

ENEMIES

with Benefits



□Prologue E.W.B□

Hey, do you guys know the word F.W.B.?

And no, don't bother with this "Friends with Buffet" joke or something like that, because I'm going to make you regret it so much that you'll go home crying.

Hm? You really don't know?

I'll explain it to you a little bit, then.

Friends with Benefits is when friends have mutual benefits for each other, more than just traveling, hanging out and watching movies together, because there's sex involved. So, basically, it's just when friends can have sex with each other and nothing else.

But the situation I'm facing right now is a bit peculiar and eccentric, that I honestly don't know how to explain...

It looked like a small battlefield was taking place inside a bedroom of a luxury condominium, by all the clothes scattered around the room. Anyone could imagine how much energy the two, who were still fast asleep in the king-size bed, had lost with their activities last night.

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The last smartphone rang loudly, waking me up, who was still exhausted from the heavy activity. I decided to press the stop button at that moment and the sound went quiet. There was only the steady sound of breathing,

indicating that I had fallen asleep once again. Luckily, the phone's alarm had a snooze function, so it rang again to wake up both of my sleepy heads with such determination 10 minutes after I had pressed the button.

Wow, it's so loud...

I fumbled around, trying to find the source of the noise. When my hand touched the familiar surface, feeling irritated, I picked up the ringing phone to check. The brightness of the screen made me squint as I dizzily read the time and date displayed on the screen. Everyone felt groggy after they woke up.

Today is... Monday...

6:30... 6:30!!!

"Shit!"

I exclaimed when my brain finished processing and immediately jumped out of bed, feeling completely awake all of a sudden.

"Hey, wake up!"

".... "

"K. Wine[1].....You need to wake up!!!"

I tried to wake the sleeping woman again.

"Hm..."

The person sleeping next to me raised her sleepy head and tried to get up, causing the thick duvet to fall down to her waist, revealing her bare, smooth, milky skin. Any other time, it might have been an attractive sight, but now is not the time for it!

"K. Wine, don't go back to sleep! "

I could only whimper when the woman still hadn't opened her eyes and looked like she was about to fall asleep again.

"I didn't get much sleep last night..."

The sleepy voice came from the woman who begged for more time to sleep, but sorry, this was an emergency, so I couldn't go easy on you now!

"We have a meeting for next quarter today!"

I yelled, telling her about the important matter while I was busy looking for a shirt and hurriedly buttoning it.

Oh, damn it! I'll be dead if I'm late, the boss will kill me for this.

"Quarterly... meeting for next quarter!!!"

Her delicate lips murmured as if she was talking in her sleep. By the time her brain seemed to catch up with what I said, the little woman was wide awake. Her sleepy eyes were wide with panic, she ran inside and joined me, searching and fighting for the clothes that were scattered across the bed.

"Why didn't you wake me up!!!"

And there, I was greeted with a scolding from the pretty girl as a good morning...

"I woke up! I tried to wake you up for the third time! But you kept drooling in your sleep, K. Wine!"

I shouted angrily at the woman
as I tried to tuck my sleeves into my blazer.

Why does this feel a little tight...?

"This is mine!"

The woman in front of me scolded angrily, answering my question. I quickly took it off and handed it to the owner.

"Well, I can't tell them apart, okay? We wore similar blazers yesterday. Geez, I'll get a new one from my closet."

I groaned as I turned around and found those bright eyes staring at me. So I decided to give up, willing to seek a new solution peacefully.

"Wait."

"W-what is it?"

"Can you get me another shirt too? The one you've never worn to work before, if you'd be so kind."

The beautiful woman asked me... though it sounded more like an order than a request. The shirt she was holding in her hands was all wrinkled, it didn't really look, um... presentable for the meeting.

"Who would remember what we wore to work? Geez, here, take this one."

I complained as I handed her a new shirt that I hadn't worn before.

"This neckline is too much, do you have a normal shirt?"

The picky woman give me the shirt back almost instantly, ugh, what was wrong with her? Didn't she know I was in a hurry!?

"..."

"Don't look at me like that, it's too revealing."

"So picky, here... take this one, it's the most unfashionable one in the closet. My mom sent me."

But I still let her do whatever she wanted.

It's her fashion sense that's too avant-garde.

And the gorgeous woman here didn't even thank me for it, she give me a sarcastic comment while wearing a delicate and feminine pink blouse that

my mom sent me as a birthday present just to annoy me.

"K. Wine, please, can we discuss it later, okay? We'll both be dead if we're late for the meeting."

I pleaded her, everyone knew how important and heated these meetings were for the upcoming quarters. The woman, who kept finding reasons to argue, remained silent for a moment before leaving.

And the sound of the door closing was practically her answer to this offer of truce. Never mind... I should worry about myself first, I better hurry up with this!

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Luckily, the traffic wasn't bad, so I got to the company on time... Meetings were the most boring thing in the world and the higher the position, the harder it was to avoid meetings. It was like more time was spent in meetings than in the work itself.

"P' Lal,[2] sit down here, quickly."

Two of the juniors in my department called out to me in low voices as I entered the meeting room. **Noomnim** was a junior administrator in my department, to put it simply, she helped me with all the documents.

"Did you reserve a seat for me? Thank you."

"I thought you would be late. Khun Wine arrived a few minutes before you, did you know that?"

Noomnim said to me after I sat down in the chair. Her last sentence made me look at the petite woman, who was opening the file of documents on the opposite side of the long meeting table. Her pretty face was devoid of emotion, her eyes fixed on the heavy report.

"That's rare."

"Right? She's always punctual, sometimes she even arrives more than 10 minutes early."

"She slept late, I guess..."

I replied to Noomnim a little more dryly than usual. Well, last night took a lot of energy... so it was no surprise if she slept in...

The entire conversation ended the moment the company president entered the meeting room. Everything went according to his order and procedures. I felt more at ease after I finished presenting the quarterly sales report I was responsible.

"You are amazing, P' Lal."

Noomnim give me a thumbs up as I walked back to my seat.

"Do you have an ulterior motive for this flattery?"

"No! I am probably the most sincere person in the world. I am so lucky to have you as my supervisor, P' Lal. You are so smart and beautiful."

"You are exaggerating."

I raised my lips in a smile as my subordinate flattered me a little too much. Time passed until they got to the meeting summary. Then, a question was asked out of formality.

"Would anyone like to add anything else?"

The secretary said. The room fell silent in response to her question.

No, no more questions, I just want this meeting to end!

That was probably what many people in the room thought.

"The Accounting Department would like to add something."

But perhaps not this person...

Her small hand rose to shoulder level, making her demand clear.

"Your 'addition' will take half an hour. God, I'm already hungry."

Noonnim leaned closer and whispered close to my ear while whimpering. I could only look at my subordinate with sympathy.

It's not just you, Nim, I'm hungry too...

"Feel free, K.Vetaka."

The entire meeting room fell silent, all eyes were on the petite woman who wore thick glasses, her figure was small but she had that oppressive air around her. **Vetaka, the Accounting Manager, was also known as K. Wine the All-Kill**, which was an accurate name for her since she was super strict and organized at work. She wasn't the easiest to get along with in the office either.

"This is just my personal opinion, but the work of the Sales Department should be more organized than this. For example, their estimation of the amount of wine that needs to be stocked should have been more concise."

Her sharp eyes beneath her glasses stared straight at the Sales Department, showing no sign of hiding her intention.

Hey, she wants to pick a fight with us!

"Sorry, Khun Wine, but normally, our department never brings any problems, or am I wrong? Sales have only increased as well."

Since the woman mentioned my department, who was I to remain silent?

Let everyone here see that I will not sit here and let you walk all over on my department!

"Do you have no problems or do you never remember how much trouble you have caused?"

"..."

"Are you aware of this? How much of our funding has been wasted on your department's dead stock..."

The data that come out of the highly organized woman's mouth slowly drained all the color from my face, which I had carefully put on a brave mask to prepare myself for this battle.

"You lost, P' Lal. My morning's work is over."

Noomnim said softly, her voice making me feel a growing sense of defeat.

Vetaka's additional comments took up the entire morning of her work schedule, by the time the meeting finished, it's already past noon. As for me, who woke up so late, let's just say my stomach was growling, demanding food. It turns out that a cup of coffee alone wasn't enough.

"I hate this, P' Lal, I don't want to have meetings at all. Just seeing Ms. Wine's face gives me goosebumps. Why did she just take over our department by out of the blue like that? And she looked sour as if she was mad at everyone in the world or something."

Noomnim said. She looked irritated as she followed me out of the meeting room.

"Yeah, I don't like it either."

"We always lose to her, you have to fight her next time, okay, P' Lal? You're our department's only hope, you know?"

Bas, the salesman in the department tried to give me a pep talk.

"I tried my best, however..."

I chuckled shyly at the juniors on my team.

How could I compete with her? That woman was like a walking dictionary with all the information she had. I didn't want to have anything to do with her, especially with her sharp tongue. I thought I was well prepared this

morning and still got knocked out by that woman. Seriously, Vetaka should be in some debt collection department instead of accounting...

"One day, I will win. I promise."

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I promised my subordinates that I would make them feel more confident. But during the afternoon work hour, I took a quick look as I passed by the Accounting Department and saw the woman who had been at my throat this morning at the meeting. Vetaka was typing on her computer, a delicate finger moving to fix her thick glasses out of habit. Her serious expression could send shivers down anyone's spine, I probably wasn't the only one who felt that pressured air coming from her because no one approached the woman.

The beginning of the month was the time when they had to finalize the budget... so the Accounting Department tended to be more hostile than usual, this woman especially.

It was a shame because she looked so beautiful when she had other expressions. Just thinking about the voice she made last night when she moaned so sweetly made me blink a few times to get the somewhat erotic image out of my mind. What was this contrast?

I never would have imagined that our relationship would end like this.

Friends with Benefits?... that term sounded really good to us. Because between this evil woman and me, we could only be Enemies with Benefits to each other.

Footnote:

1 - K. or Khun (ကု)

) is a term used to call or refer to someone politely in Thai, similar to Mr. and Mrs.

2- P (pronounced Pi) or \bar{w} ' in This is a common term used to call someone older than the speaker in the Thai language.

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□01.First Impression□

There were many reasons for someone to change jobs, for example, they might not get along with their previous colleagues or they wanted a higher salary or position. As for me, I wanted career growth, I guess? I was lucky that everything went according to my plans; I worked hard to gain more experience, completed my master's degree in what interested me and used my higher degree to apply for this new job.

Although I was qualified for the position the company was looking for, starting as a supervisor put a lot of pressure on me.

I wasn't afraid of the workload, I was more concerned about people, and the problems related to colleagues were much worse than the work problems.

Please let what lies ahead in this new beginning be peaceful and nothing more...

"Follow me, N' Lal¹, I will introduce you to the others and show you around the company."

"Thank you, P' Jantra."

I smiled politely at the chubby senior HR officer. I was a bit nervous, but I thought I could handle the situation easily and professionally.

It was said that you could get a feel for the company's vibe and culture from day one. After I finished the orientation and signed the contract, P' Jantra showed me around the company's important places.

"Hello everyone, I'm Lal, a Sales Supervisor. Today is my first day at work. Nice to meet you."

My throat was a little dry, I don't know how many times I repeated these sentences. But first impressions are extremely crucial, impressing everyone from the moment we met was the motto of every successful salesperson who was good at their job. I greeted everyone with a smile as if I was in a beauty contest.

I've been nice to everyone, so everyone, please be nice to me too...

“Oh, right... The entire Accounting Department has an external training today. But you'll meet them eventually, you have to work with them after all.”

P' Jantra told me when we arrived at the empty Accounting Department, I simply waved at her.

'I can introduce myself to them some other time.'

After greeting almost everyone in the company, it was time to introduce myself to the employees in my department. In addition to taking care of the customers in my account, the Sales Supervisor in this company also had to be responsible for the three subordinates in the team.

"I'm Bas, I'm in charge of Sales Marketing. Nice to meet you, P'Lal."

A tall man greeted me first, he was the salesperson in my department, he was responsible for classifying new customers and taking care of them.

"Hello, I'm **Noomnim**, I'm the admin here, nice to meet you."

As for an administrator, a simple way to describe their job description would be to assist the salesperson with the necessary documents, from issuing a quote to collecting payment from the customer to logging orders into the system.

"I'm Lal, nice to meet you."

I greeted two of my subordinates. I looked confused when I counted them, I should have a total of three subordinates, right?...

"Hmm... what about the other person?"

"Actually, our department only has two salespeople, which are P'Bas and the manager, when he retired, they recruited you to replace that position. About the other position, I think they said they will recruit someone after we have more product lines.

Noomnim was the one who answered my question. I considered the young woman in front of me, her face was flawless, she had a wide smile adorned on her face that matched well with her ponytail hairstyle, she looked quite agile. And she seemed to have good social skills.

"I see, I'm still new to this company, so please feel free to tell me if there's anything I need to know."

I tried to be friends with Noomnim, the administrator, since she would help with the salesperson's documents.

"You're stunning, P' Lal. I'm so happy, I've always wanted to have a beautiful supervisor."

"Wow, flattery since the first meeting, do you have something in mind?"

I chuckled to hide my embarrassment when Noomnim complimented me straight out of the blue. Well, I knew very well that I was quite pretty. Since I worked as a saleswoman, I had to meet and impress a lot of customers, so my appearance was very important for my job. That why I always paid a lot of attention to my appearance and the way I dressed.

"No, not at all. You are quite stunning, P' Lal. But, I can't say that I would mind if you were so kind as to buy bubble tea for your lovely subordinates."

Noomnim denied the accusation and smiled cheekily after she finished speaking.

"P" Lal, you are the most beautiful person in the world. And I want taro milk tea."

Bas moved his chair closer to add. I let out a defeated laugh, these kids were good...

"Hey, we've known each other for less than five minutes and now you're robbing me?"

I teased them in a friendly manner.

"Sure... go ahead, but don't choose an expensive store, okay? Have pity on my poor wallet."

"Hooray! Free Bubble Teal, leave it to me, P' Lal, I know a lot of people, I'll tell you everything you need to know."

Noomnim seemed especially excited when she got a free drink.

"Nim knows everything, P' Lal. Everyone here called her 'Nim the all-seeing'." Bas added happily.

"First of all, the main rule of this company is; you have to be nice to P' Jantra."

Noomnim suddenly said in a serious voice, this piqued my interest immediately.

"Hm? Why is that?"

I asked, curious. Was there something I should...

"Look..."

Noomnim turned to me and spoke in a serious voice.

"Her name means 'moon', so if you anger the moon, in the name of the moon, she will punish us all."

Okay... now I wasn't sure if I had applied to be a Sales Supervisor or a comedy team... you know?

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I was lucky that my subordinates were very friendly, so we managed to get along pretty quickly. The work was exhausting because I still had a lot to learn about the new company's procedures, but it wasn't going to be a problem.

Having good colleagues is like winning the lottery.

I thought about the content as I patiently worked on my tasks.

But sometimes, a problem didn't always come in the form of an individual or a job.

No, it could come in the form of...

Beep beep beep beep

A copier that was squeaking in front of me!

I sent some documents to be printed as I normally would and walked over to the copier to wait. At first, it worked normally, but then the machine suddenly vibrated loudly and let out this loud, high-pitched noise for the entire area to hear. I panicked, I didn't know what to do. I had only been here for a week and it was already in trouble.

Oh no... is it broken? The red light kept flashing and then there's that weird sound.

Then there were the beeping noises and the red light, it all made me feel more panicked and clumsy with my hands. I didn't know what button to press or how to fix the machine, P' Jantra only taught me the basic functions like copying documents or scanning the document and sending it to my email, she never told me what to do when it squeaked like this!

How much does it cost to fix a photocopier? Oh my God... It's only the first week and you just break the photocopier.

"Excuse me, Miss..."

"What should I do...?"

I let out a high-pitched groan as I grabbed my essential, the phone, and dialed the name of the person who was supposed to help me at this moment.

"Miss, can you move?"

"Nim... please answer."

I waited anxiously for the other side to answer the phone. Noomnim was usually easy to contact, but now, when I was in trouble, she would suddenly disappear as if it were some kind of prank.

"Excuse me, but can you move!?"

The voice sounded so irritated then someone moved to pass me. It startled me, making me instinctively back away.

"S-sorry."

I said timidly when I realized I was blocking the way and was scolded for it.

"It's just a paper jam, pull it out and it'll be fine."

The person explained the situation to me as she maneuvered around the printer.

She seemed a little irritated as she fixed it. I tried to sneak a peek to observe the person's quick movements, feeling amazed.

And soon after that, the problematic printer was working smoothly once again.

"Is this yours?"

I looked at the document the woman showed me and noticed her flawless face, fair skin beneath her glasses, looking irritated. The person who came to my rescue was wearing a thick sweater over a shirt and a pencil top. She dressed like a college student... I didn't know our company also accepted internships.

"Um... thank you."

I just realized I had been staring at the person in front of me for a little too long, so I quickly accepted the documents and was about to thank the kind woman.

"Don't get in the way of others if you don't know how to fix it. If I waited until you were done, I'd probably finish printing it tomorrow."

I swallowed my words hastily and could only stand there, dumbfounded as I watched the little girl speak harshly to me before walking away without a care, carrying her documents with her. Was I trying to be civil to her, did she wake up on the wrong side of the bed or something?

Okay, I might be a little embarrassed, but how was I supposed to know it could be fixed this way? That girl got pissed just because she got here before me and had more experience with it, that wasn't nice of her.

Let's just pray I don't have to work with her...

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"P' Lal, you took so long with the documents. I almost had the front desk call your name over the loudspeaker."

Noomnim's voice was a bit teasing when I returned to my desk, which made me feel a little irritated.

"I called you several times. What were you doing?"

I didn't want to blame, but I was still upset that she wasn't there when I needed help. She only showed up when it didn't matter anymore, since I had already been scolded by that intern with a bad attitude.

"Oh... I went to the bathroom, oh shit... five missed calls."

Noomnim smiled shyly and looked at the documents I was holding.

"The printer broke, didn't it?"

"Something like that."

"Which printing option did you select, P' Lal?"

"I chose the reuse paper option..."

"I forgot to tell you that the reuse paper option likes to cause problems sometimes. I didn't think you would use it, though..."

Noomnim looked surprised and guilty as she explained.

"I just wanted to be environmentally friendly."

And all I complained about was feeling sick and tired.

"But the printer wasn't friendly to Lal at all, was it?"

"Stop making fun of me. I was panicking the whole time I was fixing it... by the way, Nim, does our company also accept internships?"

I decided to ask Noomnim about the babyface girl who scolded me earlier. But Noomnim just shook her head.

"Don't think like that... the boss is too stingy to accept one. He probably won't hire another salesperson if you're really good at your job. He'll just let you do two jobs instead."

"Then he should add the salesperson's salary to mine too, if that's what it takes."

I scoffed at Noomnim's provocation and decided to put the whole thing with that person with the bad attitude out of my mind. Anyway... The company wasn't that big, so I'd probably find her.

Bas had left to meet a client today, so it was just me and Noomnim in the department. After the commotion, there was only the sounds of typing on computers and my voice as I talked to customers on the phone. I continued pitching the new products to the clients until I felt Noomnim's presence as she came to stand near my desk, practically pleading with me with her eyes. I looked at her curiously until I ended the call.

"P' Lal... please help me," Noomnim said timidly.

"What's the matter?"

"I recorded the wrong price," she confessed, her voice shaking as she handed me the quote. The price I gave Noomnim was fifty-four baht, but the quote showed forty-five baht.

"You haven't sent it to the customer yet, right?"

I asked Noomnim. She shook her head. I relaxed a little.

"Go fill out the price correction request form, Nim. Hurry up or we won't be able to send it to the customer in time.

(We had to fill in the product price and press confirm. So if we wanted to edit the price in the system, we would have to fill out a request form. The request form must be approved and signed by the supervisors of three departments: Purchasing, Sales, and Accounting.)

"Waaa...that's the problem."

Noomnim looked so discouraged that it made me wonder what was so hard about getting those people to sign the application, why did she act like the world was ending?

"You just have to ask for their signatures..."

"You don't get it, the Accounting Department isn't going to give their signatures that easily... Christ...I want to die, I really want to die. I shouldn't have made that mistake."

Noomnim still whining about her mistake, oddly enough, I read the name of the person who had Noomnim so terrified.

"Khun Vetaka...is she like, really scary or something?"

"She's beyond all beings, P' Lal. I don't want to see her, she's so evil."

Noomnim told me everything when she had the chance.

"How about...I'll take care of it. I'll talk to her for you."

I was silent for a moment before deciding to pay a visit to the Accounting Department.

I can use this as a chance to introduce myself there...

"P...P" Lal, you'll cover for me, right?"

"I told you that, don't make any mistake again, okay?"

I smiled gently at Noomnim, it wasn't like she did it intentionally...

"P' Lal, my breathtaking and kind supervisor, good luck to you. Here are my documents. Oh, and K. Vetaka's nickname is K. Wine, by the way."

Noomnim handed me the documents and details.

"Go, go P' Lal, fight her and win, don't back down, don't give in to her. Show your effort, diligence, and discipline, bring victory to our department!"

I shake my head at Noomnim's dramatic actions. All of this, and the march, just for talking to the Accounting Department? Seriously, were K. Wine or K. Vetaka that scary? ...It seemed like I would have to see it for myself now...

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Footnote

[1] N' or Nong referred to someone younger than the speaker in Thai, it is the opposite of the word P'

□02. Show No Mercy□

Rivalry departments were the departments that usually had conflicting opinions or often had disagreements with each other. Everyone knew that the Sales Department and the Accounting Department had never seen eye to eye because those two departments had different goals. The Sales Department's goal was to focus on the results, which was the sales. The Accounting Department, on the other hand, was meticulous, they were all about rules and regulations. It was tiring, really...

I scanned around the area where the Accounting Department was, it was quiet as a grave even though it was only two in the afternoon 'maybe they have another external training?' I tried again to look for any life form then I noticed a small head from the desk that was placed further apart from the others. When I walked closer, I found that person who was sitting painfully familiar.

It's that bad attitude girl from the printer accident...so she' in the Accounting Department...

I recognized her immediately, I didn't anticipate that we would meet again this soon, small world, I supposed. But it seemed like the person who I wanted to meet wasn't here...

'Definitely not K. Vetaka,' I concluded to myself when I considered her smooth, youthful, unblemished face that had a light touch of makeup, her doe eyes underneath thick glasses that made her look like a prim and proper nerd, delicate frame, and long dark brown hair complimenting her fair skin.

It's a shame...she looks kinda cute, if only her attitude isn't so bad...

"Is there something you need?"

It seemed like I had been staring at her face long enough for the girl to notice. She didn't sound very friendly when she asked me.

"P' is here to see K. Vetaka, do you know where she is, Nong?"

I answered more sternly, feeling annoyed by the girl's manner, the grumpy look she made and her harsh tone started to get on my nerves.

"You can talk, I'm listening."

The girl answered me while her eyes were still glued to the computer's screen.

Woah... she's challenging me too...

"I want to talk to K. Vetaka, not you, Nong. Do you not understand?"

I didn't really want to abuse my power and use it on someone with a lower position but for someone without manners, I ought to show her who she was talking to.

"Yes ..You can talk now, I' m waiting."

It seemed like the girl was doing it on purpose. I took a deep breath to keep my anger at bay.

"...."

"If you don't have anything to say, I will get on with my work then."

"Are you doing this on purpose?"

Okay, now I couldn't stand it anymore... it seemed like I had to lecture this staff about her behavior today.

The girl took her gaze off the screen to look at me. Then suddenly, a woman came running to her desk without knowing how tense the situation was

right now.

"P' Wine, here, I gathered all the in-stock information."

The woman handed a heavy pile of documents to the girl who was sitting in the chair.

"And it's the correct one this time, I take it?"

The girl ignored me to talk to the newcomer instead.

"Y-yes, ma' am."

The woman paled at the question and she hastily nodded.

"It's the right one this time, I already re-checked everything."

"Go continue with your training, Tangkwa. Don't let me keep you."

The petite woman opened the documents and read through them for a moment before she gave her permission. I could hear the woman named Tangkwa let out a soft breath of relief.

"I'm really sorry, P' Wine."

"Check it more thoroughly next time. Don't make the same mistake."

I stared at the petite woman who was talking, whose face was void of emotion as I could feel disaster slowly creeping into me. If I didn't misheard it, what did the woman call this person a moment ago...?

"It was 'P' Wine' ...right?"

"So what is your business with me again?"

The girl turned her attention back to me after the woman who interrupted left.

"You are...K. Vetaka?"

I swallowed a huge lump before I decided to ask the question out loud.

The girl's delicate finger tapped on the stainless nameplate on the desk. The nameplates clearly showed the name and the title of the owner and it made me want to find a glue that instant. Why a glue? To glued back the pieces of my shattered pride!

Who would have thought that the real Accounting Manager was the petite woman with a baby face who was sitting in front of me...

"What? Don't you have something to say to me, K. Lal?"

The fact that my name came out from K. Vetaka' s mouth meant that the woman did, in fact, know who I was...

"You know me?"

"It's expected of me to know everyone I work with, naturally."

She said as a-matter-of-factly but I felt as if I was punched in the face by her words. Even if I were to explain that I was busy going out to clients and working on the documents, it would still sound like an excuse.

"Nice to meet you, K. Wine..."

It must be the worst introduction ever but I couldn't think of anything else to say.

Aren't you going to keep calling me 'Nong' anymore? Tangkwa really shouldn't interrupt us back then. I am see how much the new Sales Supervisor likes to abuse her power."

Her round, doe eyes were openly glaring at me, it made me have to avert her gaze, feeling like a baby deer cornered by a tiger.

I secretly thanked Nong Tangkwa in my mind, if it wasn' t for her then I'd probably be in big trouble with Vetaka, though, the situation right now didn't look that promising either.

"I..."

Normally, I prided myself on being very good at thinking on my feet and being able to come up with a solution very quickly. But for some reason, being in front of this petite woman made my brain go blank temporarily.

"So, what is it that you want to say to me, K. Lallalin? Or are you just going to gasp here all day?"

Vetaka said impassively, which was very annoying, by the way, and I could only gasp like a fish out of water, I couldn't come up with anything to get back at her at all.

And at that moment, it came to me why Noomnim cheered on me like I was about to go to a battle...

I'm sorry, Noomnim. But I think I can't bring us victory now....

.

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I thought that no one saw the incident where K. Wine and I quarreled yesterday so how come it became the talk of the town in the Sales Department the next morning!?

"P'Lal....I heard that...."

"If you continue, Bas, you can say goodbye to your free bubble tea. Because I won't buy you any for the rest of your life."

I warned Bas with a serious look.

"Relax, P' Lal. Anyone can make that mistake. K. Wine has such a baby face, and she is so small."

Noomnim comforted me sheepishly.

"How did you know..."

I stared at Noomnim curiously, even though I already had my suspicions.

"Don't threaten Tangkwa, P' Lal. She gets spooked so easily, the poor thing texted me privately because she was terrified that you'll go and beat up her supervisor if you find out."

Noomnim immediately tried to cover for her friend and it was just as I thought, Tangkwa was the little bird who spread the news.

"Beat K. Wine up? Me?"

"Well, you dress bold and sexy, of course, Tangkwa would be scared of you. Have you seen K.Wine? She's the size of a kitten."

"Please, you think I am one of those people who beat up others?"

I complained to my subordinates. It was true that I appeared fierce and bold to others because of my almond-shaped eyes that slant upward, it made my eyes look fierce. That and the fact that my favorite shade of lipstick was bright red, made me look like a villain in a soap opera.

But I was the victim here! You guys were fooled by her kitten image, she was actually a tiger, alright? A beast, obviously.

"At first, I did, actually. But after I heard the story from Tang, I just prayed for you in peace, P' Lal."

"You didn't consider helping me?"

I side-eyed her who said it so casually. Really, this was the girl's fault, right? It was like I took the bullet in her place.

"If I go, we would all die, P' Lal. We won't have anyone to work in the department if we are all dead, right?"

Noomnim flashed me a docile smile. Damn it, everyone here was terrified of K. Wine.

"But I think K. Wine took a liking to you, though, P' Lal."

Bas, who had been silent the whole time, spoke up.

You call that a liking? Are you blind or something?

"I can practically hear you lecturing me with your glare, P' Lal...I mean, she did sign the paper for you. She sometimes scolded me and the others for half an hour and still refused to sign it. Told me to think about my mistake and all that. See, P' Lal? She likes you."

Bas's theory got me thinking about Vetaka's smirk, and I suddenly shivered.

"No way in hell..."

Rrrr

The sound of the phone ringing stopped us from chatting some more, I was about to pick up the phone on the desk.

"Oh, my...speak of the devil,"

Seeing the name displayed on the screen, I let out a tired whine. Just why would K. Wine call this early in the morning!?

"Nim, can you take this call and tell her I went out to meet a client?"

I told Noomnim. Please...I really didn't want to talk to her right now.

"Is it from K. Wine?"

"Don't say that name, my head hurts just from hearing it."

Vetaka's voice and words still traumatized me until now.

"You should take it, though. K. Wine is P' Jantra's favorite, she can check with her whether or not you are at the office today."

"Seriously? What even..."

I exclaimed, astonished by what Vetaka could do.

"It's true, I pretended to be away once. K. Wine called P' Jantra and asked her about it. I nearly had to take my leave permanently."

Noomnim told me, she looked haunted. It compelled me to face Vetaka once again, even though it was just her voice this time.

"Alright, I'll take the call. This time, **I'll show her no mercy!**"

I gave myself a pep talk, feeling determined. I can do it! I worked with so many demanding clients, I even got through the Accounting Department that everyone called them 'the sharp-tongued auntie', I had no reason to be afraid of one petite woman.

The Lal today was not the same person as the Lal yesterday who let you attack me one-sidedly anymore.

Let's give it a shot!

"Yes...of course, K. Wine, I'll be more thorough next time, yes,"

"Yes, K. Wine, I will, yes..."

"What did P' Lal say earlier? '**Show her no mercy**', right?"

Bas whispered to Noomnim after I ended the call.

"All I heard is '**please have mercy**', P' Bas."

"Hey, I can hear you! If you don't stop gossiping, no one will ever get a free bubble tea from me again."

My words quickly made Noomnim and Bas dissolve their little talk.

Once my subordinates stopped chatting, I stared at the phone that I just ended the call, feeling irritated. Vetaka made me feel like I had lost, and someone like Lallalin hated losing above everything.

I don't like this at all...

Just you wait, I'll find a way to win against you... I just let you get a head start this time so you could be at ease and when I get serious after this, you better be ready for it...

□□□□□□

□03.Knocked-Out□

Even though I made a promise to myself that I would make Vetaka feel defeated even once, it was actually a really difficult task to do. The Accounting Department was the most difficult to handle.

"K. Lal, you can't just rely on Excel's formula,"

"K. Lal, can you explain why this time's shipping cost is more expensive than usual?"

"K. Lal..."

If this went on, how would I be able to win against Vetaka...? When the woman practically gave me no way to get back at her. K. Wine was scarily too organized and strict in work. I could get away with it on my own but Vetaka had this standard system where whenever someone from my department made a mistake, I, as the supervisor, would be the first person she summoned to have a word with. And Vetaka's words cut deep, if her words were knives then I would be stabbed so thoroughly already. I didn't like it but there was nothing I could do to get back at her at all.

"And you were attacked by her every single time?"

The man sitting opposite me said after I was done talking.

"Yeah, I'm so screwed..."

I sighed heavily as I picked up a slice of beef on my plate and ate it to get rid of my irritation.

Friday evening was the right time for workers to hang out. And nothing was better than a good quality beef at a shabu-shabu restaurant with a dear pal.

Pakphoom was my closest friend, we decided to meet up to celebrate my new job but it suddenly became my sad little Ted Talk.

"You' re the one who didn't pay enough attention before you took it out on someone. She was sitting in a fancy ergonomic chair separated from the others, she was clearly the boss. Your first impression is so bad."

Pakphoom remarked.

"She doesn't look like it..."

I tried to make up flimsy excuses to defend myself. After that misunderstanding, Vetaka never wore a sweater again, she wore a blazer or a cardigan to shield herself from the cold. It did make the petite woman look more mature but it also made me feel more anxious.

"Dumbass,"

"....."

"You just started working there and you got into trouble with the company' s most terrifying figure. You' re so dumb. And crazy."

"Bitch, I didn't tell you this so you could make fun of me, don' t walk over your friend when they fell, man."

I could no longer stand the insults thrown at me anymore.

Gosh... Don't get so conceited and keep insulting me just because I didn' t say anything.

"I'm not walking over you, I' m beating you up."

Pakphoom giggled, pleased to see me getting so pissed at him but I couldn't find anything to counter him back.

"You' re so mean. I hope you get GERD," so I decided to jinx him instead.

"Hey! You can't argue so you hex me? You' re terrible, Lal,"

Pakphoom whined, it made me feel like I had an upper hand in this situation.

Oh well... GERD was known to be common among white-collar workers. The older one got, the more one was prone to diseases, so it was natural that Pakphoom would be scared that one day, he might suffer from this disease.

"Whatever."

I ignored my friend entirely, I was just saying things, it wasn't my fault he got offended.

"Heh...so this is how you wanna play it? You better watch out with that K. Wine of yours. They you tend to get what you despise. I'll be laughing and making fun of you if you end up in her bed after all this talking behind her back."

"God, no! Don't say something like that, dude, it's disgusting."

I whined when Pakphoom teased me. This little shit tried to get back at me after I jinxed him, huh? He was terrible! The worst!

Suddenly a picture of a certain someone who was the topic of our conversation came into my mind. Even in memory, Vetaka's piercing eyes still traumatized me, much like in real life.

"Hey, I'm not just saying this, didn't you say so yourself that K. Wine is cute? You don't normally give compliments to people."

"Why do you have to pay attention to things like this?"

I complained when my dear friend seemed to have a fantastic memory of unnecessary things like this. Though, it couldn't be denied that Vetaka was lovely, she had fair, healthy skin and looked cute even with the barest makeup on, but...

"Nah, I really can't. Just hearing her name makes my skin crawl. Seriously, that woman is as fierce as a tiger, and she has this oppressing aura around her too."

"Whether or not you will take that back, we'll see."

"Not. A. Chance."

I nearly chewed Pakphoom's head instead of the meat in the shabu-shabu pot.

From an outsider's point of view, anyone would think that Pakphoom and I were a couple, adorably teasing each other. A handsome man and a beautiful woman looked picture-perfect, but please...

Pakphoom only liked cute guys, just like how I only had eyes for pretty girls.

"Speaking of romance, you've been single for a long time already, don't you get lonely?"

Pakphoom asked, curious.

"Nope, my life is hectic right now. I want to focus on my career at the moment."

I smoothly answered my friend. I had been single for so long I couldn't even remember what it was like to have a significant other. But I was happy with my life right now so there was no need to find romance any time soon.

"Or maybe you've finally found someone...in your workplace.."

Pakphoom annoyingly dragged each syllable.

"Hey! I told you not to try to get me together with her!"

I said sternly at my best friend who still had not stopped teasing me.

"What about you? It's not every day you are here on the ground, when's your next flight?"

"Next week, I think. Why? You wanna meet up again?"

"Yeah, wanna have a friend to talk to, I wanna get all of this stress out of my chest."

I confessed honestly. Pakphoom was a flight attendant so our schedules did not usually match. But talking face-to-face like this was much better than talking through the phone.

"Let's hang out again, or you could call me...it's hilarious though, now that you think about it. You put so much effort before working here hoping that everything would go well at work."

Pakphoom laughed, he looked so amused I wanted to yank his head down into the *shabu-shabu* pot.

"I know right? It went so well I nearly died."

I sarcastically complained and touched my hair absentmindedly, feeling tired. This caramel blonde hair color too, the magazine said the color would help you thrive in work, yeah, thriving I did, with an insane amount of issues I encountered at work! Where did I put that magazine, by the way? I would tear it apart once I got back to my place!

"Don't you think you're a little too pissed at her? From what you told me, Wine didn't seem to pick on you specifically or anything, right? She didn't even target you on purpose."

Pakphoom said as he was eating his fifth cup of ice cream. I wondered if he picked this *shabu-shabu* restaurant for the meat or for the ice cream.

You should probably get your Fasting Blood Sugar check, though...

I think it's probably off the roof by now...

"Pent-up anger...? I dunno, I feel annoyed just from seeing her face, dude. Well, it just comes out of nowhere."

"You might not like her, but no violence okay?"

"Oi, you too? Let me tell you, Lallalin here only uses the brain, alright? ez, why does everyone think I'm the type to solve problems with violence."

I protested as I scooped up my ice cream as well, the refreshing sweetness of the um ice cream made me feel a little better.

"Just you wait, I'll make K. Wine completely speechless one day..."

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Monday morning always came fast, but today, I entered my apartment with an unusually wide grin that Noomnim and Bas ad to comment on with a curious look.

"P' Lal, did something good happen?"

"Hm? Was it that obvious?"

I answered Noomnim with a mile as I put my favorite designer' s bag inside the drawer and ook out the laptop to turn it on. It took five to ten minutes for he company's laptop to be fully activated, so I could just turn it n and by the time I finished breakfast, it would be ready for me O get to work.

"It' s like you emit happiness from you, P' Lal, it's obvious,"

Bas added as he searched my face for an answer.

"I'm just happy," of course, I would be, because today was ne day that I would have victory for once. Because my answer 'as vague, Noomnim threw random guesses of what could be the reason.

"Oh? Did you go on a date on the weekend?"

"No, no, let's just say that I'm very happy today. That's all you need to know."

I dropped the mysterious bomb at them but I didn't care, just thinking about K. Wine's stunned expression when she knew I finished my work before the due date and I did everything exactly by the book, leaving no error at all. I was filled with so much joy that I wanted to burst a laugh. I spent my weekend on this report and it was worth it.

"I'll be back in a minute," after I worked for a while, it was finally time for me to go see K. Wine.

"Where are you going, P' Lal?"

"To the Accounting Department. I'll deliver the sales report to them."

"Wait....didn't they tell us to hand it in by Friday?" Noomnim asked me.

"I want to hand it in today, I'll be back,"

I told Noomnim with a grin and walked out, feeling like a champion.

I walked to the Accounting Department and went straight to Vetaka's desk. The petite woman still had not acknowledged my arrival. There was a certain steady rhythm in the way Vetaka clicked the mouse. Her doe-eyes stared at the screen diligently, her other hand was holding a box of drinking yogurt. Our company didn't prohibit eating food during working hours but from what I noticed, Vetaka usually only had sandwiches and a box of drinking yogurt for breakfast.

Shouldn't she be sick of it...?

But then again, why would I care about K. Wine's life?

"Oh...K. Lal? Do you need anything?"

It seemed like Vetaka finally noticed me and of course, I did, that was why I came all the way here to her department. And the topic I wanted to talk to you about...

"Just here to deliver you the sales report,"

I said as I placed the sales summary report on K. Wine' s desk with a wide grin. The woman quietly accepted it.

Vetaka flipped through each page while I stood there, gulping with anticipation.

"You included all the information and it is very thorough and detailed,."

Finally, the woman uttered softly.

"So...if this report is good to go and you don't have any more comments, I'll take my leave then."

I said to her with a wide grin on my face.

Take that! You' re speechless, right? How's my goddamn perfect report!

"Hold on," as I was about to walk out, Vetaka called out to stop me,

"I have something to tell you K. Lal,"

"Yes?"

Vetaka closed my report and said with a serious tone, "our company just introduced a new sales report form last Friday."

"...."

"You can take a look here if you don't believe me."

I approached Vetaka's computer that she pointed at and bent down to read the email displayed on the screen. I smelled a faint scent of strawberry yogurt from the woman, it seemed to be coming from a lotion...wait, why would I pay attention to how Vetaka smelled right now?

That email clearly CC my email in the announcement...

"Seems like you have to revise the report, K. Lal."

The report was handed back to me.

I might be mistaken but I felt like I saw the corners of Vetaka' s lips lift up a little, but that wasn't important, right now, I could feel my face heated up because of how embarrassed I felt!

"Then...I'll go back to change it, K. Wine,"

I accepted the report from her hand and quickly excused myself from the Accounting Department as fast as I could because I didn't want to face Vetaka, who had a faint smile on her face.

"Watch your steps, don't crash any desk, K. Lal. You really shouldn't have to rush it this much next time, the deadline is on Friday."

Vetaka's voice followed me from behind, it made me want to hide my face in a hole like an ostrich. The email was so spot- on, how come I had not noticed it before? Should I just get myself glasses!?

Losing was an understatement in this battle, I was freaking Knocked-Out!

□□□□□□□□

□4.Plan B□

On the king-size bed, two bodies tangled up together passionately. One could tell from the heavy pants what kind of feverish activity they were occupied with.

"Lal...Lal..."

A breathy moan from the person in my arms made me feel bold enough to pepper kisses along the person's delicate body. The pleasant scent of strawberry yogurt made me want to nib and bite the soft skin.

"Ngh...d-don't bite, please."

The person in front of me groaned when my attention was on her shoulder and nape. skin.

"You smell nice."

I told her as I stubbornly nuzzled on her

"Lal, baby, kiss me."

The person begged, I turned her face to me so I could kiss the person in my arms so sweetly. But I was flabbergasted when I saw the other person's face clearly.

K. Wine!?

!!!

I was startled awake in the dark. My heart was pounding like I just had an intense exercise session.

'Was it...a dream?'

I came back to my senses shortly after, before I realized that what happened earlier was just a dream but it was such a vivid dream. The image of Vetaka's naked body still lingered in my memory, my face burned hot. I picked up my phone to check the time, it was just one a.m.

What kind of dream is that!? Was I that lonely? Why did it have to be K. Wine of all people!?

I didn't know if it was because of Pakphoom's taunt or if I ate too much for dinner that it made me dream about something so absurd.

I couldn't find any answer no matter how hard I thought about it so I decided to go back to sleep and failed because I couldn't...

Who would be able to sleep after that though...every time I closed my eyes, a picture of that explicit scene between me and K. Wine flashed in my mind...

[So you chose to call me?]

"Hm, can't sleep. And it's still two p.m. there, right?"

I said tiredly to Pakphoom on the other end of the phone. Well, I couldn't sleep so what could I do? I had tried to sleep since one a.m. and there was still no sign of drowsiness even now. So if I did something, like talking on a phone, it might help me get sleepy even a little bit.

Besides, my best friend was in France right now, the sun had not even set in that region so it wasn't like I was bothering him.

[You can't sleep? Why? Are you getting too stressed about work or are you pissed with K. Wine again?]

Pakphoom asked with curiosity after I told him about that embarrassing scene the other day.

"Nope."

I wasn't pissed off but I almost got off, does that count?

[I take it that you are on good terms now?]

"Well, it wasn't like we were mad at each other in the first place."

It was like Vetaka and I were just colleagues who didn't get along, maybe that was it? It might be because our first impression of each other went badly, so it was like we missed the first button and we ended up messing up the rest of them.

[Hey...since your proudly presented Plan A failed miserably, how about you listen to my Plan B instead?]

"You have a good plan for this?"

[Of course, this is Mr. Phoom, the coolest of all. This plan will work for sure.]

Pakphoom said with so much confidence in his voice that I was intrigued by his plan.

"Let's see then," it wasn't like I could sleep so it wouldn't hurt to listen to Pakphoom's plan.

[This is...one hell of a plan, trust me,]

After I ended the call with my best friend, I pulled out every method by the book, counting sheeps, and drinking a glass of warm milk, yet I still couldn't sleep until it was time for me to go to work. Thank goodness that I didn't have a meeting with a client on my schedule today so I could go through my paperwork blankly due to my lack of sleep. At the same time, as I was typing on my computer, I thought about Pakphoom's advice from last night.

"Make a friend out of your enemy?"

[Well, you told me often that K. Wine is distant and cold, so, if you try to get closer to her, you may not find her irritating anymore after you become friends,]

"So..."

[Try changing how you call her, it sounds more casual that way.]

Change the way I call her? ... and it might make us closer?

[The word 'Khun' ...sounds way too distant, is she older than you? Try casually calling her P' Wine, who knows, she might be fond of you a little more.]

P' Wine...

"Ew, no way. Sounds weirdly yucky,"

I shivered just from imagining it, no way I'd say that out loud.

[You haven't even given it a try, don't overthink it just yet. You said so yourself that you dream of a peaceful work life, that K. Wine of yours stirred it all up, so you ought to fix that, alright?]

"Dude! She's not my K. Wine,"

[Give it a try first, would it be so bad to call her P' ? Trust me, it will work.]

"But..."

[Just give it a try!]

You made it sound so easy but you weren't the one doing it, though...you could say that because you have never met Vetaka in real life... I let out a huge sigh at my best friend's creative advice. To be honest, I thought Pakphoom worked in the service industry too long, he just got used to

compromising. Just thinking about approaching Vetaka, and talking to her cutely, weirded me out.

'Lal, baby...'

Vetaka's voice was as sweet as honey in my dream, I shivered so bad that I barely stood it. Could you just get out of my head, please? I'm begging you...

I grabbed the coffee beside me, hoping that the Latte's sweetness and caffeine could heal me from my throbbing nerves that were caused by work and something so absurd, but I was met with emptiness...since when did I finish the drink?

No way, I can't work in the afternoon without sugar energizing me! My brain needs energy to function! I stared longingly at the empty cup.

'My body is craving sugar...but if I leave to grab a drink now, it wouldn't look good on me, what should I do...hm...our company has a common room, I recall.'

After that though, I decided to fix the problem in hand first by dragging myself to the targeted room. I turned on the light and scanned the room. There was a coffee machine inside the place, a first aid kit cabinet, a sink, and a microwave.

Truth be told, I had been here only once when P' Jantra showed me around, but then it wasn't like I had a reason to make a cup of coffee or need first aid before.

I might as well try it now, please little coffee machine, give me some nice Latte.

I walked straight to the coffee maker that didn't look too complicated, there were buttons that showed a selection of coffee and a green button that lit up. Once I pressed the Latte button and the green button, the coffee started pouring down to my cup that I placed below. I mused to myself as I was waiting for the coffee.

'Try calling her P'

Suddenly, Pakphoom's advice came back to me, I argued with him inside my head, and Pakphoom won in the end. Maybe I should follow his advice, if it went well then I might stop feeling irritated with Vetaka and my work life would be more peaceful...

Let's give it a go! It seemed like God must hear my prayers because, after my internal pep talk, Vetaka stepped inside the common room as if on cue. By the look of it, I wasn't the only one who was startled, the petite woman seemed as surprised, her round eyes underneath the thick-lens glasses widened a little.

Jeez, just because I thought about it, doesn't mean I want it right now, alright?

Silence fell between us. As I said, Vetaka and I barely talked about things outside of work. And now, there was only the sound of the coffee maker, it was kind of awkward, to be honest. And yes, the scene in the dream from last night came back to me again!

"Good-ouch!"

I decided to greet her to break the awkwardness but then I yelled as I felt the burning feeling on the palm of my hand. I looked down and found that the latte that came out of the coffee machine overflowed the cup and spilled onto my hand. I noticed that Vetaka sighed a little, though she hid it before she moved to the coffee maker and pressed the green button.

"You have to press the button to stop it. The machine is an old model,"

"Thank you P' Wine."

Even though I hurt myself and felt embarrassed from how awkward I was in front of K. Wine, this was a good opportunity for me to try to call the other woman P' just like Pakphoom suggested.

"...."

Vetaka looked at me quietly. She didn't respond to my thanks, instead, she took hold of my wrist.

"Ouch!"

Of course, the skin where it had been scalded by the hot water was very painful. So I cried out.

"K. Lal, how long are you going to keep staring at me? Your hand looks red, come here."

The woman said sternly when she saw that I was still frozen in the same spot. All I could do was quietly follow Vetaka to the sink and let the smaller woman watch my hand with clean water. Her eyes bore into the reddened area on my palm thoughtfully. Without knowing, I watched the woman's gentle action.

"..."

"Does it still hurt?"

"K. Lal?"

"Huh? Oh, n-no, not so much now,"

I answered her question after I pulled myself together.

"You should see a doctor if it still hurts after work. Our company covers employees' health insurance, you can reimburse the expenses."

"Thank you, P' Wine, I-If you don't mind, I would like to buy you coffee sometimes."

I told Vetaka hesitantly, at least I should repay her for this.

"K. Lal," but then Vetaka interrupted me quietly.

"Yes?"

"I'm thirty-two."

"Oh...I see, P' Wine is-what!?"

I exclaimed with surprise once again. How old did Vetaka say she was? Thirty-two, right? That would mean...

"Yes, we are the same age, K. Lal."

"...."

....after I realized the truth, I was so speechless. I could only stare at Vetaka's face with panic, the woman stared at me calmly and asked me.

"K. Lal, are you a single child?"

"I beg your pardon? ..."

I replied to Vetaka's question with confusion, why would I be a single child or not have anything to do with this situation?

"Nothing, it's just that you seem very keen on having a sibling since you keep calling me Nong and P' often."

"...."

....damn it...Pakphoom, I'll make you pay for this after get back.

I "You don't seem all there lately, you should get some rest, don't overwork yourself."

"I appreciate it, K. Wine, I-I'll excuse myself then,"

I felt like if I stayed there any longer, it might end up like the usual; I would feel like I needed to transform into an ostrich and hide my head in the ground, I should run...

"You forgot your coffee, K. Lal. Be careful when you walk, can't have you spill the coffee again."

Her words made me hurriedly return to grab that troublesome coffee cup and nod at K. Wine, who returned my gesture with a small smile at the corner of her lips. Had anyone ever told her that Vetaka looked much better when she smiled than when she showed no emotion? But couldn't she smile from something else? Not from situations where I embarrassed myself like this!

When I got back to my desk I took a large sip of latte and internally cursed my best friend.

Pakphoom you little shit! So much for calling her P' to boost our familiarity.

It went straight out the window!

Who would have thought she was the same age as me!? K. Wine had not gotten over what happened last time and I already made another scene for her to remember some more. Kill me already...

.

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[So you're calling me at this time to...]

"Yup, to give you hell, you shit. What the hell was that plan? I had the whole basket of eggs on my face, man."

I said annoyingly to the phone.

[Christ, can't you wait until morning?]

Pakphoom protested, he sounded pissed off. Feeling satisfied by this, I giggled. If I did the math right it should be about three a.m. there, well, that's karma for your action, dude!

"Serves you right, you gave terrible advice, so much for calling her 'P' she is the same age as me. I'll never recover from this."

[It's not like I'm the one to blame, though? I did ask you if she's older than you, it's you who didn't bother to look it up first. You just call her P' out of the blue, it's a miracle she didn't scold you for it. Oh? You're not gonna say anything? Can't argue with that, right? That aside...since you embarrassed yourself so many times now, I'll buy a souvenir for you, okay?]

My friend's complaints made me grab a nearby pillow and squeeze it until it wrinkled because I didn't have anything to counter back. It was my fault that I didn't look it up first.

"What souvenir?"

Fine, I could shift my attention to the souvenir that Pakphoom would bring me for now.

[Wine,]

"What..."

[I'm in France, they're known for their wines, right? Don't you like wine too-]

I pressed to end the call with my best friend immediately. I wanted to scream at Pakphoom for trying to get on my nerves. But I could only bury my face into the pillow and scream. And then the LINE notification rang, interrupting me. When I grabbed it to see, it was a notification from the person I just ended the call with.

PhoomJAI: u can't even stand that word?

PhoomJAI : since when we can't say the word 'wine'

You little shit!!! You're doing this on purpose: **Lullaby**

PhoomJAI : so do you want the wine?

PhoomJAI want some wine, the wine, do you want the wine?

Bitch...:**Lullaby**

PhoomJAI : don't be sad that plan B failed

PhoomJAI : lemme come up with plan C, alright?

STOP. Stop it! :**Lullaby**

I nearly threw my phone to the wall, no more plans, no more advice, shut it all down at once!

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□05.BAD DAY□

Bad Day was probably the term used for an awful day when nothing went your way at all like today when I drowsily opened my eyes to turn off my phone alarm that was ringing loudly with a foul mood. It came with a throbbing pain in my lower stomach which got so much worse that I frowned from the suffering. Oh boy, it seemed like it was that time of the month.

I wanna call for a day off so bad...

It was just my wistful thought, I had too much work waiting for me to get a day off... I decided to flip the cover and got up to freshen myself up before work. The fact that the traffic today seemed worse than usual irritated me even more. I just didn't understand the purpose of the red light timer. Why bother with it at all when the police were just going to switch the traffic lights as they please? I was stuck for almost five minutes at each red light, should I leave my house two hours earlier so I could get to work on time?

Then there was the crowded elevator that stopped at every single floor. My company was on the highest floor of the building so imagine how much time I wasted inside the elevator. I quickened my pace, practically running. This would be the day that my favorite tall high heels annoyed me. I let out a smile when I saw the face scanner within my sight, I made it! Good thing that my company had advanced technology like this face scanning machine instead of a clock-in system, it saved a lot of time.

"Please try again,"

The voice from the scanners said and yes...it was nearly half past eight, can I just not do this...

"Damn it, you see me every day, why can't you recognise me today!?"

"Please try again,"

"I tried so many times."

I said through my teeth, feeling angry but it wasn't like I could just argue with a face scanner this early in the morning.

"Welcome," and it appeared that my rebuke was heard because there was the word 'Welcome' being shown on the screen. I let out a relief sigh...as if I could be relieved!

The time '8:31 a.m.' was displayed on the screen, taunting me. Being one minute late was even worse than being half an hour late, alright? Damn it! What on earth was going on today? Everything went wrong from the moment I woke up to when I arrived at the company. Since I encountered lots of misfortunes already, was it too much to ask for a good, simple day at work for the rest of the day?

Some people tended to sense disaster. A more common superstition belief would be something such as if your right eye twitched, something bad would happen. It was the same for work, if Bas and Noomnim suddenly rushed to my desk at the same time, both looking alarmed, then it could only mean one thing; **disaster**.

"P' Lal, you have to help us!!"

There it is...I should buy a lottery ticket. I should've won a lottery with this skill...

"Explain to me, be brief, no unnecessary details."

After I said that, Bas took the duty of filling me in about the situation. It started when Bas was finalizing the sales with a key client but the client's account in the system was locked so Noomnim couldn't issue the receipt. And the person responsible for that was no stranger to them at all...

"Please have a word with K. Wine for us."

From the look of it, both of them likely tried to talk to her and were rejected so they came to me, their final refuge. And who was I to deny my poor subordinates' request?

"Why didn't you finalize it before, when you knew that the client's account was about to expire?"

"I was so busy, it slipped my mind. I'm sorry,"

Bas admitted his mistake. He looked so dejected that I felt bad for him. Normally, our company had a policy where we had to check on our clients' financial and business statuses every year. The Sales Department was responsible for gathering necessary documents regarding the matter and handing them to the Accounting Department. In this case, Bas forgot to forward the documents, hence, the Accounting Department put the client's account on hold, locking it from making financial transactions.

"Make sure to do it first thing next time, understand?"

I chided my subordinate because this time, it was entirely our department's fault.

"I'm really sorry,"

"I can't promise you that it will go well, though..."

My voice was hesitant. I just prayed this morning for the day to go well without any trouble. It was barely half the day and I had to go to the Accounting Department.

The cramp hurts like hell...

"You are our last hope, P' Lal, please give it a shot,"

"I'll try, okay?"

I walked to the Accounting Department with a heavy burden on my shoulders because I was carrying the hope of my subordinates. Vetaka looked up from her work desk, she eyed me as if asking what made me

come all the way here. When she noticed Noomnim and Bas who were standing not too far away, watching the situation, she seemed to understand what I was here for.

"The answer is still no."

Vetaka's voice was stern even though I had not said a single word.

As expected of K. Wine, this negotiation won't be easy...

"Help me out this one time, please? This client is very important. I'll make sure Bas handles the documents and send them to you as soon as possible."

I tried to negotiate with Vetaka the best I could but she did not seem to budge at all.

"Rules are rules, K. Lal. I can't do that even if it's for you."

"You're so...can't you let it slide just once?"

It pissed me off for some reason, why did she have to be so harsh, she could just unlock it.

"If I let this one slide, then rules won't be needed at all. I don't have anything to say to you, you should just go. If you really want the sales, then follow the procedures,"

"But..."

"Both of us can't afford to take responsibility for it if something goes wrong. Please, follow the procedure with the paperwork."

"....."

I stared at Vetaka, infuriated to the boiling point but I had to back off even though I felt sore from it. Since the woman refused to help, I didn't have the power to do anything about it.

The client's deadline was today, but they won't make it in time with the paperwork and the waiting-for-approval process.

'I know that it isn't exactly by the procedure but can't she help me out!?'

'What a mean woman!'

"You should hurry with the paperwork, so I can help you check them."

And the fact that she talked so unfazed about it irritated me even more.

