads going to start fighting again like when we were kids?

“Yeah… he knows.”

I calmed myself as I sat on the bed. “And what did Uncle Pakorn say?”

“Dad wants me out of that room because he’s going to break down my room's wall.”

I reached over and took Proud’s hand. “I will never going to stop seeing you. I’m old enough to know right from wrong, and I can make my own decisions. And if our dads forbid us from seeing each other again, then I’ll—”

Her soft lips cut my words off with a kiss.

“Why did you kiss me?” I asked.

“Dad’s planning to break the wall in my room and install a door right there.” Proud pointed at the wall in her room directly across from mine. “That’s why they removed the canopy (Room extension)." They’re going to connect our rooms instead. The wall on your side will have to be broken too—right there.” She pointed to the spot on my wall. “While they’re doing the construction, can I stay at your condo?”

“Wait… are you saying they’re build a connecting door?"

“Yeah. Dad said he doesn’t want a future daughter-in-law with a disability from falling off the roof.”

“Huh?” I was stunned. “Hold on! And your dad’s not angry? About us? Our dads literally fought in the past because they don't accept girl with girl relationship?\_you know

Proud shrugged “Dad knew for a long time that I like girls... When I was in college, I was brave enough to tell him I like girls.”

"And your dad really didn’t say anything? Back when we were kids, he looked like he was so much angry.

“Uh…” Proud looked hesitant. “He said he started suspecting and coming to terms with it since my first year in university… when I brought my girlfriend to stay over at our house.”

“Said it again?” I asked.

“Anyway, I’m staying at your condo, okay?” The little brat quickly changed the subject.

I fell silent for a moment before asking, “In your first year… you brought your girlfriend to your house? And—ugh.” I was genuinely irritated. “When was the last time you bought new bedsheets?”

“Why are you asking that? I don’t remember. It’s been a long time.”

I glared at her. “The sheets on your bed right now—are that the same ones from back then?”

“Uhh… I just realized I can’t stay here tonight. I’m going home.” Proud jumped up suddenly, but I grabbed her arm.

“Tomorrow,” I said, pulling her back down to sit. “You have to go with me to buy new bedsheets.”

“Call me darling, and then I’ll go.”

“You’re going whether I call you that or not.”

“I will not going”

“I’m too tired to argue. I’ll go shower.”

“Then I’m going home,” she said as she walked to the door and grabbed the door knob.

“Darling,” I blurted out without thinking, then walked into the bathroom.

And just that single word was enough to stop Proud in her tracks. She backed away from the door, followed me, gently gathered up my hair, and kissed my shoulder—then walked away smiling, climbed onto the bed, and curled up under the blanket.

As for my plans to buy a new house or condo—they were officially canceled. I got my condo back, got my girlfriend, and even got a new family member.

“What’s it's name? it's so cute!” The little golden-furred puppy was handed over to Proud, who cuddled it to her chest and kissed its head lovingly.

“When are you going to stop kissing dogs?” I muttered, watching Thongdee run in circles around Proud’s legs, demanding attention.

“What’s this one’s name?” she asked

“Tony.”

“Tony what?” Proud looked stunned.

“Tony Stark.”

“Come on, Rin, she’s a female dog. Why that name?”

“I just watched Civil War.”

“A female dog can’t be named Tony!”

“My dog is agender. It can be named whatever. I bought it for you to raise.”

“For me?” Her eyes sparkled like she was about to tear up.

“Yeah. Thongdee’s old enough to have a wife. When Tony grows up, I think she’ll be a good match for him.”

And maybe then Thongdee would stop obsessing over Proud’s legs. I was so done with that.

Proud burst out laughing. “Rin, Thongdee’s a **Pomeranian**!”

"Mm" I nodded."But Tony is a **golden retriever…** Don’t you think that’s a bit too big of a breed?”

*"Love doesn't have any breed, gender and it can't follow our plans, No one can control who they fall in love with."*

**The End.**

#### Deleted Scenes: ‘Si’ Friend’s Wedding

I wandered around the Wedding event , casually checking that everything was in order while hanging out with Tam and the others.

