

# Chain



REVERSE  
Story

MothilA  
Illust

## INTRODUCTION

“And where is our daughter, dear?”

KhunYing Nara inquired her husband when she noticed their eldest daughter absent from the house that morning.

“She’s probably at work, dear.”

“Work?”

The husband’s response gave KhunYing Nara a headache. Her usually kind face now furrowed with concern.

“You’re frowning so much, you’ll get more wrinkles, dear.”

He teased his wife, only to receive a sharp glare in return. The husband chuckled at her expression, which reminded him of her younger days, unchanged.

“But today is a day off. I had plans with our daughter. How could she possibly be at work?”

She said with a slight tone of dissatisfaction. It was clear that the mother was already quite miffed with her daughter.

“Miss Akhira will probably be back soon, KhunYing. She left early this morning.”

The housekeeper, who took care of the household, said to reassure KhunYing Nara. But it seemed more like an excuse for the eldest daughter of the house.

“Why did she leave so early this morning, this child?”

KhunYing Nara couldn't help but complain, wondering if her daughter would even return. They'd made plans, and yet her daughter vanished. KhunYing Nara could only sigh softly in resignation, while the others present could only hope that the subject of their conversation would return in time. If she didn't, or if she was even a minute late, there would likely be a long ordeal of making amends.

"Dr.Panipak, KhunYing Nara is waiting for you in the room."

Said the plump nurse to the beautiful doctor as soon as she saw her approaching.

“Thank you.”

Dr.Panipak replied with a smile, thanking the nurse before entering the room.

“Good morning, KhunYing Nara.”

“Good morning, dear. What's this ‘KhunYing’ business? You call me Auntie.”

Said KhunYing Nara, who was close to Panipak's mother and quite familiar with her. The younger woman didn't say much in response, just smiled at the elder as usual. She didn't mind being considered family, but out of respect, she hesitated to use such familiar terms. She could tell that KhunYing Nara was quite fond of her, which made her feel good.

In fact, she should've been packing up and preparing to leave, but when the elder had called to make an appointment, citing a matter she wanted to discuss, Dr.Panipak couldn't refuse.

“Are you feeling well, KhunYing Nara?”

After the greetings, the lithe figure immediately broached the subject. She didn't want to prolong the conversation, eager to know the condition of the

person before her so she could proceed with treatment. She feared the elder might have a serious problem.

After a brief conversation, it was concluded that KhunYing Nara was suffering from insomnia, headaches, and fatigue due to accumulated stress.

Dr.Panipak then provided some initial advice and appropriate treatment methods for KhunYing Nara to follow and scheduled a follow-up appointment as it was their routine.

Out of concern, the lithe figure walked KhunYing Nara to her car before heading to the bus stop as she did everyday. KhunYing Nara had mentioned that her daughter would pick her up since she'd sent her driver home earlier.

"How will you get home, Pleng?"

The elder asked after they reached the front of the hospital.

"I'll take the bus."

The younger doctor replied truthfully. She wasn't trying to be down to earth, it was just more convenient than finding parking, and her condo wasn't far from the hospital where she worked. Besides, she didn't like driving.

"Well, why don't we go back together, dear? My daughter should be arriving soon. Oh, look, there she is, right on time."

Speak of the devil, a sleek black car pulled up not far from where they stood. Dr.Panipak didn't have a chance to decline because KhunYing Nara had already taken her by the hand and was leading her to the luxurious vehicle.

"Already here, you little rascal?"

She said sternly to her daughter as soon as she saw her stepping out of the car. She'd managed to slip away in the morning, but didn't expect a second round. When the lady used her trump card, threatening to make her daughter come to pick her up with the words,

"Zo, you don't have to worry about me. Just leave your old mother to find her own way back."

Akhira paused slightly when she saw her mother waiting for her. It wasn't that she was surprised to see her own mother, but it was the woman standing next to her that caught her off guard. The striking figure and the sweet eyes that looked back at her made Akhira, who was usually so self-assured, feel unexpectedly intimidated.

Their eyes met unintentionally until Dr.Panipak was the first to look away from that intense gaze. She felt an inexplicable discomfort; the woman before her seemed formidable, perhaps due to her sharp attire, which was dark tones from head to toe, and, most importantly, those piercing eyes.

"I thought you were going to leave me to find my own way back, Zo."

Khun Ying Nara's slightly petulant words to her daughter brought a faint smile to the face of the outsider, Dr.Panipak, who stood by. But that charming smile quickly faded when she turned to meet the indifferent gaze of the eldest daughter of the Watcharakitkun family once more. Why doesn't she seem as endearing as the others?

The lithe figure pondered this in her mind. She knew this family well, as the Ananwakun and Watcharakitkun families were quite close. She'd never seen the other party because she'd been studying abroad since she was young.

Occasionally, KhunYing Nara would mention her eldest daughter to her family, but that was just hearsay, never seen with her own eyes until today.

Akhira opened the car door, waiting for her mother to get in, without saying a word, and seemingly indifferent to the person standing next to her mother.

"Zo, this is Pleng, she's my doctor."

Her mother's doctor... Her mother's doctor? She knew her mother had a personal physician, but she didn't expect it to be this person. The image in her head was of a doctor around her mother's age or perhaps a few years

older, but the person in front of her was quite different from what she'd imagined.

"Pleng, this is Zo, my eldest daughter."

KhunYing Nara said sweetly, a stark contrast to how she spoke to her own child.

"Hello,"

Said Dr.Panipak, greeting Akhira first with a traditional 'wai'. She knew the person before her was older. Akhira returned the gesture before turning to look at her mother, questioning with her eyes whether KhunYing Nara was getting in the car.

"Zo, drop off Pleng too,"

She said, pushing the lithe figure into the car that Akhira had held open. Dr.Panipak hesitated slightly but had to comply with the mother's insistence and get into the car. Akhira also noticed that the young woman didn't seem too willing. After the beautiful doctor was seated in the car, KhunYing Nara cheerfully opened the rear door and sat down as if something greatly pleased her.

"Yes, mom... It's late. You should go to bed. Goodnight."

After hanging up with her mother, the lithe figure collapsed onto the bed, which felt incredibly comfortable, more so than sitting in that luxurious car. She wondered why such an expensive car could be so uncomfortable. Reflecting on the car ride, it was only her and KhunYing Nara talking. When they arrived at Dr.Panipak's condo, the driver was still silent, not even acknowledging her thanks as if she hadn't heard, forcing KhunYing Nara to respond to her gratitude instead.

She didn't know what she might've done wrong, but the other person's demeanor seemed indescribably displeased with her. From now on, she'd have to be careful and avoid encountering that person. But then again, they probably wouldn't have to meet again...right?

A slim, elegant hand clutched a small piece of paper just handed to her by her mother, examining it with keen interest. The slender fingers flipped the paper back and forth as if searching for something hidden within, even though it was nothing more than an ordinary business card. Her sharp, beautiful eyes scrutinized the tiny letters, silently repeating the name in her mind:

***“Dr.Panipak Ananwakun.”***



Sunyanv



## 01. HER AGAIN

"Hey there, beautiful doctor."

Dr. Ninlaneen, one of Dr. Panipak's closest friends, greeted as she opened the door and walked into her friend's office without permission.

"Neen, not knocking again,"

Dr. Panipak playfully complained to her, but she didn't really mind; she was used to her friend's habit by now.

"Oh, Pleng,"

Dr. Ninlaneen pretended to be sad to gain some sympathy, but it didn't work as usual. Dr. Panipak could only shake her head at her friend's silliness.

"Just spit it out,"

Dr. Panipak said, looking up from her paperwork to meet her friend's eyes, curious about what had brought her rushing into her office so early in the morning. Prompted by Dr. Panipak's words, the pretend-sad doctor quickly reverted to her usual self and flashed a swift smile, causing Dr. Panipak to put down her papers and give her friend her full attention. The teasing grin on her best friend's face made Dr. Panipak feel a bit uneasy.

"Who picked you up yesterday?"

There it is... The reason she had come to see her so early was this very topic. The gossip spread too fast. Just because she hadn't gone home by herself as usual, the hospital staff seemed to be talking, and she had no idea how far the rumors had spread.



Her friend stood there as if ready to catch her in the act.

"I just happened to tag along,"

Dr. Panipak admitted truthfully. It wasn't that someone had come to pick her up, she'd come to pick up her own mother.

"You, Dr. Panipak getting a ride with someone else? I heard it was a luxury car."

Dr. Ninlaneen said teasingly. Dr. Ninlaneen knew better than anyone that Dr. Panipak would never easily allow anyone to pick her up or drop her off at her condo. Plenty of people were lined up, hoping to give her a ride, but it seemed no one ever got the chance.

"It was inevitable," replied Dr. Panipak.

"What?"

What does she mean by getting a ride with someone else inevitably?

"Yesterday, KhunYing Nara came, and on the way back, she offered me a ride."

Dr. Panipak explained slowly, seeing the confusion on her friend's face. It really was inevitable; she couldn't refuse an elder.

"KhunYing Nara drove a supercar? That's quite youthful of her."

Maybe the rumors about the supercar were exaggerated. It was dark, perhaps there was a mistake. Dr. Ninlaneen thought to herself while Dr. Panipak looked at her friend with a bemused expression. She didn't know why her friend was so surprised.

She'd already mentioned that she got a ride with KhunYing Nara, and yes, it was a supercar, just that it belonged to her daughter, a detail she hadn't shared with her friend.

"Was it really KhunYing Nara, Pleng?"

"Really. If you don't believe me, ask the nurses. She was here yesterday."

Dr. Panipak told her friend with a light chuckle, amused by her best friend's behavior. The gossipers had probably passed the story around, and somewhere along the way, the part about her being with KhunYing Nara got lost, leaving only the details about how she had a supercar picking her up in front of the hospital.

"Ms. Akhira, KhunYing Nara would like to speak with you on the phone."

The secretary informed her boss as soon as she received a call from the matriarch of the Watcharakitkun family, making sure to knock on the door first.

"How long will the meeting start?"

Akhira asked, not really listening to her secretary. She was preoccupied with a pile of documents and had a meeting to attend in a few minutes. She was so focused on her work that she'd even turned off her personal phone, which is why her mother had to call her secretary instead.

"In ten minutes."

"Tell her I'll call back soon, and are the documents ready?"

"All set."

The tall figure nodded and stood up from her chair to head to the meeting room. With little time to spare and the importance of the meeting, she didn't want any mistakes. When she saw that her boss had left the room, the young secretary hurried to call KhunYing and relay the instructions her boss had given before quickly gathering various documents to follow her boss to the meeting room immediately.

She knew how seriously her boss took her work. She always had a charm about her when she was working, and she couldn't help but admire her in her heart... After the meeting, Akhira didn't hesitate to call her mother right away.

[Come pick me up. I'm waiting at the same place]

Her mother had said before hanging up. Akhira knew exactly where the usual place was, the shop her mother frequented with her high-society friends. She'd occasionally dropped off and picked up her mother there, but lately, it seemed her beloved mother preferred to ask her for picking up more often, even though they had a driver at home.

"Stop, Zo, stop right now!"

Her mother's alarmed voice forced Akhira to jerk the steering wheel and pull over unavoidably. Without waiting for her daughter to ask or wonder anything, KhunYing Nara hurriedly got out of the car. Akhira watched her mother through the rearview mirror as she walked back to the bus stop they'd just passed. It wasn't long before she saw two women walking together.

Today was another day when Dr.Panipak had to hitch a ride with someone else. The lithe figure sighed softly, thinking back to the uncomfortable ride she'd shared with someone she'd rather not have encountered just a few hours ago. If she had to guess from that person's expression, she seemed displeased about having to give her a ride again.

It was clear she didn't want her company, but she couldn't refuse KhunYing Nara, so she grudgingly agreed to drop her off. Just like Pleng, who reluctantly got into the car, not wanting to upset KhunYing Nara, who wouldn't take no for an answer. She hoped there wouldn't be a next time because she felt uneasy every time she had to ride with KhunYing Nara's eldest daughter.

"Pleng!"

Dr. Ninlaeen, who was sipping coffee, suddenly exclaimed, startling her friends.

"What's up, Neen? You scared me."

"Seriously, are you possessed by a ghost?, Neen?"

That was Dr. Plaifha, one of the group's friends, complaining about Dr. Ninlaneen's outburst. But it seemed she wasn't concerned with their comments, instead gesturing with her eyes for the two friends to turn around and see what had startled her. Dr. Panipak shook her head slightly before turning to look as her friend had indicated, knowing that if she didn't, Dr. Ninlaneen wouldn't stop nagging... It's her again...

"Wow, she drinks coffee too?"

"Why wouldn't she, Neen? What else should she drink?"

Dr. Plaifha asked, puzzled by her friend's strange question.

"Oh, just look at her. She looks so refined, and yet she's in a coffee shop like this."

The conversation is getting ridiculous.

"Even refined people are still human, aren't they?"

Dr. Panipak sat quietly, listening to her friends' conversation, when her gaze inadvertently fell on the woman who was the subject of their discussion. She did look as good as her friends said. As she turned away, losing interest in the woman ordering coffee at the counter, her friends suddenly fell silent, prompting her to raise an eyebrow inquisitively. But she got no answer, only seeing Dr. Ninlaneen sipping her coffee as if it were her last.

The sound of the door opening again didn't concern Dr. Panipak; she didn't know who was coming or going since her back was to the door, and she wasn't interested anyway. But when she saw her friend sigh and look toward the door, she turned to see the back of the woman walking away.

"What's wrong, Neen?"

She asked again, seeking an answer from her friend, not understanding the strange behavior.

"It's just that the woman from before was looking over here."

"There's nothing to it, Neen."

She has every right to look around, doesn't she? It's just human nature, she thought.

"Pleng is right. It's a coffee shop. It's not strange for her to look around and enjoy the ambiance, right?"

"It's not strange, but what's weird is that she kept looking at Pleng."

"It's all in your mind, Neen,"

The slender figure said aloud. She might've been looking, but she was probably just glancing at everyone. But her dear friend had to go and overthink it.

"I'm not imagining things. I'm one hundred percent certain,"

Dr. Ninlaneen said, lifting her chin confidently and striking a pose as she took a sip of her coffee. The slender figure shook her head slightly at her overly confident friend.

"But speaking of which, that person is really beautiful and looks so cool,"

Dr. Plaifha complimented after swallowing a bite of cake. Dr. Ninlaneen could only nod in agreement; since the woman had entered the shop, she'd been noticeably good-looking, prompting her to nudge her two friends to take a look. Dr. Ninlaneen wouldn't be interested unless she was really something special.

"Cool or not, she's still a woman."

The slender figure murmured softly, causing both Dr. Plaifha and Neen to look at the speaker with a unified gaze. Then the two exchanged looks full of questions, as it seemed like Dr. Panipak was muttering to herself more than talking to them.

"Let's check out,"

Dr. Plaifha said after they'd finished their desserts.

"How much is it?"

Dr. Panipak asked when the waitress approached their table, opening her purse to pay for today's expenses.

"Your table has already been taken care of."

The waitress informed them.

"What?"

The three of them were puzzled. What payment? They hadn't paid anything since they arrived; they'd only ordered and eaten.

"Excuse me, is there some mistake?"

Dr. Ninlaneen asked the smiling waitress standing at the head of their table.

"No mistake, Ma'am. Is there a customer named Ms. Panipak at this table?"

The waitress asked with the same smile.

"Yes."

"Then everything has been paid for."

The three sat there, dumbfounded, as the waitress walked away. What is this, a free meal? But they weren't the type to cheat, of course.

"Oh, Pleng, would you like to order anything else?"

The familiar shop owner asked when she saw Dr. Panipak approaching the counter by herself.

"Well, the thing is, I haven't paid yet, but the waitress said our table has been taken care of."

"Oh, yes, that's right,"

The shop owner exclaimed, nodding to indicate that what she'd just said was correct.

"Ms. Akhira has already paid for you."

Huh...?

Ms. Akhira...?

*It's her again...*



Sunyanv



## 02. I'M GIVING IT BACK

"Oh! I'm so sorry."

A sweet voice quickly apologized as soon as she regained her balance. She must've been in such a hurry that she didn't notice anyone around her and ended up bumping into someone. Luckily, the green tea in her hand didn't spill on the other person, otherwise, it would've been a bigger mess.

"It's okay."

A calm voice responded, making her look up at the person. She froze for a moment before lifting her chin slightly. Her again. Dr.Panipak could only think to herself, why do I keep running into her? Just yesterday, she'd paid for her and her friends' drinks for no reason, and now she was giving her this cold look. She didn't even apologize back. She'd bumped into her, too, after all.

"Excuse me, wait a minute."

Dr.Panipak called out before the other person could walk past her into the store. She opened her bag, searching for something. Akhira just stood there, watching her rummage through her medium-sized bag.

"Here."

She handed over some money. It was the amount the other had paid for her and her friends. She wanted to return it so there wouldn't be any debts between them.

"I'm giving it back."

She said, offering a few hundred baht, even though she showed no intention of taking it.

"Hey!"

She grabbed her arm as she moved to walk into the shop. Was she not listening to her at all?

"I am giving the money back."

She said slowly and clearly, one word at a time, as she turned to look at her. Did she even have a mouth? Was she going to say anything?

"I won't take it."

"Why not? It's your money. You should take it. I don't want to owe anyone favors, and we don't even know each other."

They didn't know each other in the sense of being close enough to pay for each other's things. Even with close friends, they'd share the cost. So who was she? Why should Dr.Panipak accept her generosity? What reason was there for her to do that?

"Do you think just returning the money will settle everything, Doctor?"

Dr.Panipak looked at the taller person, confused. What did she really want? She was starting to get irritated.

"What do you want then? I owe you, and I'm trying to repay you right now,"

She said, referring to a debt she didn't create, a debt she imposed on her.

"If you really want to pay me back, it won't be just this,"

She said, What did she mean by that? Dr.Panipak didn't understand until she continued,

"The gas money for twice, the time I waited for you at the bus stop that day, taking you to your condo, and now standing here talking to you. Do you

know how much time that costs?"

What was this? When she decided to talk, she talked a lot about things she didn't understand. How could she think of time as a cost? Did she think she was a businesswoman, where time was money? So, talking to Akhira was costing Dr.Panipak money?

She was stunned by her words, and by the time Dr.Panipak came to her senses, the other had already walked into the shop. She had work to do, too, and no time to argue with her. There were many patients waiting for her. With that thought, she walked away from the shop, feeling slightly annoyed.

"Do you have something going on with Dr. Pleng?"

The shop owner asked when she saw her regular customer, Akhira, watching the beautiful doctor walk away. She'd seen them talking for a while earlier but didn't know what they were talking about. The person who walked into the store seemed in a good mood, unlike the doctor, who left with a frown.

"Does she come here often?"

Akhira asked out of curiosity. She came to this shop quite often, too, so why hadn't she seen her before?

"Every morning. She must work early. Sometimes she comes with friends, like the other day."

The shop owner explained. Akhira nodded, indicating she was interested in what she was saying. Akhira realized why they hadn't met before. Even though she was a regular, she didn't usually come at this time. She usually came later in the morning, so it wasn't surprising she hadn't seen her before.

If I want to meet her, I have to come early, like seven in the morning... Akhira shook her head at her own thoughts. Her faint smile was barely visible unless one was paying close attention, a smile she wasn't even aware of herself. It was just a small smile, but it didn't escape the notice of the

shop owner, Thita, who couldn't help but return the smile... Well, well... Ms. Akhira can smile too, it seems.

"Pleng, what's wrong? Are you feeling unwell?"

Dr. Ninlaneen reached out to touch her best friend's forehead, thinking she might be sick.

"It's nothing, Neen."

"You don't look well."

"Come on, Neen. Does this face look sick to you? Dr. Panipak looks more like she's mad at someone."

Plaifha, who'd been observing for a while, spoke up. Even though Dr. Plaifha pretended not to care, she'd secretly gathered information that her dear friend had met that person this morning. The one named Akhira. The one who bought them coffee the other day. The one who nobody really knew...

"Pleng?"

"Hmm?"

"Can I ask you something? Who is Ms. Akhira?"

Dr. Plaifha asked directly. Since she was curious, she had to ask. They didn't keep secrets from each other anyway.

"Well... that's enough staring!"

Dr. Panipak thought, wondering why they were so intent on listening.

"Well, then, Pleng?"

Neen pressed for an answer after Dr. Plaifha had brought up the topic. Why had her life been filled with that person's name lately? Dr. Panipak could only sigh before answering her friend's question.

"She's KhunYing Nara's daughter."

"What!"

Two voices exclaimed almost simultaneously. That person? The eldest daughter of KhunYing Nara? The one they heard had moved abroad since childhood? When did she come back? Why did no one know?

"No wonder. I was wondering why she treated us to coffee that day,"

Dr. Ninlaneen thought it made sense because her friend was close to that family, except for Akhira, of course. Besides, her friend was also the personal doctor of KhunYing Nara, Akhira's mother. Maybe she wanted to return the favor.

"Forget about her."

Dr. Panipak cut off the conversation, glancing at her watch. It was 20.00, and she had an appointment with her mother and didn't want to be late.

"I have to go. Mom's waiting."

"Do you want me to give you a ride, Pleng? Deen will be here soon."

Dr. Ninlaneen offered to take her friend home as she did every day. She had a brother who picked her up, so she liked to invite Dr. Panipak to go with them.

"No, it's okay. I'll go now."

Dr. Panipak declined as usual. Dr. Ninlaneen could only watch her walk out of the room. Why didn't her friend enjoy comfort? What was so good about public transportation? She really wanted to know. It wasn't often that Dr. Panipak would let her friends give her a ride unless it was a really urgent matter. The honk of a sleek black car startled Dr. Panipak, who was lost in thought while waiting for the bus.

"Get in the car."

Said the calm voice from the person inside the car after lowering the window to talk to her. But she ignored her, still upset about what she'd said to her that morning. Her time was so valuable, wasn't it? If she wasted more time on her, it wouldn't be good, would it?

"Get in the car,"

Akhira repeated, seeing that Dr.Panipak was ignoring her.

*HONK! HONK!*

This time, it wasn't from Akhira's car but from a bus behind them.

"Move your car. You're blocking the road."

"Get in."

Huh!? Is that the only phrase she knew?

"No, thank you."

"Then I won't go."

*HONK! HONK! HONK!*

"You!"

Dr.Panipak could only look left and right, feeling the stares of everyone at the bus stop on her because Akhira was blocking the road, and she was the one talking to her. Why hadn't the bus she wanted to take arrived yet?

"Get in the car."

Unable to withstand the pressure from the many eyes on her, combined with her naturally considerate nature, Dr.Panipak reluctantly opened the door and got into her car. This was clearly forcing her indirectly. Such annoying!

"You can drop me here,"

Said Dr.Panipak, receiving no response from the person beside her until she began to feel annoyed by the other's indifferent demeanor. She couldn't understand what Akhira wanted from her.

"Didn't you hear me, Ms. Akhira? I said to stop!"

"Here?"

"Yes, please stop here."

She'd already taken her far enough. From here, it'd be hard to find public transport. Even though she knew that she chose to tell her to stop, it was better to take her chances than stay in this car. Maybe she could find a taxi around here.

Although the tall figure didn't turn to look at the person sitting next to her, she could see from the corner of her eye that Dr.Panipak seemed eager to get out of the car the whole time. She couldn't help but wonder if there was something wrong in her car because Dr.Panipak always had that same expression. An expression that clearly showed she didn't want to be in this car.

"I'm taking you to see your Mom."

"Pleng, You're here. Oh, Akira, too,"

"Hello."

Phimwilai greeted the one who arrived with her daughter. Akira gave her a Thai wai and a smile. Dr.Panipak could only look at the other and greet her mother with confusion. Until now, she still didn't understand how Akira knew that she had an appointment with her mother.

"You're here, rascal?"

KhunYing Nara's voice made the slender figure understand immediately. This was the reason why she knew where her mother was. Dr.Panipak greeted the other elder.



"Good evening, KhunYing Nara."

"Phim, please tell Pleng to stop calling me 'Khun Ying' already,"

KhunYing Nara said with a joking tone, which made Phimwilai laugh. She knew well that KhunYing Nara wanted her daughter to call her 'Aunt,' but her daughter never complied. Year after year, she called her 'KhunYing, and this always became a topic of discussion whenever they met.

Phimwilai turned to look at Akhira, who stood not far away. It wasn't often that she saw the eldest daughter of this family. Her demeanor, dress, and even her movements were all graceful. This family raised their children well.

"Have you two eaten anything yet?"

"I don't eat late, Mom,"

Dr.Panipak answered truthfully.

"Zo, you haven't eaten anything yet, have you?"

This time, KhunYing Nara asked her daughter. A mother always knows her child's lifestyle and eating habits. Working hard and resting so little, it'd be strange if her child had anything in her stomach at this time.

"Then Pleng, go with her. We've already eaten."

Her mother suggested.

"But, Mom, didn't you plan to meet me?"

The lithe figure interjected. Normally, Dr.Panipak and her mother would go grocery shopping together. Because she came home once a week, she'd go shopping with her mother every time. It was a time for them to spend together.

"We'd like to look around here. You go with Akhira, and we can meet up later."

"It's okay. She might be busy. We can go shopping together now," The tall figure finally said after listening quietly for a while.

"Zo, if you don't eat, you'll get a stomach ulcer. Then, Phim goes shopping with Pleng. I need to take care of this one first."

If she didn't insist, people like Akhira would definitely not have a meal. If she had to guess, the last meal her daughter had was probably lunch or breakfast at home, which was a long time ago. The two elders' regretful expressions made Dr.Panipak feel guilty as if she'd somehow separated friends from their time together.

"Mom, you go with KhunYing Nara. I'll go with Ms. Akhira."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I changed my mind and want to grab something to eat,"

She said, smiling sincerely at her mom and KhunYing Nara. She knew her mom was lonely and rarely got to see her friend. She herself didn't have much time for her mom, so this was a way to make up for it. This was not at all what she had expected.

It wasn't since she had to ride with the person currently leading the way in front of her. Once she met her mother, she thought things between them would end, but it turned out to be the opposite. She didn't understand why Akhira had to make such a fuss.

Just eating three meals on time would've been enough, but it seemed like someone like Akhira needed her mother to push her frequently. Even at her age, she still needed her mother to tell her what to do.

"Oops!"

Dr.Panipak stumbled backward slightly when she bumped into the taller person's back, who stopped without warning.

"What do you like to eat?"

The person who had stopped turned around to ask the one who was steadying herself.

"Whatever you like, I'm not hungry."

Akhira wasn't particularly surprised by her response. She'd already figured Panipak wasn't really hungry but had agreed to come along out of a sense of guilt toward the two elders. With that answer, Akhira quickly walked ahead, not caring whether the other one could keep up or not. As soon as she found a restaurant she liked, she turned and entered without hesitation.

Was she wrong not to order anything? Panipak felt a bit strange sitting and watching someone else eat. The premium steak was being cut and eaten repeatedly by the person across from her. Her manners were impeccable, and the way she used the knife and fork was so smooth. It made sense since she'd studied abroad from a young age. She must've picked up these habits.

As time passed, Dr.Panipak sat still while the other person ate as if nothing was amiss, as if she wasn't even there. When the steak was gone, she ordered something else and finished that too. Where does this hunger come from? Dr.Panipak wondered to herself. But at least Akhira knew the value of food; she ordered a lot but finished it all, one dish at a time, only ordering more once she finished. Such good manners.

"I'll pay for it."

The slender figure quickly said as soon as she saw the woman across from her wipe her mouth. Dr.Panipak signaled for the waiter before handing her card to them. Akhira just sat there silently, not objecting, which Dr.Panipak thought was good for her. This way, it showed she accepted her repayment.

"All done."

She said. The tall figure looked at the speaker, who now stood up, not quite understanding what she meant.

"I've repaid you for the coffee, and I've compensated for your time. I hope we're even now."

Even though this meal was more expensive than her coffee, she was willing to pay, considering it to cover the fuel cost as well. She wanted this matter to be over. As for Akhira's time, she considered it compensated by the time she had to sit and watch her eat her meal instead of spending time with her mother. We're even now.

"Such a hurry,"

Were the first words Akhira uttered after finishing the meal. Dr.Panipak saw a chance where she didn't argue, and she took it. Was Dr.Panipak really taking what she said that day so seriously? Are doctors always this serious about life?

"What did you and Mrs. Phim get while shopping?"

Akhira asked her mother while driving, not taking her eyes off the road.

"A daughter-in-law, maybe."

"Mom..."

"Why are you calling me? I'm right here,"

KhunYing Nara looked at her daughter, who was focused on driving, with a smile. How could a mother not see?

"You like her, don't you?"

"Mom..."

"Why do you keep calling, Zo?"

She spoke with a smile. She didn't know if it was her plan or her daughter's to have Dr.Panipak take her to eat. And someone like her daughter, if she didn't want to do something, no amount of forcing would make her do it. But when it came to Dr.Panipak, she easily agreed. She even went to pick her up.

"This one is good. I like her."

"Mom."

"What is it? You keep calling."

"It's not what you think."

"I'm not thinking about anything. I'm just saying that if it's Pleng, I give her flying colors. That's all,"

KhunYing Nara said cheerfully. In the past, she never saw her daughter with anyone, whether in the country or abroad. She never saw or heard Akhira talk about love even once. As a mother, she could only wonder, never having imagined the face of her daughter's lover or even picturing what Akhira's partner would be like. What's her name? Where does she live? What does she do for a living? What does she look like? She couldn't picture it at all. But now, she was starting to get an idea.

"Hey!"

"Ouch, Mom, why did you pinch me?"

The slender figure gently rubbed her own cheek after her mother had pinched her with a mischievous grip.

"Is this the doctor? I think the patients would be too scared to come for treatment with a face like that."

Her daughter's face was sweet, but she always had a serious or grumpy expression. Wouldn't that scare the patients? She didn't know what her daughter was like at work, but judging from today, she probably wasn't the kindest doctor.

"Mom, nobody's scared of me."

"Really?"

"Really."

As usual, her face was friendly. Why did her mother have to bring this up?

"Then why do you always look displeased around Akhira?"

She saw it, her daughter's reluctance was obvious. It was a good thing she didn't pinch her arm until it turned blue. She wondered if Akhira noticed her daughter's attitude. She was genuinely worried.

"What kind of look did I make?"

"You're still asking? You had a 'not welcoming' face."

"She had the same kind of face, Mom."

The situation didn't seem to please anyone, both of them, especially Akhira; she was probably more displeased than her.

"You're exaggerating."

Phimwilai hadn't seen Akhira look displeased at all.

"I'm not, Mom. She doesn't like me. You should've seen her face when she picked me up."

"She picked you up?"

Dr.Panipak wanted to slap her own mouth. She let it slip. She sighed softly and ended up telling her mother everything, every situation she had to face with that person. But her mother just laughed.

"Mom, there's nothing funny about it. She might even slap me."

Her words only made her mother laugh harder.

"Why would she slap you?"

"I don't know."

"I think you're more likely to slap her."

"Mom!"

Why did her mom have to side with Akhira? She was totally confused.

"Alright, I'll go check on your father and brother. They must be done eating by now."

Phimwilai patted her daughter's head affectionately before getting up and going inside the house, leaving her daughter alone. After hearing her daughter's serious stories, she couldn't help but think back to when she saw the two of them walking together. At first, she wondered how they arrived together, but after knowing the backstory, it was... So adorable. Next time, she might have to ask Khun Ying Nara about this...





## 03. BOTHER

"Thank you, but I don't drink coffee."

This was the first time Akhira felt completely cut off from the world. Apart from the sound of the wind, birds, and leaves, there was almost nothing else to hear... . Meanwhile, Dr. Ninlaneen, who was present, stood there stunned, blinking in surprise before regaining her composure and following Dr. Panipak into the shop. The conversation between her friend and the other person ended quickly.

"The usual, right?"

Before the slender figure could say anything, the shop owner spoke first.

Dr. Panipak smiled and nodded to the person behind the counter.

"And what about mine, Thita?"

Dr. Ninlaneen asked, hoping she might be one of the customers who got special attention. But when she saw the shop owner looking thoughtful, her pretty face started to frown. Why could she only remember her friend's order?

"If she could remember, she wouldn't be human. Neen."

"You're overstating,"

The slender figure turned to smile at the shop owner, who looked embarrassed. Well, Dr. Ninlaneen never ordered the same thing twice whenever they came here. Besides, she didn't have a regular order, so who could remember?

"Hey, Pleng."

"Yes?"

"Isn't that a bit harsh? She went all the way to buy it for you. You could at least accept it, so it wouldn't be a waste."

"Why didn't you take it then?"

"Well, she bought it for you. How could I accept it?"

Thita pretended not to care, but the conversation between the two women was loud enough for her to hear. If she guessed correctly, the 'she' they were talking about was probably Akhira. No wonder Akira stood in front of the shop for so long when Dr. Panipak walked in. If only she'd told her that she was buying coffee for Dr. Panipak, she could've recommended the right menu. One thing to know is that the doctor doesn't drink coffee. The doctor likes green tea.

Even though the luxury car had already been parked in the executive parking lot, the person inside showed no sign of getting out..

"Is everything all right, Ma'am?"

The security guard asked from outside. He tried to peer in but couldn't see the person inside because the car was darkly tinted. He hesitated to knock on the window, knowing how much the boss loved the car. Soon, the tall figure opened the door and handed a coffee cup to the guard, who stood awkwardly beside the car.

"Th-thank you,"

The security guard said, looking at the coffee cup in his hand and then at the back of his beautiful boss, who'd already walked into the building. Suddenly, Akhira handed him a coffee. It couldn't be just to hold it because the boss had another cup in her hand.

Although it wasn't yet work hours, because she'd gone to the coffee shop near the hospital early in the morning, Akhira arrived at work early. She

couldn't help but think about the cold tone of the woman she'd met just minutes before, which made the taste of today's coffee strangely unpleasant.

*Thud!*

She tossed the coffee cup into the small trash can without a second thought, even though she'd only taken a few sips. The coffee tasted so bitter and unpleasant that Akhira sat back with a sigh of boredom, her mind stuck on the same thought over and over that she doesn't like coffee.

If she didn't like coffee, then what did she like? Was it true that she didn't like it, or was she just trying to reject her? Or was the doctor afraid of being indebted again? Sigh.

"Please take a deep breath,"

The beautiful doctor instructed the patient a few times before she jotted down details on the paper with focus.

"It's nothing serious, but you need to get proper rest and exercise regularly to stay strong."

Dr. Panipak said gently, handing out smiles that made the patient shy. The practical nurse could only watch the doctor, seeing only a fraction of her face from the side, but she knew well that the doctor must look very lovely when she smiled. Before Dr. Panipak turned to hand the file to the nurse and bid farewell to the patient, she didn't forget to give her patient another smile.

"Please take care of this."

"Of course, Doctor."

Dr. Panipak repeatedly opened the patient's file, reading every detail meticulously. She cared about everyone because she always believed that every life was important, and as a doctor, she couldn't afford to make mistakes. It was no surprise that someone like her was beloved by everyone at the hospital.

Beautiful, charming, and, importantly, single even though she might have a stoic face due to her personal demeanor, it didn't make Panipak any less endearing. On the contrary, her calm demeanor only added to her charm, making many people admire her and want to get close.

"Patients come into the hospital looking like they're about to be slaughtered, but once they meet Dr. Pleng, you wouldn't believe the transformation."

"It's like flipping a switch,"

Another chimed in.

"Exactly, they smile from ear to ear. Whatever the doctor asks them to do, they do it like they're under a spell."

"She's just that adorable."

"Isn't it weird? A doctor this cute has no partner."

"Seems like she might have one."

"What! Dr. Pleng has a boyfriend?"

"Why are you shouting?"

"Is it true?"

"I don't know for sure. Rumor has it last year, but who knows if they're true."

"Wow, if she does, she's kept it really well hidden."

"Right."