'Don't pretend like you wanted to help, this isn't helping at all because there is no way we can make it in time.'

"Sure, I'll handle the documents. Thank you for being so helpful."

I said to the person who refused to help and walked away with anger. I had no idea whether the woman would feel anything from my word or not, I didn't think she would though. She couldn't even spare me a small generosity...

I have my cramps and I was pissed off by someone so mean, today is such a Bad Day for me...

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My mood was still bad by the time I got off the clock. Good thing that my cramps didn't hurt that badly anymore but I still felt fatigued. So I decided that I should just hurry back home to rest. I had a rough day already.

"Let's go home, P' Lal, P' Bas,"

Noomnim said, she sounded exhausted. Bas and I could only nod.

After K. Wine refused to help, Bas had to call the client to apologize. This client in particular was known for how demanding they were and for their rude remarks. They threatened to sue Bas for the fine since he couldn't deliver the goods as per their agreement. I had to intervene and smooth

things over. By the time it was over, we all felt exhausted to the bone. So the whole Sales Department decided to pack their bags and head home.

"Wait for me, P' Lal, P' Bas, hurry."

Noomnim called Bas and me to get in the elevator together. They were lucky that there was enough space for the three of them to squeeze in. Otherwise, they would have to wait for the next elevator to arrive and during this clocked out hour, it would take a long while.

Inside the elevator, they were packed like sardines...

I let out a long sigh, caught up with the exhaustion and irritation from the day I had, the feelings all mixed up together.

"It's not your fault, P' Lal. Don't worry about it, it was our fault that we didn't check it beforehand."

"Sorry I can't help you on this at all,"

I don't know...I felt like I was a useless supervisor...my subordinates couldn't even rely on me for help.

"It doesn't matter, P' Lal, at least we get to see with our own eyes how someone can be so heartless."

Noomnim brought the topic up when she wasn't able to resist her irritation even though we were still in the elevator.

"P'Lal, do you think...K. Wine did that to us on purpose?"

"I dunno..."

I replied to Noomnim, who still seemed pissed off. Vetaka might be a little too meticulous but she didn't seem like the type to do this on purpose.

"I don't think she did, but yeah, she's a piece of work."

Even I started to complain.

"Right? She's so heartless, can't even do us a little favor. She probably feels overjoyed seeing us in trouble. I feel sorry for Tangkwa, having someone like this as her boss."

"Yeah, I'd feel so pressured having a supervisor like that." Bas added.

"I know right? We're so lucky to have P' Lal who is way prettier, nicer and a whole lot better than her."

Ding!

Then the elevator sound came when they arrived at the fourth floor which was the parking lot floor. We stopped chatting that instance so we could make way for the people who would get out on this floor.

"Excuse me."

A familiar voice and figure walked past me and Noomnim to exit the elevator. The scent of strawberry yogurt lotion confirmed exactly what I was thinking...

K. Wine...

Once the small back was out of sight and the elevator's door shut again, I, Noomnim, and Bas looked at each other without a word.

"We're dead...we're so dead."

Bas mumbled, he was freaking out.

"P-P' Lal, do you think she heard us?"

Noomnim asked me with a horrified look in her eye. I had no idea whether Vetaka was so small that she was completely hidden behind the crowd or that it was us who were so pissed off and failed to notice her.

"No,"

"No, she didn't hear us?"

"No way she didn't..."

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□6. CRY□

Hearsay goes as water flows,
As harmless as a blade carved on stone.
Even holy statues deemed as flawed,
How could mortals escape the known?

I looked up with surprise to the two piles of Dhamma books that were placed on my desk. Seeing the text that was printed on the cover on display very visibly made me feel oddly sheepish. The person who was organizing the piles saw me looking and beamed at me cheerfully.

I responded by flashing a wry smile at her. P' Jantra was holding two large piles of books on both sides of her arms, she was likely on a mission where she planned to give out the books to the whole company.

These Dharmma books must have been a souvenir for the merit donation last Monday then...

"Yours are twenty books in total, N' Lal, I'll put them right here, alright?"

P' Jantra patted the pile together one more time before she started chatting.

"Got it, P' Jantra, thanks a lot."

I replied to her. When I looked to the spot where P' Jantra told me and saw the book cover directly on my eye level, well...*perfect position, I can see the preaching clearly with both eyes...*

"Sigh...let me catch my breath a second."

P' Jantra placed the large plastic bag on the floor, looking sore. I leaned out to see the bag, there were only a few books left but judging from the size of the bag, I supposed it must have been very heavy when she carried it here.

"P' Jantra, you should call to get the newbies to help out next time."

I wouldn't want her back to break if she continues this...

"Oh, I just want to give them out to people myself. Consider it an exercise. After you, all that's left is N' Wine and I'll be done."

The name of the person I didn't want to see the most came out from P' Jantra's mouth, I didn't want to comment on anything so I remained silent. But P' Jantra was still chatting like she just wanted to share the news with me.

"I saw N' Wine this morning, she doesn't look too cheerful today. I hope the Dhamma book will give her some comfort."

"K. Wine...doesn't look too cheery?"

I couldn't resist asking about it.

"She looks kind of sullen today, maybe she quarreled with her partner?"

P' Jantra said thoughtfully, but seriously, why did everyone just assume that whether one appeared to be happy or sad, it would be because of one's love life? If someone looked prettier than usual then people would ask if they were seeing someone, that they were feeling in love and that was why they looked better.

If they were irritated then people would ask if they had a quarrel with their significant other. Was it not possible for a person to be pretty because they wanted to? Maybe they were in a foul mood because of the traffic, because of how bad, bumpy the road was...

"Maybe K. Wine has something on her mind?"

I voiced out, if it was really about her significant other, it was probably better than being about what happened yesterday evening. 'But K. Wine is already seeing someone?

'..wait, is that really something I should focus on right now?'

I frowned at my own thoughts.

"Alright, I should probably go, so I can get back to rest faster."

P' Jantra stretched a few times before bending over to pick up the bag.

"May the merit bless those who do not indulge in gossip, love."

"Of course, may the merit bless you too, P' Jantra."

I clapped my hands together at P' Jantra's blessings. I tried to forget what happened yesterday but then I was reminded of it again...maybe this was another kind of punishment by the power of the moon?

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I tried not to think about what happened, acting like nothing was wrong, Vetaka would probably forget it soon enough... but it seemed like the ones who were so shaken up were Noomnim and Bas.

"P' Lal...P' Bas told me he has to deal with a client today, he probably won't be able to make it to the office."

"Sounds like an excuse to me."

I commented knowingly, I knew that someone as sly as Bas was likely to find an excuse to avoid Vetaka. That was one good thing about being a salesperson; he could go and meet up with clients without coming back to the office. But for Noomnim, who had to work at the office every day, she seemed to be the most anxious...

"Hey....you keep sighing so much you' re starting to stress me out too."

I told her when I heard her sigh loudly from the desk nearby.

"I have so many things to take care of, I have to feed my cat, I don't wanna get fired right now."

"Don't freak out, Noomnim,"

I tried to console Noomnim, who was still losing her mind over the incident yesterday. It was a pretty awkward moment indeed but it was not something that made a company fire people out so there was no need to be that overly anxious about it.

"You aren't any better either, you keep staring at your phone, P' Lal."

I was startled when Noomnim talked back to me. I moved my gaze back to the laptop's screen, since when did I keep staring at my phone's screen?

"Are you scared that she'll call?"

"Don' t jinx it! What if she actually does?"

I sternly told off Noomnim. The three of us were accomplices in yesterday' s incident, alright?

I had no idea how I could face that woman face-to-face, much less talk to her on the phone.

Even though I had prepared myself mentally...it was unusual to not receive a call from Vetaka even though the day was already past noon. I tried to calm myself down, thinking that someone as heartless as her wouldn't be affected by this nonsense gossip.

We just don't have work that requires us to talk today, that's all...

"Everything will be okay..."

Noomnim murmured her prayers, it made me let out a sigh.

"Want a Dhamma book, Nim? It might calm you down."

I said as I picked out one from the pile and handed it to the freaked-out woman.

"No way, get it away from me!"

I chuckled at Noomnim's reaction, who screamed as if the Dhamma book was holy water.

And here I thought I could get away with avoiding Vetaka for the whole day today, but then N' Tangkwa called, informing me to pick up the documents at the Accounting Department.

If I make it quick, maybe I won't run into the petite woman...

It was as if my prayers were in vain because the person who was at the department was the same person that I had been trying to avoid since morning.

"Your files are there, K. Lal."

I swallowed a huge lump and tried my best not to look suspicious, though the large pile of Dhamma books next to my files made me feel somewhat nervous.

"You can take it if you're interested."

The woman said. It startled me.

"It's alright, I got those too."

I muttered my reply, it didn't look like Vetaka was still angry or anything...

"Bas's file would likely be ready by tomorrow, that one is urgent, isn't it?"

Not only did Vetaka not seem affected at all, but the petite woman was still talking to me as usual. So P' Jantra was exaggerating after all, and if I did

not read too much into things, I would think that K. Wine's phrasing sounded kind of like a taunt.

"It's fine, it doesn't matter whether you finish it tomorrow or next week, really."

And that made me taunt her back. Though this time, oddly enough, Vetaka simply watched me in silence.

Is it just in my head or does K. Wine's eyes seem more swollen and redder than usual...?

"I'll call you once it's done."

After I got back from the Accounting Department, I felt irritated for some reason. I couldn't focus on my work no matter how hard I tried. I could not get rid of Vetaka's swollen eyes from my mind. Her eyes were so red as if she had been crying hard before this...that would be insane, no way someone who seemed that heartless would be so upset over something like this...

Feeling irritated, I got up.

'This can't go on, I can't be thinking about some nonsense, this is the fifth time I mistyped an email that was meant for my client.'

I should freshen up in the toilet a bit...

I paused when I opened the door because the person who had lingered on my mind was standing in the restroom. Vetaka was standing in front of the mirror right now, her hand was still holding a toilet paper.

"K. Wine..."

I called out to her and when she turned to look at me, her eyes widened with surprise, but not as much as mine when I saw that both of her eyes were wet with crystal-clear tears. Instead of greeting me back, Vetaka only nodded to me as she grabbed her glasses near the sink and quickly wiped her tears away.

The petite woman lowered her head and walked past me as if I was nothing but air to her. That strangely created a sharp pang in my chest.

Hold on... you're really hurt by that!?

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"P'Lal."

"What...?"

I replied to Bas, my voice sounded more languid than usual because I barely got enough sleep last night, the reason for that was...that petite woman from Accounting. I had never considered that my action would hurt someone this much.

"You have to see this, P' Lal, hurry."

Bas showed me his phone enthusiastically. Naturally, Noomnim would come to see what seemed to be interesting.

"Well...what's this about?"

I took Bas's phone and found that it was the headline of this morning's news.

*Famous factory goes bankrupt and goes out of business effectively
Thousands of workers are unemployed, the owner claimed he cannot pay off
the dept*

I reread the news and then my brain finally caught up with the information. Wasn't this factory Bas's key client?

"That's the client that was going to buy a large lot from us, right?"

I turned to Bas, surprised.

"Yeah, we're so lucky, P' Lal, otherwise...we'll have to suit up and go to court."

Bas said as he was petting his body to ease the goosebump,

"Thank goodness that K. Wine was strict, thank goodness, indeed."

"My heart dropped when I saw the news."

Noomnim joined the conversation,

"Our merits must protect us from this, I will continue doing good deeds and be a decent person from now on."

She took one Dhamma book from the pile on my desk with a relaxed gesture.

The air around Bas and Noomnim was strangely cheerful, completely different from yesterday. I was so curious about it that I decided to ask.

"How come you two look so chill today, aren't you guys stressed anymore?"

"No, P' Lal. We already talked."

Noomnim turned to answer me with a smile, 'Wait...talk about what, exactly?' it seemed that the confusion on my face must be a little too obvious because Noomnim added.

"Heh...we came clean to her."

"..?.."

"Bas and I ran into Khun Wine this morning so we apologized to her."

Noomnim explained and that made me want to drop my jaw internally, hang on...

"She only scolded us a little, she said 'I don't take it personally but don't do this again. What if someone else hears it?' Sigh...we should have apologized

to her since yesterday. The food tasted like ash in my mouth for a whole day over nothing."

Bas added with relief.

"Right, P' Bas? I'm so relieved. I have the strength to work now."

I watched Bas and Noomnim laughing together so cheerfully with a sour feeling...

How can you two be relieved and leave the bomb to your boss like that, guys!?

I raised my hands to my head without knowing, the memory of Khun Wine wiping her tears flashed into my mind again.

Somehow I wanted to make soup out of that Dhamma book, maybe then this tight, uncomfortable guilt in my chest would lessen a little...

□□□□□

□7. Alcohol Free□

Sometimes, a simple word like 'sorry' seemed so difficult to say out loud.

"Yes...I'll call you once I send the email, sir."

I stared at my phone as I just hung up the call, and let out a soft sigh.

Today won't be much of a success, just like before...

I planned to have a serious talk with Vetaka and apologized to her but the timing was never right even though we had something to discuss nearly every day. I felt restless but I couldn't tell anyone about it since this one was completely on me. If I told someone about it, especially my annoying friend, Pakphoom, he'd give me an earful.

And Vetaka acted as if nothing happened, she discussed work with me like normal.

Maybe it's okay if I let it go? K. Wine will probably forget about it sooner or later.

I tried to cheer myself up while I was replying to my client's emails. An email notification rang with a pop-up notification on the bottom right corner of the screen, the email's topic made me put down my work and click to read the full message.

Announcement: Shareholders Welcoming Party

I read through the email, it was a pretty short notice, that was for sure. Sometimes, the company's executives from abroad would fly to Thailand

for some check-ups at this branch and after they had a meeting with the company president, there would be a welcoming party in the evening.

Let's see...who has to be there now.?

We kindly invite all staff from management level and above to join us on Friday the XXth, 5.30 p.m. at XX restaurant.

The company will arrange transportations to and from the venue. The van will leave at 4.30 p.m.

'Oh Christ, and here I thought I could chill on a Friday evening.'

I swore internally without meaning to. Good thing that I did not have plans on that day but I still felt annoyed by it.

"Nim, Bas, I'll get off work early next Friday, okay? If you have documents that you need to send to me, send them before that."

I informed my two subordinates because I would have to show myself at half past four so I would have to get off work faster than usual.

"Something's the matter?"

"I have to go to the company's party, the shareholders will be here at the company next week."

"Wow, that's nice, they only invite management level, we want to get free food too."

Bas complained with envy.

"Right? It's not fair."

"I would rather go home and watch Netflix, really."

I argued tiredly with Bas and Noomnim as I grabbed a pen and circled the date on the calendar to remind myself. But on the bright side... getting a free dinner did sound like a good thing to cheer me up.

Time flew and a week passed, the next thing I knew, it was the day I had to attend the party. I decided to wear a dark brown check blazer which paired with the skirt, and a black camisole. I wanted to go with more sexy looks so I wore a black stocking and high heels. The outfit I picked out turned out to be a beautiful success, confirmed by the praises I received from the moment I walked into the company. And then as I was about to walk to my desk, I paused. Someone was coming from that high-risk curved corridor.

K. Wine...

Here was the thing, this company had many high-risk curved corridors that were prone to accidents where people bumped into each other because the large file cabinets created a blind spot. So the pedestrians had to walk with caution and be mindful while they walked, or accidents might occur.

"Good morning, K. Lal."

Vetaka greeted me first. I did say that the petite woman did not seem to take what happened in the elevator to heart anymore, but I still had feelings that our relationship had gotten worse.

"Good morning, K. Wine."

I greeted her back with a smile, Vetaka nodded lightly with a neutral expression.

After that day, K. Wine never smiled at me again...

I watched as the woman walked away with a hollow feeling inside me.

'It's a good thing right? ...we're just colleagues, there's no need to be acquaintances to each other as long as we can get work done.'

But what's with the uneasiness I feel inside my chest...

When we lost track of time, it seemed to slip away so fast and then it was time for me to go to the meet-up point.

"Get your stomach full for us, P' Lal,"

Noomnim, who seemed to long for free food, told me as I was packing my stuff into my purse.

"I will describe every single dish to you, Noomnim, down to every detail,"

I teased the girl who always seemed to be hungry with amusement.

"You're so mean, P' Lal...I will send you pictures of food in the middle of the night as payback."

"Just kidding, girl...I'll buy you bubble tea next Monday to cheer you up, okay?"

I tried to cheer up my fairly upset subordinate. After getting a free drink offer, Noomnim appeared to brighten up and let me get out of the department with a smile.

'To be honest, I'd prefer to drive there myself.'

I mused as I walked to the parking lot in front of the company. The restaurant where the event took place was not far from the company but it had limited parking space so the HR had arranged a transportation for the company employees to ride there together.

I arrived at the meeting spot ten minutes early and found that almost everyone was there. I smiled sweetly at the familiar faces such as P' Jantra and managers from other departments but there was no sign of that petite woman...

"Guys, you can get in the car while we wait, so you can get comfortable in the air conditioner,"

And after we signed our names on the registration list, P' Jantra told us to get in the van that was waiting for us. The weather in Thailand was burning hot, Bangkok, especially, I could not remember when was the last time my body felt the natural winter breeze.

Why isn't she here yet?

I kept looking for Vetaka until I was the only one left so I hurried into the ride. As I was about to step inside to find the seat, I paused. There were several gift baskets on the seats. P' Jantra, who was in charge of the event, came to me with curiosity when she saw me step back outside.

"N' Lal, I'm so sorry, I forgot that I have to leave a seat for the gift baskets."

P' Jantra said to me, she looked concerned and guilty.

"What should we do? I have to check the venue first, otherwise, I'll let you sit on my seat and I'll catch you guys up with a taxi afterwards."

"It's fine, P' Jantra, no worries at all, I can drive there,"

I quickly told her. I would prefer this way too since I could drive home after the party was over and I wouldn't have to waste my time coming back to the company to get my car.

"The thing is I only reserved a parking lot for one car,"

P' Jantra murmured to herself, considering before she said to me with relief.

"You should go together."

"Pardon?"

I asked, feeling confused. P' Jantra seemed to make a conclusion with herself more than talking to me.

"N' Wine will drive there and catch up with us later because an urgent work came up so I reserved a parking space for her. But since it turns out like this, N' Lal, you can go with N' Wine."

P' Jantra quickly explained the situation to me, who was still standing there, confused.

"Excuse me?"

P' Jantra wanted me to go with who again?

"You can talk with N' Wine about whose car you will take there, okay? I already texted her about it."

P' Jantra lowered her head as she typed on her phone and ended the conversation without waiting for my reply, "see you at the venue,"

The van's door slid closed in front of me, I watched as the van left, looking baffled.

Wait, wait, P' Jantra, shouldn't you ask me first before you decide things for me!? Have you asked K. Wine whether or not she wants to go there with me?

I let out a huge resigned sigh before I walked to where I parked my car. I scrolled through the company's chat room to find K. Wine's name and once I found it, I mentally prepared myself for another five seconds before I decided to click on her LINE to send her a private message.

Where does this nervous feeling come from? I feel more nervous than when I have to talk with important clients on major projects.

K. Wine: Lullaby

This is Lal by the way: Lullaby

I held my breath when my texts were marked as read as I was waiting for her reply. But 3 minutes had passed and the other woman showed no sign of replying to my messages. If I actually held my breath for the reply, I'd be in the afterlife already.

D

on't leave me at read, K. Wine, it's making me feel uneasy, you know?

Wine Whose car will it be?

Vetaka replied, she appeared to know what was going on which wasn't surprising to me because P' Jantra must have texted her about it.

We can take mine : Lullaby

I'll drive you back here afterwards: Lullaby

Wine: I can use the company's van on my way back.

Wine: Thank you anyway.

Vetaka's rejection caused a sharp pain in my chest.

Why would I be disappointed?

Let's meet up on the 2nd floor : Lullaby

Wine: I will be there in 10 minutes.

I used that ten minutes of waiting to clean my baby until she was shiny and clean. Luckily, I had already sent her to the car wash service yesterday, just a few dust off and she would be as good as new.

I fixed my gaze on my white BMW which was practically shining with a worried look.

Is it clean enough? Should I dust it off a little more?

But when I saw Vetaka walk out the door, I gave her an awkward wave. It was then that I noticed K. Wine's outfits clearly. The woman dressed more formally than usual. She wore a pencil skirt that paired up nicely with the slim-fit blazer and because the clothes were all black, it made her skin illuminate even more, her skin was so...fair...

It was a simple outfit but when Vetaka was dressed in it, it looked oddly charming.

"Shall we?"

"...right, yeah, let's go,"

When Vetaka moved to sit and buckled the seatbelt, her pencil skirt moved up a little, revealing the fair skin of her thighs.

Lallalin, move your ungrateful gaze to somewhere else now! Eyes on the road, you hear me!

The trip to the restaurant actually took less than half an hour but I felt the uncomfortable tension the whole time. I wanted to turn on the radio but I did not have the courage so I could only sit quietly until we arrived at the destination.

This time the shareholders came from Japan so they reserved a traditional Japanese private dining room, the decor and atmosphere screamed Japanese, even the waitress who came to take us to our room was a foreigner.

"Hi, dit ywe bood a table?"

A foreigner as in a foreigner from a neighboring country I guess...

I told the staff my company's name and the waitress informed me that the reserved room, since it was a VIP room, was a little further inside the restaurant. I nodded before heading in the direction I was given, I mused to myself in the meantime.

I did wonder sometimes...they came all the way to Thailand, why didn't they try Thai food...like Tom Yum Kung, that was so good, and then there was Som Tum...

"Some of them have weak stomachs, if they have Thai food and get diarrhea, we'll have to cancel the meeting the next day."

"?"

I turned to Vetaka who answered my question out of the blue with surprise.

But I didn't say anything out loud earlier though?

"The look on your face says it all, K. Lal."

Vetaka remarked impetuously before she slid the door open. to the private room. Her delicate lips let out an apology to the people in the room for being late. She brought herself to sit at the table that P' Jantra prepared for her.

I followed the woman inside as I started to wonder...I was pretty certain that I did a good job at controlling my expressions...how come K. Wine figured it out?

And then I had to put my question aside when the company president gave an opening ceremony speech and introduced the important shareholder to the employees and then it was time to feast.

"Lallalin-san, cheers."

Wakaba-san said in his heavily accented Thai language, he was the staff from Japan who came to visit the Thailand branch. Several employees came from Japan with him.

And all of them seemed to enjoy Thailand a lot... well, obviously, the food was great and they practically lived like a king with people servicing them around, who wouldn't?

"Thank you for offering but I have to drive home today,"

I told him in Japanese. It probably impressed Wakaba-san greatly because his eyes gleamed even more.

"Please, just one drink."

"No, I don't want to."

I declined the amber color liquid that the Japanese man tried to offer me, with a smile but the man still kept insisting I drink it. I shoot him a dagger glare.

What the hell? No means no, why is he still imposing, does he want me to say it with my fist or something!?

"No, I don't drink, really,"

And because of my firm rejection and glare, the man gave up peacefully. I ate the meal in front of me as I turned to chat with the Japanese team who asked about work and some small talk until the party was over.

I got out of my seat, feeling elated. Finally, I could go home now...But then P' Jantra's voice got my attention.

"N' Wine, are you alright?"

When I walked to P' Jantra's table and saw the petite figure slumping, lying face down on the table.

"What's wrong with K. Wine?"

I asked about what happened but then I heard the petite woman trying to say something. So I bent down closer to her to listen more carefully.

"I'm...good...i'm fine,"

She reeks of alcohol...

"Does she normally drink?"

I asked P' Jantra. The woman firmly said no to the question.

"She didn't drink at all, N' Lal, she only drinks these orange juices."

P' Jantra pointed at the empty glasses of orange juice on the table.

"And who ordered the juice? Did she order it herself?"

"Well...N' Wine asked if they have orange juice. But the menu is in Japanese so I..."

P' Jantra stuttered as she answered me.

My eyes snapped to the Japanese staff, all of them looked away like they were caught red-handed. It was obvious what happened, I did not even need to demand the truth from them. It was not that I wanted to be pessimistic about people. But sometimes, these foreigners like to find some short-lived entertainment in a foreign country like ours.

Can't they just buy a prostitute or something instead of being a jackass like this!

It appeared that my anger was clear on my face and eyes because those guys hurried to follow their boss back as fast as they could. I'd never let them get away with this if they weren't from another branch... They were clearly planning on getting her drunk, why did K. Wine trust them so easily...

"Will N' Wine be okay?"

P' Jantra sounded worried,

"I'm really sorry, I didn't know."

"I'm fine...just feeling dizzy...let me catch my breath a bit and I'll get better."

Vetaka was still in the same spot and if her face that was starting to flush deep red from the alcohol was anything to go by...

No way...no way she would make it back home.

I watched Vetaka as she staggered to get up before I decided to do something that even I was surprised by my impulsive decision.

"I'll drive K. Wine home."

I told P' Jantra as I raised my hands to support Vetaka, who could barely walk on her own. She was still murmuring something incomprehensible but I paid her no mind.

She can't go back home by herself like this...

No, I wasn't worried about Vetaka, I just did not want to see the woman in a situation that did not seem safe, that was all. This was to make up for what I did to her before...so both of us could call it even.

□□□□□□

□08. The Dream Comes True□

Ethyl alcohol was the type of alcohol used as an ingredient in liquor, beer and other alcoholic beverages. It was produced from fermenting agricultural goods such as sugar cane, tapioca, corn, grape, and yeast. When we consumed alcoholic beverages, alcohol would suppress the function of our frontal lobe, which was the part that controlled our thoughts, memory, intelligence, personality, and emotions. It caused the drinker's change of personality and behavior, and reduced one's ability to process and make decisions.

When I helped Vetaka into the car, the person, who insisted that she could go back home on her own, immediately nuzzled against the car seat. Her unblemished face flushed a reddish color, her eyelids were closed but her brows were still furrowed a little like she was feeling uncomfortable.

"K. Wine," I grabbed her shoulder as she attempted to turn away so that we could talk.

"Hmm..." without knowing, I shook my head when I saw K. Wine grumbling as if she was annoyed, it was endearing. Here, her normal fierce and cold demeanor vanished.

"K. Wine, are you good? Can you tell me your address?" I tried to talk to the woman, whose consciousness seemed to slip away even further. I was worried, I didn't expect Vetaka to be this much of a lightweight...

Can she even give me the direction?

"Good,"

"Then can you tell me..."

"Good as nothing!"

"Um..." I eyed the petite woman who blurted the words out loudly with suspicion. I had my share of adventures in numerous nightclubs and bars during my college years, I had met nearly every type of drunk: the one that turned into an academic, the dramatic crybaby, or the animal-friendly type of drunk that could suddenly communicate with animals.

"Hehe." Vetaka acted completely differently. The petite woman got up and giggled, showing no sign of drowsiness from earlier. It was as if she was too happy...

"K. Wine?"

"The face you make is so funny, Lal, never heard a joke before?" Vetaka was still smiling, I concluded that K. Wine must be the energetic type of drunk.

Wait a second, what did Vetaka just call me?

"You open your mouth so wide, Lal, a fly can get in, close your mouth, hurry," and Vetaka raised both of her hands to fondle my cheeks playfully. I gave her an awkward smile.

Should I record this to blackmail her? Khun Wine, who was feared by all, has turned into a talkative kitten.

But it was just a passing thought, who would have the heart to be so mean to the woman? The poor thing was already drunk without her consent.

"K. Wine, you're drunk." I grabbed Vetaka's hands so she could stop squeezing my cheeks after they were thoroughly fondled. I was only letting her do this because she was drunk, okay?

"Wine...just call me Wine," the woman's expression hardened that instant.

"...."

"We're the same age, so we should get along right? I call you Lal without saying the title Khun,"

"Um..." so I didn't mishear that. Vetaka deliberately called me that.

"Lal, you don't want to be friends with me?" The petite woman looked sad when she asked me. I hastily denied it.

"Of course, I do,"

"Really? No lying, okay?"

It's you that I want to ask, K. Wine, you're sure you still want to be my friend after you're sober? ...

"Why would I lie to you, Wine?" I asked her helplessly. This version of K. Wine was much harder to deal with, there was no way of telling what the woman would do next.

"Maybe you're lying, you used to talk behind my back, Lal, that's very mean," and the words that came out of Vetaka's mouth along with the defeated look in her eyes sent me into some kind of panic.

Khun Wine didn't forget about it after all, she really did remember!

"I'm really sorry, I'm sorry about the way I acted, I'm sorry that I made you cry." I couldn't make an excuse for that so I decided to apologize to her when I finally got the chance. Maybe it was because I was talking to a drunk person, I could say everything that I wanted to say to her.

"I cried? When did I cry?" Vetaka looked confused. So I refreshed her memory.

"That day in the bathroom, you..."

"Ohhhh," the petite woman stilled for a moment before she let out a long 'oh' and giggled a while. Then she explained to me, "my period came that day and my eyes dried out because I was staring at the screen too long so I used eye drops. I wasn't crying that time."

"...."

I was so grateful that the woman was not entirely conscious right now, otherwise, my face would be entirely gone because I lost my face, again...

But as I was dwelling in my own embarrassment, I had no idea since when Vetaka's delicate hand came to rest on my head.

"Did you think I was crying? Oh, you poor thing...there, there, Lal's the best, you're so adorable. I'm not mad at you anymore," and she even patted me on the head to comfort me.

"So you've been mad at me this whole time?" I asked what I was curious about. The way the petite woman was behaving for almost two weeks made me so anxious.

"I'm not mad, I just don't wanna talk to a meanie!" Vetaka's serious expression made me lower my gaze. I could not look at her in the eyes with the lingering guilt inside that I felt. "But you're much nicer now, Lal, I can hang out with you now,"

"Thanks, I appreciate it," I was aware that she wasn't herself but I still felt strangely relieved, even though tomorrow, Vetaka would forget all of this and act cold towards me like before...

"That's good, let's go home, I wanna go home."

"But you have to tell me your address first, Wine, or else I won't know where to drop you off, okay?" I laughed at her stern façade. I quite liked this version of K. Wine, really, she was adorable and easy to talk to. Can I just bought this version of her and kept her for myself?

"You don't have to drive me home...tomorrow's Saturday, I could just stay over at yours, Lal." The petite woman beamed cheerfully. Like I said, a smile suited Vetaka's face way better, it was a shame that the woman rarely did.

"You can't, your family would be worried," I told her tiredly. Actually, I did not know a thing about the woman who was giggling right now. If she had a family member waiting for her at home, they would be so worried about her by now...

"I live alone, and I'm single too! No worries! I'm an adult, I can sleep wherever I want!" but then Vetaka just informed me of her status by yelling out loud.

That's good, I guess...I don't have to waste my time asking... she's just casually telling me everything...

"Lal, you don't want me to stay over, do you?" Vetaka asked me as I was still thinking about how to respond, she sounded hurt.

In the end, I gave in to those round, adorable eyes.

Don't give me those puppy eyes, oh boy, how could I deny her like this?

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Ding!

After the sound, the door of my condo was opened. Vetaka was the one who entered my room first. I put my shoe and hers inside the cabinet when I looked up, I saw Vetaka exploring the place with interest. It was just like a kitten exploring its new home... The petite woman walked around and glanced at everything from looking at the books on the shelves, opening the fridge, to counting the number of glasses on the counter.

Just thinking about what would happen when the woman woke up in the morning was amusing already...would K. Wine remember how unhinged she was acting?

I watched her with amusement and fondness but then I had to dart to the petite woman, who was picking up a rather expensive bottle of liquor, she

seemed to pay a lot of interest on it.

"Looks nice, right?" *'right? You are in no place to 'right?' me!'* I watched with horror as Vetaka was holding my limited edition package of liquor.

"How possessive."

"....."

Of course, I am...it isn't available on sale anymore...

"Can I drink it?" Vetaka asked bluntly, "well, you just collect the bottle, right, Lal? You aren't collecting what's inside of it," I glared at the petite woman who liked to argue with me so much.

"That' s..." when she saw how reluctant I was, her mood turned foul plainly for me to see.

"Huh, talking behind people's backs and stinky too."

"Hang on you said you aren't mad anymore" I whined when Vetaka brought my fault up.

"I'm not mad, but I still haven't forgiven you yet." She said pointedly like she had the upper hand, "œbut...if you drink with me, I might forgive you, Lal." I looked at the liquor from the famous TV show collection longingly.

"Fine...which one do you want, K. Wine, the wolf or the dragon?"

Vetaka ended up choosing the wolf...at first, I felt like it was a shame to open it, but after the amber liquid went down my throat, the smell of vanilla and the sweet taste of honey that was followed by the burning taste of spice caught up to me. It was pleasant, worthy of a limited edition series. I lost track of how many glasses we drank together, next thing I knew, I only had half of the amber liquid in the bottle left.

Even I, who intended to take a few sips but completely lost count, started to feel lightheaded. As for Vetaka right now, who was barely conscious before...

"Lal...I'm so hot, let me unbutton a bit, okay?" The petite woman complained, showing no consideration for the air conditioner in the room. She didn't wait for my permission either, she was already planning on unbuttoning herself from the start.

From the first button to the third one, that's a lot of unbuttoning, K. Wine...

"I'm hot, get off me!" Vetaka made a fuss when I covered the buttons to prevent her from unbuttoning more than this. She jerked away from my hands.

I swallowed with difficulty when the shirt that Vetaka was wearing was wrinkled and loose around her, revealing her smooth, fair skin and then there was that alluring black brassiere.

"Hey..." when I moved my eyes upward to the voice I heard, I was met with K. Wine's eyes, she was staring right at me, unblinking. I was startled, I nearly fell off the chair.

"What are you looking at?" K. Wine even moved closer to me when she asked, teasing me as I didn't meet her eyes.

Don't move your face so close to me! I'll get a heart attack like this.

"You're blushing, Lal, are you flustered?" I did not know if my eyes were playing tricks on me or not but K. Wine's gaze seemed more glazed than usual...

I decided to get up all of a sudden, causing Vetaka to stumble back in surprise. I took her wrist and led her to the bedroom.

"Let's get to bed, it's very late," I cut off the conversation and did not pay attention to Vetaka's complaints as she trailed behind me.

If I leave her like this, it will get worse.

"You're so fun, Lal." You were the only one who had fun since we left the restaurant, K. Wine.

I took Vetaka to my bedroom and looked at the bed, contemplating. *It's fine...I'll just change the sheets tomorrow, sleeping on the bed without showering for once wouldn't hurt...*

"Lal, where will you sleep?" Vetaka asked after she tucked in when she saw that I was about to leave the room.

"Oh...um...the sofa," I told her softly, please, I tried my best to get it together earlier, just let me rethink my actions in peace on the sofa. But as I turned around to walk out of the room, I felt my shirt was tucked by the woman on my bed.

"Hey...sleep here with me," Vetaka said, patting the space next to her, inviting me to join. Damn, K. Wine, you were acting like you own this room.

"I'll just-woah!" I didn't get to decline the offer when the spoiled woman pulled me over until I lost balance and landed on the bed with her.

"Huh...you think you can get away? Not a chance." Vetaka smirked like she just won this battle. The smaller woman took the opportunity when I stumbled on the bed to crawl over me and snatched me like a tiger capturing its prey.

"K. Wine...let go of me, okay?...."

I pleaded to the woman on top of me, my voice trembling unintentionally.

"Nope, you will sleep somewhere else if I do," Vetaka hugged me so close, I could smell her strawberry yogurt lotion, the more I breathed in that scent, the louder my heart was beating inside my chest.

"...I'll sleep with you, alright? Just get up first," I tried to sweet talk her, Vetaka nodded and released me from her tight embrace a little too easily. But as I was about to get up, Vetaka jumped at me again.

"You think I'll let you go that easily!"

"Wine! I'm being serious."

I shouted as I was startled. The woman, who was having the time of her life, paused and looked crestfallen.

You don't get to look all sad...do you have any idea how precarious we are right now?

Luckily, I was able to regain some balance, otherwise, I would hurt myself by hitting my head on the wall. But because I grabbed the woman's frame in time, Vetaka ended up sitting on my lap...

This is worse than before!

"Wine...get up," I told the woman sternly. Still, Vetaka acted like she didn't hear anything, how was it possible for her to make a face like an annoyed kitten?

"Wine..."

"Are you mad, Lal?" Vetaka asked me, she looked sullen.

"I'm not, but you'll hurt yourself, jumping at me like this." I tried to explain to her. I did not like how she looked when she was sad, it made me feel strangely guilty.

"Are you lying?" K. Wine asked me, she held my face, preventing me from turning away, "let me look you in the eyes to prove it."

I let Vetaka lock her eyes with me until she was satisfied but it appeared that the woman wouldn't be content with a simple stare.

"I want to get a better look at you, Lal, I can't get a good look at you, can I stare at you a little closer?"

Well, duh, you threw your own glasses away, K. Wine...

I complained to myself because K. Wine's new level of drunk seemed to be more fatal than her talkative level. I thought I'd call this level of drunkenness the flirty level...

"Lal, your eyes are brown...so pretty."

My whole body flushed, I couldn't determine if it was because of the alcohol or the petite woman on my lap. My breath caught when our eyes met, Vetaka's doe-like, black eyes were mesmerizing as well... before I knew it, her face moved closer and closer.

"What are you doing?" I raised my hand to block her, Vetaka's lips ended up crashing into my palm.

That was close, the power of the wolf liquor was not to be underestimated...give me back the talkative kitten in the car!

"Why can't I kiss you? You look like you wanted me to, Lal."

"Wine...beside being so cheerful when you're drunk, now you're also horny?" I could not resist asking it out loud.

"I'm not drunk and I'm not horny. I just have a feeling that you wanted me to kiss you, so I did." The woman cutely made things up. Her blushing face looked pouty and childish, only drunk people said they weren't drunk...

"Are you seducing me?" Because I was also under the influence of alcohol, I boldly asked her to see how she would react. Vetaka scowled when she heard it.

"This? This is not it," The smaller woman on my lap seemed irritated before she slowly licked her lips, making me swallow, my heart was pounding. Vetaka bent down to whisper softly in my ear.

"This... is what I call seducing."

"Hey! Wine, stop!" I cried out, I wasn't able to stop her in time. Vetaka's white shirt was thrown away somewhere, now, the woman in front of me only had a black bra covering her upper body.

"So you don't have to peek at it anymore...here, Lal, you can touch it," Vetaka said invitingly, my heart was beating like crazy but I still tried to restrain myself.

"You don't want this, Wine, get yourself together, okay?" tried to talk her down gently but I was no saint. Pakphoom commented that I didn't usually give compliments to people but I admitted that Vetaka was beautiful. She was breathtaking even when she barely wore makeup. If she kept tempting me more, I wasn't sure if I could resist her.

I kept warning myself that if I let this fleeting desire take over, I would have to clean up a huge mess later.

But...her skin is so smooth and pale, if I can just take a bite...

Damnit, get yourself together, Lal...

"You really don't like me..." she appeared to get the wrong idea, totally opposite even, about what I meant, "even when I tried to kiss you, you didn't even let me.

"It's not like that...I mean..." I tried to give her a good reason that I rejected her when her eyes started to water from the disappointment, "if we kiss, it won't be just kissing, you know that right?"

Uh-huh," Vetaka was looking at me all smug, it kind of annoyed me.

Just who do you think you are, you tiny little kitten,

"Do you know what will happen next?" I tried asking the woman on my lap, no way she knew if the innocent look in her eyes was anything to go by. "If you don't...let's stop this and go to sleep-" I barely finished my sentence when Vetaka, who was scowling, suddenly tilted my head up.

"Teach me then, Lal, the things I don't know...or are you keeping it to yourself?"

The petite woman said to me, her eyes gleaming, a kitten who acted as if she was a tiger.

And then Vetaka's lips pressed down against mine, all reasons I clung on to were out of the window all too easily. Images of that dream faintly came back to me, what was happening was a hundred times better than the dream.

Oh to hell with it, whatever happens tomorrow can be dealt with by tomorrow me.

For now, I have a seducing kitten to deal with.

So...I'll leave the rest to you, tomorrow Lallalin...

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□09.Foxy (Vetaka)□

Was it possible for a person to immediately dislike someone from the first time they met?

I used to read some articles or heard some podcasts about this topic. Psychologically, there were two possible theories as to why we immediately disliked someone the moment we met them:

1. That person might behave in a certain way that triggered some bad memories that we could not recall but our subconscious would send out an alarm for us to be careful of this kind of person.
2. That person might carry a certain trait or behavior that we disliked about ourselves, the ones that we kept hidden. So when we saw them act on that trait freely while we had to hide it, we would feel irritated all of a sudden.

Which...I couldn't figure out which one was Lallalin for me...

I heard rumors from P' Jantra that the new Sales Supervisor was a total looker and very friendly, and when I met her...P' Jantra words were not that exaggerating. Lallalin was stunning, she had a nice body, a great personality, and seemed confident. (Though her name was kind of difficult to spell, I felt dizzy reading her name sometimes, just how many Ls did she have in her name?)

It seemed that she had good social skills too, but well, she worked in Sales so it was expected... it took Lallalin only a short while before she was well acquainted with everyone in the company. Everyone said that Lallalin might have beautiful, long, sharp eyes that appeared fierce, her piercing eyes

formed crescent moons when she flashed them her signature smile, they were utterly charming, smiling eyes...

But I found that her eyes were more sly like a large fox that smiled with crescent eyes and sweet-talked until she got her way, she looked dangerous. I tried to act normal with her despite my opinion because I did not want my own bias to affect my work.

But then I unknowingly showed my irritation to her the first time we met...this time, I was not the only one who disliked the other person, Lallalin did not seem too fond of me either.

Well...that's fair, I guess.

Even though I was personally not a fan of hers, I tried to remind myself that Lallalin did not do anything wrong. We shouldn't go and judge people based on our bias...still, my instinct was right after all.

It was an odd feeling for me, I experienced much worse situations before but when it was the taller woman who did it, I felt...

Rather disappointed.

It was like what they said '*no expectation, no disappointment*,' so I made up my mind that it would be best if I did not bother with her, both of us staying out of each other's business, it looked like it would be the most peaceful solution for this...

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"I can go back on my own, let me take a breather for a moment."

I tried to tell Lallalin, who offered to help out. My words did not seem to get her attention at all.

My head is all fuzzy...

I knew it...there's something weird about that orange juice.

I could only follow where Lallalin led me, I felt her hand support me firmly. Her face, which was usually adorned with a smile, had a serious look on it that I had never seen before.

Perhaps...Lallalin is actually a more decent person than I thought...

"Hm..."

I woke up, feeling dizzy. Because of my roughly five-hundred eyesight, everything was blurry in front of me. Yet, seeing the person sleeping soundly up close, so close that I could feel her breaths, made me completely wide awake.

Lal... Lallalin, the person sleeping right next to me is a naked version of Lallalin!

Maybe I'm dreaming?

I internally asked myself and accidentally touched the caramel blonde woman's arm, who seemed to be having a good sleep, to see if I was dreaming or not. Her skin was soft and warm to the touch, it felt too real to be a dream.

My movement caused the thick duvet to fall to my chest. My skin was exposed to the cool air from the air conditioner, I had to hug myself from the cold, when my hands touched my bare skin, I panicked.

And why am I naked too!?

I looked down to check my body out of surprise, then I blushed when I saw some rosy bruises all over my breasts, and my lower part felt weird...

From how we looked, it was obvious that Lallalin and I must have...damn it, turned out you could do it with a woman too. I felt angry and sad, I trusted her because she was a woman like me.

You couldn't trust anyone after all...

"Wine...you're up? Does your head hurt?"

My irritated gesture stirred Lallalin up. Seeing me got up and cover myself with a duvet, she looked worried as she asked me. The sight of her face made me even more angry, I could barely contain it.

Slap!

My hand moved to slap Lallalin's face from my temper.

"You're such..."

I admitted that I was mad, I was so mad at the woman that my whole body trembled. My eyes watered with tears from my disappointment, I wanted to get this frustration out by hitting this sly vixen.

But this time, the taller woman grabbed my wrist in time so I threw my other hand to the woman's face.

I have two hands! You think you'll get away with grabbing just one?

"Khun Wine, just calm down!"

Lallalin cried out as she held my hands.

"Let go of me!"

"No! I didn't force you into doing anything, K. Wine."

Lallalin grabbed both of my wrists firmly, not letting me lash out on her face again.

"Let go!" I screamed out with rage. It did not make Lallalin afraid at all, on the contrary, the woman with caramel blonde hair tried to conform me.

"Take a deep breath and focus, I believe that theory that says it isn't possible for someone to be so lost they can't remember they had sex while they were drunk. Try to remember it, please."

Her voice seemed so serious and composed that it calmed my boiling temper down a little. I tried to control my labored breathing that was due to

my anger and took a good look at the woman. Lallalin's body was also covered in rose-colored bruises.

Is she saying that I was the one who made those embarrassing marks on her?

I looked the taller woman in the eye doubtfully. It was as if Lallalin could read it from my eyes, she answered me.

"You did those, K. Wine,"

"You're lying! Who would do stuff like...that."

I argued with Lallalin as a matter-of-factly as I tried to recall what happened the night before to confirm what I was saying but then...it was as if someone turned on the switch...when I started to remember, the lost memories flashed to me like a movie that was missing certain scenes.

"Teach me then, Lal, the things I don't know...or are you keeping it to yourself?"

I grabbed her face, tilting it up to ravish her mouth, demanding in my touch. Then, Lallalin deepened the kiss as I all but melted into the heated touch.

"Lal...it feels so good,"

I nearly collapsed by the time the woman 'taught' me all the things I wanted to know, but then I felt the need to return the favor and make her feel good as well.

"Hey...let me touch you this time, okay Lal?"

The question was rhetorical, I flipped Lallalin and got on top of her cheerfully and then our second lesson between the sheets began with me being in charge of the person under me...

"You remember, don't you? You were quite good at it too, by the way,"

Lallalin said, she sounded so smug when she saw me pause and looked at her wide eyes.

"I don't!"

I cried out, my face was burning up so bad that I could feel the heat. I cursed myself, I had no idea which part of my subconscious coaxed me into doing such a scandalous thing.

I thought the taller woman forced herself on me, who would have thought that...I practically offered myself to her on a silver plate!

What kind of lesson was that...damn it...

"Oh, please, Wine...Khun Wine, you remember, your face is practically a tomato, you know that?"

Lallalin paused when she said my name, it stirred something in me, I avoided meeting her eyes.

"We're the same age, so we should get along right?..."

I was the one who insisted on the first-name basis...

"I don't remember all of it..."

I did not have the courage to meet her eyes. The more I remembered, the more embarrassed I felt. I didn't even know what face I should make, now that I recalled almost everything. The embarrassment was driving me mad, I could only utter my apology to her,

"Sorry for the trouble I caused you, and for slapping you too..."

"Oh, um...I'm sorry too for taking advantage of you and dishonoring you."

Lallalin also apologized to me, the air between us felt awkward.

"It's not dishonoring,"

It wasn't like I was the only one who was dishonored. The rosy bruises on her body kind of showed that I did some damage to Lallalin as well.

I was quite a good student though, right? I was able to do it just after one lesson...

"Eh...Khun Lal.," I started the conversation to break the uncomfortable silence.

"Yes?"

Lallalin looked mildly confused when I called her with a serious expression.

"Let me borrow your shirt,"

I tried to say without looking at the woman's face or her body.

Just how long does she plan on having this conversation without clothes on?...

"Oops, sorry, my bad,"

I shut my eyes tight when Lallalin got up from the bed and walked to the closet while still naked. I almost asked her out loud did she have no shame but then I realized that I had taken up all of the large duvets to cover myself, good thing that I realized it first, otherwise, if she told me that, I would not have known what to say.

We got dressed in silence and said nothing at all. Heat crept up my face again when I glanced at the pile of clothes scattered on the floor around the bed.

I did not drink alcohol because I disliked its bitter taste, but really, perhaps I should practice drinking it. I got into trouble the moment I was drunk, big trouble at that too, oh boy...I was so lost in thoughts that I did not know when Lallalin came to stand in front of me.

"Um...I made you congee, have some so you could sober up."

Lallalin smiled awkwardly at me. I was about to decline the offer but the throbbing ache in my head that had been there since I woke up had not gone away. A hot meal might really help with that. As I was about to get up from the bed, Lallalin offered a hand. I looked at her hand in front of me with a questioning look.

"..?.."

"Want me to help get you there?"

I immediately frowned at her question.

"Don't be so dramatic, it's just getting up,"

I answered her irritably, everyone could get up and walk, was she making fun of me or something? I ignored the caramel blonde woman's hand and got to my feet with confidence.

Thud

I blinked a few times as I dropped to the floor, the woman, who was watching me in waiting, quickly caught me just in time so I did not hurt myself.

My legs...turned jelly...

"Well...you were quite rough last night..."

Lallalin mumbled as she helped me get on both feet again...

"Your legs might feel weak from it."

"Just help me walk quietly, could you!?"

I cried out at her, annoyed and embarrassed.

Stop trying to remind me about it! Do you want me to be embarrassed to death!

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After I finished Lallalin's congee (the instant one), my headache really did get better so I told her I would take my leave. The taller woman offered to drive me to the company to retrieve the car that I parked overnight at the company. I declined her goodwill instantly.

Which of course, Lallalin did not let me reject her...

"You just sober up...let me give you a ride, please? You exhausted your body last night-"

"Stop it! You can drive me there, alright?"

I accepted her offer without making a fuss after that. I really did not like the smile on the caramel blonde woman's face, I knew okay? That I made a mistake last night but no need to rub it on me, jeez, she kept bringing last night up...

When the white BMW car parked next to mine, attempted to open the door but I found that the owner of the car still had not unlocked it yet. I glanced at her curiously.

"I'm sorry about what happened in the elevator the other day...not only did I not stop my subordinates...I did you wrong, K. Wine."

Lallalin said, she looked guiltily dejected.

"I'm sorry that it took me so long to say that, I told you yesterday about it but I still want to officially apologize to you, Khun Wine."

At first, I almost told her to forget it but she looked so dejected, it somehow reminded me of a depressed fox...

"...."

"I promise that I will be more thorough and I won't let this happen again, please forgive me?"

And she was looking at me through her lashes with puppy eyes begging for my sympathy, this was...um...was this a salesperson thing or something? I felt like I could do nothing but swallow down my rejection and accept her apology.

"I...forgive you,"

The woman seemed like she genuinely felt bad about it, alright?...

"Also..."

Lallalin stuttered like she wanted to say something. The caramel blonde woman closed her eyes and took a deep breath as if she was giving herself encouragement.

"...."

"I want to take responsibility for what happened last night,"

Lallalin met my eyes with such seriousness before she said her next words,

"Would you like to go out with me?"

That...her words made me feel strange...

Lallalin and I...we did not even like each other that much.

We weren't friends...and now she wanted us to date each other?

In your dream...

"Take responsibility? That won't be necessary, last night was a mistake for us both, I won't make a big deal about it, you can be assured of that, Khun Lal."

I rejected her coldly. The taller woman looked stunned for a moment before she quietly said,

"...alright, K. Wine, if that's what you want."

Then she unlocked the car for me.

"Thank you for helping me out."

I sincerely thanked Lallalin one more time.

"No problem."

The taller woman replied with a smile,

"See you on Monday, K. Wine."

"See you on Monday, K. Lal."

I watched as her car drove away until it was gone from my sight. Without knowing, I rested my head on the seat of my car tiredly. I did not expect to be in an uncomfortable situation like this.

Forget it, Vetaka.

It was a mistake, that's all, I swear that it won't happen again...

□□□□□□□□

□10.Unforgettable (Vetaka)□

**Your first time would always stick with you
like your first love, your first kiss,
even your first time having sex...
And if it was fantastic,
it would be hard to replace or forget about it,
only time could wash it away.**

As I was taught that one had to stay in line to be a good woman and I was never terribly curious about the things that were beyond the line, so my life progressed in a pretty boring fashion. I spent my school and university years studying, romance was not my priority. And when I started working, it took up all my energy that I stopped thinking about dating altogether.

Never would I expect that my first time in this regard would happen because I was drunk...it had always been the furthest thing from my mind. When I was a teenager, I used to think that I would know what it was like once I got married, and my future husband would teach it to me.

Who would have thought...

That I suddenly mastered the level of expertise on that topic, and with a woman instructor at that as well...

It was pretty different from what I had known from school lessons and TV shows. There was no blood on the bed sheets, it wasn't even painful at all. That made me do some research about the topic, which I had never been curious enough about before. The more I read through the information, the

more I felt like I had unlocked a whole new world for myself. If your partner was gentle and caring enough, the sex would be simply blissful...

Gentle yet passionate...I suppose that would be the definition of that night...

"P' Wine..."

I could almost feel her touch still...

"P' Wine..."

"Hm?...did you say something to me, Tangkwa?"

I looked up and asked the junior in my department when I heard her calling me.

"Oh, um...you're not busy, aren't you?"

Tangkwa sounded hesitant, she kept looking at her feet, unsure of what to do. Sometimes I wondered how Tangkwa and Noomnim were best friends when they had completely different personalities.

But I was lucky to have Tangkwa as my subordinate, or else my wallet would be drained empty like Lallalin, whose subordinates kept asking for free bubble tea almost every day, ah... thought about her again...

"Not really, do you need something, Tangkwa?"

"I want you to help check this budget report, P' Wine. I called you many times but you didn't hear me..."

Tangkwa's words made me throw that nonsense out of my mind. I smiled softly at my subordinate.

"I was thinking about the auditor who will come to evaluate our company, so I got distracted. I'll have a look at it for you, yes?"

I took the file from Tangkwa and read it thoroughly.

"Thank you, P' Wine,"

I sighed with guilt after Tangkwa walked back to her desk.

Sorry for lying to you, N' Tangkwa...

It's all your fault, Khun Lal, I can't focus on my work because of you.

I put all the blame on the caramel blonde woman who was grinning cheerfully in my memory. I took a deep breath and tried to get myself together so I could focus on the task at hand.

The human brain was an extremely complicated thing. When you try to forget something, those memories would, in turn, take deeper roots in your brain. That was why I tried to keep myself busy so I would not have to think of that nonsense again.

I should put the documents in the cabinet, so I won't have time to think about something that will make me lose focus again.

Once I made up my mind, I put the documents inside a binder. I stared worriedly at the binder locks that could fall apart at any moment. One of the cons of this company was that all office equipment expenses could not be claimed until the tool was broken, obviously irreparably broken, which...the loose locks that moved all the time probably did not count as broken.

I'll have to wait for the binder to break until it falls apart...

Please hold on a little longer, don't fall apart now...

After I encouraged the binders, I carried them in my arms to store them in the cabinet.

"Ah!"

I exclaimed when the binder started acting out as I thought. The lock made a loud noise and then it sprung out of the binder, causing the documents inside to scatter on the floor.

Time to file the binder claims...

I thought tiredly as I lowered myself to collect those documents. A pair of familiar black high heels came into my view at the same time that I heard the lovely voice.

"Let me help,"

Before I could say anything, Lallalin lowered herself down and kindly sent me a smile, which...was the same smile as every day but my traitorous eyes focused on her delicate lips that were glazed with bright red lipstick instead.

"Oh...thank you," so I looked away. The caramel blonde woman dressed more modestly than usual, it was likely because the area above her breasts was covered with...

WHY DO I KEEP THINKING ABOUT THAT NIGHT!?

I lowered my head and collected the documents in earnest, not wanting to spend time with Lallalin more than I had, my thought was a mess the closer I was to her.

The last piece of paper...

I extended my arm to get the paper at the same time as Lallalin, she probably aimed for it too. Our hands ended up grabbing each other instead of the paper.

The moment our hands touched, I flinched as if something sparked, and dropped all the documents I had collected.

"Um..." Lallalin looked at me, she seemed shocked.

"The air is dry in here, it's winter now," it was the flimsiest excuse I ever came up with. But the kind woman in front of me seemed to buy it. This time, I kept my distance from the woman until all the documents had been collected safely.

"I'll help you carry it to your desk," I nodded, letting the other woman follow me to bring the large pile of documents to the table without a fuss.

"Thank you," I thanked her for helping me.

"It's nothing, K. Wine," I watched the back of the caramel blonde woman as she walked out of the department with a strange feeling.

Lallalin acted so normal that it surprised me. Maybe it wasn't that surprising since the fact that the woman could 'teach' me so many things with that level of expertise was a tell-tale sign that she probably had a handful of experience before.

She must have been with many people before...

But why is that bothering me?

I tried telling myself to forget about it and acted normal like the other woman did. But when I tried, it did not work, and I even heard some strange rumors going on as well.

"I have to talk to her about work, but I'm scared, K. Wine seems more intimidating than usual lately."

"It's like she has this scary tension around her, I wonder what ticks her off."

And... i had heard do many other rumors about this.

Everyone was entitled to their own opinion, if the rumors were work-related that was, but this time, it appeared that I really was the problem.

