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CHAOPLANOT

□ Introduction □

"This time, I'll be the one to choose."

Actually, I had a meeting early this morning, but when I heard that Mom was going to hire a maid to clean my condo, I decided to choose one myself. The ones Mom picked never quite met my standards. One left dust behind the TV, another missed lizard droppings in the corners. Money isn't the issue if the outcome is good, but I absolutely hate half-hearted efforts.

"You don't need to waste your time on this. Besides, Frung, you don't even know how to choose one. You love cleanliness but can't even clean your room."

"Well, why did you raise me to be like this then, Mom? If you'd taught me when I was little, we wouldn't need to hire anyone."

"Oh, so it's my fault now? Well, whatever, we have money. What's the point of having money if we don't use it? Actually, I have three or four candidates in mind. I'll call them in for interviews today."

Mom hands me a sheet of paper with information about the applicants, probably from a job website. I glance over it without much interest since there are no photos, and the profiles all seem similar.

"What time are they coming?"

"The first one is scheduled for 9:30. It's almost time."

Mom's phone rings shortly after that. She then asks my nanny, whose duty now is to take care of her, to go downstairs and welcome the candidate. While waiting, I skim through the profiles and frown at the age listed.

"This one is only 28, Mom?"

"That's right"

"Why would someone this young be a maid?"

"Not everyone has the opportunity for higher education. There aren't many options for them."

Mom seems to remember something and adds,

"Oh, but this one applied directly with us, through your nanny, not an agency."

"Can we trust her, Mom? Without any background check?"

"Aren't you good at reading people? Once you see her, your instincts will tell you whether to hire her or not."

I have quite a reputation for being able to read people. If I feel someone is untrustworthy. I stay cautious, and they usually turn out to be just that. Like an employee at my company who I sensed was suspicious just by walking past him.

After investigating, we found out he was stealing information to sell to a competitor. This wasn't the first time; there were many cases that I caught. It's either instinct or just that I don't easily trust anyone, so I see things others don't.

The door opens, and Mom and I, who have been waiting, peek to see P Khwan [*[1], my nanny, bringing in the interviewee.

"Here she is. Yu... Say hello to Ms. Frung and Madam. They'll interview you themselves today."

It's like a scene from a movie where the heroine makes her entrance. My nanny steps aside, revealing a petite, sweet-faced girl who walks in politely and greets both me and Mom with a wai. As soon as I lock eyes with her

brown ones, my heart races like I've just finished a workout. I grip the sofa tightly and look away, feeling flustered.

"Hello, ma'am. Hello, Ms. Frung"

Hearing her say my name makes me even more anxious. Mom looks at me for my opinion, but I'm at a loss.

"Well, Frung?"

"What?"

"What do you think?"

"Hire her."

"Huh?"

I glance at Mom and then at the petite girl smiling slightly at me. Unlike me, she doesn't look away and stares straight at me with determination, making me blush.

"No need for an interview. She's the one. Hire her."

"Ms. Frung, don't you want Yu to try cleaning first? Why..."

P'Khwan looked at me with confusion. My behavior now is strange to those who know me well. Even I don't know what is happening. I just feel excited and nervous. This is the first time I've felt shy and can't make eye contact with someone. But my gut tells me not to let her slip away.

"She's the one. Hire her. No need to call anyone else. Hello, Ms. Yu."

"Hello, Ms. Frung."

When she says my name again, I finally turn to meet her gaze. The sweet-faced girl tilts her head slightly and raises her eyebrows playfully. Her demeanor is relaxed, making me angry that I can't act normal. No, I have to win.

With that thought, I stand up from my chair and walk confidently toward her, raising my hand and...

"Ow!"

I flick her forehead, leaving a red mark. Yu rubs her forehead and smiles, showing no signs of anger, which makes me smile.

"You're quite the smiler, aren't you?"

"Frung... What did you just do?"

Mom looks at me in shock because I've never acted so familiar with anyone before.

"Do you know this girl?"

"No."

"Then why..."

From smiling shyly, I switch to a serious face again.

"Getting familiar. She'll be cleaning my room. Besides, we're about the same age. What's so strange about that?"

I stand with my arms crossed, defending myself, while Mom and my nanny look like they just saw a ghost. Only Yu seems pleased and smiling. She doesn't seem scared of me at all, which makes her even more endearing.

"Great! Let's get to know each other, Ms. Frung"

It seems I've met someone for whom I have a weak spot. Seeing that I'm kind to her, she hasn't stopped smiling.

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Sun Yan Note:

CRUSH by CHAO PLANOY

Footnotes

1.^"p" is the abbreviation of the word "Phee" (w), which means "older sister" or "older brother" in Thai. It is used as a title and gives off a casual tone in a conversation.

□ Chapter 01 □

Even though she's already been hired, Mom still wants the new maid named Yu to do a trial cleaning to ensure she's truly capable. I had a meeting scheduled, but I called to postpone it, saying I had an important errand. For some reason, watching the new maid sweep and mop seems more important than today's meeting.

"She seems quite skilled,"

Mom says, nodding in approval as she watches the petite figure expertly clean. I rub my chin, watching her small frame move around, thinking of something else entirely.

"Cute."

"What?"

"I said it looks clean."

I repeat myself and walk closer to get a better look at her face. The sweet-faced girl, engrossed in lifting a vase and wiping around it, glances at me briefly and raises an eyebrow.

S... So cute.

But feeling that I can't lose, I stare back with a stern expression.

"Something wrong with your brow?"

I joke, but it only makes Yu look startled and apologetic.

"I'm sorry."

Why is she apologizing? I was just trying to make a joke. Why does she have to look so pitiful?

"There's nothing to apologize for... I think that's enough for now, Mom,"

I say, turning to my mother. I think if we let her continue, she'll just wear herself out for nothing. The room isn't that dirty, she should take a break and have some water.

"Okay, let's hire her then,"

Mom agrees, then starts talking about the job description.

"Pixie, you'll come to clean here..."

"What?"

"What?"

"What did you call her?"

"Pixie."

"Why are you calling her that?"

I protest, disapproving of Mom bullying someone she just met by calling her Pixie. Nicknaming isn't nice. What if she's self-conscious about her height? She could get upset.

"It's cute, Pixie. I wanted to call her 'little girl,' but too many people have that nickname. Calling her 'Yu' feels too distant... or do you not like it?"

"I like it. It sounds endearing."

Yu smiles broadly and turns to me.

"But if Ms. Frung doesn't like it, you can call me 'Yu'."

"If you like being called 'Pixie,' then I'll call you 'Pixie' Mom, where were we? Continue, please."

"Okay, Pixie, you'll come to clean around ten in the morning until four in the afternoon. That means you can come anytime during that period, but not when Frung is here. She values her priva..."

"No, Yu... Pixie should come when I'm here."

"Why would you want her to clean while you're here? She'll just be in the way."

"She won't. Besides, this is a private room... having someone you just met come in when the owner isn't here, what if something valuable goes missing?"

"...."

The atmosphere turns so quiet that I immediately feel angry at Mom. She was so chatty at first, but now it's as if a cat got her tongue. And what did I just say? I practically accused her of stealing. What was I thinking?

"I understand. I'll come to clean in the morning when you're here or in the evening when you're back."

"That's better."

"I'll clean quickly and leave."

"How can it be clean if you rush?"

I straighten up and reason.

"Whatever you do, it needs to be thorough. Doing it hastily is like not doing it at all. So.... don't rush. Just clean quietly while I'm in the room."

"Understood. When should I start?"

"You can start now,"

Mom orders, patting my shoulder.

"And you should get to work. I'll keep an eye on things; nothing will go missing."

"But..."

"Is there another problem?"

I look between Mom and the new maid, then walk out, almost stomping my feet.

Why did Mom have to chase me away? Can't we just let the new maid clean while we sip Earl Grey tea and chat about current events or the fluctuating stock market?

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Today is the first time I go to work without concentration.

It feels strangely lonely and depressing. The marketing analyst talking about Twitter trends and today's search engine queries can't capture my interest. My mind is filled with thoughts about the new maid. I have so many questions.

Why would someone my age, with such good skills, work as a maid instead of at a company or as a full-time employee? Is she poor? How poor is she? What is her home like? Would the salary Mom offered be enough...?

And why isn't she afraid of me? It's rare to find someone like that. As far back as I can remember, everyone said I looked unfriendly. Every boyfriend I had ran away, and even the men Mom set me up couldn't stand me. But she looked me in the eye and raised an eyebrow.

So bold... even when she raised her eyebrow mischievously, she looked cute. She should be afraid of me. I won't lose my authority just because she smiled at me.

"Ms. Ratsamee."

"Yes, ma'am!" The marketing analyst, who has been droning on, straightens up, looking like she's facing a strict teacher. "What is it, boss?"

"Do you think I'm scary?"

"Not really."

Well, who would dare say 'Yes, you do' to their boss? I'm not strict, just meticulous. Everything on my desk must be orderly because it clears my mind. Nothing should be moved because I won't find them. My office is like an interrogation room for my employees. Whenever they walk in, though I've never yelled at anyone, all my subordinates are ready to cry just by looking at me.

But that maid... she looked me in the eye, raised an eyebrow... *UGHH I want to bite her cheek.*

"Why does your voice quiver?"

"U Uh. N Nothing"

Ms. Ratsamee's voice sounds like she's going to cry. I sigh and nod at her.

"You can leave."

"I'm sorry. I don't know if I made you frustrated... or did I speak too quietly?"

"I said that because I understood everything you said."

I didn't mean to sound cold. I just wanted to say that everything was fine, but that just put my subordinate on the verge of tears. This won't do. I need to do something.

"Don't cry"

I slowly hand her a box of tissues, but I miscalculate the timing, and it drops in front of her. It looks as if I'm being mean to her, and that makes her cry out.

"I'm sorry, boss."

"I said, 'Don't cry! If you don't stop crying, I'll...'"

"You'll fire me?"

"UGH!"

"Wahh!"

I tried to explain things to her, but because of my grunt, she was startled and ran away. See? I have to deal with this every day. Everyone acts as if they're wrapped around my finger. Everyone is dead scared of me just because I have a resting bitch face, but that maid...

She met my gaze.

She raised her eyebrow.

And smile...

I can't let this go. I need to know more about the new maid. I'll call Mom for details and have her fax all the information I didn't read today.

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Frung: Mom, can you fax me the maid's details?

Frung: The one named Yim.

ImHereMyDearEnemy: Her name is Yu. What? You can't remember her name after just a moment?

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I smile as I see Mom's retort. Smooth, now she won't suspect why I'm so interested in the new maid.

But... why am I so interested in her? Normally, I don't even notice the old maids who come to clean.

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Frung: Oh, really? I kept thinking her name was Yim.

ImHereMyDearEnemy: Then call her Pixie like I do. You already called her Pixie today. Why would you have to remember her name?

Frung: True. By the way, when will you change your account name? Don't your friends get confused about who they're talking to?

Frung: It sounds like a sentence from a corny novel.

ImHereMyDearEnemy: I put it up for my lover to read.

Frung: Do you mean Dad?

ImHereMyDearEnemy: I don't know. Do I?

ImHereMyDearEnemy: I'll take a picture and send it to you here. Faxing is so outdated.

ImHereMyDearEnemy sent a file.

ImHereMyDearEnemy: Why do you suddenly want to know?

Frung: I like to know the details of people who come into my life.

ImHereMyDearEnemy: Including maids? Well, whatever, you're like that. Bye now, going to put on a face mask.

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I don't feel like talking to Mom either, so I stop chatting and open the file she sent. Now, I start to carefully read each letter. The handwriting is neat and consistent, easy to read, and shows how much effort she put into it. If I had to guess, she probably won a handwriting contest. Compared to my handwriting, it's like an angel's versus a pattern on a cracked heel.

Born on June 14, the same year as me. Two months older than me. Well, just two months, that doesn't really count.

Lives in the city center... It's a house number, not a room, not an apartment, not a condo. She should be well-off. Why did she become a maid?

Education: Grade 9.

Reading this makes my throat tighten. Why...? Someone so cute should have a higher education. What made her quit school this early? I purse my lips tightly, feeling emotional, and look at the next line.

Single...

As I read this part, I nod in understanding. Nowadays, everyone is single. If being single makes you happy, then you should stay that way. From being sad, I now bid farewell to my tears with a smile like someone who has met a friend with the same fate. This is girl power. We can be alone without needing a boyfriend.

I snap my fingers cheerfully, and my eyes drift to the phone number...

None of the digits pair up to be auspicious. If we were closer, I'd persuade her to change her number. But anyway, I'll save it on my phone just in case I suddenly feel my room is dirty one day. I can call her to clean it then.

Heh. How thorough...

Since I have her address, let me sneak a peek at her house to see what it looks like...

I take the address and search it on Google Maps to see the surroundings and am stunned. The single-story wooden house is in a dilapidated condition, starkly different from my condo. Besides being very old the surrounding area feels unsafe. But I can't judge from this because the photo might've been taken a long time ago. If I get a chance, I'll drop by to see it myself.

Why am I so interested? Oh, because of GIRL POWER.

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After finishing work, I head straight back to my room as usual.

When I open the door, a faint, tea-like scent of perfume wafts through the room. I look for the source and am surprised to see the diffuser I bought a long time ago, which I remember sitting forgotten in the bathroom, now placed on the small table by the door with a wooden tray for car and house keys.

Did she clean my house and put this fragrant stick here?

I smile in satisfaction and feel instantly better with the familiar scent of white tea. I'm glad I told my mom to hire her. Just the first day and she's already made me smile.

Wait.... but if the house is too clean, she won't have enough work to do. I should make the room a bit messier so she'll have something to clean tomorrow morning, giving me time for a private interview.

Such a good and considerate employer I am.

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I have to admit, this is really an exciting morning.

I set my alarm for seven o'clock, quickly shower, and dress in the most business-like outfit I can find: a black shirt and a brown skirt that complements my fair skin. Today, I want to present myself as a cool

businesswoman so she'll think I'm impressive, though I don't know why I'm doing this.

But I do look very cool

I sit at the bar counter in my room, changing my pose several times to find one that looks natural and not too forced.

Beep!

The sound of the door opening makes me straighten up, pretending to sip coffee while pointing my pinky finger out to show off my newly painted red nails from last night. Today, I look fiercely stylish. Even I am in love with my reflection in the mirror.

"Good morning, Ms. Frung."

The cheerful voice combined with the scent of white tea creates a memorable image in my mind as I see the sweet-faced girl. Her bright smile makes me momentarily forget to breathe before I set down my cup and speak slowly.

"Good morning, Pixie."

"When you call me that, it really feels like we're closer,"

Yu, dressed in a comfortable t-shirt and shorts with loosely tied hair, looks naturally beautiful.

"You're very enthusiastic."

"Now that I have a job, I'll do my best to make my salary worth it."

"Did you put the diffuser here?"

"Yes."

She nods slightly, looking a bit uneasy.

"I asked Madam, and she said it was okay. Are you mad?"

"Why would I be mad? You did the right thing."

"Phew, I was afraid you'd think I was overstepping my duties. I'll go make the bed and vacuum now."

"Go ahead."

The small girl walks past me at the counter, grabbing cleaning supplies and tying an apron around her waist. Maybe because she's so small, wearing that apron makes her look like a Blythe doll carrying a vacuum cleaner into my bedroom. After posing for a while, I quietly sneak in to see what Pixie is doing. I see her pulling the bed sheet tight, folding the blanket like in a hotel, and then starting to vacuum efficiently. Her movements are in my sight the whole time, and all I can think is:

Kyun, kyun.

Kyun, kyun.

How can someone look so cute in every single movement....?

"Ms. Frung."

I'm startled a bit when she calls my name while I'm watching her intently.

"Hm?"

"You spilled coffee on the floor and your shirt."

The sweet-faced girl looks shocked and quickly grabs a tissue to wipe my shirt collar. I'm startled by her eagerness to touch me and push her away as if I've been electrocuted, but my reaction probably looks more like disgust, making Yu freeze and quickly bow in apology.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to. I just wanted to clean your shirt. I didn't mean to overstep your boundary."

"You didn't. No need to apologize."

"I heard that you don't like people invading your personal space."

"Where did you hear that?"

"P'Khwan told me."

P'Khwan is slandering me! I never said I don't like people being close to me. They're just scared of me and back off a meter, making me seem disgusted with them. What did my nanny tell this little girl?

"It's not like that. Don't overthink it. I'll just change the shirt."

"Give it to me. I'll wash it for you. I'm good at washing clothes."

The small girl proudly shows off her skills, making me look at her fondly.

"Are you that good?"

"Yes, because I only have two sets of clothes, so I have to wash them every other day. I know how to wash them to keep the fabric in good condition and clean... Ms. Frung, what's wrong?"

"Get out."

I quickly turn away, feeling deeply moved. Underneath the face people say is stern, no one knows I'm sensitive to things like this. Just seeing news about injured dogs, dead cats, or grandmothers being robbed by their grandchildren, I can't stand it. And now.... a cute little woman with only two sets of clothes... it pains me so much.

"Huh?... Understood."

Yu walks out of the room sadly, but I call her back.

"How much is your salary?"

"Salary?... Oh, nine thousand five hundred baht."

"Nine thousand five hundred!"

My voice almost shouts when I hear it. I clench my fists tightly, making Yu look shocked.

"Are you okay..."

"Are you crazy? Nine thousand five hundred!?"

My words might sound harsh, but they come from shock, making the sweet-faced girl look downcast as if scolded.

"Is it too much?"

"I'm angry now."

"I... I can lower it."

"Yu."

Because I'm serious, I forgot the name my mom gave her and called her by the first name I heard, making her stand up straight.

"Y Yes?"

"Is twenty thousand enough?"

"What?"

My sudden negotiation of her salary makes Pixie look confused and ask again,

"What do you mean?"

"Your salary... twenty thousand."

"I can't take that!"

The sweet-faced girl waves her hands in refusal.

"I only have middle school degree. Getting a big raise on the first day isn't good. Nine thousand five hundred is fine."

"Then... nineteen thousand five hundred."

"Ms. Frung..."

"Nineteen thousand."

"Ten thousand, no more. Ms. Frung, don't negotiate anymore."

"Eighteen thousand."

"I said..."

"Then seventeen thousand."

"Twelve thousand, final offer. Don't make it more."

"Last offer, seventeen thousand."

"Fifteen thousand. If you raise it more than this, I'll quit."

"Fifteen thousand five hundred."

"Ms. Frung... fifteen thousand two hundred, so it's not too awkward."

"Deal, fifteen thousand two hundred. From now on, Pixie, I'll pay your salary myself."

I feel a bit more at ease, making Yu smile a little.

"You're back to calling me 'Pixie': What a relief."

"Why?"

"When you call me 'Yu,' it feels distant. I don't know how to act. But I don't mean to be overly familiar... but it's better if we're not distant."

Her radiant smile is so bright it hurts my eyes. It's like the light in my room reflects off her teeth, making my vision blur. I turn away, unable to handle the glow, and shrug.

"I didn't realize I was doing that, but I wasn't trying to be distant from you."

To show I'm not too stern, even though I turn away, I reach out to pat her head and ruffle her hair lightly, feeling the soft, fine strands. She's small and cute, and her hair is as soft as a doll's. God really did a good job on her.

"You're always kind to me. Sorry if I overstepped the boundary."

"I told you, you didn't..."

She walks up and gently hugs me with a bit of a shy demeanor. I'm caught off guard and freeze up, not knowing what to do. My heart races, blood pumping vigorously. The white haze covering my eyes starts to take over my vision more and more.

Thud!

"Ms. Frung!"

And that was the last sound I heard before my consciousness slipped away.

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□ Chapter 02 □

The smell of ammonia fills the air around me, and a sweet-faced girl is fanning me with a K-pop fan to help me breathe easier. I wake up and look at Yu's face with a bit of confusion. The dizziness is still there, but I can't meet her eyes because I'm not cool anymore. My cool self is gone, replaced by a pathetic loser who fainted just because I didn't have breakfast-I only had coffee-and it makes me look bad in the eyes of the small maid.

"You're awake. Thank God,"

Yu says, pressing the K-pop fan to her chest with relief.

"Suddenly, you just collapsed. I almost called an ambulance."

"It's nothing serious. I probably overworked and stressed myself out."

I try to sit up. Yu tries to help, but I wave her off because I want to show that I'm strong now. The excuse about overworking sounds cooler than saying I didn't eat breakfast, but I really am stressed, even if not that much.

"You shouldn't overwork yourself, Ms. Frung. What's the point of it if your health isn't good? I made some hot congee for you. I noticed you only drink coffee, so I thought your stomach might be empty."

"My stomach isn't empty. I was just stressed about work. Don't you understand!?"

"..."

"..."

Trying too hard to be cool, I accidentally snap at her. My body language wants to emphasize that I fainted from overworking, not something embarrassing like not eating. But geez... I accidentally raised my voice at her.

"But thanks for the congee.... Even though I'm already full, you'll be sad if I don't eat it."

"Okay"

"Such a short response. I said a lot,"

I say, patting the small maid's head, trying to make up for my loud voice but not finding the right words.

"Your hair is nice. How do you take care of it?"

Why am I talking about hair? Why does my life have to be so complicated? Can't I just say sorry for raising my voice?

"I just wash it and apply conditioner... Ms. Frung, would you like to eat the congee now?"

The small girl still looks a bit scared and not as joyful as usual, which makes me feel like I need to do something to make it up to her.

"I think I'll take a day off today."

"Okay."

"Come shopping with me. As you can see, I'm stressed with work. I think my body can't take it anymore. If I get some rest and spend some money on myself, I might feel better."

The sweet-faced girl doesn't respond, so I don't know if she's agreeing or not. My desperation to get Yu to come with me makes me blurt out.

"I'll pay you by the hour."

At this point, Yu looks at me for a moment, then grabs her bag to leave. I grab her arm, shocked that the sweet, cheerful girl is leaving without a word.

"Or do you want it by the minute?"

"I don't have time to go out with you. No matter how much you pay, I won't go. If money could buy me, I wouldn't have written that I expected a nine-thousand-five-hundred-baht salary when I first applied."

"You undervalued yourself. You have to like money. Who doesn't like money?"

"For me, just enough to live is enough. Remember, money can't buy me."

"If it can't, why are you a maid?"

"Because."

She trails off, shakes her head, and smiles again.

"I'm not arguing with you anymore. It's my first day working with you, I don't want to seem disrespectful"

"Are you mad?"

"Huh?"

"Just now, when I.. raised my voice a bit."

When I ask, the sweet-faced girl looks like she's saying 'yeah, but she covers it with a smile, which I catch just in time.

"It's okay. I talked too much. You're not feeling well, so it's normal to be frustrated. Please eat the congee; it's getting cold."

The more she acts like it's no big deal, the worse I feel. So, the only way to make it up to her without feeling too awkward is to eat the congee and pretend to enjoy it.

"Hmm... It's really good. Did you make this yourself? It's as if Gordon Ramsay made it."

I've never tasted that Gordon Ramsay's cooking, but I see people on Twitter talking about his cooking show often, so I remember the name. Yu goes to get a packet and shows it to me.

"Then, it means this company seasons it well because I took it from your shelf."

"R... right"

Ugh. She said she made congee, but it's not her cooking. Who was I complimenting?

"I've finished cleaning today. I'll head back now,"

The sweet-faced girl says cheerfully, waving goodbye.

"Please fill the bowl with water after eating so it doesn't leave stains. I'll wash it tomorrow. And get some rest. Don't go to work today"

"So you're leaving?".

"Yes. See you tomorrow, Ms. Frung!"

The sweet-faced girl waves enthusiastically and leaves. Usually, that smile makes me happy. But today, I feel bad for raising my voice, and she still smiles like that. She must be hurt but doesn't show it. This won't do... I think I need to make it up to her. Since she won't go to the mall, I'll have to find another way.

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If I say I'm taking a break, it means I'm really taking a break. It's rare for me to take time off without a reason. I'm like a machine at work because I hate staying home doing nothing. Using my brain for work helps prevent

Alzheimer's. But today is an exception. I fainted, which means I'm sick. So today, I need to relax to improve my health. The company won't thrive if the CEO isn't healthy.

After Yu leaves the room for about two minutes, I realize I should use my day off to check out her living conditions. The small girl takes the elevator to the ground floor, so I run down the fire escape to catch up with the elevator. Otherwise, I'd miss her.

Turned out I wasn't that sick because I ran and managed to catch up with the elevator, something a normal person shouldn't be able to do. Today, I'm playing detective, following her around to see where she's going. It's rare for me to use public transportation. When she gets on the bus, I board from the back door, playing the role of a stalker to see where she gets off.

After four stops, Yu rings the bell and walks into a slum full of houses and running children. I pause, feeling emotional as I see the environment.

She lives here? In a house made of wood and rusty tin sheets?!

I keep a distance, just enough to see her back. Yu stops at a house and goes in. The house is lower than the newly built road. I can imagine that if it floods, the house will be submerged. Now, I can only watch from afar, tears welling up like watching a sad movie, analyzing what needs to be fixed in the house

Tin roof...

Walls made of vinyl signs...

Rotting wood used as a fence that won't last long...

How can people in this country live in such shacks? I think, feeling like my heart is breaking. Is she this poor? No wonder she only finished ninth grade. She probably didn't have the money to continue her education and get a good job.

This won't do. From now on, I'll plan her life. From now on, call me...

Daddy-Long-Legs!

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"Why are you suddenly taking a day off? Are you dying of cancer? Tell Me!"

Today, I'm wearing casual clothes and visiting home after living alone for a long time. Mom is shocked to see me lounging and watching TV while waiting for her to come down after doing her facial treatment. The elderly woman looks like she's seen a ghost. As I said, I never take time off. Mom knows me well, so she's almost in shock.

"No, I just want to take a break. Do you have to be this shocked?"

"But you never take time off. Are you sick?"

Mom sits next to me, placing her hand on my forehead.

"You don't have a fever."

"That's why I said I'm not sick. I just stopped by. It's boring in my room

"Then why not go to work if it's that boring?"

"I need to get some rest sometimes."

"You? Need some rest? The world must be ending... What are you doing, by the way?"

Mom peeks at my tablet screen and frowns.

"What type of roof is the strongest? Why are you looking at this?"

"Just studying."

"We run a website company. Why are you interested in roofs? And you live in a condo. When do you need a roof?"

"Since when did you start doubting me? I always have a reason for what I do. By the way, Mom,"

I narrow my eyes at her, my gaze sharp enough to draw blood,

"Why are you so stingy?"

"What? Explain so I can prepare an answer. Why are you suddenly calling me stingy?"

"Mom, are you really giving the new maid only nine thousand five hundred baht a month? That's too little. That's the Stinginess with a capital 'S'."

"We've always hired a maid at this rate. The previous one also got the same amount... She works two hours a day cleaning and then takes other jobs somewhere else. Nine thousand five hundred is already expensive."

"It's not even minimum wage. She works two hours a day, which means she only gets one hundred fifty baht per hour."

"Even 7-Eleven doesn't pay as much as we do for part-time workers."

"I don't care. From now on, I'll pay Pixie's salary myself."

"What's gotten into you?"

Mom looks at me suspiciously, making me shrink back a bit.

"What?"

"Why are you suddenly interested in the new maid? Is there something going on?"

"Why does there have to be something? I just think it's unfair. Someone so cute is getting only nine thousand five hundred baht a month... I can't handle it Pixie could easily be an idol, but she has to be a maid. It's so sad."

"She's twenty-eight. She can't be an idol anymore. Besides, she only finished ninth grade."

"Right?"

Tears well up in my eyes thinking about her education.

"If she'd had a higher education, she could've gotten a better job and wouldn't have had to be a maid. Just talking about it makes my voice shake."

"Don't let anyone know you're this sensitive. Your subordinates won't respect you anymore... Some people don't have the opportunities. If she hadn't discontinued her studies after ninth grade, she wouldn't be a maid, and you wouldn't have met her."

Oh... that's true. Thinking about it from this angle, it's not so bad. Meeting Pixie has brought a lot of joy to me.

"But now that she's met me, I'll make her life better."

"She's just a maid. Don't get involved with her..."

I jump up before Mom finishes her sentence.

"I have a good idea. Thanks for the perspective."

"What did I say? Hey, tell me."

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Within a day, I order my secretary to call a furniture maker to my condo and buy a wardrobe, bed, and other things. Everything is done in a rush as if an ambassador from a distant land is coming to stay in my guest room. The power of money is incredible. You can create anything you want. I look at the princess-style bedroom, trying to imagine how the sweet-faced girl will

feel about what I've prepared for her. She's met her real-life Daddy-Long-Legs. And, not to brag, my arms are long, too.

I couldn't wait for the day to end, and I could barely sleep. When the alarm goes off at seven, I shower, dress up, and sit coolly waiting, but no coffee this time because I don't want to faint and lose my cool. Yu arrives right on time, smiling brightly.

"Good morning, Ms. Frung!"

Her enthusiastic voice makes me smile a little and nod at her.

"Still cheerful as always."

"If we stay cheerful, we can spread happiness to others, too. I'll start cleaning now."

She heads straight to my bedroom as she has for the past two days. But today, I quickly call her back.

"Pixie, clean that room first. It's really dusty."

"Huh?"

"The guest bedroom."

"But I clean it every day. How can it be dusty?"

"I don't know. I can't talk to dust."

I answer nonchalantly. Yu laughs a little at my joke and switches from the master bedroom to the guest room. I sneakily follow her to see her reaction.

"Wow, did you redecorate the room?"

"Yep."

"Are you getting a dog, Ms. Frung?"

What?

I roll my eyes and pretend to laugh.

"That's a good one. A room this cute can't be for a dog."

"But people can't sleep here, right? It's all pink. Hmm... but why is there a desk if it's a dog's room?"

"That's because it's not a dog's room."

I straighten up a bit, feeling annoyed. Why isn't her reaction what I expected?

"This is your room."

"Huh?"

The small girl turns to look at me like she's seen a ghost.

"You heard it right. This is your bedroom. I made it because I felt sorry for you having to travel here every day. From now on, you can live here."

I pretend to look at my nails like a cool lady, waiting for her to thank me. But there's no response, so I glance at her.

"Why are you suddenly silent?"

"Did you really make this room for me? I thought you were joking."

"How is it? Touched, right? You don't have to bring anything. If you need anything else, we'll buy it together."

I act like a generous benefactor, but her eyes become teary, and she looks at me with hurt.

"Why are you so mean?"

"Huh?"

"For the past few days, I tried not to overthink. You yelled at me, tried to buy me with money to get what you wanted, and now you want to make me live in a dog's room."

"..."

"I can't take this! You meanie!"

The sweet faced girl throws down her cleaning supplies and looks like she's about to run away. But I grab her arm in shock. She isn't crying a river, but I feel so guilty for making her feel this way.

"Yu.. I didn't think you were a dog. I just..."

"Just what?"

"Just want to apologize!"

I say, closing my eyes. I've never thought I'd have to apologize to anyone because all my decisions have always been right. But with her, who's only been working for three days and smiles so brightly, just hearing her say that makes me lose my composure and say that.

"Yesterday, I felt bad for yelling at you, so I wanted to surprise you because I thought it'd make you smile. I never thought you were a dog."

"Then what do you think I am?"

"A friend."

"...."

"With a beautiful smile."

After saying that, I shift my gaze to the floor and scratch my cheek. The person in front of me is silent before speaking in a normal tone again.

"Then just say that."

"Huh?"

"If you had apologized from the start, it would've been over. No need to spend money decorating a room. Is your life always this complicated?"

The small girl leans in to look at me, and I meet her eyes. Seeing her bright, smiley eyes makes me purse my lips tightly, feeling like I can't take it anymore.

"Can you stop smiling like that?"

"But you said you liked my smile, didn't youuuu? Don't you like it anymore."

I grab her small face and bite her cheek, making the sweet-faced girl jump back in shock, touching the spot as if it hurt. Realizing what I've done, I stand there, mouth open, not knowing what to do.

"Pixi..."

"You biggest meanie!"

Yu runs out of the room, slamming the door so hard it shakes the whole floor. I remain standing, unable to move, thinking about what I've done before slowly sliding down to the floor, exhausted.

What kind of person bites someone else's face?

Well... me.

□□□□□

□ Chapter 03 □

Right now, everyone in the meeting room is dead silent, waiting to see how I'll react after presenting the outcome of the second quarter and the website engagement numbers, which are lower than last week. Not to mention, the stickers designed for comments look too lame and unappealing. I tap one finger on the table and use another to massage my temple before saying briefly,

"Is this the best you can do?"

I push the distorted cartoon sketches toward the graphics department.

"Is this supposed to be good? Would you want to use these for comments? 'Great!?' I can just type that, can't I? There's no need to waste time clicking on these ugly cartoons to comment and slow down the website performance."

Why is everything today not going as planned? I sweep my gaze over everyone in the meeting and close the folder in front of me, feeling exhausted.

"Meeting adjourned."

"...."

"Are you all not leaving? Or do you want to continue the meeting?"

With that, everyone grabs their documents and scurries out. The secretary, who's responsible for taking notes, is the only one I call back with a sharp gaze.

"Ms. Orn, why does the room you decorated look like that?"

"Huh? Well... you said she wanted it that way."

"Are you sure I said that? How exactly did I brief you?"

"You didn't exactly brief me. You said you wanted the guest room to have a cheerful personality, to feel luxurious, like a princess's room."

"But someone told me it looks like a dog's bedroom."

"What kind of dog sleeps in that room?"

"Are you arguing with me?"

I ask in a calm voice, but the secretary quickly retracts her neck after trying to explain.

"You're not arguing with me, right?"

"N...No, I was just trying to explain that I followed the brief."

"Sometimes a princess's room doesn't need to be pink, and the bed sheets don't need to be frilly. I'm giving you another chance. Listen to the brief carefully."

"...."

"Make my guest room look luxurious, simple, and like a human's bedroom. Remove anything pink."

Because it seems Pixie doesn't like that color.

"Just make the room white. Got it?"

"Understood. About the budget..."

"That's not the problem. Have I ever had a problem with money?"

"Got it."

"Wait."

I wave my hand to call the secretary back before she leaves, feeling a bit embarrassed as I ask:

"Ms. Orn, how would you feel if I suddenly bit your cheek?"

"Huh?"

Just asking makes her so shocked. How would the person being bitten feel?

"No need to answer. I understand. Just wanted to have a small talk so you wouldn't be too tense."

"O...Okay."

Even though I tried to be friendly, it seemed to have scared my subordinate even more. It looks like trying to be nice and social is very difficult for me. I can't help it; my face looks like this. When I smile, people think I'm being sarcastic. When I keep a straight face, they think I'm looking for trouble. Not everyone is as lucky as Yu, who looks cute just by standing still.

I wonder if her cheek has a bite mark... She must feel terrible by now.

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Ever since the new maid came into my life, I feel like my days are no longer the same. Normally, my head is filled only with work. Personal matters are completely left out, or to be precise, I have no personal matters at all. I never go out drinking after work with anyone. I went on dates only because my parents arranged them to maintain connections. My life is boring.

Besides waking up, working, coming home in the evening, eating, and sleeping, I can't think of anything exciting I do each day. Then, Yu appeared with that bright smile and a salary of nine thousand five hundred baht, which is barely enough to survive.

Why does she have such an influence on my thoughts? It makes no sense. It prevents me from focusing on my work. And now, I've been worried about how angry she might be all day. What if she quits...

This won't do... I have to do something.

Today, I return to my room very early and inspect what is too tidy. I then devise a plan to make it as messy and dirty as possible. But the cleanliness I've maintained so well means there is very little trash in the room, and it frustrates me. In the end, I have to go down to the condo's communal trash and bring some up to my room. Then, holding my breath, I dump the trash all over the room until the smell permeates. The Italian rug I bought is stained with trash water, almost bringing me to tears. Why do I have to go to such lengths?

Pixie, you make me stain my own rug!

And when I see the room in such disarray, I dial the maid I've been thinking about all day, using my authoritative boss voice.

"Pixie, come to my room this evening... It's too messy. I can't sleep. You can charge overtime, but you have to come."

I don't even give her a chance to speak and sit coolly at the counter in stylish workout clothes, sipping expensive mineral water I rarely drink. I'm trying to show her that I'm a health-conscious and fit person, completely different from yesterday.

Why am I doing this? I don't actually know either.

About thirty minutes later, the petite figure arrives at the condo in a brown T-shirt, shorts, and flip-flops. Her hair is a bit messy, making me look at her fondly.

"What happened, Ms. Frung? Why is the room like this?"

"I don't know. I came home, and it was like this. I was planning to do yoga in front of the TV, but there's no space to stretch."

I respond nonchalantly, and from what I observe, Yu doesn't seem as angry as she was this morning... or maybe I'm overthinking. This morning, she was still calling me a meanie.

"How can you not know why the room is like this? Someone must've done this. Was it a thief? Should we report it?"

"A thief? What should I do? I'm so scared."

I pretend to place a hand on my chest in fear, but my demeanor makes Yu shrink back a bit, looking like she's seen a ghost.

"You don't seem scared at all. Seriously, why is the room like this?"

"I don't know."

"...."

"Did you come from home dressed like this? It looks natural."

"Really? I look cute, right?"

The sweet-faced girl proudly shows off her clothes and leans in.

"I even took a shower. Smell good, right? Smell it."

"Hmm?"

"I smell really good."

"Uh-huh."

"And I washed my hair, too."

"Very clean."

"I even apply baby powder on my face. Smells so0000000000 good."

Why is she presenting herself so strangely? Did she forget what happened this morning?

"I saw that. You must've been ready for bed... But let me see."

I examine her cheek closely, looking for any bite marks.

"Your face... is it okay?"

"It's fine. This morning, there was a little bite mar-"

At this point, we both fall silent. Suddenly, I feel my face heating up, and Yu seems to realize it, too. She clears her throat and looks around awkwardly.

"Then, I'll clean the room now."

Yu rolls up her sleeves as if to show she's ready for the task even though she's already wearing short sleeves. I stand with my arms crossed, watching her rituals. She starts by picking up large items and trash, putting them in a bag, and placing it in the corner. Then she grabs a broom to sweep, followed by a vacuum cleaner for the corners and crevices. I made such a mess that she had to be thorough.

She's quite good at this.

It seems like a lot of work for her, but when I check the clock, it's already past eight in the evening. While she's working, I follow her around with curiosity and try to make friendly conversation.

"Have you been this cute since you were born?"

"What?"

"How old were you when you started working?"

I rephrase, and she seems to catch on.

"I've been working since I can remember. My dad taught me to work for money."

"He taught you well... And now, besides housework, do you have any other jobs?"

"None at all."

"So, after cleaning here, you just go home?"

"Yes."

"How many people live at home?"

"Right now, I'm staying with a friend. I pay my friend two thousand baht a month for rent. After deducting that from my salary here, I have just enough for some shopping."

"Is that what you call home?"

I think back to the rusty roofed wooden house and can't imagine how she can sleep peacefully when it rains, with the sound of raindrops hitting the roof. The house isn't suitable for a delicate young woman. I can't stand it.

"You talk like you've seen my house."

"I guess you must be very poor."

"No one's house is as beautiful as yours."

"That's true."

When I say that, Yu throws a playful glare at me. Seeing that she's about to finish her work, I can't stand it. I slowly walk over to the trash bag and kick it over.

"Whoopsie, it's all messy again! It fell on its own. I didn't do it,"

I say, placing a hand on my chest and looking around.

"How can such an expensive condo like this be haunted?"

"Don't blame it on something else. I saw you kicked it over."

"That's a lie. Why would I do that?"

"I don't know why, but you definitely did. I'm tired, you know?"

The sweet-faced girl complains, but not harshly, making me smile fondly.

"Come on, just a little more. I'll give you something extra to buy snacks."

"I already told you money can't buy me."

"I'll add another thousand."

"Why don't you kick another bag over then?"

I actually kick the black bag over as dared, making her gape in shock.

"I was being sarcastic."

"Oh, really? I couldn't tell. Anyway... do it over."

"Why are you doing this to me?"

I sit back, wiggling my toes, watching the sweet-faced girl clean up again with amusement. The clock ticks on, and now the short hand points to nine. Yu wipes her sweat after vacuuming and prepares to mop the floor as the final ritual. This time, she's very careful not to let me mess with the trash bags, tying them securely so nothing spills out even if kicked.

Hmph.

"Make sure to clean thoroughly. I don't like sticky floors," I instruct.

"Roger."

"Behind the TV, too,"

I point around, making the small girl clean everywhere, even though there's no visible dust.

"By the way... the curtain rails probably have a lot of dust too."

"For that, I think we need scaffolding or a ladder to clean it properly," she says.

"Is that so... then do it," I command.

"But there's no ladder here, or do you have one?" she asks.

"No, I don't."

"Then we have to buy one, right? Let's do it tomorrow. I'll clean it after you buy the ladder," she suggests.

"That's not possible. If I feel there's dust, I can't stay here,"

I say, crossing my arms stubbornly.

"If you can't do it, you have to stay here tonight, and tomorrow, we'll buy a ladder together."

"Do we have to do that?"

"I'm like this. If the work isn't finished, you can't leave. Leaving things unfinished makes me feel imperfect,"

I say, striking a cool pose and raising an eyebrow.

"So, Pixie, you stay here tonight, and tomorrow, we'll buy a ladder."

"Ms. Frung."

"What?"

"You're just looking for an excuse to talk to me and keep me here longer, right?"

She asks directly, making me jump. But I don't show my surprise; I just stand still and slowly turn to look at her challengingly.

"What are you talking about?"

"I don't want to assume, but the amount of trash in the room seems too deliberate. You were probably shocked when I ran out this morning and didn't know how to apologize, so you came up with this plan. Am I right?"

Who is this girl? Is she a telepath?

"No, I just..."

"You don't drink canned beer nor smoke. How can these kinds of trash be in your room?"

Because the trash I dumped in my room included those items, I can't think of an excuse quickly enough.

"They're my friend's."

"You're terrible at lying. Just so you know,"

Yu says, putting down all the cleaning supplies and walking up to face me directly.

"Is saying 'sorry' really that hard for you?"

"..."

"Have you never made a mistake in your life? That's why you don't know how to apologize."

The small girl reaches out and pulls my cheek, stretching it like a rubber band.

"Why are you so cute? Have you been this cute since you were born?"

She used my own words against me, meaning she heard my first question.

We lock eyes for a long time. I let her pull my cheek without even saying, 'Ouch,' even though it hurts.

"It hurts," I finally say.

"You didn't even cry out.

"If I cried out, it wouldn't look cool."

"You'll still be cool but also much prettier."

"What does that mean?"

I frown, not understanding her comment. But she just shakes her head and smiles broadly.

"Just wanted to compliment you."

"How long are you going to pull my cheek?"

"Just a bit more. Consider it payback for biting my cheek this morning."

"I didn't mean to bite your cheek,"

I explain, still crossing my arms and licking my dry lips.

"I just meant to nibble on that cheek, but my front teeth went for it first, so it felt like a bite..."

"Even your explanation is cute."

She sighs, finally letting go.

"It's late. I should go home. You tease me so much that I have to go home late. Now I have to shower. What a paaaaaaaain."

Yu stretches lazily, bending her body slightly, then puts away the cleaning supplies. I follow her like a duckling following its mother, trying my best to

keep her from leaving by standing in front of the storage closet to trap her there.

"Why are you blocking the way?"

"I've decided. You don't have to go home tonight. No, from now on and forever, you don't have to go anywhere," I declare.

"What? What do you mean?" she asks.

For the first time, I'm going to be straightforward. I have to make it clear, concise, and understandable in one sentence without needing further explanation. And what I'm about to say is...

"Be mine!"

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□□□□□

□ Chapter 04 □

"What did you say?"

It's not just Yu who looks stunned. Even I am shocked at myself for blurting out those words. '**Be mine**' makes me feel like a bandit dragging a mountain girl and forcing her to be his sex slave. But that wasn't my intention at all. Why did I say that?

"I don't know, I don't know anymore!"

"What are you doing?"

I push Yu into the storage closet and close the door, pressing my body against it to keep the maid from coming out. There is a banging sound from inside, a sign of her panic at being locked in. But it's nothing compared to my own shock at myself right now.

Not only did I say something that sounded like I was abducting a mountain girl, but I also locked her in a closet like someone who didn't know what to do. I must be going crazy.

"Ms. Frung, let me out. It's hot in here, and I can't breathe."

"Then tell me quickly that you'll be mine."

"And why should I be yours?"

"Well... if you're mine, you won't have to go back to your friend's house. You can just stay here, wake up in the morning, and clean. No need to go back and forth. No need to pay rent either."

"But that's not enough reason for me to stay. You've only known me for two days and are already dragging me to stay with you. Why?"

"I like you."

"...."

"I mean, I adore you."

Why does my *'like'* have such a strange meaning?

"To be honest, I feel a connection with you. I don't know why. You seem endearing, so I thought of taking care of you."

"Taking care of me?"

There is no more banging on the door. Her voice softens noticeably, making me stand up straight, no longer pressing against the door but still not letting the sweet-faced girl out.

"If you get more care, you'll be a quality citizen. Staying with me, you'll have a good room with ventilation, good food, and a good environment, making you work efficiently."

"Is that all the reason behind the word *'like'*?"

"I get to have you as a friend, too... I won't be lonely."

"...."

"...."

There is no response, making me step away from the door and open it to let Yu get some air. The smaller girl pouts a bit, seemingly deep in thought. I quickly offer another proposal.

"I'll make a new bedroom for you. No pink, no dog's room."

"I don't have a problem with the bedroom."

"But you said it's like a dog's room."

"I don't mean it. Why are you so serious?"

"So? Will you move in with me?"

I stand up straight and ask her eagerly. She rolls her eyes and thinks until I flare my nostrils.

"Don't play hard to get."

"Is this how you ask someone to move in with you? No patience at all. I'm thinking of reasons to move in with you."

"Can't you just like me?"

"W...what?"

"The reason to move in with me, I mean."

I say it without thinking, just like I told her that I feel a connection and like her. If you don't like someone, why ask them to move in? It has to be a good thing.

"You say it so casually... So, if I don't give a satisfactory answer, you won't move and will lock me in the closet again, right?"

"Yes."

"So selfish... What can I say now!"

The sweet-faced girl squeezes out of the gap and takes a deep breath.

"Alright, I'll move in because I like you too."

BA-DUM...

BA-DUM...

I feel so embarrassed that I pretend to kick the dust in the room, even though there is hardly any dust left. The sweet-faced girl smiles a bit and leans toward me knowingly.

"Feeling awkward after hearing it yourself, right? That's how I felt when you said it. But it touched my heart so much that I feel like moving in."

When Yu leans in like that, I swallow hard. My hands start to fidget, and I reach out to hold her face like I did yesterday. But this time, the small maid waves her hand to stop me.

"No."

"S...Sorry."

"Please wait here."

"Huh?"

The small girl says only that and rushes into the bathroom for a moment. Then she comes out with a freshly washed face, noticeable from her slightly wet hair.

"Okay, I'm ready."

The small maid leans toward me as if luring me. I don't do as she says; I just stand and watch until she pouts.

"Not doing it? I already washed my face."

"Doing... what?"

"Well... whatever you were going to do, do it."

She doesn't specify and leans in with her eyes closed. I reach out to do the same thing as I did in the morning but pull back and clear my throat.

"I don't understand."

"I thought you were going to bite my face... like this morning."

This time, she says it clearly, so I can't avoid it.

"I went outside today, and my face was exposed to the sun and pollution. I'd taste salty. If you like to bite that much, I'll let you."

"You're weird. Who lets someone else do that?"

"Well, because I like you."

Gulp...

"You bite my face because you like me, too, right? Even if it's a bit strange, it's okay. Anything that starts from liking is good... right?"

"Ahh!"

I run into my bedroom and lock myself in, slapping the door repeatedly. Yu, seeing me suddenly scream, rushes after me and knocks on the door.

"Ms. Frung, what's wrong? What happened?!"

She's too cute. Right now, I want to bite her head, ears, nose, and mouth and tear them apart so no one else can look at her. What is this? Who is this cute, puppy-like girl? I want to put a leash on her and take her for a walk.

I open the door to face the person about to knock and answer firmly.

"From now on, Pixie, you're mine. I mean..." I clarify,

"Under my care."

"So, what was that scream about?"

"A cockroach."

""

"La cucaracha, la cucaracha

La la la la la la

La cucaracha, la cucaracha

La la la la la la

I sing the song I once heard, then quickly change the subject.

"Sleep here tonight. Tomorrow, we'll go shopping."

"You changed the subject... Oops."

I ruffle the hair of the person in front of me until it's all messy. The fine hair feels like silk, making me grab it slightly before switching to her ear and rubbing it.

"No!"

She jumps away and holds her ears tightly. Her initially cheerful face turns red, making me laugh.

"Sensitive spot? How cute."

"You always make my heart race. You meanie. You said you like me, and now you tried to grab my ear."

"What's wrong with that."

This time, the maid, who doesn't like to lose, reaches out to grab my ear and play with it, raising her eyebrows. I'm startled, frozen, but I don't brush her hand away; I just stare at her.

"Why aren't you ticklish?"

"...."

"You're no fun. Hmph, I'm going to bed. I'll find out where your sensitive spots are and touch them all day and night."

The small girl grumbles and goes back to the guest room. As for me, after making sure she's gone, I slowly sit on the floor, feeling a flutter in my stomach like someone with no strength.

Too cute. My heart is exploding... Why is she so cuuuuuute?

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So now I have Pixie with me. The proof that it's real is that this morning, someone forced me to eat breakfast. She made a simple meal: instant congee.

"You have to eat breakfast. You might faint again. There is not much in the fridge to cook with. I think we should go grocery shopping today."

"Sure, let's go in the evening. I have to go to work first, but I'll be quick."

"Okay, I'll wait."

She'll wait for me...

Such a valuable and meaningful words. I spin my chair, thinking about what to do with her this evening. It feels refreshing like I have other activities besides going home to shower and sleep.

"Hehe."

I laugh and tap the table with my pen, only to realize that everyone in the meeting is looking at me.

"You done presenting?"

"Yes."

Today, the IT department discussed adding servers because the website loads too slowly. People are staying home with nothing to do, so they're all on the internet. But... I don't remember the details.

"Your presentation is all over the place... start over from the beginning."

"Y...Yes."

"Cute. Doing again without any complaint."

I praise cheerfully, making everyone look like they've seen a ghost.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Then go on. I'm getting annoyed... Don't like being praised, huh?"

And everyone buries their heads in their documents while the IT department person starts the presentation again. This time, I stop daydreaming.

Even though I come across as strict to my subordinates, I do have a kind side. I allow employees to bring their pets to the office to relieve stress. Honestly, I love dogs and cats a lot, but since I live in a condo, I can't have any pets. So, this rule is kind of my way of getting employees to bring their pets so I can play with them, but no one has ever dared to bring one.

However, today... the IT guy who did the presentation in the meeting brought a tricolor Pomeranian to the office. He instantly became popular among the ladies because everyone gathered around to play with the dog.

Even I wanted to join in, but I was afraid of them being scared of me, so I just watched from a distance.

"Ms. Orn, how's the task I asked you to do coming along?"

The task is to redecorate Yu's bedroom. My secretary reports everything professionally, as usual, indicating it's all done.

"It'll be redecorated today."

"Do you think it'll be finished today?"

"I told them to speed things up. It should be done today, but it might take a bit longer because they have to remove all the wallpaper and move in new furniture. The old furniture can be refunded, so it won't be expensive."

"Great job. Ten points for you."

I smile at my secretary cheerfully, which makes her look like she's seen a ghost, just like the IT guy during the meeting.

"Why do you all make that face?"

"Did something happen? You don't seem like yourself."

"How so?"

"You're smiling."

"And what's wrong with that?"

"It's..."

"Spit it out."

"It's scary."

I immediately stop smiling and put on a neutral face. My secretary must've sensed my mood and quickly excused herself. Why? Smiling is supposed to be a sign of friendliness. Why does it make my subordinates even more scared of me?

My eyes are still on that Pomeranian when an idea strikes me...

If I have something cute around, people will come to me, right? I have something cute! With that thought, I quickly call my maid.

[Yes, Ms. Frung?]

"Pixie, come to my office."

[Huh? Is something wrong, Ms. Frung? Why do I need to come to your office?]

"You're mine. Can't I ask you to do a little favor for me?"

[You really said that, huh?]

Her voice on the other end is so cute that I can't help but smile, but I quickly swallow it down, afraid someone might see and get scared again.

[I don't know where it is, though.]

"I'll send you the location... Wait, why don't we have each other's LINE contacts?"

[Because we haven't added each other yet.]

"But we have each other's numbers. Doesn't it do it automatically?"

[I set it so my account can't be added through phone numbers.]

"Why?"

[It's such a pain. Well, please send me your ID, and I'll add you, and you can send me the location.]

I do as she suggests, and soon, we become friends on LINE. After sending the location, I sit in my office, tapping my foot, watching the Pomeranian outside, and muttering, "Hmph, hmph, hmph."

About twenty minutes later, Yu arrives at the office. The receptionist calls to report that someone is here to see me. I personally go out to greet her, looking at her sweet face, now flushed from the heat, and her outfit, the same as yesterday's, with a fond smile.

"Why are you so poor?"

"What kind of a greeting is that? I rushed here, you know?"

"But you're still cute."

"What? You really said that right after calling me poor?"

"Definitely cuter than that dog. Come on."

I lead the small girl into the office. She walks shyly, smiling at everyone who stares at her. The atmosphere begins to change as everyone looks at her curiously, wondering who she is. I stop at the IT guy's Pomeranian and raise an eyebrow.

"You'll lose for sure."

"M...Ma'am?"

"Everyone will gather around me. Heh heh."

My personal gloating makes me smile, and as usual, everyone falls silent. Yu, upon seeing the tricolor Pomeranian, immediately rushes to play with it. And now we're witnessing a hard-to-come-by interaction of the most adorable creatures known to man: Pixie and a Pomeranian.

"Ms. Frung, people can bring their dogs here?"

"Yes."

"How nice."

Yu's smile makes the male employees look at her dreamily. I raise an eyebrow and reply to Yu, thinking of something.

"From now on, you should come to my office."

"There will be dogs to play with like this every day? That's great."

"If you want it to be, there will be."

I'm not sure if my maid heard what I said because she's so focused on the tricolor dog. I stare at the IT guy and whisper to him, feeling victorious.

"My Yu is cuter than your dog. You lose."

□□□□□

□ Chapter 05 □

There are many things in this world that I don't quite understand. For example, why does everyone crowd around the IT guy who brings his Pomeranian to the office, even though they've never talked to him before? Or why do they greet Yu, who is playing with the Pomeranian, in a friendly manner, yet no one comes to chat with me? Why is that? They can greet the dog owner but can't talk to me, the boss?

"Ms. Frung... Ms. Frung."

As I walk through the supermarket, I turn to the sweet voice calling me from beside me and frown.

"Why are you shouting?"

"I've called you several times already. Is there anything special you want to eat? I'll make it for breakfast."

"Anything is fine. I'll eat whatever you make, or not at all," I reply honestly.

"I don't usually eat breakfast."

"But you ate the breakfast I made this morning."

"I ate it just to make you happy."

"You're so kind. Then, from now on, eat breakfast every morning for me, okay?"

When she smiles widely like that, I can only shrug as if to say, 'That's the least I can do,' thinking that I'll get Pixie's smile every morning.

"Fine."

"Okay, so that's it for the groceries. The ladder is left with a staff in front of the elevator, and the duster is bought. That should be all."

"Not yet. Pixie, you still don't have any clothes, not to mention other essential items... Leave the cart with the ladder and go up to choose clothes and necessary items."

"No need. I can wear the same clothes."

"No, you're mine now. I have to take care of you properly like..."

I pause to think while the sweet-faced girl waits to hear what I'll say.

"Like my kid."

"Your kid?"

"Yes, and after buying clothes, we'll buy stationery and textbooks. That's the plan."

"Why?"

"Because you're uneducated. I want you to be smart and good-looking. I've thought it all out," I say, like a guardian with a small child, thinking about what I want her to do every day. Hearing this, she looks like she just saw a ghost before walking over with arms and legs spread out to block me.

"Hold on. What exactly have you thought out, Ms. Frung? Because from what I can guess, it seems far from a maid's job."

"Well, I feel sorry for you. How can someone only finish middle school... It's sad,"

I place my hand on my chest to swallow a lump and hide my sensitivity.

"People need education. I plan to have you take special classes and then take equivalency exams to get a high school diploma. After that, I'll send

you to university so you can apply for a full-time job and earn a salary like others."

"No need. I don't want..."

"No, education is important."

"But..."

"No buts... You're giving me a headache now. Let's buy underwear first, then a week's worth of clothes, towels, and...eh, what else..."

I start counting on my fingers, listing what else is necessary. Yu doesn't argue anymore; she just follows me closely with a pout, making me frown.

"What's wrong? Why the pout?"

"You don't listen to me at all. You decide everything on your own."

"Because what I decide is a good thing."

"Suppose I do what you said; by the time I graduate, I'll be over thirty. Who would hire someone that old?"

"That's true,"

I scratch my chin thoughtfully.

"Never mind, you can work with me... You can work at my company. You don't have to be just an employee. We'll see each other at home and work. It'll be great."

"That's boring."

"What?"

"Nothing."

Yu walks away and runs to the underwear section, leaving me to ponder her words.

"Boring about what?"

