

AA



60 Chapters

Rhythm

Vol. 1



Prologue

The sky was overcast even though it was only three in the afternoon, I'd already told in that it'd rain today, so there was no need to dress up so glamorously to walk outside. Or, to put it more accurately, there was no need to endure the heat. Despite being wealthy, the heir to a nationwide chain of department stores, and able to get anything she desired, she had to go through all this trouble just because I wanted to visit Sampeng Market.

"It's okay. I'd like to shop like a poor person for once."

It was a bit infuriating... but also kind of cute.

From a spoiled rich girl who used expensive things, she now looked thrilled with hair clips bought in bulk at wholesale prices, with enough change left to take home. I watched her short-haired, cheerful face as she enjoyed picking out items, even though I was the one who wanted to come here. Yet, I just stood there, not knowing what to buy.

"In, I'm going to buy some water at the entrance."

"Hurry back, or you'll get lost."

"You hurry up too; it's about to rain."

"What are you afraid of? We have an umbrella."

"The umbrella is with me right now."

"In the end, You'll come to get me anyway. Don't bother In, In is shopping."

The usually aloof in went back to focusing on the hair clips, even forgetting to refer to herself as "T" as she usually did. I found her endearing as she happily picked out items, humming a Korean song in her thoughts.

Okay, if she was that content. I'd look at some things for myself.

Among the crowd, I often got annoyed by the noise of people's thoughts, sometimes to the point of getting a headache. The best way to avoid those noises was to plug in earphones and play loud music. Especially in a place like Sampeng, I had to protect my brain before it exploded from the noise of thoughts at the level of a super duper maximum category-6 scale hurricane.

Ah... whether it was summer, rain, or winter, this country was always hot. The impending rain only made the heat from the pavement more intense. I had to step aside to buy some cold water to quench my thirst, only to be startled by the ringtone that got changed to that of the demanding rich girl.

Answer the phone now, Lay. I bought you that phone. Answer it now, now, now!

The female owner of a water stall chuckled at the ringtone. I gave a dry smile and answered the call through the Smalltalk, forgetting that the mic on the cord was broken.

I couldn't help but sigh. It looked like I had to take it off again, and when I was in the middle of the crowd at that.

As soon as I removed the earphones and brought the phone to my ear, the surrounding noise turned into silence. There were no thoughts from anyone else intruding as usual.

But suddenly there was one sound that echoed clearly in my ears, familiar enough to make my heart race.

Ba-dum

Ba-dum.

This wasn't the sound of my heart, but it pounded loudly in my ears. Startled and feeling a pain in my left chest, I clutched it tightly, realizing that my heartbeat and the sound in my head were in sync.

[Lay, you answered the call, but why aren't you responding? I'm done shopping. Where are you?]

Miss Intuorn's voice still echoed from the phone speaker, but I wasn't paying attention. I was scanning the area, looking for the owner of that heartbeat.

Ba-dum...

It was too loud, and I sensed that he or she must be nearby.

[Lay, can you hear me? Are you using earphones? I told you the mic is broken; talk through the phone.]

Pitter-patter

And then the rain started to fall from the sky. Everyone began opening their umbrellas and crossing the street humedly. Even though I was searching for the owner of that heartbeat, I didn't forget to open my own umbrella.

"I can hear someone's heartbeat."

[What?]

I responded absentmindedly, my eyes still searching for the person whose heartbeat matched mine. My legs began to cross the street as the traffic light signaled. Just as I was about to reach the other side, I felt like I was being electrocuted, stopping me in my tracks.

Ba-dum

Ba-dum

I slowly turned to look at the person walking past me. That person was holding an umbrella and looking at me with the same disbelief.

"Jom."

The adorable woman stared at me as if we knew each other. I stood there, frozen, unable to understand why. I only knew that tears were streaming down one side of my face. I felt the urge to call her name, but I didn't know what it was.

"Teach"

Strangely, I didn't know who she was, but I said the word "Teach" out of the blue. The woman in front of me covered her mouth, dropping her umbrella before rushing to hug me tightly

"Jom, my dear Jom"

As I was about to hug her back, someone soaking wet from the rain, because I'd taken the umbrella, stared at me with a sorrowful expression. Intuorn looked at me. Even though I was being embraced, the usually moody rich girl said nothing. Yet, her thoughts were as clear in my mind and heart as the heartbeat of the person hugging me.

"I don't want to lose you, Lay."

Seven years ago.

Room 211, 7 points.

Room 412, 8 points, three of a kind.

Room 305, 6 points.

"Jom, should I draw a card?"

"Draw. Everyone has high cards."

My father nodded in understanding after I whispered in his ear, reaching out to draw the last card, sweating profusely. But then...

"Zero"

"Oh... no luck today, Dad, you poor thing."

I laughed heartily as I watched my father pay everyone around the table, leaving almost no money to be the dealer. Just as he was about to ask me to borrow some money, a call from my mother came, asking him to go to the apartment office to continue his duties. I felt grateful that she called at the right moment because Dad never returned the money he borrowed.

Great, during the holidays, I didn't have to do anything but watch him play cards with the tenants and screen new tenants for Mom. It'd been like this ever since I could remember.

Well, it couldn't be helped. Being able to hear and perceive people's inner thoughts was a special ability I had. If used wisely, it could be beneficial, even if some things were good and some were bad.

It took me about two minutes to get from the rooftop to the office on the ground floor to meet my mother. The new tenant, who was sitting with their back to me, surprised me a bit because I couldn't see anything and only heard one unmistakable sound.

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

What is this...? It sounds like a heartbeat.

"Hey."

Mom called me down to read the new tenant's mind, speaking briefly as if it were a secret code. I frowned and tried to listen, but I heard nothing except...

Ba-dum...

The very clear sound of a heartbeat.

"Excuse me," I said, reaching out to touch the shoulder of the person sitting with their back to me, apologizing politely. Usually, I could hear people's thoughts or see vague images when passing by them. But if it wasn't clear, I'd have to touch them. The thoughts in their minds would appear like images on a TV screen, more vivid than 3D.

But with this tenant, I saw nothing. Absolutely nothing.

"Is there something wrong?"

As soon as she turned to look at me, I was taken aback. Her light brown eyes had a certain magnetic pull, making it impossible for me to look away.

Ba-dum...

"How is it?"

Mom tilted her head, asking again to confirm whether we should accept the tenant or reject her. The tenant looked puzzled, not understanding what the middle-aged woman meant. I could only stare at the cute woman. And judging by her attire and other indicators, she must be older than me. I shook my head because I couldn't hear anything except...

Ba-dum...

The sound of a heartbeat.

"She's fine..."

I replied simply, nodding Mom looked back, baffled by my vague answer. Usually, I'd give a straight- up yes or no.

But I'd never given such an ambiguous answer like "she's fine," which could be interpreted in any way.

"Alright, then Pay the deposit, and you can move in at the end of the month."

"Thank you."

"The rules here are no gas stoves, no children, no pets in the building..."

Mom recited the rules as if she'd memorized them, speaking automatically. The new tenant politely acknowledged everything my mother said, then turned to smile at me.

"You're adorable."

"Who are you?"

"What?"

Mom, who was picking up the contract book, looked up at me in surprise. My strange behavior made her frown in confusion, unable to resist asking

"Why are you asking that?"

This meant, "If you can read people's minds, why do you need to ask who this lady is?"

But since I couldn't read anything about this woman, there was only the sound of her heart pounding loudly whenever I was near, and it made me curious.

Who are you...?

Why can't I hear anything.. except for the sound of your heartbeat?



💡01.Renu, who are you?💡

Why can't I hear anything when I'm near her except for the erratic pounding of her heart?

Even now, I was still trying to find an answer for myself. Her face haunted me every time I closed my eyes, forcing me to stare at the ceiling often. It'd been like this for three days, and I expected tomorrow to be the fourth day of this endless cycle.

Renu...

What is so special about her that makes me so obsessed?

"Mom."

The following morning, after only three hours of sleep, I couldn't hold back any longer. After getting dressed to stay home, I immediately asked my mother.

"What?"

"When is that woman moving in? It's the end of the month, isn't it? Today is the scheduled moving day."

"Which woman? There are thousands of people in the apartment."

"Is this an apartment or slum with the many people?"

"Can't I use metaphor? You're so annoying."

Mom's voice trailed off as she raised an eyebrow.

"Which one?"

"The pretty one."

"In this building, only I am pretty."

"You really believe you're the most beautiful woman, even in your head."

I pouted a bit while Mom bared her teeth, knowing exactly who I meant.

"If you mean Renu, she'll come eventually. She's already paid the deposit. Maybe she's just busy or something. Why are you so interested?"

"Can't I just be curious?"

"Normally, you're not nosy about other people's business, so I'm surprised..... By the way, when does school start?"

"5th."

"Time flies, doesn't it?"

Mom suddenly looked me up and down.

"You're almost in college. When will you have a boyfriend?"

"Other parents don't ask their daughters this early."

"I'm asking because I'm perplexed. You're cute like me, so why doesn't anyone want you? Maybe your personality is bad, just like your dad."

"If you could hear what others think like me, you wouldn't want anyone either, believe me."

To me, all humans were untrustworthy. They said one thing but thought another. I saw every thought and action as they were standing naked before me, which made me feel disgusted.

Don't get me started. I was so cynical now that I found peace in being alone, listening to music without hearing or seeing anything. But I did have a friend, even if it was just one. A friend who no one else wanted to be friends with because...

"You look old today."

'Ongart' a chubby guy with a feminine side, whom renamed 'On-an. She was a blunt person who said whatever she thought, often almost getting beaten up or slapped by other girls, but she was too big or something like that. But I know she was sincere, as I'd heard her thoughts before she spoke.

Or perhaps she just had no filter...

"Didn't sleep much."

"Why? Were you homy??"

"Seriously, I think sometimes you should learn not to speak all your thoughts or maybe choose more appropriate words."

"What did I say wrong? I asked if you were horny. How is that inappropriate?"

I rolled my eyes but found her endearing, so I didn't get too mad. I let it go and changed the subject.

"Why are you here so early?"

"Hungry. Came for you to treat me noodles."

"Is your family poor?"

"Nope, but I'm saving money for an EXO concert."

"You never lie, do you?"

"I'm straightforward. Treat me."

To cure my boredom, I took On-an to a noodle shop near my house, run by a senior from my school. I heard he graduated in architecture but came back to take over the family business. When I went to crowded places, I'd wear headphones and blast music to drown out the flood of people's thoughts. As a kid, I couldn't handle it and cried every day, even telling my mom I wanted to be reborn. But growing up, I managed to adapt, thanks to technology that let me listen to unlimited music for a monthly fee.

"Jom, what would you like to eat?"

On-an yanked my headphones out aggressively.

"You only listen to music."

Without the headphones, people's thoughts flooded in.

'It's the end of the month. I have to pay the rotating savings. How boring.'

'What lottery number should I buy?'

'I want a husband who looks like Nadech.'

I glanced at the last thought's owner, a plump woman holding her baby and chatting with the senior who was making noodles. Well, she already had a husband and a baby but still coveted someone who looked like Nadech. But who could blame her? He was quite the catch.

"The usual. You know what I like."

"Just in case you want something different. By the way, you seem really grumpy today. What's wrong?"

"Just a bit irritated; I didn't sleep enough."

"Why are you imitated?"

"I'm waiting for someone."

"So I was right; you're horny."

"Oh, for God's sake..."

I rubbed my face.

"It's a woman I'm waiting for."

"Oh, so you're homy for girls."

"Why does waiting for someone always have to relate to dating?"

"Because you have no friends. What else could it be?"

"Then what are you if not a friend?"

"I'm the benefactor who sacrificed myself to be your friend. Without me, no one would want you."

Wasn't that supposed to be my line?

But arguing with a sassy person like On-an was pointless. Better to tell her what I was thinking

"She's a new tenant. It's strange. Since I saw her, I can't stop thinking about her..."

"Love at first sight?"

"Idiot... How do I explain this?"

I never told On-an about my ability to read minds, so I couldn't explain the weird feeling.

"Let's just say she's special. I want to meet her. She's supposed to move in today, but she hasn't shown up."

"How special?"

"I don't know anything about her."

As I said, everyone in the world was pretty much naked to me, making me tired of seeing everything with no secrets. But with "Renu," it was different. It was like someone pointed at her and said, 'Don't look.

And you know, the more you were told not to, the more you wanted to.

I needed to know who she was, where she came from, and why she suddenly appeared.

Ahhhh, so frustrating!

"Full now, I'm leaving"

On-an waved goodbye, picking her teeth as if to say the food was very enjoyable. I watched my friend, who purposefully came for a free meal, and sighed, then put my headphones back on and walked home.

I tended to look down when walking to avoid seeing people's thoughts in images. Some were blurry, but others were clear enough to see what happened in their bedrooms.

Oh, wow. Let's just say porn sites mean nothing to me.

While looking down and listening to music, someone suddenly yanked me hard. My back hit someone's soft chest. and my headphones fell out, silencing the music and replacing it with the sound of a pounding heart.

Ba-dum....

Everything around me went silent like a muted TV. I gasped in bewilderment, then looked down at the arms wrapped around my chest.

Ba-dum.

The sound was loud. Whose heart was it?

"Are you hurt?"

A slightly nasal voice made me frown and turn to look The owner of light brown eyes and slightly wavy shoulder-length hair made me gape.

It was really her, the woman I'd been waiting for-the one with the 'Don't look' sign on her forehead.

"You look really shocked. Did a car run over your foot or hit you?"

The woman, about my size, spun me around to check for injuries.

"But you seem fine."

"I'm not hurt."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes"

Then she stared at me as if ready to reprimand me, her powerful gaze making me shrink a bit, feeling like a child about to be scolded.

"Don't wear headphones while walking; it's dangerous Especially when crossing the street, be careful. Were you playing on your phone too?"

"No."

"Good. It's fortunate that you're not hurt. Next time, be careful. You can listen to music but not too loud, or you won't hear anything."

"Right now, I can't hear anything but your voice."

"....."

"I mean..."

How do I explain this? I started to panic. looking around for the right words, but she laughed first.

"Sorry, I forgot myself. I have this habit of scolding my little sister. You must be startled, right? Someone you don't know suddenly talks to you like this."

"N-no, not at all."

"We've met before, haven't we? Are you the one I met that day at the apartment?"

Hearing that, I nodded vigorously. Finally, my waiting had come to an end. The person I'd been waiting for since morning had come to meet me as she'd agreed.

I meant, the lease agreement to move in today.

"You came late today."

"Hmm? Was I supposed to come early? Is there a rule at the apartment that you have to move in only in the morning?"

"Not like that... So, you're moving in today, right?"

I looked at the lady in front of me, searching for any belongings she should've brought for the move-in.

"I don't see any stuff."

"Oh, I bought everything new. The things I ordered from the mall will be delivered today. I came to buy some food and drinks. Is there anything tasty around here that you can recommend? I'm not very familiar with this area."

"Yes, there's a noodle shop nearby that's quite good."

"Which one? I'll go check it out."

"Well..."

"Have you eaten yet?"

"I have."

I hesitated for a moment and then changed my sentence.

"I haven't eaten enough. I was just thinking of going to that shop. If you're hungry, I can take you there."

"Great, thank you."

Ba-dum

I tried to stuff the noodles I ordered into my mouth, feeling nauseous as I pretended I wasn't full. I didn't know why I was doing this, perhaps because I was curious about Renu, the beautiful woman who was about to move in.

And yes... I was conducting a test. Being with someone so pretty made me unable to hear anyone else's thoughts, just the steady heartbeat in front of me.

Only the sound of her heartbeat echoed in my ears. It was bizarre.

"You haven't eaten at all. You said you weren't full."

"Oh... When I actually sat down, I started feeling full. Besides, seeing you enjoy your meal makes me feel good."

"This place is really delicious. I'll probably come here often."

"Where are you from?"

"From home."

"....."

Then, the adorable lady covered her mouth and laughed softly as if she found me endearing. Even though we were about the same height and build, she looked much more mature and elegant.

"Just kidding. I'm from Bangkok. Sukhumvit."

"Why are you staying around here?"

"I got a job around here, so I had to move. If I stayed where I was, I'd have to wake up at five in the morning because of traffic. That wouldn't be doable."

"I see... So, what do you do? Are you an office lady?"

"Do I look like an office lady?"

The woman raised an eyebrow slightly, then rested her chin on her hand, smiling at me.

"Guess what I do."

"I can't..."

Because I couldn't read anything from her. Just the steady heartbeat.

"Try it. I want to know what kind of job you think I have."

"You seem serious, a bit strict... Maybe a doctor?"

"I thought about it but didn't have enough inspiration."

"Hmm... Then what could it be? An avid businesswoman?"

"Then why would I rent an apartment? Wouldn't it be better to buy a big house?"

That's true...

I'd never had to guess before since I always knew everything about others. But with this woman, I was excited because I didn't know anything.

"I don't know. I can't guess. You don't seem very old. If you're not an office worker, doctor, or businesswoman, then I don't know what you could be. Oh, there's one more job. A kindergarten teacher."

"Why kindergarten?"

"Because of your face, I guess. You look gentle and beautiful. Kindergarten teachers should be pretty."

The beautiful lady smiled slightly and tilted her head a bit, which caused me to stare in a daze. How could someone be this attractive? How could someone so striking come to stay in my mother's apartment? It was usually just old women.

"Can't I be a high school teacher?"

"You can, but students might flirt with you. Every time a pretty student teacher comes to teach, they get hit on."

"Then I'll have to set an example that pretty teachers can be respected."

"So, are you a kindergarten teacher?"

"No, but I'm a teacher"

Suddenly, I felt tense and began to fear that what I was thinking might be true.

"Where do you teach? No, let me rephrase that."

I bit my lip, trying to think of the right question to get the right answer.

"Which school do you teach at?"

"Somewhere nearby."

"Is it Upsompittayakhom School?"

"Yes."

"So, you're a teach, Miss.... Wait, no one would call you a teach or Miss if you work at that school. They'd call you... Teacher."

I looked at the person in front of me, not quite believing it. But since she revealed it herself, it couldn't be anything else but...

"That's right," the gorgeous woman answered me with a proud smile.

"I'm a teacher."



02.Can you hear it

She really was a teacher, that stunning lady...

The school term had started, and I was standing in line for the flag-raising ceremony. Today, I was doing something different from my usual routine: standing still with my hands clasped in prayer, without wearing my headphones, as I had for most of my life. Having Teach Renu nearby allowed me to be among normal people without the intrusive thoughts of others bombarding me as they used to.

Her presence brought me peace.

Even though it wasn't completely silent-there was the steady heartbeat of a certain someone nearby-it was better than hearing the mental noise of others, especially on the first day of school when everyone had something on their mind they either wished to keep to themselves or share with their friends.

But it wasn't like I couldn't hear other people's thoughts at all. I could still hear and see them, but they weren't as loud and overwhelming as they used to be.

"The new teacher is really lovely."

The said lovely teacher standing at the end of the line, hands clasped in prayer like everyone else, was now the center of attention for most of the male and female students. Of course, with such beauty, it was hard to tell if she was a teacher or a leading actress.

"Why would someone that beautiful become a teacher? She looks so young," a classmate standing next to me, hands clasped in prayer, turned to talk to the friend in front of them with interest.

"Maybe she didn't know what else to do. Nowadays, becoming a teacher is easy. Some can't even spell some words correctly."

"What do you mean?"

"Most teachers are dumb, hahaha."

I heard everything and shifted uncomfortably because I didn't like hearing people talk about the cute teacher like that. But who can I blame? The image of teachers these days was like that. The smart ones became doctors or architects with good salaries. Teachers were government employees with low pay, and most graduated from open universities since they didn't have to take many exams there.

"But if dumb teachers teach us, won't we become dumb too?"

"That's why we need to go to tutoring schools. The good teachers are all at tutoring schools."

"But aren't we judging too quickly? That cute teacher might be outstanding."

"Nowadays, are there people who are both beautiful and smart? Most attractive people are stupid. When they can't make a living, they marry rich. Look at celebrities; they only date high- society people because when they get old, beauty won't help them anymore, especially without brains."

"That's why you need to study hard, starting today," I said calmly after hearing everything they'd said, smiling at a friend from another class.

"Huh?"

I beamed and stood quietly, not answering any questions. After a while, I heard the thoughts of the classmate I'd just ridiculed, loud and clear.

'She just insulted me.'

Well, at least you're getting smarter. Remember, if you're not pretty, you have to be smart because no one will take care of you when you grow up.

I glanced back at the end of the line and saw Teach Renu talking politely with another male teacher. The charming lady's steady heartbeat made me feel like she was a calm presence, like a cool breeze soothing my heart.

Ba-dum...

After staring at her for a while, I noticed a slight jolt from her. Unexpectedly, Teach Renu turned and locked eyes with me like an arrow cutting through the air. And I was sure she.....

Winked at me.

Uh?!

I quickly turned back, startled. The woman's heartbeat skipped a beat, and I noticed she held back laughter as if to say...

'I saw that.'

I can't get excited about seeing her like this every day, darn it!

After the flag-raising ceremony, the students dispersed to their classes according to the schedule. As I walked away from the adorable woman, the thoughts of other students started to intrude, making my ears hurt. I had to put on my headphones and play music loudly. When I reached the classroom for the first period, I was enjoying the view outside the window when my friend, a certain buzzkill sitting next to me, yanked my headphones out.

"Hey, stand up and greet her first."

"H-huh?"

Not knowing what was going on, I saw everyone standing up to greet the new teacher, and I hastily followed suit, stunned to see...

Teacher Renu.

Ba-dum...

It was true. When she was close, I couldn't hear anyone else's thoughts except for the heartbeat. This couldn't be coincidence. But why?

The professor didn't show any reaction upon seeing me, just maintained a collected demeanor. Her every move exuded authority, which contrasted with her youthful appearance. Honestly, high school students don't usually respect young teachers as they believe wrinkles are a sign of experience. But with her, her gaze and presence made everyone in the room silent.

She didn't seem strict, but no one wanted to take a risk.

"Hello, everyone. I'm a new teacher and will be your homeroom teacher," she said, picking up a whiteboard marker and writing her name with a squeak.

"My name is Renu. Nice to meet you all. You may sit down."

"Thank you, ma'am."

My classmates and I sat down in unison, staring at the new teacher with various expressions. Most of the boys admired her looks and wondered what color and pattern her underwear might be.

Those bastards...

The girls, on the other hand, looked at her with a mix of envy and curiosity, trying to gauge how approachable she was.

"We'll be together for the whole year. If you have any problems or need advice, you can come to see me anytime. I'm in the Math Department, Building 6, second floor," Miss Renu explained, handing a stack of papers to the nearest student.

"These are the schedules for this term. Please distribute them."

Everyone passed the schedules from the front to the back. While looking at the schedule, a group of boys at the back asked the first question.

"How old are you, Teacher?"

Everyone seemed interested in personal details. Teacher Renu smiled slightly and answered honestly.

"Twenty-three."

"Why didn't you become an actress? Why did you become a teacher?"

A girl sitting in the front row asked, a question everyone seemed curious about.

"Because it's something my family doesn't like."

Her answer made the whole class go silent. The same girl asked again, still not satisfied.

"And do you like it, ma'am?"

"Yes, I do. What I chose to do has been well thought out."

"It'd be great if you liked us too, ma'am. You and we look alike. We could get along well, vreeeeeeeeeeeeeeew."

The boys' teasing and whistling were met with a calm but firm response from Teacher Renu, silencing the initial troublemaker.

"Unfortunately, I don't like you."

"....."

"Since this is the first period and it's free, I don't want you to be idle. Tear a blank sheet from your notebook and write an introduction to hand in at the end of the period."

The beautiful lady smiled at the now-quiet boys.

"Maybe your introductions will make me like you."

And it worked. Teacher Renu's smile left all the boys in the room speechless. Their thoughts were unanimous.

'What a lovely smile.'

Even my heart couldn't help but race.

"This teacher has excellent psychology skills. She shows she's not to be messed with but also wants to get to know us. It's like a slap on the head followed by a pat on the shoulder, making us her puppies. Don't you think? ...Hey, Jom, what's wrong with you? Why is your face so red?"

"Huh?"

"Your face is really hot."

On-an looked a bit alarmed and placed a hand on my forehead.

"It's just the heat. What did you say earlier?"

"I said Teacher Renu has great psychology skills. Judging by the boys' faces, they're all her slaves now after that killer smile."

'How infuriating!'

'Flirt.'

'Pretentious.'

'Nice teeth. Where did she get them done?'

But the thoughts of the girls were a chaotic mess. Hearing and seeing everything, I felt a bit annoyed with my classmates but let it on because my focus was solely on the homeroom teacher.

At first, I didn't believe the woman I met could be a teacher. But now I did... she undoubtedly was.

As I intently observed the school counselor moving around, the pretty teacher who seemed to sense it glanced at me briefly. Even though it was just a fleeting second, I saw...

A smile.

'I saw that.'

Gasp!!!

Again. Why did she like to communicate with me through her eyes like this? And I always felt guilty, like some creep who got caught peeping at girls all the time!

Thud!

I dropped my head onto the desk, not planning to lift it again. On-an leaned over and nudged me gently.

"What's wrong, Jom?"

"Headache."

"Got a fever? Fake illness? Why do you have to get sick on the first day of the semester? Are you that lazy?"

"Mind your own business."

"You can call me nosy if you want. Don't pretend to use polite words."

I kept my head down, too ashamed to look at the teacher again.

Wait, why do I feel ashamed? I'm so confused with myself!

"I'm back."

I plopped down next to my mother in the clerk's office while she read a newspaper, which hardly anyone buys these days. Mom couldn't read the news on her phone because it strained her eyes. As soon as I sat down, she pushed me away.

"Don't come near me. You stink like a student."

"It's your daughter's smell, Mom..."

"How was your first day at school?"

"Nothing special. Just studying. I'll get straight A's in every subject anyway."

"Such a cheater."

Mom pouted a bit. Normally, if other kids got such good grades, their parents would be proud. But since my mother knew about my special ability, she saw it as nothing extraordinary.

It was no different from seeing the exam questions before taking the test.

"But it seems this semester might be a bit different."

I said, almost whining. Mom, who had never seen me talk so absentmindedly couldn't help but nudge me with her elbow.

"Different, how?"

Because I couldn't figure out what that stunning teacher was thinking, I could only hear the heartbeat. There was no image or thought for me to read at all, which meant I might fail math this semester.

Cheating from the start meant I had to keep cheating forever... I guess Karma was catching up to me.

"Mom..."

I sat up straight and turned to talk to her seriously.

"I have something to confess."

"Did you steal my money? How awful."

"No!"

"Then it must be your dad's."

I rolled my eyes and sighed. Seeing my exasperated expression, Mom laughed and lightly tapped my head.

"What is it? I'm listening."

"Actually, I can't read the mind of that beautiful tenant."

"Who?"

"Teacher Renu."

"A teacher?"

Ba-dum...

And the heartbeat of the one being mentioned echoed loudly in my head. I sat up straight, sensing her presence without even looking.

"Oh, speak of the devil, we were just talking about you, belle."

My mother, ever the conversationalist with the tenants, swiftly greeted the beautiful teacher. I slowly turned and nodded respectfully at the advisor.

"What were you saying about me?"

Her voice, nasal but full of grace and humility, made me feel even more embarrassed.

"Uh, what were you saying, Jom? I didn't catch it."

"Teacher Renu."

"Hmm?"

And because I didn't say anything, Mom turned to the adorable woman, who knew her role and explained with a smile.

"Probably telling you that we met at school today. She's my student, and I'm her teacher."

"You're a teacher? What subject?"

"Mathematics."

"Smaaaart!"

Mom, who always saw numbers as a marvel, gave a thumbs up.

"But you look too young to be a teacher. You seem more like a nanny."

I noticed a fleeting cold look in her eyes when Mom said the word "young." Even though I couldn't read her mind, I knew she didn't like it. My mother probably wasn't the first to comment like this. Today, too, when the boys in class teased her about being only a few years older than them, I saw that same expression.

It must've felt like an insult.

"Teacher Renu is also my counselor," I whispered to my mother without moving my lips. And she looked even more excited.

"Great! Then you should consult her a lot. Maybe your behavior will improve. Teacher, this one gets good grades but has few friends. Her social skills are terrible. Since you're her counselor, help her out. She's good-looking but friendless. What a terrible person."

"Mom! I'm your daughter!"

Seeing me and Mom baring our teeth at each other, the cold face turned into a smile again, as if pleased.

"Not having friends doesn't mean she's a bad person. But... you can consult me anytime, 'Jao-Jom.'[*1]

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

This time, it wasn't the lovely teacher's heartbeat but mine. I couldn't control it. No, I never could, but it'd never pounded so hard it felt like it'd leap out of my chest.

Just being called by my name made me feel this way?

And yes... I was being memorized. She remembered my name, even though she had to teach many students!

"Well, I'll take my leave now."

"Okay."

Mom smiled sweetly at her before turning to me and shouting, "Hey, Jom! What's wrong with you? Your face is as red as a tomato. Where are you going?"

I got up and hurriedly ran into the building. As the striking lady walked up the stairs steadily, I called out to stop her.

"Teacher."

"Hmm?"

"Who... who are you really?"

"You're asking the same question as the first day we met. You seem very curious about who this teach is."

Even though I called her "teacher," she still preferred to refer to herself as "teach" in a more familiar way. Maybe it was shorter or sounded more intimate. But as far as I recall, in the classroom, it seemed like she wanted to be addressed as "teacher," not "teach" like she did with me now.

Am I imagining that, or am I really special?

"...."

"Today, I saw you watching me all day."

I lowered my head in embarrassment, not daring to meet her eyes. How could I explain that I was curious... very curious because she was the only person in the world whose thoughts I couldn't hear or see. It made me wonder... could it be that we were the same? Maybe the cute woman had the same unique ability to read minds like me.

"And people who were the same couldn't read each other's now?"

"Can you hear the heartbeat pounding in my chest right now?"

"Hmm?"

"Just like I can hear your heartbeat too."

"...."

"Are you like me?"

Footnotes

1. ^Jao (bá»•n) is a Thai suffix added before a name, conveying fondness or closeness with a person. It is often a way for an adult to address children or someone younger.



03. My Fragrant girl

Ba-dum...

My heart pounded rapidly and forcefully. I wasn't sure if the woman across from me could see the vibrations on my chest through my shirt. What was happening to me? I'd never felt this way with anyone before.

"Did you mean that our hearts are in sync or something like that?" She asked.

"Uh... well, I mean..."

My question was far from implying that our hearts were in sync. I didn't know why the meaning had shifted, but whatever. I wanted to know what the person in front of me was thinking.

"That's romantic. It feels like I'm being confessed to," the adorable woman said, reaching out to gently pat my head from a higher step on the stairs.

"But you need to grow up a bit more. Focus on your studies first."

"Huh...?"

"See you at school."

I didn't get any answer other than a cold smile from someone older, who seemed to see me as nothing but a dreamy student confessing to a teacher. But my intention wasn't romantic at all. I just wanted to make sure I'd found someone like me.

Because, at least, I'd know that I wasn't the only weirdo in the world.

Since that day, I'd given up on asking the gorgeous teacher if she had the same abilities as me. It looked like she'd already misunderstood me as a student with a crush on her, just like the other boys.

Now, Teacher Renu was very popular among the boys.

I knew because I could hear everyone's voices loudly. Every day, at least five people had thoughts filled with Teacher Renu. I was grateful that it seemed only I had this ability. Otherwise, it'd be embarrassing if someone could read my mind and know that every two seconds, the name 'Renu' was flying around in my head like I was a fangirl.

I've never felt this way before...

"I think this teacher is amazing. She looks young but doesn't come off as someone you can easily mess with," I commented.

"In what way?"

On-an asked, curious about what was on my mind.

"She jokes around and talks like a friend. Can you believe that boys from grade one to the gym teacher all like her? But no one dares to get close or flirt. It's like there's an invisible wall with a sign that says... 'You're not worthy.'"

"Well, they really aren't worthy."

On-an, sitting next to me, whispered as we watched the beautiful teacher teach math and demonstrate on the board. Usually, we'd gossip occasionally, but with this teacher, everyone seemed to focus so hard that it looked stressful. Lately, I'd also been paying extra attention in this class, partly because I was interested in the teacher. But more importantly.....

I couldn't predict what the math exam would be like this term.

For me, this lovely lady was an exciting challenge. Usually, could read everyone like an open book, but not her. I couldn't anticipate anything. I didn't know what she was thinking except for my own assumptions, like...

She liked things that could be proven... Otherwise, she wouldn't be teaching math, which was all about facts and clear results.

She was a perfectionist... Her clothes and hair were always impeccable, never wrinkled or messy. Every class was well- prepared. If a student couldn't answer a question, she'd teach until they understood.

She was dedicated and serious about what she did. Even drawing a circle or underlining something, she'd use a compass on the board, even though a rough circle would suffice.

"Number 24, come up and solve this problem."

She remembered and cared about almost all her students names. At first, I was delighted that she remembered mine, but it wasn't just me. She could call anyone by name correctly, even their class numbers.

Yes... I'm number 24, and this isn't a coincidence.

"Yes."

We made brief eye contact. I didn't show any reaction and went to solve the math problem on the whiteboard. The problem wasn't too tricky, but I felt like testing something out of curiosity.

I pretended to hesitate while solving it and turned to look at the striking teacher...

"I can't do it."

Even though I could, I chose to say I couldn't, wanting to see her reaction. The beautiful woman frowned slightly, puzzled.

"What don't you understand?"

"I don't understand any of it."

I stepped back from the board, looking apologetic. Even though I couldn't read her mind, I could hear her heartbeat, which was now pounding with frustration, not understanding what she did wrong.

Teaching and having a student not understand was a mark of failure for a teacher, especially for one with high self- confidence.

"If you can't tell me what you don't understand, how can I explain it to you?"

"Sorry for being stupid."

My answer made my classmates look at each other, puzzled. They knew my grades were usually good. I was an outstanding student academically, even if I didn't socialize much. If a new teacher couldn't teach a good student like me, whose fault would it be?

Hers, the belle...

"It's okay. I'll teach you again from the beginning."

But even if she did, I still pretended not to understand. In my head, my classmates started thinking loudly that 'Jom is annoying Teacher for sure!' Though I was angry that everyone misunderstood my intentions, I couldn't say anything.

I just wished to know what Teacher Renu would do if I didn't understand. Not being able to read her mind was fun, but learning about her every day was even more challenging.

Why is she so interesting...?

But class time wasn't that long. Eventually, the bell rang, and the gorgeous teacher had to let everyone go, but she called me before I left the room.

"Jao-Jom, can I talk to you?"

"Yes,"

I said, packing my bag and walking over to the beautiful teacher, bowing my head respectfully.

"Do you really not understand what I taught?"

From her tone, it seemed she didn't believe it, but I still gave her the same answer, curious about how she'd handle it.

"Yes, I must be a bad student."

"If you don't understand, it's not your fault. It's mine."

I saw the disappointment on her face and felt guilty for wanting to test her so much that it turned into pranking. But so the serious woman seemed to make a decision.

"Would it be possible for you to have some one-on-one math lessons with me?"

"Huh?"

It was an unexpected offer, but I felt strangely excited.

"Do you mean tutoring?"

"I'm not charging money. It's not tutoring."

"I didn't mean that," I hurriedly shook my head and agreed.

"I don't mind if you teach me. It's great."

"...."

Seeing my overly enthusiastic reaction, the pretty lady looked at me suspiciously as if she knew I was pretending to be dumb. I had to be more convincing.

"Because I'm really worried. I've always been a good student in almost every subject. But during the final stretch before university exams, I suddenly didn't understand math, even though it never happened before. It's very strange."

Gulp...

I saw her stunned expression and felt a pang of sympathy. This cute woman was a great teacher who made students learn fast since she was well-prepared. Now, she must've lost confidence, being the only one who couldn't teach an intelligent student like me.

"When will you teach me?"

"Tonight, if you can. We'll focus on what you don't understand."