I needed to fix this before it got worse...

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On the weekend, I headed to a coffee shop in a famous mall where I would meet with my best friend.

That was a Bangkok life for you, how many recreational places were there? Parks were so hot during the day, the sun would roast us all. And there were way too few libraries and museums, so, only a mall would do as a place to hang out with friends.

"Hey, did you wait long?" I greeted my best friend who was paying great attention to scrolling her phone right now, she beamed when she saw me.

"Just got here as well, boy...the weather outside is so hot, my shirt is soaked," the woman with shoulder-length hair put her Bluetooth headphones away when I sat on the seat opposite to her.

"You didn't let me pick you up at your house," I complained to my petite friend who was holding a portable fan, it must have been very hot out there.

"Nah, you can drop me off on the way back, I don't wanna trouble you much. Pa and Ma keep telling me to go outside, they say that I'm as pale as a corpse because I always stay in the shop."

"Hey, same goes for me, I'm stuck in the office on a daily basis."

I let out a soft laugh at my best friend's family comment. This very energetic, short-haired woman was Cheese, my best friend. We had known each other since middle school. Our group used to have ten people, but everyone knew that when people grew up, life and responsibilities got in the way, by the time I knew it, the only person who could meet up and still wanted to hang out with me was Cheese.

If I waited until all of us were free to hang out, I'd never see anyone again in this life...

"I'm still curious though, something is off here. You love staying in more than anything but here, you were the one who asked to hang out..." I avoided my best friend's eyes that stared at me, trying to detect what this was about.

"You have a fever, Wine?"

"Want me to leave?"

I barked at her with no bite before
I told her the truth,

"I can get bored sometimes too."

*Staying in my room alone would do me no good, I really want to get rid of
that smiling face out of my mind.*

"Here, take it,"

Cheese handed me a paper bag. I looked at her suspiciously. She took over her family's bakery shop, which she insisted that she would not rely on her parents reputation and past work at all, and that she would make the shop famous from the bread made by her own recipe.

And who had to deal with its consequences?... Me, I was her number one guinea pig...

"I won't die, right?"

I looked at the soft, smooth-looking bread with horror, you could never judge it from its good look, you know?...

"I'm still alive, aren't I? Don't make a fuss, just eat it."

Cheese coaxed me, so I had no choice but to eat that piece of bread.

The bread was soft and chewy, the texture was nice and the filling was very fine and...bitter as hell!

"Cough," I nearly spilled the bread I just chewed out but I was able to hold it.

"It's so bitter...girl, what filling is this?"

I asked my best friend as my eyes watered.

"It's ginkgo bread, it's a good idea, right? I'm thinking about selling it during this Lunar New Year to attract Chinese heritage customers, like, saying that it boosts your memory or something."

Cheese was still chatting away, oblivious to my bitter expression as I snatched her cocoa smoothie and drank it to get rid of the bitterness on my tongue.

"Cheese..."

"Or do you think I should try making Chrysanthemum filling instead?"

She still has no idea, hasn't she?

I cast a more serious gaze than normal and told her firmly to persuade her.

"I think it's best to get back to basics...go back to selling your parent's traditional pandan custard bread, I'm begging you..."

"Hey, I'm already treating you to this meal, stop looking so sour."

Cheese tried to make me feel better with today's lunch, now that we both moved to sit at a pasta shop.

"Why don't you try it yourself? What if my tongue lost its taste bud because of it?"

"So nagging, you nag like my mom. Oh! Extra cheese too, please."

Cheese murmured to make fun of me, then she turned to talk to the waiter with a smile.

"Hey..." I warned my friend who seemed to enjoy herself with the food in front of her way too much.

"What? What are you nagging me with this time?"

"You're not that young anymore, you know that right?"

I gave a disapproving look to my best friend's extra cheese carbonara.

"Relax, I can just exercise it out, you have to live a little, you know? Do whatever makes you happy."

Cheese said as she rolled the spaghetti and ate it happily.

"Live a little?..."

"Yeah! Do whatever you want, we aren't that young anymore."

Cheese giggled cheerfully. Sometimes I envied Cheese's positivity, my best friend was so cheerful, she could be content with everything in the world.

"Oh, good thing you brought that up, Wine. I'm thinking about looking through some fitness courses."

Cheese said as we walked out of the restaurant. I turned to look at her with disbelief.

"Are you really going to sign up for it? Do you even have the time?"

"Why of course, you will be hitting the gym with me."

I frantically shook my head to reject her. I was so tired from work already. In the end, I did check the fitness out with my best friend. Fitness Second had many advantages since they had many branches and many of them opened inside malls so it would be very convenient to travel to.

'Try talking to the staff first to see their suggestions, it's fine if you don't wanna get a membership.'

Even though that was what Cheese said, the staff who suggested the courses to us looked like they were already determined to sell the membership to both of us. Christ, I could feel the chills up my spine...

As the staff gave us a tour around the fitness from the exercise bike zone, the class zone, to the resting area, I suddenly had a sense of familiarity when I saw a figure, it was a ponytail woman who was turning her back to me as she was using the vending machine to get a soft drink.

"Oh, hello, Khun Wine, do you work out here?"

And when the figure turned to greet me, I almost passed out without needing any exercise to exhaust me.

Yep, that's her...does the world need to be this small, though?...

Here I've run out to relax and take a break, now I run into the cause of my stress...

"No, I'm just checking this place out. What a coincidence, Khun Lal."

I forced myself to smile through my teeth at the taller woman. Lallalin was in a tight-fitting gym outfit with a crop top that showed off her toned stomach.

I didn't know she has a hobby like this?...

"Oh...this gym is great, has lots of classes and they're all fun. You and...?"

Lallalin told them casually.

"Hi, I'm Cheese, nice to meet you."

"I'm Lal, K. Wine's colleague, nice to meet you too," the taller woman flashed Cheese her signature smile. This wasn't the company's sales target, did she need to be this friendly?...

"Your body is stunning, Khun Lal, oh wow, is that the 11-line abs?"

But then it was Cheese who seemed overly excited with the taller woman.

"You look amazing."

"If you work out, you can have great abs like me too, Khun Cheese," the woman glanced at my belly for a moment, "of course, the same goes for you too, Khun Wine," and then she grinned, her eyes formed two crescent moons.

I don't have any fat on my belly right now, okay!? Don't tease me with that look!

Then, Lallalin and Cheese chatted enthusiastically, they had similar personalities after all. Why did I feel like I was watching two talkative dogs getting to know each other?...

After that, Lallalin excused herself to attend a class and that was how their conversation ended.

And with the persuasion of the company's renown salesperson, my docile best friend fell right into her trap.

"Great job, you got yourself a membership when you don't even know if you have time for it or not," I remarked snarkily at my friend when we walked out of the place.

"Khun Lal makes it very convincing, though, look at her body," Cheese smiled at me sheepishly.

Does that sly vixen have something to do with this gym? Boy was she good at this.

"She's a salesperson from my company, of course, she would be good at persuading people," I told Cheese who could not even keep up with Lallalin's schemes.

"You're just being pessimistic about her, she's so pretty and has a hot body, did you see her abs? Damn, what a snack...what would abs like that feel like to the touch, though?"

Cheese said wistfully as she fantasized about nice abs and hoped that she would be able to touch them.

Oh, it was fun to touch, that's for sure...

I answered her internally before I caught up with what I said, even if it was just inside my head, that annoyed me somehow. Stop thinking about her for once! Maybe I need to do something, or I would think about her again...

"Let's go bowling." I grabbed my best friend's wrist and took her with me.

"What has gotten into you this time?"

Cheese looked confused by my shifting mood but she still followed me.

"The company will have a New Year party next week, they will have a bowling competition there too, I want to practice beforehand."

I gave her a reasonable explanation so Cheese did not say anything. She just loved all the activities, really.

If I could not stop thinking about it, then I would just exhaust myself until I couldn't think at all...

I should practice bowling so I could keep my mind off things, and I might get the reward money at the New Year party as a result too, who would know?

Sweating from sports is way better than sweating from...

Oh, damn it, get out of my head now!

□□□□□□

□11.Sport, Sport, the Magic Pill (Vetaka)□

There were many benefits of exercise. It made you stronger, increased your immune, enhanced your mindfulness when you work, had anti-aging benefits, and allowed one to get a good night's sleep. Most importantly, it did a fantastic job taking my mind off what happened that night.

I should've worked out a long time ago...

"K. Lal, why is the VAT total on our receipt not the same as the customer's? Please come see me at my desk."

I told her on the phone as normal as I could, our relationship turned back to normal at last...

I could talk to her without feeling awkward, meaning that I could point out her mistakes at work like before. All thanks to my nightly yoga routine and waves of work issues that came crashing in, I was so taken up by my work that I completely forgot about it.

//Greeting team, today, the HR Department has an announcement to make about the details of the company's annual Bowling and Lucky Draw//

P' Jantra's announcement on the speakers was loud enough to attract everyone in the company.

It was usual for the company to host a gathering and have an annual lucky draw to let their employees have some fun. Though, this year was a little special because the president was really into the healthy working lifestyle

lately so he proposed that they held an activity that encourages employee's health by exercising at the New Year Party.

And the sport that was suitable for the event, in which it could be held indoors in an area with air conditioning, and no experience was required for the participants, the sport that allowed them to eat and announce the results of the lucky draw was no other than "bowling".

If this was a normal circumstance, I'd be reluctant to participate and likely just throw the ball to grace the bowling alley. But now, I was more sure of myself after I practiced bowling for three hours straight...I thought at least I could manage a strike or two...

"Do you want to draw for the team, Tangkwa?"

I asked Tangkwa. The announcement said each department had to send a representative to draw the team lot for the competition.

"Okay, I can do it,"

Tangkwa answered me hastily. Feeling curious, I had to look at my subordinate who was busying herself with figures on the computer's screen.

"Are you busy right now?"

"No, no, I'm fine."

"Tangkwa...aren't you handling the budget right now?"

Tangkwa looked like she was about to cry when I figured it out.

"I..."

"If you're busy, you could just say it. I'll do the draw, just focus on your work, Tangkwa."

Sometimes I wanted to tell the girl that I was not angry at her or anything. It was just my face and tone that might have come out a little cold, and it made me look stern. But I was simply asking, I wasn't going to make her do

it but everyone seemed to get a different idea and got scared of me. I tried to explain it so many times, but it was getting tiring and I just stopped explaining it altogether. People could talk and judge all they wanted.

"Try to get paired up with the engineering team, P' Lal, those guys are great at bowling."

I walked past the Sales Department and overheard Bas speaking to his supervisor. I knew that I was being rude but I sneaked a glance at them.

"How would I know what number the Engineer Department will get? Why don't you do it? My luck is bad on something like this."

Lallalin pouted when she had to carry the department's weird hope. It made me jealous that she could get so close to her subordinates.

"You're the oldest one here so you must have the most accumulated merits, go for it, P' Lal."

Lallalin fisted and smacked her sneaky subordinate before she exited her department and saw me standing there. She looked a little surprised to see me before she quickly mellowed her expression and sent me her signature smile in less than a second. But that did not escape my eyes ... these people from sales changed their mood fast, didn't they?...

"Oh...Khun Wine, are you the representative for the draw?"

"I am,"

I answered her question. I came to the meeting room so of course, I'd be here for the draw, what kind of question was that? But I didn't want to embarrass her so I did not say that out loud.

Our company had many departments, which was why we had to send the team's representatives as participants and combine different departments together to compete. Otherwise, we would have to close the company for three days for everyone to compete. We used a basic way of drawing lots from plastic eggs, there would be a number inside each egg, so if the

departments got the same number then they would have to be on the same team. They also had to share the reward money if they won.

I lowered my hand inside the box and grabbed an egg, it was number '13'.

Lucky number 13, great...

I watched the Engineer Department get number 7 and I glanced at the caramel blonde woman next to me. Lallalin's eyes were bright and burning like there was a raging fire inside, was that the fire of determination or something?

When it was the Sales Department's turn, the only numbers left inside the box were number '7' and '13'. Lallalin was acting like that scene from a movie where The Boy Who Lived, who had a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead, was about to put on the sorting hat where he would be sent into one of the four houses.

"Not the Accounting Department, not the Accounting Department,"

Lallalin muttered quietly as she put her hand inside the box.

But alas...God must have been too exhausted with work since he got her prayers wrong.

"It's number 13!"

P' Jantra shouted to announce it, the woman's shoulder dropped at that, she looked sullen.

"Pleasure to be on your team, K. Lal,"

I smiled softly when I saw her face pale as a paper, she really didn't have luck in drawing lots.

"...the pleasure is mine, K. Wine."

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The gathering was held on a Friday evening after work, it would take place until late at night. There would be a buffet and alcoholic beverages served at the event. Naturally, I would be cautious this time, I would not let even a single drop of alcohol in my mouth.

It's not like we can make the same mistake twice, right?

"Would you like a drink, K. Wine? I'll grab some for you."

Noomnim, who seemed to enjoy the food, offered me kindly when the staff brought out various colored glasses to our table for us to choose from.

That's right...because the Accounting and the Sales Department were on the same team, we had to sit together at the same table.

I can't seem to successfully escape Lallalin...

"I'll pass."

I declined Noomnim's offer and unintentionally avoided Lallalin's eyes, who was sitting next to me. Even though I could talk to her like normal now I still did not want to be this close to her.

"That's a shame, this one is really good, though."

Noomnim looked somewhat sorry for me that I refused to taste the good stuff. Bas, her partner in food tasting, added to support his junior's point.

"You won't get drunk from one glass, here, K. Wine, I'll place it here for you
in case you want to try."

I looked at the bright blue cocktail in front of me with longing, I wanted to take a sip...but I knew my limit, if only I was not that much of a lightweight.

But while I was whining to myself, a hand took my cocktail and drank it in one go right in front of me.

"Yeah, it's very good."

Lallalin smirked playfully, which darkened my expression, like gray clouds before the storm,

"Think another round is required then, waiter! Hi, can you bring me more of this?"

It appeared that the woman was oblivious to what she had done.

What a jerk! Even though I can't drink, that cocktail is still mine, did you even ask before you grabbed my drink?

I could only snap at the woman next to me inside my mind and eat a spoonful of fried rice with irritation. But then, a blue glass of drink was handed to me.

"What?"

It came out harsh as I asked the woman with annoyance.

"It's for you, try a bit."

Lallalin handed me a glass of cocktail but that worsened my mood.

"I told you I don't drink-"

"This one is alcohol-free."

Lallalin interrupted me. What she said surprised me.

"Oh...I asked them to make an alcohol-free version of it. Try it,"

Lallalin explained as she handed me the glass. I eyed her suspiciously before I gave in and took a sip.

Yum...

"You like it? If you want, I can tell them to make more."

The woman smiled softly at me before she continued,

"so you could enjoy the party with us."

"...Thank you."

I thanked her quietly. I was almost impressed by Lallalin's action but then she added with a sly smile.

"Our team would lose miserably if you can't help yourself and get drunk, K. Wine."

"You're such a... you still want the first prize?"

I frowned when she still seemed to aim for the prize money despite the slim chance of beating the winning team.

"You won't know unless you try, don't give up just yet!"

I watched as Lallalin gave her team the pep talk, it looked oddly similar to the salesperson's encouraging sales tactics.

Sigh...the chance of winning was so slim, just give up...

But then Lallalin surprised me. Not only did the woman have very impressive social skills, but she also excelled in sports. I watched with naked awe and admiration as the round metal ball rowed and crashed all the pins.

Strike...nearly every round, if it's not a strike then she collects all the spares impressively.

"Woahhh, you're amazing, P' Lal."

"My boss is the coolest!"

Noomnim and Bas were screaming and shouting like they were losing their minds. The two of them kept high-fiving each other so loudly and repeatedly that I worried their hands would bruise. Tangkwa, meanwhile, kept mumbling about the free buffet voucher and the first-prize winning money.

Whether it was a miracle or something else, Lallalin's little pep talk and tips seemed to work better than expected. Even Tangkwa who appeared unsure of herself could crash the pins with the bowling beautifully. Now, our team got into the final round.

But things would start to get serious from now because the final round was the round where each department's manager had to compete as a representative! I watched the team that we had to compete with, the guys from the Engineering and IT departments, with stress. I didn't like being the center of attention without reason. But now, everyone in the company was watching this contest closely.

Lallalin scored a beautiful strike, but when it was my turn,

I missed...

Even though everyone on the team told me that it was alright, that made me feel even more pressured. Ever heard of the theory 'never step on a person when they are down, but do beat the shit out of them if they are someone you despise'? I tried to ignore the gossip and chatter, still, I was aware that everyone in the company thought that I was a burden to the team, which was true so I couldn't deny it.

"Tough luck, N' Lal, with a teammate like this, it wouldn't be easy to win against us."

P' Phong, the middle-aged man who was the Engineering Department's manager, bluffed in high-spirited when his team was leading.

"Wait until we see the total scores,"

Lallalin replied casually when she returned to the table. The other three teammates did their best to cheer Lallalin and me up. I gave them a forced smile the best I could.

Since they did not want everyone to get bored, the HR hosted two events at the same time, they held the bowling competition at the same time as they announced the drawing lots results. Still, I couldn't bring myself to pay attention to the results. Only two games left before we knew the total score, the only way we would win was that I had to hit a strike or spares.

"Khun Wine..."

"You don't have to cheer me up."

I turned to Lallalin, who called me after we were the only two left at the table.

"P' Phong is good at this, I admit it, but P' Cee isn't that good, you know? You could easily beat him up. But right now, you are pushing yourself too hard, K. Wine."

Lallalin's words were more genuine than simply giving comfort. She didn't just give me a random pep talk, it encouraged me to let my feelings out to her.

"I tried, I tried to relax, I'm a burden to you, aren't I?"

I asked her dejectedly. My hands fisted as I took a deep breath, trying to calm myself down but my heart was beating faster and faster until I felt Lallalin's hand touching my arm gently.

"Hey, hey...Khun Wine, I have a way to ease the stress, okay?"

I looked at her in the eyes with hesitation. Truth be told, I really wanted to quit the competition and let Lallalin handle the rest instead.

"There's a Japanese belief that if you write the word 'person' on your palm and eat it, you will stop feeling nervous."

I watched Lallalin uncurled my hand and wrote the word 'person' with her slender finger.

It's kind of tickling, Is it supposed to really help?

"But in your case, I'll write down the words 'Phong' and 'Cee' on it. And you can eat them right up."

Lallalin whispered with a serious tone and prompted me to glance at the Engineering Manager, P' Phong, and the IT Manager, P' Cee, our opponents. She wrote their names on my palm.

"Very funny..."

"You'll have to hurry and eat it, K. Wine, or else the magic will fade if you take too long."

The woman who suggested this strange method encouraged me. I had to do as she said without much choice. I opened my mouth and acted like I bit their names and swallowed them down. Lallalin held my hand as she waited and uttered to me.

"Now you've eaten both of them. If you're still nervous, I will write down every name in the company for you to eat, K. Wine."

"That's enough, Khun Lal."

I let out a smile when Lallalin was about to grab my hand and write down more names.

"Remember this, K. Wine, you're in my team. Do your best, I'll cover the parts you miss. No need to care about what other people say, I'll give them a piece of mind if they dare to say bad things about my teammates."

Lallalin said all those things so seriously that I was awed by her. This must be one of the reasons why Lallalin became a supervisor at a very young age and why she gained so much trust from her subordinates.

Even I was convinced that I could put the team in Lallalin's hands.

"Are you still nervous?"

"It's...better, thank you."

"Your hand is still freezing cold, K. Wine, let's get your hands warm."

I watched with surprise as the taller woman was so focused on softly rubbing her hands on mine. In truth, Lallalin would not come talk to me and get this touchy under normal circumstances. Then I glanced at the cocktail glasses next to her plate and understood what was going on easily.

Must have been alcohol then.

"Do your best, Khun Wine. If we lose...we still get the second prize money. anyway. Just not that much money and we won't get the buffet vouchers, we could take the kids to eat a buffer somewhere to cheer them up, how does that sound?"

Lallalin still chatted with me casually.

"Flaunting money now, are you?"

I bit a snarky remark at her but Lallalin did not seem to mind. She even beamed playfully back at me.

"Well...I have you share the bills with me so I think my wallet won't be sucked too badly."

I gasped at how she just dragged me into this. Then the voice from the microphone came, announcing that it was time for the final round.

"Let's go, we will win and make them pay for it!" Lallalin raised her hands in front of me, waiting for a high-five.

"..."

I didn't say anything to her. I raised both my hands to high-five with her quietly and rushed to the competing lanes. How strange, I did not feel as

pressured as before now.

I had no idea what made me calm down, was it because of her weird coping method or because of the warmth of her hands from earlier?...

□□□□□□□□

□12.Bread of Truth (Vetaka)□

Encouraging speech had a strange psychological effect; sometimes, it could awaken a hidden strength that was dormant deep inside our mind, allowing us to overcome our limits.

We actually won...

I watched as our teammates rushed in to hug the team leader with a feeling that I could not describe. Noomnim and Bas cried with joy when Lallalin won against the opponent only by a bit.

"Who said you can't do it, K. Wine?"

After the heartwarming moment was over, Lallalin walked back to the table to me, grinning.

"More of a miracle at work really, besides, we won all because of you,"

I replied, not taking all the credit even though I played much better than before, but Lallalin was the reason we won.

"We won because of the both of us,"

Lallalin drank the cocktail happily,

"You saw P' Phong's face when I did the last throw? It was so worth it, that's what you get for being so cocky."

"You've had enough of drinks,"

I warned the woman who drank glass after glass of alcohol like it was water.

"I'm a heavyweight and I sober up quickly, it won't be a problem."

Lallalin looked carefree, she talked a lot and had a blush dusted on her cheeks, but the caramel blonde woman did not seem too drunk, she still appeared to have control.

"Congratulations to the dark horse team!"

P' Phong and P' Cee came to our table. Lallalin quickly turned and smiled at them sweetly.

"Thanks for going easy on us, P' Phong, P' Cee."

I watched Lallalin say cheerfully to the people she just talked about behind their backs.

Didn't you just talk shit about them earlier...? Why are these salespeople so terrifying?

"Let's have a rematch next time. I heard you kind of have a beef with N' Wine? I almost didn't believe my eyes, I didn't think you two would play this well together."

I gave P' Phong a disapproving look. Did he think he could say something like this in others' faces?

"Oh yeah, we certainly had some kind of bite of each other, tasted fantastic too, right K. Wine?"

Lallalin replied smoothly, a little playful in her tone. P' Phong looked confused, I wasn't but I almost panicked.

Why are you saying that!? You said you aren't drunk!

"What bite? N' Lal, what are you talking about?"

"A bite of beef, why? You don't get it, P' Phong? I think you're getting tipsy."

The two men returned to their table after they heard Lallalin's confusing words. The woman, who just said something suggestive, turned to me, eyes looking innocent.

"You too, Khun Wine, why are your eyes popping out like that?"

"Why did you say that..."

I uttered through my teeth. Lallalin pretended to be oblivious, and turned her attention back to the prize announcement.

"Let's hear what they say about the prize."

Lallalin changed the subject, I swore internally.

She knew...she knew what she was doing for sure, having a bite, what bullshit is that!?

But it seemed that today was Lallalin's day because everything went well for her, both the competition and the drawing lot.

"Goldddd...you get gold, P' Lal!"

Noomnim, Bas, and Tangkwa cried out when they announced Lallalin's name as the person who received this year's biggest prize.

Seems like the person besides me used up her luck quota right into the next year.

Lallalin had already been drinking with Noomnim and her friends since the event started until they won the bowling competition. The woman celebrated even more and everyone in the company came to toss with her, congratulating the lucky winner. So now, Lallalin's eyes got all glossy and drowsy.

I sneaked a glance at the smiling woman who just got back from receiving the winning prize with mild annoyance, just how lucky could she be? But then, what she did next after she was taken over by the alcohol made me widen my eyes with shock.

"We have to share our luck, guys! Noomnim, come here, take the five-hundred baht from me, Bas, here's another five-hundred for you,"

Lallalin grabbed her wallet and took out her bank notes, handing them to her two subordinates generously. And there was no way Noomnim and Bas, her two little troubles, would let this chance slip. They practically were bowing down to her.

Wait...she is the charitable type of drunk?

"Tangkwa, come here, come here, your boss doesn't give nice things to you that much, right? Here, take five-hundred."

I glared at her, the woman who had the audacity to talk behind my back when we were this close. Tangkwa looked nervous, she glanced at me as Lallalin was waving her five-hundred baht banknote in front of her to tempt the girl.

"P'Lal.....I..."

"Oi, K. Wine, don't glare at N' Tangkwa like that!"

Lallalin made a fuss when she didn't get her way. That made my face harden even more.

I'm not glaring at her, I'm glaring at you!

Tangkwa declined her again and again, saying she couldn't accept it. But the drunk woman still grabbed her hand and forced the banknote to her. I shook my head at her behavior, whatever...it wasn't like she caused any problem when she was drunk. Even though Lallalin got drunk, she was drunk in peace at her table until an issue arrived.

"Congratulations, P' Lal."

An unfamiliar delicate voice came, I turned and saw that there was a good-looking woman in front of Lallalin. It was N' Mean from HR...

"Oh, hi, N' Mean, whatcha doing here?"

Lallalin asked what I was wondering about. Though she sounded friendly, she probably did not get to work with her that often but a friendly person could always make friends in a short time.

"I'm getting some snacks but I wanted to congratulate the lucky star first. Congratulations on winning both of the first prizes by the way."

Mean smiled sweetly at Lallalin.

"You're so, so, nice, N' Mean, come, come, I'll give you a reward."

Lallalin beamed and gestured to Mean to come closer. I watched as Mean approached Lallalin, letting the woman pat her head before accepting the five-hundred banknote. I felt irritated.

Yeah, congratulate like hell. She obviously came for the money in your wallet.

I really do not want to poke my head into other people's business but I despise this kind of behavior, excuse me for being rude after this then...

"But N' Mean...the snack bar is over there. Or is getting snacks never part of the plan?"

I looked at her sharply, Mean seemed startled by my stern voice. She might be from P' Jantra's department but I would not tolerate this kind of behavior.

"Oh? You aren't here for the snacks?"

Lallalin's words made Mean look paler. The girl smiled sheepishly before she was gone. My eyes followed that small back with irritation.

"K. Wine, you're scowling...are you upset? Here, let me give you a thousand, okay?"

Lallalin seemed to catch on my mood. She tried to cheer me up by giving me a thousand banknote...she still didn't realize that she nearly got taken advantage of.

If this continued, she would be persuaded to give away all her money, just look at these people watching, it appeared that I had to do something about it...

"Just one thousand? And if...I want the rest of your wallet, can I get it?"

I tested out, the taller woman considered it for a moment before handing me her expensive designer bag, still beaming at me, while the rest of the table looked surprised.

I took Lallalin's wallet and turned to look steadily at all the people who lingered around in case they got some fortune from the generous woman. I shoved her wallet in my bag,

"Cash Giveaway is over, everyone."

Those people immediately avoided my gaze.

You all think you can extort my teammate's money? In your dreams...

"K. Wine seized her wallet," Bas mumbled, he looked bummed. Noomnim nodded to him in agreement.

"And P' Lal just casually gave it to her, sigh..."

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There was nothing better than taking a shower and resting after a long day of activity at the workplace. The sound of the hair dryer was loud in the room. I was in my pajamas as I combed through my dampened hair and glanced at the closed bathroom door. The sound of running water falling against the wall suggested that a certain someone was using the bath.

Is this the right decision... letting someone who I recently had an incident with stay over for the night?

I let out a long sigh as I thought back to when the party was over and everyone went their separate ways. Lallalin sobered up a little, she was

about to call for a ride but I... offered her to stay at my place. It wasn't like I could let her go back on her own, she might sober up but she still wasn't that fully conscious.

*Consider this my kind gesture, to repay her kindness from the time before.
But just this once!*

"Are you gonna go to bed?"

I asked Lallalin who looked different from how she usually looked when she was at the company. Her long, caramel blonde hair was tied up into a bun, she looked young without makeup, without eyeliner, those sharp, fierce eyes looked like a little Chinese doll.

"A-alright."

She answered me, looking uneasy. Lallalin did not actually want to be here, she tried to decline my offer but, because my reason made more sense; told her that a woman traveling alone at night was dangerous, Lallalin gave in and agreed to stay the night.

Why did this feel so awkward and uncomfortable? I tried to force myself to sleep and told myself that the woman sleeping beside me was just another colleague, there was no need to be shy with her.

Grrr

The quiet growling sound from her stomach was loud in the silence. At first, I tried to ignore it and get some sleep but then the growling sound came again. I decided to grab my glasses on the nightstand and got up to turn on the light.

"K. Lal, are you hungry?"

I asked Lallalin who got up and sat on the bed. The taller woman's face blushed a pinkish shade, embarrassed by the sound of her stomach that did nothing to save her face.

"Eh, the party must have been too fun, that I've used up all the food I had."

Lallalin smiled at me sheepishly. I was a bit hungry too, actually. It must be from halfway through the competition, I had to run around and did not eat much.

"Want some bread? I'll have some too."

I offered in case she would be interested. Naturally, Lallalin said yes so the two of us moved to the edge of the bed. Lallalin was looking at the large, round loaf of bread in her hand.

"Thank you, it looks so good."

"Cheese made it. She likes to bring what she made to me sometimes."

Lallalin nodded as she listened to my explanation then took a bite of the bread, chewing and enjoying herself, both of her cheeks puffy from chewing. When I deemed that she seemed fine after she ate Cheese's experimental recipe, I took a bite, a taste of bitter sweetness flooded my mouth.

Chocolate bread this time it seems, I can't believe that Cheese could make something normal for once instead of baking the weirdest stuff...but what's with this weird taste?

I frowned when I felt that my vision was blurry even though I was wearing glasses.

Why does it feel hotter the more I eat it? And dizzy too...

Cheese... what on earth did you get me?

My best friend liked to come up with background stories for each bread she invented. I normally did not read it but I had to this time, I turned the package to read its label.

Bread of Truth - have you ever heard of how people only tell the truth when they are drunk? Meet this soft, fluffy bread, filled with fine dark chocolate mixed with a hint of whiskey for you to enjoy this bread as if you are sipping expensive liquor underneath the moonlight, romantic and sensual.

Cheese! This story doesn't make sense at all!

I cursed my best friend internally. I was mad at myself for not reading the label before. I already finished the whole portion, there was nothing I could do by now...

"K. Wine, I think something is off about this bread."

The person beside me asked, she seemed to get the sense that something was wrong.

"...it has alcohol in it, CHEESEEEE!"

I answered Lallalin as I yelled the name of the one responsible for this with anger even though she couldn't hear it.

I have been avoiding alcohol the entire event and now I failed at the last moment!

"Are you alright, Khun Wine? Your face is very red right now."

Lallalin looked down worriedly to search my face.

"Don't get closer to me...move away can you?"

My body flushed and burned everywhere. It didn't help that I got to see Lallalin's unblemished face without makeup up close. My treacherous eyes traveled lower to her pink lips which looked so soft.

I wanna kiss her...wait...

I was surprised by my own thoughts and stumbled away from the woman without caution...

"K. Wine, you'll fall!"

Fortunately, Lallalin was able to grab me in time so that I didn't fall to the ground. It brought us even closer than before.

Stop having dirty thoughts about Lallalin!

I growled in my mind, annoyed with myself. I knew that it was the alcohol but I couldn't stop thinking about touching her...

"Don't scowl, okay? What is it that upsets you, K. Wine?"

"I'm angry at myself for being drunk from the bread,"

I told Lallalin harshly, the more I thought about it, the angrier I got,

"it's because of that damn bread, I'll call that little shit!"

"Hold on, hold on, it's one a.m. already, please calm down."

Lallalin pulled me into a hug to stop me from rushing to get my phone on the nightstand. Drunk and angry, I tried to peel her off but the taller woman's hands were more persistent than an octopus. I thrashed around until I was tired but I still couldn't get rid of her. She even hugged me tighter.

Which one are you really, an octopus or a python?

When it did not work, I started to throw a tantrum.

"Yeah, right, you try to stop me because you like that Cheese was fun to talk to, is that it? Cheese said she likes your abs, she kept talking about it, it's so annoying."

I couldn't help but make a fuss about it, the woman released me from her embrace.

"These abs you mean?"

Lallalin pulled up her shirt, showing off her beautiful muscular stomach. I eyed it greedily.

"Yeah...Cheese said she wanted to touch it."

I muttered to her pale stomach absentmindedly. Then, Lallalin asked me a question that sounded like an invitation.

"Do you...want to touch it?"

I did not answer her verbally. I raised my hand to her toned stomach, gently caressing it, feeling satisfied. But then Lallalin took hold of my hand, our eyes met and Lallalin's eyes were filled with a certain kind of desperation.

I did not know if it was the alcohol that stirred my feelings right now or if it was Lallalin in front of me, but I decided to kiss her lips, losing myself in it. Naturally, Lallalin seized this chance to deepen the kiss, making me lose my mind to where she guided me once again.

I don't remember what our first kiss tasted like, but our second kiss right now tasted a lot like chocolate...

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□13.Probation□

Happiness was something that needed to be treated with caution, especially the kind that made us forget ourselves. More so when there was alcohol flowing in our veins and other factors that stimulated adrenaline. All of these combined had me celebrating my victory and luck way too much.

"I can go home on my own, I'll be fine,"

I said to Vetaka who was standing close to me. Thank goodness that I sobered up pretty fast, I only felt a little dizzy now.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah..."

I glanced at her suspiciously, the petite woman seemed to remain strangely close to me, unlike the Vetaka I knew.

"And you have money to pay for the ride?"

"Of course, I do, what kind of question is...that,"

I answered her. I was rather confused but then my eyes widened with shock when I saw my wallet in her hand. How did it get there!?

"If you still don't remember why I have it, I think you should come with me."

My eyes followed Vetaka as she headed to her car and I decided to follow her. My memories were fuzzy during the lucky draw.

I hope...I won't get lulled into the woods and get murdered or something...

Even though I prayed that never happened, being alone with someone who... gosh, I didn't even know how to describe this complicated relationship. Let's just say I got so uncomfortable that my muscles tensed and ached so badly right now. I wouldn't come to her apartment in the first place if I knew it would be this awkward.

But to my surprise, Vetaka was kind of nice, she could ignore me and sleep but she put the effort into getting up and fetching something for me to eat. Khun Cheese's bread did not taste like chocolate bread with a mix of liquor, it tasted more like liquor bread with a hint of chocolate scent.

Did she pour the whole bottle into this?

My question from that day was answered, I suspected that Khun Wine must be the type of drunk that had a higher sexual drive, her flushed face looked annoyed and deep red. Her eyes traced along my body like she wanted to swallow me whole and I ended up losing myself in it when she tempted me once again.

You started this again, Khun Wine....I'm just finishing what you started...

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'You can't have sex with someone you don't love.'

I used to believe that until the recent incident made me rethink about it.

I woke up for a while but I did not dare to look at the woman beside me. What happened yesterday occurred when I was fully conscious. I admitted that I was attracted to her body, her unblemished face, her doe-like eyes, and her smooth, fair skin.

I could be intimate with her without feeling awkward but my heart never skipped when we were together or when we normally met except...when we

were on a bed. So what exactly do I feel about Vetaka then? What was this strange relationship that could not be described in words?

"Khun Lal, how long are you going to stare at the ceiling?"

"!!!"

I was startled and turned to look at the person lying next to me. I found Vetaka on her side, staring at me.

Jesus, my heart nearly jumped out of my chest!

"If you back away further from that, you will fall off the bed. You're too far, I can't catch you if you fall."

Vetaka said flatly, it made me grab the edge of the bed in time before I fell off the bed. Damn, she was so different when she was completely sober.

"Um..."

"Let's talk about this."

Vetaka was the one who decided to start the conversation in the most awkward situation. Was this a heart-to-heart talk? Was she really planning to have that talk while being completely naked?

Despite my opinion, I brought myself to the headboard next to the petite woman, who looked troubled.

"Last night...alright, I admit that I was drunk and couldn't control myself but
you..."

"How about we become friends with benefits?"

I decided to change the subject before Vetaka could press on about why I let my desire run wild to the point that led both of us to bed again when I was fully conscious.

"Friends with benefits?"

"Yes, friends with benefits. Like....we keep it strictly physical and nothing more. Whenever we feel like it, we could just...arrange a meet up."

I explained a bit when Khun Wine appeared to take an interest in the familiar word. As I contemplated my own feelings...I found that this was the best option for now.

"And what if I don't want sex?"

Who started the kiss yesterday then?

I glanced at Vetaka, incredulous that she asked this question.

"This is not the first time, K. Wine, in case you forgot."

Vetaka let out an irritated sigh, her pale face flushed deep red like she was deeply embarrassed by that, her brows furrowed. She was probably debating with herself right now.

"You still good there, Khun Wine?"

"What?"

"Your face is very red, it's okay, no need to be shy. It's natural, if we can come to an agreement then it's a win-win for both of us, you know?"

But Vetaka looked clearly uncomfortable, I did not want to force her into anything she did not want.

"If you aren't comfortable with it, we could-"

"Fine."

"What did you just say?"

I asked, surprised. I did not think that she would agree to my offer this easily this time, it was quite a shock.

"I said fine, why are you asking again?"

Still, I couldn't deny how cute her voice was right now, she sounded so annoyed and shy...well, we were still in bed, it wasn't a crime to compliment Vetaka in bed, was it?

"So we are friends with benefits then, okay?"

I confirmed our arrangement again. To be honest, Vetaka wasn't the only one who felt shy about this, I was too. I... did not know, I never had to agree to something like this either.

"Okay...but...can we go for another round?"

"..."

I thought my jaw probably dropped from her very explicit invitation that I would never expect coming from Vetaka's mouth. Maybe I was a little overreacted.

"It's nothing like that! I...I mean ... every time we did it, we were never both fully conscious, right? So maybe it's the alcohol..."

"...."

"Maybe it won't be that good when we actually do it."

"...."

"Like work, we have to work for three months before we pass the probation period right? We just...did it twice only..."

Vetaka explained, looking all serious, that I had to slowly follow her strange logic.

So...I had to have sex with this person again and if it wasn't good then I wouldn't pass the probation? Woah... that was cruel, Khun Wine, but sure, I would let you know that Lallalin here never did not pass her probation before so...

"Sure, we could do it now."

My competitive nature reared its head. We were already naked on the bed anyway so it was fine by me if we started now.

"Okay, so we'll start?"

"Ah!...Khun Wine, wait, hold on, mmm..."

After she asked permission, Vetaka bent my neck down and without giving me time to react, she thoroughly ravished my lips.

"W-wait, aren't I supposed to..."

When my mouth was not occupied, I asked her, feeling baffled.

Aren't I...supposed to be the one who takes the lead in this?

"You have to evaluate me too....if...I'm not good at it then it won't be fair for us to have this arrangement, is it?"

Okay...I meant, even though I had never been in this kind of relationship before, did people really evaluate their sex buddy's performance? Like did we have to take it this seriously?

"Hm...you're too serious, K. Wine."

I frowned when Vetaka explained what she was aiming for, her small hands were touching my breasts at the same time. Then I flinched when I felt the touch on my folded flower.

"You're this wet just from kissing alone?"

"Khun Wine..."

Her question did not sound like she was mocking me, Vetaka seemed genuinely curious. That made me keep my mouth shut, not answering her and embarrassing myself more.

“Do I..do it like this?”

Vetaka mumbled. Her fingers worked on pressing the pollen of my core, each movement came faster after another.

“K-Khun Wine,”

I gritted my teeth, my stomach quivered tensely at the touch. Vetaka was good at work and even at this, despite how inexperienced she was the first time.

A true fast learner right here!

"Tell me if you don't like it."

I had no idea when Vetaka came to stand by the bed. The next thing I knew, she was already spreading my legs apart.

"What?... Khun Wine, you don't have to-ah!"

I cried out to stop her when the curious woman was about to have a taste of the flower in front of her out of curiosity. I couldn't stop her in time as I felt a sense of wetness on my sensitive part. So my hand raised to cover my mouth from letting out the embarrassing sounds instead.

"You like it here... right?"

Vetaka said to herself and I was not in the state that I could respond. Her little tongue assaulted the bud of my pollen brutally as her fingers worked through it. Vetaka was determined and it was a terrifying thing...she did not have to make me feel that good because I barely could not take it anymore.

It is already hard to suppress my moans...

Christ...you have passed, Khun Wine, you passed the probation and I want you to do that full-time right now...

"Aah!"

I whimpered in my throat and sighed when Vetaka took me to the edge with flying colors.

"Never see that look on your face before, does that mean I did a good job? You finished-ah!"

Vetaka crawled back to the bed and asked for feedback like a little pupil waiting for their test results from their tutor.

That somehow annoyed me because Vetaka was acting so smug, I did not know if she intended to brag about it or not but no way I would give up and lose now.

"Then it's my turn now, okay?"

I grabbed Vetaka before she could react. My arms latched on her hips.

"Ah, wait, I still-oh...hey, move your hand away."

"You said so yourself, Khun Wine. We don't take advantage of each other. I owned you one there, so I'll gladly pay you back."

Vetaka was caged under me, she looked panicked now that she was the one who was being touched.

"It-it's okay-haa! I told you it's okay...ah..."

Vetaka closed her eyes tightly when I nuzzled her neck.

"Khun Wine, you said you wanted to evaluate me. So I will have to do my best."

Her folded flower was soaked with the nectar from her core so it would not be difficult if I were to explore the inner of her sensitive part.

"Oh! No, not...there."

Vetaka tried to move away when she felt my fingers pressed into her entrance, I would let her know that I was way more experienced.

I will make this tigress turn into a little kitten, just watch!

I dived my finger inside the tight entrance as I comforted Vetaka, who was holding onto me,

"Don't tense up, Khun Wine, does it hurt?"

"No...but it feels weird."

"I'll make you ease up a little, okay?"

"Ah, Lal..."

Vetaka cried out with surprise when I nipped at her nipple and started sucking it like it was a fine dessert while trying to find the spot that made her feel good.

"Found it."

I let out a smile when I felt the smaller woman flinched as I pressed one particular spot inside, so there it was...

"Khun Lal, wait, it...feels strange."

Vetaka breathed out, her face was deep red.

"You'll like it, Khun Wine. You always do...every time."

I pressed her hips down as she tried to move away and flicked my finger faster and deeper to that sensitive spot inside her that responded to the movement so wonderfully.

"I don't exactly remember each time...oh....-too deep, let me go first...ah...La... let go."

Vetaka whimpered. Even though she seemed against it from her words, her hands clinged onto my body so tightly like she was holding me for dear life.

"Oh, I will let you go alright, after I make you finish, that is."

I said smugly. Vetaka adored dirty talk...even though she seemed to have no idea that her body responded so well with my teasing.

“Haa...Lal...don't flick there, I can't-”

Vetaka helplessly cried out my name when I teased the sensitive spot inside her entrance. Her body was trembling with desire and that made me even more smug.

“But you like it, don't you, Wine? I know. You like this spot the most.”

I whispered next to her flushed red ears. The petite woman was still panting hard, her skin flushed pink from the ecstasy, and both of her fingers latched on my shoulder, holding on tight. She looked so debauched, time for me to finish this game now.

Sorry Khun Wine but I won this time...

“Lal...slow...slow down, I'm going to-haaa!”

I ignored Vetaka's pleas and sent the woman over the edge of this bliss. I could feel her scream in her throat and feel her entrance clenching my fingers so tightly. K. Wine leaned her face down to my shoulder, panting hard from exhaustion. It took her a while before she came to herself.

"You passed my evaluation on the probation, Khun Wine."

I withdrew my fingers from her inside as I informed the evaluation result with a soft smile.

"...."

Vetaka avoided looking me in the eyes. She looked so embarrassed that she became awkward. It made me want to tease the stubborn woman some more.

"What about me? Did I pass?"

I asked her. She did not answer, simply nodding, admitting defeat to her feelings.

Honestly, I did not need to hear her answer to know how good I made her feel, seeing how she was moaning and coming undone earlier...

"Khun Wine, you don't have to be kind to me with your answer if you don't like it."

I pretended to look dejected and that prompted someone as determined as Vetaka to answer immediately.

"It's good...it felt very good,"

It made me proud of myself even when the woman looked down when she answered,

"Here, wipe your hand."

I looked at the petite woman who took out a napkin and carefully wiped her own nectar on my hand. Delicate hands tenderly traced my fingers, it made my inside flush.

"K. Wine..."

"?"

"Since I passed the probation, shall we start full-time work?"

I asked the woman in front of me, eyeing her with a desire that was ignited again. Vetaka looked baffled and confused, I couldn't resist pressing a kiss on her delicate lips.

"Hold on, K. Lal. Mmm..."

Vetaka whimpered when I suddenly lashed on her lips but when I deepened the kiss, her hands came to rest around my neck as she lost herself in the kiss.

I'm a hard-working person when it comes to what the task I am assigned to work on, so I'll give this work my best then...

□□□□□□

□14. Rule of us□

Being friends with benefits only had a few rules.

Basically, it just came down to

'meet up whenever we wanted to do it.'

But...how exactly do we meet up?

It seemed like saying it was way easier than actually doing it....

I laid spread on my bed, pondering. It had not been a week but I started to miss Vetaka's hands, damn it....I thought it'd be easy after we came to an agreement but who would have thought? Vetaka acted like nothing happened after that day like we never had our arrangement.

My face was not thick enough to tell her *'oh, hey, Khun Wine, you free tonight? I want to have sex.'* anyway? Are you kidding me? It would be such a disgrace and embarrassing for me!

PhoomJAI : Sup, u ghosted me. Got urself a beau or sth?

Rude: Lullaby

I pouted at my best friend's text but I mumbled to myself internally that it wasn't that far from the truth.

I have work too, you know: Lullaby

PhoomJAI : Really? So u and k wine are good now?

PhoomJAI: You haven't asked for my advice about it

You didn't text me cuz you miss me, didn't you!?: Lullaby

You just want the tea!!! : Lullaby

PhoomJAI : u were acting like you were gonna die from it last week

Yeah, we can work together now: Lullaby

I'm very good at adapting: Lullaby

PhoomJAI: that's no fun

PhoomJAI: I texted u cuz I was bored. I still am.

then...I need ur advise on something: Lullaby

PhoomJAI: shoot

Well...it's a story from a friend of a friend: Lullaby

PhoomJAI : okay?

This friend of a friend have someone : Lullaby

whom she doesn't like that much : Lullaby

Wait, not really : Lullaby

The thing is, that someone is hot : Lullaby

So they ended up sleeping together: Lullaby

Like she didn't mean for it to happen : Lullaby

PhoomJAI: Lal

PhoomJAI: You little bitch

? : Lullaby

PhoomJAI: why is your friend of a friend's story

PhoomJAI : so detailed

I typed my reply and tried to stop my hands from shaking from the nerves. I thought I was very subtle about it. How come Pakphoom seemed to catch on?

She told me in detail, asking for my advise: Lullaby

I swallowed when I saw the typing icon on Pakphoom's side blinking on the screen.

PhoomJAI : Right. So?

Then I let out a relieved sigh when Pakphoom did not seem to be suspicious.

So after that they agree to be friends with benefits: Lullaby

PhoomJAI: Ooo spicy

Yeah...but they haven't met up since that day: Lullaby

PhoomJAI: Oh? Why not?

It's embarrassing, she can't just go to her and ask: Lullaby

Can't even text her about it: Lullaby

PhoomJAI : maybe you should try to establish a symbol to convey that?

PhoomJAI : if it's embarrassing

Oh, that's a good idea : Lullaby

I'll try that : Lullaby

I panicked when I saw that I accidentally typed that response to my friend's advice. So I corrected it, though I did not know if it would look suspicious or not.

Okay, I'll tell that friend of a friend to try that* : Lullaby

PhoomJAI: sure...

PhoomJAI: tell her that, girl

When I saw Pakphoom's response, I was relieved. At least my best friend did not know, it was a good thing that I had quite the survival skill, so smooth there, Lallalin.

Then Pakphoom was gone, he probably went to find something to do so he would not get bored. I pondered on my best friend's advice until I fell asleep.

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Rumble...

The sound of thunder could be heard from inside the building, followed by the sound of lighting. The rumbling sound vibrated made me flinch as I was calculating the price of the product's new part. I glanced at the watch on my wrist, I knew it, it was precisely half past five... the rain sure was punctured...For this little country called Bangkok where the drainage system was in a considerably bad condition, and there were so many unfinished bumpy roads...

Hello rain, traffic jams, floods, and the invasion of sewer rats!

"Nim, are you done packing?"

Tangkwa appeared. She approached her best friend, judging from the weather, it wasn't surprising why she was in a rush to go home.

"Wait a sec, okay? Is it raining yet? I forgot to bring an umbrella."

Noomnim replied as she was shutting down her computer.

"Not yet, hurry."

"Let me pack a bit, P' Lal, let's go."

"You can go home, Nim. I need to get this pricing done."

I looked up to respond to Noomnim when she came worriedly to tell me.

"Ah...I totally forgot you have a car. Sigh...I'm so jealous, P' Lal, you don't have to battle with cockroaches on the sidewalk and get packed in the crowded Skytrain."

"I practically could sleep while driving in this traffic jam though."

I laughed at Noomnim's complaints. The girl quickly shoved her belongings inside her backpack.

"Tang and I will go home now, okay? Goodbye P' Lal."

"Yeah, you too, be careful on your way back, don't slip."

I bid my two lovely juniors goodbye.

I took a while to finish up some work before I decided to go home. I took a turn to exit the building parking lot with my car and saw a familiar figure standing there, looking outside the building with a worried look.

Khun Wine...

She didn't drive here today?

Maybe this is a good opportunity that fate has given me!

"Need a lift home?"

I parked the car in front of the building and asked the petite woman. Vetaka seemed hesitant at the offer,

"I'll drive you home, come."

Because the rain was getting heavier without stopping, Vetaka had no chance of calling a ride to pick her up. She had to get in my car instead.

"You didn't drive here today?"

I asked the person next to me and turned the windshield wiper to the third level when the rain nearly blocked my entire vision.

"I forgot to renew my car tax extension,"

Vetaka answered with a troubled look. Owning a car came with a long list of responsibilities, one of them was the car tax extension. It was not worth the trouble when the police fined our cars for it.

"I feel you."

I nodded, sympathetically. Silence took its place after we finished talking. There was only the sound of the rain falling on the windshield. We might have been intimate with each other but the air between us was still as tense as usual, it was so uncomfortable...

By the time I parked the car at her place, the heavy rain seemed to get even heavier.

I haven't had the chance to talk to her...I thought to myself, it was a shame that I could not muster the courage to ask the person next to me despite the long period of time we shared while we were in the car together.

"Khun Lal, do you want to...come upstairs first? It would be dangerous if you drive back now."

Vetaka was the one who said it before she shut the door. Her large, round eyes glanced at the heavy rain outside the building with worry.

I'd be a fool to reject the offer when she was the one who initiated it.

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"This lotion..."

I looked at a lotion bottle that had a picture of yogurt and strawberry on its label with interest.

The same feeling returned, I had no idea where the sense of uneasiness came from but I felt it when I was in her room. So I tried to find something to calm my nerves.

Of course, the way to calm my nerves is to sneak around other people's rooms!

"It's good, smells nice too."

Vetaka approached me and sat down on the seat next to me on the sofa. I knew immediately that those products were where the woman's faint fragrance came from, the one that often distracted me when she was near.

"You bought so many of them,"

I commented when I saw the pile of lotions displayed on the shelf.

"They were on sale, you like it? Would you like to have one?"

"It-it's fine."

I hurriedly declined when K. Wine was about to get up and hand me one of those lotions. Not a chance...if I used it, I would feel like the woman was somewhere nearby and that wouldn't be good for my psyche.

"You wanna turn on the TV?"

Vetaka asked when the tension was getting more uncomfortable.

"Sure,"

I responded immediately. When K. Wine turned on the TV...the image on the screen and the sound came briefly before everything went dark. The black screen suggested that the rain was so heavy outside that it crashed the TV signal. Without the TV, the two of us were left with uncomfortable silence and our phones on the sofa.

Sitting this close to her, I could smell the faint strawberry yogurt scent coming from her. My inside quivered... in the end, I was the one who gave in.

"Hey..."

I touched her hand but the reaction I received from Vetaka was a slap on it. She looked startled and it made me feel even more upset.

"Khun Wine...what's up with you?"

I grabbed her wrist, demanding and petulant. I was angry because I couldn't tell how she felt and she was acting estranged. I was so upset that I chose to be straightforward and asked her,

"Our arrangement, is that still on the table or not?"

"That's...I mean, yes?"

Vetaka uttered quietly, her wrist was still in my hold.

"Then why did you ignore me?"

I searched Vétaka's face for an answer. I hated this feeling and I had to let her know it.

As I demanded the truth from her, I noticed that she was acting unusual, she did not look like she was disgusted, on the contrary, she looked flustered.

"...who could just say stuff like that out loud?"

Vetaka looked away like she didn't want to meet my eyes. She was blushing lightly, that was when I recognized the sign; Vetaka was embarrassed.

That made me understand something I never did about what was going on. So...she had the same thought as me, right? I forgot that she was too proud and there was no way she would actually say what she wanted. Thank God for the rainstorm, if it wasn't for the rain I'd never sort things out with this prideful petite woman.

When all of my questions were answered, I released her hand.

"I think it's time for us to really discuss this."

Seeing that Vetaka still looked baffled, so I took out my phone to demonstrate my idea.

"I propose that we use a symbol to convey it,"

I pressed at the application and moved closer to Vetaka so she could see my screen,

"Like a sticker for example, so we don't have to feel embarrassed about it, what do you think?"

"...."

The beautiful woman did not answer, she only nodded softly as an acknowledgement.

"Then let's pick a sticker, shall we?"

"But you have to pay for that one."

Vetaka seemed hesitant as she looked at the front page of LINE's sticker store.

Now that I think about it... Khun Wine rarely sends stickers while talking about work and when she does, the stickers are free ones.

"I can buy it for you."

"No, it's fine."

"You can buy me coffee later, K. Wine."

I offered her after she interrupted. She was so incredibly righteous that it could make people feel uneasy sometimes. There was nothing wrong with accepting other people's kindness from time to time, no need to be so cautious about it.

"Alright..."

K. Wine agreed when she was convinced about my proposal. I thought of something fun in the meantime.

"Let's take turns and pick a sticker that represents each of us, here...you pick one. When you're done, hand it to me, and I'll buy it for you."

I said and handed Vetaka my phone, she still looked like she had not quite followed but she accepted the phone anyway.

I stared at the screen when Vetaka handed me back my phone. She picked... a fox? Was this sly-looking fox supposed to be me? Was that really how she saw me?

I turned to look at Vetaka who acted all innocent.

Oh, so you're going to play it like this!?

"Are you saying I'm this grumpy-looking tiger?"

Vetaka whined when I sent her a set of stickers as a gift via LINE.

"Well, you implied that I'm a fox first."

I countered. Vetaka muttered something under her breath and downloaded the grumpy tiger sticker when she could not think of anything to say.

"Two simple rules would suffice; the little fox and tiger stickers represent a booty call,"

I sent a sticker of a hungry-looking fox to Vetaka's chat,

"And if you agree, just send me an OK sticker."

"Will this do?"

Vetaka sent me a sticker of a tiger gesturing OK and asked if what she did was correct according to my instructions.

"It does. And now that we have a deal..."

I moved closer to Vetaka, smirking wider as I approached her.

"Wait, what now? Wait!"

Vetaka cried out when I cornered her until she was pressed against the corner of the couch.

"Now that I asked for it and now that you agreed,"

I showed K. Wine my phone with a smirk like the sly fox I was.

"K. Lal! That's cheating."

Vetaka made a fuss when she realized she walked right into my trap. It made me laugh.

"Come on, you invited me to your place because you kinda want sex too, right? Admit it, K. Wine."

It seemed that I hit the spot with that one because Vetaka made a face like she was annoyed.

"You talk too much..."

Vetaka shut me up with her lips. I let her ravish my mouth, pouring her irritation and childish sulk into the kiss. Feeling oddly content, I brought my arms around her as she tried to peel off her clothes.

Well, I did enter the tiger's den, so what could go wrong with being mauled by one...especially when this tiger was totally gorgeous...

□□□□□□□□

□15.Lunch Time (Vetaka)□

The office at the end of the year was very peaceful because everyone was on leave and traveling for the holiday. There were only a few departments that had to have someone on standby in case there was an emergency and there were some people who had used up all their leave so they had no choice but to come to work.

But isn't it nice, having so few people in the office?

I came to work feeling more comfortable than usual, there was no phone call at all since the morning. The clients and suppliers probably had the week off for the New Year by now. I took my time finishing off some documents. When it was time for a lunch break, the office lights were automatically cut off according to the office's energy-saving policy.