“Hello?” I heard Tam answering a call. “What?! Are you okay?” Her face immediately turned anxious. “And whose phone are you using to call? Huh? You borrowed from someone’s? So how am I supposed to contact you? Where are you now exactly? Okay, I’ll send someone to pick you up… Don’t hang up yet. I’m just so glad you’re okay, Si.”

As soon as I heard that name, I walked over to ask.

“What’s going on, Tam?”

"Si had a car accident. But—she’s fine, no injuries at all,” Tam quickly added when she saw my expression.

“She’s really okay?” I asked, already raising my phone to call Si.

“No need to call. Her phone broke, Rin. I’ll send someone to pick her up. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Just then, Jud, the bride-to-be—who had already finished her full-face makeup except for putting on the wedding gown—walked in. “Is something wrong,

Tam?”

“Si had a car accident, but she’s fine. No injuries at all.”

“What?! Where did that happen? What exactly happened?”

“She’s completely okay. She told me not to worry, and I don’t know many details yet.”

“Does Ice know?” the bride asked.

“I was just about to call and tell her to check on Si. That way they can come together.”

“You think they’ll end up kissing on the way?” Jud teased with a mischievous grin.

“I don’t know about their dating, but kissing? Not so sure.” A sly smile appeared on her face.

“Call her! Hurry!” Jud urged, grinning and pushing Tam arm.

Tam dialed the number and started talking to someone named Ice, but after a few words, raised voices could be heard from the other end.

“We already left for Pattaya ahead of time. She was just going to pick up the bridesmaids' dresses and follow later—I didn’t expect anything like this to happen. You’re nearby, so can you go check on her, Ice? By the time we get there, she might not make it to the wedding ceremony. Hello? Why are you quiet?” Tam’s brows began to knit together. “Ice? Ice? Are you still listening?

Ice—are you okay? Hey calm down and listen to me\_

There was a pause before Tam said, “Si had a car accident near XXXX. Please calm down, Ice. She’s safe. Just drive carefully, okay? Hello? Hello?” Tam then looked at us in confusion. “When did she hang up?”

“Did Ice go into shock?” Jud asked, and looked worried.

“Well, if you had just been told your girlfriend got into a car accident, wouldn’t you be in shock?”

“Yeah… probably.”

“Exactly.”

About three or four hours later, as the guests began arriving, I finally saw Si walk into the event, looking perfectly normal. Still, I couldn’t help but worry about my friend.

"are you hurt?"

“No, I am fine. Nothing serious.”

“I already heard from Tam. We really shouldn’t have come separately—we should’ve come together,” I said to Si, but then I suddenly felt a piercing, intense look from someone.

A clean, pretty woman with brown hair standing beside my best friend, was giving off a strange, almost threatening aura. She wasn’t staring rudely or directly, but she kept glancing at me when she thought I wasn’t looking.

So that’s Ice, huh?

Si and I stayed together the whole time until wedding ceremony was over. The bridesmaids, dressed in yellow, happily took group photos.

Later, when the bride, groom and guests started dancing, I decided to do something a little bold.

“Hey, let’s dance,” I said.

Si looked at me, confused. So I grabbed her arm and pulled her up. “Your ex is sending me death looks, nonstop. So let's show her a show. Smile—she’s watching us now.”

“Okay, let’s dance,” Si said, changing her expression like she’d taken off a mask. A bright smile lit up her face the whole time we were dancing—together."Is Ice still watching us?” she asked

“She's watching, but pretending not to. I swear I can feel her eyes burning a hole through me.”

“So... is she watching me, or watching you?” Si voice held a note of displeasure.

Hey, what did I do?

I leaned in to whisper by her ear. “Well, she’s dancing with her own Boyfriend, but her eyes? They’re all on us. Let’s make it a little sweeter, love.”

From that point on, Si and I became a fake couple for the night—whispering, teasing, and holding hands as we moved to the rhythm. Honestly, the way we held hands the whole time? That was some serious take-that energy.

“She probably hates me so much right now.” I said

“No one could hate you, Rin,” Si said with a laugh, her eyes sparkling.