"But I don't think so. If she did, what kind of partner would let her take the bus back to her condo every day?"

"Exactly."

"Right? I mean..."

Their conversation was abruptly cut short when they saw Dr. Plaifha approaching. The two nurses scrambled, pretending to look for something, unsure if Dr. Plaifha'd overheard them talking about Panipak. They only knew one thing: They're in trouble!

"Hey."

"Pha, are you free now?"

"Not really, just wanted to drop by."

Dr. Plaifha plopped down on the sofa, watching the slender figure engrossed in reading the dark-colored file in her hands. She couldn't help but think about what she'd overheard the nurses saying about her friend. Even though she didn't catch everything, she got the gist that they were talking about her friend.

"Can you believe it, Pleng?"

It was the fourth time today that Dr. Ninlaneen'd burst into the room like this.

"Believe what?"

Dr. Plaifha could only watch as the person who'd just entered the room was panting and making a fuss. Dr. Ninlaneen raised her hand as if to ask for a timeout because she was out of breath. Once her breathing returned to normal, she started speaking again.

"Seriously, Pleng."

The person being addressed didn't respond; she just sat quietly, listening and shaking her head at her friend's thoughts.

"Can you stop shaking your head, Pleng?"

"Wait, Neen, have you lost your mind?"

Dr. Plaifha grabbed the shoulders of her friend, who seemed on the verge of going insane. Was she a doctor or a madwoman?"

"I'm telling you, Pleng, and you still don't believe me?"

"Believe what?"

Dr. Plaifha asked again. Since Dr. Ninlaneen'd come in, all she'd been talking about was believing or not believing, and she was lost as to what it was all about.

"Believe that Ms. Akhira likes you, Pleng."

"..."

Is this a time for a heart-to-heart, or did I miss something? Dr. Panipak felt like she was a suspect, with her friends acting as investigators. After the incident where Akhira'd bought her coffee that morning and the information had been passed on to Dr. Plaifha, the slender figure just sat there quietly, letting her two friends scrutinize her. But what exactly are they hoping to find by staring at my face? These people.

"Aren't you shy, Pleng?"

Finally, after a long staring contest, Dr. Plaifha spoke up, hoping to see some sign of shyness or tension from Panipak, but there was none.

"Shy about what?"

There was no reason for her to be shy in front of her two friends. If they wanted to stare, she'd let them. But doing this was just a waste of time.

"Both of you, stop staring. There's nothing to see."

It was the last sentence Dr. Panipak spoke before her two friends were invited out of her office. She could only sigh, feeling exhausted because she'd been busy all day. There were moments when she could take a break, but whenever she did, her friends would always come to bother her. In

conclusion, she barely got any rest today. Besides dealing with patients, she also had to handle her friends' ideas.

"I don't drink it."

"Thank you, but I don't drink lemon tea."

For two days now, the same scenario had repeated itself. Akhira arrived at the coffee shop early in the morning, ordering her usual along with an extra item for the other one, but it never reached her. Today was yet , another day she came here. The tall figure stood still.

She looked at the many menu items on the cutely designed blackboard sign. She was thinking about many things, standing there so long that the shop owner had to ask again if she wanted to order anything else..

Thita watched the person who was intently looking at the menu. She'd seen everything that'd happened over the past few days. The person in front of her would order something for herself along with another item for th Panipak, but it was always rejected. The truth was, she could tell what Dr.Panipak liked, but since the other party didn't ask, she shouldn't interfere.

"I'll have an Americano and Cotton Candy Vanilla."

Cotton Candy Vanilla was a blended vanilla drink with raspberry syrup. Akhira decided to try it because it seemed interesting, and maybe the doctor would like it.

"Is that for me?"

The newcomer's voice made both Akhira and Thita, who were preparing the drink for customers, turn to look. The slender figure walked into the shop with her two friends. Because Akhira arrived later than usual today, the order wasn't ready before Dr.Panipak arrived.

"If that's mine, cancel it because I'm not drinking it."



Stunned. Both the person being spoken to so bluntly and the person about to make the coffee were stunned, as well as the other doctors standing behind Panipak. Akhira looked at the speaker for a moment, unsure what to do with this woman. She didn't really despise her, did she? Akhira could only recall her mother's words from the other day.

"What did you do to Pleng?"

"Do you know she thinks you don't like her?"

"Learn to smile at others, dear."

KhunYing Nara had heard about this from Phimwilai and then complained about it. Akhira still remembered clearly what her mother had said. Now, what should she do? Smile at Panipak? But she was like this; how could she change? It's not easy to change one's nature.

"If I can guess what you like, you'll accept it from me, won't you?" "Long."

The first word that popped into Dr. Panipak's head. She didn't think someone like her would say such a long sentence.

"Well?"

Both Dr. Plaifha and Dr. Ninlaneen stood tense, watching the person talking to their friend, wondering what these two would do. Thita herself was anxious about their conversation, and the menu Akhira'd ordered earlier was being made incorrectly, so it wasn't finished yet.

"Don't bother. It's a waste of time."

She thought Akhira wouldn't know unless someone told her, or if she was lucky, she might order correctly. But before she randomly hit on her favorite drink, she'd waste money unnecessarily. Besides, she didn't want to accept anything from her.

"A week."

"Pardon?"

"One week. If I can't guess, I won't bother you. But if I get you something you like, you have to let me buy it for you. Every day."

Dr.Panipak looked at the other party, not understanding why she had to do something like this. What did she want from her? She tried to understand what she was trying to convey.

"Fine."

She agreed because she didn't think Akhira'd guess correctly. The menu had dozens of items, and it seemed like the other person had no clue about these things. Accepting would end this matter, and she wouldn't have to bother her anymore.

"Your coffee is here, Ms. Akhira."

Seeing an opportunity, the shop owner interjected, handing a cup of coffee to the customer standing in front. It turned out that the Candy Cotton Vanilla ordered along with coffee wasn't made.

"So today, I'll have an iced latte. What about you, Neen?"

Dr. Plaifha turned to ask Dr. Ninlaneen.

"The same as you."

"Then two iced lattes, yes?"

Thita confirmed the two doctors' orders once more, secretly hoping that Panipak would finally place her order.

"I'll have the Usual,"

She said, to which the owner simply smiled in response.. Oh, the doctor is being quite harsh. Normally, Dr.Panipak wouldn't say it like this. She would always say,

"I will have a green tea, please."

Clearly, she was doing this to Akhira on purpose. But then again, it wouldn't be fun if the other party found out too easily... Akhira could only watch as the slender figure lost interest and walked away. She could've waited to see what she ordered; she would've known immediately. But she didn't want to cheat. She'd try on her own, or else she would've asked the shop owner long ago. There was no need to go through the trouble of guessing her thoughts every day.

"Wait a minute."

The person who was about to leave the shop stopped and turned back at the sound of the sweet voice calling out.

"You have three days left,"

Dr.Panipak said, not waiting for a response. She seemed to just want to inform, not care about the listener's reaction. Akhira frowned slightly, said nothing, and simply walked out of the shop.

"She's flirting!"

"I told you she likes you, Pleng."

Dr.Ninlaneen spoke, shrugging as if she'd known all along and what she'd told her two friends was true.. This time, no one objected, and Dr.Plaipha even nodded in agreement.

"But isn't Pleng cheating her? She asked for a week, why only three days left?"

"Three days left is correct, Pha,"

Dr.Panipak said nonchalantly. A week has seven days. On the first day, she bought her coffee. On the second, chocolate. On the third, lemon tea. Today counts as the fourth day. She didn't care when Akhira's week started, but for her, it started three days ago. So, only three days were left. After that, she'd finally stop bothering her.

"Good morning, Ms. Akhira,"

The secretary greeted her boss, checking to see if she had brought anything for her today. Ever since she found out the boss came to work early, she'd made sure to arrive before her. It didn't seem right for the boss to arrive first and the subordinate later. For the past two days, the boss often bought two drinks, always leaving one for her when she saw her sitting there. It was hard not to feel good about it but at the moment... Nothing.

Akhira barely acknowledged the person who greeted her. The tall figure walked past as if she didn't exist. The secretary followed her into the office, doing her duty.

"Here are the budget files,"

She said, placing the file on the table. Akhira simply nodded in acknowledgment, not looking up.

"Wipha."

"Yes?"

It was rare for her boss to call her by her name like this. The secretary was surprised but composed herself.

"What's your favorite drink?"

The question left her standing still as she processed what she'd heard. It was the first time she'd been asked about something other than work.

"Uh. I like milk tea,"

She answered. The person working just nodded in acknowledgment before returning to her work. Wipha couldn't understand why she asked her that. Was it related to the drinks she'd been bringing? Seeing that her boss wasn't paying attention, she quietly left the room. It seemed her work pleased her to some extent. Otherwise, she wouldn't have stayed this long.

Since Akhira returned from abroad to manage the business in Thailand, it was known that she often changed secretaries because they didn't meet her

standards. Some didn't last a month. Wipha was the first to work with her this long.

The truth wasn't anything significant, just a matter of asking and answering. If the boss inquires, you must have a response ready. If the other party isn't interested, that means you need to distance yourself. And importantly, if you're not instructed to do something, don't bother. Being diligent and patient, she thought, wasn't so hard. Why couldn't others manage it? Because Akhira wasn't particularly harsh, just serious about her work.

The Watcharakitkun Residence.. Inside the living room of the grand house, the mother sat conversing with her eldest daughter. As they talked, Akhira suddenly remembered something and asked her mother a question.

"What drink do you like to order, Mom?"

"Oolong tea."

Her mother's answer made Akhira sigh softly. Her disappointed expression left KhunYing Nara puzzled.

"What's wrong with Oolong tea? Why do you look so let down?"

The coffee was now half-empty, yet Akhira remained seated without ordering anything more. Today was the last day of their agreement.

A slender figure walked into the coffee shop as usual, noticing a woman sitting at the counter who looked slightly out of place today. She wasn't wearing her usual dark suit. Instead, Akhira wore ankle pants paired with a plain shirt and clean white sneakers. No matter what she wore, this woman always looked good, making her think that even if Akhira wore an outdated T-shirt and unfashionable pants, she 'd still look great.

As Dr.Panipak approached, she glanced at the other woman, noticing only one coffee cup. This nonsense would finally end. She never imagined she'd encounter something like this, and it seemed Akhira was deep in thought and didn't notice her approaching.

"Green tea,"

"One green tea, please."

Bing of Dr.Ninlaneen, who'd just walked in, could only scream in her mind. She hadn't told her friend how much she was secretly rooting for the other person. Akhira turned to look at the one who'd just ordered at the same time as her. Her heart raced. upon hearing the same order, did that mean she guessed correctly?

"One green tea, alright."

When the shop owner saw both customers silent, she concluded it had to be one green tea and only one. Dr.Panipak remained quiet, saying nothing more.

"Your green tea is here, Ms. Akhira."

Akhira's green tea. This phrase echoed in Dr.Panipak's head, annoying her. Did this mean she had to accept something from her? Just the thought made her uncomfortable.

"Akhira, that's a beautiful name,"

Dr. Ninlaneen commented, spinning her friend's green tea cup. She admired the name written in cute handwriting on the cup.

"She's pretty good, huh? Guess it right ultimately."

"We actually ordered at the same time."

Dr.Panipak seemed to want to dispute what'd happened.

"But Ms. Akhira got it right, Pleng. What are you thinking? Are you trying to cheat?"

"No,"

She admitted, not pleased with the outcome, but there was nothing she could do about what's already happened. There was nothing to do but accept it.



SunYanV

## 04.I'M NOT INTO WOMAN

From one day to two days..

From two days, it turned into three, and from three, it stretched into seven, a whole week since Dr.Panipak agreed to let the other party buy her green tea every single day. But in reality, it wasn't every day that Akhira would get to fulfill that role because Dr.Panipak was avoiding her. She used to visit the coffee shop every morning, but now her appearances were occasional, and today was another day that Dr.Panipak didn't show up.

*Ding...*

The sound of the doorbell chimed as the shop owner looked up to see the customer walking in. Thita couldn't help but be surprised to see her at nine o'clock like this since this was Akhira's usual time to come in, but not the time she came to wait for Panipak.

"What can I get for you today?"

"The same."

Thita paid attention to her customers, especially regulars. She paid so much attention that she could remember almost every customer's face and name. She even remembered what each customer liked to drink. It wasn't hard for her to recall what Akhira had ordered yesterday.

"Did Dr.Panipak come in today?"

Akhira asked the person behind the counter. She had come in late today due to errands with her mother, and now it was past nine. If the person she was asking about had been here, she would have already left, but if she hadn't come...



"She hasn't come in today."

Came the expected reply. Akhira felt that the other party wanted to avoid her. Why wouldn't she know? She wasn't foolish enough not to guess. For several days now, the other party had been deliberately avoiding her. She'd come in sometimes and other times not, even though she normally visited regularly. If this wasn't avoiding, what was it?

"Then I'll have another green tea."

"Of course."

"No sugar."

"Sure."

Thita thought she wouldn't have to make a drink for Dr.Panipak anymore. Thita watched the customer who came in to order green tea for the doctor every day. Sometimes, it reached Dr.Panipak; sometimes, it didn't. She'd come early in the morning, and if she didn't see Dr.Panipak, she'd wait until late morning before leaving for work. Thita felt a bit sorry for her, as lately, Dr.Panipak hardly ever came to the shop.

"Here you go."

Akhira took her drink, paid, and left the shop. Today, she was determined to talk to the other party, so her destination wasn't the company but the nearby hospital. Her sharp eyes scanned for a particular sign as she entered the building. She hesitated whether to ask the nurse at the counter, but Akhira was still the same person who disliked asking for help from anyone, no matter how trivial the matter.

*Chest and Respiratory Center, 7th Floor*

*Ding!*

Even though she'd planned to come here for a reason, once there, Akhira wasn't sure if she was doing the right thing. Before she could decide to give up and turn back to the elevator, it was too late. She could only watch the

digital numbers climbing steadily, with no sign of descending easily. Akhira complained to herself for doing something so stupid. She knew which floor she was on, but being there didn't guarantee she'd see her. Dr.Panipak might be with a patient.

What am I even doing? She didn't think she'd have to feel like this, unsure of what to do next or how to handle these feelings because her experience with love was almost non-existent. That's true; society was open but not open enough for Akhira to easily let someone in. Perhaps it was because she was too serious, but when she met her, something started to change.

Akhira must admit that she was quite displeased at the thought of her beloved car having to accommodate an extra passenger. But when she actually got in, Akhira didn't feel negative about it at all. Maybe she wasn't upset because Panipak smelled nice. Akhira couldn't figure out what perfume she was using, and it just added to her frustration. She was frustrated that she couldn't do anything about it, frustrated that she didn't even know what exactly was bothering her.

"What are you inquiring about?"

Asked the passing nurse, in case the patient had come for some business. Akhira had been standing there for a while but didn't respond, simply handing over someone's business card she'd received from her mother for the nurse to examine.

"Oh, Dr.Pleng. If you're looking for Dr.Pleng, she's not here right now. But what are your symptoms? You can see another doctor,"

The nurse offered helpfully.

"It's okay,"

Akhira replied briefly before turning to press the elevator button, eager to leave the place.

*Ding!*

The sound signaled the elevator's arrival at the desired floor. Dr.Panipak hesitated slightly when she saw who was standing in front of her. She wished she could press the button to go up another hundred floors. Dr. Panipak slowly led her seemingly uncontrollable body out. She felt uncomfortable, not expecting to run into Akhira here. Seeing her face made Dr.Panipak feel even more awkward, as if there was some unresolved tension between them, possibly because she'd been intentionally avoiding her.

Neither of them spoke. A green tea cup was offered in silence, and Akhira's refusal to speak only made Dr.Panipak tenser. She reluctantly reached out to accept the green tea, but still, the silence persisted. There was no conversation, not even a greeting.

"Pum, here you go."

"Aren't you going to have some, doctor? Why give it to me? You should have it."

"Someone gave it to me."

"A patient's relative left it as a thank you."

"Well, then I'll accept it,"

The nurse said as she took the drink. Dr.Panipak then walked back into her office, sank into her chair, and was deep in thought. Just a few minutes ago, she'd gone down to discuss something briefly, but when she returned, she encountered that woman at the elevator who also handed her a green tea. No matter how much her body craved the green tea, if it came from that person, she didn't want to swallow it. It was as though the glass was filled with the word '*obligation*' for some unknown reason.

Dr.Panipak was a huge fan of green tea, knowing too well that drinking it too often wasn't good for her. She tried to quit several times but never succeeded. Was it thanks to the person she managed to abstain for a few days? Just to avoid meeting her, she stopped visiting the coffee shop as

usual, thinking it might be a good opportunity to adjust her habits and maintain her health.

No coffee shop visits meant no green tea. No green tea meant better health. And most importantly, no encounters with that person. There is nothing to worry about. From weeks to months...

Since she stopped going to the coffee shop, a delivery man started delivering green tea instead. Akhira came here almost every day at the same time. She guessed it was the time when Akhira had to go to work. But still, she made time to drop off the green tea, and of course, Dr.Panipak never drank it..

"Thank you, doctor."

Said the nurse gratefully after receiving the drink from Dr. Panipak. Normally, she'd share it with her close nurse friend, but since the nurse had been drinking it several days in a row, which might not be healthy, Dr.Panipak started giving it away to others occasionally, making it a routine.

And she always claimed it was a gift from a patient's relative as a thank you. But the nurses didn't know who this relative was, only that the name Akhira was written on the cup every time. Although others didn't know, Dr.Panipak's friends were well aware.

"Pleng?"

"Hmm?"

"I think what you are doing isn't right. Akhira bought it for you, so why should you give it to someone else?"

Dr.Plaifha said out of pity for the other party. After that day, her friend hardly visited Thita's shop anymore, but, Akhira kept buying things and bringing them to the hospital. Sometimes, she even brought gifts for both of them. Dr. Plaifha didn't understand why her friend had to be so difficult with the other party.

"If she finds out, how do you think she'll feel? She went out of her way to buy it for Pleng."

"I didn't ask for it,"

Dr.Panipak said softly, but her two friends heard her.

"Pleng!"

"Why are you raising your voice, Pha?"

"What's wrong with you, Pleng? Is it so hard to just accept her kindness?"

"She's probably just teasing,"

Dr.Panipak said, and Dr.Plaifha wanted to bang her head on the table in frustration. How could she think Akhira was teasing? From what she saw, the other party didn't show any signs of such behavior.

"Teasing or flirting? Say it again,"

Dr. Ninlaneen couldn't help but interject.

"After all this, you still think she's teasing? Even a grade-schooler could see that she likes you. She comes every day bringing you green tea. If she didn't want to please you, why did she come? And you say she's teasing. What teasing? When she comes, I've never seen you two talk."

Acting like a delivery man. If Akhira hadn't had an executive aura, she might've really become a delivery man.

"Let's drop this topic. She doesn't like me. She probably just wants to annoy me more than anything."

"I think you should ask her directly so you'll know. Or clear things up so it can be over."

"..."

"Dr.Pleng, what will you do?"

"Uh, I'll ask tomorrow,"

She replied softly to her friend, though in her heart, she didn't want things to get complicated. She simply didn't want to be involved with that person, preferring instead to focus on her own life. But since she kept coming around, Panipak might as well try what her friend suggested, hoping this would finally put an end to it.

Today was another day that Akhira stopped by the coffee shop, but she was surprised to see someone there at this time. She should be at the hospital, shouldn't she?

"Can I talk to you for a moment?"

Akhira hadn't been in the shop for a minute before she was led outside to a quiet corner, a small garden nook beside the shop. Akhira didn't say anything, waiting patiently in silence. After a long pause, Dr.Panipak took a small breath to muster her confidence.

"What is it?"

Seeing the other one hesitate. Akhira guessed she didn't know how to start, so she started the conversation with a question. Her tone was even but not harsh, striking a chord with Dr.Panipak. Even though she spoke bluntly, she could feel a gentleness in her voice, and her gaze unsettled her. Now, Dr.Panipak was losing confidence, influenced by her friends' daily suggestions that this woman liked her. Facing her now, even though she felt nothing for the other party, she was at a loss.

"What do you want?"

"..."

"What are you doing this for?"

"What do you mean?"

Akhira asked, confused.

"I mean, you are bothering me every day like this: what exactly do you want?"

"I don't want anything."

"Then please stop bothering me. Let's just live our separate ways."

“ ... ”

"You live your life, and I'll live mine. We barely know each other."

Even though they knew each other now, the result was silence. The other party didn't respond, so Dr.Panipak decided to ask what she really wanted to know.

"Do you like me?"

Here we go! After beating around so many bushes, she finally asked the question she'd intended to ask her. But instead of an answer, all she heard was the sound of the wind and rustling leaves. Is she even listening to me:

"Ms. Akhira, I asked if you like me."

"Yeah."

“!”

Now, after hearing the answer, Dr.Panipak fell silent. She didn't know how to feel.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not into women."

"Neither am I."

"But you just said you like me."

“Yes.”

“ ... ”

"But I'm not into women."

What is she talking about?...

"But I am a woman."

Dr.Panipak informed the taller one, starting to feel confused by her behavior.

"Really?"

Ugh! Dr.Panipak was beginning to get annoyed with this person. She couldn't tell if it was her or Akhira, who was not making sense. After all the times they'd met and all the conversations they had, she still didn't realize she was a woman. That just couldn't be.

"Yes, I am a woman."

She reiterated. Akhira said she liked her, and then she said she didn't like women, even though Dr.Panipak was clearly a woman.

"I like women then."

Is that how it works? Dr.Panipak, usually so calm and composed, was beginning to feel her patience wane. She could only stare at that impassive

face, which only added to her confusion. This demeanor made her think she enjoyed teasing her, whether through her actions or her words.

"Ms. Akhira!"

"I don't like women. I like you. If you say you're a woman, then I like women."

*So annoying!*



Two friends of Dr.Panipak left her office with smiles and laughter after hearing about her morning encounter. In contrast, the office's owner sat still, her sweet eyes glancing at the clock, indicating her break time was nearly over. She shook off the ridiculous thoughts and turned her attention back to her work. It wasn't just Dr.Panipak who was focused on her job. Akhira was the same, having not taken a break since arriving at the company that morning. The meetings had lasted for hours and had only just concluded a few minutes ago.

"You can go."

She told her secretary, who'd brought in a file of documents.

"It's fine, I'll just..."

"Go."

Akhira insisted. One reason she was admired and respected by her employees was her punctuality and kindness. When work hours were over, every employee had the right to go home and rest. Leaning back in her chair, Akhira exhaled softly as the room fell silent. Normally, her mind would be filled with work all day long, whether at the company, driving, or even at bedtime. But now, things are different. Akhira began to think of something other than work. She started to think of someone else.

Seeing that it was past six o'clock, the tall figure stood up from her desk, taking the file with her. The sleek black car glided along the road, the traffic starting to congest during the evening rush. After a short drive, she saw the hospital building with its large sign and didn't hesitate to turn into the driveway. Although she passed by here regularly, she'd never thought to stop by before. But recently, Akhira had to change her mind.

After parking for a short while, her eyes searched for the person she wanted to meet. She wondered if the other person had arrived yet or if she was already at the bus stop. Akhira didn't want to park for long, as the hospital had constant traffic, and parking here could block the way. Luckily, she soon spotted someone walking out of the building.

*'I don't care.'*

That was what was going through Dr.Panipak's mind at the moment. Just seeing the car, she knew whose it was, but she chose to walk past it. It wasn't the first time Akhira had waited for her like this, and she thought today would be like any other day. Sometimes, she'd escape on the bus; other times, she'd flatly refuse, and Akhira would accept it graciously. But not today, as she saw her get out of the car and follow her.

"Get in."

"I don't want to go."

"Get in."

"Ms. Akhira, I said I don't want to go."

Dr.Panipak spoke slowly and clearly so that the person in front of her could hear what she wanted. Normally, Akhira would give in when she saw that Dr.Panipak was starting to get upset, but today, it seemed she wasn't going to make it easy for her.

"I have to go."

"Get in, it will rain."

"..."

Akhira had learned that if force wouldn't work, she had to use gentleness. The doctor didn't like being forced. Over the past month, she'd always been the one to relent. If she said no, there would be no coercion. But today, she really couldn't let her go, not with the cloud thicker than usual, signaling that rain was imminent. So today, she had to go against the stubborn doctor's wishes because she didn't want her to get wet.

Just as she said, not long after they got into the car, the rain poured down so heavily that the road was barely visible, only the taillights of the cars ahead. When it rains, traffic is jammed.

Dr. Panipak sat with arms crossed, looking at the view outside, paying no attention to the other person at all. Even though there was nothing interesting to see outside, the current traffic conditions meant she couldn't see anything but the car next to her. It seemed like the traffic would be stuck for a while with no sign of movement. And as the air outside cooled, it made the inside of the car quite chilly.

Seeing the other person just sitting with arms crossed, Akhira turned down the air conditioning, even though it wouldn't help much at this time.

"Cold?"

After speaking, she turned to grab something from the back seat. Dr. Panipak leaned slightly as the other person came closer than usual. Akhira didn't wait for an answer from the slender figure, thinking it'd be pointless. She probably wouldn't respond, or if she did, she'd say she wasn't cold. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the other person glance at her slightly, moving almost against the window. The truth was, she wasn't getting that close; she just wanted to grab the jacket from the back seat.

"It's ok."

Dr. Panipak said, not deviating from what was expected. As soon as the jacket was offered, she immediately uttered that phrase. No matter what, she always refused. When Dr. Panipak showed no sign of accepting the jacket, Akhira placed it on her lap instead. Then, she rested her arm on the center console to prevent the other person from putting the jacket away. If she wanted to put the jacket back, she'd have to get closer, which she surely wouldn't do. And since she couldn't do anything, Dr. Panipak just sat still with Akhira's jacket on her lap. She'd admit she was cold, but she would definitely not wear her jacket.

Due to the terrible traffic, it took longer than usual to reach the condo, and by then, Dr. Panipak had fallen asleep. She woke up again because she started to feel stiff. Her eyes slowly opened before she looked around and saw that they'd arrived at her residence. Dr. Panipak turned to look at the person next to her, who sat still, doing nothing more than looking straight

ahead. She didn't know how long they'd been here because the other person hadn't woken her up.

"Thank you for the ride."

Even though I didn't really want you to drive me.

"No problem."

Akhira replied briefly before starting the car and driving closer to the condo entrance as it was still raining. If Dr. Panipak were to walk from here, she'd get quite wet.

"Can I borrow your phone?"

"What do you need it for?"

"It won't be long."

Dr. Panipak didn't care whether it'd take long or not; she just wanted an answer that matched her question. Not only did the other person not respond, but she also extended her hand, waiting to receive something from her.

In the end, she had to relent. The slender figure unlocked her phone and handed it over. Dr. Panipak saw the other person press on her phone for a moment before returning it. As soon as she got her phone back, she prepared to get out of the car immediately.

"Take the jacket."

"It's fine, it's just there."

"You'll get wet."

"..."

If it were a normal day, Akhira might've been home by now, but after dropping off the other person, she had to face the multitude of cars on the

road again. She would've been more upset if she hadn't had the company of the beautiful doctor on the way.

For Akhira, being stuck in traffic was something she despised and hated the most. There was nothing good about it, not even a little. But today, the thing she loathed began to reveal its silver lining because, at the very least, it meant she could spend more time with the doctor, even if they didn't exchange a single word.

Her slender fingers picked up the mobile phone, pressed the missed call, and added it to the contact list on the device. Akhira had never really gotten Dr.Panipak's number before. True, the business card had a contact number, but that was the office number, not the personal number she desired from the doctor.

The slender figure looked at the suit jacket, now damp in place of her hair, because Akhira had told her to cover up with it before getting out of the car. Although she initially refused, it ended up the same as always. The other party didn't force or threaten her to comply, she simply refused to unlock the car door until she did. So she had to comply before she'd let her out. It felt like Akhira enjoyed playing mind games with her for some unknown reason. Akhira always had a way to make her give in.

But then... How was this jacket washed? Why did it smell so good? To guess, it must be her perfume, for sure. It smelled so good that she didn't dare wash it to return it. If she washed it and the scent didn't stay the same, it'd be such a shame.



## **05.CAN WE BE JUST** **FRIENDS**

'Dr. Pleng's girlfriend.' It was a label already assigned to someone else. Just seeing this person frequently visiting Dr. Panipak at the hospital, sometimes even leaving together, it wasn't surprising that others began to assume they were a couple.

"Hey, have you seen the person who often comes to the hospital, the one they say is Dr. Pleng's girlfriend?"

"Are you sure she's really the doctor's girlfriend?"

"Come on. She takes care of her very well. If they're not dating, I don't know what else you'd call it."

"The doctors in this hospital must be heartbroken."

"True, trying so hard to charm Dr. Panipak for so long, and now it turns out she's already taken."

The gossiping nurses' voices were so loud that the subject of their conversation overheard them. The slender figure chose to walk past quietly without saying a word, and it seemed the nurses didn't realize it because they continued to talk about her even after she'd passed by.

"Thank you so much, Doctor. I'm concerned that you have to do this nearly every day. It must be a bother for you to bring these to me."

"Don't mention it."

"How can I possibly thank her? The other juniors would like to express their gratitude as well, as they receive these every day."

"It's okay. The giver does so willingly."

"Please send our thanks to Ms. Akhira as well."

"I'll let her know."

"Thank you, Doctor."

It was routine for the nurses to receive green tea from the doctor every day. They had no idea why someone named Akhira was so generous. When they asked the doctor, they were told that Akhira was the child of KhunYing Nara, a regular patient here, who wanted to express gratitude for the excellent care given to her mother.

Dr.Panipak returned to her private room, unsure whether she had made the right decision to avoid the coffee shop, wanting to avoid that person. As a result, Akhira came to find her here so frequently that others began to think they were a couple. Fortunately, that person didn't come up to this floor often, as they usually met in front of the hospital first.

The sound of a cell phone demanded attention from its owner. The slender figure picked it up, surprised by the unfamiliar number and certain it wasn't someone known.

"Hello?"

"..."

"Hello? Can you hear me?"

"Are you free now?"

It was surprising to hear the voice on the other end, which she seemed to recognize. She wondered how the other person got her number to call her like this.

"I'm not free,"

She replied without hesitation. Even though she had no patients at the moment, she was still on duty and considered herself busy.

"Oh,"

Was all the other person said before falling silent. After a moment, She added,

"Okay."

And then the person who had just called hung up. She called when she wanted and hung up just as easily. The slender figure sighed before checking her phone, seeing the number she'd dialed the day before. It was clear evidence of how the other person got her number; it must've been when she borrowed her phone. She tapped on the screen for a while before setting it down again.

Akhira decided to park the car and walk into the hospital, having called Dr.Panipak several times without a response. Initially, she went to the bus stop in front of the hospital but didn't find her, so she had to come here.. If Dr.Panipak had already left, she wouldn't have to worry anymore. She had her number, but it didn't seem to help.

The sound of muffled conversation echoed from the corridor. The person who had just exited the elevator and was about to look for someone stopped in their tracks upon seeing the doctor talking with what seemed to be her patient. Soon, an older, plump woman approached with an irritated demeanor.

"What kind of doctor are you!?"

The words came from her mouth as she passed by her. Akhira looked at the slender figure, who was still standing still. They made brief eye contact before she turned and walked back into her room.



A tall figure took the liberty of opening the door and entering the room after knocking but received no response. Knowing that Dr.Panipak was inside and that there were likely no patients at this hour since it was the end of her shift, Akhira entered and saw Dr.Panipak busily packing up her things-equipment, white gown coat, and file folders without paying any mind to anyone else.

Even though the slender figure pretended to be busy packing, Akhira could sense something was off, including the tremble in her eyes. Is she about to cry? Akhira approached closer and then pulled Dr.Panipak into an embrace. The slender woman remained still, offering no resistance or response, as tears she'd been holding back since entering the room threatened to spill.

Her sweet face was buried in the shoulder of the taller person. She wanted to push Akhira away, to tell her to leave her alone and not meddle in her affairs. Why did she have to show up at a time like this? No words of consolation came from Akhira, who held her in silence, offering no platitudes or reassurances.

"Let's go home."

Dr.Panipak followed quietly behind, aware that Akhira had witnessed her being berated by a patient dissatisfied with her treatment. She'd never encountered such harsh criticism in her career and had felt like crying the moment that woman left. But when she caught sight of her, she pretended as if nothing had happened, as if she felt nothing.

In truth, Dr.Panipak had heard the knocks on her office door for a while but chose to ignore it, focusing instead on tidying up what she considered a cluttered space, even though her office was already well organized. Then, out of nowhere, Akhira entered and embraced her, causing the tears she'd been fighting to drip onto her immaculate black suit.

It seemed this time Akhira knew her more than her favorite drinks because she didn't like being consoled, didn't want anyone's pity or to be seen as vulnerable. And what Akhira did, simply holding her without saying anything, inexplicably comforted her. The slender figure got into the same car, but what was different today was that she did so willingly.

"Hungry."

Suddenly said the one who was driving, a simple word that was more of a declaration. They ended up at a restaurant because Dr.Panipak refused to respond, so Akhira took it as permission to find something to eat. This time, Dr.Panipak didn't fail to order for herself as well, having learned from a previous occasion how it felt to watch someone else eat alone. She ordered a simple salad, in contrast to the other's main dish of fish steak.

Would she become overweight in the future? It wasn't an unlikely thought if Akhira continued to eat like this every day. Dr.Panipak observed her Western eating habits with mixed feelings. The fork used for the salad reached over to pick at the vegetables from the opposite plate before she put it in her mouth.

She noticed the other person pause, probably displeased with her because the culture she grew up with was completely different from Thailand. Thais often share food, but in Western culture, there's no sharing or eating from the same plate. Even knowing this, Dr.Panipak still wanted to do it, secretly hoping it might annoy her and she'd stop bothering her, as she was being impolite.

But she seemed to forget that even though Akhira had grown up abroad, she was still Thai at heart. A sliced piece of fish was offered to Dr.Panipak. This time, Dr.Panipak was taken aback because not only that Akhira wouldn't mind that at all, but she even offered her meal to share with her, too.

"It's okay... Do you normally eat late?"

She asked to cover up the embarrassing incident she'd caused. She intended to tease her but ended up being the one who played. She was surprised at herself for daring to eat food from someone else's plate like that, especially since she normally didn't like to share meals with others either.

"Normally, no."

She replied softly, but Dr.Panipak heard her clearly. Akhira smiled slightly, the first smile that Dr.Panipak had seen from such a close distance. She can

smile, too, after all...

*Ding...!*

A message notification sound rang out, causing the slender figure who was drying her hair to walk over and pick up her phone to check.

[Akhira: Are you asleep?]

She read the message on the notification without actually opening it, then walked back to continue drying her hair, pretending not to care about the message. But once she finished, she couldn't help but check it again. Dr.Panipak sat there, anxious, debating whether to reply or just let it be.

In the end, she chose to reply, justifying to herself that she was responding because she'd read the message. If the other party saw that she'd read it and didn't reply, it would be impolite.

[Panipak: About to sleep.]

[Akhira: Oh.]

[Akhira: Ok.]

She replied back, just like when she called her earlier in the day. She wondered how many words she actually knew. Not, oh, and okay, was that really all? Seeing that she didn't seem to be typing anything else, she decided to send a message herself.

[Panipak: I've washed your jacket. I'll return it to you tomorrow.]

[Akhira: Are you texting in your sleep?]

[Panipak: I'm not.]

[Akhira: Oh.]

[Akhira: I thought you were sleeping; I thought you were sleep-texting.]

[Panipak: I'm about to sleep, but not yet..]

[Akhira: Oh.]

[Akhira: But you'll get sleep, right?]

[Panipak: Yes.]

[Akhira: Ok.]