The whole floor went dark that instant but it had little effect on my work. I was not in a rush and I did not have to meet up with anyone after this, so I simply fixed my glasses and worked through my work schedule on the computer's screen.

"No wonder why your eyesight is that bad, Khun Wine."

A voice came out of nowhere and made me jump. When I saw who it was, the tension in my muscles relaxed.

"What is it with you?"

I glanced at the woman. We usually did not talk to each other except when it was work-related. But here, the taller woman came to my desk today.

"Wanna grab something for lunch together?"

"You're asking me?"

"I mean...I came all the way here to your desk, you think I just came here to inform you?"

I frowned when the woman chose to annoy me instead of answering my question. Ever since we had that arrangement, Lallalin seemed more confident to argue with me.

"It's fine, you should go."

I declined her invitation without any hesitation... it was not like we were that close anyway.

"Doesn't it get lonely, eating lunch alone every day?"

The taller woman did not seem to give up. Lallalin still tried to persuade me with a smile.

"Nope,"

I said sharply to cut her off when she was still bothering me.

"Liar."

"What are you talking about?"

"You tend to look away when you lie, K. Wine."

"Mind your own business,"

I really hated how perceptive Lallalin was. It could not be denied that their bedroom affair allowed her to notice many things about me.

Well, some habits could not be hidden...especially during those moments.

"So you wanna grab lunch together?"

I sighed at her annoying insistence, somehow I felt like I had a huge fox nuzzling my legs.

"I already brought my lunch."

"One carton of milk and a stupid cereal bar hardly count as a meal in my standard."

Lallalin had a decent argumentative skill. I could practically feel my temper rising.

"Ha? And how is my food your business?"

"That's why you are so small, K. Wine, you eat like this every day."

Normally, I was the one who cornered the taller woman until she lost face. I had no idea what on earth made her come to my desk just to get on my nerves. She must have too much free time on her hands...but that was likely the case since the Sales Department usually had nothing to do during this time of the year. The only reason Lallalin was here was probably because she used up all her leaves.

"So go eat lunch with your subordinates. Oh...I forgot. None of your juniors are here today."

I lifted the corner of my lips when I found something to wipe that smile off her face.

"Hey, I'll let you know that I usually eat alone. No way I eat lunch with them every day, they will probably be so nervous if that happens."

Lallalin protested when I countered her.

"Being a supervisor means that you have to give your subordinates some space. They are already close to me as it is."

"So you're just lonely?"

I cornered her teasingly. I could relate to Lallalin though, deep down. If you were too close to your subordinates, you might not be able to keep them in line.

It's like what they say, the higher it goes, the cooler it becomes....high position in work comes with a little bit of loneliness.

"Are you coming, K. Wine? We're wasting our lunchtime."

"I'm only doing this because I pity that you don't have any friends."

I put a carton of milk and a cereal bar in my bag when the woman started to make a fuss because she was hungry. Alright, I'd stop teasing her for now...

"Come, I'll take you to a good place."

I walked beside the caramel blonde woman who seemed so content. I did like the sheepish look on her face when she was cornered but I couldn't deny that her smiling face was quite lovely too. Besides, I won the argument this round so it was only fair that I went out with the loser to get lunch because I felt bad for her, right?

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In the end, Lallalin took me to a nice, simple Japanese restaurant. I had no idea that there was a nice restaurant this close to the company. I read through the menu and glanced at the person sitting on the opposite side, she seemed more excited than me.

"Is it your first time here?"

The taller woman had sparkles in her eyes at every single item on the menu so I could not help but ask.

"Yeah...saw the reviews of this place a while ago but never had the chance to try it."

"You're acting like you're comparing the product price."

I teased Lallalin amusingly when she frowned at the menu in front of her like it was some complex mathematics equation.

"I wanna eat both of them,"

Lallalin said so longingly that it piqued my interest.

"Which ones do you want?"

"*Gyudon* (beef rice bowl) and *Salmon-don* (Salmon rice bowl)."

My eyes followed her finger to the picture on the menu. Now I understood why the taller woman was acting like it was the end of the world. The dishes did look so good in the pictures...but ordering two dishes would be too much for one person.

I lifted up a smile when I came up with a solution to this and quickly calmed my expression. It was fortunate that Lallalin had not noticed it, she was too busy thinking about what to get.

"Go ahead and order them, we can share." I proposed. Lallalin seemed obviously interested.

"We can?"

"Of course, it's not like I want to order anything in particular."

After I insisted, the woman hurriedly called the waiter to take their order. Shortly after, the food arrived, the dishes looked mouth-watering. Lallalin, who seemed to be famished, took half of both each dish and put it on a separate plate that she requested from the waiter.

"Thank you."

I accepted the plate from her.

"No, thank you, Khun Wine."

Lallalin picked up a piece of slide beef covered in sauce and put it in her mouth, followed by a thick piece of salmon sashimi. The taller woman munched the food before smiling,

"Thank you for joining me and for being so nice to me."

Ba-dum...

I could feel my heart beating faster ... must have been from hunger...

"Don't be dramatic, you could have brought a client here instead,"

I told Lallalin who was acting overly grateful. I tried eating the food, *hm, yum...*

"It's not the same."

"?"

"Dining with a client is still work, not like this one,"

Lallalin said as she took a large spoonful of beef rice into her mouth.

"It's not the same as eating with me?"

"Of course, it isn't. Eating here with you is way better."

"I mean...the food tastes much better when you're eating with a friend, right?"

Lallalin explained cheerfully.

I see, a friend... Now that I thought about it, since when did we become friends? And why did I have to feel oddly irritated when Lallalin said we were friends?

I decided to focus on the salmon on my plate so this irritation would go away. As I was eating, I could feel her eyes glancing at me until I could not

stand it. My mouth asked the question before I knew it.

"What are you looking at?"

"You're beautiful."

"Cough! What's wrong with you?"

I almost choked on my miso soup when Lallalin complimented me out of the blue. And my heart skipped a beat because of how sudden the compliment was.

"Why don't you wear a little more makeup? Outfits too, you always wear the same things, aren't you bored?"

Lallalin looked at me, sincerity in her eyes, it made me avoid her gaze.

"It's not your problem, I like the way I am right now."

"I could teach you how to do makeup, you know? The clothes too, if you dressed up a little bit more, you'd be so pretty, even more than you are right now."

"I told you I like how I am right now! Don't stick your nose into my life."

I didn't mean to raise my voice, I was annoyed that she kept nagging me. Lallalin looked as surprised as I was.

"...."

"Just eat, lunch break is almost over."

"Yeah."

It was a flick of a second that Lallalin showed how startled she was before she changed her expression and smiled. I did not like that smile at all. Why? Because I could tell that it was a fake one...

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Lallalin is the one who keeps bothering me.

So....why is it that I'm the one who feels guilty about it?

I have my own reasons and she was nagging me about my personal stuff so it isn't so strange for me to be mad about that, right? Lallalin's expression changed only for a split second before it returned to normal.

Like hell that is normal...that is not normal in any sense.

I did not know how I could sense her sting underneath that smile on her face. I did not have any reason to think about it at all but before I knew it, I already brought myself to the Sales Department.

The clock on the wall suggested that I still had ten minutes before I could get off work, I sighed.

I did not usually reach out and make it up with someone if I wasn't in the wrong, but I was in the wrong this time...perhaps I was too harsh earlier.

Even though I came to reconcile with her, seeing the taller woman so focused on work that she did not pay attention to her surroundings, I was at a loss for words, I did not dare to say anything as I did not want to disrupt her.

"Do you need something, K. Wine?"

"!!!"

I was startled when Lallalin spoke without looking up from the calculator that she was using.

"Do you have something you'd like to ask from the works I sent?"

The caramel blonde woman ran her fingers through her hair, irritated from the long series of numbers on the paper. She turned to regard me in silence.

Had anyone told Lallalin before that she looked scary when she looked so impassively....somehow, it made me feel a shiver up my spine.

"..."

I frowned. I did not like how I was acting right now, since when was I not confident about myself?

"Are you free this evening?...We could have dinner together?"

It was painful to finish the whole sentence, I almost bit my tongue.

"We just had lunch together earlier."

"Can't we have another meal together for dinner?"

I asked. Lallalin's passive expression made me feel both embarrassed and annoyed.

"Unless you already have plans?"

"Hm..."

Lallalin pretended to think very hard about it. My patience started to run thin by this point.

I came all the way here to make it up to you, don't be so difficult about it, alright!?

"If you're not free then I'll take my leave."

"I'm free."

Lallalin grinned. The tension earlier disappeared that instant.

"But you pick the place this time, okay?"

"Alright."

I had to agree on that one, was this her way of getting back at me?

Lullaby: Sent Sticker*

I looked at the notification on my phone and pouted, annoyed at how the taller woman could act like nothing happened as she packed her things. Heh...I would have to think about it before I replied to that longing fox sticker.

I could wait until after dinner to reply to that, tomorrow was the beginning of a long holiday anyway...

□16.Green Day□

CSR was short for Corporate Social Responsibility, generally, it was an organization's social and environmental responsibility that led to sustainable development. Simply put, it would be something like,

'If you are going to make profits out of the people, might as well give something back to society.'

There were various types of CSR activities depending on how the company would arrange it. A common activity was volunteering and an even more common activity was reforestation.

Rrrr

"P' Lal, the car is about to leave, where are you?"

Noomnim complained over the phone. I tucked my iPhone to my ear as I hastily washed my hands.

"I'll be there in less than a minute."

Normally I was confident that I was healthy, I meant, how could I not? I worked out at the gym regularly and was mindful of my food quality ... sometimes I even cooked my own meal, sigh...now that I thought about it, I was so mad at myself for this just because I didn't want to waste the clams I had in the freezer, my stomach had been acting weird since morning today.

I got on the bus feeling fatigued, everyone was wearing a light green polo shirt, including me, and the sight was dazzling. I wondered if we were going to plant trees for reforestation or be part of the trees in the forest. I looked for an empty seat after I signed my name with P' Jantra.

"P' Lal, Good Morning."

"Morning, New, how's it going? Going on fieldwork after you start working less than a week, I see."

I responded to New with a friendly smile. He was a new employee who worked in a Sales and Marketing position. Alas, our department had expanded its product line. Our workload was pretty heavy before this so the company hired another position and now I had three subordinates under my care.

"It sounds like fun,"

New said enthusiastically. It put me at ease that this newbie would share some of the workload. So long OT, no more going home late and living unhealthily.

"Right? I like these kinds of activities, it's a change of scenery."

Bas barged in to join the conversation. They were both men and it seemed that New was a fan of the same football team as Bas, it only took a few days for them to hit it off.

"Geez, you two get along so fast. I'll go find a seat, the bus will leave soon."

"Alright."

I left the two talkative men alone as I scanned the bus, my brows furrowed when I saw that there were only two seats left...

The first seat is next to the petite woman who has this scary cold air around her, it is so intense that I could feel it from here.

The next seat is..next to the pile of boxed lunch that was nearly as high as my head.

If I have to choose between a seat next to Khun Wine and a seat next to a pile of pad krapao with rice...

"Is this seat taken?"

I would choose to sit next to this woman who smells nice like strawberry yogurt.

"You can take it."

Vetaka turned to glance at me before nodding lightly. I carefully sat next to her, she did not seem to be in a good mood.

We had our little clandestine arrangement for five months now, it already became a routine. That being said, it did not make our relationship progress any better than before. Honestly, I could not tell what Khun Wine was thinking, the smaller woman was unapproachable.

Whenever she realized she was letting her guard down around me, she would go back to being cold and blunt like the first day we met.

But then again...why would I want to know more about K. Wine's personality? The rule of our arrangement was that there would be no commitment between us, right?

I like what we have right now, we're not close, we're not even friends to begin with.

"No coffee today?"

Despite what I thought, I still couldn't help but ask her about the lack of a coffee cup that she usually had near her every day.

"Just look at the time,"

Vetaka answered me with a grumpy look in her eyes. I had discovered another secret of the smaller woman; K. Wine was addicted to caffeine, if she did not have her coffee in the morning, she would get irritated and have that freezing chill air around her like today.

The trip to where they would do reforestation took a whole day, so the company asked us to start the day early in the morning. It was too early for

coffee shops to be opened, that was why the woman was looking like the whole world had offended her somehow.

"Want some candy?"

I offered Vetaka a coffee flavored candy that I got from the convenience store the other day. I did not know what compelled me to buy it even though I did not often eat candy,

"Coffee flavor ones might do."

Vetaka accepted it willingly. After the light brown candy disappeared inside her mouth for a while, "it's good..." she seemed to like it very much,

"Thank you. Do you have the package with you? I think I'll buy some for myself."

"You can have this pack, I bought a lot of them. Oh, you can just buy me coffee later, okay?" Vetaka did not like to take advantage of people so I had to insist on her. Really, she did not have to overthink about a pack of candy that was less than a hundred baht. I watched her unblemished cheeks puffed from the candy and wondered what the candy tasted like. I wanted to try it but just the one inside Vetaka's mouth, of course...

I'll just trick her into having one when we're alone in the room...

I watched the petite woman cheerfully scrolling through her phone with relief, at least I could get rid of that scary chill. The comforting cold air from the air conditioner made my eyelids feel heavy. I thought I could smell a faint scent of coffee in my dream too.

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They said that Thailand was the land of traffic, so by the time we arrived at our destination, it was time for lunch...

I swallowed a large lump when I saw the incoming disaster as I nervously watched the HR handing out lunch to everyone.

What on earth made me sign that I want to eat pad krapao? My stomach was already hurt, no way I'd survive the chili...

The time for Lallalin to die from clams has come...

"You girls enjoy your meal."

"Thanks, P' Jantra,"

I responded to her with an awkward smile. I looked at the pad krapao in my hands with a troubled feeling. If I did not eat then I would not have the strength to plant the trees but if I did, I could have a terrible stomach ache,

None of the options seem to have a good outcome...

".... "

"Take mine."

To my surprise, my lunch was taken from me and was replaced by another boxed lunch.

It's stir-fried pork with garlic.

"Khun Wine..."

I turned to the person beside me, she opened my lunch and the smell of chili and basil leaves hit me at once. If I smelled it yesterday, I'd find the scent mouth-watering but now, the smell made my stomach feel nauseous.

"I'll eat yours, you can take that one,"

Vetaka said, not caring about my baffled expression. She tore the little fish sauce package and poured it on top of the fried egg in one swift motion.

"B-but..."

I was the one who felt bad for her this time, she had to give up her meal for me. But I had to swallow my protest down when K. Wine shot me a glare.

"Know your limits when you're feeling unwell. I told you to throw those clams in the freezer away."

Okay, her glare was not the only thing she shot at me, a lot of snapping was there too.

"In my defense, the weird smell was gone after I stir-fried it with chili paste."

"Was it worth it now that you have a stomach ache like this?"

"...."

I kept my mouth shut and quietly ate the meal because I could not argue with her in time.

"Here, the pills..."

Vetaka handed me a few black capsules.

"....."

"I could tell that your stomach will probably hurt today."

I accepted the activated charcoal or carbon pills from K. Wine's hand.

"Thank you."

It made my heart feel warm and fluffy when Vetaka took care of me. We might not be that close but she was not too mean to me, right?

"It's just because you're my partner for the day."

Vetaka said matter-of-factly and started eating the *pad krapao*.

To make it easier to arrange, the HR team announced that the people who sat with each other on the bus would be paired up as a team throughout the activity.

"I will fight for our little sapling!"

Even though I did give myself a proper pep talk, the moment I stepped out of the bus and met the heat and the dry land in front of me, I immediately wanted to give up.

I wanna go home, I wanna get cozy under my blanket.

"P' Lal, you look like you're praying for the land."

Noomnim teased me when she walked past me to get the saplings from where they were provided.

I pray for myself, Nim...I pray that I'll survive this activity.

I fixed my cap and headed to the plot where Vetaka and I would plant our trees. I felt like passing out the moment I saw the sapling in K. Wine's hand even though I had not started yet. I took a deep breath, trying to gain some courage and tried to dig a hole in the ground where I wanted. The soil was very hard...so hard that it nearly broke the shovel.

"You have to water the soil first to make it softer."

Vetaka grumbled idly before she repeatedly watered the soil with a watering can until the dry, cracking soil looked more moist,

"There, try to dig it again, Khun Lal."

This time, I could dig a hole easier. Before long, the two of us finished preparing the soil for the sapling. K. Wine and I carefully carried a sapling.

"You..."

Vetaka uttered when my hands cradled hers.

"I'm helping you carry the tree so the soil won't drop,"

I told her my excuse that instant. Vetaka did not say anything. After we placed the sapling in the hole, Vetaka hurriedly grabbed a long stick to support the sapling as I backfilled the hole with soil.

The last step was tying the sapling to the stick with a straw rope to prevent the tree from being blown away by the wind. By the time we were done, K. Wine and I were soaked with sweat like we just came out of the shower without drying ourselves.

"I'm so tired already after planting one tree."

I took out my phone to take a picture of the little sapling. Then the chattering sound from the next planting plot caught our attention.

"Other companies are here too."

I watched the group of people wearing white polo shirts that just arrived here. Strangely enough, K. Wine suddenly moved to stay behind my back.

"K. Wine...what's wrong?"

I asked Vetaka with concern. She was trembling like she was afraid of something. Her hand clung to my hand, she must have not realized it.

"I saw someone I know, someone I'm not close with."

Vetaka had always been a bad liar so she tended to withhold some information instead. I could feel Vetaka's whole body trembling so I squeezed her hand and held it firmly.

It was then that P' Jantra announced on the microphone that it was time for everyone to go back to the assembly area so they could get on the bus and head back to Bangkok.

"Let's go, K. Wine,"

I told Vetaka, who still looked clearly frightened, her eyes darted back to that group of people.

"!!!"

Vetaka flinched when I put my cap on her head. Her head was much smaller than the large cap so it concealed most of her face.

"Let's go, grab my hand so you won't trip."

"Hm."

Vetaka quickly followed my lead. I wondered as I took the petite woman to the assembly point, who could make K. Wine, who never backed down for anyone, shake like a baby bird like that?

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Of course, if Vetaka did not want to tell me, there was nothing I could do to get her talking no matter how much I wanted to know. So changing the subject was probably the best solution right now...

"So tired. But it's kinda fulfilling right?"

I tried to make a conversation with the petite woman to lighten up the mood.

"It's...not bad, I suppose."

I was relieved when Vetaka allowed this conversation between us.

"You know...should we come back here again?"

I looked at the picture of the sapling. It was tied with a bow that had my name and Vetaka's on it. I asked the person beside me eagerly, I was so excited just thinking about it. I wanted to see how our tree had grown by the time we got back.

A year from now, I think the tree that we grew must be so beautiful and grand...

"No need to do that,"

Vetaka said impassively. I turned to look at her, failing to understand what she meant.

"....."

"Don't look at me like that...I'm telling you that that tree won't last for you to watch it grow."

"What? Why not?"

"Just look at the plot and the weather,"

Vetaka gestured for me to come closer to watch the view outside by the window together. I was being so awkward about it that the woman decided to pull me closer to sit on the same seat.

"Hold "

"We planted so many trees here, have you ever wondered who will water and take care of them after we leave?" Vetaka continued. Though, I wasn't exactly focusing on that at the moment since her breasts were pressing against my upper arm!

"...."

"And we have no idea if the saplings that they prepared for us could grow in the soil here or not. Those trees won't last a week."

"What a shame,"

I uttered as I retreated to my own seat. After that, silence engulfed between us and yes.... still couldn't forget the soft touch that I felt earlier. We slept together regularly but I never grew tired of it, in fact, I craved it even more. I sent a sticker via LINE and waited for Vetaka to notice the text.

It was funny that we had to text each other via LINE even though we were sitting so close to each other.

Sent Sticker: Lullaby

Wine: Sent Sticker

I frowned when Vetaka sent me a sticker of a tiger gesturing a clear no.

Wine: I'm already tired from planting the tree.

Wine: You are not feeling well either right?

I let out a soft sigh and sent her an OK sticker.

Wine: I'm free tomorrow.

Wine: If you feel better by then, that is.

The texts she sent me made me turn to look at my side and find that Vetaka was already asleep. The woman turned to face the window to end the conversation.

But Khun Wine, your ears are bright red...

Fine, I would stop bothering her when she pretended to sleep, it wouldn't be worth the trouble of getting smacked anyway. I should just use this opportunity to rest and recover. After that, the cold air and the exhaustion from leftover fever and using physical labor lured me into slumber before I knew it.

This time my dream was wrapped with the smell of strawberry yogurt, it was so comforting that I never wanted to wake up at all...

□□□□□□

□17.OUR Tree□

Monotony of life could take away one's liveliness, therefore, people craved something new to spice up their lives from time to time. And if you were an office worker with a fixed work schedule, chances were you would have to face this unsolvable dilemma.

What should I get for lunch?

I aimlessly strolled to the market near the office building. I intended to shop around and grab lunch to eat at my desk. The day market was considered an excellent place for leisure, it was like a paradise for white collar workers. That was what I thought still, I had to be mindful at all times. Because if I spent money carelessly, those gray banknotes could easily slip out of my wallet in this market...

"Check these out our plants, they are all affordable, beautiful, and auspicious too."

And what caught my attention at this moment was a small florist shop that seemed to be specialized in indoor plants because there were only small potted plants that could fit in the palm of my hand lined up everywhere in the shop.

"Hey gorgeous, are you interested in some plants to decorate your desk?"

The owner of the shop called out to me. Since the Auntie had complimented me on how beautiful I was, I had no choice but to check out the plants.

I guess I am still not over with the reforestation activity from last week, that would explain why these plants caught my interest...

I mused to myself amusingly as I casually scanned through the decorative plants. Then, a small bamboo plant strangely caught my eyes...

"Oh, that's Guanyin bamboo. It's easy to take care of and said to be bringing good luck too. If you want one, I can give you a special discount on the plant, dear."

When she saw that I was interested, the owner of the shop immediately explained the plant's traits to me.

By then, I was already smitten by this cute little bamboo. The plant was not pricey and it looked like a perfect addition to my desk. I could just buy it here and now, although...

"Can you keep it for me, Auntie? I have to go buy something first, I'll come back and get it in a bit."

I told the old lady who owned the shop. This florist shop was located right in front of the market entrance, so coming back to get it after I was done shopping would be ideal. This way, I would not have to carry it around the market.

"Of course, dear. This one, right?"

"Here, I'll come back to pick it up later."

I gave the old lady the money and left the little bamboo in her care.

After a short while, I returned to the florist shop. But the table where the plant in the plastic bag used to be was empty. My tiny little bamboo was..gone. Where did that outstanding bamboo in a white pot go?

"Auntie, where's my plant?"

I asked not-so-quietly. The old lady who was busy serving other customers immediately turned to me. She seemed surprised to find that the table was empty with no sign of the plant.

"O... Oh, I thought I'd already put it aside for you..."

The old lady looked concerned. She tried to find the bamboo pot. As I watched her, I mentally prepared myself that the little bamboo I was smitten with might not make it home to my desk.

"I'm very sorry, hon. I must have switched the plant with the other customer's order just now. I'm so sorry."

In the end, the old lady returned the money that came with a long apology that made me unable to stay mad at her. Oh well, mistakes happened. It was a shame to go back empty-handed, though, and here I already planned out where I wanted to put it on the desk.

Sigh...

I decided that I would stop by the auntie's shop again next week in case a new bamboo tree that I like just like that one would arrive. Now that I thought about it, I was kinda pissed off at that customer.....

I don't care how hurried you are, you can't just take someone else's stuff, okay!?

I was hoping to get a plant to calm my mind, but then someone took it away. And the newbie, who I expected to lift up my burden when he arrived, started to give off a bad sign.

"New, what are you doing!?"

Because I was not particularly in a good mood, my voice came out harsher than usual when I greeted him.

"Oh, P' Lal! Hehe, I mean I have nothing to do, so....."

New flinched and turned to look at me, he looked sheepish. The young salesman was caught red handed with a fighting game displayed on the phone in his hands.

"So you decided to play a game instead?"

"I've finished all the work you assigned, miss."

New kept arguing that he wasn't in the wrong for doing what he did. That pissed me off even more.

"And you are certain you did it right?"

I looked at my stubborn subordinate sternly. New paled now that he witnessed my wrath mode. The young man hastily logged out of the game to recheck his assignment.

"I guess I could check it again..."

"If I find any mistake, we'll see how it goes,"

I threatened him again before I walked away to deliver some documents to the Accounting Department. I gently massaged my temples as I walked. The burdens from the workload and the new salesman that I had to take care of gave me a nasty headache...

"Khun Wine, I brought you the travel expense receipts."

I handed the documents to the petite woman. I was about to head back to my department after the woman accepted my files.

"Khun Lal, wait..."

"Yes?"

I turned to Vetaka who looked oddly unsure. The petite woman looked around the department, which was empty at the moment, cautiously before she handed me a brown paper bag.

"This is for you."

"Um..."

"Take it. I assure you it's not a bomb."

And because K. Wine suddenly looked scarier, I had no choice but to accept the mysterious bag from her.

I was still puzzled but it was not like Khun Wine would actually give me a bomb. Maybe I left something at her place and forgot? But if that was the case, why would she return it to me here?

Could it be that... Khun Wine doesn't want to have me over at her place anymore?

While my thoughts were scattered in different directions, a notification from the LINE application popped up. When I opened the app, I found that the woman who had just given me the mysterious bag had sent me a message.

Wine: You can take care of this one instead.

I didn't really understand Vetaka's message, so I opened the paper bag. My eyes widened with surprise.

That's my little bamboo in a white tiny pot...

When I finally caught up with what was happening, I chuckled softly, finding the whole situation slightly hard to believe. It turned out that the customer who accidentally bought my potted plant back then was K. Wine. And she actually bought it for me...

"What are you smiling about, P' Lal?"

"Nothing."

I quickly stopped smiling and tried to calm down my expression when Noomnim commented on it. Still, my chest felt like it was full of happiness. I did not know what K. Wine was thinking, but I would gladly accept the bamboo.

Love u : Lullaby

Love it*: Lullaby

Guanyin bamboo, also known as Lucky Bamboo, was an auspicious

ornamental plant. It was known to bring good fortune to its owner and it was very easy to take care of.

Water it timely... Change the water every two weeks. So... Where did I go wrong?

"P' Lal, doesn't the little bamboo's color look a bit off?"

Noomnim asked with concern while she turned in her work to me.

"So the color really is strange, right?"

I asked Noomnim again just to make sure of what I was seeing.

"P' Lal, your little baby bamboo has turned yellow... I think it's about to rest in peace."

"No, that's silly... I don't think it's that... bad."

I was about to argue with my chatty subordinate, but I only stutter when I saw that my little bamboo baby look just as bad as Noomnim said. Its leaves were starting to turn yellow, its trunk was too.

"This is the first time I see someone fail at keeping Guanyin Bamboo alive. You're amazing."

Noomnim's words made me even more worried. If I had bought this bamboo myself like I originally planned, I would just feel bad that I couldn't keep it alive for 2 weeks before it had to return to Mother Nature.

But this was something that K. Wine had given me!

How can I face her now that her gift is dead under my care? If I told her the truth, Khun Wine would definitely be angry at me and she would probably refuse to meet me this Saturday..

"You wanna deliver the documents to K. Wine, Nim?"

I was confident that I was good at thinking on my feet with ease, but whenever I was in front of K. Wine, it was like my survival skills were futile against that petite woman.

"No way. What if K. Wine asks me something that I don't have the answer for?"

Noomnim waved her hand in all of her seriousness to reject me when I asked her a favor.

"Not even for a free bubble tea?"

"Don't try to tempt me with bubble tea, it won't work."

"Even if it's from the Fire Snow Leopard shop?"

"Ugh! Extra boba, and extra puddings!"

"I'll even upgrade the size for you!"

"I'll risk my life for it!"

Noomnim grabbed the documents from my hand and rushed to the Accounting Department immediately. There she went, my subordinate who could be bought with bubble tea... In the end, I managed to avoid Khun Wine for another day...

But no matter how hard I try to avoid her, we did work for the same company and with each other. It was inevitable for us to meet. If we had to see each other anyway, could it happen in a meeting room or in the office, please?

It's way too cruel to put me alone in an elevator with her like this!

Today, I planned to put my little bamboo baby in the sun a bit, as I was suggested by Google. That was why I came to the company early in the morning. I was the only one who occupied the elevator. But after a while, I suddenly had another companion.

"!."

A familiar figure that I had been trying to avoid for the past few days stepped into the elevator. I felt the guilt that trailed behind me so I brought myself close to the elevator wall as possible and tried to pay attention to the lined up buttons so I could avoid having any conversation with her.

Speaking of which, the elevator buttons in our building are quite pretty, though...

But our company is located on the 35th floor, so it took for what felt like forever to reach the destination. I felt a shiver run down my spine as if Vetaka's eyes were boring into me.

"Do you have a problem with me?"

The petite woman asked, she looked mildly irritated,

"I have a feeling that you're avoiding me."

"I'm not avoiding you. You're imagini..."

I was about to deny it but then I had to swallow my words down when my eyes met her large, round eyes underneath the thick glasses that were narrowing at me.

"I think I've told you before. I don't like liars."

"I..."

I hesitated for a moment before I let out a deep breath,

"If I tell you, promise you won't be mad?"

I uttered quietly.

Vetaka didn't say anything. She simply looked at me flatly, waiting for me to continue. It was at that moment when the elevator stopped at the 35th

floor.

"You should see for yourself, Khun Wine."

I told her weakly and led the woman to my desk. When we reached the crime scene, I gestured at the Guanyin Bamboo that was in a bad shape with a guilty expression.

Vetaka stared at the bamboo calmly before looking down at the pitiful condition of the plant, it looked so weak and fragile. She then turned to me.

"...So the reason you're acting strange is because,"

"I'm sorry, I tried to give it the best care I can offer."

I quickly confessed my mistake and unexpectedly, the petite woman simply picked up the bamboo. She did not show any sign of being upset.

"I'll try salvaging it. But I can't guarantee you that it will survive."

K. Wine regarded the bamboo in her hand, which made me feel even more surprised.

"You're not mad?"

"Just come to my desk if you want to visit this little thing."

Was that my imagination or did the corner of Vetaka's mouth just twitch into a smile,

"You're so weird."

Then she turned around and walked away from my desk, leaving me alone. I mumbled softly.

"Little bamboo, you better behave with Khun Wine, okay?"

It was like a miracle because in less than a week later, the bamboo seemed more lively under Vetaka's care, there was barely any trace of its withered

self left.

"Sigh... I hate it. I hate the REJECTED stamp so much."

Bas grumbled as the young man walked back from the Accounting Department, carrying a pile of rejected documents to his desk, looking irritated. He sighed in annoyance for a while before he took out the client's quotation from a new project and handed it over to me for approval.

While I was reading through the details, Bas noted as if he just remembered something.

"P' Lal... I think that bamboo on Khun Wine's desk looks kinda familiar."

"It looks like yours, P' Lal."

Rip!

"P' Lal! My quotation!"

Bas cried out when I accidentally pressed the pen too hard, causing the paper I was signing to tear into long stripes.

"Ah, my hand slipped. Bas, go print a new copy for me."

I quickly waved my hand to chase Bas, who was groaning to reprint the documents, away. By the time the young man came back with a new set of documents, I already gathered my thoughts back to normal.

"You're imagining things, Bas. Guanyin Bamboo looks the same in every shop. I just found out from you that she has it as well."

I responded to him smoothly.

"So the little baby tree on your desk...already went to heaven, I take it?"

"Stop rubbing salt in my wound, Bas."

It was obviously not going to make it.
I had no idea how that woman nourished it back to health, it looked so vibrant and green nowadays.

"How did you manage to let it die, though? I actually don't understand, P'Lal."

If I knew, I would have told my subordinate already. Just how did the little bamboo nearly wither?

"I will start hitting you if you don't stop talking about this, Bas."

I threatened the curious young man. Bas gave up without much thought.

"If only you and Khun Wine are close, I would assume that she cared so much about you, she nurtured the plant back to life."

Bas took the document with my signature back. But he couldn't not help himself but to voice out his thoughts.

"Well, sorry that I'm not close to her."

"Oh, I'm just joking. You and Khun Wine become close friends?... I think it will snow in Thailand first."

I pondered on what Bas said after he returned to his desk. I shook my head at my thoughts.

The two of us weren't that close. Khun Wine probably did not want to see the plant she bought withered and that was it...

□□□□□□

□18.Broken□

"With great power comes great responsibility" was not a quote from a superhero movie, it was my life right now.

The boss had to take responsibility for their subordinate's mistake..

"I apologize, Miss."

[I can't help you with this, the Accounting Department already submitted it into the system.]

"But it's only been a day. And the documents are..."

I tried my best to negotiate with the person on the other end of the line.

[No can do, Khun Lal, sorry. The price will have to stick with this for this period.]

Feeling troubled, I looked at the phone after the call ended. I glanced at the culprit who was responsible for this huge mess and my mood worsened.

New had sent a quotation to the client without having my signature to verify it. Naturally, the price was wrong. But that wasn't the worst part the client already put New's quotation into their price system and refused to accept the correct price.

Well, the price that New sent to them by mistake was almost half the normal price so it wasn't surprising. Those damn sneaky opportunists...

"Why didn't you let me check the quotation first? How can you just send it without my authorized signature?"

I looked at New, who was standing with his hands clasped and his head low.

"You weren't in the office that day, P' Lal."

"...."

"I really thought I got it right... I don't expect it to go wrong. My old company used this exact formula."

"Do you realize how much the damage will cost us from this point?"

I stared at him, feeling exhausted. He had experience from his previous company but he still managed to make the same mistakes repeatedly. And this time, he went and made an arbitrary decision on his own.

"Well, Nim didn't object anything so I thought I could just send it."

"New"

I looked at the young man in the eye as he tried to put the blame on Nim,

"Be honest with me, New, do you even realize that this is your fault?"

"I..I mean, I did try my best. Come on, it was just a minor mistake."

"A minor mistake? How can you say it was just a minor mistake?"

I tried not raise my voice at the man in front of me.

"Hey, I just worked here for less than 2 months. I.. Fine, I'm sorry, okay?"

Even his apology felt reluctant like he just said it halfheartedly. But I didn't want to argue with him anymore.

"Go finish your work, New,"

I waved my hand, dismissing him back to his desk.

Oh boy, my head hurts..

The phone rang again and what I heard on the phone made me want to bang my head on the table to knock myself out and never have to acknowledge any more problems again. After I hung up, I immediately connected the phone to Noomnim's desk number.

"Noomnim... Come see me at my desk."

"P'Lal..."

Noomnim seemed to have an idea of why I called her here.

"Last month, you issued a wrong invoice."

I opened the email that the customer had complained to me about and showed it to her,

"This isn't a mistake you would make, and there's also that mess with New. You have been working long before him, you should know the process better than this. Why did you let New send the quotation to the client without my approval?"

"...I'm sorry, P' Lal,"

Noomnim apologized quietly when I scolded her.

"Never mind. It's my fault for expecting you to be more reliable than this."

I cut her off when I felt all these apologies started to get on my nerves.

"C-Can I help you fix this in any way?"

"Just do your job well. And don't cause me more headaches, please."

I told her. I searched for the email to use as reference and ignored the girl entirely.

Finally, I was able to fix the problem with Noomnim's client. But New's case...was a tough job. I tried talking to their Accounting Department directly, but even they refused to budge at all.

No way I could accept that price for the whole three months. We would lose at least a hundred million baht from the cost. The more I thought about it, the more hopeless I felt. So I decided to get a glass of water from the pantry.

I should take a break... I'm almost at my limit now..

After I filled my glass, I sat on the couch for a while to take a break. I closed my eyes and raised a hand to lightly massage between my eyebrows, trying to lessen the tension. Then, I felt the spot next to me on the sofa dipped.

"Here... For you..."

A familiar voice came. I opened my eyes and found a delicate hand holding a plastic cup right in front of me.

"Thank you."

"It's buy 1 get 1 free. I don't know who else to give the free one to."

Vetaka stopped me before I could protest. I could only accept the cup without saying a word.

I'm so drained I could barely move..

But then after I took a sip, I was surprised,

"It's cocoa."

"I think you should cut down on coffee. You had one in the morning, and another in the afternoon."

"Aren't you busy with work?"

I asked the woman who came to slack off in the pantry with me. It was kinda out of Vetaka's character.

"I am..but my department is occupied at the moment."

Vetaka told me while she was sipping on the iced Thai tea in her hand.

"The girl from your department is crying in my department right now."

Noomnim... I said some harsh things to her a moment ago. I just vented out on someone who didn't even know what was going on.

"Well.. I don't know what happened in your department, but this doesn't seem like the K. Lal I know."

"...."

"You told me yourself, 'always be kind and empathize with your subordinates'."

Since we were intimate in bed, I could get a vague sense of Vetaka's mood. One time, I coaxed her into telling me what was bothering her and the stubborn woman gave in. She had concerns about her relationship with her subordinate, Tangkwa, who was terrified of Vetaka a little too much.

I advised her to use a softer tone when talking to Tangkwa and try to be more patient.

"But, sometimes, it's faster if I do it myself."

Vetaka frowned at my advice.

"But then Tangkwa won't learn anything, right? Sometimes, you have to let go about work, Khun Wine."

"But she might make a mistake..."

"We just have to guide them so they won't make the same mistake."

I turned to look at the other woman, who was frowning. I flashed a patient smile.

"It won't do if the boss doesn't trust their subordinates. They put their trust in us, so we just have to trust them in return too."

Vetaka was quiet for a moment. Then, she spoke with a soft smile on her lips.

"You're always full of surprises."

"I'll take that as a compliment,"

I pulled the woman into my embrace and smirked,

"Now, it's time for me to collect the consultation fee."

"*Sigh...* You're so..."

Vetaka obliged despite her verbal complaint.

The result from my advice that day was a great success. There was even a rumor going around the company that Vetaka accidentally fell and hit her head and that was why she wasn't as scarily aggressive as before and seemed calmer than ever.

Well, *I* was the one who did the hitting....they should all give me a reward or something....

Even though I gave Khun Wine that amazing piece of advice, and I did promise myself that I would be a good boss, I made a huge mistake today...

"So many problems keep coming at me, I don't know what to do anymore,"

I told her about the issues I've faced and sighed tiredly.

"It wasn't my intention to take it out on Noomnim... But then I... *sigh...*"

"Why don't you bring all the documents on that matter and the client's number to me later,"

Vetaka turned to me with an expression so determined that it surprised me.

"Khun Wine, are you helping me?"

No way. The Khun Wine?

"It's about the company's benefit, you don't have to give me that puppy. sparkling eyes. Besides, it's only fair to send our accountant to fight with theirs."

I swore I saw Vetaka's eyes gleaming. I suddenly felt sorry for the client's Accounting Department a moment there.

And Khun Wine really didn't disappoint me with the results. Not long after she made the call, I received a call from Vetaka asking me to send her the correct quotation so she could send it to the client herself.

Oh, the power of the almighty Accounting Manager. Honestly, I was aware that the document New sent to them was not valid because it did not have my signature on it. But the client sneakily claimed that the price was already put in the system and therefore could not be edited. It took Vetaka exerting her terrifying skill for the client to back down. Even though the work problem had been resolved, there was still the staff problem.

"Here's my work, P' Lal."

"Noomnim..."

I looked up at Noomnim, who seemed to have a different air around her today. But that was not surprising considering that I was the one who scolded her so harshly yesterday.

"I'm sorry, P" Lal. I'll be more careful from now on. Please believe me?"

Before I could say anything, Noomnim started speaking. The young woman, who usually had a smile on her face, looked so crestfallen that I felt angry at myself for making the girl like this.

"I'm not angry anymore, but Nim, you have to be more careful next time, okay?"

I tried to provide my subordinate some comfort,

"I had a lot on my plate yesterday so I might have said something too harsh..."

"No, no, it's fine, it was really my fault there. I just felt bad, I felt bad at myself for making... a mistake."

"Oh dear, don't cry so easily. Hold it, there, there."

I hastily said when Noomnim looked like she was about to cry again.

"You were so soared when you scolded me, P' Lal. I almost had a heart attack back then."

"You have to be more thorough, alright? Not just for me, but for your own sake."

"I understand, Oh, I can't, P Lal. I'm about to cry."

I patted my subordinate's head to comfort this crybaby. I thanked the petite woman internally for giving me my wake-up call just in time. Otherwise, I might have lost my lovely subordinate for good.

Thank you, Khun Wine, really.

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Since all the problems were resolved peacefully, I decided to buy some snacks for the woman who helped me to show my gratitude. Then again, I suppose unexpected events could happen all the time.

Wine:

Khun Lal,

Wine:

I'll have to cancel our plan for today.

Wine:

Something urgent came up.

I blinked as I stared at the texts she sent me.

This was the first time our plan was canceled so abruptly.

Even though Vetaka texted me almost half an hour before the time, it was still too late because I was already in her apartment's parking lot in my car right now...

I mean, I always arrive early whenever I have to meet with a client, so it seems appropriate to give Khun Wine the same courtesy..

Did something happen to her?...

I paused when I was typing the question in the LINE application.

Do I have the right to ask, though?

But well, since I was already here, I decided to give her the snacks anyway. The two of us met quite often so I had her spare key card and naturally. Vetaka also had mine. That way, I wouldn't have to waste time going to the lobby to pick her up every single time.

As I was heading to Vetaka's room, I couldn't help but feel anxious....

Because... what if Khun Wine has someone else over in her room?

"And how exactly will you take responsibility for this?!"

But then a familiar voice echoed through the hallway. It made me shake off my absurd thoughts and quicken my pace.

I saw the door of Vetaka's room open wide, there were three people that I didn't recognize inside the room. That made me decide to walk over to ask about the situation.

"What happened?"

Vetaka gave me an apologetic look when she noticed me. But what made me widen my eyes from surprise was Khun Wine's room wall. It had... a

large hole in it, I could practically see the room next to me from here.

"It was an accident. We really didn't mean to. It slipped out of my hands..."

"Does your apology fix my wall back to its normal state?"

Vetaka argued, she did not hold anything back at all. She and the person who acted as the mediator both looked sheepish.

Judging from the situation, this couple must be the neighbors who were moving in and an accident probably happened during the move.

Bewildered, I looked at the scene where the incident took place. If that enormous wardrobe fell down while Vetaka and I were doing...thank goodness, it fell down before.

"The Condominium Juristic Person will pay for the compensation and repair the wall for you, free of charge, Miss."

The young juristic person's face paled as he tried to calm her down.

"How long will the repair take?"

"Um... it should be about a month."

"A month? Are you crazy? That long?"

Vetaka immediately shouted when she found out how long the repair would take.

"Come on, it's an accident, it happens."

I tried to calm the petite woman down because the couple in front of me already cowered at this tiger's wrath. And the juristic person practically trembled with fear.

"Easy for you to say, if it takes a month to fix the wall, then where am I supposed to stay?"

This time, Vetaka turned and snarled at me instead. But I had grown accustomed to being threatened by this ferocious tiger all the time. So I had experience on how to handle her.

I considered it for a moment. Then I offered her a solution with a smile.

"Come stay with me."

"What?"

The petite woman stared at me in disbelief instead.

"You can stay with me for the time being, K. Wine. It's just for a month, isn't it? So, it settles then?"

Just like that, the broken wall problem was solved peacefully... I knew that Vetaka desperately wanted to decline my offer, but the woman could not. If she stayed at K. Cheese's house, she would have to impose on the bakery as well. And if she rented a hotel... the insurance wouldn't be able to cover the full compensation.

"I really don't want to trouble you..."

Even after Vetaka carried all her necessary belongings to my place, she still went on non-stop about not wanting to take advantage of me. I honestly did not know what to do with this side of her.

"Chores then...how about you help me with the chores?"

I suggested and Vetaka seemed to consider it.

"It's okay, my place is spacious. You can iron the clothes if you feel uncomfortable just staying at my place for free."

Vetaka agreed in the end. The woman was already familiar with my apartment, so there was no need to show her around. I simply arranged some space for the petite woman to put her belongings.

"You can put your toothbrush in this cup, Khun Wine."

Upon my permission, Vetaka arranged her personal supplies next to mine. That pulled my attention to the other woman's toothbrush, it looked so small like a child's toothbrush.

"What are you looking at?"

Annoyed, Vetaka asked me when she noticed my fond gaze.

"Nothing, just.."

I drawled, teasing the other girl.

"Your toothbrush is so tiny. Khun Wine. Like a child's."

"Hey!"

"Khun Wine, everything about you is so baby-size: your hands, your mouth, and your figure."

I giggled when I saw Vetaka's face flushed deep red from being teased. Still, the woman did not say a thing even when her face was red enough to explode from outrage. Vetaka continued to organize her belongings in the bathroom and walked out when she was done.

"You still moan on all my baby-size body parts though. Every. Single. Time."

Baffled, I watched her disappear into the bedroom. After a while, my jaw dropped at that innuendo.

And that night, I understood intimately what the word "pocket rocket" meant..

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□19.Surprise (Vetaka)□

Attachment was far more dangerous than falling in love. I was certain that I got annoyed easily and that I did not appreciate people barging in my private life. I did not know when it happened but... had grown used to having her by my side.

Although I had tried not to get too close to Lallalin more than I should, I kept finding myself meddling and helping the taller woman lately. I always cursed at myself afterward for never learning my lesson when it came to this matter.

Always be acquainted with colleagues, don't ever get close to any of them.

No one was sincere in the workplace...

But because of that unexpected incident that I never thought I'd experience in my life, I had to live with Lallalin temporarily. I tried to decline the offer, but she somehow managed to talk me into this. By the time I knew it, it had been more than a week already...

They got along surprisingly well. Perhaps... living with Lallalin wasn't so bad after all...

Rrrr

The vibrated sound woke me up in a daze. I realized that there was an incoming call on Lallalin's smartphone. But because today was Saturday, the woman beside me decided to sleep in, her unblemished face was buried in the pillow. I felt a sense of fondness at the sight. At the same time, I felt bad for the caramel blonde woman, she had a lot on her plate lately whether it was about work or about her subordinates.

I looked at Lallalin's phone, the girl was still sleeping soundly even though her phone was vibrating aggressively. Such a sleepyhead.

They called three times already. Maybe it was an important matter?...

Beep

The sound of the doorbell startled me. But the sleeping woman did not even stir. Could Lallalin even escape in time if there was a fire? I was starting to be concerned...

I got out of bed and walked to the front door. I tried to peek through the peephole and saw a tall man typing on his phone with an irritated expression. Then Lallalin's phone, which I carried with me, vibrated.

It must be someone she knows. I wonder if it's alright to let him in....

The doorbell rang again, followed by a series of notifications from various applications. So I decided to take the liberty to unlock Lallalin's phone. Sometimes, I would stay over at Lallalin's place after we hooked up if I felt too tired to go back. That was how I learned that the taller woman got especially cranky if she woke up early on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

And if something came up that would disturb her sleep, the woman would just ignore it altogether. Or she would let me, who was a light sleeper, take care of it. That was how I knew Lallalin's phone passcode.

After unlocking her phone, so many texts kept popping up with no sign of stopping soon. The messages was something along the line of:

*Are you dead? Girl, my muscles are aching. Open the door, will you? Still want these souvenirs, girl? Do I need to call the police? Did you die in your sleep or sth?' Etc...

I guess the man who was left standing out there alone was that sleepyhead's friend. When I tried looking through the peephole again, I found that he did

have several bags on the floor beside him. So I decided to open the door to let this stranger in.

"Surprise!!! Damn, I thought you died in your... sleep."

As soon as I opened the door, the man, whom I noted that was very good-looking too, cried out with joy and excitement. But then he paused when he saw me instead of the woman who was the owner of this place.

"Oh... Sorry. I might have knocked on the wrong door."

"Mr., wait..."

Before I could say anything, the man was already walking away. And in less than five seconds, he turned back to me, he seemed to be freaking out.

"It's the right room number. Who are you! Where's Lal?!"

"....."

"Khun Wine? What's up with that noise....Phoom, you bitch!"

The real owner of the apartment drowsily walked out of her bedroom when she heard the yelling. Lallalin seemed surprised to see the man because she pointed her finger at him and cried out.

"Lal, you little shit!!! You... You're really hiding your beau here."

And the man pointed at Lalalin and started yelling and screaming as well.

Hold on... Who's hiding their beau again? ...

"God, no! Christ, how did you get here?"

I felt confused as I watched Lallalin's face blushed a deep shade of red when she approached the man, looking irritated and frustrated. And then it was my turn to blush after I finished processing the man's words.

The said beau... does he mean me?

But now, what was interesting was how did this man come all the way up to Lallalin's room? The woman's condominium had an excellent security system. It was impossible to come up to the resident's room without a keycard to tap on the door and the elevator...

"I called and texted you through both LINE and Messenger, but you didn't respond, like you died or something. And the souvenirs I brought for you were heavy, yeah? So I followed this person into the elevator. I was planning to get out on a few floors closer to yours and used the fire escape afterward. But damn! I was so lucky. There was this one person who pressed your floor button. Then I stood there in front of your room, ringing the doorbell for god knows how long until this lady opened the door and let me in."

The man puffed up with pride as he rapidly answered Lallalin's question.

"Damn, Phoom...you're something there."

Feeling amazed, Lallalin exclaimed after she heard the man's story. To be honest, I was too.

"Let's just say people in the society find me trustworthy."

"You're a danger to them, though."

Lallalin threw him a harsh remark before gesturing at me in an awkward manner.

"This is Khun Wine, my colleague from the Accounting Department."

"Oh... Khun Wine. That Khun Wine, I take it?"

The man turned to me and smirked.

"Nice to meet you Khun Wine. I'm Pakphoom, Lal's boyfriend."

"Jerk!"

"Ooh, that stern voice. I'm kidding, sorry, I'm Lal's best friend."

The man giggled, pleased with himself that he made Lallalin whine.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Wine."

I introduced myself to him and reluctantly added.

"Something happened so I had to stay with K. Lal for a while.

"I see. She never mentioned that to me before..."

I saw Pakphoom shoot the taller woman a glare. Lallalin pretended not to notice it.

"But that's for another time, I think I better be on my way now."

"You should stay. You've been waiting for some time."

I tried to make him stay, but Pakphoom simply shook his head and smiled.

"Nah, I don't want to impose Lal's time. I did come here unannounced so.'

Pakphoom offered me a polite smile.

"But I'll have you booked for tomorrow!"

And he turned to point a finger at Lallalin accusingly.

"Wait..."

"I'll have to borrow Lal for a bit tomorrow. Hope you won't mind, Khun Wine?"

Pakphoom turned to me to ask for my permission before Lallalin could object. The man's gentle smile and words persuaded me to nod along.

"You're the best, Khun Wine. You're so adorable. Lal, see you at our regular place tomorrow afternoon, yes? If you bail...don't say I didn't warn you,

Lal."

Pakphoom threatened Lallalin before waving goodbye to me in a friendly manner.

"Good day, Khun Wine. Lovely to meet you."

"Good day."

Then the door closed. Pakphoom, Lallalin's best friend came and left as swiftly as a storm, leaving Lallalin and I there looking at each other blankly, both still very much confused by the whole thing.

"Um..."

"That's Phoom, he's a friend of mine. Not a boyfriend like he claimed to be."

Lallalin looked so serious that it made me almost smile. She seemed to be fixated on what that man said when he teased about their relationship.

Honestly, I could just tell by looking at them. They kept bickering, practically fighting tooth and nail with each other...really, she concerned herself with the most absurd things.

"I know. Your friend is really... something."

That was one way to put it.

"Let's... go back to bed? It's still early."

Lallalin, who still looked a little tired, invited me. I was about to decline the offer since I was already wide awake from that confusing situation earlier. But then I met Lallalin's puppy eyes and strangely, I couldn't find it in myself to refuse.

"...Let's."

It was Saturday so sleeping in for a bit wouldn't hurt...

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(Lallalin)

"Just ask what you want to know. I can't eat with you staring like this."

I looked at my best friend and told him after I had enough. In the end, I met up with Pakphoom at the restaurant and left Vetaka alone in my room. The woman insisted that it was fine and that she was really okay with me hanging out with my best friend.

Still, I think I should hurry back... I'm worried... I'm worried about my apartment. What if that petite woman doesn't know how to adjust the iron's temperature and burns a hole in my favorite shirt?

"You're slick, you know? Next thing I know, you already smuggled her inside your house."

"I did not smuggle her. There's a problem with her place, so I let her stay with me temporarily."

Pakphoom nodded with that annoying gesture and continued to ask more questions out of curiosity.

He's too nosy to let this kind of entertainment go!

"Since when did you two end up like this?"

"What are you whining about?"

"Oh please, that Friends with Benefits thing that you asked for my advice back then... was about Khun Wine, was it? You keep telling me you don't have feelings for her at all. Look where that got you...so what? You enjoyed her so much that you decided to move in with her now?"

"Cough."

I choked on the *unagi* with rice in my mouth, and the eel nearly stuck in my airway.

"So you knew?"

"You weren't subtle, Lal. You're terrible at lying. I just didn't want to out you back then."

Pakphoom said and gave me a smug smile.

"So... you have feelings for her or what?"

"Are you nuts?...No, I don't have feelings for her."

I almost cried out when my best friend cornered me.

"For real? Not even a little bit?"

Pakphoom looked like he did not buy it.

"For real. Not even that..."

I stood by my word. It was true that I liked...no...I meant, I felt comfortable when I had Vetaka close to me. But my heart never skipped for that petite woman, well, I meant it did sometimes but it wasn't like that, like...my heart didn't skip and I didn't feel butterflies in my stomach for her every time.

"Look, this is just me sticking my nose into your business, but we've been friends for a long time. You value your personal space more than anything. You never allow me into your bedroom but you let her share your bed, Lal."

Pakphoom looked so certain of his hypothesis.

"You have feelings for her for sure."

"I only have one bed, okay?"

I quickly dismissed my best friend's accusation.

"Besides, it was normal for K. Wine to come over, so it's not like it's strange that I'm comfortable with her being there."

"Let me ask you this...doesn't it get to you, all the sex you had with her?"

"That's too forward! You prick!"

I cursed at my best friend through my teeth for saying such a thing in public with a straight face.

"No....it doesn't get to me. It's just a carnal need, after all."

I insisted firmly. Pakphoom nodded in understanding when he heard me and took a large sip of his tea. When he talked again, his words came out more serious this time.

"If you insist. That's good for you, this way you won't get hurt too much when it ends."

"What?"

"When you go your separate ways, I mean."

"What are you talking about?"

I frowned at my best friend's words. I did not like where this was going.

"Oh, come on! Your friends-with-benefits thing isn't going to last forever, you know that, right?"

Pakphoom ate a spoonful of rice as he explained to me.

"What? What's with that dumbfounded face? Did you seriously think that a relationship of yours can go on like that forever?"

"..."

Now, that was something I never thought about before... that my relationship with Khun Wine would eventually come to an end...

"When you or Khun Wine meet someone, one of you will walk away from this flimsy relationship anyway."

"But what if...I still want this relationship?"

I tentatively asked.

"You may want this. But what about your Khun Wine? You don't know for sure, right?"

Pakphoom's words were like a dagger, I winced from the sharp pain.

"Who knows? Your Khun Wine could come to you tomorrow, telling you that she is moving out to live with her girlfriend."

"That's absurd! She doesn't have a girlfriend."

"Hypothetically then, it's all hypothetical. Ask yourself this; can you handle losing her?"

"I guess...I would be?"

It was not like I had a choice anyway. If we wanted different things then we just had to end this thing between us...

"Ask yourself carefully, Lal. You don't have to answer me, just answer yourself."

"I'm telling you, I don't have feelings for her. But you just keep bugging me."

My mood started to turn sour from what Pakphoom said.

"Okay, okay, why are you angry? Jeez. I'll drop the topic, happy now? After we're done eating here, how about we go get some ice cream and call it a day? Hate to make your Khun Wine worry if you get home late."

"I haven't done any chores because you asked me to hang out with you all of a sudden. I have to hurry back to do my laundry."

I nodded, agreeing to my best friend's suggestion, and continued eating. But then something was off about Pakphoom's teasing look the man was giving me.

"Ew, why are you looking at me like that?"

"You have no idea, do you? I keep saying 'your Khun Wine' for a while now. You don't even object to it once."

"Chris, you little..."

I was too tired to argue with my best friend, he was too annoying. I already told him I didn't have feelings for her. Why did he keep talking like I did? If I did not know he was a flight attendant, I would assume he was a chef with this stuff he was cooking! Even though I kept bickering with Pakphoom like usual, I could not help but worry.

I did not like Vetaka like that... but I did not want to lose her to someone else either. How nice it would be if things between us could stay like this forever...

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□20.Unsure□

'We never realize what we have until we lose it.'

I frowned at the quote Pakphoom shared with me through the LINE application. So he still had not gotten over that weird theory... I lost count of how many times I told him. But he was so persistent even though I had told him countless times that it was impossible...