"Okay. Thank you for your dedication," I said, smiling gratefully, though feeling shy.

"Where will we study? Here?"

"I don't want others to think I'm tutoring for money. Can you come to my room?"

I was a bit flabbergasted, not expecting such a privilege. Everything started from curiosity about whether the teacher was as serious as I thought, and it matched my expectations perfectly. Now, I'd get to enter Teacher Renu's personal world.

"I can."

"Then see you tonight. After dinner, we'll review what you don't understand."

I felt like a golden light was shining from behind. I wasn't sure if I looked in the mirror, there would be white wings sprouting from my back. It felt like my stupidity today led me to get to know Teacher Renu better.

On the first day, we went to eat together.

Today, I get to go up to her room.

Why am I so excited?

I frowned, staring at my reflection in the mirror, not quite grasping why. But then I realized that I had to meet with Teacher Renu for our scheduled math tutoring session in about twelve minutes. My heart felt light and airy, like a sponge used for scrubbing.

After getting home, I quickly showered and changed into casual clothes, choosing a mustard yellow T-shirt to make people feel good being around me.

No more stinking of a student, as my mother often complained. But come to think of it... while I didn't smell like a student, I didn't smell like anything at all. It wasn't impressive. Maybe I should use some perfume.

"Mom, do we have anything that smells nice?"

"In the bathroom."

"Perfume?"

"Floor cleaner."

Ugh... my fault for not being specific.

Since I couldn't rely on my mother, I decided to run to Dad who was lounging on the sofa watching TV.

"Dad, do you have any perfume I can borrow?"

"I only have men's cologne, but I'm not sure if it's expired. I bought it from Hong Kong a long time ago."

"That'll do."

Hearing that, I ran to the master bedroom and sprayed myself a few times with the cologne my father mentioned. The scent was a bit manly but still pleasant enough, so I felt confident enough.

Alright, today's tutoring session is going to be fantastic!

I grabbed my books from home and walked to the apartment complex across the street where Teacher Renu lived. I called up to her room and waited. Soon, the striking woman came down to get me, pausing for a moment.

BA-DUM...

BA-DUM, BA-DUM, BA-DUM...

Teacher Renu's heartbeat seemed to change as if she were surprised, and it skipped a beat. But soon, everything settled back into its usual rhythm, which intrigued me a lot.

"Is something wrong, Teacher? You've been staring at me for a long time."

"The perfume."

"Oh, I sprayed some on. Didn't want you to smell the stench of a student. My mother complains about it a lot."

I smiled shyly, feeling proud that she noticed the scent and that it made her heart skip a beat.

"It doesn't give you a headache, does it?"

"Not at all. Let's go up and start tutoring."

The teacher, who was about my height, placed a hand on my back as if to guide me up. But she didn't notice that such a simple gesture made me feel surrounded by warmth and an odd sense of safety.

Is this what being an adult is like... making me feel like a little kid even though we're the same height?

Finally, I got to visit her private room for the first time. Ever though I knew the layout of the apartment, I couldn't help but feel thrilled since everyone decorated their space differently. As soon as I stepped inside, the soft scent of fabric softener filled the air, creating a cozy, inexplicable atmosphere.

The white bedspread was so neatly made that you could probably bounce a coin off it, confirming that the room's owner was indeed meticulous. The few items in the room were all necessary and perfectly arranged. How did her parents raise her to be this precise?

"Sit here."

"Okay."

I hugged my textbooks to my chest and walked shyly to the desk next to the beautiful woman. Without wasting any time, Teacher Renu began explaining the parts I didn't understand with a calm and patient tone. She always asked if I followed and had me try it out. If it weren't her, I'd be annoyed.

Why keep asking?!

But I was pretending to be dumb, so I had to play the part until the end.

"Teacher, is this correct?"

As I leaned in, our noses almost brushed, making us both jump. I widened my eyes and gaped while she managed to keep her composure, just staring at me without pulling away. But what she couldn't hide, and probably didn't realize, was...

Ba-dum...

The loud beating of her heart growing faster and faster.

"Do you really not get it?"

I couldn't tell what she meant, so I just rolled my eyes, still trying to gather my thoughts. Yes... I didn't understand what was happening. Why were we in this strange, awkward situation? But why... did it feel so exciting.

And good...

"No, I don't."

"But you seem to solve the problems well, almost like you're pretending to be dumb."

"Huh? What do you mean? Are you talking about math?"

"Yes, we're studying math."

"Oh..."

I hastily tried to cover up, smiling and then going emotionless because I didn't know how to react.

"I'm not pretending to be stupid; I just didn't understand. If you say I did well, it means I understand better now."

"That's a relief."

The adorable woman leaned back in her chair.

"What a relief."

"Are you that relieved?"

"Yes, I was worried that I wasn't teaching you well enough, Jom, thinking maybe I wasn't a good teacher if the student didn't understand."

"Teacher, you seem to want everything to be perfect, like a white sheet of paper. If there's a single black dot, you'd be ready to throw it away, saying it's useless."

"Do I really look like that?"

"Yes, if you lowered your standards a bit, you'd be happier. A student not understanding doesn't mean the teacher is bad. Maybe the student is just dense."

"That's a good perspective. I'll remember that."

We stared at each other for a moment, and the one who looked away first was the beautiful teacher.

"Is there anything else you don't understand?"

"Well..."

Should I say yes or no? If I said yes, I'd seem too dumb because, honestly, I understood everything in class. I just wished to test something. But if I say no, I mightn't get to ask again.

"It's okay. If you don't understand something, you can ask again."

"Really?"

I asked eagerly, then smiled timidly because I was too enthusiastic, making the cute woman laugh.

"Of course. It's good to teach you. It helps me practice teaching others, too."

"In that case, I won't hesitate to ask again."

"You're quite adorable."

"....."

"Bubbly and lively."

"And you're beautiful, Teach. Drop-dead gorgeous."

"....."

"....."

We both fell silent. It seemed like I'd said too much. Usually, I was a girl of few words because I was too lazy to talk, but with her, I almost spilled everything. I was embarrassed but cheerful and just complimented her directly. What now?

Look... she's gone quiet. I must've been too bubbly.

"Finally, you called me 'Teach' instead of 'Teacher.'"

"Huh?"

"I actually prefer 'Teach.' It feels more casual."

"Can I really be close to you, Teach?"

Then, the lovely lady did something cute, resting her chin on her hand and tilting her head with a smile.

"Of course... we can be close, my fragrant girl."



Sunlyan

04. Irregular Heartbeat

"Confiscated!"

I snatched the perfume from my father's room and yelled as if announcing it to the whole world. Dad just furrowed his brows slightly but didn't say anything since he hardly ever used the perfume himself. You could tell from the fact that the bottle hadn't diminished at all since he bought it in Hong Kong two years ago.

My heart pounded as I looked at the dark blue bottle, reminiscing about the time I spent alone with Teach Renu. The moment when her cute face leaned in and our noses brushed against each other was still vivid in my mind, and I knew I wouldn't forget it easily. She must really like this scent, and I decided I'd wear it every day.

Davidoff Cool Water

And I did exactly that. The next day, I sprayed just the right amount before heading to school. On-an, my sarcastic buddy, sniffed the air and then bared her teeth.

"What mood are you in, spraying perfume? That's men's cologne."

"I'm in a good mood... Oh, wait a sec. Teach Renu!"

I ran cheerfully towards the striking teacher who was heading to the flagpole area. As soon as I approached her, the slight irregularity in her heartbeat made my own heart swell even more.

"You're in a good mood today. Anything special?"

"No, not really."

I just wanted to say hi out of habit.

I just wanted to show off that I was wearing this perfume again... But, well, none of my reasons could be put into words, so I just made something up.

"Actually, I tried to solve some math problems last night but couldn't get them right. Could you help me with them?"

A faint smile adorned her pretty face, and her light brown eyes looked at me with a knowing kindness. She merely nodded.

"Sure."

"I feel bad for bothering you."

"Is this what feeling bad looks like?"

"..."

"You're adorable."

She said with affection, lightly patting my back.

"Go line up."

"Yes, ma'am."

I never liked coming to school. I never found it fun or exciting to see friends because I didn't like crowded places. They made me feel overwhelmed, having to hear about everyone's lives when I didn't really care.

But now I had a reason to come. I felt a bit sad that I was in my final year and wouldn't get to see her for long like the younger students would. So, I had to make the most of this time.

Since she taught math, I had to be bad at it to get close to her as often as possible.

But as everyone knew, she wasn't just popular with me. She was also admired by many male students and some teachers. Once, I overheard a young student teacher planning to drive her home, and I had to intervene by saying...

"Let's go home together."

I positioned myself at the math department on the second floor of Building 6 at four in the evening, offering to accompany her. Teach Renu always stayed late to finish some work. She looked at me with slight surprise.

"Is something wrong? I have a lot of work to finish, and it'll be quite late."

"It's okay. It's better to go home together. Lately, there's been a new apartment being built near my house, and walking past it feels a bit eerie. I'd feel safer with you. At least you can protect me."

"Me, protect you?"

"Two heads are better than one."

I noticed her glance towards the door. The student teacher I overheard was waiting there, probably looking for a chance to talk to her. Or maybe they'd already talked; I wasn't sure.

"Alright, going home with you sounds good. Two heads are indeed better than one."

"Exactly."

Great. As for you, go home. Shoo!

But why did I do that? Normally, I knew and saw who had good or bad intentions but never got involved. But when it came to Teach Renu, I felt the need to intervene, to keep everyone away. I knew and saw everything about everyone except my own feelings... and Teach Renu's.

"Thank you."

"Huh?"

Walking beside the beautiful teacher, I was startled by her words and looked at her, confused.

"For waiting to go home with me, even though it wasn't necessary. And I know it's not because of the construction site near your house."

"If it's not that, then what is it?" "To keep that student teacher from bothering me, right?"

She chuckled softly.

"You know a lot."

"Ah..."

I blushed but smiled.

"I wasn't trying to prevent him from getting close to you..."

"How did you know he was planning to ask me to drop me off at home? Did you overhear?"

I turned to her, shocked by the word "overhear," and quickly asked back.

"What do you mean by overhear?"

"I mean overhearing me talking to him. Why are you so surprised?"

I was startled, thinking she knew I could read minds...

"Uh... something like that. I noticed he was hanging around you too much."

"You're very observant. By the way, you hang around me a lot, too."

"....."

"But I feel better if it's you hanging around."

She reached out and patted my back affectionately.

"We're getting closer, aren't we?"

"Yes, we are."

I lowered my head, unsure of what to do. She seemed to know I was hanging around her but didn't seem bothered, which made me feel relieved. As we walked together, Teach Renu suddenly stopped, noticing something. Her hand on my back slowly lowered, and she walked ahead, crouching down.

"Meow, meow."

"Don't hide. I saw you. Come out."

Her commanding words didn't match her gentle tone. I watched her actions with interest, curious about what she'd do next. Despite her calls, the cat didn't come out. So, she reached into the gap between the trash cans and pulled out a tiny creature.

"There really is a cat."

"Of course. Do you think I imagined it?"

She laughed, holding the small orange kitten in her hands. The tiny, scruffy kitten meowed as if calling for someone.

"Why are you here alone? Where are your parents and siblings?"

"I think its mother abandoned it."

"How do you know?"

Because I can read animals' thoughts, but saying that would be hard to believe, so I played dumb.

"Well, if its mother didn't abandon it, how would it end up here?"

"Someone might've abandoned it."

"No, its mother definitely left it here. It must be quite an uncaring cat."

I squatted beside her, talking casually.

"I always thought only people could abandon their kids. Even animals can do it. I thought they loved their offspring instinctively."

"That's true. Parents don't always love their children."

She spoke with a slightly tense tone, making me glance at her. When she realized, she put the kitten down, and it hurriedly ran back into the gap, scared.

"Let's go."

"That's it?"

"Hmm?"

"I thought you liked it."

"What else can I do?"

"I thought you'd take it home."

"But your mother said the apartment doesn't allow pets."

"That's true."

"All I can do is leave it here."

"Will it die?"

"If it learns quickly, it'll survive and grow strong. People who grow up on their own don't need parental love to succeed."

"Are we still talking about the cat?"

"Yes, we're talking about the cat."

She smiled coldly before standing up and walking away, not looking back at the kitten.

That's it?

I continued pretending to need help with my math homework, but I knew I had to come up with a better excuse. If I kept this up, she might catch on that I was lying. I needed to think of a more convincing reason...

What could it be?

"Is this the right answer?"

Still unsure, I continued doing my homework, pretending to ask questions. Honestly, I knew this answer was wrong because I'd deliberately multiplied incorrectly in the second line. But...

"That's correct. Well done."

Huh?

I recoiled slightly, observing her as she absentmindedly said it was correct. Just as I was about to ask, her phone buzzed, startling her.

BA-DUM...

BA-DUM, BA-DUM, BA-DUM

Out of nowhere, Teach Renu's heartbeat started to skip and then noticeably sped up as she looked at the screen. The stunning lady straightened up and stood before turning to me.

"I need to take this call. Keep working," she told me.

I noticed a certain eagerness in her that I'd never seen before, making me curious about who was calling. As she walked out to the balcony to talk, I couldn't hear who she was speaking with, but I could feel the happiness in her rapid heartbeat.

It was the same kind of heartbeat I had when I got to be near the beautiful teacher.

Just as my curiosity was about to get the better of me and I considered eavesdropping, the cute woman walked back in. I stood there, unsure of where to go in the small room.

"Are you leaving already?"

"Huh? Oh, yes," I replied, even though I hadn't planned on leaving. But since I was already standing, I quickly gathered my books to my chest.

"I'll be going now."

"Did you understand today's lesson?"

"Yes."

'But you taught it wrong!'

"Okay, see you at school," she said.

"Tomorrow's Saturday. We won't see each other," I reminded

"Well, there have to be days when we don't see each other."

"Can't I see you on non-school days?"

"Hmm?"

"I mean, like on Saturdays or Sundays,"

I uttered softly, longing for her to hear but also not wishing for her to hear as I was still uncertain. If I looked in the mirror, my eyes would probably look like a puppy begging to be taken in.

Teach Renu seemed to understand and smiled fondly.

"You're getting too attached to me," the teacher noted.

"S... Sorry, ma'am."

"I have classes every weekend."

"Even teachers have to study?"

I asked, a bit surprised.

"Do you study all day?"

"We can meet when I get back."

"Really?"

I couldn't hide my excitement, but then I quickly calmed down, realizing I was too loud.

"Won't I be bothering you?"

"Of course you will."

Wow, that's so blunt.

"If you act annoying, it'll be a bother," she added.

"What if I'm not annoying?" I asked.

"Then it won't be a bother. If you want to come, come. But I don't do much besides grading papers and typing. You might get bored."

"I won't. Being with you makes me calm and focused, like being in a temple."

"What?"

"Sometimes, even at the temple, I get annoyed with the monks. They think about buying new games all day. If I had Buddha's number, I'd call to tattle."

I said, recalling what I often heard when I went to make merit with my mom. Young monks were talking about buying new games or how much food they got in the morning... I couldn't believe these youths are monks.

"What are you talking about? What do monks have to do with video games?" she asked, puzzled.

"Nothing. I'll come tomorrow!"

I cut the conversation off before it got even more off the track.

"Alright," she agreed.

With her permission, I was overjoyed. I no longer needed an excuse to see the beautiful teacher, even if I didn't have math homework questions. We're close now! But my joy was short-lived.

The next morning, after getting ready and putting on perfume, I found out that Teach Renu wasn't home.

Someone had picked her up early, and my mother was the one who reported this in detail.

"Probably her boyfriend."

"What?"

I spun to glare at her, very upset. My tone made her glare back.

"What's with that tone? What did I do?"

"You just said Teach Renu went with her boyfriend."

"Well, it's true. A guy in a Mercedes picked her up early. A belle like her must have a boyfriend."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"I'm your mother."

"Sorry," I apologized, unconsciously clasping my hands in a wai.

"Why are you so angry? Are you jealous, Jom?"

"What are you saying? If Teach Renu heard this, how would she feel?"

I argued, my voice shaking, but my mother just laughed.

"She'd think it's ridiculous. I was just teasing... And why are you running to see her so early?"

"Nothing, we just planned to spend the day together."

"You're acting strange. I know she's your school counselor, but isn't this too far? Normally, you're so cautious around people. Aren't you annoyed by their thoughts anymore?"

"If I can tolerate you, I can tolerate anyone."

I retorted, stomping back to our house across from the apartment, feeling helpless. My mind flashed back to last night when she got that call, and her heartbeat changed.

Ba-dum...

Yes, I recognized that rhythm well. It was excitement and joy. She walked away to take the call and came back in a good mood. Why was I surprised? Someone her age, that beautiful, it'd be strange if she didn't have someone.

It hurts...

"What's wrong?" my mother asked, noticing my strange behavior as I clutched my chest.

"Nothing."

I answered without looking at her and walked back into the house, locking myself in my room, not wanting to see anyone.



💣05.It's none of your business💣

"Number 24, please come up and show us how it's done."

The cute teacher called out, knowing full well it was my seat number. I stood up, acknowledged her request, and walked to the front of the board. I demonstrated the method smoothly, without any hesitation. Then, I returned to my seat and focused on the math problems without even glancing at Teach Renu.

Ba-dum...

My school counselor's heartbeat skipped a little. So, you notice something is off with me, huh?!

"Back to being smart now? Where'd you get your brain back from?"

On-an, sitting next to me, looked surprised to see me as brilliant as ever. I just shrugged a little.

"The problem wasn't hard."

"It was even easier before, and you were dumb as a rock. Thought you left your brain on Mount Everest."

"Yeah, well."

Even though I tried not to make eye contact, I could still catch glimpses of the adorable teacher staring this way. But she didn't ask anything out of

curiosity, which was infuriating. It felt like my anger this time didn't affect my counselor at all.

Welp, if she doesn't care, then I don't either. To emphasize my genuine displeasure, I decided to leave early on Monday evening, even though I knew full well that the student teacher would be waiting to go home with Teach Renu. My heart ached and itched, but I told myself that if she didn't care, I didn't need to waste my time and effort on her.

But what did I gain from this? It felt like I was losing my mind all by myself.

"Meow, meow."

I walked home alone, and when I passed the construction site where I used to stop with my counselor because there was a stray kitten, I couldn't help but call out for the little orange furball. But today, it was gone. I couldn't read anyone's mind, so I had no idea where the scruffy little thing had gone.

Its mother probably took it away.

Hmph, I thought I'd play with the cat to cheer myself up, but even the cat ran away from me!

In the end, the school became an unappealing place, as usual. Even the excitement of going home was dampened. Of course, my mother noticed something was wrong when she saw me so quiet. While watching cartoons, she nudged me with her shoulder.

"What's wrong? Not sticking to your pretty teacher anymore?"

"Nope."

"Why not?"

"We're not that close."

"Why is your relationship so short-lived... Teach Renu, are you tired of Jom already?"

I was so focused on the cartoon that I didn't notice the beautiful teacher's arrival. Even the heartbeat I usually heard was drowned out by the fog in my head. When I turned to my mother's call, I saw Teach Renu looking at me briefly before giving a faint smile.

"No, it's more like Jom is tired of Re."

The sweet-faced teacher referred to herself as 'Re' with my mom without any formality. She glanced at me once more before heading back upstairs. The statement 'Jom is tired of Re' carried no emotion, as if she was just clarifying and then leaving without any attachment.

I could only watch her until she was out of sight before turning back to the cartoon, making my mom laugh.

"You're sulking at each other? What kind of student- teacher relationship is this?"

"I'm not sulking. Teach Re doesn't even care."

"So, you're the one sulking at her. What did you two fight about?"

"She broke a promise."

"Hmm?"

"She said I could visit her on Saturday, but she went out with her boyfriend instead."

"This is what you're fighting about? Are you mad?"

Mom looked at me and rolled her eyes.

"That's not a reason to get upset. She went out with her boyfriend. Why are you mad?"

"She broke a promise."

"That's nonsense. Go and be nice to her, or your grades might suffer."

"Grades are something I earn myself. Teach Re doesn't help with that. I don't need to be nice."

"At least don't be enemies. That's why people don't want to be friends with you."

"It's not that people don't want to be friends with me. Everyone is just selfish and horrible."

"Teach Re is a person, too. Why don't you hate her? You only dislike her when she has a lover. That's contradictory."

"That's because..."

Because I couldn't read anything, and being taken aback to find out the beautiful teacher had someone else, leaving me alone to watch TV, was infuriating. Her indifferent attitude towards my anger made me feel like I was invisible.

It felt like I was just air.

The atmosphere between Teach Renu and me had been like this for three days. On the fourth day, as I was about to walk home, Teach Renu, who seemed to be passing by coincidentally, reached out and touched my shoulder lightly.

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum... Teach Renu's heartbeat remained steady, unlike mine, which was about to leap out of my chest. These past few days, I tried to act nonchalant and keep my distance, but now it seemed like everything was crumbling due to my joy.

"Jao-Jom."

"Yes?"

"Tomorrow, tell the class representative to get the math sheets from my desk in the morning. Thank you."

And the gorgeous teacher walked away, leaving me with my mouth agape. That's what you wanted to say to me?!

"Teach Re."

The school counselor paused after taking a few steps. Unable to hold back, I walked up to her and faced her.

"Hmm?"

"Um... It seems like I don't understand one of the problems. If I want you to help me like before... Can I come to you?"

Teach Renu hesitated for a moment, then answered clearly.

"I'm afraid you can't anymore. If you have any questions, ask me in class."

The cute teacher smiled at me briefly and was about to walk away, but I grabbed her sleeve.

"What happened between us? Since Saturday when you disappeared, we haven't really talked."

"You're the one who said you'd come see me in the evening but didn't, right?"

"Yes, but..."

Because I was sulking and being childish, trying to get her attention, but nothing came out of it.

"My mother said you went out with a guy on Saturday. Is he your boyfriend?"

I couldn't hold back any longer. I needed to change the subject and know about that other person.

"Jao-Jom."

"Y-Yes."

Teach Renu's stern tone indicated I should stop asking. My initial displeasure and hope for reconciliation vanished as she stared at me, and my voice faltered.

"It's none of your business, Miss Jom."

Splash...

When I got home, I rushed into the kitchen and buried myself in washing dishes to help Mom. My fingers were wrinkled from soaking for over half an hour; trying to distract myself, but nothing seemed to help.

"It's none of your business, Miss Jom."

So cold...

The distant tone and unfamiliar way of addressing me made my chest ache. Since Teach Renu said that, I should back off for real.

"Jom, watch the apartment for me. I'm going to the market for a bit."

Mom came into the house and called out. Afraid she'd see me crying, I hastily pulled my hands from the water and wiped away the tears that had been flowing since the evening.

"I'll watch it."

"What were you doing in the kitchen?"

"Washing dishes."

"...."

"What?"

"Nothing."

My mother just nodded towards the opposite side.

"I'll hurry back. Keep watch on it for me."

"Okay."

"You're too stressed lately, Jom. If the problems are too much, I'll have her move out."

I stared at Mom in shock. The 'her' she referred to could only be my school counselor. Hearing that, I hurriedly shook my head.

"What nonsense are you talking about, Mom? I'm not talking to you anymore."

I walked away, but my mother spoke through her thoughts, knowing I could hear.

'Every time you cry, you wash dishes. I don't like it!'

Hearing that, I turned to Mom and smiled mockingly.

"Are you worried about your daughter?"

"No, just saying it's pointless. Go wash the car or motorcycle instead. They're filthy."

"Ugh, Mom!"

I obediently followed her request, even though I didn't want to go near the apartment. My heart was still fragile, and keeping watch on the apartment risked running into Teach Renu, especially since she hadn't returned from school yet. We might face each other awkwardly.

Meeting her would naturally be uncomfortable after being told not to meddle in personal matters. But if Teach Renu came back, I'd pretend not to see her, just like with others I didn't care about. The less I cared, the more distant they'd become. Easy.

As I was about to step into the clerk's room, someone tapped my back, and all those thoughts flooded my mind like a torrent.

"Excuse me, my sister stays here, but I need to wait for her to return first. Do you have a key I can use to get in?"

I gaped, staring at the boy around my age with very fair skin and a clean-shaven face. He was dressed in a private high school uniform with blue shorts and greeted me with a somewhat dazed expression.

"You can't go in until the room's owner arrives."

"Aw... That's too bad. Do I have to wait in this heat?"

"But Teach Renu will be here soon."

"Is there anywhere around here to sit and rest?"

The handsome boy looked around before pausing.

"By the way, how did you know my sister's name is Renu and that she's a teacher?"

Yes... The flood of thoughts rushing through my mind came from this boy, someone connected to Teach Renu since the day he was born. Although their appearances weren't exactly similar, his fair skin wasn't much different from his sister's.

"Well, you're new here. Teach Renu is also new to the neighborhood. Seeing your skin tone, I figured you must be her guest."

"Do you know all the tenants' guests here? Amazing."

"You can wait at that marble table over there. She'll be here soon."

"Thanks."

We stared at each other for a moment, and then the boy walked to the marble table as I suggested. Not long after, my mother returned. Not wanting to confront the pretty boy, I slipped into the house but kept an eye out for when the school counselor would return.

As usual... around 7 o'clock every day.

Now, Teach Renu's younger brother had gone into the dorm with his sister. He stayed for almost two hours before coming out. Curious about what happened in the room, I quickly ran to him and...

"Hey."

"Hmm?"

I reached out to touch the tall boy's arm, my eyes widening. The charming teacher's brother still didn't understand why I looked so dumbstruck and asked right away,

"Is something wrong? Why do you look like that?"

"Nothing!!"

I smiled broadly, like someone ready to share happiness with the world.

"Have a safe trip home."

"What...?"

I didn't give a sound answer; I simply hastily ran back to the apartment, used my personal key card to enter the building, and went up to the third floor, in front of the counselor's room. Once there, I stared at the clean white door and raised my hand to knock.

Knock, knock, knock.

"Yes, who is it?"

"...."

"Please respond."

Teach Renu's cautious tone made me sigh a little before I nervously replied, fearing she wouldn't talk to me due to what happened earlier. But I had a plan if that happened.

"It's Jom."

"...."

"If you don't open, I'll get my mom to come up."

My threat worked. The lovely counselor opened the door almost immediately but kept a calm expression. Her heart pounded with nervousness as she looked into my eyes.

"What's up, Jao-Jom? What do you want to talk about?"

"These past few days, we haven't talked. You wouldn't let me come to your room for math tutoring and treated me coldly. Is it because of this?"

"Because of what?"

The irregular heartbeat made me smirk with a sense of victory. Earlier, I'd been crying, but now I felt so happy I couldn't hide it. The cold behavior was just to keep me away because it was too dangerous for the apartment owner's daughter to know about this.

"Because you brought a cat into your room."



Sunlyan

06. Please

And then I found a small living creature called a 'cat' lying buried in a pink basket lined with thick, soft cushions. The little orange cat, which I was a bit worried might've died from being abandoned, was sleeping with its eyes closed, completely unaware of anything. Honestly, I always felt calm when I was near Teach Renu because of the sound of her heartbeat. But right now, I was pretty annoyed because it was loud and rapid with anxiety, even though the teacher's face showed no emotion.

She's really good at keeping a straight face.

"When did you take it in, Teach?"

"Friday."

"What?"

I glanced at the lovely teacher's face with slight disbelief since I remembered that I was still tutoring math in her room that day.

"After you left, I went to get it that night. You said its mother abandoned it. I thought it was too small to find food on its own."

"Okay,"

I responded briefly, not knowing how to express my thoughts. Just as I was about to ask what she planned to do next, Teach Renu spoke up hastily.

"I'm looking for a solution. Right now, I've sent my brother to discuss keeping the cat with our family. There shouldn't be any problems."

Actually, I knew from the moment I touched that handsome young man, but I pretended to nod in acknowledgment.

Okay."

"Are you going to tell your mother?"

"Technically, pets aren't allowed here."

"...."

"But since you've found a solution, I'll pretend I don't know anything."

"Thank you," she said, and I noticed the worry in her eyes. The beautiful teacher crossed her arms and hesitated before speaking about the past few days.

"I know we've been talking less lately, and it seems like there's some anger."

"I felt that way too. I was a bit dumbfounded that we were fine on Friday, but after you went out with another guy the next morning, we became distant."

"...."

"I'm sorry if I talked too much and made you uncomfortable. You were right; it wasn't my business."

I hoped that the striking teacher standing before me would make an excuse or do something to make me feel better since she felt guilty. But no, it seemed like her scolding me with 'It's none of your business' was something I deserved, and there would be no apology.

Teach Renu was really blaming me for overstepping, and it made me frustrated again.

"But in exchange for not telling my mom, you have to tutor me in math," I demanded.

This wasn't a request like before; it was coercion from someone seeking revenge. Teach Renu's heartbeat quickened again, but it seemed more irritated than excited. Yet, the beautiful teacher nodded calmly, showing no emotion as usual.

"Fine. It's my duty anyway. Even if you didn't bring up the cat, I'd still teach you."

She was accusing me of blackmailing her, but I didn't care and didn't feel bad because I was more furious. So, I just grinned and excused myself.

"See you later."

"See you."

From a teacher and student who once had a cute, close relationship, it now felt like we were playing a game of wits. I wanted to be close to her but acted like I had thorns growing out of me, like a sarcastic teenager. Meanwhile, the adorable teacher tutored me out of duty but without the usual smiles.

What I loved most was Teach Renu's smile and her gentle kindness. But now, I wasn't getting any of that. What was the point of facing this situation?

While I was stressed and starting to hesitate about whether I should go for math tutoring this evening because I didn't want to face that awkward atmosphere again, I stood hugging my math book to my chest. Suddenly, I heard someone clear their throat behind me. When I turned around, I saw it was the teacher's younger brother.

"Ong," I called out his nickname without thinking. For a moment. I saw the handsome vouth standing still. stunned. and I could hear his thoughts loudly.

'She knows my name.'

Yeah, come to think of it, I'd never heard his name from asking either him or his sister. It must've been strange that I knew who he was before he introduced himself.

"I heard Teach Renu call you that, so I figured it must be your name. I remembered."

I smiled widely, not knowing how to make my expression look believable. But the sound of his heartbeat was loud, and I could read his thoughts immediately.

'She's so cute!'

Looking at me and thinking I'm cute, what are you thinking? I was a bit shocked and stepped back, tucking my hair behind my ear and smiling.

"Are you here to see Teach?"

"Oh, yes. Has Re come back yet?"

"She should be back soon. I'm here waiting for math tutoring with her."

"You're waiting for her, too?"

"Yeah."

"What a coincidence."

"While we're waiting for Teach, why don't we sit down and chat over there?"

I nodded towards a stone bench. Suddenly, I felt that talking to the teacher's brother might be pleasant.

"We don't have anything else to do anyway."

"Sure. What's your name?"

"Jom."

"I'm Ong"

"I know."

"Oh, right. I forgot."

As my mother often said, I wasn't very good at making friends. For me, talking to others was difficult. So, meeting Teach Renu's younger brother and inviting him to chat was filled with awkwardness, not knowing what to talk about. But luckily, Ong didn't let our conversation fall into silence.

"Are you Re's student?"

"Yes, Teach Renu is my school counselor and a math teacher."

"Are you close?"

"Well... I don't know. It's not really close, but not distant either."

"You must be somewhat close; otherwise, Re wouldn't let you get this close. My sister is hard to approach and doesn't like people being too close. She keeps a proper distance."

"You seem to respect Teach Re a lot."

"Do I look that way?"

The handsome young man smiled shyly.

"Maybe it's because there's a big age gap between us I have to be more respectful, unlike siblings who are just a year or two apart."

"Tell me about yourself."

"Hmm?"

'She's interested in me.'

I felt a bit awkward hearing that thought and quickly waved my hands as if to explain. I didn't mean it the way he thought.

"I mean about Teach Re, the relationship between you two as siblings. Think of it as killing time while waiting for your sister."

'She's really interested in me.'

Whatever...

I knew I'd made the right decision to talk to him and ask questions. If we wanted to know someone, if we couldn't learn through them, we should ask those around us. I got to know Teach Renu through Ong from a different perspective.

Teach Renu's family consists of five people.

Father, mother, and two younger siblings, with the pretty teacher being the eldest. Teach Renu was born perfect in every way-appearance, status, and intellect. She excelled at everything from birth, even competing in the mathematical Olympiad selection.

"But she didn't make it. Re sees it as a blemish in her life. No one can talk about it."

"She doesn't accept defeat, does she? By the way, how many people do they select for that competition?"

"You have to be in the top twenty-five."

"And what rank did she get?"

"Twenty-six."

A narrow miss; no wonder she was so frustrated.

"But even if Re had made it to the top and won, it wouldn't have made our father happy. He wanted a son to take over the family business."

"So no matter how well she did, it meant nothing to him."

Behind the flawless face, there were deep wounds, too...

"Your father must have high expectations for you, then," I continued. Ong nodded and kept praising his sister.

"But expectations are pointless. I'm not even a fraction of Re."

"That's true."

"What?"

"Where were we?"

I quickly changed the subject while he was still confused and didn't hear clearly.

"What surprises me is that someone as talented as her, even if she ranked twenty-sixth, is still very impressive. Why didn't she choose another profession? As we know, teachers don't earn much. If she's that smart, why not become a doctor, architect, or engineer, something that leans towards math?"

"Rebellious spirit."

"Hmm?"

"Our father used to belittle the teaching profession. So, Re wanted to spite him by becoming a teacher."

This new information made me quite impressed with the adorable teacher's thinking. Beneath her calm and indifferent demeanor, she chose to become a teacher just to spite her father because he didn't like the profession.

Unbelievable...

"So, Teach Re didn't really want to be a teacher, right?"

"No one can predict what Re wants to do. Everyone in the family sees her as a wonder of the world... except for our father. She's a woman with a very complex thought process, so intriguing that even as her brother, I can't help but admire her."

"That's cute."

I genuinely admired Teach Renu's brother. It was rare to see a younger sibling so proud of their older sibling or family member, almost like they were a celebrity. I could sense how he felt because I saw it. In Ong's mind, Teach Renu was someone to respect, honor, and look up to.

Listening to this was truly awe-inspiring. That woman, the one I couldn't read her mind at all, caused me to pretend to be bad at math just to get her to teach me, all because I longed to get to know her.

"What kind of person would win Teach Re's heart?"

I murmured, then realized and instantly locked eyes with Ong.

"Since you're her brother, you must know about Teach's boyfriend, right?"

"Boyfriend?"

"Yes."

"Well..."

Before Ong could elaborate on the man who had captured the stunning teacher's heart, the person we were talking about spoke up as if she knew the timing perfectly. I could only close my eyes in disappointment.

"Have you been here long, Ong?"

Teach Renu chose to ignore me, knowing we'd talk soon, while her brother stood up and smiled at her with a mix of admiration and respect.

"For a while now. I was talking with Jom while waiting for you."

"And what did the family say about that matter?"

"That matter? Oh... the cat, right?"

Ong looked almost reverent, even putting his hands behind his back in a formal stance as if he were a soldier reporting to his commander,

"Dad said no. He thinks it's a burden."

Teach Renu just nodded in acknowledgment and dismissed him in a calm voice.

"I see. Go home now; I need to rest."

"I have to go now? I thought you'd let me go up to your room."

I have to teach math. You should go."

"Okay."

If it were any other younger brother, he might've thrown a fit for being sent away after coming all this way and only exchanging a few words. But Ong willingly complied and walked away, looking dejected. Besides being aloof, his sister showed a complete lack of interest in interacting with him, which surprised me. Despite the age gap, she shouldn't be this apathetic.

Why is she so hard to predict?

"Let's go study."

The beautiful teacher nodded at me knowingly. Initially tense, seeing her indifferent attitude made me even more unsure of how to act. I felt like I shrank to the size of an ant, even though we were about the same height. When we reached her room, the familiar cotton scent hit me as usual. The cute teacher walked to the balcony and loosened her shirt to get more comfortable while I sat at the writing desk, too afraid to move, just waiting.