"What are you talking about? I don't understand."

"When you said it's boring... it followed the sentence about seeing me at home and work... Is seeing me that boring?"

"I didn't mean it that way... but are we really going to see each other both at home and work? Besides, I probably won't stay with you that long. Shouldn't I be doing the housework and playing with you instead of spending my time studying? Wouldn't that be better?"

"If you don't stay with me, where will you go?"

"There are many places to go. I might get married and have kids."

"Why? You're still so young?"

"I'm twenty-eight. I'm not a kid anymore. Besides, You'll have to start a family, too. We won't be together that long. I'm just speaking realistically."

I fall silent, staring at the small girl with displeasure when talking about this, then speak in a serious, angry tone.

"Not cute at all."

"Aw, Ms. Frung... I shouldn't have started an argument, should I?"

"No."

"Alright, forget what I said. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it. If you want me to study, I'll study. I don't want to argue with you."

The sweet-faced girl, who's always compromising, hooks her arm around mine. Even though we live together as boss and maid, we don't have much

close physical contact, except when I bite her cheek out of affection. My irritation eases a bit.

"You're tactful."

"Seeing that arguing gets us nowhere, making you happy is better. Come on, buy whatever you want for me. Buy it all. Haha!"

"Alright, because I'm rich... very rich. So rich I can burn money for fun. I want to spend money. I want to go bankrupt. I want to feel poor like you."

"You know, you're both adorable and annoying at the same time."

.

.

Having a good secretary makes all the irritations disappear with just an order. When Yu's bedroom is redecorated, the pink room in the morning becomes a clean white room by evening. She looks astonished, like a dog seeing the sea for the first time.

"The room wasn't like this in this morning."

"You said it looked like a dog's room, so I asked them to make it look more like a human's."

"There's a piano, too."

"Really?"

I look at the white electric piano in surprise. Is this one of the pieces of furniture the secretary ordered? Even though it's unnecessary, it doesn't clutter the room. It's beautiful.

"You didn't have to go to such trouble. How can I repay you? Now I feel like I'm your sugar baby."

"What?"

"Just saying. You're like a rich man in a novel who spoils a girl with money to impress her."

I straighten up a bit and raise an eyebrow.

"Then, are you impressed?"

"I am. Who would go to such lengths for a maid?"

"Because you're mine. Haha!"

Honestly, I think I'm overdoing it. Why do I have to pamper a maid I just met? I feel sorry for her low education, having only two sets of clothes, and even caring about her room -all because of her smile.

It's the most irrational thing...

"Ms. Frung!"

"Hm?"

Suddenly, the maid jumps and hugs me, rubbing her head against my chest. Caught off guard, I step back a bit, trying to stand firm and clear my throat to sound cool.

"What is this?"

"It's a way to say thank you. I didn't know how to show you my gratitude that would match your effort, so I hugged you. I hope you won't think of it as disrespectful."

"I didn't, but give me a heads-up next time."

"How? 'Ms. Frung, I'm going to hug you now...' Like this?"

The small girl demonstrates again and lunges at me. Hearing the signal, I open my arms and pull her into a hug, laughing.

"Yes, like this."

"..."

"..."

Then our laughter turns into silence. The excitement becomes something strange and awkward. Yu pulls away while I step back, crossing my arms and raising an eyebrow.

"So you won't fall. Understand?"

"Understood."

The sweet-faced girl spins around, thinking about what to do next. I help change the subject by rubbing my stomach.

"I'm hungry."

"Then I'll cook something for you, but it might take a while."

"Then let's order something. The groceries are for breakfast, right?"

"That's true."

"Then I'll order a famous kuaitiao khua kai. You just need to wash the dishes so you won't be tired. Save your energy for cooking tomorrow."

I say, planning step by step, and press the app to order food. Then I sit and watch things while waiting for the delivery. While waiting, I secretly watch the small girl who doesn't like to stay still doing this and that. Whether organizing things or reading a book, everything she does is in my sight, and it feels pleasant.

"Ms. Frung, do you have any friends?"

"Hm?"

Even though she's still reading, she asks as if she knows she's being watched.

"Of course."

"Who?"

"You."

When I answer like that, the sweet-faced maid looks up at me and shakes her head.

"No, I mean friends you talk to about everything. Friends from school you've known for a long time."

"If you mean that kind of friend, not really. Back in school, I was quiet. People said I was arrogant."

"So, how did you manage group work?"

"I mostly did everything myself. And when it was time to do a presentation, I'd just hand it over to a friend."

I shrug casually. I did it myself because everyone else's work was pretty sloppy. Or, to put it more accurately, I trusted my own research more. When it came to formatting the paper, I did it myself. If I let someone else do it, I'd end up redoing it all anyway. So, it was no different from doing it alone.

"That's so sad."

"Why? I'm rich."

"Those aren't the same thing. When you have a problem, who do you turn to for advice?"

"I can solve any problem without having to consult anyone."

"And what about when you're sad?"

"I keep it to myself. I don't tell anyone."

"... "

"Because humans find joy in seeing others sad. And I don't want to be anyone's joy. So, I comfort myself. The next day will be better."

"Even though you're such a nice person, why do you have such a negative mindset?"

Yu looks at me and sighs. The book she was reading earlier is now closed and set aside as she stares at me thoughtfully. Seeing her look at me like that, I raise an eyebrow.

"But now you're my friend. If I get sad... I'll try consulting you first. Oh... looks like the food's here."

I answer the phone when the food delivery guy calls from downstairs.

"I'll be right down. How much is it?"

"I'll go get it," says Yu.

I nod and then speak to the person on the phone about the person who will be coming down to get the food.

"Please wait in the lobby. A woman in a cheap white T-shirt and jeans will come to get it."

After hanging up, Yu wrinkles her nose in displeasure.

"My jeans aren't cheap. It has a brand, you know?"

"But aren't you poor?"

"Because I'm poor, I have to buy good stuff. It lasts longer."

"Fair point. But the shirt is cheap, right?"

"Hmph, you're not nice."

"You didn't say that a few minutes ago."

I hand the money to the small girl, not missing the chance to tug her hair a bit. She turns around with a frown. It's probably the first time I've seen her really annoyed, but she quickly returns to her normal expression as if nothing happened.

"Were you mad just now? Who were you frowning at?"

"No."

"I saw it!"

I tease, tugging her hair again. This time, she turns back, baring her teeth, making me laugh.

"Even when you're mad, you're cute."

"Ms. Frung, you annoying bitch."

"What did you say?!"

She quickly runs out of the room before I can tease her more. It's the first time someone has insulted me to my face and made me laugh. No, no one has ever dared to insult me before. This girl is something else. I'll have to teach her a lesson, but I'll think about what to do first.

While waiting for Pixie to return to the room, I hide behind the door, planning to jump out and scare her when she comes back. But as I listen for the elevator chime, a message notification interrupts.

Off White: Sorry, I'm the food delivery guy from earlier.

I frown, puzzled by the message. Usually, if there's a problem, these people would call. What's going on? Did I not pay enough?

.

Frung: Yes, is there a problem?

Off White: Normally, I wouldn't do this. Please don't think I'm a creep.

Off White: Would it be okay if I wanted to talk to you?

.

This is strange. What's going on?

Off White: I was in love with you as soon as I saw you coming down to get the food. I'm really worried you'll think badly of me, but if I don't do anything, it'll be like letting you slip away.

.

When I went down to get the food?

Ding!

The elevator dings, signaling someone has arrived on this floor. Yu, carrying the food bags, walks over and looks at me curiously.

"Ms. Frung, what are you doing here? Are you that hungry?"

"Annoying."

"What?"

"You like to flirt with others, huh?"

"?"

The girl looks confused, like a puzzled puppy, but I don't explain anything more. Instead, I walk into the elevator, ready to go downstairs. Yu runs to the door, about to ask something, but I just look at her silently.

"Ms. Frung, where are you going?"

"Not telling you."

The elevator doors close, and I head down to the lobby. I pull out my phone and type a message to the guy who sent the flirty texts, feeling a bit amused.

Frung: If you haven't gone far, come back, and let's have a talk. I didn't get a good look at your face earlier.

Off White: Okay.

.

About five minutes later, as I wait in front of the condo, the food delivery guy rides back on his motorcycle. He's not in his delivery uniform, but it's clear he's not living here. I walk over to ask.

"Did you deliver food to a woman in a white shirt and jeans earlier?"

"Y...Yes."

"So, you're Off White, right?"

He looks unsure when I ask, probably because he wants to talk to Yu more. Realizing it's someone else, he falls silent.

"You can't do this. Flirting with customers."

"I..."

I step closer, staring him down fiercely. Yu needs to finish her studies before she can think about love. She's the only friend I've just officially made. Don't you dare distract her.

"Your job is to deliver food. Don't meddle in personal matters or randomly send people messages. Even if it's just your side job, there should be boundaries. Don't make customers feel harassed. And most importantly... remember this well. Look at me." I point two fingers at his eyes and then back at mine, forcing him to look.

"...."

"This woman...is mine."

"...."

"Give up and drive back the way you came!"

□□□□□

□06.Matchmaking Season□

"Ms. Frung, what's wrong? You've been frowning since you got here. I don't know what to do."

I remain silent, thinking about how to teach her a lesson. She's just going down to get food, and someone messages her to meet up. Her cuteness is way over the top.

"Yu, who do you think looks better today, the delivery guy or me?"

This is the first thing I say after being quiet for over half an hour. The small girl looks puzzled, like a confused puppy, which is both suspicious and adorable.

"Calling me with that name means you're in a bad mood. Who made you angry?"

"Don't try to dodge the question."

"What kind of question is this? I'm totally confused."

"You can't answer that, can you?"

"No, I can't."

I bite my lip and turn my head to look at the TV. The food we ordered today is barely touched, even though it's from my favorite place, which is so delicious it got a Michelin recommendation.

"Because he was wearing a helmet, it wouldn't be a fair comparison, would it?"

Hearing that, I glance at the talkative girl and shift a bit, feeling a little less annoyed.

"So, who do you like more?"

"Of course, I like you more."

"Good answer."

"But if I compare you to a dog, I might have to think again... By the way, the Pomeranian at the office is so cute."

The small girl chews her food and looks at the TV, watching a singing show. What? Is she comparing me to a dog?

"I want to go to your office again. Besides that Pomeranian, have there been other dogs at the office?"

"You."

"What?"

"You puppy face."

I get up and stomp off to the bedroom. Why am I so moody today? Maybe it's because her answer didn't please me, so I got even more upset. Even though I try to be nice to her in every way, she still thinks that the dog is cuter than me. But if I have to compare her to all the dogs in the world, she'll still be cuter in my eyes. I even proudly showed her off to everyone at the office because she's cuter than that dog.

But she says she's torn between me and that Pomeranian? It's obvious I'm cuter!

Knock, knock.

The sound of knocking on the door doesn't make me turn to the door because I know someone is coming to apologize. This is the nature of

women or anyone who feels superior. If we get attention, we want to play hard to get to feel important.

"Can I come inside?"

"No."

I only say it loud enough for myself to hear because if I shout, she'll get scared and won't come in. I want her to know I'm sulking. At least I should hear myself that I'm still sulking and need her to make up with me. The sweet-faced girl walks to the edge of the bed and pokes my shoulder as I lie back-facing her.

"Ms. Frung, what's wroooooong?"

"...."

"Look, if you don't tell me, I don't know what to do, and I can't apologize properly... If you're like this, I feel awkward. I'm staying at your place, and you're not talking to me."

"...."

Hearing her complain like that, I start rolling my eyes. She's right. If I stay silent, it might scare her. But turning around and being nice right away wouldn't be cool. I'm Frung, Frung that means...

Wait... What does it mean?

Why didn't my mom ever tell me the meaning of my name? It's hard to brag without knowing it.

Yu pokes my shoulder again and starts singing a spider song.

"The itsy bitsy spider..."

"Climbed up the waterspout.."

I'm not done being upset; I just want her to know I'm responding. She's not a wall, and I'm a kind-hearted person. When angry, you have to know how to forgive-a good quality of an employer and guardian that should be an example to others. I'll write a guidebook on how to be a mature person someday so the world will become a better place.

After I say that, there's a giggle, like she's amused, making me sit up and glare at her.

"Is it that funny?"

"Why are you so cute? Hehe."

"I did that because I was afraid you'd be sad."

"So, why are you mad at me?"

"Mimimi, mi-mi, mi-mi

Mimimi, only mi-mi"

"...."

"Nothing."

I shift a bit and make a serious face.

"Actually, I'm not angry. I'm showing you that I'm upset and I need someone to make up with me. Today, you charmed the delivery guy. Do you know that?"

"Huh? When? I just went down to get the food, paid the money, and came back up. Didn't even talk to him."

"If you didn't do anything, why was he so impressed with you that he sent me a message saying he wanted to know you? I went down to clear things up and chased him away."

"That's why I don't let people add my LINE account via phone number."

The small girl sighs and sits on my bed without realizing it.

"Last time, when I ordered pizza, the same thing happened. Nowadays, it's easy to contact each other. It's not just me; it happens to many people in the news. So, I nipped it in the bud."

"The mystery is solved. No wonder we're not friends on LINE."

I nod in understanding and smile a little at the maid's carefulness.

"So, your cuteness is the problem."

"What? Why are you praising me like that?"

"Not a praise. Your beauty and cuteness are real problems."

I pull the blanket over her small body, covering her head, leaving only her eyes.

"From now on, cover your face so people won't see you."

"No, it's hot."

"But I want to be the only one who sees your cuteness!"

"...."

"...."

Everything falls silent after I say that. The sweet-faced girl suddenly blushes, making my heart almost stop. I touch her cheek with concern.

"What's wrong?"

"Your words... are embarrassing."

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"...."

"Don't have one. Stay single and make people jealous like me."

I teasingly raise my eyebrows, wanting to teach her to look up to me.

"Act proud. I'll make you a strong woman who everyone feels is out of reach."

"What? Why..."

"Because you're mine. Keep your cuteness just for me."

I pull her into a hug like I'm holding a puppy. I want to cuddle, squeeze her into a ball, and put her in my mouth.

"I never had a pet before."

"What?!"

She pushes me away forcefully. The sweet-faced girl in the blanket lifts it up, messing her hair. She glares at me fiercely, making me surprise.

"Did I say something wrong?"

"You said you never had a pet. What does that mean?"

"Well... You give off that vibe. Like, that of a cat or a dog. It's the first time I want to take care of something seriously... Wait-"

Yu gets up and walks out, slamming the door. If you're not too dumb, you can easily see she's angry. Suddenly, the tables have turned. Just a few minutes ago, she came to apologize to me, unsure of what she did, but now I'm the one left confused.

What did I do...

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The atmosphere is so dreadful, like being in a maze with no way out. This morning, the small maid still makes breakfast for me as usual, but after finishing, she retreats to her room without saying a word, making me nervous. The discomfort she felt from me yesterday is now mine. It's like there is something heavy on my chest, and I don't know what to do with it.

"Pixie."

This time, I'm the one who knocks on her door. But Yu opens the door and faces me directly, unlike me who turned my back to her yesterday, and asks clearly but without a smile.

"What?"

"Yesterday..."

"...."

"All my troubles seemed so far away. Now, it looks as though they're here to stay. Oh, I believe in yesterday. HmmmmHmmmHmm Hmm."

Bang!

The door slams shut. I stand smiling at the door I asked the interior designer to make it match the room's color, admiring its beauty seriously for the first time. I have such a good taste.

No, I'm being sulked at. Why am I admiring the door?

"Today's breakfast was delicious. Make it even better tomorrow... I'm off."

I don't know how to apologize, so I speak through the door and grab my bag to go to work. While waiting for the elevator, my mind is puzzled about what has upset the little maid since yesterday. What's wrong with comparing her cuteness to that of a dog, the animal I love most? As I ponder, the elevator arrives.

No... I shouldn't go yet. I want to clear things up with her first.

I change my direction from taking the elevator to walking back to my room. I swipe my card to enter, determined to clear things up with Yu. I'm a reasonable person. If someone is mad at me, I need to resolve it within the day and not let it drag on. Her smile is worth the world. Just one day without that smile, and the world becomes gloomy.

Oh... what a beautiful sentence. I'll use this line to apologize to her.

As soon as I step in front of her room, just as I'm about to knock on the door, the sound of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata drifts out from inside. I freeze in place. The way the notes are played, I can tell the person inside is in a bad mood, with occasional pauses as if she's reviewing the sheet music. This makes me certain that it's not just a recording.

Wait... Pixie can play the piano?

I know this song because I was forced to learn music as a child. However, after being scolded by the teacher, I developed a hatred for it. Just by staring back at the teacher, they never returned to our house again. The grand piano still sits in my parents' home, now just an expensive decoration. I stand there, stunned, wondering how a maid who only finished ninth grade can play such music. Then, my phone rings, causing the person inside to stop playing.

Does Mom really have to call right now?

"Yes, Mom?"

[Today, I have an appointment with a friend. Come with me.]

The word "appointment" from Mom makes me instantly guess that it's another matchmaking session. This must be the eighth or ninth time.

"Aren't you tired of this, Mom? How many times do you want me to get married?"

I say, a bit annoyed, just as the door to Yu's room opens.

[Nope. I don't believe there's no one in this world who likes you. You're beautiful, rich, and well-educated. How could all the men run away? There must be someone who loves you for who you are. I believe that.]

"That person might not even be born yet, Mom. This is the last time. I'm tired."

[Alright, alright.]

"You always say that."

[And you always say it's the 'last time.']

"This time, it's the 'Last Time' with capital letters."

I firmly end the call and turn to talk to the maid, who has been standing at the door, staring at me for a while.

"I thought you've gone to work."

"I was about to, but..."

I roll my eyes, searching for a lie.

"But Mom called to say I have an appointment today, so I came to tell you that I might be back late. No need to wait."

"Okay."

"Were you playing the piano just now?"

"No, I was watching YouTube."

"That's not true. I heard..."

"How could someone like me play the piano? I only finished ninth grade. I'm poor. Piano lessons aren't cheap... I was just watching YouTube to learn how to play. It's boring not doing anything."

"Ah... I see."

"So, where are you going?"

The sweet-faced girl changes the subject, seeming to have forgotten her earlier anger, which is a good thing.

"To work."

"I mean the appointment."

"To a matchmaking session."

"You mean meeting a guy and talking, that kind of thing?"

I nod, feeling our conversation flow more smoothly, not as tense as this morning.

"Yes, today, my parents are having dinner with friends. They'll bring their kids to meet each other."

"Understood."

"How do you understand that, Pixie? You're poor."

"Poor people can understand something like this, too. So... if you're coming back late today, can I go meet my friends?"

"You have friends?"

I look surprised and frown.

"Really?"

"It's my school friends."

"Why do you have friends? I don't even have one."

"Well, we're not the same person. So, can I go? I promise I'll be back before you."

"And among these friends... are there any guys?"

"Yes."

"And if I say no?"

I glare at the small girl, but she just looks blankly at me like this morning. I quickly soften my tone.

"Just kidding, haha."

Whenever I end with a laugh, everything becomes less tense. That brings back Pixie's bright smile.

"I knew you were kind. Thank you."

The sweet-faced girl starts to close the door, but I pull her hair, making her turn back with an annoyed sound like yesterday.

"Why do you like to do this? It hurts."

"I'm annoyed."

"About what?"

"About the guys you'll meet today. Hmph."

"What? Aren't you going on a date, too?"

"Because I can control myself and have a smart brain. But Pixie... you seem dumb and poor."

I take out my wallet and hand her two thousand-baht bills.

"Who knows if you'll get into trouble. Keep this with you."

"You don't have to."

"Take it. And send me your location so I know where you are. In case of an emergency, I can find you."

At this, the small girl smiles sweetly and looks at me for so long that I have to pull back.

"What is it? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Suddenly, Pixie hugs me tightly. I wasn't prepared, so I grabbed onto something to keep from falling.

"What is this?"

"I miss this kindness."

"W... What?"

"Nothing. I just hug you to energize myself. See you in the evening."

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Honestly, I usually feel very happy when work ends-like in school when I always watch the clock, waiting for three o'clock, the time of my freedom. But work has always been my priority. I enjoy working. Since Pixie has been with me, coming home feels like there's something waiting for me.

But today is different...

After work, I have to stop by the hotel where Mom arranged the meeting. Being dragged around like this makes my already stern face even more irritated. But even if I go home, I won't be there because she's out with friends. Thinking about this makes me a bit frustrated.

Why does she have other friends when I only have her?

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Frung: Have you met your friends yet?

Yu: Yes, I have.

Frung: How is it? Are you having fun?

Yu: Yes, it's fun. How about you, Ms. Frung?

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I grit my teeth, feeling annoyed that she's having fun without me while I'm not having any fun because she's not here. Why aren't we the same? It's frustrating.

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Frung: Same here.

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If I say it's not fun, I'll lose. So I type that and stop chatting because Mom walks over, introducing her friend to me.

"Frung, this is Ms. Ae, the owner of the jewelry store I often shop at."

I greet her politely, my face not smiling but not too stern either. I maintain a neutral expression to keep my cool.

"Hello."

"Your daughter is as beautiful as you said. Or, must I say, elegant?"

Ms. Ae examines me closely.

"Is she really single?"

"Of course, she's single. Otherwise, I wouldn't dare show her off. She works all the time. After graduating, she went abroad immediately. When she came back, she took over from her father. No time to find a partner, so I have to help her."

"Excuse me for a moment, Mom,"

I say, bowing slightly to the guest who admires me. I then try to escape to the bathroom, but someone taps my shoulder before I can go.

"Not planning to run away, are you?"

A familiar voice comes from behind. I don't even need to turn around to know who it is. I recognized this voice and never wanted to forget it. It's like it's recorded in my brain. My muscles and body react in unison, my heart pounding.

My first love...

"P' Kitt."

I don't dare smile, but I don't dare frown, either. When I turn to face him, my expression is stone-cold, showing nothing. My senior from school smiles at me.

"Thank goodness you remember me."

"Of course I do."

"I've been watching you from afar for a while. It's been a long time."

The handsome man reaches out to pat my head and ruffles my hair gently. Normally, no one dares to touch me like this except him. He knows me well enough and is the only one who dares.

"It really has been a long time. I heard you went for a second master's degree."

"I didn't want to take over the family business, so I pretended to study. As for you, you got dragged into a matchmaking session. Am I right?"

"Smart."

I praise him, even though I don't explain anything.

"How did you know I was here for a matchmaking session?"

"I saw you looking uncomfortable from afar. Your body language screamed displeasure. So, I guessed you might be thinking of running away, and I hurried over to say hi before you disappeared."

"Where would I run to?"

"Our lives aren't that different. I was also forced into this.

Sigh."

"Why don't you run away?"

"As long as I still rely on their money, what can I do?"

I can't help but purse my lips, unsure of how to react. The handsome guy tilts his head slightly and looks at me.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

He asks the question as if it's the most normal question in the world.

"What?"

I stare directly into his eyes and shake my head.

"No, I don't."

"Will you marry me?"

"What?"

"Marrying you is better than marrying someone I've never seen before."

The handsome guy sighs and finishes the champagne in his hand before placing the empty glass on a passing waiter's tray.

"I think I'm not a bad choice. You might find it easier to decide to marry me than the person you're meeting today. I hope your mom won't mind me."

"Your jokes scared me."

"I'm serious. If I marry you, I'd be okay because right now, I'm not okay at all."

"Our lives sound like a soap opera. So, what are you going to do next? Maybe I can use it as a guide."

"If she didn't run away, I might've run away myself. I have to thank the bride-to-be for running off first. But it wouldn't be fair to let her do all the work. I need to do something, too."

The handsome guy reaches out to touch my hair slightly, then runs his fingers along my chin.

"I'm serious. If you don't have anyone and you don't like the person you're meeting today..."

"...."

"Let's get married."

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□ 07. My Kid □

I get back to my room around ten in the evening. Yu, who said she'd come back before, kept her promise. Now, the sweet-faced girl is sitting and watching TV, seemingly waiting for me.

"You're back!"

Her slightly nasal voice sounds cheerful and happy to see me. I smile a little because I feel that the once quiet room now seems lively just because someone else is here. It's such a delightful change.

"You kept your promise."

"Of course, I said I'd come back first, so I did. By the way, how was the matchmaking session today?"

"Well..."

I roll my eyes and walk to the fridge in the kitchen pantry to get some water to drink. Yu, seeing that I'm doing something myself, quickly runs over. It's like she forgot that it's the maid's duty to take care of her employer like me.

"No need, I'm just pouring water. And this isn't your working hours either."

"So, should I just watch you do everything yourself? That wouldn't be worth the pay..."

"I think I should learn to do some things myself. Like... how to cook rice. I could wash dishes when I was studying abroad, but cooking, it's a disaster."

I make a face as if I've just remembered something.

"Pixie, you can cook, right?"

"Yes, but I'm not very good. I can do some things."

"Then teach me those things, will you?"

"Well, I can, but why do you suddenly want to learn how to cook?"

"I just think that if one day I get married, I might've to cook for my husband."

"I thought you said you'd stay single to make men regret it."

"The situation has changed."

I put down the glass and scratch my head before looking at Pixie, trying to start a conversation.

"Pixie, have you ever had a boyfriend?"

When asked that, the sweet-faced girl goes silent for a moment, seeming to hesitate whether to tell or not, before nodding and deciding to speak.

"I have."

"Precocious," I immediately bare my teeth upon hearing that. Suddenly, I feel angry for no reason.

"Hey, you asked me, and now you're insulting me for answering?"

"Why did you have to have one? Can't you just stay single and virgin?"

"Well, I am. I've never done that kind of thing."

"But you said you had a boyfriend."

"We haven't gone that far. Ms. Frung, you're so old-fashioned. Even if I'd lost my virginity, it doesn't mean my value has decreased."

"That's true..."

But I still don't like it. Why does a small, cute person like her have to be messed with by men? It sounds unacceptable, like a Pomeranian being humped by a bulldog.

"So, why did you suddenly ask about my boyfriend? Did something special happen today?"

I purse my lips a bit, feeling shy, and turn my face away, not daring to meet her eyes, but the small person is determined to know, running into my focus and asking again.

"Avoiding eye contact like this, something must've happened to you. What's going on?"

"Someone proposed to me."

"Oh..."

The sound she makes seems to understand, but it makes my chest ache in a strange, inexplicable way.

"I see."

"What do you mean by 'I see'?"

"It means I get it. Someone proposed to you."

"Is that all? No comments or anything?"

"What comments could I have? I'm just a maid."

The dejected look on her face makes me quickly try to better the situation by placing my hand on her head and using my fingers to make her look at me.

"Are you worried that if I get married, you'll be out of a job...? Don't worry. Even if I get married, you can still stay here because you're mine."

"Are you worried that if I get married, you'll be out of a job...? Don't worry. Even if I get married, you can still stay here because you're mine."

"Will I belong to you forever? Am I still yours even if you get married? Won't you let me marry someone?"

"No!"

I answer almost immediately without thinking. My voice and emotions are off the scale, and it's like throwing a ball against a wall. The harder you throw, the harder it bounces back. Yu, too, responds with a loud voice that almost breaks my eardrums.

"Selfish! You can get married, but someone else can't!?"

"You aren't just someone else. Others can get married, but you can't. What's so fun about having a husband?"

"Then why do you want a husband if it's not fun?"

"Well..."

I start to stammer, unable to find a retort but still feeling displeased. "I'm smart and good-looking, while you're dumb and poor. You might get tricked by others. Stay with me. I'll make you an ideal woman for everyone."

"Who is he?"

"Hm?"

"The person who makes you want to learn how to cook."

This time, there's no sarcasm in her voice. She looks at me with hurt before turning away, avoiding eye contact.

"Even if I tell you, you wouldn't know him."

"Yes, I don't know everyone in the world. But just tell me who he is, where he's from, and what makes you so interested in him."

"He's a senior from school. My first love... Hey!"

I answer, feeling a bit embarrassed, and that makes the sweet-faced girl stomp back to her room angrily.

"You asked and didn't even listen to the end. How rude."

There's no response at all. I just stand there in the middle of the room, feeling confused, like I've been sulked at, but I'm trying to understand why.

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I can't sleep...

They say humans have over 2000 things to think about in a day, and I'm feeling that way. My head is full of confusion about that small person. She was talking to me and then suddenly got mad. Why can't people make everything simple? I'm not good at interpreting complicated things.

Because I can't sleep, I end up walking outside to get some water. My eyes glance at the door designed by the interior designer to blend with the wall. It's so beautiful. I have such good taste...

No, why do I like admiring my own door? And this is what my brain thinks about as the 2001st thing today.

I don't understand. Not at all.

Knock, knock, knock.

I knock on the door three times at three in the morning. It's not too late, right? Everyone stays up late, like me. Three in the morning isn't sleeping time. It's time to chat and have fun.

Click...

See? I told you it's not sleeping time. Yu opens the door, looking sleepy as if she just woke up. Her messy hair looks like a bird's nest, making me feel even more affectionate towards her. She's so cute, even in her most disheveled state.

"So cute!"

I pull the maid into a tight hug. Yu freezes for a moment and then lightly taps my back as if to complain.

"What's this? You suddenly hugged me. I'm so confused."

"Why are you so cute? You're not allowed to have a boyfriend, okay?"

I use both hands to cup the maid's face, which is now scrunched up into a pout.

"If he keeps you to himself, what will I do? I can't stand it."

"What is this? Did you come to bother me just to say this? I'm going back to bed. Tomorrow, I have to wake up early to cook for you."

She pulls my hands away from her face and looks like she's annoyed. I tilt my head and frown, feeling my heart weaken because I can't resist her whining.

"Can't you be my kid?"

"What?"

"You're so cute. I want you to be my kid."

"Now I'm really mad."

This time, she looks me straight in the eye. The sleepiness seems to have flown away, and she stares at me.

"In the morning, you compared me to a dog. Now, a kid. What next?"

"I don't know, but you're mine. You'll be everything to me."

"Everything?"

"Yes."

"Then be mine."

"Hm? How is this working? You don't intend to take care of me, do you?"

"I never intended to care for you from the start. When I said be mine, I meant..."

The sweet-faced girl steps closer, leaning in until our lips almost touch. The shock makes me stumble back until my back hits the wall. But it seems the more retreat, the more she advances. Yu props her arm against the wall and looks at me with a smile.

"I haven't done anything yet. Why do you look so shocked?"

"Because you suddenly looked at me like that..."

"Like what?"

"Like this..."

I swallow hard and turn my face away, not daring to meet her eyes.

"It's unusual."

"And is it good?"

"What's good?"

"The feeling of seeing this look."

Because I keep looking away, Yu uses the arm propped against the wall to grab my cheek and force me to look at her.

"Tell me how you feel."

BA-DUM...

BA-DUM...

I can't describe how I feel. I just know that I'm about to faint from that look. The sweet-faced girl smiles at the corner of her mouth, pleased, before letting out a laugh.

"You look so cute when you're surprised."

"Hmm?"

"I copied it from a movie I watched earlier tonight. I imitated the leading man from a Chinese series. How is it? Cool, right?"

The small person raises her eyebrows and laughs joyfully.

"Why were you so shocked? Did you think I could do anything to you?"

"Pixie, you look like you're about to eat me alive."

"Eat you? How would I eat you?"

"I... I'm not really sure."

"That's such a cute way to put it, eating you... Anyway, let's not joke around. It's late. Let's go to bed. You have to go to work early tomorrow." The sweet-faced girl turns to head back to her room but pauses and looks back with a different tone in her voice.

"Ms. Frung?"

"Hmm? What now?"

"Who do you like more, that guy or me?"

"What kind of question is that?"

"Goodnight."

She says that and then closes the door, leaving me to admire the well-designed wooden door by the interior designer once again.

□□□□□

□ Chapter 08 □

I couldn't sleep all night...

So, I have to wake up at six in the morning to read documents for today's meeting. Even though I try to focus on work, my mind keeps wandering back to the events at three in the morning and the gaze of that sweet-faced person that made my stomach flutter in a strange way.

'Who do you like more, that guy or me?'

Why did she have to look so serious? She's always been so cheerful, and suddenly, she looked so cool when she did that. I shake my head to clear the thought that she was too sexy and pretend to read my documents again. Yu, who wakes up at six-thirty to take a shower, looks surprised to see me sitting in the living room.

"Why are you up so early today?"

"I wanted today to be a bit longer. They say the earlier you wake up, the more you can do than others,"

I say, raising an eyebrow to look cool. Yu nods in agreement and gives me a thumbs-up.

"That's awesome. I'll take a ten-minute shower and then make breakfast for you, hehe."

Her giggle brightens the atmosphere again. As soon as the bathroom door closes, I slump in my chair and take a deep breath because I feel like I've been holding my breath, trying to look cool.

What was that? She seemed perfectly normal, not a hint of excitement. Thinking this annoys me as if that sweet-faced girl is using some cheat code. Ridiculous... Am I the only one feeling weird?

And the ten minutes she mentioned went as expected. It's as if she just ran through the water to feel like, 'Hey, I really took a shower.' How did she shower so quickly? I really want to know how she cleaned herself in there.

Yu grabs an apron and puts it on skillfully. I watch her movements, forgetting that I'm supposed to pretend to be working. The small figure picks up this and that, then touches her lips with her finger, thinking about what to do next. Seeing the apron strings coming loose, I, a perfectionist, can't help but get up to fix it.

"Ah!"

She lets out a surprised, nasal voice when she realizes I'm behind her, tying the strings. The scent of freshly showered soap makes me untie and retie the strings repeatedly, not wanting to leave the spot.

"Is it hard to tie?"

She asks, turning to look at me, but I push her face to make her look forward again.

"Just trying to make it look good."

"Just tie it tight. That's enough."

"I like you more than him."

"What?"

"The answer to what you asked last night."

I feel a bit regretful as I finish tying the strings and rest my chin on her shoulder while she toasts bread, adding to her burden.

"Don't feel bad. I really admire him, but you still hold the top spot in my heart."

"So, you're not sure if you'll like him more than me in the future?"

"Well..."

"Then I have to make you like me more every day," she says, turning to cup my cheeks with both hands.

"Hmmm. How should I do that?"

"You're so cute!"

"Oh!"

I pull her into a tight hug, waiting for her to squirm so I could tease her more. But she just stands still, then hugs me back with both arms, her delicate hands rubbing my back, making me feel strange.

"I love how you smell."

She doesn't just say that; she buries her nose in my chest, making a loud sniffing sound. Shocked, I jump back as if electrocuted.

"What's wrong?"

"I... I don't know. It felt like static electricity."

"I didn't feel anything. Let's stop playing. Go sit down; I'll serve the toast."

I still hold her, feeling regretful that I have to part from her until she pushes me away and guides me to the table. As she moves, I can't take my eyes off her. What makes me so fond of her? What is so special about her?

"Can't we stay together forever?"

I voice my thoughts. Yu pauses, then turns to smile at me.

"Probably not."

"Is there any way to make you stay with me forever?"

"Well, there is..."

She looks up, thinking logically.

"But never mind."

"Never mind what? You've said this much."

"My way isn't very popular in our society. Let's just say, if you want me as much as you want to breathe, then I'll tell you."

"As much as I want to breathe?"

"Yes. In the meantime, you can find your own way. My way will be the last resort."

She smiles but doesn't say anything more, as if to let it sink into my head.

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I lost my focus again...

Today, I couldn't concentrate on the meeting or grasp any work details. Luckily, my secretary took notes so I could read them later. But it made me realize my work standards had dropped.

Now, I'm opening my notebook, trying to connect the dots on why I can't work as well as before. But no matter how I draw the lines, they all lead to the same conclusion.

Pixie...

Since Pixie came into my life, I haven't been as focused on work. I spend my time thinking about how to tease her when I get home. And it's not just work. Even when shopping with my mom, I always buy things for her because I think they suit her.

Is it good or bad to have this maid in my house? My daily life seems to have changed a lot.

I eat breakfast.

I bought a game console and left it at home because I was afraid she'd get bored.

I rush home because I don't want to leave her alone.

And now, I'm thinking about her again.

Rrrrrr...

While lost in thought, my phone rings with an unfamiliar number. At first, I thought it was an online delivery person since I often shop aimlessly online at night. But the deep voice on the other end makes me sit up and quickly forget about the maid.

"P' Kitt."

[You remember me. I was going to surprise you.]

The handsome man laughs, making me feel a bit embarrassed even though he can't see me.

"Where did you get my number?"

[I asked around. It's not like you aren't well-known... You're a CEO at such a young age. Impressive.]

"If I were really impressive, I'd do things on my own, not just continue the family business."

[Don't think like that. If you didn't do well, the company would collapse, too.]

P' Kitt chats with me about various topics, and half an hour passes so smoothly. I've never spent that long on the phone before.

[Oh, we talked so long I forgot it's your work time.]

"It's okay. You called when I was free and helped me realize something... You're quite a good distraction."

From observing our half-hour conversation, I forgot about the maid for a moment, focusing on the person on the line. It makes me realize that P' Kitt can help me regain my focus. What a great help.

[What were you thinking about before I called?]

"I can't remember."

[Then I won't bother you anymore.]

"Okay."

[I'm really hanging up now.]

"Goodbye."

I hang up and place my phone on the table, tapping my fingers to the rhythm of a song in my head. After hanging up, I think about the maid again, curious about what she's doing.

Frung: Have you eaten yet, Pixie?

Yu: Not yet.

Frung: What? It's already two in the afternoon.

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Her reply makes me sit up straight and frown.

Frung: What are you doing that you haven't eaten?

Yu: Playing the game you bought the other day. I got so caught up building my island that I forgot to eat.

Yu: But don't worry, I won't forget your dinner, hehe.

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As I'm about to reply, my phone rings again with the same number. Recognizing it as P' Kitt's, I answer, surprised he calls back so soon.

"Did you dial the wrong number?"

[No, I intend to call you. Why did you hang up on me so fast? You didn't even try to keep me on the line.]

"Are we mad at each other?"

I don't understand what he meant. We were talking normally before hanging up. He said he was going to hang up, and I ended the call. What did I do wrong? I'm confused.

[Because you're so clueless, I find you adorable, haha.]

"What?"

I scratch my head, puzzled.

"So why did you call back?"

[Besides being clueless, you're also straightforward... I think our conversation isn't over yet.]

"Hm?"

[I was thinking of inviting you to dinner. Are you free this evening?]

"I am, but I need to hurry back home."

[Why?]

"I miss my maid,"

I reply honestly, which makes P' Kitt laugh warmly.

"What's so funny?"

[Is that an excuse to avoid having dinner with me?]

"No, it's the truth."

I chew my cheek.

"But... we haven't seen each other in a long time. Talking on the phone isn't the same as meeting in person. Dinner this evening sounds good."

[Or should I come over to your place for dinner?]

"That's alright... actually, no."

I change my mind, thinking of Yu.

"My maid is too cute. I don't want you to meet her."

[What? Are you afraid your maid will fall in love with me?]

"No, it's the other way round."

[What kind of person do you think I am? Fine, we'll go to a restaurant... but now I'm curious about this maid. You've mentioned her ten times since we started talking.]

"Then I won't mention her anymore. From now on, don't ask about her. I'll get jealous."

[Why are you so adorable?]

"You sound just like my maid."

[There you go, mentioning her again.]

"You're right. That's the rule. No more talking about her... see you tonight."

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When work ends, I'm about to leave the office for the meeting spot when I'm surprised to see P' Kitt waiting to pick me up. The handsome guy in a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves is casually playing with his phone. At first, I'm not sure it's him, but as I get closer, I call out his name.

"P' Kitt?"

"Yup," he responds immediately, putting away his phone when he hears my voice.

"Surprise."

"I thought we were meeting at the restaurant you sent the location for."

"I changed my mind. Picking you up for our first dinner together is cooler than having you drive yourself."

"How is that cooler?"

"I want to pamper you, like..."

He takes my handbag and raises an eyebrow.

"Carrying your bag and escorting you to the car parked out front."

P' Kitt leads me outside the company. The flashy red sports car is hard to miss, and I nod in amazement.

"Showing off your car, huh?"

"Oh, come on,"

P' Kitt says, placing a hand on his forehead as if troubled.

"At least pretend to be impressed."

"Did I react wrong? Let me try again."

I rub my face and shake my head as if resetting everything, then start over.

"Wow, is this your car, P' Kitt? It's so beautiful. Is the red color made from the blood of 2,540 Tibetan pigeons?"

"If you're not excited, it's okay. My bad."

The handsome guy laughs, opens the door, and invites me into the car. I follow him willingly, leaving my car at the office and letting him take me to the restaurant.

Our destination is a Thai restaurant in Thonglor, where reservations usually take months. But since the owner is his friend, we get to eat there without waiting. As I ponder what to eat, I catch a glimpse of the desserts in the display case near the cashier.

"We haven't seen each other in years. How's your life? Tell me."

"Not much happened."

The desserts look so tempting. I should buy some for my maid. Come to think of it, I don't even know what she likes...

"I ran into Witsanu the other day. Remember him? The guy who used to chase after you."

"He did?"

"How could you not know? You're as clueless as ever."

"If he was interested in me, why didn't he just say so? I've been single almost my whole life..."

I reply absentmindedly, still eyeing the dessert case. Does she like chocolate or coconut cake?

"So, if someone wants to date you, they should just say it outright?"

"Probably. At my age, I don't have time for games. If we like each other, we date. If it doesn't work out, we break up... that jelly cake looks good."

"You clueless girl, look at me!"

He forces me to look at him, holding my face with both hands and frowning playfully.

"What?"

"How can you talk to me without paying attention to the food on the table?"

"Oh?"

I exclaim, realizing I haven't noticed the food on the table. All the desserts from the display case-chocolate cake, coconut cake, jelly cake, brownies-are now in front of me.

"When did you order these, P' Kitt?"

"When you couldn't stop staring at the display case. Do you like sweets that much?"

"They're pretty. Please excuse me."

I wave to the waiter and make a circular motion with my finger, signaling to pack everything up.

"Please pack these to go. Thank you."

"Why don't you eat them here?"

"They won't look as nice if they're half-eaten. It feels like leftovers. But if they're whole, the person receiving them will be happy."

I smile cheerfully, making P' Kitt sigh.

"So you're taking my desserts to give to someone else. Let me guess, it's your maid."

"I told you not to mention her. We won't talk about her."

"I really want to meet your maid now. What makes you so interested in her? You keep getting distracted and talking about her. If she were a guy, I'd be jealous."

"Why would you be jealous?"

I laugh, waiting for the main course that should have been served before dessert but hasn't arrived yet.

"Because I proposed to you."

"Don't joke around. You proposed to avoid an arranged marriage, using me as a tool. That's not nice."

"I like you."

"How can you suddenly like me?"

I laugh sarcastically.

"We haven't seen each other in years. And back in school, you saw me as a little sister."

"Back then, you were not as beautiful as you are now. Do you know that as an adult, you look great? You're an executive, straightforward, and cluelessly adorable."

He places his hand on mine, squeezing it gently as if to confirm he's serious.

I thought he was joking, but his earnest expression made me look away. I now realize he's serious.

"You're not pranking me, are you?"

"I like you. I'm trying to flirt with you. To not waste time, as you said, I want to date you. I'll give you three days to think about it."

"Three days?"

"We're both busy, aren't we?"

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I return to my room with a bunch of sweets in hand.

It's past ten now. I've eaten a lot but still brought back desserts for my beloved maid.

"I'm back."

As I place the items on the dining table, I notice the dishes on the table and feel puzzled. My sweet maid hasn't come out to greet me as usual. She seems to have gone to bed early, making me uneasy.

Knock, knock, knock.

"Pixie, I'm back. Come out and see. I brought lots of goodies."

"...."

"Pixie... hey, are you okay?"

Her silence worries me, so I keep knocking and try to turn the doorknob, but it's locked from the inside.

"Yu... are you sick? Yu... oh."

The sweet-faced girl slowly opens the door and smiles at me as if nothing happened.

"Yes, Ms. Frung?"

"What were you doing? I've been calling you. Are you okay?"

I examine her body worriedly but find nothing unusual. She stares at me intently and asks,

"Where did you go?"

"I went out for dinner."

"With whom?"

"A senior from school. He picked me up for dinner."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, I forgot."

I smile sheepishly, then quickly gesture to the kitchen pantry.

"But I brought lots of sweets for you. They're all so cute and delicious."

"You said you liked me a lot. So, you were lying?"

My little maid complains, and that surprises me.

"I wasn't lying. I really like you... oh, come here. You're so cute. Give me a hu-"

Before I can pull her into a hug, she jumps into my arms, pushing me against the wall like last night. But this time, she doesn't just talk; she bites my ear, making my legs weak, but I manage to stay upright.

"I like you too, Ms. Frung, in case you didn't know."

"Yu..."

"And to make you understand how it feels to be ignored, from now on, I won't tell you where I'm going or what I'm doing."

"You can't do that. Pixie, you're under my care."

"Then control me. When you're not around, how will you know where I am or what I'm doing?"

"Are you challenging me?"

"I'll make you restless. Your mind will be filled with thoughts of me. Just wait and see."

The sweet-faced girl speaks challengingly and walks back into her room without looking at me. I stand there, mouth agape, staring at the door, biting my lip.

No need to wait. My mind is already filled with thoughts of her!

□□□□□

□ Chapter 09 □

Is she really going to do that...?

I watch the maid making breakfast as usual. Her lively movements still amuse me. Nothing seems out of the ordinary. She continues to act relaxed and enthusiastic about cooking. So, I have to pretend that yesterday's incident never happened by forgetting about it.

"I'll be back early for dinner today."

The sweet-faced girl turns and gives me a small smile.

"You don't have to rush."

"Why not?"

"In case I come back late."

"Where are you going?"

I straighten up immediately when I hear that. Yu serves ham, fried eggs, and freshly squeezed orange juice that she made herself, even giving me a bit of salt to season it.

"I'm thinking about where to go."

"Why do you have to go?"

"And why do I have to stay home all day and night? Since coming to live with you, I've only gone out to meet friends once."

"If there's no reason to go out, then stay home. Why would you look for reasons to go out?"

"Is this place a prison?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do I have to report every time I go somewhere? In reality, I'm here as a part-time maid, working only two hours a day. And I'm here because you asked me to... I should have more freedom to go out without having to tell you."

I gape as she continues her long sentence, now speaking clearly and confidently, with no more regard for me.

"Is it because of last night? Are you still mad at me?"

Even though I don't want to bring it up, it's unavoidable. My tone softens because I want to speak peacefully without arguing. The sweet-faced girl looks into my eyes and nods with a smile.

"Yes."

"I just forgot to tell you. There's no need to get back at me."

"You can see it as retaliation, or you can see it as letting me go out and have some fun."

"If you're going somewhere, tell me. I'll take you."

"Telling you wouldn't be a surprise."

"Why does it have to be a surprise?"

"Last night, I was surprised that you came back late, tricking me into making dinner and waiting. From now on, we'll live in suspense, wondering who will go out and who will stay at home. It'll be so much fun."

The small girl speaks while raising her eyebrows playfully, but it makes me frown.

"No, you can't go. That's an order."

"And what will you do if I don't follow the order?"

"I'll..." The word 'fire you' never crosses my mind, and if I use that word, it'd be for someone in the office, not for the maid.

"I'll order delivery instead."

"Changing the subject. I was wondering if you'd fire me."

"And if I do fire you?"

"Guess what I'd say?"

.

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She's challenging my authority...

No one in this company has ever dared to defy me before-not because I'm strict but because everyone respects my stern face- but Pixie never listens to my orders, always challenging me. Not to mention that she bit my ear like a dog! Hmph!

I walk into the company in a foul mood, passing the HR department and seeing a crowd of job applicants. Does our company need more employees again? If Yu had a higher education, I'd have her apply and use my connections to make her my secretary.

What a kind-hearted company owner with a broad vision...

But because Yu can't apply for these positions, it makes me even more irritated. I glare at the applicants like a bully, walking around and staring at everyone. Coming to apply for a job without preparation, the seams on the

shirt are not sewn, and the shirt looks too loose, probably borrowed from a friend... If they work here, will they borrow things and take them home?

"You can leave now. You didn't pass."

"Y-yes."

"I'm speaking as the owner of this company."

I glance at another applicant who's nervously shaking his leg before bending down and tapping his knee lightly with my finger.

"Your posture is terrible. What position are you applying for?"

"Sales."

"You won't be able to sell our product to anyone like this. Go home."

I've rejected two applicants already. As I prepare to screen a few more, someone speaks up.

"Frung, is that you?"

I tilt my head slightly and look at the person with the corner of my eye. An applicant in a clean white shirt and neatly pressed slacks speaks up. He looks about two years older than me, and yes, I remember him.

"Senior."

Even though I remember, I don't know his name. He was one of the seniors who hazed me in my freshman year in front of over a hundred classmates, making me feel humiliated.

"It's really you."

"Are you here to apply for a job?"

"Yes."

"At your age, you still don't have a job?"

I hear the applicants gulp simultaneously. The senior, who I remember, smiles awkwardly and nods.

"The economy is terrible. I had my own business but couldn't handle the costs, so I decided to become a salaryman."

"What position?"

"Maintenance."

"Do you want the job?"

"Of course."

"Spin like a dog right here."

I cross my arms and speak seriously. The senior looks stunned and laughs.

"Don't tease me like this."

"I'm not teasing you. I'm using what you taught me in the uni. If you can't endure this, how will you endure work? Do it twenty times, and I'll consider hiring you."

"Frung..."

"I said do it! If you don't, then go home!!!"

I shout loudly, mimicking him from our uni days. The entire floor goes silent. Even the HR staff opens the door to see what's happening. Initially, they were going to scold the shouter, but upon seeing it's me, they clasp their hands in front of them and bow politely.

"...."

"How does it feel to be humiliated in front of so many people?"

I see the anger in his eyes. The senior lowers his head and sighs before raising his hands in surrender.

"I'll go home. I can't be anyone's subordinate, especially yours! You demon!"

His voice is filled with anger as he tears up his application, letting it flutter in the air. I glance at the paper at my feet and see that his previous work experience includes being an electronics technician and installing CCTV cameras.

Ding!

This is the sound of a light bulb being switched on in my head. I call out to the senior who's about to leave.

"Wait!"

"What now?"

"You don't need to interview anymore. You're hired... Follow me to my office. I have something for you to do."

I snap my fingers and lead the newly hired employee to my room. The senior, who was initially angry, becomes submissive upon realizing he got the job and follows me closely. The first task for the new employee is to help me choose hidden CCTV cameras that can be discreetly placed around the room.

"Are you sure no one will know there's a camera in the room if we install it the way you said?"

I no longer call him senior because he is now an employee. The senior, whose name I later learn is 'Frank,' answers respectfully like a subordinate.

"Absolutely. These are pinhole cameras, meant for covertly recording people in nudes."

"What?"

Frank quickly waves his hands.

"I'm just recommending what you want. Just explaining their actual use... Where do you want to install them?"

"In my condo."

"For what purpose?"

"Personal reasons."

"You must have your reasons."

Frank doesn't press further. I have him prepare the cameras and bring them to me as his first task.

"I'll be the only one who can view the record, right?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"How do I know you can't access it?"

"I'll let you set the password."

"Okay, you've done a great job."

"If there's anything else you need, just let me know. I'll do anything."

"You'll have to. With all the hazing you did in school, you should be able to do anything except eat dog poop."

I smile appreciatively, but it makes him look uneasy, and I realize my smile might've unsettled him.

"Actually... since you mentioned it, I have another task for you. Can you handle it?"

"Of course, ma'am. Just give the order."

"I want you to follow someone."

.

.

After a stressful day, I finally found a solution. Since she wants me to worry and not know where she goes or what she does, I'll have someone follow her. From now on, Pixie will be under my watch, whether she's at home, going out, or doing anything with anyone.

About two days after I gave the order, Frank handed me a pinhole camera that could be placed anywhere in the house without anyone noticing, along with instructions on how to install it. After receiving it, I placed it in various corners of the house when Yu was taking a shower so she wouldn't know what I was doing. I chose to hide it in my own picture frame, on the handle of the built-in cabinet in the kitchen, and in the picture frame hanging on the wall at the foot of the bed in the bedroom.

Now I'll know everything about that little one.

"Heh heh... heh heh heh... heh heh heh heh heh heh heh."

Why do I seem so creepy... Suddenly, I feel guilty.

"Sigh."

Or maybe I should really install it, so I can know everything.

"Ho ho ho... ha ha ha ha."

"Are you going to audition for a horror movie?"

"Yikes!"

I jump when I realize I've been laughing alone.

"You scared me."

"I should be the one scared. You're standing in my bedroom, laughing like you're plotting something."

"What plan... NOTHING!"

My voice rises to a soprano pitch, making the sweet-faced girl raise an eyebrow in disbelief.

"NOTHING means there is something. What are you doing here?"

"Just... taking a walk."

"In my room?"

"Can't I? Since you moved in, I haven't come in here at all."

"Do you have to? It's not like our rooms are thirty kilometers apart."

"It's not fair."

I try to justify myself with every reason in the world.

"You come into my room every day, but I never get to go to your room."

"I have to clean and change your bed sheets as part of my duties. It's not a fair comparison, is it? I'm so confused by your logic."

"I'm just hard to understand."

"That's true... you aren't like a normal person. That's why you're cute."

The small girl nods and smiles, letting it go without further questions.

"So, how is it coming into my room?"

"Well... it's clean, bright, peaceful, and tiny. Just like you."

"Is that all? I thought you'd analyze something interesting."

"Analyze?"

"I heard you're very observant. Just one look and you can tell what a person is like by looking at the context and environment. I'm curious about what you see in me after entering this room."

I haven't really observed anything because I was too busy hiding the camera. When asked, I have to improvise by glancing around the room. There's almost nothing to notice because everything was arranged by the interior designer and the built-in contractor. She asked this question as if to challenge me.

"You're very clean. The room remains as it was. You hardly buy anything new for this room... probably because you're poor."

"Is that how you read people?"

The sweet-faced girl laughs and shakes her head.

"I heard you're good at reading people. Why do you only talk about poverty with me?"

"Because you're poor. If you were rich, you wouldn't be pitiable."

"You only have pity for me, don't you?"

"I also have some fondness. What more do you want?"

"I don't know. I want more. The more, the better."

She smiles, making me shift uncomfortably, feeling a bit embarrassed.

"I should go. I've been in your room too long."

"Sweet dreams. Dream of me, too."

I pout and walk out of the room, feeling awkward. Why does she say such strange things lately? It gives me goosebumps, but it's not exactly goosebumps. It's more like a ticklish feeling.

But the mission is accomplished!

After leaving Yu's room, I quickly rush to my own bedroom and access it the way Frank taught me. Then, the live images from every corner of the condo appear before my eyes. I select the screen showing her room from the camera in the art frame at the foot of the bed. Her image appears clearly. I smile triumphantly, feeling superior.

"From now on, whatever you do, I'll see it all. Heh heh heh... ha ha ha... am I crazy, talking to myself?"

I look around nervously, worried someone might see me, and shake my head. I'm the one who criticizes Indian movies the most for long monologues. Doing it myself feels a bit crazy. Alright... better focus on Pixie. What will she do before bed?

Even though I want to watch her, it feels wrong. It's like I'm invading her privacy too much. But I have no ill intentions. It's just for peace of mind, to feel safe and secure.

Yu picks up her phone, reads it, and types something. I press my ear to the phone, hoping to hear something like a crazy person, knowing she's typing. That means there's no sound, but I still do it. Soon, she gets up from the bed, looks at the camera, and stares for a long time.

OMG!! Does she know there's a camera?

The sweet-faced girl chews her cheek and thinks before doing something I don't expect. She takes off all her clothes.

Thud!

My phone drops to the floor as I weaken from shock. I quickly pick it up and look again to be sure. Yu's figure makes me turn away from the phone, feeling rude, but I still sneak a peek out of curiosity.

She sleeps naked...

The sweet-faced girl, now completely bare, slips under the blanket and turns off the light. The camera, which can film in the dark, still shows her, though not as clearly as in the light. She lies on her side, hugging a pillow, and falls asleep while I remain wide-eyed, my heart racing. I swallow hard several times.

Pixie... you...

Your boobs are bigger than mine!

□□□□□

□ Chapter 10 □

Today, I still can't sleep as usual....

Ever since the new maid moved in, I haven't had a full night's sleep. I wake up early every day with something always on my mind, and it messes up my routine. For example, now, when I try to focus on the documents in my hand before heading to work, Instead of focusing on the text, I keep seeing images of Yu being naked on the paper. I have to slam the paper down on the table, hoping that doing so will shake off the imagination from the documents.

"Ms. Frung, what's wrong?"

Yu, who brings me the breakfast and serves me orange juice, looks at me curiously.

"Didn't get enough sleep? You look really tired."

"..."

I glare at the petite person with a frown.

"You can tell me anything."

"Liar."

"Huh?"

"Is there anything you haven't told me yet?"

There's a moment of stunned silence, which is enough for me to read her body language.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you tell me."

I shift my gaze from her face to her chest under the T-shirt and purse my lips tightly.

"Cow in the sheep's clothing."

"You knew? How did you find out?"

I flare my nostrils because I can't reveal how I knew; it's wrong and too creepy.

"Let's just say I know. Hiding such things under a plain T-shirt."

Her figure is no joke. How can I, who exercise like crazy, lose to a maid who only cleans all day? Yoga classes and aerobics classes are all a waste of money.