"Is something wrong, K. Lal?"

"N-Nothing."

Even though I told my nosy best friend off, Pakphoom's words lingered in my head. It made me wonder why I allowed this petite woman into my personal space this much.

And strangely, that did not make me feel uncomfortable at all...

"Do you not enjoy this movie? We can change if you'd like."

"N-No. I enjoy it."

Vetaka turned her attention back to the movie when she saw that I did not have a problem with it. That gave me the opportunity to observe the petite woman. She was currently snuggling in the thick blanket and cuddling the huge cat plushie. Her doe-like eyes under the spectacles were watching a Netflix movie on the TV screen.

"I can't concentrate on the movie when you're staring at me, you know?"

It seemed that she felt my eyes on her because Vetaka turned her gaze back to me and paused the movie.

"Let me finish this movie first, okay? We can do it after this if you still feel like it."

"Pardon?..."

"The movie will end in less than 15 minutes. So hold on, alright?"

Even though her eyes were fixed on the screen, Vetaka's ears, which could be seen amid her hair, flushed red. I blinked when I finally caught up with what she meant.

'Hold on, did she think that I was staring at her because...oh, wait, no, it wasn't like that. What kind of person does she think I am? I'm not the kind of person who tries to get it on all the time, okay!!!?'

But then I lowered my gaze to Vetaka's lips, taking in how glossy and healthy they looked from her lip balm, and my breath was caught all of a sudden.

"Yeah, I can wait."

But if... she already got the wrong idea, then I should just roll with it. Giving me the benefit of the doubt, as one might say.

Now that we lived together, it was easier for me to observe Vetaka's behavior and personality. This smaller woman loved to stay in. And Khun Cheese seemed to be the only close friend she had. Knowing that I couldn't resist smirking at Pakphoom's texts before locking my phone before tossing it to the nightstand so I could occupy myself with something way more interesting.

At least now I could conclude one thing; Pakphoom's speculation was ridiculous. There was no way Khun Wine had her eyes on someone else...

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"Do you have to go out to meet with a client this afternoon, P' Lal?"

Noomnim asked me while I was packing my belongings into my handbag.

"Yeah, you have something you want me to sign?"

"No, I just found a new restaurant near our office. I thought I'd ask you to try it with me. Everyone in the department is going, except you, P' Lal."

Noomnim handed me a brochure to present her case. She looked so eager, it made me chuckle fondly at her.

Kinda want to tease her about how she's never this determined with work...

"Sure."

Korean food sounded like an interesting choice. I would still make it in time to see my client after lunch.

"I'll call them to make a reservation then. Oh... Tangkwa is coming with us too, P' Lal."

"Fine by me. The more the merrier."

It never bothered me when people from other departments joined us anyway. These days, I was as close to Tangkwa as was to Noomnim. Those girls were always attached to the hips.

"At first, Tangkwa said she was going to ask K. Wine to join too, but K. Wine said she'd pass."

Noomnim chatted with me idly while she was waiting on the phone.

"Maybe Khun Wine brought her own lunch?"

"Maybe... Hello, is this restaurant XX? I'd like to reserve a table for 5 at noon."

When lunchtime came, we all rushed out of the office so that we could enjoy the food without worrying about the time. This newly opened restaurant served Korean food. Since the shop was quite small, we sat in the innermost corner of the restaurant where there was a large table to accommodate a large group of customers.

I looked at the juniors who were so excited as they read through the menu. I couldn't help but smile softly at the sight.

"I'll cover one thousand baht for this meal."

As soon as I said that, Noomnim and Bas did a high-five. Seriously, these kids asked me to join them just because they wanted someone to help them pay for the meal, damn, they were good at this.

"Thank you so much, P' Lal."

After the waiter took the order, everyone focused on their smartphones. Then suddenly, Bas started acting strange.

"Guys, isn't that Khun Wine?"

Bas whispered. When I turned in that direction and saw that it was really Vetaka sitting in the corner of the same restaurant. But then who was that woman smiling across from her?

"Who's that woman? I've never seen her before."

Luckily, all the juniors were interested in other people's business, so Noomnim asked the same question that I had out loud for me.

"She's from the audit team."

Tangkwa told them. Speaking of which, Khun Wine had told me that she would be busy from now on because the auditors were coming in to inspect the company's financial statement.

Inspection is one thing but why is she having lunch with Vetaka? How is that necessary?

"They seem pretty close. Just look at K. Wine, she is smiling right now."

I frowned when I saw that Vetaka was really smiling at that sweet-looking woman in front of her.

"Khun Wine does look softer when she smiles like that, though. I want her to smile more. Normally, her expression is so expressionless and scary. I almost have a heart attack when I see her."

New commented. But that seemed to annoy me even more.

Why is she smiling so much? What is there to talk about?

I don't like this at all...

"P' Lal... You seem stressed..."

"I-I do? I guess I'm really hungry."

I quickly schooled my expression and returned Noomnim's smile. I was kind of surprised that I made it so obvious to other people how irritated I was.

When the food came, everyone stopped paying attention to Vetaka. But for some reason, I could not help myself, I kept sneaking glances at the petite woman. It affected me so much that I couldn't even enjoy the food in front of me. This strange sense of irritation seemed to linger with me long after because I still felt it when I came back to my room after I was done meeting with my client. The feeling seemed to intensify when I saw Vetaka.

I tried to forget about it, but the scene from noon burned in my memory that I just had to ask her about it...

"Oh, you mean Proud?"

"Yeah, Noomnim said she saw you at the restaurant during lunch break."

I nodded as I poured the clear soup Into a bowl.

Sorry, Noomnim... I have to use your name as an excuse here...

"She's my junior from college. She was my four-year-apart peer mentee actually. Small world, isn't it?"

Vetaka told me as she accepted the bowl from me and set it on the dining table.

"It is."

Too small, in fact...

"I heard that your smile was so sweet it startled the juniors, Khun Wine."

"Sweet? It's just a normal smile. I don't think I've been too stern lately. Tangkwa doesn't seem to be terrified of me that much anymore either."

"That's good. Oh... The rice is at the right firmness today."

"You said you were going to make clear soup with tofu and minced pork, so I cooked it a little firmer than usual."

The petite woman smiled with pride when I complimented the rice that was beautifully cooked on the plate.

"It goes together very well. I have no idea you're so good at cooking rice, Khun Wine."

"I'm living on my own. I should be able to cook rice and make some simple dishes, at the very least."

"But your breakfast and lunch always seem to lack nutrients, though."

I teased Vetaka. The woman frowned and mumbled that she made pretty mean rice with a Thai omelet.

"That's because I don't want to do the dishes at the company."

"You still have to do the dishes here anyway."

"Of course, I'm the one doing the dishes. You already cooked for us."

The first few days that we started living together, Khun Wine always ordered her own food because she didn't want to impose on me more than she was. But since I usually cook my own meals, cooking for two people did not require a lot of ingredients more than it did for one person so I invited Vetaka to join me for the meals.

Of course, with Khun Wine's nature, she offered to pay for the ingredients from time to time and help me prepare the meals on some occasions. And every evening, I started to get used to having someone sharing a meal with me.

"What do you want to eat tomorrow?"

"Curry, maybe?..... Just tell me what ingredient you want me to buy."

"I'll take care of it. You must be busy with the auditing now, right?"

"Then I'll send the money to you later, okay? Sigh... You're so good at cooking. I start to feel like I've gained some weight."

Vetaka sighed as she rubbed her stomach lightly, she looked worried.

"Let's do some exercise tonight... Hold up! I mean actual exercise, real one. Don't give me that look, Khun Wine."

I quickly added when I saw Vetaka looking at me with obvious suspicion.

"It's not like you can be trusted."

Vetaka said sternly. I didn't dare to deny the woman's accusation, so I continued speaking like nothing happened.

I mean, we're so close within each other's reach, I just can't keep my hands to myself sometimes... And it's not like Khun Wine has tried to stop me at all...

You should stop me, not join me, Khun Wine!

"I might not look like it, but I'm a pro at yoga, you know? How about we exercise together after we do the dishes and chill for a bit?"

"Fine... I'll believe you."

Even though Vetaka didn't seem to trust me that much, she agreed without much fuss. After the two of us had eaten our fill, it was K. Wine who was on washing the dishes duty today so I decided to chill out on the couch while waiting for her.

While Vetaka was doing the dishes, I considered something and smirked to myself. I had decided that I should wear my favorite workout outfits to seduce and tease her a little, a black crop top that showed off my gorgeous toned stomach that Vetaka loved to touch.

I won't be the one who initiates it this time. But if Khun Wine couldn't resist my sexy abs, oh well, that's another story...

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Things seemed good between me and Vetaka, so maybe... was the one who overthought everything. And that N' Proud girl was nothing more than a junior from her university years who was just happy to reunite with her senior...

They said a woman's intuition was more accurate than anything.

Normally, the audit team would come in to examine the company's financial statements every 6 months and the task would take about 2 weeks to be completed, which... I only knew a little about the whole process since I was not in the Accounting Department.

My job was to generate as much income for the company as possible. Still, what annoyed me the most now was how Vetaka and that Junior were getting a little too close to my liking.

"P' Wine? Can I have some information on this subject?"

"You can wait there in the room, Proud, I'll bring it to you when I find it."

"Oh, it's fine. I'll help you carry them."

And it wasn't just in my head. I felt like that sweet-looking junior was clinging to Vetaka on purpose. She just wanted to see some documents so why did she have to cling on her arm while doing it? And what was even more annoying was that Khun Wine didn't reject those advances at all...

I came to see the petite woman because I wanted to discuss some work with her. But after I saw them together, I couldn't help but feel irritated by the sight. Since Vetaka seemed so occupied, I should come back later.

I wonder if Khun Wine is available now... Or is she still chatting with Proud?

Even though I said I would return to work, I couldn't concentrate much on it. The image of the petite woman smiling tenderly at her sweet-looking junior was still vivid in my memory. What was this irritation I felt? It always simmered under my skin and I could not get that image out of my head... But then, as I was flipping through the documents to sign and verify them, I paused. The numbers on New's reimbursement receipts were way too high.

Because of this suspicion, I decided to lock the thing with that Proud girl away in my mind for the time being and turned my attention to New's travel expense reimbursement from his meetings with clients.

After examining it for a while, I let out a long sigh.

It seemed that I had another troubling issue at hand.....

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□21. Adults□

When we were younger, we thought growing up into this ideal version of ourselves or the future adult we dreamt of being would be easy. But when we actually became adults ourselves, it was not as easy as we once thought. Growing up was not fun in any sense; the responsibilities and burdens that we had to bear were always so heavy. When I was young, I wanted to be a good and reasonable adult when I grew up.

What about now?... Am I a good adult now?

"New, come see me in Meeting Room A in half an hour."

I decided to call New to have a talk one-on-one with him. This would be the first time in my career that I had to face a people management issue as serious as this. And to be honest, I did not like it one bit...

The company had many meeting rooms to provide private rooms for different business discussions. It appeared that New had no idea why I called him to one of the rooms. The young man looked puzzled. When I closed the glass door and made sure that what I was about to say would not leak out, I walked over to New who was waiting for me at the meeting table.

"I have some questions about your travel expense reimbursement," I said as soon as I sat down and handed the documents to New. When the young man saw his reimbursement documents, I noted that he paled a little before he quickly schooled his expression back to normal.

Was I like this when my mask slipped in front of Khun Wine?...

I wondered now that I could plainly see how New's expression changed.

"I went to meet a client in the area that I am responsible for."

New tried to dodge the subject, trying to look innocent. It made me disappointed in my subordinate even more. I decided to get to the point without beating around the bush.

"...I think the toll and gas fees are too high, judging from the route it takes from our office to the client's."

"I..."

"Tell me the truth, New. It won't look good on you if you continue to make up excuses."

I warned him when I saw that New was still trying to make up excuses to save himself. After I cornered him, the young man just sighed in defeat and smiled bitterly.

"No matter what I say, you will report to HR, won't you, P' Lal?"

"....."

"I will be fired anyway..."

New's voice trembled with distress. The young man's eyes watered when he looked at me in the eyes, "so what's the point of this? Are you trying to be a good supervisor to me? Are you going to listen to what I have to say?"

I was about to scold him but after I heard what he said, I froze...

New might be a subordinate who... often caused me problems, truth be told, but I believed that we all made mistakes and we could improve ourselves. So I should be a good boss too...

I think I should give him a chance.

"Tell me. I promise I will listen."

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We had to think carefully before saying things out loud because words could not be taken back. The same went for promises. I already made that decision, but it was still bothering me deep down. Did I do the right thing? Giving New a chance to improve himself.

"It isn't like I want to do this... but my salary is hardly enough to pay off my debt."

New explained the reason for his actions. Because of his impulsive spending, the young man used his credit card until it exceeded the credit limit. Before he knew it, the amount he had to pay was twice his salary, so he had to pay the minimum amount. Not only would it take forever to pay off his debt, but the interest would just keep piling up while he tried to pay it off.

"But New, you're using the company's working hours to work on your side job. That's against the company rules."

"I just drove a little bit further. I had to deliver the products to my customer."

New said, looking dejected, hoping I would sympathize with him.

Fortunately, New was a supplement sales representative in his other job, which had nothing to do with the company's confidential information and trade secrets. But it was still wrong. This must be the reason why New was often careless about his tasks, he focused more on his side job.

But with this much debt... I thought I could understand what he was going through...

"I... I won't tell anyone about this, but you have to promise me that you will stop working on that side job."

"Wait, what? If I stop, how will I be able to pay off my debt?"

New instantly argued with me. I felt my anger stir up, I've helped him so much, and he still refuses to back down.

"That's your problem. You have to deal with it yourself. So, are you going to quit that job or not?"

"Can I do it until the end of this month? Once I pay off my debts, I'll quit."

"...."

"Please, P' Lal."

I looked at New, weighing the decision because I never had to make a decision like this before. If I forced New to quit his part-time job, he wouldn't have money to pay off his debts.

But if New did not have the money to pay off his debts and the young man got so stressed out that hurt himself, wouldn't that be my fault?

"Fix the numbers so they don't look so exaggerated. Promise me you won't do anything against the company rules like this again next month and that you'll work harder."

In the end, I couldn't find it in myself to be cruel to him. New's reasons made sense... And it would only be for one more month...

"I promise!!! Thank you for understanding me, P' Lal. You really are an amazing supervisor."

New smiled happily and kept thanking me profoundly.

I really hoped that New would keep his word...

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Thinking back about what happened in the meeting room, I couldn't help but let out a long sigh. My decisions had an impact on someone else's

life...it would be too cruel to use extreme measures. Even though my mind wandered far away, I was still stirring the curry in the pot to prevent the bottom of the curry from burning.

Then I turned the heat to low and put the lid on, waiting for Vetaka to come back so we could eat dinner together.

As I walked out and sat on the sofa, I turned to look at the time... It was almost 8 pm.

Khun Wine is late tonight...

Rrrr

Vetaka's name was showing on the screen, I smiled with relief. I just started to get worried...

"Hello."

[Khun Lal... I'll be back late today.]

"It's okay. I'll wait for you. I'm not that hungry."

I said casually. It would take a while for the curry's taste to be balanced anyway. It would be ready to be served by the time the petite woman came home.

[That's not...]

Vetaka sounded uncomfortable, I wondered why but then I understood when I heard another voice come through the phone.

[P' Wine, let's grab something to eat, what do you want?]

Oh, that was Proud's voice...

Ah. So that was what this was about...

"Go with her. I'll put the leftovers in the fridge."

[Sorry, by the way...]

"It's okay. See you."

I looked at the dark screen on my phone, feeling hollow inside. When I put the delicious-looking curry rice on the dining table, I couldn't help but stare at it blankly for a moment.

I cooked it because Khun Wine said she wanted to eat curry...

But the smaller woman just ran off to dine with that junior of hers...

Now! Why would I be sad about that? I had been eating alone for almost my whole life. I should just enjoy the delicious meal.

After cheering myself up, I started eating the food in front of me...

But no matter how hard I tried to cheer myself up, the food left a bad taste in my mouth. Even though I used the same recipe and the taste was just right, it....

It wasn't delicious at all...

I let out a soft sigh and I looked down, more than half of the food portion was left on my plate. The empty chair opposite mine made my heart feel tight for no reason.

I never realized that eating alone could be this lonely...

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No matter how much I felt neglected by Vetaka, I could not show it. After all... we never agreed that we would have dinner together every day. So she did not do anything wrong when she went out with that junior.

When Vetaka returned, I simply smiled and greeted her as I normally would. The one who was acting unusual here was actually Vetaka. I didn't know if this was her trying to make it up to me or not, but the tiger sticker she messaged me was more than enough to make me forget about the curry rice situation.

Khun Wine had been so busy as of late, so I needed to make up for lost time for the both of us...

"Ngh!"

I groaned softly when Vetaka kept pleasuring me until I came. The petite woman seemed to be more determined than usual today, every touch, and every kiss were gentle as if she was apologizing for letting me eat dinner alone.

I think it's time for me to return the favor.

"I have something to do tomorrow... I have to sleep-"

Vetaka tried to be coherent while my hands were still hovering over her thighs.

"Ah... Lal, let me finish talking, will you?"

I couldn't help but giggle when the smaller woman tried to keep a stern look on her face. In times like this, Vetaka tended to forget herself and call me by my nickname alone.

Which I...quite liked. If we were in an exclusive relationship...would she call me like that without the formal 'Khun' title?

Wait, what the hell was I thinking? I was getting ahead of myself. I quickly ceased that strange thought.

"You and Khun Cheese going somewhere tomorrow?"

I decided to ask her a question instead.

"No, Proud asked me to visit a bookstore with her."

Vetaka's answer annoyed me instantly. They just had dinner together, and now they would be hanging out again tomorrow?

"You two are hitting it off quickly."

"We did know each other before and we work in the same field. And she also likes to read so... Ah..."

I leaned down and kissed her while she was still talking. And started it all over again. Vetaka protested in her throat for a moment before she lost herself in my touches.

By the time I allowed the woman to sleep, it was already late at night... Secretly, I hoped Vetaka would wake up late and I would let her sleep in without waking her up at all.

"What's up with you lately? You seem upset."

Vetaka turned over and asked me.

"Just busy with work, I guess."

I avoided meeting her eyes. I trusted the dim light in the bedroom to hide my face and feelings.

"You should take a break. What if you get sick?"

"Khun Wine, you come home later than me."

"Retorting, are we? Fine, I'm done talking with you for the night. Good night."

Vetaka frowned at my words, Then she yawned and closed her eyes to end the conversation.

When I heard the petite woman's breathing become steady, I moved a little closer to her. Vetaka looked peaceful and lovely in her sleep...I could not

help but reach my hand out, hoping to touch her unblemished cheek with such fondness. But then I retreated my hand and let out a heavy burdened sigh.

I did not want Khun Wine to go see Proud. I wanted to keep this petite woman for myself. What was wrong with me?

Looking at Vetaka's face, I only felt my anxiety grow.

We were so close, next to each other but I felt that she was so far away from my reach...

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□22.Overload□

The corporate world had never been easy on me, higher positions and salaries came with much higher responsibility. So handling various problems that came crashing in at the same time was part of what the management had to do....

I sat in the car, waiting for the time that the client and I agreed to meet. I took a deep breath and smiled at myself in the rearview mirror to shake off the sullen air around me. I was supposed to be cheerful when meeting a client. I could not carry the negative energy with me and risk ruining this talk about the project. Being a working adult was exhausting, you know? We had to follow through with our responsibilities and we had to handle other various problems we had in life at the same time.

Even though was still worried about what New did...I could only hope that from now on, that young man would keep his promise. Having to worry about my subordinate was already a lot for me and then there was that thing with Vetaka and that auditor...

When will that auditor complete her inspection? Why didn't she just apply for a job here if she liked this place so much?

That was how I felt but could not say it to anyone. Vetaka didn't seem to realize it, but I noticed the way Proud looked at the petite woman when they were discussing some work. It did not look like how a junior would look at a senior they respected, it was something more.

I wonder if Khun Wine knew this, or maybe she did and she still let Proud get very close to her...

Shortly after, I was surrounded by that same sullen energy again. I quickly shook that thing with Vetaka out of my thoughts and smiled at myself in the mirror once more before getting out of the car, trying to appear cheerful and bright.

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Unfortunately, the project proposal talk did not go as well as I had hoped because one of our competitors had offered a lower price to compete with our product. So it delayed the contract signing schedule. I had to go back to the office in

the afternoon to come up with a strategy for my next pitch. But as I stepped inside the office, the atmosphere here seemed different, off...

It was different in a way that made me sense that something was not right...

"P' Lal... We have a problem."

When I walked to my desk, Noomnim jumped to me and whispered quietly, she looked alarmed.

"What happened?"

"It's New... P' Jantra asked for New."

Noomnim gestured her head towards New's empty desk.

"Why would she ask for him? It's not time for his evaluation yet."

"I don't know, but... I saw the boss following them into the meeting room too."

Feeling uneasy, I swallowed a lump at that... I may not have explained it in detail, but my job entailed being responsible for taking care of clients and helping my subordinates take care of their key accounts to make the sales go smoothly. There was another position higher than me; the Sales Manager.

Normally, this position was reserved for foreigners from the headquarters branch in another country who were sent to oversee our work. The department called that person '**boss**'. The boss rarely got involved with what was going on in the department unless something major happened.

This is not a good sign.

By the time New was allowed out of the meeting room, it was almost time to clock off. The young man walked straight to his desk and quietly packed his things.

"New..."

As his supervisor, I decided to approach him while he was busy packing his belongings. I asked him with concern but I only received a cold look from him in return.

"You lied, P' Lal...you said you won't tell anyone."

"New, what are you talking about?"

"Don't act like you don't know anything. I just got fired..."

New's voice was trembling when he tried to hold back his sobs. That made me feel more stunned by what was happening.

"It wasn't me, New. I didn't tell anyone."

"If it's not you, then who else would it be?"

New looked at me, his gaze filled with disappointment and sorrow.

"You just pretend to be nice to me in the end, making a fool of me by giving me false hopes."

"New...I don't know if you will believe me or not, but I can tell you right in front of everyone here that I only wish the best for all my subordinates."

I looked New in the eye when I said it with determination.

"..."

The young man refused to look me in the eyes. He stubbornly kept his mouth shut, with no hope of getting through him. When he was done packing, he simply walked out of the department. New did not say goodbye to anyone, not even Bas, who seemed to be closest to him.

New's incident happened so quickly that I could barely know how to deal with it. It was true that the young man's work was nothing to write home about. Still, did not expect it to end like this.

When I opened my email, P' Jantra's email that popped up made it very clear to me that the HR department was aware of New's felony and that they had already taken action to penalize him. Since New was still in his probationary period, the company could terminate New's employment contract at any time.

And what he did was some serious offenses like working two jobs and using the company's budget for his other job, it was no surprise that the penalty of this would be a contract termination.

Although I felt sorry for New that his contract had been terminated and that I did not have the power to help him, it turned out I had to bear the consequences of my own actions as well...

"I am very disappointed in you, Miss Lal."

That's right... I was called to have a talk with the boss about my acknowledgement of New's actions.

"You covered up your subordinate's offense when you should report it to the HR."

"I apologize, sir" I replied to him in English softly.

"Do you realize just how serious this is? What you did."

The foreigner's voice was filled with anger. I could only stand there and calmly take in his scolding.

""

"Miss Lal, you realize that you were involved in the corruption of your subordinate?"

"I'm really sorry, sir."

I kept apologizing because I knew that I deserved the scolding because I made this mistake myself.

I messed up everything... I made the wrong decisions, all of them...

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In reality, I should have received a written warning letter or something worse than that, but because my performance evaluations were marked as excellent and because of New's confession.

New asked if I was the one who reported this to the HR when he was pressured inside the meeting room, he reasoned that I was the one who caught him just last week. So all I got was a harsh and stern talk from the boss.

But all of this made me exhausted and so dejected that I did not have the heart to do anything....I turned to look at the time, Vetaka would probably come home late as usual.

Did she have dinner with Proud again?

The more I thought about it, the worse I felt. I just wanted to close my eyes and hide away from it all: the project that didn't go as planned, my wrong decisions, and the thing with Vetaka that had been getting under my skin.

Gosh...my head is killing me, I should take a break for a bit...

I mused when I closed my eyes and let myself fall into a sleep.

"Khun Lal?...Hey, Khun Lal."

I heard someone calling me up close and felt someone lightly shaking my shoulder. I slowly opened my heavy eyelids. Oh, it was Vetaka who woke me up.

"Ah, sorry. I must have dozed off. How was your dinner with Proud?"

I sat up and gently massaged my eyes with my index finger and thumb to relieve my fatigue and drowsiness.

"It was okay. Have you...."

Vetaka's answer made me feel my heart throbbed from the pain. So she went out with that pretty junior again. The two of them hung out on the weekends and often had dinner together in the evenings.

"I'm not hungry."

I told her because I did not feel like stomaching anything at all.

"I see... I'll go shower, alright?"

I nodded in acknowledgement. When Vetaka walked into my bedroom, I felt irritated with myself because I could not accomplish anything today. Everything went wrong and nothing went according to plan at all today.

Then I remembered that there was a pending project, the one that the signing had been postponed.

"I will finish the new pricing quotation and the presentation slides tonight so I can work on New's task tomorrow."

I told myself, fixing my eyes on the laptop. Since New was fired, I had to handle his work until the company could find a new replacement. I got so absorbed in my work that I was startled when I felt a touch on my upper arm.

"Khun Wine, do you need something?"

I asked when I saw Vetaka standing next to me. I had no idea how long she stood there.

"Are you alright? You should eat something,"

"I'm really not hungry. You can go to bed first, let me finish this first,"

"But you can work tomorrow, right? Or are you doing New's work right now?"

"You knew..?"

I turned to look at the petite woman, curious. The incident with New was confidential, only the Sales Department and the HR were aware of it. But now that I thought about it again, how did P' Jantra know that New had violated the company's rules if no one reported it?

Oh, so Vetaka was the one who... I forgot that the Accounting Department was in charge of the expense claims.

"As expected of you, Khun Wine,"

I said to Vetaka, sarcasm in my tone.

"Reporting it as soon as you found out. Without any sympathy."

"You're throwing a tantrum here, Khun Lal."

Strangely, Vetaka was calmer than I expected. Even though I was aware that I was throwing a tantrum just like she said, I couldn't stop the words coming from my mouth. It was not Vetaka's fault, still, I couldn't help but felt angry...

"You didn't consult me first. I am New's supervisor."

"The kind of supervisor that covers up their subordinate's mistake? You should be the first person who informed P' Jantra when you found out about what he did."

"What would you know!?"

I forgot myself and yelled at her after I heard her harsh words. Then I froze when I saw the stunned look on Vetaka's face.

Guilt immediately crashed in, *what have I done?*

"It's true...what would I know?"

Vetaka took a moment to adjust her expression before replying to me calmly, "I was simply doing my job. Technically, this is confidential, but I will have you know then, it wasn't just the travel expenses. The phone bill was used for his other job as well."

"...."

"The subordinate you tried so hard to protect that you almost had to take the blame with him, in the end, did he even appreciate it?" The truth from Vetaka's mouth made me feel even more guilty for taking it out on her.

"Look, Khun Wine... I'm so-"

"Just forget it. Anyway, don't stay up too late. I'm going to bed now, Good night."

Vetaka interrupted me before I could apologize and ignored me by saying good night and walked away without looking back.

"...."

"By the way, I forgot to tell you. My room's wall will be fixed by next week, Thank you for helping me all these times."

The petite woman popped her head out from the bedroom to inform me. Her words pained me even more when I knew that she would be moving out of here.

After Vetaka disappeared into the bedroom, I just noticed the small bowl of soup on the table. It made me want to hit myself even more. What had I

done..taking it out on someone who was not a part of this like Vetaka,
especially when the woman was clearly worried about me?

In the end, I ruined everything... I can't handle or solve anything at all..

I might not be able to keep my relationship with Vetaka as well..

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□23. Awareness□

Humans were weakest in the mind when they were sick. All the stress and the lack of rest that made a headache and a sore throat came crashing down on me the next morning. My eyelids were so heavy, I could barely open my eyes.

"Cough... cough"

My throat was dry and I had a throbbing headache.

Ah... I caught a cold... This is the worst...

I tried to force my eyes to open but it was so hard. Even when the alarm on my phone rang so annoyingly loud, I didn't have the energy to reach out and turn it off...

"Khun Lal...it's time to wake up."

Vetaka, who usually wakes up earlier, reached out to shake me as I was still lying face down on the mattress.

Then, the petite woman exclaimed in surprise.

"You have a fever."

"Khun Wine..."

"How are you feeling?"

"My head hurts... and my throat feels sore... *Cough cough.*"

I reluctantly told her my symptoms. I was not sure if our interaction last night was considered a fight or not, but if it was... Vetaka was really kind for still caring for me this much after what happened.

"I think you should call in sick. You can't go to work like this anyway."

"Yeah..."

I nodded at her advice and accepted my phone when the smaller woman handed it over to me. I texted my subordinates in the group chat that I would be on sick leave today. I would submit my sick leave request in the system from my laptop after I felt a little better. After I finished assigning the work to my subordinates, I felt tired and closed my eyes.

"Hey, get up first, you need to take your medicine."

After a while, Vetaka appeared beside my bed, she was already dressed to go to work. The woman handed me some fever-reduced pills and a glass of water. It took a bit of effort for me to get up and lean against the headboard. Then I took the medicine and glass of water from the petite woman's hand to drink it, then I returned an empty glass to her.

"Khun Wine...I'm sorry...about last night."

I apologized as I still felt guilty about last night. I sensed her hand pause for a moment.

"It's okay. I don't hold it against you anymore."

"It's not okay. I'm really sorry."

I felt that I was being a bit too clingy now, but what could I do? I would hate to fight with Vetaka. I did not want the woman to simply accept my apology like this too...

"Khun Lal..."

"I'm sorry for taking my frustration out on you. I was just too soft-hearted, I should have done the right thing from the beginning."

I confessed what I was feeling guilty about after thinking about it overnight.

"I also...have to apologize."

When Vetaka heard my words, she went quiet for a moment before hesitantly responding.

"For acting on my own, I should've talked to you first."

"So...we are good now, right?"

"You should rest."

Vetaka didn't answer. Though she blushed a little and it made me feel a bit more at ease. Khun Wine was very proud, I did not expect her to apologize to me at all... So when the tense atmosphere between us faded, I finally laid down as the woman asked.

"Thank you,"

And thanked her when the petite woman reached out to tug me in with a blanket.

"You should take better care of yourself. You're lucky that I'm here."

Vetaka grumbled as she placed a cooling pad on my forehead to help lower my fever faster. But what she said made my heart throb.

I completely forgot that Khun Wine would go back to her place next week...

"Then... I'll head to work now, okay?"

I don't want her to go....

"Khun Lal?"

Vetaka looked down at her arm where I tucked her just when she was about to walk away. When I realized what I did without knowing, I immediately let go of her arm...

“Um.....”

I stuttered because I did not know how to explain what I just did.

"...."

"Please bring dinner when you come back!"

You're a genius, Lallalin... You're the best at thinking on your feet.

Hearing my sudden request, Vetaka seemed to be considering something before she said to me, sounding unsure.

"Today is Proud's last day here for the inspection. If something comes up... I'll order food and have it delivered to you, okay?"

It hurts...

"..."

This again... This tightness was like a lump in my chest that I felt every time I learned that Vetaka was going to spend time with that junior.

"Of course... Have a safe trip to work."

I told her quietly. The petite woman did not seem to suspect anything, she simply nodded and turned off the light in my bedroom for me on her way out.

After Vetaka left work for a while, I couldn't sleep even though I really should and the headache from the fever hadn't subsided. The heavy pain in my chest felt oddly worse than the fever itself...

What's wrong with me? Why do I feel irritated and sad every time Khun Wine hangs out with Proud?

I could only lie there and contemplate my emotions. This kind of feeling sounded a lot like '**jealousy**', didn't it?

I am... jealous of Khun Wine? Even though the smaller woman had never made my heart race even once?

Was it possible for people to be jealous without having feelings for that person?... Or was it just possessiveness that I felt? I pondered, feeling puzzled. But no matter how I felt about Vetaka, I could no longer deny the truth that the woman would be moving out soon and I had no idea if the two of us would ever be this close again.

And K. Wine seemed to be closer to Proud each passing day...

It hurts... It hurt as if my heart had been squeezed tight in my chest when I pictured the smile Vetaka gave me would belong to someone else.

"Ask yourself this, can you handle losing her ?"

Pakphoom's words echoed in my thoughts.

I could not... I could answer Pakphoom's question right away, but what's the point? It was already too late by the time I realized it.

Even though I was this sick, the petite woman did not even bother to come back and check on me. My feelings, the sadness, the hurt, and the fever tangled up together, I let my feelings run in the form of tears and soft sobs.

It's better to be with Proud than to be with me, isn't it?

Tears kept flowing at that thought, I felt my eyes burn from the crying.

I did not want to be weak, but I was alone now, so I could cry all I wanted, right?

I was afraid of losing Vetaka, I didn't want her to get closer to that junior. But I did not have a say in this...not when the only relationship we had was nothing but a physical one.

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I kept crying until I fell asleep from fatigue. I didn't know how long I slept, but when I woke up, I felt the cooling pad peeled off from my forehead. I thought I smelled strawberry yogurt lotion too, it was Vetaka's signature scent. The scent was so strong as if that petite woman was close by.

"Khun Wine.."

I opened my eyes in a daze when I felt Vetaka's soft hands touching my face and neck to check the fever. The woman was still in her work outfit. When I grabbed my phone to check the time, I found that it was only one p.m.

"How did you get here? What about work..."

"I took a half-day leave."

"...."

"You probably haven't eaten yet..."

Vetaka avoided my suspicious gaze. She quickly explained to me.

"So I bought you rice porridge. Can you get up to eat?"

I absently nodded at her words. Strangely, I felt that my heart was filled like a balloon that had been inflated to the brim.

I felt so happy that my heart was racing like a drum...

Hold a second! My heart...

The petite woman walked back to me with a bowl of rice porridge and sat beside the bed. Without meaning to, I drank in her fair, unblemished face as she was blowing a spoonful of rice porridge carefully before feeding it to me. My heart beat even faster than before to the point that my ears were ringing and I started to feel dizzy.

Ba-dum, Ba-dum...Ba-dum

"Are you alright, Khun Lal? Is your head still hurt?"

"N-No."

I quickly opened my mouth to eat the rice porridge after I went so still that the woman noticed.

"Let me check your temperature again. Your face is red... Is your fever back?"

Vetaka lifted the bowl of porridge and placed it on the bedside table before turning back to me again.

"Sure..."

It must be because I was acting weird, she thought that my fever might not go down yet.

The smaller woman touched the back of her hand a few times and frowned before she held my face in her hands and spoke softly.

"The porridge made my hands all warm. Sorry..."

And then Vetaka leaned her beautiful face down and pressed her forehead against mine to check my temperature. It was at that exact moment that I realized how I felt about her.

"I'm in love with Vetaka... I don't know when it happened. But before I know it, I have already given her my entire heart..."

My racing heartbeat which felt like it was about to jump out of my chest was the best proof of all.

"You still have a fever. Finish this and take another pill, okay?"

"Yeah..."

I smiled at her sheepishly. Who would have the courage to tell K. Wine that the reason my body and face were burning up was because of her...

After Vetaka finished spoon-feeding me, the smaller woman was still worried about my symptoms so she asked again.

"Your fever already went down...how come your fever is back again?"

"I'll rest some more then I'll probably feel better."

I avoided Vetaka's gaze and quickly grabbed the medicine she had prepared for me, popping it into my mouth, and drinking water to cover up the embarrassment that I showed her earlier. Luckily, Vetaka didn't suspect it further...

"I'll come to check on you again after work. Call me, if you need anything. I'll be working outside the bedroom."

Vetaka told me when I was lying on the bed once again. This made me remember that the petite woman took a leave of absence to check on me...what about her dinner with Proud?

"Khun Wine... You can go out with Proud, you know? I'm feeling better now."

I told the woman in front of me and tried my best not to show any signs of hurt that she could see.

"How can I leave you alone when you're like this?"

And Vetaka's simple words made my heart weak all of a sudden.

Those strange feelings that I had been asking myself all this time were so obvious. Why had I made a fool of myself with my stubbornness for so long? Was it because the two of us were so close that I didn't realize how special it felt having this woman by my side every day?

"Thank you so much, Khun Wine."

"See you after work. Sweet dreams."

After Vetaka turned off the lights and left the bedroom to let me rest, my eyes widened in the darkness. I quickly grabbed my phone and sent a text via the LINE application with a troubled heart.

Phoom: Lullaby

I think: Lullaby

I have feelings for k, wine: Lullaby

What should I do?? : Lullaby

I don't wanna lose her: Lullaby

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Even though I realized that I had feelings for her...it wasn't that simple...

I didn't even know what Vetaka would think if I told her how I felt...

□□□□□

□24.Confuse (Vetaka)□

What was Lallalin to me? What did our relationship mean to me?

I told myself many times that what was between me and that tall, smiley woman was only a mutual benefit, that I should not get attached to the woman...

That was what I told myself and yet...

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The time after work was so boring that I let out a loud sigh while I was behind the steering wheel. The sight of the red backlight shimmering from all the cars in the street put me down even more. That was how life was; a forever cycle of human life, being born, studying hard, and working like our lives depended on it, only to grow old and pass away. There was a time when I was looking forward to work before that fresh graduate's naive worldview faded away when faced with the cruelty of the corporate world.

By the time I knew it...I was living a terribly mundane life.

But my boring life was not so boring anymore when...

Lullaby: Sent Photo*

Lullaby: Let's eat here this sat?

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The corner of my lips lifted at the photo of the menu that Lallalin texted me and asked me to go. We usually stayed in and cooked dinner at home in the

evening. Sometimes, the caramel blonde woman would take me out to eat together. It could not be denied that the woman had good taste in choosing a restaurant. Her restaurants of choice have never disappointed me so far.

Before this, I used to think that eating was just something to keep my body functioning so I would have the strength to go to work. I didn't care much about food, as long as it was nutritious and I wouldn't get diarrhea from it. But after I got to know Lallalin, my monotonous life completely changed.

I don't know if it is a good idea or not...being this involved in her life.

"Did you get your hair dyed again?"

I asked the taller woman when she returned from the gym. Lallalin had an excellent working out habit even on Saturdays like this. I didn't really understand how she could enjoy working out and getting soaked with sweats like this. But alas, her body did show a very pleasing result from the workout.

Since...I am the one who gets to touch her body, well...

"I thought you wouldn't notice,"

Lallalin grinned as she slumped down next to me on the sofa while I noticed her hair color and asked out of curiosity.

"Why did you dye the same color?"

"Does it not look good on me?"

The tall woman asked me back.

"No... It looks good on you."

I stared back at her expecting gaze as I told her softly. I simply complimented her hair color, so why did my face feel hot all of a sudden? I was not very fond of this sly fox's gleaming eyes right now.

"Hey... Can I kiss you?"

Lallalin bluntly asked me out of nowhere. She no longer acted shy in front of me, so I became the one who was blushing instead. Damn it...I might not act on it but I still felt embarrassed, okay? Even if I never refused what the taller woman asked for even once.

Ever since I temporarily moved in with Lallalin, we did that sort of thing more often. Sometimes, I completely forget about those LINE stickers we used as a code. There was no reason for me to refuse if it felt good for the both of us, was it?

Wait... this is what friends with benefits do together, right?

I wondered before bending Lallalin's neck down to give her the kiss she asked for. And by the time we went out for dinner as planned, I was almost full from having my fill of that vixen.

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I was happy to see a junior from my university years and the girl was part of the peer mentor line that I was in as well. The girl grew up from being insecure about herself to a much more mature woman. Proud and I weren't that close in college because we were four years apart, she was just a freshman when I graduated after all, but since we were from the same university and faculty, there was a lot for us to talk about compared to others.

And since it was the auditor's job to inspect the company's financial statements and bank accounts, it was my duty, as the head of the Accounting Department, to facilitate and provide all documents the auditor had requested.

Sometimes I saw Proud working overtime until late at night and I couldn't help but worry about the girl.

As her former upperclassman, I wanted to take care of my junior a bit...

[It's okay. See you.]

I stared at my smartphone's screen after the call was cut off, feeling somewhat anxious. Lallalin did not sound angry at all, so why did I get a sense that she was hurt? It was as if I could see through the mask that she put on.

I was the one who told her that I wanted curry rice, and now I am the one who turns back on my words...

"The reviewers said that this restaurant is very good, P' Wine."

I feel like I just stood her up. Would Lallalin be lonely now that she has to eat alone?

"P' Wine?"

"Oh, sorry, Proud. I was just thinking about something. Let's go to that place you suggested."

I turned to smile at the taller junior who was walking beside me. I shouldn't have come...I shouldn't give in to Proud when the girl insisted that we should have dinner together. But it was too late for me to leave her here and go back now.

The restaurant Proud suggested was as good as the reviewers said. The atmosphere was relaxing from the easy flow of the conversation. Proud was telling a colorful story about that one particularly harsh professor back at the university. I could not help but laugh along with her, humored by the story because I had experienced that as well. So...why did I feel like I could not fully enjoy it?

Lallalin's face occupied my mind and kept making me feel uneasy. The thought of the dejected and lonely look on her face like she was a kicked fox made me feel even more guilty.

I'll try to make up with her when I get back then...

I felt that the taller woman was acting strange lately, like something was bothering her...

"Lal... Stop, Lal, I'm... Ngh."

I tried to tell Lallalin with a trembling voice, but it was no use because the other woman stimulated me until I came once again. My protests turned into moans and whimpers instead.

Even though I firmly told her that I had to wake up early because I had to go see Proud tomorrow, Lallalin did not seem to listen. She was determined not to let any drop of the sweet nectar go to waste.

"Wine, kiss me."

Her face was mesmerizing when she was covered in sweats like this, I could only swallow down my complaint and moved closer so I could ravish her lips passionately.

'Bloody hell, I always forget myself in times like this, when I am consumed by this burning desire, all my words and actions go down the drain....'

I mused, annoyed and I closed my eyes from exhaustion. Luckily, that greedy vixen was kind enough to let me sleep eventually, otherwise I would have to rain-check my meeting with Proud.

But as I felt my consciousness start to slip away, I heard a soft sigh coming from the person next to me. Lallalin was demanding and seemed to be in a bad mood when we had sex earlier.

I felt from the intimacy that had just happened, that Lallalin seemed irritated and rather willful. With my original curiosity, I decided to overcome my sleepiness to ask her a bit.

"What's up with you lately? You seem upset."

I turned over to ask her when she was still moving around.

"Just busy with work, I guess."

Lallalin refused to meet my eyes like she had something to hide. But... if the taller woman did not want to tell me right now, I wouldn't press it to her.

"You should take a break. What if you get sick?"

I noticed that she had been working quite hard despite having more subordinates in her department. Lallalin probably was more tired than before.

"Khun Wine, you come home later than me."

"Retorting, are we? Fine, I'm done talking with you for the night. Good night."

Lallalin's immediate retort annoyed me instantly. I no longer wanted to press on so I decided to end the conversation by closing my eyes instead.

I am worried for her but she just keeps making it difficult...

And the lack of sleep made my response slower than it should be, it made the bookstore trip with Proud even more boring. The only reason I agreed to leave the room and get some fresh air was because my clingy junior kept saying that she wanted to buy some books and hang out at a cafe. Proud had just moved back to work in Bangkok, so she wanted to find someone to hang out with.

What on earth made me agree to this? Gosh...I want to go back to sleep...

"You look sleepy, P' Wine."

"I was watching a series last night and got carried away,"

I told her with a half-hearted smile, she seemed concerned. I thought back to when I was leaving the house this morning, Lallalin was still happily asleep, it made me feel a little annoyed. That rude fox kept messing with other people until they were drained and exhausted because the fox herself did not have any plans.

I should flick her forehead a few more times when she was sleeping comfortably on the bed... I made a mistake flicking her just once...

"Should we head back?"

"Hm? But we just arrived here?"

"Well... I already got the book I wanted. And you don't look like you're going to buy anything. Besides, the shop has clearly oversold itself. The decor here isn't as grand as the pictures they promote."

Proud grumbled in annoyance. This newly opened bookstore was presented as this grand and breathtaking bookshop but when we saw the real thing, the beautiful bookcases shown in the reviews were just, in fact, a small corner of the entire store.

Even though I had some questions about Proud's abrupt decision, I was not against my junior's suggestion of going back home because I kind of missed Lallalin's soft bed.

"We can call it a day. I think I'll go back to sleep," I said as I covered my mouth when I yawned.

"....I changed my mind. Let's go get some ice cream so you can freshen up a bit, P' Wine."

"Hm?...Sure, lead the way."

I shook my head at her impromptu decision and decided to follow her not far behind.

We were lucky because the ice cream shop Proud suggested did live up to the review this time. To be honest, I found that it was kind of like a gamble, going to places based on the reviews alone. It was quite draining for a homebody like me.

But eating something cold and sweet really made me feel refreshed.

"They all taste amazing, right?"

"Yeah, it's good that we came here. Today's trip would be very boring otherwise. You sacrifice your time going out with me after all."

Proud sulked while she was eating her ice cream. That made me feel even more fond of my junior.

"If today isn't fun for you, there's always next time, isn't it?"

"For real? Then I'll ask you out again, okay, P' Wine?"

I found Proud's reaction to be similar to the caramel blonde woman... they must be the same breed, this puppy kind of people. Why did I only have this type of people around me? There was Proud, Cheese, and Lallalin...

"Oh, right, I'll introduce you to my best friend next time. I was going to invite her to hang out with us today, actually."

I told her cheerfully now that I thought of Cheese. Maybe that mischievous friend of mine would find the next guinea pig for her bread recipe.

"...."

"I'm too lazy to go out regularly, it'd be more convenient to hang out with many people at the same time. Cheese also likes to discover new places to eat. I think you and her would get along well."

I said happily as I was flipping through the ice cream menu. I thought I would order a few pints to take home.

The ice cream here is amazing, I think Lallalin would like their sherbet ... which flavor should I get for her?

"Hey, P' Wine... There's something I want to tell you."

"Hm? What's up?"

I put the menu down when I noticed the change in my junior's gaze. She looked so serious that I felt like I should pay attention to what she was about to say.

"P' Wine, I have feelings for you..."

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"You're home late...Khun Wine..."

Lallalin greeted me from her laptop when I opened the door. I frowned at that, my voice was stern when I replied to her.

"How's six p.m. late, Khun Lal?"

"You haven't eaten the curry that I made yesterday." Lallalin ignored my words and asked me back. She smiled expectedly, "did you have dinner yet?"

"I was hoping to eat with you," I told her. I felt like I saw the tall woman's fox ears and tail swaying lightly, which was both adorable and annoying at the same time.

Lallalin sent me a picture of the curry in that large pot, who would have the heart to eat dinner outside after seeing that? I tried so hard to make it up to her last night. I just wanted to have a peaceful night today.

"I bought this for you."

I put my bag away on the shelf and held up the ice cream pints that I bought for the taller woman when she approached it with interest.

"Oh, you're bribing me with gifts, now? I'll have you know, Lallalin can't be bought with...woah...that's my favorite flavor. You know me so well!"

"... I'll go wash my hands."

What Lallalin said nudged something inside me.

It made me feel so uncomfortable that I had to flee to the bathroom to calm down for a while.

"I'll fix you a plate."

Fortunately, all of Lallalin's attention was on the ice cream. She cheerfully said to me and didn't notice the change in my expression.

While I was washing my hands in the bathroom to get ready for dinner, Proud's words from this afternoon came back to my mind.

"P' Wine, I have feelings for you..."

"Is this some kind of joke?"

I was going to laugh it off but then I went quiet when the girl in front of me said in a serious tone.

"It's not a joke," my junior's beautiful face looked determined, "I fell for you from the moment we first met. But the timing wasn't very good back then."

"..."

"P' Wine, you might not remember this, but you helped me the day I was lost when I was visiting the university, you dazzled me, P' Wine. And we coincidentally ended up in the same peer mentor group."

"..."

I tried to search through my memory, when exactly did that happen again?

"At first, I thought that it was a miracle that we ran into each other again. But in the end, it turns out to be just a coincidence."

Proud let out a heavy sigh before smiling sadly.

"Proud..."

"It's a shame that you already have a special someone when we meet again."

I immediately denied it when I heard the tall junior's words.

"I don't-"

"Khun Wine, the food is ready. You've been quiet. Are you alright?"

Worried, Lallalin came to get me because I had stayed in the bathroom for a while. I shook those distracting thoughts away and shouted back.

"N-No. I'll go out now."

That evening, I could barely focus on the curry rice that the taller woman was giving a presentation. Proud's words still lingered in my mind.

"Why are you staring at me? Is something wrong with my cooking skills? Is the food not to your liking?"

"No, it's delicious."

I quickly averted my gaze when I realized that I had been staring at her for too long. Fortunately, the caramel blonde girl wasn't interested in anything except the food in front of her.

"I was just thinking that you could quit your job and open a restaurant with your cooking skills. Would you?"

"Then I guess you'll have to help me cut all the vegetables and pork."

Lallalin giggled at my playful comment.

"Eat up if you like it then."

This woman's genuine smile made my heart skip a beat throughout the entire dinner...

All of this was because of Proud's words, really.

That nonsense about my special someone... I don't even have one yet...

Or even if I do, it definitely won't be this tall, sly woman in front of me....

□□□□

□25.Fake Smile (Vetaka)□

A smile was Lallalin's mark and signature. She had sharp facial features and eyes, her features made her look like she was always pissed off at something. But Lallalin made up for that weakness with a smile. Everyone praised her for it, saying that the world lit up when she smiled.

I agree. I think Lallalin looks her best with a smile on her face...

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Despite Proud sudden confession, I was kind enough to not push the pretty junior away from my life. Proud insisted that she would handle her feelings without making me uncomfortable. To be honest, I had never taken an interest in romance, rather naive when in this sort of thing. If Proud did not say it out loud, I would have no idea.

"I want to take the risk. If you are still available, I'd go for it," Proud looked more relaxed after she let it out, "I did not expect that I would be turned down on the first date. Sigh..."

"This is a date?" I could only ask her with a surprised look when I heard the girl. Proud sighed again.

"See? I was being so obvious already, but you hardly noticed me at all. You were clearly thinking about someone else the entire time."

Proud sounded hurt. I immediately denied the woman's accusation.

"I did not do that."

"You might not realize it, P' Wine, but I have been watching you. Sigh... Getting my heart broken is so sad. Treat me to ice cream to cheer me up, P' Wine."

"Hang on, why are you getting a free treat now?"

I couldn't help but laugh at how my junior acted, she changed from being sad to cracking jokes without batting an eye.

But Proud's words refused to leave my mind, so I kept thinking about it. If I were to think about it, there was only one person that had been occupying my thoughts as of late... It couldn't be helped, though... Lallalin was acting like she had something on her mind. Sometimes, the taller woman seemed distracted and sad. It was not strange for me to worry about her, I was her temporary roommate after all...

I had been trying to deny Proud's accusation since that day, but the closer I got to Lallalin, the more I had to stay firm with myself every day. As someone who worked with numbers, I found rules and regulations crucial above everything. The same applied to this arrangement, I myself could not afford to break the rules...

If one of the parties falls in love with the other in this friend-with-benefits relationship...they won't be just friends-with-benefits anymore. I could do this, this is nothing difficult. I can't be affected by someone with a beautiful smile and a good personality...

My hand continued to work while I quarreled with myself internally. Our company had a policy to facilitate our salespeople by giving them smartphones that they used to call their clients. I, a staff from the accounting department, was the one who was in charge of overseeing the expenses.

What's with this ridiculously expensive phone bill?

I frowned at the long phone bill receipt. The numbers on the bill of the phone number I was inspecting were way too high that the costs from other

numbers could not come close to it. I frowned even deeper when I checked the list of calls this number made.

None of these numbers are our company's clients...

When I looked at the list of salespeople who owned the phone, I felt angry at that moment because it was as I expected. This new kid was nothing but trouble. No wonder Lallalin always had to clean up New's mess countless times. The taller woman was the type to get angry easily but quickly got over it. Her most obvious weakness was that she was soft-hearted...

Lallalin tended to be generous to her subordinates in her team. If I called her to talk about this, she would ask me not to report it to P' Jantra yet. If that was the case, then I would rather handle it myself...

"Hello, P' Jantra? There's something I need to discuss with you..."

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It turned out, the situation was not much different from what I had expected. Lallalin knew about what New did before I did. But the tall woman gave New a chance to fix the travel expense report out of her misplaced kindness. That young man must have forgotten that other than the travel expenses, he still had a phone bill that showed how he took advantage of the company. The man was dishonest, so I made the right call notifying P Jantra to escalate the matter.

When I returned, I found Lallalin sleeping on the sofa. The caramel blonde-haired girl looked exhausted. It wouldn't be good to let her sleep here, so I decided to wake her up.

"Ah, sorry. I must have dozed off. How was your dinner with Proud?"

When Lallalin opened her eyes, she beat me to it and asked me a question instead.

"It was okay. Have you..."

I responded despite my confusion. If she was talking about the instant meal from the convenience store....that I had with the entire audit team, it was alright...

But when she heard my answer, Lallalin looked crestfallen. Then she tried to smile and said she wasn't hungry.

Even though she said that I still can't help but feel worried.

I was worried about Lallalin, who had just been reprimanded by her boss and had to finish both her work and New's. She might get sick if she continued to work like this. So I ended up sticking my nose where it did not belong and Lallalin snapped at me as a result, she was not in a bad mood.

"The subordinate you tried so hard to protect that you almost had to take the blame with him, in the end, did he even appreciate it?" I snapped back at the girl who didn't know the truth, I was angry as well.

"Look, Khun Wine... I'm so-"

"Just forget it. Anyway, don't stay up too late. I'm going to bed now. Good night."

"...."

"By the way, I forgot to tell you. My room's wall will be fixed by next week. Thank you for helping me all these times."

Out of anger, I shut the door at the owner of the room, who was sitting there looking like a kicked puppy. After I calmed down for a while, I also started to feel guilty. I ended up acting out on my temper ...

Even though I felt guilty, I thought that it would be better for the both of us to calm down first. If we tried to talk now, it would only make things worse. So I decided I would talk to her again tomorrow morning, peacefully this time, because I was also partly at fault for handling this matter without telling her first.

But Lallalin fell sick and was bedridden before we could talk. What on earth? I already warned her about it.

"Khun Wine...I'm sorry...about last night."

Her apology stunned me, and shame took over my emotions. I was also partly at fault in this but Lallalin was the one who apologized to me first.

"It's okay. I don't hold it against you anymore."

I was the one who still refused to swallow my pride.

"It's not okay. I'm really sorry."

"Khun Lal..."

"I'm sorry for taking my frustration out on you. I was just too soft-hearted, I should have done the right thing from the beginning."

"I also...have to apologize," I told her, "for acting on my own, I should've talked to you first."

Lallalin's happy smile then made my heart race... I hastily took a deep breath to calm it down that instant.

Don't let yourself get carried away...Don't break the rules...

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After taking care of the sick woman until I was certain that she would be fine on her own, I went to work as usual. What was unusual, however, was the image of Lallalin's face, flushed and bedridden from the fever, kept popping in my mind. Annoyed, I let out a soft sigh.

I can't concentrate on my work like this...

I'm worried about her... how is she doing, being all alone?

What if... Lallalin's fever goes up so high that she has a seizure?

As soon as those thoughts popped up, I stood up abruptly, causing Tangkwa, who was typing her report, to jump from her seat.

"Tangkwa, is there anything you want me to check this afternoon?"

I asked my subordinate, suddenly restless, surprising Tangkwa as well.

"N-No..?"

"Then I'll take a leave in the afternoon, alright? Something urgent came up."

After Tangkwa confirmed that there was nothing she needed help with, I immediately started packing my things into my handbag.

"I'll leave before lunch break so I can go and queue up to buy some delicious rice porridge around here."

"T-Take care, P' Wine."

And as I was walking out of the department in a hurry, I ran into Proud, who stopped by to use the restroom in the opposite direction.

"P" Wine, about our plan for this evening-"

"Let's rain-check it, okay? I have something urgent to do."

I replied before Proud had even finished speaking. And I didn't stop to listen to her answer. I could make an appointment with Proud anytime, but the sick patient couldn't wait.

It seemed like I was really overreacting. But because Lallalin's condition was not stable yet, her fever came up again, I made the right call taking my leave to take care of her.

"You should have an early night today."

"Roger that. You should sleep with me, Khun Wine."

Lallalin nodded. Her temperature had gone down to almost normal. If she had enough rest today, she should be fine by tomorrow.