"Jao-Jom."

Teach Renu's voice made me jump a little before I responded politely.

"Yes?"

"I've been thinking.."

The stunning woman paused for a moment, then spoke directly, not beating around the bush.

"I'm very uncomfortable."

"What?"

"Because of the cat, I have to tutor you in math. I don't like feeling forced to do something. So today, I'm going to tell your mother that I need to move out."

I stared into her eyes, unsure of what made her feel that way, but it seemed asking would do more harm than good.

"Are you uncomfortable with the cat or with meeting me?"

"I'm uncomfortable with you."

Ouch...

Teach Renu let out a big sigh.

"I'm someone who always follows the rules, never bends them. The cat was the first thing that made me break my own rules for no reason, and I don't like that about myself."

The beautiful teacher looked at me. "It's dishonest, a bad example. But more than that, being blackmailed by my own student and constantly worrying about getting caught makes me stressed."

"Teach..."

"I don't want to tutor you in math anymore. If you have questions, ask at school. As for the cat, I'll talk to your mother. You should go home."

Not only was her brother getting pushed away, but even I, who thought I could get closer, was also shut out. I gathered my textbooks, hugged them to my chest, and followed the adorable teacher to the door. But I didn't open it; I just stood there beside her.

"I didn't mean to blackmail you or make you feel terrible. I just....."

"It's fine. I've made my decision."

I shook my head and looked at her with tears welling up. Lately, I'd been very emotional, especially with this lovely teacher.

"I just want to be close to you."

Then I said something even I couldn't believe I was thinking. My mouth hung open while the gorgeous woman seemed stunned to see my uncontrollable tears streaming down my cheeks.

Damn, what did I just say?

But it seemed my weaker side was revealing my true feelings, and I couldn't hide them anymore...

Even though I didn't want to believe it, it was inevitable. I had to accept it.

"I like you so much it's driving me insane. Please... don't push me away."



Sunlyan

07. We are alike

I never expected that I'd end up crying and begging the woman in front of me. But what I feared even more was being rejected by Teach Renu. That would mean I was heartbroken, humiliated beyond repair, and it might mean we could never talk again. Or if we did meet, it'd be incredibly awkward.

But then...

"You like me, Jom?"

"Huh? ...Yes."

I nodded hastily, still shell-shocked. But once the words were out, there was no taking them back.

"Please don't send me away."

"..."

"Otherwise..."

"Otherwise what?"

"I wouldn't know what to do in the days to come and the days after that..."

A silence fell between us as if we were testing each other's resolve. Teach Renu pursed her lips slightly as if chewing on her cheek. It was a gesture I'd never seen before, like a mischievous child plotting their next move.

But Teach Renu was far from mischievous. What kind of gesture was that?

"Alright, you can stay in my room today. That way, you'll know what to do next."

Suddenly, everything turned upside down. My declaration of love received an unexpected response. I wasn't sent away, instead, I was invited to stay without any mention of math tutoring.

While I was still baffled, the beautiful woman walked over to the cat and sat down to play with it in a charming manner. Not knowing what to do, I pretended to make small talk about the cat.

"Have you named it yet?"

"Hmm?" Teach Renu glanced at me with interest, raising an eyebrow.

"Do I need to name it?"

"Well, if you're raising a cat, what will you call it if it doesn't have a name?"

"I'll call it 'Cat.'"

"So, you just call it 'Cat' every day?"

"Yes, a cat is a cat. What else would I name it?"

The stunning teacher picked up the sleeping kitten, waking it up. I moved closer, looking for a way to continue the conversation.

"Calling it just 'Cat' might seem too distant. I think you should give it a name."

"Hmm... What should I name it? I have no idea."

"There's 'I don't know' in your dictionary?"

"Actually, no. But I don't know what to name it. It's not a math problem with a fixed answer. It's not science that can be proven. It's not..."

The cute lady rambled on, referencing academic principles. It made me realize that this person valued logic over vague words. She didn't like things that couldn't be proven or controlled, like my feelings today.

When she felt threatened or unsafe, she was ready to cut me off without hesitation.

She wouldn't stay here but wouldn't allow herself to be taken advantage of or blackmailed.

"There are many things in this world that we can't find answers to, Teach."

"Like what? Ghosts?"

"Something like that."

"If I've never seen it, I won't believe it exists. It doesn't make sense."

"There are things that exist even if they don't happen to us."

"Like what?"

"Hearing people's thoughts."

"That's fantasy."

Teach Renu laughed for the first time in days.

"Ugh, And I was actually listening."

"Then... air. We can't see it, but it exists."

"That's reasonable. Do you have any other references?"

"Love."

"....."

"We can't see it, but it exists."

"Good example."

The adorable teacher smiled slyly, knowing I was talking about myself.

"Why weren't you surprised, shocked, or disgusted when I said I liked you?"

"Why should I be?"

"One... I'm a student. Feeling this way shouldn't happen. Two... I'm a girl. You should feel weird or uncomfortable. You know what it means when I say I like you, right?"

Teach Renu didn't answer; she just looked at the cat in her hands and changed the subject.

"What should we name it? Help me think, Jom."

This was avoiding the question, but I didn't know why she chose to do that. Maybe she couldn't find an answer or didn't see it as a big deal.

"I don't know. What kind of name do you want?"

"Something unique would be nice. A name that makes you think of it immediately."

"That's a tough one."

"Google always helps."

The belle looked around as if searching for something, then grabbed a nearby laptop and searched for names. She looked serious, twirling a pen around her fingers skillfully. I watched it and was slightly impressed because I'd seen Ryoko Hirose do the same in a Japanese movie. I'd attempted to learn but always dropped the pen.

"How do you do that?"

"What?"

The pretty teacher looked at the pen in her hand.

"Is something wrong?"

"Well..."

"Oh, this name is strange but a bit long."

It seemed Teach Renu was more focused on the name and didn't notice my excitement about the pen. When she changed the subject, I forgot what I was talking about.

"What name?"

"Viramarati-savitritithita."

"Is that a name for a Likay troupe?"

"It's the name of a celebrity's cat. I found it by chance."

Teach Renu turned the laptop screen to show the celebrity. I instantly recognized her.

"That's my senior from school, Dawan. She graduated when I was in middle school."

"I like this name."

"I can't believe someone who likes simple things would like such a fancy name."

"I just like unique things. This name it is... Kitty, from now on, your name is Viramarati-savitritithita."

"If Dawan finds out, she'll think we copy her."

"Well we really did"

With that, we both laughed. I felt like the good vibes between us had returned, so I relaxed and took the kitten from her hands to play with it, wanting to get to know it better.

"The reason I wasn't surprised when you said you liked me is that I understand the feeling of admiring someone. I once had a crush on a teacher."

It was the first time the lovely teacher revealed something about herself. I wasn't sure if her brother knew this, so I widened my eyes a bit and asked with interest.

"A female teacher?"

"A male teacher."

"So it's not exactly like me. I'm a girl who likes a female teacher."

I paused for a moment and asked directly,

"Is it okay for me to like you, even though I'm a girl?"

The beautiful woman smiled shyly and answered hesitantly.

"I didn't say anything, did I? Liking is better than hating. Whether you're a girl or a boy doesn't matter."

"You're so kind."

"Because I'm not cruel enough to hurt a student's feelings. Having a crush on someone is a great motivation to go to school. You feel the same, right?"

"Yes."

"So, does that mean you weren't bad at math but just wanted to be close to me?"

"Well..." I scratched my cheek.

"Yes, I confess my sin."

"So, I can still teach well. That's a relief. From now on, you can come to see me without pretending you need math tutoring."

"If I don't use that excuse, what reason will I have to see you?"

"Help me take care of the cat. We have a shared responsibility now."

"Alright."

I looked at the cat, feeling grateful that it was like glue bonding me and the teacher. The adorable teacher reached out and patted my head affectionately, but I didn't like the look in her eyes.

It was the look of an adult towards a child.

"Teach, I really like you."

"I know."

"You're too relaxed about it, making me feel a bit strange. It's like you don't take my feelings seriously."

"Isn't it good to be relaxed? It won't be awkward."

"Yes, but I feel you're too comfortable."

"....."

"Why is that?"

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

The heartbeat of the stunning woman before me slowed down like someone who didn't feel anything. She smiled and answered honestly.

"I'm not worried because I know."

Ba-dum...

"Know what?"

Ba-dum...

"That our relationship will never be possible."

This was Teach Renu, a straightforward person who wouldn't hurt my feelings because she knew my feelings might get hurt. But she also wouldn't give false hope, knowing well that my feelings mightn't last. So she said outright that it'd never happen in order to avoid problems from the start. But she didn't stop me from feeling love or admiration because she knew feelings couldn't be controlled.

But our relationship could be stopped, so Teach Renu decided on her own that it'd never happen.

"Is it because I'm younger?"

". ..."

"Is it because I'm a student and you're a teacher?"

I asked, my patience wearing thin, forgetting that we'd just reconciled.

"So, if I weren't at this school wasn't your student would I have a chance to love you?"

The cute woman seemed stunned, as if contemplating what I'd just blurted out, before nodding.

"That's right. If you weren't my student... Big if."

"Does that mean if I graduate and we're no longer in a student-teacher relationship, we could date each other?"

There was no answer; Teach Renu only crossed her arms as if to protect herself. There was a troubled look and hesitation, but I couldn't figure out what it was other than my heart beating a little off rhythm.

It seemed my question had triggered something in her.

No... I still had hope. Something in that hesitant demeanor. We'd already moved past the issue of gender because Teach Renu didn't seem to care, or maybe she didn't see me in that way, so she never mentioned it. The biggest issue in the relationship I longed for was the teacher-student status, which was unavoidable. Everything else seemed secondary.

"Then I'll wait until I graduate. Our status will be over. Until that day, I'll remain hopeful. I won't give up on you, Teach. I promise."

"Jom."

I stood up abruptly and handed the kitten back to her. I couldn't think of anything except wanting to be alone. But before I left, I had one more question that nagged at me, so I turned to ask the room's owner.

"Why did you stop liking that teacher?"

"Huh?"

"The male teacher you used to love."

BA-DUM...

BA-DUM, BA-DUM, BA-DUM...

The rapid heartbeat indicated some kind of shock. I watched Teach Renu's calm demeanor, beginning to notice and yearning to understand what was going on.

Could it be...?

"You never stopped liking him. You still love that teacher, don't you?"

"I think you should go home, Jom."

Teach Renu's answer became clear when she callously told me to leave, just like before. I immediately realized that I still had hope, even if it was faint.

"If you still love that teacher, then I have the right to love you as well!"

I declared my determination to her before walking out. I wouldn't give up on this. If she still had feelings for her old teacher, then I could do the same.

I'll love you until the day I die; just watch!



08. Aekaphop

I admit that last night, I was pretty amazing. I had determination, resolve, and enough courage to confess my feelings, even though I'd just realized I liked Teach Renu for real only yesterday night.

It was falling in love, and I couldn't quite believe that I felt this way about someone I'd just met. Teach Renu was my first romantic crush ever since I was born.

But as yesterday passed and a new day began, my bravery seemed to be lost in the sea. I couldn't even look my school counselor, who was teaching math at the front of the class, in the eye. It was so embarrassing... If I could turn back time, would I still say what I said? Waah.

When the math class ended, as I was packing my bag to move to the next class, Teach Renu called my name as if she had something to discuss. I lowered my head, avoided eye contact, and acted shyly, unlike the confident teenager I was last night.

"Are we mad at each other again?"

"Huh? No... No, ma'am."

"I noticed you didn't look at me at all during today's lesson. I thought you were mad about something again."

She's paying attention to me too? What a charming belle...

"I just felt a bit embarrassed, that's all."

"Is that so? I was wondering where the brave girl from last night went. Did you pack all that determination away?"

"No, I'm still as determined as ever."

I looked into her cute face with resolve. All my life, I'd succeeded in things without much effort because I could read people's minds and actions, whether it was taking exams, winning at cards, or anything else. Teach Renu was the only one who made me think and analyze what to do next because I couldn't predict her one bit. And it excited me!

"Great strength of will."

"Did you call me just to say this?"

"It seemed like the gorgeous teacher in front of me was taken aback for a moment before she laughed as if she just remembered something."

"That's right, I almost forgot. I wanted to tell you that I might be home late today, so I'm worried about Viramarati- savitrithita..."

Teach Renu took a quick breath. "That's a very long name for a cat."

"Almost out of breath, right?"

We laughed a little, and then Teach Renu got to the point.

"I'd like to ask you to stop by and feed her. Is that possible?"

"Of course, it's no big deal."

I agreed eagerly.

"By the way, why will you be back late? Where are you going?"

"...."

The silence made me realize I might've crossed a line into her personal space, which she cherished. So, I hurriedly changed my approach, even

though I was a bit suspicious.

"Then, can I have the room key? So I can take care of her."

The beautiful teacher handed me the key and smiled so sweetly that I almost melted.

"Thank you."

Where is she going?

All day, I couldn't stop thinking about it, unable to focus on anything else. I wanted to ask but didn't dare intrude too much since Teach Renu was very introverted. Knowing too much would make her put up a high wall and treat me like a stranger, and I didn't want to risk that again.

But I couldn't help but be nonplussed. The lovely woman didn't seem to mind my love confession at all. She didn't give me hope but didn't reject or push me away either. She looked understanding but hinted that our relationship was at 0%.

Our relationship will never be possible...That's what she said.

Great strength of will... That was her compliment when she saw I didn't back down even after being rejected.

Was there really someone this hard to read in the world? And why did it have to be her, the only person whose mind and thoughts I couldn't hear, except for the sound of her heartbeat?

If I'm given a gift, it should be absolute, not excluding her alone!

Curiosity made me patiently wait until evening. I hid near the math building and waited until Teach Renu, carrying her bag, left. When she said she'd be late, it meant she wouldn't stop by her apartment first but would go somewhere else. I needed to know how she'd travel.

Soon, as expected, the adorable woman took out her phone and called someone, then quickly walked to the school's back gate. A fancy European car pulled up, and a rather dignified man, a bit older but not too old, got out.

He was perfect from head to toe.

BA-DUM, BA-DUM, BA-DUM...

Teach Renu's heartbeat was so fast and loud that I couldn't focus on what the man who came to pick her up was thinking. Everything was blurry, which was frustrating. At the most critical moment, I knew nothing except that the man looked exceptionally handsome.

He was mature...

He was a man.

I had nothing to compete with.

My arms fell to my sides as I watched Teach Renu enter the fancy car and drive away, feeling utterly defeated. I walked home with my head down but didn't forget that I was asked to feed the cat. While thinking about whether to go to the orange cat or change clothes at home first, I saw Ong sitting at the stone table. When he saw me, his excited heartbeat was so loud that I couldn't hear anything else.

Excited to see me, really?

"You're here."

"Oh, yes, I'm here."

I smiled tightly, feeling that his enthusiasm was a bit too much for just an acquaintance.

'She's so cute.'

He was showing it so much that I didn't know how to respond...

"Why are you late today? And isn't Re with you? Didn't you ask if you could meet with Teach first?"

"No, I didn't. Usually, we don't talk much. Re doesn't like me bothering her."

If I couldn't read Teach Renu's mind or get to know her directly, there was another way-through her brother. Ong might know who that man was and where he was from.

"Teach will be late today, so chat to me first, okay?"

"Sure."

"...."

"So you won't be lonely."

Dang, he didn't come to see his sister. He came to see me.

Once I understood Ong's thoughts, I felt a bit self-conscious because I wasn't used to being admired like the popular girls at school. I wasn't even well-liked. I barely had friends since I didn't like hanging out with gossipers.

Even if they gossiped in their minds.

"Then, do you want to go to Teach Re's room together? Let's..."

I looked around, afraid my mother might be nearby and heard.

"Help feed Viramarati-savitritithita."

"Is that a monk's name?"

"Cat's."

"That's the cat's name?"

"Make sure you memorize it."

I went up to Teach Renu's room with Ong, feeling slightly strange, like entering someone's room without permission. Ong, on the other hand, put his bag on the floor and went straight to the cat's basket, greeting her gently. He avoided touching most things in the room out of respect.

"It's weird that you're not close to your sister. Teach Renu seems more like your teacher than your sister."

I poured cat food into the bowl, not forgetting to fill the water that was almost empty because I remembered the teacher's instructions. Ong smiled awkwardly and sighed.

"We're not close at all, even though I want to be."

"Huh?"

"Re doesn't like me."

"Is there a sister who doesn't like her brother?"

"Because Dad pays too much attention to me because I'm a boy, Re doesn't like me. She says I get more privileges than the others. Re dotes on Miriam, and I become invisible when she's around."

"Miriam?"

"Our middle sister."

"That's an unusual name."

"Re never says directly that she doesn't like me, but her cold and distant behavior says a lot."

"If you know she doesn't like you, why do you keep coming to see her? Just curious."

"Because I admire her a lot, really."

Ong sat comfortably and spoke about his sister with admiration.

"If I were to have a girlfriend, I'd want someone like Re."

"Incest?" I blurted out, thinking of internet stories about brothers loving sisters or sisters with brothers. But Ong hastily waved his hands.

"No, no, it's just admiration. You've probably never put someone on a pedestal so much that you want to be close to them, even if they push you away."

Oh... That hit home. I should've understood. I'd been pushed away for days but still found excuses to see the striking woman and even confessed my love. If anyone should've understood, it was me.

"So, do you come every day to seek sympathy from your sister?"

The young man took a pen from his shirt pocket and twirled it, pouting in frustration, which made me stare.

"Something like that. I just think that if I visit often enough, Re might get used to it, and we might talk more. Usually, when we're home, Re sticks with Miriam, and I become the lonely guy in the house. So, I end up hanging out with Dad or cling to Mom instead."

"You can twirl a pen too?"

"Hmm? This?"

Ong looked at the pen in his hand and raised an eyebrow slightly before spinning it around again. But I remembered that this was different from what Teach Renu did last time.

"It's called Pen Spinning."

"I saw Teach doing it the other day."

"I saw Re doing it, so I learned from YouTube. Once I got it, I felt cool."

'You're thinking that I'm cool, aren't you?'

As soon as I heard what Ong was thinking, I lost interest and returned to the original topic to stop him from being so full of himself.

"You really are lonely."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean a younger brother whose sister doesn't care about him."

"She does care! Actually, I have to thank this cat."

Ong picked up the orange cat and cuddled it affectionately.

"Re called me for help when she got this cat. It was unexpected because I didn't even know she had my phone number."

"Maybe she couldn't reach Miriam."

"...."

So it's true.

I just said it offhandedly, but the voice I heard in Ong's head confirmed my assumption was correct. Teach Renu couldn't contact her sister, so she called Ong as a last resort.

How sad.

"But still, it's a good connection. From now on, I have a reason to visit my sister."

"And if you get kicked out?"

"I'll find another reason."

"Like what?"

"Well..."

Before I could hear his answer, my phone rang, which was a relief because I accidentally saw his answer and the image in his head. I was quite scared, no, a bit nervous about hearing it because I didn't know how to react.

"Yes?"

I answered sweetly when I heard it was Teach Renu, who we were just talking about.

"How did you get my number, Teach?"

[As a teacher, I should know my students' numbers. How's it going? Is Viramarati-savitrithita being fussy? I'm worried she might be noisy, and the neighbors might complain to your mom.]

"Not at all. She's very well-behaved. She's happy."

I looked at the orange cat and smiled. Even though I couldn't speak cat language, I could read its mind and feelings, so I answered confidently.

[How do you know she's happy?]

"Of course, I know. Having a safe place to live and meals to eat, she must be happy."

[Have you fed her yet?]

"Yes, and I filled her water too... Oh!"

Ong was playing with the orange cat and accidentally kicked the water bowl, spilling it everywhere. His handsome face looked terrified at making a mess in his sister's room.

"I'm in trouble now. Re will be mad for sure."

[Whose voice is that?]

"It's Ong, your brother."

[Where are you two?]

"In your room."

[Why did you do that?]

The slightly stern tone surprised me as I couldn't adjust my emotions in time.

[Let me talk to Ong.]

I quickly handed the phone to Ong, who hurried to get a cloth to clean the floor. Teach Renu's brother pointed at himself before taking the phone and speaking respectfully. From his closed eyes and nodding, I knew he was being lectured, but I didn't understand why.

"I won't do it again. I didn't realize it was so inappropriate... But I didn't do anything wrong."

Suddenly, Ong's tone changed, no longer afraid.

"Since I didn't do anything wrong, you have no right to stop me from visiting."

Then the guy hung up and handed the phone back to me with a sullen expression. I didn't even get to say goodbye to Teach Renu, but never mind. I was more interested in what had just happened.

"Re is coming back. She told us to wait at the apartment entrance right away."

I could tell Teach Renu was very furious about us being alone in her room. It wasn't about being possessive of her belongings but about propriety. I'd forgotten about that. Or maybe I saw Ong's thoughts. He was a guy with a remarkably pure heart, an optimist with no dirty thoughts, so I trusted him enough to talk like that.

After waiting for about fifteen minutes, Teach Renu arrived. As soon as she got there, she marched towards us and stopped, looking back and forth between us, especially at her taller brother.

"From now on, Ong, you don't need to come here anymore."

"I'll come."

The self-assured tone in which he argued with his sister made me admire him a bit. At that moment, Teach Renu's heart was pounding with anger, but she tried to control her emotions. The adorable woman bit her lip and tried to speak calmly.

"Why do you need to come? Do we have anything to discuss?"

"You live here. Can't I visit my sister?"

"We..." Teach Renu glanced at me and shook her head.

"You don't need to come. I'm fine. There's no reason for you to come. Go back and focus on your studies. Dad has high expectations for you. Don't waste your time coming to see me like this."

"Is visiting my sister a waste of time?"

"Then go do whatever you want because we're not that close!"

And the one who rarely revealed personal feelings couldn't hold back anymore. She finally expressed her frustration about her brother's existence. If I could read the beautiful woman's mind, what emotions would she have now?

Rage...

Jealousy...

The word 'jealousy' didn't suit Teach Renu at all. To me, the cute woman had no aura of unpleasant feelings. But who knew? Being the eldest

daughter, ignored by her father, who only loved his son, might've made Teach Renu like that. After all, she was human, just like anyone else.

"Fine. From now on, I won't come to see you."

"....."

"But I'll come to see Jom instead."

I pointed at myself and was immediately able to read his mind, knowing what he'd say next. Teach Renu glanced at me and frowned, not understanding.

"Why come to see Jom?"

"Because I like her. If I come here to pursue her, it has nothing to do with you!"

I closed my eyes as soon as I became the unforeseen bargaining chip between the brother and sister. I sensed that Ong's feelings were genuine, but it wasn't the main reason he brought that up. He just wanted to win against his sister, so he spoke impulsively. Just as Teach Renu was about to reprimand her brother, a third person's hand gently touched her arm as if to calm her.

"Renu, don't fight here. Calm down."

The deep voice, commanding respect, made me turn to see the same man who picked up the teacher today. A flash of jealousy surged when his big hand touched the striking teacher so familiarly.

"I need to teach him. He should know that what he's doing is inappropriate."

"Then teach him elsewhere. This is the apartment entrance. What will people think if they see a teacher arguing with her family like this?"

I barely listened to what they were saying. I was too upset that the large hand was touching Teach Renu so familiarly. My jealousy overrode all propriety, and I reached out to slap the big hand with a loud 'smack.'

Zap!

A flood of thoughts and feelings from the man I'd slapped in jealousy rushed into my head. The man in front of me was an educated adult with a high-ranking job and genuine feelings for Teacher Renu.

But...

"What are you doing, Jom?"

Teach Renu's voice rose when she saw me do something so unseemly, like slapping the man's hand. I opened my mouth, then hastily made an excuse.

"I saw a mosquito biting Mr. Aekaphop's hand. I have a weird condition where I can't stand seeing things like that. It makes me itch."

I gave him a wai and apologized like a kindergarten kid learning to greet parents.

"I'm sorry."

"It's alright," the attractive man smiled at me fondly.

"It's late. Ong, you should go back."

Teach Renu tried to control her emotions and told her brother. The handsome guy, who seemed equally mad at his sister, clasped his hands in a wai before walking away without looking back as if unsure what to do.

I saw guilt following him. He just tried to act tough, only to realize how terrible his actions were. As I was about to leave, the pretty teacher called me back.

"Jom, stay and talk with me."

"Okay."

"Then I'll take my leave," Mr. Aekaphop said, smiling at both of us. The cute woman greeted him respectfully and watched him leave. I glanced at

her and couldn't help but ask.

"Is this the teacher you once loved?"

"....."

"I guessed from the perfume."

Finally, I realized that the perfume I'd been using was the same as her boyfriend's. No wonder her heart raced when she smelled it. It must've reminded her of being close to her partner.

Darn it. I'll stop using it!

But there was no answer as if it was a silent admission. I'd already anticipated being scolded like last time, something along the lines of 'It's none of your business.'

But no, everything remained quiet, with only the steady heartbeat of the sweet-faced lady in front of me.

Not angry, but definitely not pleased.

"What were you doing with Ong in the room?"

"What?"

I glanced at the questioner, not very happy.

"What could I possibly be doing other than feeding the cat?"

"Don't you know it's unseemly? And both of you in school uniforms like that, what will others think?"

Teach Renu reprimanded me as she should, and I admitted my fault entirely, so I could only apologize.

"I'm really sorry. I'll be more careful."

"So what did you do to make Ong say he wants to date you?"

"It must've been my cat-feeding pose."

I demonstrated.

"Does it look hot?"

"You idiot."

The beautiful teacher, who had been stern all this time, burst out laughing and bared her teeth.

"I'm being serious."

"But it's true. I was just feeding the cat. Oh... there was also a water-giving pose."

"Alright, I won't ask anymore."

Teach Renu shook her head and waved me off as if she didn't know what else to talk about.

"I'm tired today. Let's talk another time."

"Was the movie fun? I wanted to see that one too."

I didn't want to leave yet, so I tried to engage the sweet- faced teacher in conversation a little longer as if to extend the time to hear her soft, nasal voice. But Teach Renu just stood silently, staring at me suspiciously.

"Did you follow me?"

"Follow you where?"

Then I realized I'd inadvertently revealed too much and couldn't explain how I knew.

"So you did go see a movie."

"Was that a guess?"

"Yes, I smelled cheese popcorn when you spoke."

The teacher in front of me brought her hand to her mouth, trying to see if it was indeed smelly as I'd claimed, but she still looked bewildered.

"Are you Conan? How did you know I went to see a movie?"

"I just wanted to find something to talk about. I won't bother you anymore... But, Teach, is it really okay to go see a movie with Mr. Aekaphop?"

"....."

The pretty woman's silence indicated irritation that I was intruding into her personal life again, so I chose to step back.

"I'll take my leave now. I won't keep you."

I waved goodbye with a broad smile before walking away, pondering whether my beautiful teacher knew about this. But before I could go far, she called me back.

"Jom."

"Yes?"

"How did you know his name is Aekaphop?"

This was a question I didn't know how to answer, just like another important thing I knew, but I wasn't sure if the stunning woman knew.

"Take a guess. It's a puzzle to think about. Always determining the one truth with the small body and the mind of an adult. Your name is Teach Renuuuu."

I echoed playfully, citing a famous quote from Detective Conan to make it funny, but the gorgeous woman simply stared, scrutinizing me. This playful banter made it seem like I knew something, leaving Teach Renu curious. I

believed that one day, the pretty teacher wouldn't be able to stand it and would come to ask what I knew. By then, I'd explain how I knew about this to build more credibility.

So I could tell her once and for all that Mr. Aekaphop...

Already had a family.



09.Mumu

Today, I felt like Teacher Renu kept staring at me as if she had doubts. If I could read her mind, I wouldn't have to guess like that. But since I could only hear the sound of her heartbeat, I thought it might be about how I knew that man's name was 'Aekaphop.'

Actually, it was kind of nice to be the center of attention, to have someone curious about you, and to be in Teacher Renu's sights this much. So, I decided to continue playing dumb because it was cute to see her trying to find a chance to talk to me while I continued to avoid her.

'Today, I need to talk to Teacher Renu and get straight to the point.'

Just as I was lost in my thoughts, the voice of the trainee teacher, who had been eyeing Teacher Renu for a while, echoed as he was about to pass by me. Just as I turned to look back at him, various thoughts and imaginations of that man surfaced vividly as if they had already happened.

"What's wrong with you?"

On-an, who was talking about her dream of opening a restaurant named 'Jessica' after her favorite girl group, paused and nudged me lightly with her elbow, but I ignored it.

"Not now, you bitch. I can't hear you clearly."

"I was speaking loud enough. What can't you hear?"

"Damn it!"

I yelled at my friend, irritated.

"You keep speaking so loudly. I can't hear you. I can only hear that intern teacher."

"Listening to what? He's walking around by himself and doesn't talk to anyone."

"You're so annoying!"

When I was a kid, I thought I was cursed with something that made me hear everyone's thoughts, and it made my life very difficult. Ever since kindergarten, I could hear Mrs. Kookkal, the teacher who always smiled but cursed the chubby student in her mind, thinking,

'Why don't you fall down the stairs and die?'

When I asked my friend's mother to her face, *'Why does Mrs. Kookkal want Sompong to fall down the stairs and die?'*

The teacher wrote a behavior report for my mother, saying that I was a liar who made up stories to slander others.

"Why did you say that about your teacher?"

Mom, who didn't know I could read minds at the time, asked when we got home. Her head was already full of stress about Grandpa's recent death and the fear that Dad wouldn't get anything.

"Don't worry. Grandpa left the building to Dad because he can't fend for himself."

When I suddenly expressed this, my mother was shocked. Her mind was filled with a million questions, and there was a song playing in her head, completely out of context.

'Sometimes I run... Sometimes I hide... Sometimes I'm afraid of you.'

"Why are you singing this song out of nowhere?"

"I'm just singing along with you."

"How did you know I had this song in my head?"

"You've been singing this part over and over since school. It's so loud. Change the song soon."

Mom started to suspect that I could read minds, so she had me test it with Dad. My dad, who loved gambling, picked a card without showing it to me and asked me to guess.

I picked a red card with a diamond shape and a number that looks like a circle... I can't remember what the number is.

Since I was very young and hadn't learned many numbers, I answered like this. I could answer everything in my dad's mind. Instead of thinking I was weird, my parents thought I was special and kept telling me, *"Don't tell anyone about this. It's too special."*

Not only did my mom not scold me, but after that kindergarten year, she also scolded Mrs. Kookkai for being unethical, talking about students' parents behind their backs and pinching Panjan, a classmate, and telling her not to tell anyone.

The whole truth came from me...

Although it wasn't as stressful as in the movies where people with special abilities are repressed, it was still irritating. The multitude of voices of people around me flooded in, darkening my heart and making me see people as horrible as if they were born to envy and kill each other. There were some people whose minds I couldn't read, and they were on TV.

"Tell me when that useless prime minister is going to run for election?" My mother asked.

I couldn't answer because the prime minister was on TV.

Like now, Teacher Renu seemed to have been tricked into going to the gym by some plan of the trainee teacher. The teacher looked around the room in

confusion and called Teacher Pimpaka, who taught sword dancing, as if there was something to discuss.

On-an and I, hiding behind the basketball hoop, smiled at our intelligence.

"Is this what you said would be interesting?"

I called On-an to join me because I thought that, as a (biologically) boy, she could help in case of an emergency. She whispered, not knowing what I was thinking, so I put my finger to her lips to make her be quiet and showed my teeth.

"Just watch."

"But it's too late. The gym is empty."

"Is Teacher Renu a ghost? Shut up!"

Click!

The door outside was closed and locked, and the sound of footsteps from someone else's leather shoes appeared. On-an looks at me and blinked rapidly, starting to get excited. Her mind was so high that she almost laughed.

‘This is definitely a dramatic scene!’

This girl exclaimed so manly.

"Monchai? How did you get here?"

Although Teacher Renu's voice was calm, her heartbeat indicated that she was very scared and felt an unusual and imminent danger.

"I have something I want to talk to you about."

"Can we do this another day? This is not a good time."

The lovely teacher seemed to realize that she had been tricked by the intern. However, Monchai blocked her way with a hesitant but determined demeanor.

"This semester, I have to leave. I'm afraid I won't see you again."

"..."

"Will you have dinner with me?"

That was the creepiest way to ask a woman out to dinner. Luring her to a secluded place, locking the door, and then half-asking, half-demanding her to comply?

The stunning woman's heartbeat indicated that she was terrified, but she bravely showed no sign of fear.

"If you came during work hours, I could respond more easily. But now you're making me..."

"Don't be afraid. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Teacher Monchai approach my beautiful teacher without hesitation, as if he was afraid that the opportunity would slip away.

"I just don't know how to talk to you. I'm afraid it would be obvious outside. I'm just a trainee teacher. It wouldn't be appropriate to approach you directly."

"....."

Please give me a chance.....

"Have you found your basketball that got mixed up with the school one?"

I spoke at full volume and stood up, with On-an in her Mr. Ongart persona, standing with her hands on her hips, shaking her head and speaking in a deep voice.

"No, it has my name on it, but I can't find it anywhere. There are, like, thousands of them here."

My friend joked softly, looking thoughtful before looking at the two teachers and acting like she had just appeared from another world.

"Oh, hello, sir, ma'am. We didn't know there was anyone in the gym."

'Bitch! You can lie about anything, but don't say you didn't know there was someone here! How am I supposed to play along with that?!'

"You gave us a fright. What time is it, Teacher Re?"

The charming teacher, still perplexed, looking at her watch and tells the time.

"Six thirty."

"Oh no, because of you, I missed my favorite soap opera!"

I pretend to grumble in frustration.

"Let's go back. The school is already empty except only two of you. By the way. What are you doing here, Teacher Re, Teacher Monchai Pimpiset?"

I shouted the latter's first and last name loudly, making Teacher Renu smile a little. It was very inappropriate for a male and female teacher to be alone in a secluded place, especially a mere trainee teacher who was acting so rudely.

"Uh... um... "

Teacher Monchai looks nervous, then looked at Teacher Renu as if seeking help, implying that they are in the same boat. But when the stunning woman see a third person, the threat seemed to disappear, and her firm and decisive voice immediately returned.

"I was about to leave. But it seems that Teaches Morichal has some explaining to do to other teachers tomorrow."

"Teacher Renu..."

The young man, full of love but afraid, seemed to be suffocating. The lovely woman turned to me and nodded.

"It's very late now. Jao-Jom, Ongart, let's go home."

"Yes, Teacher."

We both answers obediently.

On-an looked at the trainee teacher and made a mocking and crying face before leaving. As we walks down the stairs together, I sees Teacher Renu pause for a moment and hold the railing tightly.

"Are you okay, teacher?" On-an asks.

"I'm fine..."

But the rhythm of the teacher's heartbeat sounded like she was about to faint from excessive shock. Even though I couldn't read her mind, I knew she was scared. So I reached out to touch the teacher and gave her a reassuring smile.

"It's okay now, teacher. You have me."

Then those brown eyes looked at me and she smiled.

"That's right, I have you, Jom."

"And I'm here too! Don't try to be the hero by yourself," On-an chimed in, smiling at the beautiful teacher before we all started to head downstairs.

On-an, in her cute and whimsical way, couldn't help but ask curiously,

"It seems like Teacher Renu was tricked into coming here. I noticed from the beginning that you came in and called out for Teacher Pim, looking shocked as if you were about to start dancing when you saw that trainee teacher."

I bared my teeth a little, imagining my beautiful teacher doing a ridiculous breakdance.

On-an, you idiot!

"Something like that."

Teacher Renu replies, still as succinct as ever, not wanting the students to know too much about why she wanted to handle everything herself.

"Good thing Jom here is so perceptive. She suggested we wait in this room right after school. It was so hot in there!"

"And how did you know?"

Teacher Renu's question was directed at me, and since I couldn't think of a sensible explanation, I pretends to admire the surroundings.

"The sky darkens so quickly today."

"Jom."

"I'm so hungry."

"Yes, hungry. Let's part ways here then. See you tomorrow."