"Ms. Frung..."

"You know, since you came into my life, I haven't been myself at all. From now on, I'll distance myself from you."

I need to focus. Focusing too much on her disrupts my daily balance, especially work. I need to tell her so she won't feel neglected later, thinking why I'm not as playful as before. There's a lot of work lately, so I need to put Yu aside for now.

"I'm going to work."

I take a couple of bites of bread to make the maid happy and get up to prepare for work. But as I'm about to walk out, I'm suddenly hugged from behind, which startles me a bit.

"Huh?"

"Don't hate me."

She rests her forehead on my shoulder and mumbles. I don't quite understand what she means, so I intend to turn around and look her in the eye, but she holds me tightly.

Who hates her? I just said that I mightn't have much time to play with her.

"I like you a lot. Everything I did was just to be close to you."

"Why are you saying this all of a sudden?"

I peel her hands off and turn to look her in the eye. Her tears welling up, almost falling, make my heart wither.

"I don't hate..."

"I understand. Anyone would be angry at being lied to."

"I'm not exactly angry. It just makes me feel like a loser.

"No, you're not. I don't see it as a competition. I just... hmm?"

I reach out and grab her boob, squeezing to check the size, comparing it to mine, and found it slightly bigger.

"Yours are really bigger."

"Huh?"

"See? Hiding such things under your T-shirt. I was shocked to find out your boobs are bigger. I'm so jealous of small people with hourglass figures."

I pout a bit.

"Whatever, I'm late for work. I'm not mad that your boobs are bigger. What can I do? My parents gave me only this much."

"What are you talking about?"

"Boobs."

"Huh?"

"Aren't we talking about the same thing?"

I ask out of curiosity. Yu, who seems a bit surprised, slowly smiles and laughs.

"We're talking about the same thing. You're saying you lost sleep because my boobs are bigger? I believe you. And what's this about distancing yourself from me?"

"You make me lose focus at work. My head is full of you. It disrupts my routine. I can't handle it, so I need some distance."

"So, you're not mad at me at all?"

"Why would I? Just saying so you won't sulk that I'm not playful and seem distant. I don't want you to feel neglected. I'm going to work now."

I wave goodbye and grab my shoes to leave the room, but Yu jumps on my back like a tick and hugs me tightly.

"Cute! Sooo cute! Ms. Frung, you're so cute. Don't get a boyfriend, okay?"

"What?"

I laugh and use my hands to support her bottom, afraid she might fall. Now I feel like a mother monkey carrying her baby.

"Just like you don't want me to have a boyfriend. Let's stay together like this forever. Or if anyone asks, we can say... we're a couple."

"A couple?"

I glance at the person resting her chin on my shoulder with a pounding heart.

"Even though we're both women?"

"Yes."

"You crazy. What kind of woman dates another woman?"

"Our kind."

"Nonsense."

I knock her head lightly, making her rub her head.

"Get down now. I really have to go to work."

Yu gets off my back, pouting in displeasure. I look at her and pull her cheek like a rubber band because she's so cute.

"Don't go anywhere today."

"If I go out, you won't know. Bleh! Since you won't be my girlfriend, I'll find someone else."

"No."

"Bleh!"

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This is a time for focus.

I've decided not to be distracted by the maid anymore. What I do now is most important: the work I have to discuss with other executives today about adding servers and restructuring some unnecessary departments to form a new team. Today, I didn't touch my phone for almost three hours, which is quite an achievement. But when I get a break, I quickly grab it and open the surveillance camera app.

Yu is playing a game on the sofa, looking very serious, which makes me feel fond of her. Come to think of it, I've never played a game with her. I

should find time to try it. I heard you can build islands, visit others' islands, and give each other items in the game. It sounds fun. It's like watching a reality show about a kid going about their life at home. But I feel a bit guilty about the camera in the bedroom. Maybe it's unnecessary to have a camera there.

I'll find a chance to remove it.

While I'm watching her, Yu suddenly picks up her phone, reads something, and rushes to the bedroom. She grabs a shoulder bag and leaves the room. I straighten up and call Frank, the special employee, who said he could do any job. I've assigned him to be a detective, and he's been on standby near my condo since I gave him the task yesterday.

[Roger. If there's any progress, I'll report with photos immediately.]

Such a diligent employee. I chuckle and focus on my work, leaving everything to Frank. While I'm reading documents, discussing with important executives, or calling subordinates for project updates, Frank sends me photos. So far, nothing seems too worrying.

She went to 7-Eleven.

She took a ride to a local market.

She stopped by a game store...

Does she want a new game?

"Excuse me for a moment. I have some important business."

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I excuse myself from a trade partner discussion and type a message to Frank.

Frung: What game did the target pick up?

Frank: Mario, but I'm not sure if it's the Olympic or Kart version.

Frank: She picked it up, looked at it, and put it back before walking out.

Frung: Buy it. I'll pay you back. Do you have cash?

Frank: None, but if you transfer me some money, I'll buy it for you.

Frung: Okay.

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I send him the money and prepare to return to the discussion. But out of the corner of my eye, I see two female employees chatting intimately with unusual body language. One has short, boyish hair, dresses neatly, and is petite. The other is taller with long hair. I can tell they weren't just friends.

LGBTQ+ love, huh...

Or if anyone asks, we can say... we're a couple.

Is that what she meant? The love of a tom and a dee... [1]

I touch my hair, comparing its length to the cool-looking woman, wondering.

I don't look cool and boyish at all. How could we date... Pixie must be mistaken.

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When I get home, I place the newly bought game on the table in front of Yu and shrug slightly.

She looks at the game, frowns, and picks it up.

"You bought a game? Well, this is new."

"I thought you might be bored playing the same games, so I bought this one for you."

"It's like you knew I wanted to get a new game."

I smile smugly and raise an eyebrow.

"That's because I'm attentive. Where else would you find an employer this thoughtful? You should be grateful."

"I've known for a long time that you're sweet, but actually... I want to play another game more."

"What game?"

I turn quickly to look at her, wondering if this isn't the game she wanted the most.

"A cooking game, but it needs two players. I want to play it with you."

"What? But today, didn't you pick up Mario..."

I say and then quickly shut my mouth because it feels like I've let out a national secret. She looks at me for a moment and asks again.

"Excuse me?"

"Nothing."

"You said you saw me pick up a game. When did you see that?"

"In a dream."

"Huh?"

"I took a nap this afternoon and dreamed that you went to a game store and picked up a Mario game. So, I got inspired to buy it when I woke up. But it's okay. Having this game is better than nothing."

I smile as if it's not a big deal.

"Then, I'll stop by to buy the cooking game you mentioned later. We can play together; it sounds fun."

"Okay."

Yu doesn't say anything else, seeming to be lost in thought. I walk to the kitchen to pour a drink and remember something, so I start a conversation.

"Today at the company, I saw a tom-dee couple."

"Uh-huh."

Yu just listens without any particular opinion, but when she sees I don't continue, she asks,

"And then?"

"That's it."

"Is this a story? Why is it so short?"

"That's all there is to it. Just wanted to say I saw a tom-dee couple today, that's all."

"There must be something more. Otherwise, why would you bring it up?"
When she says that, I nod in agreement and speak my mind.

"Actually, there is... I just wondered why you asked me to be your girlfriend today. I mean, neither I nor you looks like a tom."

"What?"

"If two women like each other, there has to be a masculine side and a cute, girly side, right? But both of us... we're very girly."

"So, you're wondering, if we're not a tom and a dee, how can we be girlfriends? Is that it?"

"Yeah."

"You don't need a masculine or a feminine side to love each other. You're a woman. I'm a woman. If we like each other, that's enough."

She smiles before walking to the counter between us and leaning down, resting her chin on her hand.

"We don't have to be a tom and a dee to..."

"To...?"

"Fuck."

Pfft!!!

I spit the water in my mouth onto Yu, who said such a vulgar thing, making the maid wipe her face and laugh.

"What is this? I'm all wet."

"What did you just say? That's so vulgar."

"Was it too crude?"

"Obviously. I'm not talking to you anymore."

"Ms. Frung, your face is red. So cute and so polite."

I walk away to my room while the maid follows me like a duckling.

"So, what do you say?"

"Say what?"

"Will you be my girlfriend?"

"Still not done playing?"

"I can be either the masculine or the feminine side, whatever you want... I can do it all."

"You crazy!"

Bang!

I slam the door in her face and quickly lean my back against it as if afraid she'll break in. What's with her? She suddenly acted all serious. What's more shocking is myself...

How can I feel good about those words?

I can do it all...

□□□□□

Footnotes

1. ^Tom,' from the English word 'tomboy,' and 'dee,' from the English word lady, are distinct gender identities in Thailand. Tom is associated with masculinity while a dee looks, acts, and speaks in a manner according to the female gender norm. Moreover, a dee is often engage in relationships with a tom.

□ Chapter 11 □

Up until now, I still haven't removed the camera from Yu's bedroom...

But I'm polite enough not to watch it. Or if I do, I avoid her bedroom and only check what she's up to. Like today, from what I saw, she did nothing unusual. She played games at home all day. And now, I have the game she wants in my hands after ordering it online to be delivered to the office. Initially, I planned to go back and play with her, but P' Kitt came to pick me up for dinner first. So, I had to come back later than usual today.

And today, I won't make the same mistake!

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Frung: No need to make dinner today. I'm eating out.

Yu: Who are you eating with?

Frung: My colleague.

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I don't know why I can't just say outright that I'm with the guy I told her about. It's not something that should be hidden, but deep down, I feel it's better to keep quiet to avoid any sulking.

But why am I afraid of her sulking? I'm her boss. When did I become like this?

"Have you thought about it yet?"

"About what?"

"About dating me."

I completely forgot about this. Or rather, thoughts of P' Kitt barely cross my mind. Each day, I'm too busy worrying about where Yu is going, who she's with, what she wants to eat, if she's lonely, etc. When asked like that, I could only falter.

"It takes time. Since we met the other day, it's only been three or four days.

"I believe that if it's meant to be, just a glance is enough to know. But I gave you time to think because I want you to consider it thoroughly and talk to your family about us.

"Why do I need to talk to my family?"

"When their kid dates someone, they want to know if that person is suitable. I want you to introduce me to your family because I've already told mine that there's someone I want to date, and that person is you.

I feel strangely uncomfortable. Even though I like him a lot, setting a deadline and having everything planned out like a business negotiation makes me uneasy. What P' Kitt said isn't wrong. Our backgrounds are like that. When dating someone, our families have to know about that person. If they see it's suitable, we can continue dating. Everything must be on equal footing.

Wealth.

Education.

Taste.

The rest is just getting to know each other...

"I remember you have a fiancée, right? The one arranged by your family."

"She ran away. Having a new option like you, who's no less, my family has no problem."

"I haven't talked to my family about this. Everything is happening so fast that I can't keep up."

"You can say I'm impatient. I want things to be clear. Besides, I'm afraid you'll like someone else more than me. By the way, do you have someone you like more than me now?"

"I do."

I answer honestly, and the sweet face that comes to mind first is hers. P' Kitt looks a bit shocked before asking in a disappointed tone.

"Who?"

"The maid."

And when I say that, he sighs deeply and takes a drink.

"You like to joke and scare me. I thought it was some guy."

"You asked if I like someone more than you. I answered honestly that it was the maid. The first thing that came to mind was her face."

"I'm starting to want to meet this maid."

"No way. She's too beautiful. She's mine,"

I answer with a slightly possessive tone.

"And the reason I haven't decided anything is because if our relationship becomes real, there will be marriage involved."

"Uh-huh."

"Then what will I do with this maid?"

"There's nothing to do. You can bring her to live with us."

He laughs as if it's easy, but I shake my head.

"I said no. She's too beautiful."

"Are you afraid I'll seduce the maid? What kind of person do you think I am? I'm not a flirt... Or are you jealous?"

"Jealous?"

I pull my neck back a bit and purse my lips.

"You make me happy. It seems I have hope."

I don't answer; I just sit and think to myself, then eat out of politeness. As usual, my socializing ends, and I return to the condo. But today, when I return, Yu doesn't run to greet me as usual. I hear the shower in the bathroom, indicating the little maid is enjoying the warm water, humming a song.

"Pixie, I'm back."

"Okaaaay."

A nasal voice responds, then continues humming. I press my ear to the door to listen to what she's singing before walking to the sofa and looking at her bedroom door, thinking.

This is a good chance to remove the camera...

Thinking that, I quickly walk to the door and turn the knob, but it's locked, unlike that day.

Oh, come on!

"What are you doing, boss? Trying to sneak into my room again?"

Her sly tone and smirk make me shiver a bit.

"Just checking if the door works properly... Why do you lock it? Afraid I'll steal something?"

"That's not it, but lately, I feel strange."

"Strange?"

"I feel like being watched all the time, but I don't know why."

I straighten up, feeling guilty. Does she have such a good intuition?

But to avoid suspicion, I go along with it.

"You're imagining things. Who would do that?"

"I don't know. It feels like being stared at all the time. So, I lock the room in case someone sneaks in when I'm alone... Have you seen the news about the condo security guard who sneaked into a resident's room to steal stuff? I have to protect myself. Like just now, I locked the door while showering."

"Oh... I see. Don't worry. If there's a thief or anyone, I'll be the first to know."

"How will you know?"

"Because I installed..."

I almost blurt out, then roll my eyes a bit, thinking of an excuse.

"Installed what?"

"Install, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, means 'to put furniture, a machine, or a piece of equipment into position and make it ready to use.'!!

"...."

"It can also mean, 'to put a computer program onto a computer so that the computer can use it.'"

"Talking to you is exhausting."

Yu shakes her head and unlocks her room. I look inside, feeling guilty and wanting to remove the camera so badly. But it seems harder now that she's so cautious because of that security guard news.

"What is it?"

"Hmm?"

"What are you looking at? I saw you peeking."

"Just looking around. Going to bed?"

"Do you want me to do something?"

"Kind of."

After I shower and change into comfortable clothes, we both sit in front of the 75-inch TV with game controllers, fiercely competing in a game called Overcooked. We have to cook in a kitchen, dividing tasks, with each level having different obstacles. Sometimes, we can't keep up, serve the wrong dish, or there's a fire. At first, it wasn't that hard. We divided our duties well. Maybe because I'm an executive, organizing tasks is my forte, so I tell Yu what to do systematically.

"So easy. What kind of game is this?"

"Right? They say this game makes you angry. I thought I'd get to argue with you."

We laugh and keep playing. But... I underestimate this game.

Because later, the game gets intense. Each level gets harder, and we can't keep up.

"I told you to get the tomatoes."

"I pressed the wrong button."

"Shouldn't have made mistakes."

"Hey, I didn't want to make mistakes, either."

"See, there's a fire!"

"Then put it out. Why are you complaining?"

"Why can't I complain? You don't know how to play this thing."

"It's you don't know how to play it. All you did was bossing around. What can you do?"

"Hey, I'm cooking here."

"What cooking? Looks like a total garbage."

"Those are my words. You can't even get tomatoes for me. You garbage brain."

"Ms. Frung, you're crossing the line!"

"Ms. Frung, you're crossing the line!"

Yu stands up and throws the controller on the sofa angrily. The game, which we're already losing, ends in defeat because she quits. I can't accept losing.

"Why are you like this? Quitting halfway is unacceptable."

"So what? I'm not playing."

"Don't use that tone with me."

"Why can't I? I'll do even more than this. Why? Why? Why?"

"Hey! I'm your boss. Show some respect."

"If you can't stand me, fire me."

"Fine, you're fired."

"Fine!"

Yu stomps to her room, and I mimic her, stomping to my room, jumping on the bed, and screaming into a pillow. The anger still lingers because I can't accept losing. After sitting alone for over ten minutes to calm down, I realize...

Am I really fighting with her over that cooking game?

'If you can't stand me, fire me.'

'Fine, you're fired.'

Right now, I'm blinking in utter shock. My anger made me blurt out something crazy, and I couldn't stand it. I break my rule and vow not to check the bedroom's CCTV, only to find Yu sitting on the bed crying with a small suitcase beside her.

Oh my... She's packed her clothes!

I quickly jump out of bed and rush out of my room, stopping in front of her room, feeling helpless. I raise my hand to knock but pull it back, open my mouth to call but shut it tight, afraid of being yelled at. So, I just stand there doing nothing until she opens the door herself, carrying her suitcase while still in her pajamas.

We stand facing each other in silence.

"I'm leaving."

"Okay."

Yu glances at me briefly, then stomps her feet, bumping my shoulder as she walks past. I follow her helplessly to the front door. She stops for a moment, turning to me with tears in her eyes, looking pitiful.

"I'm really leaving now."

"Really?"

"What do you mean, 'Really?' I'm leaving!"

"What should I do?"

"Do whatever you want."

I bite my lip and reach out to grab the hem of her shirt, unable to speak. I hold on tightly to show I don't want her to go. I want to say something, but I'm afraid if I do, I'll cry like a child, so I stay silent.

"I'm mad at you!"

"Please don't."

Tears stream down my cheeks with a shaky voice. I'm very sensitive, so speaking out comes with weak tears.

"I should be the one crying. You just fired me."

"You said you'd quit."

"I said you should fire me, and you did."

"You should've said you wouldn't quit."

"I'm a servant. How can I say that?"

"You're mine....*Hic*."

I cry to tell her she's not a servant.

"Can't you stay, Pixie?"

"Waah, I'll stay. Ms. Frung, don't cry."

"Waaah."

She drops her suitcase and hugs me tightly. Now we're hugging and sobbing together as if competing to see who can cry harder. I pull away and wipe

her tears while she laughs and cries, wiping my tears, too.

"Ms. Frung, you don't look pretty when you cry."

"But you're still beautiful, whether you're crying or laughing."

I flatter her. Yu smiles a little and looks at me for a long time as if she's thinking about something, then shakes her head.

"What? Is there something?"

"Nothing, just thinking."

"Thinking about what?"

"Better not say it."

"Come on, tell me. I want to know. I can tell that you want to do something but stop yourself. Your body language says so... I'm an expert in this."

I say, sniffing, trying to show off.

"If you can read my body language, why don't you know what I want todo."

She seems to have made a decision. She stands on tiptoe, wraps her arms around my neck, and gives me a light kiss on the lips before pulling away. I'm stunned, wanting to smile but not knowing how to react.

"Goodnight."

Yu pulls away, grabs her suitcase, and heads back to her room. I can only watch her in shock before shouting:

"Yu, just now..."

"A goodnight kiss. We're good now, right?"

"Uh-huh."

"See you in the morning."

Click.

Yu's bedroom door closes while I stand there, frozen for about half an hour....

□□□□□

□ Chapter 12 □

"Is Mr. Kitt the owner of that famous textile and bedding company?"

"Maybe."

I never knew anything about P' Kitt. Today, I came back home for our weekly family dinner. Sundays are family days. It's a rule set by my parents. No matter how busy I am, I have to come home to share updates about my life with them on Sundays.

"What do you mean 'maybe'? Is he or is he not?"

Mom keeps pressing, but it doesn't make me any more enthusiastic because I never cared.

"I guess so. I don't know much, just that he's wealthy."

"Some people are W.A.P., you know?"

"Wealthy and prosperous? Isn't that good?"

I shrug, understanding Mom's dirty joke, which makes her reach over and pinch my waist in frustration.

"Why did you pinch me?"

"When you date someone, you need to know who they are, not just that they're rich."

"It's not like I'm dating him. I'm just telling you what happened to me as your daughter."

"If he's not important, would you be telling us about him?"

This time, Dad speaks up after listening for a while. Usually, he doesn't meddle much in my love life, leaving it to Mom.

"I had a crush on him back in school."

"That's a good sign, but the word 'had' is past tense. It sounds odd."

"People change as they grow up."

I sigh, recalling the kiss from the other day. It's still stuck in my head. The next morning, after making up, Yu acted normal, as if that goodnight kiss was something everyone did. It annoyed me because while I couldn't sleep, she acted like nothing happened, like she was teasing me!

"So, what changed as you grew up?"

Mom asks while serving me food, a habit I don't particularly like because she always piles my plate without asking, but I know she means well.

"Did you and Dad get married because you loved each other?"

I change the subject, looking at my parents curiously. I heard they were arranged to marry, but their relationship has lasted until now.

"No, we didn't love each other."

Dad answers simply while Mom shifts uncomfortably.

"Why are you asking this all of a sudden?"

"What's it like to be forced to live together without love? And now, do you love each other?"

The question makes them both go silent. Dad purses his lips and nods, ready to share the truth. After all, it's family day.

"Living together made us grow closer. That's how we had you."

"Did you have someone you loved before marrying each other?"

"Alright, no more questions."

Mom raises her hand to stop me, clearly irritated.

"Next time, be more subtle. Asking this kind of thing directly makes it awkward."

"I thought I was close enough to ask you guys anything. Fine, I won't ask anymore."

"Is there something you want to know? You can ask anything. You, too, don't shut her down. If we can't talk to her, she won't talk to anyone. You know she struggles to connect with others."

Dad scolds Mom, who slumps in defeat.

"Fire away. We'll answer everything, even how to make a baby."

"Sure, if I have questions about that, I'll ask you."

"Why did you say that? You know she'll actually ask us that!"

Dad scolds Mom, rubbing his temples before clearing his throat.

"Go on, but don't ask about that. Look it up online."

I chew my cheek and nod, asking directly.

"Have you ever been interested in the people of the same sex?"

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My question is dismissed as nonsense, and they change the subject.

Family day ends with Mom looking puzzled by my strange questions.

"Are you sure there's nothing going on?"

Mom asks as she walks me to my car. I look at her and shake my head.

"What could there be? I was just asking."

"Why did you bring up same-sex love?"

"I was just curious about your views. Do you like it? Are you indifferent, or does it make you disgusted?"

"I'm disgusted."

Mom answers without hesitation, making me pause before continuing the conversation.

"Why do you feel so? Any personal reasons?"

"No, it's just not natural. So, don't think about it too much."

Mom waves her hand, trying to change the subject.

"By the way, if things go well with that guy, bring him to meet us sometime."

"If things go well... I have a date with P' Kitt around four."

"Then hurry up, don't keep him waiting."

Even though Mom has never met P' Kitt, she seems eager for me to see him. It feels like she's pushing me, and the more she pushes, the less I want to do it. But I can't cancel it since I already made plans.

Dating can be so boring and repetitive. Why is it always dinner, movies, music, and small talk? It doesn't add any depth to the relationship. Right now, I'm at a private movie screening with P' Kitt in a sectioned-off area that feels like home. While watching the movie, my mind drifts, and P' Kitt's hand lightly touches mine as if he's seeking permission. I tense up but smile and let him hold my hand, even though it feels strange.

"What kind of movies do you usually watch?"

"I don't watch much. I usually leave it on and let the movie watch me.

I answer honestly. The TV at home is more like a piece of furniture. Without its seventy-five-inch screen, the room wouldn't look as luxurious. It was just for show until Yu started working as a maid, and we had the chance to play games and argue.

Thinking about it makes me laugh at how serious we were. We were crying a river, and I almost fired her.

"What's so funny?"

P' Kitt asks, seeing me laugh out of nowhere. I just shake my head.

"Nothing, just random thoughts.

After holding hands for a while, my palm gets sweaty, and I want to pull away. But I feel bad for the effort he made to hold it. Luckily, Frank, who works even on weekends, sends a message with a picture, giving me an excuse to check my phone.

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Frank: The target is dining at a fancy restaurant.

Frank: sent a picture

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I focus on the blurry picture taken from a distance. The restaurant's glass walls reflect the outside light, making it hard to see. I can barely make out that it was Pixie with a well-dressed woman with an old-fashioned hairdo.

Frung: Can't you take a clearer picture?

Frank: If I get closer, they'll know I'm spying on them.

Frung: Did you take this with a calculator? I can't see anything.

Frung: Do whatever it takes to find out who she's with, what they're doing, and why.

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I lick my lips in frustration at the lousy photographer. P' Kitt takes phone and hides it behind him, shaking his head.

"It's rude to use your phone during a movie."

"But I..."

I meet his eyes and nod.

"Okay, I won't use it."

"Is it work?"

"Not really. Never mind."

"Why do you seem so annoyed? Is it about the maid again?"

His question surprises me. How does he know? He laughs nervously.

"Should I be jealous? Why do you seem so interested in her?"

"Jealous of what? She's a woman."

"Exactly, but seeing you so interested makes me unsure... You don't like women, right?"

"No, I don't,"

I answer quickly, feeling odd inside. Being cornered like that makes me uncomfortable.

"If I liked women, I wouldn't be watching a movie with you."

"Hey, I was just kiddin-'

Before he can finish his sentence, a staff member approaches and politely asks us to stop talking and lower our voices. P' Kitt apologizes, and I give a weak smile, knowing we're in the wrong.

"Don't be mad. I was just teasing you. Let's watch the movie."

"Should we kiss?"

"Huh?"

"So it can be over and done with. And you won't think I like girls anymore."

"I told you I was just kiddin-"

I'm the one who lunges at him, wrapping my arms around his neck to pull his handsome face down. It's like I'm forcing him to do what I want. Our lips press together, but strangely, I don't feel anything at all.

"Now, we can continue watching the movie."

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After doing something I wanted to try, I pulled away from him and went back to watching the movie. P' Kitt was left sitting there, stunned and frozen, not saying another word to me until the movie ended, and we parted ways around 10 PM.

Yu is still acting the same. When I get back to my room, the sweet-faced person playing games in front of the TV runs to greet me, acting as if she's been home all day. I pause to look at her lips for a moment, comparing them to P' Kitt's, and it oddly irritates me.

"Did you have fun at home?"

"A bit lonely, you weren't here."

"Really?"

"Why did you ask that?"

"Well... I don't know. I was just thinking that you might snuck out today but didn't tell me."

"You talk like you know everything. Did you secretly have someone follow me?"

"What kind of person do you think I am?"

"Exactly, only a crazy person would do that."

I straighten up, feeling a bit annoyed because it feels like I'm being sarcastically criticized. I smile and walk away to my bedroom. We go to our separate bedrooms as we do every day, except that after I shower, I feel restless because my mind won't stop thinking.

Why am I like this?

Ever since that kiss with her, I've been irritated all the time, even now.

I just went on a date with a guy I secretly liked, but I didn't feel anything. Everything seemed empty, like a can with a hole that no matter how much water you pour in, it all leaks out. He didn't make me feel as good as I thought he would. Instead, I've been thinking about Yu since the first day we met for no reason.

This is so unreasonable!

Even though I keep telling myself that I won't invade my maid's privacy anymore, I still pick up my phone and check the camera in her bedroom. But it's pitch dark; I can't see anything. I shake my phone, thinking the screen has gone off.

Geez, why does it have to break now? I want to see what she's doing.

I miss her!

What? I miss her, even though we just parted five minutes ago?

I grip my phone tightly and pace around my room, not knowing what to do. As I'm biting my lip, wondering how to deal with this insomnia, there's a knock on my bedroom door. When I open it, Yu is standing there with her arms crossed, looking at me with a determined glint in her eyes.

"Ms. Frung."

"I thought you were asleep."

"Do you remember when I said I felt like I was being watched all the time?"

"Uh-huh."

"Turns out I was really being watched."

Yu holds up a pinhole camera.

"Someone put this behind the picture frame in the bedroom."

Gulp...

"Why did you do this?!"

I got caught!

□□□□□

□ Chapter 13 □

I got caught...

Ugh! Now I understand why criminals feel so pressured during interrogations. In my life, I've never done anything sneaky before. I've only ever caught others doing wrong. But this is the first time I've done something wrong and got caught red-handed. The evidence is right there, and Yu doesn't seem to be a fool either.

"It's for security purposes."

"Where did you install them?"

"Well..."

I roll my eyes.

"Because it's for security, I won't tell you where they're installed. If thieves find out, they'll avoid the cameras."

Yu is silent for a moment before she speaks in a serious, angry tone that makes my skin crawl.

"Or did you install the cameras because you're afraid I'll steal something?"

"No!"

I respond quickly because I don't want my intentions to be misunderstood. When I speak loudly like that, it brings a brief smile to her face, but it quickly fades because this isn't a situation where anyone should be smiling.

"Then why can't you tell me where they're installed?"

"...."

"It's okay. Just leave them as they are."

"Huh?"

At first, I thought I'd misheard, so I asked again:

"What?"

"I said leave the cameras as they are. I'll put this one back in its place."

"Why?"

"No reason. If you want to maintain security in the house, what can I do? This is your house, after all."

At first, I thought she'd throw a fit and argue with me, then pack her bags and leave again. Instead, she remains indifferent, not showing any emotion, and even plans to put the camera back in its original place.

"Are you being sarcastic?"

"No, why would I?"

"But what I did violates..."

I stop myself because I don't know if I should continue. Pointing out my own wrongdoing seems foolish, but I still don't understand.

"Violates my personal privacy, right?"

"You know that term?"

"Why wouldn't I? Do you think I'm that dumb?"

"Well, you're poor and uneducated."

"...."

"I mean, you don't seem to know such difficult words... I'm not insulting you, haha."

I try to explain as best as I can, and that makes Yu sigh deeply.

"You underestimate me too much. Since you know it's a violation, then just leave it. Because you wouldn't watch me while I'm bathing, dressing, or sleeping... right?"

At this point, I straighten up because I feel guilty and uncomfortable. I've already seen everything in her bedroom. Now, I don't know what expression I'm making, but Yu, who is observing me closely, narrows her eyes with suspicion.

"Or do you secretly watch me while I'm sleeping?"

"No!"

I respond almost immediately, and that brings a smile from the maid, which I can't decipher.

"Good. It'd feel strange if someone secretly watched us while we slept... Don't you think?"

Yu's 'Don't you think?' makes me smile awkwardly. It's strange. She sleeps without clothes yet insists on putting the camera back in its original place. Even if the reason is to catch thieves, as I claimed, knowing there's a camera should make her more embarrassed, not less. Why?

"Yeah."

"And about having someone follow me..."

"How did you know!?"

I look shocked. Yu sighs and shakes her head.

"I told you, I'm not dumb. There's no way a Mario game would end up in my room without someone spying or following me."

She raises an eyebrow and smiles triumphantly. I feel a bit down and pout like a child caught doing something wrong.

"I'll tell him to stop following you."

I quickly say that because I don't want her to scold me or, in other words, I want to show remorse before being pointed out.

"Thank you."

"But..."

"Yes?"

"..."

"The person you met today, who was she?"

Even though I said I wouldn't violate her privacy, I can't help but ask. Yu pauses for a moment, so I answer for her,

"You aren't..."

"Aren't what?"

"You aren't finding a new employer, are you?"

My question brings a smile to her face before she reaches out to pinch my cheek, something no maid should do to their employer.

"Where would I find another employer as cute as this?"

From pinching my cheek, she changes to gently touching it. The warm touch of her palm makes me tilt my head slightly as if to snuggle. I don't know why I do it. I'm like a puppy wanting to cuddle its owner, like a lover seeking attention.

Wait... like a lover?

I immediately pull away from her hand and straighten up.

"Right, there's no other employer as cute as me. Go to bed early. Tomorrow, you have to wake up early to prepare breakfast for me."

"Yes, I'll go to bed now."

She raises the small camera again and winks.

"I'll put it back in its place. Don't sneak a peek at me, okay?"

"Why would I watch you sleep?"

"Exactly. But I just want to remind you not to watch. Because if you do."

"And what if I do?"

"Nothing."

She says only that and walks away. I can only watch her back, feeling annoyed by her attitude. What kind of person does she think I am? If I say I won't watch, I won't!

That night, I lie in bed, reviewing some work before taking off my glasses and preparing to turn off the lights. But for a moment, I wonder if Yu is asleep yet. My eyes glance at my phone before I lift my chin and silently say,

"Hmph."

I won't watch her. I already said I won't.

I turn off the lights and cover myself with a blanket, ready to sleep. Even though my eyes are closed, my mind keeps wandering, unable to stop thinking if the maid is asleep yet. What position is she sleeping in? And her clothes... is she still undressed?

Why do I care if she's wearing clothes to sleep or not? I don't want to know and don't want to see, no!

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One hour later...

I'm too restless, so I turn on the lamp again and pick up my phone, watching random clips on Twitter. There's a lot of gossip on social media to distract me. But while scrolling through political tweets, someone suddenly posts a porn video, and I accidentally click on it.

Ugh...

The explicit video with moaning sounds makes me quickly mute it. Even though I feel embarrassed, I don't close the video. Instead, I keep watching. The woman's face in the video isn't clear as it focuses more on her body, which is dangerous because my mind unintentionally replaces her face with Yu's.

"Ah... ah, ah, ah."

My imagination is running wild. The moaning, the body, the movements, the thrusts make me bite my lip and quickly place my phone face down on the bed. My heart races, almost making me faint from the blood rush.

Why is this happening... Is it because I've seen her naked?

I close the video and decide to check the camera in the maid's bedroom. Even though I told myself I wouldn't, I ended up watching what the sweet-faced person was doing. She's already asleep. Her bare shoulders above the blanket indicate she's still sleeping naked. Only the blanket covers her, hiding what's below.

My imagination is running wild. The moaning, the body, the movements, the thrusts make me bite my lip and quickly place my phone face down on the bed. My heart races, almost making me faint from the blood rush.

Why is this happening... Is it because I've seen her naked?

I close the video and decide to check the camera in the maid's bedroom. Even though I told myself I wouldn't, I ended up watching what the sweet-faced person was doing. She's already asleep. Her bare shoulders above the blanket indicate she's still sleeping naked. Only the blanket covers her, hiding what's below.

What a shame....

I feel disappointed not seeing more and ashamed of myself at the same time. My hand slips into my pants to check if the wetness is from my period, and it's not. Just from that video, my body reacts disgustingly.

I'm disgusted.'

My mother's words echo in my head, causing pain in my chest. This isn't normal. Even if the general society is more open about this now, not in my family or those of my social status.

I need to get rid of these thoughts immediately!

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Everything continues as usual.

I wake up looking refreshed. Thanks to the concealer under my eyes and my cheerful pretense, no one can tell that I'm actually not. I glance at the small person busy preparing breakfast and pretend to help, striking up a conversation.

"Why didn't you ask where I went yesterday?"

"You said every Sunday is family day, so I thought you were with your parents."

"Smart."

"I'm both a maid and a personal secretary. See? I can be anything for you."

Yu winks playfully. I can't help but move closer, sniffing around her nape until she turns and flinches slightly as our noses accidentally touch.

"Oh, what are you doing here?"

"Oh, just watching what you're making for breakfast. I want to learn."

She smells really nice, or maybe I'm just finding excuses to be near her. All those disgusting thoughts make me click my tongue in frustration and turn away, which Yu notices.

"Is something wrong?"

"No."

"You seem a bit off today. Is there something you want to tell me? Is something wrong?" Yu tilts her head slightly and gives me an adorably curious look. I chew on the inside of my cheek, deciding to talk about what I'd planned to say this morning.

"We're close now, right?"

"What's this about?"

Yu laughs, clearly amused.

"I think we're close. We argue and make up quickly. It's a good relationship."

"I wonder what exactly we are."

"Huh?"

I pretend to phrase it like a question to see how she reacts.

"We're best friends, right?"

"I... guess."

"That's great. You're my first best friend,"

I say with a strangely bitter smile.

"Best friends are someone who listens to both our joys and sorrows, right? That's what they do."

"Is there something you want to talk about, Ms. Frung?"

"Yesterday, I went to see a movie with the person I'm considering."

"...."

Yu goes silent before turning back to continue cooking.

"And?"

"We kissed."

"...."

"I was the one who pulled him in for the kiss,"

I continue, walking back to the dining table, afraid my voice might crack too much. Everything needs to seem cool when telling this story. It has to feel natural, like girl talk.

"It felt soft on the lips."

"Okay."

"I'll bring him to meet you later because you're important to me."

"...."

"You're the only best friend I have."

Yu comes over to serve the food, maintaining a normal expression before sitting down across from me and nodding in acknowledgment.

"How nice. You sure care about me a lot to share something like this," she says.

"So, I guess it means we can't be a couple anymore."

I laugh as I say it, trying to make it seem like her earlier comment was just a joke, even though it made me overthink. Yu looks me in the eye before saying something that hurts even more.

"That's too bad. I thought I'd be with you forever."

"...."

"Now that you have a boyfriend, I have to go my own way, too."

"Why can't we stay together forever?"

"Don't be greedy."

"...."

"Because if you have a boyfriend, I have to have one, too. I won't stay alone."

She speaks with a rather stubborn tone before standing up, but I grab her wrist first, both out of possessiveness and the pain of her indifference. I squeeze her wrist tightly.

"Is there something wrong?"

"No."

"Then why are you holding my hand?"

"Then I won't."

I let go of her hand, but she grabs my wrist instead. This time, she squeezes my arm tightly before leaning in and kissing me hard. Caught off guard, I forget to breathe for a moment before starting to follow her lead as her

small tongue slips into my mouth. It's a completely different sensation from what I did with P' Kitt, and it feels much more intense. My lower stomach is filled with mixed emotions.

Just from a kiss... I see images in my head from last night when I watched that porn video, imagining what face and what sounds she'd make. My hand slips into her hair, gently gripping it as if wanting to release raw emotions. But my phone rings, snapping me back to reality, and I push her away.

Rrrrrrrr..

The phone keeps ringing and vibrating, but no matter how important the call is, I don't answer because the situation in front of me is more dangerous.

"Get out."

"...."

"You can no longer stay here."

"Ms. Frung."

"You're fired."

□□□□□

□ Chapter 14 □

I accidentally bite my lip while saying that, feeling a sharp pain in my chest. I want to take back my words, but it seems too late because once something is said, it's hard to undo. So now, I just stay silent and keep a straight face, waiting to see what she'll say next.

How did I become like this, saying things without thinking them through? I'm the one who dragged her out of that rented house. If I kick her out like this, where will she go?

"You're firing me? Have you lost your mind? Do you think I'm gonna let you do this to me?"

"Huh?"

My mind, which is racing to find a way to take back what I said, pauses for a moment when I hear her respond like that.

"I've watched you screw up this office for ten years, and I'm filing a lawsuit, and I'm gonna tell them about every stupid thing you've ever done up in this office."

"...."

"I finally understand how Stanley feels in The Office."

Yu crosses her arms and laughs, seemingly annoyed, while lightly pushing my chest as if she doesn't know the meaning of respect.

"You dragged me here, and now you're kicking me out just like that. It's not right. If you want me to leave, at least let me find a new place first or give

me the first month's salary I should get. If you're not satisfied, have someone drag me out."

"...."

"Because I'm not leaving."

Yu crosses her arms as if I'd throw a dagger at her chest. I almost sigh in relief but have to keep a stern face to match my previous statement of kicking her out.

"You're just going to refuse that?"

"Well, can I?"

"Fine."

What else can I say? Arguing too much might make her actually pack up and leave. From now on, I have to be careful with what I say or do. Words are powerful, and lately, I've been blurting out strange things.

"But if you're staying, you must not..."

"I won't stay long. Just need to save up for a month or two, find a new job, and I'll move out. Maybe even by the end of this month."

Move out? That's crazy. Didn't she just say she wouldn't leave? Why is she bringing this up again?

"You don't have to rush."

"If I stay any longer..."

The sweet-faced girl, who was about to walk past me to her room, says, leaving me almost collapsing because my legs go weak.

"It won't just be a kiss."

I grab her wrist as she's about to walk away and stare into her eyes.

"Why did you do that?"

"Ms. Frung, do you really not understand why I did that? If you don't understand, then why did you kiss back?"

"Kiss back? No, I didn't."

"Think back to what just happened. You'll remember the details. You kicked me out because you were scared, right?"

"Why would I be scared?"

Yu doesn't answer and leaves me alone in the living room. So, she's not leaving. No, she said she might stay only until the end of this month.

Ugh.

Why has the situation turned out like this? I love and care for her more than anything. When something like this happens, it makes it hard to face her.

Why did she kiss me? Does she like girls like that tom and dee couple? Or is it because we're too close? It must be that. I might've made her misunderstand something because even I got confused by this, even though I've never been like this before. I need to fix this before my life and thoughts change!

But it has to be a solution where I can still have her around.

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"What happened? Why did you suddenly ask me to find a psychiatrist for you? If you're not feeling well, you can tell me."

I, who had arranged to have lunch with my mom, mentioned wanting to see a psychiatrist. The elderly woman looked very shocked, even though seeing a psychiatrist is quite normal these days.

"If telling you would make me feel better, why would people study to become doctors? Do you have any recommendations? If not, it's okay. I'll find one myself."

"What are you going to talk to the doctor about?"

"...."

"Can't you tell me?"

I can't tell her. Mom is even more closed-minded about this than I am. I raise an eyebrow slightly, then take a sip of water before changing the subject.

"I kissed P' Kitt."

"What?"

Mom, who was about to take a bite of spaghetti, dropped her fork with a clatter, making the staff rush over to replace it.

"You changed the subject too quickly. You didn't tell me the thing I wanted to know, and now you are telling me the thing you didn't need to tell."

"You said to update you if anything happened. So, I told you. Or do you not want to know anymore?"

"I do want to know, but there's something I want to know more... Frung, are you hiding something from me? I've noticed a lot of things."

"I'm full."

I wave to call the staff to get the bill.

"I have some errands to run. Tell Dad I miss him."

"Only Dad? What about me?"

"Do I have to miss you when we see each other?"

"I miss you every day."

"Why do you miss me every day?"

"Because it's love."

I pause for a moment, then lick my lips and call the staff again. For a moment, I feel shocked that every time I talk to Mom, my mind drifts to someone else.

If thinking about someone all the time is love, then I love Pixie.

It doesn't make sense. She's just a cute maid with a pretty smile who talks sweetly every day. Love should have more reasons than that. This is...nonsense.

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Knock, knock, knock.

I return to my room early and knock on Yu's door. She should be inside. She opens the door with a cold expression because our unresolved issue from yesterday still lingers.

"Why are you back so early today?"

"I bought something for you. What are you doing?"

"Searching for a new job."

Hearing that, I immediately frown because I feel annoyed, but I keep it to myself and change the subject.

"I bought the noodles from a famous shop for you. I saw them and thought of you, so I stopped by."

"That's quite an effort."

She smiles slightly, knowingly.

"Are you trying to make up with me?"

"Make up? For what? No."

"Well, someone suddenly kicked me out yesterday. Maybe you're afraid I'll feel bad, so you had to do something."

How does she guess so accurately? After parting with Mom, I quickly searched for the nearest famous restaurant to find an excuse to come back and talk to her to clear things up. But with her being so straightforward, what should I do now?

"Come on, I'm just buying food for you. Then, from now on, I won't do anything nice for you anymore."

"Good, because it made me confused. After what happened yesterday, I thought about giving up on you."

"Giving up?"

My voice is a bit loud as I repeat that. I can't even admit that I like her, but she's already thinking about giving up.

"Yes, giving up. You wouldn't think I kissed you because I see you as a puppy or love and care for you like a daughter, right? Because no child kisses their mom with a tongue like that."

"What are you talking about? Aren't you embarrassed?"

I don't need a mirror to know how red my face is right now because, honestly, my cheeks are burning. I can feel the blood pumping.

"I'm just telling the truth. And I'm saying I'm giving up on you to make you feel better. I mean, come on... how can two women love each other, right?"

"Did you just realize that?"

"Yes, you made me realize it. I need to know my place. I'm just a servant."

"I don't see you as a servant. If I'm going to reject that kind of relationship, it's not because of our statuses."

"Whatever the reason, I have no hope. So, it's better to give up. And to make it work, I need to find a new job. Staying away from you as far as possible is what I need to do... Enough talking. Where's the food? Let me try it and see how good it is."

Yu takes the food bag and walks to put it in a bowl while I stand there, feeling frustrated. She's doing well, but I don't like that she keeps talking about giving up as if trying to provoke me.

"Duck noodles?"

"Yeah."

"I don't eat duck, but since you bought it, I'll try."

The sweet-faced girl adds some seasoning and starts eating. She enjoys the taste. Even though she said she doesn't eat duck, she can't stop eating, making me feel like she was just joking earlier.

"You said you don't eat duck."

Because her face is too cute while eating, I can't help but watch her, mesmerized. As she chews, she smiles with her eyes closed and describes the taste.

"You have good taste. Even the noodles are delicious. I never ate any duck, but now I'm a die-hard fan."

"You're exaggerating."

I laugh and gently tuck her hair behind her ear, afraid it might fall into the bowl.

"You're being nice to me like this; how will I ever give up on you?"

"What?

"You want me to give up on you, but you continue to charm me, buy me delicious food, and tuck my hair behind my ear like you care. It makes me used to it."

She says, pouting,

"Can't you just like me?"

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BA-DUM...

BA-DUM...

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That straightforward question leaves me stunned. Our eyes lock, and I'm the one who has to look away first.

"That means you can't. It's okay."

"When did you start liking me?"

Though I've avoided talking about this since yesterday, this time, I'm asking her directly, making her look equally surprised before smiling.

"A long time ago."

"How long is your '*a long time*'? We haven't even known each other for a month. Your love is such a fleeting one."

"If people love each other, it happens quickly. Those who wait for a long time are the ones who aren't sure about their feelings."

"What do you like about me?"

"Well..."

She thinks for a moment until I have to give her some choices to pick from.

"I'm beautiful?"

"Maybe."

"Rich?"

"Well, yes."

"Smart?"

"No."

"I'm not smart?"

"You act like a bitch."

"What!?"

Yu, who has finished her last bite, takes the bowl to wash. For a moment, I see a satisfied smile at the corner of her mouth, and it makes me unable to resist following her to the sink to clear things up.

"How am I acting like a bit- Insufferable? That's not a nice thing to say."

"You're unpredictable. Sometimes, you say things directly; sometimes, you act like you want one thing but say the complete opposite. Just like when you kicked me out yesterday."

"How so?"

"You didn't want me to leave the house even for a step. Isn't that true?"

She turns to face me directly, letting the water run behind her. Now our noses lightly touch, and I don't think of pulling away.

I want to lean in but can only stand still... not even pulling away because the distance is too precious.

"I like you."

"You've said that many times today."

"When I sleep, I sleep naked."

"...."

"And you know that."

She doesn't seem surprised when she says that. As I prepare to pull away, she grabs my collar to keep our distance the same so she can look at me closer.

"Tonight, I won't use a blanket."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"In case someone wants to watch, and I'll let them. I have no problem with that."

"That's too perverted."

"People who sleep naked aren't perverted. Those who secretly watch them are. But anyway... now you don't have to sneak. I know there's a camera and allow you to watch me. Ms. Frung, if you want to watch, go ahead. And if you get lonely while watching...

"Just knock on my door. I won't lock it. Yes... and I'm seducing you, in case you don't know."

Is she testing my patience?!!!

□□□□□

□ Chapter 15 □

Whenever someone tells us not to look, we always get curious about what it is that we're not supposed to see. But why is that... Because Yu said I could look, I feel even more that I shouldn't. Yet, my eyes keep fixating on my phone, thinking about opening the CCTV app to spy on the sleeping body like a creep. I've never been like this. Nudity has always been something I considered indecent, or if seen from another angle, art. But that should be in paintings, not in CCTV images.

Humans are noble creatures. We can control ourselves and our thoughts, unlike common animals. So, let me state right here: In the name of my grandfather, I'll never sneak a peek!

"Did you sleep well last night?"

I wake up early to do yoga, and as soon as I see the little maid, she asks me with curiosity.

"Same as always."

"I saw you up early; I thought you couldn't sleep."

"Why would I have trouble sleeping?"

"I don't know. Maybe you were anxious, arguing with yourself about whether to sneak a peek or not, and in the end, you couldn't sleep, so you exercised early to distract yourself."

"You're full of yourself."

I'm starting to get paranoid about how this little one knows everything. Maybe I'm not the only one with a hidden camera; maybe she has one, too,

without me knowing. I'll have to search my room when I get the chance. She knows I have a hidden camera, but I don't know about hers. It feels like losing, and I can't stand it.

"So, how was it?"

"How was what?"

"Did you sneak a peek last night?"

The person asking serves me orange juice and props up her chin in her palm, smiling mischievously like she's teasing me. I find her actions more cute than annoying, so I don't stop her. No matter what this maid does, she always looks infuriatingly adorable.

"I didn't."

"Wow... so strong-willed. Last night, I even endured the cold without a blanket, hoping you'd look. Well, tonight I'll try again, but I'll turn off the air conditioner."

"Pixie, you must be crazy."

"Crazy in love, Ms. Frung. You wouldn't understand how it feels to hope you'd come and knock on my door."

She walks away to clean the dishes in the kitchen after cooking. I chew my bread, watching her, and imagine what's under those clothes before shaking my head in frustration. I'm not like this, but she's making me this way!

"I'm full. I'm off to work."

"Don't forget to sneak peek. I'll be walking around naked all day."

"What?"

I'm genuinely getting annoyed by her teasing and turn to make a sound of disapproval. The sweet-faced girl laughs and then hugs me tightly, showing no fear of me as if she no longer sees me as her employer.

"Come back soon. It's lonely being alone in the room.

"I don't know. It depends if I have something to do."

"When you see me begging you a lot, you act all high and mighty, huh? But whatever, if I seduce you every day, there has to be a day when I get what I want. Ouch!"

I flick her forehead. The one saying cheeky things bares her teeth at me.

"I'm not talking to you anymore."

"Bye-bye."

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Even though I act annoyed by her teasing, when I'm alone, I smile and find her adorable. The contradiction within me is something only I understand. I know I feel very special, but I can't accept it for many reasons. It's quite unbelievable that a girl who never felt anything for people of the same sex before, like me, is now deeply infatuated with another girl. So, it wouldn't be strange if I wanted to see a psychiatrist. Intimacy might be confusing me, and if there's a way to treat it, I should try, right?

As I'm about to enter the office, I spot the same female employee with a masculine demeanor waiting for the elevator alone. When she sees me, she steps back as if to let me go first.

"It's okay. Let's go together."

"Thank you."

This opportunity seems perfect. It's as if heaven knows I want to talk to her but never had the chance. So, when the elevator arrives and we get in alone, I take the opportunity to chat, asking about her well-being, even though I've never done this before. I'm usually too lazy to do a small talk. Most employees are afraid of me because of my stern face, which is good

because it means I don't have to talk much. But today, I'm being friendly. This time, I'll be the one to start the conversation.

"How's working here?"

"Huh?"

The tomboyish girl, standing with her hands clasped modestly, looks surprised before smiling shyly.

"It's good, ma'am. Everyone is friendly. No problems."

"Uh-huh."

I nod and try to ask indirectly.

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

This is as indirect as I can get. She widens her eyes a bit before laughing awkwardly.

"I...I do."

"Is it the girl I saw the other day? The small one with light brown hair drinking green tea in front of the building?"

I try to recall details to be specific. She nods quickly, avoiding eye contact.

"Do you know there's a rule here that employees can't date each other."

Gulp...

I notice her breath hitch. My instinct to assert authority as the boss makes me laugh to cover it up.

"Just kidding. Don't worry. Just don't let too many people know."

"Yes, ma'am."

"But seriously, it's still against the rules. Should I fire you?"

"...."

"It was a joke. Why aren't you laughing?"

Because her face looks like she's about to cry, I quickly smile to cover it up. But it seems my smile only scares her more. Finally, when the elevator stops at a floor she didn't press, and she looks like she's about to leave, I speak firmly.

"If you leave, I'll really fire you."

"...."

"I have something to discuss."

It seems I have to stop beating around the bush. The tomboyish girl, ready to bolt, stands still and quiet as the elevator continues to the upper floors.

"What's it like dating a woman?"

"...."

"I'm doing research... for a website. I'm focusing on the LGBT community. Just answer honestly, and I promise I won't fire you."

"Yes, ma'am... Dating a woman is fine. I'm happy."

"Did you always like women?"

I cross my arms and glance at her with interest.

"When did you know you liked women? Did you ever like men?"

"I've known since early on that I like women. I prefer looking at beautiful women and their shapes more than men. If I choose a movie or show, I pick based on the heroine."

"If you like women so much, why dress like a man?"

"Men's clothes are more stylish, in my opinion."

"Does that make you a tom?"

"Yes, that's what they call it."

"And women who dress like women but like other women... what are they called? Dee?"

"Actually, you don't need to label it. There are many sexual orientations and genders: bi, tom, dee, cherry [*[1]], gay, or nothing at all."

"What about criticism... like from your family? Don't your parents mind?"

"At first, there were some issues, but they turned a blind eye and called my girlfriend a friend."

"And your girlfriend's family? No issues there?"

"There are, but we feel it's our business, so we continue dating."

"Aren't you embarrassed holding hands in public?"

"Nowadays, it's more accepted. People see it as normal."

"Normal..."

I murmur to myself, nodding slightly in disagreement.

"Is liking the same sex normal?"

"Normal for those who want to be happy. I'm happy with my girlfriend, so it's normal for us."

"Have you ever... seen a psychiatrist?"

I'm getting more personal, making the tomboyish girl blink at me.

"No, because I know a doctor can't help. I saw a show where a transgender host said they went to a psychiatrist for help but got nothing. It's a preference, a taste."

"Uh-huh."

Ding!

The elevator had reached the floor long ago, but I kept pressing buttons to prolong the conversation until I got the answers I wanted. After she left, my mom called at the perfect time, or maybe she called earlier, but there was no signal in the elevator.

"Yes, Mom."

[I've scheduled a psychiatrist for you tomorrow at 2 PM. The doctor's name is Pilaipan.]

"Thank you. You don't need to come. I want to consult privately."

I quickly interject because my mom will insist on coming.

[You're so independent now, huh? I guess you don't need me anymore. If you're hungry or want something, don't tell me.]

"I won't. Someone else takes care of that for me."

[Who?]

"Goodbye."

I hang up the call and get back to work. My professionalism forces me to try to shake off my personal feelings and focus on my job first. But still, the feelings in my chest follow me like a shadow. Whenever I have a moment of free time, my mind automatically finds something to think about. It's always like this whenever I glance at my phone.

free time, my mind automatically finds something to think about. It's always like this whenever I glance at my phone.

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'Don't forget to sneak peek. I'll be walking around naked all day.'

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Is that a challenge to prevent me from sneaking a peek? She might be saying this because she knows I respect personal privacy (really?). If it's a trap, I won't fall for it.

I need to check what she's doing now. I'm not looking in her bedroom, just the ones outside, which is perfectly fine.

I don't know why, but I clear my throat a bit when I grab my phone and open the CCTV app. Before I know it, I'm jumping up, grabbing my bag, and rushing out of the office back to my apartment in shock. I see my mom in the room with the maid... the latter wearing only an apron.

She really is naked. And it has to be on the day my mom visits my room!

Twenty minutes later, I reached my condo, though it would be faster if the traffic wasn't so bad. When I arrive, I find my mom sitting on the sofa with her arms crossed while Yu is now fully dressed.

"Did you call your boss?"

Mom turns to talk to Yu as soon as she sees me, but I quickly step in to answer first, feeling anxious.

"No, she didn't. But why are you here, Mom? You didn't tell me you were coming."

"I just came to visit you, as usual, to see how the place is. But I didn't expect to find such a surprise." Mom looks at Yu before narrowing her eyes at me. "Since when did you let the maid move in here?"

"Well... for a while now."

"Didn't think to tell me?"

"Do I have to tell you everything, Mom?"

I say without thinking, but it makes Mom frown a bit, so I quickly change my words.

"You already have so much to think about at home. If you have to think about my stuff, too, you'll just get a headache. Besides, this is my place. I can handle it."

"Uh-huh."

Mom just acknowledges my words before smiling at the maid.

"Pixie, go to your room. I need to talk to her."

"Yes, ma'am."

Yu glances at me briefly before obediently walking back to her room. Now it's just Mom and me alone, and it makes me feel a strange chill down my spine.

"If Pixie didn't call you, why did you come back?"

"I just came back as usual."

"Leaving work and coming home in the middle of the day isn't something you usually do."

Mom looks at me suspiciously, but I manage to stay calm and not let her suspect more.

"I come back sometimes. You just don't know."

"It's not. I raised you; I know your routine. It's all work and work. Suddenly coming home like this..."

"Because I saw you on the surveillance camera."

I have to tell the truth, and it surprises Mom even more.

"You have cameras in the house?"

"With someone else living here, I thought it'd be safer."

"How often do you check them to know I'm here now?"

"Do I need a specific time to check the cameras?"

"If it were anyone else, I wouldn't be suspicious. But it's you... You moved out to avoid anyone bothering you, but you let a stranger live with you."

"Pixie isn't a stranger."

"...."

"She's my maid."

I turn away, not wanting to meet Mom's eyes, and cross my arms. Mom shakes her head and steps in front of me, forcing me to look at her.

"Do you know I found your maid wearing nothing but an apron?"

"Really?... Well, there's no one here. I usually walk around naked, too. It's normal."

"You suddenly wanting to see a psychiatrist has nothing to do with this maid, right?"

"Why are you mixing these two things up, Mom?"

"I don't feel good about this. I think it's better to get this girl out of the house. No... just fire her. I'll pay the compensation."

"No,"

I speak firmly and decisively, like a boss who has to manage many people, and now I'm using it on Mom.

"Pixie is my responsibility. No one can fire her."

"I found her."

"But she's mine!"

"...."

"...."

The silence between us stretches on like an eternity. Seeing that I won't back down, Mom finally gives in.

"I'd better go. You seem upset. We'll talk later."