Rrrr

But just as the two of us were about to lie down, Lallalin's phone rang. At first, the woman ignored it and pressed the mute button. But the person on the other end of the line kept calling relentlessly, the taller woman gave up and answered the call.

"Khun June, hello. What can I do for you?"

I looked at the sick person as she spoke in her salesperson's pretty voice. Even though I had seen Lallalin use her salesperson voice to her clients many times, it still astonished me every time I heard it.

She spoke so sweetly, it was no wonder that the woman could smoothen sales-related problems almost every time... But the angry voice coming from the phone made Lallalin's face froze a little.

"Pardon? You still haven't received the items? New... didn't deliver the items to you?"

"I have to apologize for it, ma'am. New recently resigned on such short notice and I'm on sick leave."

"Yes, I'm very sorry, ma'am."

"I will fix this as soon as possible. Yes, yes. I'm really sorry, ma'am."

After she hung up, Lallalin made a call, it must be someone from an overseas branch...the tall woman switched into speaking English fluently. It appeared that the person on the other end of the line must be irritated from being disturbed by a call this late at night.

After negotiating for a while, Lallalin made another call.

"Khun June, hi... The goods will be delivered to you no later than the day after tomorrow. No, this is the fastest we can do, ma'am."

"I really have to apologize for the inconvenience, ma'am."

Lallalin continued to apologize profusely until the client hung up. The woman let out a soft sigh when the call ended.

"Can't you just not pick up the call?"

I asked, baffled and upset. It was almost nine p.m. Was this an appropriate time to call someone and talk about work?

"That's our client, Khun Wine," Lallalin gave me a sheepish smile,
"Besides, it's really our fault this time."

"Is it so bad that she had to scold you like that?"

Even if Lallalin's side was in the wrong, the words I overheard from the phone were so harsh that it pissed me off and I was just a listener. What would Lallalin feel? She was the one who got scolded.

"She's a client...I'm a salesperson, I have to deal with all types of customers, you know?"

I nodded at the tall woman's explanation, feeling irritated all of a sudden.

A customer is not God, alright? What rights does the client have to talk down to people like that? She's so rude...

What kind of clients does this tall woman who always smiles brightly have to deal with every single day?

Salespeople had a crucial role in the company. They had to build credibility for the clients to see, they had to be talkative and were also the ones who defined the company's survival in terms of sales and profits. Lallalin herself had a hard time dealing with so many kinds of clients, some of them were not professional and often asked for the salesperson's personal contact and phone number so that they could follow up on their work all the time.

"...Do you just go around giving out your LINE and number to everyone?"

I frowned and asked in an unhappy tone.

"If they ask for it, yes, I have to."

Lallalin replied reluctantly, "b-but, it's strictly work-related, okay?"

"I'm just concerned about your privacy."

I quickly explained. I felt my face heat up because my actions looked a lot like someone who was being jealous.

Rrrr

Then the phone rang, interrupting us again. I could only look at her and comment in my mind.

My, my...she's popular.

But when I saw that the name displayed on the screen was 'Mom', I was about to get up from the bed, in case the taller woman wanted some privacy. However, Lallalin pulled my arm and flashed me her soft smile, so I reluctantly threw myself back to sit against the headboard.

Most parts of the conversation were normal, like any other conversations between mothers and daughters. Lallalin's mother called to ask about how her daughter was doing, and it seemed that Lallalin had a sister in high-school as well.

"Everything is going great, Mom. No problem at all."

"I love you, Mom."

She eventually hung up. Lallalin's family appeared to be warm and loving. but the woman's words, who constantly had a smile on her lips, made me wonder so I asked her about it before I could stop myself.

"Why didn't you tell your mother?"

"Oh?"

"Was it because I'm here with you?.."

"What do you mean?"

"Well... you told her that you're happy, that everything is going great, that you're strong and healthy, even though you just recovered from a fever. Shouldn't you tell your mother these things?"

"It's nothing serious, really. I'm just a little under the weather. I am a grown up now, I have to handle these small things on my own."

"Which part of this is nothing?..."

"...I just don't want to worry her..."

Lallalin's words and her soft smile made me feel even more worried. Her smile grew more tired each passing day, I feared that if this went on, Lallalin's mesmerizing smile would break and fade away....

I have to do something about this....

"Are you tired?"

I reached out and took her hand loosely in mine.

"Hm? Not really, I mean, I'm no longer sick, right?"

"I mean..are you tired, pretending to smile when you're not happy?"

"Khun Wine..that's silly. I'm always happy, alright?"

"Hey.."

I firmly looked into the taller woman's eyes, who stubbornly refused to admit it. It was not like me to be like this, if people didn't want to talk, I wouldn't press them anymore.

But for some reason...I was worried about Lallalin, I wanted to listen to her many problems.

"Sigh... I really can't hide anything from you, Khun Wine." And Lallalin lost in this staring contest, "it's really nothing much...don't laugh if I tell you, okay?"

"Tell me anyway."

My breath caught when the woman beside me turned to look at me, I started to feel a little embarrassed that I seemed so eager to listen to her story, "Consider it an exchange for the time I asked for your advice about Tangkwa. I want to... help you out as well."

"Wanna lie down while you listen? We can pretend it's a bedtime story."

I didn't refuse her invitation. When the two of us laid down on the bed, Lallalin slowly started telling me her story.

Starting from Lallalin's mother, who made a mistake by choosing a wrong partner. She stayed strong as a single parent until she found someone to love, they built a happy family together, and have another bundle of joy in the family..

"A happy family, right? Father, mother, daughter, and I, who was the older sister," Lallalin stared at the ceiling and kept talking, "I didn't know when I started to feel out of place in the family."

"I was already twenty by the time my younger sister was born...Uncle and Mom already had a lot on their plate...from raising my younger sister. I don't want to impose them over something and cause them unnecessary headaches unless it is very serious."

"I don't want to cause any problem. I just want everyone to see that I'm fine, that I'm happy all the time. I didn't want to trouble them with my work or even my well-being...there's no need to tell them anything unless it is deadly serious."

"Sometimes I have my best friend, Phoom, whom I could complain to and talk to him about stuff. But honestly, after a good night's sleep, I completely forget everything. Haha."

Lallalin chuckled softly. But I didn't see how her story was funny. There was so much pain that she had to bear alone underneath that smiling mask she wore.

I want to soothe her, I want to be there for her by her side...

"Can I hug you?"

"Khun Wine...why do you suddenly...?"

"I just feel like it," I moved closer and pulled the taller woman into my arms while she was still mumbling something from her surprise. Lallalin didn't resist me...so held her tighter and spoke softly, "what you told me isn't silly at all. You've done a great job, being so strong after all these times alone..."

"..."

"I want you to know that you don't have to be strong or force a smile when you're with me. If you have anything you want to say or let it out, do it. I...want to hear about your day at work, I want to know what you encountered, I want to know how your client treats you." I gently stroked Lallalin's hair, "and I'll tell you about my day too."

"So let me ask you again, Lal. Do you want to tell me about it?"

"...I'm tired."

Lallalin went quiet for a moment before she uttered the words. I felt the woman's face nuzzling against me and my pajama felt wet.

"I'm so, so tired..."

"...."

"Do you know, even though I told her I was sick, Khun June still said that even if I was hospitalized, I'll just have to drag the extension tube with me to make sure that she receives the products. She's so mean..."

"...."

"That annoying Khun June can rest assured that I will check every single detail about your company's budget and payments, I will make sure of it..."

"Even though I tried my best..." Lallalin's voice started to break, "I tried fixing everything, but it's like they're doing it on purpose...there's always new problems, it never ends."

As for New... I'll tell P' Jantra to use the power of the moon to punish him, making him pay nicely for what he did....never underestimate the power of HR's connections. His new company will find out about the problems he caused...

"I didn't even know what was going on. She treated me like I was her emotional punching bag. She's our client, so what? So therefore, she's God?... Sob, I was sick, what did she want me to do? I want to tell her off so badly."

"You did your best, Lal. You eventually managed to solve the issue, right? You did so well."

I could only comfort her as she was crying her heart out.

"She said....if...if I can't fix a minor problem like this then I don't deserve to be in this position...waa....it hurts, I already did the best I could."

"Lal, listen to me, okay? You are amazing, you know that right? Your sales performances are good and you're loved by your subordinates. Don't take what that kind of person says to you personally."

I hugged Lallalin while she was crying from the hurt, from how cruel work had been to her.

"I was so angry...but I can't do anything about it..."

"Lal, you did your best. You can talk to me about anything...I'll...I'll be by your side, Lal."

"You're way too kind, Khun Wine. Don't say stuff like that to me, I'll be damned, I'll get used to it, sob..."

Lallalin muttered incoherently. I could feel her body shaking from the sobs, her arms hugging tight.

"Don't look. I probably don't look pretty when I cry."

"I won't look. I promise. Just let it out, okay? And we'll start over tomorrow together."

I could only hold Lallalin in my arms and let her vent all the feelings she had kept inside.

Eventually Lallalin fell asleep from exhaustion after letting everything out because of the aftermath fatigue from her sickness and the exhaustion from crying. I eyes and had to wipe her tear-stained face with paper napkins. I took in her swollen the tip of her nose that was slightly red from crying, I couldn't help but smile with a mixture of sympathy and fondness.

The ever beautiful and confident Lallalin had her issues and the work environment had molded her into someone who had to keep her feelings hidden underneath her smile...

I want...to stay beside her, to heal her and to keep this beautiful smile from fading away.

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

Ba-dum...

I widened my eyes when I felt my heart pounding erratically as I was staring at Lallalin's face right now.

Come on...

I've been telling myself for so long that there's no way I'd fall in love with her.

Do I really have to admit the truth simply because I can't stand your tear-stained face?

□□□□□

□26. Make you love me□

Love was the hardest thing to explain in theory. If we studied hard, we would receive good grades or good exam scores as the results. But when it came to love, no matter how hard we try, If the other person doesn't love us back, it would still be over...

"What should I do!?"

"You were still denying it two weeks ago."

Pakphoom, who was sipping on his sports drink next to me, asked out of curiosity as I was riding on my bike.

"So what makes you realize it?"

"Not gonna tell you..."

"Oi, this bitch..."

"You'll make fun of me if I do. So I won't tell you."

I held my head high like I had the upper hand.

"All you have to know is that I have feelings for K. Wine. So what should I do? She is already so cute, and now she's a hundredfold cuter...Khun Wine is the best, she's the only one for me."

"Lal..."

"I can't stop thinking about her, dude. Her skin is pale, she smells so good too. Her cheeks are so soft. Her eyes are so large and fierce-y, like a little kitten. Ughhh, I want to smooch her again now that I think about it."

When I thought about Vetaka, my inside felt all soft and fluffy, it was odd. I let it out by working out on the bike instead.

"Calm down. Damn! You can even ride Mount Everest's steep slope?"

Pakphoom walked over to my monitor and gasped,

"So that's the power of love..."

Pakphoom and I hit the gym together to strengthen our physical health. I had so much energy today for it. After I was exhausted from working out, I sat with Pakphoom in a resting corner to catch my breath.

"Seriously though, you're so obvious. How on earth did she still not know how you feel?"

"Nah, I'm good at hiding my feelings."

I was just being smug in front of Pakphoom. In reality, though, I got it pretty bad. I cried in front of Vetaka and told her everything that I had been keeping inside for so long just the night before. I was so embarrassed that I couldn't look her in the eyes the next morning. Though I had to admit, it did make me feel much better.

"Thank you."

"..."

"For telling me something this personal to you,"

Vetaka had said while we were having breakfast together.

"I... might not be able to help you much with your family matters. But I can give you a handful of decent advice when it comes to work."

"Thank you so much."

"You feel better now, don't you? I like it better when you're like this."

"T-thank you. Khun Wine, don't forget to tell me about your work too, okay?"

I could only stutter. What did Vetaka mean by the word like?

"Heh... it's your department that causes trouble for me in most cases."

She remarked and I could only smile sheepishly at that. But then Vetaka laughed, playful and amused from being able to corner me like this.

The petite woman seems so friendly and she acts like she cares about me.

Do I have a chance then? Could Khun Wine have feelings for me as well?

"Let's get serious about this. If this goes on, you're the one who will get rejected, Lal."

Pakphoom's words made all the good memories in my head vanish.

What does he mean by getting rejected? Why is he jinxing it!?

"Khun Wine seems to care about me a lot, though. Do you think... she might have feelings for me too?"

"It's hard to say. I've seen some friends with benefits fuck like a million times but in the end, they are just sexual partners and they go on their separate ways."

"...that cheers me up so much, man. I'm in the mood now."

I hid my hands as I clenched my fists at my best friend's words.

"In a mood to go for it?"

"In a mood to strangle you. The things you said are so..."

"Just telling the truth,"

Pakphoom drank his soft drink in one go to quench his thirst and suggested,

"If you're so sure about your feelings, why don't you just tell her how you feel?"

"No way...what if she rejects me?"

I quickly turned down my best friend's suggestion

"It's too risky..."

I thought about the time when I asked the petite woman to be my girlfriend after our first time, the woman rejected me right away... it kind of hurt my feelings, okay?

"I'll try flirting with her...until I'm sure she likes me too."

"What?"

Pakphoom whined when he heard that.

"Dude, no need to whine. I think I have a plan."

"Honestly, ever since I found out about you and Khun Wine, I don't think your plans have been working well at all. It's hard to believe that, Lal."

"Just wait and see with this one."

I had not done my research on the target well enough last time. But now, I knew even what brand of toothpaste that petite woman preferred.

It's time for Khun Wine to know now that I didn't get to be a Sales Supervisor for nothing, I will do everything in my power to make you fall in love with me. I will make you stay brand loyal to me and me alone so that you don't have a space for anyone else in your heart...

And to boost my morale, first of all...

"Phoom... Let's go pray to the deity for a blessing in love."

"What the heck!? All this talk and now you decide to go with the superstition route!? Dang it!"

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I told Pakhum all those things but right now, I needed to make her stay first before I could make her fall for me!

"Khun Wine, are you going back to your place?"

Feeling anxious, I asked Vetaka who was folding her clothes into her luggage.

"They finished fixing the wall in my room, so."

Vetaka busied herself with folding the clothes neatly. I felt so anxious that I could hardly sit still.

Damn it, I need to do something to stop it...

"Khun Lal?"

Vetaka looked up with confusion when I walked over and grabbed the bag of clothes she was packing.

"Your place could still smell like paint."

I told her in a serious tone,

"And no one has stayed there for a month... it's probably full of dust by now."

"...."

"Maybe you should hire a maid to clean it before you move back? I'm worried about your health, Khun Wine."

It wasn't hard to convince the woman with my persuasive skills. Lallalin, your skill as a salesperson really did come in handy.

It's like what they say, by hook or by crook, maybe I should just hook her with a spell or something?

"I guess I could book a cleaning service on the app to get it done right away."

"Khun Wine, you're acting like you want to go home as soon as possible. Don't you want to stay here with me?"

"... It's not like that. I feel bad crashing at your place."

"I don't mind at all. It doesn't bother me one bit."

Honestly, I wanted her to stay here forever and never return...but I didn't want to scare off this tiger, so I swallowed the words down and changed the subject instead,

"I'm hungry. Do you want to go out to eat? We can try finding a cleaning service when we get back."

"...Sure."

Vetaka was stunned by my words. She decided to put her smartphone down on the bed and walked over to get change without saying a word.

When Vetaka entered the bathroom, I grabbed her suitcase and put her clothes and belongings back into my closet. My mission now was to stay attached by the hips to Khun Wine to prevent her from going back to her place.

"K' Wine...can you come here for a sec?"

I called her to turn to me before we left. The woman was checking her belongings in her handbag, she looked confused by my request. But the petite woman still approached me and I pulled her into an unexpected hug.

"What's up with you?"

Vetaka yelped out in surprise but she still stayed in my arms willingly.

"I put on too much perfume, though I could share it with you, Khun Wine,"

I answered her, grinning.

"You're such a weirdo..."

Her flushed ear was visible in her hair, it put a soft smile on my face.

Vetaka was flustered by my actions my plan was very simple this time. I just had to make her fall in love with me so when I came clean to her that I didn't want to be just friends with benefits anymore, Khun Wine would agree and we would be dating exclusively.

As for now, I hoped my perfume lingered on her clothes.

Hmph... This petite woman over here is Lallalin's, get in line!

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And then the end of the quarter was back again. The end of the quarter was the most intense and stressful time in the company, especially for the Sales Department. It had been hectic for us from the beginning of the month to the last day before the annual closing. Yes... because we had to sell as many products as possible to the client!

When the final sales numbers were submitted, both Noomnim and Bas cheered like every person who had been freed from their hard work. That made me feel like I had to boost my subordinates' morale a bit.

It's a piece of cake, really to motivate these kids...

"You guys wanna go eat moo krata? My treat."

"You're treating us, P' Lal!?"

Bas shouted, elated.

"Why are you being so loud? We are all here."

"Waah...free meals are the best. I love free meals."

The restaurant where I took these naughty kids wasn't far from the company. So I decided to leave my car at the company and come back to get it later. Free parking was a privilege for the Sales Department exclusively, you know?

After dinner, my stomach was full. I hummed a song as I walked back to the company, carrying a bag full of snacks that I bought from the convenience store. I thought I would invite a certain petite woman to watch a movie together tonight...

It seemed that the famous Goddess of Love in front of a famous shopping mall was, in fact, as powerful as the reviews claimed. Because the problems in the other woman's condo did not stop after the wall had been fixed.

This time, the room opposite Vetaka's had a problem with a broken pipe, causing water to flood into her room. It was a mess. And on top of that, the newly repaired wall cracked when it was damped by all the water and moisture.

I still remembered it very clearly, the day I had to carry the petite woman back to my place after the woman practically passed out after she found out about the problems...

Even though the blessing from the Goddess of Love was a bit weird...the result of it did make me stay close to Vetaka for a little longer. A life with this petite woman living with me was a very happy one indeed...

My train of thought stopped when I saw that the lights were still on in the office building. I couldn't help but frown when I thought back to the text Vetaka sent me in the evening.

Wine: I will be back late today.

Don't tell me she is still here...

'You were the one who told me to take care of my health and not work too hard. And now you stay at the office until late at night.'

I scolded her in my mind. And when I went to the Accounting Department where Vetaka was still working and looking all tensed and stressed out, I let out a deep sigh.

Work-life imbalance; it was a strange norm in Thai society that seemed to idolize overwork. What was so wrong with the management levels leaving work on time? Bosses were people too, alright? They could get tired, they could get sick...

"Khun Wine.."

"!!!"

Vetaka was startled when I touched her shoulder. She took off one of her Bluetooth earphones and grumbled,

"Don't show up without making a sound like this. You startled me."

"You shouldn't wear both earphones. What if a burglar breaks in? Khun Wine, you'll probably be knocked out to the ground before you know it."

I told her idly. Though, I really did want to start a campaign and tell everyone to wear only one earphone when they were doing stuff in their daily lives.

Safety First, as they said. Because danger was all around us, whether it was a potholed sidewalk or a bad driver. At least wearing only one earphone would allow us to hear the noise from the outside world.

"Our company has a face scanning system, you know... But I'll wear only one earphone next time."

Vetaka was a nice person like this, she always used her reason when she talked. If it sounds reasonable, the petite woman would do it without

making a fuss.

"Still a lot of work to do?"

"You can go back home first. I'll be done shortly."

"Your 'shortly' is more like three hours, though. And you haven't eaten anything yet, right?"

Vetaka's answer made me feel kind of angry at the petite woman. She told me to go home first and didn't care about her own well-being at all.

"I'm not very hungry. Hey... If you keep talking to me like this, I won't get my work done. You should go back first."

What she said made me tighten my lips, feeling angry at the other woman who seemed unusually stubborn today.

"Khun Wine, you can continue working late, but I also have the right to stay here."

I gave the beautiful woman an ultimatum when she insisted on overworking.

"Suit yourself then. I'll continue working here."

After Vetaka gave me her permission, I came up with a good idea. Then I carried on my secret mission in the pantry. Khun Wine had not met her equal match yet.. if she wanted to be stubborn, I would make her come to me and beg...

"I thought you said you were going to treat Noomnim and the others to a meal earlier?"

She was so curious about what I was doing that she blurted out a question.

"Well...I'm not quite full yet."

I flashed her my charming smile. Vetaka hastily looked away. I noticed that her ears had turned red more often lately! It was a very good sign.

What made the petite woman turn her attention to me was this small cup of instant noodles. Its lid was covered right now because I had to wait for another three minutes before I could eat it.

And when I opened the lid, the white steam and its mouthwatering smell spread around the area.

"Hmmm, smells so good."

I used a plastic fork to scoop up those thick, chewy noodles. I blew it softly to spread the heat. That clearly made Vetaka react.

"Why are you blowing it now?"

"It'll burn my mouth if I don't. And does it bother you, Khun Wine? Me blowing the *ramyeon*?"

I turned and raised my eyebrows at her, trying to get on her nerves. Vetaka only pouted, annoyed when she realized what I was doing. One time when we were alone, I shared the ramyeon cooking recipe that I learned from a series with her, and she liked it a lot.

Growl

"Khun Wine.."

"You're doing it on purpose..."

Vetaka's face was red with embarrassment. I had to stop myself from smooching her right then and there.

But first, I had to stop teasing her before she got really angry for real.

"I'm worried about you, Khun Wine."

I smiled gently at Vetaka, "let's eat. Just instant noodles are good enough. I even put an egg into it for you, just how you like it."

"But what about my work..."

"I'll make it convenient for you. You can just continue with your work, how does that sound?"

"How can I refuse?"

Vetaka accepted my offer, I could tell by her voice that she was pouting. That made me hastily feed her the *ramyeon*.

Khun Wine's cheeks turned light pink, I wondered if it was from the chili or her own embarrassment.

A dinner under neon lights, eating instant noodles while working overtime is quite romantic in a way, isn't it, Khun Wine?

□□□□□□

□27.OT (Vetaka)□

Rules were enforced in order to prevent damage. Regulations were structured to maintain orders.

Therefore, rules and regulations were crucial to one's life, in both work and relationships. No matter what we did, adhering to the rules would make things go smoother.

But since I am the one who breaks the rules, I have no choice but to accept all the pain...

After being fed instant noodles by this stubborn woman until I ate the whole thing, even the soup, the other woman also served me snacks and an iced green tea afterward.

Stop making my feelings for you grow, will you?

It's very tiring not showing how embarrassed and shy I felt...

I let out a soft sigh before I could stop myself when my heartbeat calmed down after beating so rapidly because of how embarrassed I felt. I had to give Lallalin the credit though, because after my stomach was full, I had more strength to go through the pile of unfinished tasks.

I turned my attention back to work, but after a while, I heard how the rattling sound next to me had quieted down, surprisingly. I turned to look and found that the tall woman had already fallen asleep.

I stared at her for a while before I opened my drawer to get a blanket and cover the woman, who was sleeping with her hands crossed. I tried to remind myself not to be affected by how Lallalin took care of me. I couldn't

help but stare at her beautiful sleeping face. I knew full well that our relationship was just something physical.

I shouldn't let my heart cross the line. Lallalin was a good-natured person, she took care of everyone like this, I was not special to her...

But what can I do? I love her, what's done is done, so I just have to deal with my own feelings alone...

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The office was quiet at night, and right now, it felt like I was the sole owner of this vast space, so I let myself relax for a little by unbuttoning another button on my shirt and pulling the hem of my shirt out from my skirt. It was already late, so let me just be anything but neat for once. After all, the only one here with me was Lallalin.

"What time is it?"

Came a sleepy voice that belonged to the woman who had just stirred up. It made me feel guilty that she had to wait here with me.

"It's almost eleven p.m., just a little longer, okay?... I'm sorry. You should be resting at home by now.

"I don't mind waiting. At least we get to go back together."

"You're making assumptions here....who said I would go back with you?"

I tugged my hair behind my ear to distract myself from how shy I was and uttered quietly.

"Then you should drive me here tomorrow too."

She stayed at the office for me, I should spoil her a little...

"K. Wine..."

Lallalin, who had been quiet for a while, suddenly spoke out of the blue.

"Did you see... that light over there flickers just now?"

"Hm? I don't think so..."

I replied when I looked in the direction she suggested.

The filing cabinet area in the corner looked normal. But the electricity might have gone out... I would ask P' Jantra to call the technician to come and check it out on Monday.

"Hey...can I hug you?"

"What's up with you?"

I narrowed my eyes at her when the woman made a strange request.

"Please, K. Wine. I'm...I'm scared...can I hug you?"

The taller woman kept asking me. She looked anxious and refused to look in the direction where she said she saw the light flickered.

Is Lallalin afraid of ghosts?

The question popped into my mind but the fear in her eyes did not seem fake. Lallalin looked genuinely scared.

"I'm still working..."

"K. Wine, you finished all of the urgent tasks a while ago. You just have to double-check it, right? Please let me hug you?"

This sneaky woman...

"If I let you hug me, how am I supposed to continue working?"

"You can sit on my lap and work, Khun Wine. I can hug you myself."

"Wait," I yelped when Lallalin didn't just suggest it. She immediately got up from her chair and rushed over to carry me without caution. And there was no way could resist the strength of someone stronger. So I was being carried as if I were a stuffed animal.

And now, I was sitting on Lallalin's lap who was sitting behind me. Was this the right way to work?!

Okay.. Lallalin might be able to remain calm in this position, but I was the one who could not! My mind was running wild like this.

"Aren't I heavy?"

I grumbled softly when the woman's arm loosely wrapped around my waist.

"Not at all. It's like hugging a big teddy bear."

Lallalin replied in a relaxed tone and let out a deep sigh.

"Phew, this is much better."

'I'll be your teddy bear. Think of it as goodwill to help out this easily frightened girl...'

I thought as I continued typing from earlier.

"!"

And I had to flinch when Lallalin's warm lips touched the nape of my neck and started to nip it lightly.

"Hmm...K. Lal?"

If I were a teddy bear, I might think nothing of it and would probably like it when someone cuddled me. But I was a healthy human being with needs. You couldn't just nuzzle my neck like this!

Do you seriously hug a teddy bear like this, K. Lal? Where exactly are your hands touching there?

"We're in the office..."

I tried to stop her when she started to get handsy without caring where we were. I didn't know which part of me turned the caramel blonde-haired woman on, but this situation didn't look good. It was also very risky for me.

"Must be good being you, right? Even though you are rather small, you have a great body."

Lallalin pretended not to hear me, her hand slipped under my shirt to caress my stomach with intent. That made my breathing hitch.....

Even though I knew what Lallalin was going to do, I couldn't resist her. This woman knew intimately which parts of my body were sensitive to the touch... She knew how to make my emotions run wild and make my inside pool in arousal from her touch alone.

"Are you not afraid of ghosts anymore?"

"I read a theory from somewhere, they said that if we are afraid of ghosts, we should do lewd things instead to make the fear go away."

"Who's they? Ah..."

I gritted my teeth as I asked the woman who slipped her hand into my bra and deliberately flickered my nipple, causing me to flinch and shiver as I tried to toss away from the touch.

"I don't know, but right now it seems like an appropriate situation to do it. It's perfect for experimenting."

Lallalin laughed while nuzzling on the side of my neck.

'Don't test the theory with me then!'

I could only growl in my mind furiously when the woman latched on me in a perfect embrace, leaving me with no room to escape.

"Hey...I'm no longer afraid because 'playing' with you is more fun, K. Wine."

Hearing this sly woman's teasing words stunned me, it was then I realized that I had been tricked.

I knew it was strange. Lallalin used to work overtime late at night too, so why would she be afraid of ghosts? And she lived alone before...

"Was this your plan all along?"

"Don't think of me in such a bad light, Khun Wine."

Lallalin whispered softly in my ear.

"I was really worried about you, so I came to keep you company. But you are so cute, I couldn't keep my hands to myself."

She pressed her lips against my cheek with a loud smooch.

"Ah..."

Even though I was angry at the scheming woman who managed to fool me completely, my face was burning hot from Lallalin's compliment to the point that I wanted to hit myself instead.

"You're so cute when you're embarrassed, K. Wine. I like it..."

Her teasing hands grabbed my chest and pointed at where my heart was beating so hard from embarrassment. It was probably loud enough for her to feel it from the touch.

"Your heart is beating so fast."

"W-wait... someone might see."

I tried to change the subject when the woman seemed to take things further. I didn't know how much I could fool Lallalin.

"Everyone's gone home to sleep by now."

She immediately told me.

"K. Wine, hurry up and get to work so that we can finally go home."

"You're the one stopping that from happening! Ngh!"

I let go of the keyboard. I was about to turn back so I could scold the woman behind me, but my words were swallowed by her talkative lips.

Lallalin had always been a good kisser. Just her kiss alone could make my senses feel like they were on fire.

"Mint flavor...did you rinse your mouth earlier? I thought I would get the taste of *ramyeon*."

The tall woman teased after we parted.

"I thought you would taste like grilled pork too."

I replied when I tasted the faint mint from her mouth.

"You're good at talking back. Can you keep that up if I do this?"

"Don't go insid-"

"K. Wine..."

"Don't say it! It's all because of you!"

I threatened the woman who had reached lower to touch my sensitive part where it was wet. I was so embarrassed that my face was burning from the blush. Why didn't she try to see what it was like for me then? All the hugging, touching, and nuzzling. Whoever could stand it without being aroused should become a saint!

"...."

"No..."

I grabbed her wrist to prevent her from entering my body any further. My subconscious kept reminding me that this was an office and that I shouldn't be doing something like this...

"No one will see. Our company doesn't have any surveillance cameras, and your seat is quite secluded, K. Wine."

It was as if this fox demon was trying to seduce me and make me lower my defenses.

"...."

"If we leave things like this until we get back, the one who will feel tortured here is you."

Lallalin's fingers slowly penetrated my sensitive spot while her other hand was teasing my nipple. The woman's talkative lips tried to persuade me with those sweet words of hers. In the end, I was too turned on, so I let the tall woman do whatever she wanted with me.

"...."

"You're tighter than usual there. Are you excited?"

I turned to glare at her as soon as I heard the embarrassing words.

Lallalin was like this every time. She loves saying things that make me blush until my face almost burns...

"Ah-... Lal, not yet."

I could only purse my lips tightly and told her in a trembling voice when her fingers pressed against the sensitive spot inside the passage. We had done that countless times. It was no wonder that Lallalin could find the places that made me moan within a few seconds.

The tall woman looked very pleased by this too...

"I found the place that you liked so quickly, Wine. Don't you have any compliments for me?"

She did not only tease me with her words, Lallalin's slender fingers moved in and out of the passage at a slow pace, but intentionally rubbed against my weak point repeatedly.

"Haaa... You bully...Ngh..."

I tried to scold the woman, but unfortunately, when I opened my mouth to speak, only incoherent moans came out.

What a sly vixen! You bully. How did I let myself fall for someone like this!?

My body temperature soared until I felt like it was going to explode. The torture mixed with pleasure spread throughout my body. I almost couldn't endure it anymore.

"Lal...go faster, please?" I asked her.

"...of course."

"Haa... Wait, Lal, ah!"

I gasped in surprise because the other person sped up the pace without warning and even used her thumb to rub my clit violently.

Even if I said to go faster, can you give me some time to prepare myself?

"S... Slow down, slow down a bit."

"You're so spoiled, Wine. I did everything you asked for and you're still not satisfied?"

And the fingers that were moving suddenly stopped. It almost made me cry with the lingering feeling.

"Mhmm...can you stop teasing me?... I'm going crazy right now."

I gritted my teeth and begged her hoarsely because I wanted this blissful torture to end.

"Please... Lal..."

"I like it when you're being cute like this, Wine. You should do it more often."

Lallalin, who seemed satisfied with the request, moved her hand to wrap around my waist tightly while the slender fingers that were still inside my lower part started moving again until I tilted my face away and pursed my lips tightly to prevent the moans from leaking out.

"Lal! Ngh!"

And that hot rhythm sent me to my orgasm within a few seconds. The sensations were so intense that I couldn't hold back my voice, so I chose to bite the arm of the teasing person to prevent the screams from escaping my mouth.

"Ouch... You bit me hard, K. Wine. It'll definitely leave a mark."

Lallalin moaned softly because I bit her with all my might.

"Who told you to... Pant..."

I looked up and tried to control my rapid breathing while my inside was still clenching on Lallalin's slender fingers tightly and twitching uncontrollably. I tried to hold back my strength, or else she would have bled.

"You told me to go faster..."

The person who bullied me fell silent and apologized in a soft voice because my actions showed that I was really angry at her.

"K. Wine... I'm sorry."

Because of Lallalin's pleading, I gave in and accepted the other person's lips that pressed down again, trying to please me, while the lingering feeling

was still there. Until my breathing calmed down, the tall woman withdrew her fingers that were soaked in my fluid and wiped them clean.

"!!!"

And I was shocked again when Lallalin tried to use a paper napkin to wipe the sweet nectar that stained my folds.

"You don't have to... I'll do it myself."

"Let me help... okay?"

In the end, I had to give in to the other person's dejected tone. Even though I was so embarrassed that my face was about to explode with Lallalin's attentiveness, compared to the wrong that she had done, I had to punish her once and for all!

Slap

"Ouch! Khun Wine, you're hitting me?"

Lallalin exclaimed when I hit her with full force after I chased her back to her seat.

"This is still not enough."

I shot her a glare while fixing on my clothes. Then I blushed again when I realized that Lallalin had just done something embarrassing to me. I came right at my desk.

"This is so inappropriate..."

How am I going to look at this place on Monday? This memory will definitely be stuck in my brain for a long time....

"I'm sorry..."

"...."

"Please don't be mad, K. Wine."

I tried not to look at the pinky finger that was extended in front of me.

"K. Wine, please?"

I don't like myself right now. I was too soft-hearted for this woman...

"When we get back to your place, I'll get my revenge on you."

I sighed deeply and linked my pinky finger with the woman who was trying to make up with me.

It was because I was soft-hearted and let the other person do whatever she wanted. That's why things had gotten to this point...

'In the end, I had to take my work home!'

I could only complain in my mind while saving the files of the remaining tasks and closing my laptop.

"You're not going to work anymore?"

Lallalin shut her mouth abruptly when she met my fierce gaze.

"Ooh...your glare is scary. Hehe."

I glared at her.

'Who would be able to work after being teased like that?...'

When I finished packing, Lallalin helped me carry my bag. She offered me with a playful smile that made me growl at her with anger and embarrassment.

"Would you like to ride on my back, K. Wine? Your legs must be weak."

"Are you crazy?!"

"It's late at night, no one will see. Come on."

And Lallalin who bent down in front of me. It made me hesitate. But because my legs were trembling when they touched the ground, I decided to let her carry me on her back without making a fuss.

When I was lifted up and pressed against the back of the taller woman, I really couldn't stop the muscle in my chest from revealing how I felt...

"K. Wine, your heart is beating fast..."

"Because I'm afraid of falling..."

I pretended to change the subject and reached out to hug her neck tightly.

"If you drop me, you're dead."

"You're as light as cotton. I won't drop you."

Lallalin laughed and held me tighter with her hands.

"Let's go home."

"Okay..."

My heart felt so full when Lallalin mentioned going home. Could I take this as a good sign... that if I told her how I felt, the other woman would tell me the feelings were reciprocated?

Even if it's just a fleeting hope, I still want to enjoy this feeling of happiness for a little longer...

Even though our relationship will eventually come to an end...

□□□□□

□28 .Outing Trip□

They said that when we fell in love, we would see the whole world in pink. And if we were down bad for the person, we would be able to notice even the tiniest details about the object of your affection.

Vetaka was beautiful. That was what I thought from the moment I laid my eyes on her. Even though she barely wore makeup and always had thick glasses on, it didn't make her look any less attractive. If I did not know her well, I would think that Vetaka was the type of woman who didn't really care about fashion and beauty because she usually preferred to wear modest or formal attire.

But I had a feeling that Vetaka was putting on this kind of image on purpose...

One's career could shape their personality and character. In my case, I was a salesperson. Some of this career's strong suits were good rhetoric skills and the ability to think on one's feet. We had seen a lot of people in our career so another skill we gained by default was how to observe people's behaviors. And when it came to the person who had my whole heart, my interest in that person was probably doubled.

The thing about K. Wine is that... she likes beautiful things. So K. Wine probably likes me as well...

Okay, stop being such a simp and being narcissistic for a moment, Lallalin. Why did I think Vetaka probably liked beautiful things? Because sometimes when I put on makeup or paint my nails, the petite woman would sneak an interested glance at me but when I caught her, she would pretend she wasn't looking.

"Wanna try this lipstick?"

I teased her when I felt Vetaka's eyes sneaking a glance at my limited edition designer's brand lipstick. It was currently trending on the internet.

"This shade is so pretty, the texture is nice too, and it smells so good."

"N-No, it's fine. I was just wondering if you changed your lipstick again."

Vetaka immediately turned down the offer and scrolled her phone to cover it up. which made my suspicions grow even more.

Why would K. Wine deny her interest? What is her reason?

"Won't you give it a try? I'll help you put it on."

"No need. It won't look good on me anyway, Mhm!"

I ignored Vetaka's refusal and applied lipstick on her using my lips.

"Hey!"

"See? It's pretty."

When I pulled away from the kiss, I grabbed the powder container and opened the case to let her see her reflection in the mirror.

The lip gloss on her lips looked glossy and beautiful, it was well worth the price... But K. Wine's face right now was redder than the shade of the lipstick...

I was quite sure that Vetaka must have been somewhat affected by my actions. When I flirted with her, with just a few sweet words, the petite woman looked so embarrassed that she blushed hard.

But it's not obvious enough... I need to be more reassured...

"It's not pretty..."

When Vetaka saw herself in the mirror, she bent down to wipe her mouth with a napkin and muttered softly. Her small hands adjusted the glasses on her face.

"Stop playing around. What if the glasses hit your face?"

"Have you ever tried wearing contact lenses, K. Wine?"

I wondered when I looked at the woman's thick glasses.

"I have...I don't really like them. It irritates my eyes."

Vetaka answered hesitantly and looked away.

"It would be nice to see your face without your glasses."

"You see it often enough."

Vetaka grumbled when she heard my idle complaint.

"Other than when you wake up and when we are doing that... If you're nearsighted, what do you see when you look at something? Like, is it blurry?"

"If I have to explain it to someone with normal vision like you, I guess it would be frosted glass?" I listened to Vetaka's explanation and imagined it.

"Then... don't you want to get a clear view of my face?...sometimes, your glasses are in the way."

I leaned in to whisper softly in her ear and walked to the washing machine to hang up the clothes, leaving Vetaka to blink in confusion on the sofa before her face turned red as soon as she realized what I was talking about.

Sometimes my entertainment came in the form of teasing this straight-faced tiger. The petite woman was so cute when she was embarrassed...

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Coming to work at a new company was like moving to a new school. Other than having to work to make yourself worth the salary, you also had to adjust to the company's environment. Since I came in at a time when the company was adjusting and trying to add more activities for the employees to do along with the work, I got to try many new things.

Company Outing Trip was like going to an adult scout camp. It was an activity trip to build unity among the employees. It didn't seem to work though, did they seriously think that playing fun games would change our work habits? Hell no...

So for me, this activity is just a fun way to hunt for prizes.

Besides, I get to stay overnight at a beautiful hotel with Vetaka... All Hail Company Outing Trip.

Today, the bus was unusually chaotic. There was gossip going on that made me curious. Luckily I had Noomnim as my personal spy. She really lived up to her nickname, Nim the All-Seeing...

"You should check it out yourself, P' Lal. You'll have to sit next to her anyway."

Noomnim left me with her cryptic words. When I arrived at my seat, my jaw dropped a little at the sight of the person in front of me. Vetaka looked different than usual, she had a high ponytail and lacked her glasses. Her sweet-featured, beautiful face was plain for everyone in the company to see.

She's so cute...oh my poor heart...

"The bus is about to leave now. Sit down, hurry."

And Vetaka grabbed me, who was standing still, by the arm.

From the day we went to plant the trees, I had become Vetaka's seat partner by default. No matter what event the company organized, the seat next to Vetaka would belong to me as if someone reserved it for me.

That also included being roommates this time when the company arranged for the hotel room...

"P' Lal... If you can't sleep because K' Wine radiates her scary vibe, you can text me anytime. I will take one for the team and sleep in front of the bathroom for you."

"Don't be so dramatic."

I laughed softly when Noomnim rushed to me, looking alarmed, as soon as she saw the announcement on how they assigned the rooms. Normally they would draw the lottery to get the results, but for me... I suspected that P' Jantra must have set the result prior... the power of the moon was astonishing.

"P' Lal, you sacrificed so much. I shall remember this heroic act and tell my descendants about this to pass on your legend."

I felt like I had gained the benefits from both sides. I had been praised as a heroine for being the one who had to deal with K. Wine, and I also got the chance to get close to the petite woman...

"Glasses.... and hairstyles..."

I greeted Vetaka as soon as I sat down next to her. Before we left my place earlier today, the petite woman was still wearing glasses and letting her hair down like every day.

"There are activities I have to participate in... it will be difficult... if I wear glasses and let my hair down..."

Vetaka looked down, pretending to look at her phone. That made me pick up my own smartphone and quickly type on the screen.

Btw: Lullaby

you're so cute today: Lullaby

Vetaka blushed a pink shade, her ears, though flushed deep red, it was so adorable that it made me want to bite it...

'Keep it together, Lal, we're on the bus... the moment we get to the room, we could...'

the room is very nice, you know: **Lullaby**

there's even a bathtub: **Lullaby**

Sent Sticker*: **Lullaby**

Wine: we're on a company outing!

I happen to live by the 'work hard, play harder motto: **Lullaby**

This time, Vetaka stopped looking at the phone screen and looked up at me, glaring. It might have scared me off in the past, but now...sigh...she looked like a hissing giant cat... I just wanted to grab her and scratch her chin until she gave in.

"You seem excited."

"I like everything about competition and exercise."

I turned to answer the petite woman with a big smile and took the pamphlet of the activity schedule that the HR staff were handing out to the employees. I flipped it open with interest.

"Just looking at the activities makes me feel tired."

"Well, you really don't like exercising, do you?"

"It seems like I'll be on the same team as you again."

Vetaka handed me a blue wristband. Her pretty face looked surprised because this time, the wristbands were given out in a pamphlet to arrange people into teams at random.

My mobile phone vibrated, indicating that someone sent me a text. I smiled softly when I read it.

The Moon Power: Please take care of Wine, dear

You can leave it to me: **Lullaby**

I'll say it again... The power of the moon is truly astonishing.

"You can rest assured since you're on the same team as me. I'll win first place in every activity."

"The prize is just a can of cookies ... maybe you don't have to be that determined about it?"

Vetaka said to me, sighing, while I continued to read the schedule on the pamphlet to plan my strategy for this competition with high spirits.

It doesn't matter what the prize is, as long as I win first place, that's considered a win!

Lallalin was the type of person who kept her word. In the end, I was able to win first place for my team. The members who were on the same team as me exclaimed and took group photos with the trophy, enjoying the moment. Then there was an announcement telling us to go rest and enjoy our leisure time before assembling again for dinner.

"You're too reckless sometimes,"

Vetaka kept saying as she headed to the room. She shoved a towel into my hands seeing that I was soaked with water, it practically dripping from my shirt.

The last base of the activity required team unity and quick wits. The rules were simple: we had to fill the basin with seawater which was about ten meters away from the basin. The team with the highest volume of water won.

"I mean, they have a prize for us, so..."

I always got swept away by every competition. No matter what task it was, whether they asked me to jump or fly, my team had to win...

"Taking off your shirt is a bit too much."

"I have a tank top underneath though..."

I tried to explain, but when I saw the petite woman's angry and worried expression, I only apologized quietly.

"Sorry for not being careful."

At that time, all I could think about was winning. And if I dipped my shirt into seawater, I would definitely be able to bring back more water than if I just scooped it up with my hands or took it in my mouth.

"I'm just worried about you... I don't want anyone to think badly of you."

Vetaka mumbled when she heard my apology. She quickly changed the subject by pushing me into the bathroom.

"We're going to have dinner at the restaurant at five. Hurry up and take a shower so I can shower after you. I feel so sweaty right now."

"Come shower together so we don't waste the time."

I grabbed her arm and dragged Vetaka, who shouted in surprise, into the bathroom with me.

"Wait-"

I had been eyeing the petite woman's pale nape since we got on the bus. Not only did she not wear glasses, but the petite woman also had her hair tied in a ponytail. Who could possibly resist that?

I'll help you scrub every single inch of your body. You can trust me on this, K. Wine...

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What made this hotel special was that it had facilities for outing activities specifically. So our company was not the only company here. But normally, the schedule for using the recreational areas was arranged so that each company would not run into each other, for the sake of privacy.

But it was a different story when it came to meal time...

The dining room, which was the meeting point for the company dinner, had a large buffet line with a variety of international dishes prepared. The juniors in my department really liked it... I saw Noomnim shout with wide eyes when she was checking out the buffet while Bas could only shake his head slightly at her, he was holding piles of food in both of his hands.

The hotel will definitely go bankrupt after these two are done with the food...

"K. Wine, do you want anything to eat? I'll get it for you."

"I can go get it myself!"

The petite woman replied harshly and walked straight to where the food was to get food for me. I smiled and watched her fondly.

I mean, she did use a lot of energy in the bathroom earlier. So I'm worried that she'll feel tired...

"N' Wine, N' Lal, how are the food? Is it to your liking?"

P' Jantra, who came by to check on everything, greeted us both and asked for feedback. To be honest, I had quite the respect for the HR department. They had to deal with a large group of people, just thinking about it made me feel tired. They even had to try and make everything meet everyone's satisfaction.

"It's really delicious, P' Jantra."

I replied with a bright smile.

"You seem to be the happiest one around here, N' Lal. You worked out a lot. Eat up."

P' Jantra teased me in good humor when she saw the piles of dishes lined up on my table.

"The activities were fun. The room is nice. The bathroom is great too."

"It's good that you like it. Phew... I'm relieved to hear that."

P' Jantra looked happy to receive positive feedback from me. But I noticed Vetaka had not looked up from her soup at all, her flushed ears could be seen amidst her hair.

Someone here still thinks about what happened in the bathroom, it seems...

"And how are you doing, N' Wine? I saw you this morning, you took off your glasses and changed your hairstyle. It's very lovely, dear."

"G-good... everything is good. Thank you so much, P' Jantra."

"N' Lal, please take care of N' Wine. You know, since you came working here, N' Wine has never looked so lively."

"P' Jantra!..."

Vetaka cried out weakly at P' Jantra. She probably felt like she was being exposed.

"Alright, I won't bother you girls anymore. I'll check on other tables now. Enjoy your meal, you two."

"You should do it again, the ponytail, I mean."

I teased the woman in front of me, smirking at her.

"..."

Vetaka looked up and glared at me while fixing her long hair to cover the faint teeth mark on the nape of her neck.

I knew that she must have been scolding me with her gaze just now.

'Well... I couldn't help myself. I just want a taste...

"I'll go get more soup."

I watched the shy woman walk to the food area on the other side and couldn't help but smile because Vetaka was acting so cute.

And while I was having the food on the table, the petite woman came back and sat down empty-handed. I was curious because she had said earlier that she was going to get more soup.

"Didn't you say you were going to get pumpkin soup?"

"... I'm not hungry anymore."

"There are a lot of other companies organizing events during this time period, aren't they?"

I told her conversationally when I saw that the dining room was crowded with so many different groups of people. Though, each company had its own separate seating zone.

"Yeah..."

"I didn't see those people at all during the day. They must have gone to do other activities."

"K. Lal... I'm full. I'm going back to the room first. You can continue eating."

Vetaka suddenly spoke up, making me wonder even more. Just what did she see when she went to get her soup? The woman was clearly paranoid after she came back.

"K. Wine, you only ate a little. Are you feeling unwell?"

"I'm not feeling very well right now," Vetaka hesitated.

"Then... can you wait for me for another ten minutes? I'll go back with you."

At first, Vetaka looked like she wanted to refuse, but then she looked around carefully. I noticed that she let out a sigh before nodding a little, agreeing to my suggestion.

It was not a normal walk on their way back to the room. Vetaka paced as if she was trying to get away from something. I was worried because she squeezed my hand so hard that it started to be painful.

"There are a lot of people waiting for the elevator...let's go to the back."

When Vetaka saw that the elevator was filled with a large group of people waiting, the petite woman turned around and grabbed my hand, almost forcing me to follow her.

It was the same reaction she had when we did the reforestation that time...

Vetaka is afraid of something...

I watched the narrow back of the woman in front of me with questions mixed with concern. But then, K. Wine stopped walking so suddenly causing me to almost bump into her. As I was about to ask what happened, the petite woman moved closer to me when I heard someone greet her.

"I knew it. It really is you, Nong Wine."

□□□□□

□29.Bad Memory□

Everyone had different ways of dealing with horrible situations. Some chose to ignore it, some chose to fight back, while some chose to run away...

Vetaka is afraid of something...

I watched the narrow back of the woman in front of me with questions mixed with concern. But then, K. Wine stopped walking so suddenly causing me to almost bump into her. As I was about to ask what happened, the petite woman moved closer to me when I heard someone greet her.

"I knew it. It really is you, Nong Wine."

Said a middle-aged man. He was tall, well-built, handsome as well...

It took me one look before I decided that this man was not the trustworthy type. My instincts told me that his soft, pleasant voice along with his gentle smile was laced with some kind of danger that I could not explain.

"Do you remember me? I'm P' Korn."

"...."

Vetaka stiffened in front of the middle-aged man who was blocking her way on purpose. Right now, the two of us were on the side of the parking lot where there was no one around. The petite woman squeezed my hand tight in fear.

"It's been a long time since we've last seen each other. You're still as lovely. N' Wine. How are you?"

"I'm fine..."

Vetaka answered his question quietly.

"And how have you been, N' Wine? I haven't heard from you at all. How's your new job, is it good?"

The man continued to ask her in a friendly manner.

"It's...okay."

"It was so shocking for me when you suddenly resigned."

What this man named Korn had said made Vetaka tremble so violently that I could feel it from here.

"N' Wine, are you still not getting over what happened? I really didn't mean to...."

"Can you please stop?"

I said out of frustration when the man made a move to reach for Vetaka's shoulder. I used my body to shield the shaking woman behind me.

"And who are you?"

"It doesn't matter who I am. You have eyes, you should be able to see that Khun Wine doesn't want to talk to you at all."

"She hasn't even said anything. Why are you meddling in other people's business?"

I held Vetaka's cold hand tightly and glared at the man in front of me. At first, he was clearly upset and tried to get close to Vetaka, but when he met my angry glare, he stopped and backed away.

"Hey, don't do this to me. I came to say hi to you seeing that you and I know each other."

He still tried to smoothen things up with his words.

"...."

"N' Wine, I'm not mad at you anymore for accusing me like that back then. It was a long time ago."

"You still talking?"

I lowered my voice out of anger as I was overtaken by rage.

I have to thank all the classes at the fitness center for giving me a foundation in Muay Thai. I could knock him down even if he is a man bigger than me!

Eventually, the man backed down and walked away, I eyed him carefully until he was out of sight. When I was sure that the man wouldn't come back, I held Vetaka's hand, who was still looking uneasy, and took her with me.

"Let's go back to our room, Khun Wine."

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After dinner, it was free time in the schedule, they would meet again at nine a.m. in the conference room for a seminar on how to deal with stress at the workplace. At first, I planned to invite the petite woman to walk along the beach after dinner, but when things turned out like this, I had to take Khun Wine, who was still shaken by what happened earlier, back to the room.

Vetaka looked more relaxed after the two of us were in the room. As I was about to start talking to her, a notification from the LINE application interrupted me.

NoomNim:

P'Lal, we're having a mini casino at P'Bas's room today

NoomNim:

come join us anytime if u want

NoomNim: Sent Photo*

I couldn't help but smile when I saw a selfie of Neomnim in her pajamas with her little casino party. Normally, some fun gambling and alcohol were something that I would never turn down in an outing like this.

But right now, I have something else to worry about...

I'll pass: **Lullaby**

Gonna get some sleep: **Lullaby**

Have a seminar early morning tmr: **Lullaby**

Don't stay up all night!: **Lullaby**

Rrrr

After I turned them down via LINE, my mobile phone received a call. The caller was none other than...

[P' Lal!!! Why are you abandoning us!? Didn't you say you would be the croupier!!!]

Noomnim was yelling so loudly that I had to take the phone away from my ear before I could go deaf from my mischievous subordinate's scream.

"I have back pain... I'm going to bed now. I guess I overdid the activities today."

I chose to lie, but with my superior convincing skills as the boss, Noomnim, who had less experience, definitely couldn't catch on.

[Aw, that's too bad... Rest well, P' Lal. Good night.]

"Good night, kid."

When I hung up, I smiled.

You're way too young to compete with me in this thinking-on-the-spot skills, Noomnim...

"You can go, if you want. You prepared a lot of twenty-baht bills just for this after all."

Vetaka walked over and grabbed the hem of my shirt, her eyes looking up through her lashes at me, looking disheartened after she saw that I had just turned down Noomnim's invitation.

"Khun Wine..."

I turned and took her hand instead.

"How could I leave you alone like this?"

"I'm sorry for being so silent and letting you do all the talking back then."

Vetaka started the conversation first, which surprised me a little.

"And thank you so much for helping me out..."

"That man...can you tell me what's the matter with him?"

"..."

Vetaka looked uncomfortable at that. But this time, I couldn't let the petite woman keep this to herself anymore.

I took Vetaka's hand and led her to sit at the end of the bed. I turned to face the woman who was trying to avoid eye contact with me...

"I'm very worried about you, Wine. You might not realize it, but how you acted that time...it was unlike your usual self that I know."

I held the petite woman's hand and gently massaged her palm.

"Your hands were cold, did you know? And your body was shaking like you were having a panic attack."

And my soothing method made Vetaka apologize to me.

"I'm sorry for making you worry...it's all my fault. I thought that I'd grown up a lot since then, that I'd gotten stronger, but the moment I saw him, I was trembling, I was horrified, I didn't know what to do. Just like back then."

"What did that man do to you, Wine? Can you tell me about it? Please... I want to listen to your worries too."

"You won't look at me any differently, will you?"

The petite woman hesitated. Her big round eyes were so frightened that I wanted to pull her in for a tight embrace, but I could only hold her hand to give her encouragement.

"I don't want you to hate me..."

"I don't know what you've been through in the past, Wine, but trust me. I'm a reasonable person, you know?"

I squeezed Vetaka's hand firmly and looked into her eyes to convey my sincerity.

"I just graduated...at that time."

Eventually, Vetaka slowly told me the story... starting with a freshly graduated girl who had just gotten her first job. Because it was her first company, everything seemed so new to the petite woman. In the beginning, everything was going well, Vetaka thought that she had found her dream company. She was close to her colleagues and seniors in the department, the other employees had been kind to her.

Vetaka was adored by seniors from various departments. Sometimes they took her out for meals or brought her snacks. The petite woman accepted it willingly because she thought it was just a welcoming gesture, gifting to the new kid in the company, and P' Korn was among these seniors.

"Everyone was so kind to me, it was like I'm the youngest sister in the company. I was the youngest there after all."

"P' Korn was just like them. He was a Sales Engineer, he had to deliver documents to me, so we talked often....he seemed like a gentleman and he was kind...so I trusted him a lot. That day....I had to check the stock. When I arrived, no one else on the schedule had come down to the warehouse yet, I and P' Korn were the only ones that arrived on time."

"So we started working. But while I was chatting with him as I was walking to where the products were, he suddenly complimented me, saying that...I was cute....and he hugged me..."

"I didn't know what to do at that time, Lal. I froze but I still let him pull me into a hug. After a while, the other seniors came to join us. P' Korn let go of me and acted as normal. After that, I felt completely dazed and kept asking myself over and over again if I just got harassed?"

"But I didn't dare to say anything and I chose to keep my distance from him instead..."

"I thought that was it. But I was wrong..."

Vetaka stopped talking and took a deep breath as if she was trying to gather the courage to fight her horror. I held her hand to comfort her.

"P' Korn...followed me into the document storage room... but this time, it wasn't just a hug...he tried to do something more. I was startled and when I was about to call for help, he covered my mouth. He told me that if I agreed to be his, he would take good care of me... I was so scared, I was shaking and didn't know what to do. But luckily, the file that I put on the shelf fell down then because I was so startled by the hug, I just managed to put it there. The sound made everyone in the company hear it and knocked on the door to see if anyone was hurt. So I managed to escape..."

"This time, I couldn't keep quiet anymore. I was very scared, so I told my colleagues and seniors in my department, asking them what I should do, and whether I should inform HR or not. At first, everyone was surprised and stopped me...they told me that I should wait and see a bit longer because they didn't believe that P' Korn, who seemed to have a bright future

ahead of him, who already had a girlfriend he was about to get married with, would do something like that to me, a newly graduated girl."

"And in the end, it got out...even though I... only told the people that I thought were my close friends, the people that I trusted..."