"Goodbye, Teacher."

On-an quickly bowed like a kindergartener and walk away. I continue to act as if I hadn't heard the question, forgetting that someone like Teacher Renu, who taught math and always needed to know the reasons behind everything, wouldn't let this go easily.

A thin hand grabbed my arm, and those light brown eyes stared at me, determined to get an answer.

"Tell me how you knew, Jom."

"About what?"

I rolled my eyes and smiles. I know everything in the world. I'm the awakened and enlightened one.

"..."

"Alright, alright, I'll tell you."

I laughs and pretend to joke.

"Actually, I can read minds."

Then, my arm was released, accompanied by a sigh from the older woman who shook her head,

"I don't think I'll ever know the truth. No matter how much I ask, you still won't tell me."

"What do you mean? I just told you the truth."

"Am I supposed to believe you can read minds?"

"I'm telling the truth."

I laughs, making it all sound like a joke.

"I knew the intern teacher planned to meet you in a secluded room at a time when no one would interrupt. I knew your brother admires you so much that he keeps your picture in his wallet."

"You know too much."

"I even know that Mr. Aekaphop, the teacher you love, took you to the movies and dated you without ever revealing his identity. Therefore, you don't even know that he is married and has a daughter."

I walks ahead, noticing the silence. My playful words were meant to tease and see how the lovely woman would react. As expected, Teacher Renu stopped, stopped all her actions and stared intently at me when I turned to meet her gaze.

"Did you follow me the other day?"

"If I really followed you, who would feed the cats? Ong was with me the whole time. Can you check the timeline?"

"Are you saying that you can actually read minds? That's impossible."

"Just because you've never seen it doesn't mean it's impossible."

"Alright. If you want me to believe it, then read my mind now. What am I thinking?"

Swallow...

This was the only problem in the world that I couldn't solve. The person in front of me was the only one whose thoughts I couldn't read or hear. It was like she was the most complex math problem in the world.

"What am I thinking right now?"

"I don't know."

"Hmph."

I felt a mocking tone, which made me even more frustrated because I couldn't stand being underestimated.

"Because you're the only person in the world whose mind I can't read."

"Enough. Just for a moment, I thought that what you said might be possible, and that's strange enough."

The one who believed in principles and always thought that everything had to be proven dismissed the idea that I could read minds as soon as she saw

that I couldn't do what I said. To make her listen, I had to touch a raw nerve.

"You pushed Ong into the water when you were kids."

Ong never told me this, but in his memories, there was a hint of this incident when he mentioned that his sister didn't like him. It was like a dark memory, and I couldn't imagine someone like Teacher Renu being jealous.

"Did Ong tell you this? How close are the two of you?"

"Ask him if he told me. Deep down, he thinks you really did push him, but he consoles himself by saying... someone like his sister wouldn't do that."

"..."

"A sister who is a teacher."

"Okay, I'll ask him if he told you. Let's go home."

"You're trying not to believe what I said because you're afraid that if it's true, and I can read minds, it'll hurt you, right?"

"Why would it hurt me?"

"Because you'll become a mistress!"

Slap!

Teacher Renu's hand slapped my arm hard before squeezing it tightly. It was clear that she was trying to suppress her emotions, avoiding slapping me directly in the face, but ready to do something harsh to teach me a lesson. It was like saying that this was a punishment, not an act of revenge, and I should stop crossing the line.

Because being insulted like that was no different than being slapped in the face, especially coming from a student who got it right exactly, but it was too sensitive for someone like me to say it to someone's face.

Especially for a teacher!

"If you could really read minds, you would know that nothing happened between him and me... ever!"

"Yes, I know that. Because to Mr. Aekaphop, you are noble and worthy of respect. He feels pain every time he thinks that he got married too young."

"So why say this?"

"Because it will make you pay attention to what I say, even if it is just a little."

Tears streamed down my face as I felt the pain of hurting an honest person like Teacher Renu. We had only known each other for a short time, but it seemed like we argued more than some couples, is this what a teacher-student relationship is like?

As we stared at each other for a long time, she reached out and used her thumb to wipe away my tears.

"Does it hurt?"

"Did it hurt when I said that?"

"Yes."

"It hurts me too."

"I won't apologize."

"But I will."

I raised my hands in a wai, knowing what I did was wrong.

"I keep crossing the line with you."

"So don't do it again."

"Yes, Teach."

Teacher Renu smiles gently. Even though she said she wouldn't apologize, I could feel that she felt guilty for hitting me because she couldn't control herself.

"Actually, I should have taught you differently. People don't hit each other anymore."

The gorgeous teacher gently touching my arm.

"It didn't hurt, it was more of a surprise that we kept encountering each other in intense situations."

"Let's go home. It's getting late."

"Okay."

So we walks to the bus stop to go home together as usual. On the way, the pretty lady suddenly pointed to a cute dog in a beauty salon and looked at me.

"Can you read the dog's mind?"

"But you don't believe me."

"Okay."

"So you're tricking me into reading the dog's mind, hehe."

I looked at the brown poodle wagging its tail at us.

How am I supposed to read it?

"What is it saying?"

"I can't understand dog language."

"Well, you can't communicate if you can't understand."

The teacher, who believed in reason and logic, smiled smugly as if she wanted to corner me. Seeing this, I could only pout and try to focus on the wagging dog.

He remembers you.

"He should. I've been to this salon before."

"You came here to get your hair washed."

"This is a hair salon. If not to get your hair washed, what else? Very spacious."

"He smells the cat on you, so he's excited and still remembers you. Did you call him something..."

I tilted my head and pursed my lips.

"Fufu? Bubu? Jukgru?"

"..."

"I don't know. I see you pursing your lips when you play with him, as if you're calling his name... Tutu? Prayoooood?"

"..."

Seeing the beautiful teacher remain silent, I give up. Making someone believe that I could read minds was not easy, especially for a person who always sought reasons and believed in the only physical objects she could see and touch, like Teacher Renu.

"This is a joke! I don't know which names in Thailand have the vowel 'oo' in them. Don't worry, I'm just being silly. If you don't believe me, don't test me. The bus is here. Let's hurry up, or we won't get a seat."

I pulled the beautiful woman's arm to get on the bus quickly, afraid that we would lose our seats. Once there, I blocks everyone else and invite Teacher

Renu to sit while I stand holding the back of the seat. The older woman take my bag and placed it on her lap.

"Mumu."

"What?"

The teacher look straight at me, her light brown eyes wide with surprise, believing and not believing, but she said it anyway.

"I call this dog Mumu."



Sunlyan

10. Meaning

Everything continued as usual, although the night before, Teacher Renu revealed that she had named the dog at the hair salon 'Mumu'. The pretty woman didn't say whether she believed it or not, so I didn't know how to react.

Since the teacher was intrigued but didn't ask, I let her continue to be curious.

That way, she would understand how torturous it was to be burning with curiosity and wanting to know someone better.

"I heard that Teacher Monchai got into big trouble. I heard some friends from 9th grade gossiping about it in the discipline room."

"Really?"

I knew without needing a report from my friend. Just by walking past the teachers, I could almost hear their every thought. But believe it or not... most of the teachers thought Teacher Renu consented. If not, why would she be alone in that place with him?

"Victims always get blamed. It was weird."

"You don't seem surprised at all."

"I kind of figures he'd get into trouble, so I'm not surprise. And if Teacher Renu needs witnesses, we are here, so I'm not worry."

"Oh my God, acting all nonchalant, not nosy at all."

"I wasn't because my snooping covered more than the internet signal in the entire country."

"What do you think would have happened to Teacher Renu if we weren't there?" — On-an asked.

"Bitch, why think about it? It's a good thing it didn't happen."

"Do you think the intern teacher would have kissed her?"

"I don't think so. Don't make me think about it. It's annoying!"

I started to get genuinely angry, but On-an remain the same, speaking whatever come to mind as if the devil himself is whispering in his ear.

"Judging by how much he likes Teacher Renu, there must be beeri kisses on her hair, eyes, lips, and neck."

"For God's sake!"

"And on her feet too."

"If you don't stop talking, I'm going to kick your ass."

"Just thinking out loud. Did you know that kissing different parts means different things and gives different feelings? I'm comparing how much he likes Teacher Renu. But kissing is too slow; he should have had sex with her."

"I'm leaving now."

On-an made a clicking sound, irritates that I am not in the conversation, and changes the subject.

"Are you waiting to go home with Teacher Renu again?"

"Yes."

"I'm so jealous, you two are so close."

"After going through such an unpleasant experience, it made me and the Teacher talk more."

"If it were you, where would you kiss the teacher?"

"Still on this topic?"

"This is no longer about Teacher Monchai. It is about you. If it were you, where would you kiss her?"

"Wherever I kiss, what does it matter?"

"It does. It is different. Think of it as a psychology game. Hurry, where would you kiss? Hair, forehead, nose, cheek, chin, neck, hand, feet?"

If I didn't answer, she wouldn't let it go. So I answered randomly to finish.

"Eyes."

"Why the eyes?"

"Teacher Renu has beautiful eyes."

"Yes, I agree. They are like brown marbles."

"Explain quickly. Isn't this a psychology question?"

"And you acted like you didn't want to play, idiot."

On-an laughs and elaborate:

"I read on Twitter that if you kiss the eyelids, it means you're in love."

"..."

"Are you in love with Teacher Renu?"

I rolled my eyes and felt my face start to heat up, wondering if it was true, before I shook the thought away and changes the subject.

"Nonsense. I'm not talking to you anymore."

"Yeah, nonsense. But why doesn't Teacher talk or come near me? I was in the equipment room too, acting all tough. But I get it... hotties don't want to be around other hotties."

On-an shook her short hair, cut in a ROTC hairstyle, in the most exaggerated way possible. I laugh and say nothing, leading us to the back of the school to buy ice cream from a cart.

It Friday night, a time when we were quite happy. Some ran home to play, but some, like me, always wait to go home with the gorgeous teacher.

But today was a little different when I see Ong, Teacher Renu's younger brother, in his blue school uniform, waiting at the school gate.

"Ong."

"Hey."

I see his thoughts flash by and knew immediately why he is here. Teacher Renu had called him... but not even Ong knew why. However, he was excited and happy because his sister had never paid much attention to him before, except when she asked for permission to have a cat at home.

"Who is that?"

"Teacher Renu's little brother."

"What a kitten. I want to lick him."

"Disgusting."

On-an licks her Thai coconut ice cream like she is in a blowjob movie. I grimaces slightly and continue talking to the teacher's brother to avoid an awkward silence.

"Why are you here?"

"No wonder you don't have any friends. What kind of stupid question is that?"

On-an clicked her tongue and asked Ong,

"Then why are you here?"

Yeah, that's such a different question!

"Re called me... I mean, Teacher Renu. And I wanted to see Jom too."

"Jom..." — On-an look at me and gritted her teeth, mentally cursing that I never mention him.

"Are you keeping secrets from me now?"

"It's not a secret."

"Because I never care about the guy in front of me!"

Besides... it would be weird to tell my friend with a big smile, "Someone likes me." Just thinking about it made me irritated.

"I heard that Re teaches here, and you study here too, so I come to see what the school is like."

"And what is it like?"

"It is a school."

"Thank you very much!"

"So, when are you going home?"

"Probably late. Teacher Re always leaves work late, around six."

"No problem. I can wait."

Ong wait for Teacher Renu at school until the lovely teacher finishes all her work. At first, I thought they will go home right away, but there is more surprise when the car of Mr. Aekaphop, the teacher's boyfriend, park at the back gate of the school.

"Today, I'm taking you all out for dinner."

Teacher Renu referred to herself as the less formal "me" since Ong are there too. The cute little brother and I sit in the back seat while the lovely teacher sit next to the driver in the front, speaking politely as always.

"Did you wait long?"

"It didn't take long. I got here about five minutes ago. The car is so quiet. Shall we listen to music, Re?"

"Let's talk. Music gives me a headache," she suggests in a slightly nasal voice.

"Ong, let me see your wallet."

"What?"

"Your wallet. Let me see it."

"Why?"

"..."

And when there is no answer, that meant,

"Don't ask too much."

Ong reluctantly handed his wallet to his sister, his face turning red. I watch for a while and then peeked out to see that Teacher Renu had opened the black leather wallet and stopped when she see...

"Very cautious."

"A condom..."

"The school gave it out. I haven't thrown it away yet."

I looked at the speaker and smiles. He is telling the truth, the school gave out condoms to carry. If they had done so earlier, I would have seen it when I met him.

"Why throw it away? Carrying it around is good. I appreciate it."

Teacher Renu spoke understandingly before picking up several items and looking at her brother through the rearview mirror.

"Do you have a picture of me too?"

"Yes... I thought you looked pretty, so I kept it."

This time, the pretty teacher looked at me through the rearview mirror, making direct eye contact without hiding. I raised an eyebrow slightly and looked away, feeling victorious.

Daddy gives you a lot of money for school.

Teacher Renu folded her wallet and handed it back to her brother, starting a conversation.

"Do you save money?"

"Yes, I don't spend much."

"Good, because if something happens to Daddy, there won't be anyone to give you money like that."

I wasn't sure what emotion the teacher's voice conveyed, but it made the tall, handsome boy next to me nod and look dejected, feeling hurt in his thoughts.

"If there's no Daddy, can't I keep my sister?"

Being a good brother but not being loved hurts a lot. Poor boy. So pitiful

"What"

Ong, not knowing why I was looking at him, arched an eyebrow and asked, causing me, who was feeling a little sympathetic, to look away abruptly.

"Nothing."

‘I must be handsome. She’s sneaking glances.’

Actually, I didn’t want to intrude on all his thoughts. I almost rolled my eyes at him right then and there...

"What do you want to eat today?"

Mr. Aekaphop, who had been driving for a while, turned the car into a shopping mall. Teacher Renu looked at him and answered.

"I'm not very hungry."

"What about the kids? Are you hungry?"

"No. No. What about you, Mr. Aek? You’re hungry... don’t answer yet."

The cute woman pauses and look at me through the rearview mirror.

“Jom... Is Mr. Aek hungry now?”

The sudden question made me tilt my head, and I begin to understand that I was being tests.

"Hungry."

"What are you doing?"

The dignified man chuckles and look at me through the rearview mirror.

"What does he like to eat?"

"Well..." Mr. Aekaphop is about to answer, but Teacher Renu interrupts him first.

"No, I'm not asking you... Jom, what does he like to eat? I shake my head a little and rolls my eyes in mild annoyance.

If I couldn't read it, you are planning to embarrass me in front of everyone, aren't you?

"Spicy pork spaghetti is a menu item at One Of A Kind, located near Rama IX. I explains in detail, causing the driver to gape and stare at me, forgetting to pay attention to the road.

Ong, who regained his composure first, quickly shout a warning.

"Watch out for the pole!"

The car swerved slightly as the driver quickly corrected course. Teacher Renu looked serious, pursing her lips tightly, and asked her own teacher for the correct answer.

"Is that right?"

"Yes... How did Jom know?"

"Is this child spying on us? What else does she know?"

Mr. Aekaphop's paranoid thoughts echoed loudly. I laughs and cross my arms, looking into my school counselor's eyes.

"Ask, Teacher, all you want!"

"I'm not asking anymore. I'm asking Mr. Aek... No need to park, keep circling the parking lot because we probably won't be able to eat now," the beautiful woman interrupt as the driver signal to park.

"How many years have you been married?"

"What are you talking about?"

The stammering tone of the once distinguish man reveals his guilt. Ong and I exchange glances, silently waiting to see what would happen next.

"Just tell the truth; how many years have you been married? I know everything. Don't even think about lying."

"I've never been married."

"Is that true, Jom?"

The question direct at me indicates that my counselor is seeking confirmation, which show that... she believed it!

I straightened up, smiles slightly, and nodded.

"That's true. The woman got pregnant, but he didn't get married. Mr. Aek didn't lie. However, he registered the marriage."

"What nonsense are you talking about? Don't make baseless accusations."

"You have a five-year-old daughter. Your daughter threw up on her pants this morning, so you had to go home to change, which made you late dropping her off at school."

"How do you know that? Were you spying on me?"

This time, the car owner turn off the signal and park on the shoulder, instantly turning around to confront me. Teacher Renu interrupt her furious outburst with a calm but firm voice.

"By saying that, you admit that you have a family. We should end this here. Ong, Jao-Jom, get out of the car."

There is no loud argument. This is a fight between two polite people. Mr. Aekaphop get out of the car and calls out to Teacher Renu, who is walking between us, preparing to enter the mall.

"I don't love her. It all happened by mistake. I only have you, Re"

Mr. Aekaphop took that woman to a motel. It was indeed a mistake because he didn't carry a condom in his wallet like Ong does.

I looked at the narrow-eyed guy and smiled before imitating Teacher Renu's tone,

"Very cautious."

"Shut up!"

But even polite people can't always control their emotions. I should stop teasing now because the beautiful teacher made it clear that this is the end of it. But still... just seeing the image of that man trying to repeat his "mistake" with Teacher Renu in my head made me unable to bear it.

"From now on, I don't think it's appropriate for us to meet again."

"Re, I really love you."

"Don't make me lose all respect for you, Mr. Aekaphop."

The woman's stern tone made Ong and I take a step back, bowing our heads in fear. We were like puppies in a well with a snake that wasn't hungry yet. And yes... Mr. Aekaphop was equally scared.

"Let's talk when you're calmer."

"If you come back, I'll beat you up," Ong, who had been silent for a long time, spoke up, wanting to protect his sister in his childish way. Seeing that things are getting out of hand, Mr. Aekaphop decided to back off.

Now, it was just the two of us standing there in silence. It was okay... the cubs had to face the snake.

"You've grown up a lot," Teacher Renu said to her brother, smiling slightly before patting his arm lightly a few times.

"Thank you for protecting me."

I looked at Ong, whose mind is now blank, with a golden glow of happiness, as if he had achieved enlightenment.

‘Re thanked me. Re smiled at me.’ How much must he love his sister...?

"It's late. Ong, go home. Jom and I will be back soon."

"But we just arrived at the mall."

"Go home!"

And when threatens, the male cub nodded and walks away dejectedly. Now, it was just me and the teacher, and honestly, I felt strange.

I couldn't read her thoughts, and she didn't like people prying into her personal affairs. What should I say?

"Are you okay, teacher?"

"Try reading my mind."

"I told you before. You're the only one I can't read. That's why I keep watching you."

"Watching, huh..."

After walking until we reaches the exit of the mall and are about to call a car, the striking woman, who had been silent the whole time, stop and turns to look at me.

Tears I had never seen before streamed down her face, shocking me.

"What do you think I'm feeling right now?"

The charming young lady, with a trembling voice, hugged herself in pain. From what I could see, she is trying hard to contain her sadness, but she couldn't anymore.

"You're fragile now."

I reach out my hand, but it seemed like she is ready to back away, not wanting anyone's pity. Teacher Renu is very vulnerable right now. Sometimes, even a student like me needed help.

So, I reaches out, not wanting to give up, and grabbed her shoulders tightly.

"I won't say 'stay strong' or 'It's okay' because it feels like I'm forcing you to get through this."

"Jom?"

"Just know that if you're in pain, I'll stay with you until it goes away, and it will."

Then, using all my courage, I leaned in and gently kissed her eyelid.

"You're not alone. So many people love you."

"..."

I moved to kiss her cheek and murmured,

"And I want you to know that one of those people who loves you is right here."

The sweet beauty let me continue without interruption until the final moment when I gently touches her lips.

Yes... I love you, Teach.



Sunlyan

11. You know what?

Teacher Renu hasn't come to teach at school for three days now. I knew everything that was going on, but all I could do was hope that the beautiful woman would be able to get over this sad moment.

Honestly, not having the beautiful teacher at school makes me depressed and I really didn't want to wake up early to go to class. She became a little inspiration that made me want to wake up every day and look forward to going home together, which became a habit.

I wasn't supposed to be in my senior year. That meant that when I graduated, I probably wouldn't see her again...

Today was the same. Seeing that Teacher Renu hadn't shown up, I was worried that she didn't have anything to eat. So, I stopped to buy noodles before heading back to the apartment and planned to hang the food in front of her door like usual. But when I got to the front of the building, I saw her brother, Ong, who looked so worried about his sister. However, Ong didn't dare bother her too much, as he was afraid of being kicked out.

"Didn't you see Re too? Ah... How long is she going to lock herself in her room?"

"She needs some time. This isn't a love that has just begun; it's been going on for a long time. She must be really shocked. And for someone like her, a perfectionist, even a small mistake can throw her off balance."

"True. So, I guess we came here for nothing today." Ong shrugged a little regretfully.

"At least you're here to keep me company."

'Actually, I wanted to see you more.'

Ong's voice echoed in my head. I heard it, but pretend not to notice.

Lately, I had started to get used to the feelings he had for me. It tickled my heart to know that someone liked me because, ever since I was born and raised, I was far from the puppy love stories like my peers.

I couldn't blame him. I tended to see into everyone's thoughts and assumed that everyone in the world was evil and irredeemable.

"No, I plan to go upstairs and read at home today. Entrance exams are coming up, so I need to study hard."

"Do you want me to be your tutor?"

"No, thanks. I have Teacher Re."

My quick refusal left Ong visibly dejected. I used to think that I wanted to be decisive. If someone liked me and I wasn't interested, I would reject them from the start. But when that happened to me, I couldn't be so harsh. Maybe because I understood how much courage it took to approach your crush... just like I had to gather all my courage to approach Teacher Renu.

But... I was kind enough not to give false hope. If I couldn't reject him, it was better to let his hope fade gradually. I smiled at Ong and walked back home, glancing back to make sure he had left. Only then did I quickly leave and run to the apartment to hang the food as an offering to Teacher Renu, as usual.

Knock, knock.

I knock on the door to signal that I have brought food. Honestly, I don't dare ask Teacher Renu out because I don't know how to face her if she left. That day, she had gone silent after I acted nervous. I couldn't tell if she was angry or not, but it made me uncomfortable. Just as I was about to turn around and leave, Teacher Renu's door opened, and the person I hadn't seen for three days peeked out and called out to me in a hoarse voice.

"Jom."

"Teacher...?"

I looked at the lovely woman with sleepy eyes and felt inexplicably dazed before I realized something unusual.

"Why does your voice sound like that?"

"I'm sick... cough cough."

Even when she was sick, she look sexy. I must be crazy...

"I noticed that you were quiet, so I didn't dare disturb you and just bring food."

"I'll pay you back... Well, actually, I want to ask you a favor."

"What's wrong?"

"I'm out of cat food. I don't have the strength to go out."

I smiles at the cute lady and sigh.

"It's okay. You rest, and I'll take care of this."

I took the money she gave me to buy the cat food and look at her for a moment. My eyes went to her lips, and I felt my face heat up, remembering that day. Where did I get the courage to do this?

"Is something wrong?"

"Oh... No. I'll be quick. Don't forget to lock the door."

There is a fleeting smile on the corner of her mouth, and I don't know what it meant.

"Come back soon. I'll be waiting."

Not seeing her for three days made me realize how much I missed this beautiful teacher. Even though she was around, she seemed so distant. Her words, "I'll be waiting," gave me the energy to rush to the vet clinic to buy cat food quickly, as I couldn't wait to be with Teacher Renu. However, just as I was about to pay, a client brought in a sick dog.

It was the grooming session the other day when Teacher and I tested my skills. Today, the poodle looked weak, and the owner was crying because she didn't know what was wrong with him, except that he kept vomiting.

"What did he eat before that?"

"I don't know. I left him at the salon and went out to get something to eat. When I came back, he was vomiting everywhere. He's my first dog..."

I looked at the weak poodle, feeling sympathetic. My curiosity made me crouch down next to him and touch his paw lightly. Then, thoughts of the dog flashed through my mind.

"He ate chicken bones. He's in a lot of pain right now."

Everyone turned to look at me, wondering how I knew.

Oh, right... Everyone's thoughts are clear in my head, like a 3D TV.

"I figured it out. My neighbor's dog had the same problem."

"I've never given him chicken bones. I know dogs can't chew them."

"It seems like a child did it. About six or seven years old." — I said randomly, and when everyone looked over, I hurriedly smiled.

"Just a guess. Excuse me."

Why did I intrude...?

After buying the cat food, I stopped paying attention to the dog and ran back to the apartment. I knocked lightly to wake up the person inside. At first, I am

afraid that Teacher Renu might have fallen asleep, but soon the door open and she greet me with a smile that is a little melancholic due to her illness.

"You're fast."

"Can I come in?"

"You might catch my cold."

"..."

"But I think you can."

Seeing my puppy dog eyes, Teacher Re smiles slightly and let me in. The room is as cozy as ever, fill with her fragrant scent, making my heart swell.

I could stay here all day.

"Aren't you going to see a doctor?"

"I have a cold. Taking medicine won't help much. The important thing is to drink plenty of water and get enough rest."

"Maybe you're stressed and your immunity has dropped."

"Hmm?"

"Nothing." — I changes the subject, not wanting to remind her of her ex and make her sadder. They say stress can weaken the body. Teacher Renu must have been the case.

"Ong came earlier, but he left."

"Uh-huh." — She nodded.

"You kids are close."

"Everyone loves you. We're worried and want to know how you're doing."

"It's true. A lot of people love me."

Ba-dum...

At this point, her heartbeat sounds thunderous. It is probably because of that day when I act on impulse.

What should I do? I can't face this!

"Who's teaching math in my place?"

"Teacher Chavee."

"Is she good?"

"More like confused. Honestly, I wish Teacher Chavee would teach math instead of you."

"Why?"

"Because it lets me know what's going to be on the test." I scratch my head.

"When it's you, I can't see anything. So, I have to study a lot more this semester."

"Because math is hard, isn't it?"

"Because you're beautiful."

"Do you love me because I'm beautiful?"

"..."

Ba-dum...

I notice the beautiful teacher bit her lower lip slightly, realizing she had said something very revealing. Silence envelopes us. We pretended that day had never happened, but we both knew it had.

"No, I love you because..."

Because...

"Because love has no reason. If it has reason, it's not love... I saw that on the cover of a book."

I wink provocatively, making Teacher Renu turn my face away.

"You're quite a character."

"Are you okay now?"

"Hmm?" —She tilted her head and then nodded, understanding what I meant about Mr. Aekaphop.

"Don't say 'better'. Say 'nothing'"

"Nothing?" — I repeated, surprised.

"Yes."

"Why? You've loved Mr. Aekaphop for so long." — I rolled my eyes in confusion.

"How can you not feel anything?"

"Weird, right? But I really don't feel anything."

"..."

"You don't believe me."

"That day, you cried."

"I felt embarrassed." —She admitted.

"I felt terrible that he wasn't what I expected."

"You never knew he had a family? Honestly, someone with his prestige..."

"Do you know the meaning of 'prestige'?"

"I heard it when my mother was reading a fortune-telling book."

I clear my throat a little and went back to the original question.

"Good-looking, educated, rich judging by the clothes and the car he drives. How could you ignore that?"

"I met him recently. Even though we were close in school, that doesn't mean I know everything about him."

"Ah."

"I met him at an alumni event and we started talking."

"We've been in touch ever since. I wondered why Mr. Aek was still single, but I thought maybe he hadn't found the right person yet."

"So, you thought you were the one he'd like?"

I said, almost teasingly, but the confident woman answer nonchalantly.

"My prestige is no less than anyone else's."

"That's true."

"I don't really know Mr. Aek that well. One time, he left his wallet in the car while he was going to the ATM. When he remembered, he ran back and snatched it from my hand really quickly. I was puzzled, but I didn't think much of it."

"He was afraid that you'd find his address on his ID card."

"You know that? Reading minds, huh?"

Teacher Renu look at me with interest.

"What's it like to read people's minds?"

"I see images and feel emotions. If it is a foreigner or an animal whose language I do not know, I understand the feelings, since I do not understand the words."

"Even the art of meddling has its limits."

"The word 'meddling' sounds hot coming from you."

I laughs, covering my mouth before quickly composing myself as she glares at me.

"Sorry."

"I'm not mad, just impresses with you, Jom."

"Just impressed? Can't I be cute too?"

"You give me a headache."

Her tired demeanor probably stemmed more from her illness than anything else. Seeing her like this made me feel sorry for.

"Get plenty of rest so you can recover quickly. And stop thinking about Mr. Aek."

"I'm really not thinking about him as much anymore. Other things are bothering me more."

She glances at me before returning to the original topic as if she knew what I was about to ask.

"Maybe I just admired Mr. Aek, not loved him. It was fleeting."

I stayed silent, knowing she was comparing it to my feelings for her.

"I'm not like you, Teach."

I blurt, sensing her slight discomfort.

"Are you reading my mind?"

"No, but I can guess what you're thinking."

"When you're young, feelings are intense. Remember that, Jom... People always change. I used to think I really liked Mr. Aek, but now that I know he has a family, I don't feel anything. I haven't even been heartbroken."

"I won't change."

"Don't say that. Everyone changes. One day, you might not even remember I existed."

"Why do you belittle my feelings? Because I'm a child?"

"Feelings fade with memories," she explained patiently, though she seemed too weak to speak.

"Like me with Mr. Aek. At first, I was excited to see my first love again. We dated for a while, but when I found out what kind of person he was, I easily pulled away. My thoughts matured with age; I didn't let hormones control my feelings."

"..."

"When you graduate and go to university, you'll meet new people, and we'll grow apart..."

"Are you scared?"

"What?"

I look at her and smiles slightly, sensing her hidden feelings.

"Are you scared that one day I'll forget my feelings for you like you did with Mr. Aek?"

"Why would I be scared?"

As soon as she finish speaking, she back away as I lean in close.

Our bodies didn't touch as if a thin wall separated us. I know my limits because Teacher Renu would back away if she felt insecure.

Not pushing...but not chasing either. Our distance was perfect.

Our faces are only a hand's breadth apart. We stare into each other's eyes, assessing each other. Finally, Teacher Renu couldn't take it anymore and crawl away to play with the orange cat, turning her back to me.

"Viramarati is hungry."

"Your heart is beating fast."

"It's beating normally."

I watches her back and crawl closer, resting my head on her. She tenses slightly, like someone caught off guard, making me smile at having teases her.

"Have you ever heard of heart rhythms?"

"And?"

"There's a study that says that when lovers' heartbeats are measured, their rhythms begin to synchronize. I wrapped my arms around her waist, hugging her shamelessly. If she had shown any sign of rejection, I would have backed away quickly."

But she doesn't...

"And?"

"Don't you want to know? Know what? If my heart..."

My chest presses against her back, and I am sure she could feel my heartbeat, since it was so loud... As loud as the heartbeat of the person being hugging.

“ ...”

Beating in sync with yours.



Sunyan

12. Symptoms

Now, the only sound is the beating of my heart, echoing back and forth between me and Teacher Renu. She probably couldn't hear anything, but I could. Both my own heart and the heart of the charming person in front of me, who I usually hear regularly, are racing against each other, and it looks like there is no clear winner.

Both of them are beating fast....Everything fall silent. Teacher Renu straighten up and leaning towards me, reluctantly letting go of my arms.

"Jom"

The beautiful person called out to me briefly, reaching out her hand. Just when I thought she is going to pull me into a hug, she slap my forehead with a loud crack.

Pop!

"Ow!"

"Serves me right."

I rub my forehead, feeling a little irritates, and glare at the beautiful teacher.

"What was that?"

"I patted her forehead. You're daydreaming too much... Go home now, I need to sleep."

"Are you kicking me out like this?"

"Yes."

An annoying smile flashed briefly on her face before quickly disappearing. Yes... I wasn't mistaken. Teacher Renu, who had always been mature, just showed a hint of a mischievous child, and it made me smile.

"We're getting a little closer, aren't we, Professor?"

"What are you talking about... Go home soon, or you'll catch my cold."

"Do you want to get rid of your cold, teacher?"

"Medicine won't help."

"I have something better than medicine. I heard someone's thoughts on curing a cold."

I thought of the owner of the noodle shop I visited earlier to buy noodles for the teacher. This idea popped into my head, making me laugh a little. I didn't expect to use it on the cute person now.

"And what did that person think?"

"They said that if you have a cold and kiss someone, you'll get better."

"Do you believe that?"

"If you never try, you'll never know. If even I can read people's thoughts, then there might be a chance of catching a cold."

I leaned closer.

"Want to try?"

"Ugh"

The charming person quickly turned my face away, knowing that I was joking, and then burst out laughing.

"Go home quickly. I really need to rest."

"Okay," I said reluctantly. But before I could leave, the beautiful teacher called out again.

"Why are you still wearing that perfume?"

"Huh?" I sniff myself and look at the teacher.

"How can you smell perfume when you have a cold?"

"It's faint, but I can tell it's the same scent. You know I don't like that perfume, so why do you keep wearing it? Are you trying to piss me off?"

"No, I just think it's unfair that a good perfume gets hates just because the person wearing it isn't worthy."

"Did you know that scents can link our senses to certain events or people?"

"That's even better. You'll associate that scent with me instead of Mr. Aek."

"..."

"From now on, whenever you smell Davidoff, you'll think of me... and you'll never forget me."

I wink, and the lovely person turn around, waving at me with a mixture of exhaustion and annoyance.

"Go home soon."

But in her annoyance, I could sense that the owner of the racing heart is just pretending...

"I love you, Teacher."

"Are you still here?"

"Wow, your heart is beating so fast."

And when Teacher Renu pick up a pillow, ready to throw it, I quickly duck.

So shy, this beautiful teacher!

As I mentioned, my ability earned me excellent grades since kindergarten, elementary school, and almost every subject in high school. Since I knew what the tests would be like beforehand, I didn't even need to understand the questions. I just read the relevant parts and voila! I got almost everything right.

But this year, in the final stretch, I stumbled because of a teacher whose mind I couldn't read, whose answers I couldn't predict, and whose approach I couldn't decipher.

"Six out of ten."

On-an, who was sitting next to me, glances over with a curious look and stared at me in confusion.

"Have you ever been this dumb?"

"I passed, by the way."

"You barely passed. You've been lazy. What do you do all day besides follow Teacher Renu around?"

My curious friend looked confused.

"Shouldn't your grades be better than that, since you're such a big fan of the teacher? You're close to the math teacher, but you barely passed the pre-test?"

I frowned, genuinely concerned about my performance in the exams. Teacher Renu, now recovered from her illness, had returned to teaching and decided to give us a pre-test to see if we were ready for the first semester finals.

Everyone scored a seven or eight, which wasn't surprising. But my six was surprising to all my friends, given my reputation for academic excellence.

Or rather, for being excellent at cheating...

I looked at the excited teacher, irritated that she would make us take a test without any preparation. The beauty, aware of my gaze, looked at me and smiled before pretending to ask innocently.

"How did you do, Jao-Jom? Did you pass?"

"I did!"

That wasn't my voice! It was the voice of my very-good-natured friend, who couldn't keep quiet when she saw my grade.

"Jom, you didn't pass the test? What a shame... It seems like getting a 4.00 GPA won't be as easy as before."

She knew I was cheating all along, and now that she knew, she was mocking me with a straight face. I looked at the cute person and smiled, feeling that the teacher was acting like a child wanting to win. Instead of getting angry, I found it cute.

Even when she's annoying, she's cute.

Ba-dum...

The heart of the person being observed change rhythm, becoming heavier and faster. I notice and look at Teacher Renu, puzzled by her reaction.

"What's going on..."

"I just realized that we need to take the cat for vaccination."

While waiting for the bus as usual, the lovely person speak and sigh.

"Then take it. Why do you look so stressed?"

"I don't know how to get Viramarati Savitri..."

The sweet face took a short breath like someone who was about to faint.

"... this out of the apartment."

"Worried that my mother will see, huh?"

"Yes."

"Then let me help... Huh?"

As I offered to help, a hand lightly tapped my shoulder. Without turning around, I knew who it was because her thoughts flowed through her hands to me.

"It's really you."

The owner of the grooming salon we met at the veterinary clinic the other day greets us with a smile.

"How's your dog?"

"As you said, my nephew gave a chicken bone to George W. Bush, so we had to operate on him to remove it."