“Except maybe your ex- girlfriend who’s too jealous to see us… she still loves you, you know.”

Si gave a small smile with a neutral expression.

“Or maybe she’s just being possessive.”

That small smile quickly disappeared, turning into a sharp, straight line.

.

. .

After the party ended, a new problem came up: Ice suddenly insisted on going back home that night—even though everyone had planned to stay over in Pattaya. She’d been drinking.

“Ugh, it’s okay. I’ll ride back with Ice. You have work early tomorrow too, right? That way, we don’t have to rush in the morning.”

Wait, what? I never said that. because I didn’t have any work in the morning. No field inspections either. I was fully ready to stay the night.

In the end, the three of us ended up awkwardly sitting in the same car. I volunteered to drive, with Si sitting in the passenger seat and Ice sleeping in the back.

“She’s cute, huh? You’ve got good taste,” I said, glancing at Ice, now she was asleep.

Si gave a sad smile, but that was a Proud smile as she looked at the sleeping girl in the back seat. “I know.”

We reached my house late at night. Si got out of the car to switch to the driver’s seat. But before she got back in, she walked over and gave me a hug.

“I’m glad I saw you today.”

“Same here,” I replied, hugging her back before heading inside.

#### Proud: Darling / Bedsheet

"What did you just call me, Rin?"

We were standing in front of the fridge, arguing playfully.

"You’re not throwing away the bedsheet, right? I was going to use it," she said and trying to change the topic, trying to walk away.

“Are you blushing?” I narrowed my eyes, catching on to her awkward expression.“Ah-ha, you are blushing.”

“Why would I blush? I’m not,” she denied quickly.

“Is it because the weather’s cold”

“Why?”

“Because your lips are hard.”

“How would you even know they’re hard? You haven’t touched them yet,” she said—and before I could react, Rin suddenly grabbed both sides of my face and pulled me into a kiss. It was deep, passionate and overwhelming, melting away any resistance.

“Still hard , huh?” she murmured smugly, her lips still brushing against mine.

Rin was such a tease—asking provoking questions while we were still so close.

“…Yeah. Still hard." I said. "Is there a way to make them soft”

“How?” Her voice was a soft tremor.

I ran my fingers into her hair and leaned in, nipping her soft lips that clearly didn’t match her sharp tongue.

“Ouch! You are like a crazy dog!”

“Tell me, what did you call me before?”

“No.” Rin pouted like a child, and I had the sudden urge to pinch her stubborn little cheeks.

“Then I’ll bite you again.”

“You can bite them off, and I still won’t tell you”

“Even if I bite you numb, you won't tell me?

“…Why are you grabbing my boobs now?” she grumbled, but she didn't stop me from squeezing her anyway.

“It's soft. Unlike your lips,” I replied as I let go of her chest and wrapped my arms around her neck. “I want to hear it.”

She stayed silent. So I leaned my cheek against her soft, flawless one and pleaded sweetly, “Rin, I want to hear it.”

“You’re such a cheater.”

“There weren’t any rules. What makes it cheating?”

“Being able to sweet-talk your way into getting what you want—that’s cheating.”

“You know I’m sweet-talking… So why give in?” I leaned into her, rubbing my nose against hers playfully.

“…Because I love you.” She said

This one's good. I like this one. But the one I really want to hear is the other one.

“So, what did you call me just now?”

“I called you Proud.”

“Before that.”

“If you already heard it, why are you asking again?”

That won’t work—she’s stubborn. “Can you say it again?” If it doesn’t work this time, I’ll pretend to be sulky. I leaned in, lips just barely brushing hers, teasing without actually kissing. “I like it.”

She responded“…Darling.”

Just that word. But the moment I heard it, my heart and cheeks felt like they were about to burst.

“You’re cuter now than when we were kids.”

“I’m always cute,” she replied, eyes squinting sweetly.

“Then… Can I make love to you?”

“What are you planning to do, Proud? I’ve never done it before,” she said with a mischievous smile, just as my fingers reached around her back to find the clasp of her bra.