After that, Akhira didn't send anything else. The slender figure stared at the screen for a while, waiting to see if any more messages would come. Several minutes passed, but nothing else came. This was one thing she thought was quite rude about Akhira. She'd message whenever she felt like it, and when she was done, she wouldn't say anything, just an okay, and then disappear. Crazy woman!

Dr.Panipak lay down on the bed, thinking that today had been a tough day after being scolded by a patient. But she'd completely forgotten about that, not having a moment to think. It was all because of that one woman.

"Pleng, are you looking for someone?"

Dr.Plaifha asked after sitting in their usual café for a while. She noticed her friend constantly looking around as if searching for someone and couldn't help but be curious.

"I'm looking for Neen,"

She replied. The other raised an eyebrow..

"Didn't Neen ask us to buy something for her?"

"Oh, right... I forgot,"

Dr.Plaifha was confused by her friend's behavior. Normally, she wasn't forgetful and had the best memory among all their friends. Why would she forget something like this? Strange....

"Your green tea is ready, Dr.Pleng."

"Thank you."

She picked up the green tea and looked at it as if it held some interest. How long had it been since she last drank it? Probably since that person bought it for her. After taking a few sips, Dr.Panipak just stared at her cup of green tea, her expression one of surprise, until the owner, Thita, had to ask.

"Is something wrong? Or is it not delicious today?"

"No, it's good..."

But she was just surprised that the taste was different from before. Had she forgotten the taste because it'd been so long?

"Did you change the recipe?"

"Oh no, I made it with less sugar as usual for you."

"Less sugar?"

That wasn't normal. She thought to herself. Ever since she became a customer here, she'd never mentioned anything about the sweetness because she trusted the owner's skills and never asked for any special adjustments. Although she was curious, she didn't mind because it was delicious, maybe even more so than before.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. Ms. Akhira asked me to make it with less sugar for you."

Thita smiled, surprised that the doctor wasn't accustomed to the taste, even though she'd been preparing it this way for her for quite some time at least since Akhira had started buying it every day. She didn't know the status of their relationship or how far it'd progressed.

But one thing she knew for sure was that Akhira paid a lot of attention to the other party. Aware that drinking these things too often wasn't good, sometimes she'd inquire about Japanese-style green tea. But asking her to

brew it that way was out of the question; it was almost a completely different thing. Since there was nothing better than the doctor's usual menu, Akhira had asked her to make it as less sweet as possible. Thinking about it, she felt quite jealous of Dr.Panipak.

"Oh."

Dr.Plaifha, sitting next to her, nodded in understanding and turned to smile teasingly at her friend. However, the lithe figure showed no sign of the shyness she'd hoped to see. Although disappointed, deep down, she felt that her friend was also interested in the person being mentioned.

"Has Ms. Akhira not come in yet today?"

It was Dr.Plaifha who asked the coffee shop owner, her mischievous gaze stealthily observing her friend, who was pretending to be indifferent. She could guess that her friend was secretly looking for someone. She chuckled to herself, suspecting that the beautiful doctor might finally have a partner, just as the hospital rumors suggested.

"Not yet today. Oh! Speak of the devil,"

The persona in question walked into the shop just as they were talking about her.

"Hello, Ms. Akhira,"

Both Thita and Dr.Plaifha greeted the newcomer, in contrast to the slender figure who sat still, not turning to pay attention to the newcomer like the others. Akhira glanced at her back, who didn't even turn to look at her, getting used to her habits.

"Here you go, Dr.Pha."

"Thank you,"

As the two cups of coffee Dr.Plaifha ordered were placed on the counter, the slender figure stood up immediately.

"Wait, Pleng!"

Dr.Plaifha called out to her friend who was about to leave the shop. She hadn't even taken out her wallet to pay yet. Dr.Panipak walked past the tall figure before stopping behind her.

"Don't forget to pay for me,"

She said before walking out of the shop. Why did she feel so irrationally annoyed? She didn't greet her, and she didn't seem to want to either. Akhira didn't turn back to look at Dr.Panipak but walked straight to her friend, who was frantically searching through her bag, probably unable to find her wallet.

"The usual for me, and... check all of these out."

With just a glance at the coffee cups still on the counter, Thita immediately understood what the other person wanted. Dr.Plaifha looked up from her large bag, locking eyes with the owner of the intense gaze for a moment before quickly thanking her and running after her friend outside the shop.

"Pleng, how could you leave me behind?"

"Here you go, a treat from Ms. Akhira."

"Wow, Ms. Akhira is so generous."

"Right?"

"Someone's girlfriend, I bet,"

The two girls chatted with a hint of envy, wanting to tease their friend.

"Not my girlfriend at all."

"I haven't even mentioned her name yet, Dr.Panipak,"

The laughter from the two friends made the anger; slender figure feel a bit odd. It wasn't shyness or anger, she didn't know what she was feeling.

"Right... not your girlfriend for now, but who knows about the future?" Dr. Ninlaneen continued to do her job well without relenting. "Definitely not."

Oh, Dr.Panipak's response made the two doctors, who were giggling, suddenly fall silent.

"I don't like her,"

The following statement made the two even more disheartened. They tried to look into those sweet eyes, but they found nothing. Moreover, those eyes seemed resolute and clear, indicating that what she said was the truth. Dr.

Ninlaneen's face shrank to the point of being only two inches wide, turning to exchange a meaningful look with Dr. Plaifha. Poor Ms. Akhira.

It was the end of a workday, and Dr.Panipak had made up her mind that she would return the item to the other party. She picked up the black jacket suit, checking it over to ensure there was no damage or anything out of the ordinary. She couldn't resist sniffing it to check for cleanliness one more time, hoping that the hospital's smell hadn't clung to it. Dr.Panipak walked out at her usual quitting time, and as expected, the familiar car was already there waiting for her. Without hesitation, the slender figure opened the car door and sat down, today without the owner having to coax or make any excuses.

"Have you been waiting long?"

"No,"

Was the first greeting uttered before the car pulled away from the hospital. The weary figure, exhausted from a day's work, dozed off as her body met the coolness inside the car. Akhira glanced at the person beside her, noticing she was clutching her suit jacket tightly.

She'd planned to stop for something to eat, but seeing that the other had fallen asleep, she didn't want to disturb her rest. Dr.Panipak must've been tired for the whole day. When they arrived at their destination, the luxurious car came to a smooth stop with the engine still running.



"Arrived."

She said softly, but there was no response of course, Dr. Panipak was asleep.

"Pleng..."

The slender figure moved slightly before slowly opening her eyes after being called just once. Her sweet eyes slightly fluttered as she raised her hand to rub them cutely. The groggy person looked at the driver before stretching and sitting up straight again.

"We're here."

"Thank you,"

She said, then opened the car door to get out. But shortly after, she turned back to the person still in the car, uttering a sentence Akhira didn't expect to hear.

"Have you eaten anything yet?"

*Ding...!*

The sound of the elevator opening was followed by the slender figure leading the way to her own room after asking that question. When she replied that she hadn't eaten yet, Dr. Panipak volunteered to make something for her. She had already figured that someone like Akhira, who didn't eat on a regular schedule, probably hadn't had anything substantial.

She didn't really want her to bother this much, but since Akhira had been so kind to her, she felt she should reciprocate.

"Make yourself at home. I'll get you some water."

She told her after they had entered the room. Dr. Panipak placed the jacket, which she just realized she'd been carrying the whole time, on the same sofa where Akhira was sitting before disappearing into the kitchen. Akhira's sharp gaze surveyed the room.

The upscale condo was as pricey as the building's exterior suggested. The room was decorated in a clean white and cream tone, which she thought suited the owner very well. There were many decorative items, but they didn't make the room look cluttered, mostly family photos and vases with fresh flowers.

She noticed several vases with different kinds of flowers placed around the room, and some bouquets were just left lying around. No one would buy large bouquets that could wilt at any time just to decorate their own room, or if they did, not in such abundance. Besides, these flowers wouldn't last long and would be extravagant without good reason. No wonder the other person was so tough. Thinking about it, she wasn't much person was different from one of those bouquets' owners.

"You like flowers?"

Akhira asked after she placed a glass of water on the small glass coffee table in front of her. She asked, even though she didn't really want to know as she'd guessed from the start that Dr.Panipak didn't buy them herself.

"Not really.."

It was an answer that wasn't far from her guess. Akhira took a sip of water and then fell silent, feeling suddenly and inexplicably annoyed.

"Just wait a moment, please."

Dr.Panipak had just brought her water and then disappeared back into the kitchen. Akhira could only ask herself over and over whether she should be happy that she was about to eat her cooking. She should be happy, but what was bothering her right now were those flowers.

Not long after sitting and waiting, she walked into the dining area, where the room's owner had said the food was ready. The simple, light dish was set before the tall figure. Dr.Panipak wasn't sure if the food would suit the other party's palate. Seeing her looking with interest, she thought for sure she wouldn't be familiar with the food in front of her.

Akhira quietly took a bite, making the cook tense with anticipation. When cooking for someone, at the very least, you hope for a little praise in return, and Dr.Panipak was no exception. But no matter how many bites the other took, there was no sign of any comment forthcoming. The slender figure sitting across could only watch, giving up hope when she saw no reaction from the person in front of her.

"Won't you eat?"

Akhira asked, looking up after finishing her chewing.

"No,"

Came the reply, followed by intermittent conversation. It wasn't anything lengthy, but it was enough to get to know each other a little better. Dr.Panipak was getting used to having Akhira around. She didn't feel as uncomfortable as before and no longer wanted to avoid her.

Sometimes, having Akhira there to bother her was actually quite nice. But what troubled her was not knowing how she felt about her. Dr.Panipak could only watch as she ate her cooking, bite after bite. Even though she didn't verbally compliment the food, her actions seemed to indicate she enjoyed it. She sat there, watching Akhira, overthinking the situation between them until...

"Can we just be friends?"

Dr.Panipak blurted out after a long silence, catching the listener off guard.

"..."

"Ms.Akhira?"

"I'm full..."

The speaker neatly gathered their utensils, meeting her eyes briefly before taking a drink as if she hadn't heard what Dr. Panipak had just said. Then, the tall figure stood up from the chair. Dr.Panipak followed when she saw the guest putting on her shoes and preparing to leave.

"Ms.Akhira, wait a moment."

Akhira turned at the call and saw Dr.Panipak hurriedly bringing something to her.

"Your jacket... please wait."

Akhira took the jacket without looking at her and left the room immediately, even though she'd asked her to wait. Dr.Panipak intended to walk her out. She grabbed her key card quickly, but by the time she came out of the living room, the person she'd told to wait was gone.

She stood frozen in front of the firmly closed door, feeling anxious. Akhira had left even though she'd asked her to wait. Then there were those fleeting glances she wasn't sure she'd really seen and her sudden change in demeanor, all of which left her worried...

The car that had been speeding came to a halt. The owner stepped out and slammed the door without fear of damaging her beloved car. The suit jacket in her hand was about to be thrown away in anger, but in the end, it was gently placed on the sofa, remembering the person who seemed to have taken great care to wash and return it.

KhunYing Nara, who had come down from upstairs because she heard the screeching tires, guessed that the person who had just arrived must've been driving fast. The middle-aged woman's eyes followed her eldest daughter inside the living room without greeting her. She'd seen Akhira enter with a tight grip on her suit jacket, even about to throw it away.

She couldn't help but be surprised, as no matter the issue, Akhira was always calm. No matter how angry she was, she never showed it like this before. Akhira was the type to be silent when displeased. She'd raised her children herself, and even if they weren't always together, she knew her own child's temperament well.

"Zo."

She approached when she saw her child had calmed down.

"Mom, it's late. Aren't you asleep?"

"I just came down to check on the house. Not sure if the garage needs to be fixed,"

The mother teased her daughter playfully.

"What's got you so upset?"

She asked, gently stroking her daughter's hair with affection.

However, the question was not answered, and Akhira herself didn't know how to answer it either.

"Mom, you should go to bed. Dad must be missing you,"

KhunYing Nara chuckled lightly. Her daughter sure had a way with words.

"Missing me? I just came down. I think it's you who's missing someone else."

She teased back, looking at the other's face. But the indifferent expression made it crystal clear to the mother that her daughter's earlier frustration had a specific cause.

"I don't have someone to miss, Mom."

Because even if I do have that someone... I wouldn't have the right to miss her.



## 06. WORTHLESS

Time passed, and everything remained the same. Wake up in the morning, go to work, come home in the evening, nothing changed. But one thing that felt different was someone who had changed. Akhira still performed her duties flawlessly.

The green tea she'd promised to buy for her every day was still being delivered. However, what was strange was the silence that even Dr.Panipak didn't know how to handle. A question answered with a brief reply, and if not asked, the other party wouldn't think to speak. It'd been like this all week.

"Doctor, have you packed your things yet? We should get going."

Dr.Ninlaneen spoke playfully after opening the door, managing to elicit a smile from the slender figure seated there, just as she'd hoped. She'd noticed her friend's gloominess for a while and felt the need to cheer her up, to get a laugh out of her.

She didn't know what was bothering her and considered that Dr.Panipak wasn't one to share personal matters unless she was pressed for the truth. At first, she thought to do just that, but seeing her friend looking so downcast, she didn't want to make her uncomfortable.

"It's not time to get off work, Neen."

"Hasn't the doctor already come to take the shift?"

"I have one more appointment left."

"Well, then I'll wait in Pha's office. Message me know when you're done."

"Mhm."

Dr.Panipak immediately picked up the patient file she'd scheduled after her friend had left for the last patient she had an appointment with KhunYing Nara....

"Good evening, KhunYing Nara. You have an appointment with Dr.Panipak, right?"

"Yes, dear."

"Please come in."

The nurse said politely, turning to look at the person walking alongside KhunYing Nara. She was unsure of their relationship, but the aura of nobility was so striking that she couldn't help but admire the other person internally. She looked so beautiful, even if her face seemed a bit arrogant. They looked familiar, as if she'd seen this person somewhere before but wasn't certain.

"Zo, come in with me."

"..."

"Akhira, I said to come in with me."

KhunYing Nara's voice prompted the nurse, who was about to return to her duties, to look back once more before the mother and daughter entered Panipak's examination room.

'This is her, Ms. Akhira! Why didn't I notice that she must be KhunYing Nara's daughter?'

The plump nurse thought to herself. And she remembered the name well, it belonged to the person who often brought green tea as a regular treat. She resolved to thank her personally today and hurried off to share the news with the other nurses, who sometimes enjoyed the free green tea as well.

Hearing the door open, Dr.Panipak looked up from her documents. The slender figure stood up, greeting the elder before noticing another person following behind. She greeted her as well, but she didn't seem to care at all.

"Can't you accept a greeting, Ms. Akhira?"

The mother turned to scold her child in front of Dr.Panipak who stood awkwardly, clearly uncomfortable with her child's disregard for manners. But even as she spoke, Akhira showed no interest in responding, causing KhunYing Nara to become slightly irritated. She really wanted to scold her child, but then she thought about it and realized that her daughter must be sulking at the doctor.

"I apologize on behalf of Zo, Dr.Panipak."

"It's alright, KhunYing Nara."

Dr. Panipak didn't say it just to please the elder; she truly felt that way. She wasn't angry with the other party, just a bit uneasy..

"She probably doesn't know how to accept a greeting, only knows how to shake hands and kiss. cheeks."

KhunYing Nara couldn't resist making another jab at her child before sitting down, realizing they'd already wasted enough time. Akhira sat down next to her mother. Dr. Panipak inquired about KhunYing Nara's condition carefully. Occasionally, her gaze would drift to the person sitting in the chair beside her, catching KhunYing Nara's attention.

The older woman's face, lined with the wrinkles of time, gave a smile at the endearing behavior of the two. Although the situation between them seemed a bit uneasy, through the eyes of an elder, it appeared quite charming. Did Dr.Panipak realize that Akhira was sulking, and did she know what her own worried looks toward her daughter conveyed?

"KhunYing Nara."

"Yes! What is it, doctor?"



"I was wondering if you've been experiencing any chest tightness or shortness of breath lately?"

The elderly woman, preoccupied with thoughts of her children, was jolted back to reality by the repeated calling of her name..

"Not at all, Dear. I've been feeling much better lately. I'm fine, but Zo has been having trouble breathing all the time. Doctor, could you please check on her? I'll be right back."

Dr.Panipak felt awkward when KhunYing Nara said she'd step out to make a phone call and asked her to examine the person in front of her instead. She thought she'd grown closer to the other party, but now it seemed that closeness had slipped away as she continued to ignore her.

"Do you have allergies?"

Dr.Panipak asked, confident that the breathing difficulties mentioned by Akhira's mother were due to this condition. It wouldn't be surprising if she also had allergies, as they could be genetically inherited, and KhunYing Nara, her mother, had them too.

"..."

"What medication do you usually take?"

After two questions and no answers, she persisted.

"You don't have to do what my mother says."

With just that sentence, she stood up and left the room immediately. Akhira chose to get to her mother, knowing well that she hadn't stepped out to make a phone call. When she found her mother, she told her to go back in and finish the examination while she waited outside. And when the daughter caught on, the mother didn't force or contradict her a second time.

"Hello, Ms. Akhira. It's nice to finally meet you today. Thank you so much."

"Yes, the others send their thanks as well."

Two nurses approached with a respectful bow and polite words. Akhira was somewhat puzzled by the situation, not knowing what she'd done to deserve such thanks from the nurses.

"Ms. Akhira, you didn't have to bring us anything. We are concerned for Dr.Panipak, too, having to bring something every day."

"Thank you so much. The green tea is delicious."

"Green tea?"

Akhira asked after a long silence, just as Dr.Panipak and KhunYing Nara emerged from the examination room. Dr.Panipak paused slightly, having overheard the conversation not entirely, but enough to understand what the nurses were discussing with Akhira.

"Yes, the green tea that you brought for us."

The speaker, unaware of the situation, continued Dr. Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha, who had arrived just in time, could only swallow hard, having timed their arrival to pick up their friend, not expecting to witness such a scene.

Akhira fell silent, and so did everyone else. She glanced at Dr. Panipak for a mere fraction of a second, and she, too, became still. The others could only look at each other, confused as to why the atmosphere had suddenly become so tense, making it difficult to breathe. The two nurses quickly excused themselves and left.

"Pleng."

"Pleng!!"

Dr. Plaifha called out again, louder this time.

"Why are you yelling, Pha?"

The slender figure flinched slightly. The noise from their table was so loud that nearby diners jumped from their seats.

"If she didn't yell, would you stop daydreaming?"

Dr.Ninlaneen commented on what she saw. Ever since they left the hospital for the café, the other doctor had been silent and lost in thought, unresponsive to their conversation as if she hadn't heard them at all, which was indeed the case.

"What's on your mind?"

Dr.Plaifha initiated the conversation, certain that something was amiss. And if she had to guess, it'd undoubtedly involve Akhira. She believed her friend's current state was due to the incident that had occurred just an hour ago.

"It's nothing. I'm just wondering if my mom has arrived yet."

Dr.Panipak's response immediately gave her two friends a headache. Stubbornness at its finest... The three of them continued to enjoy their sweets, almost having a perfect weekend in the minds of Dr.Plaifha and Dr.Ninlaneen if not for the evening's events.

They had the chance to go out together, even though one of their members had a prior appointment with her mother. They understood, as it was part of Dr.Panipak's routine with her family, which was quite endearing.

"Pha, Neen, I have to go, my mom's here."

"Do you want me to walk by?"

"No, it's okay, you two keep eating."

The slender figure stood up to pack her bag, having received a message from her mother that she'd arrived. Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha could only send their regards to their friend's mother. After bidding a warm farewell to her two friends, she walked away. Dr.Panipak walked to the spot where she was to meet her mother, her sweet eyes narrowing slightly when she saw that her mother was not alone but standing with KhunYing Nara.

She approached the two adults and greeted them with a respectful wai. If KhunYing Nara's here, is the other person here, too? Her question was reflected in her eyes, noticeable to the elder.

"That one didn't come. She said she had to go back to work."

KhunYing Nara whispered, audible only to the two of them, understanding the situation well. Her daughter's demeanor and words during the hospital visit clearly indicated that these two young people had issues. The young woman offered a smile, but she might not realize how awkward it looked.

"What are you two ladies talking about? We have a long shopping list today. But what does this say, Pleng? I can't see it."

Said the mother, eliciting genuine smiles. from both with her determined tone and mannerisms as she tried to read a small piece of paper in her hand, looking like an adorable elderly person.

"Isn't Akhira coming today?"

Phimwilai turned to talk to KhunYing Nara, holding items to put in their shopping cart.

"She said she was going back to work."

"It's so late already, and she's still working? You must tell your daughter to stop sometimes."

"It'd be great if I could stop her. She is quite serious about her work, but lately, she's been better, Phim,"

"Better?"

"I've heard that lately, she leaves the company much earlier than usual, not later than seven. Before, she wouldn't get home until nine or ten p.m."

"I don't know either, but if it's something else, it must be very important. Otherwise, my workaholic daughter wouldn't leave the company."

The two adults continued to chat about other things, with Dr. Panipak silently following behind.

"Pleng, leave it, I'll take care of it."

"It's okay, I'll help."

"Just go take a shower and go to bed. You've been tired all day."

Phimwilai told her daughter with a slightly stern voice, prompting the young woman to comply, but not without saying she'd come down to help after her shower. Phimwilai watched her daughter with concern.

It seemed like her daughter was more tired than usual today. otherwise, her beautiful face wouldn't look so stressed all the time. It was clear something was bothering her. She was very worried, but if her daughter didn't want to talk, she wouldn't pry.

Can't sleep. The slender figure tossed and turned on the wide bed, feeling uncomfortable in every position. What was initially thought to be a manageable situation turned out to be quite the opposite. Ever since Akhira had changed, she'd thought about trying to talk to her once more, hoping she might understand her better. But today's unexpected events only made things worse; she seemed angrier with her than before.

*'If you didn't want to accept it, you could've just told me. There was no need to give it to someone else.'*

Those words kept echoing in her head, playing over and over like a broken record. She could see it in her eyes and gestures that she was angry, dissatisfied, and hurt. The slender figure could only sigh softly, wondering whether she should apologize to her or just let it be. After all, she hadn't wanted her to meddle in her affairs from the start. Perhaps after today, Akhira would stop involving herself with her for good.

*'This is for the best...'*

Then why couldn't she stop thinking about it, to the point where she couldn't even sleep?



SunYanV

## 07. IT'S A SMALL WORLD

A couple sat chatting as they did every morning, enjoying their breakfast in good spirits. It'd been a long time since it was just the two elders at the breakfast table, as Akhira often wasn't there to join them. But today, the household was in for a surprise when they saw a tall figure walk in and sit down at the breakfast table, not having left early as usual.

"Oh, Zo! I thought you weren't here, so I didn't prepare breakfast for you. Just wait a moment, please. I'll go and make it now."

The elder housekeeper hurriedly said, ready to rush into the kitchen to prepare breakfast. It'd been two months since the young lady of the house had joined them for breakfast, and she'd told them herself not to bother as she had to leave early every day. No one knew where she went, not even KhunYing Nara or Mr.Akhin, her father.

"Just a cup of tea will do, thank you."

"Of course."

The housekeeper replied before Akhira picked up her phone to pass the time while waiting.

"Why do I get to see my daughter today, of all days?"

Mr.Akhin folded his newspaper after only reading it for a short while.

"Just as usual, Dad."

Akhira replied in her usual calm tone without looking up from her phone screen.

"Usually, I don't see you here. Do you have morning appointments with someone every day, Zo? Don't you have to leave early today?"

Mr.Akhin fired a series of questions at his daughter, causing KhunYing Nara to give him a stern look. He sat confused, not understanding why he was being scolded.

"Your tea is here."

The tall figure thanked the housekeeper before lifting the hot cup of tea to sip. KhunYing Nara watched silently, her concern growing...

A luxurious black car slowed down in front of a familiar shop but ultimately drove past. Even the hospital, which Akhira used to visit every day, was no longer on her itinerary. Exhausted, Akhira slumped into a plush chair, trying to focus on work, but her mind was elsewhere.

She massaged her temples, feeling a headache coming on. Lately, there seemed to be too much on her mind. Why was she so restless just for not stopping by? Would she wait for me? If I don't go, will the doctor wait for me as usual?

No matter how much her heart was hurt, Akhira couldn't stop worrying about the other person. She'd become someone Akhira cared for deeply.



"Doctor, are you waiting for someone?"

A nurse asked as he approached the beautiful doctor who had been standing outside the hospital for a while, looking as if she was searching for someone.

"No, I'm not."

"Oh, I see. I thought you were looking for someone."

He said, knowing full well that the doctor often stood waiting for something from the owner of the black car every morning. Everyone talked about how



the owner of that car must be the doctor's girlfriend.

Feeling others' gaze upon her, Dr.Panipak turned and smiled politely at the nurse before heading back into the hospital. Despite having lingering thoughts, when it was time to work, Dr.Panipak always performed her duties well. She could separate her professional life from her personal one, but during her free moments, the same questions and thoughts circled in her mind.

*Why didn't she come?*

Dr.Panipak didn't want her workday to end. She wished she could work longer or even until the next day. She was confused, unsure if that person would come to see her again and, if she did, how she should face her. Perhaps she was so angry that she hated her now. She didn't know why she felt so anxious, but eventually, she concluded that all these feelings were... A feeling of guilt.

She picked up her phone, scrolling to find the name she needed. The keyboard lay still, waiting for its owner to type. Minutes passed without a single character being entered into the message box. Her lips pressed together in contemplation before she finally decided to type and send a message. A message she thought was best. And it might be the last message she'd send.

[Panipak: I'm sorry.]

The smartphone, which was rarely used during work hours, now played a crucial role in her slender figure. She'd constantly check to see if the other person had received her message, but no matter how many times she checked, it never showed that it'd been read.

Three days after she sent the message, it'd finally been delivered to the other party. She knew because it showed as read, but still, there was no response. The white mobile phone was laid down just as before, its owner no longer interested in paying it any attention.

No one knows what the future holds. Dr.Panipak, who just last week was worried about someone, now acted as if she'd completely forgotten about that person. Her life had returned to normal, but to say it was completely normal wouldn't be accurate. Both Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha knew this well..

Dr.Panipak worked harder, and even without Akhira bothering her, she didn't think of returning to the same coffee shop. There was no more green tea in her life. Even when her friends offered to buy it for her, she refused every time. It was uncertain whether this could be called a normal life.

"Pleng, I'm going home."

"Mmm, get home safely. Don't dilly-dally, Pha."

"Where could I stop? It's you who should get home safely. With you finishing late, I'm not even sure if there will still be buses."

Dr.Plaifha couldn't help but worry about her friend, as the doctor who was supposed to take the late shift had called to say they were caught up in an urgent matter and might not come in. The slender figure had volunteered to stay on until midnight. It was no wonder everyone liked her friend, who was both beautiful and kind-hearted, a rare find, someone beautiful both inside and out.

"Have you prepared the instruments for the patient?"

"All set, Doctor. But the child."

The nurse couldn't finish her sentence before the doctor had already walked far away. The lives of patients were truly important to Dr.Panipak. The slender figure who hurried in felt slight chaos upon seeing several nurses and patients' relatives filling the room, along with the loud cries of a boy who refused treatment.

"Mom, I'm scared!"

The little boy cried out loud before shaking off the nurse who was holding his arm and running to hug his mother. The mother looked distressed as her son was having trouble breathing and had to be brought to the doctor, but upon arrival, he cried and refused treatment, causing the nurses to be equally anxious.

Despite their attempts to pull the little boy away from his mother, they couldn't manage it as he clung tightly to the mother's legs. Dr.Panipak looked at the scene with sympathy. It was normal for children to dislike doctors and hospitals, especially when nurses were pulling and tugging like that, which only made them more scared

"Let him be. I'll handle it."

Dr. Panipak said gently to the two nurses who were trying to separate the child from his mother. Upon hearing the doctor's words, the two women quickly stepped back. Dr.Panipak crouched down to the level of the smaller figure and gently patted his back to comfort him. The little boy, who had buried his face in his mother's legs, glanced at her briefly before burying his face back into his mother's embrace. It took a while of comforting before the little boy quieted down.

"What's wrong? Let me know."

She asked softly, which stopped the little boy from wailing, though he still sniffled.

"I can't breathe."

He replied between sobs, endearing himself to those around him.

"If you can't breathe, we need to treat you,"

She said.

"I'm scared..."

"You can tell me what scared you."

The little boy pointed with his chubby finger toward the medical equipment not far away. Dr.Panipak followed the direction of the small finger and then reassured the little boy with a sweet voice that there was nothing to be afraid of. Before long, the young boy allowed Dr.Panipak to lift him onto the chair he'd been so afraid of.

Others couldn't help but admire her skill. Apart from being skilled at treatment, she was also adept at persuasion, especially with young children who were said to be difficult to manage. She made it look so easy, turning a room filled with cries and wails into a haven of tranquility.

"I'm scared."

The little one says to the beautiful doctor with a whimper, tears, and snot smeared across his cheeks. The kind doctor gently wipes them away.

"Don't be scared, you won't get hurt at all."

The beautiful doctor cooed, gently wiping away the tears and snot that streaked the child's cheeks.

"There's nothing to fear. It won't hurt at all."

She reassured, crouching down in front of the little one perched on the chair, preparing the equipment for use, even as she heard the faint whimpers of protest.

"I'm scared it'll hurt..."

"It won't hurt at all, see? This big sister here doesn't hurt, right?"

She asked, turning to the person sitting next to the child to reassure him. But she froze when she realized who it was. Looking up, she saw KhunYing Nara smiling warmly at her. The little boy stared intently at the person wearing the strange equipment on her face as if waiting for an answer.

Akhira turned to look and gently guided the child's head back toward Dr.Panipak. Though not the gentlest gesture, Akhira's once fierce eyes now softened noticeably. The small hand reached out to hold Akhira's hand, still

resting on his round head, seeking comfort. Now, the little one raised his arm, showing off his armpit.

"Come here, let me put this on for you."

The doctor said softly as she fitted the small figure with a mask for the nebulizer. Dr.Panipak straightened up to look at the child, who was swinging his legs and gazing curiously at the adult beside him. She watched fondly as both the child and the adult sat together with masks from the nebulizer.

"Does it hurt?"

Dr.Panipak asked, and the little child shook his head, beaming a squinty-eyed smile at the doctor.

"Just wait here for a bit."

She told the woman she assumed to be his mother before turning to Akhira.

"Excuse me."

She said, reaching out to remove the equipment from the other person.

"Feeling better?"

Akhira nodded in response. Dr.Panipak hadn't expected to encounter Akhira here at this time. When the nurse reported a patient with breathing difficulties requiring nebulizer treatment, she didn't imagine it'd be Akhira. She hadn't realized that the quiet adult sitting there earlier was her, as she was too preoccupied with calming the fussy child, and she was already wearing the equipment.

"Please follow me to the room."

She said, slightly tense about speaking to her as a doctor to a patient. But since Akhira was the patient and Dr.Panipak was the doctor, she had to do her job at best. She briefly checked Akhira's medical record before looking up to talk to her.

"You're not taking any medication, right?"

Dr.Panipak asked for confirmation. The record indicated no current medications, but some patients often self medicate without consulting a doctor.

"No,"

She replied briefly. Dr.Panipak nodded slightly.

"Then I'll prescribe some medication for you."

"..."

"You might feel drowsy after taking it, so don't drive. This condition can't be cured, but the medication can help alleviate the symptoms. Do you normally exercise?"

"..."

After asking the question, she looked up at Akhira, but she showed no sign of responding, so Dr.Panipak assumed she didn't exercise often.

"You should exercise to stay healthy."

"I don't have time."

Akhira replied softly, her voice weary. It was fortunate that Akhira only had respiratory allergies. Nevertheless, she was concerned about potential complications, such as sinusitis, given the fluctuating weather. It was no surprise that her symptoms had flared up.

"Don't scratch."

She said sternly to the other, noticing the other party lifting a hand to scratch her eye Akhira sat still, momentarily subdued by the doctor's chiding. The lithe figure examined the other not for long. The check-up was complete. She handed the prescription to the nurse to arrange the medication. She greeted KhunYing Nara before the two of them left.

Dr.Panipak could only watch the tall figure walk away, feeling a mix of emotions. If she hadn't been working someone else's shift, they might never have met again. Why did the fate have to bring them together like this?

Dr.Panipak had to exert a great deal of effort to maintain her composure in Akhira's presence. She tried not to let her facial expressions betray her, hiding everything behind a mask of indifference, concealing the thunderous beating of her heart like a drum set, all because she saw her face again. She thought she'd forgotten about this person, but it turned out not to be the case.

It was the first time Akhira had been seriously ill and had to go to the hospital. Akhira herself didn't expect to see Dr. Panipak there as it should've been her time off. She sat in silence all the way home in the car.

"Zo, why aren't you asleep yet?"

KhunYing Nara asked the one who had been standing and staring at the sky for quite some time, refusing to come inside.

"You're standing there like a music video actor."

"Mom..."

"What are you thinking about?"

Akhira didn't respond; she just shook her head gently. What happened to this child?

"Are you missing the doctor?"

KhunYing Nara got the reaction she expected when her daughter turned to look at her as if shocked by what she heard. Though she didn't show much, her fierce eyes widened at the mention of "the doctor." KhunYing Nara wanted to laugh out loud. This time, Akhira didn't deny it; she just fell silent. She didn't know how she'd raised her daughter to become so aloof, but then again, the daughter must've gotten it from her...

"Mom... if you were me, what would you do?"

Akhira asked without explanation, just making eye contact with her mother.

KhunYing Nara chuckled softly with affection.

"If I were you... I'd follow my heart. I'd do what I want, but I'd make sure that what I do doesn't affect or trouble anyone else."

KhunYing Nara said seriously, looking into her daughter's eyes. She knew that when her daughter hit a dead end and couldn't think of anything she needed someone to guide her. It wasn't often that Akhira would speak out like this.

"Then I can't follow my heart."

"Why not?"

"Because it would make others uncomfortable."

"So what? Are you going to give up? I never taught you to be a quitter."

She said, amused by her daughter's uncertainty. It was rare to see Akhira like this; her daughter was competent in everything but seemed to be defeated by the doctor. Akhira just looked at her mother, admiring her intelligence. Even without explicitly stating what this conversation was about or who it involved, she was confident that the woman standing beside her understood perfectly....

"You know, some things take time."

Akhira sighed softly after hearing that phrase.

"How many times have you sighed now? Do you even realize?"

The aged hand reached out to ruffle her daughter's hair affectionately.

"Mom..."

"So, standing here all sad, it's because of Dr. Pleng, isn't it? Don't overthink it. If it were me, I wouldn't like you either."



“Huh?”

"What kind of person are you? You're arrogant, you have a stern face, and your words are unpleasant. Let me tell you, the people who approach Dr.Pleng are all polite, kind, gentle, attentive, enchanting, wealthy... so many."

“ ... ”

"If I were Dr.Pleng, I'd cut you from the list first. Besides having a good face that you got from me, umm what else is good about you? Nothing else..."

Stunned, Akhira could only stand there in shock. Was this really her mother?

"I think I better go to bed, and you too, or you might get sick again,"

She said, then walked back into the house, leaving the tall figure standing there, blinking in disbelief. It seemed like she just stood there to get nagged for no reason. KhunYing Nara walked into her room with a smile that made her husband ask.

"What's got you smiling like that?"

"Just amused by our daughter. Nothing, really. I just think she's adorable."

"What did she do this time?"

"Oh, come on, KhunYing?"

She replied to her husband with a smile. Her daughter was so charming; how could Dr.Panipak not like her? What she said earlier was just teasing. Akhira had more to offer than many others, and she knew it well. She also believed that the doctor who had made her daughter overthink things knew it, too. Akhira was different, therefore, even though she always had a stoic expression, who would know what was hidden beneath that indifference?