"They wondered, if I wasn't okay with it...why didn't I scream in the stock room the first time? Why did I stay quiet... until it happened the second time before telling everyone?"

"P' Korn denied the accusation... He said he just wanted to check the documents. And since there was no evidence, I was accused of making things up because I wanted to have P' Korn for myself."

"And it started to escalate, people started gossiping about it. Saying that I had a habit of seducing men... because I sometimes got close and chatted with male seniors, that I dressed up all pretty to catch men's attention, and that I liked to accept things from men who flirted with me so I could lead them on."

"I didn't know... I had no idea at all. I was only talking to them because they came to greet me, so I just chatted with them. About the way I dressed...I just wanted to change how I looked. I accepted the gifts because everyone in the department also received the same gifts. It turned out that everyone I thought was kind to me just wanted to flirt with me... I tried to tell everyone, but everyone said that I was playing coy and putting on a show..."

Vetaka's tears fell from the overwhelmed feelings she kept inside...

"No one believed me."

The petite woman tried to take a deep breath to hold back her sobs.

"And when I told my family about this...all they did was ask me did I do something that aroused him, did this happen because I didn't behave at work. Everything that happened was my fault..."

"I'm so sorry by the way...my family did not make me feel safe and comfortable either so what right did I have to criticize yours."

"Khun Wine.."

I couldn't just listen to her without doing anything anymore, so I pulled Vetaka who was shaking from her sobs into a hug.

When she was held, the petite woman hugged me back tightly and let herself cry her heart out.

"In the end...I quit because I couldn't handle the pressure anymore."

"When I was looking for a new job, I thought to myself that if I couldn't fix the problem with other people, I just had to fix myself..."

I could only hug Vetaka tightly, trying to suppress my anger so hard that my eyes also watered.

It was no wonder why Vetaka was so fair with everything. She never accepted free gifts from anyone. Everything had to be shared equally. And the reason she acted cold and did not get close to anyone at work was because the petite woman had such a painful past.

And what angered me the most...

Was the actions of one horrible man and that disgusting group of people took away Vetaka's confidence for ten years. It was so infuriating...

"Wine... Listen to me, okay?"

I took off her glasses from her tear-stained face and carefully used a napkin to gently wipe them away.

"You did nothing wrong, Wine, responding afterward like that. You didn't expect that you would experience that when you went to check the stock. You were very brave for fighting for yourself."

"It doesn't matter how you dress, if they want to harass someone, they would do it anyway."

"I hate it so much, this whole victim-blaming thing. Why do we have to blame the victim when it was those terrible people's fault?"

"I dressed up like this every day because I wanted to, not for anyone else."

"I feel joy every time I see myself in the mirror, and I want you to experience that happiness too"

"Don't give these people in your old company too much credit. I think they were jealous of you because you were cute and pretty and that many people were trying to hit on you."

"You are beautiful, Wine. Even without makeup, you are already so gorgeous. How stunning would you be with makeup?"

I looked Vetaka in the eyes with all honesty I could muster, it made her shyly look away.

"B-but..."

"You can change some little things at a time. If anyone dares to talk shit about you, I will make them regret it."

I smirked cruelly.

"What happened today was just a coincidence. You probably won't see him again, Wine. Don't worry, okay?"

"But... when we went planting the trees."

Vetaka's reluctance gave me the answer immediately. So... that asshole P' Korn was there too that day...

"Then I will be by your side, Wine. I assure you, you will be safe."

When there were no tears on the petite woman's face, I returned the glasses to Vetaka.

"Trust me. I just chased him away earlier, didn't I?"

Vetaka could only nod at my confident words.

"Thank you so much, Khun Lal. I feel... much better."

"Would you mind calling me Lal... without the honorifics 'Khun'?"

I told Vetaka my request, wanting to take a step a little further in our relationship.

"I think we're close now, right?"

When the petite woman heard my request and saw my puppy eyes, Vetaka lowered her head and uttered.

"Then you should call me Wine... without the "Khun" as well."

Vetaka's face was very red when she spoke.

"But only when we're alone, alright?"

And Vetaka's permission made me grin from ear to ear.

"From now on, I will teach you how to do makeup."

I would make everyone see how gorgeous Vetaka was even more.

"There's no need... I'm good for now..."

"Wine, can't you see? You sent everyone in the company into a meltdown just by taking off your glasses and changing your hairstyle today."

"Lal, you're so..."

Vetaka laughed at my joke. I was relieved that I could finally put a full smile on the petite woman's face.

It might take some time, but I will make Vetaka become more comfortable being herself again...

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The two of us talked until late at night, Vetaka excused herself to shower again before bed. The woman gave in to me when I asked to join her in the shower. After we finished showering, I put tea bags on the woman's swollen eyelids from all the crying she had to reduce the swelling.

When it was time for bed, I called Vetaka who was sleeping next to me in a soft whisper.

"Hey, Wine..."

"?"

"Can I hold you...?"

I asked the petite woman shyly. Vetaka didn't answer anything but she moved closer so that I could pull her tiny frame to my chest.

"Thank you... for worrying about me."

Vetaka muttered to me again.

"I have to thank you too, for telling me about it."

"I'm glad that you're here with me, Lal."

Vetaka hugged me back, and the intimacy allowed me to hear Vetaka's heartbeat clearly.

"Wine..."

I called out softly. Vetaka shyly looked up at me.

I want to tell her... about how much I love her... about how I want to take care of her forever...

"Yes?"

...Sweet dreams, okay?"

My words made Vetaka pause for a moment before she said goodnight back.

"Goodnight."

I looked at Vetaka, who was sleeping soundly in my arms, with a gaze filled with so much love that I couldn't conceal it.

Adoration... Love...

The words describing my feelings for her filled my heart, making it so full, but when I opened my mouth to speak, I couldn't say anything because right now Vetaka was not in her best condition... I didn't want to take advantage of her feelings.

Our relationship had progressed this far today, it was considered a very good sign already...

I wanted to have her in my arms like this every night. Would this wistful hope inside me ever come true?

□□□□□

□30. Lallalin's Power□

They said that no human was inherently black or white. Everyone was gray... There may be some who were darker or lighter shades of gray. Meaning that no one was a hundred percent good or bad...still, would it hurt for them to be a lighter shade of gray?

"I think Khun Wine is in love with someone," Noomnim said conversationally after putting the work on the document tray for me to approve.

"Alright, break it down for me. What makes you think that?"

I leaned back against the chair as I waited for Noomnim's theory. When my menace of a subordinate saw that I was interested, she explained with such enthusiasm.

"Well, she has been looking great lately, like prettier than usual. I mean... I thought that Khun Wine was already cute before. It's just that she doesn't dress up much. When she puts on makeup and dresses up like this, holy cow, she's so fine."

"Uh-huh, go on."

"There is only one reason why women suddenly become prettier in a short period of time, they are in love!!!" Noomnim concluded, looking confident.

"I wonder which guy is responsible for making the cold-hearted Khun Wine shine so beautifully like this."

After listening to Noomnim's analysis, I couldn't help but scowl but then I quickly schooled my expression before she noticed.

What guy? I'm the only one who's been dolling her up.

I was the one who chose her beautiful clothes and all the makeup on Vetaka's face was mine.

I cuddled with her every night in bed. How could Khun Wine fall for anyone else but me!?

"I'll go meet a client now."

"Oh...I thought you were going to check my work."

Noomnim looked baffled when I suddenly gathered my belongings.

"I'll do it tomorrow morning. I better get going first. See you tomorrow."

I was so annoyed that I wasn't in the mood to check the document...

"Um...in that case, drive safe, P' Lal."

I paced in my high heels in a foul mood. Thinking back to Noomnim's words earlier, I felt even more irritated. If some handsome guy really came to hit on Vetaka, would she get swept away? And because I was so lost in thoughts, I didn't see the subject of my thoughts walking towards me with documents in her hands.

"Are you heading off to see a client?"

Vetaka stopped to greet me first.

"Yeah, the meeting location is pretty far away so I should head off now."

I tried not to take my irritation out on her. When I really took in Vetaka's appearance, she really did change. Even though she still had that stern air around, she was also...stunningly gorgeous, drop-dead gorgeous, in fact...

My thoughts were mixed up, alternating between wanting to keep this beautiful Khun Wine for myself and wanting to let the whole world know that my Khun Wine was so, so fine, guys.

"Then can you wait a moment, Lal... No... I mean Khun Lal?"

But it seemed that Vetaka was more focused on how I hurried out to meet the client. The woman told me briefly and immediately walked to the pantry, leaving me standing there. Puzzled, I watched her small back as she walked away.

And shortly after, Khun Wine came back and handed me a small bag.

"See you in the evening."

She turned and walked back to her department after I took the bag. And before I could ask anything, a notification sound came from my phone.

Wine: Your lunch for today.

I saw the text and opened the bag. I saw the noodles from a famous restaurant in an insulated food container, I had to try my hardest to hold back a smile.

you're the best, Wine: Lullaby

Hm... I'm not afraid of some handsome guys taking Vetaka from me. Did she order food for those handsome dudes? Nope... She only bought lunch for Lallalin!

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After the outing, my relationship with Vetaka improved greatly by leaps. I thought that I was being very obvious that I wanted to ask her out...even though I never explicitly said it directly.

But the petite woman went out with me almost every weekend now and even let me hold her close to me every night. I thought those were good signs suggesting that Khun Wine must have feelings for me as well.

I couldn't wait for the day I could confess my love to her...

But if Lallalin were to do something this big, she would have to do more preparation.

Vetaka is like an important client that I have to get at all costs.

I have to perfectly seal the deal on asking Khun Wine to be my girlfriend!

I was determined by the time I was parking the car in the parking lot to wait for the appointment time. I had a meeting with a client today about a new project at a large company. If I succeeded, it'd be my masterpiece work for the company.

I better work hard for it!

But when I opened the conference room's door to meet my important client, my bright smile suddenly disappeared. I meant...I only liked the small world theory because it made me meet Vetaka by accident. But the world really did not have to be this small...it wouldn't hurt to be big sometimes, okay?

Like so big and flat that it made this man in front of me sail across the sea and fall off the edge of the world. It would do me a great favor if that happened.

I looked at the man sitting in the Sales Engineer Manager position, I was so infuriated by the fact that I crossed paths with him again, as a client too.

"Good afternoon, Khun Korn, I'm Lallalin from the XX Company. I'm here to discuss the project..."

I introduced myself to the man in front of me politely and handed him my business card.

"Good afternoon, Khun Lal. We meet again."

Korn looked at me and smirked as he reached out to take my business card. It seemed that he calculated the timing of his movement wrong because his hand made contact with mine.

He was trying to touch my hand when he took the business card... this pervert...

Habits can change, but his disgusting nature probably could not...

I mused in disgust, but what could I do? Part of a salesperson's job was to deal with all kinds of clients. Men like him were like secret boss levels in a dungeon. 1, who had leveled up with so much XP, must defeat him at all costs.

"Please allow me to explain-"

"Khun Lal, I forgot to tell you that I have an urgent meeting. Can I postpone the project we planned to discuss to tomorrow instead?"

That did not mean I did not want to curse him out loud to hell and back, I hated this kind of person. The man was clearly doing it on purpose!

"I can come back tomorrow...feel free to pick the time for us, K. Korn."

I could only swallow the curses I had for the man down and replied to him sweetly.

There are so many different swears and curses I have for him but I can't say even one of them...ugh...

Even though I was being pushed down right now, I still didn't give up and tried to complete this task.

No matter how irritating this is, the man is still a client. What can I do?

And when it was time for the rescheduled appointment, I could only try my best to present my work. What happened between that man and Vetaka had already passed a long time ago. As long as this guy didn't show up and cause my Khun Wine trouble again...

I'll just have to hold on until this job is done. After this project is over, so long, sucker!"

I kept telling myself that I had to separate work from personal matters.

"That's too bad, Khun Lal...your offer is quite interesting, but there are many other companies that want to offer me good deals as well," he said casually after I finished presenting the work.

"..."

"But Khun La, if you have something more....appealing for me... I might consider signing the deal without waiting for other companies' offers."

'Something more appealing? No way he meant well with that.'

I looked at him suspiciously. Even though I was very upset, I couldn't let this project slip away either. Not without trying my best first.

"It's lunchtime now, K. Korn. How about you let me treat you for a meal, to show how good I am at taking care of an important potential client such as yourself?"

I flashed him an enticing smile.

"This isn't quite appealing, though," he quickly commented. I had to reply to him hesitantly.

"...I'm afraid that's all the time I have today, Khun Korn."

"Then, perhaps you'd have more time for me next time? I like you, Khun Lal. You put on quite a fight and you're confident. I want to get to know you better."

The man told me without beating around the bush at all. It was a good move on his part, he probably made many women fall for his face and his charisma alone.

But I already knew what kind of person you are, asshole. You can't fool me!

"Shall we talk about it over lunch then?"

Fortunately, I was able to smoothen things over before it was too late. But I still had to catch a breather in the bathroom and sighed a few times. If the theory that said a person's lifespan would decrease every time they sighed was true, my life would have been shortened by a decade already.

This project was huge and troublesome. I wouldn't back down if it was just about presenting the project, but my own safety was at risk in this too.

No matter how dedicated I was to my job, I wouldn't sleep my way to get the job done.

While I was thinking hard about how to handle the problem, my eyes glanced at the poster on the bathroom wall. After reading the poster, I couldn't help but smirk when a good idea came to my mind.

Heh... that man thinks he has the upper hand? He'll see what plans I have in store for him...

Let's see... how can I get revenge for Vetaka...

You don't have to wait for the judgment calls for God to punish you anymore. Because Lallalin will do the punishing herself, don't worry.

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I made an appointment with the man to go to a fancy restaurant with a private room. Although it was quite dangerous, the result would be worth it... so I had to take a risk...

"I'm terribly sorry, K. Korn. I was rude to you last time."

I started by apologizing to the man politely, and that made the man in front of me look even more smug.

"It's fine. I don't mind such trivial matters." Korn smiled calmly.

"Um...wouldn't it be more convenient for you to sit on the opposite side?"

I asked when he deliberately sat down on the sofa on the same side as me.

"Not at all, I think sitting next to each other like this is more convenient."

'Convenient your ass!'

I could only curse him in my mind when I felt a rough hand touching my thigh and petting it back and forth as he pleased.

I didn't like this man's intruding gaze and actions even though I was dressed formally. The man was disgusting...but for Vetaka and all the women who might experienced it like the petite woman.

I have to go for it...

"Khun Korn! Let's eat first...save this for next time..."

I grabbed his arm and tried to pull his attention to the fancy food in front of us. But it seemed that this man was not interested in the delicious food anymore.

"I'm going to..."

Korn mumbled in a daze as he was about to press a kiss on my cheek. I pushed the man away with all my strength in disgust.

"!!!"

"Hey, what are you doing?"

"I should be the one asking you, Khun Korn. I just invited you to a meal since you are a potential customer."

When I explicitly refused, Korn showed his obvious irritation.

"You're backing off now!? I thought we had an agreement."

"Khun Korn, what I can offer you must be within the company's agreement."

I looked at him, determined.

"I have to apologize if you want more than that"

"Sigh...this trick again. N' Wine taught you this trick, didn't she? Let me tell you something, Khun Lal. It's annoying when women play hard to get."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Don't act coy now. You just rejected me now to make it more interesting. didn't you? But you actually want me to chase after you, right? It's the same with all of you. These are obvious tricks. Did Wine teach you this? You've been trained well."

"You dare to talk about the woman you harassed like this?..."

"Heh... Harassed? She was seducing me, leading me on, and making a fuss when I played along."

Korn said nonchalantly. I had to clench my fists to calm myself down so I wouldn't grab the chopsticks on the table and stab them into his eyes to teach him a lesson for bad-mouthing my Khun Wine.

"...So you think every woman is nice to you because they want to seduce you?"

"Isn't that why you dress up nicely for business meetings? Besides, my offer is a win-win situation for both of us. You get to sell your products and make a good performance."

He said smugly like he had the upper hand, "I've given you a good offer. Won't you care to reconsider it?"

"...."

"Don't play hard to get, doll. A woman's only job is to be a man's wife. No matter how capable and strong you believe yourself to be, deep down I know you just crave a man's warmth and comfort."

I sighed quietly at his words. He was so confident of that extra limb between his legs. I wanted to let him know out of goodwill that most men tended to think that their sex skills were so great in bed. But several interviews and research found that most women had never climaxed during sex.

And some women had never even experienced orgasm even once even after they got married and had children.

What a pathetic, self-confident jerk.

"I'm a salesperson, I sell things with my professional skills and ability!"

I said while grabbing the arm of the pervert man who was about to touch my chest. I twisted Korn's wrist hard until he cried out in pain and pulled away.

"Ouch! You!"

"And I stand by my word, I will work using my professional skills alone," I rejected him again.

"You're so damn...I thought you were smarter than this. I didn't think you'd... ouch, fucking hell!"

Korn swore in pain, "you're so stupid, you know that Khun Lal?"

"I'll show you that women can succeed in their work without taking shortcuts just like you said."

When Korn heard my confident words, he laughed and snarled at me.

"Then you should know! That this project and all projects from your company's network will never get my signature! Not until you come and beg me to take you to bed!"

"..."

I widened my eyes in shock when I realized that Korn had influenced the projects of the other branches in my company's network as well.

"It's too late to regret it now, Khun Lal."

"If you don't want to ruin your future...hm... I'm generous. If you apologize and give me satisfactory service... I might reconsider it."

"...."

"I'll give you three more days to think it over, Khun Lal."

And then the man walked out of the room with a victorious look on his face despite the bruise on his wrist. I let out a long sigh and reached into the handbag next to me, pressing the pause button on the voice recorder...

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Dear XX Company's Compliance Management Manager

I would like to report an employee of your company regarding their inappropriate behavior. Please find the audio clip of a discussion of the project... as evidence to support my claim. I hope you will take appropriate measures against this inappropriate behavior and the sexual harassment tendency that may be prone to have a lasting effect on damaging the company's image.

Sincerely,

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When I clicked to send the email, I wiped the sweat on my forehead, I was sweating like I was on a secret mission. I truly hoped that all my efforts would make that man pay for what he did just like he deserved.

I really have to thank the Compliance Management Unit that I noticed their poster in the bathroom.

And I hoped that my boss wouldn't give me too much trouble for letting such an important client slip away. But if that was the case, I guess I would just have to find a new job...

But at least I got to take revenge on that disgusting man for what he did to Vetaka, so it was worth it...

And it turned out when I really thought that I had no hope for this project, about two weeks later, I received a phone call, asking to reschedule the project discussion with me again...the person who called me was the new manager...

Then I used my skills to get acquainted with the receptionist. I learned that the parent company suddenly inspected all of Korn's past performances and found several corruptions and plenty of questionable contracts. He ended up getting fired and faced many more lawsuits.

I hope that man gains some remorse for what he has done, for better or worse...

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"Did something good happen today?"

Vetaka asked me while we were having dinner. Was I so smug that it radiated around me to the point that the petite woman could feel it?

"Please don't call me a bitch if I tell you, okay?"

I hesitated. I knew that my actions were not exactly the best course of action. But what else would I do? That man hurt the woman I love...

"Try telling me first."

"You won't be angry, right?"

"If you don't tell me now, I'll be, Lal."

Even though I had already asked her not to be mad, I knew Vetaka would definitely not like the idea of me putting myself at risk like that at all. And the petite woman was mad at me in the end. Even though I tried to make her feel better, she didn't seem to be less angry at the moment.

"Lal, don't you ever put yourself at risk like that again. You hear me?"

Vetaka said sternly as she warned me again.

"Wine, are you jealous?"

"Oh..."

I whimpered when Vetaka did not answer my question. She deliberately moved her wrist in a steady rhythm, causing me to cry out as I winced...

"Promise me you won't do it again."

"Ah...I won't, I won't do it again, ngh..."

Vetaka wasn't playing fair, making me promise when we were in the middle of doing this.

"I... promise....A-Ah!"

Who would dare to disobey her order!? Cheating, that's cheating!!!

When Vetaka had punished me until she was satisfied, the woman leaned down and gave me a soothing kiss as I was lying there, panting helplessly. She acted so gently after doing that to me. The only reason I let her do this to me was because I loved her, alright?

I rolled over and buried my face in the pillow, letting out a loud sigh.

"Lal... Are you mad?"

"No, I understand why you are angry at me."

I turned to answer Vetaka, pouting, and said petulantly. Okay I was kinda pissed, I did it for her but she got mad at me instead.

"I'm worried about you, okay? I was so worried that I got angry at you because you went and did something like that without consulting me first. With P'Korn out of all people. Lal, you're a woman, don't put yourself at risk like that ever again, please?"

"I get it... I'm sorry for making you worry."

After hearing Vetaka's reason, I apologized because I understood her feelings. When she saw that I was no longer pouting, the petite woman lay down next to me. We looked into each other's eyes, and she then spoke shyly.

"By the way...thank you for being angry on my behalf and for doing this for me, Lal. I appreciate it, truly."

"I'm happy to do it. Hey...won't you reward me for it?"

I asked the petite woman. I waited for her to agree before I asked her to go on a date tomorrow.

Where should I take her out on a date?

"I'd be happy to."

But then Vetaka flipped over and kneeled on top of me again.

"W-Wine? What are you doing?"

I asked, confused.

"Hm? Giving you a reward like you asked?"

She's giving me a reward... but why do her hands come to rest on my hips then!?

"Wait, oh-"

And then I received a huge reward from Vetaka...

Honestly, if I was in a state where I could still form coherent sentences, ones that weren't moans, I would very much like to ask her.

How come Vetaka's punishment and reward turn out like this!?

□□□□□□

□31. Oversea (Vetaka)□

There were many definitions of the word 'friends with benefits'. Some people would say that friends with benefits were normal friends who got intimate in bed as well. Some people said that 'friends with benefits' were people who only had sex with each other and nothing else.

I felt that our relationship was a lot more than being friends with benefits, Lallalin's kindness and attentiveness completely wrecked all the walls that I built, making them crumble to dust. At this point, I dare say that I fell in love with Lallalin so completely, so utterly that I could not find a way out of this anymore...

Rrrr

"...."

I opened my eyes sleepily because I heard the alarm clock on my smartphone ring loudly. Even though I was awake, I could not move much since I was being held by a certain sleepyhead.

"..."

Looking at Lallalin's sleeping face up close, I could not help but let out a sigh.

It seems that I have become her favorite plushie now...

"Hey, wake up."

I tried to wake her up again. Her tightly closed eyelids started to move and revealed those light brown eyes that reflected me.

Lallalin's eyes had a really pretty color, and I could not help but admire the person in front of me once again.

"I'm awake..."

"Get up... Hm..."

I grumbled when Lallalin bent down to steal a kiss from my lips early in the morning. The culprit had the nerve to even beam at me drowsily.

"Good morning."

"...Hurry and get up. You'll be late."

I tried not to look her in the eye because I knew that my face was probably red from embarrassment. But then I couldn't help it. Because her teasing lips leaned down to rest on my cheek.

"Woah, alright, alright. Don't hit me, Wine."

Lallalin yelped when I hit her on the shoulder.

"Stop playing around! Hurry up so I can take turns using the shower."

I growled when the woman still didn't stop fooling around. We'd both be late at this rate.

"I'm leaving, I'm leaving."

I looked at the other woman who had run off to the bathroom and couldn't help but sigh.

No friends with benefits would sleep in each other's arms every night and kiss each other in the morning like this...

Even though what we did was so obvious, if she never said it, how would I know for certain...

It might make me happy, my heart raced every time she acted like we were dating, but neither of us had asked what we were to each other in this ambiguous relationship, not even once... Did Lallalin love me? Or did she just want to have fun while it lasted?

And oh my God...when will my room be fixed?... It's almost like I've moved in with Lallalin permanently.

I felt more and more uneasy, and if the tall woman still refused to say it out loud...

I would have to ask her, what exactly were we?

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But to say that I have to ask wouldn't sound quite right, it would be more like me confessing my feelings...

Since I already knew what I felt about her.

I want to gather all my courage one more time.

Even if the result may not be as I expected, it is better than keeping it and holding it in like this.

Because I was a very meticulous person with everything I did, I wanted to confess my feelings to the tall woman in the most impressive way. And there was probably no time more appropriate than her birthday which was coming up this Saturday.

A gift and feelings from me, I really hope she will accept it wholeheartedly...

When I glanced at the small box hidden in my handbag, my delicate heart beat wildly with excitement. I didn't want to daydream and get ahead of myself too much, but since Lallalin asked me to celebrate her birthday together at a restaurant.

I can only hope that my feelings are reciprocated...

I can hardly wait for her birthday. Why is time going so slowly...

"Hi there, doll. Daydreaming of someone right now?"

P' Jantra's voice startled me from my thought, "I brought you some banana candy, dear."

"Why, thank you. I was just thinking about work, that's all."

I took the bag of banana candy from her and muffled a reply.

"Suit yourself, dear, I won't press you if you don't wanna say it. But I must say, I really like this look on you, N' Wine."

"You're too kind, P' Jantra."

Even though I still felt a little embarrassed by the compliments, when I saw my reflection in the mirror, my heart swelled with joy and happiness.

Told you that you are gorgeous. From now on, please shine bright and be happy.

"How have you been lately?"

I asked P' Jantra about her well-being so that I wouldn't have to keep thinking about what that cheery woman in my memory said.

"Hectic, really. My term is about to come to an end."

P' Jantra complained tiredly.

Normally, employees from overseas branches would have to stay for approximately three years in the Thai branch, and sometimes employees from Thailand had to be stationed at overseas branches as well.

The HR team, who was responsible for booking airline tickets, was often busy finding the appropriate flights both in terms of timing and price.

"The transfer period must be hectic," I said to P' Jantra sympathetically, the woman looked exhausted and sore.

"It's a pity for N' Lal though. I am fond of her," P' Jantra commented, but those words made me feel so confused and curious that I had to ask her.

"Khun Lal is going somewhere?"

"Oh... Haven't you heard? Lal is going to Japan with the others this time."

After the conversation with P' Jantra, I sat there motionlessly, my mind wandered elsewhere and the work in front of me barely entered my head.

"I'm not sure either, but the Sales Department asked me to book a flight for them on such short notice. I wonder if the Japanese branch took a liking to her and asked to see her."

"...."

"But then again, who would refuse such a good opportunity, right?"

P' Jantra's words stuck in my mind my entire morning until it was lunch break.

Does Lallalin know about this yet? Or did she already know but kept it from me?

I tried to put it aside and ate my lunch, hoping that the food would make me feel better. But when I opened the food container, the sandwich reminded me of Lallalin again. I still preferred to eat at my desk, though sometimes Lallalin would come to fetch me to eat with her.

But on days when the taller woman had to go out to meet with her clients, she always took time to make me lunch.

She takes such good care of me, it's like she never wants me to leave.

"Tanggg, I'm so tired, I'm so sick with life."

And a familiar, distinctive voice came from afar.

"Nim...what's wrong?"

Tangkwa turned to Noomnim who staggered to her desk, looking completely drained.

Sometimes I didn't really want to find out about workplace gossip, but what else could I do? There was only so much space in the department. Even if I pretended not to be interested, I could still overheard Noomnim's daily gossip.

"It's P' Lal, Tang. She's going to leave me and P' Bas here and start an amazing life abroad."

"What do you mean? P' Lal is going abroad?"

"Yeah, I heard she'll be transferred to the Japanese branch, Tang. I'm kinda bummed that she has to go, but damn, I'm really envious."

"It's so sudden though."

"Her flight is this Monday. It's too sudden. I can't accept it, I can't."

Noomnim whined.

"Let's grab lunch, Nim. You can sulk more at the restaurant. I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."

Tangkwa tried to pull her best friend with her who slumped on the table.

"Okay...no way, this is too soon. I'm not ready to deal with a new supervisor."

Noomnim's whines gradually faded as she walked further away. After Noomnim and Tangkwa walked out of the department, I was not hungry anymore. Though, I still forced myself to eat the ham and cheese sandwich, it used to be delicious but now it left a bitter taste in my mouth, and the bitterness spread all the way to my heart.

At first, I thought that P' Jantra might misunderstand some things, but after hearing it from someone in the Sales Department like this, I could no longer deny the truth...

My love has come to an end before it even starts...

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No matter how much I wanted to ask her the truth, every time I opened my mouth, I felt like I couldn't speak. I was afraid that if I asked and the answer was as Noomnim said, I wouldn't be able to accept it...

And Lallalin had been busier than usual as of late. The taller woman practically buried her nose in the laptop all the time. And she had to have dinner with clients almost every evening. I didn't know how to convey this uneasiness I felt, so I took the opportunity to call my best friend asking her to hang out with me to talk about my unsolvable life problems.

"Wait, wait, what did you just say? You're in love?"

"..."

I could only nod at my best friend's question.

"And you are about to get your heart broken?"

"Yeah..."

"What a complicated relationship."

Cheese scratched her head after she listened to my story.

"I'm sorry, Cheese. We don't get to see each other very often. And when we do, it's a sudden meetup because I want to talk about what has been worrying me."

Told Cheese, feeling guilty. But right now, I really didn't know who else to turn to.

"Relax, what do you think friends are for?"

Cheese asked and continued without waiting for my answer.

"For me, friends are there for you to talk with when you have problems you can't find a way out by yourself."

"Cheese..."

I looked at my best friend with gratitude, my eyes started to water.

"Don't think too much about it. Honestly, I just want to be nosy about this, I mean, I'm worried about you."

"You little rascal..."

I cursed at her. I was almost touched by her words but she just had to ruin the mood. But Cheese didn't look ashamed at all, she giggled.

"Feel better now? Come on, tell me so I can help you think of what to do."

I blinked blankly at that. But because of Cheese's joke, I felt strangely relaxed. So I slowly told her the whole story of how I had fallen for someone without meaning to. But of course, I had to keep the Friends with Benefits thing a secret... If Cheese found out, she would probably have a heart attack...

"I never thought I could like someone this much before. And..."

A woman at that... I could only sigh sadly, just telling Cheese about it hurt so much already.

"Khun Lal is gorgeous and friendly. I like her too. There's nothing wrong if you fall for her."

"Wait...you..."

I gasped at my best friend's casual words. I was certain that I didn't mention Lallalin's name even once when I told her my story.

"I go to the same gym as her, Wine. Honestly, I kinda have a feeling ever since the day she forgot to bring her shoes and you showed up bringing them to her. And when I thought about it, you've been coming to see her frequently."

"Then why didn't you say anything?!"

I shouted at her when I felt the embarrassment creep up to my face. How many times has Cheese seen me and Lallalin together already!? This gym had so many branches, why did you have to come all the way to the branch that was so far from your home?

"If I did, I wouldn't be able to see you blushing red as a beet like this."

Cheese laughed happily when she saw me blushing so much.

"So... don't you think it's weird?"

"You mean the fact that you are attracted to a woman or that you like Khun Lal?"

"Both," I muttered back.

"Hm...you have always been so focused on your studies. When you got to university, you just kept studying hard. You gathered up the courage to dress up more when you first started working. Then, after that happened, you went back to being plain like before."

Cheese said, considering.

"So it isn't weird that you just find out about your preferences now."

"Really?... But I've never been attracted to you."

"Try and I'll hit you in the head hard!"

Cheese barked.

"Seriously, you're only good at working and fail at everything else. Being attracted to women doesn't mean you will be attracted to every woman you see, alright? You gotta have a type."

"...So that's how it is."

I nodded at my best friend's explanation.

"As for being attracted to Khun Lal, ugh, why are you still wondering why? She sounds so amazing."

"How? She's a sneaky, a bully, and a weirdo."

I argued when Cheese was praising Lallalin more than I liked. The thought of that tall woman made me blush again. She was such a tease. She would smile happily every time after teasing me...

"Right. you complained so much but your face and ears are so red."

"Don't tease me!"

"If you like her, just tell her that. I saw the ways she looked at you so lovingly when you were with her. She likes you too, you know."

Cheese encouraged me. That made me even more embarrassed. What was she talking about, lovingly?

"You're exaggerating... I meant to tell her... But even if I tell her, she'd leave anyway..."

"Have you asked Khun Lal yet if she's really going? It's all in your head right now, you know."

"It's not all in my head. I heard it from her subordinates and from HR too."

I said disheartenedly.

"So what... Are you going to let this amazing person go just like that? Have you really thought it through?"

"...."

"Never mind. No matter what I say, if you've made up your mind, I cannot stop you anyway."

"...."

"No matter how it turns out, my house will always have a place for you, you know? Daddy would appreciate getting another help kneading the dough."

Cheese reached out for my hand and comforted me.

"Thank you, Cheese. I appreciate it."

And my life in my thirties has taught me that having a true, good friend is more valuable than anything else...

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In the end, even though I got advice from Cheese, I hesitated and didn't dare to do anything. By the time I knew it, it was the night before Lallalin's birthday...

"She made you much livelier you know? She even got rid of that disgusting prick!"

Cheese's words kept echoing in my mind...

I feel like I'm being selfish...

I should be happy for Lallalin when she takes a leap in her career...

But I don't want her to go... I want her to stay here with me. It is terrible of me...

"Are you okay, Wine? You don't look happy. Are you not feeling well?"

While I was sitting there, lost in thought, the person sitting next to me asked me with concern.

"It's nothing..."

"Let me check your temperature. Hm, you don't seem to have a fever..."

The back of the taller woman's hand suddenly touched my forehead and neck. The closer I saw Lallalin's worried face, the more painful it was for me.

I just have to rip off the bandage...

"Lal, there's something I want to talk about..."

I decided to say it today. At least it would be better than saying it tomorrow at a restaurant on the taller woman's birthday. I didn't want to hurt the feelings of the person I love, but what can I do?

It's better to end this before we hurt each other more...

Good thing that... the two of us never ask about the label of our relationship.

It would be best if we ended this now when we aren't anything...

I really can't hold you back from your bright future...

□□□□□

□32. Do you love me?□

It was the most anxious time, the period before confessing one's love to the object of their affection. No matter how confident we were, the human mind was more complicated than that. How we acted might not be aligned with how we felt at all...

Tomorrow would be my birthday and I was so excited that I could faint. Vetaka had already agreed to our dinner date, but recently, I couldn't help but notice the petite woman had been acting very strangely. I only hoped that she had prepared a surprise for me as well.

But Khun Wine doesn't look like the type of person who would prepare a surprise like this...

“Lal, there's something I want to talk about...”

Vetaka said out of the blue. I grabbed the remote and paused the famous series that was playing on the TV screen so that it would not disturb what the woman was about to say.

"Is everything okay, Wine?"

I asked her out of concern because I sensed that Vetaka had this sullen air around her.

What could happen to my bright and lovely Khun Wine...

"It's just that..."

"....."

Vetaka's doe eyes looked so sad that I put away the thought she might tell me how she felt tonight. And I had a feeling that the situation was turning downhill.

"Let's..."

The petite woman in her pajamas looked like she was swallowing something incredibly painful for her.

"...."

"Let's...end this arrangement."

And the words that came out of Vetaka's mouth nearly made my heart stop.

"Wait, Wine, what are you saying?"

I was in a daze, I did not understand a word she was saying at all.

"I said...let's end this thing between us. I'm...I'm sorry."

"What do you mean..."

I asked her as she lowered her head, her voice was trembling when she spoke. I was completely at a loss. What just happened? I was going to tell Vetaka how I felt tomorrow...how did it turn out like this?

"I'm sorry for not telling you this until now, but...we should go back to being colleagues like before."

Her confirmation made me feel helpless and lost all of a sudden.

"I don't understand. Why are you suddenly..."

"I made up my mind. I'll go stay at Cheese's house tonight. I'm really sorry. I'm sorry for tomorrow too. I probably..."

"You're lying," I told her before I could stop myself, my head was filled with confusion and an endless series of questions.

"...."

"Wine, you're messing with me, right?"

I grabbed her hand and looked straight into her eyes, hoping that Vetaka would smile and say that it was just a surprise and that she was glad that she could mess with me like this.

But the woman only made it clear that this wasn't a joke.

Our relationship is really about to end...

"Tell me, please tell me that this was just a part of your surprise. Right?"

I pleaded to the petite woman.

"..."

Vetaka didn't say anything and my heart shattered. The woman lowered her head and refused to look me in the eye.

"What is this about? What did I do wrong?"

"It wasn't you. You didn't do anything wrong..."

"Then why did you say that!? Why?"

I let my emotions take control. Vetaka simply kept apologizing over and over because of that.

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry..."

"All this time..."

"...."

"All this time...have you ever loved me at all?..."

I asked Vetaka with a trembling voice, trying to hold back my tears. My heart felt so tight that I couldn't breathe from the pain... Everything I had dreamed of would really collapse unexpectedly here, just like this?

"Wine..."

"I love you. I love you so much... I don't know if my actions are enough to make you realize it or not."

I told her, tears streaming all over my face.

I don't care about tomorrow's surprise plan anymore. If I don't say it now, I might lose Vetaka forever...

But looking at how it turns out... It's probably too late anyway, right?

"I must have gotten the wrong idea to think that you felt the same way.."

"...."

"It...might sound selfish of me, but can you still celebrate my birthday with me tomorrow? And after that, we can just... Sniff...go back to being colleagues like before... Let me be happy on my birthday, please? Just for one more day?"

I tried to swallow the lump in my throat and desperately asked her.

But after I said it, I felt angry at myself. In the end, I tried to force Vetaka to comply with my request again...

Even though she must have felt so uncomfortable... I'm really pathetic.

"...."

"I'm sorry for asking you something like this. If you don't want to..."

"Sob...can you please stop apologizing, Lal!"

Vetaka suddenly blurted out. She finally looked up at me. Her face was wet from tears flowing down her cheeks.

"..."

"Of course, I love you... I love you so much it hurts."

The petite woman said and let out a trembling sob, "that's why I don't want to hold you back from your future."

"...."

Confused, I watched Vetaka crying as she let it out.

"Sob...why...why did it have to be this way?"

"Hold on, Wine. Wait, what? What are you talking about?"

I'm completely lost. Hold me back from what? What is Khun Wine talking about?

"Lal, you're... *Sniff*... You're leaving..."

"Stop, stop, don't cry, okay? Take a deep breath first."

I quickly used the back of my hand to wipe the tears from my face because Vetaka looked even worse than me somehow. The petite woman was sobbing so hard that what she said was completely incoherent. I hurriedly grab a napkin to wipe away her tears.

"Wah..."

But the more I tried to wipe her tears away, the harder Vetaka cried.

"There, there, don't cry. I'm here now."

So I could only hug the petite woman as she was sobbing violently. Vetaka seemed so heartbroken that it made me feel hopeful. She didn't seem like she wanted to end her relationship with me...

Then why did Khun Wine try to cut me off like that?

I tried my best to comfort the petite woman. After a while, Vetaka looked much calmer, so I asked her again.

"What did you just say, Wine? Who's going where now?"

"You are transferred to the Japan branch permanently, aren't you?..."

Vetaka's red and swollen eyes looked at me, making me want to hug the petite woman and comfort her again. But first, I had to clear up the misunderstanding.

"Permanently? I only go there to get some products."

I blinked when I felt like I started to piece things up together in my head, "the one who is moving there is my boss."

"B-But..."

"I have to go there to pick up some urgent products. It'll just be a day trip, I'll be back in the evening on the same day. Hm...Wine, wait here for a moment,"

I got up from the bed and hurried outside the bedroom. It took me a few moments to return with the company's laptop.

"...."

"Wine, read this email."

I opened the email and handed the laptop to the petite woman.

"Picking up the products?"

Vetaka looked up and asked me after she finished reading the email on the laptop in her hand.

"Yes! Picking up the products. It just so happens that there is an urgent product that a customer wants and it won't be shipped here in time. So I'll have to go pick the items up myself. Also, the boss is going to be stationed at that branch, so he wants to introduce me to the staff on that side since we work together quite often."

"Then...the reason why you seemed so busy in these past few days..."

"Was because I had to book the flights and make an appointment with that branch. It's hectic."

I explained with a wide smile.

"...let me wash my face first."

The petite woman suddenly shoved the laptop into my hand and got up from the bed abruptly.

"Wine, wait, Ouch! Don't run away when you're embarrassed."

I shouted, quickly putting the laptop on the nightstand, and rushed to pull the petite woman into my arms before she managed to escape from the bedroom.

"...."

"Wine..."

Even though I couldn't see Vetaka's face right now, her flushed ears that were poking out of her hair showed that she must be extremely embarrassed right now.

"I'm sorry...for the misunderstanding,"

The woman in my arms said softly.

"Lal, can you let me go first..."

"No, I won't let go. Or else you will run away again."

"...."

"Where did you hear the rumors from?"

"...."

"Well?"

"From P' Jantra, and from Noomnim."

Vetaka answered, she sounded sheepish. I blamed my menace subordinate internally. No more bubble tea for you, Noomnim!

"And you believe them?... without even asking me?"

"I'm sorry... it's all my fault."

She apologized.

"Hey... I'm really hurt that you would end our relationship so easily just because I have to move to oversee."

I said to Vetaka in my arms.

" ..."

"Wine, do you think my love for you can change that easily?"

"It's not like that!"

This time, Vetaka turned to face me.

"I just..."

"You just?"

"I was just afraid... that if I tell you how I feel, you would abandon your own future... So I..."

And because Vetaka looked so guilty while she explained her reasons, I hugged the petite woman again and whispered into her small, reddened ear lovingly.

"You are part of my future too, Wine. How could I leave you?"

When I finished speaking, Vetaka's heart was beating so loudly that I could feel it.

"Wine, are you embarrassed? Your heart is beating so fast."

"Tck! Stop teasing me already, Lal."

She pouted after she embarrassed herself like that, it made me feel so fond of her that I decided to hug her tighter.

"Alright, no more teasing."

And when I lowered my embrace, Vetaka's face blushed deep red, it made me smile.

"You said you won't tease anymore?"

The petite woman sulked. She was probably embarrassed by what just happened.

This time, Vetaka just embarrassed herself so badly that she might not recover anytime soon...

"Let's go wash our faces."

"Hehe..."

"Stop laughing at me, Wine. Your face is just as funny," I told her.

The petite woman had the nerve to laugh at my face when hers was stained with tears as much as mine...

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"Wine, do you want to continue watching the series?"

I gestured at the TV screen that was still on pause. Vetaka smiled sheepishly.

"Let's watch it later."

I don't blame her... who would want to continue watching the series? When the real drama just happened in this room...

"Hey...Wine..."

I called the woman who was arranging the pillows to turn her attention to me.

"Yes?"

"I love you."

"...."

"Wine, your jaw actually drops there."

I teased her amusingly when the petite woman seemed to be speechless. Vetaka was so adorable when her jaw dropped a little.

"I didn't think you'd just say it like that..." she grumbled softly.

"What about you, Wine..."

"I already told you..."

"I want to hear it again."

I cornered Vetaka, demanding

"Do you love me?"

"...of course, I love you."

This time, the petite woman said it without much fuss. Her cute face blushed a light shade of pink, it made me fond of her even more.

"Then we're not friends with benefits anymore, right?"

And now I had to ask about what we were.

"...."

When I saw that Vetaka nodded a little in agreement, my heart soared with happiness.

"Then..."

"How about we try getting to know each other a little more first?"

Vetaka spoke up, that it made me look at her in surprise.

"Getting to know each other?"

"Yeah, before we start dating officially, isn't it normal to start by getting to know each other more first?"

I blinked when I heard the innocent words coming out of the petite woman's mouth.

Does Vetaka seriously think we still need to get to know each other? Isn't it too late for that by now?

"We don't need to, let's just date."

"B-but..."

"We've known each other plenty. Besides, I have been trying to win you over for a long time.."

I pouted at Vetaka, "don't tell me that you didn't know?"

"I thought it was normal for friends with benefits at first... But lately, I've felt that it's more than that. But I was not sure." She mumbled.

"Oh...Wine...I'm kinda hurt, you know."

I cooked every meal for the petite woman, I packed her lunch, took her out to eat, and took such good care of her, and Vetaka still had no idea that I was hitting on her.

"Well, you've never said it... If you don't say it, how would I know for sure?"

Vetaka replied to me, pouting.

"I wasn't sure if you like me or not, so I have to ask instead."

"Then... I'm sorry. Well, it's just that... I wanted to ask you out on my birthday...sorry for making you overthink things, though."

When I heard her reason, I apologized to her, feeling sheepish.

"It's okay, I'm not mad anymore."

"Hug me?"

I opened my arms and Vetaka came closer to give me a hug.

I'm so happy...

The two of us let ourselves bury into each other's warmth, and when we pulled out from the hug, I said to Vetaka gently.

"Be my girlfriend, Wine."

"Hm..."

"Wine...be my girlfriend?"

"Okay..."

Vetaka refused to meet my eyes but told me quietly and nodded her reply.

"Look at me when you say it, please? For me?"

I pressed on when Vetaka hid away from my gaze, "are you embarrassed, Wine?"

"You know I would say yes anyway. Why did you have to ask again just to tease me..."

The petite woman was so embarrassed that her face turned bright red. It was so adorable that I had to lift her chin to kiss her lovely lips repeatedly.

It started as a playful teasing, but once the passion was ignited, gentle kisses turned more heated, deeper, and longer, until Vetaka groaned softly in her throat.

"Lal...haa... Stop... Stop it. Didn't you reserve a restaurant for tomorrow?"

When I pulled away from her lips, the petite took deep breaths to make up for the ones I stole. She stuttered when I gently pushed her down on the bed.

"I'll postpone the time."

I looked into Vetaka's eyes with sparkling eyes when I caged her under me.

"Since my goal has been accomplished. You are my girlfriend now. Mission Complete."

"Lal, you're so..."

Vetaka gasped adorably until I couldn't help but steal a few kisses from the petite woman's cheek.

"Hmm...we won't be able to make it tomorrow."

"It's my birthday today. Spoil me a little, please?"

I tilted my head to the clock on the wall, it was midnight. Because of the misunderstanding, we talked until the next day to clear it up.

When Vetaka saw the time, she looked sad and apologized to me, guiltily.

"I'm sorry. It should have been romantic, but I ruined everything."

"Having you here with me is romantic enough."

"You and your sweet talk..."

"You seem to like the taste of it, though?" I leaned down and pressed her lips against mine again. I looked up and met Vetaka's eyes, who was blushing, so I teased her "is it really sweet?"

"...."

"May I?"

"I-I have a gift for you, Lal."

Vetaka quickly interrupted as my hand was about to reach down to unbutton her pajamas.

"Don't you want to unwrap the gift first?"

"We can leave it for tomorrow. Right now, I would rather unwrap the gift in front of me."

"Why are you so lewd..."

Vetaka complained with a flushed face, "and so spoiled."

"You're just too beautiful...so can I please unwrap this special gift?"

I asked the woman under me as I traced my hand along the buttons of her pajamas affectionately.

"Please...?"

"...Have I ever denied you anything, Lal?"

The petite woman pouted before guiding my face down to kiss her again. When our lips parted, Vetaka fixed her loving eyes on mine.

"Happy birthday, Lal. May your life be filled with happiness."

"Just having you here with me makes me happier than I could ever imagine."

What I got this year was the best birthday present I've ever asked for...

□□□□□

□Lal Loves Wine (FINAL)□

Love, as it turned out, might be simpler than one would think. It did not have to be exciting or intoxicating. It might be the comfort of keeping each other company. It could turn an ordinary day into a special one.

Rrrr

The sound from the smartphone's alarm disturbed me in my dream, causing me to open my eyes lazily as I grabbed my phone to check the time. Today, the person who usually woke up earlier was still sleeping soundly in my arms.

She might have had it rough last night and was still recovering from it...

Normally, I would let her sleep a little longer... But today, I really can't...

"Wine... Wake up. We have a quarterly meeting."

"Hm... I'm awake..."

"Wine... Didn't you say you were awake?"

I teased Vetaka who responded to me but her bright face was still buried in the pillow and didn't seem to move.

"..."

"You'll be late for the meeting," I whispered to her when she seemed to be dozing off again.

"Hmm... I'm sleepy. You were mean to me last night... I told you to stop, but you just keep teasing me."

The petite woman whined while her eyes were still closed. I watched her fondly and I had to restrain myself. if I teased her again, we would never make it to the meeting.

I'll have to save that for later, it seems...

"Wake up, please? I'll make pan-fried eggs and coffee for you."

I leaned down, taking in her scent and the softness of her cheeks as I lured her with food and coffee.

"Hm... Fine, I'm up."

I watched the petite woman, her hair was messy as she staggered into the bathroom. felt my heart blooming at the sight. Even though it was something ordinary, I thought that this was something special that was reserved for me alone.

You can't find this spoiled side of Khun Wine anywhere else... I'm so lucky...

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After the two of us decided to officially date, I thought that nothing would change at first... But after a while, I had to take back my words because Vetaka in her girlfriend mode was really doing things to my heart, more than I could ever imagine...

"Good luck today," I said to the petite woman as I put on my perfume on my shirt and checked my appearance again in front of the mirror before going to work.

"You too, Lal. Good luck," Vetaka walked back and hugged me, cradling my head, guiding it down to kiss her cute lips.

"You're not putting on your perfume today?"

I asked her as I pulled away from the kiss.

"No, I'll just take it from you."

The petite woman giggled softly as she hugged me a little tighter. I let this clingy kitten snuggled with me without caring that my perfectly ironed shirt would be wrinkled.

Try meeting this adorable version of Vetaka, no one stands a chance against her...

The two of us still drove our separate cars to work. Even though I wanted to have the time where I could drive to work and come home with Vetaka, it couldn't be helped because I usually had to go out to meet clients outside the company, so I didn't often get back to the office on time.

And when I complained to my girlfriend about this, I got scolded instead, saying that we nearly saw each other almost twenty-four hours a day, that I should just turn down the longing if it was too much...oh, well...Wine was cold for that...

"Good morning, P' Lal," I was greeted as soon as I stepped into the meeting room. I turned to greet my diligent subordinates.

"Morning, guys. You've been waiting for me since early morning?"

"Nim told us to come early so we can get a good seat."

N' Tape, a new employee, smiled at me politely. After going through all the chaos, our Sales Department finally welcomed a new member once again. I could only hope that everything would go well this time.

"Tape, this is the first time you're joining a meeting, right? Wait and see our P' Lal perform her miracles."

Noomnim whispered in her new friend's ear.

"Pardon?"

"You see Khun Wine over there, right?"

Noomnim gestured towards the petite woman who was adjusting her glasses while focusing on reviewing the meeting's documents.

"Oh, I see her. Even though we're on opposite sides, I still get goosebump. She seems kind of stressed, though?"

"Even though she's not as scary as she used to be, but in the meeting rooms, she still..."

Noomnim threatened her new friend and made a playful slitting motion to cut her throat. Tape's face paled.

"Hey... Don't tease Tape, Nim."

I scolded my menace of a subordinate idly.

"Just a little bit. Welcoming the new kid and all. Hehe."

Then the meeting started and when it concluded, the secretary's usual question was asked.

"Does anyone have any suggestions?"

And everyone in the room just sat silently, no questions came from them. But it probably wasn't the case with the serious petite woman.

"The Accounting Department would like to add something."

Her small hand raised up to her shoulder level, making her demand clear. When she was allowed to speak, she began.

"With the current economic crisis and the increase in oil prices."

Vetaka spoke calmly, her large round eyes behind her thick glasses looked directly at me.

"This time, I would like to suggest the Sales Department to control their expenses on their client meetings."

Why do I get a sense of deja vu in this situation? Though, to be honest, it's like a deja vu every time I attend the quarterly meeting!

"Khun Wine... You always ask for impossible things again."

I interrupted her, "my department has to go out to meet with customers, it is part of our duty. If you ask me to reduce these travel expenses all of a sudden, how will you take responsibility if the clients are not happy with this?"

"Khun Lal, I suggest planning... route planning..."

Vetaka still refused to give up on her idea.

"Khun Wine, it's easy for you to say, but not all the clients are available at the same time."

"Please try it first, Khun Lal. If it doesn't work out, then you can come to me."

I looked at the petite woman's determined face and screamed internally.

Wine... before we left our place, when I wished you good luck, I didn't mean for you to use it against me!

Is Vetaka getting back at me for what I did last night? ...

"I understand... I will try planning it and report the results."

"I appreciate it."

I felt that Vetaka's voice softened, and after that, the petite woman also commented on other departments, purchasing, IT, and engineering, all of them received Khun Wine's suggestions...

When the meeting ended, everyone went their separate ways, looking exhausted from using so much energy early in the morning.

"Is it always like this..."

Tape asked when we were walking back to our department.

"Yeah, this is normal," Bas, who joined the group, said cheerfully.

"Yeah, it happens all the time. P' Lal was the only one who dares to talk back to Khun Wine."

Noomnim commented, "even though she loses every time."

"Nim..."

"Yesss...My lovely, beautiful P' Lal."

"I was going to buy you guys bubble tea this afternoon, but it seems like you don't want one," I said to my junior with a cruel smirk. Noomnim kept frantically apologizing to me the whole time we walked back to the department.

Wine: Were you mad about earlier?

Wine: I'm sorry.

Hey, it's work: **Lullaby**

I understand: **Lullaby**

But... tonight: **Lullaby**

Wine: I have work to do. I will get back to you later!

I laughed at the message that Vetaka sent to cover up her embarrassment.

Noomnim doesn't know anything...

Even though I've never won against Khun Wine in a meeting.

Just so you know..... have won Khun Wine's heart...

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My leisure activities with Vetaka were so simple... Nothing was more joyful than having this person resting her head on my shoulder while watching a series together on the weekend. We were not just Friends with benefits or even colleagues anymore...

"Are you going out with Proud?"

I pouted when the petite woman said that she would go out with Proud and Cheese next Saturday. I still had not gotten over the fact that the junior had tried hitting on my Vetaka once.

"Cheese will be with us too, it's not like there are just the two of us."

"I'm a reasonable person, I won't get jealous of everything."

I told myself. After we started dating, Vetaka didn't hide anything about our relationship. She even introduced me to her best friends officially this time. Khun Cheese had looked very happy even though she pretended to mourn the lost chance of touching my 11 line abs, which caused the petite woman to shoot her a glare.

"You're saying it as if no one has made a move on you."

Vetaka sounded a little harshe.

"I saw the flowers from that client, you know."

"I already gave them to P' Jantra to put in a vase to decorate the company."

I quickly told Vetaka.

"My girlfriend is so breathtaking, how could I have my eyes on anyone else?"

"Don't compliment me out of nowhere, please"

The petite woman seemed to lose her composure after she received my sudden compliments.

"You really are gorgeous, beautiful, I'm just telling you facts, is that so wrong?"

"...."

"Alright, I won't tease you anymore, you're so embarrassed, your cheeks are all red now."

I took the liberty to sneak kisses on her lovely cheeks.

"My cheeks are all bruised now," Vetaka protested when I repeatedly kissed her soft cheeks.

"What lotion did you use? Smells good."

"I use the same brand as usual..."

The petite woman answered softly and tried to hunch her shoulders when my lips moved to her thin shoulders to breathe in her signature scent.

"I want to kiss you everywhere, Wine."

"That's enough. You should take some break from this kind of activity. I want to watch a movie."

Vetaka shoved my face away from her own skin. I was not the only one who couldn't keep my hands off her body though. The petite woman could get turned on as fast as me, I thought it probably annoyed her too sometimes.

It can't be helped... I think Vetaka is as deeply in love with me, just as much as I am with her...

"Want to go to a temple together tomorrow?"

I asked her when I recalled that I should thank the Goddess that I had prayed to for making my wish come true.

"Sure, do you want to make merit?"

"Well... I prayed to the Goddess for you to be my girlfriend..."

When Vetaka listened to how I asked for a blessing for love in detail, her jaw dropped and her delicate hands grabbed my soft cheek and twisted it.

"Ouch! Why are you twisting my cheeks?"

I whined because she actually put her force into twisting them, not just putting on a show. I begged her for mercy a few more times, before Vetaka finally let go. I rubbed my reddened cheeks with pain and confusion.

"The Goddess you prayed to is not the Goddess of Love! She is the Goddess of War!"

Vetaka explained and threw me a look. The petite woman grabbed her smartphone and searched fidgetly before handing her phone to me.

"...."

When I read the articles displayed on the screen, I was stunned...

The Goddess I prayed to was really the Goddess of destruction... As for the Goddess of Love, her temple was located in another place...

"I've been wondering for a long time why my room never gets fixed. Turns out it's your doing!"

"Wine, don't hit me. It's just a superstitious belief. Ouch!"

I cried out in surprise when the petite woman growled at me and hit my back mercilessly.

"Go tell her to stop destroying my place!"

"Okay, okay, I'll tell her. Wine, stop hitting me..."

I groaned and tried to make up with Vetaka who was growling. I didn't know that the reason her room was never fixed was because of my prayer. Still, I thought that it was worth it...

She might be the Goddess of Destruction, but in the end, my prayers had been answered. I shall find something very nice to repay you for kindness, Goddess...