"Next time you visit, call me first."

"Frung... I'm your mother."

"This place is my world. If I don't allow someone in, they can't enter this world."

"What about the maid?"

"She's part of my world."

□□□□□

Footnotes

1. ^'Cherry' is a distinct sexual identity in Thailand. It refers to a woman who is attracted to gay men and kathoeys (transgender women.)

□ Chapter 16 □

Knock, knock, knock.

After my mom leaves, I walk straight to the maid's room and knock on the door. Yu, who has been hiding quietly inside, comes out looking a bit guilty before asking with concern:

"How did it go?"

"What do you think?"

I raise an eyebrow playfully, making the sweet-faced girl shrink her neck like a little turtle, which is kind of cute.

"I thought there would be a huge fight, but I didn't hear any loud noises."

"People don't make loud noises when they fight these days. It's not cool."

"No wonder... I tried so hard to eavesdrop but couldn't hear anything."

"Did my mom scold you?"

"Getting scolded would've been better. She didn't say anything, just stared at me and kept asking where my clothes went."

Initially stressed, I can't help but laugh when I hear her say that, which lightens the mood instantly. Yu wrinkles her nose at me.

"What's so funny?"

"Serves you right for walking around naked."

"Who would've thought your mom would show up out of the blue? Instead of seducing you, I ended up angering Madam... Am I getting fired?"

"No one can fire you except me. Don't worry."

"Really? So that means I don't have to quit? Hehe."

She laughs and gives me a mischievous look, making me knock her forehead lightly, causing her to yelp,

"Ouch, that hurt!"

"Don't be dramatic. I barely touched you."

"It hurts."

Because she looks so pitiful, I lean in to check her forehead.

"Don't exaggerate it. I didn't even hit you that hard."

"I have a delicate forehead."

"Let me see..."

I reach out and gently rub her forehead.

"There, there... all better now..."

Muah!

Caught off guard, Yu kisses me on the lips and blinks innocently like a puppy. I'm stunned, wanting to scold her, but my muscles betray me with a smile. I end up opening and closing my mouth repeatedly before stepping back a bit.

"You're doing it again."

"So you can get used to it. Once you're used to it, you won't be so shy anymore. Why do you act like this is unusual when you've studied abroad,

Ms. Frung?"

"How can it be normal when you keep saying you like me? It doesn't feel like something friends do."

"That's the point. If it felt like friends, it'd go nowhere."

The small girl raises an eyebrow and winks, making me blush. Was she this bold when she first came? I usually read people well from the start, but I misjudged her. Initially, she seemed polite, but now she's walking around the house naked.

"That's why my mom wanted to fire you. She seemed to suspect something."

"But I'm still here, right? You know what I think, but still don't chase me away. It seems like you're the one who has a problem."

The sweet-faced girl pokes my chest again, making me grab her finger and stare at her.

"Can you not joke around? This is serious."

"I wasn't joking from the start."

"I still have to marry a man one day."

"But that doesn't mean you can't have a girlfriend, right? Hehe."

She continues to joke and sighs.

"Better get back to work. Talking to you always circles back to the same old topic."

"I need to introduce him to my parents."

Yu pauses for a moment before nodding understandingly.

"Okay, no problem."

"No problem?"

"I'll stay in my place. How about that?"

"...."

"So you'll feel more at ease."

"This is far from feeling at ease."

I rub my face, feeling cornered.

I tried not to give in, telling her firmly that I'd marry a man, but she didn't leave and even said that without caring about anything.

"You're making progress, huh?"

"W...What?"

"If you didn't feel anything, you wouldn't be this stressed... It means my daily seduction is working. When you're ready, just open that door."

She points to her room and tilts her head cutely.

"...."

"My world is in there."

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"Do you think your parents will like me?"

P' Kitt picked me up from work today because I invited him to dinner at my house.

I smile at him and raise an eyebrow to boost his confidence.

"Of course, they will. They liked you even before meeting you."

"Why?"

"Because your family is rich."

"I'm impressed."

The handsome guy laughs while I look confused. Seeing my confusion, P' Kitt explains why he laughed.

"Normally, people would be more subtle, saying they've heard a lot about me or something like that. But you just speak the truth, not worried about me thinking it's strange."

"Should I have said it differently? Can I say it again?"

"Too late. It's because you're like this that I like you." The handsome guy gently pats my head, making me think of how I did the same to Yu.

"So this is what it feels like to be patted on the head."

"Feels good?"

"Well, yeah, but it'd be better if I'd washed my hair. Your hand might be a bit sticky."

"Oh, come on. You're not romantic at all."

All the way to my house, he kept laughing to himself while I frowned, not understanding what was so funny. I wasn't performing a comedy show. How rude, treating me like a clown. Luckily, we arrived quickly, or I'd have to tell him off for his bad manners, laughing at every word I said.

Are you high or something?

P' Kitt takes out the swallow's nest gift basket he bought and brings it into the house. My parents, who're waiting for us, smile warmly, especially

Mom, who doesn't mention what happened yesterday and keeps chatting with our guest non-stop.

"Are your family really billionaires?"

Mom asks curiously, and I sense Dad kicking her under the table.

"We're not that wealthy."

"Even if they were, they wouldn't give it to us, Mom."

I chew my food and speak the truth, making P' Kitt laugh again.

Here we go again....

"I wasn't trying to ask for it. I was just curious about his background, but meeting him today is reassuring."

I immediately understand what she means. This is why I bring P' Kitt home, so Mom can stop bothering Yu, seeing that I have a serious boyfriend.

"They still need to get to know each other,"

Dad interjects, making Mom click her tongue with annoyance.

"Bringing him home means they're dating."

"Don't mind her,"

Dad says to P' Kitt, smiling kindly.

"She's just worried about our daughter being single."

"She won't be," says P' Kitt.

I smile weakly and continue eating quietly. Throughout the meal, I keep glancing at the clock on the wall, eager to go home, even though I've told Yu I'd be late.

"I heard you're already engaged. Isn't that a problem dating her?" My dad asks.

"No problem. It seems my fiancée isn't keen on the arranged marriage either. We've never met. I've only seen her in a picture."

"Whose daughter is she?"

"The Korkiatphanich family."

"Oh... the jewelry business. She's very wealthy, too."

Mom, who always thinks about money, makes me sigh. Honestly, I'm starting to regret bringing a guy home.

"Excuse me, I need to take care of something."

'Take care of something' means that if I'm not going to the bathroom, I'd be dealing with my work. Now, P' Kitt is left to answer Mom's questions. Stepping outside to breathe in the scent of the blackboard tree helps clear my head a bit. It's already 9:30 PM, and we're still eating. When will I get to go back to my room?

"Hey, kiddo."

Dad's deep voice makes me turn around, surprised. He opens his arms and hugs me, inviting me to chat. It seems he's also escaped the interrogation.

"Are you full?"

"I want to talk to you. I can't stand listening to your mom. It's embarrassing."

I'm more like Dad than I thought.

"Yeah, I wonder if P' Kitt hates me now. Our family is rich, yet Mom asks about his wealth."

"If he likes you, he'll find it funny. You brought your boyfriend home, but why do you look so unhappy?"

"What do you mean by 'boyfriend'? I just brought him over because you guys wanted to meet him, didn't you?"

"He's not a boyfriend, yet you brought him home? When have you ever brought anyone home to meet us?"

"Well..."

I roll my eyes, unsure how to explain.

"I just wanted you to stop worrying about nonsensical things."

"Like what?"

Dad looks at me, waiting for me to speak up, but I pretend not to understand.

"Just a lot of things."

"Have you seen the psychiatrist yet?"

At this, I immediately lock eyes with Dad.

"You knew, Dad? Oh, come on, Mom..."

"So you haven't."

"...."

"Because you know it won't help."

Dad speaks as if he knows something, and that makes me cross my arms defensively. Yes... I didn't go today. I pretended to invite P' Kitt over, so Mom wouldn't interrogate me too much. But who'd have thought I'd end up having to answer Dad's questions about this?

"I've heard that we all have both male and female traits within us, just that our sex defines us. Some people are born male but like other males, and the same goes for females who like females. It's a matter of preference."

"What are you trying to say, Dad?"

"Saying what you want to hear."

"What do I want to hear?"

"Try interpreting what I said in the most self-serving way possible."

"...."

"...."

We both fall silent and look out at the view in front of us.

"I'm normal like everyone else, right?"

"Yes, but... You're a bit unlucky to be born into a prominent family, so you can't do whatever you want. I'm not trying to say you should do something; I'm just saying... there's nothing abnormal about what you are."

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Dinner ends around almost ten o'clock. P' Kitt drives me back to my condo because I left my car at the office today. The handsome guy parks the car and sits quietly, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel as if he wants to say something.

"Is there something on your mind?"

"Are we officially a couple now?"

I glance at him, feeling a bit awkward. Does just having dinner together mean we're a couple? Well, whatever he says.

"What do you mean? I just brought you over for dinner."

"Then next time, I'll take you to my house. I want to introduce you to my family."

"Sure, whatever you say. I'm going now... drive safely."

As I prepare to open the door, he grabs my wrist.

"Yes?"

"When will I get to go up to your room?"

Is that a suggestive question? I roll my eyes and play dumb. Honestly, I'm not good at dating or relationships, but I'm not so naïve as to not know how personal it is to invite someone up.

"Someday."

"You say you like me, but I don't feel it at all."

"But we've kissed, haven't we?"

"You call that a kiss?"

The handsome guy laughs and ruffles my hair gently.

"I'll let it go for now. Taking it slow has its charm, especially with you..."

"Okay, text me when you get home so I know you're safe."

"Will do."

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After watching his car's taillights disappear, I head back to my room as usual. However, when I get in, I find only dim lights in the living room,

which means Yu has already gone to bed. It's a bit disappointing that we only saw each other briefly this morning.

"Pixie... are you asleep?"

"Not yet."

"Then come out for a bit."

"No, I'm not coming out. I'm naked right now."

The sweet voice shouts back without any embarrassment, making me blush instead

"Then put on some clothes and come out."

"No, I'm lazy. If you want to see me, come in yourself. The door's not locked."

The small maid sets the conditions for meeting, making me sigh and think about walking away. But then...

"Was the food delicious?"

Even though she doesn't come out, she's still curious about my day. I smile a bit before shouting back.

"It was okay. I'm used to my family's cook's cooking."

"I asked because I wanted to know if eating with your boyfriend was better than eating with me."

The sulky tone makes me press my forehead against the door. I really want to see her face, but if I open this door, I don't know how far things will go because the person inside is like a ticking time bomb.

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There's nothing abnormal about what you are.

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Dad's voice echoes in my head, and I can't resist reaching for the doorknob any longer.

Click...

I push the door open and find Yu standing not far from the door, just as she said, not wearing anything. Startled, the small figure quickly grabs a blanket from the bed to cover herself and looks at me in shock.

"You opened the door."

"I wanted to see what it'd be like."

□□□□□

□ Chapter 17 □

Now, I step into Yu's world just as she's always wanted. She even hinted at what I'd find behind this door. I've prepared myself and am ready to face it after holding back for so long. However, as soon as I enter, the brave maid quickly grabs a blanket to cover herself, her face turning bright red. In contrast, I stand there staring at her calmly, almost bursting into laughter at her nervous demeanor.

"Hey."

"Huh?"

I speak first, crossing my arms and looking at the flustered girl who's gripping the blanket tightly. She's been teasing me for so long, but when it comes down to it, she's just as nervous.

"What are you doing?"

"About to go to bed."

"Uh-huh."

"So, Ms. Frung, is there something you need?"

"I just wanted to say hi. I haven't seen you all day except this morning."

I step closer, leaning in until our faces are almost touching.

"You look the same as always."

"Beautiful as always, I know... But do you know what it means to come into this room?"

"What does it mean?"

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BA-DUM...

BA-DUM...

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Honestly, I think if we keep talking, it won't be as awkward as this silence. The sweet-faced girl, who seems to pause for a moment, lets go of the blanket covering her body. It falls to the floor, leaving her completely naked. She's challenging me in her own way.

"It means that tonight, you're going to sleep with me."

That sly smile makes me smirk. In this situation, I can't afford to act clueless. Her word 'sleep' has many meanings, but I'll accept it no matter what it means because I want to see her next move.

Let's see how far this goes. I've crossed all boundaries of fear to open this door. How far will my Pixie take me...?

"Alright, it's good to change the sleeping place sometimes."

I put my hands in my pockets and walk to the bed, lying down nonchalantly.

"Which side should I sleep on?"

"You can be under me."

"Hmm?"

"Because I'll be on top."

As soon as she finishes speaking, Yu climbs on top of me immediately. Now, as I'm being straddled, I look up in astonishment because I never

thought I'd see her from this angle. The sweet-faced girl, completely naked, looks at me seriously and speaks in a firm tone.

"I've gone this far. This isn't a joke, you know?"

"When I decided to open the door, I wasn't joking either."

I flip her over so she's lying beneath me. The feeling is different when looking from different angles. Strangely, Yu now raises her hands to cover her chest, unlike when she willingly stripped in front of me.

"So, what's next?"

"What do you mean, what's next?"

"What will you do next, Ms. Frung?"

This is surprising. I wanted to know how far we could go, so I came here to let her lead. But now she's asking what we should do next.

But I'm Frung... I'm good at everything. I won't stop just because I don't know what to do.

"I'll probably follow my instincts."

I bite my lip slightly and reach out to brush away the hands she raised to cover her chest, staring intently.

"Like this."

My palm lands on one of her breasts. My blood pumps wildly. The soft feeling in my hand makes me sweat, and now I fear my hand might be too sweaty and make her uncomfortable.

Yu looks at me in shock but asks bravely as before.

"So, what's next?"

I start to squeeze gently, locking eyes with her because I don't know what to do next. I also do this when I check for lumps in my breasts in the bathroom.

"Then squeeze."

"And then?"

"Then knead."

"And then?"

"Beep beep."

"...."

"Honk the horn."

Thud!

She pushes me away, my hand slipping from her chest. Before I can react, her foot kicks my chest, sending me tumbling to the end of the bed with a loud thud. Luckily, my head doesn't hit anything, but it makes me jump up in anger.

"What the hell are you doing? What if I got hurt?"

"Then you can honk the horn for the ambulance to pick you up."

"What? Why are you mad?"

"Shouldn't I be mad? Is this the damn time to joke?"

This time, she speaks without any politeness, making me shrink back in fear.

"I wasn't... joking."

"Then why did you say that?"

"Because you kept asking what's next. How should I know?"

"...."

"I don't know how to do this!"

Everything falls silent again. It seems like there are many awkward pauses today. If this were a radio station, no one would listen to it because of all the second-hand embarrassment. Yu, who stares at me for a moment, looks around as if searching for something. Then, she grabs a small T-shirt and quickly puts it on, along with shorts, before extending her hand to me.

"What?"

"Please get up. Are you hurt?"

"Kissing me after kicking me, huh?"

"Or should I rather honk your boob?"

Her sarcasm makes me smile weakly, and I give her my hand obediently. Now, we stand facing each other, avoiding eye contact out of embarrassment.

"I also want to know how far you can go. But if you don't know how to do it, you should say so. But didn't you say you were good at everything?"

"But not this. Pixie, you too. You kept suggesting I do this and that, daring me to turn on the camera and walking around naked. I thought... you knew how to do this."

"I only know how to get naked. For other things, I'll wait for you to teach me."

"So, neither of us knows how to do this, right? If this situation were between I and P' Kitt, would it be this clueless?"

Because the nature of men and women is different, instincts might lead us better. Or maybe P' Kitt knows something about this. I only know what

should be put in where. Other than that, I don't know anything else. Well, I've never done it before.

"Are you still talking about someone else while being with me?"

"Hm?"

Her long arms pull my neck down until our noses touch. I'm not tall enough for her to need to stand on tiptoe, but I find her smaller size adorably cute.

"From now on, when you're with me, don't talk about anyone else, okay?"

"You mean P' Kitt?"

"Yes."

"Can I talk about my mom?"

"Sure."

"What about the prime minister?"

"Ms. Frung."

I keep talking about other things, but hearing her stern voice makes me shut up and stick my tongue out playfully. Yu, seeing this, scrunches her nose slightly, seemingly annoyed, and bites my lower lip lightly, enough to make me yelp in pain.

"It hurts. Why did you bite me?"

"How can you be both cute and annoying at the same time? Why do I like you so much? Even though I have so many options."

"What options? When did you have them?"

"Just know that I do."

"Those options aren't as cool as me. And I'm very rich, too."

"Don't be too proud. You won't say that if you really know." The sweet-faced girl laughs and stands on tiptoe to kiss my lips. "Since we're not good at this, let's do what we can first."

"And that is..."

It seems we think of the same thing. We lean in and kiss, knowing the rhythm. Last time, the situation led us, but this time, it's intentional, and we want to make it good. Even though it's a bit nerve-wracking, we can talk about it later, knowing it was all intentional. No more excuses or backing off.

"We're really good at this."

"Other things will follow."

I feel like a certain mountain has been lifted from my heart...

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If you ask what happiness in my life is, aside from getting my first car from my parents or luxurious items, it'd be getting first place in elementary school, getting into a good high school and university, and studying abroad. But those are fleeting happiness. Unlike this time, even when I wake up, my heart still races and feels fresh. My blood flows well, and I know if I get out of bed, I'll see a certain someone.

"Pixie."

"You're awake! Yay!"

The skilled maid, who woke up early to prepare breakfast, drops everything and runs to hug me like a little monkey. Knowing she's light, I hug her and spin around, laughing together.

"You're too skinny. Eat more."

"If I get fat, you won't be able to carry me."

We kiss again to remind ourselves that last night wasn't a dream. Even though it's just a kiss, it symbolizes that we're more than just an employer and a maid now.

"Can't you take a day off?"

"Wicked," I laugh and set her down on the floor.

"Like we're on a honeymoon or something?"

"People on a honeymoon would've gone far beyond what we did. But us? We're hopeless. Seriously, other couples would be making the whole condo file a complaint for noise pollution by now."

"You say that without any shame."

I tap Pixie's lips with my finger and sigh.

"Didn't you say we should take it slow?"

"That's why I suggested you take a day off to do research from videos. You're the boss, aren't you? You should be able to take a day off."

"You're such a whiner."

Seeing her sad but cute face, I can't help but pull her cheeks until they stretch like rubber.

"I'll spend the whole day with you on my weekend."

"When it's the weekend, you take your boyfriend to see your parents. You never have time for me."

"Well..."

I stammer because I know I'm in the wrong here.

"Ms. Frung, you have me already. Why don't you break up with him, this P' Kitt, or whatever? You like women but trick men into loving you. It's not good, you know."

"I have to..."

I gently stroke the cheek of the person in front of me, feeling guilty.

"So, you're going to keep seeing him and me at the same time?"

"...."

"It's okay. I won't pressure you. We'll take it slow,"

Yu scuffs the floor with her foot and puts her hands behind her back, making a cute sound. I laugh and knock on her head, feeling like I'm going crazy.

"No pressure at all. Fine... I'll make it clear with P' Kitt quickly. Good thing we haven't done much yet."

"But you've kissed already, haven't you?"

"It was just a kiss."

"We've only done just kissing, too. Does that mean you can break up with me anytime?"

"Break up?"

"Yes, break up... Do you think we kissed just to taste each other's saliva? Oops... mmmph."

I cover her mouth with my hand to stop her from saying anything more embarrassing and then bare my teeth.

"I get it, I get it. We're not employer and employee, not friends."

"Not mother and daughter either."

"Not daughter."

"So, what are we?"

"We're..."

"Say it!"

"We're... lov..."

"Say it now. Say it out loud."

"We're lovers!"

"Say it now. Say it out loud."

"We're lovers!"

"Great."

Yu snaps her fingers, pleased that she got me to say what she wanted, and smiles brightly.

"Come back early today, okay?"

"Why?"

"To make out!"

"You crazy."

"Don't you like it?"

"...."

"Do you like it or not?"

I bare my teeth at her again and answer, knowing my face and ears are probably red by now.

"I like it!"

"Then hurry back. I'll be waiting."

□□□□□

□ Chapter 18 □

I'm known as a workaholic. If I have to write my life's purpose to inspire someone, I'll write, "Work is my breath," because work gives me value. My parents see me as talented because what I do goes well, and when I go to work, I get recognition from my subordinates, which makes me look cool.

However, now... I'm excited about the weekends. The TGIF vibe is something I cherish, the same feeling when I was in school and knew that for the next two days, I could sleep in and lounge in bed all day because it was the weekend. Now, weekends make me giddy because I know I'll get to spend the whole day playing with the little maid who always gives me smiles.

"Is it heavy?"

"At first, it wasn't, but now I'm starting to feel it."

Today, Yu keeps jumping on my back like a little monkey and asking me to do this and that. Even though she's the maid, she makes me walk to get water from the fridge, wants to eat fruit, and wants a massage. At first, I was about to get angry, but when she smiled brightly, I softened, like now, when she's clinging to my back and won't let go.

"Even if you complain, I won't stop doing it. You smell so nice."

"You smell nice too. Carry me for a change."

"We can switch if you want."

The sweet-faced girl agrees to get down and turns her back so I can jump on. Judging by the height, there's no way I can ride on her back, but she insists I try anyway.

"Come on up."

"Are you sure you can handle it?"

"Of course, I'm strong. Hurry up."

I climb on, more like hugging than clinging, but Yu pretends to be weak and falls to her knees. I lose my balance and fall with her, our bodies piling on the floor. It feels like a scene from many Thai dramas where the leads stumble and almost kiss, staring into each other's eyes. But for us, she holds my face with both hands, making me look at her, and raises an eyebrow.

"Oops, I can't carry you. I guess I'm not that strong."

"That seemed a bit intentional."

"What should we do now, falling on the floor like this?"

"Just get up."

"..."

"What? Did I say something wrong?"

"Why are you so dumb!"

"Owww!"

My face is pulled by the hands of the person beneath me, stretching my cheeks like rubber. I cry out in pain, but it only makes Yu laugh instead of showing any sympathy.

"Because you're so clueless, you're cute. If it were easy, it wouldn't be fun, right?"

"I'm not clueless. I know what you want."

I pout before leaning down and pressing my lips hard against the person beneath me, then scrunch my nose.

"But I didn't do it because I think this scene is cliché. Everyone does it. I just didn't think my maid would do it, too."

"So, you know what to do but play hard to get. If you know that it means kissing, then you should know what to do next... How far have you studied the homework I gave you?"

Of course, I know what she means. We both have a curiosity. The homework she mentioned is about how to make love. Even though I'm a workaholic, when I'm alone in the office, I read articles about how women make love and sensitive spots. I also watch movies. So, I have some idea of what to do.

"I don't need to learn much,"

I say nonchalantly, but my hand slowly slides under Pixie's shirt, who loves to challenge me.

"The article says to let nature take its course."

"You even read articles? Hehe."

The sweet-faced girl laughs, pleased, and when my hand reaches her chest, she shudders a bit, goosebumps forming on her arms. But she still tries to be brave while I start to get excited by the soft and pliable feel.

"Knowledge comes from books."

"Unlike me... I watch videos."

After saying that, the maid flips me onto my back while she straddles me. My hand slips away, but I still hold onto her waist as if needing something to cling to.

"So, what do they say?"

"They say a lot, but I'm too lazy to talk about it now."

"Why?"

"When people do it, they don't usually talk."

Yu proves her point by leaning down to kiss me and nuzzling my neck. I lie there stiffly, not knowing what to do, letting her do as she pleases, closing my eyes tightly out of embarrassment.

"Relax a bit; I'm nervous, too."

"Should I wiggle my toes and whistle while at it?"

"Then, just stay quiet. I'll handle it."

"Don't be mean."

I refuse to let the cheeky girl feel victorious by resisting, pulling her in for a kiss, and starting to get mischievous by taking off her shirt, as I learned from the videos. When Pixie sees me unbuttoning her shirt, she widens her eyes in slight astonishment before smirking and raising her knees, showing her chest covered by a bra, to see what I'll do next.

"What happens after taking off the shirt?"

"This time, I'm not as clueless as last time."

I reach out with one hand to unhook her bra in one go. The maid quickly raised her hands to cover her chest, startled because she didn't think I could do it.

"Where did you learn to unhook with one hand?"

I raise an eyebrow and let it remain a mystery to her. How hard could it be to unhook a bra?

"Move your hands so I can show you what else I can do."

Even though I say that, Yu still doesn't move her hands. Now, the bold girl is blushing and realizing this is no longer a joke. Seeing her like that, my affection makes me lean in and kiss her hands gently, offering reassurance.

"It's okay, we'll go slowly together."

It seems my reassurance works. Yu slowly removes her hands, biting her lip tightly, revealing her chest to me. Strangely, even though we both have the same parts, seeing hers excites me so much that my hands tremble. I feel like I'm about to faint.

Just as my hand is about to reach out and grasp, preparing to taste, my phone rings. The maid's startled reaction makes me smile at her, then pull her into a tight hug, swaying back and forth.

"It's okay, we've come far. Let's stop here for today."

"We haven't done anything yet."

Though she talks tough, her body language shows relief, even to the point of hearing a sigh. I nod at her, who's on top of me, to reach for the phone on the coffee table. At first, the maid hesitates but then complies easily.

"It's annoying, isn't it? On a day like this, there's still a phone call that interrupts us. You didn't turn off your phone. Hmph."

"You always have a sharp tongue."

"It's your mom calling... Seeing her name, I'm now turned off. If we start again, we'll have to build up the mood from scratch."

"Talkative."

"Ouch!"

I flick Yu's forehead lightly and answer the call. The maid, still not fully dressed, hugs me and wiggles around, trying to distract me from the call. Since I can't shake her off, I have to talk to my mom while still in this awkward position.

"Yes, Mom."

[What are you doing? You sound stressed.]

Honestly, I'm not stressed at all, but because I'm trying to sound composed, it comes off as too serious. The person on the other end thinks I'm in a bad mood, which aligns with my intention. It's better this way.

"Just thinking about this and that. Is there something you need?"

[Can't I call you just because?]

I bite my lip hard when Yu bites my ear. I want to snap at her, but my limbs feel weak. I have to use all my concentration and strength to hold the phone and keep my voice steady.

"You can call, but I was just asking to get to the point. What do you want to talk about?"

[Tomorrow, let's invite Mr. Kitt to have dinner with us.]

"We just had dinner... Hgnnn."

[What? ... What are you doing?]

I accidentally moan when the maid slips her hand under my shirt, making me startle and shake my head, even though the person on the other end can't see.

"Stretching while talking to you, Mom."

"Hehe."

Yu's laughter almost makes me laugh out loud. I'm both angry and amused, but I have to keep it in.

"Meeting him often makes your daughter look desperate. He might think we want him too much."

[We do want him a lot. Anyway, invite him. Tell him we'll have dinner at the
condo tomorrow.]

"Which condo?"

[Your condo.]

"Why here? No."

I frown, displeased that my mom is making decisions on her own.

[Because it's your world.]

"Since you know that, why here?"

[To let Mr. Kitt see your world and to let the maid meet him.]

"This is what you want, isn't it?"

I stop playing with Yu and get serious. My mom is suspicious of my relationship with Pixie. Unable to do anything, she uses this tactic to quickly clear up any ambiguity. Inviting P' Kitt over is to tell Yu to stop thinking about what she shouldn't think about.

[Yes, that's it. Do as I said.]

Mom doesn't even wait for me to agree before quickly hanging up. Yu, who has heard the entire conversation, even though she couldn't hear Mom's side, can probably guess what's going on. She smiles at me understandingly.

"It's no big deal, really. If he wants to come, come. Besides, I want to meet the guy you went on a date with and kissed. I want to see what's so special about him."

Yu says this in a playful, teasing tone, but not too seriously. I shake my head in disapproval because I don't like people meddling in this room.

"She's crossing the line. Letting P' Kitt come to my room-this is my space. It should be a sanctuary, not somewhere anyone can invade."

"Well, that Mr. Kitt, or whatever, isn't just anyone, is he?"

"Don't be sarcastic."

I grab her wrist before she can storm off in a huff.

"I'm not being sarcastic. You made him think he's important. Your parents think the same. If you don't want him to feel special, make it clear. Why keep him around if you don't like him?"

"You should know the reason..."

"Maybe back then, you did it because you couldn't believe you liked me. But now, it's different."

"But he's a shield between me and Mom."

"And is he still a shield now? Your mom's using your shield against you, can't you see?"

I stay silent and nod in agreement. My actions have been too selfish. Maybe it's time to stop. It's not fair to the guy who's being used as a shield. How am I any different from a gay man marrying a woman to hide his true self? It's time to stop.

"By the way, can I see a picture of this Mr. Kitt?"

"Huh? I don't have a picture of him."

"You went to the movies, had dinner, met the parents, and kissed, but you don't have his picture?"

"I use my phone for calls. I don't even have your picture. Oh, but there's a profile picture on LINE."

I remember and open the chat app, enlarging the picture before showing it to Yu.

"Don't get jealous."

"I wo..."

Her sweet voice falters after seeing the picture, then she looks back and forth between the photo and me.

"This guy?"

"Yeah."

I nod and sigh.

"He's someone I liked back in school. We ran into each other at a party and hit it off."

"A good-looking guy like this doesn't have a girlfriend?"

"He has a fiancée, but she ran away. P' Kitt wasn't serious about it since they never met, so he started flirting with me. But... what's wrong with you? You're acting weird after seeing the picture. Didn't I tell you not to get jealous?"

I squeeze her shoulder as she smiles awkwardly.

"He looks good and suits you well."

"Someone who looks good and someone you love is different, you know?"

I raise an eyebrow. She smiles widely and nods.

"Of course, I know better than anyone. That's why I'm here."

"Such sweet talk. I'll spend the whole day with you today because tomorrow will be boring."

"I wish every day was as boring as tomorrow so you'd always pamper me. Hehe."

She continues to smile sweetly and play with me all day without mentioning P' Kitt again. I forgot that I needed to call and set up a meeting with him until almost 10 PM, after showering and getting ready for bed. When I finally call, the handsome guy on the other end quickly agrees to

the invitation. Honestly, I'm a bit disappointed that he's free. Calling this late, I thought he'd have plans already, like a typical businessman who plans ahead.

[So, I'll get to meet your maid tomorrow?]

"What's this? You're coming to have lunch with me, but want to meet the maid?"

I get a bit annoyed at this point. She's already cute enough. If P' Kitt sees her, wouldn't he like her?

[I'm just curious why you're so possessive of her. You always keep things secret. Now, I want to know what your maid is like. Normally, I wouldn't care about anyone's maid.]

"Haha."

I fake a laugh.

"You'll meet her tomorrow. See you at 1 PM."

[Alright, see you. Sweet dreams.]

"Okay."

I hang up and plug in the charger, then jump when I'm hugged from behind.

"Oh!"

"What's this? Are you so engrossed in talking to your boyfriend you didn't hear me coming?"

"You scared me! When did you get here? Are you a ninja, or what?"

"I snuck in. You didn't lock the door. You're like a maid waiting for your master to sneak in."

"Stop talking nonsense. Are the roles switched?"

"Can I sleep here tonight?"

"Huh?"

"I've wanted to sleep in your big bed for a long time."

The small one rolls around on the bed, swimming in a butterfly stroke.

"It's so spacious, and the temperature is cool."

"You like it that much?"

"Yes."

"Then... want to sleep here every day?"

I say embarrassedly, trying to test the water. Yu quickly sits up and looks at me with a sly demeanor.

"It sounds like you invited me to move in with you again."

"You said you like the bed, so I'm inviting you to sleep here. But if you don't want to, that's fine."

"Let me try sleeping here tonight first. If I like it, I'll move in."

"Do I have to beg?"

"We'll see if you need to."

Yu slips under the blanket. I watch her head sink into the pillow and feel affectionate. I turn off the light and slide under the blanket, too.

"You must really like my bed."

"It's not the bed I like; it's you."

The clingy one hugs me. When I touch her, I realize she's not wearing any clothes.

"Your clothes..."

"I get hot easily. I sleep without clothes. You know that."

"Well..."

Even though I knew, I forgot.

"I probably need to adjust to this a bit... What are you doing?"

"Making love with you."

She moves and lies on top of me, kissing here and there with her naked body. I feel like tonight won't be like the previous ones, but I'm still very nervous.

"Did you plan this, didn't you?"

"Yes,"

Yu admits easily and slowly slides down to the end of the bed. I've read enough to know what she's going to do, so I try to sit up, but it's too late. She grabs my ankle and lifts it while pulling off my thin pajama pants.

"Lift your hips."

"No... It's..."

"Now."

Her firm tone makes my body obey as if I'm powerless. Her lips slowly kiss my calf, teasing me lightly.

"I really like how you smell."

"What are you saying? You shouldn't talk about...."

Gasp!

As soon as her lips touch my sensitive spot, I clamp my mouth shut and cover it with my hand, eyes wide in shock.

"I'll make you beg for me to sleep here. Just watch."

Geez... I've walked right into her trap.

□□□□□

□ Chapter 19 □

I've never felt like this before. My lower body, which is supposed to be private and personal, is now being invaded. Her tongue and her mouth are gently touching that part of me. I flinch, wanting to push her head away, but my body won't obey. My raspy voice comes out in quick gasps. It feels like I'm climbing higher and higher, and suddenly, Yu stops and looks up at me.

"How is it... are you willing to give in now?"

"What is this, and why..."

"I'll make it even better."

Her finger slips inside, and pain shoots through my body. I try to squirm away, but she moves with me, locking me in place. Yu's lips remain where they are. What started as torment turns into a strange pleasure. My lower abdomen tingles, and I start to let her do what she pleases.

"How can it feel like this... Hghnn."

I let her continue. Yu's hand moves faster and harder until I scream. The sweet-faced girl, seeing that I've reached my peak, crawls up to me and presses her lips to mine. Her tongue is warm, with a faint taste of me on her lips, making me feel inexplicably shy. My hands wrap around her neck as if seeking support, feeling a deep hunger for that kiss.

"It feels good, right...? Please tell me."

"It does."

"Very good... then do me, too."

"What do I have to do?"

"Use your mouth."

She moves up to sit above my face and presses her body down on my mouth. I taste her hungrily, inhaling her scent. Her moans make me even more aroused, wanting to be rougher, to bite her so she feels pain, to crush her with my mouth.

"I'm coming."

She grinds her body against my face until she shudders and collapses. I quickly get up, not wanting her to escape, and hold her legs in place.

"I haven't done to you what you did to me."

I slip my fingers inside her, moving them rhythmically to feel her sweet insides. Yu's face contorts, but she still clings to me. Her hands clutch the bedsheets, guiding my rhythm with her husky voice.

"Faster, like that... a little more."

I speed up as she asks, and soon, something bursts out, splashing onto me. Yu arches her body in a final spasm. I throw myself down to hug her tightly because I also want to feel her. Our bodies cling to each other. Now, we have each other.

We're one now...

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The sound of my cell phone on the bedside table wakes me up instead of the alarm clock I set. I frown a bit, seeing it's already past eleven. I remember I forgot to set the alarm because everything happened so suddenly last night, dragging on until late.

I was exhausted and fell asleep immediately. Thinking about what happened makes me feel a bit embarrassed. I glance at the empty space beside me, surprised not to see the cause of my deep sleep.

"Pixie... Yu."

I call out, but only silence answers, making me curious. I get off the bed, quickly gather my scattered clothes, and put them on haphazardly to search for her. But I find no one, just breakfast with a small note attached.

'Eat breakfast every day. It's an order.'

Seeing that makes me smile, but then I frown, not understanding where that little troublemaker has gone. The house feels quiet without her wide smile and daily mischief, making me restless and annoyed without her around. I grab my phone and call until she picks up.

[Yes?]

"Where did you go? I woke up and didn't see you."

[Miss me already?]

"..."

[...]

"Yeah."

I scratch my head before quickly adjusting my tone to sound more authoritative.

"Why aren't you in the room today? I was so shocked when I woke up. You didn't even wake me."

[I saw you sleeping soundly, so I didn't want to disturb you.]

"You haven't answered the first question."

[I heard you have a guest today, so I thought it'd be better not to be around. It hurts, you know, seeing the one you love with their lover.]

"He's not my lover."

[Well, you haven't made it clear.]

"Wasn't last night clear enough?"

I bite my lip as I speak, scratching my head in embarrassment, even though she can't see it.

"Today, I'll tell P' Kitt that I don't like him anymore."

[Changed your mind so quickly? You had sex with me, and now you're dumping him, huh?]

"We liked each other before we had sex, didn't we? And what are you saying. so crude? Aren't you embarrassed?"

[Hehe, you just said it yourself, and now you're scolding me. But seriously, are you really going to tell Mr. Kitt that today?]

"Of course. I'm not indecisive. After thinking it over, using him as a tool is too cruel. It's better to be honest."

[Aren't you afraid your parents will scold you?]

"I'm grown up. When it comes to choosing a partner, we have to decide for ourselves... P' Kitt's runaway fiancée probably thought the same."

[True, you're grown up.]

"After everything is done, I'll call you. It's so boring. On a weekend like this, instead of being with you, I have to put on a fake smile."

But whatever, today will be the last day. I'll do what I want. I'm known for being decisive. It'll end today.

[It seems I need to grow up, too.]

"Do you realize you act like a child?"

[Only when I'm with you. Sometimes I need to do something, too.]

"Like what?"

[Like stop playing house. We're grown up. We can make our own decisions. No one, not even my parents, can force me.]

I tilt my head and smile. I don't know if Yu is being sarcastic or just talking nonsense. But mentioning her parents makes me realize I know nothing about her except her beautiful smile.

"By the way, you never told me about your family. Since we're talking about parents..."

[From now on, I'll tell you everything. But let's get through today first.]

"Cutting me off, huh?"

I pout, even though I know she can't see it.

[Don't you want to know who Mr. Kitt's fiancée is?]

"Why would I care? He isn't that interesting. I'm more interested in you."

[Then, start by asking him who his runaway fiancée is.]

"I don't get it."

[We'll talk later. Go shower and get ready.]

"How do you know I haven't done anything yet?"

[You said you just woke up and didn't see me. So, I know you haven't done anything. I've been with you for a while now. Even though it's not that long,

I know you well.]

"And we'll be together forever."

[Go shower.]

"Cutting me off again."

Yu hangs up. I can only huff at the air. How did it turn out like this? Before, she followed me around like a duckling. Now, I'm the one clinging, and she's ignoring me. I gave in last night, and now you're acting all high and mighty? Terrible behavior.

Last night, I wasn't the only one who gave in!

Thinking that, I shower in a good mood. Being in love feels great. My heart is light. I feel fresh. I used to have a crush on P' Kitt, but it wasn't this intense. I just thought he was handsome and got a bit shy, but that was it. Then, we met again as adults. How strange... being attracted to another woman like this.

After getting dressed, my mom called to say she'd ordered food from a restaurant and wanted me to set the table. When she arrived and saw me setting the table alone, she frowned.

"Where's the maid?"

"Not here. Sent her out for errands."

"Why would she be a maid if she doesn't work when needed?"

"Then she doesn't have to be a maid."

"Then what is she?"

"My wif..."

"Mary had a little lamb

Little lamb, little lamb

Mary had a little lamb

Its fleece was white as snow!"

"...."

Suddenly, my mom starts singing just as I'm about to speak, making me fall silent in shock.

"If she isn't here, we'll serve the food ourselves. It's not that hard... Hey, stop lounging around and help. Mr. Kitt will be here soon, and we don't want to be embarrassed."

Mom calls Dad, who's enjoying the view on the balcony, to help. I scrunch my nose, annoyed that Mom is trying to deny Yu's presence. Even though I haven't said directly what we are, Mom seems to know. Inviting P' Kitt for lunch today is also for Yu to realize her place. But Yu not being here doesn't ruin Mom's plan. Her absence means she does know her place.

But that's what Mom thinks. In reality, she'll always be my number one. I'll even worship her like a god.

Nah, kidding.

"Call Mr. Kitt and see if he's arrived yet."

After setting the table, my mom forces me to call the handsome guy immediately. But before I can even move, P' Kitt calls first to say he's waiting in the lobby. I go down to get him, fulfilling my duty as a good host, and invite him into my room, which is my private sanctuary. Even though I'm the one who opens the door for him, I still feel annoyed and uncomfortable.

"Your room is pretty big,"

P' Kitt says admiringly.

"Don't you get lonely living alone?"

"I'm not living alone."

"Oh, right. You live with the maid. Where is she? I came here to meet her."

My mom, who overhears the conversation, clears her throat and comes out to greet him with a smile. P' Kitt, who was interested in the maid, now turns his attention to my mom.

"You must be tired, dear. I've prepared some food for you."

This is the second time they've met, but my mom already talks to him like he's part of the family. My dad and I exchange weary glances but say nothing, following my mom's script.

The meal is ordered from a fine restaurant and is enough to feed ten people, but it'll surely end up as leftovers. In my family, the rule is 'better to have too much than too little.'

"How old are you, Mr. Kitt? I'm not sure if I've asked before. If I have, forgive me for asking again,"

My mom says, laughing softly, which annoys me. Her fake laugh grates on my nerves, and I can only frown.

"Thirty-four."

"That's the perfect age for marriage."

I shoot a sharp look at my mom as soon as she brings up the topic. But my glare never works on her; she always ignores it.

"Yes, my mom wants me to get married soon. She wants grandchildren."

"That's why he's looking for a fiancée,"

I add, emphasizing that 'he's ready to marry, but not with me,' which makes my dad chuckle because he knows what I'm trying to convey.

"Well, his fiancée ran away. Now, the opportunity falls to you, Frung. Mr. Kitt, If you want to marry her, go ahead. You have my support."

"Mom."

"Ahem,"

My dad clears his throat to support me and smiles at P' Kitt.

"Don't feel pressured. She's not serious. Take your time to get to know each other. No need to rush into marriage. Sometimes, relationships don't work out."

"Hey, you..."

"That's right, P' Kitt. Don't feel pressured by what my mom says. I'm not thinking about marriage. We've just reconnected after many years. Marriage has never crossed my mind,"

I quickly say, sipping my water and smiling sweetly at P' Kitt, who purses his lips and raises an eyebrow.

"I'm not feeling pressured if it's you we're talking about."

It's like I intentionally kicked the soccer ball out of play, but P' Kitt slides in to catch it just before it crosses the touchline. Hey steers the conversation back on course, playing right into my mom's hands.

"See? He's already said that."

"P" Kitt, you don't know me well enough yet."

"For the right person, three days is enough. We have a lifetime to get to know each other."

His refusal to back down puts the pressure on me, making me anxious. I need to find a way out. If it gets too convoluted, I might have to be frank in front of my parents, but that should be the last resort. It'd be too embarrassing for P' Kitt. It's better to talk about this privately.

"But I still want to get to know you a bit more. A man whose fiancée left him must have some issues that I don't know about."

"I don't have any issues. My fiancée just didn't want an arranged marriage. I've told you this before."

"Since we're on this topic,"

I shift uncomfortably,

"Who's your fiancée?"

"She's my mom's friend's daughter."

"Do you have a picture."

"Huh?"

"I want to see. It's part of getting to know you."

In other words, I'm just being nosy. Honestly, I don't care that much because it has nothing to do with me, but I need to divert P' Kitt's attention away from the marriage talk.

"I don't have a picture of her. We never met in person. Oh... but my mom sent me one on chat. Not sure if it's still there."

P' Kitt pulls out his phone and scrolls through it. My mom, curious, tries to peek from across the table until my dad pushes her back and shakes his head.

"Ah... found it."

"Let me see."

My mom reaches out to grab the phone first, but I'm quicker and smirk at her.

'I won.'

"Hurry up. I want to see it, too. I want to know if she's prettier than my daughter."

I look at the picture on the phone screen. It shows a woman with slightly wavy long hair and a wide, bright smile. The face I see every day, now on the screen of the handsome guy, introduced as the fiancée who ran away from an arranged marriage.

"This one?"

"Yeah."

"What's her name?"

"Her name... Yu, if I remember correctly."

It has to be that name. I asked, just in case. If there was another name, I could still think that it was a different person. But if the name, face, smile, and height are all the same, it has to be Yu.

'Then, start by asking him who his runaway fiancée is.'

She said that because she wanted to introduce herself to me, to let me know who she is and where she's from... and now I know.

"Let me see. I want to see too."

My mom, ready to snatch the phone, is stopped by me closing the screen and handing it back to P' Kitt, subtly indicating that if she wants to see it, she has to ask P' Kitt again. This would make her seem overly curious, and yes... she doesn't do it because my dad is glaring at her.

"Excuse me for a moment."

I get up from my seat and head to the bathroom, but, in truth, I just want to talk to Pixie, who has intently disappeared today. At first, I thought of calling her, but then I decided to text instead. Messaging might be better right now.

Frung: I saw P' Kitt's fiancée's picture.

Yu: How was it?

Her 'how was it' can mean many things.

Frung: Good.

Everything falls silent. I can't tell if she's typing or just leaving it. In the end, I have to type and then immediately turn off my phone.

Frung: You make me feel bad.

□□□□□

□ Chapter 20 □

After dinner, P' Kitt stays and chats with my parents for a while before excusing himself to leave. I walk him out myself because I want to find an opportunity to talk to him privately. Ever since I saw that picture, our meeting today has been frustrating, and it must be obvious because the handsome man speaks up as we ride the elevator together.

"Ever since you saw the picture of my fiancée, you've been quiet. Are you mad?"

He asks that question with a smile, and that makes me glance at him sideways, clearly showing my annoyance.

"Yes."

"Don't tell me you're jealous."

The more he smiles, the more I breathe heavily, glaring at him with a look that could kill.

"Yes, I admit I'm very jealous."

"Wow, I'm happy to hear that,"

P' Kitt says, covering his mouth with his hand like a boy who just found out his dad bought him a game console.

"You're so straightforward that it makes me blush. But come on, I already told you I only like you."

"I also love only one person at a time. I've never been in love before, so when this happened, I couldn't handle my emotions. Can I have that

picture?"

"Picture?"

"The picture of your fiancée, P' Kitt. Send it to me."

"Why would you want to see it and get even more upset?"

"If you don't send it, I'll be even more upset. Please do."

We talk until the elevator reaches the ground floor. P' Kitt steps out and reluctantly sends the picture from his phone.

"I sent it."

"And delete the picture from your phone, too."

"I won't look at it, I promise."

"Delete it."

"Alright, alright."

Seeing that I'm insistent and serious, P' Kitt deletes all the chats with his mom and shows me his photo gallery to prove there are no pictures of Yu left. I smile lightly, feeling pleased, and nod in thanks.

"Thank you for doing what I asked."

"Are you feeling better now?"

"Yes, I feel better. Thank you for having dinner with us today."

"I should be the one thanking you. The food was delicious. But it's a shame I didn't get to meet your maid that you always talk about."

"From now on, I won't mention her to you anymore."

"Please do. I like hearing about her."

"But I don't."

I look him in the eye and get straight to the point.

"This will be the first and last time you come to have dinner at my condo. From now on, let's stop contacting each other."

"Huh? What?"

"I don't like you anymore."

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Simple, short, and to the point. Why would I complicate things? And why did he keep asking, 'What did you just say?' followed by questions of...

Why,

Why,

And why?

'I want to make it clear, and I feel terrible being the third wheel in my own relationship.'

'You're not the third wheel. She and I have never even met.'

And that was the shortest, most concise breakup ever. I didn't explain anything further. Let's just say I felt bad for getting in the middle of them. How could I take someone's fiancée and still be their girlfriend?

It's confusing. I talk nonsense now. Let's just say I'm done. This is me clearing things up. Mission complete.

Now, there's just one more person I have issues with. Yu still hasn't come back, but I'm too proud to call because I'm so angry. But it seems she knows; she sends a short message.

Yu: Are you still mad?

And I'm too straightforward to lie.

Frung: I am.

But even though I'm mad, when I look at the wall clock showing it's 10 PM, I can't help but worry, so I ask bluntly, hoping she understands my angry tone.

Frung: Where are you now?

Yu: At home.

Frung: k.

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If it were before, I would've asked which home because she's poor, struggling, uneducated, and pitiful. But after seeing that picture from P' Kitt, I didn't respond because I thought the home she meant was the one she was born and raised in, a big, luxurious mansion. That eased my worry a bit.

And I didn't reply because I understood she was at her home.

My anger spilled over to my subordinates at the company. Today, anyone who was smiling would shut up and almost crawl away when they saw my face. The meeting today made me even more frustrated. I ordered everyone to revise all the plans, including the poorly made PowerPoint slides, and then kicked everyone out of the meeting room.

Why are there only stupid people here? Why can't anyone work properly? Is no one as smart as me?

"Boss."

Frank, the senior I hired, walks in with a bright smile before reporting the progress with well-printed photos and placing them on my desk.

"I investigated as you asked. It turns out the woman you had me follow is the daughter of a jewelry business owner. She ran away from home. It's like a soap opera!"

I remain silent, glancing at the latest photos he took. They show Yu walking in a mall with an older woman. She dresses in a way that makes her look more sophisticated, exuding an aura of wealth. But there's one photo where she seems to notice the camera and poses.

"I got caught taking this one."

The photo shows Yu smiling softly, looking at the camera mischievously as if posing for a magazine. I take that photo and keep it with me, then return the others to Frank.

"Got it."

"Is that all? Aren't you excited that she's rich? This is like in those swindler novels. She's probably pretending to be poor to gain something from you."

"Mind your own business."

"...."

"I said I got it. Now get out."

I glare at Frank, baring my teeth. He gasps in shock and runs out before I can say anything further. Once alone, I look at the photo again, comparing it with the one P' Kitt sent me.

This must be an old picture... but her face hasn't changed at all.

Ding!

A message notification sounds as I'm quietly evaluating the photos. It's another short message from Yu, the fifth one since we last saw each other.

Yu: Are you still mad?

Frung: Yes.

Yu: Can we talk?

I stare at the screen and type back before flipping my phone over.

Frung: No.

I won't meet her. I won't look at her. I won't do anything!

But... Yu is Yu. She's the type who gets what she wants. She didn't want to get married and ran away from home. If she wants me, she'll make it happen. Now, I'm facing the sweet-faced girl in my own room. I completely forgot she had a keycard because she was my maid. But now, she's no longer in that role.

I quickly grab a file from my bag and use it to cover my face.

"Ms. Frung."

"No, I don't want to see your face."

"Do you hate me that much?"

Even though she says that, I pretend to be tough, using the file to cover my face and quickly walking to my bedroom. But she blocks my way, causing me to bump into her. Yu stumbles against the door, and in my panic, I lower the file and ask worriedly.

"Are you hurt?"

"Yes."

She pouts, looking pitiful. I look at her face and then lift the file to cover my face again.

"Serves you left."

"Not right?"

"Because you're in the wrong."

"Come on, why won't you look at me?"

"I don't want to. Now move. I want to go to bed."

"Then let me go with you."

"No."

"I will."

We argue back and forth like kindergarteners. My anger, mixed with annoyance, makes me lower the file and pretend to look at her earlobe.

"This is my room. If I say no, it means no."

"Why won't you look at me?"

"I'm looking."

"You're looking at something else."

"Yes... I'm looking at your ear. I won't make eye contact with you, Pixie."

"Why? Do you hate me just because I'm rich?"

When she says that, I accidentally turn around and look her in the eye, then bare my teeth.

"Why would I hate you for being rich?"

"Because I tricked you."

I frown, not understanding.

"What did you trick me about?"

"Tricking you into thinking I was poor and becoming your maid. You're very angry that I didn't tell the truth and asked to stay with you. I made you feel like a fool."

Tears well up in her eyes, and her face and body language show deep remorse, which confuses me even more.

"Why would I be mad that you're rich? Do you think I'm an envious person?"

"It makes the most sense. What other reason could there be?"

"Do you really not know why?"

"Because I'm rich and tricked..."

"It's because you didn't tell me you're P' Kitt's fiancée. You made me the third wheel. And P' Kitt..."

"What about him?"

"P' Kitt still has beautiful pictures of you, while I have none. We're a couple, aren't we?!"

I stomp my foot in frustration.

"On my phone, there are only pictures of you cooking, cleaning, and vacuuming. I've been close to you all this time, yet I have no pictures like that. I feel like I'm losing. Ugh!"

I hold out my phone and show a picture of Yu standing and smiling brightly. Then, I turn my head away at a precisely 45-degree angle. The person in front of me goes completely silent, making me glance at her slightly. I see that she looks like she's seen a ghost.

"Why are you silent?"

"This is why you're mad?"

"Of course."

"And what about the fact that I'm... rich? Aren't you mad about that?"

"Why would I? I love you regardless. Knowing you're rich makes me feel at ease."

I place my hand on my chest, mimicking the pose of the Virgin Mary.

"What kind of person gets mad that their partner is rich? If your partner is doing well, you should be happy for them."

"But I told you that I wasn't well-educated and applied to be your maid."

"If you said you graduated from college in Australia and then became a maid, that would be scary. If you want to be a maid, you have to lie about your qualifications. That's the right thing to do."

"Then why aren't you mad? Why!?"

Yu still looks confused, which makes me just as confused.

"Do you really want me to be mad that much? I'm not mad about this, so why do you want me to? Are you a control freak or something... Ouch, why are you pulling my cheek? I'm still mad at you, you know. Don't touch me, ew, don't hug me either. It's hot. Get off... ugh."

The small person hugs me tightly like a python. Her strength is so great that I have to cry out in protest. Hmph. Does she think hugging me will make me less mad?

Well... maybe a little. She smells nice.

"How can someone be this cute? How can someone like this exist in the world?"

"Don't try to flatter me."

Yu pulls away from me, smiling with tears streaming down her cheeks, which startles me.

"Why are you this cute? Waah."

"What kind of person compliments and then cries? Where's your sincerity... Hey, are you really crying?"

"Waaaah. I'm so happy that you aren't mad about me becoming your maid."

"Why do you want me to be mad about this so much? You ran away from home and wanted to find a job quickly, so you had to use this trick. I could piece things together, so I'm not mad. Besides... You're really good at housework. You did your job perfectly. I'm okay with that."

"Waaaah."

"Geez, the more I talk, the more you cry."

I throw my bag and various files on the floor. The small person who's hugging me and crying non-stop pauses for a moment.

"What are you doing?"

"Jump up. I'll carry you."

"Why?"

"You can cry on the bed."

"Waaah. Why are you so cute? Why, why, why?"

Even now, I still don't understand why she's crying, but she obediently lets me carry her to the bed.

"I'm still mad at you, you know. What's this? P' Kitt has a smiling picture of you, but when you're with me, you just keep crying. I don't even want to look at you... There, there, wipe your tears, sweetheart. But I'm still mad at you, just so you know."

How did it come to this?

And why should I be mad that she's rich? I'm still confused...

□□□□□

□ Chapter 21 □

Right now, Yu has stopped crying. Actually, she doesn't spend much time crying, but she tends to be more clingy because I'm still angry that I never have any pretty pictures of her, unlike her fiancé, who has a picture with a bright smile. Why is it that people who have never met her have such pictures? It means we aren't close enough, right?

"Where are you going?"

As I get up to walk out of the room, the maid pulls my shirt. No, I should say former maid because her true identity has been revealed.

"I'm thinking of going to America for a while."

"..."

"I'm just going out to get some water. It was a joke."

Why does no one ever laugh at my jokes? This is a mystery I've never gotten an answer to.

"Ms. Frung, you are terrible at jokes. You don't have to look so serious. I thought you were really going to America."

"How could I just go like that? You have no sense of humor at all."

I lift my chin in a huff but can still see Yu smiling happily out of the corner of my eye.

"What are you smiling at? Did you find the joke funny now?"

"No, I just feel like you're finally talking normally to me."

"How is this normal?"

"Well, you're willing to banter."

"No, I'm still angry. Look here; this is the face of someone who's angry!"

I stick out my tongue to emphasize and prepare to walk out, but Yu jumps on my back like a little monkey, making me let out a small 'ack' from the weight.

"What are you doing? You scared me."

"I'm trying to make up with you. Why are you this mad? If you want a beautiful picture of me, you can just ask me. I'll take one right now. What poses do you want?"

"Too late. Someone else already has a better picture than me. It hurts my feelings."

"The picture you saw wasn't taken by that Mr. Kitt. That picture was taken when I was studying abroad and sent back to my mom. Mom probably picked a good picture, that's all."

"You sure?"

I glance at the person talking behind me, feeling surprised.

"It's not that P' Kitt took it?"

"How could he take it? We've never met in person. It was a picture for matchmaking."

"Yeah, P' Kitt said that, too,"

I say to myself and change the subject.

"So, who took this picture?"

"My friend who studied there with me. Didn't you have friends to take pictures when studying abroad?"

"No."

"..."

"No one wanted to be friends with me,"

I answer, a bit embarrassed, clearing throat.

"So that picture was taken by someone else, and P' Kitt got it because your mom sent it?"

"Exactly. You think so logically about my disguise, understanding even why I had to use a fake degree, but you can't figure this out?"

"That's true..."

I start to think and smile embarrassedly, realizing I overlooked something like this. Yu ran away from an arranged marriage to stay with me because she didn't like P' Kitt. How could it be possible that P' Kitt took that picture unless someone else sent it?

"Are you smiling now?"

"Well..."

"You get so possessive that your logic and reason disappear, huh? Chomp."

Gasp!

The person clinging to my back nibbles one of my ears, making me shiver. I get goosebumps on my arms, and I have to lift one of them up to look, which makes Yu laugh.