Today might be a bright morning for many, but not for Dr.Panipak. After all, she'd spent the night at the hospital. She slept there, woke up in the morning, showered, put on clothes she kept in her office, and continued working. Feeling unrested, she asked a nurse to make her some coffee, but after a few sips, she didn't want to touch it again. If you don't like something, you just don't, and that's not easy to change.

Today, she chose not to go downstairs as usual because she was certain that someone wouldn't be coming here anymore. She wasn't really waiting for anyone, but she told herself that her daily trips to the front of the hospital were just to get some fresh air and stretch her legs, nothing to do with anyone else.

"Wow, is that a doctor or a panda?"

Dr.Ninlaneen teased as she opened the door and found her friend, who had been here since last night.

"You look tired."

Dr.Plaifha added, causing the slender figure to touch her face slightly..

"Do I look that bad?"

"Not really. You're still pretty, but you look tired."

She assumed it was because the other had been working hard and sleeping little, hence the wornout appearance

"I told you not to overwork yourself."

"It's all right, Pha."

"How can it be all right?"

"Exactly, you should take care of yourself. What if you get sick?"

"Then you and Pha will take care of me."

"It should be Ms.Akhira who takes care of you. Ouch!"

After that comment, Dr.Ninlaneen was pinched by Dr.Plaifha, rubbing her arm and feeling guilty. The atmosphere quickly changed from cheerful to gloomy, much like the weather outside the hospital at the moment.

"Anyway, Pleng, don't overwork."

"Yes, Mother."

Panipak smiled at her two friends, who always looked out for each other no matter what before they went their separate ways to work. She leaned back in her chair, exhausted. She'd rested, but only for a few hours, and the place wasn't conducive to sleep. Now, she wasn't sure if she was more physically or emotionally tired. But what could be weighing on her heart?

When work was over, Dr.Panipak waited for the bus as usual. She regretted not letting her friend drive her because the rain that had been threatening since morning had been pouring for over half an hour with no sign of stopping. She waited a long time, but there was no sign of her regular bus, perhaps because she'd finished work almost two hours late, or maybe the bus was stuck in traffic and hadn't arrived yet.



As time passed, the heavy rain began to lighten, but it still fell persistently, annoying her. The crowded bus stop was now thinning out. Even though it was a bus stop, she didn't feel very safe. Buses passed by one after another, but there was no sign of hers. She couldn't call anyone for a ride because she didn't have anyone, and she didn't want to bother her friends. By now, they were probably comfortably bathing, lounging, or already asleep.

If she called, Akhira would surely rush out to meet her. She could only press her phone, scrolling back and forth. She periodically sent messages to her mother, all the while sighing wearily. Maybe she'd have to spend another night at the hospital. Even though the rain had eased off, it still annoyed Akhira considerably.

Knowing full well that she was a lead foot, she had to be extra cautious to avoid any harm to herself or others. On slippery roads like these, an accident could happen at any moment. She'd almost lost her brother to an accident once. Back then, Akhira was living abroad, hoping only for her brother's safety, until she finally received the good news that he was alright, though he needed a long recovery. Ever since she heard her mother crying on the phone, Akhira promised herself to take the utmost care because if anything happened to her, her family would be the ones most devastated.

The windshield wipers moved back and forth mechanically, giving the driver a clearer view. Even though she'd tried not to visit the hospital again, she couldn't help but look as she drove past. Her luxury car automatically slowed down, not just at the sight of the hospital, which her keen eyes often glanced at, but even at the bus stop sign. Akhira almost braked abruptly, but remembering the car behind her, she continued driving.

Her sharp eyes didn't leave the rearview mirror. Without wasting time thinking, she immediately pulled over to the side of the road, parked, and walked back to the spot she'd passed. It might've been a bit of a distance, but not too far to walk. It wasn't far at all for her.

"Why haven't you gone home yet?"

The calm voice tinged with displeasure made the slender figure turn around, only to see a taller figure slightly wet from walking in the rain.

She'd seen Akhira's car pass by not long ago, and all she could do was look down, pretending to be busy with her phone, forbidding herself from caring about that car. She was angry with herself for remembering her car so precisely. Even though it'd passed quickly, she knew it well, and she never thought the other would see her and come back like this.

"Ms. Akhira..."

"It's late. What are you waiting for?"

“ ... ”

"Don't you know it's not safe?"

The displeased tone made her start to get angry. Why did she have to scold her? Why did she have to speak so sharply? Dr. Panipak could feel her dissatisfaction, even if it wasn't much. She was just waiting for a bus. How could Akhira ask what she was waiting for? Who would ever want to wait for anything? She turned her face away, not wanting to talk to the person in front of her. Suddenly, she was angry with her, a person with a bad attitude.

"Hey!"

Before Akhira could finish the sentence, the slender figure quickly ran to get on the bus that had just arrived. Even though it wasn't the bus that went to her condo, it was better than talking to this person. Before the tall figure could follow, Dr. Panipak was already frustrated. She couldn't get off because the bus had already started moving. Why is she following me?

"Fare, please."

Said the ticket taker, and the sound of the money box clinking disoriented Akhira. The slender figure handed over the money after the ticket taker stood in front of her.

"Your fare, please."

"Ma'am, your fare."

The plump lady's voice grew louder with impatience.

"..."

"Hey, you."

"I don't have..."

"Ha, oh wow, you look good and are well-dressed, but you don't have just a little money to pay for the bus?"

Akhira could only look at her silently. She hadn't brought anything with her except her car keys as she'd rushed out to meet someone and hadn't thought she'd end up on a bus like this.

"Ah, what are you going to do!"

The ticket taker raised her voice again.

"Here, Ma'am."

The slender figure couldn't stand it anymore and handed over the money.

"That's it."

As soon as the ticket taker finished speaking, she walked to the front of the bus near the driver. Dr.Panipak could only look at the other person's face, which remained indifferent. Did she not carry any money at all?

Dr.Panipak couldn't tell what Akhira was feeling. In fact, she'd noticed other passengers preparing to pull out money to pay for her as well if she hadn't done it first.

A young man in a suit and tie nudged Dr.Panipak, who was swaying while standing, to take his seat. Initially planning to refuse, she sat down obediently when she heard he was about to get off. However, the person who said he was getting off never did. He just stood there holding the handrail close to her, making Akhira begin to feel annoyed.

"Excuse me."

A woman said, not only catching Dr.Panipak's attention but also causing Akhira to turn and look as well. The woman simply asked Akhira to sit in the empty seat next to her. Akhira, feeling sore in her ankle, sat down because she didn't know where the destination was since she'd never taken this bus before. She assumed Dr.Panipak was heading back to her condo. She tried to glance at the person sitting across from her but found it difficult because the man was standing in the way. She didn't understand why he had to stand so close when there was plenty of space available on the bus.

"There's plenty of space."

"What did you say?"

Akhira made eye contact with the man, who turned to look at her with a challenging expression.

"Nothing."

She said in her usual indifferent tone, but her demeanor was irritatingly provocative to the others.

"Oh, ok."

"When are you getting off?"

"Excuse me?"

"I wasn't talking to you."

Akhira snapped, her eyes flashing with irritation. The longer the man stayed, the more annoyed she became. Soon, the sound of the bell rang, and Dr.Panipak stood up.

"Excuse me."

Dr.Panipak said to the man before walking to wait near the exit door. This bus would turn onto another road before reaching her condo, so she had to get off and walk the rest of the way. After getting off the bus, she walked ahead without saying anything because the rain continued to pour down. The dark colored coat of the other person was gently placed over her head.

"You'll get sick."

"It's ok, you can cover yourself."

"I'm fine."

Akhira said, pointing to her wet head. Then, she walked with her in silence. I thought this kind of scene only happened in movies. Dr.Panipak held onto the other's jacket tightly, sneaking glances at that impassive face often. The displeasure she felt toward her had disappeared at some point, and she didn't even know when. All she knew was that she wasn't angry anymore.

The walk wasn't as scary as she'd imagined. She wasn't sure if it was because of the streetlights or because she had someone by her side. She felt lucky to get back just in time as the light rain turned into a heavy downpour again as soon as they stepped into the condo lobby.

"Dry yourself now, or you'll get sick."

She handed Akhira a white towel before hurrying to take care of herself. Dr.Panipak had noticed for a while that Akhira was starting to sneeze more frequently, likely due to her allergies acting up. Tissues were repeatedly used as Akhira sneezed nonstop, looking quite pitiful. Dr.Panipak, who had disappeared into the kitchen, returned with a cup of warm water for her guest.

"Did you bring your medicine?"

The person asked nodded slightly before pointing to the suit jacket she'd hung up, while the jacket's owner continued to wipe her nose. Dr.Panipak's slender hands searched briefly before finding the medicine she'd prescribed herself. Then, she handed it to the person who now seemed unlikely to stop sneezing. Initially, she'd planned to let her take her car back after they arrived.

But seeing her condition and considering the medicine she'd just taken, plus the heavy rain outside, she didn't seem to have another choice but to let her stay. If she sent her away, an accident would surely happen. She wasn't that heartless...

"The bathroom is in the right corner. Hurry up and take a shower; it's cold."

Dr.Panipak said and then immediately stood up. Akhira followed the doctor's instructions like a child, obediently listening to an adult. She could



only watch as Dr.Panipak's figure disappeared through the door to the guest bathroom.

She never thought that the kind of coincidences people often talk about would happen to her like this. They met even though it wasn't time Akhira would normally be there. When she worked late, Akhira worked late, too. There was always a reason for them to run into each other. She just realized that the world is indeed small.



Sunyanv

## 08. Friends Don't Do This To Each Other

The slender figure spent an unusually long time in front of the wardrobe, unsure which outfit to choose for the other person. Even though the clothes weren't very wet, it wasn't right to let her wear the same outfit. Finally, she found something suitable, a pair of long sweatpants she thought Akhira could wear, along with an oversized white T-shirt she'd accidentally bought in the wrong size and hardly ever wore.

She placed the clothes near the bathroom so the other person could easily see them before heading to the kitchen, thinking she should prepare something for her guest to eat. Dr.Panipak spent some time in the kitchen and when she came out, she saw the tall figure holding her own clothes, seemingly unsure where to put them.

"I'll wash those for you."

She offered.

"Thank you."

Dr.Panipak took the clothes before storing them away, sneaking a glance at the person now wearing her clothes. She looked good all the time, indeed. Even in such an outfit, she wouldn't look bad wearing them outside at all, even if the pants Dr.Panipak gave were a bit short. Well, it wasn't her fault Akhira was so tall; she thought this was the longest pair in her wardrobe.

"Make sure to dry your hair, and there's soup in the kitchen if you're hungry."

She said before walking away, leaving the tall figure alone. Akhira went to the kitchen after dealing with her hair until it was dry. The still warm soup was ladled into a clean white bowl. Akhira sat and ate quietly by herself, feeling her allergies start to improve. After finishing the soup, she took the bowl to wash it.

"You don't have to wash it; I'll take care of it."

Dr.Panipak said as she walked in and saw what was happening, but the other person didn't seem to listen.

"It's ok."

The tall one replied without looking back. Akhira was quite comfortable with such tasks, having done them often when living abroad. It didn't feel like a burden at all compared to other things. Akhira left the kitchen and, not seeing the host, chose to wait on the living room sofa instead.

"You can go to sleep in the room."

Dr.Panipak said after coming out of another room, seeing the other person sitting as if about to fall asleep at any moment. Akhira turned to look at Dr.Panipak, who was now in her pajamas, a simple outfit not much different from what she was wearing, making her look effortlessly cute.

Following her into the bedroom, Akhira found a neatly organized space, everything arranged orderly, just like the rest of the house. The wide white bed had a pillow placed in the middle as a divider, which made Akhira chuckle softly.

"What's funny?"

Dr.Panipak asked, noticing the laughter. Was there something amusing about her room?

"Are you sure?"

Akhira asked calmly, locking eyes with the slender figure standing not far away. The host stood still, deep in thought, well aware of what the question

implied. Dr.Panipak didn't answer, instead, she was deep in thought, asking herself over and over if she was really sure about letting the other person sleep in the same room with her.

"I'm sure. Friends can sleep in the same room. I don't mind."

She finally said.

“ ... ”

Seeing Akhira just smiling teasingly, Dr.Panipak spoke out of a desire to win the moment. The taller person's smile faded immediately, and the slender figure also paused, lips pressed tightly together. When the other person fell silent, not responding, Dr.Panipak realized she was making the atmosphere worse. After a long silence, the tall figure approached, causing her to feel uneasy with her demeanor.

"Are we really just friends?"

"Ms.Akhira."

"Do you usually call your friends 'Ms.'?"

"No, I don't."

"Then that means we're not."

"You are a friend... but we're not that close yet, so I address you this way."

"Really?"

The slender figure stepped back slightly as the other person moved closer, beginning to feel unsafe..

"Do friends usually do this?"

"Hey!"

The taller person, who was about to lean down for a kiss, stopped abruptly. She looked at the slender figure, turning her face away, raising both arms to create distance. Her delicate hands tried to push the other person away, stepping back to get away from her. In response, she wrapped her arms around her waist, pulling her closer. The more Akhira did this, the more Dr.Panipak resisted, hitting her shoulder because she felt unsafe from her touch.

Finally, Akhira let her go, seeing her eyes welling up with tears. Her trembling, sweet eyes and the tears that seemed ready to fall at any moment made Akhira feel even guiltier for her inappropriate behavior

"Sorry..."

Akhira whispered, reaching out to grab the arm of the one who seemed about to walk away. Seeing her glance back with furious eyes, she braced for the pain she expected to soon hit her own face. She closed her eyes as if accepting the blame for her actions, but nothing happened.

"Let me go."

Dr.Panipak said softly, increasing Akhira's restlessness.

"Pleng."

"Please, let me go..."

She spoke without looking at her. Akhira could only watch the smaller figure trying to pull away from her grasp until she finally let go, thinking she must be angry to avoid eye contact like this.

"Pleng..."

"I want to rest."

When she said that, Akhira had no choice but to comply. She watched the slender figure lying down on the bed before closing her eyes as if she didn't want to see her anymore. The taller figure lay down on the other side of the

bed, her guilt intensifying as she saw her move away, even though they were already far apart. Her actions were a clear answer to many questions.

Akhira could only gaze at the delicate back lying on the far side of the bed, worried she might fall off. Glancing at the clock, which showed it was very late, she quietly got up from the bed, walked around to the other side, and saw her peaceful face, already asleep. She adjusted the blanket higher as the room temperature grew lower, sighing softly at her own foolishness. She'd thought too little of herself and had done something inappropriate. Panipak must be very angry with her.

Soon, the lights in the room were turned off. Akhira grabbed a pillow before taking herself out of the bedroom, not wanting to make the other feel any more uncomfortable. It'd be too selfish to stay after such a shameful incident. The light from the outside room passed through before darkening again as the door closed softly and silently.

The slender figure opened her eyes in the darkness, looking at the closed door, feeling indescribable emotions. Although confused, she was still angry because Akhira had crossed a line with her and disrespected her. She wanted to slap Akhira's face to make her feel the pain she felt, but after hearing her apology and seeing her remorseful face, she couldn't do it.

Even though Akhira had angered her, she couldn't help but worry about her. No matter how big the sofa was, it wouldn't be as comfortable as a proper bed. Her condo was large, but it only had one bedroom; the other room had been turned into an office since she moved in. Otherwise, things wouldn't have come to this.

"It serves her right."

She muttered to herself, a reminder not to care about someone with offensiveness. She tried to close her eyes to rest, but sleep wouldn't come. Her sweet face was buried in the large pillow in confusion. Why did she have to feel soft hearted toward someone with such bad behavior?

The ringing at the door disturbed Akhira's sleeps considerably. It'd taken her almost until dawn to finally drift off to sleep, and now she was being

interrupted again. Rising from the long sofa, she stretched to relieve her stiffness and looked around.

Seeing no sign of the room's owner, she walked to the door. Before she could do anything, the person outside had already unlocked it and barged in without her being ready.

*Thud!*

A small figure who had dashed in after the door opened fell to the floor, having collided with Akhira's tall frame.

"Pot, my boy!"

A well-dressed man hurried in and picked up the small boy from the floor. At the same moment, a slender figure walked out. The little boy, crying, reached out for Dr.Panipak, seeking comfort. Akhira was left bewildered by the unfolding events.

"Please come in."

The slender figure said to her brother, who looked just as confused as Akhira, while she took the boy into her arms. Her brother must've been quite shocked to see a stranger in her room. She led them into the living room, the little boy snuggling against her shoulder.

"Well, Ms.Akhira, why don't you go take a shower?"

She suggested to the still person, who complied without hesitation. Dr.Panipak watched her brother's gaze follow Akhira with curiosity before turning to her with a questioning eyebrow raised. She could only sigh, it seemed this morning was destined to be a hectic one for her.

"Who's that?"

"That's Ms.Akhira."

"Akira."

The little boy echoed cutely, his mispronunciation not clarifying anything. The older sibling didn't press further and quickly got to the point of his visit.

"I need to leave my son with you for three days."

"Are you going out of town again?"

"Yes, they're rushing me over there."

Given the nature of his work, which was quite difficult, taking his son along would only lead tantrums that would prevent any work from getting done. Dr.Panipak understood: both her brother and sister-in-law worked in construction, a field too dangerous for children to be around.

"Is it too much trouble for you, Pleng? I'd leave him with our parents, but Pot refuses."

"It's okay, just three days."

"Thanks, I'm at my wit's end with him."

She nodded, knowing the little one was quite attached to her. If he wasn't with his parents, she was the only one he'd stay with without fuss. Babysitting wasn't an issue for her; it wasn't the first time, but it did complicate her own work.

"Sorry for barging in like that."

He apologized. He'd rung the bell for a while, but there was no sign of her, so he took the liberty of using his spare keycard to let himself in.

"It's ok. I was just getting dressed,"

She replied.

"Then I'll leave the little rascal with you. I have to hurry, or I'll be late."



He informed her before handing over a bag filled with clothes, necessities, and toys for the child. The father and son hugged goodbye, and Dr.Panipak saw her brother off at the door. The little boy waved without a fuss, happy to be with his favorite aunt.

Akhira came out of the bathroom, neatly dressed in the clothes Dr.Panipak had dry-cleaned for her earlier that morning. Drawn by the smell of food, she headed to the kitchen and saw the slender figure lifting the chubby child into a high chair. Their eyes met, Akhira's sharp gaze clashing with the boy's bright, innocent eyes, nestled in Dr.Panipak's embrace. The little face quickly turned away to bury itself in her shoulder.

"Auntie Pleng,"

The little one looked up and called out in a whiny voice.

"What is it, Sweetie?"

The little one did not respond; he just clung tightly to his beautiful aunt

"Ms. Akhira, come have some breakfast first."

She called out when she noticed the other person standing and watching. She invited her to join the breakfast she'd prepared... Even as Akhira began to eat; her young nephew still wouldn't let go of her. Perhaps because he wasn't used to being around strangers, he seemed a bit wary. It was slightly surprising since her nephew usually liked beautiful people, and Akhira was indeed very beautiful. But why was little Pot clinging to her as if he was possessive, just like when men would come near her?

After they finished breakfast, it was time for both of them to go to work. It'd been a long time since Dr.Panipak had ridden in her own car, with the taller woman driving for her. The car hadn't been used much, but it was always well-maintained. Even though she'd said she'd drive home to see her mother, that was a long time ago.

After that incident, she never wanted to drive again. Akhira couldn't help but wonder why Dr.Panipak had to take public transportation to and from

the hospital when she had her own car. But even though she was curious, she didn't pry.

"You can take my car if you need to."

She said when they arrived at the hospital, not knowing the other person had sorted out her car situation. Once they found a parking spot, the slender figure got out of the car clumsily, juggling her own bag, the little boy's shoulder bag, and the chubby boy she was carrying. Seeing this, Akhira offered to help with the bags, wondering how she'd manage the boy in the hospital since he seemed like a handful.

"Dr. Pleng!"

"What is it, Pum?"

"There have been a lot of patients since early morning."

The plump nurse hurried over to the doctor as soon as she arrived.

Dr.Panipak had already noticed that it was going to be a busy day.

"Just a moment, I'll be right there."

She replied.

"Ok, Doctor."

Dr.Panipak put her nephew down on the desk and started looking for her phone to call a friend for help. Initially, she thought of leaving her nephew with a nurse, but he was fussy and crying, so she decided to call a friend who had met Pot before and could help look after him. No answer. Whether she called Dr.Plaifha or Dr.Ninlaneen, no one answered her calls. She knew that they must be busy with their work, too. Otherwise, they would've picked up.

"You should go to work, Ms.Akhira, or you'll be late,."

She said, even though she was feeling overwhelmed. Akhira calmly checked her watch; it was still early, and she had plenty of time before work.

"I can take care of him."

She said, causing her to pause and look at Akhira. There was nothing in her expression to suggest she was joking.

"It's ok, I don't want to trouble you."

"My workplace is more suitable for children than a hospital."

Akhira said calmly, waiting for a response. Dr.Panipak felt torn, looking back and forth between her sullen nephew and the face of the woman offering to help.

"Pot, do you want to go with Ms.Akhira?"

She finally asked her little nephew, having no other choice since she couldn't look after him all the time and would need to ask someone else for help.

"Nooo, I'll stay with you."

Came the reply, along with more crying, making her feel even more burdened.

"You go ahead to work."

She said, but by then, Akhira had already picked up the little boy.

"Auntie Pleng! I wanna stay with Auntie Pleng!"

The little boy squirmed and kicked in the tall woman's arms, making Dr.Panipak worry he might fall.

"Ms. Akhira."

"If you indulge him too much, he'll become spoiled."

Akhira said flatly before bending down to pick up the little boy's bag.

"You go ahead; the patients are waiting."

Akhira said as Dr.Panipak watched the two people leave her room with unease. She knew all too well how headstrong her nephew could be. Even though the two had left the room, she could still hear the distant sound of her nephew's crying lingering in the air.



SunYanV

## 09. THE ARCH NEMESIS

*Watcharakitkun Corporation*

It was a workday that took many by surprise. Today, their boss didn't come alone but brought along an adorable little boy whose face was now streaked with tears. He sat sobbing on the long sofa in Akhira's office, having exhausted himself to the point of starting to calm down.

"Here are the documents. Ms. Akhira."

"Please bring him some snacks."

Akhira instructed her secretary, who had just entered, before turning to the little boy sitting with tears streaming down his face. The secretary glanced at her boss and nodded, having seen the child since the moment her boss had carried him into the room. He seemed quite a handful, but his cute face and fair skin made him adorable.

He must be the pampered child of some wealthy family, she thought. But which one? As far as she knew, were none of the Watcharakitkun daughters or sons were married yet... She shook off her curiosity and hurried to prepare the snacks as ordered by her boss.

Soon, she returned with cookies and a glass of milk, setting them before the little boy in his tiny suit, then left the room, offering an encouraging smile to the tear stained face. Akhira sighed softly; the child had been quite a handful, squirming and crying, giving her quite the headache. Having never had to take care of a child like this, Akhira was unsure how to handle him. She walked over to a moderately sized bag to see what was inside, guessing it'd contain essentials or perhaps toys for the child. After a brief search, she found what she needed.

A handkerchief. She walked over to the little boy on the sofa, kneeling to be at his level, sitting back on her heels, and began to wipe his face, which was quite pitiful.

"Where's Auntie Pleng?"

He asked between sobs, his mischievousness seemingly gone, perhaps because he was scared of the adult in front of him.

"I'll take you to her at noon."

She replied, continuing to wipe his face. Though not overly gentle, Akhira was careful enough not to hurt him. After cleaning him up, she handed him the glass of milk. His small hands could barely hold it. She took out some toys from the bag and placed them in front of him before returning to her desk to work.

As she worked, her eyebrows furrowed slightly when she noticed the small figure wandering around from the corner of her eye. Though she didn't look up she could tell that the little explorer had begun to survey her office.

Akhira watched the little figure repeatedly pass by her field of vision, showing no sign of stopping. He wandered left, then right, occasionally circling her desk, peeking at the window to view the scenery. Finally, he stood holding a robot toy in front of a tall glass cabinet in the room.

Akhira looked up from her documents, watching the little boy staring intently at something. His tiny neck seemed to strain as he looked up at the items in the cabinet, unaware that Akhira had approached.

"Do you want that?"

There was no response. The little one hugged his toy tightly, then walked over and plopped down on the carpet near the sofa as if he had non interest in conversing with the adult before him. Seeing this, Akhira could guess that the little boy wasn't pleased with her.

The items that had been on display in the cabinet were now placed on the coffee table where the little one was playing. The realistic sports car figure caught his attention as Akhira had anticipated, but even so, the child didn't think to touch or grab it, not even slightly.

"Take it."

She said to the small figure before sliding the car over. Akhira watched the little boy who was clutching his own toy, lost in thought. From what she knew, young children were usually excited by the toys they wanted. This sports car seemed to catch quite a bit of interest, so why was this good-looking little boy just staring at it without touching it?

"Don't you want it? The car doors can even be opened. Look."

She said, demonstrating what this toy could do. Little Pot watched with interest, but when Akhira handed it to him, he still didn't take it. Eventually, she gave up and went back to work. Even though it seemed like the boy wasn't interested in the toy, as soon as Akhira sat back down and pretended not to care, Pot put down his toy and started playing with the car, pushing it back and forth happily.

"Waaah!"

The small body was lifted from the ground, followed by a whining sound.

"I'm taking you to Auntie Pleng."

She said when she saw the little one resisting and about to cry, telling him they were going to see his aunt.

"Auntie Pleng."

And just as expected, the little one in her arms didn't resist anymore. He's really his auntie's boy.

"Auntie Pleng!"

A little voice called out from afar, a big smile on his face. Dr.Panipak's friends, who were waiting with her, couldn't help but smile, too. They greeted the newcomer with a nod. Akhira nodded back slightly before handing over the wriggling child to Dr.Panipak. She took her nephew into her arms, hugging him affectionately.

"Say hello to Auntie Pha and Auntie Neen first."

The little one looked up, waving his hand to greet the two doctors, as Dr.Panipak had told him.

"Come here, let Auntie Neen hold you for a bit."

Dr.Ninlaneen said. She opened her arms but was quickly rejected. Both Dr.Plaifha and Dr.Panipak laughed at the situation.

"Why won't you let me hold you today?"

Dr.Ninlaneen pretended to complain to herself.

"Maybe he's just missing Pleng."

Dr.Plaifha chimed in before ruffling the hair of the little one who was leaning on his beautiful aunt's shoulder, refusing to look up. They'd already heard about the morning's events from their friend. They sneaked admiring glances at the one who had brought little Pot.

Akhira was this nice, but why wouldn't their friend soften up to her at all? It was clear that this woman cared not only for their friend but for everyone around her as well.

"Let's go get something to eat; the little one must be starving."

Dr.Plaifha suggested, as their break time was limited. If they kept standing around, they'd be late getting back to work.

"Please join us, Ms.Akhira. It's on me today."



Dr.Plaifha said. Once they'd agreed on what to eat, the four of them along with the mischievous boy, headed to a nearby restaurant. This place was popular among the doctors because it was close to the hospital, within walking distance, and had a nice atmosphere and delicious food.

"Order whatever you'd like, Ms. Akhira."

Dr.Plaifhaa told Akhira, seeing that she was quiet and choosing to engage her in conversation. And her friend, well, she didn't seem to care at all. Akhira just nodded and thanked her, ordering only one dish for herself. The rest of the table was filled with dishes ordered by Dr.Panipak's friends, which surprised Akhira at how much these ladies had ordered.

"What a coincidence to see you here."

Someone greeted them as they were eating. The three doctors turned toward the voice. Dr.Ninlaneen rolled her eyes in annoyance. Coincidence my ass. It seemed more like this person had intentionally followed them.

"Do you need something, Dr.Krit?"

"Not at all, Dr.Neen. Aren't you going to invite me to join your table?"

"I was going to, but unfortunately, the table is full. Sorry about that."

Akhira sat quietly, listening to the exchange between Dr. Ninlaneen and the man who had approached them. From the tone of their voices, it was easy to guess that these two didn't particularly like each other.

"Too bad... And aren't you going to introduce me to your friend here?"

"This is Ms.Akhira, Pleng's guest."

Dr.Plaifha spoke up instead, as she herself was quite fed up with this man. Pretending to strike up a conversation, his real purpose was to see her friend. Feigning interest with various questions, did the other person realize how annoying he was? For months, this man had been pursuing Dr.Panipak, but there was no sign that the beautiful doctor was interested in the slightest.

"And who is this little one? So cute."

The man's thick hand reached out, hoping to touch the boy sitting next to the slender figure, but the little one dodged and climbed onto Panipak's lap instead. Dr.Plaifha and Dr. Ninlaneen chuckled quietly at the man's failed attempt.

"Sorry, he doesn't like strangers."

Dr.Panipak apologized.

"It's okay. So, Pleng, you should introduce me. I won't be a stranger."

The man insisted, as those sitting around almost wanted to gag at the look he was giving their friend. They silently urged Dr.Panipak to reject him, but how could she when she was so kind?

"Pot, say hello to Dr. Krit."

Instead of doing as told, the little one got up and hugged her tightly. The slender figure tried to peel the little nephew's hands away to face the waiting man but to no avail, as Pot clung to her

"Pot."

"Nooo!"

"What did I say, Pot?"

Dr.Panipak's tone became stern, as she didn't want others to think her nephew was ungrateful. Dr.Panipak got stern, and her nephew began to pout, looking like he was about to cry.

"It's ok, Pleng. Maybe next time."

The man said, choosing to back off when he saw the kid's reaction, even though he didn't want to. He actually didn't like kids, and the thought of a crying child was too much to bear.

"Sorry about that."

"No problem, I should go then."

"Good riddance."

Dr.Ninlaneen muttered under her breath, but everyone at the table heard.

"Neen."

The slender figure could only chide her friend. It was a good thing the man had walked away; otherwise, it would've been awkward.

"What, Pleng? Look, he made your nephew cry."

"Pot, please don't cry, Sweetheart."

Dr.Plaifha reached out to soothe her nephew. Dr.Panipak sighed at her nephew's petulance. From a tight embrace, as soon as the stranger left, the little kid squirmed out of the hug, now sulking at Dr.Panipak for scolding him. The little figure was set down on the sofa by Dr.Panipak, who continued to feed him, but the little boy turned his face away.

"Pot."

"Nooo!"

He shook his head, sulking at Dr.Panipak and disliking the vegetables he was offered.

"What would you like then, Pot?"

Dr.Panipak asked softly, realizing she was being given the silent treatment. The little hand pointed to a dish, a Tom Yum Kung, that Dr.Plaifha had ordered.

"You can't have that. It's spicy."

Dr.Panipak insisted, knowing she couldn't allow it. The sulking only intensified.

"More, Akhira!"

"Let him try just a little bit. It won't hurt."

Akhira said, and Dr.Panipak was displeased. Why did she always have to do things that upset her? A spoon with a tiny bit of soup was offered to Pot by the person sitting across from her. Dr.Panipak could only watch as her nephew tasted it, signing. The actions and words of the two were observed by Dr.Plaifha and Dr.Ninlaneen, but they pretended to focus on their food, ignoring the interaction.

"I told you it was spicy."

Seeing the weird look on her nephew's face, Dr.Panipak handed him water. After drinking, the little kid immediately moved off her lap and took his small self over to where Akhira was sitting.

"A-ki-ra,"

The small voice called out before Akhira picked up the little one to sit on her lap.

"Akira, this."

The chubby finger pointed this way and that. He probably came to Akhira because he knew he'd get what they wanted. If he was with Dr.Panipak, there'd be no way he'd get to try things like this. Akhira served different dishes for the little one to taste.

"Pot, come eat your meal,"

Dr.Panipak said, noticing that Pot was too busy fussing over Akhira, wanting to taste this and that, neglecting his own plate. The child didn't respond, just shook his head in refusal, dodging every attempt by the slender figure to feed him properly.

"Hand it over. I'll feed him."

Akhira said to the slender figure. It was a short sentence delivered in a calm voice, but it still made Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha blush. It seemed like the heavy burden during this lunch would fall on the tall figure who had to take care of the demanding kid. But Akhira handled it well. The image of the little kid being a handful, making it hard for Akhira to eat anything, was adorable to many, including Dr.Panipak

After lunch was finished, Dr.Panipak took the little one to tidy up before handing her nephew over to Akhira for the afternoon.

The quiet allowed Akhira to work more smoothly especially now that the little boy was sound asleep adorably wrapped in a small blanket on the sofa. It must be his nap time for sure, as he'd shown no signs of fuss since being picked up and even seemed a bit subdued, likely due to sleepiness.



"Pot, it's time for bed... little Pot."

Dr.Panipak called out, but there was no response. Then, she paused to watch her nephew, who was busy playing with his toy car.

"What are you playing with?"

She asked, sitting down on the floor next to him. She knew what he was playing with but was curious where this particular toy came from, as her nephew didn't own anything like it..

"A car."

"Where did you get it from?"

"Akira gave it to me."

The slender figure watched her nephew, who seemed quite fond of the car.

She reached out to affectionately ruffle his fluffy hair.

"You can't just call Ms.Akhira like that, you know,"

Pot must've remembered others calling her that and mimicked them. It wasn't wrong, but since Akhira was much older, it wasn't appropriate for her nephew to address her so casually. The little boy looked up at his aunt with curious eyes.

"You should say 'Auntie Akhira.'"

"Auntie Khira."

From Auntie Akhira, it became just Auntie Khira, as the full name was too long and difficult for the child. The slender figure smiled at the little one's cuteness, chuckling softly because it didn't sound much different from before. Akhira and Auntie Akhira.

"Don't like Auntie Khira."

"Hmm?"

She was slightly surprised, as the two seemed to get along to some extent, especially since her nephew didn't usually warm up to people so easily.

"Why don't you like her?"

"Auntie Khira likes looking at you. I don't like it."

The nephew's answer nearly floored her.

"Do you like Auntie Khira?"

The little boy got up and affectionately hugged his beautiful aunt's neck.

"No, I don't like her."

She replied while stroking his small back fondly. It seemed the young boy was satisfied with the answer and smiled brightly. Anyone who got too close to Dr.Panipak was considered an enemy by this little boy. She smiled at the mischievous kid before taking him to bed.

She knew all too well how possessive her nephew was, probably fearing she'd love someone else more than him. If she ever really got a boyfriend, this child would surely throw a fit.



SunYanV

## 10. GROWING FEELING

Today was another day Akhira had to bring the little boy to work. But unlike yesterday, the young boy came along willingly, even though he showed some reluctance at being separated from his aunt, typical for children.

"Auntie Khira."

The child's voice in her arms made the person carrying him raise an eyebrow slightly. Was he calling her aunt, or was it just his unclear pronunciation?

"What's up?"

"It's cold."

Akhira put the small boy down as they entered the office. She opened his backpack and took out a small blanket, wrapping it around him. The little figure bundled up and walked over to play on the sofa, just like yesterday.

Although he wasn't as fussy today, it was still a challenging day for Akhira.

Since it was a meeting day, she couldn't leave the little one alone in the room, and it didn't seem right to leave him with someone else, she had to bring him to the meeting with her.

Although the secretary kept an eye on him from a distance, the little boy wandered around the room, calling out to the tall woman sitting at the head of the table whenever he found something interesting.

Auntie Khira this, Auntie Khira that. Despite the slight chaos, no one complained or said anything because of the child's cuteness, and they even



got to see another tender side of the boss. The secretary couldn't help but watch the two as the child being carried was chattering nonstop, and the carrier was being a good listener.

She had the chance to take care of the child during the times when the boss had to do something important. Even though it was only for a short period, she could tell that the little boy was quite attached to her boss because she always had to answer the child's constant questions.

*Where's Auntie Khira going? Where's Auntie Khira? When will Auntie Khira come? I wanna see Auntie Khira.*

Not to mention the office, which now seemed to have turned into a playground, with pillows, blankets, and toys everywhere. By noon, the two would go out and then return a little after the afternoon. Whenever she brought documents for signing, she'd often find the little boy asleep on the sofa. If someone didn't know that her boss was single, they might think she had a child of her own.