"What's the owner's name?"

Teacher Renu frown slightly and couldn't help but ask.

"That's the dog's name, the one you played with."

"Mumu, right?"

"Actually, George W. Bush."

"That's really complicated."

Teacher Renu said, surprised. I look at her and laughs.

"Why are you surprised, Teacher? Your cat's name is no different."

"You're very good. Just by seeing the dog vomit, you could tell exactly what happened. At first, I thought you were the one who gave the bone for George W. Bush, but I never saw you in the salon."

"I just guessed."

"You're a great fortune teller, maybe even better than the staff at the clinic. The X-rays and everything cost me about ten thousand baht."

The owner complained about the cost before saying goodbye and heading to the salon. Teacher Renu turn to me with a smile.

"When did you two meet?"

"The day I went to buy cat food. I happened to see your Mumu, so I touched her. When I saw the images, I started talking."

"You're more accurate than an X-ray machine. Your ability is really useful if you use it for good, not to cheat on tests."

I pouted, knowing I was wrong. But what could I do? I didn't want to know the answers to the test, but the information just came to me while I was taking the test. Hmph.

"My mother calls this ability... meddling."

"That's right."

Teacher Renu cover her mouth, trying to stifle her laughter until she cough. I looked at her, feeling irritates, but I ended up laughing along with her.

"You're mean, laughing at me... Even when you laugh, you're still beautiful. It's annoying."

Ba-dum...

Teacher Renu's heart skip a beat again, and I notice it clearly. When I turn to face her, she quickly act normal, knowing that I could hear her.

"Have you decided what course you want to take?"

"Probably business administration."

"Do you like numbers?"

"If I liked numbers, I would have barely passed today?"

"So why study business?"

"To manage my body."

"Silly."

Teacher Renu scold lightly and playfully hit my arm.

"Seriously, have you decided what you want to study yet?"

"I don't know what I like yet. Probably business management, it's broad and easy to find a job. What else can I do besides listening to people and animals' thoughts?"

"I think it's a good opportunity, especially with animals."

"Huh?"

They can't talk or communicate. If there's a veterinarian who knows what's wrong with them and can treat them accurately, that would be great."

"Oh... I've never thought about that before."

I said, feeling a sudden rush of excitement at the thought of what I could achieve. Teacher Renu is really impressive.

"Okay, I'll study veterinary medicine. But... can I really do it?"

"Why do you think you can't?"

"I only got a six out of ten in math."

"So stupid."

"Teacher!"

"Just kidding, hehe."

Lately, I've noticed that Teacher Renu laughs more often, and that always puts me in a good mood. If a little teasing can make my advisor happy, then it's worth it.

"What are you afraid of? You're afraid of me."

"Oh, you're offering to teach me? I used to have to make up with all sorts of excuses just to be around you."

"If it's too much work, then don't study."

"Just kidding! Of course, I'll study! How could I refuse someone who almost made it to the top 25 in the Math Olympiad?"

Realizing that this was a sensitive topic for the perfect Teacher Re, I quickly covered my mouth."

"Sorry."

"Where did you hear that from? Ah... Ong, right?"

"Yeahhh."

I dragged the word.

"Your little brother is full of stories about you. If I want to know anything, I just ask him."

"You two seem close."

"A little. When you're not around, Ong is my friend."

I boasted, trying to imply that my closeness with Ong was because he was her brother. But suddenly, Teacher Renu fell silent.

"Is there something wrong?"

"No, it's good that you two are close. Ong is good at math too."

"It must be in the genes, passed down from generation to generation. That's good. If you're busy, Ong can tutor me."

"..."

"Right?"

"Then I guess you don't need me... The bus is here."

The lovely teacher got on the bus without looking at me. Our conversation had taken a noticeable turn. But since I didn't want to let it go and I couldn't read her mind, it is hard to predict what was going on.

Especially since she is someone who doesn't show her feelings easily, the only thing that could serve as a lie detector was the sound of her heartbeat.

Time to ask some questions...

"Are you hungry?"

"No."

Ba-dum...

Her heartbeat is normal.

"When should we take Viramarati for the vaccine?"

"I haven't thought about it yet."

Ba-dum...

Nothing unusual...

"I love you, teacher."

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

Her heartbeat changed. I look at her as she cross her arms, realizing that I am watching her.

Did she feel something from my confession?

I smiles until the beautiful teacher ask back in a stern voice.

"Why are you smiling?"

"Nothing."

"I'll close my eyes for a while. Wake me up when we get to the stop."

Teacher Renu avoided the conversation by leaning against the window. Suddenly, I felt like testing her again by mentioning a third person...

"Does Ong have a girlfriend?"

Teacher Renu's closed eyes slowly open. She seemed to think for a moment before closing them and then again without saying anything, leaving me alone with my thoughts. I watch her every move with my heart racing.

Ba-dum

Ba-dum

Ba-dum...

Yes... the teacher's heart is also beating, but it was the sound of someone feeling irritates. I know because I had been watching her heartbeat for a long time. It made me put my hand over my heart. Even though I didn't

want to jump to conclusions, there was definitely something there. Ong's name had an effect on her. Our conversation before getting on the bus made me realize it.

Was she jealous?



SunYan

13. Honestly

"Why are you so happy today?"

"How happy? I don't get it."

"Walking around whistling like a bird possessed you, what was that?"

"I didn't even realize I was doing that. Was I?"

Maybe I was in a good mood today to hide it.

Honestly, my heart had been fluttering and swelling for days. It looks like my relationship with Teacher Renu was going well, making my heart flutter. Even though I secretly thought it was all in my head, the context really made me think that way. Teacher Re doesn't like me talking about Ong too much... Even if it wasn't out of jealousy, it was still good.

"Exams are coming. Have you been studying? Oh, silly me, you always get top marks on your exams."

"Time flies, doesn't it? Soon, it'll be break. Thinking about going to university next year makes me a little sad."

"Why are you sad? It's not like you have a lot of friends here."

I turn to snarl at my friend, who always contradict everything, but then I smile brightly, remembering that I am still happy.

"I just realize recently how great it is to go to school."

"Waking up at six in the morning to shower and get dressed for school is great? Only people who are in love or have a crush would think that."

My chubby friend look at me and smiles. Of course, I heard her thoughts loud and clear.

‘She definitely has a crush on Teacher Renu.’

"Do you like..."

"Have you been studying?"

I quickly interrupt her before she could say something stupid, causing her to stop and look confuses.

"No, I haven't."

"You better start. You're already stupid."

"What was I going to say? I forgot."

Well...

"Teacher Re, let me help you carry this!"

I see the cute teacher walking towards the Thai language department building and quickly ran to her side happily. She smiles slightly, and I could hear her heart beating clearly as always.

"I remember what I was going to say. Jom, you..."

Of course, before I could hear what she said, Teacher Renu and I had already walked away.

As I mentioned, Teacher Renu is dedicated and determined to succeed in everything she does. For example, she takes my math tutoring very seriously. She found old math problems that I used to solve and made me try them, explaining what I needed to read and review each day.

"Beside math, you need to study other subjects too, Jom."

"I can handle other subjects, but math is a fact-based subject with specific methods. I think I'm going to have a hard time with this one."

"You're lucky to have me."

"Yes, I am."

"Then try my method first."

Her method was to solve the hardest mathematical problems.

When I saw all the numbers, I felt like I was trapped in a pyramid with Egyptian hieroglyphics. I just stared at the problems like a mute, realizing how dumb I really was.

Very dumb!

I can't do this at all," I said, looking at the teacher with a dry smile. She tilted her head slightly and raised an eyebrow.

"Are you scared because there are so many symbols?"

"Probably."

"Think of it as a game. Have fun solving the puzzle. Change your mindset and you'll feel better."

"I feel better, but it still feels like I'm looking at DOS computer code."

"Do you know about DOS?"

The beautiful teacher laughed.

"Okay, just watch me solve the problem first."

"And then?"

"When you see me do it and realize it's easy, you'll feel easy too. So I'll let you try. It's about overcoming fear."

"I'll try. Where did you get this method?"

"From Teacher Aek."

I pause for a moment, but the lovely teacher quickly add, as if she know I may feel bad.

"Perfume isn't bad just because it's on a bad person. A good method of learning mathematics isn't bad just because of who taught it."

"That makes sense."

I smile and agree. Then, the charming teacher solved the problem without any small talk. I was surprised when she solved it line by line, making it seem easy. I had learned everything she did before, but I couldn't apply it. When she was done, she let me try. What seemed difficult became easy. The obstacles were solved in minutes, although the problems initially sounded like an alien language.

"It's not that hard."

"See? Now I'm going to change the numbers, and you do the same way."

"Okay."

"We spent some time with new sets of numbers, solving them smoothly. Later, I found out that these were problems from ten years ago that the teacher had prepared for me. Everything went slowly, focusing on understanding and enjoying them because there was still a lot of time before the entrance exams.

It was actually a bit late, but I was confident that I could do it, so I didn't get too stressed. At least I could copy the others during the exam. But this subject was different; you had to understand the rules. A mistake in one line meant the whole problem was wrong.

I really enjoyed this subject with such a great teacher!

"I think I'm getting the hang of this problem."

"So let's solve another one tomorrow."

"Shall we meet every day?"

"We already do that."

"Awesome!"

The entrance exam had about thirty math problems, which meant I would have private lessons from Teacher Renu for thirty consecutive days. No matter how happy I was come to school, I couldn't forget that I also expected good results from this tutoring.

Some topics I did well.

Some I didn't understand much.

Some days, the tutoring went on until almost midnight. But solving these problems made the math problems at school seem easy, like peeling a banana.

"More math tutoring?"

Ong pouted as he came to see his sister. Honestly, I could tell he wasn't really there for Teacher Re.

He came for me...

"Yeah, sorry."

Even though I knew how he felt, I chose to ignore it. As long as he didn't confess, I had no reason to reject him. Why hurt someone who care about you?

Being loved is much better than being hated.

"Why do you have private lessons with Re all the time? I'm her brother, and she never asks if I want to join."

Usually, before tutoring, the pretty teacher and I would grab something to eat because we knew some topics would take until late. One day, we forgot to eat, and our stomachs growled loudly. So every night, we knew we had to grab something to eat in the alley. Teacher Re, in casual clothes, stopped when she saw Ong standing next to me.

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

Teacher Renu's heart beat faster for no reason, and once again, I thought she was jealous of me.

Wow!

"Ong, do you need anything?"

Or a clearer question would be: Why are you here? The pretty teacher still smile shyly at her brother and scratch her head.

"I came to see you, but Jom said you have math class today... I'm jealous."

The word "jealous" made me unsure whether he was jealous of me for being close to his admired sister or of his sister for being close to me, whom he liked.

"Yes, we are having private lessons. If you don't need anything..."

"Give me private lessons too."

“ .. ”

I also have to take the college entrance exam.

Because of Ong's visit that day, I've been irritated to this day. He finally had an excuse to see his sister and be around me 'every day.' Some days, the tutoring went so late that he couldn't go home and had to stay with his sister, making me so jealous.

Damn, he's a guy. How can he stay with such a beautiful sister?

Teacher Renu didn't tell her brother to leave like I thought she would. The cute teacher devoted herself to teaching him the same way she taught me, with the demeanor of a teacher.

I thought I was the only one with this special privilege.

Why does Ong have to come so often?

"Is something wrong? You seem distracted today."

The beautiful teacher noticed that I was daydreaming and not solving problems, so she asked when her brother went to the bathroom.

"I saw you teaching Ong so diligently. I thought you hadn't noticed."

'Are you mad at me?'

"Do you really think Ong is bad at math?"

Teacher Renu look at me and smiles.

"He's not bad, but like you, he doesn't understand some problems. He sees a problem and thinks it's hard, so I have to teach him to be brave enough to solve some problems."

"Will he come for private lessons every day?"

"I don't know. You can read other people's minds; why not read Ong's?"

"You know Ong likes me, right?"

"Really?"

Her heart beat a little faster, though her face show no emotion.

"Well, teenagers are like that."

"But I like you, teacher."

"I know, you keep saying that."

"I want to study with you alone."

Teacher Renu look at me briefly, her expression calm, and then she ask back.

"So, what do you want me to do?"

"Can't you tell Ong that you don't want to teach him anymore?"

"As a teacher and an older sister, how could I say that? I'm a teacher; it's my duty to teach... You said Ong likes you, right? If you're the reason for him coming for math lesson, then the reason has to be told to him."

"Tell him what?"

"Tell him anything to make him not come."

Then, the bathroom door, where Ong had disappeared for a while, opened. A tall, handsome young man walked over to sit at the Japanese table next to me, looking at me and his sister with a curious smile.

"What are you guys talking about? You look so serious."

"Nothing, just solving problems."

"I was just saying that I like the teacher," I said directly.

Teacher Renu, who was about to start teaching, paused for a moment, looks surprises. Ong still confuse, ask again.

"What do you mean?"

"I like the teacher... I like teacher Renu."

This time, the young man was speechless because my answer was so direct that it couldn't be interpreted any other way. But I could hear his inner voice trying to find an excuse for this situation.

'Like in this context, it should be the same as admiring Re.

"I like Teacher Renu romantically and I want her to be my girlfriend."

I answered what he was thinking and tried to ignore it. Ong blinked repeatedly while the lovely person remained silent and showed no reaction.

"But Jom and the teacher are both women. Plus, Re is a teacher."

"Just because we like the teacher doesn't mean the teacher has to like us back. Have you heard that song? 'I just want to call you my love, but you don't have to love me back. Is it wrong that my heart misses you, misses you, even if you don't think about me?'"

"Why did you suddenly bring this up?"

Ong looked at me curiously, not even interested in the lyrics of the song I had just recited. The handsome boy was visibly shaken, his mind in turmoil, as if he couldn't believe that what I said was true.

"I want to study with Teacher Renu alone. Ong, make sure that I don't have time to flirt with the teacher."

"..."

"From now on, can you no longer come to take classes here?"

There was no response from the handsome boy, except for his hurried actions as he picked up his school bag and bowed respectfully to his sister.

"I'll go home first, Re. Goodbye."

And then everything fell silent as Ong left the room.

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

Now, without Ong's thoughts interrupting, the sound of Teacher Renu's heartbeat was clear again, and it made me focus as if the beat in her chest was a metronome, like the ones you see in movies when you visit a psychiatrist, swaying back and forth.

"So, let's continue studying."

"Yes."

"What was the name of the song you sang earlier?"

"Huh? The song is called 'My Boo. Why?'"

"The rhythm is catchy."

I focused on solving problems, trying not to bring up what had just happened again. But as I wanted to know how the lovely person felt, I looked up and saw something that made my heart race even more.

Teacher Renu is smiling.



14. Trophy

"Are you sure your mother won't see us, Jom?"

"You give me that same cold look. I guarantee my mother won't ask. You're too scary."

The lovely person looked at me, a little irritated, and asked, "Do I really look that cold?"

"You're scary."

"Probably not that scary, or else no one would be so persistent."

"You've probably met a stubborn person," I say with a wide smile. The lovely person's heartbeat is high for a moment before she turn away from my face.

"Always making that face."

We were talking about trying to get Viramarati-savitritithita to the vet for her vaccinations after a long delay. The big orange cat had gotten fat, so we had to put her in a cloth bag and pretend to walk out of the bulding, past the clerk's office where my mother was sitting.

"Where are you two going?"

Ba-dum...

Actually, my mother asked casually, but if I acted coldly and didn't answer, it would seem rude.

"We'll go out for something to eat and will come back to study math later."

"You girls are very close," my father, who was standing behind, said, reaching out to touch my shoulder and expressing his thoughts.

'When will you have time to play cards with me?'

"I'm busy, Dad. I have to study math for my future education."

"Study math with me then."

"Your math is gambling."

Teacher Renu watch our father-daughter conversation with some confusion. My mother, worried that the beautiful teacher might find out about the card game on the rooftop, quickly interrupted.

"Hurry up and go before it rains."

Meow.

"What was that?"

The orange cat in my cloth bag meowed loudly, unable to bear it any longer. Not knowing what to do, I hugged Teacher Renu and squeezed her arm, imitating a cat's meow to cover everything up in front of my parents.

"Meow, meow, meow. That means I want you. I'm so hungry I could eat you, Teacher."

Everything went silent, especially my mother, who looked at me with a horrified expression because she had never seen me act so out of character.

"Since when did you become such a clingy child?"

My mother blinked. Teacher Renu struggled to keep a straight face and not laugh, nodding before quickly apologizing.

"Can I have an excuse to go eat something first?"

"Okay."

"When will you have time for me?"

My father keeps complaining, but the beautiful teacher and I left, thinking it wouldn't be good to stay any longer. Teacher Renu's heartbeat was loud and excited, almost making me laugh, and she knew why.

"That was close. Viramarati meowed so loudly."

"Exactly. I had to act embarrassingly clingy. Mom must have noticed something."

I pouted, feeling embarrassed by my behavior.

"Meow, meow, meow, really?"

"It's surprising that you can sing the P' Mos song."

"I used to listen to it a little when I was very little."

"By the way, does your father have any subject? We don't need to study math today."

"It's nothing important. Don't worry about it."

"And what is this unimportant thing?"

"Playing cards."

"..."

"Yes, Jom, the cheater."

I scratched my cheek as we walked together to the vet clinic. As we waited for the vet to call us, Teacher Renu turned to me with a worried look.

"It's not good."

"I know cheating is bad, but Daddy likes it when I..."

"I mean, you shouldn't get involved in gambling."

Oh...

"I don't play alone. Besides, Dad thinks it's fun. I just read the minds of the people holding the cards and tell Dad."

"It's still not good. Maybe, I think I need to talk to your parents."

"Don't make a big deal out of it. If you don't like it, I won't get involved. Besides, I've been spending time with you and learning a lot. I hardly ever get into card games anymore. I should be thankful. If you weren't there before, I'd be sitting next to Dad."

"Another excuse to hang out with me, huh?"

I pouted and smile shyly.

"Maybe. If you don't want me to get involved in these things, keep me around."

I wink and smile happily. Teacher Renu smiles and held out her hand, but stop when the vet calls us over.

"Yes."

We handed the orange cat over to the vet and stood outside the room, not wanting to get in the way.

"That's a lot of doses."

"She's a stray cat."

"It must hurt... Does it?"

"Of course, it's an injection."

I looked at the anxious person, knowing something.

"You're afraid of needles, aren't you?"

"You know too much, too observant."

"I always watch you because I can't read your mind," I admit honestly and sigh.

"I want to know more about you, who you are, where you came from, and what made you a teacher. You're like a puzzle that needs to be put together to see the whole picture.

"Once you complete the puzzle and know my big picture, you'll get bored, like the way you see through others."

"No, to me, you're a trophy."

"..."

"Knowing everything about you is a great trophy, like getting a diploma when you graduate."

"And what do you expect to get from me?"

I smile and shook my head.

"I won't tell."

"Why not?"

To make you curious.

"..."

"Then you'll pay attention to me... Oh, Viramarati-savitrithita finished her vaccinations."

I pretend to change the subject and happy that the vet finish the vaccinations, then teases the teacher a little.

"It's a good thing I can't read your mind."

"How is that good?"

"Because the teacher in my imagination... is very spicy."

Ba-dum..

The lovely person's heartbeat is loud, and knowing that I could feel it, she quickly crosses her arms and look at the cat.

"It's a good thing that I can't read your mind, and it's a good thing that you can't read mine."

"What do you imagine about me?"

"Because the Jom in my imagination..."

"..."

"It's crazy."

It felt like pouring water on sand; nothing reflected back. But it's okay. Being close like this makes me happy. I had never considered the teacher's question before.

What do I expect from Teacher Renu?

Nothing... I didn't expect anything in return. Being close every day and talking sometimes was enough for me. Like the song "My Boo" that I used to sing to the teacher. You don't have to love me back, something like that.

"My family came from China."

On the way back home, the lovely person suddenly spoke amidst the silence, making me look at her with interest. Of course, I am interest. Someone who never talked about personal things suddenly brought it up.

"No wonder Ong looks so Chinese, with his narrow eyes."

"My father always wanted a son. First, he had me, then he tried again and had another daughter until Ong was born."

"Uh-huh..."

"Ong was born to make me realize that daughters mean nothing to my father. He always said that I would get married and leave."

I felt the coldness and distance in her words. It wasn't painful, but it wasn't pleasant either.

"But your mother loves you, right?"

"Smart, trying to find something good to make me feel valued."

Teacher Renu smiles and laugh a little.

"Yes, Mon is my mother. She loves all her children. As for the father, who only provides protein, they don't feel much."

"Protein?"

"Forget it."

I understood what she meant, so I was a little stunned. She tried to keep her father out of her circle. It wasn't that she didn't love him, but they weren't that close.

"But you are very good at studying."

"That's probably the only good thing my father gave me. He is good with numbers."

The beautiful teacher smiled.

"But I am better than him."

"I believe in you."

“ ... ”

"I'm not being sarcastic."

"You said you couldn't read my mind."

"With the way you look, I have to know what you're thinking... I really believe you're good at math. But why become a teacher if you're so good? I heard you say in class that your family doesn't like it."

"I chose this career because my father didn't like it. He always insulted this profession, saying that only stupid people do it. He meant that the salary isn't high, you have to deal with students, and that doesn't generate income. My family has a business."

"What do they sell?"

"Leather bags."

"Uh-huh..."

I replied, thinking of common bags in the market. To be honest, I don't know much about this industry, so I asked about something else.

"Is being a teacher what you really want?"

"It's not what I imagined, but since this my choice, I have to do it well."

Teacher Renu reached out to touch my back lightly as if to emphasize something.

"You make me like this job."

Ba-dum...

This is the sound of my own heart. We didn't touch each other often, so I am so excited that I don't know what to do. The deep voice that said that I also meant a lot to Teacher Renu make me feel even more valuable.

Valuable to the teacher...

"I will be your trophy, teacher."

"Hmm? How?"

I smile broadly and answer with determination.

"I will become a veterinarian. That's your trophy."

And I really meant what I said. Already a diligent student when I was with the teacher, when I got back to my room, I focused on solving math problems to reinforce the methods in my brain and make sure I wouldn't forget them. Math is about skills and adaptability, so I tried to find unusual problems to solve, not just for exams.

Studying for exams is different from understanding and applying.

And the hardest problems I had solved, the easier the ones I had done before. Teacher Renu would time me for each problem, giving me three minutes per question. If I couldn't solve it, I had to move on immediately.

In the last few days, I had solved eighty percent of the problems. There were a few that I couldn't finish in time, but Teacher Renu encouraged me, telling me it was okay. But it wasn't enough for me because the beautiful teacher liked perfection, and I wanted to make her proud. Today, I had to get them all right!

"Five minutes left."

Teacher Renu glances at her watch and reminded me. My heart races as I felt like I am about to achieve my dream. Soon, I solve the problem and tap the table as a signal, like a judge pressing the buzzer button on Thailand's Got Talent.

"Ready!"

"One minute left... but you're done."

The sweet-faced teacher smiles at me and picked up the math problems I had solved to check in the exam preparation book. Tense with anxiety, I clasped my hands together, resting my chin on my fingertips.

"I thought I get them all right, but there were a few I wasn't sure about, so I did my best."

"Hmm..."

"How was that, teacher?"

Teacher Renu looked up and met my eyes, smiling.

"All very well."

"You're kidding."

"I'm not kidding. You got them all right."

"Yay!"

I cover my mouth and scream silently, then take a deep breath and exhales in relief.

"My effort paid off. I'm going to become a veterinarian like you expected."

"I didn't expect this. You can be anything you want, as long as you like it."

"Can I be your lover? I want you to be my love, don't you have to love me back? Am I wrong to think of you? Even though I know you don't think of me."

"..."

"Just kidding!"

I was still excited and happy about my achievement. I winked at the charming teacher, who pretended to flip through the book.

"Teacher Re, look. I'll be your proud student. All the credit goes to you."

"Just solving all the math problems doesn't mean you'll pass. There are other subjects too."

"I'm not worried about other subjects. I can copy other people's answers in the exam."

"Cheater."

'Just kidding! Beside math, I also prepared for other subjects. Wow... so serious."

"That's good then. With this determination, you'll surely succeed."

"Finally, I can be your trophy."

I was still dizzy with excitement. The sweet-faced teacher rested her chin on her hand and asked,

"You're only thinking about making the teacher proud, being a trophy. What about you? Don't you want something for yourself?"

"That's true. I've never thought about what I want. But it doesn't matter. Just making you happy is the greatest reward for m...."

I hadn't finished my sentence when the owner of the lips that lean in and presses against mine stole my words. Teacher Renu's heartbeat is loud and strong, but it's nothing compare to my own heart and the emptiness in my mind, which felt blank at that moment.

"Teacher..."

The charming teacher walks away and return to her seat without showing any expression.

"What?"

"Just now, that was..."

"A trophy."

"..."

"A trophy. You did well and you deserved it."

When the sweet teacher said this, there was a hint of uncertainty. In order to prevent Teacher Renu from losing confidence and thinking that what she did was wrong, I gathered all my courage and spoke.

"Can I have it again?"

"..."

"One more reward, and I promise to be a good girl... just for you."

"Just for me?"

I didn't wait for the teacher's permission because I feel it's too slow, and I am too impatient to wait. So, I bow.

"Yes, just for you."

And I receive the reward once again... without any refusal from the giver.



15. One day

Did this really happen?

I was still lying awake in my square room, tossing and turning restlessly. The events of earlier in the evening kept replaying in my head. I finally understood the phrase "wanting to stop time at that moment."

When Teacher Renu kissed me for the first time, I might have thought it was a mistake or that she was very happy to have helped an idiot student like me succeed in something, so she gave me a reward. But the second kiss, slow and lingering, was intentional.

Teacher Renu kissed me willingly.

"That's enough."

Teacher Renu quickly pushing me away. It wasn't forced, but it was decisive. I pulled away and took a deep breath, my heart almost jumping out of my chest. I could only sit there, not knowing what to do next.

"It's too late now. Jom, you finished the test on time and got everything right. Today went well."

"Yes, it went well."

Looking back, I bit my lip and kicked my legs in the air in frustration. What an idiot! At that moment, I should have said something more profound.

'It went well?'

'What does that mean?'

It was all right. There was always tomorrow. I would go see the beautiful teacher and talk about it seriously, although deep down I was scared. I was afraid it wouldn't end well if she remembered what had happened and felt bad. Everything takes time.

Speed is of the essence in this situation. Tomorrow morning, I will go see the teacher!

"I saw teacher Renu leaving the building early this morning."

I went to find the teacher, but got no response, so I went back downstairs, dejected. My mother, who didn't need to read minds, was able to guess why I was there so early. It was only seven in the morning. How did the teacher wake up earlier than me?

How did she manage to sleep? Because I hadn't slept at all.

"What was she wearing?"

"Do you think I'm Sherlock Holmes? I didn't notice. Maybe she went to the market."

"Is she really going to the market?"

"I don't know. I'm not free enough to notice."

"Did you know that the husband in room 322 sneaks out to see his mistress at the end of the alley?"

"I knew that. Oh..."

Mom pause and look at me knowingly.

"Don't look at me like that.

"I thought you said you weren't free."

I pretend to talk to my mother, but my mind was still preoccupied with the beautiful teacher leaving the apartment so early.

It's okay. She'll be back.

Why wouldn't she, right?

But it seemed that besides reading minds, I could also guess situations. Because it was already night, and I, who was waiting for the lovely teacher to return, was getting anxious and couldn't do anything. The teacher had been gone since morning and hadn't come back yet!

"Mom, can you give me Teacher Renu's number?"

"What? You're always with her, but you don't have her number?"

"No, I didn't dare ask her number. Besides, we see each other every day. There's no need to have her number."

That's the real reason. I never dared ask for the cute teacher's phone number. And I regretted that once, when Teacher Renu called me, I forgot to save her number because I thought we would see each other anyway. We go to school together, come home together, and review math at night. Why would we need each other's numbers?

But I never thought of this situation ...the situation I needed to call her.

"Why are you so anxious? Did you do something wrong?"

"No."

"What did you do to her?"

"Are crazy? How could I do with Teacher Renu? We are just teacher and student.

"What nonsense are you talking? I meant, do you have a problem with her? Where is your mind wandering?"

Mom shook her head, confused by my overreaction, before taking out the notebook with all the residents' information and finding the beautiful teacher's number.

"Here, the number... Hey, why are you in such a hurry?"

I grab the notebook from Mom, look up for the phone number, and dialed it immediately. The line rang for a long time before it cut off. This happened repeatedly until I started to worry. I wasn't thinking that the teacher had been in an accident because I knew that wasn't the case.

The teacher was avoiding me.

I knew it!

Snap!

I took a picture of the address with my phone and went back inside to grab my wallet, ready to call a taxi from an app to take me to my destination. It was about 8 pm. It took me about thirty minutes to get to the address near Sukhumvit that she had given me, and it turned out to be...

Very fancy...

Although I could only see the closed gate, it was clear that the owner was wealthy. I paid the driver and got out of the car, stopping hesitantly in front of the house, unsure of how to begin. I paced back and forth, trying to figure out how to reach the teacher.

Calling didn't work. Ringing the doorbell at this hour would be too intrusive...

But I had to do something.

'I'm in front of your house now, but I'm afraid to ring the doorbell. I'll wait.'

Finally, I decided to send a message and stood there in silence. The teacher's house was on a street with only a few streetlights. This area was

known for its exorbitant land prices, and the fact that the charming teacher lived here meant that her family was very wealthy.

Well, they had a business making leather bags.

So, this street was full of large houses with high walls, making it difficult to see inside. To stand safely, I had to stand where the light could reach.

15 minutes passed.

25 minutes passed.

40 minutes... passed.

There was no response from Teacher Renu, and I began to wonder if my message had been delivered. To be sure, I sent another one.

'I'm waiting in front of the house.'

This time, it worked. A short, concise, and rather cold message came back.

'Go home. I don't want to talk.'

The fact that she responded made me believe that part of her was worried about me standing in front of the house at that hour. Besides, this area was quite far from my house.

Otherwise, the lovely teacher wouldn't have responded

'No, I'll wait.'

I continued to be stubborn, as usual. I admitted that I was being very irrational, using her concern to force her to come out and talk. But soon, the wooden gate slowly opened with a remote control, and a beautiful European car drove out, stopping next to me. The window rolled down.

"Jom, get in the car."

"Teacher..."

"Get in the car."

Although her tone was authoritative, it was decisive enough for me to obey. I quickly got in and buckled my seatbelt. The sweet-faced teacher shifted gears and drove skillfully. We sat in silence for a long time until I couldn't take it anymore and had to start the conversation.

"Nice car."

"..."

It didn't work... Talking about random things didn't even get a response.

"Were you avoiding me, teacher?"

"Yes."

This was what we needed to talk about. Teacher Renu was always straightforward, and even now, she was the same. Getting straight to the point was what suited her best.

"Why?"

"Because it shouldn't have happened."

That short answer left me speechless. I was expecting some effect, probably from Teacher Renu's principles.

"Is love really so wrong?"

"Is it love?"

"If it's not love, then what is it?"

"...."

"You kissed me. What was that?"

A reward.

“ ... ”

"You solved all the math problems. It was a reward."

"I'm mature enough to have a reasonable conversation, but using 'reward' as an excuse is cowardice."

I look at her, tears welling up, one rolling down my cheek. My shaky voice show how hurt I am, unlike Teacher Renu, who keep her face straight and show no emotion.

Or maybe she did, but I couldn't see what it was. Only the steady rhythm of my heartbeat made me ache.

This lie detector was too calm, like someone without feelings.

"I got too close to you, and that made us cross a very dangerous line... too dangerous."

Teacher Renu grip the steering wheel tightly, her eyes fully aware of the road.

"You're still young. Hormones make you act without restraint, but I don't."

“ ... ”

"I have maturity. I think and consider before I act, and what happened was really bad."

"How bad can it be when you're just a person with a heart too? How bad can it be just because you're a teacher?"

"Very bad."

"You loved Teacher Aekaphop."

"That was after I graduated. It's different. And if you really compare, Teacher Aekaphop was more respectable than I am now."

Teacher Renu speak slowly, but I could feel the pain in her words.

“When he was a teacher, we never crossed the line. We never did anything wrong. We had boundaries to maintain, and he did it well.”

“ ... ”

"Unlike me now, I can't even be a good teacher. I"

"You're just finding an excuse to leave me."

I raised my hands to cover my face and cried loudly. I felt like a dog that someone pretended to adopt, but in the end, they chose another one and left me waiting in despair.

“Soon, I'll graduate, and we won't be teacher and student anymore.”

"I lost my self-respect."

“ ... ”

"In my life, I did everything with pride. Even though becoming a teacher wasn't what I expected, I had to do my best when I chose to be one."

"You did your best, teacher. I will study hard and become a good student. You made a student see a future she never thought of."

"A dirty kitchen cannot produce quality food."

"Teacher..."

"You have a bad teacher, and this will result in you becoming an unqualified person. I thought about it... I am not qualified enough to teach anyone."

Finally, the fancy car stopped in front of the apartment. I don't even realize we have arrive. I only know that our conversation is about to end.

"I am going to resign."

"No, please..."

"I made my decision."

That determined tone made my heart sink. The decision made me accept the truth with tears.

"So, you're leaving me."

I looked at the apartment with a sinking feeling.

"What about Viramarati? What will you do?"

"I'll try to contact a friend to take care of him. I'll come and tell you about the move... You're home now, Jom. Get out."

"I'll never forget you."

"Forget me. I'll try to forget you too..."

I turn around and kissed the teacher again, but this time, it was a decisive kiss. The lovely person stood still and didn't resist like I expected. Instead, she sit silently, letting me do whatever I wanted, as if she know this would be the last time...

That we would kiss.

"Can you smell my perfume?"

"..."

You'll never forget that smell.

"..."

"Every time you kiss someone, my face will come to your mind first."

"..."

"Remember this. When we meet again, I will not back down anymore."

"I will forget everything."

"People who say they will forget never forget. And those who say they will remember."

I emphasized the last sentence and kissed the beautiful one again.

"....will remember until they die."

"Go now."

Teacher Renu gently pushes my chest and turn away as if she don't want to make eye contact. I got out of the car easily, but I don't close the door because I want to look at her one last time.

"One last question, think of it as a math problem."

"What?"

She still didn't turn around, but she answers.

"Why did you kiss me?"

"..."

"You like me, don't you?"

And that made the beautiful teacher turn to look at me and answer coldly.

"No."

I smile at the lovely person and close the door easily. Then, the fancy car slowly drive away until the taillights disappears. I watch the car and smile through my tears because I know what she said was a lie.

The mouth said no, but the heart said differently. She also had feelings for me, but because she was a teacher and had self-respect, she had to leave. I

went back home. The sound of the door made my parents, who seemed to be waiting for me, scream loudly first, holding a broomstick, especially my mother, who was having a big fit.

"Where were you! What time is it... and..."

And as soon as my mother see me, she froze because now her daughter is crying with tears streaming down her face, holding an orange cat that my mother seems to recognize.

"Mom..."

"The cat."

"I want to keep it, mom."

"You can keep it."

Mom replied almost immediately and run to hug me. It seems like all her anger melt when she see my rare tears.

"I'm not mad. You can keep the cat. Don't cry."

'She must have been heartbroken'

My mother's thoughts echoed, making me nod against her chest and cry even harder. It seemed like my mother already knew that someone was secretly keeping a cat, but she didn't want to complain because Teacher Renu was tutoring me, and it wasn't so blatant that the people in the building knew or cared about it. Right now, encouragement was the most important thing.

My parents were the ones who would help me get through this defining moment of adolescence.

I would overcome it and grow up beautifully, making Teacher Renu proud and no longer blaming myself for being a dirty kitchen.

One day, we will meet again, Teacher Renu.



Sunyan

16.Ba-dum

7 years later...

It may look long or short, depending on whether you are waiting for something. If you are not waiting, time flies surprisingly fast.

Well, it seemed long to me because I was waiting for someone to return.