"So sensitive. It was just a little nibble on the ear."

"You're so annoying."

"You're not mad anymore, right?"

"Well, your explanation makes sense. I guess I'm not mad anymore."

I stick out my tongue and smile at the smaller person before carrying her outside to pour two glasses of water, one for her and one for myself.

"Did you feel lonely without me today?"

"The house was so quiet. There was no one for me to secretly watch like every night."

"Ah-hah, so you admit you were secretly watching me sleep naked."

"I used to, but lately, I haven't because I get too embarrassed... Don't change the subject. Now that everything has come to this point, will you tell me about yourself?"

I squat down to put her on the floor, but she clings to me tightly, insisting I carry her. In the end, I have to take her to the nearby sofa and lie down together.

"Can't I cling to you a bit longer?"

"You're heavy."

"So mean. Fine, we can talk like this."

"We need to look at each other when talking."

I sit up, but Yu, who loves to snuggle, takes this chance to push me down and lie on top of me, resting her head on my chest and nuzzling her face against it.

"You're very clingy today," I remark.

"Once the anger is gone, I feel like I want to be close to you all the time. I like you even more now. They say the more couples fight, the more kids they have. I think I understand why a little."

"Stop... You're saying such an embarrassing thing."

"What do you want me to tell you?"

She plays with the buttons on my shirt and looks up at me.

"What do you want to know? Ask me."

"Let's start from the beginning. Why did you leave home?"

"I didn't want to be forced into marriage. You knew that."

"Can you tell me the details? From start to finish."

"You're so impatient."

"Once you finish, we can do other things."

I say, pretending to play with her hair, trying to lure her, which seems to work. The sweet-faced girl clears her throat and starts telling her story from the beginning to the end.

"I'll summarize it in three lines. We don't have much time today."

The three lines must be a joke because, in the end, she takes almost half an hour to tell the whole story. I'm quite amazed to learn who she is. She's the only daughter and heir to a jewelry business with multiple branches in malls. She graduated from abroad in gem design to take over the family business. However, being rich means her parents don't trust her enough to find a suitable partner.

They believe women are more emotional than rational and might end up with someone unsuitable, risking the family business. So, they arranged a marriage with P' Kitt which was a suitable choice. Both families had the same idea in mind: combining businesses. Considering their wealth, status,

and education, no one could be more perfect. Yu, who'd just returned from abroad, couldn't accept her parents' plan and ran away, taking her mom's expensive watch to sell for some money to survive.

"Everything sounds good, but stealing is so out of character. Hah, a thief."

"What could I do? I could only grab that. Being a thief is better than being forced to marry someone I've never met. But I only did it once. I've never stolen anything from anyone."

"You've done it twice.

"When?"

"Recently."

"What did I do?"

The sweet-faced girl looks like she's seen a ghost, being accused. I look at her and smile.

"You stole my heart. Eyyyyyyyyyyy!"

"..."

"Not funny?"

"I told you not to joke with such a serious face. I can't tell it's a joke!"

She lightly hits my chest with her small fist, making me laugh and cough. To stop her from hitting me, I grab her hands and hug her tightly, wrapping my legs around her.

"Is that all?"

"That's it. It's already long... To not waste time, let's..."

"Wait."

I push the mischievous maid's face away.

"I have one more question."

"What now? Why do you want to know so much? I've told you everything."

"Was working as a maid for me a coincidence or intentional?"

"Oh..."

Yu pauses, looking a bit embarrassed.

"How could I forget something important like this?"

"How did it happen? Why did you apply to work at my house?"

"It was both a coincidence and intentional. That day, I was wandering around, not knowing what to do. Staying at my friend's house, I felt like I was bothering them, so I walked around the market, hoping to find a job. While sitting at the bus stop, I saw your car pass by."

"Hmm?"

I sit up, interested.

"Why was my car at the bus stop?"

"It was just passing by. I looked up and saw you daydreaming in the back seat. The car stopped at a red light, and I immediately recognized... that you're that kid."

"What kid?"

"The kid I met at cram school when I was in high school."

"What do you mean?"

"How can you not understand? We met ten years ago."

Suddenly, my heart races with excitement. It feels too much like a drama. I never knew I was in someone's memory, especially in high school when I had no friends and didn't talk much. At cram school, I didn't have friends to chat with either.

"I don't remember. What subject?"

"English. It was late, and it was raining heavily. It was hard to get home. I remember you were the one standing in front of the cram school with me and asked... 'Are you homeless'?"

"Huh?"

I'm digging through my memories from ten years ago but can't recall. Yu, seeing my confused face, laughs and pokes my forehead.

"If you can't remember, don't worry. I'll tell you."

"I'm not the type to talk to strangers at all."

"But you talked to me that day. Even though the conversation was a bit frustrating, you still tried to chat. I was waiting for a taxi to go home, but none would take me. Then you called one, and we did get one."

"After that, I invited you in the car with me and had the driver take a detour to drop you off... Oh, the memories are coming back."

This memory had been buried deep in my mind. It should've been unforgettable. Inviting a stranger to share a ride home was something I'd never done before. But that day, I felt sorry for the girl who couldn't get a taxi, so I couldn't help but invite her to join me.

"Yes, you agreed to take a detour to drop me off. When I went to apply for a job at your parent's house, I found out that you had the taxi take a detour to drop me off before heading home."

"The taxi fare that day was almost two hundred baht. Ten years ago, that was quite expensive... Look, I even remember the fare, but I couldn't remember you!"

I touch my mouth in astonishment.

"But you just saw me in the car and remembered?"

"Yes, that day I ran after your car from the bus stop. Luckily, your parent's house wasn't far from the bus stop, so I knew where you lived. It must've been Sunday, the day you had to come home for dinner with your parents."

"How lucky that you looked up and saw me. Otherwise, we wouldn't have met. So, how did you... end up working for me?"

"I hung around your house for quite a while. The servants at your house saw me so often that they asked who I was looking for. When they found out I was looking for a job, they said they were looking for a maid and suggested I apply. So, it was a perfect match. You hired me in a blink of an eye."

Yu smiles broadly, and I pull her into a hug, kissing her head lightly.

"Ah... It's so good that my instincts told me to hire you. When I saw your face, I felt you were familiar and endearing. So much so that I wanted you as a daughter."

"A daughter?"

"Or a puppy."

"Ms. Frung!"

"Well, you're so cute. I just wanted you."

"No parent says such things to their daughter."

"My love is unconditional love, you know?"

"Do you still want me as a daughter now? Hmph!"

From being affectionate, she starts to get annoyed and genuinely irritated, making me smile before pulling her into another hug.

"Don't you want to suck mommy's titties?"

"Ms. Frung!"

Yu sounds both shocked and amused, mixed with a bit of irritation. I finally make a triumphant face.

"Ah... Finally, the joke worked. You giggled a little."

"That kind of joke is too much."

"Don't you want to suck my titties?"

"Are you done joking?"

"Okay, I'll stop. Now that we know the truth, you can go home."

I push her away, pretending to forget what I said earlier. Yu, seeing that I'm about to get up, jumps on me and lies down, speaking in a babyish voice.

"Mommy."

"Now, who is the one joking... Whoa!"

It seems she can't wait any longer, both missing and longing for me. Plus, we've just made up. So, we stop talking and express our love in other ways.

This honeymoon period shows no signs of ending soon, and it looks like tonight will be a long one...

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My body is thoroughly explored by the sweet-faced girl with her small hands. Her thin lips trace from my chest to my toes. There isn't a part she hasn't touched. Our bodies intertwine like snakes, the sweet and carnal scent of sex making us both float in a light-headed state.

My toes curl into the bedsheet as my legs are spread apart. Yu invades me with both her lips and fingers. I moan, harmonizing with the pleasure. She whispers words of love and touches me in ways no one else has. Then, we take turns, ensuring neither of us reaches the climax alone.

"I want to swallow you whole."

"...."

"I don't want anyone else to see you."

"...."

"Promise you'll be mine alone."

She keeps murmuring as she climbs on top of me, rubbing her groin against my thigh. The wetness mixed with the heat makes her moans incoherent. I hold her waist, sitting up to nuzzle her neck, inhaling her sweet, intoxicating scent. I help her move faster, more intensely, and reach out to cup her beautiful breasts, urging her to reach her climax quickly.

"Hgnnnn."

Yu collapses face down on my legs when she comes. I turn her over, kissing her face tenderly as she drifts off, exhausted from the passion.

"Sweet dreams, my dear."

"The dream would be even better if you hugged me."

She pulls me to lie on top of her, hugging me tightly.

"Stay like this, don't go anywhere."

"Mm."

"Sweet dreams, darling."

"Sweet dreams, darling."

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Last night, Yu went home around three in the morning. When I went down to see her off, I glanced at her fancy European car and raised an eyebrow slightly. The sweet-faced girl stood there, looking embarrassed, as if she still felt guilty.

"Are you sure you're not mad about me being rich?"

"If I'm mad, it's because I never knew you could drive. I have a lot to learn about you, Pixie."

"We can learn about each other for a lifetime."

"Good words"

After she left, I decided to talk to my mom about this. Another reason I found out last night why she suddenly agreed to go home, even though she ran away to avoid the arranged marriage, was partly because she wanted her family to know what she was about to do. One of those things was telling everyone that we were together. It was the bravery of the small person that made me feel bold too.

She dares to reveal herself to make everything clear. I have to do the same.

In the morning, after showering and getting ready for work, I pick up the phone and call my dad. It's rare for me to have a serious conversation with him, but I want the one who listens to me the most to know first. Then, I'll talk to the hardest person to talk to, my mom.

"Dad, please listen to what I have to say I want you to know first because I need courage."

[What's up, troublemaker? It must be important Did you break up with Mr. Kitt?]

"How did you know?"

[From your slightly surprised tone, this isn't the main issue. So, get to the point. Whatever it is, I'll listen quietly and support you.]

I bite my lip, feeling pressured. Even though Dad is kind, this isn't easy to say. I need to cross a line to find my courage, and Dad is the first step in helping me do that.

"I like women."

"...."

"And I've found the right one. If you ignore her gender, she's perfect for me in every way. I hope you'll give us a blessing."

The line remains silent. I can't guess what expression Dad has. He may be shocked, disappointed, or sad that his only daughter calls to say this early in the morning, ruining his whole day.

[I trust your judgment... I hope everything goes well.]

"...."

[You have my blessing.]

□□□□□

□ Chapter 22 □

Life is never easy, but worrying in advance doesn't help either. My dad's feedback gives me a huge boost of confidence in this love, so much so that I have to call and tell Pixie. On the other end, she sounds excited, surprised, and happy to hear that I've already made a move.

[Ms. Frung, you're amazing! You finally told your dad about us.]

"Well, I thought I had to do something. You even go back home."

I say this while standing on tiptoe in front of the elevator, not knowing what to do. The reflection of myself in the elevator mirror surprises me a bit. I'm smiling so widely right now. Wow... am I really this happy?

[So, what are you going to do next? Have you thought about it?]

"Well... I guess I need to make it clearer, like..."

[Like what?]

"Are you free on Sunday? Let's have lunch together."

[But Sunday is family day, isn't it? Don't you usually go home, Ms. Frung?]

"I am going home."

[Are you inviting me to have a meal at your house? Is that okay? I know you clear, but I didn't think you would do this. Won't Madam....]

"My mom no longer your boss. If it's not too much trouble, you can call her 'Mom'.

But maybe not..."

[What? You're going back and forth.]

"If you have another mom, you probably won't be sucking my titties anymore"

[Ms. Frung!!!]

"But it's okay. I'll let you be the 'Mommy' because I like to be the one sucking the titties more. Hehe."

[Since when did you become like this? QWREESFDSF]

The embarrassed and flustered voice from the phone makes me laugh, forgetting that I'm waiting for the elevator. What's more surprising is that I was so lost in my own world that I didn't notice others waiting for the elevator, too. Everyone is looking down at the floor, but I can see they're holding back smiles.

"Go ahead first"

I nod to the employees behind me to enter the elevator first because I don't want to squeeze in. But the real reason is that I don't know how to face them after everyone heard what I said on the phone.

[Where are you, Ms. Frung?]

"In front of the elevator."

[Did anyone hear us talking?]

"...."

[Ms. Frung!]

"See you later. Mommy. S.Y.T!"

[S.Y.T?]

"Suck ya titties."

[Ms. Frung!]

Hearing her flustered voice in the morning is a simple joy.

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Once I set my mind to something, I follow through with my plan.

I arranged for Yu to come over on Sunday morning so we could have lunch together at my house. The day before, I called my mom to tell her I was bringing my lover for lunch. As usual, Mom ordered food from the same hotel she thinks is the most delicious to impress today's guest.

"Isn't it Mr. Kitt?"

As soon as Yu appears with a new look, expensive clothes, and a polished appearance, not the casual T-shirt and shorts from our first meeting, Mom immediately asks loudly.

"No, it's not."

"But you told me you were bringing your lover for lunch today."

"Yes, Yu is my girlfriend."

I answer nonchalantly while Yu starts to step back, unsure of how to react. We agreed to make this relationship as normal as possible and acknowledged by our elders

Love is love. That's how we see it.

"What are you saying? And what about Mr. Kitt?"

"Not really my business. Yu... have a seat"

"What seat?!"

Mom snaps and pushes me aside to get a clear look at Yu.

"What's this? How much did you spend to make your her look this good?"

"What do you mean, Mom? I didn't spend anything."

"This! How much have you spent? Expensive clothes and stuff don't make your maid look better. What's the hell has gotten into you? We have a reputation to uphold. You were in a relationship with Mr. Kitt. Why are you now together with a maid? Not to mention that she's a woman."

"So what if she's a woman? It's normal nowadays. You should open your mind a bit. Moreover I didn't buy these things for her. These are all hers."

"How can a maid afford expensive clothes and accessories? Do you know why we shouldn't date poor people. No... people below our status? Because they'll take advantage of us. Frung, you're being exploited."

"Even if she skinned me alive to cover herself, I'd let her. Why do you have to insult her like that? As far as I remember, you never taught me to look down on anyone."

"Frung!"

My plan to introduce my girlfriend today is scrapped because Mom ruined the mood. Now, I'm standing face-to-face with her, neither of us backing down until Yu tugs my arm to get my attention.

"It's okay, Ms. Frung. Let's talk calmly... Mom."

"I'm not your mom."

"Madam,"

Yu sighs and tries to smile. I accidentally bare my teeth at Mom for snapping like that because I feel embarrassed and can't accept her behavior toward my lover.

"I know our relationship won't be easy. So, Madam, you can scold me all you want, but please let me explain myself first"

"What do you have to explain?"

"First of all these clothes are really mine. I'm about to start working at my family's company, so they got me appropriate outfits."

"Your family's company? Ha! You talk like you're some billionaire's kid. Don't forget you're a maid"

"It's a long story. Here's the thing..."

Yu takes out her wallet and shows her ID card to Mom. Mom reads the name and frowns slightly at the surname.

"Why does this surname sound familiar? Like I've heard it before."

"Of course, you've heard it. P' Kitt told you about his fiancée's surname. Don't you remember?"

"Mr. Kitt's fiancée?"

Mom looks at the little maid again.

"What about her?"

"Yu is the one who ran away from home because she was forced into an arranged marriage. She's the heir of the jewelry business and P' Kitt's fiancée."

I introduce my girlfriend proudly. It's like a climactic scene in a drama with grand sound effects.

"But now she's my girlfriend. Do you believe now that these are her clothes? Her bag, watch, shoes, everything is hers. I never gave her anything except my body."

"Ms. Frung!"

"Frun..."

Mom stumbles back, looking like she's about to faint.

"Mom, don't be dramatic. Fainting is for people who get heatstroke. Don't believe everything you see in dram.... Whoa!"

I say that but can't help rushing to catch her as she really starts to collapse. My mom, probably breathing too fast, gets dizzy and falls because of the stress. Dad, who's been watching, quickly runs over to help and fans her face to get some air.

"Frung, go get her some ya-hom medicine. I'll take care of her."

"I don't know how to make it."

"It's just ya-hom, Frung."

"I never do anything myself. Yu always does it."

"Where is it?"

Yu asks Dad instead, seeing that I'm still clueless.

"It's in...never mind, dear, the maid is here. Jib, make some ya-hom for Madam."

Dad orders the housemaid and helps Mom to the nearby sofa. Mom isn't seriously ill. After a while, she gets up, ready to argue again.

"I'm dreaming. This is a dream. Suddenly, the maid becomes a jewelry heir. and my proud daughter as a girlfriend. This is all crazy."

"You're not crazy. It's not a dream. It's reality, and you have to accept it."

"Accept it!?"

Mom stands up and then collapses back onto the sofa.

"Who can accept this? Being normal one moment and then suddenly becoming a pervert who likes the same sex"

"Pervert? That's too harsh. We're just normal people who love each other. Can't you accept that?"

"No. I can't"

"Dad doesn't mind. Why do you have to make it difficult?"

"Dad doesn't mind because he also li..."

Mom stops and glances at her husband before pursing her lips.

"No. I can't accept it. You're my pride, my perfect daughter. How can I accept you liking another woman?"

"I've never disappointed you. I did whatever you wanted, whether it was about what or where I studied. I never refused you anything, but can you give me just this one thing, Mom."

"Are we alone in this world? Do we have no reputation to uphold anymore? What about business credibility and connections?"

"What does that have to do with me having a girlfriend? If you want me to marry a rich guy to merge businesses, let me tell you, that's so outdated. If you want to work with someone, just do a joint venture. It's that simple Stop being so old- fashioned with this 'marriage of convenience' nonsense."

"No way. I won't allow it. And what about you, Frung? You're dating a woman. How are you going to have kids?"

"Then we just won't have any. With an economy like this, the pandemic, and the cost of raising a child, do you even know how much that is? If it's such a big deal, we can do IVF."

"I won't allow it!"

Mom screams like in a soap opera, and it leaves me stunned. This is it the influence of media. In other countries, people don't scream when they don't get their way. Only in Thailand do they mimic villains from TV shows, and my mom is one of them.

"This time, I won't give in either."

"Then don't you call me 'mom' ever again!"

"Mom?!"

I look at Mom, shocked by her stubborn refusal. The sweet-faced person next to me tugs at my sleeve, signaling me to stop arguing and retreat for now. Clearly, we won't get anywhere today.

"Let's talk when you're calmer, Mom."

"Next time we talk, I'll still say the same thing. I won't allow it."

"Run away together."

Dad, who's been listening quietly, finally speaks up in a calm voice. This shocks Yu and me even more than Mom's scream.

"What?!"

"Dad..."

"I'm serious. Just run away together. If the people around you are such a problem, then just go live together, just the two of you."

Dad looks at Mom and clenches his fist.

"Don't make the same stupid mistake I did, destroying your own happiness for the sake of the elders and ruining another woman's life, turning her into someone like this."

"..."

"Someone pitiful like you."

□□□□□

□ Chapter 23 □

The atmosphere, which was already tense, becomes even more strained when Dad raises his voice. Since I was a child, I've always seen Dad with a calm smile, speaking little and letting Mom manage my life in her motherly way. If it wasn't something serious, Dad wouldn't get involved at all. From my perspective, it seemed like he respected Mom quite a bit. But today, everything seems different. Mom is the one causing a scene, and Dad is the one trying to calm things down. My dad's words carry a hidden meaning that makes me curious and a bit speculative, but I don't dare to guess too far. I just stay silent and watch the situation unfold

"Don't you pity me! Stop looking at me like that!"

Mom explodes, forgetting that it's not just family here but also Yu. Yu reaches out to hold my hand tightly as if to give me strength or perhaps seek help because she's afraid Mom might lash out at her. Dad glances our way and nods slowly.

"Go back first. I'll handle this."

"Yes"

Dad's words sound like a suggestion, but if you listen closely, it's an order. With Yu still here, Dad can't fully handle this situation. Yu and I leave without even touching our food. The entire ride in the car is silent because I don't know what to say. Everything seems terrible. Even though I come prepared, it's worse than I imagined.

"It's okay. Ms. Frung."

Yu touches the back of my hand and gently strokes it. I don't dare to look her in the eye because the family issues make me feel so ashamed.

"I'm sorry it turned out this way"

"I knew from the start it wouldn't be easy. This is just the beginning. You haven't even met my family yet."

Thinking about that, I look at her, starting to feel a bit scared. Yu gives a weak smile.

"Is your family very strict?"

"Why do you think I ran away from home?"

"What? We've already overcome financial and status obstacles. Why does it seem so difficult? If I were a man, it'd be better"

"Then we probably wouldn't be in love"

"Why?"

"Because I like you as a woman. If you were a man, we mightn't have met at the cram school. I wouldn't have dared to walk around naked to tease you"

Hearing that, I smile slightly

"So, walking around naked was really to seduce me, huh?"

"Well, it worked, didn't it?"

"How can you be sure I'd play along? You're a woman, too."

"It's like there's a feeling. It's hard to explain. I sensed that if I pushed a little more, you'd definitely waver. Maybe it was the first time we made eye contact when you were nervous and had a funny demeanor, something like that."

"You know-it-all I didn't even realize I liked you."

"I think I'm attractive to both men and women. Back in school, many girls hit on me.

"Hmm?"

I pull my neck back a bit as the car stops at a red light.

"Really? Girls can hit on other girls? I never knew that before. I thought only you dared to do something like this. I'm shocked."

"Cute. I like your shocked gesture. Do it again."

I place my hand on my chest again.

"I'm shocked"

"So cuuuuuute. I want it."

"What do you want?"

"What else do I want from you?"

Yu blinks rapidly like a child who gets a new toy, making me lean back slightly in surprise

"Just me acting shocked makes you want to do it with me? Why are your desires this easily ignited?"

"It happens only with you. With others, I'm not like this."

"How would I know? You never had anyone else."

"Did I ever say that?"

"Hm?"

I sit up straight and furrow my brows. She raises an eyebrow and nods forward.

"The light's green"

"What do you mean? You used to date someone?"

"The car behind us is honking"

"Pixie, are you serious or joking?"

"Hmm. Ms. Frung, if your P' Kitt met me, do you think he'd like me?"

"You're trying to annoy me, aren't you?"

"They say jealousy makes people more passionate Hehe.

She didn't answer my question as if she intended to leave it a mystery. Her reason was, so that you will always think of me, which I must admit, worked. No matter what I'm doing-even while sitting at my computer working right now, I still wonder about what she hinted at.

That's right. I never asked if she had a boyfriend before. Or maybe I did but didn't get an answer, or I just don't remember.

But with her unique charm and tactics, I think many people must've hit on her. Even the food delivery guy, after seeing her once, messaged her on LINE and risked getting reported for harassment. Mysteries need to be solved. Just as I'm about to grab my phone to text Yu, a call from my secretary comes through, saying there's a visitor. And that visitor is..

"Why did you come yourself. Dad? I could've gone see you."

Someone who almost never shows up at my workplace unless there's a major shareholders meeting comes in a casual polo shirt and slacks, indicating this isn't an official visit. Dad waves for me to sit back down and pulls a chair to sit across the table to talk.

"If we talked at home, we wouldn't go anywhere."

"I haven't asked how things were after I left. I didn't dare call, afraid the situation would still be tense."

"That's why I came to see you. As for your mom, she's holed up in her bedroom, not talking to anyone"

"Oh okay."

"...."

"...."

We both fall silent. I don't know what to say next. There were so many questions I wanted to ask before, but I was afraid of the answers, so I chose to stay quiet. And Dad, probably guessing what I want to know, starts speaking first.

"I'll tell you why your mom is so adamantly opposed to it while I am on your side."

I don't know if I should listen to this. When Dad and Mom argued the other day, I thought I heard Mom slip something out, making me choose to shun away any further information. That's right when it's about someone close to us, we act like we can't accept it. And it's even harder if that person is our child or grandchild.

And probably our dad, too!.

"Okay"

We both fall silent again. I clasp my hands on the table and smile at Dad as if to encourage him. Or maybe I should just say he doesn't have to tell me if it's hard for him. But before I can do anything, Dad starts speaking.

"Your mom and I were forced into an arranged marriage..."

A lot of stories spill from Dad's mouth, and my job is just to listen quietly. Dad and Mom were set up to meet, and their parents approved of the marriage without caring if either had previous lovers. Suitability was the only important thing, and it'd bring their businesses together well.

Back then, Dad's family business wasn't this great until he married Mom, the daughter of a big bank owner. A lot of capital flowed in, allowing Dad to expand and branch out the product line, leading to what our family has today. My company, which deals with a web search engine, is one of the subsidiaries that branched out but still falls under Dad's influence.

The reasons Dad had to comply so much were ambition and the parents.

Dad used to think having a big company and lots of money would make him happy. But no, as time went on, he became emotionless, especially with Mom, whom he didn't love. Having me was the most awkward outcome, but luckily, I was an obedient child, never causing trouble for them. I was the only hope for taking over his business in the future and the hope for Mom's idea of perfection.

"I had a lover"

"...."

"A boyfriend."

Even though I could guess, hearing it from him makes me feel indescribable. It's too suffocating. I think I understand my mom a bit now.

"Mom knew about this all along, didn't she?"

"Yes, that's why she's so opposed to your situation."

"While you understand me very well."

"Yeah"

Dad looks at me steadily before asking bravely.

"How do you feel knowing this?"

"Shocked, but I get it."

Maybe because I'm a daughter, I sympathize with Mom a lot, too. I'm quite unsure. I lick my teeth in thought and look at Dad.

"Actually, you didn't have to tell me this. It must've been hard for you."

"I had to tell you so you'd understand why your mom is so opposed. As I said... your mom is very pitiful. Nowadays, your mom and I live like strangers. We have separate bedrooms and only talk about you. And now it seems we can't even talk about you anymore."

"Did you ever go back to talk to your ex-boyfriend?"

"Never."

"Why not?"

"Because it'd hurt both him and your mother."

Dad says, almost like he's talking to himself.

"If I go back to him, I'm afraid I won't come back again."

"...."

"When you get older, you realize life is very short. You should grab whatever happiness you can. But, you know... if I hadn't married your mother, I wouldn't have a lovely daughter like you to pour my heart out with."

"Have you ever told anyone this before?"

"Never. You're the first"

.

.

Dad left, and it seemed like the story he told had completely replaced the thoughts of Yu that were swirling in my head earlier. By the time I

remembered to reply to her message, she'd already sent a sticker with a pouting face.

Yu:

You didn't reply to my message.

Yu:

I don't love you anymore.

Frung:

I was just lost in thought.

Frung:

My dad came to the office just now. We talked a bit.

Yu:

Are you okay?

.

The message makes me smile a little before I reach for the phone from my secretary. She informs me that a guest named 'Kitt' is here to see me.

Frung:

Not okay. P' Kitt is here.

Yu:

He's definitely here to bother you.

Yu:

Send him away quickly. I'm jealous, you know!

.

This is what it feels like when someone acts all jealous and possessive. It's kind of cute I keep that smile in my heart before inviting P' Kitt in, standing to greet him respectfully. Lately, it seems like I've been showing him a bad attitude because I was too hung up on Yu's photos. The handsome man walks in wearing a formal suit but looks exhausted like he hasn't slept.

"Hello, P" Kitt,"

I say, giving him a polite war, and he returns the gesture before looking me in the eyes.

"I want to talk to you about that day. I'm not a persistent person, but I still don't get what happened. We can end things amicably, but I need to know the reason. I'm a mathematician kind of guy; if I can't solve the problem, it's hard for me to move on."

P Kitt has always been someone who makes sense. It's my fault for not being clear with him I invited him to dinner at home and then broke up with him on the way back. No normal person does that (but I'm a normal person, though).

"Please, have a seat."

"If I sit, I'm afraid we'll talk for too long. Standing is better, you can be brief... I know you don't like to drag things out. What happened?"

I give him a small smile before sighing a little It's like the difficulty of deciding to fire an employee to cut losses. They didn't do anything wrong, but they have to be let go because of my own mistakes.

"I like someone else more than you."

"So, while we were in a relationship, you had someone else?"

"It's not like that I'm not so terrible that I'd keep someone as a backup but it was a feeling that told me not to drag it out. Better to cut it off early so neither of us gets hurt. And the other person doesn't have to feel like they are in a secret relationship anymore."

"Okay"

"I'm sorry for playing with your feelings. I tried."

"I know you tried, very hard even."

"Why are you such a good person?"

I look at P' Kitt with gratitude. He's mature and generous enough not to be angry or hate me.

"When I think that someday you'll marry someone else, I feel jealous"

"If you're jealous, why did you leave me?"

"I'm not good enough. Besides. if we got married, we'd end up breaking up anyway because I realized later..."

"Realized what?"

"Realized that I like women."

My answer leaves P' Kitt stunned for a moment before he nods in understanding.

"Hmm, I see. I understand now"

"I'm sorry. Please don't be mad at me."

"Like I said I still want to see that maid."

"P' Kitt."

He smiles at me through his tears. Mentioning the maid means he has some idea, which makes me look down at my desk in shame until his large hand gently rests on my head

"It's okay. It's good. I didn't like you that much yet. Ending it early, we can still be good friends."

"Thank you."

"Let's have dinner sometime. Bring that maid. I really want to see what kind of person won your heart."

□□□□

□ Chapter 24 □

Ever since I cleared things up with P' Kitt, I feel like a huge weight has been lifted off my chest. Luckily, the handsome guy was quite understanding. Even when I told him directly that I liked women, he still treated me with respect. We went from being potential lovers back to being friends. I tested this by messaging him on LINE, and he responded normally, even inviting me to a new Michelin-starred restaurant he found.

Kitt:

Bring your girlfriend, too. I'll treat you both. Eating alone is lonely.

Frung:

No way. What if you like my Pixie? She's really pretty.

Kitt:

What kind of person do you think I am?

Frung:

You're a good person, but I'm possessive.

Kitt:

You're cute.

.

I smile at his response. Of course, Yu is always watching my every move. She scrunches her nose in annoyance while we watch a series together.

"Smiling so much. Hmph"

"P" Kitt is nice. He even said to invite you to dinner, and he'll treat us."

"Praising him a lot, huh? You must regret breaking up with him."

"Of course, but I can't help it. I like you more."

"Well, now I really want to meet him. He was my ex fiancée, you know."

"Don't tease me."

"Can you tell when I'm teasing? Hehe, I like seeing you get possessive."

Yu puts her legs over my lap and rests her head on my shoulder. She looks like a little kid sitting on her dad's lap, watching TV.

"By the way, have you talked to your mom yet?"

I sigh at this since our argument, I haven't been home. Even though a week has passed, which included Sunday, I still haven't gone to see my mom. It's like I'm protesting, waiting for her to call and apologize first.

Sometimes. I can be so childish

"Not yet. I know it won't go well if I go back."

"Have you tried talking you need to understand her. This kind of thing hurts if it happens to someone close"

I know that, but I just don't want to go back and argue with her. It always ends in anger. Even my usually calm dad lost his temper with her that day.

"I'll try to talk to her, but not anytime soon"

"We knew from the start it wouldn't be easy. Even you took a while to accept the truth and even fired me once"

"Why are you defending my mom so much today?"

"I don't want you to have problems with your family. You haven't even met my family yet."

I straighten up, feeling a bit uneasy Yu, noticing my reaction, gently rubs my arm to comfort me.

"Is your family strict?"

"Probably as strict as yours. I've already hinted to them that I have a girlfriend"

"And what did they say?"

"They didn't accept it. They keep bringing up P' Kitt. What's so great about him?"

Yu makes a face like she's chewing something bitter. I start to feel insecure, realizing I might be compared to P' Kitt by Yu's family.

"But when I think about it. P' Kitt is perfect. I can't compete with him at all."

"No matter how great he is, if I don't want him, what can anyone do? Besides. you shouldn't worry. It's not like he likes me. He was thrilled when I ran away from home. Otherwise, he wouldn't be with you."

"Now I'm really worried."

"Don't worry about things that haven't happened yet. If there're too many troubles, we can follow your dad's advice."

"Are you suggesting we run away?"

"If it comes to that, will you go with me?"

"Yes"

"You answered without thinking."

"What else can I do? There's no other choice."

"Then don't worry. We'll handle this together."

Yu starts to get playful, slipping her hand under my shirt and kissing my neck, making me shiver.

"And tonight, I'll take the lead."

"You always do."

"You never start first."

We make out on the couch, and I forget my earlier worries as Yu undresses and climbs on top of me."

How could I not run away with her?

.

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Even though today isn't Sunday, after thinking it over, I decided to visit home. Even if I don't want to argue, I should let my mom see me. When I step into the house, I find her drinking water in the kitchen in her pajamas, indicating she hasn't gone out and has probably been in her room all day.

"Mom."

My call makes her pause before she finishes her glass of water.

"Did you forget something here?"

Since I don't usually come home on weekdays, she asks, pretending to sound surprised, though her face remains neutral.

"I forgot that I should come home for family day. So I'm here to make up for it. Have you lost weight?"

"Probably. I haven't been eating much."

"Then have dinner with me tonight."

"Mm."

Mom is more agreeable than usual, or maybe she's too tired to argue. We don't touch on the sensitive topic, we just sit facing each other at dinner, with Dad at the head of the table. The atmosphere is so tense it's suffocating. Sometimes, I think her old, talkative, bossy self was better than this. I'm not used to this quiet version of her.

"I told our daughter that I'm gay."

Mom almost drops her spoon but catches it in time. I'm just as shocked by Dad's bluntness

"Are you crazy?"

"I want her to understand why you reacted against it so strongly.

"So now you understand her completely, and I'm the enemy she has to fight."

"One side supports, the other opposes. That's family."

"This is the most shameful thing. It's so sensitive you shouldn't have told her about this"

Mom looks at Dad with teary eyes, avoiding my gaze out of embarrassment.

"Don't be ashamed, Mom. I understand."

"Of course you do. You're both perverts!"

Okay, now she's back to yelling, which oddly makes me feel better, though I'm also angry at her words. Just as I'm about to leave the table to cool off in the bathroom, Yu messages me.

"I need to take care of something. You two talk."

"What? Why can't you do it here? That maid texted, didn't she?"

"Yes, you're so smart, Mom."

I sarcastically reply and call Yu instead of texting back. Mom, seeing my defiance, slams her utensils down but doesn't yell, maintaining some dignity. Once I'm away from the dining room, I speak to Yu as soon as she answers.

"Sorry for the delay. I was quarreling with Mam."

[You're at your parents home? Good girl. I like the word quarreling. You're so cute.]

"Really? Just saying that is cute?"

[Everything you do is cute. Did you call me just to avoid your mom? I just texted you.]

"Yeah. What are you doing?"

[You'll be surprised.]

"I'm ready. What's more surprising than being called a pervert by your mom?"

[Oh, sweetie...]

"It's okay. I knew it wouldn't be easy. So, what's the surprise?"

[Mr. Kitt and his family are at my house. My parents surprised me with a matchmaking visit.]

"What!"

I make the shocked gesture.

"That really is surprising. How's it going?"

[He's handsome, has a deep voice, clean. But I almost slapped him when he spoke.]

"He talked shit to you?"

[Hehe, even your swearing is cute...No! Every time I see his mouth, I imagine you kissing him.]

"Being possessive, huh?" I laugh.

"I was figuring myself out. Kissing him and you felt different."

[Should I kiss him back to reclaim you's kisses?]

"Don't be mean. So, how's it going after the surprise?"

[I haven't done anything yet. He's nice to you, so I didn't want to embarrass him by revealing we're dating. But overall, he's polite, makes eye contact, has good manners, and is rich, offering to treat us to dinner.]

"And what did you say?"

[I agreed out of politeness, but honestly, I won't go.. Oops, my mom's calling me. I'll update you later. Don't be jealous. I'm being forced to meet him.]

"Who's the one being jealous? Wasn't you about to slap him?"

[Hehe, true. Scew him.]

"What?"

[I'm off now.]

Honestly, I heard what she said, but I asked again because I wanted to hear it one more time. It sounded cute. After finishing the call and preparing to head back to the dining room, P' Kitt sends me a message on my phone, which makes me a bit annoyed.

He just met my girlfriend, and now he's texting me. Hmph.

Kitt:

Frung, we promised we'd have a meal together. Remember?

Frung:

I do. You said you'd treat me

Kitt:

Wow, you remember that well.

(Of course, I remember. Pixie just told me that you were acting generously and offering to treat her. Money must come easy for him.)

Kitt.

So, I was thinking of inviting you to dinner this Saturday. Are you free?

Kitt:

You can bring your girlfriend.

Frung:

You're really eager to meet my girlfriend, aren't you?

Kitt:

It's not like that. If you go with me alone, it might look bad. Besides, I'll bring a friend too.

Kitt:

It'll be a double date.

Frung:

Double date? Do you have a new girlfriend, P' Kitt? What... why do I feel annoyed?

Frung:

You got over me so quickly?

Kitt:

If you hadn't dumped me, I wouldn't have met her. I'm tired of typing. I'll call you.

.

He really does call me. I've been away from the dining table for too long, and I have to stay and talk for a bit. Why does he want to have dinner with me this much?

"Yes, P' Kitt?"

I answer the call. His excited tone surprises me because P' Kitt usually controls his emotions well. He's never sounded like this before.

[So, here's the thing I feel a bit guilty saying this, but it's in the past now. I think maybe I didn't like or love you that much.]

"You called to say this? That hurts."

I laugh, standing with my hand on my hip, even though he can't see me.

"Who is this woman?"

[This is the first time I've felt this way... I think I fell in love with her the moment i saw. her in person.]

"Hm? Who is she? A celebrity? What do you mean by 'in person'?"

[Do you remember I told you about the fiancée my parents arranged for me?]

At this point, I get a strange, uneasy feeling. This can't be.....

"I remember. Your smiley fiancée in the photo."

[That's her... The moment I looked into her eyes, I knew I was completely in love. She's the real deal, Frung. Thank you for breaking up with me. I'm not being sarcastic... If I'd met her later, we would've ended our relationship painfully.]

"P' Kitt, don't tell me you like your fiancée who you met today."

[How did you know I met her today? I haven't told you anything... Or did I slip and forget... Yes, yes, I'm coming.]

P' Kitt shouts to someone on the other end, then quickly returns to our conversation.

[Anyway, see you this Saturday. My treat. Bring your girlfriend. I'll bring my fiancée too.]

"What's your fiancée's name? So I can call her properly."

Even though I already know, I want to hear it with my own ears. And it's just as I expected

[Her name is Yu.]

Ugh, I want to slap him!!!

□ Chapter 25 □

So, I agreed to have dinner with him, which, to be honest, felt really awkward when I found out that his date was actually my girlfriend. Yu, who knew everything, agreed to go instead of declining from the start.

But then again, I can't really expect her to refuse when even I can't do it myself.

P' Kitt picks me up at my condo and says we should just take one car. But when he sees I don't bring my maid along, he can't help but ask.

"Where's your maid?"

She's sitting right next to you.

"She's not working today"

"Is she really a maid? If you're dating, why don't you live together? I thought you and your maid were already living together"

Yu glances through the rearview mirror and smiles, raising her eyebrows playfully at me, which, of course, P' Kitt can't see.

"What would my parents think?"

"So, you're dating without your parents approval?"

P' Kitt says understandingly.

"Well, I get it."

He speaks as if musing to himself before smiling at Yu, who has been sitting quietly for a while.

"Oh, I forgot to introduce you to my sis. Yu, this is Frung."

"Hello. Mr. Kitt's sister? You don't look alike at all."

"We're close friends."

"You sure seem close. Wow... I wish I had one."

Yu smiles sweetly at P' Kitt with a hint of something more. I don't know what it means, but from what I see, P Kitt doesn't see it the same way I do. He smiles and laughs nervously.

"Frung and I have known each other for a long time. We go back a long way."

"Strange. There is someone as beautiful as her, and you didn't try to date her If it were me.."

The sweet faced girl looks at me through the rearview mirror again and smiles, clearly pleased. Today, she seems quite mischievous. Maybe it's the branded clothes and expensive perfume that make her look like a rich, cunning girl, unlike the Yu who stays with me, wearing T-shirts and shorts, cleaning the house all day.

"What if it were you?"

I tease back, feeling like I'll be a supporting character today and don't want to be overshadowed.

"Would you try to date me?"

"Something like that. I don't mind whether it's a girl or a guy. I love someone who has a good look, especially someone as cute as you I wouldn't let her slip away."

"You're very confident."

"Well, I have some experience."

We exchange glances through the mirror, not fighting but teasing each other. with P' Kitt completely oblivious.

"Eh, what do you mean?"

P' Kitt clears his throat a bit when Yu reveals her sexuality. She shows no intention of hiding her sexuality

"Since we're here to get to know each other today. I don't plan to hide anything from you. Mr. Kitt... I date women sometimes."

She smiles coolly and giggles.

"These days, people are more open minded. I don't want to hide it from you. Finding out later might feel like being deceived."

"O...Okay"

"What about you. Ms. Frung, do you like women?"

"I do like to look at them if they're beautiful."

Yu turns from the front seat and looks at me with a mischievous smile, the kind she always has when she feels victorious.

"Would you look at someone like me?"

"Already looking."

"Attagirl."

So cute. Even though she acts all mischievous, she's still adorable in every way. Yu, who never wore perfume, felt like an innocent girl. But today, just a little perfume turns her into a sexy young woman.

"What perfume are you wearing?"

The question, unrelated to the conversation, makes Yu, who initially looked mischievous, show a bit of a Pixie-like expression as if caught off guard.

"Dior."

"Lovely."

"The perfume?"

I lean in and mouth silently for her to read my lips.

"You."

Her mischievous face slowly turns red as if her blood is circulating too well. She then sits back normally and clears her throat.

"You haven't answered me yet. If it were me, would you try to date me. Ms Frung?"

"She won't. She already has a girlfriend"

P' Kitt, who's looking ahead, answers for me, perhaps thinking it's a difficult question for me to answer.

"She also dates women.

"I already knew that. I was asking if she didn't have a girlfriend, would she try to date me?"

"How did you know she dates women?"

There's a moment of silence, probably because Pixie slips out, making P' Kitt curious.

"Probably when you asked if Ms. Frung didn't bring her maid, I guessed the maid must be a woman. Someone important enough to invite for dinner must be a close friend or a girlfriend. So, I guessed she must have a girlfriend.

"Very observant."

P' Kitt looks at Yu admiringly, then asks for my opinion through the mirror.

"What do you think, Frung? Does she suit me?"

"Do you need her opinion? If she says no, will you not have dinner with me?"

The playful question is testing me on how to respond. If I say 'yes, it means I support them. If I say 'No.' P' Kitt will be in an awkward position.

"No"

I see Yu's pleased smile at my answer. Only P' Kitt starts to look worried and speaks hesitantly.

"Come on, Frung. Don't do me like that"

"This woman is a 'No.'"

"How so?"

P' Kitt starts to look visibly stressed, gripping the steering wheel tightly and feeling bad for asking in the first place.

"Ms. Yu likes women If you date her, you'll be paranoid every time she meets a woman, and even more so when she meets a man... not to mention the food delivery guy who confessed to her on LINE"

When I mention this, my voice starts to sound really irritated. I was the one who went down to scold that delivery guy to stop bothering my maid out of jealousy. This girl is good at flirting. It's infuriating.

"I wouldn't be like that."

"She makes a good point, though. Dating me might make you paranoid, wondering if I really like you. Like now, you don't even know how I feel about Ms. Frung."

"What?"

"Ms. Frung is so cute. I like her."

Pixie's straightforward answer makes me a bit flustered. I quickly lean back in my seat, resting my chin on my hand, and look out the window, feeling awkward. It's a mix of embarrassment and not knowing how to act.

"I know."

"Know what?"

"Know that I'm cute."

"Hehe."

The giggle that I usually hear when she's pleased with something slipped out. Since sitting together in the car, Yu has only smiled. This is probably the first giggle in the car this time.

"What are these two girls joking about?"

P' Kitt laughs at the strange situation as if trying to make the previous conversation seem like a joke.

"I wasn't joking."

I lock eyes with her through the rearview mirror again.

"I really like her"

She's hinted this much. Now, it's as if she's trying to pressure me subtly waiting for me to tell P' Kitt myself. Yu probably decided not to hide anything about herself. But that means I have to cooperate with her. If I'm ready to tell P Kitt, so is she.

"I'm so hungry Where's the restaurant"

I change the subject. Yu wrinkles her nose a bit and smiles, not really angry because she knows me too well. She knows I don't want to hurt his feelings too much. But I don't plan to drag it out for long. When I broke up with him, I didn't give him any hope I can do it again today.

"Pattaya"

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The handsome guy drives about an hour to Pattaya just to take us out for dinner. This restaurant is famous online and lives up to its reputation. The atmosphere and taste are unmatched. Our table is filled with food that can feed ten people. Yu excuses herself to the bathroom, giving P' Kitt a chance to talk to me alone.

"Frung, why did you say that in front of her?"

"What did I say?"

"That she is a 'No'.

"I didn't want to lie to you. You can't handle her."

I tell him honestly. Besides being mischievous, she's also a schemer. Do you think someone who could sneak out of the house without caring about anything like Pixie is ordinary? She approached me so smoothly and got me, too.

"She doesn't seem dangerous at all. You just said that. Sitting together in the car. I was really nervous when you said that. It's our first dinner together."

"Yet, you still brought me along."

"I didn't want her to think I brought her to Pattaya for anything inappropriate, just for dinner."

"Then why do you take us so far for dinner?"

"I want her to remember that our first date is at the beach."

"Did you tell her that I'm your ex?"

"Who would dare? What would she think if I told her I brought my ex to meet my new girlfriend?"

"I don't understand you."

"You're my friend, someone I can talk to about this... I think we're quite close."

Gulp

As I mention this, I feel a sense of shame. He sees me as his closest confidant. He brings me along because he wants Yu to know more about his world and understand what kind of person he is. Or, to put it more accurately, he brings me to cheer him on.

"Aren't you afraid that Ms. Yu might like me instead?"

"Huh?"

I lock eyes with P' Kitt and ask another question.

"And aren't you afraid that I, who already like women, might like Ms. Yu?"

"That's ridiculous. You have a girlfriend. People don't fall in love that quickly."

"Well, even you liked her from the first time you met her. Time doesn't matter....Who knows, maybe after today's meal, I and Ms. Yu might end up together."

"Don't joke like that."

Even though he laughs it off, I can sense a certain fear. Yu has hinted at so many things in the car, and she expects me to finish the job. P' Kitt should be wary of these signals by now.

"I'm back. What do I miss?"

Yu intentionally sits next to me, even though the original seating arrangement was next to P'Kitt.

"We were just talking about general stuff. Let's eat. The food has been sitting here for a while"

"Indeed, it looks delicious."

Yu picks up a serving spoon to scoop some deep fried sea bass with fish sauce, with P. Kitt helping. But she shakes her head slightly.

"I can do it myself, Mr. Kitt. Please, help yourself."

"Oh... okay."

"Here, eat a lot. Ms. Frung. You're too skinny."

Yu puts some food on my plate and props her arm, looking at me.

"You haven't been eating breakfast lately, have you?"

Yu's question makes me smile awkwardly. I haven't been eating much because I'm too lazy to cook and don't know how to respond, especially with P' Kitt watching us talk so intimately.

"Ms. Yu. please eat. Don't worry about me."

"How can I not worry? Did you skip breakfast just to eat this meal all at once."

Yu turns to P' Kitt with a seemingly vengeful look.

"Mr. Kitt, too. Bringing us this far for a meal, Ms. Frung must be starving. It's already two in the afternoon. What if she gets a stomach ulcer?"

"You seem to get close to Frung very quickly."

Yu doesn't respond and starts putting food on her own plate. We eat quietly until Yu initiates the conversation again.

"Before meeting me, I heard you had a girlfriend. Why did you break up?"

She asks P' Kitt, even though she knows. P' Kitt, uncomfortable with the question, takes a big gulp of water and tries to find the best answer.

"She liked someone else, but we parted on good terms."

"Why did you let her go so easily? Does that mean you didn't like her as much as you thought? For me, the more I love someone..."

Yu looks at me.

"The less I'm willing to let them go."

"Maybe you're right. I mightn't have liked her enough"

"When you were dating, what did you call your girlfriend?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you have any pet names for each other, like 'chubby or 'troublemaker."

She suddenly changes the topic catching P' Kitt off guard, but he answers.

"No, I just called her by her name"

"For me, my lover called me 'Pixie."

"That's cute. But if your ex called you that, I can't call you that"

"Of course, please don't call me that. It's reserved for the person alone."

Yu turns to me and smiles, pleased.

"So, what do you want me to call you?"

Just call me by my name for now. We're not in a relationship yet. I was just asking."

"Oh, okay."

The straightforward rejection makes P' Kitt a bit disheartened.

"And Ms. Yu, what would you like to call your lover?"

"Darling."

The word is directed at me when she says it, making my face flush red without needing a mirror to know. It's the word I use to call her when I'm in an unusual mood when she takes me to the climax while we're both naked.

"But let's save it for special moments. It adds to the mood."

Yu continues eating, and P' Kitt changes the subject.

"I heard you ran away from home. Where did you go, and what did you do?"

"You're the reason You dare to ask?"

Yu laughs, and P' Kitt smiles along

"That's why I'm asking I feel guilty."

"I stole my mom's watch and money, pawned them, got some cash, and stayed with my old high school friend. Paid cheap rent and then started looking for a job. But I couldn't use my real qualifications because the big jewelry companies in the country are owned by my family. So, I used my high school diploma to apply as a maid"

"A maid."

"Yes, I worked as a maid for a rich family for a while. They're kind."

Yu says while stroking my thigh under the table, teasing me.

"She invited me to stay with her. Luckily, I have a cute face. At first, she wanted me to be her daughter"

"Really?"

"But what kind of daughter kisses her mom and sucks her mom's boobs, right Ms. Frung?"

Seeing Yu trying to reveal more and more of our story, I start to feel guilty toward both of them. Yu is trying to make P' Kitt know the truth as soon as possible by giving hints while I remain silent, not saying anything. And P' Kitt remains clueless, looking pitiful.

"So, you and the homeowner...."

I close my eyes and interject at the climax.

"Yes, we're a couple."

P' Kitt looks at me, stunned, and Yu rests her head on my shoulder, laughing and wrapping her arm around me, pleased.

"Finally, you said it. Hehe."

"Frung..."

"She's the maid that you wanted to meet. The reason I said she couldn't come today is because you already brought her... And yes, we're a dating."

□□□□□

□ Chapter 26 □

Our answers make P' Kitt get up from the table and walk toward the beach next to the restaurant like someone who has lost their mind. He must be so shocked that he doesn't know what to do. I'm already quite worried about his feelings, so i quickly run after him to talk and clear things up, though I'm not sure if I can.

"P' Kitt, are you mad at me?"

It's a totally stupid question, but I ask anyway as if I want him to reflect on his feelings right now. The handsome guy stops walking and turns to look at me with red eyes, like someone who wants to cry but can't. His feelings are all mixed up.

"What kind of a question is that?"

"I could only think of this question... What are you mad about?"

"What am I mad about? Can't you see what happened and why I should be mad?"

It's the first time P' Kitt seriously yells at me. He's always been good at controlling his emotions because he's mature, but it seems that patience has disappeared when faced with this situation.

"P Kitt, what are you mad about?"

"Frung!"

"I want you to reflect on what you're really mad about mad that I'm dating Yu or mad that we told you the truth"

I give him options so that P' Kitt can find a good reason to respond. He pauses for a moment and then tightly presses his lips together.

"I'm mad about everything. Mad about why, out of all the women in the world, it had to be Yu. Mad about why you didn't tell me from the start that you were already dating, and I had to find out now."

"I was afraid that if I told you, you'd be hurt."

"Oh, telling me now doesn't hurt my feelings at all, huh?"

P' Kitt takes a deep breath and stands with his hands on his hips, looking at me like a giant ready to strike with a club at any moment.

"It's like you two teamed up to make me look like a fool, and then when you see me angry, you laugh together about tricking a guy."

"I'm not that kind of person

"I don't know what you two are like anymore. Right now, I don't want to see either of you"

P' Kitt walks back from the beach and heads to the table, placing five thousand-baht bills on it.

"Go ahead and eat. I'm leaving"

"P'Kitt."

I still don't give up. I run after him, pleading and not wanting to leave him alone. When people are left alone, they tend to think of bad things more than good ones. What if he suddenly gets so upset that he drives into a truck on the way home?

"Mr. Kitt."

Yu, who calmly follows, calls P' Kitt with a sweet voice. The handsome guy turns to look as if he's under a spell, and it makes me a bit annoyed because

when I called his name while running after him, he acted like he didn't hear me at all.

"Yes?"

"I understand that you're angry and don't want to see us right now."

"..."

"But since we're already here, wait until we finish eating. Then, you can drop Ms. Frung and me off at a nice hotel in Pattaya and drive home. It should be fine."

"Pixie."

I scold the sweet-faced girl who says that without any feeling.

"I can have someone from home come pick us up. That way, you can drive back alone as you want, without having to bear our presence. You brought us so far. Where can we go without a car? Isn't that right?"

It's a reasonable request but also selfish enough to be infuriating. P' Kitt turns his face away and responds briefly.

"Okay"

"Thank you"

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P' Kitt is generous enough to wait for us to finish eating, then takes us to a luxurious hotel in Pattaya before heading home as Yu planned. Now, I can only watch the taillights of his car with a heart full of guilt before glancing at Yu standing beside me.

"That was really cruel."

"The truth is cruel in every way. Gradually telling him was the wrong thing to do from the start.

"Then why didn't you tell him from the beginning?"

"You didn't plan to tell him from the start either, even after knowing about the double date. You even agreed to this"

Now it's Yu's turn to throw a fit at me. Then she strides toward the back of the hotel, where there's a swimming pool. We arrived here without any luggage except for our bags and phones. This is the most unplanned trip I've ever taken.

"Why are you suddenly mad at me? Shouldn't I be the one who's angry and upset?"

But when I protest, the sweet-faced giri turns sharply and glares at me fiercely, making me shrink back.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Double date. How could you agree to that?"

"Are you mad about that?"

"Yes, you agreed to the double date instead of telling the truth over the phone from the start. I wanted you to solve the problem yourself. Because of your hesitation, it escalated like this. You've never fixed this habit."

"What? I'm hesitant? I'm the one who told my family that I like women"

"Because if you didn't do that, you would've been pressured by your mom."

"Just now, I told P' Kitt that I'm dating you."

"Because I pressured you to. Otherwise, you wouldn't have said it. Think back, if I hadn't approached and pressured you, who knows when we would've fallen in love? Because you kept thinking of me as a pet to be cared for!"

Yu's sarcastic words sting a bit, and I think about what she said I have to admit, I am like that.

"I don't really know how to act. Back then, I couldn't distinguish between love and adoration. With P' Kitt, I didn't have the heart to hurt his feelings."

"But the result is that he got hurt anyway because of your hesitation. Why am I the only one who is firm in this relationship? It's like I'm the only one trying while you just stand by, waiting for the right moment to step in."

"...."

"I don't care how Mr. Kitt feels because he's a stranger. In this world. I only love you and you alone. So, Ms Frung, please be serious so I can feel that you like me..."

I pull her into a hug and rub her back, understanding her intentions. She just wants to teach me that hesitation and worrying about others feelings can have negative consequences. Even though Yu's method is quite cold and heartless toward P' Kitt, she doesn't care about others.

She only cares about me.

"I'm sorry."

"I don't care"

"Sorryyyyyyy"

"I don't care!"

"Sorryyyyyyyyyyy."

"Stay here for a night, and I'll forgive you."

I sigh and smile while hugging her, knowing that my apology has been accepted.

"We have to. We don't have a car. Tomorrow is Sunday. What's the big deal?"

"Get a suite room with a jacuzzi. If it has a whirlpool, even better."

"Whatever you say. Any room is fine because I have a black card."

"My rich baby. How can I not love you?"

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I've never done anything unplanned before, like staying overnight in another province-not to mention in a five-star hotel with a jacuzzi and a private balcony pool. But believe me, if you're with someone you love and are crazy about each other, you hardly swim at all.

You'd rather do other things

Now, I let Yu soak in the foamy bathtub, listening to music after we've had our fun. Of course, I don't forget to step outside to call the driver at home to arrange for a pick-up tomorrow before checking out of the hotel.

"Yes, please"

After hanging up, I continue to look out at the scenery and sigh deeply. I usually hurt someone's feelings when I have to fire an employee or criticize someone in a meeting when the topic isn't interesting. But this situation isn't like that.

Many times, I think about texting him, but I'm not sure if it's the right time. While I'm lost in thought, Yu sneaks up from behind and bites my shoulder hard, making me scream.

"Ouch, it hurts"

"You're so cute I couldn't resist."

Yu's saliva on my shoulder makes me pretend to be grossed out a bit, but I don't really mind. Then I put on a stern face.

"Acting like a child. Look, I got a bite mark."

"I'm marking my territory. If anyone sees it, they'll know you have an owner. What were you thinking about? Mr. Kitt again?"

"Yeah, thinking about whether I should call him. Is it too soon?"

"Too soon. Don't pester him. The more you pester, the angrier he gets. Haven't you ever been so angry that you get even angrier when someone apologizes? To make the other person feel worthless."

"Is there such a thing?"

"Have you ever been so angry at someone that they had to apologize?"

"Not really. If I'm mad, I just cut them out of my life. I don't have many friends, especially among coworkers. We do our work, we go home."