The luxury car parked in front of the hospital as usual, before Panipak got in. The little figure smiled broadly, hugging his aunt tightly.

"I missed you, Auntie Pleng."

Dr.Panipak smiled at her nephew's sweet words. Surely, he wasn't trying to wheedle something out of her, right? She turned to look at the person driving before averting her gaze when she saw that she was looking at her. In truth, she still had unresolved issues with her, but because of the naughty little one, she'd almost completely forgotten about that. Since that day, she and the other party hadn't had a chance to talk properly.

"What have you been up to?"

She asked while fixing the little nephew's hair, which was quite messy at the moment.

"He just woke up."

Came the reply, not from little Pot but from the person driving.

"Has he been naughty?"

Dr.Panipak decided to ask the other party after being silent for a while, feeling somewhat guilty toward Akhira. Her own nephew, yet she had to rely on someone else to take care of him, not to mention the pick-ups and drop-offs like this.

"I'm not naughty."

The little boy quickly replied to his aunt, causing Akhira to chuckle slightly at the speaker's restless manner.

"Auntie Pleng?"

"Hmm?"

"Auntie Khira's place is so big. There's a long table and lots of people."

He was probably talking about the office, Dr.Panipak thought.

"I had milk and snacks."

"Was it good?"

The little boy nodded with a smile.

"The pretty lady gave it to me."

"The pretty lady?"

"Auntie Khira's pretty lady."

The person being talked about had to turn and look.

"My secretary."

Akhira clarified before turning back to focus on driving as before. She wasn't trying to hide anything, but the words the little boy used could lead to misunderstandings. Dr.Panipak didn't respond as if she hadn't heard what she'd said earlier.

"The pretty lady is kind. '

"Really?"

The young boy nodded in response before leaning against the slender shoulder, feeling a chill. Once the small voice was gone, silence fell inside the car until they reached the condo. Dr.Panipak could only watch the person getting out of the car, carrying bags full of stuff. Once inside the room, Akhira set down a large bag, and her nephew hurriedly rummaged through it with excitement. Dr.Panipak immediately realized who the items in the bag belonged to. However, what she didn't know was when the two had sneaked off to buy them.

Dr.Panipak could only watch her nephew, who seemed so happy, before heading into the kitchen. As she still had many things to prepare, she left the little boy with Akhira in the living room. She flinched slightly when she turned to find someone who had just walked in.

"I was just about to bring you some water."

"Thanks."

Instead of handing it over, she placed it on the table. Seeing Akhira lift the glass to drink, Dr.Panipak returned her attention to preparing the meal. Her delicate hands carefully diced the carrots into small cubes, but out of the corner of her eye, she kept watch on the other's actions. She noticed Akhira drank two glasses of water, and instead of focusing on the task at hand, her mind was preoccupied with her nephew's words.

"Did you take care of Pot yourself?"

"What?"

"I asked if you take care of him yourself."

The slender figure put down the knife and turned to ask the other person seriously.

"Yes."

"Really? Then why does Pot say about someone else?"

The taller one pondered what she'd heard. The "someone else" must refer to her secretary.

"Just left him with my secretary briefly."

"You let someone else take care of my nephew?"

"No."

"If you don't have enough time, then don't volunteer. It's unnecessary trouble."

Akhira stood still, watching the slender back of someone who seemed not to care anymore. She didn't know what she'd done wrong to warrant such displeasure. Perhaps she was upset that she'd left Dr.Panipak's nephew with someone else. Seeing that the other party had nothing more to say to her, Akhira walked back out. The once tidy living room was now cluttered with toys.

"Auntie Pleng."

The little boy called out with a clear voice as soon as he saw Dr.Panipak approaching.

"Pot, let's go take a bath."

Dr.Panipak picked up her nephew and took him to bathe, completely ignoring the person sitting with the child. Akhira sat amid the multitude of things, feeling a mix of emotions, unsure of what to feel first.

Everything between the two of them was confusing, and no matter what she did, it seemed wrong in her eyes.

The bathing robot. Not long after taking the little one to the tub, Dr.Panipak had to come back out because her nephew wanted the new robot toy to join him in the bath. She didn't know what it was like, but when her nephew asked for it, she had to go look for it. After searching for a while without finding anything that looked like a robot, Akhira. who was sitting there, had to ask.

"Looking for something?"

"A toy. Pot said it's a bathing robot."

Once she got the answer, Akhira handed over the item she was holding because it was what Panipak was looking for the toy the little boy wanted to take to the bath. Akhira remembered it well. The slender figure paused for a moment before taking the item without looking at the other's face.

"Well... I should go."

After speaking, the tall one stood up and walked out immediately, not waiting for a response because Akhira knew well that even if she waited... she probably wouldn't say anything.

The mission to bathe the kid was completed in no time. Dr.Panipak came out to prepare to place the dish on the table in the living room for the little nephew who was still not out of the room because he was being fussy, insisting on dressing himself, even though all that was left was to apply powder.

The little figure, dressed in superhero pajamas, paced back and forth, turning left and right, walking into the kitchen and then into the bedroom as if looking for something.

"What are you looking for?"

Dr.Panipak asked her nephew, seeing him walking back and forth restlessly.

"Auntie Khira. Where did she go?"

"Auntie Khira has left."

She said.

"..."

Upon hearing this, the little boy's face immediately turned sour. He climbed onto the sofa ignoring the toys that had once excited him so much. Dr.Panipak began to doubt whether her nephew's claim of disliking Akira was true or not... Though the room was completely dark, Dr.Panipak couldn't fall asleep. She held her nephew close, listening to his steady breathing, a sign that he was fast asleep. She sighed softly, puzzled why she was fretting over trivial matters. Why am I thinking of her...

Whenever she thought of Akhira's face, especially when she'd scolded her about her nephew, guilt washed over her. She shouldn't have let her emotions get the better of her. Even though she hadn't used harsh words, she knew her tone had likely hurt Akhira. She couldn't understand why she was so upset, especially since the other had been kind enough to help take care of little Pot and had done a good job. It might've been because of that one phrase that had irked her.

*'Auntie Khira's lady.'*



The morning sky wasn't as clear as it'd been on previous days. The gloomy clouds matched the atmosphere inside the car. Dr.Panipak sat quietly while her nephew clung to her, refusing to sit still. There was none of the usual lively chatter between Dr.Panipak and her nephew nor any conversation between the two adults.

"Could you stop at the coffee shop, please?"

As they neared their destination, Dr.Panipak decided to break the silence that had persisted throughout the journey. Although it wasn't much different

from other days, Akhira used to often ask her if she was okay or make small talk. Even if it was just a brief conversation, it made her feel more familiar with her.

But today, she chose to remain silent and didn't even look at her, which made her feel uneasy and frustrated. This might've been because of the incident the previous night when she had let her emotions slip..

Akhira didn't respond but still followed Dr.Panipak's request. The luxury car turned into the coffee shop, a place she frequently went to buy green tea for her.

"Oh, Dr. Pleng, hello!"

The shop owner greeted her with a smile as soon as she recognized the new customer. It'd been a while since the beautiful doctor had visited, and the owner beamed even more when she saw the cute little boy tagging along.

"He's so adorable."

She said, admiring the fair cheeked little boy in the doctor's arms.

"Pot, say hello to her."

Dr.Panipak prompted.

"Hello."

The little boy said, raising his hand in a traditional greeting, eliciting an even broader smile from the shop owner. Dr. Panipak noticed her nephew's subdued mood. Even though he did as she asked, Pot didn't seem as bright this morning.

"What would you like, Dr. Pleng?"

"The usual for me, please."

"Sure."

"And... I'll have a coffee as well."

Dr.Panipak added, glancing at Akhira's car still parked outside and deciding to order an extra cup of coffee.

"Here's your coffee."

She said, handing the cup to her after getting back into the car. She glanced at it briefly but didn't take it. Seeing this, Dr. Panipak chose to place the coffee cup down, feeling a surge of hurt, and turned her face away. It wasn't until the car stopped in front of the hospital that Dr.Panipak looked at her nephew, still sulking in his seat. Her brother had said he'd pick him up in the afternoon, so she decided to leave her nephew with Akhira for the half-day.

"See you, and don't be stubborn with Auntie Khira."

The delicate hand caressed the soft cheek of her nephew, unable to resist glancing at the other adult. Soon, the car moved away at a steady speed, and the slender figure could only stand and watch the vehicle leaving the hospital, with feelings hard to explain.

"What's up, little rascal?"

Akhira turned to talk to the little boy, who seemed unusually listless today. On any other day, if he wasn't crying, he'd be making a fuss in the car, calling for his Auntie Pleng. But today, he was just sitting quietly. Akhira reached out to touch the boy's forehead to check for a fever, sighing in relief when it wasn't as she'd feared. She knew that little Pot wasn't sick; otherwise, his aunt wouldn't have let him come like this.

Upon arriving at the company, Akhira carried the little boy as usual. Her sharp eyes caught sight of a coffee cup someone else had bought for her. In the end, she had to take the coffee with her. The tall figure sat the little boy down before looking over at the person sitting still because no matter what she did, the little boy didn't resign as if he wasn't a person but a doll. He looked like one, too, acting just as stiff.



Akhira didn't know why the little one had been so sullen since morning, nor did his aunt, Dr.Panipak. And probably no one knew that the little boy's behavior was because he felt slighted that Akhira had left early the night before....



Dr. Panipak looked up at the tall building in front, unfamiliar, before walking inside slightly nervously.

"Hello, how may I help you?"

The voice from behind the counter greeted her as soon as she approached.

"I'm here to see Ms. Akhira."

The two women behind the counter exchanged glances, surprised that a beautiful woman had come to see their boss.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No, I don't."

"Please wait a moment."

"Ok."

Dr.Panipak nodded and gave a faint smile. After waiting for a while, the employee told her to go upstairs to wait. From what she observed, she guessed that no one was answering the phone.

"Take the elevator, turn right, and you'll see the desk of the president's secretary."

That was what Dr.Panipak remembered clearly. The people downstairs said she could come up to this floor to contact Akhira's secretary, but when she got up, she found no one there. The desk she thought belonged to the secretary was empty. She looked at the closed door of the room, and from what she could see around, there were only two rooms on this floor.

Dr.Panipak was about to sit down on the sofa set up for guests but hearing the sound of a child crying from inside the room, she knew for sure it was Little Pot. Instead of waiting, she decided to enter the room immediately, even if it was impolite, because her nephew was inside, and she couldn't just stand by.

"Don't cry. I'll put some ointment on for you."

As she entered, Dr.Panipak saw and heard the sweet voice of a woman sitting down, bending over the knees of her little nephew, who was crying on the sofa.

"Ms.Akhira, are you back?"

The woman turned toward Dr.Panipak, thinking it was her boss, but paused when she saw it wasn't who she expected.

"Auntie Pleng!"

The little boy immediately called out as soon as he saw who had come. The boy ran to hug his aunt's legs affectionately before Dr.Panipak picked him up and held him close.

The secretary looked on in confusion, not knowing who this woman was or why she was in the room without permission. But seeing the boy call her so familiarly, she assumed she must be someone close, just as Akhira walked into the room at that moment.

The person who had just walked in was slightly startled to see someone else there. Dr.Panipak turned to look at Akhira, who seemed in a hurry, before glancing at the object in her hand and beginning to understand why her nephew had been crying nonstop. Dr.Panipak gently laid the little boy down on the sofa, then crouched down on her heels to examine him. Looking down, she immediately noticed blood oozing from Pot's knee.

"Auntie Pleng."

"Don't cry, my brave guy."

Dr.Panipak said soothingly as the small voice called out to her between sobs. Akhira handed her some medicine before Dr.Panipak began to tend to her nephew's wound herself.

"Go rest."

"Ok, please excuse me."

The secretary said. Even though Dr.Panipak was focused on treating her nephew, her ears were still tuned in to the conversation between the two. She shook her head slightly to dispel the distracting thoughts from her mind, she didn't need to pay attention to those two.

Before long, the wound was neatly taken care of, and the little one stopped fussing since it was now covered, and Auntie's gentle touch was almost unnoticeable.

"Have you eaten yet?"

Akhira asked, concerned, as Dr.Panipak wiped her nephew's face. She'd noticed that she'd called several times earlier but didn't answer because she was busy with the little one and had left her phone on the work desk.

"I wouldn't like to bother you."

"But Pot hasn't eaten yet."

"..."

"We can order something to eat up here."

She decided, seeing that she was letting her speak alone. Akhira made the decision herself, not knowing how long the doctor had for a break. Going out to find food would be a waste of time. Dr.Panipak could only watch her nephew walking around, wearing Akhira's suit as if he were playing the role of a big boss. But because the suit was too large, it dragged on the floor, and his small arms couldn't even come out of the sleeves. She looked at her nephew with a smile of affection.

"He ran and tripped in front of the elevator."

Akhira started the conversation, seeing that she was only watching the little boy. While waiting for the food, Akhira decided to leave behind any lingering resentment and start fresh.

"Was he being naughty?"

She asked, turning to her with a small smile that made Akhira smile back.

"His aunt is probably naughtier."

She replied with a chuckle, but she didn't respond and chose to change the subject instead.

"The coffee this morning... Did you drink it?"

She asked without looking at the other person, not sure if it was because she wanted to watch her mischievous nephew running around the room or because she was afraid of the answer.

"It was good."

"I thought you might throw it away."

"I'm not like you."

Akhira replied softly, prompting Dr.Panipak to look up. She pursed her lips slightly as she began to understand the other's feelings. She'd been secretly hoping for a while to hear her response about the coffee she'd bought for her. Relieved to know that Akhira hadn't thrown it away, she couldn't imagine how she would've felt if the answer hadn't been 'It was good.

"I'm sorry."

"For?"

"For the green tea you'd ever bought for me."

Dr.Panipak turned to look into the other's eyes seriously. She'd wanted to apologize for this for a long time, but due to various reasons, she hadn't had the chance. But today, she wanted her to know that she also felt guilty about what had happened.

"It's ok..."

Akhira smiled faintly before hearing a knock on the door. The food they had ordered just a few minutes ago must have arrived. The little boy quickly ran after the tall one, excited by the arrival of so many things-mouth-watering food and cute, tempting snacks. The three of them began eating amid a bit of chaos, as the little troublemaker wouldn't sit still, leaving the two adults quite exhausted.

By the time they finished feeding the boy, the afternoon had slipped by. Dr.Panipak glanced at the clock before pulling out her phone to check her messages. She was here today because she'd taken a half-day off from work, and on top of that, she had to prepare to send her mischievous little charge back to his brother. So, there was no rush, just waiting for her brother to arrive.

"I can drop you off."

"No, it's ok."

Akhira immediately offered upon noticing the slender figure, constantly checking the time, concerned that she might be late for work. But the other party had to speak up, mentioning that she'd taken a half-day off.

Dr.Panipak chose to wait here for her brother, who had said he'd arrive by the afternoon. But time passed, and he still hasn't shown up, prompting her to make a call.

[Pleng, I'm probably going to be late into the evening.]

Dr.Panipak was about to nag her brother, but he hung up first. All she could do was sigh. Why did her brother have to be like this? If he'd told her from

the start, she wouldn't have sat waiting in someone else's office like this. It felt as if she was keeping watch over Akhira at work..

"Auntie Khira!"

"What's up?"

"Look, Auntie Khira."

The little boy ran over to the tall one who was working and presented something. Dr.Panipak could only watch the scene with a smile. It was hard to believe her nephew was so attached to Akhira. He said he didn't like her, but ever since she'd been here, she'd heard her nephew call out for Akhira time and again until, finally, sleepiness set in.

There was nothing else, but this child was ready to run out of battery in the afternoon. The little one climbed onto the sofa, with the aunt not bothering to help as it seemed the little monkey could manage on his own. Then the small figure lay down, resting his head on the lap of his beautiful aunt, covered with a small blanket that had been brought out.

Akhira glanced at the two of them before returning to her work. The tall figure could only shake her head at herself. Just having the doctor here with her like this was enough to make her happy. She'd never imagined before that she could find joy in such simple things.

As time passed, Dr.Panipak had several opportunities to see Akhira's secretary. When there were documents to be signed, she noticed that the secretary was quite beautiful.

It wasn't that she disliked her, as the other woman hadn't done anything to her, but she couldn't quite explain the odd feeling she got whenever this woman entered the room. What was she unhappy about...?



SunYan

## 11. EMOTIONAL EMPACT

By the time the little one was returned to the embrace of her parents, it was already dark. The three of them decided to spend some time at the mall, treating the nephew to some snacks and shopping while waiting. The little boy fell asleep from exhaustion, and he was handed over to Dr.Panipak's older brother.

Dr.Panipak gently stroked the little one's head with affection, knowing she'd miss him when he was gone. Before her brother took his child home, she turned and smiled at the woman standing behind her. Akhira returned the smile, albeit faintly.

"Let's go home."

The tall one spoke softly, prompting Dr.Panipak to nod in agreement.

"Need help?"

"Do you know how?"

Dr.Panipak looked at the person who had followed her into the kitchen. The taller one shook her head slightly before admitting she didn't know how to cook Thai food.

"But I can chop vegetables."

Dr.Panipak pondered for a moment before stepping aside to let Akhira take over the vegetable prep while she attended to the soup and seasoning. Her sweet gaze fell on the taller one diligently chopping vegetables on the cutting board. Akhira's long-sleeved shirt seemed to bother her, especially when it came close to the food.



"You should roll up your sleeves."

Akhira stopped immediately upon hearing her request, trying to fold her sleeves without putting down the knife. This caused Dr.Panipak to worry until she stepped in to fold Akhira's sleeves for her. Akhira paused, surprised by her gesture.

"The knife is for chopping vegetables, not for your arms."

She teased before turning her attention elsewhere. Akhira watched the petite figure bustling around, preparing various things, and continued chopping the remaining vegetables with a slight smile on her fierce face. How could I let go when Dr.Panipak is this adorable..

"Done."

She announced to the busy figure at the stove. The taller one could only watch as Dr.Panipak deftly added ingredients to the pot. If Akhira didn't know she was a doctor, she would've mistaken her for a chef for sure. Dr. Panipak sat across from Akhira, surprised at herself for sitting down to a meal at this hour. This wasn't like her at all, and she didn't need to cook for anyone... Yet here she was.

"Aren't you tired of it?"

"About what?"

Akhira looked up, unsure what she was referring to.

"Chasing after me, even though I've already told you."

"And you? Aren't you tired?"

Silence fell on Dr.Panipak, who had been the one to ask the question. Right... Is she tired? When Akhira noticed her silence, she spoke up, putting her spoon down and meeting her gaze seriously.

"I'm not."

“ ... ”

"And I won't be rushed."

"Will you wait for me forever, even though.."

"Even though what?"

"Even though I might never... never..."

"I told you I won't be rushed."

Akhira interrupted, knowing the words she was about to say. It was ridiculous how she dreaded the words that might come from Dr.Panipak's mouth, even though she'd prepared herself.

"Ms. Akhira..."

"There's no rush... I have all the time in the world for you, or until..."

“ ... ”

"Until you find the right person. If that day comes. I'll let you go."

Her serious gaze held no trace of jest, and Dr.Panipak knew that what Akhira was saying was true.

"And don't think about finding someone just to fool me because I'm not stupid. "

She said it with a light-hearted tone, smiling as if she knew her all too well. The plan to pretend to have a boyfriend to make her give up was immediately dismissed as an option. Dr.Panipak chuckled lightly, amused that she'd read her like a book as if she'd been sitting on her head. After they finished with the meal, Dr.Panipak told her guest she could leave, but Akhira refused to go. She stayed to help her clean up the room and even washed the dishes until they were spick and span.

"You should go now. It's late,"

Dr.Panipak told the person who just stood in front of the door, refusing to leave.

"Lock the door properly."

"I will."

"See you tomorrow."

"Okay."

The tall one glanced back briefly before finally walking out of the room, with the door slowly closing behind her. Even though Akhira had been out of the room, she didn't move away, just like the person standing inside the room. Dr.Panipak watched the small screen displaying the image of the person outside with interest. A small smile appeared on her beautiful face, unaware that she was smiling at the other one. The beautiful doctor tilted her head slightly when she saw that the person outside was just standing there, smiling, unwilling to leave.

*'Are you crazy?'*

Dr.Panipak muttered to herself softly. Anyone seeing Akhira right now would think she lost her mind, standing there smiling like that. She saw that the other party took out her phone and started tapping it. She couldn't help but wonder who she was talking to. But her curiosity soon vanished when she heard the notification sound of an incoming message, prompting her to pick up her phone and check.

[Akhira: Forgot to say goodnight.]

Dr.Panipak shook her head gently, laughing, before walking back to the door once more. However, she found no one there and chose to reply with a message.

[Panipak: Drive carefully.]



It was a morning without the troublemaker, but Akhira still came to pick up the doctor at her condo. It was quite subtle, as Dr.Panipak usually went to work by herself, and Akhira only had the right to pick her up for the return trip. Initially, she allowed Akhira to pick her up because of her nephew, she didn't want her nephew to struggle with public transportation and throw a tantrum.

But now that her nephew had gone back, she didn't understand why she still allowed Akhira to pick her up. The slender figure turned to look at the driver. She observed carefully. Today, Akhira was dressed nicely as usual but not as formally as on previous days, which made her curious.

"Aren't you working today?"

As soon as Akhira heard the question, she nodded slightly in acknowledgment. After that, there was no further conversation, but neither of them felt uncomfortable.

"Will you come with me?"

Dr.Panipak turned and spoke to the puzzled person. Nevertheless, Akhira agreed to get out of the car and accompany her quite easily, only being able to follow the slender figure quietly into the hospital.

"Good morning, Dr.Pleng."

"Good morning. Do we have any patients this morning?"

"Not yet."

"Then, could I have Ms. Akhira's medical record, please?"

"Sure thing."

The nurse quickly complied with the doctor's request. Akhira, who had come along, heard the entire conversation but still didn't understand why the doctor needed her medical history.

"Here you go, Dr. Pleng."

The practical nurse said, handing the documents to the beautiful doctor. She couldn't help but glance at the tall woman sitting in the room. Akhira now sat in the doctor's office, watching the doctor flip through the documents for a while without saying anything.

"Let's do a thorough check."

Panipak said after a moment of silence, indicating that she was going to perform an allergy test to determine what the patient was allergic to.

"Besides dust, have you noticed anything else you're allergic to?"

"No."

"Nothing at all?"

"Well... maybe I'm allergic to doctors..."

Akhira pondered for a moment before responding, but the answer made Dr. Panipak pause, as did the assistant nurse who was still standing there, blushing as if she were Dr. Panipak herself, prompting the slender doctor to give a gentle, reprimanding look.

"I am serious, Ms. Akhira."

"I'm not joking."

Dr. Panipak bit her lip gently. This person was getting on her nerves again. When she looked at the practical nurse, she saw her clasp her hands tightly, trying to suppress a smile that threatened to burst forth.

I'm going crazy. After that, Akhira didn't get a chance to say anything else as the doctor began to examine and test her without giving her the opportunity to ask or refuse anything. The doctor then busily scribbled notes on a piece of paper.

"All done. Your allergy symptoms will improve if you exercise."

Dr.Panipak finally said, placing the file down and locking eyes with the tall one who had been staring at her earlier.

"Worried about me?"

"As a doctor, I'm concerned about all my patients."

After giving that response, Dr.Panipak glanced briefly at the person across from her. Her heart had been racing ever since she heard her question. She was surprised at herself and wondered why her heart was beating so fast all of a sudden.

Akhira looked at the face of the person who had averted her gaze, smiling faintly. Although it wasn't the answer she'd hoped for, it wasn't too bad for now. At least she hadn't been outright rejected.

Dr.Panipak let out a small sigh of relief, feeling more at ease now that she was no longer in the room with the troublesome patient. She walked with Akhira to the elevator, even though it wasn't necessary. Her beautiful eyes followed the back of the woman entering the elevator, filled with mixed emotions before she turned to meet her gaze once more.

"I've got to go now."

Akhira said. The slender figure didn't respond, just offering a small smile in acknowledgment. Even after the elevator doors had closed, Dr.Panipak remained standing there, watching the numbers decrease with confusion.

She was unsure of her feelings, wanting to ask Akhira where she'd go if she wasn't working today and if she'd come to pick her up in the evening. Yet another part of her thought it wasn't her business to care.. And why should she care about someone else's life? She truly didn't understand.

It was a holiday that seemed more lively than usual at the Ananwakun residence. Daughter, son, daughters-in-law, and a little grandson had all gathered at the family home, bringing smiles to the elders' faces all day. It wasn't easy for the family members to have the same day off as today.

"Where's Auntie Khira?"

No one could count how many times little Pot had called out for Akhira from his aunt. The aunt didn't know how to react as everyone in the house openly stared at her, forcing her to excuse herself from the dining room.

The four adults watched her leave as she claimed that she needed some fresh air. Her mother just shook her head slightly, her face full of a knowing smile. She didn't know when her grandson had become so attached to or familiar with the person he called Auntie Khira, but she thought it was a good thing.

"Who is Auntie Khira?"

The family head, who had no idea who his grandson was calling for, was left puzzled. He couldn't ask his daughter as she'd already left, and when he turned to his wife, he only got a smile in return.

"Why didn't you bring this Auntie Khira along if your nephew wanted to see her?"

A voice from behind startled Dr.Panipak, who shot a glare in response. But her brother was unfazed, shrugging before sitting down on a chair.

"Aren't you going to sit?"

"No."

"If you have a girlfriend, you should bring her home."

"I don't have a girlfriend."

"Then what about Pot's Auntie Khira?"

silence... No answer came from her, who seemed like a statue in the garden.

"I should get inside,"

She said, a statement that didn't leave room for her brother to ask anything further. She walked back into the house, leaving her brother to enjoy the evening breeze alone, as she didn't want to answer any more questions, questions she couldn't even answer herself.

After going upstairs to clean up and prepare for bed as planned, she found herself unable to sleep. Even with her eyes tightly closed, her mind was too active, and she was too aware of her surroundings to fall asleep.

Dr.Panipak pushed herself up from the bed, blaming the whistling sound of the air conditioner for her sleeplessness. Her sweet eyes glanced at the unit attached to the wall, but her gaze inadvertently caught sight of the slim mobile phone lying on the bedside table. She began to doubt what was truly keeping her awake. Her slender fingers aimlessly scrolled on the phone screen.

*'Fine, just no call.'*

She muttered before shutting off the communication device and tossing it carelessly onto the bed as if the small phone had somehow offended her.

*'I'm not waiting at all.'*

She grumbled, exhaling a sigh. Today, she hadn't seen the person her nephew kept calling for because it was a holiday. She'd spent time with her family and sent a few messages, and the conversation ended when the other party asked if she could call her.

When Panipak replied that she was busy, she read the message and didn't respond. This irritated her. She was annoyed that Akhira read and didn't reply, annoyed that she didn't call, and irritated at herself for obsessing over it to the point of losing sleep.

The slender one woke up feeling far from refreshed due to her late night or, to be more precise, her sleepless night. Panipak forced herself out of bed, even though she didn't want to.



But when she saw the clock on the bedside table showing that she'd overslept, she decided to get up and wash her face. She was puzzled why her mother hadn't come to wake her.

Chatter drifted from the living room, causing her to frown as she walked down. It was true that on holidays her family would be together, but it shouldn't be so lively and loud. Seeing it with her own eyes confirmed her suspicion. Besides her family, there were guests.

"Oh, Pleng!"

The call made everyone turn to look at her. When she saw those sharp eyes, Dr.Panipak's face was a mix of emotions. She quickly composed herself and greeted the elders sitting next to her mother. She looked at the tall figure playing with her nephew with a neutral expression showing no emotion, though inside, she felt anything but calm.

"Your siblings are in the kitchen, Dear. The foods should be ready soon."

Phimwilai told her daughter, who seemed at a loss upon seeing the new guests. She understood; it was surprising to have guests on a family holiday, but they weren't exactly strangers.

"Then I'll go take a shower."

Dr.Panipak said, immediately turning to leave. Phimwilai watched her go, thinking that her daughter was probably feeling embarrassed to meet someone else while still in her pajamas.

If anyone was to blame for her daughter's embarrassment, it was herself for not informing her that the Watcharakitkun family would visit today.

The two elders smiled fondly at Dr.Panipak's charm, glancing at someone who was busily engaged with the lively nephew, who seemed quite taken with his new aunt. Akhira smiled slightly when she saw Dr.Panipak's demeanor.

It wasn't that she found it funny to see her in that state, but rather that she looked adorable in her sweatpants and white short-sleeved T-shirt, her hair slightly messy from just waking up, which made her even more charming.

"So, this is your Auntie Khira."

Her sister-in-law's voice rang out as soon as Dr.Panipak entered the kitchen after taking a shower.

"She's not mine... she's Pot's."

"Oh, really?"

"..."

"Then it seems our son has a new aunt."

Her brother commented. Dr.Panipak could only roll her eyes at the couple's teasing. They really were a perfect match.

"Where's Dad?"

Dr.Panipak asked as she sat down at the dining table, realizing something was missing. From morning until now, she hadn't seen her father at all.

"Your dad has been out to play golf with Mr.Akhin since morning, Dear."

Since morning, everyone had come to her house.. It was a leisurely brunch, the table filled with chatter and laughter from both children and adults. Only Dr. Panipak seemed quieter than usual, speaking little and answering briefly until they finished their meal.

The slender figure sat at a long white bench, taking a deep breath of the late morning air in the front garden under the shade of a large tree that was cool and refreshing. Looking out, the bright sunlight was everywhere, but the breeze made it feel even cooler under the tree shade.

The sound of footsteps and movement seen from the corner of her eye made Dr.Panipak aware that someone had come to sit beside her without needing

to look.

A faint perfume scent wafted to her, confirming the identity of the person next to her. She was annoyed with herself for remembering the scent of this woman's perfume. Was it because she had a good memory, or did she pay too much attention? But then again, it wasn't surprising to remember, considering she came to pick her up and drop her off almost every day. It'd be strange if she didn't remember....

"You've put on makeup?"

The greeting made the addressed turn with a look that clearly showed her displeasure before she turned her face away.

"Why do you ask?"

Was it because she found her bare face amusing? She never cared much about going without makeup and never minded what others thought. But with this person, it bothered her. Since seeing her in the living room, she had to admit she was startled and wasn't ready to meet people. She claimed not to care, but deep down, she knew it wasn't true.

"Nothing... I just thought... you're cute without makeup, too."

“ ... ”

Besides the sound of the wind and rustling leaves, there was silence, except for the sound of her own heart beating like a drum set, fast enough to startle her and make her want to check her own pulse.

"You!"

Her heart, already beating irregularly, had to work even harder when the tall figure suddenly lay down with her head on her lap without warning.

"Sleepy..."

"Then go to sleep properly."

"Just a nap."

"Get up, Ms.Akhira, right now."

"..."

"Don't sleep right after eating. It's not good for you."

Intending to protest, Dr.Panipak fell silent when the other person closed her eyes, seemingly determined to fall asleep. The thought of scolding her vanished when she saw her face up close, looking more exhausted than usual, making her relent.

"You'll get acid reflux."

"Hmm..."

The last sentence seemed more like she was talking to herself than to the person lying down. Dr.Panipak pursed her lips, annoyed at the person who seemed to be sleeping comfortably. She muttered softly, but the other could still hear. When she spoke seriously, she got silence in return. So annoying...

What was meant to be just napping turned into actual sleep for the tall one. Her breathing was steady, making Dr. Panipak realize the person using her lap as a pillow was now asleep. She'd never looked at her face this closely before.

Her face seemed perfectly made in every detail, making her wonder how many people wanted to see Akhira's face up close like this. And who would be the one chosen to see her face up close every day? Just thinking about it felt strange.

Dr.Panipak quietly watched the sleeping one, her slender fingers gently smoothing the furrowed brow between Akhira's eyes. Seeing it almost touching, she did this until Akhira's sharp face returned to normal.

"What kind of person frowns in their sleep?"

Complaining as usual, she didn't know what the other person had to think about or what she'd been through every day. But since Akhira chose to rest, she wanted to let her truly relax, so she allowed the tall one to use her lap as a pillow without any object.

"Auntie Pleng."

The cheerful voice of a little child made Dr.Panipak. who was sitting, turned to look. She couldn't get up to greet her nephew because the big figure was lying on her lap.

"Pot, don't run."

She told her nephew, who was running recklessly toward her. Luckily, the ground was grass, so she wasn't too worried. She wasn't sure if he was coming to see her or his Auntie Khira. The noise and slight movement from Dr.Panipak made Akhira wake up. The tall figure sat up groggily just as the little boy tried to climb up and sit between them.

"Auntie Pleng."

"Yes?"

"Snack time."

Dr.Panipak raised an eyebrow slightly. After some questioning, she learned that her mother had finished making sweets and was waiting for them to come inside.

"Ouch!"

Before they could go anywhere, Dr.Panipak, who was about to get up and pick up her nephew, suddenly sat back down. Akhira was just as startled by the sudden cry but then realized it was probably her fault. From being worried, she started to smile with amusement, earning a big glare from the slender woman.

"Let me carry."

The stern look she gave her intensified when Dr.Panipak shot her an annoyed glance Akhira fumbled a bit before looking at the little boy and clarifying...

"I mean, carry him."

After saying that, Akhira quickly carried the little one into her arms, confirming her words, and extended her hand to the other. But Dr.Panipak, being herself, wasn't one to easily accept help from others. No way.. The slender one massaged her thigh for a moment before standing up on her own.

Although she managed to stand, she was still unsteady. Seeing this, Akhira took her hand without asking, pulling her close to herself, even while holding the little boy.

"Sored?"

"..."

Knowing she wouldn't get an answer, especially with the beautiful doctor looking so grumpy, Akhira still wanted to ask, still wanted to talk.

"Sorry."

Akhira's soft apology made Dr.Panipak, standing beside her, turn to look. Her eyes were serious without a hint of teasing. She immediately knew she meant it. In truth, she wasn't really angry. She didn't know why she was upset with her, maybe because she ignored her messages since last night.

"I'm sorry, Auntie Pleng."

The little boy's voice broke the silence adorably, making Dr. Panipak smile. Her nephew was so cute it was almost unbearable. When she glanced at the face of the one holding her nephew, she felt even more annoyed because

Akhira seemed quite amused by Pot's words. Just a moment ago, she'd felt guilty. This crazy... Not wanting to prolong the conversation, the one who

was starting to feel better quickly walked into the house, leaving the tall figure and the little boy behind without a second thought.

"Auntie Pleng, wait for me!"

When her nephew called out, Akhira had to hurry after Dr. Panipak into the house with a smile.. Now, in Akhira's mind, there was only one word... adorable... Adorable, both the aunt and her nephew.



SunYanV

## 12. The Unexpected Incident

Akhira spent the entire day at Dr.Panipak's house, feeling almost as if it were her own place and family. The ones who seemed to be the happiest were undoubtedly the mothers of both families, who chatted away so enjoyably that they lost track of time. Before they knew it, the heads of both families, who had been gone since morning, had returned. This meant it was time for everyone to part ways.

"Look, my little grandson."

Everyone looked affectionately at the chubby little boy of the house, who was now sound asleep in Akhira's arms. The grandfather, seeing this, couldn't help but wonder. Normally, his little grandson wouldn't be close to strangers and wouldn't care about anyone other than his father, mother, and aunt. Akhira handed the little boy back to his father, and a small groan of protest sounded as he felt like his sleep was being disturbed.

"Be careful, or he'll wake up."

Dr.Panipak whispered softly. If the boy was woken from his comfortable sleep, he'd cry hard, and it'd take a long time to soothe him. Everyone in the house knew this well, so she didn't want that to happen.

"Ugh..."

Before she could finish her sentence, the moment the little kid was in his father's arms, he opened his eyes. The whole family braced themselves for the impending cry. But then....