“Don’t worry. I will take it slow,” I whispered. Rin let out a husky little laugh—but I still couldn’t find the clasp.

“Front clasp today… Please use your mouth,” she bit her lip and gave me that teasing, seductive look.

God, Rin. Why do I always lose to you?

“Wait! We can’t yet.” I said, something I remembered.

“What now?” she asked in confusion.

“I have to change the bedsheets first.” I replied.

Rin froze. Then she slowly raised her hand, shaped her fingers into a gun, pointed it at her lips—and pretended to shoot herself.

#### A Tale: The Little Fawn and the Bloodthirsty Wolf

She panted softly, her breath hot against the crook of my neck. Our chests pressed together, and at this point, I couldn’t even tell whose heartbeat was whose—just that both were pounding, tangled, wild.

As I lay there, half-lost in the thundering in our chests, something warm and soft brushed my skin—a wet stroke. The wolf was licking the mark she’d made on the fawn’s neck, a bite from earlier. Gentle, deliberate, electric.

Why… why did it stir something in my heart when she licked my neck like that?

—Would it be so wrong…

If this little fawn started looking at her that way?

If I tilted my head and offered my neck again, silently begging her to end this moment with another slow, claiming lick?

“You animal…” I whispered. “I swore, the moment you stopped biting my neck, I’d get you back.”

“Oh?” Proud—the bloodthirsty wolf—answered in a teasing, sultry tone as she unbuttoned my shirt, her tongue trailing down the parting of the fabric. Her soft hair swept along my bare skin, sending goosebumps down my spine. She brushed her bangs aside, lifted her face, and smirked with those flushed red lips.“And how exactly do you plan to get me back?”

Proud was unbelievable. Claiming she didn’t want anything to do with me, disappearing without a word, then coming back wearing this sexy, confident face as she straddled me—making my heart skip erratically.

I let her slip my pants off. Then I rose, shrugged out of my outer shirt, leaving only two pieces of underwear between us, and pushed her back down onto the bed.

“Take your shirt off.”

She obeyed without hesitation, slowly undoing the buttons of her pajama top, her eyes glinting with smug seduction.

Her fair, full chest was cradled in a sleek black bra. I flipped her over onto her stomach, pulled her hips up, and cupped her soft, rounded backside. Then I leaned over her, pinning her gently, gathering her silky hair to one side and whispering into her ear.

“I’ll get you back like this.”

My lips pressed to her neck from behind, biting down gently where her scent was strongest. She moaned low in her throat, a name I knew belonged to no one but me.

I was going to make this bloodthirsty wolf beg for her life—from a little fawn.

My hand slid over her hips, across her narrow waist, her stomach, and up to squeeze her soft breasts over her bra. My mouth and teeth never left the sensitive trail behind her ear, down her nape, to her smooth shoulder.

Then I rose, dragging my fingernails down her bare back to her hips. I tugged her panties down to her knees. My fingers traced slowly up her inner thighs. Proud let herself sink into the bed, bracing on her forearms, face flushed, eyes hazy—her body soft and yielding, like a tamed wolf under my spell. Her hips lifted, arching even more, shamelessly offering herself.

I slid the back of my hand between her legs, from front to back, across skin flushed and hot. Her whole body trembled under the teasing, her hips swaying with need. I couldn’t help but drag my fingertips right across the slick entrance—just to see how badly she’d react.

We teased each other the whole night.

Who won that night?

It didn’t matter.

Because in the end, we both got each other.

#### Rin Got Shot

“Khun’Rin, I saw someone run around to the back of the house,” Art’s voice crackled through the headphones I had plugged in my ears.

“Art, you stay out front. Proud and I will flank around the back. Job, go ahead and rush into the house.”

“Khun Rin!!! I found him! They escaped through the window!”

“He is headed this way! Art, he ran toward the front! He’s right in front of you—shoot, shoot, shoot!” I shouted back.

**Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!**

“That’s another one down!” Art triumphant laughter rang through my headset. “Now they’ll know who they’re messing with!”

“And who exactly are you, Art?” Job said, chuckling. “Whoa! I just saw another one into the green house!”