"And what about us?"

"What about us?"

"We do each other..... oops!"

I push Yu's face away as she cheekily speaks and bare my teeth.

"You're such a pervert!"

"I'm like this only when I'm with you."

"Should I try getting mad at you? I wonder if I'd get even angrier if you tried to make up with me."

"You won't stay mad for long. As soon as you see me crying, you'll come running to comfort me."

Yu hugs me and nuzzles her face into my shoulder affectionately

"Don't worry about Mr. Kitt. He'll move on just like when you broke up with him. I'm not close to him at all. This is only the second time we've met, not counting the first time we were introduced or the times he saw my picture. He doesn't like me that much."

This is the first time I've felt this way. I think I fell in love with her the moment I saw her in person.

Thinking about P' Kitt's words, I sigh and turn to look at the person hugging me.

"Your looks really are a weapon, Pixie."

"What do you mean? I'm beautiful, right?"

"You're alright."

"Don't lie. If I wasn't at least somewhat good-looking, you wouldn't be so fond of me, even asking me to be your daughter. Ugh, this is making me upset again. Suddenly, she frowns deeply and stomps her foot.

"Why? Why do you want to be my mom?"

"What's this talking to yourself and suddenly getting angry? Are you on your period or something?"

"If I were on my period, the water in the tub would've been red just now!"

Yu scrunches her nose before looking down at her feet and blushing.

"Oops"

"What?"

"My period really did come. I just noticed. Oh my god. Oh my god..."

The usually shameless person suddenly gets embarrassed by her unexpected period. I watch the small one rush to the bathroom with just a towel, feeling amused. I grab some tissues to clean up without any disgust because I see it as a normal thing that can catch us off guard.

Well lucky it happened now. If it'd been in the bathtub earlier, it would've ruined our sweet moment for sure.

While I'm lost in thought, my phone buzzes with a message. Glancing at the screen, I see it's from P' Kitt, and it makes me nervous to read it.

I want to read it, but I'm also scared. I don't know which feeling to handle first.

As soon as I open the message, I frown at the short text from P' Kitt. I can feel the emotion and guess the tone from every word.

Kitt: I won't back down.

□□□□□

□ Chapter 27 □

"Is he out of his mind or something?"

Yu, upon seeing the last message from P' Kitt, blurts out the first words that come to her mind. Being on her period, her mood is fiery and irritable.

"No, he just really likes you, that's all."

"You're still defending him? Don't you feel anything?"

"I'm not defending him, just explaining so you understand."

I'm not sure if it's the hormones, but Yu's words are filled with frustration. I get it, but I don't often see Yu this agitated. When we're at the condo, she's never like this. Or maybe I just never noticed because I never asked when her period was. But this time, it's clear.

"What kind of a person is he? I've made it clear that I don't like men and don't want anyone but you. Yet, he still texts saying he won't back down. How? Does he want to fist-fight me? Fine by me!"

Yu rolls up her sleeves, ready to punch the phone, making me laugh so hard I have to pull her into a hug and console her.

"Wow, so fierce. If P' Kitt saw this, he'd be scared."

"He should be. I've made it clear, yet he still wants to challenge you. What's he going to fight you with? He doesn't have boobs, and I don't like dicks."

"Pixie!"

"I just want you to understand. No need to be worried. I've dated men before and wasn't into it. You're my number one."

Yu gives me a thumb-up.

"I like sucking boobs."

"If you say another word, I'll scream at you."

"Don't you like it? If you had to choose between Mr. Kitt's chest and my boobs, which would you pick?"

"...."

"Why are you quiet? Are you hesitating?!"

"You're funny."

I burst out laughing and grab her chest, knowing I can.

"Of course, I like yours more."

"See? He'll never ever win."

Yu leans back into me, wanting me to support her weight.

"Don't be worried. I won't lose you."

"I'm not. Just telling you. Sigh... You're quite charming, aren't you? P' Kitt once told me that you were the first to make him feel this way. He fell in love the first time his eyes met yours."

"Isn't that too fast?"

"But I felt the same when I first met you."

"Then it's clearly a destiny."

There's no fairness for Yu when it comes to me. Thinking that makes me happy, knowing I'm so important in the eyes of the charming girl in front of me.

"Let's not think about others and get annoyed. Let's lie down and watch a movie on the phone. I'll go to the bathroom quick. Meanwhile, Pixie, you can choose what to watch."

Since we're at a hotel, there's no interesting movie to watch in the room. The phone is a good alternative. It might be romantic to lie close on the bed and watch a small screen together. If we get sleepy, we can just fall asleep. But... after being in the bathroom for less than three minutes, I come out to see Yu talking on my phone with someone.

"Don't think about fighting to get her..."

Hey!

I almost run to grab the phone, but Yu is quicker, dodging and speaking loudly enough for me to hear.

"Because even if you dedicate your life to competing with Ms. Frung, you'll never win. Since you dare to declare you won't back down, I'll say this now: it's useless. If you still don't get it, I'll curse you with the worst words... you son of a bi..."

I grab the phone and end the call, panting from excitement. Yu didn't get to finish her curse, but I imagined all sorts of vulgarities. She looks at me with a mischievous smile.

"What were you going to call P' Kitt?"

"I forgot."

The sweet-faced girl kicks her legs and gives me a look.

"Let's go lie down. I have a movie in mind while you were in the bathroom."

"You had time to think about a movie after that call?"

"I'm talented. I can do many things at once. Like..."

"Like what?"

"Being your maid and your wife at the same time."

"Pixie."

"Hehe, teasing you is so fun."

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The short trip to Pattaya ends. As everyone knows, Sunday is family day. I have to have dinner with my family. So, I have the driver drop Yu off at home before heading to my parents' place. But I'm surprised to see P' Kitt's car parked there.

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BA- DUM

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Suddenly, I feel uneasy. P' Kitt, whom Yu dealt with last night, is here now. Why?

As soon as I step into the house, Mom and P' Kitt, chatting in the living room, turn to smile at me as if expecting me. P' Kitt shows no signs of sadness. Mom, who used to be at odds with me after learning I was dating a woman, is now smiling brightly, making me uneasy.

"Hello, Mom. Hello, P' Kitt... How did you get here?"

I know he drove, but my question implies,

'What are you doing here?'

Luckily, P' Kitt isn't annoying and doesn't give an obvious answer.

"I had a thought."

"What thought?"

"A thought about you. So I came here to discuss it with Mom."

The familiar way he calls her 'Mom' makes me feel unsafe.

"Discuss what? What are you talking about?"

"About you dating a woman,"

Mom says straightforwardly. It seems they've accepted this truth well enough. But I didn't expect Mom to discuss this in front of P' Kitt. If she's speaking this openly, they must've talked about me already.

"What did you discuss?"

"Mr. Kitt and I agree that you're sick."

I clench my fists and glare at the handsome man who talked behind my back and called me sick. How is dating a woman an illness? If that's the case, then everyone in the world dating the same sex, including my dad, is sick too.

"Or maybe you're just misguided. So, we discussed ways to correct it."

"It's not his business."

The man in front of me is the man I always respected, and I felt guilty for wronging him, but now, I speak to him coldly, without manners, because I'm angry he's crossing the line.

"It's not, but I'm affected by this if you remember."

"We talked, didn't we? I thought being straightforward would make you understand and end the relationship on good terms."

A faint smile appears on his handsome face but quickly disappears.

"I understand, but I thought if there's a way to make you return to being the sweet 'little girl' you were, it'd be good."

"Mr. Kitt said you had a crush on him in school. It sounded cute."

Mom smiles, pleased.

"It means you liked men before. So now, you might just be misguided."

"So what? If I'm misguided, what will you and P' Kitt do?"

The house falls silent, the ticking of the wall clock the only sound.

Tick-tock

Tick-tock

The silence makes me seriously anxious, swallowing hard. P' Kitt breaks the silence with a calm answer, but to me, it's like a hammer to the head. I don't smile like he and Mom do.

"I'm here to ask for your hand in engagement."

"What..."

Everything is beyond expectation. Yesterday, he took Yu and me to dinner in Pattaya because he loved Yu. But after learning the truth and being rejected, today, he comes to propose to me?

"Are you crazy? Why are you doing this?"

"Because women should be with men."

Mom stands up, answering for the handsome man to prevent me from refusing or to interrupt my argument.

"Being engaged to Mr. Kitt might make you see things clearly."

"Mom!"

I shout, unable to tolerate her reasoning.

"Don't raise your voice at me."

"I have to. What you're thinking is fundamentally wrong. If we don't love each other, we won't. No matter how you bind me, I won't force myself to love someone I don't."

"But you liked him."

"That was the past. I was a kid. I admired him because he was smart and handsome. That's all."

"He's still smart and handsome. What's different?"

"Because I like beautiful women, Mom. I like women!"

"No, Frung, you're just confused."

"If this could be fixed, Dad would've done it long ago."

"Frung!"

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SMACK!

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Mom slaps me, but it doesn't hurt much. Right now, everyone is more shocked than anything else. I look at Mom, stunned, because she's never laid a hand on me before. As for Mom, who acted impulsively, she quickly hides her hand and turns away. It's the embarrassment of not wanting P' Kitt to know about Dad and the shame of hitting with me.

"We're done talking. I've made my decision," Mom says.

"I've made my decision, too. I'm not getting married," I reply.

"Then don't come to see me ever again."

"Okay."

"Every single baht, all the companies that I own... you won't get a single thing."

"Okay."

"Go,"

Dad, who I didn't notice standing there, touches my shoulder. He looks at Mom with equally cold eyes.

"Go live your life, Frung, if she won't give you a thing..."

"...."

"I will."

□□□□□

□ Chapter 28 □

My father suddenly appears in the middle of the argument, like a spring welling up in the dry season. My mother, who's been adamant about cutting me off, looks taken aback

"How dare you say you'll help her?"

"Because she's my daughter too. If you won't accept her for who she is, then it's my responsibility. I'm ready to support her in every way!"

My father's voice is just as firm, making my mother stomp her foot. I quickly step behind my father, realizing I now have a powerful ally.

"You can help her, but not with any money from my family."

"That's fine. I have some money left. I can support my only daughter! Let's go, Frung."

My father puts his arm around me and pushes me toward the door, ready to leave. But my mother shouts, refusing to give up.

"If you're leaving, leave the car keys and condo keycard here. That's my money, too."

I look at my mother in amazement that she's thought of this, or maybe she just wants to win.

"Okay."

I take out the car keys and the condo keycard and place them on the coffee table. I feel numb all over. I don't know what to do next. I have no car and

no place to go back to. This might be the first time I take the bus like everyone else.

"Go wherever you want!"

My father puts his arm around me, and we walk out. What started as a mother-daughter argument now includes my father. As we walk out the main gate, P' Kitt runs to block our way, looking deeply remorseful. But I'm too angry to care about his past good deeds and glare at him.

"What now? What do you want? I've got nothing left but shoes and clothes! Oh... and two thousand baht in my pocket."

I list what I have, frowning and shaking my head.

"Why do I have to tell you that? I'm telling you, I don't need your sympathy. Just venting."

"I don't want anything. I... I..."

P' Kitt looks like he's in pain, trying to say something but failing, then turns to my father.

"I apologize, sir. I didn't think it'd go this far."

"It was bound to go this far. Did you think it'd end like a fairy tale, with no one hurt and everyone being happy ever after?"

My father isn't one who likes to yell at others. Even when reprimanding P' Kitt, he remains calm, speaking softly but with a hint of sarcasm.

"I just wanted to hurt Frung a bit. I never thought she'd have to leave home."

"Well, you did it. I'm hurt. I'm homeless and have no car to drive."

"Then tell me where are you going. I'll take you."

"No need for your kindness. It's too late."

I pull my father out the gate without looking back. I don't know what face P' Kitt is making now, and I don't care. I'm more worried about my mother, who has to stay alone in the big house because Dad is with me. He seems to want to teach her a lesson.

"Where are we going, Dad?"

"To a hotel for a few nights."

"Then you're going back home, right?"

I glance at my father walking beside me and sigh in relief.

"Good. I thought you were leaving Mom."

"I won't do something like that at my age. But a stubborn old woman like her needs to be taught a lesson. She can't always get her way. Life isn't that easy."

"Like you, right?"

I ask with a hidden meaning. My father nods and laughs as if it's no big deal.

"Yeah, like me. That's how I know it's not easy to get everything you want. But what about you? What will you do next? Your mom took the condo and car. Want to stay at the hotel with me for a few days? Teach her a lesson. When she comes to apologize, we can go back

"That might be hard for my case. She'll probably stand firm unless I get engaged to P' Kitt. And he... how could he think of that? He loves another woman but comes asking to get engaged to me."

"He might think if you love her so much, he'll separate you, making you two hurt."

I wrinkle my nose and bare my teeth as if facing P' Kitt, just as I'm muttering something rude under my breath, my phone rings. Yu calls, as

usual, sounding cheerful until she almost screams when she hears I've lost everything because of P' Kitt.

[Is this your 'good person? See his true colors now? When things don't go his way, he burns with choler.]

"Do people still use the word 'choler' these days?"

I laugh, seeing Yu is angrier than I am. But the small girl sounds furious.

[Where will you stay?]

"Maybe a hotel. I'm homeless now. I have no job, no car. Do you still love me?"

[It's okay. I'm rich... Come stay at my house.]

"Hmm?"

[I always go to your house. Now it's your turn to come to mine.]

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At first, Yu wanted to pick me up, but I felt it'd be more convenient to send me the location. Then, I called a taxi to go to her place. My father went his way to find a hotel, seeming to enjoy this escape from home.

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Rrrrrr

I press the doorbell on the large wooden gate, which blocks the view inside. The house is surrounded by trees, making it hard for a thief to climb in, not knowing what it looks like inside. The high walls and solid gate add to the mystery. But as soon as someone opens the gate, I see a modern-style house, newly built, probably less than ten years old. The well-maintained garden shows the family is quite wealthy.

Of course, they have to be... they run a diamond business.

"Ms. Frung!"

Yu's cheerful voice comes from inside the house before she rushes to hug me as if we haven't seen each other in ages. She looks me up and down curiously

"Where are your things?"

"I got kicked out suddenly, so I have nothing but myself and my heart."

"It's okay. I don't plan on wearing clothes when I'm with you anyway. Ouch!"

I knock her head for being cheeky, making her giggle and stick out her tongue before linking arms and pulling me inside.

"Come on, let's go to my room. I always thought of bringing you home, but I didn't think it would be this exciting."

"Yeah, you seem overly excited."

"What's going on, Yu?"

"Mom, this is Ms. Frung, the friend I told you about."

A middle-aged woman in a flowing nightgown speaks up. Hearing she's Yu's mother, I quickly give her my greeting in respect, feeling a bit nervous.

"Oh, Ms. Frung, hello."

Hmm... strange.

Why doesn't anyone in this house have a hostile attitude? They even act welcoming, as if they know me. I glance at Yu, who still smiles broadly, questioning her before smiling at her mother.

"Sorry to trouble you."

"It's no trouble at all. I never knew Yu and Frung were friends. Did you go to the same school? Hmm?"

Her mother smiles warmly. I'm still hesitant, so Yu takes over.

"We met at cram school and then reconnected as adults."

"I often see your mother at parties. How is she?"

"Not very well."

I answer truthfully, feeling a bit dazed. Her mother looks at me, eyes wide.

"What's wrong with Ms. Mon?"

"She's very self-centered."

I laugh awkwardly, but the older woman thinks I'm joking.

"Oh, I thought something serious happened. I just saw her recently. Yu said you're staying over tonight, right? Make yourself at home. It's nice... my daughter finally has a good friend. She's always been a bit rebellious"

"Yes, I'll take my friend to my room now."

Yu quickly pulls me upstairs, locks the door, and listens to make sure no one is outside. Then she jumps on me like a monkey. Caught off guard, I fall back onto the bed, closing my eyes because I'm exhausted from the day's events. Come to think of it... I've been through a lot today.

"You look so tired."

"Yeah... I argued with Mom, and it's still on my mind. It's the first time we've had such a serious fight. Mom never hit me, and I never walked out on her like this."

"Welcome to the world of rebels. I've been through it. The worry will fade as you get stronger."

"Talking big... By the way, I'm surprised by the warm welcome from your family. I thought it'd be harsher."

"That's because they don't know what you are to me yet."

"You haven't told them?"

"If I tell them, you won't have a place to sleep. Sigh... it's so sad. Someone who used to live so comfortably, having everything, now has nothing and is asking a maid for a place to stay."

Yu says, playing with the buttons on my shirt.

"How should you pay rent to me? When I stayed with you, I cooked and cleaned in exchange"

"You're so stingy. Everything is about money, huh?"

"I didn't say I wanted money. This time, it's your turn to pamper me."

"So, what do you want me to do?"

"I like it when you use your mouth"

"Aren't you on your period?"

"Oh, right! How annoying!"

Yu suddenly remembers and flops down next to me, laughing.

"It's so embarrassing, trying to seduce you but forgetting it's not the right timing. And when my period ends, you'll be on yours. When will we ever get to do it?"

"They say when women spend time together, their periods sync up. It's something about hormones or something."

"Really? Then you should stay here forever. Hehe."

"As what?"

"As my wife."

"You crazy! I'm not talking to you anymore."

I sit up and look around the room.

"Do you live in this house? You grew up so well."

"This house was built just a few years ago, but it's comfortable."

"You even have a digital piano."

I point to the white piano in the corner of the room.

"I saw another piano downstairs when I walked by."

"When I was little, my mom wanted me to be a professional pianist. But I felt it wasn't my dream. I can play songs, but I didn't want to make it a career. Then I discovered my talent for drawing, so I went abroad to study design, focusing on jewelry design to match the family business."

"Wow, that's impressive. Unlike the Pixie, who does housework all the time when I met her."

"I'm good at many things, including flirting with you."

Yu says, throwing herself into my arms. I laugh a little before pushing her to stand upright again.

"By the way, I've only met your mom. Where's your dad?"

"He's probably somewhere in the house. You'll meet him soon."

"That's not good. I should've greeted your dad first before coming to your room."

"My dad is busy with his work... Oh, since you're here, do you want to swim?"

"But you're on your period."

"I use a menstrual cup. I can swim with it."

"What is that?"

"It's a new innovation. Ms. Frung, update your gear a bit. Come on, let's swim. I want to show off the heated pool."

"You have a heated pool? Fancy... but I don't have a swimsuit."

"I do."

She says, rushing to the wardrobe and pulling out a string bikini that won't cover anything. She winks.

"This is for you."

"I think you're having too much fun. When I said I was coming, you must've planned everything you wanted to make me do."

"Hehe... how did you know? Hurry up, I want to see you in a bikini."

Since I have to stay at her house, I can't refuse when she wants me to do something. After changing into the swimsuit, Yu excuses herself to go to the bathroom to take care of her business. Meanwhile, I follow the smell of food downstairs with a growling stomach.

Grrrr

That's not the sound of thunder but the sound of my hungry stomach. I haven't eaten a single bite since the argument with my mom at noon. When I reach the kitchen, I see steam rising from a pot. My hunger makes me forget my manners, and I lift the lid to sniff the aroma.

"Smells so good."

"Want to try some?"

A deep voice from behind startles me. I turn and smile, not knowing who it is.

"No, thank you."

"Yes, thank you. Since you're here, try some."

The elderly, kind-looking man ladles some soup into a small bowl and hands it to me with a spoon. I look at him and decide to taste it, not wanting to be rude because I'm hungry. I blow on it and take a sip. The first taste is like salty fish being dissolved by a sunbeam turning into soup. The liquid in my mouth immediately dribbles out like Niagara Falls, cascading from high to low with a splash.

"What happened? Why did you spit it out? Is it too hot?"

"It's..."

"It's what?"

"It's not tasty."

"..."

"It tastes like it was used to wash someone's bald head, like salty fish marinated in grade-F Dead Sea water, like something even though you're paid a billion to eat, you wouldn't."

I don't know how to describe it to make this elderly man understand. But my blunt words from the bottom of my heart are hurting the person in front of me. His teary eyes make me feel guilty. Being a boss all my life, I've always been straightforward with my subordinates. I accidentally criticized this dogshit dish, hurting the cook's feelings.

"S... sorry."

"Is it really that bad?"

"Ms. Frung, there you are... Oh, you guys met already? Dad, this is Ms. Frung, the one I told you she's staying over."

I stare at the elderly man, who looks dazed, as if his spirit just left his body. And I'm no different...

"This is your dad?"

"Yes, my dad."

Shit!!!

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□ Chapter 29 □

So, it turns out that the swimming plan has to be shelved for now because my legs are weak. After honestly critiquing the food, I find myself sitting like a sad puppy in front of Yu's parents, who have just invited me to dinner. It's an indescribable situation-sitting at the table in a bathrobe with a bikini underneath, being stared at bitterly by Yu's dad.

No one knows what Yu and I are to each other yet. I can't even imagine what would happen if they found out.

Being me isn't easy.

The ticking of the wall clock in the dining room is annoyingly loud. No one moves because the atmosphere is so tense. Yu's father, sitting at the head of the table, twitches his index finger and clears his throat, nodding toward the food.

"Why is everyone so quiet? Let's eat."

No one responds, but everyone starts moving as if given permission to act normally. Trying to please Yu's father, I reach for the serving spoon to scoop some soup that I'd critiqued earlier, but I'm interrupted by a cough.

"Is that a good idea?"

"Huh?"

Everyone looks at me with sympathy, especially Yu, who reaches out to touch my thigh, unsure how to help.

"It's not tasty."

The sarcastic comment makes me want to cry, but what can I do? If I put the spoon down abruptly, it'd be like admitting that it's true.

"At that time, my taste buds were a bit off. Now they're back to normal, so I thought I'd try it again to be sure."

"It won't be much different."

Yu's father says, inspecting his nails and pursing his lips like a child.

"It'll taste like it was used to wash someone's bald head."

Gulp...

"But have you ever drunk that? What does it taste like? Tell me."

"Dad..."

Yu quickly interjects to save the situation, but her father glares at her disapprovingly.

"Stop"

Alright, I've been cornered this far, so I might as well go all the way. Whatever he asks, I'll answer because it seems like Yu's father won't back down easily. If I give up, it'll be too humiliating for me. Since I've been bold from the start, I should see it through to the end.

"It's an imaginary water. Describing it that way gives a clearer picture... Imagine the scalp is full of pores, and without hair covering it, sweat makes it smell. After a day in the sun, it becomes greasy and moderately salty."

"...."

"When water splashes on the head, the grease on the scalp mixed with a bit of sweat would give a salty taste. Your soup gives that feeling. It's bland and greasy, with a salty sweat taste like under- seasoned fish sauce. And yes..."

"...."

"It's not tasty."

Yu squeezes my thigh tightly and takes a deep breath. This woman is never afraid of anything and always fights with a smile. But today, she looks like she's seen a ghost, filled with despair and hopelessness. It's like her spirit is leaving her body, and I can't tell if she's going to heaven or hell.

At which one will we meet again?

Yu's mother, sitting next to her husband, drinks water nervously in this tense situation. Yu's father looks at me and nods slowly.

"Since I was born..."

"...."

"No one has ever spoken to me like this. What kind of family raised you? Why are you so..."

"Dad, that's too harsh."

"Well-raised. If there were a million people like you, the world would have no wars. Excellent."

Yu's father stands up, making a standing ovation gesture, and claps like he's just watched a theater performance.

"I'm very impressed."

"Huh?"

"What?"

Everyone around, including the maid standing by to refill water, looks confused. Yu's father must be so hurt that he's lost his mind. Why is he suddenly praising me?

"I've always wondered why this dish I cook is the one often left untouched... No one ever dared to tell me the truth. You're the first and only one to give an honest critique. You're brave and straightforward. I like that. Yu, your friend is a good one."

Yu smiles at me and stands up to clap along with her father. Her mother, who was stunned, stands up too, making it feel like we're in a TV show studio, giving me encouragement.

"You don't have to praise me that much. I was just... describing it as you asked."

"I wanted to see how far you'd go with your critique. If you'd suddenly changed your mind and said my food was delicious just to please me, I would've been very disappointed. Alright, everyone, sit down and eat. As for the soup."

Yu's father orders the maid, "throw it away."

"Throw it away? But..."

I protest, but Yu's father waves it off.

"Anything that isn't tasty should be thrown away. Forcing yourself to eat it just because you don't want to waste it is bad for your health. How long will you be staying here, Frung?"

"Huh? Um... I'm not sure."

"Stay as long as you want. I'm looking for an honest food critic. If someone can critique my cooking like this, my cooking skills will improve."

"Okay."

"Frung, please continue to critique my food in future meals."

"Sure!"

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How did things turn out like this? Suddenly, I've become Yu's father's favorite. Even Yu can hardly believe it.

After dinner, we decided to shower and go to bed because we were too full to swim.

"I can't believe it. Normally, Dad is very strict, except when he's cooking, which makes him especially happy. So, we've never told him directly that his food isn't tasty... But today, you showed us that being straightforward is best. And now, you've become Dad's favorite!"

I smile dryly, unsure if this is good or bad.

"Being straightforward is really better... Do you think if we told them what we are to each other as directly as I critiqued the food, the response would be the same?"

"Do you want to try?"

"We have to tell them, but I just don't know when."

"Honestly, it doesn't matter when we tell them. I've prepared myself to be kicked out of the house at any moment. I've lived alone before, so leaving again wouldn't be a big deal."

"Then let's not tell them yet. This time, we might end up really becoming homeless because we have nowhere else to go."

"For me, I can sleep anywhere as long as I have you. And now we're alone in the bedroom."

Yu nudges me playfully and makes a mischievous face.

"Should we do what we're good at, like..."

"Like what?"

She pushes me down onto the bed.

"Like taking off our clothes piece by piece!"

She does exactly what she says, which I find cute. But if it's too easy, she might think she can do whatever she wants, so I play hard to get, resisting a little to add some charm. Honestly, it's more like a ritual. I want to play around first before getting into the serious love scene. It won't seem too intentional. Just as we're getting into it, our bathrobes slowly falling off, and my legs spread for someone to taste, Yu's mother knocks on the door.

"Ahh!"

I kick Yu off the bed, sending her rolling to the foot of the bed, and quickly grab a bathrobe, not knowing whose it is, and fix my hair. Yu, looking dazed, ties the robe around her waist and walks to the door, frowning.

"What is it, Mom?"

"What are you doing?"

"I'm about to..."

Yu takes a deep breath and smiles at her mother patiently.

"Sleep."

"In bathrobes?"

"We were about to change. Do you need something? It's ten o'clock."

"I brought milk for you and your friend."

"Mom... I'm grown up. Why do you keep giving me milk?"

"So you'll grow taller."

"It's too late for that, but thank you."

The small girl gives her mother a wait like a kindergarten student thanking a teacher, takes the milk, kisses her mother goodnight, and closes the door. I can't help but smile at her cute behavior.

"You're quite a good daughter. Hard to believe you ran away from home."

"You're obedient but still ran away from home."

True...

"Cheeky... But from what I see, your mom has taken good care of you. She even brings milk for you and me before bed."

"She's just used to it. I don't know why she's so obsessed with height. From kindergarten until now, almost thirty years, she still hopes I'll grow taller."

"Well, your mom is cute."

"Not when she interrupted us. And I got kicked, too... You must've been in a lot of pain when I kicked you back then."

"Karma."

I laugh and look at the door, feeling uneasy.

"I think we shouldn't do anything right now. We should respect the elders in the house. We never know when they'll open the door."

"Here"

Yu hands me the milk, but as I reach for it, she spills it all over me.

"Hey. It's all over me."

"I want to grow taller."

"Then why did you splash it on me?"

"So I could lick it off! Next time, if you kick me again, you'll be in frouble."

"I just told you not to do it. What if your mom comes back... Hgnnnn... Come on."

I haven't even finished my sentence before I give in to the smaller person, completely forgetting to resist. She licked off all the milk we got, both that on my body...

And that on my own boobs.

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I've been staying at Yu's big house for three days now. During the day, her father handles his duties as chairman on his computer. Once everything is done, he comes down to water the garden, like a typical elderly person who doesn't know what else to do with his day.

His favorite daily activity is cooking. He prints various recipes from the internet and practices them in the kitchen. These dishes need to be practiced repeatedly to be delicious, but they aren't tasty because as soon as he finishes one, he gets bored and moves on to a new recipe immediately.

"It's not tasty. Too salty."

"Too greasy."

"There's too much vegetable."

"The pork is too raw."

"The coconut milk isn't right."

"If you keep doing this, we might as well order food from outside."

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"Are you trying to annoy me, Frung?"

After several dishes over five days, my critiques are interrupted by the usually kind father, who now seems ready to be mean. I press my lips together and force a smile, sensing the bad mood.

"Sorry. It's tasty."

"Oh, come on!"

He throws the spatula away and crosses his arms in frustration.

"Why do you have to be sarcastic about it being tasty?"

"I can't keep up with you, Dad. Do you want me to be honest or not say anything at all?"

"It's like you're mocking me. How can someone make bad food every day?"

"Someone like you."

"Do you want to die?"

"Wahhh, I'm scared."

I say, placing my hand on my chest to look frightened. When I do that, the irritated father can't help but smile.

"Has anyone ever told you that you're funny and cute?"

"Yes, but even if they didn't, I know I'm cute."

"And annoying, too. I'm done! How much have I spent on ingredients already? It's never tasty."

"People don't have to be good at everything. You mightn't be a good cook, but you can be a good taster. Have you ever thought about changing your hobby?"

"Well... you have a good perspective, But I prefer creating over consuming. If it were art, I'd rather paint than buy paintings."

"I understand."

We high-five and turn our attention back to the food in front of us

"But I don't want to hear only your opinion, Frung. So, I called for a second opinion."

"Who?"

"Let's call them now."

The elderly man leaves the kitchen to get the phone from the middle of the house. I can only look at the food in the pan, which will soon be thrown away. It's a pity for the pork, mushrooms, ducks, and chickens that became test subjects, only to die in vain because someone can't cook well. I wonder if they go to heaven or hell since their sacrificed meat didn't end up in anyone's stomach.

"Ms. Frung!"

Yu hugs me from behind, making me jump a little before I quickly pull away when she whispers nervously.

"Don't do that. What if your dad sees us?"

"It doesn't matter. I plan to tell him anyway. Sooner or later, I have to. I haven't told him because I was afraid you wouldn't have a place to stay."

"That's true..."

I've gotten so close to Yu's father these past few days that I'm scared if he finds out the truth, he'll be disappointed in me. From love, he'll hate me in a split second. Sigh... it's so hard.

"Don't hesitate. We have to tell everyone eventually. Even if the whole world is disappointed. I won't break up with you because of someone else,

even if that person is my father."

"Come on, let's taste it. If even Mr. Kitt says it's not tasty, I'll stop cooking forever."

The loud voice from afar makes Yu let go and stand beside me before another person appears next to her father.

"Here's the second opinion I mentioned... didn't even need to call; he came just in time. Mr. Kitt, this is Frung... my new beloved daughter."

Yu's father wraps his arm around me, ignoring his own daughter, and introduces me to someone I know well, P' Kitt, who's smiling.

"And Frung, this is Mr. Kitt, Yu's fiancé."

BA-DUM...

BA-DUM...

My heart is pounding so loudly I can hear it in my ears. Yu reaches out to hold my arm possessively, unnoticed by her father. And then...

"Nice to meet you, Ms. Frung."

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□ Chapter 30 □

The appearance of P' Kitt sends a shiver down my spine, and I brace myself to fight back at any moment if he shows any sign of being a threat. Meanwhile, Yu remains determined, not afraid that our secret will be exposed, but simply displeased with the presence of this handsome guy.

However, he acts as if he's meeting me for the first time, not revealing to the older person in front of us that we know each other. Although relieved, I'm still uneasy about what his intentions might be.

"This is my second opinion,"

Yu's dad gestures toward the soup pot for P' Kitt to see.

"Mr. Kitt, taste it and tell me what you think."

"In that case, I won't hold back."

P' Kitt picks up a ladle and pours the soup into a small bowl, then uses a new spoon to taste it, blowing on it to cool it down. After about three seconds, the handsome man looks at Yu's dad and smiles.

"It's delicious."

"Really...?"

Yu's dad responds briefly, glancing at me before tasting the soup himself and nodding.

"I see."

That's all he says, while everyone else seems indifferent. Only I feel something about the words 'I see', but I let it go as he changes the subject abruptly.

"Kids, go sit and get to know each other. I'll tidy up the kitchen first. Mr. Kitt, stay for dinner with us."

"Thank you."

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This might be the first time, except for the trip to Pattaya, that the three of us are alone together. Yu hooks her arm around mine and hisses like a protective cobra while I brace myself for a confrontation. Only P' Kitt sighs and puts his hands in his pockets, refusing to speak. I can't stand it and have to ask because his actions make me feel like a small child.

"Why are you sighing? Can you please tell me, P' Kitt?"

"Why are you being so polite to someone like him?"

Yu snaps, seeing me speak respectfully to P' Kitt, and bares her teeth at him.

"He doesn't deserve any respect from you after making you get kicked out, disowned by your mother, and turning you into a wandering homeless."

"I don't look like an actual homeless, and I'm still living with you."

"But you're still technically homeless. Don't talk to him. Keep your mouth shut."

Yu covers my mouth, making P' Kitt raise his hand as if to make peace.

"I'm here with good intentions today."

"You probably said that when you went to Ms. Frung's house, too, asking her to get engaged without caring that she already had a girlfriend! What you did was revenge. She's admired you since she was young and gave you her first kiss, but you still did this. You trash."

Yu stomps her foot, getting more worked up, and I gently pat her shoulder to calm her down.

"P' Kitt hasn't done anything yet, Pixie. Calm down."

"Are you defending the person who made you homeless? I'm standing up for you, you know?"

"I know."

I squeeze her small shoulder and smile apologetically.

"But I think P' Kitt has a lot to say to me. If we keep doing this, we won't get anywhere. How about letting me talk to P' Kitt alone for a bit?"

"You're pushing me away."

"No, I'm not."

I scrunch my nose and flick her forehead.

"Ouch, you flicked my forehead, too. Do you like him more than me now? You're already softening toward him."

"If I were, I would've agreed to the engagement and not run away to become homeless."

"Why do you have to be so reasonable..."

Yu nods reluctantly.

"Fine, but know that I'm not willingly doing this. Remember, she's mine, and I'm hers. No one can come between us."

Yu sends a death glare at P' Kitt one more time before walking away. P' Kitt watches her leave with a look of unresolved feelings as if it's a love deeply ingrained in his heart, just as he used to describe it to me. Despite being cursed at, he still shows no sign of anger toward Pixie.

Who could? She's so cute and endearing. I've never been able to stay mad at her. I get that.

"She's left. Do you have something to talk to me about? I can tell from your body language."

Because I'm good at reading this, I ask.

"Let's find a quiet place to talk. If someone hears us, they'll know we know each other, and the act we put on earlier will be exposed."

"Actually, there's no need to pretend we don't know each other."

"I didn't know if you'd be uncomfortable, so I acted like we didn't know each other from the start."

He makes a good point. I have to admit I was uncomfortable, fearing Yu's dad would get suspicious and ask a lot of questions. We choose to walk to the backyard, where there's a swimming pool, now lit up as it's getting dark. We stand looking at the blue water that Yu said is a saltwater pool, and P' Kitt starts the conversation.

"I'm sorry for making things this way, causing both you and your father to leave home."

"Okay."

I respond, but it doesn't mean I accept the apology.

"You made things worse, but even without you, I would've fought with Mom eventually. You just sped it up and gave Mom false hope that I might come to like men again."

"At that time, I was so angry I lost my mind. I just wanted to make you and Yu feel some pain."

"Congratulations. You did it. It hurt. I have no home or car and have to live in someone else's house, eating their food, while my dad has to stay in a hotel."

I laugh bitterly.

"Have you visited my parents' home? How's my mom?"

"Your mom is quiet, unlike that day. I visit her every day, afraid she'll be lonely."

"Every day?"

I look at him, feeling grateful and surprised.

"P' Kitt do you have that much free time to visit my mom every day?"

"Not really, but what can I do? I'm the reason your mom is alone. Last Sunday, she ate alone, so I had to join her."

"Did I make a mistake not getting engaged to you?"

I joke before quickly correcting myself.

"Just kidding. I have a girlfriend. I'm not giving you hope."

I glance around, paranoid that Yu might be eavesdropping. P Kitt, seeing my anxious behavior, laughs and gently places his hand on my head.

"I know."

"Don't do that. If someone sees, it wouldn't be appropriate for people who just met to be so familiar."

I step away, and P' Kitt nods in agreement.

"Sorry, I keep forgetting... So, I'll get to the point. I think you should go home and talk to your mom. She seems very lonely."

"I tried calling... but she didn't answer."

And that made me call only once. It's not just Mom who has pride; I do, too. Making the first call was already a big step, but if she doesn't accept it, I won't force myself.

"It might take some time. Meanwhile, I'll keep visiting your mom."

"Why?"

"Hm?"

P' Kitt looks at me, confused, and I don't understand him either.

"Why are you doing this? If it's out of guilt, I think you've done more than enough. What Yu and I did to you wasn't a little thing either."

"I'm not a bad person from the start, Frung. I acted out of a moment of anger, just feeling why the two girls I liked ended up loving each other. Why did I have to be in this mess? I only thought about making one of you hurt, so I came up with a childish, stupid plan, forgetting that it wouldn't matter. You wouldn't care about me anyway. I'm grown up but still acting like a kid."

The handsome man kicks the water in the pool out of boredom.

"Can't it change, Frung?"

"What?"

"If they try dating a guy, will those girls stop liking each other?"

"No. Love is based on liking the person first. I only realized I was gay recently."

"So, even if it's not Yu, you could like other girls too."

"I don't mind. Everyone has their own beauty, but right now, Yu is the one for me. You know this feeling well, the feeling when you first met Yu. It's different from meeting anyone else. That's how I feel about Yu and how she feels about me."

I speak from the heart, and it makes the handsome man look at me as if he's realized something.

"Yeah, I guess I really have to give up."

"Dinner! Time!"

Yu calls out, sounding whiny and crossing her arms in displeasure. I walk toward her voice, wrapping my arm around her waist to show P' Kitt, which surprises Yu.

"Just in time. I'm starving."

"Aw, you're hugging me."

"Your tone changed."

I laugh, and Yu, who was initially grumpy, bites her lip and smiles.

"Doing this means you didn't give him any hope."

Yu glances at P' Kitt, who stands not far away.

"Come in, Dad's waiting for dinner. If you're not going to eat, go wherever you want. It's annoying. Why do you have to make that face?"

"Can't I look sad?"

P' Kitt asks softly.

"No."

"...."

"Seeing you makes people softened, but luckily, I'm as firm as a rock. Don't make that face anymore because it won't get you anything."

"Okay, I won't."

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Now, we're all gathered in the dining room for dinner.

The food Yu's dad cooked for us to taste earlier isn't on the table; instead, it's food ordered from outside. The atmosphere at the table is normal, with the usual small talk. Then, Yu's mom, who hasn't had much to say, speaks up, asking Yu to serve P' Kitt some food.

"Yu, don't just sit there. Serve him some food."

"Doesn't he have hands?"

The sentence makes the whole table go silent. It wouldn't be surprising if it came from Yu, the family's rebel, but it was her dad's voice. Mom looks at her husband in disbelief.

"He does, but I want Yu to serve him. It's not a big deal."

"Is our daughter a waitress?"

"What's wrong with you today?"

"I'm a father, someone observing someone's actions, and I don't like how you pamper Mr. Kitt like that."

He glances at P' Kitt with a changed expression.

"If you want something, serve yourself."

"Yes, sir."

P' Kitt looks uncomfortable as Yu's dad's tone becomes noticeably stern. The atmosphere grows tense, with only the clinking of cutlery breaking the silence.

"Mr. Kitt, did you have a girlfriend before meeting Yu?"

"Excuse me?"

P' Kitt almost chokes on his food, feeling like he's become the topic of the conversation.

"Yes, I did."

"Why did you break up?"

"We couldn't get along for personal reasons."

"People only break up for one reason: a third party."

Now, I can barely swallow my food, feeling like I'm being indirectly scolded. It's not exactly a third-party incident; I just didn't realize I already loved someone.

"Well..."

"Was it you who had someone else?"

"What?"

"You must like to sneak around, flirting with others. That's why she couldn't stand you."

Yu's Dad slams his cutlery down hard on the plate.

"You're despicable!"

Everyone at the table, especially me, is stunned. Yu's mom, who hasn't been following the conversation, quickly tries to calm him down.

"What's going on? Why are you suddenly accusing Mr. Kitt? He hasn't done anything, and the story he told is just the past. He hasn't even told us the details."

"I don't need any detail; I can guess. Today, I saw something in this man."

Yu's dad glares at P' Kitt as if ready to shoot him if he had a gun.

"This evening, I saw him trying to flirt with Frung!"

"What?"

"What?"

P' Kitt and I exclaim simultaneously in shock.

"Today, by the pool, Mr. Kitt was all over Frung, putting his hand on her head, acting all caring. Luckily, She walked away quickly. From her body language. I could tell she was disgusted."

"At that time, I..."

P' Kitt tries to explain but can't find the words.

"I... I..."

"I felt you weren't sincere from the moment you tasted my food. While Frung said it wasn't good, you said it was fine. That's deceitful. I can't believe I thought of entrusting my beloved daughter to you."

"Dad, calm down..."

Yu tries to intervene, not knowing the full story, but her father seems unwilling to listen.

"From now on, don't set foot in this house again. You're not welcome. Deceitful people don't deserve to be in our lives!"

"Yu, you're free now. You no longer have a fiancé named Kitt!"

□□□□

□ Chapter 31 □

P' Kitt, who's chased away by Yu's father, quickly excuses himself and leaves because he senses trouble. I'm about to run after him out of concern, but Yu grabs my arm and shakes her head, signaling me not to follow.

Perhaps it's because her father currently believes that P' Kitt and I didn't know each other. If I show any concern, it may raise suspicions about how we got acquainted or, worse, lead to misunderstandings that I have feelings for him, too.

"What is this?! You just assumed everything and chased him away like that? Aren't you going to listen to his excuse about what really happened?"

"If he has to say some excuse, he's definitely in the wrong. If someone isn't guilty, why would they need to find an excuse? And you, do you still want our daughter to be involved with a man like that? He's engaged to one woman but flirts with her friend in the same house, thinking no one would see. But I saw."

"You only saw that, but you didn't hear what they were talking about."

"I trust my own instincts. I'm Trilowni, Professor of Divination, you know?!"

"Frung, tell me what Mr. Kitt was talking about at the pool. Why did he do that?"

"I... well..."

I stammer, unable to come up with a lie in time. Yu, seeing that I'm struggling, speaks up first.

"Why do you even need to ask, Mom? What decent person touches someone they just met like that? There's only one reason."

"But..."

"I love you, Dad!"

Yu changes the subject and quickly walks over to hug the elderly man who is still looking toward the front door, seemingly to see P' Kitt off but actually cursing him in his mind.

"You keep me safe from bad people. There's no man in this world as great as you. If it's not you, I won't marry anyone."

"Yu, that's your mother's husband!"

Her mom says.

"Hahaha. You're going to get dumped now."

"Yes, I'm going to dump you for this No. 1 girl."

Yu's dad plays along and hugs his daughter tightly, feeling proud and happy.

"The only man who truly loves Yu is me."

"Then I won't get married. I don't like men anymore."

"Loving me is enough, my dear daughter."

Yu turns to me and winks with satisfaction. Suddenly, the situation turns out this way. One pot of soup got P' Kitt kicked out of the house without Yu having to lift a finger. But strangely... I feel an inexplicable fear when I look at her dad.

He's scarier than I thought.

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After everything settled down, we returned to our bedroom. Yu, in a good mood, whistles while picking out clothes from the closet as if she's never seen them before. Meanwhile, I stare out the window, starting to stress about my own situation.

Being loved by the people in this house is good, but I dread to think how difficult it'd be if I became hated. They can love someone so intensely one second and turn to hate them equally the next. Initially, I intended to reveal everything to everyone without caring about their opinions.

Now, I find myself hesitating.

I don't want to be hated... especially by her dad, who loves and cares for me like his own daughter. It'd be very painful.

"Ms. Frung!"

"Ah... you scared me."

Yu, who'd walked up behind me and poked my waist, made me jump. I scold her, genuinely annoyed. Seeing my frown, she puffs her cheeks.

"Why are you scolding me?"

"Because you scared me."

"Don't you love me anymore?"

"Don't make that face."

"Say you love me."

"...."

"Please, pretty, please."

"I love you."

"I'm not mad anymore, yay!"

The small girl hugs me and smiles so widely that it eases my irritation and worry.

"What's wrong? Why are you so distracted? Don't tell me you're thinking about Mr. Kitt."

"Let's say I'm thinking about him, but P' Kitt isn't the main reason for my stress."

I place my hand on her smooth cheek and gently stroke it.

"It's your dad."

"My dad? Why? Did he say something to you? I'll handle it."

"He didn't do anything. On the contrary... He's very fond of me."

"Then why are you stressed? Explain it to me."

"He seems like someone who can switch from loving someone intensely to hating them to guts in the blink of an eye. I'm afraid that if one day he finds out about us..."

"They'll have to know eventually. And if anything happens, Ms. Frung, remember that I won't ever leave you alone. Even if we have to run away together, I'll do it. I swear, in the name of my grandfather."

Yu smiles brightly and makes a joke to lighten the mood, but my stress doesn't completely fade away.

"I know you won't leave me."

"And you mustn't leave me either, no matter what happens."

"Of course. I've never been a bad child to my mom, but I left because of someone."

"Because you love me. Enough of the serious talk. Your eyebrows are all knotted up."

Yu pokes my forehead and shakes her head.

"Let's do something fun."

"Again?"

I raise an eyebrow, seeing Yu's mischievous look and covering my chest, thinking of something naughty.

"We've been doing this almost every day since I moved here. Aren't you bored?"

"Never, and I can do it all the time. Wait... I didn't mean that!"

The sweet-faced girl laughed heartily.

"I want to go swimming."

"At this hour? It's ten o'clock in the evening. Isn't it too late?"

"That's why I'm inviting you to swim. I've always dreamed of swimming with my girlfriend at night. Make my dream come true. Ms. Frung."

"Why swimming?"

"It's so romantic. They do it in the movies all the time. I've wanted to do this since the first night you stayed over, but we never had the chance. Let's swim to relax and sleep well."

"But... is it okay?"

"It is!"

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Have I ever been able to refuse Pixie? No... never. With her adorable face, slightly nasal voice, and a bit of a pitiful act, it's enough to make me easily give in without much effort, just like when she applied to be a maid. Just seeing her face made me hire her immediately because of her unique charm.

Now, we're at the swimming pool. Yu turns on the underwater lights, making the pool glow blue, just like the first day I visited.

"The pool is heated and filled with salted water. Swimming here doesn't damage your skin, and you won't feel cold."

"Is it really that good?"

"I requested this pool from Dad as a graduation gift. But when I returned to Thailand, things happened, so I never got to swim in it."

"So, this pool hasn't been used yet?"

"Yes, that's why I want to swim so much. And swimming with you will make it a memorable first time."

Yu, in a blue and white two-piece swimsuit, slowly lowers herself into the pool with a splash before beckoning me to join her.

"Hurry, come in. The water is so warm."

Hearing her invitation, I smile slightly and slowly take off my robe before stepping down the ladder into the water. The warm pool feels really good, like soaking in a large jacuzzi where you can swim freely. The pool isn't very big, not enough for serious 4x100 Olympic training, but it's enough for casual swimming.

"But the water is a bit salty."

"It's a saltwater pool."

"And it's quite shallow."

"It can't be deep. I can't swim."

"Hmm? You can't swim but wanted a swimming pool?"

"I can only kick my legs and then sink. It'd be nice to have a girlfriend who can teach me to swim."

The small girl hints, trying to subtly force me to do what she wants. I told you, this girl is a little devil. She gets what she wants by acting cute until the other person feels guilty or too fond to refuse.

"What if the girlfriend can't swim either?"

"How can that be? You were a school swimming champion."

"How do you know that?"

"You said that in an interview for a magazine."

"You read it?"

"You don't know how obsessed I am. But back then, I didn't think it was love. I just felt... *'Wow, the person who once went home with me is so talented'*. My heart pounded, just like now."

The small girl swims over and pulls my hand to her chest, letting me feel her heartbeat.

"See? My heart is racing."

"If your heart didn't beat, you'd be dead."

"Come on, be a bit romantic! I'm trying to set a sweet mood in our pool."

"What's sweet about this? The pool is as salty as Pattaya sea."

"Have you ever drunk water after saltwater?"

"What about it?"

"It tastes sweet."

"And where will we get water?"

"From me."

As soon as she finishes speaking, she lunges forward and kisses me passionately. Her soft lips press against mine, making me stumble back a bit until I realize my back is against the edge of the pool.

Yu pulls away and wraps her legs around my waist underwater, creating a weightless sensation. We hold each other like that, but it doesn't feel heavy at all.

"What is this?" I ask.

"Is my saliva sweet?"

"Is this the water you talked about? This was a plan, wasn't it?"

"And was it a good plan?"

"You said you just wanted to swim."

"Well, we are. What did you think I was going to do?"

She doesn't just say that; she leans in slightly and nibbles my ear, making my arms and legs go weak.

"What do you call what you're doing now?"

"I'm not doing anything. I just want to cuddle you. You're thinking... naughty things."

Her warm tongue glides from my ear down to my neck. I start to relax and look up at the night sky, feeling utterly powerless.

"I could drown if you keep doing this,"

I warn.

She doesn't respond but instead uses her fingers to pull down the strap of my swimsuit and lightly bites my shoulder teasingly.

"Then we'll drown together."

My hands start to explore her body, and I manage to untie her small underwater pants with one hand. My fingers know exactly where to go, feeling the warmth and slickness under the warm water, a new sensation that makes my heart race. Yu moans softly and whispers.

"You said you wouldn't do anything like this."

"Isn't this part of your plan?"

Her beautiful eyes lock onto mine, and she starts to move herself because she feels I'm not doing it right.

"Ms. Frung, just stand still. I'll set the pace."

She instructs.

"You're being so demanding again."

The atmosphere, filled with the sounds of crickets and splashing water, is interspersed with our breaths like we're singing a duet. Yu, who seems very excited by the new experience, reaches her climax quickly, clinging to me so tightly that I feel like I might break. Her pleasure slowly subsides, and she seems to lose strength, making me support her waist underwater.

"What was that... so quick."

"Yeah... today I feel like I've been on a roller coaster. I'm exhausted."

"What about me now?"

I say, pouting, which makes the petite girl kiss me again, full of playful affection.

"Don't worry. I'm just recovering... now it's your turn."

As we're getting intimate in the pool, the sound of breaking glass nearby makes us both freeze. The proximity of the noise makes us stand still and look at each other but not turn around and see what's behind us because we're sacred.

Scared to face the truth!

"You two..."

Yu's father's voice makes me press my lips together tightly. At this moment, every sense in my body feels paralyzed. Continuing from here is out of the question.

"Yes."

Yu responds, more determined and resolute than anyone. She turns to face the person standing behind us directly.

"Ms. Frung and I, we're a couple."

She declares.

Thud!

The older man, who'd been watching us for a while, collapses to the ground without a word.

"Dad!"

□□□□□

□ Chapter 32 □

Yu's dad's condition isn't as serious as we thought. He just got so shocked that he fainted. After some first aid and help from a menthol inhaler, he started to come around. While everyone in the house is in a panic, Yu, who seems to be the most composed, tells me to wait about five minutes. Then she appears with a small bag slung over her shoulder, ready to go.

"What is this?"

"The clothes. I packed it in advance. Just need to grab my wallet and a few essentials. Let's go."

"Go where?"

"Away from here. It's time."

The sweet-faced girl who's pulling my hand to leave the house stops when I resist and refuse to move.

"What is it? Did you forget something?"

"The only one who needs to go is just me."

"You think I'll let you go alone? I've been ready since the first day you stayed over. Just waiting for the right time to tell the truth to everyone in the house. Besides, I didn't think it'd take this long."

"Where will we stay?"

"I have a place ready for us. Do you think I came back home this time without any preparation? Let's go, no more questions now. You can ask later. Let's get out of here first."

Yu walks ahead with determination. I can only stare at her back in amazement. She's always been so resolute since the first time we met. It's like once she sets a goal, nothing can stop her. Just as we're about to step out of the house, her mom's voice calls out, making us both stop and turn around.

"Where are you going?!"

"Our own way."

"What way? Your father is this sick, and you're leaving?"

"Trust me, Mom. If Dad wakes up, he'll be the first to ask us to leave."

"Leave? What is this? And what's with the bag?"

The elderly woman, who has no idea what's going on, looks like she's seen a ghost. Her voice, full of displeasure, is just angry because Yu seems to be going out to have fun with a friend who stayed over.

"Ms. Frung and I are going to go away. To live our lives as..."

"Lovers."

"Lovers? What nonsense... Dear, why are you getting up?"

Yu's mom, startled by a touch on her shoulder from behind, is shocked to see Yu's dad getting up.

"You'll faint again."

"Let them go."

"Huh?"

"Don't hold them back. Let them go wherever they want... It's better than staying here."

His voice is calm, but his eyes show disappointment, which makes my heart sink. I feel a lump in my throat. But a certain someone who seems well-prepared for this hooks her arm around me and nods as if she understands.

"Let's go, Ms. Frung."

"Dad.."

I feel more heartbroken than Yu, who is his real daughter. Even though I call out, he doesn't even turn to look. He walks back into the house, half-dragging Yu's mom with him. Yu, who pulls me out to catch a taxi in front of the house, sighs a little and gently rubs my arm understandingly.

"Don't overthink, Ms. Frung. It had to be this way."

"Pixie, don't you feel anything?"

"On the contrary... I've been through this since I was a child and am used to the people in this house. I can handle everything. If you ask who knows these people best, it's me."

"If we go back and explain to your dad now, he might soften up."

"If he would, why would I run away from home back then? When I ran away, he never thought of looking for me because he was that stubborn. If you want to beat him, there's only one way."

"What is it?"

I look at her with interest. She shrugs just as the taxi pulls up.

"Ignore him. That's the best way to win."

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After getting into the taxi, she gives the driver a destination I'm not familiar with. Even though I don't know where it is, I don't ask much because it

seems Yu has planned everything well. She looks so capable and determined, an image contrasting her delicate frame, making me feel like she has a warrior spirit inside her. Since it's almost midnight, the journey takes only 10 minutes, with a few red lights before we reach our destination.

It's a medium-sized apartment with everything we need. I follow her into the building, swipe a key card at the door, and take the elevator to the 7th floor until we reach the room. Before I can ask anything, Yu starts explaining as if she knows what I'm thinking.

"I rented this room since moving back home because I knew one day I'd have to tell Dad the truth about having a lover. I wasn't going to marry Mr. Kitt, so I prepared an escape plan while still sneaking money from Dad and Mom."

"Sounds thorough but not very nice."

"Well, I don't have a job. I'm not a maid anymore, so I have to live off my parents."

"And after this? No parents to rely on, and I don't have a job either. What will we do?"

"I plan to find a job. With my degree from overseas, it won't be hard."

She flexes her muscles as if working requires strength. I laugh a little and sigh.

"Being you is great. You make stressful things seem light while I overthink until my head is a mess and get nothing done. I should find a job, too."

"No need to rush. I still have a lot of money in the account. We can take our time thinking and looking for our jobs."

"But money will run out eventually. Sigh... You shouldn't have to do this with me."

"It's me who brought you into hardship. You used to be a CEO. Now, you're jobless. You used to live in a pricey condo, and now, you have to live in this small rented apartment."

The small girl hugs me, feeling sorry, but I hug her back more out of affection because she looks so adorable.

"We're both rich kids, remember? No one can bring us down... Let's give it a shot! Living like middle-class people, what's the big deal?"

"Seeing you so determined makes me feel better. We have to be each other's positive energy. Remember, no one can separate us. Yay!"

"No one can separate us. Yay!"

We cheer each other up before seriously exploring the room. I try to see everything positively, thinking this is a new adventure. All my life, I've been in a safe zone, protected by my parents. So, if I have to struggle a bit, it's just a taste of life. Nothing to worry about.

But I need to update someone about this, and that person is Dad. In the morning, I call to briefly tell him about my situation. I also learn that Dad went back home because he softened up after Mom called, crying because she was too lonely.

"Good thing you went back to Mom. I heard from P' Kitt that Mom has been home alone, keeping to herself."

[We've been together for so many years. We can't cut ties so easily.]

"Does she ever mention me?"

[No, but I know she misses you a lot. She can't even bear to hear your name.]

"She must be very disappointed in me."

[People can't have everything. Accepting disappointment helps you not to be too idealistic... By the way, you plan to find a job, right? Need any help

from me?]

"No, thanks. I can't always rely on you."

[But jobs are hard to find these days. And you started from the top. Who would dare hire you? Your past experience is as a chairman at an IT company. Your salary would be higher than a small SME owner.]

"Thanks for the encouragement."

I smile weakly. It's not like I haven't thought about this, but I don't have many choices.

[If you ask me... you should start a small company. You're good at managing people. Use your strengths.]

"A company... What could I do?"

[Start thinking now. If you need any help, tell me. Even though she's richer, I also have a lot of money... I'm not just your mom's husband.]