"Auntie Khira..."



Little Pot mumbled sleepily, looking around for Akhira. Many were surprised and confused that the small boy wasn't throwing a tantrum. Though he did whine a bit, it wasn't as bad as they expected.

"Auntie Khira is leaving now."

The father told his son, turning him so he could see Akhira clearly. The boy's big, bright eyes stared at the tall figure before turning away. Then, suddenly....

"Waaah!!"

Suddenly, the little one burst into tears, leaving the adults puzzled by the unfolding events. The little boy struggled to get out of his father's arms, making onlookers nervous that the boy might fall. Dr.Panipak, sensing trouble, stepped in to hold the little one, who stopped struggling but continued to cry inconsolably. He buried his face in Dr.Panipak's chest, refusing to show his face to his grandparents or anyone else.

"This child..."

Phimwilai spoke with a tone that wasn't too serious. Dr. Panipak just shook her head wearily, knowing that if her nephew continued like this, he might develop a bad habit. But since he was the first grandson, the whole family doted on him and often indulged him. Whenever he didn't get what he wanted, he'd throw a fit. They all knew it, but out of love, they didn't want to punish him. They'd have to gradually adjust his behavior.

"Why are you crying? No one has done anything to you."

Dr.Panipak said softly, her slender hand soothingly stroking his back. She didn't understand why the little one was suddenly so upset.

"Where's Auntie Khira."

Tears streaked the little face as he sobbed, eliciting sympathy from onlookers. Dr.Panipak exchanged a glance with Akhira for a moment before

handing the little one over to her. She couldn't help but smile at her nephew's behavior.

She'd noticed twice now that whenever Akhira left, little Pot would immediately become sulky. And today, it was clear just how attached her nephew was to Akhira; just mention of her leaving was enough to set off a tantrum. Even though he claimed not to like Akhira...

Because of the youngest's tantrum, Akhira had to stay and comfort the little nephew of the house a while longer. Meanwhile, Mr.Akhin and KhunYing Nara had already left for home, as it was getting quite late.

"Are you leaving tonight, Pleng?"

"Yes, Mom."

Her mother was concerned, wanting her to stay another night and leave tomorrow. But she didn't say it out loud, knowing her daughter would refuse.

"I'll have your brother drive you home."

"It's okay. He's probably asleep by now. Besides, he drank today, so let's not have him drive."

She spoke while stroking her nephew's back, who was now resting on Akhira's shoulder. It looked like he'd fall asleep soon. The little boy sucked on his baby bottle contentedly, being held and comforted by his favorite aunts. How could he not feel at ease?

"But I think..."

"I'll drive her myself."

Akhira interrupted the mother-daughter argument by volunteering to drive

Dr.Panipak home. This seemed like the best solution for both sides. Phimwilai turned to her daughter, waiting for her response.

"Okay,"

She replied simply but clearly. The older woman beamed with a smile, surprised at how easily her daughter agreed. She must've missed something.

"Then, Zo, please take care of her."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Akhira responded in a calm but firm tone, which reassured the older woman that her daughter would be safe.

By the time they reached the condo, it was already quite late. Akhira, who had been showing signs of drowsiness throughout the drive, was invited by Dr.Panipak to come up and rest.

Dr.Panipak herself didn't understand why she was being so lenient with the other one.

"Didn't I tell you not to take allergy medicine if you're going to drive?"

She muttered, though it was pointless. Akhira was already slumped against the sofa, not responding. She seemed even more sluggish than she'd been while driving. Exhausted from dealing with her nephew all day and then driving, Akhira looked like she could fall asleep at any moment. Adding the allergy medicine only made her more drowsy. Dr.Panipak sighed, looking at the woman half-sitting, half-lying on the sofa in an uncomfortable position.

"Ms. Akhira."

"..."

"Ms. Akhira."

"Hmmm."

"Rise and go lie down properly,"

Dr.Panipak nudged her arm gently. She'd initially thought of sending her guest home to rest, but seeing her like this, she couldn't let her leave, worrying an accident might happen.

"Where should I sleep?"

Akhira stood up obediently, asking with an innocent expression that made Dr.Panipak wonder if she was really that sleepy or just pretending.

"Maybe in the bathroom."

"..."

Akhira stood there, stunned by the response. She hadn't expected such an answer. After Dr.Panipak disappeared into another room, Akhira gathered her thoughts and realized the doctor was just being sarcastic. Still, she had no idea where she was supposed to sleep.

"So where am I supposed to sleep, or does she really want me to sleep in the bathroom...?"

She murmured to herself quietly, thankful that Dr.Panipak wasn't there to hear her, or she would've surely been chided again... The faint scent of soap wafted to Akhira's nose as she stepped out of the bathroom. The tall one stood hesitantly, unsure where to place herself in this condo or whether she should've stayed in the bathroom after all. The bathroom was large, with distinct wet and dry areas.... Akhira's thoughts were interrupted when she noticed the person who had been asleep now sitting up and staring at her.

"Turn off the light, please."

The tall one immediately went to turn off the light as requested. Dr.Panipak looked at the person who seemed out of place and felt a pang of pity.

"Come to bed now. I have to wake up early tomorrow."

Said Dr.Panipak. If Akhira kept standing or pacing around, she wouldn't be able to sleep. Dr.Panipak placed a bolster in the middle of the bed to mark the boundary.

"Don't cross this bolster."

She warned. Akhira simply nodded, watching the slender figure lying down with her back turned before lying down.

"Goodnight..."

The slender figure shifted sleepily before snuggling into the warmth to escape the chill from the air conditioner. The warmth was so comforting that Dr.Panipak didn't want to leave the bed. Her clear eyes blinked rapidly to adjust to the light when she felt a breath on her forehead.

“!!”

She quickly pulled away when she realized how close she and Akhira were. The drowsiness vanished, replaced by a racing heartbeat. She wanted to chide Akhira, but upon closer inspection, she realized she was the one who had crossed the boundary. Akhira was lying still, pressed against the edge of the bed. If she moved any further, she'd fall off.

Dr.Panipak glanced at the bolster she'd placed as a boundary herself. Now, it lay crumpled at the foot of the bed. No need to guess; she knew it was her own doing that had caused the bolster to end up there. She tried to regulate her breathing as much as possible, looking at the person sleeping soundly, undisturbed by her movements. Such a heavy sleeper....

Her beautiful eyes shifted to the clock on the bedside table. It was time for her to get up and go to work. Though she could be late today, her habit had her waking up anyway. The slender figure decided to get up and shower immediately, as going back to sleep seemed impossible when her mind refused to calm down.

By seven in the morning, Dr.Panipak had already showered and prepared a simple breakfast. Due to her work schedule, she didn't often have the time to make breakfast, but today, she had the time and chose to indulge herself. The bedroom door opened.

The slender figure looked at the person still sleeping soundly on the bed with curiosity. Someone who woke up this late shouldn't be able to pick her up for work in the morning, yet she always managed to. Dr.Panipak kept her curiosity and went to wake the sleepyhead.

"Ms.Akhira, it's morning. "

"Hmm..."

There it was again... she responded with a groan. Dr.Panipak stood with her arms crossed, watching the person who turned over and buried her face into the big pillow as if trying to escape her voice.

"Well then, take your time. I'll head to work now."

"Wait..."

It works. The person who had seemed ready to continue sleeping suddenly sat up, even before Dr.Panipak could finish her sentence. The tall one looked at her, who was already dressed and ready, with sleepy irritation. Then, she told Dr. Panipak to wait for her to shower.

Dr.Panipak stepped outside to wait for Akhira, a small, amused smile on her face. She wondered if Akhira would be mad if she knew Dr. Panipak was just teasing and wasn't really in a hurry to go to work. She placed the hot shrimp porridge on the dining table, thinking it wouldn't be long before the person she was waiting for would come out.

Akhira looked a bit confused when she saw the breakfast. Wasn't she supposed to leave already? She kept her curiosity to herself and sat down opposite the room's owner. The scent of the porridge made her stomach start to work. They ate quietly, with some small talk, not too much and not too little..

"What's wrong?"

Seeing the other person constantly massaging her shoulder, Dr.Panipak couldn't help but ask.

"Shoulder pain. I think I slept on it."

Akhira replied nonchalantly, causing Dr.Panipak to feel a flush of warmth on her face. Dr.Panipak fell silent, covertly watching Akhira, who seemed oblivious to the real cause of her soreness.

"Ahem..."

"?"

The sound of Dr.Panipak's clearing throat and uncomfortable shifting made Akhira raise an eyebrow in curiosity.

"So... waking up this late, will you make it to work on time?"

The slender one chose to change the subject immediately, feeling strange and embarrassed, making it hard to control her emotions.

"I usually start work at nine."

"..."

"But lately, I've had to wake up a bit earlier, or I won't make it."

Akhira said, implying that she wouldn't be able to pick up Dr. Panipak in time.

"How can you handle waking up early? You don't seem like a morning person."

Seeing her sleep late and deeply like this, it was easy to guess that Akhira wasn't someone who woke up early regularly. She was quite a sleepyhead.

"Using an alarm clock,"

She answered while scooping the delicious porridge into her mouth. Dr.Panipak watched the person earnestly eating her food. Her sweet eyes flickered before returning to normal when the person across the table looked up from the food with a charming smile that was rarely seen.

"Yes?"

Seeing Akhira just smiling at her without saying anything, Dr.Panipak raised an eyebrow in a questioning gesture.

"Delicious."

She said simply, yet her words effortlessly brought a smile from the listener. Dr.Panipak knew well that the other's compliment wasn't just to please her; it was genuine, evidenced by the empty bowl before her. Even though they hadn't been together long she was getting to know her better.

Akhira, besides being a sleepyhead, was also a big eater... By the time they left the condo, it was nearly late morning, all because Akhira kept indulging in Dr.Panipak's rice porridge. It wasn't until the Pot was scraped clean that she finally stopped eating... Dr.Panipak worried that Akhira might overeat to the point of discomfort...

It was another day when Akhira went to pick up. It was another day when Akhira picked up Dr.Panipak from the hospital. After that, they stopped to grab a bite to eat by the street. Of course, it was the tall one's idea.

Akhira actually wanted to go back to the condo and have Dr.Panipak cook for her, but she had to return for a meeting later, so a quick and convenient street food was the next best choice.

"Aren't you in a hurry to get back to your meeting? Won't this dinner waste your time?"

Asked Dr. Panipak.

"It's fine, just a quick meal."

As soon as the food arrived, Akhira began to eat immediately. Dr.Panipak could only watch as Akhira shoveled food into her mouth in a rush. It seemed she really would eat quickly, as she said, given how she was eating non-stop and not talking to her.



She guessed Akhira must've been starving all day. Dr.Panipak stirred at her crab-fried rice before taking a bite to taste it. One bite led to another, and before she knew it, her plate was empty.

They had hardly talked at all. Dr. Panipak looked at her empty plate, silently, blaming the other person. Since this woman came into her life, many things have changed. She used to skip dinner but now she ate it. Conversely, she no longer drank her favorite green tea that she used to buy every morning. She wasn't sure if these changes were good or bad....

Akhira's luxury car pulled up in front of the condo, and she turned off the engine.

"Thank you for the ride. Are you coming up? Aren't you going to your meeting?"

Asked Dr.Panipak

"I'll walk you to the front."

Akhira replied, unbuckling her seatbelt and stepping out of the car with an indifferent expression. The front was so close, yet she Insisted on escorting her...

"Goodbye."

"Bye"

The slender woman said to the taller one who was seeing her off at the condo entrance. It felt like she had a guardian seeing her off. Akhira watched her enter the elevator, and once the doors closed, she turned to leave.

*Thud!*

"I'm sorry!"

Akhira wasn't sure if she wasn't paying attention or if the man wasn't watching where he was going, but they bumped into each other. Akhira

stepped back slightly, looking at the man who was just a bit taller than her, before walking away without acknowledging the apology.

The young man watched the proud woman leave with an impenetrable gaze before quickly pressing the elevator button to reach his floor.

Dr.Panipak reached her floor and walked to her room unhurriedly. As she got to the door, she sighed in exasperation as she realized she only had her wallet with her. All her other belongings were in the large bag she left in Akhira's car. She remembered placing it on the back seat.

She wasn't sure if Akhira would notice her belongings, including her phone. Dr.Panipak could only be annoyed with herself. She thought that if Akhira saw her bag, she'd bring it up, but what if she didn't? With that thought, she quickly turned to head back downstairs, hoping Akhira was still there.

"Oh, sorry!"

The small figure collided with a tall figure in her haste but didn't pay much attention and hurried past.

"Oof!"

Before Dr.Panipak could take another step, she was startled, never expecting to encounter a situation like this.

"Shut up, or you'll get hurt."

The stranger whispered beside her ear before dragging her struggling body, which paid no heed to any threats, back to her room.

"Open the door!"

The man shoved her slender frame against the door, one hand gripping both of her wrists while the other covered her mouth, forcing her to unlock the room.

"Now!"

"Let me go!"

She struggled, hoping to break free from his powerful grip. Her entire body ached, and her heart pounded wildly with fear.

*Thump!*

*Thump!*

Dr.Panipak tried to bang her body against the door as hard as she could, hoping to make enough noise for the other rooms to hear and come to help her. In this situation, there was nothing more she could do.

"What the hell are you doing?"

The large figure pulled her away from the door, annoyed. Despite her small stature, she was quite reckless.

"Open the door, or do you want to make a scene!"

The man started to lose his temper. He noticed a black bag on the floor, thinking it might contain her room key. He moved to pick it up while still holding her tightly. As he bent down to grab the bag, Dr.Panipak took a chance on his distraction and used all her remaining strength to break free.

"Help!"

*Thud!*

Just as she was about to run, she fell flat on the floor when the assailant grabbed her leg. She felt a sharp pain and could barely move, lying still on the ground.

"Didn't like it when I asked nicely, huh!?"

The man straddled her, opening her bag in hopes of finding what he wanted but coming up empty-handed.

"Ouch, you bitch..."

In a split second, she bit down hard on the hand covering her mouth. Despite the pain, the assailant didn't let go. Enraged, he slapped her face hard, turning her beautiful face with the force of his palm. Dr.Panipak's tears streamed down with fear.

"So you really want to mess with me!"

"Yeah!"

*Crash!!*

The sound of a vase shattering echoed along with the thud of the heavy body falling into a pool of blood. The noise of the breaking vase caused everyone living on the same floor to open their doors to see what had happened.

"Ms.Akhira..."

The slender figure, covering her face with her hands, quickly crawled to Akhira. Akhira gently stroked her hair to comfort her. The slender body trembled with fear as she clung tightly to Akhira, sobbing uncontrollably.

"It's all right."

Akhira's soothing voice only made Dr.Panipak cry harder.

"What did you do to my brother!?"

Another man, coming from a room, rushed to check on the unconscious man, accusing the two women sitting close together of assaulting his brother.

"Shut up!"

The commanding voice silenced both the onlookers and the shouting man, spreading fear that made everyone go quiet.

"Call the police."

She said coldly, and everyone immediately complied. The security guard, alerted by someone in the crowd, quickly arrived at the scene. Akhira chose to take Dr.Panipak into a room to rest before dealing with the chaos outside.

The argument showed no signs of ending as the assailant's brother threatened to press charges against Akhira for seriously injuring his sibling. However, once the security footage was shown, the entire incident became clear.

Silence fell over the crowd. Akhira clenched her fists in anger, the violent images fueling her rage. She couldn't bear to think what might've happened if she didn't come in time.

"I think it'd be best if you two come to an agreement."

The building manager suggested, trying to resolve the situation amicably.

She didn't want the incident to tarnish the condo's reputation.

"How will you take responsibility?"

Akhira asked the assailant's brother and the building manager, leaving them at a loss for words. The tall woman sat with crossed arms, watching, determined not to let this go. A luxury condo worth millions but lacking in security was unacceptable.

"I... I will compensate for the damages, or something like reparation."

Akhira only looked at the man in front of her with a vacant gaze. Money can't fix everything.

"Please, I'm begging you."

The building manager tried to mediate when they saw that Akhira wasn't saving anything. They could only plead.

"I will take legal action to the fullest."

Akhira's icy tone conveyed her unwavering intent, indifferent to anything else. Akhira wasn't going to show mercy to anyone. She stood up to leave the room, already knowing that these people only cared about their reputation and their own people.

"Please take care of this, officer."

She said to the senior police officer who had been listening for a while wondering how the mediation would go. In the end, it had to follow the legal process because the victim refused to compromise.

Akhira left it to the police to handle the evidence collection and the investigation, which still had to wait for both Dr.Panipak and the perpetrator. This case wasn't difficult to resolve, as the evidence was clear. There was nothing to worry about except the victim's mental state.

Akhira quietly opened the bedroom door. The light from outside illuminated the sweet face that was fast asleep before the room went dark again as the door closed. She knelt beside the bed, looking at the sleeping person with mixed emotions.

Although not visible in the dark, the marks of pain and bruises were still vividly remembered by Akhira.

"Where did you go...?"

A slightly whiny, sweet voice made her smile a little before shaking her head.

"Didn't go anywhere."

Akhira replied to the person on the bed before stretching out and lying down under the same blanket. Knowing how scared she was, Akhira had to wait for her to fall asleep before handling the situation. She gently pulled the small figure into her arms. Dr.Panipak was still trembling slightly from fear, but not as much as an hour ago.

"Are you cold?"

Dr.Panipak just shook her head. Akhira didn't ask if she was in pain or talk about what had happened. If it'd been before, Dr.Panipak wouldn't have allowed someone to hold her like this. But now, the warmth of the embrace was too comforting to refuse.

Akhira pulled the blanket up to provide warmth to the smaller figure, her slender hand stroking the hair of the one in her arms as if to soothe. Indeed, it worked, as the steady breathing indicated that the smaller person had fallen asleep.

Dr.Panipak slowly opened her eyes, adjusting her vision for a while before looking for someone who had made her sleep without worry. But she didn't see anyone this morning.

Where had she gone? She took a shower and got dressed to freshen up despite the visible bruises that were hard to forget. She had to get through this. She charged her phone, which had died the night before, and saw missed calls and numerous messages.

Checking the time, she realized her friends had been calling her all morning, probably because she hadn't gone to work.

[Pleng, Ms. Akhira said you took leave. Is everything okay?]

The worried voice on the other end made Panipak smile. These two worried about her more than anything.

"Just a little incident."

Dr.Panipak replied truthfully, unsure how much her friend knew.

[It sounds just like Ms.Akhira. So what actually happened? Are you going to tell me?]

"I'll tell you face to face."

[If you don't tell me now, we're coming to your condo.]

Dr.Panipak could only shake her head at her best friend's stubbornness before deciding to tell the whole story that had happened to both of them. Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha were equally shocked by the incident that had occurred. Dr.Panipak then made sure to tell everyone not to mention this to her family, as she didn't want them to worry.

After finishing her conversation with her friends, Dr.Panipak dragged her battered body out of the room. She encountered several police officers, including Akhira, who were sitting and talking. Dr.Panipak noticed the tall one looking quite exhausted, wearing the same clothes from the previous night when the incident occurred. If she had to guess, Akhira probably hadn't slept at all.

The slender figure sat down next to the taller one, knowing what she had to do next. Dr.Panipak followed every step of the legal process, feeling much relieved but still scared. She never imagined something like this could happen to her. Not long after the police left, chaos ensued as both Dr.Plaifha and Dr.Ninlaneen came to visit her at the condo.

"Pleng!"

As expected... The two women rushed to hug their friend before spinning Dr.Panipak left and right, examining her face to check for any injuries. Seeing her up close, both Dr.Plaifha and Dr.Ninlaneen had tears welling up in their eyes out of sympathy. Why did their friend have to go through something like this? This terrible incident should never have happened.

"You said if I told you, you wouldn't come."

In the end, whether she told them or not, her friends showed up anyway. The more she explained what happened, the more anxious they became, to the point of skipping work to come to see her out of concern.

"Doing this is not good behavior. There are so many patients, Pha, Neen."

"Today, there are fewer patients."



One of them joke, as close friends do. Soon, the four of them ordered a variety of food and sat down to eat together while chatting.

"It's just awful."

"It's a good thing Ms.Akhira came in time."

Dr.Plaifha thought. If her friend hadn't been lucky, who could've imagined what might've happened?

"And who was the culprit?"

"It's the younger brother of the guy who lives in the room across the hall."

"The suspect has confessed to all the charges, Ma'am."

"Yes."

Akhira, Dr.Panipak, and her friends listened intently to the police report. But what was even more shocking was hearing from the police that the criminal had planned the attack for a long time. He'd been staying with his brother only once a week, and every time he came, he saw Dr.Panipak with someone else, thinking she was never alone.

That someone else was Akhira. Until the night of the incident, the criminal saw Akhira leave the condo and assumed Dr.Panipak was alone, giving him the opportunity to strike.

"How long ago was this?"

"Three to four months ago."

The more she heard, the more her heart skipped a beat. Danger had been looming over her all this time, but she'd never known. The culprit had intended to commit the crime ever since he started staying there, which coincided with the time Akhira came into her life. Dr.Panipak could only turn to look at the tall woman sitting quietly, not saying a word. She sighed softly before thanking the police.

"Don't worry, Ma'am. We'll take care of it."

"Thank you."

"And what about the room?"

This time, it was Akhira who turned to ask the building manager and the criminal's brother, who were also present. Dr.Panipak looked at everyone with a puzzled expression, not knowing what was going on.

"Please, I'm begging you, don't let it come to that."

To what extent? What was she referring to? Dr.Panipak looked back and forth between the other woman and Akhira, who had an unchanged expression.

"Ms.Panipak, please."

She pleaded when her request to Akhira seemed to have no effect, turning instead to seek sympathy directly from the victim.

"What are you begging for?"

She asked bluntly, truly unaware of the situation and what had been discussed before.

"Please, let's not evict them from the condo."

Dr.Panipak paused slightly. She'd never thought of taking it that far. Besides, the man in the room opposite wasn't the one causing trouble; it was his younger brother.

"We don't need to do that,"

Said Dr.Panipak.

"Yes, we do,"

Akhira's calm, steady voice said, causing Dr.Panipak to turn and look at her with a stern gaze. Why was she being so unreasonable?

"Excuse me for a moment,"

She said, pulling Akhira up by the hand and leading her away. As soon as they stepped outside, she closed the balcony door for some privacy.

"Ms. Akhira."

"No,"

Dr.Panipak sighed, looking at the stubborn face before her.

"Please, be reasonable. That man didn't do anything wrong. I've been living here for a long time without any issues."

"But there was an issue last night."

Akhira countered.

"That was his younger brother."

Dr.Panipak explained.

"No."

"Ms. Akhira."

"I give in to you on everything... except this."

Akhira said, turning to leave immediately. But Dr.Panipak's quick reflexes allowed her to grab Akhira's arm just in time. They hadn't finished talking, and now Akhira was trying to walk away with that bossy attitude. Dr.Panipak didn't like it at all.

"But this is my life, this is my place, and this is my problem. I know you're worried, but could you please be reasonable?"

Dr.Panipak pleaded. Akhira could only look at the sweet face holding her back. Was Dr.Panipak implying that she was meddling too much in her affairs?

"Let me handle this myself, okay?"

Dr.Panipak concluded.



Sunyanv

## 13. The Consolation Prize

The two ladies could only sit and look at each other after Dr. Panipak said she'd go rest in her room, leaving them to watch TV in the living room by themselves. After Dr. Panipak had settled the chaos that had erupted, everyone went their separate ways, including Akhira.

Since the two of them had gone off to talk privately, Akhira had been silent, only listening. Their demeanor made Dr. Ninlaneen and Dr. Plaifha uneasy.

They thought something must've happened between them. Plus, their friend seemed down. It was possible that Dr. Panipak was feeling low because of the recent incident, but her friends believed that something else was affecting her more at the moment.

"Aren't you going home yet? It's getting late."

As soon as she walked out of the bedroom, Dr. Panipak asked her two friends. She'd only intended to take a nap but ended up falling asleep until time had passed.

"Nope, we're staying to keep you company. Want something to eat? Wait a bit, Pha's cooking."

Dr. Ninlaneen said without giving the slender woman a chance to respond. They'd already decided to stay over today because they were still worried. Leaving her alone wouldn't be good, even though the condo was safe with 24-hour security, and outsiders weren't allowed in without a resident coming down to get them.

But the person who caused the trouble and the relatives of the person who hurt her friend were just in the room across the hall. How could they trust that?

"So, are you staying over tonight?"

"Yes!"

Both voices replied in unison. Dr.Panipak didn't object because having friends around made her feel safer. She wasn't made of steel or so tough that she didn't feel scared about what had happened-quite the opposite. She was terrified...

"I'm scared!"

Dr.Ninlaneen jumped up from the bed to get a clear look at the person lying in the middle when she asked Dr.Panipak if she wasn't afraid of the man in that room. The answer was that she was terrified.. If she is scared, then why is she still kind enough to let the man stay!?

"So why didn't you just have him move out, Pleng?"

"That's right, Pleng. Actually, I agree with Ms.Akhira on this."

Dr.Plaifha said. She thought back to the stern-faced woman who was pursuing her friend and felt sorry for her. It seemed that no matter what she did, Dr.Panipak would oppose it..

"Because he's not the one who did it."

"So you have to live in fear like this?"

"Do you have to be on guard every time you come back alone, Pleng? Oh, it's driving me crazy."

Dr.Ninlaneen said, full of emotion.

"It's not that scary..."

"Why wouldn't it be scary?"

Both stared intently at their friend, lying still. Dr.Panipak shifted slightly, feeling the immense pressure from their gazes.

"Well... someone comes to drop me off."

Ohhh! She's bragging! The tense atmosphere immediately turned bright. Dr.Panipak beamed at her friend's answer while Dr.Ninlaneen covered her mouth, trying to stifle a scream that nearly choked her. She wanted to scream out loud but held back out of consideration.

"What?"

Dr.Panipak asked her friends, who suddenly sat up and looked at her with mischievous eyes, making her feel awkward. Just a moment ago, they were staring at her like they wanted to tear her apart. What was up with these two?

"Have you told her yet?"

Dr.Plaifha asked with innocent eyes, but to Dr.Panipak, it was a loaded question. But there was no way someone as stubborn as her would give an easy answer.

"Are you going to sleep? I'm tired."

"Reallyyy?"

Once again, both voices spoke in unison. Dr.Panipak wanted to turn away, but turning left, she saw Plaifha; turning right, she saw Dr.Ninlaneen. The one lying in the middle could only close her eyes to escape from the two.

Even though her eyes were closed, she could still hear their giggling, which sounded more like teasing her. That made Dr.Panipak's patience run out.

"Hey! Where are you going, Pleng?"

Dr.Ninlaneen called out to her friend, who suddenly jumped out of bed without any warning. If the room had been brighter, she would've seen her friend's beautiful face all scrunched up. Even so, she was sure that her friend wasn't angry, just embarrassed.

A slender figure walked over and slumped down on the sofa, eyes fixated on the big TV screen that had been turned on again. She stared at the screen, but the viewer didn't seem to take in any of the documentary being broadcast. Her delicate hand stroked the communication device, heavy with thought, wondering whether she should call her or perhaps send a message instead.

The communication device lying next to her vibrated, effectively capturing its owner's attention. Akhira diverted her gaze from the documents in front of her and picked it up to check.

[Panipak: Don't tell my mom about what happened, okay?]

[Panipak: I don't want her to worry.]

The phone owner could only sigh softly to herself. What was she to expect from a message sent if she didn't have any urgent business? She wouldn't want to bother otherwise.

Akhira set the phone down, deciding to stop thinking about others. Her sharp eyes focused on the numbers and letters on the important documents, but no matter how hard she tried to read, she couldn't comprehend them at all.

A tall figure leaned back in an expensive chair, eyes still glued to the black smartphone lying still, filled with worry. Finally, she picked it up and typed out a message.

[Akhira: Who are you with?]

The message that appeared on the phone screen made Dr. Panipak feel a bit better after she'd been annoyed with the other party for a while. She saw that Akhira had read her message a long time ago but hadn't bothered to reply.

[Panipak: With Neen and Pha.]



She typed back. The other side read it quickly as if she'd been waiting for her message all along, just like she was at that moment.

[Akhira: Good.]

[Panipak: Aren't you going to sleep?]

[Akhira: Working.]

The response she received made Dr.Panipak frown slightly. She thought Akhira would've gone back to rest, especially after such a busy day dealing with her affairs. She must be tired. But instead, she went right back to work.

[Akhira: You should go to sleep now.]

It seemed like she was overthinking, so the other party sent her another message after she read it and didn't reply.

[Panipak: Ok.]

Dr.Panipak could only press her lips tightly together. There were many things she wanted to type, but in the end, she only sent a short acknowledgment. Seeing that Akhira read it but didn't reply, Panipak felt disheartened.

She didn't know what to do with these feelings. The communication device was turned off, and the slender figure walked back into the bedroom quietly, careful not to wake the two friends who seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

"What did your girlfriend say?"

Just as she was about to lie down, Dr.Ninlaneen's drowsy voice came up. Dr.Panipak wasn't sure if her friend was asking or just sleep-talking. When she didn't respond, Dr. Ninlaneen fell silent again, breathing steadily, her eyes closed with a small smile. Seeing this, she thought that her friend must be sleep-talking or dreaming out loud. The slender figure pulled up the blanket and closed her eyes, exhausted.



"We're leaving now, Pleng. Call us right away if you need anything, ok?"

"Got it."

She replied while pushing the two clingy girls out of the room. She intended to go down to see them off, but they refused, claiming they didn't trust her to return alone. Dr. Panipak could only laugh at their reasoning. Even though she wasn't alone today, she'd have to go places by herself in the days to come. She sighed with boredom.

Normally, she would've gone to work, but due to a recent situation, she'd taken an abrupt leave, with all her friends agreeing it was for the best. She didn't want to go to work feeling like this, and worse the matter might reach her family's ears. Anyway... would she come to pick her up today?

Out of the blue, someone slipped into her mind. Maybe it was out of habit, but Dr. Panipak found herself thinking about Akhira. She worried that Akhira might be waiting to pick her up for work. She mightn't know. With that thought, her slender figure quickly walked over to grab her phone, only to find it empty...

No messages. No missed calls. Nothing at all.

Standing there, weighing her options, she found a reason to call her. If Akhira didn't know she wasn't going to work today and ended up waiting for her, it'd waste her time.

[Hello?]

It didn't take long for Akhira to pick up. Her indifferent tone made her want to hang up immediately.

"I'm not going to work today."

[hmm..]

Dr. Panipak fell silent as soon as she heard her response. Her slender hand gripped the phone tightly without realizing it, feeling a bit hurt. Couldn't

she have said something longer? She didn't know how long they stayed like that, neither of them saying anything nor hanging up.

"Are you going to work now?"

In the end, Dr.Panipak couldn't stand the silent battle any longer.

[Not yet...]

Hearing her response, she immediately remembered that Akhira didn't have the same early shift as she did. It wouldn't be strange for her to leave the house a bit later today.

"Oh... ok."

[Is there something you want?]

"I feel like having green tea..."



"Here's your green tea."

The shop owner's voice snapped her out of her thoughts. Akhira paid for the drink and took the cup with her name written on it.

"Enjoy!"

The shop owner smiled, and Akhira nodded. She'd thought she wouldn't have to see the person who had made her overthink today. But when she heard her say she wanted green tea, everything fell apart. Even though she was still mad at her, she couldn't stay upset for long. Maybe it was because of that pleading tone... How many times had she given in to Dr.Panipak just because of a few words and that tone of voice?

Akhira stood in front of the condo, waiting because the security guard wouldn't let her in until a resident came out to get her. She frowned slightly. She couldn't even sit in the lobby. The condo might've tightened security

and followed the rules more strictly because of the incident the other day. Even though she had to wait, Akhira felt satisfied with the current situation.

"I'm sorry about this."

The security guard bowed respectfully, recognizing the tall woman who came and went regularly. To be more precise, she was likely to be the beautiful doctor's person who lived there. But with strict orders not to let anyone in who wasn't a resident so, the security guard had to abide by. What she'd planned as a quick drop-off of green tea before heading to work turned into a change of plans because Dr. Panipak said she'd made breakfast.

"Thank you."

Dr. Panipak took the cup and drank immediately. Her bruised body felt refreshed with something sweet. She didn't know if it was the green tea or the person who brought it that made her feel better.

"Wait a moment, it's almost done."

Dr. Panipak didn't wait for a response and quickly walked into the kitchen. She'd left the food unfinished, and another reason was that she was embarrassed. The two ate breakfast together in silence. Dr. Panipak could still sense something off about her.

Feeling awkward, she chose to pick up her phone. She looked at the picture of a coffee cup her friend sent in the group chat, along with the message,

[Delicious.]

[And This place is so good, they have green tea, too. Do you want some?]

It was clear that the sender intended to make her crave it. Dr. Plaifha added to Dr. Ninlaneen's message above. The reader chuckled at the two of them. Didn't they have any work to do? Dr. Panipak didn't type anything in response. She simply sent a picture of her own green tea back, indicating

that she had one too. And importantly, it was from the same place-their regular shop.

[Waaaaait a minute!]

[Did you go out and buy it yourself, Pleng?]

[Nope.]

[Delivery order?]

[Probably.]

[I'm serious]

[Someone bought it for me.]

[Who?!]

[Who!?!?]

[Tell me, tell me, tell me. Just say it.]

'[Mrs. Akhira.]

[Why did she buy it for you?]

Dr.Panipak wondered if she'd made the right decision by sending the green tea picture to her friends in the first place.

[Pleng! tell me now!]

[Well...]

[????]

[I wanted green tea... so I asked her to buy it for me.]

[Reallyyy?!]

Dr. Panipak felt as if she could hear a teasing tone emanating from the text itself.

[Uh-huh.]

[Well, Pleng... Do you want green tea, or do you want to see the delivery guy, Doctor?]

After reading that message, Dr. Panipak decided to put her phone down immediately. The heat on her face made her feel uncomfortable, so she took a sip of her green tea to cool down. Looking at the green tea in her hand, she convinced herself that she genuinely just wanted to drink green tea. She didn't want to meet anyone at all.

Akhira looked at the key card for the condo that she'd just gotten from Dr. Panipak. The doctor had explained that she wasn't going anywhere anyway, and since Akhira was coming by this evening, she gave it to her to avoid wasting time waiting for her. She stood there staring at it until her secretary came in to inform her that the meeting would start in fifteen minutes. That made Akhira stop thinking about other things that were bothering her and focus on preparing for the meeting in a few minutes.



After entering the room, Akhira immediately began to inspect the surroundings. The door was securely locked with an excellent security system, and the camera outside could clearly see anyone standing there. She observed these features for a while before moving to the living room. The wilted flowers had been thrown away, but no new ones had replaced them, making her room look emptier.

However, Akhira preferred it this way. No flowers meant no one to give them. Her sharp eyes noticed a slender figure curled up on the sofa in an uncomfortable position, but she didn't want to wake her just yet. She quietly started to put away the things she'd bought.

Dr. Panipak stirred slightly before opening her eyes and hearing someone doing something nearby. She didn't know when she'd fallen asleep, likely

due to exhaustion. Even though she was awake, she didn't get up. Her sweet eyes watched the tall figure's back as she seemed to be organizing something on the glass table until Akhira turned around, and their eyes met.

"You're awake?"

Dr.Panipak propped herself up to sit while Akhira remained kneeling on the floor, making them about the same height. She turned to face her without saying anything, making her feel even more awkward sitting on the sofa.

"Have you showered?"

Akhira asked and Dr.Panipak nodded in response. She asked her as if she was a child. After that, Akhira didn't say anything else and focused on opening a box that she guessed contained some kind of medicine. Akhira looked up at her clear, fair face, which now bore the marks of injury, and sighed. Dr.Panipak met her gaze. Her heart started to pound harder as she gently stroked her cheek, finally stopping at the cut on the corner of her mouth.