While waiting, I kept myself busy focusing on my studies. I wanted to graduate and become a trophy for her. Today, I did it. I graduated from veterinary school in six years and now I have my own veterinary clinic.

I simply dragged myself home at 9 pm after finishing a cat's spay surgery.

"Daughter, come eat something delicious, quick!"

"I'm coming!"

I replied sweetly to my mother and got up from the couch in front of the TV, feeling hungry. Since the clinic opened, I had no time to do anything, not even breathe. But it was good; it was really rewarding to help animals recover from their illnesses, even if some cases were beyond my capabilities.

"Where is the delicious food?"

I walk into the kitchen and found it empty. My mother is smiling, watching Viramarati-savitrithita eat her food. But when she looks at me, her mood changes instantly.

"What? Go find something to eat yourself."

"But you just invited me to eat."

"I was talking to Viramarati."

"And now you started calling the cat your daughter?"

"She's a girl."

"She's a cat."

"Why do you have to disrespect Viramarati like that? She's upset now, you see?"

"She feels nothing but bored with her food."

I said, knowing this cat better than anyone, but my mother didn't care.

"I can feel that she's upset. Don't be jealous of the cat."

My mother, who never liked pets, has become more compassionate since Viramarati came into our lives. But that doesn't mean that people in the apartment can have pets.

"By the way, I saw the news today about that actress who was your senior.

"Dwan."

"Yes, she admitted that she's dating a woman. That celebrity gossip page is really something. Everything they say turns out to be true. Where do they get their sources from?"

"Nosey people."

"Like you?"

I pouted at my mother and left.

"I'm leaving. Since there's no food, you don't mean anything to me anymore."

"Even an ingratitude was defeated by you. That clinic I invested in means nothing, huh?"

"Come on, dear mother, I appreciate your kindness."

I run to hug her tightly, trying to be affectionate. She push me away. Irritates, not used to so much attention.

"Go away, I want to play with my daughter."

"I'm your daughter."

"I picked you up on the street."

Why is my mother like this? But it's okay. Even if she acts like this, I know she loves me more than anything. Since she doesn't like sweetness and affection, I'll leave her alone.

"I'm going to sleep."

"I'll make you some instant noodles."

"I owe you one."

After escaping to my room, I opened my computer to check the feedback on my Facebook page, "Celeb Gossip," which my mother had just mentioned. Most of the comments praised the accuracy of the page, while the negative ones usually came from fans of the celebrities I exposed. They said things like, *"No matter what our idol does, we still love them."*

Running this page is a hobby. Besides the fun of revealing the truth, it gives me an adrenaline rush when celebrities threaten to sue.

My life as a veterinarian isn't very exciting, so I need something to make it fun, even though I know that digging into other people's lives is not good.

Do I benefit from this page? Advertising revenue? You overestimate me. This page is more about causing harm than providing benefits. Even if many advertisers approached me, I would not dare accept them because it

might reveal my identity. So, I run this page mainly for my own satisfaction.

It's pointless, but it's better than doing nothing.

Every day, I read comments and check my inbox for news tips to create content. Most of them are just unfounded rumors or not interesting enough. If I'm not interested, I delete them. If I find them intriguing, I respond with more details.

Lately, other than the news about Dwan, nothing has caught my attention. While browsing, my mother walked in with the smell of pork-flavored instant noodles.

"Eat this, so you can die sooner."

"What kind of statement is that?"

"The kind that says if you know you're going to be home late, eat something before you go back. Those instant noodles are full of sodium."

"It's a thoughtful statement that feels like a curse. Anyway, thanks, Mom."

I bowed respectfully and placed the hot bowl in front of my computer. My mother glances at the screen, but she /looks like more clueless than curious.

"What are you looking at?"

"Just taking a look. Thinking about creating a Facebook page for the clinic."

"Oh, a vet clinic? Are they going to send their pets for treatment?"

"Just to let people know. If they find out there's a vet who can read pets' minds, where do you think the money will go?"

"Clever... Good thing you're using it for a good reason. For a moment there, I thought you were the admin of Celeb Gossip."

I kept my composure and raised an eyebrow.

"Why do you think that?"

"It's a very nosy page, as if it can read minds. But you're not the type to hurt others. Probably not."

"I can do it."

"A kind-hearted veterinarian wouldn't hurt people... I'm going to sleep. It's almost midnight. My melatonin won't be released."

And with that, my trend-following mother left, leaving me feeling guilty. She was right. My ability is harmful if misused, and it seemed like I had gone too far down that path. On the surface, I was a kind veterinarian, but on the other hand, I was a gray area ready to hurt and destroy without reason.

This page started by accident...

Once, a relative of On-an came crying, not knowing what to do about her pregnancy. On-an, being naive, thought that I, a veterinarian, could perform an abortion and asked for my help.

"Are you crazy? I deliver puppies and neuter cats, I don't perform abortions on humans. And I'm still a student!"

"What should we do then? She's only in 11th grade. She has a long future ahead of her."

"Make the guy take responsibility. Why carry the burden alone?"

"He abandoned her. He said he's an actor, he's not ready to have a child, he gave her money to have an abortion."

"He told her to have an abortion, so she's going to? That's crazy!"

"What else can she do? It's the only way."

I'm not very idealistic. I thought about what I would do if I got pregnant before I graduated. I probably wouldn't go through with it because I wasn't

ready. But that's just a thought, and it never happened. It was different when someone close to you was pregnant and considering an abortion.

Reality and hypotheticals aren't the same!

"You should talk to other people about abortion. I'm afraid of sin. But if you need help with something else, I can."

"How?"

"Revenge."

"..."

"Why should we suffer alone? He should, you idiot."

And that's how I got into the dark side. On-an and I investigated this actor exclusively. I created a page to expose him, revealing everything I learned from On-an's relative and reading his thoughts.

This wasn't the first woman.

I dug into his past before he entered the industry, finding out his history with surgeries and what he gained and lost. It was a satisfying takedown. The backlash on social media was intense, and he lost his status.

Now he is posing for adult calendars.

After that, I found it fun and continued to expose others.

Some people sent tips out of revenge, others out of spite. But it all depended on my judgment and interest. The news about Dawan increased the credibility of my page. I was the first to describe who she was, where she came from and who she loved, something no other media outlet anticipated. Today, she confirmed in interviews that she was dating a woman, validating the authenticity of my page.

Incredible...

After my mom left, I checked my inbox to see if there were any interesting tips. But it seemed like there weren't any, and I was about to hang up and go to sleep.

Ding!

My phone notified me of a new message on the fan page. Just as I was about to hang up, I reopened my computer to read it. The message looked intriguing.

'Maya, the budding actress, dated a tomboy five years ago and underwent artificial insemination, resulting in a three-month pregnancy. However, she had to terminate the pregnancy to enter the entertainment industry. She recently left a supporting actor for a high-society guy who imports cars on the gray market. I hope you find this interesting.'

I stared at the message, thinking for a moment before replying.

'Let me check this first. If it's true, I'll get back to you with more details.'

That was all I said before I quickly logged on to Twitter and Instagram to check for updates on the celebrities. Most famous stars have fan clubs that keep track of their schedules and share where to catch up on the news.

With Dawan, I followed this method. Everything went smoothly, as planned.

I received the event schedule for the actress named Maya. In two days, she would be back from a modeling event abroad around 8 pm. Luckily, I didn't have to be at the clinic that day, as it was another doctor's shift.

See you soon, Maya.

"Hey, since we're all adults and have our careers, especially me, credibility is very important."

"So what?"

"And you want a lawyer like me to hold up a light sign cheering for a celebrity?"

"Even the Prime Minister holds up a light stick for AKB48."

Just now, I dragged On-an to cheer for actress Maya and mingled with the group of fans waiting at the airport. I heard there would be a photo shoot with headlights and a chat. Today, I would take the opportunity to touch her and read her thoughts.

That's how I gather information.

"But coming to cheer like this, what will we gain? She won't tell us if the news is true anyway."

"I have a way to prove it. Don't ask too much."

Up until this point, On-an still didn't know about my ability. But my friend never asked why she thought I got my information from reliable sources.

"By the way, I haven't seen you wearing headphones lately. In high school, you wore them all the time, saying that you were bothered by the noise of people."

"I'm still uncomfortable, but... I want to hear more."

"Hear what?"

I just smile at my friend and think of someone. I stop wearing headphones since Teacher Renu left because I believe that if we met again or we're nearby, I would hear her heartbeat.

And she would help me find Teacher Renu.

I swore to myself that if we ever met again, I wouldn't let her get away, no matter what it took. At least now, we weren't teacher and student anymore.

As I focused on the target actress being interviewed by the media, everything around me suddenly went silent, as if someone had pressed the

mute button on a remote control. My heart pounded, knowing exactly what this meant.

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

"Teacher."

"What? Hey, where are you going?"

On-an grab my arm, but I shook it off and point at her.

"Wait here."

"Where are you going?"

"Find the teacher."

"Teacher who?"

"Teacher Renu!"

That's all I said before looking around. This place was a shopping mall full of people. The event was held in the activity area, which was quite spacious. There were many people, but the sound of the heartbeat was still there. The teacher was definitely around here... but where?

Ba-dum...

The sound gradually faded away. I quickly pushed through the crowd, searching. The heartbeat turned into the noise of the crowd, and a flood of thoughts hit my head like a tsunami.

She's gone...

"Jom!"

On-an, who had followed me, grab my arm and shouts,

"You dragged me here and then ran away. Are we still following the celebrity or not?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you run here... and what happened to Teacher Renu? Are you delusional?"

"It really is Teacher Renu. I heard her."

"I only hear screams. Are you crazy? Let's finish this work quickly. After today, I can't go with you anymore."

In the end, On-an dragged me back to our seat, holding the neon sign. But I was sure that the beautiful teacher who had disappeared for seven years was around here. So, I decided to call someone I hadn't spoken to in a while because we were both busy with our studies.

"Ong."

And as soon as I called, the guy who used to have a huge crush on me answered with a strange tone.

[Hey Jom... calling like you knew.]

"Is the teacher back?"

[Yes.]

I couldn't help but smile when I heard that. During all this time, I never forgot about the teacher. And how my feelings remained strong, I didn't date anyone, just waiting. Waiting without knowing if there was any hope.

And if I wanted to hear news about the teacher, I had to keep in touch with Ong. Our past was behind us. Now, the guy with the pretty face and I were

friends who frequently updated each other on Teacher Renu.

"Did she graduate?"

[Yes, but she didn't come back until something happened.]

"What happened?"

Then, the person on the other end of the line sobbed when I asked this question, as if I had touched a nerve. It seemed like Ong was crying about something, and I called at the right time.

[Our father passed away, so Re came back.]

I knew it wasn't the right time. It was lucky we were talking on the phone, so Ong couldn't see my expression. If he knew, he would probably get mad or stop being my friend.

I was happy for someone to die... to have someone back.

Teacher Renu has returned.



17. The Same Scent

I knew very well that at times like these, I shouldn't feel too excited or happy because it's as if I find joy in someone else's sadness, especially Ong, who was crying so hard over the loss of his father, the man who loved him most in this world.

Today, I came to help Ong serve drinks or do small tasks at the funeral. As I helped, my eyes kept searching for someone else who should be here, but I didn't even see a shadow.

How could Teacher Renu be absent from her own father's funeral?

"Ong, have some water."

I handed a bottle of water to Ong, who was standing with his mother and another sister, welcoming the guests. I had only heard of her, but had never met her in person. I had to admit that everyone in Teacher Renu's family was beautiful. Even if they weren't as stunning as her older sister, they were still presentable enough that they wouldn't be embarrassed to be seen.

"Thank you, Jom. You must be tired."

"Just serve drinks."

"Thank you anyway."

A nasal voice that I could never forget came from behind. Even though I had prepared myself well, knowing that I would inevitably encounter it, its sudden appearance without warning made me a little nervous.

'I'm an adult now... We're not the same as before. Don't show any panic that would make the teacher laugh.'

"Dr. Renu, hello."

I turned to the owner of the voice and raised my hands in greeting, trying to keep my voice steady. Teacher Renu looked at me and gave a small smile. Her elegant demeanor in a black suit made me feel inferior.

Although I kept telling myself that I was an adult, I still felt like a student. Ridiculous...

"Just call me teacher like before."

Then, the person about my height reaches out to pat my head, but I quickly dodged it and stand next to Ong. This surprised the lovely person a little, but she didn't say anything; she just put her hand back to her side.

"You're different."

"You've changed too, Jom."

Teacher Renu greet the guests before turning to me and speaking slowly.

"Go sit inside. We'll take care of things here."

That meant this area was for the family. I wasn't that stupid, so I nodded and went to sit inside like a guest. But the whole time I sat there, I kept looking at Teacher Renu from the corner of my eye, afraid she would disappear from my sight.

I really missed her...

When I heard her voice, I almost acted like a child, running up to her and hugging her tightly like a little monkey. But I wanted to show her that I wasn't a child anymore. We were far from being teachers and students. Now, I had every right.

Yes... I could do whatever I wanted now.

For a moment, it looks like Teacher Renu hesitated and turned to look at me before pausing and raising an eyebrow. The old vibe from when I was a student came rushing back to me, making me turn around quickly, feeling awkward and unsure of what to do.

'I saw that.'

Damn, how am I supposed to act like an adult now?

"Thank you so much for today, Jom. How are you going home?"

Ong saw that I was about to leave and rushed to ask. He no longer thought of me as a romantic interest like when we were students. He had a girlfriend now, and we had become surprisingly good friends.

"I'll call a taxi."

"Do you want me to drive you?"

"No, you should spend some time grieving."

"..."

"I know you're sad. Go to your girlfriend's apartment. I can go home by myself."

I said sincerely because I knew Ong was full of sadness. Being together was depressing. His father, who loved him the most, was no longer in this world. Ong was very scared now, especially for his family, like Teacher Renu.

I understood... Teacher Renu was someone who never showed her feelings, especially to her younger brother. Although Ong loved and admired his older sister, he still felt scared and insecure. The other sister seemed closer to Teacher Renu, so now he felt lonely.

"Why do you want me to go to my girlfriend's apartment instead of staying with my family?"

"....?"

"And how do you know my girlfriend is at the apartment?"

I rolled my eyes, unsure of how to respond. My curiosity, which was my talent, could sometimes be dangerous.

"If she's not at the apartment, she must be at home. Somewhere around there."

Teacher Renu, who heard our entire conversation, interrupt, making Ong flinch a little and stand respectfully.

"Re."

"Jom, I'll take you home. It's dark and I don't trust taxis. Ong, go home today. At least be there for Mom."

"Okay."

"Let's go."

Teacher Renu reaches out gently push me forward, almost forcing me to walk. One of her hands was in her pocket as we walk together. I glance at her, admiring how naturally she blended in. She is so calm that even though I am standing close to her, her heart was beating normally, unlike mine, which was beating so fast that I fell weak.

"Actually, you don't have to take me home."

As soon as I finished speaking, the sweet-faced person stop walking and looked at me with unreadable eyes.

"Girl."

"What's wrong?"

"You're trying to show me that we're not teacher and student anymore, right?"

"..."

"Not calling me teacher is really weird, Jom."

The pretty person smiles faintly and walk towards a beautiful European car, which was probably the same one from seven years ago when she took me home. I hesitated for a moment, unsure if I should go with her, before daring to refuse her for the first time.

"No."

"What?"

"I'm not going home with you..."

I take a deep breath, feeling like it was too force, and I had to tell myself, *'Enough.*

"....Teacher."

A satisfied smile spread across her face as if to say she had won. I bit my lip a little, not liking to lose, but it is true. It felt forced and unnatural to call Teacher Renu **"Miss"** or **"Dr. Renu."**

"Give me one reason why you won't go with me."

"I won't follow your orders anymore."

"So, you're saying you're an adult now."

"Yes."

"As you wish."

The charming person shrugged and opened the car door, ready to get in. But it seemed like she remembered something and stopped to call out to me, who was standing and watching her.

"Jom."

"Yes?"

"You've grown up."

It's been seven years. It would be weird if I hadn't.

"..."

Teacher Renu muttered to herself before nodding and getting into the car, driving away. I could only stare at the taillights until they disappeared before placing my hand on my chest and taking a deep breath.

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

I was so excited that I felt weak. Meeting someone I had been dancing with for over seven years made it really hard to control my emotions and not get too excited.

I couldn't sleep!

From last night until ten in the morning, I tossed and turned in bed, wide awake as if I had drunk twenty cups of coffee. In order not to waste time, I decided to open the clinic early to find something to do. At least if a client brought a dog in for flea treatment, I could distract myself.

I shouldn't have played hard to get last night!

If I had get in the car with her, I could have asked her how she was... But I had already known everything about her for the past seven years from Ong.

Still, it was a missed opportunity to talk to her for a long time. Now, what could I do? How could I find another chance to see her? We were no longer teacher and student meeting for math lessons like we used to.

"Damn"

"S-sorry."

"S-sorry!"

I didn't realize a customer had come into the store, so I accidentally curse loudly, making "Broomy"'s owner look shocked.

"Is the clinic open?"

"Yes, it is. Sorry, it's just... the lottery took my money."

"The lottery results come out at 4:00 p.m."

I glance at the clock on the wall, feeling a little embarrassed, before forcing a smile because I couldn't find any other excuse.

"Oh, Broomy."

"His name is Pizza."

Many times when this customer brought Broomy in, he would always correct me when I called the dog by the name I made up. I smiled apologetically and shared my opinion as someone who knows dogs well.

"He likes the name Broomy better."

"How do you know?"

"Try calling him. I'll call him Broomy, and you call him Pizza. Let's see who he responds to."

We glare at each other defiantly and took turns calling the dog's name, thinking we were superior.

"Pizza."

"Broomy."

"Mumu."

Then a third voice interrupt, and the Old English Sheepdog turn towards the voice and run towards Teacher Renu, who had entered the store as if they had known each other for a long time. I look at the flirtatious dog playing with the teacher and could smell that... there was a dog smell about her.

"He seems like you a lot. Or maybe he likes the name Mumu."

"It's probably the smell of a dog that's stuck on her."

I answer on behalf of Teacher Renu and quickly changed the subject to the dog's owner.

"So, what brings you and your dog here today?"

Honestly, I was really excited, but I tried my best to keep my emotions in check, I was shocked that this sweet-faced person just appeared out of nowhere.

How did she know that I opened a clinic here?

"For the annual vaccination."

"Alright, let's weigh him first."

I quickly interrupt the conversation. The owner follow the procedures with Broomy, and I drag him into the examination room. I examine him, give the injection, calculated the bill, and quickly kick the handsome owner out within ten minutes.

"Hello, Teacher Re. How did you know I opened a clinic here?"

"I stopped by the apartment. Your mother told me you opened a clinic here."

"Did you come to see me?"

"Well..." Professor Renu tilts her head slightly and smiles.

"You could say that."

"What does that mean, 'you could say that'?"

"Actually, I came to see my Viramarati-savitrithita... Where is she?"

A wave of disappointment washed over me, making me slump my shoulders as I look at the orange cat that was sleeping without care in the world. Even with a dog in the store, she didn't move as if she was dead.

Ugh...

"Viramarati-savitrithita, wake up... Look who's here to see you."

I take the chubby orange cat from the basket. She looked a little irritated, but she couldn't resist.

"Here she is, your daughter."

Teacher Renu take the cat she hadn't seen in a long time, grimacing slightly at her weight. Cats are different from dogs; they don't get excited or happy. They love solitude. When they meet their former owner who they haven't seen in a long time, it's as if they've forgotten or are pretending not to be excited, just like me now.

"You took good care of her. She's chubby and healthy."

"Yes."

"And you've grown up well too, with a bright future ahead of you."

The beautiful person looked around in admiration.

"You have your own clinic. Is this building rented?"

"It's my father's building. It used to be rented, but after I graduated, he kicked out the old tenant so I could use it. But I still pay rent, although some months I pay, and some months I don't.

"Your father is generous."

"In exchange for me having to watch his card games every now and then."

"That's not good."

The stern tone, reminiscent of the old days, made me shiver a little, just like Jao-Jom at eighteen, afraid of being scolded.

"But I don't have time to sit there often."

"It's better to stay away from such things."

"..."

"..."

We both fell silent, not knowing what to say next. Teacher Renu give me back the cat and apologizes.

"I should go."

"Did you stop by for this?"

"Yes, I missed the cat."

"Just the cat?"

Finally, I asked what I really felt. Teacher Renu keep her composure with a smile.

"I missed you too, Jom. We didn't talked much last night, so I thought I'd stop by."

"How are you?"

"I'm fine."

"I mean about your father. How are you coping?"

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum

The sweet-faced person's heart skipped a beat. My question seemed to hit a nerve, and I would call it... sadness. Although her face was calm, I was sure she was sad.

"It's nothing big. Just a shock. Losing a parent."

"You know I'm observant, especially about you, Teacher Re."

"..."

"Your heartbeat isn't normal. You came here because you're thinking about the past. Coming home hurts you, and you can't show it, so you come here."

"Are you overestimating yourself? Why would I come to you if I don't know where else to go?"

"Because I'm the only past you have besides your family."

And her heart skipped a beat again. She was still pretending to be tough, not showing her weakness, and she kept talking as if she wanted to hide her feelings.

"Aren't you a veterinarian? Analyzing me like that..."

I went to her and hugged her, wanting to comfort her. Part of me wanted to touch someone I hadn't seen in a long time out of longing. I've always believed that a hug can absorb and lessen pain effectively.

Now, Professor Renu needed someone to hug her. No matter how smart or how many degrees she has, everyone has a vulnerable side.

"You still wear the same perfume."

The sweet-faced person hugged me back, her voice trembling. It wasn't a feeling of longing, but probably gratitude that I understood.

"The smell makes me feel at ease.

"You can come to me anytime. I'm always here if you need me."



18.Date

"In a good mood, huh, dog doctor?"

"What, mom?"

"But with a donkey's brain."

"Why are you teasing me, mom?"

I pouted at her, but I wasn't really angry. My mood was full of happiness, as if the atmosphere around me was blooming with flowers.

"Isn't it because your beloved teacher came to visit?"

"She came to see Viramarati-savitrithita."

"Oh, my poor daughter."

"..."

"Yes, I didn't mean you."

My lovely mother hugged Viramarati-savitrithita tightly.

"How did she react when she saw her former owner?"

"She looks indifferent."

"The cat has more sense than you. She knows how much she was hurt and that there's no point in being happy to see you again."

"Mom... "

I sigh and look at the lady of the house, who, despite the teasing, is clearly worry about me.

"I'm fine, really."

"Your joy is annoying. I don't need to read your mind to know how happy you are. Are you still feeling butterflies in your stomach about your teacher?"

"Butterflies in my stomach? I don't understand, Mom."

I covered my ears, not wanting to hear, but Mom keep talking.

"You are a young woman, beautiful too, but you still don't have a boyfriend. I'm worry. You have a uterus, use it."

"Good morning!!!

"When are you going to grow up? "

And when she said that, I immediately glare at her.

"What? Why are you looking at me like that? I'm going to slap you."

"I'm not a child anymore, Mom. Why do you keep saying I'm not an adult?"

"Because you're not. The world moves on, but you keep acting like a girl waiting for your first love, the teacher. It's a good thing the teacher didn't join in the fun."

"How do you know she didn't?"

"Because she's smart. Someone with a doctorate wouldn't look at a lowly dog doctor like you. Look at her car, her education. She needs someone of her level. And from what I can see, no one is worthy of Renu."

"You're praising the teacher too much."

When Mom gave her reasons, I start to feel bad. What was that? I didn't feel anything before.

"I'm just telling you to live in reality. A woman should be with a man. Two female plugs won't do anything. No spark of electricity. Got it? You'll only hear the sound of plugs clashing."

"Eww, what kind of comparison is that? I'm not talking to you anymore!"

Shock, shock, shock!

I run to my room, pretending I didn't want to hear Mom's dirty talk anymore. But the truth is, I felt bad about the reality she pointed out.

Teacher Renu seems so important now...

It's not that having a PhD was that great, but her profile was perfect and flawless. They say that if you make yourself valuable, you can filter the people who approach you. So anyone trying to hit on Teach Renu now should consider whether they are good enough.

And I am just a veterinarian, treating dogs and cats, with a modest income.

I spent seven years trying to be what Teach Renu wanted so that when we met again, I would feel ready. But when I took one step forward, the charming person took two steps back, making me feel discouraged.

No, this is crazy... I hadn't even started anything yet. How could I say I was discouraged?

No! Change the subject and think about something else.

I diverted my attention and sat in front of my computer, opening the Celeb Gossip page to check my inbox for any interesting news. I almost forgot that I went to the airport two days ago and got some news about Maya. The appearance of Teacher Renu made me forget everything, even my role as the fun administrator of this page.

'Are you going to cover Maya's news or not? If you need more information, just ask. We want you to expose the fraud. Why should someone who can kill their own child have a good life? It's not fair to others.'

This news sender named his Facebook as 'Anonymous', without revealing anything about himself, which made me laugh a little.

People who post scandalous news about celebrities are usually jealous and can't stand to see others doing better, so they try to step on others to feel good about themselves. I admit that my page leaned towards the dark side, but I started it to seek justice. Later, I continued because it paid well. But being a tool for someone's revenge didn't appeal to me.

Maya's news is really interesting, though...

No... I won't reply yet. I turn off the computer and go to take a shower to clear my mind.

Let's not think about anything for a day.

Professor Renu's father's funeral was over. Since that day, I had been waiting for her to contact me, but there was only silence. I didn't want to rush because I knew that the teacher had a lot to deal with. Losing the pillar of the family and running the business must have been chaotic for the sweet-faced person.

But I miss her so much...

In the end, I couldn't bear it anymore. Waiting for someone for seven years was long enough. When we met again, there was still silence. I could no longer be patient and wait calmly. I will do what I can.

Is the teacher still using the same number?

I stare at my phone screen, hesitating and finding reasons not to call because I was so excited. Many times, I put the phone face down and

pretend to watch TV. But in the end, I picked it up again for the tenth time and dialed the number.

Ring...

Same number!

[Renu speaking.]

"Uh... Hello, Teacher."

[Hi, Jom.]

"How did you know it was me?"

[There's only one person who calls me 'Teacher'. It's been a while since we last spoke, huh?]

The nasal and relaxed voice made me feel a little relieved. Teacher Renu is always mature. Although we had sadly parted ways before, meeting again was smooth sailing, without any awkwardness.

"I thought you might be busy, so I didn't want to bother you."

[That's thoughtful of you.]

"Oops!"

[What a cute exclamation. Haha.]

The captivating laugh made me scratch my cheek shyly. From the sound of it, she looks fine now.

"I'm glad to hear you're okay."

[Is that all you called? I thought there was something more.]

"Actually..."

[Hmm?]

"I miss you. Is it possible for us to meet?"

The line went silent, making me nervous. Did I move too quickly, making Teacher Renu uncomfortable? Damn it! I intended to not act like a child, to be mature, not to chase but also not to back down, keeping a proper distance. But I couldn't help but act like I did in school.

There must be a way out. I need to break this silence quickly.

"Why so shocked? I was joking... I meant I miss Viramarati.

[Jom.]

"Yes?"

I straightened up when she called me seriously.

[You should call her Viramarati-savitrititha. Not saying her full name is disrespectful.]

"Uh..."

[Just kidding. Haha.]

"You seem so cheerful, Teacher."

[You're tense, aren't you? I'm just trying to make things comfortable so you can talk freely.]

"Thank you for helping me feel comfortable enough to talk."

[Let's meet around 3 PM at the mall. We can go for a walk, and I'll take you out for a meal.]

"Okay."

I quickly calmed down and lowered my voice.

"See you then. When it's close to the time, let me know where to meet."

[Sure.]

I switched shifts with the vet at the clinic and arrived half an hour early because I was so excited. It took me a while to decide what to wear. At first, I thought I would dress maturely, but each outfit looked more like I was ready for a wedding than a date. I didn't want the teacher to think I was overprepared. In the end, I settled for a black hoodie and skinny jeans.

"Hi, teacher. Where are you now?"

[I just parked. Let's meet at the xxx restaurant.]

"Okay."

We soon met. Teacher Renu was dressed in a practical outfit, looking like she had just finished some business. Honestly, she looked a little different. Maybe because she used to dress conservatively as a teacher, but now she looked confident, wearing black pants and a white shirt, with one hand in her pocket.

So cool.

"Am I late?"

"Not at all. Just in time... Where did you come from?"

"Just business. I'm taking care of everything now. My brothers aren't ready yet."

"Oh... I noticed you've been absent lately."

I mumbled before realizing I'd let it slip that I was waiting for her.

"Uh, I wasn't waiting for you, actually..."

Great, the more nervous I get, the worse it gets!

“So it’s not just Viramarati-savitritithita who misses me, huh? Let’s eat at this place.”

Teacher Renu waved toward a famous seafood restaurant and invited me to order food. Her sweet face looks like a painting, as flawless and beautiful as ever.

Could people really be that perfect?

"My face doesn't fill you, you know."

‘I saw that.’

She kept her gaze fixed on me, making me quickly lift the menu to hide my face, feeling awkward.

Damn, I'm trying not to act like a child here.

"Alright, I'll order for us then. You seem too nervous to decide... Let's have fried sea bass with fish sauce, two rices and..."

After she finished ordering, I put down the menu and see her light brown eyes smiling at me.

"Is there something you want to tell me?" I asked.

"Try reading my mind."

"You know I can't." I pouted in frustration.

“You ask a lot, knowing I can’t read yours.”

"I thought you might have developed that ability after all these years. If you could read my mind, I wondered if we would still be close."

"Why wouldn't we be?"

"You are a curious person."

"..."

"Because I am interesting, that makes you curious."

"It's true, you're interesting. But that's not why I want to be around you."

"Then what is it?"

"Because my heartbeat matches yours."

Ba-dum...

This time, Teacher Renu was the one caught off guard, disguising her embarrassment by taking a sip of water. When silence fell, neither of us knew what to do next.

"I've decided that if you come back this time, I won't give up on us again."

"Us?"

"I've never forgot that day, the day I won the award and took the trophy from you."

The memory of our kiss still lingered vividly in my mind. Our hearts beat in unison, uncontrollably. But the next day, the sweet-faced teacher broke up with me because she couldn't handle the status of "teacher" and "student." But today was different. We were nothing to each other now. Calling her "teacher" was just a formality for me.

"After all these years, you're still as determined as ever."

"What can I do? No one else has ever been your equal."

A faint smile appeared on her beautiful face. As I said, Teacher Renu is very proud of herself. Knowing that I still thought so highly of her certainly flattered her.

"I thought time apart would make these feelings disappear."

"You are my first love."

"I heard from Ong that while I was away, you always asked about me and studied hard."

"I asked Ong because I wanted to ease the longing. As for studying hard, I wanted you to come back and be proud of what I have achieved."

"..."

"You made me who I am today."

"Jom, you are deeply in love."

"I don't want to make you uncomfortable."

I waved my hands to reassure her.

"Just sharing."

"You have become more thoughtful," she said, resting her chin on her hand.

I notice something on her right finger and complimented it because it looked cute.

"That's a beautiful ring. Is it a real diamond? Oops, that's rude. Of course, it must be real."

But my question made Teacher Renu hide her hand immediately as if she is uncomfortable. I couldn't help but ask.

Her heartbeat is irregular again.

"Does this ring mean anything?"

"Reading my heartbeat again, huh?"

The beautiful teacher, knowing she couldn't hide the truth, look irritates, feeling at a disadvantage because I know too much.

"It's not fair that I don't know anything about you."

"I love you. That's something you've always known... And I don't know everything about you either. Otherwise, I wouldn't ask. What's the ring about?"

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

"A lot has happened in the past seven years. This ring is part of it." she admitted.

"He's a friend from college. He recently asked me to be his girlfriend..."

Ba-dum...

"But I didn't say yes."

"But you're wearing his ring."

The beautiful teacher stare at me for a long time before finally speaking her mind.



"I heard from Ong that you always asked about me, and made me realize that you probably haven't moved on. So, I told him that I needed to clear things up here before giving an answer."

"What do you mean by clearing things up?"

"I want us to be close as teacher and student again like before."



Sunlyan

 **19.8:08 PM** 

"Does that mean that if it's not clear yet, you won't say yes to him?"

The lovely person took a sip of water and answered briefly.

"Yes."

"I won't let things go the way you want. Let them stay this dark. Now that you're back, it's my turn. I won't let you have a second to think about him."

I answer after thinking it over, looking into the eyes of someone who always decides everything on her own terms. For a moment, I see a fleeting smile on her sweet face, but it disappears so quickly, I am not sure if it is real or just my imagination.

Now, the sound of Teacher Renu's heartbeat echoed loudly in my head, but it wasn't as overwhelming as the confusion falling over me. I didn't understand the reason behind her actions.

"Still as determined as ever."

"You took me out dinner just to talk about this?"

"No, I just want to have dinner. But you see the ring first and keep asking until I couldn't help but answer."

The charming person answered honestly, which only made me more confused.

"When were you planning on telling me you had a boyfriend?"

"He's not my boyfriend."

"You weren't even going to tell me you had someone new."

"I don't have anyone new. I've never had anyone old either."

Teacher Renu replied in a monotone, taking a slow sip of water.

"You asked, so I answered.

"Then why are you telling me to go back to being just a teacher and student?"

"Because it's not the same."

The cute person sighed as if something was weighing on her chest.

"I feel like you haven't moved on.

"..."

"You keep waiting for me, and I feel uncomfortable that you're still waiting. Before I left, I hurt you once. Isn't that enough?"

"No, it's not."

"..."

"Because I know you still like me."

Ba-dum...

The sound of Teacher Renu's heartbeat was clearly audible, probably from embarrassment. I smile a little when I hear that signal.

"You're such a narcissist."

"You haven't started dating him yet, right?" I asked, needing confirmation.

"Right."

"Then I still have a chance. I have decided that I will not back down if I see you again. The memories of that day are still with me. I believe that the spark from seven years ago is still there."

" ... "

"She'll light up"

As I speak, the next dish arrives, which the restaurant's famous fried sea bass with fish sauce. I immediately begin to serve myself, not caring about our conversation, then take a bite of the rice.

"Is that it?"

Teacher Renu look at me in confusion, while I focus on eating. I look at the sweet-face person and nod.

"Yes, that's it. I'll try my best. I still have a chance, since you didn't agree to be his girlfriend."

"Your determination is admirable."

Seeing that she couldn't change my mind, the sweet-face person begin to serve herself some food.

"Is it a he or a she?"

My question made her raise an eyebrow and laugh.

"A he."

"Good."

"Why is that good?"

"At least I can get closer to you."

Ba-dum...

The intensity of the heartbeat in front of me make me stop and look into her eyes, knowing immediately how much my words had affects her. The teacher, aware that I had my own lie detector, bared her teeth slightly.

"Just eat your food."

"At least I know I still have a chance. The seven years I waited for you weren't completely wasted."

"Cutting it now would be better."

"I will never give up."

"I warn you."

"Why are you smiling while warning me?"

"I'm not smiling."

If I'm not mistaken, I noticed a smile on the teacher's face as she helped herself to rice. It was the same smile from years ago when she was happy to see me kick out her younger brother during math class.

"I hadn't completely lost it."

"Who is this guy?"

" ...?.. "

"The one who asked you out."

After finishing our meal, Teacher Renu and I walked around the mall, ostensibly to kill time. In reality, every minute with her was precious to me. Even if she had to rush home to run errands, I would shamelessly keep her with me.

"Even if I told you, you wouldn't know him."

"I can't know everyone in the world. I just want to know who he is and where he's from, so I have some information."

"You're quite the talker."

The sweet-faced person crossed her arms and thought.

"He is a friend from my school days. When I was in high school elementary school, our parents were friends. I went to study there and happened to be close to him."

"It seems that the people who can enter your life are those around you... and I'm in that circle."

"What do you mean?"

"Your first love was Teacher Aekaphop. The person you told me to wait for is a friend from school."

"That's true."

"And the first person you kissed was your student."