I smile at Dad's encouragement. I feel a bit guilty, like I'm cheating, because when I fall, it won't hurt much, and I can get up fast, I don't have to start from zero like others.

"Ms. Frung, come have breakfast."

The familiar cheerful voice reminds me of the old days at the condo. She woke up early to prepare breakfast without fail. She's very disciplined, especially about making breakfast.

"I miss this."

"Right? I miss making breakfast for you, too... Come on, eat."

She sits down across from me, resting her chin on her hand to watch my reaction to the pork congee she made. Of course, it tastes as delicious as always. Even if it didn't, I'd still say it was because I love seeing the smile in front of me more.

"Tastes just as good as always, my beautiful darling."

"I'm flattered. So, how did it go? What did your dad say? You two seemed to be talking for a while."

"Dad's back home now. He suggested that I should start my own company. No one would hire me because I'm overqualified."

"Whose girlfriend is this? So talented in everything. Mr. Kitt was a fool not to keep you, letting a small woman like me steal you away."

"And what kind of woman are you to steal someone else's girlfriend?"

"A cute one, good at cooking, and loud. The kind that loves to do naughty things in the swimming pool!"

"You crazy."

I laugh at the lewd words.

"But I agree with your dad. You should start your own company. Someone like you can make it prosper easily."

"Before thinking that far, I don't even know what to do or sell."

"Sell food or anything women would buy."

"Hmm?"

"I once skimmed through my dad's business book. It said if you want to sell something, sell two things: one, sell to women; two, sell food. You'll definitely get rich."

"You're quite knowledgeable. But what to sell? If it's food, I can't cook. And if you're talking about a delivery service app, the big names have already taken over."

Since I own an IT company and develop applications, I really can't think of what I should do. The market is already saturated. It's really tough for a

small company to start something new. I've realized this now that I've reached this point.

"Then sell women's products."

"Clothes are everywhere."

"Jewelry."

Yu leans in and raises an eyebrow.

"Ms. Frung, did you forget that I graduated in this field? No one knows more about gems and jewelry than me."

"You want to sell jewelry?"

"Yes. I'll let you manage it. We do what we're good at. That's what you call proper job division."

I laugh with Yu. Even though it's just a rough idea, it seems like a pretty good one. We spent the whole day discussing the details of what we wanted our products to be like and thinking about funding until Yu fell asleep from all the brainstorming. Seeing her asleep, I look at my phone, thinking of something.

"Hello, Dad."

Yes... I still feel uneasy about this. Now, I walk to the balcony and call Yu's dad with the landline number. The guilt hasn't faded. It feels like I've completely destroyed his love and goodwill since last night.

"I know you're listening."

Even though the person on the other end doesn't respond, I know they're still holding the line, waiting for me to finish my business. Afraid of being hung up on, I quickly say my part concisely to avoid causing too much annoyance.

"I apologize for what you just found out. Sorry for breaking your trust. I feel very guilty and am asking for your forgiveness."

[You will never get my forgiveness. Remember that well.)

The cold response pierces my heart, but I force myself to finish speaking.

"No matter what you think, I want to say that I'm sincere with Yu."

[Sincere people don't break others' trust like you did.]

"I intended to tell you, but..."

[Is that all you have to say? If there's nothing else, I'm hanging up.]

"I'll love and take care of Yu well. Whatever you think P' Kitt has or is, I can do and be, too."

[....]

"I'll do it as well as him."

Then the most heartbreaking response comes, a condition I can never fulfill, making tears stream down my face.

[You can't do it. You're not a man.]

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□ Chapter 33 □

"Ms. Frung!"

Yu's shout startles me so much that I almost drop my phone. Her eyes widen as she stares at me, then she quickly snatches the phone from my hand. She looks at the screen to see who I'm talking to and then speaks into it impatiently.

"What did you say to Ms. Frung... Remember this: nothing and no one can change my mind. If you hurt her, you're hurting me, too. Sorry for not being the ideal daughter you wanted... But it's okay. Having Ms. Frung is enough for me!"

She hangs up and glares at me angrily.

"Why did you call my dad?"

Her sharp tone makes me flinch, and tears start to flow even more.

"Uhhh..."

"I... I didn't mean to yell at you. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Yu hugs me when she sees that I can't stop crying. The more she comforts me, the harder I cry, and there's no sign that my tears will stop anytime soon.

"I can't stop crying. Uee... Waaaah."

"Oh no... If you cry, it'll make me want to cry too, you know? You aren't a crybaby. Please don't make me feel bad."

"Is it so wrong that I was born a woman?"

I ask, confused. Her father's words still echo in my head. It feels like there are a thousand knives stabbing my heart.

"What's wrong with being a woman? Do you know how many billions of women there are in the world? Are they all wrong?"

"I told your father that I'd make you happy. Whatever P' Kitt can do, I'll show him that I can do it too, so he won't worry about you. But he just said..."

"You are not a man."

"Uh."

"Ms. Frung, don't be sad about things that can't be changed. Even if you were a man, do you think I'd love you?"

"If I were a man, you wouldn't like me?"

"I like you as a woman. We're both gay."

Yu says irritably. I'm starting to wonder if she's mad at me or the world.

"If I were a man, would you like me?"

"If you were a man and still this cute... maybe."

I sniffle and think carefully.

"But I like you as a woman more because you're cute."

"Even if you like a male version of me, I can't be that for you. It's beyond our control. We just have to accept it. If someone can't accept us, that's their problem. And you don't need to promise anything to Dad. Even if you were a princess from a first-world country, He'd never change his mind. I know him better than anyone."

"But I think that if I could prove myself a little, your dad might..."

"Why do you need to prove anything?"

"So he'll know that I can take care of you, even as a woman. I can succeed in life just like P' Kitt."

"No need!"

"...."

Yu puts her hands on her hips and closes her eyes, almost red with anger, but she holds back, afraid that if she raises her voice, I'll start sobbing again.

"If you succeed, it's your achievement. And even if we fail, it has nothing to do with anyone else. Why does our love need to be proven to others? We're just ordinary people. We can make mistakes, too."

"Yu..."

"Being gay or lesbian doesn't make someone bad. Why do adults always say, *'Even though they're like that, they're still good people; they can still earn money and build a house for their parents'*? What about those who can't? Are they the scum of humanity? It's not our job to be perfect all the time."

"But I want your dad to see that I can do it."

"You can use that as a motivation, but not to prove yourself. Even if you fail, I'll still be here with you. Even if we're broke, I'll sit by the road to beg for money to buy food for you. Understand?"

"Do you understand that we don't need to prove anything anymore? We'll just be ourselves."

"You're so determined."

I say, looking at her in awe.

"It feels like you're more mature than me."

"Well, I have a big goal."

"What goal?"

"To make you mine alone and live comfortably. Not to prove anything to our families but because I want to. So you should see me as your big goal, too. Stop pressuring yourself. Do everything with joy. Remember that I'm always by your side. Can you do that?"

"Wow... so romantic."

"Don't sweet-talk me." Yu pouts.

"You made me so mad that I'm about to cry."

"Oh."

From scolding me, Yu starts crying when she sees I'm better. So I have to comfort her and stop feeling bad about being born a woman.

That's right... our goal is just to have each other. What everyone else thinks is just a byproduct of our actions.

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After talking to her, I need to reorganize my thoughts. We start planning what work we can do to support ourselves. Of course, we can't do much alone, so my dad, who used to be a marketing head, helps us.

"You have an experience with applications. So, try to visualize what you want in the app and why people should buy from us. Remember, people today are lazy. Even waiting more than five seconds for a website to load annoys them. How can people access it in the easiest way? Think about that."

Dad tells me and then smiles at Yu.

"So, you're selling jewelry, dear?"

Dad speaks almost in a cute tone to the small girl, who beams back at him. Her cuteness multiplies as she seeks his approval, making her look endearing.

"Yes, I want to sell accessories like necklaces, rings, bracelets. But doing it alone and using an app might be too much of a work. So, I thought of finding partners and splitting the percentage."

"If you're going to do that, people would rather buy from Lazada or Shopee. Everyone knows them already. I think it's better to make a deal with artisans and brand it as our own."

"But that would be a really big project. We don't have that much money."

"We can do it. You have me backing you up. It won't be a problem."

"Let's go at our pace, Dad. We want to begin as an SME, considering the economy isn't very good nowadays."

I argue, and Dad, seeing my seriousness, nods in understanding.

"Alright, but I don't agree with partnering with other stores."

All our ideas are put together to select the best ones. We draft a business plan like the ones used to apply for bank loans, but we do it to organize our thoughts, not to get a loan.

After talking with Dad, we return to our room. I sit on the balcony, still thinking about what to do next, until Yu hugs me from behind.

"Hm?"

"What are you thinking about?"

"Just thinking about our business. I think making an app is too big of a project. And you can only design one or two pieces at a time. Maybe we need a physical store and stuff, and I can do online marketing."

"Anything is fine as long as I can do it with you."

Yu rests her forehead on my back and sniffs like a dog trying to catch a scent.

"You smell so good."

"Tired, huh? I can tell."

"Honestly, I have no idea about marketing. I can only draw and design. Seeing you talk business with Dad today was impressive... How is my girlfriend so talented?"

"Flattery. Always praising, always encouraging. Are you afraid I'll stop loving you or something?"

"I have ways to cheer you up every day when you're down. But don't give up now..."

Yu yawns and mumbles.

"Because I'm too sleepy."

"If you're sleepy, go to bed. Come here."

I squat so Yu can hop on my back. Being taller, I easily carry her light weight.

"I'll take you to bed."

"You're the best."

I carry her to the bed and drop her gently, making her laugh with delight.

"The bed is so hard it hurts."

"True, but it's better than the floor. Hang in there. Once we make some money, we'll buy a new bed."

"You promised, okay? I have to focus on designing the product now. I want a new bed. There are so many positions I want to cuddle with you."

Yu mumbles as she rolls to her side and curls up to sleep. I take the opportunity to grab a blanket and cover her, then slowly watch the little one drift into sleep after she says such a naughty thing.

Life is strange. From someone who used to be very wealthy and never considered how much money I spent each day, eating whatever I wanted, now I have to be careful with money. I have to calculate the cost of each meal to ensure it doesn't cut into next month's budget.

Honestly, it's kind of fun...

I've always lived in my comfort zone. The only challenge was making the quarterly results better than the last. If I did well, it was just okay. If not, I just had to try again. No one would say anything because it was the family business. But this time, I can't fail.

If I do, the money I have will disappear, and it might make Yu suffer. So, I need to be better and smarter. Not because I'm afraid of being looked down upon but because I want us both to make it through together.

But still... I want acceptance from those around me, especially Yu's family.

I dial her father's number again. He knows it's me and answers, but doesn't say anything, just listens.

"I'll keep calling you until you forgive us and accept our love... Don't worry, I'll do my best..."

Before I can finish my sentence, he hangs up, and I can only sigh. It's good that I was prepared. Accepting the truth makes me less sad than before.

If he doesn't forgive us today, there's always tomorrow.

If not tomorrow, then the day after.

There will be a day when he accepts us, and I'll wait for that day.

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□ Chapter 34 □

Right now, we've planned almost halfway through. It's taken over a month just to prepare to start this new business. Honestly, the current economic situation isn't ideal for starting anything new, but we have to do it to survive. Plus, we have some experience, and Dad said he'd help out financially, so there's not much to be afraid of.

We're going to sell jewelry made from the same type of crystals as Swarovski, targeting young adults aged 18-35. Most of these people are active on online apps, so reaching them shouldn't be too hard.

"Pixie, you're pretty talented, you know that?"

I look at the sketchbook where Yu designs our first collection. It's not much because coming up with each piece isn't easy. So, our first project will be a set of necklaces, rings, and earrings, starting with an online store and then small booths to reach more people. We'll price them reasonably-not too high but not too low-aiming for the middle- class market that can spread the word.

"Ms. Frung, do you think people will buy from us?"

"If I like it, everyone will like it."

"Aren't you over-praising yourself?"

The sweet-faced girl laughs and teases me, but it's clear she's quite confident.

"I think it's beautiful, too."

"But we still need to tweak some things here and there. It's not like we won't make any changes."

"You're just trying to make me feel good and then slap me down, huh?"

"To work like this, you have to be able to take feedback. Even novelists and songwriters need feedback to improve their work."

"I know. I already trust you. I don't know much about business."

"I'm not that great either. I've only dealt with online apps and ways to promote our business. We still need to consult with my dad."

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As I mentioned, I have Dad as an advisor. He's pretty good at figuring out what products will sell and what people like or dislike. As soon as he saw the designs, he pointed out areas for Yu to fix and adjust. When Dad suggests something, Yu seems to listen and not argue, perhaps out of respect for his age or just being considerate. I smile at her timid demeanor and can't help but pull her cheek in front of Dad.

"Wow, no ego at all when it comes to this, huh? But when I say something, you get all sulky."

"Ms. Frung, that hurts!"

The small girl lightly taps my shoulder and pouts.

"Your dad is here. It's embarrassing. He's reasonable, so I have to listen."

"This is the beginning of receiving feedback. What I say is mild compared to what customers might say. So, the first step before selling to anyone else is to sell to people we know."

Dad says and nods thoughtfully. We both look at each other, starting to feel worried.

"But Dad, I don't have many friends," I say.

"Then it's time for you to build connections. We can't live alone in this world... Yu, too. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes... I understand."

I look at Dad quietly, understanding that he's not just talking about selling jewelry. He's trying to tell Yu that love isn't just about two people. Lately, I've been consulting Dad often and telling him about Yu's intense focus on love without caring about everyone else. It's good in a way, but ignoring everyone can make her lonely.

'For Yu, you're still an outsider. If one day you stop loving each other, she can still turn back to her family.'

'What are you saying, Dad? I won't stop loving Pixie.'

'Nothing is certain. You, too... You might love each other a lot today, but tomorrow, you mightn't love each other anymore. We all know that forever doesn't exist. So, love each other but be mindful of each other's feelings. And there are other things besides love. What if one of you dies first? Have you thought about that?'

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Dad is right, but I haven't talked to Yu about this because she's quite stubborn. When she loves, she loves with all her heart, which means if she hates, she hates to her guts, too. Dad probably wants to teach me this.

"So, this is your homework. I'll find an artisan to make ten sets of the jewelry you've designed. You have to sell them to people you know, five sets each. That means we'll have ten connections. If you can do it, the first project is a success."

"Yes/Yes."

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I'm so confused... It's like I'm back in school with Dad as the teacher.

From never thinking of contacting any friends, now I have to find a way to reach out to old classmates. The easiest way to contact them is through a platform called Facebook. The developer intended to make it a yearbook, and now I'm using it exactly for that.

Many people have added me as friends, but since I rarely use it, I've left their requests pending. Some I know, some are friends of friends who added me for no apparent reason. After accepting the requests, I read through various statuses.

Some people are married with kids, and some who used to be very manly now have boyfriends. I'm still hesitant to message anyone because I don't know if they remember me. Then, a notification pops up about an important event, and I click to see it.

A school reunion...

Maybe because I listed my school in my bio, the event popped up to let everyone know about the gathering. I click "attend" to save the event on my phone and feel my heart race.

Will anyone remember me if I go?

And if I go, how will I start conversations with old friends?

While I'm deep in thought, Yu sees my worried face in front of the laptop and pokes my forehead, laughing.

"What's wrong, pretty girl? What's with that face?"

"I'm going to a school reunion. I'm planning to build connections... like my dad said."

"Then why are you worried?"

"I don't have friends. What if no one talks to me?"

"You're overthinking it. Just go enjoy the school atmosphere... By the way, where is it held?"

"At the school."

"At least you can go to greet the teachers who taught you. Someone will recognize you. Most people go to update their lives and show off. You can take the opportunity to sell your stuff. Rich people are easily impressed."

"I'm not that audacious."

I say, puffing my cheeks. This feels like I'm about to do direct sales.

"What should I do? I'm scared of people."

"They aren't going to bite you."

"And what if I can't sell anything?"

"Then don't. Just wear it. Do you think the jewelry I designed is pretty?"

"It is."

"Honestly, no bias."

"It is. Simple but unique."

"Then just wear it. You're a great model. Trust me."

"Really... And if I can't sell anything?"

"It's okay just wear it. Go greet your friends and update them about your fabulous life. Starting your own business without working for the family is a big deal for a rich kid. It shows you're stepping out from under your parents' wings."

Hearing that encouragement makes me smile a bit.

"And Pixie, have you thought about how you'll do my dad's homework?"

"I'll go see my friends, too. I'm better at this than you. Don't worry."

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The school reunion is about two weeks later. Two days before the event, we both received the sample jewelry sets, including rings, earrings, and bracelets. I chose to wear the earrings and ring to the event, while Yu wore the bracelet to meet her friends.

Before leaving the room, Yu hugs me, understanding that I'm nervous about meeting people who mightn't remember me and not knowing how to talk to them because I'm not very good at it.

"Just be yourself. I believe that many people admired you in school. You just didn't know about it and had an R.B.F."

"Really? How could someone like me have admirers?"

"You're super cool, just a bit hard to approach. Even P' Kitt liked you, didn't he?"

"Well..."

"And you look stunning today... I'm jealous now. I don't want you to go."

"Then... I won't go."

"You have to!"

"What?"

I'm pushed out of the room into the elevator. Yu stands there, pressing the button for the ground floor, and gives me a pep talk.

"Ms. Frung, you can do it. You don't need to sell anything and just be yourself. That's enough. Trust me."

"Uh... okay."

"And I'll call you. If anyone hits on you, tell them you have a girlfriend, got it?"

"Got it, got it."

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Even though I'm not very confident, this is my first test of Socializing 101. If not today, then I'll have to do this someday soon. I can't avoid it. Doing business requires connections. This is the first hurdle I have to overcome. I need to remind myself that I'm not here to sell anything today, I just need to wear some jewelry and walk around so people can see and get familiar with me. I can do this. If Yu says I look good, it means it's not bad.

After finding a parking spot, I walk into the school slowly because I feel awkward. Even though I've been encouraging myself the whole way, seeing the school sign makes me almost turn back in defeat.

Today, the school is lit up with twinkling lights all over the event. But because there might be too many lights, it looks a bit like a fair. If there were a carousel or Ferris wheel, I'd call Pixie to come and hang out.

In the middle of the school field, there are rows of Chinese banquet tables. Each table has a sign indicating the academic year and class, but most of them are for alumni who are around forty years old or older. Not many people are sitting. While I'm worrying about where I should go and what I should do, someone calls out to me, making me excited.

"Frung... Is that you, Frung?"

Ms. Wilai, who used to teach math, greets me and hugs me. Not having seen her for a long time makes me a bit awkward, but I hug back and politely greet her.

"Hello, Miss. I'm so glad you remember me."

"How could I not? You were the star of your class."

"Star of what?"

"Don't be modest,"

The elderly woman squeezes my shoulder affectionately.

"Did you come with friends?"

"No, I saw the event on Facebook and decided to drop by."

"That's okay, I'll take you to meet some friends. Some of your classmates just talked to me about you. They were wondering if the star of our class is married yet."

"People are talking about me?"

The teacher drags me to meet some friends, but they're from different classes. We passed each other often but didn't talk much. It's better than not seeing anyone from my year at all because at least we recognize each other.

"Take care of her, okay? She came alone and looked lost."

"Is this you, Frung? Wow... the older you get, the more beautiful you become. We were just talking about you, saying we saw you in a magazine as a CEO..."

Friends from different classes, whom I've never talked to before, start chatting with me so much that I can't keep up. Can everyone talk so easily with people they've never spoken to before?

"Are you dating someone, Frung?"

"Yes."

"Wow, I'm so jealous of your lover. What kind of person could win the star of our class?"

Everyone speaks admiringly, giving me the chance to ask immediately.

"Wait a minute, what does 'star of the class' mean?"

"It means you were one of the beautiful people everyone talked about. You were a cool girl and a swimmer. Who else was popular in our class..."

Then, everyone reminisces about who else was popular back in school besides me. Now, I'm starting to fit in with everyone. As I laugh and tuck my hair behind my ear, a cheerful, high-pitched voice calls out.

"Excuse me!"

"Hmm?"

My wrist is grabbed, making me jump. A sweet-faced but confident and stylish junior looks at me with sparkling eyes like she's found a bargain in the clearance section.

"Where did you buy these earrings?"

"What?"

No greeting, just staring at my earrings. It leaves me speechless.

"What brand are these earrings? I've never seen this design before."

"They're handmade. It's from my own brand, but it's not available in the market yet."

"Does that mean they're really unique? I'll buy them!"

The person in front of me, seeing my confusion, hands me a business card and introduces herself.

"I'm **Intuorn**. I'm a junior about three years below you. I know you well. You were so cool in school, and today, you're still outstanding with these handmade earrings that aren't available in the market. Seeing them makes my stomach churn with desire!"

"You're quite a talker, Intuorn."

"Call me In. You're a great model. If I want these, how can I get them? Can I order from you directly? Are they limited edition? Tell me the details."

"Well..."

"How much? Name the price. I'll pay whatever it costs. If I like it, there's no such thing as too expensive because I'm very rich." 😊

"You're quite annoying."

I say with a smile, half-joking.

"I'm annoying? Oh no... then I won't buy them. I like to be loved by many people. Besides being rich, I need love to enhance my prestige."

"You're really fun to talk to. I love you."

"You're quite a liar, aren't you?"

"For survival."

"I understand. I run a business, too. Deception and wearing masks are our forte. Hehe... I'll order a set. When it's ready, contact me through the business card. It'd be better if it's a limited edition. I don't want to wear something that everyone else has."

"I'll think about it."

Then, that junior is called back by her friends. I can only watch my first customer with a racing heart. I can't help but call the designer who made this jewelry to let her know.

[How's it going, Ms. Frung? Did you find any friends?]

"Pixie... I sold one of your collections."

[Whaaaaaaat, really!? I told you, right? You're a great model. Everything looks good on you. Did you get the name of our first customer?]

The person on the other end is just as excited. I pick up the business card to read again.

"Her name is In,"

I swallow hard, my heart swelling with emotion, tears welling up.

"Intuorn."

[I'll remember this name... Intuorn!]

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□ Chapter 35 □

After selling the first set to the first customer, it wasn't long before the second, third, and fourth sets followed, and soon, we reached the fiftieth set. We set the prices reasonably-not too high but not so low that anyone could easily afford them.

We wanted the buyers to feel the value. So, I came up with the idea that each collection would be limited to just 99 sets, priced to reflect the time and effort put into designing and producing them.

Seeing that her work sells gives Yu a huge boost of inspiration and motivation to design more collections. She plans to release the next collection in the summer. We've saved up enough money to invest in the new collection and still have enough left over to buy whatever we want.

For over three months, we worked tirelessly. It was exhausting but worth it. Every baht we earn is from our own efforts, without relying on anyone else though we did borrow a little from my dad and paid it back on time.

"Limited edition sales like this are great, Ms. Frung. It makes people rush to buy and stock up. They can resell at higher prices. It's like an early guarantee that whatever we make will sell out."

"But you'll get tired. Making just 99 sets means they'll sell out quickly, and then we'll have to come up with new collections constantly to keep up with demand."

"We'll stick to our original schedule. The harder it is to find, the more valuable our products become. We managed this much in three months, thanks to you for expanding our customer base. I told you, good models make good sales."

"But the downside is that without a physical store, we don't gain much credibility. If we want to make this more substantial, we should have a place for people to see the samples."

"Renting a store in a mall is expensive. It could cost us a lot."

"But doing what we're doing makes our products look less valuable. We sell jewelry, and the location is crucial."

I can't believe that everything I learned is now being put to use. Yu and I brainstorm about what we can and cannot do, and in the end, Yu agrees with me that we should have a physical store, preferably in a high-end mall.

"Which mall should we choose?"

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I take this question to my dad, but he sends someone I never expected to rely on or consult-P' Kitt, the main reason I got kicked out of my home.

Meeting at a coffee shop, P' Kitt smiles warmly at Yu and me. We both smile back, having no hard feelings anymore.

"I'm surprised we have to consult you about this," I said.

"I know some people in this field. If you want a high-end mall store with reasonable rent, I can help."

P' Kitt replied.

"Can you really do that?"

"Why do you think I'm a top choice for marriage by your parents?"

We roll our eyes simultaneously, making P' Kitt almost choke on his coffee from laughing

"Why can't you two hide your reactions? At least I helped you both get together. Feel a bit guilty, will you?"

Hearing that, I smile sheepishly. I feel bad for breaking up with him and for the incident at the beach. He never did anything wrong. and even if he did, it was because of us. We unintentionally turned a good person into a bad one.

"Sorry, It was my fault."

"Me too."

We both smile apologetically, and P' Kitt waves it off, seemingly holding no grudges.

"So, which mall do you want to open a store in? I'll check it out," P' Kitt asks.

"Somewhere in the city center with lots of tourists. I don't want to sell just to Thais. In the future, we plan to sell 99 sets to Thais and 99 sets to foreigners."

Yu explains.

"That makes 198 sets... Smart."

P' Kitt says, raising his coffee cup in admiration.

"Alright, I have an idea of which mall you want. I'll get back to you in three days. If not that mall, then another one near it."

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So, this is what having connections is like....

Knowing many people makes things easier. Besides opportunities, meeting many people makes our work smoother, just as my dad said. Even though I'm shy and don't like talking to people, running a business has taught me to be friendly and talkative. I even comment or check in on old friends on Facebook, asking how they are after having their third child...

Even though I can't even remember the name of their first child...

Three days later, as P' Kitt promised, I get a call saying we get a spot. P' Kitt arranges for me to check out the location, see if I like it, and discuss the rent and lease terms. My dad comes along, as he has experience in negotiations and reading contracts. I also want to learn how to handle these discussions for future expansions.

The location is great. After getting off the skytrain and entering the mall, a short escalator ride brings us to our spot. The mall requests that we decorate the store in a theme consistent with other stores and not close on weekends, or we'll face penalties.

The only issue is that we don't have enough products to display, so Yu has to work three times harder on designs, even asking friends from school for help.

"Hang in there, Pixie. You can do it."

"Since we started working, we haven't had any alone time. I'd rather be a beggar than not get intimate with you... Ouch!"

I pinch Pixie's cheek for her inappropriate comment. She rubs her cheek, pouting.

"I need something to keep me going, Ms. Frung!"

Pixie whines, kicking under the table. I shake my head and flick her forehead.

"Ouch!"

"Get back to work. Thinking like this won't get the job done."

"You're so mean."

Pixie pouts, laying her head on the table.

I leave to make her a coffee, glancing between the boiling water and Yu, who is still grumbling.

"Coffee?"

"Leave me alone!"

"It'll wake you up."

"Nothing can wake me up... Oh!"

I crawl under the table and spread Pixie's legs, making her jump and scoot back in surprise. I tug at her elastic shorts, frowning slightly.

"Lift your hips."

"Ms. Frung, why are you..."

"I'm going to wake you up."

"Don't try to make up like this."

"Let me try, and we'll see if you're still mad."

"....."

"Lift your hips."

Pixie complies, letting me pull her shorts down to her ankles and spread her legs. Initially resisting, she melts at my touch, almost sliding under the table.

"Ms. Frung, you always surprise me. How can I stay mad?"

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Honestly, I've heard it often that life isn't easy. But experiencing it myself, I think... it's not that hard. Everything is going well for me now. Yu designs effortlessly, and our love life is fulfilling. Our jewelry sells out as planned, giving us plenty of money to reinvest. Many people are waiting for our next collection, and that's the guarantee of our success.

But that's being complacent. I forgot that nothing is ever easy, especially love.

"What do you mean we can't rent the spot anymore?"

I ask in shock.

The contact person calls me awkwardly. No matter how I question, he keeps apologizing, unable to give a clear reason.

"I'm really sorry. I'm in a difficult position, too..."

"There must be a more reasonable explanation."

"I'm just a subordinate. I apologize."

Getting no answers, I call P' Kitt to report the problem. He disappears for a bit and calls back, sighing.

[I'm sorry.]

"For what?"

[I might be partly to blame. There's internal pressure. If your store opens, another store might close and move to a competitor's mall.]

"What store?"

[A jewelry store...]

"A jewelry store...? Why would they care about our small store? Wait... Pixie."

She snatches the phone from my hand, presses the speaker button, and interjects her voice.

"Is this jewelry store part of my family's chain?"

As soon as she says this, I immediately realize what the internal pressure is about. It's the largest jewelry store chain in Thailand, with branches in almost every major mall. Yu's family is that wealthy.

[I'm sorry, Yu. There's nothing I can do.]

"It's okay. I understand."

She ends the call and falls silent, deep in thought.

"Pixie, what are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking Dad is being really mean. He probably wants to pressure us so we can't open our store. He knows that selling jewelry without a storefront isn't credible, especially at this price level. Sending it by mail looks unprofessional. Opening one in a shophouse doesn't look credible, either. But it's fine... it's fun."

"Fun?"

"Yes. Without obstacles, life is too easy. Don't you think that our path has been too smooth? But it's okay. I have Plan B."

"What plan? I'm still completely in the dark here."

"I won't let us hit a dead end. If we can't sell in our own store because we're not allowed to open one, then... we'll use someone else's store."

"Someone else's store?"

"Yes, someone else's store. In a mall, too. Actually, some have already contacted us, but I haven't mentioned it because I didn't want to collaborate with anyone. But since we're here, working with others might be good."

Yu picks up the phone and dials someone. Then she clears her throat to sound more convincing.

"Hello... this is Yu. We talked before about designing for Ms. Gainlong's Winter Dew Collection."

Gainlong? I furrow my brow slightly and listen to the girl in front of me, trying to catch the gist of her conversation.

"Yes, I've decided to design a brooch for you so it can be sold at the storefront, as Ms. Gainlong suggested. Okay... we'll discuss the details later, but it'll be in the mall, right? Great. That makes me feel better. Let's meet tomorrow afternoon to go over the specifics. Thank you."

Yu hangs up and looks at me, raising an eyebrow because she knows I'm waiting for an explanation.

"Ms. Gainlong is an artist who designed a collection of bags and scarves for Ms. Intuorn. Ms. Intuorn contacted me because she liked my designs and wanted to collaborate with an artist she worked with. Initially, I declined because I don't like working with many people, but there's no other choice."

I look at her in awe, amazed at how she has everything figured out, making me feel completely useless.

"Since Dad intends to corner us, I'll show him that we can do better... I'm designing for the mall owner's daughter. If we can't sell in the mall, then it's going to be huge news!"

Dear Lord, she's so cool!

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□ Chapter 36 □

Today, both of us have a meeting about the collection we're going to collaborate on with Intuorn's bags. However, the meeting is in the afternoon, so I told Yu to go ahead first because there's a place I want to visit. That place is my parents' home, and I haven't returned there for over three months.

It's strange. I used to go there once a week and never felt this homesick. Maybe it's because I knew I'd talk to Mom as usual, updating our lives, and then go our separate ways to do our own things, only to meet again. But since that argument, I haven't contacted Mom.

It's a longing I never thought I'd feel because I always took for granted that Mom would be by my side. Today is the day I have to walk on my own without her protection because she disagrees with the path I've chosen.

I spend about ten minutes in the car preparing myself. If Dad hadn't come to get me, I'd still be sitting there, nervous.

"You seem really nervous today."

"Really? Yeah... It's strange to be this excited just to see Mom."

"She won't bite you."

Dad laughs and gently pushes me forward. As I step into the house, Mom, who's casually watching TV on the sofa, turns to look at me. She freezes for a moment before quickly composing herself and nodding.

"What brings you here?"

"I miss you, Mom."

I get straight to the point, and that makes the atmosphere between us so quiet that we can hear each other's breathing. Dad steps aside to give us some privacy. I sit on a nearby sofa and ask about her well-being.

"How have you been, Mom?"

"Still alive."

"...."

"...."

We fall silent again after Mom's sarcastic reply. I'm not good at talking or making amends. When Yu gets a bit upset, I usually change the subject or put my hand on her head to calm her down. I've never been angry with Mom because I've always been an obedient child. Now, faced with this, I don't know what to do, so I stay silent, unsure of what she wants from me.

"You look skinnier."

"Huh?"

"Frung... You look skinnier. That Pixie girl isn't feeding you? I remember she said she could do everything when she applied for the job."

"I eat well, but maybe I've been working too hard."

"I heard your business is facing many obstacles."

"Yes."

"It's not as easy as taking over what your parents built, is it?"

Mom leans back and gets more comfortable.

"You had it good but chose to make things difficult for yourself. If you'd listened from the start, you wouldn't be this tired."

"But it's fun, starting from scratch. Even if it's not from zero, it's a whole new beginning."

As I say this, I take out a set of jewelry from my bag and place it on the table, not to show off but to let Mom see.

"I brought this for you, Mom. I wanted to give you this first collection."

Mom glances at it but doesn't seem interested.

"It's not really my style."

"If you don't wear it, just keep it."

"Mm."

Mom's indifferent response makes me feel disheartened. I've hoped to see some pride in me in her eyes like Dad always shows, but there's nothing.

"Then I'll go. I won't bother you anymore."

"Mm."

I get up to leave, and just then, Dad comes in with a servant bringing snacks, hoping I'll stay a bit longer. But suddenly, I feel angry at Mom for being so indifferent. I turn to her, fists clenched, and speak with a pained voice.

"Why do you hurt me like this, Mom?"

"What?"

Mom looks confused and sits up straight. Even Dad reaches out to touch my shoulder, but that only makes me more emotional, comparing his concern to Mom's indifference.

"I came to show you that I'm doing well despite the hardships. But not only do you not care, you act like what I'm doing is meaningless."

"Why are you raising your voice at me? Did you come here just to pick a fight?"

"Because you're acting like what I'm doing is pointless."

"Because it is pointless! You have money waiting for you, but you choose to struggle outside for some silly love. How much can you make from selling one set? If that's not pointless, what is?!"

"You're belittling my efforts. All my life, I've wanted to make you proud. I've done everything you've asked me to. But when I want to choose my own path, the love that will stay with me forever, the work I've built myself, you don't care. Can't you support me just once? Can't you see the good in what I'm doing?!"

"If you came here to argue, then leave."

"I came because I wanted your support, Mom! Can't you give me that? I'm tired. I miss you. I just wanted to see you, that's all."

"Frung."

Dad hugs me and rubs my back.

"Let's go get some fresh air."

"Wow."

"My good girl."

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It seems like all my pent-up emotions have finally burst out. Everything feels lighter now, and I even laugh a bit while sitting outside with Dad, calming down.

"I'm sorry, Dad. I didn't mean for it to turn out like this. I just wanted to show her my first work, but it turned into a fight."

"It's okay, I understand. Your mom is stubborn, too. Who wouldn't be upset? Look at you, crying until your eyes are swollen. Don't you have an appointment with Yu today?"

"Yes, I'll put on some makeup, and it should be fine. I should go now."

"Don't worry about your mom. I can tell you she misses you more than anything in the world. She's just too proud to show it."

"Thank you for being in my life, Dad."

"Thank you for being my daughter, my little puppy."

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I carry the weight in my chest to the meeting with Yu without telling her anything. I put on a smile when I meet Intuorn and Ms. Gainlong to discuss the details. Yu, who meets me at the office entrance, looks at me knowingly

"Ms. Frung, have you been crying?"

"No, what makes you say that?"

She doesn't press further when she sees me brushing it off.

"Sorry for being late. Is everyone here?"

"Ms. Frung, you're right on time... Is there nothing you want to tell me?"

"No."

"Where did you go before this?"

"Just some errands."

"What kind of errands?"

"Do you need to know everything about me?"

I laugh it off.

"I went to see my mom to show her our first product."

I don't say anything more, and neither does Yu. We both enter the company right on time and discuss the project details. Honestly, I didn't need to be here because Yu can handle most of the jewelry work alone. It's about design and creativity. I look at her sweet face and feel a strange sadness. It's like she doesn't really need me.

She can handle everything on her own just fine.

Here, I feel like just a supporting character, here to give moral support and watch the three of them discuss the project. Since we can't sell our products in our own store, we rely on Intuorn's brand to display them.

The first product will be showcased at a fashion show in three months. The scale of the project keeps getting bigger, and it scares me. From a jewelry store targeting the middle class to the wealthy, now it's going even further.

Intuorn thinks we can export and create a subsidiary brand, and everyone agrees, discussing it enthusiastically.

"It's nice to work with you, Ms. Gainlong," says Yu.

"Once the design is ready, send it to my email. I'll send mine to you as well, so everything aligns-bags, scarves, and jewelry."

"Got it."

"We'll definitely be rich."

Intuorn laughs and winks.

"It's amazing how we're all on the same page about exporting."

"Actually, I thought about it but didn't say anything, fearing it might seem too far-fetched. But since both Ms. Gainlong and Ms. Intuorn brought it up, it turns out we all agree. Right, Ms. Frung?"

"Hm?... Yeah,"

I respond along her line, having been the listener all along. I force a smile at everyone.

"Please excuse me. I need to step out for a bit to take care of something."

I pretend to receive a phone call and quickly excuse myself, even though no one is actually calling. The feeling of being useless, having no role, makes me feel worthless.

I always thought I was smart, progressive, and good at managing people because my mom used to assign me tasks. But now that I'm out from under her wing, I realize I know nothing and can't do anything on my own.

The more I think about it, the more it hurts...

"Ms. Frung, who are you talking to?"

"Oh, when did you get here?"

I smile weakly at the petite figure and shrug.

"I just hung up. Are you done with your meeting?"

"We finished in the conference room. And I've been watching you all day. What's going on? Why do you seem so off and unusually down?"

"I'm fine."

"But you barely said anything today."

"There's nothing for me to say. It was mainly about you and Ms Gainlong. I didn't have to do anything. There's nothing for me to do. Honestly, I don't even know why I'm here today. You alone could've handled this."

"What's really going on? I don't like seeing you like this."

"Like what?"

"Without confidence. The Ms. Frung I know is much more capable."

Her words, meant to be playful and make me laugh, instead hit a sore spot, making me stand up straight, every muscle tensing in pain. Today, my mom has already shattered my confidence, and now I have to face this. I respond to Yu's teasing with a serious glare and speak out in frustration.

"Yes, I used to be more capable, but now I'm useless."

"What's wrong?"

She tries to reach out and touch my arm, but I swat her hand away. That's something I've never done before.

"I used to think I was more capable. I could handle everything because I'm well-educated, good at reading people, and manage them well. But today, I just sat like a fool in the meeting, watching everyone else have a lively discussion while I couldn't do anything. You're even about to export your products to Singapore."

"It's not just mine. It's ours!"

"How can it be ours when I didn't do anything? There's nothing for me to do!"

Tears stream down my face as I think about how I haven't been able to help her at all. It's always been her pulling me forward, guiding me on what to do next, even though it should be my job to do that because I have more experience.

"I feel like a burden. The revenue from the products you sell should be all yours, not shared with me. I should've listened to Mom from the start. Without my parents' support, I can't do anything."

"Shut up!"

"What?"

"I'm tired. Why do you have to act like you have a problem?"

"Because I'm the problem. If you didn't have me, it'd be easier. If you didn't have me, you could marry a good man and not have to run away and struggle like this."

"...."

"We should have never met!"

Pap.

The slap, which is more like a gentle touch on my face, ends my frenzy. Even though she didn't use much force, it feels like her heart is shattered beyond repair.

"Pixie..."

I reach out as if trying to grasp something, but she steps back, shaking her head slightly.

"I can't take it anymore. I'm tired."

"I'm sorry."

"My goal has always been you. Nothing has ever changed that. But why are you always ready to leave me, like a fragile glass that needs constant care and could break at any moment? I can't protect it anymore. This kind of relationship scares me. I'm afraid... that one day... the love I have for you..."

"...."

"Might turn into hatred."

"Why did you say that? Are you going to hate me?"

I'm more shocked by this than by the fight with my mom.

"No, please. I'm sorry... I was just a bit sensitive."

"I want you to be strong and determined and to move forward together. If you can't do that, maybe..."

"...."

"Maybe it's better if we don't see each other."

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Because of my fragility, things have escalated to this point. Now, even my only support, Yu, won't let me hold on to her anymore. I'm standing in front of my house, looking inside at the lights, imagining what my mom is doing. Maybe she's watching TV or reading a book. No one would think that the daughter who was yelling this morning is now standing here.

I want to hug her, but she doesn't love me anymore.

I stand there crying, clinging to the iron gate like a lost child. As I sob, I hear someone shouting from the front of the house.

"Frung... what's wrong, dear?!"

My mom's voice startles me, and I prepare to run away. I don't want her to see me defeated and back here. But her sharp command stops me.

"Stay right there!"

Mom is still the same Mom. If she orders, my body stops, even if I want to resist. I don't dare to look back, I just stand there wiping my tears with my arm. I hear the gate open and her footsteps approaching from behind. She takes a deep breath before speaking in her usual tone.

"Are you staying here tonight?"

"Can I?"

"Of course. This is your home, too."

"...."

"And I'm your mom... the one who's always proud of you."

I turn to her and immediately throw myself into her arms, crying uncontrollably.

"Mom, please hug me. I can't take it anymore."

"From now on, I'll help you, even if you choose your own path."

It seems I really have to come back home.

□□□□□

□ Chapter 37 □

Even though tonight I'm staying over as my mom suggested, my mind is still preoccupied with someone else I just had a fight with. It feels like when we argue, I'm the one who has somewhere to go, and it seems too cruel to Yu to do that. Honestly, I want to call her, but I don't know if she's ready to talk to me yet. I hurt her badly. I'm afraid Yu will really hate me, as she said.

"Frung."

It's not just my mom now, even my dad is standing at the bedroom door. Both of them look at me with concern, but they show it differently. Dad is much gentler because he's always understood me, while Mom looks stern, not as harsh as she used to be, maybe because her opposition has softened over time.

"Aren't you two going to bed yet?"

"It's bothering us, and I just had a serious talk with your dad about what happened. Why did our strong and capable daughter go out and come back crying... I'm not being sarcastic. I'm just trying to be descriptive."

Dad glances at Mom with a warning look, making her quickly explain herself. Even though she says she was trying to be descriptive, I still think she wants to say something to hurt me a bit, like someone who loves to win and say, 'I told you so' later.

"So, how was it?"

I ask Mom with a smile and invite them into the bedroom. Mom chooses to sit on the mattress while Dad stands leaning against the door.

"I heard you were bullied by someone from that house?"

"Well... would you call it bullying?"

I smile nonchalantly.

"The products we're selling are similar to theirs, so they had to block us. It's just capitalist market stuff."

"Your dad said they don't like you dating their daughter."

For mom to say something like this, she must've thought it through a lot. I nod and sit down next to her.

"Yes."

"And do they think we like their daughter that much? Hmph, they just sell jewelry. There's nothing interesting about that M.F. diamond shop."

"Dear! A lady doesn't talk like that."

"Not calling them 'motherfu- already good enough. Aren't ladies human? Besides, just having money doesn't make you a lady. Don't be pretentious. You married a middle-class vendor; what's the point of being prim and proper?"

Mom says irritably and shakes her head.

"So, they bullied you, and you just accepted it? Normally, you'd have a solution for everything."

"Well, I didn't have a heart to do anything. I came to you for support, and you didn't care."

"I care now, don't I? Even though I don't agree with everything, doing that to you is like they're bullying us, too. Do they think they're the only ones who can do this? Do you think selling diamonds and gems is so great? Just wait and see what I can do."

"What are you going to do?"

"The same thing they did to our daughter. And you, stop being so down... Honestly, I prefer it when you're rebellious rather than gloomy like this. At least it gets my blood pumping with anger. If you're my daughter, fight back."

I smile at Mom and scratch my face awkwardly. I know Mom is a fighter, but her taking my side like this is something I'm not used to..

"I want to fight, but today, I'm just not ready."

"Just because you fought with Pixie, you're backing down? If it's that complicated, just break up. There are plenty of women in the world. How about Emma Watphrakaew?"

"Watson. And why are you encouraging your daughter to like other women...? Aren't you against me liking women?"

"I try to see those people as men."

Mom gets up, ruffles my hair lightly, and walks to the door without looking back.

"Let's just say I'll show you that they're not the only ones who can do this."

I don't understand what mom means because even if I ask, she probably won't tell. Dad just smiles as he watches her leave and then looks at me with affection.

"Problems can be solved one step at a time. Now that you've solved the issue with your mom, try to figure out what you want to tackle next. You can do it, Frung."

"Yes."

Dad leaves, closing the door behind him, leaving me with his words to ponder. This morning, everything felt overwhelming because I got

discouraged and took my frustration out on Yu, who didn't deserve it. She did her best, but I couldn't handle my own problems.

After thinking for a while, I decide to call her after hesitating for a long time. As expected, she doesn't answer and even hangs up on me. It hurts a bit, but I think I need to try a little harder.

Beep....

She hangs up for the second time...

I just stare at the phone and then lie down, looking at the ceiling. Maybe it's better not to push too much right now. Better give her some time. Once she's no longer angry, she might call ba...

"Oh."

I'm still worried when I suddenly jump to answer the phone. Yu, who I thought was too angry to talk, calls back. As soon as I answer, she's silent.

"Hello... Yu, can you hear me?"

[I can!]

Then she hangs up again, leaving me confused. After thinking it over, I decide to call again. This time she answers but doesn't say anything, so I have to ask again.

"Hello... Pixie, can you hear me? Is your phone broken? Why did it keep getting cut off? Now, it happens again."

[It's not broken. I can hear everything!]

"Oh, then why did the call get cut off? Pixie, didn't you call?"

[Yes! And I hung up.]

"Oh, so I shouldn't call now, right? Am I bothering you too much?"

I don't know if this is the right time to make up. I can't read the mood on the other end well. It's full of worry, confusion, and fear that she'll be annoyed and hate me with every word I say.

[Is this considered bothering?]

"Well, I called you twice and got hung up on both times. And you said you were the one who hung up. If you aren't ready to talk, then I

[Why?]

"Huh?"

[Why can't you try harder to make up with me? Just because I hung up, don't you think about trying harder?]

"But you hung up twice. If you're polite, you should know the other person doesn't want to talk."

[But that 'other person' is me, not someone else. I'm your wife(*)]

"Oh."

I bite my finger as the person on the other end speaks bluntly. We usually use the term 'girlfriend. We never had a clear role each time we made love. This leaves me speechless.

[I want you to try harder. If I hang up, you should keep trying until I get annoyed and agree to talk to you, Don't bring up any 'polite' nonsense. Is it so hard to be a couple like others? I hate you!]

Then, the person who's yelling hangs up again. I'm left with my mouth open, unable to adjust my mood, so I just walk around thinking about what to do next. Yu calls again.

[The word 'hate' is just sarcasm. I don't really hate you... I hate you!]

Then she hangs up again as if to clarify because she's afraid someone as clueless as me will misunderstand. I used to be clueless, but after this, I

understand that the other person just wants attention and to be made up to. I laugh like a crazy person after being yelled at and decide to grab my bag and head out. But I run into Mom in the living room first.

"Where are you going?... Well, never mind."

"Okay."

"And how are you going?"

"I'll call a taxi."

"Don't be ridiculous."

Mom walks to the coffee table, grabs the car keys from the basket, and tosses them to me, sitting cross-legged coolly.

"Rich people drive cars, and our family is rich. The supercar isn't just for show."

"But it's your car."

"I'm giving it back to you. It's yours."

"Mom..."

"Yeah, we made up. I can't stand seeing you take taxis everywhere. Rich kids shouldn't struggle, and our family is rich. Remember that."

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I never cared how beautiful the car I drove was. I never even noticed that it was a car people turned to look at because I wasn't attached to material things. But today, I saw the reactions of people around when I parked at the apartment where Yu rented a room. Most people here are middle-class, working to save money to buy a room or house and pay it off.

Having someone drive a nearly ten-million-baht supercar and park under the building is something interesting. This is what they mean when they say a car is like a credit card. Even though it's just an outer shell, it makes people curious about who the driver is. First impressions are important, and this car is a great help.

Now I'm in the elevator, back at the apartment, standing in front of the door, ready to knock to see how the person inside will react. She's angry at me, and I need to make up because I'm really at fault.

"Pixie, can you open the door for me?"

Actually, I have a key to the room, but I choose not to use it because I want the person inside to open the door herself. Even though I can't hear what's going on inside, the shadow under the door shows me that Yu is standing on the other side. She remains silent, sulking but not completely ignoring me.

"Can we talk like adults, Pixie? The more you sulk, the harder it is for me to make it up to you."

""

"But if you're not ready to talk, I'll back off for now. I'll give you some space to think."

I make a show of stomping my feet loudly, then gradually quiet down as if I'm really walking away. About three seconds later, the door swings open quickly, and she yells out.

"What's this? That's all you're going to do to make up? Oh, Ms. Frung, you didn't leave."

"Of course not."

"Liar!"

Yu tries to slam the door in my face, but I wedge my foot in and push my way inside. The sweet-faced girl, seeing that she can't block me or isn't serious about blocking me, steps aside without looking at me.

"Pixie."

After closing the door, I immediately hug her. She resists a little, scratching my arm like a small cat trying to show its claws to see if its owner will give in.

"Don't touch me. Today, you made me hat... I mean, angry,"

She corrects herself to soften the blow, making me smile.

"How could you just leave when I was so worried and anxious? Are you a child who runs away to sulk after a fight?"

"I went back home."

"Home?!"

She exclaims, even more furious.

"What do you mean, Ms. Frung? You made up with your mom now?"

"Well... yeah, I cried at the door, and Mom felt sorry for me, so she let me in to talk."

"So, because you had somewhere to go, you could just leave me. That's right. You have a place to go, so you don't need to come back here anymore."

"It's because I had nowhere else to go that I went back home."

"Isn't this place your home, Ms. Frung?"

"But you said you hated me."

"Well, you...,"

She starts, tears welling up in her eyes. She pushes me away, not wanting to talk anymore because the more we talk, the angrier she gets.

"If you think I hate you, then just go. Don't come back."

"Because I don't believe you really hate me, I came back to make up with you. Please don't be angry with me anymore,"

I say.

I grab her arm as she tries to walk away and pull her close until our bodies are pressed together. I lean in to kiss her, but she turns her face away.

"Don't touch me."

Yu pushes me away again, but I hold my ground and pull her closer, speaking in a stern voice.

"Stay still," I command.

"How dare you talk to me like that? You're the one at fault today.

"Because I don't want to guess anymore. I just want to make things right."

I kiss her left cheek lightly, and she looks at me in shock because I've never approached her like this before.

"This isn't a drama where you make up with a kiss, and everything's fine... Hey!"

I kiss her right cheek and step closer, making her back up until she hits the door with a thud.

"Get out."

"Be quiet for once! Jump up," I order.

"Quickly!"

I lift her by the waist and command her like I used to when I was her boss. It seems to work she becomes a small, obedient child, jumping up and

clinging to me like a little monkey. I lean her against the door to support her weight.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"Pixie, I'm sorry,"

I repeat, kissing her chin lightly and then moving to her neck. She resists a little but soon tilts her head to give me better access.

"Today, I was so scared that I wouldn't matter to you anymore."

"Why would you think that?"

She asks, now listening and kissing me back.

"How could you not be important to me?"

"If I'm no longer useful to you, it makes me feel worthless, like you can't rely on me anymore."

"If you can't be relied on, then rely on me instead."

"How can I mean anything to you then?" I ask.

"Just having you in the world,"

She says, cupping my face with her hands and sighing.

"That's already meaningful for me. Just love me, that's all I ask. Can't you do that?"

"No,"

I say, lifting her and placing her on the floor as if I can't leave this spot because of the intense emotions.

"I want to be more than that. I want to be your mind, your thoughts, your arms and legs, your happiness..."

I pull down Yu's pants, and she doesn't resist. I use my hand to move her panties aside without taking them off because it'd take too long. I immediately taste her, making her arch her back and shudder with pleasure.

"Geez... you could actually make me stop being mad at you."

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I don't know how much time has passed, but now we're both completely naked, and my muscles ache from lying on the hard floor for so long. We didn't even think about moving because it was too much fun.

We were afraid that moving from one place to another would ruin the mood, so we endured the pain. We fell asleep on the floor, and when we woke up, it was morning. As I try to get up, she climbs on top of me to keep me from going anywhere.

"Don't get up," she says.

"It's morning," I reply.

"I like being naked with you. Remember? Besides, we don't have an office or a company. We're freelancers. Morning or late, it doesn't matter,"

She says, biting my chin playfully.

"Can we have another fight today?"

"Why?"

"This time, let's make up on the balcony. I've wanted to try it for a long time. I wonder if anyone will know what we're doing if we make loud noises."

"You crazy!"

I laugh and nuzzle her a bit.

"Let's get up. I'm sore all over. Moving to the couch would be better."

"Alright, since you were a good girl last night, we can move... but can we do it again on the couch? Let's do it just like last night. You were so wild. I love being ordered around. Last night, you were so fierce and bossy. Just thinking about it turns me on again. Chomp,"

She says, biting me.

We play around a bit more before finally getting up because Yu is still concerned about my health and insists I eat breakfast. She never neglects this, no matter how much she sulks. This morning is so good that we forget all about our fight. As I'm about to take a bite of food, I notice Yu looking at her phone with a worried expression.

"What's wrong? Why do you look like that?" I ask.

"My cousin sent me news. The mall management sent someone to talk to my family about not renewing the lease for the jewelry store."

"Which mall? If this one doesn't want it, go to another. Your family is rich. People will buy their stuff regardless of the location. Every mall would want them to open a store there."

"The problem is... no mall is renewing the lease."

"What? All of them? Why? Oh, wait a minute, my mom's calling,"

I say, my tone cheerful as I answer the call.

"Hi, Mom. Calling so early... but it's not a bad thing. I haven't heard from you in a while. I miss you,"

I say honestly. Mom laughs a little on the other end.

[Same here. I miss our chats about work.]

"So, what's up? Why are you calling this morning? Do you have work for your daughter?" I ask.

[I called to tell you that I've taken care of it.]

"Taken care of what?"

I can't remember what I talked to Mom about.

[I took care of the revenge. Now they'll know what it's like to fight against the rich in a capitalist system... Let's see what happens next. Will those malls choose that M.F. diamond shop or me?]

"What did you do, Mom?"

[Adjusting some investments.]

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Footnotes

1. In Thai, the words 'husband' and 'wife' can also be used to signify one's role in sexual activities akin to the words 'top' and 'bottom.'

□ Chapter 38 □

I've always known that our family is wealthy because we have a variety of businesses. If you ask what my family does for a living, I wouldn't be able to give a specific answer because my mom does so many things-from exporting seafood and fruits to occasionally investing in real estate. Even my app company is a subsidiary under my mom's leadership. So, it's fair to say that my mom is very influential in the business world.

And one of the businesses where my mom holds nearly ten percent of the shares is the department stores...

I once asked why she invests in so many things. She just shrugged and answered like a true investor,

"I want to be influential in every industry."

It was a simple answer, but I didn't understand why until today, the day I came to see her at home to ask about what she did. How could she prevent Yu's family's jewelry store from renewing their contract with the department stores?

"As I said, I adjusted some investments. Even though we're not in the top 10 richest, we have an impact on every industry-like dominos."

Mom touches a domino she's lined up and pushes it to make it fall.

"Did you set this up while waiting for me?"

"I wanted to look cool. I knew you'd come to ask, so I had to play big to impress."

Honestly, I think Mom has changed quite a bit. She seems more playful and happier than before. I remember her being more serious, even strict. But today, she's joking around with me as if she doesn't want the atmosphere to be too tense.

"How did you do it, Mom?"

"As someone who holds a significant amount of shares, I have the right to talk to the chairman. I mentioned the issues I was unhappy with and gave him an ultimatum to choose between me and that M.F. diamond shop."

"What does 'M.F.' mean, Mom? I've been wondering since you mentioned it."

"It's motherfu... You really didn't know, or are you just playing dumb?"

"I just realized when you said that, Mom. How did you come up with that?"

I place my hand on my chest with genuine surprise because I'm naturally not someone who uses crude language. I don't have a knack for such jokes as teenagers do.

"I thought they were associated with the MF Brands or something. But they pressured a top client like that just because you gave them the ultimatum? Yu's family's connections aren't ordinary either."

"Well, I have stakes in many businesses. I told them I'd withdraw my shares and stop supplying certain products to the store. Some shops rely on materials from me. If I don't supply, they can hardly do anything. That's the power of someone who covers a lot of ground."

"You're scary, Mom... Good thing you didn't plan to target me from the start, like pressuring our friends not to support our first product batch."

"She wouldn't be satisfied with just that,"

Dad, who's been listening patiently, interjects.

"Your mom planned to pressure the store, too, but that family beat her to it. Now, the villain couldn't stand being outdone and turned into the heroine."

"Hey!"

Mom clicks her tongue and shrugs in acceptance.

"I intended to, but seeing my daughter crying a river in front of the house because she was bullied, I couldn't stand it. I'm the only one who can bully my child. No one else has the right."

"What kind of mother are you?"

Dad shakes his head and sighs.

"Well, I'm a good person now. They cornered our child first, so we cornered them back. I haven't even thought about selling my shares to escalate things. Initially, I planned to withdraw shares here and there for anyone who's a regular customer of that jewelry store. Without customers, diamonds are just stones. Haha, screw that M.F. diamond shop!"

"Cover your ears, Frung,"

Dad reaches out to cover my ears protectively.

"Geez. I don't know how many times she's said that today."