Dr.Panipak watched as Akhira's sharp, beautiful eyes seemed to focus on the small cut at the corner of her mouth more than anything else. The more she looked, the faster her heart raced, feeling that Akhira's face was becoming clearer. Before she knew it, Akhira glanced up, locking eyes with her for a moment. The clear image of her face turned blurry. The taller one hesitated, feeling the breath of the still, motionless figure in front of her. She pulled back slightly, though her fingers still gently caressed the wound at the corner of Dr.Panipak's mouth.

"I'll give you a chance to refuse."

Akhira's serious voice echoed throughout the room, resonating deeply with both of them. She chose to meet Dr. Panipak's eyes with earnest intensity. Silence enveloped the room, so profound that even the hum of the air conditioner was inaudible. Dr.Panipak remained silent, their faces mere inches apart.

Dr.Panipak's heart pounded so hard she feared it might be heard by the person so close to her. Why did Akhira have to ask her that? What was she supposed to say? She met Akhira's gaze before looking away, realizing that Akhira was waiting for her response. There was no answer. No refusal. No fear in those eyes that Akhira gazed into. If they waited, they'd remain like this all night.

Akhira's lips moved closer to the smaller figure who refused to meet her eyes. She pressed her lips against Dr.Panipak's beautifully shaped ones. Her heart, already beating out of rhythm, worked even harder as the slender figure in front of her didn't push her away. What started as a simple lip-to-lip touch deepened into something more. Akhira tilted her head slightly to find a more comfortable angle, gently nibbling on Panipak's lips, conveying both tenderness and a hint of frustration.

Dr.Panipak moved slightly, barely able to keep her balance even while sitting. Akhira's skill made her tremble. She struggled to keep up with the demanding kiss..

"Ah..."

Dr.Panipak's small hands clenched tightly in discomfort as she ran out of breath. Akhira slowly pulled away.

"Does it hurt?"

Seeing Dr.Panipak flinch, Akhira panicked, afraid she'd caused her pain. She moved back to a normal distance, sighing slightly, angry at herself for acting impulsively. After all, Dr.Panipak had a wound.

"It'll heal,"

Dr.Panipak's sweet face avoided Akhira's fingers, which were ready to apply ointment to her lips. It that she minded, but it'd heal on its her lips. It wasn't that own soon enough.

"Let me put some ointment on it,"



Akhira said, looking sternly at the stubborn Dr.Panipak, though her gaze failed to instill fear, especially in Dr.Panipak.

"I already did."

She replied softly, lowering her head to avoid Akhira's gaze.

"When?"

'Just now...'

The slender one thought, not saying out loud. Who would dare to say it? Akhira looked at the person who seemed determined not to apply the ointment.

"I'll do it myself."

Dr.Panipak quickly snatched the tube of bruise ointment from the other. As soon as she did, Akhira opened a new one. She didn't understand why she'd bought so many. Dr. Panipak tried to protest, but the other didn't listen.

Akhira gently applied the ointment to the bruises on her legs and arms, so gently that Dr.Panipak could barely feel it.

"Thank you."

Dr.Panipak murmured, feeling both embarrassed and shy, not knowing how to act. They'd just kissed, and now she had to sit while the other applied ointment to her.

*How embarrassing...*

The slender figure lay down, the lights in the room turned off completely, feeling comforted by not being alone. She let the guest stay outside and escaped to her room, not knowing what to do.

Her fingers inadvertently stroked her own lips gently before she came to her senses, thinking that only in dramas do people touch their lips like this after a kiss. Dr. Panipak shook her head to clear the distracting thoughts,

deciding to accept the kiss as Akhira's reward for helping her and an apology for the harsh words she'd said to her.

Akhira must be feeling awful, and she felt no different. Seeing the expression on the other's face, hearing the harsh words she'd spat out, her heart had softened in response. She could still vividly recall the look in Akhira's eyes that day, the desire to hold the other person back, but her body was as if frozen by a curse. When Akhira chose to turn her back, there was still a hint of vulnerability hidden within the other's hurt feelings.

*She could sense that much.*



Sunyanv

## 14. The Intruder

The light from outside that seeped through the bedroom door made Dr.Panipak get up from her bed to see what the person outside was doing. It was already very late, and she couldn't help but be curious. When she opened the door, she only saw feet sticking out from the sofa, along with a MacBook left open. There was no way Akhira could finish her work like this.

Seeing the other person curled up, she couldn't help but feel a pang of sympathy, but waking her didn't seem right. Judging by the looks of it, her sofa was hardly long enough for the other's legs. Dr.Panipak went back into her room, clumsily pulling out a spare blanket from the closet, and carried it over to the sofa where the other was sleeping.

She carefully covered her, cautious not to wake Akhira. The tall figure shifted slightly, feeling the warmth. Dr.Panipak turned up the air conditioner and turned off the lights before heading back to her room. Akhira would definitely complain about her backache in the morning.

"My back hurts."

I knew it. The slender one looked at the one complaining of backache with a hint of amusement. shaking her head lightly at her own accurate prediction from last night. She then placed a freshly made bowl of porridge on the dining table.

"Would you like some coffee?"

The person asked nodded in agreement, hurriedly spooning food into her mouth. Dr.Panipak wanted to warn her about the heat but was too late; it seemed the porridge had already scalded the other's mouth.

Akhira watched the slim back of the figure busily preparing coffee. It was only today that she noticed how petite Dr.Panipak was, as she usually saw her in work attire or a gown. Seeing the doctor in casual clothes revealed just how slender she was.

"Should you see a doctor?"

Akhira suddenly asked, causing the slim figure to turn and raise an eyebrow in curiosity.

"And the person in front of you isn't a doctor?"

"Yes, but you can't examine yourself."

Akhira replied seriously, suggesting Dr.Panipak should get checked in case of internal bruising or other injuries, given the bruises and marks visible.

"It's fine, really. Here, enjoy your coffee."

Dr.Panipak said, placing the aromatic coffee in front of Akhira before cutting the conversation short, leaving Akhira alone in the kitchen...

Waking up like this gave them more time together. Dr.Panipak noticed Akhira dressed neatly and ready for work. Had she brought clothes with her?

"Don't forget to apply your ointment, take your medicine, and lock the door properly."

"I know."

Akhira's instructions sounded like a mother's, but standing at the door and seeing her off made her feel... she was overthinking it.. Dr.Panipak closed the door and returned to the living room. Despite being bored and having nothing to do, she didn't have many options, given her circumstances.

When will these wounds heal?... Since that day, Akhira had taken on the role of picking up and dropping off Dr.Panipak as usual. Additionally, she'd

started staying overnight at Dr. Panipak's condo, leading her family to question why she wasn't coming home.

"Is your back hurting?"

Dr. Panipak asked the taller person walking beside her. Akhira nodded. Dr. Panipak looked at her with some sympathy. Akhira stayed at her condo every day, but they slept separately. She slept in the room with a comfortable bed, while Akhira slept on the sofa outside. It was no wonder she had back pain.

"Doctor!"

Both of them turned to see a man in a suit running toward them, panting, with a large bouquet of flowers in his hand.

"Good morning."

The newcomer greeted the beautiful doctor as soon as they stood face to face.

"Good morning."

"These are for you."

He said, handing over the large bouquet. Dr. Panipak had no choice but accept it.

"Thank you."

"It's been a while since we last met. How have you been?"

Akhira stood there watching the two of them talk, scrutinizing them before turning away in displeasure.

"I'll wait by the car."

Akhira said and immediately turned her back, walking away. She left the slender one to talk with that man freely. At least the place where they were

talking was bustling with security guards and people coming and going, so it shouldn't be dangerous. But what worried her the most was probably her own feelings.

Dr.Panipak could only watch the tall figure walk further away before turning back to cut the conversation short with the young man in front of her and excusing herself to work immediately.

"Is that the owner of the flowers in the room?"

The slender figure turned to look at the person next to her, who had brought up the topic as soon as she got into the car. From her tone, it was clear she was displeased with her.

"Some of them."

She replied fearlessly, unconcerned about the consequences.

Akhira looked at the person holding the large bouquet with slight irritation. Some of them, huh? Well, that might be the case. From what she'd seen, the flowers in the doctor's room included various types, like tulips and roses.

She must get a lot of flowers. Flowers are acceptable, but green tea isn't, Akhira thought to herself, not saying anything because if they argued, it'd only be her overthinking alone..

"What's wrong with the car?"

Seeing Akhira repeatedly pressing the start button without success, asked Dr.Panipak.

"Out of gas."

Akhira replied in her usual calm tone. Dr.Panipak shook her head at the other's carelessness. A car worth millions, yet she let it run out of gas. Fortunately, they hadn't gone anywhere yet, so at least they weren't stranded in the middle of the road.

"You can take my car."

The tall one, acting as the chauffeur, turned to look at her companion, curiosity building up until she couldn't help but ask.

"Why don't you use your car?"

“ ... ”

"Can't drive?"

It wasn't that she was too lazy to pick her up or anything, but Akhira couldn't help but wonder how taking public transportation could be more convenient than using a personal car. It made no sense to her because traffic was bad everywhere, and worse, it meant jostling with many people on board.

"I don't like driving."

She replied softly and unconfidently, which Akhira noticed. Dr.Panipak turned away to look at the scenery outside, her mind filled with various thoughts.

"You should learn. I'll teach you."

“ ... ”

"Don't be afraid."

Every time the subject of driving came up, the woman seemed reluctant to discuss it. Akhira guessed that she was either not good at driving, afraid, or lacked confidence in it. Dr.Panipak didn't respond.

When she glanced at the person next to her, focused on driving, she felt a warmth she couldn't describe. Hearing her words, she hadn't thought about driving for a long time and didn't want to. It wasn't that she'd never learned or driven; she just wasn't good at it. But it seemed different for Akhira, who appeared very skilled with cars, evident from the speedometer needle that kept climbing.

"Drive slower, please."

She reminded her. If she didn't, Akhira'd forget herself. She'd never seen her drive slowly unless stuck in traffic.

"!!"

Dr.Panipak looked at her in slight shock when suddenly, the flowers she held flew out of her hands.

"I'll hold them for you."

Akhira said with a displeased expression, seeing Dr.Panipak fumbling with unbuckling her seatbelt, grabbing her bag and the large bouquet. Isn't she going to put down those flowers at all?

Both got out of the car together. Akhira walked her to the hospital, carrying the bouquet. But since she held it awkwardly, Dr.Panipak had to turn and scold her because she was holding the bouquet upside down, making her fear the flowers would fall out along the way.

"Hold it properly, please."

"Do you like flowers that much?"

"I quite like them."

She answered the person who seemed to be upset, before taking the flowers back into her own hands. Akhira looked at the person who snatched the flowers back with a slight annoyance. Why did she bother carrying them? Was she afraid people wouldn't know someone gave them to her?

"The vase in my office is empty."

Dr.Panipak said as if she could sense what Akhira was thinking. Akhira adjusted her expression slightly, realizing she was showing her displeasure.

"And why accept things from others?"

But when it came to my green tea.



"He bought them for me, so of course, I have to accept them."

"If you want them, just tell me. There's no need for someone else to buy them for you."

"You never seem to buy for me."

She retorted. With that, she turned and walked into the hospital immediately, not wanting to argue with Akhira any longer. She didn't want to accept things from anyone, but when she refused, they still insisted on giving them to her.

So, she had to find a way to deal with these flowers by putting them in vases at the hospital. She wasn't just kept in her office; she gave them to the nurses to handle. After that, she didn't even know where the flowers ended up in the hospital.

But honestly, aren't flowers a basic gift for hitting on women? Everyone who tried to hit on her brought flowers. Only Akhira bought her drinks. What kind of person does that?... Akhira stood still as if she were cursed, thinking over the doctor's words and wondering what she really meant.

"Aw, those beautiful flowers again, Doctor."

"Oh, Neen, what are you doing on this floor?"

"Just dropping by."

Dr.Panipak nodded, not saying anything back. If she said anything, she'd be at a disadvantage because she couldn't keep up with Dr.Ninlaneen's witty banter.

"Who are the flowers from today? A doctor around here or somewhere else?"

"The guy from the condo."

"Doesn't Akhira mind?"

Dr.Ninlaneen askeda playfully, her tone and expression clearly teasing.

"Why would she mind?"

She answered her friend but avoided eye contact, pretending to look for something and checking the documents to dodge the question. Little did she know, this behavior made her an even easier target.

"If I were Ms.Akhira, I wouldn't stand for it,"

Saida Dr.Ninlaneen.

“ ... ”

"Ms.Akhira is pretty persistent, you know."

Knock, knock.

"Doctor, your patient is waiting."

A nurse announced dutifully, prompting the two doctors to end their conversation. Dr.Ninlaneen shrugged slightly before leaving Dr.Panipak's office in high spirits. Have you ever heard the saying that constant dripping wears away the stone?

This saying definitely didn't apply to her friend because otherwise, the men who kept trying to hit on her would've succeeded long ago. Dr.Panipak wasn't an easy woman to win, she was one of the hardest to win over.

But for some reason, she seemed to give in to Akhira. Maybe her friend had already fallen for her, just not admitting it to herself. Sometimes, it seems like she has feelings for her, but other times it doesn't.

"Or maybe Dr. Panipak hasn't forgotten..."

Dr.Ninlaneen mumbled to herself like a lunatic woman as she inadvertently thought of something from the past.



"Did you wait long? I just finished with a patient."

"It's okay."

"Could you stop by the mall for me today?"

Akhira nodded. The car drove down the road, heading somewhere different today, the mall instead of the condo as usual.

"Got a lot to buy?"

"Better get a cart."

Dr.Panipak estimated that a basket wouldn't be enough, so she told Akhira to get a cart instead.

"I'll push it."

Dr.Panipak took the cart from the taller woman and walked ahead immediately. Akhira knew that this woman didn't like to rely on others. Whatever she could do herself, she did. Like now, pushing the cart should be her job, and she should be picking things beside her. Why did it turn out this way?

In the end, Akhira could only follow behind Dr. Panipak, who was busy browsing and selecting items, looking for a moment when the other was distracted, thinking she could snatch the cart and push it herself. But it proved to be quite difficult, as it seemed the doctor was not willing to let go of it so easily. Wandering around, they reached the section selling dolls and toys, where Dr.Panipak stopped with interest, the sight of these items always reminding her of her little nephew.

A robot toy was picked up for a closer look, but her attention quickly shifted when she saw a teenage boy and a girl walking together. At a glance, they might seem like just friends because of the way they talk to each other. From what she overheard, they definitely weren't a couple. But one thing Dr. Panipak could sense was that the boy secretly liked his female friend, though it seemed like the girl had no idea..

"Do you like this one?".

"It's cute, but this one is cuter."

"Want me to buy it for you?"

"No, it's a waste of money. Let's go before the mall closes."

Dr.Panipak watched the boy, who kept looking at the dolls with a wistful expression.

"Kids are like that."

Akhira said, and Dr.Panipak turned to look at the tall figure who had somehow come to stand next to her without her noticing. She gave her a slightly reproachful look for startling her.

"What do you mean?"

"They have crushes but are too scared to confess."

"And you were never a kid?"

"I was... but I'm grown up now."

"It's the same thing."

"No, it's not."

"?"

"When I like someone, I tell them. Not like that boy."

Suddenly, the sharp eyes that had been following the two kids turned to meet hers, making Dr.Panipak feel awkward.

"Really?"

She avoided her gaze and replied teasingly, hoping to annoy her a bit.

“Yes.”

“ ... ”

If this were a game, she would've been knocked out, with the letters KO flashing on the screen. Dr.Panipak now unsure of what to do, quickly pushed the cart away from there. Yes, what was that all about? She wasn't sure if she was walking too fast or if the person she was with was walking too slow.

She looked left and right but didn't see the person she'd just walked away from. Hopefully, she wouldn't get lost. Dr. Panipak turned over the price tags on the items, checking prices and browsing around the bedding section with enjoyment.

"Will you buy it?"

“!!”

Once again, Dr.Panipak was startled. Akhira looked at the person who had given her side-eye for the umpteenth time today. She admitted that she startled her, but what could she do? No matter how she approached Dr.Panipak, she'd still be surprised since she'd been so engrossed in looking at things that she'd forgotten about her.

"I'll take that one."

The doctor suddenly said pointing to the item she wanted. Soon, a foldable mattress, not too big, was placed in the cart, just as Dr.Panipak wanted. Once she had the item, she left Akhira to push the cart while she walked freely. Akhira couldn't help but feel like she was being teased. At first, she didn't want her to push the cart, but once there was something heavy, she left it to her.

The person being teased could only smile a little, knowing she did it on purpose but also because she was willing to be teased, which made her smile broadly. But why would she buy a mattress:

"It's for you."

Dr.Panipak revealed the answer to her question when they returned to the condo, with her staff helping to carry it up the elevator. Dr.Panipak stopped paying attention to the tall figure standing in the middle of the room and turned to organize the fresh produce and fruits they'd bought.

She thought she hadn't bought much, but looking at it now, the fridge was almost full. She was surprised at herself for buying so much. Before, her fridge had a few things, but since having a frequent guest who often stayed over, the fridge needed to be stocked more because she had to make breakfast every day. This might be the reason why her fridge was overflowing now. So, where would the rest go...

"Give it a try and see if it works."

Dr.Panipak suggested after she finished showering and came out to check on things once more. She watched as Akhira moved the new mattress from one corner to another, unable to find the right spot. Although her place was spacious, it was filled with various built-in furniture and decorations that took up a lot of room. It was actually quite large, but not large enough for the new mattress they'd just bought.

"You can place it in the bedroom."

She suggested, feeling a bit sorry for Akhira. If there wasn't enough space outside, they'd have to place in the bedroom. She couldn't let Akhira sleep on the sofa as she'd been doing..

Since Akhira started staying over, she'd been sleeping on the sofa every night, which was clearly uncomfortable for her since it wasn't designed for sleeping. Despite this, Akhira never complained, except for the occasional backache. Besides, Dr.Panipak had specifically chosen this mattress, so Akhira had to use it since she'd already spent the money.

Dr.Panipak watched as the tall figure struggled to drag the mattress into the room, unable to suppress a laugh. She wondered if the mattress she bought was more of a help or a burden. She sat and watched as Akhira arranged the

mattress next to the bed, taking one of the pillows. She heard a sigh of relief as Akhira lay down indicating that it was much more comfortable.

"It's more comfortable than the sofa."

Akhira said with a smile. Dr.Panipak turned to smile back, wondering if Akhira'd heard her thoughts. Why did she say that? Akhira got up to turn off the lights and then walked back to the bed, where Dr.Panipak was still sitting at the foot.

"Thank you..."

The tall one leaned down close enough for Dr.Panipak to feel the breath on her hair accompanied by words of gratitude. The faint scent of shampoo wafted into her nose, making her want to smell it more clearly. Thinking this, Akhira leaned in closer but eventually chose pull back. Instead of a kiss, she gently ruffled Dr.Panipak's hair with her hand.

"Time to sleep."

She said to the seemingly speechless Dr.Panipak. Soon, she lay down and pulled the blanket up to her neck like a child. Akhira couldn't see her face because the room was so dark, but if she waited for her eyes to adjust, she might be able to see Dr.Panipak's expression.

Dr. Panipak turned over to the other side, her earlier surprise starting to fade. Lately, she'd felt her heart race more often. When Akhira leaned in, she almost didn't know how to react. She turned over a few times before sitting up to look at Akhira, who was sleeping next to the bed. Truly comfortable.

At that moment, she wasn't afraid of any intruders or anything else because the scariest person of all was sleeping right next to her bed. This person hadn't only invaded her room but was also starting to invade her heart...



## 15. CHANGE

Living the same routine over and over had made Dr.Panipak unaware that someone had entered her life and started to become a regular distraction. What used to be an annoyance had turned into a habit.

From initially pushing away, she began to care more about her, but even then, Dr.Panipak remained oblivious. Unlike her, those around her knew.

They noticed to the point of gossiping that the beautiful doctor at the hospital was no longer single. They saw someone frequently picking her up and dropping her off. There were both positive and negative comments mixed together.

"I really want to see the doctor's girlfriend."

"It's the one who comes often."

"Riding in a luxury car now probably doesn't want to go back to taking the bus."

"So she just likes rich people, after all."

"It would be strange if a pretty doctor like her didn't have someone."

"The young doctors must be heartbroken."

"Even though she has a girlfriend, people still hit on her."

"What happened to the previous one?"

"They broke up long time ago."



“Nonsense, the doctor never had a boyfriend.”

These things were sometimes told to her by others; sometimes, she overheard them herself. But Dr.Panipak didn't pay much attention or care about it. It wasn't that she didn't care about society or the people around her, but she simply didn't have enough time to think about the meaningless words of those who were always looking to criticize and gossip about others. Perhaps it was because she devoted all her attention to her work, leaving no room for trivial matters.

Today was an especially busy day, with more patients than usual, causing Dr.Panipak to finish work later than usual. She glanced at the clock on the wall; it was almost an hour past her usual time. Panipak hurriedly packed everything into her bag as quickly as possible while checking her phone, in case the person waiting for her had tried to contact her. She'd been so busy that she hadn't even touched her phone, not even to send a message. She must be waiting anxiously by now..

"Doctor?"

"Are there still patients?"

Panipak asked as she was about to leave the room when a nurse approached her.

"No, I just came to get you."

"Get me?"

"Your girlfriend has been waiting for a while now."

There was no need to ask who the nurse was referring to, as there was only one person who could be it. The nurse smiled at her, and it was clear that her smile was filled with affection for the person who was dozing off outside. Why sleep here? She thought Akhira would be waiting in the car.

"Ms.Akhira."

The person sleeping in front of her didn't respond, giving Panipak a chance to observe her fully.

Girlfriend, huh? This person, really? The one to be her lover? The one she thought she didn't like from the start? Does this woman really have feelings for her? Dr.Panipak could only think to herself before shaking off the confusing thoughts.

"Ms. Akhira."

This time, she didn't just call out; she reached out and gently nudged the other's arm to wake her. It worked as the tall figure began to move..

"Are you done?"

The sleepy voice asked, rubbing her eyes and stretching. Dr. Panipak watched her with a small, amused smile.

"I am. Have you eaten yet?"

She asked the taller person who was now standing. Akhira shook her head instead of answering verbally.

"Do you want anything special to eat?"

The person being asked didn't answer but shook her head again. If she hadn't looked, she might've thought the other was ignoring the question. Today, the doctor was being kind, offering to let the other choose the menu, but she didn't seem interested.

"I'm not very familiar with Thai food."

The sleepy voice began to irritate Dr.Panipak. Is she sleepy and still going to drive?

"Do you know that drowsy driving is dangerous."

She chided the person who had already started the car engine but hadn't moved from the parking spot. Dr.Panipak sighed, looking at the face that

didn't seem fresh and unsure what to do.

"Don't drive."

She said.

"Are you going to drive?"

Akhira asked. If she didn't drive, who would? But as she turned to look at the person next to her, the words she intended to say were immediately halted because Dr.Panipak seemed a bit stressed after she'd heard the question.

"I don't want you to be in danger."

The silence that followed was brief, but the short sentence made Akhira's heart feel numb. She couldn't understand why she felt such a deep sense of melancholy from Dr.Panipak's words.

"If you're tired, you can take some rest first. Then we can go."

Dr.Panipak turned to respond, but after she did, the person next to her suddenly captured her lips, catching her completely off guard. She kissed her again. Instead of resisting as her brain commanded, her body went limp, like all her energy had been drained.

Dr.Panipak could barely react in time, her delicate hands gripping Akhira's shirt tighter, pushing back slightly in an attempt to create some distance. She suddenly remembered where she was and what she was doing.

Akhira pulled back slightly, looking at her sweet face, which was now turned toward the car window in apprehension. She gently grasped her chin, turning her face back to meet her eyes.

"They won't see."

Actually, it was Dr.Panipak who couldn't see anything except for the face of the person who had just spoken. She'd been kissing her since that last sentence, leaving her breathless and too weak to refuse. It seemed that the

person who wasn't bright due to sleepiness at first had become alert as if fully rested, shedding the weariness from her face and eyes completely, in contrast to Dr.Panipak, who was now sound asleep, her energy completely drained by the other.

Akhira turned to look at the person next to her, who was sleeping with her neck bent. Akhira's shirt was covering her, protecting her from the cold air of the car. She couldn't help but gaze at the softly red lips, thinking that if she didn't have to watch the road. Akhira wouldn't take her eyes off the beautiful doctor's lips.

"We're here."

The voice sounded just as Dr.Panipak woke up shortly after the car had parked. Dr.Panipak got out of the car, still wrapped in Akhira's shirt in front. She hesitated slightly before stopping, turning to look at the luxury car parked tightly. Looking at the windshield she'd never noticed before, how utterly dark it was, even the car seats inside that she thought she'd see as vague shadows weren't visible..

"I told you they won't see."

A soft whisper, almost teasing, sounded next to her ear. The beautiful face that was once calm felt hot, forcing her to remove the covering shirt. She was hot not just in the face but her whole body because she didn't expect the other to know what she was thinking. Such a shy person...

The smell of delicious food roused the sleepy person slightly. After sitting and waiting for a while, seeing the doctor in the kitchen made Akhira admire her even more. Not only was she a skilled doctor, but she was also an excellent cook. Dr. Panipak glanced at the person who got up to open the fridge to look for a drink from the corner of her eye.

Waking up to cook breakfast had become her daily routine. Soon, the slender figure turned off the electric stove and looked at the person who had just finished drinking, who now looked disheveled.

Would the subordinates respect her? She didn't believe that Akhira could make others agree to sign contracts or agree to invest in the business when even the shirt she was wearing couldn't be straightened out.

"Take off your shirt. I'll iron it for you."

Akhira raised an eyebrow slightly before looking down at her white dress shirt, which was crumpled due to being folded and stored in the prepared change of clothes for the morning.

Akhira looked at her own shirt and then at the slender one waiting. In the end, she had to give in because of the stern look Dr.Panipak gave her. It wasn't that she was scared or anything, but the shirt was really in bad shape. Akhira consoled herself before changing into the nightshirt from the previous night and waiting to eat while the doctor ironed her shirt for her.

"Here you go."

"Thanks."

Akhira reached out to take the shirt from Panipak, but the other party withdrew her hand, refusing to hand over the shirt just like that. The taller woman could only look at the person in front of her with confusion, while Panipak looked back at her similarly. The older one raised an eyebrow inquisitively, her gaze asking the silent question, why?

"You didn't say politely. Try again."

What... not politely? Akhira could only stare at the owner of the previous sentence, who was now pretending to be oblivious. Panipak just wanted to tease her back. Last night, she was teased until she was so embarrassed she didn't know what to do. Panipak stood there patiently, curious to see what this calm Akhira would do seeing the other when she refused to return the shirt. The person remain silent for a while, she wondered if Akhira would plan to use force to snatch the shirt from her.

"Thank you."

"Hmm."

Panipak pondered for a moment before shaking her head, indicating that such a response was not acceptable.

"Still not polite enough?"

The taller woman asked with a naive tone. Panipak could only sigh inwardly. Did she even know the meaning of speaking politely?

"Still not polite enough."

"And what would be considered polite?"

"Well... when you speak, you should have a polite particle."

"What's that polite particle?"

Akhira wondered to herself if it was like a sir or ma'am thing. The latter thought she kept to herself, not daring to say it out loud. Dr. Panipak looked at the person in front of her with slight astonishment. Did she really not know what a polite particle was, or was this a consequence of being an outsider, or was she just trying to annoy her? Despite her thoughts, Dr. Panipak was willing to explain.

"A polite particle is like 'Krub' or 'Kha.'"

"..."

"Like how I speak to you, or do you think because you're older than me, you don't have to use it? But if you don't use it, then you don't get to take the shirt, that's all."

It wasn't about asserting authority. It was just that Dr. Panipak didn't like the way Akhira spoke to her. It was a bit abrupt, and with her flat tone, it always rubbed her the wrong way. If she hadn't confessed her liking for her, Dr. Panipak might've thought she hated her for sure.

Akhira often used curt sentences that were incredibly neutral and emotionless. She didn't understand why she felt so bothered by that tone now, even though she'd been like that since they first met. The slender figure was about to turn away from the conversation but stopped when she heard a voice from the other person

"Please, return the shirt to me, kha."

"..."

Akhira looked at the now silent person. So, had she spoken politely enough to get her shirt back? With that thought, the taller woman reached out to take the shirt from the other's hand, and Dr.Panipak let go willingly.

"And... thank you for ironing the shirt, kha. "

Whether it was spoken politely or not, she didn't know, but what she did know was that Dr.Panipak wouldn't speak to her again. And was that a good or bad thing? Akhira could only wonder. Upon reflection, it was herself who still used a distant form of address with her. But from now on, that would change because she wanted to get closer to her...

"What is it?"

Dr.Panipak followed the gaze of the taller woman, who was just looking at her shirt around her waist. Looking down, she noticed a small food stain that must've splattered on her while she was cooking, and today of all days, she was wearing a white shirt. But changing now was out of the question since she'd already arrived at the hospital.

"It's okay. I'll have to wear a coat over it anyway. "

"Stay still."

Even though Dr.Panipak said that, it seemed the other person wasn't listening, as Akhira was now trying to dab the stain with a damp handkerchief.

"It won't come out,"

She told the stubborn person who was intently wiping, almost emptying the water bottle by pouring it onto the handkerchief, and she guessed her shirt must be getting wet too if Akhira didn't stop soon.

"Uh."

"What is it?"

For the second time this morning, Dr.Panipak asked this question because the other person had been acting strangely ever since she'd come to see her off.

"Here."

A single rose was handed to her. Akhira must've bought it when they stopped at the coffee shop. She'd been wondering where she disappeared. It turns out she went to buy a rose from the old lady who was selling flowers near the turn into the hospital. Dr.Panipak chuckled slightly at Akhira's unsure demeanor. The more she laughed, the more her beautifully arched eyebrows furrowed.

"Isn't this a flower used for Buddha offerings?"

"Huh?"

Akhira seemed quite startled. Dr.Panipak just looked at her, smiling. In truth, it wasn't a flower for offering Buddha as she said, but Akhira bought it from a garland shop by the roadside, so she just assumed it was.

"Anyway... thank you."

She smiled, reaching out to the flower from her hand. She was just joking, but Akhira looked like the world was ending.

"I'm going shopping with my mom this evening."

Dr.Panipak turned back to tell the tall figure who hadn't left yet.

"She asked me to invite you too."



"Tell her I'll come."



"So, what do you think, Pleng? Are you in?"

As soon as she had a moment to breathe from work, her two friends immediately pestered her.

"It won't take long, it's just an interview about general stuff, work, and a bit about life."

"Yeah, just for some magazines and websites."

"So kids can read it and get inspired. Maybe they'll want to become doctors when they grow up."

She just sat and listened. Do they still do this nowadays? She thought kids today already had their own goals from a young age.

"Come on, Pleng."

"Why don't you and Neen do the interview yourselves?"

"We already agreed to it."

In the end, the magazine chose three doctors: Dr.Plaipha, Dr. Ninlaneen, and Dr.Panipak. But since they contacted her during her break, she found out about it later than the others.

"You can share knowledge too, about treatments and stuff."

"People will better understand their conditions. I saw in the list of questions they want us to explain and educate."

"Yeah, it's useful. Or do you think it isn't, Pleng?"

She sighed and nodded indifferently. She didn't want to be in magazines or on social media, didn't want to spend time answering questions from

strangers. But for her friends, who had practically moved mountains to persuade her, she agreed. Just answering questions shouldn't take too much time.

Dr.Panipak read through the questions on her phone that her friends had sent to prepare in advance. She was quite focused because some questions could genuinely benefit the readers. She skimmed over the less interesting ones.

"Watch out."

She was so engrossed in her phone that she didn't notice her surroundings until Akhira warned her and gently pulled her arm away from the door. Otherwise, she might've bumped her head.

Dr. Panipak softly thanked her, glancing at her face adorned with a slight smile. Probably because she met her mother today, and she cooked a meal that filled her up. Dr.Panipak got a break from being the cook for one night. She wondered what her mother thought about her and Akhira. She didn't know how much her mother knew, but she invited Akhira to shop with them as if she already knew Akhira was with her. Overthinking wouldn't help though, because it seemed like her mother really liked Akhira.



## 16. Anything Will Possible

"Zo, you don't have to worry."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I am telling you right now."

"But Dad..."

"You're grown up now. Your brother will be back soon. When that happens, I'll let you two take full control of the company, and you'll have to teach him, too."

"..."

"Look at me, Zo. I may seem young, but I'm getting old. Lately, haven't you been the one running the company?"

The older man looked at his daughter, who didn't show much emotion, but he could still see the tension on her face. So, he tried to lighten the mood with a joke, hoping to ease her worries

"Don't think you're not suitable. No one is as capable as you, Zo."

"But this is a big deal."

"It's not that big. We're just changing the president. I'm just passing it on to the most suitable person. Sooner or later, it was always going to be you."

Akhira looked at her father, who spoke as this was a minor issue, nothing to be concerned about. It was true that the company was a family business, but

the shareholders played a crucial role. The old-fashioned, conservative ones would never easily accept someone younger taking over as president.

"But the shareholders..."

"Don't worry about them."

Mr.Akhin said, folding the newspaper and reclining comfortably in his chair. He then lifted a cup of fine tea to his lips with his time worn hands.

"I heard you've been going to the office early lately?"

He'd noticed his daughter a bit. At the company, he heard that she often arrived early, causing some employees and her secretary to come in before time to keep up with her. It was a hassle for everyone. He wasn't sure if she was just diligent or what. Lately, she hadn't been coming home much either. He had to ask his wife to find out what was going on. And now, he might need to prepare some dowry to propose to that family's daughter...

"Aren't you in a hurry to go somewhere today?"

KhunYing Nara asked her daughter, who was walking beside her. Akhira usually didn't have much time, so why was she free today?

"You're not going to see the doctor anymore? You got well now?"

"Mom."

The mother chuckled, seeing her daughter's face when teased. She looked like someone had taken her candy away.

"What is it, Zo? I was just asking. I heard you go to the doctor often. Are you sick? Or is it your allergies acting up every day?"

"..."

"When you have time, bring her over for dinner at home."

Since her daughter had never brought Dr.Panipak over, the mother had to speak up. Akhira had already been to her house for dinner. Even though her family was already familiar with Dr.Panipak, they still wanted her to come over. Not as a doctor but as her daughter's lover.

"Are you listening, Zo?"

KhunYing Nara sighed when her daughter left her to talk to herself, as she'd already walked into a store.

"Which one do you think is pretty, Mom?"

"Are you interested in these things, Zo?"

"They're cute."

KhunYing Nara had to look at her daughter again. Was she buying for herself? Since when did her daughter like these things? It didn't seem right.

"You don't have to buy it, dear. We have plenty at home."

"Help me choose, Mom."

In the end, she had to give in. When she spoke, her daughter didn't listen.

"This pattern is cute. I think it's..."

"This color, then. It's simple."

"Then why ask me to help you choose, this kid!?"

In the end, Akhira picked what she wanted. The mother could only be exacerbated by her daughter's nature. After getting what Akhira wanted, KhunYing Nara continued shopping, but suddenly, her companion disappeared, leaving her alone again.

"Why did you buy them for two?"

KhunYing Nara asked when she saw Akhira holding an identical item to what she'd just chosen. Why and for whom was she buying it?

Dr.Panipak walked out of the bedroom, her sweet eyes briefly glancing at the person working on the sofa before quickly looking away. She had no idea when Akhira had returned, as she'd disappeared after dropping her off at the door without saying where she was going or whether she'd be back for dinner. She hadn't mentioned anything at all.

The slender figure moved into the kitchen, paying no attention to the person sitting there. Akhira could only watch her, guessing she must've woken up thirsty. Before long, Dr. Panipak returned and passed by without any conversation.