Our characters re-grouped and sprinted across the virtual terrain.

Yes—Art, Job, Proud, and I were all online, playing the game teens called

“**Parachute Game.”**

The gameplay goes like this**:** *you make your character, team up with friends or let the game match you with strangers, then all 100 characters fly on a plane before parachuting onto a deserted island. Once you land, you scavenge for weapons in houses and hunt down anyone who isn’t on your team. Only the last surviving team wins***.** “There! I see one” shouted Proud, whose in-game character was called PP. She charged toward the enemy and opened fire relentlessly until her target collapsed.

“Wait, Proud! Don’t run in yet!”

“Behind you, behind you!!!” Job yelled.

**Bang!Bang!Bang!Bang**!

“Shoot!!! Rin, I got hit—help me!!” PP was shot and went down, crawling desperately behind a tree to wait for a teammate to revive her.

“ Rin!! There’s a sniper on the tower!!”

“Help me! My HP is almost gone!”

**Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang**!

Gunfire poured out as I zigzagged through the tall grass and trees, trying to reach Proud in time to revive her.

“Khun Rin don’t go in yet—you’ll get killed! Someone’s hiding behind that tree!”

“Rin!!! I’m going to die, please help me!!!!!!”

*Only 14 players remained. If we took down 10 more, our team would win*.

The pressure was on. My character—Ah-Jii—had to make a split-second decision. Risk it all to save my girlfriend and possibly not make it back… or stay alive and lead the team to victory.

“Art, Job—focus fire on the guy behind the tree. I still can’t spot the sniper.”

We charged in, guns blazing, aiming at the enemy crouched behind the tree. Their character twitched violently and fell still. Finally, I crept closer to Proud’s fallen body, inching through the underbrush—

But then—

**Bang! Bang! Bang**

“Hey, calm down. If we rush in now, we’re all gonna die. I saw them already. Art, you’ve got the scope—look over there. On the tower. They’re crouched behind the left pillar.”

The panic was real.

“In there!!!! I’m dying!!” yelled the girl controlling her character, still sitting on my bed. I gave her a side-eye glare.

“Just wait a sec, I can’t go in yet. You see that, right?”

“Khun ’Proud, chill and smile! Don’t die yet—I passed the sniper test! I’m running over now.”

“I can’t wait! I’m dead alreadyyyy!” Proud sulkea, dramatically said.

“LOL!!” Art, Job, and I all burst out laughing together.

After that, I got back to focusing on the game. The three of us slowly moved in toward the enemy. We snuck up, ambushed, charged—

And the fewer players left, the more intense everything felt. I was pretty sure we could win this game —unless something messed it up.

“Rin, why didn’t you help me?” Proud had already left the game, closed the chat, and took off her headset.

“Khun Rin, I think we should move left,” Art said.

“Alright, let’s move left then,” I answered.

“Darin, you let me die!” I glanced at her while still holding my iPad close to my chest, my fingers moving quickly to steer Ah-Jii(my character)into the tall grass.

“Proud, hold on—I’m about to win!” I shifted away from her sneaky hands while still trying to aim and hide at the same time.

“I don’t care,” she said—and then pulled down my baggy pajama shorts, and all, spreading my legs apart.

I tried to resist and—

“I am…”

“I am what? I didn’t even say anything,” Job’s voice came through my headset.

My legs were pinned down, spread wide, while this annoying loser started teasing me down there with her tongue—touching here and there, making it so hard to concentrate.

“Wait! Khun Rin, where are you going?! Come back! There are two of them near the rocks—don’t run off!”

I wasn’t even trying to move Ah-Jii, but Proud was messing with me nonstop, and my hands were shaking like crazy.

“Hello? Khun Rin? Are you still there? Come back!, don’t ruuunnn!”

“Damn, Khun Rin won’t stop moving. Is her internet broken or something, Art?” Job asked. “Whatever, I’ll go help her.”

Job had no idea what kind of chaos I was dealing with on this side of the screen. “Job, don’t come,” I muttered, making Ah-Jii run back into cover. “I got hit. Art, do you have any medkits?”