"I'll say it again and again and again and again. No one can stop me. I'm so thrilled, thinking of ways to make that family so desperate they have to stop selling jewelry and scavenge food from trashcans. I love it! Capitalism gives me power without having to play politics. Wa ha ha ha ha!"

Mom's laughter echoes joyfully, and it makes me realize that she just enjoys using her power like that.

"Mom,"

I rush to hug her, startling her into silence.

"What? Suddenly hugging me, it's ticklish."

"Can you not do that to her family? I like that family."

"How can you like them after what they did to you?"

"Actually, Yu and I have found a way out. Please don't do that to them."

"I've only been enjoying myself for three hours. No way, I'm not satisfied yet. Don't stop me. I need something to distract me from remembering you're dating Pixie."

"Come on, don't do this. Let her solve her own problems."

"What's with you? When our daughter was in trouble, you asked me to help. Now that I'm helping, you say let her solve it herself. If you can't make up your mind, go talk to the mirror. I won't stop anything. My heart is racing like an EDM beat. My dopamine is surging. Don't even think of stopping me."

"Please... don't do anything to my family."

The sweet-faced girl who's been hiding speaks up, interrupting Mom's rant. Mom stops and looks at Pixie with a frown, like a tiger spotting prey.

"Chat, is this real? How dare you step your foot in this house."

"Chat, is this real? You've amazed me in many ways today,"

Dad retracts his neck, looking at Mom with a cringe.

"I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but..."

"You're saying I'm loud, huh? Hmph! Pixie, you're brave to come here and insult me."

"She hasn't said anything to you. You're the one doing that to her."

"Why do you always side with this girl?"

"Because she's cute."

"I'm cuter!"

Then, everything falls silent. I look at Mom in amazement that she even wants to win in this. Yu strides over and kneels in front of Mom, raising her hands like a student being punished.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"I want to apologize for everything that happened. I know I'm the cause of it all. Today, I came to show my sincerity. Madam, you can scold or hit me; I'll accept everything. Just don't take it out on my family."

The word 'Madam' is what Yu used to call Mom when she first applied to be a maid. I look at my girlfriend and rush to help her stand, but the small girl shakes her head.

"No, I won't get up."

"Pixie, don't do this. My mom isn't someone who'll soften just because someone kneels in front of her,"

I explain Mom's nature in a whisper. Yu pulls away from me and blinks thoughtfully.

"If kneeling doesn't work, then I'll do something else."

She says only that and quickly crawls to hug Mom's leg tightly. Dad and I are left with our mouths agape while Mom looks more shocked than anyone.

"Why are you hugging my leg? Let go."

"No, I'll stick to you like a tick until you give in."

"Don't use this tactic. If kneeling worked for everything, then everyone who prayed at temples would be rich like Bill Gates. Get off me, girl."

Mom tries to shake Yu off, but she's too persistent. Mom ends up standing, panting because she's too old to move around.

"Let go!"

"What do I have to do for you not to do anything to my family?"

"When your father did it, did anyone beg him like this? No."

"That's because I and Ms. Frung have found another way to solve it."

"Fine, I admit I got involved out of pure satisfaction. Just think of it that way. I said let go! Ugh!"

Mom sits down on the floor. Yu still clings to her leg even though they're now on the same level.

"You're very determined. Okay, I'll give you a choice."

"Tell me, I'll do anything."

"Anything?"

"Yes."

"If you break up with Frung, I'll do everything you want."

"No."

"What! You said anything."

Mom shrieks. Yu lowers her head to the floor and shakes it.

"Except for this, I can't do it."

"If you can't, then nothing changes. Now it's a test of whether you love your family or Frung more. Oh... I was the heroine, and now I'm the villain again. Hey... why are you just standing there? Pull this girl away. Frung, too... don't you pity your girlfriend's behavior? She's about to hump me."

Because I know that even if we try to separate them, Yu will persist in another way. The scene of the two of them makes me sigh. It's like two stubborn people arguing.

"I can't do anything, Mom. She's...just like you."

"Oh, I'm much better than her. Get this girl off me!"

Everything seems so chaotic, and Dad and I don't know what to do. In the end, we just sit and watch. Mom is too tired to push Yu away, and Yu is too determined to let go. The sweet-faced girl now looks like a koala clinging to a eucalyptus tree. It's a cute sight that makes me smile.

"What are you smiling at?" Mom bares her teeth at me and sighs.

"How long are you going to cling to me like this?"

"Until you die."

"Are you really trying to beg me? Get off me, now!"

They tussle again, but as usual, nothing happens. Mom finally speaks in a soft voice, as if trying to make peace, hoping Yu will let go.

"At least let me go to the bathroom."

"Well, I'm not stopping you," Yu says.

"You aren't, but you can't cling to my leg the whole time I take my pants off."

"Then, you should just give in."

"Then, you should break up with my daughter. If you love your family so much and are afraid it'll fall apart, you should sacrifice your personal happiness for the greater good. Break up with Frung and go your separate ways. You can't have it all."

"Mom,"

I sigh as she insists. Even if Yu agrees, I won't. Mom is just saying it to win because she knows Yu is as stubborn as a mule.

"I think you should do what Yu asks. Even if they pressure us, we've found a way out. We're planning to design a new collection for the mall owner's daughter and plan to export to Singapore. You don't need to worry..."

"Then why were you crying a river in front of the house!"

I shut my mouth quickly when she snaps at me. Yu looks at me, feeling guilty.

"Sorry, Ms. Frung."

"You made my daughter cry. The only person who has the right to hurt her feelings is me. Remember that!"

Mom turns her head forty- five degrees to show her sarcasm.

"Talking too much makes me hungry."

"How about I cook for you!?"

Yu raises her hand cheerfully, trying to please, but Mom pouts, not interested at all.

"No need. Your food won't soften my heart."

"Try it first, Madam. You might change your mind."

Mom pauses to think for a moment and then nods. Yu lets go of Mom's leg and stretches a bit because she's tired. Mom slowly stands up and takes the opportunity to run upstairs quickly while the small girl is distracted.

"You fool!"

Mom is still Mom. Seeing that she's free from the clutches, she quickly turns to mock, but she forgets that she's still old. As soon as Mom turns to

mock her, Yu, who's been chasing her from the start, grabs her and smiles with her eyes closed.

"You're so cunning, Madam. Let's order something then."

"What... are you crazy?"

"I'll stick to you till the end of the world."

"No... Noooooo!!!"

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Yu pesters my mom all day until nightfall. It seems more like they're playing than actually being mad at each other. I can't help but smile when I see the two people I love both fall asleep on the sofa. At first, I reach out to wake the sweet-faced girl to either go home or sleep on the bed, not clinging to Mom like that. But Mom, who I thought was asleep, makes a shushing gesture to stop me from moving.

"I thought you were asleep, Mom."

"I was just closing my eyes. This girl has been a nuisance all day. Look, even asleep, she's still gripping my shirt tightly. I've never met someone so determined... She doesn't want me to ruin her family but also won't break up with you. Today, she's been acting sweet, hoping to get some affection. Hmph!"

Mom laughs and bares her teeth, making a mock fist, but then folds her arms back.

"And did it work?"

"It annoyed me. No wonder she managed to make you her girlfriend... Was she the one who made the first move? Because someone like you wouldn't do that. You're too clueless."

I scratch my cheek, feeling a bit embarrassed.

"Something like that. But she wasn't exactly the only one who made a move. I have feelings for her, too."

"Ew, spare me the details. I'm going to throw up... How long do I have to sleep on this sofa?"

"Until she gets what she asked for, I guess."

"People can't get everything they want."

"Mom... can't you do it for me? Please."

"I haven't done anything. This is the typical competitor blocking strategy."

"We all know you're doing it to get back at them for me."

"That's true, but they started it... This is going around in circles. I ● told her to break up with you, but she won't. But for me to suddenly make everything normal wouldn't feel right. I'm a businesswoman. If I lose something, I have to gain something first."

"And what do you want, Mom?"

I look at her, genuinely curious. The older woman looks at Yu and shrugs.

"I want that family to apologize to you in front of me."

□□□□□

□ Chapter 39 □

I can sense that my mother has softened a bit, but she still wouldn't just drop it. So, proposing that the other party apologize to me is more of an excuse to find a way out. Little does she know, this is a very tough challenge. Yu's father wouldn't even speak to me when I called. He hung up on me as if to say, 'Don't waste your time. Since calling didn't work, the only way is to meet face-to-face.

The large gate stands tall in front of the house and before me. It feels like a test to see if I have the courage I claim to have. The last time I stayed here, I became the beloved child of the house. But after the truth came out, I became the enemy who stole the family's princess. If I go inside and get shot, I won't be surprised.

"Don't go in. If my dad splashes water at you, I won't be able to stand it. And if I burn the house down for revenge, I'll be seen as a terrible child."

The girl, who stopped clinging to Mom, followed me out of concern after knowing what deal I got. Even though I didn't tell her, she could probably guess it and ended up sticking to me instead of Mom.

"Pixie, you shouldn't have come."

"I have to. I know what my dad is like. Besides... I can't stand it if you cling to my dad's legs like I did to your mom. The only one you can do that with is me."

"You crazy."

Even though it's a scary situation, the small person can't help but joke, trying to lighten the mood, which I have to admit makes me change my worried mood to a mix of laughter and anger.

"Let's go back home."

"No, I've made a decision since talking to Mom yesterday that I'd come to talk to your dad. Even if I have to cling to his legs, I'll do it."

"But I can't stand it!"

"And when you clung to my mom's legs, did you think I could stand it?"

"You could because it looked cute when I did it, but when you do it, it'll look pathetic, like a beggar. No way, I can't stand it."

"Why do I have to look like a beggar?"

"Well, you're tall, like a preta [*[1]],"

"Hey..."

I gape at my girlfriend's retort, but Yu doesn't care, pulling my arm to make me back off. I have to reach out and press the doorbell so the people inside can see who is at the gate through the CCTV, meaning we have no way to escape now.

"Why are you looking for troubles?"

Yu says.

It seems the person inside saw through the camera who was ringing the bell. The electric gate unlocks, signaling that we can enter, which I consider a better welcome than I expected.

"Your dad opened the gate."

"It's the maid. Dad wouldn't waste time looking at the camera. And they opened it because I'm the homeowner's daughter."

"Well, it's opened now, nonetheless."

I step into the house I haven't visited in a while. Everything is still the same, except for the chilling coldness that grips my heart. Standing outside is nerve-wracking, but being inside makes my heart almost stop.

"We can still back out."

"Stop discouraging me. If you're scared, go back first."

"On the contrary, I've never been afraid of my own family. I'm ready to fight."

Before she can finish speaking, her dad appears at the front of the house, making us both freeze in our tracks. His unfriendly gaze makes me stand stiffly, not knowing what to do. Yu steps in between me and her dad, raising her head like a programmed arguing machine.

"Why are you here?"

Yu's dad asks.

"To buy eggs? I don't know. You tell me."

"If you're here to troll me, leave, both of you."

"Then, goodbye."

Yu takes her leave and then pulls me back. I resist and sigh.

"Yu, go back first."

Whenever I'm serious, 'Pixie' becomes 'Yu' immediately, signaling that she must listen to what I say.

"I'm not going back. Hmph."

"Today, I want to talk to you, Dad."

"Who's your dad? I have nothing to talk to you. Since you came into our lives, my life and family have never been the same. My daughter ran off,

and my business is in trouble and might collapse because of you."

"Before blaming anyone, you should blame yourself first, Dad. You coerced our partners to cut us off."

"Us? I'm your father!"

"I'm your daughter, yet you still did it. You intended to leave us with no way out, so Ms. Frung's family retaliated, making you feel at the dead end just like us."

"Yu, how can you side with others over your own family?"

"Others care about their daughter enough to step in and help. What have you done besides despising us?"

"Enough, Yu."

"No, Ms. Frung, I can't stand it."

"I said stop and go back!"

My serious tone makes Yu fall silent. The atmosphere is tense. I point to the door, signaling the girl who likes to ruin the mood to leave her own house. Yu's eyes well up with tears of hurt.

"You also prioritize others more than me."

"The 'others' you talked about is your dad."

My voice softens but remains firm.

"Go back. I'll solve this problem. This is my responsibility."

"Hope you fail. Bleh!"

"...."

The stubborn person stomps off, leaving the house. Yu's dad, who has watched the whole scene, looks at me and scoffs before going inside without looking back, shouting to the maid.

"Close the door. Don't let anyone into the house!"

The door closes, seemingly to prevent me from entering. I can only look and sadly touch the lacquered door. On the bright side, they still let me into the yard, even if not the house. I don't believe someone as kind as Yu's dad would leave me outside alone. He must've softened up somehow.

After all, we used to love each other. You had me, I had you... *Midnight Flight*.

Sorry. Sorry. I was joking.

Because they refused to let me in, I had to stand idly in front of the house. Each minute passed boringly. The only thing to relieve stress was my phone. But after playing for a three days while, I felt tired. The battery, which was full at first, gradually drained until only one bar was left, forcing me to switch to battery-saving mode.

Looking up from my phone, I notice the sky changing colors. I've been standing here since noon, and now it's almost dusk. The people inside remain stubborn.

I'm thirsty, and I need to use the bathroom...

Strangely, even though I didn't drink much water, I still needed to go to the bathroom. Having stayed here before, I know where the maid's quarters are. When I peek in, I see everyone enjoying their dinner, chatting away. The chatter stops when I appear.

"Um... can I use the bathroom?"

Everyone looks at each other, unsure how to handle me. It seems the homeowner has instructed them to treat me like I'm invisible. They quickly grab their plates and scatter, not wanting to face me.

Sigh...

I guess I'm no longer liked here. Before, everyone smiled at me, but now I make them run away as if they see a cockroach.

"The bathroom

IS

in the back...

I'm not talking to you. I'm just reciting a poem."

The head maid, who I think was also Yu's nanny, says without looking at me. After that, she disappears. I look at her gratefully, almost in tears, and quickly go to relieve myself.

The first problem was solved. Next is... water.

If I ask them again, it might make everyone uncomfortable. I'm not in a position to ask for anything, so I quickly leave the maid's quarters before the homeowner sees me. My throat is parched, like I'm walking in the Sahara Desert. Then, I notice the swimming pool that Yu has once shown off to me.

The pool water should be clean, right?

I swallow hard, stepping closer, with desperation. I want to go buy water outside but fear I won't be let back in. So, I have to do this pitiful thing.

As I crouch to scoop water, a stern voice startles me:

"What are you doing?"

"Dad."

"I'm not your dad."

I quickly let the water go, shaking my hand awkwardly.

"The water looked clear, so I was just playing with it."

"Is that so? Is my house a place for you to have fun? You walk around the house without any respect, especially for the owner, who doesn't like you at all."

"Well..."

"I've said enough. You can leave now. If I were you, I wouldn't stay here any longer. Do I have to chase you out like a dog?"

His harsh tone hits my fragile heart hard. I have to admit Yu is much better at this than I am. I don't understand how she can endure my mother's words. Just hearing this much makes my eyes well up with tears. I stare at the elderly man, my lips trembling from the sadness until I start to sob.

"What? Are you crying?"

The person in front of me is clearly shocked.

"Don't cry here. Go away. Get out."

"Waah... I'm not leaving. I'm staying here."

"How shameless."

"Ueee."

I sob, lifting my arm to wipe away my tears. The elderly man looks bewildered, starting to feel guilty as if he can't stand seeing a woman cry.

"Don't cry here. Alright, alright, you're not that shameless. Just a little bit."

"Waaah."

"Alright, alright, alright, you're very demure, very mindful, very cutesy!"

"..."

I stop crying for a moment and look at the person in front of me, who is trying to find words to make me feel better, so I'll stop crying. Seeing that I'm not sobbing anymore, he sighs in relief.

"What is wrong with you? You've been shameless all day. Just a few words, and you act hurt. You can't compare to Yu. She could be cursed to death and still be stubborn like a bull."

"Waaah, but I'm not that strong. I did my best. I've never begged anyone like this before."

"I wasn't asking you to do that. Now, you're crying again! Do you want some ice cream?"

"What kind of person do you think I am? You look down on me. Waaah."

I cry louder, but this time, I'm faking it. I've figured out that Yu's father is terrified of seeing women cry. He isn't as tough as he pretends to be. That's why when he and Yu fight, no one apologizes. Yu is too strong-willed and probably never cries in front of him, so this moment never happens.

"Huh, how does me offering you ice cream mean I look down on you?"

"I don't eat popsicles. They're too cheap."

"This is Haagen-Dazs. It's almost three hundred baht. Is this expensive enough?"

"Okay, that's fine. Waaah."

"Why are you crying again?!"

"I'm thirsty."

"Then, just say that. No need to cry."

"I'm hungry, too. Waaah."

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"Then, eat something. Stop crying already!"

Because of my tears and persistence, I managed to get into this house.

The elderly man makes some simple food for me, watching closely for my reaction to the taste. Honestly, it's very salty, but my hunger makes me try to forget it and eat everything to regain my strength. I then grab a nearly full glass of water and gulp it down.

Ah... much better. My thirst is quenched, and my stomach is full.

"I'll give you a chance to speak, seeing you cried so much, even though I don't want to listen... You can say one sentence. Think carefully. If you can't make me interested, it's your bad luck, and we're done. Ah... before you open your mouth, think carefully."

I stare into his eyes and bite my lip. Fine... if I only have one sentence to say, then I'll talk about this.

"What do you have to say? I'm listening."

"This dish is absolutely dogshit."

"What did you say!"

I stand up and prepare to walk away immediately, having used up my chance. Yu's father, red with anger, can't stand it, so he walks to block my path, trembling as he asks.

"I made food for you, and you say it's dogshi... I always thought you were a polite person."

"Why aren't you saying anything!"

"Does that mean you're interested now?"

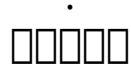
I give him a smug look.

"W... What?"

"You said if I could make you interested, you'd talk to me. And I did it."

"Y... You crazy kid!"

I win...



Footnotes

1.^ Preta (𑀧𑁆𑀭𑀸𑀓) is also known as 'hungry ghost.' They are described as being abnormally tall with tiny mouths, able to emit a high-pitched sound.

□ Chapter 40 □

"Why do I have to go talk to your mother? If she wants to talk to me, she should come here herself. Or just tell you, and you can pass it on. Why make it so complicated!"

After Yu's dad finally agreed to listen, having lost to the challenge he set for me, he immediately started ranting like a stubborn person. I want to sigh but have to hold it in because I'm the one asking for a favor.

And yes... I didn't mention the real message my mom wanted to convey, which was for him to 'apologize' to me.

"Actually, it'd be better if you talked to her yourself. Both of you are executives and should understand each other. I don't want both sides to fight over our issue and let it affect the businesses."

"It doesn't affect anything. Not renewing the contract with the mall is no big deal. We can build a building and open our own store. We're rich enough."

He says, crossing his arms and refusing stubbornly. Yu's mom, who has been eavesdropping, rushes in to join the conversation and starts persuading Yu's dad to change his mind.

"Honey, since there's an opportunity, just go talk it out instead of spending money to buy a building and advertise a new store, which mightn't get a good location like in the mall. You don't have just one branch. Don't be so proud. They've already made the first move."

"Made the first move..."

Yu's dad's tone softened as he felt he had the upper hand.

"You mean they're backing down?"

"Of course, Frung is their daughter, and she's coming to talk to you. It's clear they're reaching out first. All that's left is for you to respond and have a proper conversation."

Yu's dad sits quietly for a moment, then nods in agreement.

"Alright... I'll talk to her."

I smile so widely that my eyes almost closed, making Yu's dad scoff at my obvious delight.

"But I'm not going to them. If they want to talk, they have to come to me."

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Alright... Now, it's just a matter of getting both sides to talk. It seems both Yu's dad and my mom are ready to talk. I return home late at night. Yu, who hasn't gone to bed yet, is sitting on the front steps swatting mosquitoes, which makes me chuckle a bit.

Why does everything seem so reversed? I went to her house, and she became another daughter of my family.

Seeing the main door open, I park the car. Yu stands up excitedly, but when she sees me get out of the car, she pouts and stomps into the house, reminding me that we had a fight today.

"Pixie, stop right there. If you go inside, I can't apologize to you."

"Why can't you apologize inside?"

"Mom will hear us. She doesn't like seeing me lose. If I'm going to apologize, it's better outside."

"Fair enough. Apologize outside then. I'm listening."

"I love you, Pixie!"

My direct words make her eyes widen in surprise. She wasn't prepared for a love confession. I'm not sure if I've ever said something like this before, but I'm sure I haven't said it often enough, or she wouldn't look so shocked.

"W....What?"

"I'm making up with you. Are you still mad at me?"

I ask, walking over and hugging her tightly as if I want to merge her into my body. Yu struggles a bit, mumbling against my chest before giving in and hugging me back, making me release her.

"That's cheating. How can I stay mad now?"

"I'm so tired today."

I rest my chin on her shoulder, trying to be affectionate.

"If I had to apologize to you for a long time, I'd die."

"Dealing with my dad was tough, right? How did it go? That stubborn old man isn't like your subordinates at the company, right?"

"Not exactly." I laugh wearily.

"It went well. Your dad agreed to talk."

"Really? How did you do it?"

Yu pulls away in disbelief.

"My dad is the most stubborn person I've ever met. He once didn't talk to me for three months in school after seeing me gag because dinner was bad."

"Because you don't know his weak spot."

"And you do?"

"Something like that."

"Then why do you still look worried if he agreed to talk?"

"It's hard to get my mom to talk to your dad. She's not easily persuaded, either. The issue is, Mom wants your dad to come and apologize for causing trouble, but your dad wants my mom to come and talk to him."

"Now, that's hard. Both sides want the other to make the first move because the one who does is the loser."

Yu interprets the situation.

"Didn't you tell my dad why your mom wants to talk?"

I did, but not everything."

I smile guiltily, feeling like a schemer. It's like a business negotiation where you leave out some details, fearing the other side mightn't listen and run away.

"I left out some points."

"And they were important points. No wonder he agreed so easily. What now? Even if they meet, Dad won't apologize in front of everyone. Maybe we should give up. If you don't want me to work with In, we can think of something else. We have your mom's support now, which is huge."

Yu's resilience and tendency to make everything easy make me smile. Her straightforwardness makes me feel like I'm overthinking.

"We've come this far. Let's try a bit more. I'll talk to Mom. Maybe she'll agree to meet your dad."

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"Are you crazy? I have him wrapped around my finger. Why should I go to him? Her dad should come to clear things up. Hmph, he's acting like he's superior. He's about to have no store to sell his products in, yet acting so arrogant!"

Just as I feared, she'll never back down and go to anyone first. Yu and I exchange worried looks, wondering what to do next. Then, Yu speaks up without any prior discussion.

"It's not that you're going to him first. We'll meet somewhere outside. My dad is worried that meeting at this house would be uncomfortable. It'd be better to meet outside for a proper discussion."

"And what's wrong with my house? Do you know how many millions it cost to build? It was designed by a top architect. Look at the marble floor imported from Italy and the lead-free paint. It was designed with a focus on the convenience. Even the faucets are handmade. This house should be a museum. Only blue-blooded people can live here. BoomTharis [*[1]] should film his video here to show the world."

"Hey."

Dad, who's been silent, looks bored with Mom's pride in the house and sums everything up without asking for any opinions.

"Let's meet outside then. Frung, choose the place and time. The important thing is the content of the conversation. The place can be anywhere."

"Hey, you can't just decide like that."

"If I wait for you to decide, you'll be talking about the bed imported from England, the vanity table, and the walk-in closet, which has nothing to do with the topic."

"How did you know I was going to talk about the walk- in closet? You really know me."

Mom says, surprised, then shrugs, forgetting what she was going to say. I quickly wrap things up and call Yu's dad to arrange an outside meeting, to which he gives me an annoyed reaction.

[Why make it so complicated? Just come to the house. What's the big deal?]

"My mom isn't convenient with that. She said it might be uncomfortable."

[Uncomfortable? Hmph! You saw how big my house is. The land has been in the family since the time of King Rama V. My ancestor was a nobleman. How many houses have a lake and saltwater pool? Not to mention the architect who designed it with the concept of 'less is more; confusing but comfortable.' I was going to invite BoomTharis to review the house. Hmph.]

So Yu's dad and my mom are fans of this BoomTharis. No wonder his name keeps coming up. And they both love bragging about their houses.

"But the place we're going to is beautiful, perfect for a business discussion. It's formal and suits your high status."

[Whatever. As long as I don't have to go to your house, anywhere is fine. Just set the time and place.]

"Thank you, Dad."

[I'm not your dad.]

[Why are you quiet?]

"...I... I'm...Ueueue..."

[Just kidding. Since you're this cute, I can be your dad. Don't cry where I can hear you. That's all.]

I fake a trembling voice and burst into laughter when he quickly hangs up, afraid he'll hear me crying. Yu sees all my antics, even my exaggerated pout.

"Ms. Frung, were you pretending to cry just now?"

"Well..."

"Honestly, Ms. Frung, you could be an actress. I never thought I'd see this side of you."

She laughs.

"I love this and every other aspect of you."

"I love you, too."

"Let's hope this conversation goes smoothly. Even though Dad doesn't know the real reason your mom wants to talk, just agreeing to meet is a good start."

"Yeah, this is already great. We've come a long way."

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We book a private dining room to start.

Yu handles the menu because she knows what her family likes and even considers my family's preferences. My job is to coordinate with both families about where and when to meet. Yu and I set a date within three days to ensure both sides don't forget it. My mom and Yu's dad clear up their schedules and agree to meet at 7 PM at a hotel. I arrive with Yu's family, while Yu comes with mine.

Wait... this seems a bit mixed up. Why is that?

"Good choice."

Yu's dad says as he sits in the private dining room. The place is a blend of Western and Eastern decor with soft background music. Two minutes later,

Yu brings my mom in. If I'm not mistaken, I hear a rumbling sound of a battle between the elders.

Dad, this is my mom. Mom... this is Yu's dad."

"Doesn't he have names?"

Mom, who seems ready for a fight, asks. Yu's dad straightens up, looking like a cobra ready to strike.

"I do, but you aren't allowed to call me by name."

"So what should I call you?"

"Call me whatever you want."

"Alright, Egg Head."

"Mom!"

My eyes nearly pop out.

My dad reaches out to cover Mom's mouth in shock.

"What did you say?"

"Well, he said call him whatever, so I called him Egg Head. Or should I call him Shrek?"

"Hmm... Clearly, money can't buy class. Typical market vendor, no manners whatsoever."

Yu's dad says, inspecting his nails and pretending to blow on them as if he just filed them.

"Old, loud hag."

Mom bares her teeth but holds back.

"Oh no, I'll call you Fiona then. Let's keep it in the same story."

Yu's dad, who controls his emotions better, responds calmly.

Mom licks her lips and sits down, clearing her throat.

"To not waste time, let's get to the point so we can leave quickly."

"Go ahead."

"Put your hands together."

"What?"

"Put your hands together and apologize to my daughter."

Mom nods toward me.

"We're here because you want your business to run smoothly. I've made it easy. Just apologize to my daughter."

Yu's dad looks at me, his mouth opening and closing like a fish.

"What is this?"

"Mom, let's not go that far. Let's talk nicely. No need to apologize to me."

I say, looking like I'm about to cry, looking at Yu's dad, who was tricked into coming here.

"Please, you don't need to apologize to me."

"Why should I apologize? I'm here for your mom to apologize to me."

"And why should I apologize to you? I've already had you wrapped around my finger. I can crush you or let you go. There's no reason for me to apologize. Are you dumb or stupid? Pick one so I can understand."

Yu's dad stands up, furious.

"I'm leaving. Frung, let's go!"

"Frung is my daughter!"

Realizing his mistake, he looks at Yu, knowing his stubborn daughter won't leave with him.

"Fine, I'll go alone."

"Wait."

I rush to block his way, afraid he'll really leave.

"Don't be mad. If you leave, you'll lose."

"I'm not losing. There's no point in staying. Why should I apologize? What did I do wrong? Destroying competitors is part of capitalism. If you can't survive, go do something else."

"Exactly, this is capitalism. I'm using the same method you used on these two kids. What kind of father doesn't want his child to succeed? In the end, you destroyed yourself. Wah ha ha ha."

"A low-class vendor like you wouldn't understand the betrayal by someone you love and trust. It's like a heartbreak!"

"So you bully kids to not look stupid, even though you already are. Oh, you M.F. Jeweler."

"And you're P.H. Necklace."

"P.H. Necklace? What is it?"

Mom looks at her gold necklace.

"I don't get it."

"It works the same way as you 'M.F.' thing. Pubic Ha..."

Yu's dad tries to hint, and Mom finally gets it.

"Oh, what kind of a high-class man says such dirty things? You B.S. A.H. S.O.A.B."

"You C.S. M.F. F.U."

They start exchanging insults, and I can barely keep up. Finally, I can't take it anymore and stand between them, screaming like never before.

"Ahhh!!!!"

"...."

"...."

"Enough! I didn't want it to turn out like this. All I hear is P.H. S.O.A.B. M.F.!"

"Frung."

"Frung."

Both elders, shocked by my scream, look at me in horror. I feel dizzy and faint.

"Ms. Frung!"

And that's the last thing I hear...

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□ Chapter 41 □

Actually, I've been awake for a while...

But I don't dare to get up because I'm too embarrassed about what I said. As I mentioned, I don't like using bad language. Even though my mom is loud, she never uses foul language at home because she's afraid I'll pick it up.

I got into a good, expensive school because my mom wanted me to be refined in every way, and she succeeded. I grew up, maybe not so posh, but certainly not crude. But lately, I've been saying a lot of profanities.

Dogshit...

Just thinking about it makes me feel ashamed. How could I say that? My patience is really failing me.

I slowly open one eye to peek around and see if anyone is still here. Everyone has left me lying on the chairs they've lined up and are standing in the corner of the room, talking seriously. They want to be loud but are afraid of waking me up.

"Just apologize to my daughter. How hard can it be? If you did something wrong, just admit it. That's what adults do."

"Why do I have to? I already said it's a business competition. Should big tycoons apologize to every small shop in Thailand?"

"Actually, they should if they're monopolizing the market and killing off small businesses like that."

"Then you should bow to me too for not letting me sell in the mall."

"Ugh, you're annoying. You B.S. A.H. S.O.A.B."

"It's called reasoning. You P.H. Necklace."

"Enough!"

Yu, who's been listening, can't take it anymore and raises her voice decisively.

"This is not going anywhere. Ms. Frung has already fainted from screaming. Isn't that enough? Do you want me to collapse on the floor, too? Would you be satisfied?"

"I'd like to see that."

Her father says, crossing his arms and smirking.

"You've always been strong. If you faint, I might consider apologizing to Frung for what I did."

Yu bites her lip in frustration, seeing that her father doesn't care. I, seeing that Yu mightn't be able to handle it alone, prepare to get up and help but stop when she clasps her hands together and turns to her father.

"I won't collapse on the floor as you want, but if you want an apology from me, I'll give it to you."

Her softened tone makes her father uncross his arms, but he still doesn't seem convinced.

"Don't give a fake apology. It's obvious you're pretending."

"What do I have to do then?"

Yu raises her voice, trembling slightly.

"I don't even think I'm wrong for starting my own business. You didn't support me and didn't believe I could love a woman and build a family with her, so I left. But because she..."

She pauses, making everyone look at me. I quickly close my eyes, pretending to be unconscious, even though my fists are clenched in sympathy for her.

"Because she cares about your feelings and everyone here, we have to do this. Is it so wrong that we love each other? Did we cause you so much trouble?"

And finally... Yu starts crying in front of her father, who probably has never seen this side of her. Her father, who can't handle tears, is stunned, while my mom turns away, not thinking she's at fault, even though she's part of this whole mess.

"W... Why are you crying?"

"Because I can't take it anymore. Why do you have to torment us like this? Ms. Frung loves you so much and does everything to make you accept her, and look what you do. Don't touch me, I'm mad at you."

"Come on, my princess. You don't look cute when you cry."

I've never heard him talk to Yu like that before, which makes toddly endearing, especially when her father reaches out to touch her but gets his hand slapped away.

"You almost never cry."

"Well, I'm crying now because of you."

"Stop crying now... I told you to stop crying. Good girl... stop crying, okay?"

My mom, watching the father and daughter reconcile, looks like she's chewing on a small piece of dog poop. Now, even she doesn't know what to do with the situation.

"You too, Mom. No more revenge. We never wanted you to do this. It's all gotten out of hand."

"What! Why are you blaming me now? I was avenging you two."

"You did it for your own satisfaction. You don't even accept our relationship. Do Ms. Frung and I have to die first to satisfy you?"

"I can't answer that because you're not dead yet."

"...."

"But you don't really think about dying, do you?"

This time, my mom's voice softens when she sees Yu unusually quiet. Yu doesn't say anything in response and walks over to me, shaking me to wake me up. I have to pretend to be groggy, like a soap opera heroine waking up in a hospital with a fake dialogue.

"Hmm? What happened... where am I?"

I fainted here, so where else could I be? But if I don't say anything, it'd seem too normal, so I say something to break the awkwardness.

"You fainted. We're still at the hotel. Do you remember now?"

"Oh, yeah." I smile weakly.

"What do I miss? Let's continue."

"There is no more talking."

"No talking? Why?"

"The conversation is over. Ms. Frung, how much do you love me?"

The question, full of determination, makes me swallow hard because I know it's a continuation of Yu's conversation with my mom, and it gives me chills.

"A lot, of course. We've been through so much together."

"I'm glad."

The sweet-faced girl pulls me into a tight hug.

"I can't live without you, Ms. Frung."

"What's wrong?"

"You can't live without me either, right?"

She pulls back and holds my cheeks to make me look into her eyes. I fidget before answering with a half-smile, half-worried look.

"R...right."

"Good. Then... let's die together."

"What!"

"What!"

Yu's suggestion makes both our families gasp in high-pitched soprano. Whatever method Yu thinks of for dying, it seems terrifying enough that both parents rush over to us, trying to reason with her.

"That's not true. The Yu I know would never think of suicide. This is a plan to force me to apologize... don't dream of it!"

"Right, even though I didn't raise you, from what I've seen, you're too determined. Someone like that wouldn't think of suicide... or would they?"

My mom starts to waver and looks at her father for help, even though they were enemies just moments ago.

"No way! This is my child. I raised her myself. She's strong and determined."

"If she's very determined, if she wants to die, does that mean she'll actually do it?"

My mom starts to panic and looks at me.

"No, Frung, I raised you well. You're perfect. You'd never do something stupid like that."

"You don't know anything. People who commit suicide aren't stupid. They're determined and have thought it through!"

My dad, who hasn't had a role in a while, interjects, equally shocked.

"No, Yu, life is valuable. It took so much for you to grow up. You can't die."

"Why is it that only now everyone sees our value?"

Yu says sadly, still not taking her eyes off me.

"When we say we want to die, you see how capable we are, how we've grown. But when we want to live, to have good love, you make us feel worthless, corner us, and push us to the brink for your satisfaction."

"I didn't do that; it was all your father."

"Hey, don't blame me. I didn't do it alone. We all pressured them to the point where they want to die."

"It's because of all of you. Waah!"

Yu bursts into tears, burying her face in her hands, sobbing. Seeing her like this, I can't help but tear up, too.

"Pixie... don't cry. It pains me."

"Waah, why is living so hard, Ms. Frung?"

"I know."

Tears stream down my face as I look at my parents.

"Living is so hard, Mom."

"Frung, don't do this. I give up. Whatever you want, I'll agree to it. Just don't don't do it, dear."

"Me too. I give up, my little one... Yu, don't cry. It pains me more."

"Wow."

"I'm sorry... Frung, I'm sorry for not being an adult and for blocking your love. Whether you're a girl or a boy, I'll accept you... Please don't die. Let's keep arguing like this. I'll find other ways to stand in your way, but no more blocking your business."

"You'll still stand in our way. Waah."

"Well, life needs a bit of excitement. But, alright, I won't do that anymore. From now on, I'll welcome you two. I'm sorry... You, too, the kids are crying now. This is partly your fault, too. You hindered my business, and Yu and Frung couldn't stand it. You have to apologize, too."

"Fine, I'm sorry... Frung, I'm sorry for being stubborn and only thinking about revenge. Egg Head... I'm sorry. You can go back to your business as usual. I won't do this anymore."

"I also need to apologize for making you so angry at our child."

My father says to my mother genuinely.

"Because I caused you to have issues with this, I promise to take good care of you from now on. Even if I can't do it perfectly, I'll do my best."

"I also need to apologize to you, Dad, for not telling the truth the first time I came into the house, making you so disappointed."

I say to Yu's dad.

Now, everyone keeps apologizing to one another as if it's a game where whoever doesn't do it loses.

Eventually, everyone's eyes turn to Yu, who hasn't apologized to anyone and is just sobbing. We didn't expect anyone to apologize, but it's a bit strange that Pixie hasn't said anything.

And eventually...

"I need to apologize to everyone... for..."

"...."

"...."

"...."

"For not crying."

She pulls her hand away and looks at everyone with a big smile. Everyone is confused and stunned; even I can adjust my emotions quickly enough.

"Pixie..."

I don't know what to say because there's nothing to say, but I still feel unsettled, so I call out her name.

"Seeing everyone apologize like this makes me feel better. Actually, you guys probably have something you feel guilty about, right? That's why you're willing to make peace with each other."

"You weren't crying? You tricked me!"

The elderly man glares so hard it looks like his eyes might pop out.

"Why are you angry? Do you want me to cry?"

"I knew it. Someone like you wouldn't commit suicide. But I didn't think you'd pull this trick. How could you do this!.... Blob... Blob... Blob... Blob..."

The 'blob' is just my sound effect. Yu's father looks as if he's a fish choking on water, and it sounds similar.

"You deceiver! You've been tricking me since day one, and you're still doing it today!"

"Madam, do you really want me to die with Ms. Frung? Didn't you hear that Ms. Frung would go with me anywhere?"

"Blob... Blob... Blob... Blob..."

Even my mother looks no different from Yu's father.

It's a picture with sound, and I can hear that sound from my imagination.

"Thank you for starting to understand our love. I didn't apologize to anyone because I felt that my love wasn't wrong. I love Ms. Frung, and Ms. Frung loves me. I think everything she's done has been thought through. If there's one thing to apologize for..."

Yu puts her hands together in a wai gesture and looks at my parents.

"I'm sorry that our love doesn't please everyone, but please... understand us."

Seeing her determinedly do that, I smile at her before giving them a wai, too.

"Please understand us."

My action makes both elders fall silent and look at each other. Mom pulls the nearest chair and sits down, shrugging.

"Even if I don't understand, what can I do? We've fought this hard. Screw it. Whatever happens, let it happen. The world isn't ending."

Mom sighs like someone who can't do anything, so my dad, standing next to her, reaches out to squeeze her shoulder and smiles encouragingly.

"You're amazing."

"Flattery."

And now, all eyes turn to Yu's father, who still stands silently. He looks around nonchalantly with his arms crossed.

"What? What do you want?"

"You're the only one left. Will you be as open-minded as I am, Dumb Egg Head?"

Mom's sarcastic words go unheard by Yu's father.

"Open-minded about what? I don't understand. I don't know. I'm leaving. What a waste of time!"

As he prepares to walk away, Yu and I simultaneously pout and pretend to cry. Knowing his weak spot, I'm not surprised, but Yu doing it too almost makes me laugh, but I have to keep in character.

"Why are you doing that? Stop it. Don't cry! I don't see anything."

"Ueueueue... You apologized to Ms. Frung, didn't you? Why won't you accept us?"

"I'm about to cry, ueueueue..."

"Alright, I give up. Love each other if you want. Stop crying now. Stop!"

We both hold back tears and smile through them. Mom, seeing the elder give in, seems to catch on too.

"Egg Head can't handle tears, huh?"

"Stop calling me Egg Head, P.H. Necklace!"

Yu and I smile at each other and look around at the brightening atmosphere, holding hands. It seems like the heavy obstacles have been overcome.

We've been accepted by our families...

□□□□□

□42. Chapters 42 □

The sky after the rain is always beautiful... It's filled with moisture. Everyone who has been waiting for the rain to cease slowly comes out because they're no longer afraid of getting wet. The sky that was once dark and cloudy due to the forming clouds suddenly becomes bright. There's no metaphor that captures the image of overcoming obstacles better than this one.

Now, Yu and I have moved back to our old condo. My mom agreed to return the keys after everything was cleared up. When we packed out things, my mom saw how I was living, but she remained silent the entire way until we reached the room.

"I'm sorry. It's my fault... Someone who used to live in a big house and a condo worth tens of millions, like you, had to end up in that tiny apartment."

"Hm."

I answer briefly because I don't know what else to say. If I accept the apology with something like, 'It's not your fault, Mom,' she wouldn't remember this. However, my simple 'Hm' makes her scowl because I don't respond as she expected.

"It's not just my fault. It's Pixie's dad's fault too! I won't take all the blame alone."

"Then why are you making yourself angry? Just stand there quietly and look pretty."

"Am I pretty? No... Don't answer. I know I am. Shut up."

Mom stops feeling guilty and starts directing the people who come to help clean every nook and cranny of the room. Each piece of clothing has to be folded and arranged by color according to the auspicious colors chart. The perfection I have comes from my mom's upbringing. It's not a bad thing. Looking at it, it has made me who I am today.

Besides the household matters, the business that Yu and I invested in together seems to be going well. Yu's products are starting to be recognized among jewelry enthusiasts. They're not cheap but not too expensive either.

Our customer base consists of people who can afford it without any financial strain because these accessories don't bring profit other than their stylishness. My dad and Yu's dad help with marketing and distribution channels. Once Yu's dad gave the green light, the business ran smoothly.

We have our own storefront, and we also place our products in other stores and use them for magazine ads for models, just like famous jewelry brands do. Yu's project with Intuorn is still ongoing, and I have no objections because coordinating with foreign countries has become something I'm good at since I already have some idea about it.

"See, Ms. Frung, you're very useful. Back then, why did you sulk, thinking you were useless?"

"Actually, I'm quite capable."

"You're annoying."

Everything sounds perfect, right? Well, not quite. Calm seas often precede storms, whether small or large. The latest one is no different.

"I'm not old-fashioned, Frung, but after thinking about it... if you get married, we should get a dowry from the other side because you're a woman, right?"

On a Sunday, which is family day, I was enjoying my meal when I almost choked, and Dad had to pat my back gently.

"What are you talking about? Everything was nice, and you brought up marriage. You know our daughter is dating a woman."

Lately, the family has been more open in their conversations. No more whispering or avoiding the topic because there's no escaping the truth.

"Exactly. It feels like a huge loss. What about the dowry?"

"What dowry? Yu is also a woman."

"So what? They still have to pay us... I raised Frung with tens of millions. Am I supposed to get nothing?"

"Are you Mr. Krabs or something? Why do you always need to get something?"

"I'm a businesswoman. Why shouldn't I get my investment back? I don't care. That Egg Head guy gets Frung as part of his family. I demand a dowry!"

"Mom..."

"Tell that Egg Head that I want five million. That's cheap... just to make a point. If I don't get it, I won't let you date Pixie."

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"Do you think my daughter grew up on sewage water? We raised her well, too!"

My mom, who irrationally wants money, storms into the house of the man, who likes to argue with dirty jokes and bring up the dowry. This makes Yu's dad slam the table in anger and retort loudly. Yu and I sat side by side, shrinking.

"But growing up with parents like this, the dowry can't be that expensive. Do you know that my Frung graduated from abroad and has a stable job?

She could marry Prince Abraham Dumbledore of London."

That name sounds like a mix from various places....

"And my daughter didn't graduate from Khao San Road. Yu also graduated from abroad. A cute, fair-skinned girl like her should marry someone like George W. Bush, not your daughter. You must be desperate for money to come here and talk about money while claiming to be rich... Bullshit."

"Rude! I have enough money to buy thousands of bulls. You can't compare to me."

"If you're rich, why are you asking for money? So fake... Yu, are you sure you want to date Frung? This family has nothing. The gold they wear might not even be real."

"That's too much, Egg Head. I'm rich. Frung almost married a billionaire's son if she hadn't met your daughter first."

"My daughter almost got married too. That guy was also a billionaire. The dowry should have gone into my pocket, not me paying. You old hag!"

Yu and I look at each other and smile weakly. The man they mentioned was P' Kitt, the same guy both families were boasting and competing over.

"I don't believe anyone here."

Yu's mom, who has never had a role before, interjects and sighs, shrugging.

"You both claim to be rich but keep talking about getting money from the other side. Truly rich people would be willing to pay rather than asking for money like this."

"Who are you? A side character in this story? Who gave you lines?"

Mom snaps, making Yu's dad bare his teeth.

"This is Yu's mom. And she has as little role as your husband."

"My husband has some lines, not just suddenly saying I'm poor... I'm not poor! But I can't stand being at a disadvantage. Five million... pay up, and it's over."

"Make it six million for her freedom... I'm so worried that if Yu has to live with a family that wants five million, she'll suffer. Fake rich... Honey, write them a check for six million. Show them how rich we are."

Yu's dad, seeing his wife urging him, looks a bit confused but then nods firmly.

"Fine, I'm rich. Six million it is. And don't show your face here again. I can't stand the smell of poor people."

"They said we're poor. Can you stand that? You're one of the top hundred richest people in Thailand. Don't lose."

Dad, standing next to Mom, whispers, but I hear every word. Mom straightens up, a bit confused, but nods vigorously.

"I'm not poor! Six million is too cheap. I'll give seven million. And Yu doesn't have to stay with Frung, okay?"

"Honey, they raised the bid by a million. Can you stand losing? You're a diamond store owner. Don't let our daughter lose face."

"Eight million."

"Nine million."

"Fifteen million."

"Seventeen million."

"Twenty million!"

"Twenty-one million."

The number keeps rising. Yu's dad and my mom are competing to bid for their daughters' freedom, but it seems more like they're enjoying showing off their wealth. Yu's mom slowly steps away from the two and beckons us to sneak out of the house.

"You two don't need to stay and listen. Go do whatever you want. By the time they're done bidding, it'll be evening."

"But if we just disappear, won't it be a problem?"

I ask, worried because both seem to be competing fiercely with us as the prize.

"Don't worry. They're getting to know each other. All that money talk is just for show."

"Really?"

"Yes, your mom is having fun with her new friend."

My dad, who follows us out, explains with a smile.

"When they meet someone equally sharp-tongued, they get along well. It should end with over a hundred million."

"Wow... what a huge price of freedom,"

Yu blinks and smiles at me.

"Our families are really rich, Ms. Frung."

"What happens after the bidding ends?"

"It'll never end. Neither of them will let the other be richer. Yu and Frung will get to continue dating like this... when the bidding ends, it means the other side has given up and has to pay. Then you'd really have to break up. So... don't worry. No one will pay, and both know the number doesn't mean anything."

"Go live your life and have fun. We'll call you when we get home."

They smile kindly at us. Yu and I hold hands, nodding in understanding, and start the car, driving away while glancing at the rearview mirror.

"Seems like we'll still get some headaches from now on, huh?"

"That's true, but it's fun. It's like our two families are getting closer."

I laugh and smile at the girl who reaches out to link arms with me.

"That's right. If you married a man, you'd have gotten a huge dowry by now."

"Acting like you wouldn't get a dowry yourself. And that man we're talking about is the same guy."

Pfft!

We laugh at this truth and look straight ahead. For us, this is just the beginning of living our lives together. We don't know what lies ahead, but one thing is certain: the two of us will be strong enough to overcome everything because we have the support and acceptance of our families, who no longer stand in our way.

This is what I mean by the sky after the storm. Our love is now ripe, and it'll stay this way forever.

"Let's go home and watch a movie. Today, I just want to lie naked in bed all day and night, doing nothing."

"Naked but doing nothing? Aww... What a waste."

"Then, can you do it for me?" Yu asks.

"You're so cheeky..."

"No?"

"Of course I can! Let's go!"

I press the accelerator a bit more to make it look exciting. Yu's giggles fill the car as she talks about our plans for the day. I glance at her sweet face, her voice slightly nasal, and smile, feeling happy that we finally have a day like this.

A sunny day after the storm...

When we get back to the condo, we change into comfortable clothes and lie down to watch the movie we planned. Our happiness is so easy to find that even I am surprised.

Just lying close to each other.

Our skin is touching so that we know the other person hasn't disappeared.

The warmth from our embrace and the soft snoring of the small one who fell asleep because the movie was so entertaining.

We have no idea how much our comfort is worth right now, and it seems to be increasing...

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Ding!

My phone rings, waking Yu up as well. She blinks away her drowsiness and lets me reach for my phone.

"Who sent it? Why do you look like that?"

I, looking shocked as if I've seen a ghost, glance at my lover and smile in disbelief, amused by the wealth of our families. It makes me realize how scary the monetary value of our love is.

"Right now, our love is being bid on by our parents at..."

"At?"

"Eighty-six million."

Yu looks just as shocked before bursting into laughter and pulling me into a hug, nuzzling me like someone who knows they can.

"Let them keep bidding. No matter how many billions, I won't trade you for it because no amount can compare to the love I have for you."

"And how much is that worth?"

The small one whispers, making me smile with delight before answering...

"Same for me."

Even if our parents bid tens or hundreds of billions, they can't tear us apart.

Because our love is as big as the world!

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□Special Chapter Our Time□

"It's been two weeks now. Your dad and my mom still haven't finished bidding on us. I bet they'll be broke before it's over."

"If the bidding isn't successful, it means we don't have to be separated. Those two can't afford to lose face. Hehe."

"And what are you doing? Stop cleaning already. You aren't a maid anymore."

"Then what am I?"

"My wife."

"...."

"My husband, if you prefer."

"Aw, Ms. Frung, you're so cute!"

I jump and hug her like a little monkey when she lets me choose what role I want. She lifts me up and carries me around like a child because I'm light.

"But I approached you as a maid, though," I say.

"Then we can hire someone else to do it."

"I don't trust them. Didn't you fire other maids because they're thieves?"

"You're a thief, too."

"What did I steal?"

"My heart."

"You crazy!"

"By the way, I've been meaning to ask, why are you so good at cleaning? Cooking, laundry, I can't do any of it."

"When I was abroad, I had to do everything myself. Didn't you do anything when you were there?"

"I did some things, but not well. But you're good at everything, that makes me confused."

"So, the maid's duties are mine, and the wife's duties in bed are yours."

"You've decided what you want to be now, haven't you?"

"I decided a long time ago. From the first time I saw you, I knew what I wanted to be and do. Only you were clueless for so long."

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Now, it's my turn to tell the story of how I ended up with Ms. Frung. Honestly, I didn't have a cunning plan. It started as a coincidence, but it turned into a plan. One day, I had a serious fight with my family about an arranged marriage with a man named 'Kitt,' whom I'd never seen except in a photo.

"I'm not going on a date or do anything. Know this, no one can force me to do anything."

"We'll see about that."

Was my mother's decree. She wanted me to marry a perfect man. He looked handsome in the photo, but forcing strangers to get to know each other without fate or coincidence felt awkward. So, I ran away from home, taking some of my mother's jewelry to sell, and stayed at a friend's house.

My friend's house was in a slum, which wasn't the best environment for me, but I had to endure it with the money from selling my mother's things. Unable to find a job, I wandered aimlessly until one day, a car passed by while I was at a bus stop, and I saw Ms. Frung.

She... that woman, a friend from the cram school who once did me a favor by taking me home.

It'd been a long time, but the memory stuck in my mind. It was just one event in my life, but it left a lasting impression. On a rainy night, with no taxis willing to take me, she, with a stern face, offered me an umbrella.

"Let's go home together."

"Huh?"

I remember being in my senior year of high school, barely noticing her presence in the extra class. The pretty, aloof girl offered me an umbrella without looking at me.

"Let's just say we're going home together on a day when the sky isn't on our side. I don't want to go alone; I might get assaulted."

That's what she said before hailing a taxi and telling the driver our destination. The taxi took her without hesitation, and she waved me to join. After a while, she asked the driver to drop me off first.

"Where do you live?"

"On Charan Sanit Wong Road."

"To Charan Sanit Wong Road, please."

"But the traffic is terrible there," said the driver.

"I'll pay double. Please take us."

"But what about your home..."

"Frung."

"...."

"Call me Frung."

She introduced herself. I nodded but didn't introduce myself, feeling awkward and shy. She seemed hard to approach, with a stern face and no playful talk, but something made me unable to take my eyes off her.

"Where do you live?"

"Ratchaprasong."

"That's close to the cram school. Is it okay to take me home first?"

"No taxis would take you, right? So, let's go together."

She really took me home. When I tried to pay her, she refused.

"It's okay. Just get home safely."

"And you?"

"I should be safe, too. Good luck."

That was our first encounter. When I saw her car pass by, I recognized her immediately and ran after it like a hamster on a wheel. She wasn't driving fast, as she was close to her destination. I saw her car turn into a condo, and she got out to talk to an older woman. I hid behind a car to avoid being seen by the security guard and eavesdropped on their conversation.

"Another one? You fired your maids one after another. I'm the one who's been finding one for you. It's tiring, you know?"

"How can I keep them when they steal from me every day? Yesterday, I caught one pouring shampoo into a container. No wonder it runs out so fast."

"It's just shampoo."

"Today, it's shampoo. What if tomorrow it's a watch or jewelry?"

"Fine, I'll find another one... Here, take this dinner. If you keep firing all the maids, you'll end up having only water for dinner.."

"Thank you."

From their conversation, I gathered they were mother and daughter. Hearing she was hiring a maid, my ears perked up. My mind quickly processed what to do next, so I hailed a taxi and followed the gray van until it stopped at a large mansion in Ratchaprasong. Memories of the past flooded back. This must be the house where she was born and raised. I memorized the route, returned to my friend's house, and told myself:

I'll apply to be her maid.

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I had no work experience, and applying for a maid job with a bachelor's degree seemed inappropriate. So, I chose to apply with a middle school diploma, which was suitable for labor work. When I arrived, I rang the bell and told the servant who opened the door that I was there to apply for the maid position.

Madam, who was looking for a maid, scrutinized me from head to toe. She mightn't have had many choices, so she took me to see Ms. Frung. When I met her, I hoped she'd recognize me, but she didn't. Something made her stare at me for a long time before telling her mother:

'She's the one. Hire her. No need to call anyone else.'

It was that simple!

Whether it was because of fate, familiarity, or something else, I felt grateful she chose me that day. I worked diligently to stay close to her, and it made

me realize that beneath her stern and grumpy exterior, she was actually sweet and naive. There were many things Ms. Frung didn't understand about herself. Honestly, at first, I didn't understand why I liked her so much. It took a while to realize I'd fallen for her.

Her... a woman.

I was quite open-minded about such things, but the clueless girl didn't know what she felt until I had to slowly 'seduce' her, like baiting a fish, making her gradually realize she couldn't do without me. But her naivety made me tired.

'Can't you be my kid?'

Kid, my ass... After all this, she asked to be her kid. But I could tell she cared for me more than a typical employer. She was possessive, even when a food delivery guy texted me. So, I had to push her harder to make her unable to resist and approach me.

She started by sending someone to follow me.

Then, she installed CCTV in the house.

Though it felt a bit invasive, Ms. Frung was still Ms. Frung, clueless as ever. When I saw the red light in the bedroom, I knew it was a hidden camera.

You like me but don't show it? I'll mess with you hard.

With that thought, I stripped naked and pretended to feel hot, not covering myself with a blanket, walking around the house in just an apron.

In the end... she couldn't resist. Her instincts made her approach me.

And everything fell into place, just as I planned.

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Now, I watch the stern-faced woman typing something on the screen. I walk over, wrap my arms around her neck, and see she's writing some business plan.

"What are you doing?"

"Planning to export our products online. Looking into SEO and such. Nothing much."

"Whose girlfriend is this? So smart?"

"Glad you think so. Finally, I have something to do after losing confidence for so long."

"You're always good at your thing. But why are you so used on work and not paying me any attention?"

I tease, out the stern-faced woman continues typing without looking at me.

"What about you? You're also still cleaning the house, doing this and that, not paying any attention to me, either. Everyone has their own things to do, you know?"

"But I'm lonely. Come play with me first."

"But I'm working right now."

She still ignores me. I pout a little before closing her laptop and baring my teeth.

"Stop working for a bit. We're already rich enough, and it's a holiday. It's my day."

"You're so self-centered. This is our work."

"And what about our love?"

"I love you the same every day."

"But I want you to love me right now, right here."

I whine and fuss while stripping off all my clothes. The usually stoic one looks a bit shocked, her eyes darting around as if someone else is in the room.

"Why are you suddenly naked?"

"It's hot. I'm going to lie down in the room. If I count to three and you don't follow me, I won't let you play with me ever again."

I start walking toward the bathroom, counting each step.

"One."

"..."

"Two."

"Pixie... you're being unreasonable."

"Three."

She stops paying attention to her laptop and runs straight to me, grabbing me from behind. I giggle at how the usually composed one is now rushing toward me, afraid I'll get mad because she's not good at making up.

"Why are you like this? You're the most selfish person ever."

"And I love you the most, too... Come on, take off your clothes and play with me."

I drag her into the room and close the door. Then, our playtime continues for hours without stopping. The laughter turns into moans, and it seems I've made Ms. Frung forget all about work entirely.

Work is for Monday to Friday.

Weekends... are our time. Remember that, baby.

-----THE END-----

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