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And even though my relationship with Vetaka might have to be kept a secret for now, one day I intended to tell everyone that we were dating...

I was the one who gave her my word, but it was Vetaka who comforted me.

"There's still a lot of time...you're thinking too much."

Her gentle eyes met mine in the dark.

"I can't wait to tell everyone that you are my girlfriend."

And it was me who was sulking. Even though Vetaka was faithful to me, there were always people trying to hit on the petite woman. So I wanted to make it clear...

I want to tell them that we are in love...

"I can wait... But for now, let's go to sleep."

"One day, I will tell everyone. Just wait and see."

"Hm, I'll hold you on to it. Good night, Lal."

"Ugh... Good night, Wine."

I pouted when the petite woman kissed my lips and said good night before snuggling closer to me. I watched her adorable sleeping face and lightly kissed her forehead before tenderly cradling my lover to my chest.

I love nights like this when Vetaka is in my arms...

And I love it even more when I wake up and see her every morning...

The warmth in my heart increased even more. When I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was her beautiful sleeping face, only a breath away from me.

My heart is racing... I'm so, so happy...

Vetaka makes my ordinary days special...

"Can you stop smiling while watching other's face? It's been half an hour."

Vetaka said with her eyes closed.

"I had a nightmare from it, you know."

"You're exaggerating....it's called my loving gaze."

"Eww... You're so cringe, Lal."

Vetaka made a face when I teased her early in the morning.

"Wine?"

"Hm? What is it?"

"I like you, Wine."

I told her my feelings, seizing the chance when the petite woman was still drowsy from waking up.

"I like you too, Lal."

Vetaka replied to my confession, her cheeks started to blush.

It must be because I flirted with her so often, Vetaka seemed to be able to handle it better...

"I love you more than anything."

"...."

She didn't say it back, but her lips that landed on mine told me the answer all the same...

Telling me how much Vetaka loved Lallalin...

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(END)

□□□□□

□Workaholic (SP01)□

Workaholic was a word that sounded more negative than positive. Because if one devoted themselves too much to work, in the end, it would take a toll on one's relationships with their family members or even one's health.

Finally, Vetaka's condo had been officially fixed for good. I would not say that it was because I told the Goddess that my wish had come true...

I'm telling you, those are just beliefs!

"I kinda missed this room, actually."

I looked around the petite woman's room that had been completely renovated. Vetaka was a very organized person. Her room was full of books lined up on the shelves and her little hobbies such as building Legos.

As expected from a homebody.

"...You were the one who wrecked this room."

Vetaka eyed me briefly and said.

"Come on, it's not really my fault, Wine..."

I protested weakly because the petite woman did not seem to be getting over it soon.

"Come help me unpack, will you?"

She ignored my words and handed me a large suitcase.

"Wine, please... don't be mad at me..."

"I'm just teasing you. Come help me clean the room, quick."

When she saw that I actually looked troubled by it, this time, Vetaka offered me an olive branch instead.

"I feel so guilty that I'm about to cry," I said disheartenedly.

"I'm not angry anymore...we'll sleep here together tonight, okay? I even bought an extra pillow."

Even though she said something completely ordinary, I caught a sight of Vetaka's ears that were sticking out of her hair, they were light pink. I really liked it...people who couldn't hide their feelings when they're shy, she was so cute.

"Okay, I'll stay here. Honestly, I'll sleep wherever you are, Wine."

"And if I sleep next to a garbage pile?"

The petite woman glanced at me and said playfully.

"I'll give you a bath, scrub every inch of your body clean...and then take you to bed with me."

I told her as I shot her a flirty look. The woman, who recently learned how to tease, gasped and blushed profusely.

"You're a sly fox! A pervert too!"

"That I am."

And I smiled proudly in response to my lover's words.

It's still a hundred years too early for you to tease me, Wine...

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The loud chatterings that stirred me up from my dreams. I drowsily opened my eyes. Normally, I considered the weekends to be leisure days where I could relax and live my life to the fullest.

I'd do things like, catching up my sleep, watching a series, working out, or even going on a nice trip.

And when a certain petite woman came into my life, my days off were much happier...

Who is Wine talking to so early in the morning?

I raised my head to look at the person next to me, who was now wearing a T-shirt of her favorite brand. She put a neat make up on her gorgeous face, but her delicate lips were saying something pretty serious on the phone.

"And the whole file is gone? Take a picture and send it to me, Tangkwa."

Nong Tangkwa must be having a problem with work.

I inferred from what she said on the phone. The company's policy allowed laptops to be brought back home for work, so sometimes if we were not serious about overtime pay, we could take small tasks back home to continue working on it.

And Tangkwa must be one of them. Vetaka's subordinates were so hard-working, and when a workaholic boss and a workaholic subordinate were paired together, this kind of situation could happen from time to time.

Let's leave them alone for now...

I thought as I got up to take a shower and brush my teeth. When I walked back, Vetaka still hadn't finished talking about work. So I went to put on makeup and wait. But even after I finished, she still had not stopped talking. In fact, Vetaka went from talking over the phone to pulling out a small Japanese table and spreading it out on the bed, and had her own notebook opened to explain the work.

Babe, are you planning to teach Nong Tangkwa all day?

We have a date today, you know...

I thought to myself as I started sulking...while sighing in annoyance that today's date might be ruined because of my workaholic girlfriend over there. But then, suddenly, my evil thought popped into my head. Since Vetaka didn't pay attention to me, I might as well try to get her attention.

From what I gathered, it seemed that Vetaka had not finished getting dressed yet. The jeans she had prepared were still on the hanger. This was the perfect opportunity for me. The petite woman turned to look at me questioningly when I sat down next to her.

"!"

And lightly kissed Vetaka's cheek, causing her eyes to widen in shock.

Taking advantage of the moment when the petite woman was caught off guard, I sneaked my hand into the blanket that Vetaka was using to cover her lower half. And voila! She was really wearing just her underwear.

How improper, Wine...

"When you reach... ah," Vetaka exclaimed when I lightly stroked her bare leg.

I calmly spread the pale legs that were trying to resist, but because the small Japanese table was somewhat locking her body in place, it wasn't too difficult for me to reach in and touch her folds.

"Click here... Then enter zero..."

"It said error?... I'll explain it again. Tangkwa, listen carefully."

I carefully watched Vetaka's face, which started to blush a little pink from her emotions, but her delicate lips were still explaining the steps to insert formulas in the Excel program smoothly. I was impressed by how she was still able to remind clam, even though her folds were practically soaked with sweet nectar from my touch.

Are you challenging me, Wine?...

"...After that, drag the mouse to cover the table. Ah!"

Vetaka accidentally let out a cry when I put my finger in her sensitive entrance.

"Nothing. A gecko just ran past me. Did you catch up with what I said, Tangkwa?"

She turned to stare at me, glaring daggers with her eyes. I let out a smile from amusement and astonishment at Vetaka's problem-solving skills.

Oh... a gecko?... And look at the look she gave me...

Do you think I'll be scared?...how could I be scared of my little kitten when I know her so well?

"Whi..." I grinned, my eyes were gleaming as they met with her watered jet-black eyes.

"Ngh," I started moving my fingers in and out slowly, challenging her.

Vetaka pursed her lips tightly.

What about this?... How long can she take it?

"!"

The petite woman's breath hitched when I found her sweet spot, deliberately rubbed gently.

"Tangkwa... you got it now... can you do it?"

The petite woman asked the other end of the call slowly, trying to control her voice from shaking when my fingers were starting to speed up the rhythm.

Eventually, she grabbed my wrist tightly as it was speeding up. Vetaka's red face shook slightly, she looked at me pleadingly.

Fine, I'll stop teasing you for now... It seems that she won't last much longer...

But when I stopped moving... She looked even more tortured than before...

"Hm... It's alright. I'm glad that it's fixed..."

Vetaka gripped my arm so tightly that her nails almost pierced into the fabric.

"Then... I'll hang up now, alright?"

"Yeah, it's okay. See you tomorrow."

Vetaka's trembling hands pressed the button to end the call and I helped her close the laptop and move it to a safe place beside the bed when she was trembling too much to do anything.

"Are you done talking about work?"

"What did you think you were doing?! I was teaching my junior. Oh..."

Vetaka, who was about to scold me, exclaimed when I tried to pull my finger out of her love canal.

"Okay, I'll stop," I said with a sweet smile, "something wrong, Wine? You're gripping my arm so tightly."

"Lal..."

Vetaka looked up to me, begging with her eyes.

"Want me to do something for you, Wine?"

And I cornered her until she had to lower her head and uttered softly in embarrassment.

"Move..."

"Pardon? What did you say?"

"Move your finger... please?"

"Like this?"

I started moving my wrist again slowly, which caused her to let out a moan.

"Ah... Ngh... Lal..."

But then Vetaka had to call me again in annoyance when I moved as she requested, yes... but... I moved my fingers slowly...

"Yeah?"

I played dumb because teasing my girlfriend was really fun. The slow rhythm against her sensitive spots repeatedly, Vetaka wouldn't last much longer...

"Lal... Ah...why do you like to tease me so much..."

"I'm not teasing you at all."

I had to admit, I quite like the look on Vetaka's face when she was incredibly in lust like this. I especially liked it when the woman who usually stayed put started begging me to do what she wanted.

"Mhm... Lal... Can you... not tease me?"

"Talk me through it so I understand what's going on, okay?..."

"I'm going to... Let me finish, please?"

The embarrassing words came out of Vetaka's mouth, her face flushed from embarrassment as if she was about to explode. The sight made me smile.

Let's just say that I will give in to those sweet pleads...

"Mmm!"

The petite woman groaned when I picked up the pace and took her to ecstasy.

I looked at Vetaka who was panting heavily after her release. I used the opportunity to move myself closer. Before Vetaka knew it, our sensitive spots were already pressed against each other.

"Ah... Lal! I just finished. Mmm..."

And of course, the woman who just had her orgasm could do nothing but whimper when my movements set her desire on fire once again.

"Let me, please?"

I asked the woman sweetly. Vetaka did not respond with words, instead, she buried her face in the crook of my neck and started moving in tune with the pace that I was leading her.

My girlfriend is the cutest person in the world...

"Lal... Lal."

The petite woman moaned, her hot breaths against my neck made my emotions run wild.

"Hmm...your voice is so beautiful."

"I'm coming, I'm coming again."

Vetaka moaned, telling me what she wanted, making me quicken the pace a bit more. I bit my lips when I felt that I was also about to reach my orgasm as well.

"Together, okay?"

"Hmm... Lal, ah!!!, ngh!!!"

I loved how she often moaned my name when she came...

"Mmm... Wine, you are the best there is..."

And I murmured hoarsely, holding onto Vetaka tightly when we reached the sweet delights, following my lover closely behind.

The two of us continued to bask in the afterglow in each other's embrace for a long time until our breathing gradually calmed down.

"Are you mad at me, Lal?"

Vetaka asked softly when I loosened my embrace and was about to peel myself off her.

I couldn't hide anything from Vetaka, could I?

"...You only care about work, about Tangkwa, even though it's your day off. You make it look like you're about to cancel our date."

I grumbled. I started blushing after I was aware that I was being ridiculous.

"Lal..."

"Sorry for being silly and unreasonable."

I abruptly cut off the conversation because I didn't want to argue about something this dumb, but Vetaka quickly grabbed my arm, stopping me from running away.

"I'm sorry. Here...come here and give me a hug first."

And I agreed to hug the petite woman again.

"Sorry for being unreasonable."

I mumbled an apology to the woman because I knew that my actions earlier were quite petulant.

"Lal, you're the worst..."

Vetaka responded to me softly and pulled away to stare at me, she was pouting.

"I'm sorry..."

"I was planning to stay mad at you for a little longer."

The petite woman sighed deeply.

"But when you apologizes while looking like that, I just can't stay mad at you..."

"Hehe."

"It's my fault too, though...so thank you for telling me what you were upset about. From now on, I will tone it down a bit with work and pay more attention to you, Lal."

"Wine, you are the cutest."

I told her. I felt so happy that my partner was reasonable and was willing to listen to her flaws, she even tried to improve them.

"Don't tease me like that again. Why are you always doing perverted things."

I still got scolded by the woman anyway.

"I didn't mean to..."

"Let's go take a shower. Look at the time, you're wasting our time."

Vetaka grumbled as she got out of bed and grabbed my hand, pulling me up with her.

"Wasting time with me is completely fine. Because your time off is already reserved for me alone."

I told the petite woman, grinning at her.

"And don't you dare try anything in the bathroom! I'm hungry."

Vetaka's warning made me giggle and follow her into the bathroom.

Dealing with a workaholic is easy. Just make her pay more attention to me than work, easy-peasy...

□□□□□

□Oversea Date-Vetaka(SP02)□

'If you want to see the true nature of your lover, try observing them when you go on a trip abroad together.'

That was probably because when you were in an unfamiliar place, the hardships and certain inconveniences might make people show their true selfish nature more than usual.

"It's so cold..."

I grumbled. My breath was white when it came out.

I think I'm about to transform into a dragon...

I never want to breathe fire so bad. My hands are freezing already...

"It's minus five degrees, it should be cold. Woah, snow!"

But the person next to me looked so excited like she had overdosed on energy drinks.

"Aren't you cold, Lal?"

"It is cold. But the more we are still, the colder we will be. That's why we have to move a lot so we won't get cold!"

Lallalin turned to me and tried to explain the logic to me. When I thought about it, it was true... It was true in theory but really, who could move in this freezing weather?

Oh, right... there's one cheerful fox over here who can...

They say that fox fur is very warm, right?

"I can't move... I'm freezing..."

I walked over to hug my lover and mumbled into her coat.

Hmm, this fox really is warm...

"Then let's go to the hotel first, unpack, and turn on the heater to warm up."

Lallalin tore open a warm pad and stuffed it into my coat pocket then called a taxi to take us to the hotel.

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It all started when I was reading an article on Facebook. Lallalin became interested, so she leaned her head in to read it together.

"Going on a trip with a lover abroad, there's a chance it will either deepen your love for each other, or it will tear you apart...what are you reading, Wine?"

"I was just scrolling through my phone and saw it. Why are you scowling?"

I turned to my girlfriend who was pouting as she rested her chin on my shoulder.

"Wine, you're reading such an article like that, it's like you are jinxing it. What's with that breaking up thing?"

"They just said there's a chance. I'm just reading to know more about it."

"Tck... Wine." Lallalin still nagged me.

"Hm? What is it?"

"Let's go abroad together."

"What?"

I exclaimed because the woman's invitation was quite sudden. What had gotten into her?

"I want to prove that you will love me even more after the trip. So, let's go abroad together!"

And that was how we ended up having our first date trip in Japan...

Our trip began after we got ready in the hotel and I could withstand the sub-zero weather. Even though I still felt a little cold, I understood why the taller woman seemed especially cheerful. The weather in Japan was good. The transportation was very convenient. And the food was delicious. For Lallalin who could speak English fluently,

this place is practically paradise for the taller woman...

"I'll take you to beautiful places and eat delicious food, Wine."

Lallalin turned to talk to me and she beamed. I still couldn't get used to the loving gaze she kept sending to me... We had been together for a while and I still got shy when she was around.

Sigh...

"It was tiresome, right? Filing the vacation leaves."

I told her conversationally to cover up my shyness.

"Then we should enjoy our trip to the fullest."

Lallalin grabbed my hand and held it tightly as she chirped happily. That made me smile too because the tall woman was the cutest when she smiled, you know?

This trip will definitely be so much fun...

But it just came to me that my girlfriend was the energetic type who loved working out the most.

Lallalin's version of "to the fullest" and my version of "to the fullest" are likely different...

"Let's see the deers later."

"Lal..."

"Hm? What is it, Wine?"

Lallalin turned to look at me while her hand was still holding the trip plan.

"I'm tired... Can we take a short break?"

When I saw my partner's sparkling eyes, what I intended to say firmly came out as a mumble instead.

She looks so enthusiastic that I feel guilty for being tired...

Now, the two of us were sitting at a roadside dessert shop, and the sweet dango really went well with hot green tea in this cold weather.

"You good, Wine?"

"My legs hurt..."

I said quietly. It seemed like I had underestimated Japan and my girlfriend's walking ability a bit too much. My legs and feet were sore as a result.

"Then...we can go see the deers another day."

Lallalin said and got up to order more sweets from the shop owner.

"But..." I tried to object.

"Let's sit down and rest until we're feeling better, then we can go back to the hotel first. It's almost evening already."

When I saw her smile as she ate the dessert, she didn't look upset at all, I felt a bit relieved. But the lingering guilt still didn't fade away easily.

"I'm sorry. Even though you've planned so many things, I didn't travel to my fullest at all."

I said to my partner while we were sitting on the bed in the hotel room. Lallalin looked surprised by my words, she quickly took my hand.

"It's just the two of us, Wine. We're not with a tour group. Everything can be adjusted as we see fit."

"...."

"I came on the trip because I wanted us to have fun together. It wouldn't be nice if I'm the only one having fun, right?"

"But you went quiet for a bit, so...."

I said, anxious, because after returning from the dessert shop, Lallalin, who was always chatty, suddenly became quiet, which made me even more worried.

"Oh... my bad. I was just planning in my head that if we go to see the deers another day, how should we rearrange the schedule."

"See? I'm causing you trouble..."

Her words made me feel like I was the problem even more. Suddenly, my eyes were burning.

"Wine, don't cry! Come here, let me hug you."

Lallalin looked shocked at my actions and quickly pulled me into an embrace, stroking my head gently.

"Is it fun traveling with me?... Not really, right? I get tired easily and I tend to get cold..."

"Wine... Wine, listen to me."

The taller woman looked into my red, teary eyes and told me in a serious tone.

"I love you because of who you are. I love you who get tired easily, get cold easily, and really like to stay in. That's the Wine that I love. I'm sorry for being a bit selfish, having fun all by myself without thinking about you at all."

"That's not it. You did nothing wrong."

I tried to argue back.

"Then you're not wrong either. No one's to blame here, alright?"

Lallalin smiled gently and wiped the tears that were welling up in my eyes for me.

"Hm..."

I nodded in agreement with her words.

"Don't cry, darling. Your eyes will be swollen and it won't look good in photos."

"Okay... I understand."

"Your legs are sore, right? Here, I'll massage them for you."

Lallalin changed the subject and arranged for me to lie down on the bed.

"But..." I tried to resist.

"Wine, don't be stubborn. Come on, hurry up and lie down."

The tall woman said sternly. I didn't dare to object to her any further, so I hugged the pillow and let Lallalin pamper me as she wanted. After a while, the soreness in my calves and soles of my feet started to ease up, then I lost

track of time when I fell asleep.

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When I woke up, I was the only one in the room...

Where did Lal go?

When traveling abroad, what people often bought were internet SIM cards for their mobile phones. Fortunately, nowadays, various applications could be used to make phone calls just like calling through a phone number.

She's not answering...where did she go?

I stared at my phone with worry. It was quite late, but Lallalin still hadn't come back. I was so worried that I wanted to go look for her, but on second thought, I should just wait in the room like this. Otherwise, things would get even messier.

"Oh, you're up already- Ah."

And at the sound of the door unlocking and the tall woman poking her head in, I immediately got up and hugged her tightly with how worried I was.

"I was so worried, Lal."

I said to Lallalin, feeling worried and angry at the same time.

"Why didn't you pick up? I tried calling you so many times."

"Hm? You called me?"

Lallalin looked confused as she pulled her phone out of her coat pocket. After a moment, she saw the many missed calls on the screen.

"Sorry, I didn't get the notifications, so..."

Lallalin leaned down and hugged me back with a guilty look. When I learned that the tall woman really didn't mean to miss the calls, I didn't stay angry at her anymore.

"I'm not angry. I'm just really worried for you, Lal."

"I just went out to buy some stuff. You were sleeping so peacefully, so I didn't want to wake you. Sorry..."

"Hm, I'm not mad anymore. What did you get while I was sleeping?"

I asked curiously. Lallalin's expression changed a little, she beamed and quickly showed me a bag of mouthwatering food.

"Here! I bought some bento and a lot of snacks and juice for you. We can stay in our hotel room tonight and go out tomorrow."

Even though I was a little curious, I decided not to ask too many questions...

"Alright... then let's eat so we can shower and go to bed."

"Okay."

Lallalin agreed to my suggestion with a smile.

When the two of us had finished eating and showering, I started unpacking my bags while waiting for my lover to dry her hair.

Wait, what is this weird bag? I don't remember buying it before...

"Wine, wait-"

"..."

My eyes widened when I saw what was in the bright pink bag that Lallalin tried to stop me from opening.

"Ouch! Wine, don't hit me!"

She yelped when my deadly hand smacked her hard.

"Well, don't you deserve it? I was worried about where you had gone to, and if you got lost or not. And you didn't answer my phone, I thought you had slipped and fallen in the snow."

I complained to my girlfriend in a stern voice. So this was why she looked flustered when I asked.

In the end, you sneaked off to go shopping for adult toys? My girlfriend is so...

"Sorry... You were sleeping. And it was on the way to buy the food."

"Stop that kicked puppy look. I really don't know what to do with you, Lal."

I grumbled as I returned the bag of toys to my lover.

"Then why are you blushing so much, Wine? Tell me, are you having some dirty thoughts right now?"

It was Lal who threw me a flirtatious look instead.

"No. Mhm-"

Before I could refuse, the teasing person leaned in and kissed me all of a sudden.

"We have to wake up early tomorrow..."

I uttered when she pulled away from the kiss and my back touched the softness of the bed. I knew something was wrong...I wondered how someone as provocative as Lallalin looked unusually well-behaved today. Turned out, she was just looking for an opportunity to jump at me...

"It's not that late yet. A round...or two... or maybe three should be fine, right?"

My vixen of a lover said cheerfully.

I couldn't help but glare at Lallalin, hearing that the rounds she suggested seemed to be increasing in number.

"But..."

"Please? We've finally come all the way to Japan."

Lallalin gave me charming, sparkling, puppy eyes. I'd never been able to resist the taller woman before...

I'll be damned if you're begging me so lovely like this...

"Set your alarm just in case." I grumbled,

"We have to wake up early tomorrow."

"Roger that."

Lallalin's kiss was soft but passionate as always. By the time I knew it, both of us were completely naked.

"Hey, Wine..."

"Hm? Yes?"

I asked the woman, who had just parted her lips away.

"I want to try it. Can we?"

Lallalin asked me with her puppy face and gestured towards the adult toy.

I knew that the tall woman would use his trick. I opened my mouth and was about to refuse, but I had to swallow my words when I saw her sparkling, pleading eyes.

"Please... It just stimulates the external part. It definitely won't hurt. You can relax."

Her seducing words made me consider the small silicone rod that seemed harmless... It should... be fine?... If I wanted to please my lover on a special occasion...

".."

I nodded slightly in response, embarrassed. I guess I had to seriously practice my skills in refusing this sly vixen...

When I agreed, the tall woman kissed me again and started to move to change positions to make things more convenient.

"Does it have to be in this position?"

I asked quietly when I was manhandled to sit on Lallalin's lap with my legs spread wide. This was so embarrassing...

"Are you embarrassed?"

"..."

No way I won't be...

I could only answer in my mind and glared at the tall woman sitting behind me.

I wondered if my scary gaze was starting to be ineffective against the other woman. Because Lallalin licked her lips, then I looked up to receive her sweet kiss when she pressed her lips down against mine unexpectedly.

And I couldn't help but groan when my lover's hand reached down to touch my sensitive part in a brutal move. Lallalin seemed to set her mind on stimulating the folds of my flower. The kiss was so long and sickly sweet that I almost choked on the feeling.

"!!!"

But then I flinched when she pulled away and brought the small silicone rod that made a vibrating noise to touch my pollen, my breathing hitched from

the strange sensation, and my whole body felt electrified.

"Ah! Lal."

I moaned when Lallalin bit my neck as if she was having a bite out of a sweet dessert while her hand was still pressing the device against my flower pollen.

The unfamiliar sensation sent me to orgasm in no time. Even though I had finished, Lallalin still did not take that stick out!

"Ngh, Lal, you can take it out. I already finished, Lal..."

I said in a trembling voice and weakly tried to grab her arm.

"But we haven't tried all the functions yet."

Lallalin replied, demanding in her tone, she still seemed to be very interested in the new toy.

'That thing has multiple levels?'

I narrowed my eyes and looked at the toy in the other woman's hand questioningly.

"Oh.."

I didn't have to wonder long because Lallalin immediately continued her experiment without my consent. I couldn't resist the woman's strength as she held my legs firmly in place, continuously pressing and changing the rhythm of the device. It made me jump every time the vibration level changed.

"How... How many levels are there?"

I looked at the woman, who was having fun with the device, incredulous and kinda pissed at her.

Is she enjoying my suffering? This is tortuous for me...

"Sob... I can't... I can't take it anymore. Lal... Let go... Ah..."

My sensitive pollen twitched a few times and I couldn't remember how many times I had come from that toy alone. My legs were shaking and I had no strength to struggle. The mesmerizing sensations spread throughout my body and I could only pant and moan softly.

"This is the last function."

"Ngh..."

I squirmed when Lallalin adjusted the vibration level to the highest level. The intense vibration caused my body to twitch and come immediately.

I panted until my entire body shook. I rested against the other woman, losing all my strength...

"Wine... How was it? Does it feel good?"

Lallalin, who had already put away the toy, turned back to ask me about the results, and of course, I couldn't answer her question in this state, I was still trying to catch my breath. My ears were ringing and I could only hear my own heartbeat now.

"You don't answer me but you are panting so hard, it must feel really good."

"Ouch!"

I slapped a hand hard on her shoulder for being such a tease, wait, I thought I slapped her with all the strength I could muster.

"Lal, you're meanie-Mmm!"

Lallalin leaned down to swallow all my nagging. The woman was so skilled with her tongue that I started to get drunk on her kiss once again.

"There, there, who was cruel to this gorgeous little flower?"

The taller woman seized the opportunity when I was caught off guard to enter. Her breath was warm against my lower stomach, I widened my eyes with surprise.

"Sh...I'll make it better, okay?"

"Lal, no! Ahh...Lal..."

I cried out helplessly and tried to weakly close my legs when I knew what she suggested. My calf was already shaking in this vixen's hand, how on earth would I resist?

When her tongue lingered on my weak pollen, tormented from the teasing, I sweetly cried out her name. The toy was still vibrating inside me, making my pollen more sensitive than usual. Lallalin's comfort brought me to desperation, my lower stomach sank from arousal.

Feeling overwhelmed, I found my hand in the other woman's hair, pressing her down for more contact so I could be relieved of this burning torment.

"Ah! Not yet-"

I flinched when I felt her slender finger inserted in my entrance.

"Lal, baby, not...this...oh!"

I tried to move away because I was so overwhelmed by the pleasure the other woman gave me from the pollen and the sensitive spot inside, moans kept leaving my lips with no hope of stopping them.

"Ngh...don't do it all at once....I'll"

But the taller woman did not listen to my desperate pleas. Lallalin even held my hips down forcefully and sped up until everything turned white and my mind was empty of all sensation except the pleasure that the woman gave me until I reached my peak.

"Lal, Lal! Nghhh, ah! I can't! I'm going to-mhm!!!"

I screamed out when I could no longer resist it. Ecstasy climbed higher and higher until my hips violently twitched. Lallalin drank up every single drop of my nectar while all I could do was lay there, panting hard and trembling.

It took a while until I could control my breathing back to normal...

"Wine, you're as red as a lobster."

Lallalin retreated her finger and leaned up to give me a kiss as she commented playfully.

"I'm not a fitness freak like you, Lal. I'm so exhausted right now..."

I kissed her back and mumbled, with this many orgasms in a round, I'd passed out in one of these days.

"Well, this is your exercise, no?"

The taller woman gave me her smug smile and it looked annoying.

"Unbelievable."

"Let's shower after you catch your breath, okay?"

Lallalin lay on her side next to me and pulled me closer for a comfortable hug.

"Yeah...Wait, you did not finish even once, did you?"

I protested. I was the only one who was pleased with our previous lovemaking.

"Aren't you tired, Wine?"

"But I haven't-"

"It's fine, I don't have to today, ah."

Lallalin tried to drop the subject but I used this chance to flip our position so I was on top of her.

"..."

Then I had to frown when I felt her folds were soaked with nectar. The tall woman flinched and paled when she was caught red-handed.

"You're so turned on, why are you still trying to hold it?"

I muttered as I inserted my finger in her entrance.

"You're already tired, Wine..."

Lallalin smiled at me sheepishly and that annoyed me so much that I ended up thrusting my finger into my lover's core brutally.

You better prepare yourself for it...now it's my turn...

"Oh...are you mad?"

Lallalin winced when I dragged the tip of my finger on her sensitive spot inside. Still, the tall woman put on her brave face and smiled.

"Maybe," I told her with a sour expression.

She acted like she had the upper hand but I knew Lallalin's body as well as she knew all my sensitive spots!

"I thought you were too tired for this? Ah..."

"See for yourself. Am I too tired now?"

"Wine...ah! Don't flick your finger there, Wine."

I twisted my wrist, moving it rhythmically, grinding it against the sensitive spot repeatedly. I could feel her inside clenching on my finger, I dropped the pace, denying her from reaching her bliss.

"Ngh...I'm angry at you now, don't torture me like this, Wine...darling..."

Lallalin tried to look at me through her lashes, pleading with me. The taller woman loved to be in control just as much as I did in this.

This sly vixen is adorable like this when she all whimpers and drops her ears and tail...

"You looked like you enjoyed it when I begged you."

I smirked cruelly at the taller woman under me. Her eyes widened when she understood what she would face.

If this little fox dared to provoke a tiger, then this tiger would eat her up until she did not have any strength left...

"Mhm..Wine..."

She let out her sweet broken moans when I maintained that slow, torturous pace.

"Look at me, sweetheart."

I leaned down to whisper playfully next to my partner's ear when she closed her eyes tight. I nipped on her pale neck as I quickened the pace until she cried out.

"Oh! Wine, I'm going to... Wine don't."

Once again, I stopped the movement of my wrist when I felt Lallalin's inside squeezed me.

"Look, you're a red fox now, Lal. Your body is so red right now."

I teased her and pressed a kiss on the taller woman's soft cheek that flushed from her denied bliss.

"Wine, you're so...ugh....you're the biggest bully ever. Ah! Wine."

Lallalin let out a heavy sigh and started throwing a tantrum but then her words turned into moans when I moved my wrist again.

"What was that?"

I felt more smug when I saw her throwing tantrums. I whispered to her flushed ear as I brought my free hand to fondle her breasts, rubbing the nipple until Lallalin flinched and whimpered.

"Hmm...Wine...I can't hold it anymore...Wine..."

Lallalin arched up from how good she felt, her stomach tensed, making her abs more visible. I couldn't help myself so I brought my hand to caress it.

"Just hold on a little longer, baby..."

"Ngh...it's too much, don't tease me this way...please?"

Tears ran down her face from the high of her arousal, it made me feel weak for the woman under me.

I wanted to tease her more but I guess I could go easy on her...

Lallalin could very much take care of her desire by herself but she was willing to submit to me and let me take control of this love-making. The woman let me do as I pleased until her whole body was shaking with desire. She was so sweet that I had to bend down and give her a kiss.

"I love you, my naughty vixen."

I whispered softly and sped up the movement of my wrist to send my lover to her release.

"I love...too, oh! I love you too, Wine. Mhm! Ah!!!"

Lallalin moaned so sweetly and held on to me for dear life. Her body twitched so violently from reaching her orgasm that I could tell by how hard her entrance was clenching me, I could not even move my finger.

It seemed that I took it too far because Lallalin sobbed softly in her throat. I pressed a kiss on her trembling shoulder to comfort her.

"Are you alright, Lal?"

"Hm... let me just stay like this for a while."

Lallalin buried her face in my neck and groaned softly. Her entrance was still clenching and twitching, revealing her lingering desire.

I held the taller woman and lightly petted her back to make her relax.

"Heh..."

I chuckled after I retreated my finger from her inside and saw Lallalin's exhausted expression, it was so adorable.

"Don't laugh."

The taller woman pouted, "you like to train my stamina."

"I thought you like working out?"

I said playfully.

"This is too much. I almost had a heart attack."

"You like it," I said with confidence.

"Just tell me the truth that you like it when I do this to you."

"Wine...do you realize that you are getting scarier every day?"

Lallalin pouted and yelped.

"Don't think that you can get away with this by kissing me."

"You know me so well..."

"Hey...you're not mad at me anymore, right?"

The taller woman asked me while I was wiping her tears away with a napkin.

"..."

I looked dumbfounded when I heard my lover.

"Don't tell me that you already forgot the reason why you punished me!?"

Lallalin exclaimed with a high pitch as she scowled, "Jesus Christ..."

"You looked so cute when I teased you, sorry..."

I moved to kiss my lover's cheek who pouted so much that her cheeks puffed up.

"Can you tell me then, what were you mad about?"

Lallalin met my eyes with so much gentleness when she asked what she wanted to know.

Affected by that, I avoided her gaze. I felt that my actions were somehow childish but we did promise each other that we wouldn't hold what made us upset inside, so I sighed and confessed the truth.

"It annoyed me.....it annoys me that you don't prioritize yourself. It should feel good for both of us."

"Oh...I don't mind, really. As long as you feel good, Wine. Hey, hold on, let me finish."

Lallalin quickly added when she saw that I started scowling.

"I mean I don't want you to feel that you are taking advantage of me, Wine. I love you and I'm just happy every time we make love. I just want to make you feel good."

"...."

"You don't have to exhaust yourself to make me feel good every time, you know?"

The taller woman ended her sentence with a smile so sweet that it made my heart skip from my lover's kindness and her way of thinking.

"I love you, Lal."

I couldn't help but tell her out loud.

"I love you too, Wine," Lallalin said back as easily as breathing.

"Let's take a bath," I told her because, right now, we were both sweaty all over.

"Let me just lay here for a bit. Ouch...I'm so sore right now."

But then Lallalin dropped to the bed like she lost all her strength and mumbled.

"See? This is why I tell you to get some sleep. You're not young enough to keep this up anymore."

I told my lover who acted like she had so much energy today. And now, she was whining on the bed. Served her right, really.

Since Lallalin refused to get up, I decided to kill time by watching Lallalin's face. My lover had her eyes closed and was mumbling something idly. Suddenly, she opened her eyes and looked at me like she had something to say but was hesitant to say it.

"Hey, Wine...if I want to buy more of these toys, will you be okay with that?"

Lallalin looked shy when she asked me. She must be talking about the sex toys...

"You like it?"

"It's interesting, alright. Also...I want to see this scary tiger turning into a kitten more often."

I watched her, mildly annoyed by Lallalin's giggle.

"Heh...wait until I get my hands on it and use it on you."

I gave her my implicit permission.

"It sounds scary when you say that, Wine....please have mercy, dear, I barely made it earlier."

The taller woman looked sorry as she adorably pleaded for my sympathy.

Her expression when she looked sorry made me want to tease her so much...

"It's not like we need the toys, though."

"Because... compared to you, you're way better than any toy, Lal."

I brought my hand to my lover's toned stomach and felt her breathing catch as I caressed her abs. I never grew bored of this 11-line abs, it was mine and mine alone...

"Wine....if you keep this up, you won't be sleeping tonight. We have to go to the amusement park tomorrow, remember?"

Lallalin whined about her complaint. The tickets were bought in advance so they could not postpone the date.

I pressed my lips on Lallalin's soft cheek and whispered softly in her ear.

"The amusement park won't go anywhere if we go a bit late...don't you want to feel good again together, Lal?"

Then I giggled when this vixen fell right into my trap so easily...

PhoomJAI: Hi Lal

PhoomJAI: How's the trip?

PhoomJAI : Come on, send me some pics and make me jealous

PhoomJAI : Lal?

PhoomJAI: LAL

PhoomJAI: U up?

PhoomJAI: wait a sec...

PhoomJAI: did u ask where the sex toy shop was last night because...?

PhoomJAI: Lal, you little shit, WAKE UP!

* Audio Call

* Audio Call

* Audio Call

PhoomJAI: Christ, the tickets are expensive u can't just cancel that and stay in the hotel ok????!!

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(Lallalin)

The weather was so cold that I could see my breath, still, I felt warm from the 2 heat pads inside my pockets and from how firmly I held Vetaka's hand. right now, the petite woman next to me looked so excited about this amusement park.

We slept in for a bit but the joy of the amusement park did not necessarily come from playing all the rides, right? It was worthwhile just walking and

taking in the surroundings, you know...

Am I just trying to make up a good reason for what I did?

"Your eyes lit up like Christmas, Wine. You like it that much?"

I teased the petite woman who seemed so eager right now, the beautiful woman looked around her with so much interest.

"I didn't know you're a fan of this movie franchise."

Vetaka turned to me. She looked surprised when I took her to an amusement park that had a magical world theme, it was based on one of the best-selling young adult books in the world.

"I'm obsessed with it, really. Always want an owl to deliver a letter to my house."

I told her with a smile on my face.

"I like it too."

"I know you do..."

"Hm?"

"I saw the whole book series in your room before."

I told her, I felt kind of embarrassed. Vetaka beamed at me happily.

"So you decided to surprise me with this?" and asked me playfully.

"Do you like it?"

"I do," Vetaka replied with a smile. It made my heart feel so full in my chest.

"Then let's make the most out of it, okay?"

The two of us went to the landmarks and stopped by the gift shop, we each got our own scarf and put it around our necks to go with the amusement park theme. My petite woman looked so cute in it, I wanted to hug and squeeze her so bad.

It was a good call to tell Wine to wear glasses here, it looks so good with the scarf I picked for her...

"Let's take a picture."

I gestured for my girlfriend to come closer after she got us the signature drinks.

"You still want to get a cold drink in this weather?"

Vetaka grumbled. It couldn't be helped, alright? It was a signature drink here...

"Woah...I have like a hundred missed calls from Phoom."

I exclaimed when I took out my phone to check.

"Aren't you going to call him back?"

Vetaka saw the missed calls when she leaned over and said to me, likely concerned about Pakphoom.

"I'll call him back later."

"A true friend, I see..."

"It's tough love between us."

I told her with a smile. I opened my bag and picked up a hand-sized camera. I showed it to my partner

"Look! I have something to show you."

"Hm? A polaroid camera?"

Vetaka looked at the camera in my hand with curiosity.

"Yes, Phoom has one so I borrowed it from him."

"You could just take a picture with your phone, though..."

"But for Polaroid, there's only one photo in the world, Wine. Don't you think it's romantic that way?"

I asked for her opinion.

"I guess....it is romantic."

Vetaka looked sheepish before she answered me.

"That's such a nonchalant answer, Wine."

I sighed at the petite woman, she was really not a romantic. But that was part of Vetaka's charms and I liked everything about this person, so...

"Shall we take a photo then?"

Vetaka asked me.

"Of course, step closer to me, Wine."

I grabbed her shoulder to pull her closer then I counted 1 2 3 to signal my partner and beamed at the camera's lens as I cracked the shutter.

After that, I picked up the photo that was printed from the camera, waiting for the picture to appear.

"Wow...you're so good at this, it turns out nicely."

Vetaka commented softly, amazed by the fact that I could take a perfect selfie where none of our faces got out of the frame...

"It's me, we're talking about here."

I bragged to my partner and when the picture appeared, I smiled with pride.

"This is a very nice photo, especially for this girl here. She's so cute, is she taken?"

"Yes, by you,"

Vetaka answered my playful question bluntly. I was caught a little off guard by that, "What? You asked."

"I'm not used to you teasing me like this. My heart can't take lots of it."

I laughed softly, embarrassed all of a sudden.

"You're the one who rubs it on me, this type of thing."

"How's our first trip together so far?"

I asked her, feeling uncertain.

"It's fun, even with some hiccups then and there,"

Vetaka replied as she sipped her drink.

"That's good.."

I uttered with relief. Truth be told, I was really nervous. I put all my effort into planning this trip because I wanted to impress Vetaka. I felt kind of guilty when I saw how tired she was on the first day.

I'm so glad that she enjoys it...

"I love you even more..."

Vetaka said out of the blue. I turned and gave the petite woman who was occupying herself with the drink in her hands a questioning look.

"?"

"I'm saying, traveling together like this makes me love you even more, Lal."

She added when she saw my baffled look. It made me grin so wide that my cheeks hurt.

"Wine,"

"You can't kiss me here!"

The petite woman yelled when I was about to pull her into a hug and maul her right then and there.

"Hmph! You're cruel. Acting so cute and telling me not to kiss you."

"Don't make a fuss."

"Then...travel the world with me? Let's visit many more places together."

I asked her, a soft smile on my lips.

"Yeah, let's..."

Vetaka replied with a happy smile.

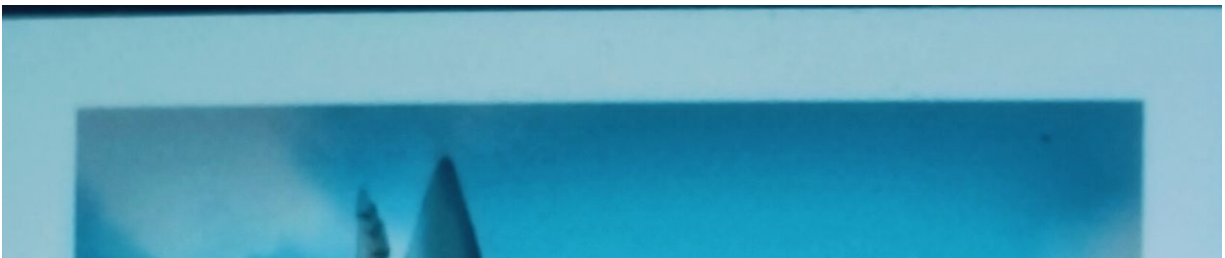
"Let's go everywhere together until we travel the world."

U there, Phoom?: **Lullaby**

Bent Photo: **Lullaby**

See for urself, I made it in time: **Lullaby**

Work hard, play harder bitch: **Lullaby**





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□Noomnim and the Secret Toilet (SP03)□

Hello everyone, my name is Neemnim, you can call me Nim.

I was an office worker working in the capital city. My dream was to win a 30 million baht lottery and quit my job to live a simple life.

But it seemed that the path to that dream was very difficult. I couldn't remember how many lottery tickets I had bought. I had never won any of the prizes, even the last two-digits:) prize. Sigh...

On the bright side, I might win the first prize, once and for all. So I would just have to hang in there a little longer...

Better have a hen tomorrow than an egg today as they said. I lost the two-digit prize to wait for the first prize!

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"Get home safe, Nim."

"Bye, get home safe."

I waved goodbye to my friends before looking for a seat at the mall for a rest. Today, I had dinner with my friends from university. The most common type of food to have while hanging out with them was either shabu- shabu or barbecue.

Oh boy... I'm so full my stomach is gonna explode.

I should play a game or two before going home.

I mused as I opened my backpack to get the power bank to charge my phone when I saw the red battery symbol on my phone screen. But when I reached into my backpack, I did not find it. I frowned, worried, and decided to search my pocket again.

Nowhere... I can't find it...

Oh no... I left my power bank at the office!

I should hurry home... I'll be in trouble if the battery runs out before I get back...

I made up my mind before getting up from the bench and walking to the Skytrain station near the shopping mall. But when I almost reached the station gate, I hesitated...

If I go home now... and the power bank I left explodes, wouldn't the company's server burn down? And when they investigate the case, they will find out that the fire is caused by my power bank...

I'll go to jail. And my cat at home will lose their mom...

That can't happen! I have to hurry back to the company!!!

Panicked, I thought to myself as I turned back and rushed to the company. Luckily, my company was quite close to the station, so I didn't take too much time walking there. It would be a waste of money if the buffet I just ate was all gone from the walk.

The lights at the company were still on, so there were still people working overtime. Sigh... At least it wouldn't be too spooky...

I walked into the empty office...they must have gone down to buy some late-night snacks, I thought to myself, as I walked to my seat.

Found it!

I quickly unplugged the power bank and put it in my backpack.

Let's hurry home...wait...

As I was about to walk out the door, my stomach suddenly ached so much. I looked at the company bathroom and couldn't help but feel goosebumps...

Nighttime made people's imaginations go wild as a starter, and when combined with the empty bathroom...

Eek...

I got goosebumps and shivers down my spine. Would I be able to hold it in for now and take care of it at home?

Growl...

Oh boy... But it seems like my stomach doesn't want me to endure it. I don't have the endurance for this at all...

Get it done and leave quickly! Nim, you can do it. You're the best!

I gave myself a pep talk and tried to take care of my urgent needs as quickly as possible.

"Ah...Hmm..."

What's that sound? I look around in panic as I hear a strange noise in the silence.

"Haa...Ngh..."

Maybe my ears are playing tricks on me?

"Mmm..."

A... woman... It's a woman's voice!!!

I widened my eyes in alarm when the sound I thought I was imagining turned out to be a person's voice when I listened carefully... No, not just a person...

It sounds like a person is moaning, but who would be doing that at this time?

Waah...

Yep. A ghost, definitely a ghost, a supernatural being, or is it Ms. Hanako"]? Are you trying to ask me to come play with you?

Hell no, I won't play!

I just stopped by to use the toilet and will be going home soon. I have a cat waiting for me at home. I don't have time to play with you, Ms. Hanako!

I could only scream internally out of fear, hoping that this message would reach the ghost.

B... But you don't have to answer, Miss Ghost. I like to do the talking myself. I love talking to myself. I always wanted to become an MC host.

"Hmm... ah... don't..."

Don't what? Don't come into the bathroom now? Sure. Fine. Got it! I'm going. I'll hurry out right now.

I thought in a panic as my trembling hands tried to get dressed as fast as possible.

"Oh... faster..."

Miss Ghost, don't rush! I'm rushing as fast as I can! I mean, I can go faster without flushing the toilet. But if I don't, Miss Ghost will be angry at me for making your house dirty, right?

Let me flush the toilet... Don't come spook me...

I almost cried and decided to get over my fear and reach out to flush the toilet.

The terrifying sound of the toilet flushing would make the ghost aware... But then, suddenly, the ghost became surprisingly quiet. Okay! It was my chance! I should take this opportunity when the ghost is stunned and... run! I wasn't stupid enough to wait!!!

Run... I just have to run away! I can't stay here anymore!

And I quickly ran out of the bathroom without noticing that the last bathroom was locked...

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"Tang!!! Wanna hear some tea?"

The first person I thought of sharing whenever I learned about something interesting was my closest friend in this company, Tangkwa.

"Bring it on, Nim."

And my lovely Tangkwa never turned me down. This was how a good listener should be...

"Oh? What are you doing here so early in the morning, P' Lal?"

I asked curiously when I saw my boss standing next to K' Wine's desk.

"I'm here to bring K' Wine the report summary. Figure I'll just wait for her here to check it."

P' Lal glanced at me for a moment. She stood next to Khun Wine's chair, sipping coffee, while the other woman was reading the report.

It's not even working hours yet... these bosses are way too hard working...

"And the coffee?"

I looked at the coffee cup in P' Lal's hand and the one on K' Wine's desk. Both cups had the same logo.

"This?... It's buy 1 get 1 free."

"But I remember that there's no promo today."

"You said you have something to tell me, Nim?"

It was Tangkwa who interrupted my curiosity. So I turned to nod my head slightly at my boss and turned my attention to my best friend instead.

"Oh, I almost forgot. I got distracted by P' Lal. I saw a ghost last night, Tang. A ghost!"

I told my best friend with an alarmed expression. But when she heard it, Tangkwa didn't seem to buy it.

"No one in our company has ever said they saw a ghost, Nim. Even the security guard has never seen one, and neither has the housekeeper."

Tangkwa began, analyzing the situation. I really hated those kinds of people who were all about logic.

"I;m being serious, Tangkwa. I'm not joking."

"...Maybe you were so scared that you were imagining things?"

"I really heard one last night. It was the ghost of a woman, Tangkwa. She was moaning...in the bathroom."

"..."

Tangkwa didn't seem to believe my words at all. That made me whine in frustration.

"Why would I lie to you, Tang? I really did meet one. The ghost in the bathroom was moaning. It was the scariest thing in the world. Ouch!!! If you don't believe me, that's on you. I'll go tell P' Jantra to send a monk to ward off evil spirits."

Bang!

The sound of the report folder shutting was so loud that I, who was chatting colorfully with Tangkwa, was startled. It was Khun Wine...it seemed like she wasn't in a good mood...

"Khun Lal, this point hasn't been explained in detail. Go fix it. The deadline is before 10 a.m."

Khun Wine suddenly looked upset. Her beautiful face was scowling and her expression was as dark as storm clouds gathering.

"Wine... Khun Wine, 10 o'clock deadline, I think it's a bit..."

P'Lal's face suddenly turned pale when K' Wine returned the stack of documents to her.

"Is 10 too late for you? Then how does 9:30 sound?"

And K' Wine's eyes were gleaming with anger that I hadn't seen in a long time. The sight made a shiver run down my spine and I wasn't the one being stared at.

"Alright... if that's what you want."

P' Lal looked so pale that I felt sorry for her. But K' Wine really was strange, her mood was fluctuating.

"... Take your coffee back. I don't want to drink it anymore."

Khun Wine pushed back the coffee cup. That made P' Lal look even more upset.

"...Keep it, please? I'll hurry and bring the work to you."

P'Lal continued to speak to Khun Wine with that kicked puppy voice of hers. Khun Wine let out a big sigh and then waved P'Lal off.

"Fine...you can go back now. I have work to do."

Why do I get a sense that the air between these two is a bit strange...

"Noomnim, go back to the department. Now!"

P' Lal came and dragged me back with her, causing me to cry out in confusion.

"W-wait...P' Lal, hold on, wait a minute."

"Come help me fix the document, now."

"Wait, why? It's not working time yet. P' Lal, wait!"

Why do I suddenly get dragged into this?

Ugh, Nim, the universe seems to hate you right now. I saw a ghost and now I'm swamped with work. I guess I'll have to make merit soon!

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Even though the company I worked for was great in terms of both the environment and the people, when it was time to change, I decided to step out into a new and more challenging chapter to grow. I had moved to a new workplace, but I still kept in touch with my lovely best friend, Tangkwa.

And today, the two of us met up to have dinner together for the first time this year.

"Wow, I haven't seen you for a long time. You look amazing."

I complimented the very modest Tangkwa, who was now much better at makeup and dressing up. She also seemed to be more confident than before.

"You're exaggerating, Nim... You're still as loud and cheery as ever."

"I'll take it as a compliment."

"What should we eat? I'm hungry."

Tangkwa asked me. I was considering some decent restaurants with good prices. But while I was looking around, I caught sight of a familiar face.

"Wait, isn't that P' Lal? P' Lal-"

"Shh...why are you yelling?"

Tangkwa scolded me, looking serious. Wow... It had been a long time since we'd seen each other. Tangkwa, who was so quiet and easily scared, looked kinda scary now...

"I was just trying to say hi to P' Lal. Why did you stop me?"

"Nim...take a look. Who is P' Lal

I turned to look at P'Lal who was walking out of the ice cream shop. Wait, she came out of the shop with...

"Is that Khun Wine?"

"Yeah."

"Am I seeing things? Let me take a closer look."

"Wait, Nim...sigh..."

I slowly approached them while still keeping a distance so I was sure the two of them wouldn't notice me.

They're holding hands?! Their fingers are lacing each other?! I mean... it would be normal for close friends to hold hands. But...P' Lal and Khun Wine aren't that close right?...

"So Khun Wine and P' Lal are close? I always thought that P' Lal didn't like Khun Wine."

I turned to ask Tangkwa who was giving me a look. So I had to continue observing the situation.

Khun Wine had an ice cream cone in her hand, and P' Lal lowered her head to say something to her. Khun Wine seemed to complain about something before lifting the ice cream in her hand to P' Lal's waiting mouth.

"Tangkwa...did you see what I saw just now?"

I turned to my best friend and whispered, panicked.

"Yeah, I did... I had been trying to tell you about it for like a hundred times already."

Tangkwa sighed and looked at me disappointedly.

"I thought you were Nim the All-Seeing?"

I turned to watch P' Lal and Khun Wine who were laughing happily. They looked as if they were...

"Are they dating?"

"Yeah, they are. P' Lal and P' Wine are seeing each other," Tangkwa added.

"Seriously?! Since when?"

"How about we have dinner first? I have the entire day to tell you about it, Nim."

Tangkwa cut the conversation, I followed my best friend willingly. Still, I turned back to get one last look at P' Lal and Khun Wine.

How did I miss this tea?

Maybe I should retire from using the nickname "Nim the All-Seeing" this time...

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(Lallalin)

"Everything okay?"

Vetaka asked when she saw me looking around for a moment.

"I thought I heard Noomnim's voice."

I answered my partner when I heard the familiar, chattering voice. But when I looked around, I didn't see any sign of my menace of an ex-subordinate. Maybe I misheard it...

"You miss her, don't you? I miss her too. It's a lot less lively without her around."

"Yeah, I suppose. It's kinda lonely."

"Let's go. Or else we won't make it in time for the movie."

Vetaka walked over and held my hand as usual. It made me smile before I could stop it.

"What are you smiling about?"

And of course, my smile didn't escape Vetaka's eyes. That was why the petite woman asked in surprise.

"I was just thinking about how good it is that I can hold hands with you anywhere, Wine."

I raised our intertwined hands to my eye level and proudly examined the small diamond ring on Vetaka's left ring finger.

"You didn't even have to quit just to hold hands with me."

The petite woman grumbled beside me.

"It's about time. Besides, it would become overly complicated if we stay in the same company."

I said cheerfully. Dating someone in the same company could be quite complicated. I was not really worried about the workplace gossip. What I was worried about was Vetaka's image since she worked in finance. I didn't want anyone to think badly of her.

This is for the best...

"That's why you're going all out now that you resign?"

I laughed when she mentioned the first month after I resigned. I showed up to send her off in front of the company and I even picked her up afterward.

"Of course. I have to tell everyone that this beautiful woman over here is taken. Don't try to flirt with her."

"So dramatic."

"Just like you, Wine."

I teased the petite woman when she commented about how I acted. Vetaka had no chill either...

It happened one day when I picked up Vetaka as usual. And because I was familiar with the people there, I was given the privilege to wait in the seating area by the reception.

"Oh...what are you doing here, N' Lal?"

It was P' Phong who walked over to greet me.

"Just picking up my girlfriend."

I answered P' Phong. When he met my confident voice, the middle-aged man's face turned a little pale after planning to tease me.

And it was at the same moment when Vetaka walked up to me.

"Since when did you girls hit it off? Don't you think it feels a bit weird?"

P' Phong suddenly blurted out, causing everyone in the company who was walking by to stop and watch the situation with interest. And that made me walk to stand beside my girlfriend. I took her hand in mine firmly.

"And... How is the fact that I am dating K. Lal have anything to do with you, P' Phong?"

Vetaka was the one who told P' Phong, she said it so flatly and coldly that the rude man was stunned.

"W-well..."

"If me dating someone doesn't affect my work, I don't think it's something that anyone should care about."

After she finished speaking, the petite woman glared at P' Phong and looked at the people around her. Of course, no one in the company would dare to confront Vetaka. That was why all the employees who were watching suddenly dispersed.

"Hey, I'm sorry... for asking something rude like that."

P' Phong finally backed down and apologized to both of us.

"It's fine... I'm not angry anymore. Then, please edit the maintenance report and make it more detailed, P' Phong,"

The petite woman said with a faint smile on her face. P' Phong agreed and quickly walked away.

"Wow... my Wine is so cool."

Vetaka was so brave earlier. I was astonished by the admiration I had for my partner's determination for a long while.

I felt even more proud because it wasn't just me who wasn't afraid to say that we were dating. Vetaka had said it in front of everyone.

How could I not fall in love with her more every day?

"..."

"You're quiet, now. You do like to keep quiet when you're shy."

"Lal, you always keep teasing me."

"Okay, I won't tease you anymore. Hurry up and eat the ice cream or it will melt."

I gestured to the ice cream cone in her hand.

"Lal, do you want to eat with me?"

After Vetaka took a bite, she turned to ask me.

"Yes, but only if you feed me."

"You're being sly again."

Even though she complained, the petite woman still fed me the ice cream without making a fuss.

"It's so good. And I got to kiss you indirectly too."

"Why on earth would you want to kiss me indirectly?"

Vetaka muttered, "when you can kiss me directly for real."

"Wine... don't be so cute. I'm already so crazy in love with you."

I said, my heart soared when the petite woman seemed to get cuter every day. That made me fall in love with her over and over again.

"Thank you... for loving me this much."

Vetaka turned to smile at me and said shyly.

"Thank you too, Wine, for loving me."

I replied to her. My heart was so full of happiness.

"Let's go."

Our hands were tightly laced together.

And I made a promise to myself that I would hold this delicate hand forever.

No matter how much time passed,

Lallalin would forever love Vetaka...

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