Art’s character tossed me a medkits pack.

“Heal up first. Art and I will go take them out.”

“Wait!!” I accidentally shouted when Proud pressed her tongue hard again— I had to bite my lip to keep from moaning.

“Not there…” I curled up, toes digging into the bed.

“Not where, Khun Rin?! Where are they hiding?!” Art asked.

I meant that for Proud—but Art heard it instead.

“Ah—don’t... not there...”

A sharp wave of sensation surged through me.

“Not where?! Where are they?! Left? Right? What o’clock?! Just say it!!” job frantic voice blasted in my ear.

I couldn’t answer. My body arched up, squirming.

“Where exactly.... can't I touch?” the little brat asked, licking her lips and glancing up from between my thighs, her eyes wide and innocent with playfully. “Here?”She swiped her tongue left and right, focusing on that sensitive spot, holding my gaze the whole time.

“Khun Rin! There’s another one over there!"

My Ah-Jii character ran headfirst into danger again without a second thought.

“Don’t go! Come backkkk!!” job shouted.

Only six players left. We were so close to winning.

But my body started trembling. My mind blurred.

My hands went weak, and I dropped the iPad face down onto the bed beside me.

“Khun Rin! Don’t just stand there! Hey!! Khun Rin got shot! Job, Khun Rin got shot!!”

Gunshots and panicked shouting from my teammates blasted in my ears, while I bit my lip so hard to keep from moaning, it turned red and bruised.

My hips pressed upward into her soft lips and hot tongue, one hand sliding to the back of Proud’s head, pulling her in tighter.

“Let it out,” Proud whispered, just as I was silently gasping, my entire body jolting as her finger pushed inside, slow and insistent—so different from the relentless pace outside.

I didn’t even need her fingers.

Just her mouth was already enough… I had already come— and she hadn’t even fully slipped her finger in yet.

“ Khun Rin’s totally Dead, Art,” Job said, sounding annoyed.

“It’s fine. No matter what, our team’s gonna—"

**Bang bang bang bang**

He didn’t even finish his sentence before Art’s avatar dropped dead in the game.

“Damn it... Art’s dead.”

“Job... you’re dead too. Hahaha!”

…And Proud? She wiped the corner of her mouth with her fingertip—grinning—still straddling over me.

#### End Credits

It was raining and traffic was terrible. The car radio had been left tuned to EFN, and I sat there, half-listening as the DJs answered live calls from listeners on the show “Ask and Answer” without paying much attention.

**DJ P' Ood**: Hello everyone.

**DJ Proud**: Hi! What’s your name?

**Caller**: Hello, P' Ood, P' Proud. First, let me just say—I’m gay, okay? My name is Moss.

**DJ P' Ood**: [laughs] Alright!

**DJ Proud**: So, Moss, what would you like to ask today?

**Caller**: Well, the other day, I saw you, P' Proud, at the park. You were with a female friend.

**DJ Proud:** Okay.

**Caller**: I wanted to say hi, but I didn’t dare to. You two looked like you were having a private moment.

**DJ Proud:** You could’ve said hi, Moss. That’s totally fine!

**DJ P' Ood:** So, what’s your question, Moss?

**Caller**: Um… I like reading drama threads on the Tuntip website, And I came across a post talking about you, P' Proud. It said that you like women. Is that true? I’ve been so curious I haven’t been able to sleep since I read it!

**DJ P' Ood:** Wow, Moss, you’re really good at digging for gossip!

**DJ Proud**: Oh, so Moss wants to know if I’m straight or not?

**Caller**: Umm…

**DJ Proud**: Everyone keeps asking! My neighbor, my uncle, my grandpa, my grandma—even the lady who sells noodles at the end of the street is curious!

**DJ P' Ood**: [laughs]

**DJ Proud**: Alright then, let me make it clear once and for all—I'm not straight. and I have a female partner.

[Suddenly off-air..] And people started gossip to each other

-

“Hey, who’s this Proud, Kris?”

“No idea. Not that famous, I guess.”

“Not famous? Or maybe we just haven’t been watching TV lately.”

**The End of Specials**