A silence fell between us. I intended to tease a little to hear the heartbeat of the person in front of me, and it worked well. The heart is the most uncontrollable organ.

I still had an effect on her heart. I am confident.

"So, you spent seven years together with that friend..."

I thought of something inappropriate and quickly shake my head. Teacher Renu seem understand and pinch my arm harshly.

"Ouch, that hurts."

"Show some respect. You know me better than anyone. You know what kind of person I am."

"Can you also read minds? You really have some skills. No wonder I can't read your mind."

"Nonsense. Just by looking at your face, I know what you're thinking, simple logic. You asked how long we've been together. In European countries, making love is quite normal, and you shook your head. It was obviously something inappropriate."

"Even though you're small, your brain is still mature. Your name is Renuuu."

I repeated teasingly like I used to, making the sweet-faced person smile a little and shake her head.

"You never grew up."

"I've grown up."

I quickly replied because I hated that sentence. It felt like I was being looked down upon as if I wasn't suitable for her due to our age difference."

"I'm twenty-four now. Don't look at me like a child, I'm ready to mate with you. Ouch!"

"You're so inappropriat."

The beautiful teacher cover her face, seemingly distressed and unsure of how to deal with this.

"It looks like we're back to talking normally."

"Maybe you've grown up. You know how to improve the atmosphere between us."

The sweet-faced person, still covering her face, look at me and smiled.

"Shall we watch a movie?"

"I want to go home."

"I want to spend more time with you."

"You're more direct about your desires. But no, I have to go home and do some work. We're rebranding, so I'm a little busy."

"It's been seven years since we last met. We used to see each other every night for hours. Now that we're meeting again, you only have an hour to spare before you have to go back to work. What excuse am I going to use to see you next time?"

I complained, feeling a little down, as Teacher Renu look at me and laughs, both fondly and slightly annoying by my relentless demands. This is a moment to remember. She should miss me and ask for what she wanted most.

"If you want to see me, just ask me out."

"Are you going out?"

"Yes."

"Whenever you want?"

"Whenever I'm free."

"You can always say that you're not free."

"You're so troublesome, annoying."

"I'm shameless. Your word no longer affects me anymore."

"So, what do you want?"

"Can I call you every day?"

"Yes, but I'll only answer when I'm free to talk."

"Can I visit your house?"

"No."

"It's okay. Ong is my friend. I can ask him to invite me in. Before you came back, I already stayed at your house for a while."

The pretty person looked at me with her mouth open.

"What were you doing in my house?"

"I got closer to your mother, charmed Ong a little, and bye! I met your whole family. Oh, and your father too."

The pretty person looked at me, and feel a little angry. Her heartbeat quickened, but then slowed down as if she controlled her emotions.

"You've got bolder while I was away. If you could do all that, why ask to come to my house? Just tell Ong."

"Are you mad because I invaded your privacy or because I went with Ong?"

"..."

I smiled with a full heart. Even though we had been apart for years, the spark that had almost died seemed to have been rekindled, just waiting for the wind to fan it.

"But telling Ong and telling you are not the same thing. My heart doesn't beat the same."

"Why do you get more annoying as you grow up?"

"You'll have to be mad at me for a long time!"

And finally, it was time for us to part ways. Teacher Renu took me home before she left, playfully showing her teeth as if she was annoyed by my constant chatter. I waved happily at her sweet face. After that, I was back to my old self, not as happy as I let on.

Teacher Renu has a boyfriend. No, wait... a future boyfriend, I guess.

The fact that she wore that ring meant she was still hesitant. This return must be to clear things up with me once and for all. But I was the one holding this relationship together.

"Hey, have you eaten yet?"

"I have. What about you, Mom?"

"Who would wait for you?"

"Did you wash the dishes?"

"They're piled up over there..."

Mom said, suddenly remembering and falling silent when I didn't answer before heading to the kitchen. When I feel stressed or sad, I always find something to do to distract my mind and focus on something else.

Washing dishes is the best and most frequent way to relieve my stress.

Ever since Teacher Renu left school, I remember crying every day. Tears would fall onto my books as I read. When I couldn't take it anymore, I would run to the kitchen and repeatedly wash every dish in the house for about six months until I passed my exams and got into veterinary school as planned.

Fortunately, college life was hectic enough to ease the pain a little.

But there were still times when thoughts of her would creep in, although I managed to push them away with strength.

But I never gave up on her.

After she left, we were no longer teacher and student. I was determined that if she came back, I would pursue her with all my might. I would brag about how much I had grown and become responsible. I was the special dish she had created, and she no longer had to blame herself for being an unworthy kitchen.

However, when we finally met, Teacher Renu, who I had been waiting for, told me that she was starting a new relationship. This return was to set the record straight. She had not prioritized me the way I had prioritized her. Knowing this made me feel bad, but I told myself that I could not lose. If I gave up, everything I had worked for would disappear.

Even if I only had the last ten seconds of my life, I would seize the chance to make her notice me, even if just a little. It would be worth it.

I was determined!

But after today's meeting, I hadn't given up all hope. She looks like return with mixed feelings, wanting to return to her old status, but also having a bit of affection for me. Combined with my persistence, things didn't go as planned.

It's okay... There's still a chance. It's not impossible.

Thinking about this, I took a deep breath, used my rolled-up sleeve to wipe away the tears that had welled up, and stood up to dry my hands. I took out my phone to call Teacher Renu, who was probably still on the road.

[Didn't we met, Jao-Jom?]

"Yes, we did. I just wanted to see if you would pick up. It's now... eight minutes past eight."

I said, looking at my watch and smiling broadly, though she couldn't see it.

"From now on, I'll call you every night at eight minutes past eight. You have to answer."

[I said I would answer if I free.]

"No, you have to answer. It's crucial, especially in the first twenty-one days, because it will become a habit without us realizing it. I don't care, I'll keep calling until you answer because it's a very important moment."

[What kind of moment? Why is it important?]

The moment to say I love you. I love you, Teach.

[...]

And I will always remember.

Remember that.



Sunlyan

20. The Dog's Owner

Viramarati-savitritithita Original

"Hello, Doctor."

I glances over at the dog owner who had brought in a five-month-old mixed-breed puppy for a check-up. The owner looked nervous, like someone who didn't know what to do, so I give her a reassuring smile.

The dog had diarrhea...

"What seems to be the problem today?"

"She has diarrhea. Her stools don't look good, and she's very lethargic, so I thought I'd better bring her in."

"Let's see... Let Jom take a look and see what's going on."

I said, referring to myself by name, as I always did when talking to pets.

"What's her name?"

I looked at the owner for a moment to make sure I had the right name.

"Viramarati-savitritithita."

"Hmm? Oh."

Clang!

The metal tray I had absentmindedly left on the examination table clattered to the floor. The dog's well-meaning owner bent down to pick it up just as I reached out quickly, and our hands brushed against each other.

Zap!

A flood of thoughts and feelings flooded my head, making my face flush. I quickly pulled my hand back, my mouth hanging open.

"Are you okay, Doc? Your face is very red."

"Uh... um."

"What did the doctor say?"

At that moment, the person in the dog owner's mind burst into the room. It was my senior, Dahwan, who I had recently written about on my Celeb Gossip Facebook page. She looked alarmed.

"She still didn't say anything. Did you find a parking spot?"

"Yes, but it's quite far. Doc, is this your clinic?"

"Yes," I replied, feeling a little shy and avoiding eye contact because I felt like I was intruding. Before taking the dog to the vet, these two women had been quite... intimate.

"Next time, you should build a parking lot. It's so hard to find a spot."

"Dahwan!"

One of the dog's owners lightly slapped her partner's arm as if scolding her.

"Sorry about that, Doctor. Please go ahead and examine her."

I nod and gently touch Viramarati to see how she is feeling. The little furball's memories revealed what had happened before they came here.

"Someone gave her cow's milk."

The two women looked at each other in surprise, especially Dahwan, who asks me again.

"How did you know Viramarati-savitritithita drank cow's milk?"

"I'm a veterinarian."

"Oh, right."

Most pet owners are always surprised by my insights.

When I answer like that, they usually don't ask any more questions, as if I've subtly warned them not to test my knowledge.

Though in reality, I have a special ability.

"She had a stomach ache since tonight. Usually, when dogs have diarrhea, most owners don't worry too much because they think it's normal. You two really love your dog."

"She watches a lot of dog care videos."

Dahwan said, pointing at her girlfriend proudly.

"She likes to read forums about dog poop."

"While Senior Dahwan has never studied anything and gave her milk."

I said.

"Dahwan, did you give Viramarati milk?"

The sweet-faced woman next to her immediately slap her partner's arm.

"Who gives cow's milk to dogs?"

"It's nutritious. She'll grow faster."

"You complain when she gets big, and now you give her milk because she's small?"

The two owners started arguing, especially the sweet-faced one who seemed more reasonable. I smiled without saying anything, which made Dahwan, who noticed, glance at me sideways.

"Doctor, you know a lot. You even knew who gave Viramarati-savitrithita milk."

"I figured. Since this lady likes to research dog care, she should know that dogs can't drink cow's milk. So, the only option left is that Senior Dahwan gave it to her."

"I see. You're like Conan. By the way, I heard you call me 'senior'. Why?"

"I went to the same school as you."

"Ah... so you're a freshman. Kim went to the same school too."

"So there are two seniors here."

I smile at the sweet-faced senior like a respectful junior. Why didn't I remember writing about Dahwan being in love with a school friend?

"This is her."

"What else do you know besides dog stuff, Doctor?"

"What do you mean?"

"Since you seem to know a lot, I want to test your knowledge."

"I know that before you came here, Senior Dahwan did something very nice."

"I looked at the two of them and smile."

"So nice that she only noticed Viramarati-savitritithita's abnormal feces later."

At this, the two women covered their mouths in shock, especially the sweet-faced one who touched the actress's elbow, looking horrified.

"I'm just guessing. Why are you so shocked? Did I guess right?"

"No!"

"So, you weren't happy?"

"We were happy!"

The actress's direct answer make Kimhan pinch her partner's arm as a reminder, and Dahwan quickly changed the subject.

"Can you treat her diarrhea?"

"Of course, it's me, Jom."

"Oh." Dahwan's girlfriend exclaimed, looking down.

"Garfield."

"What a fat cat."

The actress laughs, crossing her arms.

"Did you eat a cow, little one?"

"Viramarati-savitritithita, how did you get out... Sorry about that."

I pick up the orange cat and push it into another room, locking the door. But I felt a presence behind me. When I turned around, I saw the sweet-faced senior's stern expression.

"What was that cat's name, doctor?"

I smile awkwardly and scratch my cheek.

"Same as your dog."

"Why did you give it that name? It's not a common name. Only special people or descendants of the Qing Dynasty in Datang can have pets with such long names."

"Why the Qing Dynasty, but Datang?"

"Why should I remember Chinese dynasties? I can't even remember if Rattanakosin or Ayutthaya came first in Thai history."

"Where do you get your inner strength for period dramas from?"

Kimhan looks at her partner in surprise.

"I just say 'thee' and move on."

The senior glanced at me before returning to the original topic, not wanting to let it go.

"Copycat."

I could only smile awkwardly because I didn't know how to defend myself. I copied.

"Sorry. I really liked you, Senior Dahwan. I wanted to name a cat after you, but I was afraid you would get offended."

"I would."

"So I used your dog's name because I admired your beauty so much."

I could read minds and understand personalities, so I know that repeatedly complimenting this proud actress would calm her down.

Her mind was full of *"I'm so beautiful."*

She looked just *like my mother*.

"If you like me so much, what can I say... It's fine, since you're a fan."

The vain woman raised her chin smugly, making me laugh.

"But now our pets have the same name, which doesn't seem unique anymore. Kim... I think we should change our dog's name. After the treatment, we'll update her records."

"What name?"

"Something not too different, so that it sounds familiar but not confusing to the dog."

"What name are you suggesting, Dahwan?"

"Viramarati-savitritrito."

"..."

We are all stunned into silence. Dahwan, seeing no one object, assumes it is a good name.

"See? Not much different, so our dog will feel familiar even with a new name."

"You're crazy!"

I am listening intently...

"Doctor, don't pay attention to her."

I have to hold back my laughter because Dahwan was so charming and funny, even without trying. Her natural charm made everyone happy, even if she is annoying at times.

"As a thank you for letting me use the name, I won't charge you for the treatment."

"No, please charge us."

Dahwan's girlfriend quickly refuses, and Dahwan nod.

"Yes, take the money. You should get paid for your work. That cat is cute too. Most importantly..."

"Yes?"

"We're rich!"

After treating all the cases, I am startled by the alarm on my phone. At 8:08 p.m., I quickly pick up my phone and call the beautiful teacher. But today, she didn't answer.

Is she challenging me?

When she didn't answer after several calls, I keep dialing until there are almost ten missed calls. My persistence paid off when the sweet-faced one finally answers, her voice low and irritated.

[Are you losing your mind?]

"You didn't answer, so I was worried that something bad had happened and kept calling."

[If something really bad happened, there wouldn't be time to answer the phone.]

"But you're answering now, so nothing bad happened. I'm relieved... It's already the fifth day I've called to tell you I love you."

[You're so good at wasting time.]

"I'll try calling for twenty-one days in a row. That way, you'll get used to it and feel that 8:08 p.m. is important... I love you, Teacher Renu."

[Annoying.]

"You'll get used to it, hehe. Are you free tomorrow?"

[I'm not.]

"You said that if I wanted to see you, I could see you anytime. So, you're not keeping your word, just giving false hope to ignore me."

[Jom...]

I believe I know Teacher Renu better than anyone because I know she's very proud. If I accused her of not keeping her word, I would get what I wanted immediately, and it worked.

[Tomorrow, I really have to go discuss work. I don't have time to joke with you. Like I said, I'm running my family business, so it's a little busy.]

"It's okay. I can go with you. I promise to be quiet, not to be stubborn, not to make noise."

"Why would you come and be a bother? I really have to work."

[Tomorrow, I have an important meeting, and I don't even know if they'll agree.]

"I can read minds, you know."

At this point, Teacher Renu pauses for a moment as if she remembered something.

[That's true. It seems like you can do more than I thought. Helpful.]

"Ok? Let me go with you tomorrow. I want to be with you. I miss you; I haven't seen you in days."

[You're so clingy. Okay, I'll see you tomorrow. I'll catch you.]

"No, I'll come to you. See you tomorrow. I love you."

[Annoying.]

Even though she said that, I could feel that she is holding back a smile and I had to find words to respond. When the sweet-faced teacher said "annoying", I didn't feel the true meaning of the word because I know she is just embarrass. But it would be better if she respond with something nicer like.

'I love you too.'

Will that day ever come?

Teacher Renu agreed to let me come along to work as she said, but it was a bit surprising that Ong was there too. Today, my friend with the sharp features was wearing a suit and tie, leaving me a bit dumbfounded. Teacher Renu is still wearing a white shirt, pants, and four-inch heels, with her hair tied back, giving off a confident vibe that make me forget what the old Teacher Renu looked like.

But she looks beautiful anyway.

However, today there is an even bigger surprise. The guest that Teacher Renu mentioned is the owner of the original dog Viramarati-savitrithita. Today, Senior Kimhan also come in formal attire. As soon as we met, the sweet-faced person greeted me immediately.

"Oh, Doctor, how did you get here?"

"I came with Teacher... um, with Miss Renu. So, are you the guest we're meeting today?"

"Do you know each other?"

"Yesterday, I took the dog for a treatment."

"Great, no introduction needed."

We all sit together, but I sit in the outer circle with no right to speak or give opinions, as it's none of my business. Today's discussion is about a handbag company that wanted to join the Dream brand.

"Honestly, my brand focuses more on clothing. We haven't thought about branching out into accessories, and we don't know if we can do that well."

"These are the details I thought of. You might be interested, Kimhan."

I haven't read any of the documents, but Senior Kimhan thought the documents were quite interesting. Teacher Renu wanted to enter the semi-high-end market by making the handcrafted bags. From selling at two thousand baht per piece, if they're branded, placed in stores, and hand-painted by artists chosen by Kimhun, the price of the bag could rise to 15,000 to 40,000 baht, significantly increasing its value.

Custom-made bags, with only one unique piece in the world.

And yes... a truly Thai brand.

"Let me think about it. I need to discuss it with my father and Dahwan. But I admit that I am very interested."

"Okay, I will contact you again for your decision."

"Thank you for your interest."

I can hear Teacher Renu's heart beating fast, anxious about this project. Even though I can't read her mind, I can tell that she hopes Senior Kimhan will accept.

"Senior is very interested. Your proposal is irresistible."

"Really?"

Teacher Renu, who is s stop at the red light, look at me in surprise.

"Yes, but she is worried about the process. Senior Kimhan is good at designing clothes. If she takes on a new product, she is afraid that she will not be good at it. It is like she is afraid of stepping out of her comfort zone.

"Too worried."

"Making this a craft especially means finding skilled artisans to paint the bags. Thailand has many talented people, but finding reliable people is difficult. I mean, custom and solid craftsmen. And if you're selling bags worth tens of thousands, the craftsmen will be expensive, making it hard to make a profit.

"How do you know so much?"

Ong, sitting in the front, turn to me in surprise.

"You didn't say anything there."

"What could I say? It's none of my business."

"You're amazing, like you can read minds."

"I can really read minds."

I smile a little as if I am bragging, but Ong think I am joking.

Teacher Renu glances at me through the rearview mirror without saying anything, but I could feel the admiration in her eyes.

"Re, you can drop me off here."

"Why?"

"I have some business around here."

Ong get out of the car and drive away first, Teacher Renu told me to sit in the front so I can talk more comfortably. Or in other words, 'I'm not a

driver.'

"Do you know what his business is?"

"His girlfriend lives in that apartment."

I point to a nearby building and laugh.

"If Ong were a dog, he would be in heat. Ouch! Why did you hit me?"

"That's a disgusting thing to say."

Teacher Renu looks around the apartment again.

"Do I need to worry about Ong?"

"No need. He always carries condoms in his bag. Since you praised him for being careful, he remembered that you like him carrying condoms."

"The more I listen, the more my head hurts. Does Ong really care that much about me?"

"You have a lot of influence over your brother. Oh... and over me too."

I smile widely, making Teacher Renu look at me in silence. Her eyes are filled with feelings that make my heart race, so I have to cover my face with my hands.

"What are you doing?"

"I can't look at you for too long."

"Why not?"

"I feel like I'm in heat."

"You're crazy!"

This time, her voice was genuinely loud, and she reaches out to pinch me, displeases with my cheeky words. I can only laugh and share my thoughts.

"Well, people have flesh and blood. I've grown up now. If you want something, say it clearly. Especially yesterday, when I met Senior Kimhun, oh my..."

My heart raced as the image floated through my head. The two of them were cuddling on the bed, and the intense feelings they shared almost made me faint.

"Oh my, what? You start talking and then stop."

"You know that. Senior Kimhan and Senior Dahwan, the co-owner of the brand, are a couple, right?"

"I saw it on the news."

"I accidentally saw Senior Kimhan and Senior Dahwan making love."

"You."

Teacher Renu covered her face.

"I shouldn't have asked."

"But it wasn't disgusting. It was a love story... It was beautiful, sexy, not vulgar. It seemed more like blushing. I've never imagined how women make love, but it's possible."

"That's enough."

"The two were hugging each other, Senior Dahwan's hand touching her lover's entire body until she moaned..."

"Can you stop? I need to concentrate on driving."

"But the most important thing is that every time they make love, they care if the other is happy. And every time they finish, they hug each other and

tell each other that they love each other... Saying 'I love you' is really nice."

"Please... stop."

"It would be nice if I could do that with you."

Scream!!

Then Teacher Renu brakes suddenly, almost making me stumble forward. Luckily, I wearing a seatbelt, so I am not hurt. However, our car was hit from behind with a loud thud.

"We had an accident."

Teacher Renu turn to face me, showing her teeth.

"It's your fault, talking nonsense."

"What did I say? I just want to say that I love you, and that you love me back. Why did you get so scared and suddenly slam on the brakes?"

"Are you sure that's all you want to do? What do you think I want to do?"

"Never mind."

The sweet-faced person looked in the rearview mirror and see the other driver approaching to discuss the insurance. She unbuckle her seatbelt, ready to leave, but I grab her arm.

"Teacher, I want to tell you something before you go."

"What now? I need to go to talk."

"I just want to tell you..."

"You love me. You say that every day."

"No, I mean..."

"..."

"Let's make love."

"You idiot!"



SunYan

21. The Ring's Owner

"I love you, Teacher!"

It's been twenty days since I started this habit-forming mission. From what I've heard, if you do something for twenty-one days in a row, it becomes a habit. And I would make Teacher Renu feel like she couldn't live without my declaration of love at 8:08 p.m.

When she didn't hear me say "I love you," she felt like something was missing.

When she felt like something was missing, she thought of me.

And eventually, the beautiful teacher couldn't live without me.

[Has the clinic closed yet?]

"Just one more case and then it's over. You've improved by asking about me now."

[So that the conversation doesn't get too dry.]

"Shall we meet tomorrow?"

[No, I have an appointment.]

"What kind of appointment? Work?"

[Yes...]

The person on the other end made a curious sound, and I admit that the teacher managed to pique my interest.

"Who are you going to meet?"

[I won't tell you.]

"You don't have any friends."

[What kind of person doesn't have any friends? Get back to work.]

"Are you trying to make me jealous?"

[What are you talking about?]

"You're hiding something, making it a secret. You want me to be curious. Don't tell me that the person you're meeting is the owner of that ring."

[You're smart. It's him.]

"That lie didn't work. Because I don't think that guy exists."

[What do you mean?]

"I mean, the teacher made it up to trick me. It won't work. Hehe."

[Nonsense.]

"Whatever. See you tomorrow. That's it for now. I love you teacher.. more!"

[You're silly.]

The laugh that sounded more endearing than annoying made me smile too. It had been twenty days since I started telling her that I loved her, and I was starting to seriously doubt that the guy who gave her the ring existed. I was sure the teacher had made up the character because she wanted me to give up.

It was weird... She wanted me to give up, but not completely. It was like she was doing it just to show off and she liked seeing me chase after her.

Honestly, the stalker was happy too. I could tease her every day.

"Oh, what's wrong with Broomy today?"

The big furry dog walks up to me, rubbing against me like we're old friends. I try to touch him to see if there is anything wrong, but nothing happened, so I looked at his owner to ask again.

But before I could say anything, a thought of the handsome guy floated into my mind.

'If you're free, let's go have dinner. No, I shouldn't say that...'

'Do you like coffee, Doc? What if she doesn't drink coffee?'

'Broomy really likes you. What should I do next...'

So, he didn't take the dog to see the vet. I look at the guy who is still hesitant and hid my smile before putting on an innocent face.

"So, what's wrong with Broomy?"

"Broomy really likes you, Doc. He gets restless and wants me to bring him here often."

"I see." I nod softly.

"Did he tell you himself that he wants to see me?"

"He keeps pulling me out of the house. He took me to this clinic when I took him for a walk. Look, he's all over you."

I was still the same Jao Jom who understood the feeling of having a secret crush, it took a lot of courage to dig up my guts and say something like that. But I wouldn't give them hope if I didn't like someone. That's the rule.

"He's a smart dog."

"Yes."

"Now that he's seen me, he can go home. The clinic is about to close. It's better to bring him in the morning. At night, you can only see each other for a short time."

"I work in the morning, so it's not convenient."

I already knew that..."

"What a shame."

"Don't you have time off, doctor?"

He try to gather his courage again. I think for a moment before giving a short answer.

"None."

That's it... No hope and closing all opportunities.

"Teacher Re!"

When I surprise the teacher at her house, she is dresses casually and looked a little scares. Teacher Renu is usually quite protective of her personal space. When I had private math lessons, getting in took a lot of effort.

"How did you get in?"

"I have a special ticket. Ta-dal," I gesture to Ong, who invite me into the house.

"And yes, Ong himself brought me in."

The lovely teacher looked at her younger brother with a cold and distant gaze, causing the young man to stand awkwardly, not daring to look at her.

Guilt wash over me because I was the reason Ong was being scolded, so I quickly tried to fix the situation by acting cheerful.

"No need to get mad. I would have been bored outside if Ong didn't bring me in. In fact, I would have called and pestered you to open the door anyway."

"That doesn't mean I would have opened it. Besides, I said I wasn't free."

"You mean the appointment you mentioned? You lied. You don't have an appointment. Hehe."

"Am I that kind of person?"

"It's okay if you have an appointment. I'll go with you."

" ... "

"Let's go together. If you really have an appointment, I'll leave quietly without being a burden. Okay?"

Teacher Renu could only shake her head because she couldn't do anything.

"Then wait for me here. I'll change."

"Can't I go upstairs with you?"

"No."

"Humph."

I was just joking. The lovely teacher went back to the house to change as she said. Now, it was just me and Ong alone. Ong's thoughts were filled with sadness and disappointment. The young man was actually a crybaby. Just a few words from his sister, and he was already down.

"I'm sorry, Ong."

"It's okay."

"No, it's not!"

I grab his arm without thinking and try to cheer him up.

"It's my fault for insisting that you bring me. I wanted to surprised the teacher, but I forgot that she hates surprised."

"Because it's me. That's why Re was so angry."

"No, I can feel that she cares a lot more about you now."

"Not even close."

The young man looked at the nearby pool, thinking about the past. Of course, I saw the whole picture, but I pretended to ask.

"What's wrong with the pool?"

"I fell in once. Guess why."

"Your legs gave out?"

"Re pushed me in."

"This is crazy. I don't believe it. It's impossible."

I raised my voice and put my hand on my chest.

"No matter how angry you are with your sister, you shouldn't accuse her like that. Maybe you were playing and accidentally fell in?"

"Well... maybe."

As I said, Ong didn't remember much about the past. So when I changed the subject, he hesitated even more.

"Siblings playing together. See, she has moments of playing with you... But is the water cold?"

I pout and look at him. It seemed like the young man understood.

"You won't catch me."

"Don't be so sure!"

I immediately pushed Ong, wanting to provoke him. But since Ong was already cautious, he grabbed my arm as well.

"Hey!"

Splash!

Ong's reaction so quick, I couldn't avoid it or fix it in time, even though I heard what he was planning. In the end, I fell into the water, which shallow enough for me to stand up in. The young man laughed, and the gloomy atmosphere of being scolded by his sister disappeared.

"Look, I'm all wet! I was about to go out with Teacher Re."

"Why did you prank me then?"

"Actually, you knew I was going to prank you. You planned to get me wet, didn't you?"

"Yes."

The young man splashed water on my face.

"Take this."

"Water is in my eyes now. You're so mean!"

I threw myself back, forgetting my worry about not having a change of clothes because I was too focused on getting revenge. Neither of us noticed someone standing in the pool, watching us with an unreadable expression.

I can read everyone's mind in the world except hers...

"Having fun, aren't you?"

"Oh, teacher, are you done changing?"

"..."

"Is it okay if I borrow some clothes?"

"No."

"Then what do I do? I'm all wet."

"Wait until it dry."

"Will you wait for me until I dry?"

"I'll meet my friend as planned."

The sweet-faced teacher walked to the other side and unlocked the car. I looked at her, a little irritated.

Not even trying to comfort me...

"Ong, can you borrow me some clothes?"

My words made the charming teacher, who had taken a few steps, stop, but didn't turn around. Ong walked to the edge of the pool, got out, and scratched her head, shaking her wet hair like a golden retriever shedding its fur.

"But my clothes are all too big. But that's good... I like seeing girls in big clothes."

"Like seeing your girlfriend in a big football shirt but no pants, right?"

"How did you know..."

Well, the image of his girlfriend in a Liverpool shirt, all pink with love, popped into my head.

"Wow... Just the shirt, huh? Kind of sexy."

"What else do guys have besides football shirts? Just lend me something. Do you have any of your girlfriend's panties?"

"Idiot. Of course not."

"So I have to go braless?"

"Do you have anything to show?"

"I have nipples."

"You're a girl!"

"Go change in my room."

Teacher Renu's voice sounded, making me turn to face her with a pout.

"But you said not to go upstairs or change your clothes and wait for them to dry on their own."

"Jom."

That tone made me back away. In the end, I had to go change in the teacher's beautiful office, feeling a little excited. The lovely woman handed me a t-shirt and long sweatpants to wear. And yes... panties too.

"What are you looking at?"

"...."

"Jealous of them?"

I said, looking at her figure about a meter away.

"They could touch you in places no one else can."

"Stop being cheeky and change your clothes."

"Just kidding. But why did you change your mind and let me go upstairs?"

"You're very naughty. How can you be so touchy with a male friend?"

"Ong is your brother and my friend too. Besides, Ong doesn't have any dirty thoughts about me. We are pure of heart towards each other."

"That's still men and women."

"Women and women can be dangerous too."

I wink at the charming teacher before she throw a pillow at me.

"Go change."

"Okay."

I smile widely as we left together. Wearing the teacher's clothes made me feel like I was being hugged in a way I couldn't describe.

"I love your smell, teacher."

"What?"

"The smell of fabric softener, like linen. It makes me feel like you're always clean. That smell reminds me of a baby."

I said, sniffing my collar happily. Teacher Renu placed a hand on her cheek silently, making me curious.

"What's wrong?"

"I feel weird, my face is hot."

"Are you blushing? That's so cute."

"Stop doing that."

"I love you, teacher."

"I'm tired of hearing that."

"Today is the twenty-first day, you know. I was supposed to call you at 8:08 p.m., but I couldn't wait."

"It doesn't seem like you're used to it."

"If you haven't heard me say I love you for a day. I can tell you'll definitely be annoyed... Are you guys going to meet here? A Japanese restaurant... I don't eat Japanese food."

"So just don't eat it."

Her cold words didn't affect me much because I knew they weren't true. Eventually, when she saw that I wasn't eating, she would find something to stuff in my mouth.

"Who are you meeting? But I bet there's no one. You're just making up a character to make me back off."

I am mumbling when I hear a man's voice. He nod to Teacher Renu familiarly. The image of the man walking towards us fills my mind with thoughts of Teacher Renu, making me uncomfortable.

"Have you been here long?" She asked.

"A while... Who did you bring?"

"A student."

Teacher Renu looked at me and smile.

"Right, you used to be a teacher. Hello."

"Hello"

I held out my hand for a handshake, hoping to read everything through this man. He looked at me and chuckled a little, like 'Okay, okay,' and shake my hand. Then, everything floods into my mind.

He was the owner of the ring...

He came for an answer...

"He's real... "

I mumble, looking at the sweet-faced teacher who smile at me.

"See, I'm a liar?"

"I was wrong to accuse you of lying."

I said cheerfully, checking my G-Shock watch.

"Oh, it's time for me to go open the clinic. I'll have to apologize. Goodbye, teacher."

"Isn't today a holiday?"

"It's my clinic. I open and close it whenever I want."

I bow to the two of them and prepare to leave, but the beautiful teacher grab my wrist.

"Are you really leaving?"

Ba-dum...

Teacher Renu's heart was pounding, indicating that her stress level is rising. I smile a little and nod.

"I keep my promises. If you had a real commitment, I would leave."

"..."

"Besides, I don't like Japanese food. Eating raw things, I don't understand what's tasty about it. I'll call you when I get home. Bye."

I left feeling like I had been hit hard on the head. Maybe because I was so confident that what I thought was right, I didn't prepare myself for the reality that she had a commitment to that guy. The guy who asked her to wear the ring and think about it.

The images in his mind were full of Teacher Renu from her college days. They had spent time together studying and discussing the Dow Jones Index, things I didn't understand at all. But what hurt the most...

More than that...

They kissed.

Damn!

"Oh, I rarely see you. You never stay for meals with me on holidays... Hey, I'm talking to you."

"Have you washed the dishes yet?"

"..."

"Don't wash it off. Give me a moment."

I ran upstairs to calm my jealous emotions. I needed to distract myself as much as possible. The pain was making me despair and lose hope about the teacher, almost extinguishing the little hope I had left.

What kept me going was hope... I hoped that one day, the teacher and I could be more. But after meeting that guy, the little flame I had was about to go out.

I didn't want to give up, even if the chances were zero.

Because I was so distracted, the only thing that could make me think about anything else was the Celeb Gossip page. Many people sent in scandalous news about celebrities, but most of them weren't that interesting.

Yeah... I had a story in mind, but I didn't want to post it because it was from the past. Doing so wouldn't solve anything.

'So you're really not going to look into this news? Why does a celebrity who could kill her own child get all the good stuff while the man who was her lover has to deal with this garbage in his life?'

The usual source sent the news with a personal vendetta. I wasn't interested in the story because it seemed colorful. But today was different.

I was really shaken! Especially when I saw the picture of actress Maya laughing happily with her current co-star. I closed my eyes, filled with jealousy and hatred. The world seemed so unfair. Why could everyone be happy except me?

Why!

Finally, I typed a response without thinking.

'Okay, get ready for new content.'

And I hit enter to spread the news as an admin immediately...



22.GOD

The news I posted spread like wildfire, as if the gasoline had already been poured and was just waiting for a spark. Big and small news outlets picked up the story from my page without any filtering because they considered it reliable.

For everyone, the Celeb Gossip page was a reassurance that the story was definitely true.

But to be honest, I wasn't too comfortable with this news. Part of the reason I did it was a fleeting moment of jealousy. It wasn't the fault of a woman in love; it was the fault of that celebrity being happy while I was unhappy.

Why am I like this?

It was too late to delete the post now. Oh well, it probably wouldn't make a difference...

Ding-a-ling!

The sound of the store door opening interrupted my Chinese drama binge. When I stood up, I saw that it was Broomy's owner, the same guy from before. Today, he came alone, without his furry dog.

"Dog" He said.

"You mean doctor?" I ask.

"Oh! Doctor."

The handsome man, dressed in office attire with his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, corrected himself. At least, he thought this was good preparation. Seeing his nervous behavior, I turned to laugh before turning back to suppress my smile.

"What's up?" I ask.

"I saw a new coffee shop not far from here that just opened." He said.

"Uh-huh." I replied.

"So I thought...

'What now? You've come this far; you can't turn back now.'

I initially intended to interrupt him, but my phone's alarm reminded me that it was 8:08 p.m. I should call to tell Professor Renu that I love her, and that made me think of something.

"I never asked your name, so what's your name?" I ask.

"Huh? Oh, I'm Gun."

He answers quickly once he get his bearings.

"I'm Jom. Now we can call each other properly."

I usually don't give people hope, so I usually cut off those who approach me. But today, I felt it wouldn't be fair to be cold and dismiss a good person trying to get closer. I understood how painful it was to not have a chance.

Just like what I experienced.

"So, why did you mention the coffee shop?" I ask.

"I noticed that your shop usually closes at this time and saw that there were no customers. So, I thought I would invite you, uh, Dr. Jom, for a coffee."

It was 8:12 p.m. I had a small hope that if I didn't call, Teacher Renu might feel like calling me. But all was silent.

She doesn't think about me, huh? So why should I think about her?

"Sure, coffee sounds good. Give me a moment to close the shop. It'll take about three minutes ." I said.

"Okay."

His childish excitement reflected in his wide smile. I had never seen this side of the owner of Broomy before, and it make me laugh. I feel more fond of him because he seems sincere.

Yes... His mind was just thinking what to talk to me about, without any harmful or inappropriate thoughts.

I slowly turned off the lights and the air conditioning and checked everything, hoping that the teacher would call. I could cancel this supposed date. But no... there was no answer.

"There you go."

I say, smiling at my new friend who is waiting excitedly.

"Where is the coffee shop?"

"Across the street, about two blocks away." He said.

"Lead the way then. By the way, you're paying, right?" I ask.

"Yes, yes." He confirmed.

Gun wasn't the first guy approach me like this. Since my freshman year, many guys from other colleges tried to approach me in various ways. Surprisingly, I also attracted the same sex. My mother used to say that women get prettier as they grow up, especially those who weren't pretty as children.

'You were an ugly child, but you inherited your looks from your mother as you grew up.'

I don't know, but it doesn't matter. I was in high demand. Sometimes I almost wavered because some of the guys were handsome and generous. But thinking about Teacher Renu always held me back.

'I don't like you.'

'I already have someone in my heart.'

I had been single since Teacher left. No, let me rephrase that. I had never had a lover because I thought everyone was dirty-minded and not worth dating until I met Teacher Renu, who opened my world to feelings I had never experienced before.

No one else made my heart race like Teacher Renu.

So I kept in touch with Ong and always asked where Teacher Renu was studying, what she was doing, and when she would be back. Knowing about her made me wait and strive to grow, to be a complete person that she could be proud of.

Six years of waiting after graduation, plus another year waiting for his return.

And now, I found out that Teacher Renu had someone to relate to, perfect in looks and status, and most importantly, a man...

Just by touching his hand, I saw it all. He also had a Ph.D. He was rich, the son of a jewelry store owner. Their parents were friends and had known each other since elementary school. What reason did Professor Renu have to reject him?

I am just a veterinarian, treating dogs and cats, not even close to his status.

"My home is around here. I took Broomy in because the previous owner moved abroad and I was afraid he would have nowhere to go. I still have to rent a house, pay for my car, and now take care of a dog," Gun said.

And this is Gun, a middle-class guy living a middle-class life, just like me.

How fitting.

"That's how life is for recent graduates. We weren't born with a silver spoon in our mouths. Don't you think we're a good match for each other?" I asked.

"What?" His shocking reaction make me laugh.

"Aren't you trying to win me over?" I ask.

"Uh... well..."

"I'm just saying we're a good match. We're both ordinary, simple, nothing extraordinary. That's us."

We stayed for coffee a little longer, and he offered to walk me home since it was 10 pm. Honestly, I didn't need to ask much to learn a lot about him. I already knew when I pretended to reach out and touch his shoulder to ask for a spoon. But if I acted like I knew, there would be nothing to talk about.

Knowing too much made everyone in the world seem boring. That's why Teacher Renu was interesting to me.

Maybe it wasn't love after all.

"When do you have a day off? Oh, you don't have a day off." Gun said.

"The day after tomorrow. I'm off duty."

I replied, smiling, knowing he is about to invite me to a movie.

"D-Do you want to watch a movie? A new one just came out." He asked.

Damn, I can't know everything.

"Sure, you made it this far. Keep trying." I said.

"O-Okay." He stammered.

"See you then."

I waved goodbye and watched him until he was out of sight. Then I sighed deeply, feeling like a weight had been lifted off my chest. The feeling was so different from being with Professor Renu. It wasn't blissful, even though I was well taken care of.

No, I just wasn't used to it.

"Ahem! Who was that?"

Mom, watching a ghost show, asked with a smile.

"A guy." I answer.

"Have you slept with him yet?"

"Almost, Mom. Just a light touch."

"You're annoying!"

Mom pretended to throw her coffee cup at me, but stopped. I stuck out my tongue and ran upstairs.

"Bye."

I maintained my composure, though I was deeply sad inside. My phone remained silent, with no messages or chats from Professor Renu. The 21-day theory seemed ineffective.

Finally, I couldn't bear it and called her.

[You called at 10:30 pm today, not 8:08 pm. Not completing 21 days will become a habit.]

Her voice was light, unlike my suffering since 8:08 pm. She didn't call or appreciate that time at all.

"Did you miss me?"

[Didn't we just met? Why would I miss you?]

"Can I ask you something?"

[What?]

"Have you ever liked me?"

Silence fell between us. I closed my eyes and spoke painfully.

"Today, I held your man's hand and saw everything."

[What did you see?]

You kissed him.

[.....]

"He put a ring on you. You told him that you needed some time to clear things up before giving an answer. He came today to hear your answer. Am I right?"

[You saw all of this... Yes, he came for an answer.]

"What did you say to him?"

[Guess.]

His indifferent tone hurt me. All day, I carried sadness, ached with jealousy, and couldn't do anything. It felt like my heart had been ripped out and scattered on the worthless concrete floor.

Today, he came with so much hope. From his perspective, he had everything perfectly suited for you in every aspect. I can tell... you really are a perfect match for him.

[So, what's your guess?]

"It's obvious. You gave him a chance to wait, but for me, you never gave me anything."

I remembered seven years ago, when we were in the car together.

"You told me to forget about you, and you would forget about me too. But with this guy, it's different. You asked for time and told him to wait. So, I guess..."

I took a long pause before answering in a shaky voice.

"I give up."

I sobbed into the phone while the other end remained silent.

After holding it in all day, I cried like a child, tears streaming down like a broken dam.

"I don't want to be a burden that holds you back. You're over thirty now. You should have a boyfriend. How can you keep worrying about your student being heartbroken and not having a boyfriend?"

"...."

"I... I'll move on too. Today, I went on a date."

[Date with who? Do you have someone else?]

"He owns a dog that we usually take for treatment together. I knew for a while that he was interested, but I never gave him a chance. So today, I went out for coffee with him to get to know each other. It wasn't that bad... I'm not going to tell you this to bluff you, just to let you know that I'm fine. I won't bother you anymore. Women should be with men."

[Jom]

"Thank you. You're the best teacher ever. And today, I'm not going to say 'I love you'... It's the twenty-first. You might get used to it and get annoyed if I don't say it again."

[...]

"Good night."

I hung up and lay down, crying alone in my bed. Okay... It's time to move on. From now on, I'll eventually erase Teacher Renu from my memory.

I'm the one who does everything I say. This won't be any different...

I'll make it!

GUN: I bought movie tickets for the 9pm show. See you there.

I read the message with a slight emptiness before tossing the phone back onto the bed without excitement. It had been two days since I had last spoken to Teacher Renu. It felt like something was missing, but all I could do was tell myself, 'This too shall pass.'

I found myself constantly checking the clock. As it got closer to 8:00 PM, I got anxious and wanted to call, but I held back. By the time I calmed down, it was already 8:30 PM, so I took a shower and went to bed.

Today, it was time for my real date with Gun. I was supposed to pick out some clothes to show respect so he would know I wanted to be there, not just wear something. Feeling like the room was too quiet, I grabbed the remote and turned on the TV to provide some background noise while I picked out my outfit.

Gray... very dark.

Brown... Hmm, I guess brown suits me.

"Breaking news: Maya, an up-and-coming actress, was rushed to the hospital after a close friend became suspicious when she didn't answer her phone. Upon entering her room, they found the actress with her wrists slit, lying in a pool of blood in the bathroom..."

The urgent news echoed loudly in my ears. The clothes I am holding onto fall to the floor as I lost all strength. I slowly turn to look at the moving images and see that the Maya they're talking about is the same one I had reported, now being loaded into an ambulance and rushed away.

No way...

I drop everything I am doing and run to my computer check the news online. My entire feed was filled with stories about this actress. Some were sympathetic, while others cruelly mocked her without understanding. The current trend was to blame my page for ruining someone's life.

'Killer Page'

What a painful accusation. Initially feeling deeply guilty, my emotions shifted to anger at being blamed like this. I had reported the truth, and everyone seemed happy with what they had consumed. But when the result was bad, everyone turned on me, leaving themselves without blame.

Bastard!

I scrolled through the flood of comments on the post I exposed two days ago. There were so many, I decided to check my inbox. I found countless angry and hateful messages, mostly from fans of the actress, which was understandable. But one message stood out.

Codename God

I don't know why I was drawn to this one. Maybe it was the name, which sounded like something out of a comic book. Out of curiosity, I clicked to read it and found a message full of bitter accusations, as if the person affected was a family member.

Codename God: Who do you think you are destroy another person's life like this? How could you be raised to do something so cruel? She's in the hospital, fighting for her life. Do you feel anything?

I could have ignored it, but something made me respond.

Admin: The admin was just doing his job.

Codename God: You think you're a cop or something? Everyone has a past. Can't you just let it fade away with time?

Admin: If it's in the past, why not let it go?

Codename God: Easy for you to say! You weren't the one affected. Do you think she didn't suffer from what she did? But it's over now. You can't go back and change that. Don't you have a past?

Admin: Sorry, but we don't have a past. And even if we did, it wouldn't be as dramatic as what that actress went through. How can someone be happy at the expense of someone else's misery?

I didn't completely agree with myself as I typed, but I wanted to win the argument, so I let my emotions override reason. In real life, I played the role of a veterinarian helping injured pets, but in the online world, I was an admin exposing people's secrets. That was my job, and I couldn't help myself.

Codename God: Whose misery? Did she cause anyone misery?

Admin: I don't know, but if she didn't cause trouble, she wouldn't be in this situation. Do you really think that destroying someone's life to climb the ladder of fame will end well? Karma is the result of actions. You can't bury it.

Codename God: Talking about karma, huh? While you expose others and cause them trouble, have you ever thought about what you'll get in return?

Admin: At least the admin has no past. I've never pretended to be a role model for people to look up to.

The other person is silent. I watching the screen and smile, feeling victorious.

That's it? So easy...

Just as I was about to stand up and take a breather to relieve the stress, Codename God replied with a message that gave me goosebumps.

Codename God: Everyone has a past. It's just a matter of being pretty, sweet, messy, or ugly.

Codename God: You said you don't have a past, right?

Codename God: I'll do what you said true.

I laugh out loud as I read. What do you think you can do?

Codename God: May your past disappear, whether good or bad.

Codename God: And to make you understand the feelings of those affected, may you find a great love only to lose it immediately.

Codename God: You will get everything back when you lose what matters most.

Codename God: You will suffer and feel pain, and this will take effect from now on.

Codename God: I curse you!

Suddenly, I got goosebumps for no reason.

Our conversation ended when I closed the screen, not wanting to continue with someone who just cursed. As I suspected, the person using the name Codename God must be related to that actress. Otherwise, they wouldn't be so upset.

Damn... I ruined someone's life in a moment of anger and then spoke arrogantly. Anyone would be furious.

"The movie wasn't good?"

"What?"

"The movie we watched together today."

Gun, who had sensed my lack of enthusiasm since we met, spoke.

Today was a terrible day for me. Ever since I heard the news about Maya slitting her wrists and being hospitalized, I couldn't stop blaming myself. And being cursed by everyone on my page as if I personally took the knife to her arm.

"I just have a lot on my mind, so I'm depressed." I smile at him.

"Oh, are we home already?"

Honestly, I didn't even realize I had come home. It was as if my brain had switched to autopilot, guided by my subconscious.

"I must be very boring."

"No, no."

I quickly waved my hands in denial and laugh.

"I'm the annoying one. Going out and making you feel bad like this, I'll make it up to you next time."

"Today must have been a really bad day for you, Jom. I'll take Broomy. They say cuddling a dog makes you feel better."

"Thank you for trying to heal me."

We both stay silent for a long time. Gun looked at me, hesitating whether to speak or not. But even if he doesn't say anything, I could already see what he want.

"Next time, I'll do better."

I said, offering my pinky instead of shaking his hand like he wanted. The handsome man looked dazed as if I could read his mind, even though I had switched from a handshake to a pinky promise.

"So, there will be a next time," he said, connecting his pinky with mine.

"I'm glad I got another chance."

"You're so polite," I chuckled fondly.

"See you then."

"I'll bring Broomy to see you tomorrow."

"Okay," I tilt my head slightly, looking at him.

"So, is it officially called Broomy now?"

"Yes, I named it after what you like, Jom."

We stand there for a while before he left. I looked around for someone who had been aware of the situation for a while and couldn't help but shout out loud.

"Get out, teacher. You know I can hear your heart beating all the time."

Then, the lovely person who hiding nearby slowly reveals herself. Teacher Renu, who had been standing there for a while, walks towards me without saying anything with her hands in her pockets.

"How long have you been here?"

"Since seven."

I raised my wrist to check the time and raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"You waited until eleven? Is something important? Why didn't you call?"

"I called, but you didn't answer."

Hearing this, I took my phone out of my bag and checked it. There was indeed a missed call from her.

"I was watching a movie, so I didn't notice. Besides, even if I had noticed, I would have thought you called by mistake."

"Why do you think it was a mistake?"

"Why don't you ever call..."

I put aside my silly thoughts and got straight to the point.

"So, what happened? It must be important if you've waited so long. Do you want to come in?"

"I'd rather talk alone."

"Will it take long?"

"I don't know."

"Then let's talk at the clinic. There are a lot of mosquitoes here and it's dark."

I could hear Professor Renu's heart beating as fast as mine. But I don't know if she is excited, happy, and sad, to see her at the same time, because I found it hard to predict her thoughts.

For a moment, I secretly thought she came to make up... which was completely ridiculous.

"Okay."

Since the clinic is at the entrance of the alley, it's another rental building my father had given me. So, I walk there in just a few minutes.

I unlock the door, turn on the lights, and hung the "Closed" sign.

"What happened, Teacher."

"Well..."

The beautiful person looks at the mirror outside and changes the subject.

"Was that the guy you went out with?"

"Yes."

"He seems nice."

"Yes, he's kind and loves animals."

I complimented sincerely, looking in the direction he had walked away, even though he was no longer there.

"That's how it should be, right? A veterinarian should know people who like cats and dogs."

"Do you like him?"

"Yes, he's nice."

"What about me?"

"Huh?"

"You don't like me anymore?"

It was almost the first time I heard such a direct question from her. I smile, not knowing how to answer. If I said I still liked her, it might overwhelm her.

"I don't like you anymore."

"...."

"You're with someone else now."

"Back then, when I was with Teacher Aek, you didn't seem to care."

"Well, I was young back then and couldn't see through things. I thought I was the center of the universe."

I laugh and shrug.

"But now I'm grown up. People need to know their place. I am not suitable for you in any way, unlike him, your boyfriend, who matches you in status and education. He is perfect for you."

"Look at this."

Teacher Renu said, raising her right hand and spreading her fingers. I didn't understand at first until I see that there is no ring on it.

"What does that mean?"

"I didn't say yes to him."

She said, crossing her arms and slowly approaching me.

"We are not together."

"But I saw you kiss him."

"I kissed him, but I didn't feel anything."

Her heartbeat loud and fast as if she is confuse and excite by what she's saying as she looked straight into my eyes.

"Not like I felt with you years ago."

"What are you trying to do?"

I took a step back, not knowing if this is some kind of joke.

"When I finally accepted the truth and decided to move on, you came back to mess with my feelings? Do you think I was wrapped around your finger, squeezing me to death or letting me go as you pleased because you know I can't escape?"

"That's not true."

"But that's exactly what you're doing. Do you know how many dishes I've washed in the last few days because of you?"

I yelled angrily, thinking of the frustration I had painfully endured.

"You just like to see me chasing after you, trying to get close. When I stopped, you couldn't take it, so you came back to play with my feelings?"

"I'm jealous!"

" ... "

"You said you liked me, then you went with another guy you had just met. Suddenly, you called to say you backed out when I was planning a surprise. Nothing went as I expected."

"Because you couldn't control anything, you got scared, right? No... I won't let you control me anymore..."

She push me against the wall. The beautiful person pressed her lips against mine impatiently, afraid that I would resist any longer. My mind went blank, probably because her heartbeat was so loud in my head that I couldn't think of anything else. In the end, I let it go and honestly, it felt really good.

"*Hic...*" I cried as the beautiful person walk away. Teach Renu quite shock to see my reaction.

"Jom..."

"It will be like it was."

" ... "

"You kiss me, then leave."

I sobbed, remembering the bitter past. I still remember waking up and finding out that she left me with the pain, saying that a teacher and a student could not be together.

"I am not leaving."

"That is not true. You will leave me again. You do not know how painful it is to keep waiting."

"I really will not leave."

She said, holding my face and forcing me to look into her kind, light brown eyes, unlike the last few days.

"We are not teacher and student anymore. There is no reason to leave."

"But..."

"Are you with that guy?"

"...."

"I love you, Jom."

It was the first time she said she loved me, and it left me stunned before I started crying even harder.

"*Hic*... What is this? Just two days ago, you seemed sick and tired of me."

"I was just pretending."

"You never thought I did anything right. I was annoying and bothersome."

"I was just pretending. Didn't you say you didn't feel anything."

"I was pretending not to like you... I never forgot you, not even once. And kissing you was to make sure I couldn't forget you. I came back to see if you still felt the same. And yes... I like having you around."

I continued to sob, tears flowing like a broken dam. It felt like I had been holding it in for so long and could never release it. Teach Renu held my face and kissed me gently as if to wipe away my tears. All I could do was clench my fists and hit her lightly, wanting to do something but not wanting to hurt her.

"Don't pretend to be nice to me. I don't love you anymore..."

"Please love me, I beg you."

"Doing this makes things hard for me..."

I sobbed, gripping her shoulders tightly.

"I let you go. You have the right. You know I'm not someone who gives up easily."

"I love that thing about you."

"If I hadn't thought about leaving, you wouldn't have thought about holding on to me."

"That day, I wanted you to stay and hear that I didn't choose him, but you left first."

"You could have called to tell me."

"You said you'd call to tell me you loved me for twenty-one days. I was waiting...but you didn't call."

"Don't make excuses... How can you expect me to keep approaching you? I'm so shameless that I don't even know what shame means anymore."

"I'm so sorry. Crying doesn't suit you."

Teacher Renu laughs affectionately, wiping away my tears. Seeing her smile, I couldn't help but hug her tightly. I couldn't stay mad, and to be honest, I never thought about getting mad. Her presence alone is enough.

"You can't leave anymore. I won't let you go."

"Hold me tight."

"No turning back."

"Yes," she laughs, making me step back to look at her face for a moment before quickly grabbing her wrist, turning off all the lights, and dragging her upstairs. Being dragged, Teacher Renu don't know what I am thinking until I took her to the second-floor room with a small bed.

"I didn't plan on doing anything like that..."

I kiss and push her until her legs hit the bed, and we both fell onto it. She didn't resist, but she seem unsure.

"Shouldn't we take it easy?"

"Tomorrow, Gun will come to see me, bringing a big Old English Sheepdog to play with... The guy I went to the movies with."

"Using a dog to get attention like that is cheating."

"You're much more attractive, teacher."

Finally, Teacher Renu give in to my wishes. We took turns kissing like people who didn't really know what they were doing. It made us laugh a lot, but it didn't stop us from learning.

"Did you hear that, teacher?"

"What?"

We pulled away from each other. I straddle the teacher, listening to her heartbeat as it began to find its rhythm.

"I think we really do love each other."

"What do you mean?"

"Remember when I told you about that experiment where they measured couples' heart rates? Their hearts were beating in sync significantly."

I took the teacher's hand and guided it under my shirt, with only my bra in the way.

"Feel it. It's beating in sync with yours."

"So you're saying we love each other?"

"Yes. I did it. You finally love me."

The charming teacher pressed her hand against my chest, almost playfully.

"Are you trying to make me hear your heartbeat, or are you making a move?"

"Which move do you want?"

I leaning in and laugh.

"There are many moves."

"How about the one where you feed the cat?"

"Do you remember that?"

And then we both savored a love we had never experienced before. It was an unfamiliar feeling, and I finally understood what 'making love' meant.

It means doing everything full of love. Between people who love each other...



...

God is the protagonist of the novel “God” also in Chao Planoy from the same universe. The novel is part of the “Supernatural” trilogy along with Dream and Rhythm.

Sunlyan

23. The Touch

Our expression of love had come to an end. Now it's time for reality, where I had to enjoy every moment because I didn't know if Teacher Renu would still be the same person who had come to reconcile with me at eleven o'clock. Right now, the lovely person was lying on her stomach, eyes closed, breathing steadily. I couldn't help but lean in to admire her up close.

Her eyebrows were perfectly arched.

Her nose had a wavy shape that make me want to run a pen over it.

Her lips were neither too thick nor too thin, just right for a good feel... I can brag because I felt them myself.

Her entire body, actually.

Am I dreaming? If I am, I don't want to wake up. The teacher's scent filled the entire room, and I thought I had to do something to capture this memory. It felt a little strange, but I decided to take a picture.

Click.

I took out my phone and took a picture of the teacher while she slept soundly. Of course, I only took a picture of her face because it wouldn't be appropriate if someone accidentally saw a nude photo. I just wanted to keep it as a reminder that we had some good times together - just in case I forget.

I won't forget. I can never forget something like that.

Seeing her sleeping so peacefully, I couldn't resist using my finger... I mean, to brush her beautifully arranged eyelashes out of curiosity. Or maybe I just wanted to tease her into waking up and paying attention to me.

"Annoying."

Teacher Renu open her eyes without any sign of sleepiness, as if she was awake but just pretending to sleep.

"Why aren't you sleeping? What time is it?"

"It's four in the morning, and I probably won't sleep. My adrenaline is pumping."

I said with a wide smile.

"You're really here, like a dream."

"You're exaggerating."

"Wow, now that you've caught me, you're acting cold."

"Watch your mouth!"

Teacher Renu reaches out to hit me, but I dodge it a little and laugh.

"I won't let you hit me because if it hurts, I'll wake up, and then it'll all just be a dream."

I laid my head on the mattress and stare at the teacher, who was lying face down on the same level. At first, she pretend to be annoying, but after a while, she reaches out and gently pat my cheek playfully.

"This isn't a dream. I'm really here."

"You don't know how much this feels like a dream to me."

"You must really like me."

"I love having sex with you, teacher."

"You're unbelievable!"

Teacher Renu slap my face and
then cover her face as if she couldn't bear it.

"The vibe was so good, and you ruined it. And please don't put the words
'teacher' and 'sex' in the same sentence."

"So how should I say it? I love having sex with you."

"Jom!!!"

"I love it when your voice gets loud. It's so cute."

I cover my mouth and laugh, pleased that I had teased her. Seeing that she
was starting to get really mad, I quickly changed the subject to keep the
mood between us.

"If you don't want the word 'teacher' in these sentences, what should I call
you... Big sister? Damn! That gives me the creeps. My mouth isn't used to
it, and even my body rejects it."

I raised my arm to show her the goosebumps that formed.

"Yeah, I'm not used to it either. But calling me 'teacher' like that..."

"To me, 'teacher' is not a title, but a nickname. So, your name to me is **Miss
Teacher Renu.**"

"That's funny."

She laughs, clearly amuses. I lift my chin and let my fingers wander
playfully over her shoulder.

"I can be funny enough to make you laugh for the rest of your life."

"Sweet talk."

"Now that I think about it, I forgave you too quickly. I should have played
hard to get a little harder. Now you know that whenever we fight, all you

have to do is push me against the wall and tell me you love me, and I forgive you."

I lean closer and laugh softly.

"You must have been so scared of losing me, beautiful."

"Don't overestimate yourself."

"What if I really gave up? Would you come after me?"

"I wouldn't."

"You're so stubborn. When you saw me with Gun, you couldn't take it anymore."

"How far did you go with him?"

She quickly changes the subject, catching me off guard.

"I saw you holding hands."

"We just watched a movie and had coffee together at night. Normal dates."

"That's it?"

"We haven't kissed yet."

"....."

"Speechless, hehe?"

I laugh, teasing her before realizing something.

"Come to think of it, we skipped a step. Since we met, we've never gone on a date."

"I don't have that much time. Since I got back, I've been busy with the work my father left unfinished. The younger ones aren't ready yet."

"Just find some time. I want to have moments where I can take you to the movies, dinner and talk about silly things."

"But we've known each other for a long time. Do we still need to date?"

"You're not romantic at all. Your life is all about studying and studying, right?"

"It's never enough, huh?"

"I don't care. We've already done that."

I laugh, pleased with myself.

"We belong together now."

"Oh, stop it. Just let it go."

She cover her ears, too shy to hear.

"Please, let's go on a date. Please, please, please."

"If I have time."

"And if we fight, please make up with me. Whenever I'm sad, I end up crying while washing the dishes alone. It's lonely without someone to make up with."

"I wanted to ask earlier. What do you mean you've been washing the dishes since you met me?"

"When I'm sad, I like to find something to do. Washing dishes is a way to clear my mind, which my mom really likes."

She laughing, clearly amuses by this.

"That's new. I never knew that. Well, that's good. If I get too lazy to wash the dishes after eating, I can pretend to be mad at you."

"Are you inviting me to live with you?"

She wrinkles her nose, seeing that I had used the conversation to my advantage.

"Always finding a way. Just talking about washing dishes, and you think I'm inviting you to live with me?"

"Don't you want to live together? I'm cute, you know."

"Yes, you are."

Suddenly, the cute person complimented me directly. Hearing this, I didn't know how to react because in the past, I was always the one who approached her, confessed my love and flirted.

"But it's probably hard to take care of you."

"What do you mean?"

"Because you're an annoying, whiny, and naughty girl. Living with you would give me a headache. Look, it's four or five in the morning, and you're still not sleeping, talking about nothing."

"I just want to talk to you. Other people smoke a cigarette after sex, but I don't have a cigarette to smoke."

I leaning in and licked my lips mischievously.

"I was thinking about taking a bite... Ouch."

I got a slap on the forehead so hard my head snapped back.

"What was that? I hadn't even finished my sentence."

"Stop ruining the vibe. Go to sleep!"

"Okay, one last thing, then I'm going to sleep... Promise me you'll make up with me if I get mad."

"Hmm? What kind of promise is that? No! It's nonsense. I never fight with you without a reason. So if we do, there won't be any reconciliation because you're a crybaby."

"Not everything in life needs a reason. We could fight about not sharing meatballs in a bowl of pasta or... um, not calling to say 'I love you' because you were sleeping."

"You're so good at making life difficult. If it's so trivial, I won't make it up to you because we're both adults."

"You're so cold. You've always been cold since we met. Be careful, one day I might actually forget you."

I pout, starting to get genuinely upset. And as I speak, I started to get into it, so I decided to turn away. We both sat in silence for a while before she wrapped her arm around me and buried her face in the back of my neck.

"Let's go to sleep."

"Is this making up?"

"What are you talking about?"

Feeling triumphant, I turned to face her until our noses touched. I laughed and shook her gently.

"Come on, promise me you'll make it up to me. Suppose I don't forgive you and try to forget you like today. You have to make it up to me, okay?"

"Yes..."

"...."

"Yes..."

"...."

"Well..it depends on the situation."

"You're always so cold..."

"If it's a commitment, I'll try to talk to you first."

"Just say 'I'll make it up' and that's it. You always drag things out and confuse people."

I turn around and lay on top of her because I knew I could. Then I playfully sniffed her hair, the back of her neck and even behind her ear, knowing from experience that she was very sensitive there.

"You smell so good. I'll associate that smell with you. If I smell that smell..."

"..."

"It means you're in the mood."

"You're ruining everything again. You said one last thing, then go to sleep."

She twisted her arm, pretending to slap me, and laughed, not taking it seriously.

"Are you really not going to sleep? You're talking too much."

"You're only good at studying, aren't you?"

"Hmm? What do you mean?"

"Well... nothing."

I pretended not to want to continue and buried my face in her hair. But the former math teacher, who wouldn't let a problem go until it was solved correctly, continued.

"Finish your sentence. Why do you say I'm only good at studying?"

"Well..."

I bit my lip lightly and smiled before whispering in her ear.

"You don't seem very good at this kind of thing. You don't even know how to kiss properly."

As soon as I teased her, the sweet-faced woman bared her teeth at me.

"What makes me most curious is if this was really Jom's first time."

"Of course it was. Why do you ask?"

"It seemed too good to be true."

She said, although talking about this kind of thing openly made us both a little shy.

"How did you know where... and how..."

"I just imitated what I imagined from several people."

I said, sliding my hand under her lying body and cupping her chest.

"I found out where the most sensitive spots are and what happens when they are touched."

The beautiful woman tensed immediately at my touch. I squeezed with my left hand while my right hand moved down.

"Try to support your knees up."

I instructed, pulling her hips up while I was still positioned behind her.

"And spread your legs..."

"You're quite the bossy one. I thought you said you were going to sleep."

"Well, you're following along, aren't you? Besides, are you really sleepy now?"

She bit her lip hard, trying not to make any noise, but the stimulation of my fingers made it hard for her to contain her feelings.

"I'm trying to sleep... and you're doing it."

"This might be the only thing I'm better at than you. Does that feel good?"

"Mmm..."

It seemed I had hit the right spot because her body began to respond, signaling that she could go for another round after our recent intercourse.

"I will remember everything about you, I will never forget. The smell of every part of your body that I touch."

The sweet-faced woman gripped the blanket tighter as I circled my finger, so I bit her shoulder to heighten the mood.

"You mustn't forget me either."

"I won't... I won't..."

"Good. Don't forget me."

I had to admit, I had been holding back for too long, having loved her for seven years. Now that I had the chance, I wanted to stay like this forever. I felt a little sorry for the beautiful teacher who ended up with such a naughty student. We lay together from eleven the night before until eight the next night.

"Jom... we need to eat."

Teacher Renu said, laying on top of me like someone who had lost all strength, probably because we hadn't eaten. The room only had water to sustain us. Honestly, we were both too lazy to leave the comfort of the soft bed and the cold air conditioning. Plus, we were too absorbed in each other to want to go anywhere, making us feel like we were trapped in a cave.

"Honestly, I don't want to leave you, but... our stomachs are growling too much."

I forced myself to get up and look for clothes to wear, grabbing the white shirt she had discarded.

"I'll buy us some food. You stay here and rest."

"This is my shirt."

"I want to have you close to me all the time. It smells like you. Squee!"

I changed my mind and lay down to hug her again.

"Can we eat tomorrow? I don't want to leave yet."

"I think I have work to do tomorrow. Actually, I had work today, but... I got stuck."

"Time flies when you're having fun."

"Flies? It's been a whole day. We haven't seen the sun or the moon."

Teacher Renu took out her phone and showed me the screen.

"Look how many people have called me."

"Bragging. By the way, I didn't check my phone either."

I turn on the screen and see over thirty missed calls, which was unusual. They were from an unknown number.

"I also have a lot of missed calls. Unknown number. Could it be Gun? Ah! He was supposed to bring Broomy today. I completely forgot.

"..."

Ba-dum. Ba-dum.

Ba-dum, Ba-dum...

The sound of her heartbeat echoed in my head like a drum. It seemed like I had awakened her anger, so I quickly smiled broadly and pretended not to care.

"But it doesn't matter if I don't see you. I have you. I'll get us something to eat. What do you want?"

"Anything," she said abruptly, still seemingly upset with Gun. Being the good girl that I was, I quickly tried to make amends.

"Are you still mad? I was just scared that you didn't show up. I don't want to see you. Please don't be mad."

I looked around for my wallet, not knowing where I had left it. She noticed and asked.

"What are you looking for?"

"My wallet. I don't remember where I put it."

"Take mine," she said, handing me money from her wallet.

"We can go together, actually."

"It's okay. You should rest. I want to take care of you. I'm the hostess and I feel bad that I couldn't find my wallet."

"Don't worry about it. Just take it. If you keep looking, we won't eat."

I took the money and bowed gracefully, almost getting a pillow thrown at me. After changing into decent clothes and getting ready to leave, Teacher Renu reminded me to take my phone.

"Why? I'll be right back."

"In case you think of something else you want to eat."

"With only a hundred baht, can we really choose anything else?"

I laughed a little, waving the note.

"Okay, if you want anything else, call me. I might owe the suppliers. I'm close to them."

"And don't call anyone else secretly."

Hearing that, I smiled a little and frowned.

"Are you a little jealous, huh?"

"Hurry up."

"I love you."

"You say that a lot."

"I'm afraid you'll forget. I'll be quick. Kiss kiss."

I blew her a kiss and quickly go downstairs, not wanting to be gone for too long. Just as I was about to leave the store, I suddenly felt uneasy.

Why do I have a bad feeling?

I looked back at the store where Teacher Renu was upstairs and shook my head...

Just my imagination.

The food stall wasn't far from my house. While waiting for my order, I looked at the unknown number that had called me so many times. If it was a secure or credit card number, it would be very rude. I checked the time on my phone; It wasn't too late to call back.

Who could it be...

Ring...

[Jom!]

"Dad?"

My dad's voice practically screamed through the speaker, making me hold the phone because my eardrum was practically dancing. I put it back to my ear and laughed.

"Did you change your number to avoid creditors?"

[Why didn't you answer? What were you doing?]

"Well..."

I rolled my eyes, unable to think of a good reason. But it was a good story.

"How should I say this."

Forget about it for now. I'm in the hospital.]

"A dog bit your leg?"

[Mom fainted.]

"What happened?"

[She had a stroke.]

I stopped laughing. This was serious. I started running toward the nearest main road while talking to my father.

"Which hospital?"

[The hospital]

The hospital he mentioned was quite far from where I was. The only way to get there quickly was to catch a passing taxi.

"To Paknam Hospital..."

The taxi driver let me in without asking any questions. My father stayed on the line, explaining what had happened to my mother.

Today, she went to make merit at the temple with her friends. Suddenly, she fainted and was taken to the nearest hospital at two in the afternoon. My father had been calling me all day, but I didn't answer. Now, my mother was still in critical condition.

[Where are you now?]

"Near Phra Khanong. The traffic is terrible."

[What are you taking?]

"A taxi."

[What's the license plate number?]

Even though my father wasn't meticulous, he was being cautious now.

"TS 10***"

[Oh, my phone credit is running out. I'll call you if I have any news. Call this number when I get here.]

The road was packed with cars as if there had been an accident. The traffic was heavy and time kept passing. Finally, the taxi driver turned into an alley, apparently trying to avoid the traffic, but then he suddenly stopped and said with a blank face:

"Miss, I can't go any further."

"What?"

"I need to return the car. It will cost a hundred baht."

"Sir! My mother is in critical condition. You can't just leave me here in the dark."

"A hundred baht."

What could I do other than get out of the car and lose the hundred baht I had for food? My heart was burning with worry. I tried to find another taxi, but none seemed to come. I began to feel desperate. When I heard the news, I should have gone back to the building and asked Teacher Renu to take me, but I couldn't think straight at that moment. My anxiety made me act rashly.

Now, I was in a deserted place with only dim streetlights and an old spirit house that people had discarded, making it look spooky. I kept looking for a taxi, hoping one would pass by, but only ordinary cars drove by without stopping.

I needed help. Calling Teacher Renu now would take too much time... It would be a waste of time.

As I tried to figure out a way out, the headlights of a car approaching from afar sparked a glimmer of hope. I had to do something. Maybe I could ask the driver to give me a ride and drop me off somewhere with more traffic.

Anything was better than being stuck in this desolate place. As the car sped toward me, I decided to wave my hands frantically for help. To make sure the driver would stop, I did something foolish.

I jumped in front of the car, believing it would stop. But then!

Vroom!

Thud!

I didn't know what happened next. All I knew was that it happened too fast, and my body was suddenly in the air. I faintly heard the ringtone of the song "My Boo," which I had specifically set for when Teacher Renu called.

Thud!

My body fell to the ground. A numbness spread through me, making it impossible to move. Wait a minute, did I just get hit by a car?

"M... Miss...!?"

A sweet voice shouted, and someone leaned over me. The person above me was too afraid to even touch me, trembling in fear.

The smell of alcohol... Was she driving drunk?

I turned my head to look at my phone, which was still ringing incessantly. Suddenly, I couldn't remember... what song it was.

Was it my phone ringing?

May your past disappear before your eyes, whether good or bad.

"Please don't die, please..."

The frantic driver took out her phone to call someone.

"Janepob... it's Intuorn. Help me... please help me. I hit someone!"

Intuorn...

"I don't know, it's so dark. Think of something... You, stay with me. What's your name? I'm trying to keep you talking. Please answer."

"My name..."

May your past disappear before your eyes, whether good or bad.

Okay, what was my name again?

Everything was going black. I felt like my body was ready to shut down, and I couldn't communicate anymore.

But what was that song? The sound kept playing.

Why was I here in the first place? I was going somewhere to meet someone.

May your past disappear before your eyes, whether good or bad.

And this will take effect from now on...

I curse you!

My mind is blank as if shrouded in fog. It felt like I was lying in the middle of nowhere, in the void. I slowly raised my arm as if to grab something to hold on to. But it's just air.

Who am I?



"Intuorn" is an ex gf of May B frm SISTER novel.