*Bang!*

The unusually loud sound of the door closing made Akhira turn to look. The tall one shook off negative thoughts and continued working until accidentally falling asleep on the sofa. The next morning, Akhira, now fresh and ready, walked into the kitchen in a good mood. Though her face didn't show it much, anyone nearby could feel it. But not Dr.Panipak, it seemed. She appeared oblivious, cooking with more force than usual, banging the pan down like a street food cook.

She was chopping vegetables quickly, her head down. Was she in a hurry or mad at the vegetables? Akhira walked closer and reached to turn off the stove because she was too focused on chopping to notice if the food was burning. Dr.Panipak shot her a sharp look as if to say, 'Why are you bothering?' Akhira felt awkward; the doctor was holding a knife, after all.

Wasn't this scene from a horror movie? But she is a doctor... doctors don't harm people. Right?

"Take it easy."

"If you're not happy, don't interfere."

"I'm not unhappy. I'm worried you'll cut yourself."

“ ... ”

Silence followed as Akhira gently took the knife from Dr. Panipak's hand.

"Let me help."

Silence... no response. Akhira didn't even know if she'd done something to upset her. She walked out of the kitchen, leaving Dr. Panipak puzzled.

Wasn't she going to help? She sighed and picked up the knife again, admitting she might've lost her temper a bit. She was just irritated, probably because it was that time of the month. Calmer now, she resumed chopping more gently. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Akhira return, holding something out to her even though she hadn't turned to look.

"What is it?"

She finally put the knife down and turned to see a light blue apron, simple yet cute.

"I bought it for you. I went shopping with Mom yesterday."

Bought it for me? Went with her mother yesterday...

"Thank you."

The irritation Dr. Panipak had felt since last night suddenly vanished. She didn't understand why her mood changed so easily. Maybe it was because she mentioned going with her mom.

"Put it on, or your clothes will get dirty again."

Akhira urged her, seeing she was holding the apron but not wearing it. Dr. Panipak glanced at her, feeling pressured by her gaze, and put on the apron. She looked back at her, showing she'd done as she wanted, then turned to continue cooking, feeling a bit shy under Akhira's affectionate gaze. Dr. Panipak realized she'd never had an apron in the kitchen because she usually didn't need one because she rarely cooked, only making simple dishes or microwaving food occasionally.

A light touch from behind made the slender figure pause slightly. Someone was carefully tying the apron strings at her back. When she turned around, she saw the other person wearing an apron of the same color as hers.. Did Akhira buy these as a pair? Did she have this side, too? Dr.Panipak didn't ponder for long before turning her attention back to the pan in front of her. No matter how much she stirred, the pork she put in didn't seem to be cooked at all.

"You didn't turn on the stove."

The taller one said, reaching over to turn it on for her. Akhira then resumed chopping the vegetables that Dr.Panipak had prepared. At this moment, the doctor felt her face heat up uncontrollably, embarrassed by her mistake.

Maybe she should be more focused. And the meal preparation was taking longer than expected. She couldn't decide if having a helper was a good idea or not, as it almost made her late for work...

After finding a parking spot, Akhira immediately scanned the area for someone. She was here because two hours ago, she received a call from someone asking her to handle an errand here on their behalf.

"Hello, who are you here to pick up?"

A woman who was overseeing the children greeted her, noticing the tall woman who had been looking around for a while. Moreover, she didn't recognize the face; it didn't seem to belong to any of the children's guardians at the school, or else she would've remembered or at least found it familiar.

"Pot."

"Pardon?"

"His name is Pot."

Akhira replied indifferently, as if uninterested in the conversation, her eyes still searching for the owner of the name she'd just mentioned. The woman



paused to think, then her expression brightened with recognition.

"Oh, Pot. I'm sorry, but you're not listed as his guardian, and we haven't been notified in advance. We can't let him go with you without confirmation from his guardian,"

The woman explained. Akhira had to call Dr.Panipak to talk to the school and confirm that she indeed knew the child and his family. Once everything was sorted out and everyone was on the same page, a woman, likely a teacher or caretaker, brought the boy over. Pot looked unusually downcast.

"Your aunt is here, Pot."

The little boy looked up upon hearing this, but after a brief glance, he lowered his gaze to the ground again. His small arm was handed over to Akhira, who received it without any reaction from the child. The teacher could only offer a forced smile. Akhira held Pot's hand and led him to the car, observing his subdued demeanor. She lifted him into the passenger seat and buckled him in.

"Ms.!"

A voice called from behind just as Akhira was about to close the car door.

She turned to see the teacher holding a toy robot with a detached arm.

"This belongs to him."

"Other kids broke it, and he's been down ever since."

The teacher explained, handing over the toy. Akhira nodded in understanding before the teacher went back inside. She offered the broken toy to Pot, but he refused to take it.

"It's broken,"

He said in a small, nasal voice, not looking up. Akhira felt a pang of concern, wondering how to cheer him up.

"I'll... I'll buy you a new one,"

She quickly said herself as Pot looked up, his sad eyes suddenly brightening. Of course, he'd be excited about a new toy. Akhira agreed with Pot that she'd take him to buy new toys, but he had to stay with her first because it wasn't time for Dr.Panipak to finish her work yet. The little one didn't show any signs of fussiness. Soon, the sound of a mobile phone rang, likely from the child's aunt calling. Akhira answered the call through the car's system.

"Is everything alright?"

She asked.

"Auntie Plenggg!"

The cheerful voice rang out as soon as he heard his aunt's voice. That was enough for Dr.Panipak to know that everything was fine.

"Don't be naughty with Auntie Khira, okay?"

"I'm a good boy,"

He claimed, asserting his own goodness. The tall figure turned to look at the little boy, excited to be talking to his aunt through the car speakers, and couldn't help but smile.

"Stay with Auntie Khira for now, okay?"

"Yes,"

Akhira smiled slightly at the lively behavior of the little rascal before a voice interrupted from the other end, likely a nurse informing that there were patients. Dr.Panipak then spoke a few more sentences with her nephew before ending the call.

"My toy is broken,"

The little boy said, showing Akhira his broken toy.

"I'll take you to buy a new one,"

She replied affectionately, trying to soften her tone.

"Auntie Pleng gave it to me."

Hearing this, Akhira couldn't help but turn to look at the little one playing with the broken-armed robot. Even though this child could be stubborn, fussy, and demanding at times, he wasn't one to disregard the value of things. And, of course, items from important people were especially significant.

"I want color pencils,"

The little figure standing on the shopping cart pointed toward the section selling coloring supplies and drawing books. Akhira admired the person who arranged the shelves because they were so eye-catching, and of course, kids would love them.

The tall figure pushed the cart following the little rascal's request, who seemed enchanted by the myriad of colors. It took a long time to choose, and the child on the cart still couldn't decide which one he liked. He hesitated between colored pencils and crayons or suddenly wanted watercolors, so Akhira ended up buying all types. The little one stood beaming on the cart amid his colors.

"Auntie Khira, Doraemon,"

He said. With colors in hand, he then needed a coloring book. The little boy was interested in the uncolored cartoon characters waiting to be filled in. From popular Japanese cartoons, his interest spread to superhero books

nearby. Each book had different characters, and of course, Akhira had to buy almost all of them. The nephew didn't want them all, but just saying he liked them was enough for Akhira to buy them.

Finally, they reached the toy section, the main goal of this mall visit, which was a robot. The little one raised his arms, signaling Akhira to lift him from

the cart because he wanted to walk. How could he not be excited with so many robots around? This one was cool, that one was awesome. The little rascal carried robots around, looking at each one with sparkling eyes, picking up new ones continuously. Some he handed to Akhira, saying he'd keep them to choose later.

He finally stopped at a super cool red-armored robot. Akhira watched him with a smile. How could kids have so much energy? Just following him around was exhausting.

"Do you want it?"

Akhira squatted down and asked because she noticed Pot had been looking at this one for a long time. The little one put the toy back on the shelf and turned to hug her neck instead, surprising the adult. She gently patted the child's back to comfort him.

"No,"

He said softly.

"..."

"I already have one from Auntie Pleng."

The small voice, sounding a bit whiny, said, making it seem like he was about to cry. Akhira had to pick up the little one, who refused to lift his face from her shoulder and put all the chosen items back. When she offered to buy one for him, he fussed and cried, insisting he didn't want it.

She couldn't help but think how much this child's personality resembled his aunt's. Hard to please, hard to predict, throwing tantrums for no apparent reason, and when in a good mood, it was surprising. Both had such volatile emotions.

In the end, all they managed to get were some color sets and coloring books. Akhira paid for everything, one hand pushing the cart while the other carried the child, people passing by couldn't help but smile at the sight

of the serious-faced person carrying the kid around, thinking she was a mother taking her child shopping. How adorable.

"Do you want some ice cream?"

The child shook his head. Akhira could only feel sorry for him. This kid must be pretty sad that his favorite toy was broken.

"What would you like then?"

She asked while setting the small body down on the ground, hoping he'd turn around and talk properly. But the little one didn't answer, leaving the adult to sigh heavily, deep in thought.

"How about I fix it for you?"

It seemed to work. Little Pot quickly looked up at the tall figure with hope in his eyes.

"Can you really fix it?"

He asked, and Akhira nodded seriously. The sparkle in his eyes was even brighter than when she'd offered to buy him a new toy.

"Of course, we can fix it together, okay?"

The little rascal eagerly nodded with a big smile before the two of them went off to buy the necessary tools to repair the robot with the broken arm. Akhira didn't really know how to fix it, but for her nothing was impossible. If it could break, it could be fixed. Especially with robots, a detached arm shouldn't be too difficult. At least the parts weren't shattered into tiny pieces.



## 17. Hurtful Words

Dr.Panipak stood with her arms crossed, watching the two people sitting on the carpet next to the sofa. The floor was so cluttered with coloring books that it was almost impossible to walk. Her nephew seemed excited, flipping through one book after another, chattering non stop, and pointing out different cartoon characters. He was probably talking to his Auntie Khira. They got along so well.

"Auntie Pleng, sit here."

The little boy patted the empty space next to him, inviting his beautiful aunt to join them. The slender woman picked up some of the coloring books and walked over to sit where the little one wanted..

"Why did you buy so many?"

Her voice was colder than the air conditioning in the room, so cold that Akhira had to shift slightly to adjust her sitting position. She looked at Pot, who was now of no help as he was happily engrossed in unboxing the pencil to color his cartoons.

"Well... each book is different,"

Akhira replied softly to the stern doctor, her hands busy picking up the books her nephew requested. Dr.Panipak could only sigh at Akhira's indulgent behavior toward her nephew.

"With this many, he'll never finish coloring them all,"

She said, Even if he did, it'd take a long time, or the colors would run out first.

"And then he'll get bored and ask for something else."

She knew her nephew's habits well. Kids his age constantly shifted their interests. It wasn't that she didn't see the importance of a child's development; she knew it was crucial, but buying this much was unnecessary. Dr.Panipak glanced at the various bags to see if there were any other toys, then turned to look at the person she'd just chided.

Seeing no response, she wondered if she'd been too harsh. But even though she felt that way, Dr.Panipak didn't apologize. She got up and left Akhira alone with Pot. Dr.Panipak walked out of the kitchen after cleaning everything up and saw her nephew acting suspiciously as if trying to hide something from her. At first, she wasn't sure, but upon closer observation, she noticed something odd. When she asked what he was doing, he said he was coloring with Auntie Khira. Coloring what, exactly?

"Pot, it's bath time,"

She called. The little boy hurriedly tried to hide something, stuffing things into the tall figure of his playmate, who just laughed at her nephew. What were these two up to, acting so strangely?

"Auntie Pleng!"

Before she could reach the sofa, the mischievous boy ran to her. Akhira could only watch the little one with affection. The two disappeared into the room for a while. Soon, Dr.Panipak came out alone, without the mischievous boy. Akhira watched the slender figure sit down not far away and start tidying up the things her nephew had left behind. The silence made Dr.Panipak feel a bit uncomfortable. She noticed Akhira looking at her occasionally, but no conversation ensued.

"Auntie Pleng,"

Small voice broke the silence, accompanied by the little figure standing shyly at the door. The boy was now only covered by a long white towel wrapped around his chest.

"Weren't you going to dress yourself?"

She asked. The boy didn't answer; he just stood there, twisting. Dr.Panipak couldn't help but laugh at her nephew. When she tried to dress him in his pajamas, he fussed, saying he wanted to do it himself because 'I'm grown up.' And now look at him, in the same state as when she took him out of the bathroom.

The little one walked over, holding his pajamas in a cute manner, hoping to coax his aunt into dressing him again. Once he was dressed and powdered, he shooed his aunt away to take her bath, saying he'd play with Akhira and that she didn't need to worry. What's gotten into her nephew?

After finishing gathering the coloring supplies from outside, he brought them into the bedroom to continue painting. So, did her words really have an effect on her nephew? She told him to stop and come into the room, and he did come in, but he brought his stuff to keep playing. When she told him to go to sleep, he started to fuss. Luckily, tomorrow was a weekend; otherwise, someone would surely have a sore bottom.

Even though nine o'clock might not be late for many people, for a child this age, it's quite late. But even so, little Pot still refused to sleep. Now, he was comfortably painting on Akhira's mattress. What was so captivating about it?

"Pot, it's time for bed."

"I'm not sleepy,"

Replied Pot.

"Come to bed now."

"Auntie Khira isn't sleeping either."

The little one always found ways to create trouble for the tall one working at the desk. Akhira felt at a loss because it seemed like she was setting a bad example for her nephew. Normally, Akhira would work on the sofa outside,



but because the little one insisted she come in, she had to bring her work inside. And the result was as seen. Sweet eyes looked at her with slight reproach, which Akhira accepted willingly. She made amends by closing her laptop and lying down to set a good example for her nephew.

"Auntie Khira's going to sleep now, so Pot can too."

"I'll sleep with Auntie Khira."

As soon as he said that, the little body snuggled under the blanket for warmth. Dr.Panipak couldn't help but feel a bit hurt. Her nephew seemed to love someone else more than her now. Well, she was the strict type, unlike Akhira, who indulge him in everything.

"Up to you,"

Dr.Panipak said the final sentence before turning her back to the two people lying beside the bed. Akhira, who was watching, sensed the unusual tension. Soon, the room fell into silence. The sound of steady breathing indicated that the little one had fallen asleep. The tall figure carefully unwrapped the small hands and moved gently to avoid waking the child before lifting the small body with care.

"What are you doing?"

Dr.Panipak asked softly when she saw the other person holding her nephew. Akhira didn't respond but slowly laid the small body on the bed. The little one shifted slightly before Akhira pulled the blanket up to his neck.

"He wants to sleep with you. He might get fussy if he wakes up."

Akhira smiled at Dr.Panipak through the darkness.

"Go to sleep,"

Akhira said calmly, knowing that the other person was also attached to the nephew. Otherwise, she wouldn't have seen such a sulky reaction.

Dr.Panipak lay down again, trying not to pay attention to the person who kept smiling. Various feelings clashed within her, making her unsure how

to handle them. Should she be angry at Akhira? Not really. Should she be upset with her nephew? No. Or was she just feeling hurt? Perhaps a bit.

Dr.Panipak closed her eyes and extended her hand to gently rub the little one's belly, calming him back into sleep. The blanket was pulled up again, but this time, it was to cover the nephew's aunt instead.

"He loves you very much,"

The soft whisper made the person lying with closed eyes feel her heart race. Akhira met her gaze as she opened her eyes. With her eyes adjusting to the darkness, she could see the other person's face more clearly. Akhira didn't say it to comfort her. But because the child really loved his aunt, otherwise, he wouldn't have been so down just because a robot was broken. It was because the toy was so important to him.

"His robot's broken. Pot said another kid did it. He told me that his aunt bought it for him, so we secretly fixed it. He just didn't want you to know."

Dr.Panipak listened quietly to the person sitting with her back to her by the bed without responding. Is this the reason why my nephew's been acting so strangely?

"Pot said he didn't want you to know because he was afraid you'd scold him and be upset,"

Akhira chuckled a bit, recalling what the little rascal said on the way to pick up his aunt and even told her to keep it a secret.

"Mmn..."

The little one groaned sleepily, tossing and turning as if protesting Akhira's revelation of their secret to Dr.Panipak. The noise soon subsided when a gentle hand soothed him back to sleep.

"About what happened this evening... I'm sorry,"

Dr.Panipak finally spoke after a long silence. She felt she'd been too harsh with Akhira. At least Akhira had good intentions; she shouldn't have spoken

that way.

"I just don't want you to spoil him too much."

"..."

"And buying so much stuff is just a waste of money."

"It's alright, it's just a little thing."

"Just because something is cheap doesn't mean you should buy a lot of it. It's not necessary,"

Dr.Panipak sat up, trying to keep her voice as soft as possible. She didn't understand why they had to argue about her spending. Her initial desire to apologize vanished almost instantly because it seemed Akhira didn't grasp what she was trying to convey. Sure, she's rich, but this is too much.

"Don't worry about me running out of money. I have plenty."

Still, she doesn't get it, does she?

"I can take care of both you and your nephew,"

Akhira said. She turned to face Dr.Panipak, and, as expected, saw her stern face looking back disapprovingly.

"No need to trouble yourself. I can take care of myself. Just taking care of Pot is enough."

"So, you're okay with me taking care of him?"

Akhira raised an eyebrow playfully. Her expression, eyes, and tone were more playful than usual, making Dr.Panipak feel awkward. She shouldn't have said that. With nothing else to do, she glared at her and then lay down, pulling the small body next to her into a tight hug, signaling that she didn't want to continue the conversation. Not used to this at all.

"I want to wear it. I want to wear it."

The morning chaos began as soon as her nephew woke up. Dr.Panipak watched the two, causing the commotion. The chatter hadn't stopped since she let the tall one bathe her nephew. Now, Pot was fussing over wearing the blue apron.

"I wear it, match to Auntie Pleng,"

The little boy stood proudly, admiring the matching apron he wore.

Dr.Panipak shook her head at her nephew's enthusiasm.

"Be careful not to trip,"

She warned. The long apron and the short child were a mismatch, dragging on the floor as he walked. Soon enough, he'd get hurt because he was so mischievous.

"I'm beautiful, like Auntie Pleng."

"What!?"

Dr.Panipak looked at her nephew, twirling around as if he were a princess. She then looked up at the tall figure standing nearby, who shrugged, equally puzzled by Pot's behavior.

"Where did he learn that?"

She muttered. The last time they met, he wasn't like this. He usually played with robots or boy toys. Why was he acting like this now? She needed to talk to her brother. Maybe he let the boy watch too much TV. Kids at this age imitate everything they see. Before her nephew left, he whispered something to the tall woman, which she guessed was about the robot. But since Pot didn't want her to know, she pretended not to.

"Bye-bye, Auntie Pleng,"

Pot waved. Akhira looked at the little boy and smiled softly. She'd promised to fix the robot, so she'd have to find time to do it. Or maybe I should take it to a repair shop... Finally, the day arrived when the doctors had their

special assignment. Initially, they were supposed to shoot during the day, but to avoid interfering with work, they agreed to do it after their shifts.

Dr.Panipak surveyed the scene, noting the bustling activity around her. There were lights, cameras, and a carefully chosen location. She'd thought it'd be a simple Photoshoot with a few pictures and a casual conversation in an ordinary room. But this? This place lacked any resemblance of privacy.

Dr.Panipak mused to herself that the crew might've chosen it for its spaciousness, brightness, and beauty. Watching her two friends being interviewed, she sighed, knowing her turn was next. Even though she knew the questions in advance and there was nothing to worry about, she still felt nervous. After all, she wasn't a celebrity.

"Are you ready, Doctor?"

The young man conducting the interview smiled openly, clearly happy to be working with such a beautiful woman.

"Yes,"

Dr.Panipak replied politely.

"Check the lights,"

Someone nearby instructed, ensuring everything was perfect for the ongoing photo shoot. Dr.Panipak glanced at her watch briefly before indicating she was ready.

"Okay, Doctor, please introduce yourself."

"Hello, my name is Panipak Ananwakun."

Dr.Panipak introduced herself as instructed, and the questions began. She recounted her educational background briefly, explained why she became a doctor, and how many years she'd been working. She answered each question confidently.

"Oh, Ms. Akhira, are you here to pick up Pleng?"

Dr.Ninlaneen asked excitedly. Akhira greeted both doctors with a respectful nod before looking at the slender figure sitting with a man, surrounded by people taking photos and observing. Initially planning to wait downstairs, Akhira decided to come up when Dr.Panipak didn't appear. She figured she might be busy with work, and she was right. However, this time, Dr.Panipak wasn't as busy with patients as usual. With no other choice, Akhira stood with Dr. Panipak's friends, waiting.

"How do you take care of yourself with such a busy schedule, Doctor?"

The interviewer smiled broadly as he asked, clearly enjoying the conversation. Dr.Panipak answered truthfully, explaining that although she had little time, she managed to balance her schedule and ate nutritious food. Her answers impressed the listeners, as she always tied them back to health, fitting for a doctor. Even the nurses who sneaked a peek admired her professionalism.

"With such a busy schedule, how about your love life, Doctor?"

Dr.Panipak felt this question was unexpected and not something she'd prepared for.

"I think many people would like to know if you have someone special in your life,"

The interviewer continued, his sweet eyes meeting hers briefly before she looked away, focusing on the smiling man who had just asked her the question.

"No, I don't,"

She replied calmly, her voice steady and confident, showing no signs of nervousness or deceit. Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha, standing nearby, exchanged glances at their friend's answer and then looked at Akhira, whose face remained expressionless and intimidating.

"Why not? Haven't you met the right person yet? I bet someone as beautiful as you must have many people approached,"

The interviewer continued. Dr.Panipak gave a faint smile at his compliment, her eyes following Akhira as she turned and walked away.

"Wait, Ms.Akhira..."

Dr.Ninlaneen called out, but it was too late. She walked quickly, leaving her to shake her head at the situation. Nothing seemed to go right, and her friend's answer didn't help. Who wouldn't feel hurt?

"When did you arrive?"

Dr.Panipak asked as soon as she got into the car. She knew Akhira had waited long enough to come upstairs, and it was her fault for not informing her earlier. Akhira didn't respond, driving in silence.

"Today, I'm going to cook a new dish for you. I don't know if you..." "No need,"

A calm voice interrupted before the other person could finish speaking. Dr.Panipak pursed her lips slightly because she'd planned to cook a dish she'd learned from her mother for the other person to try today. But all her words had to be swallowed back down when she heard something that made her feel bad.

The two fell into silence. Dr.Panipak heard the other person have a brief phone conversation before hanging up. She didn't know who Akhira was talking to or what it was about, but she caught the phrase that Akhira was going to leave.

So this was the reason the other person didn't want to eat her food?... Dr.Panipak sat quietly, arms crossed, looking out the car window. When they arrived at the condo, she immediately opened the door and got out. Akhira watched the slender figure disappear inside with confusion but ultimately chose to follow her to her door anyway.

Akhira got back into the car once more and sighed with frustration after making sure Dr.Panipak had safely reached her room. Initially, she'd declined the company's internal party because she wanted to spend more

time with her. But after hearing what she said at the hospital, it made her feel so bad, bad enough not to want to see such a cruel person again. Bad enough to think she needed to distance herself from this person. Bad enough to agree to attend the event at the request of many people, even though she didn't want to go.

Dr.Panipak never spoke to her with harsh words. She always spoke politely and courteously. But every time she spoke, it made her feel bad. Her words always hurt every time she heard them....





## **18.It Ends Even Before It Even** **Begin**

Even though she knew the other person probably wouldn't be back right now and would likely eat somewhere else, Dr. Panipak still stayed in the kitchen.

"Mom, I'm not sure if I forgot to put something in,"

She said, holding the phone to one ear with one hand while the other hand stirred the pot. Her eyes were fixed intently on the food inside.

[Did you follow all the steps, Dear?]

Her mother asked on the other end.

"Yes, I did everything you told me to,"

Dr.Panipak replied.

[Tell me exactly what you did,]

Her mother prompted. Dr.Panipak described each step of the process in detail, including the ingredients she used and their quantities. She thought she'd remembered the method and recipe perfectly, but somehow, the result was disappointing. She'd succeeded once before, but that was when her mother was right there guiding her.

[Maybe you forgot to put some love into it,]

Her mother joked lightly, sensing from her daughter's tone that something was off. Dr.Panipak could remember every detail and step, so there was no

reason for the dish to turn out badly unless she wasn't really into making it.

[Just kidding. Hmm... you did everything right. Maybe the seasoning was off. Next time you come home, we'll make it together, and I'll watch you,]

Her mother said, trying to keep the conversation light after noticing her daughter didn't respond immediately. She didn't want to spoil the mood, so she acted as normal as possible, just like her daughter was trying to do.

"Okay, Mom... see you later. Don't stay up too late... goodbye,"

Dr.Panipak said, ending the call because she didn't want to bother her mother any longer. She looked at the food in the pot before dumping it out, despite having put so much effort into it. After showering and getting cleaned up, she sat on the sofa in the living room, holding a thick book she often read when she had free time. Free time, huh?

Dr.Panipak never really felt she had free time. She worked long hours, and after work, she had to wait for the bus, which could come at any time. When she got home, if she had any energy left, she'd read a bit or just shower and fall asleep from exhaustion. She never felt she had free time until now.

She didn't know why she felt this way. She opened the book to the page she'd left off and immersed herself in the words. Occasionally, her eyes would stray from the book to the clock, watching the hands move steadily. Time passed every time she looked.

She didn't know how much time had gone by. She turned page after page as if it'd never end until she heard a sound indicating someone was waiting outside her door. When she heard the doorbell, she quickly got up and walked to the small screen showing three people standing outside.

She recognized one of them immediately, but the other two were strangers. The swaying figure was being supported by a man and a woman, who brought Akhira into the room as soon as Dr.Panipak opened the door. They laid Akhira on the sofa where Dr.Panipak had been sitting just moments before.

"Um.. here's Ms.Akhira's car key,"

The woman said, handing over the key. Dr.Panipak took it and looked at the person lying on the sofa.

"But we didn't drive her car here. Please let her know,"

The young man said with a dry laugh. Everyone knew this about Akhira she was generous but had exceptions, especially when it came to her car, which she was very particular about.

"Please take care of her. We don't know what's wrong,"

The young man said, looking worriedly at Akhira before turning to Dr.Panipak, who stood silently in the middle of the room. Is this the woman Boss keeps raving about? Incredible...

"Didn't Ms.Akhira claim she wasn't interested? If she's not, why did she let her stay here? And the way the doctor looked at her, if she wasn't worried, I don't know what to say."

The young woman walking beside the man couldn't stop complaining. The boss was drunk and raving, refusing to go home. When asked where she wanted to go, she kept saying, "condo, condo." It took a lot of effort to figure out which condo she meant, leaving both of them exhausted.

Then there was the constant complaining about the heartless doctor and how she never felt anything for her. Who would've thought that someone with both looks and wealth could be heartbroken over love? It made her curious to see the face of the heartless woman the boss talked about. She heard she was a doctor, but seeing the woman who supposedly broke the boss's heart made her rethink everything. That action is that really the look of someone who doesn't care?

"We should thank the doctor."

"Why?"

"Have you ever seen Ms.Akhira like this since you started working here? Besides her stern face and serious look, this is the first time I've seen a third expression."

Their laughter echoed as they thought about the person they just dropped off. Akhira must've been really stressed about this doctor to act that way. They never knew their meticulous, intelligent, world-weary boss, who seemed to have no interest in anything but work, could fall so deeply in love with a woman. Even if she knew it was a trap, she'd willingly fall into it. Love is like that....

Dr.Panipak just realized how difficult it was to support someone who was out of it, guiding them where they needed to go. Getting Akhira to the bed was a struggle, almost causing them both to collapse. She laid her down with a bit of force because she kept trying to slump. Dr.Panipak was nearly out of strength. If they had to go any further, they would've both ended up on the floor. Dr.Panipak sighed from exhaustion, adjusting Akhira to a more comfortable position before fetching supplies to clean her up.

"Ugh..."

"Stay still,"

She told the restless Akhira, knowing she probably couldn't hear her but unable to stop herself from scolding her. She looked at her unconscious form with concern, wanting to reprimand her for her behavior but feeling more worried than anything. Dr.Panipak had felt this way since seeing her in front of the room, needing someone to bring her home. At least she didn't drive himself; otherwise, there would've been an accident for sure.

"Ms. Akhira,"

Dr.Panipak called her name as she resisted her attempts to wipe her face.

Akhira swatted her hand away and turned to avoid the cold cloth.

"Ugh,"

She groaned in frustration as the cold cloth touched her face.

"Can you stay still, please?"

This time, instead of pushing her hand away, she grabbed it tightly.

Suddenly, she flipped over, pinning Dr.Panipak down on the bed.

"Ms. Akhira!"

Dr.Panipak was shocked by her actions and even more so when her face nuzzled into her neck. Her hand, which had been holding her wrist, now gently caressed her waist, sending shivers through her body.

"Ouch,"

She cried out as she caused her pain. Hearing that, Akhira seemed more encouraged, inhaling her scent and tasting her skin as if claiming ownership. Her hand moved from Dr. Panipak's waist, lifting her shirt and slipping underneath to touch her bare skin. The coldness of Akhira's hand made her shiver, her body tensing at the unfamiliar sensation.

Akhira's prominent nose brushed against the beautiful neck, sometimes pressing down to inhale, hoping to catch the scent of the person beneath. She dragged her lips to the middle of the neck, then kissed upwards until she reached the chin. The slender body twisted in resistance with great difficulty, wanting to fight back but physically unable to. The faint smell of alcohol from the other person made her feel even more dizzy.

The delicate hand gripped the small cloth tightly, squeezing it until the water in it dripped out. The other hand clung to the shoulder of the person above, wrinkling her shirt. The overwhelming sensation was abruptly halted when the person on top stopped all actions and rolled off her, lying down with her back turned as if nothing had happened.

Dr.Panipak looked at the back of the person lying next to her with feelings that were hard to describe. She let out a sigh of relief, feeling like she could breathe normally again. She pulled down her white shirt, which had been

pulled up by the other person who was now laying with her back to her, not taking any responsibility. She didn't know how to feel about it.

Her delicate hand clutched her left chest, where her heart was pounding uncontrollably. The blood was pumped so vigorously that Dr.Panipak feared her heart might actually leap out. It felt like someone was beating a drum set inside her heart. She was more nervous than when she treated her first patient.

The person on the bed tossed and turned, a stretching to shake off the stiffness from her body. Akhira sat up abruptly, irritated by the light seeping through the white curtains, which hurt her eyes because it wasn't the usual early morning light. A headache struck her, forcing her to sit still and let her body adjust. She rubbed her temples slightly before looking at the clock, confirming her suspicion that it wasn't morning but rather late in the day.

Her sharp eyes scanned the room but found no one. The owner of the room must've gone to work early. Akhira took herself to the bathroom to deal with the fatigue from drinking alcohol. It didn't take long for her to come out looking as neat as she did every day. She walked out of the bedroom, and her sharp eyes caught sight of a small pink note and two car keys from different brands. One was her, and the other, she didn't need to guess whose it was.

‘Take my car. Food is in the kitchen. If you have a headache, the medicine is in the cabinet.’

After reading the note, Akhira put it down and walked to the kitchen. There, she saw the food Dr.Panipak had prepared placed in a microwave-safe container. She just stood there looking at it, not touching it. She didn't dare throw it away, but she didn't feel like eating it either. In the end, she chose to leave the food untouched and didn't use the car she offered.

Akhira left Dr.Panipak's condo with only her wallet. She couldn't find her phone, guessing it was in the car since she remembered not taking it to the party. It was her first time using a taxi service. After telling the driver her destination, she sat back and closed her eyes as if she didn't want to be aware of anything anymore.



"Pleng!"

"Hmm?"

"Are you listening?"

"What's wrong? Are you sick?"

Dr.Ninlaneen reached out to touch her friend's forehead.

"You're not hot."

"Of course not."

"But you seem like you are."

Dr.Panipak avoided eye contact, trying to act normal to prevent her curious friend from suspecting anything further.

"Your outfit looks different today, but it's cute in a new way."

The white turtleneck shirt looked age appropriate and even better with the white gown coat over it. Seeing her friend acting strangely, Dr.Plaifha changed the subject, steering Dr. Ninlaneen's attention to Dr.Panipak's outfit instead.

It seemed like she was helping her friend, but the person probably didn't realize that she was making Dr.Panipak feel her face heat up just thinking about the person who made her pick up this shirt to wear, even though it didn't match the hot weather of Thailand. Luckily, the air conditioning in the hospital was ice-cold, so no one thought she looked strange.

"Not as cute as you, Fha,"

Dr.Panipak replied honestly.

"Oh, stop flattering each other,"

Dr.Ninlaneen teased, pouting at her two friends, causing them to burst into laughter.

"Got a cramp, Neen? Your mouth's all twisted,"

Another friend teased back. The slender figure could only smile at her friends' humor.

"Whatever!"

"Keep twisting, and your neck will get stiff."

Dr.Panipak shook her head slightly, pushing the food around on her plate with one hand while using her phone with the other. This unusual behavior made Dr.Ninlaneen nudge Dr. Plaifha to take a look. Sure, scrolling through a smartphone was normal; everyone did it, but for Dr.Panipak, it was odd.

Dr.Panipak wasn't addicted to social media. She only used her phone when necessary. Besides, she valued real life interactions more than apps on a rectangular screen. Seeing her like this, they couldn't help but be curious. But on the other hand, she might have something important to take care of.

"Pleng, was everything okay yesterday?"

Dr.Ninlaneen asked, causing Dr.Panipak to pause slightly. Without needing further explanation, Dr.Panipak knew exactly what her friend was referring to.

"Nothing special."

"You should talk to Ms. Akhira. From the look on her face, it seemed like something was wrong,"

Dr.Ninlaneen suggested.

"Forget about her. I have an appointment with a patient this afternoon. Don't want to be late,"



Dr.Panipak said, getting up from the dining table and leaving her two friends looking at each other in confusion.

"Do you think Pleng had a fight with Ms. Akhira?"

Dr.Plaifha asked after their friend had left the restaurant.

"Who knows? When she says 'nothing, it usually means something."

"Exactly."

Both sighed simultaneously, shaking their heads in helplessness. When it came to matters between two people, all they could do was watch and support from afar. They could offer advice and remind their friend, but they couldn't control what would happen...



"Are you staying over tonight?"

She decided to ask because Akhira had parked the car in front of her condo instead of the parking lot as usual.

"Probably not,"

She replied flatly. Dr.Panipak glanced at the driver, who didn't even turn to look at her.

"Okay,"

She said, getting out of the car and walking inside without looking back. Akhira remained seated in the car, only catching a glimpse of her slender figure out of the corner of her eye before she disappeared from view.

Dr.Panipak returned to her room feeling confused. She scanned the clean and tidy room, just as it'd been when she left for work. She walked into the kitchen, where the food she'd prepared that morning was still untouched. When she checked, the food was just as she'd left it. Akhira hadn't touched it at all...

Dr.Panipak pushed away her swirling thoughts, feeling a small pang of hurt growing inside her. Besides not eating her food, the car keys she'd left for her were still there, and the note she'd written was untouched. She stopped dwelling on these trivial matters that were giving her a headache and went about her routine as usual.

"Why aren't there any stars tonight?"

"There never are, Mom,"

Akhira replied. She wasn't sure how long her mother had been standing there, maybe a while, or maybe she'd just come out. She hadn't noticed because she was lost in thought.

"But you still look at the sky, even when there's nothing there."

"..."

"You seem stressed lately, Zo. Is work at the company keeping you busy?"

The tall one didn't say anything; she just shook her head in response before letting out a sigh as if carrying the weight of the world. KhunYing Nara saw her daughter's demeanor and could only worry.

"Mom, you should go inside. It's cold out here; you might get sick."

"Are you shoosing me away because you want to stand here acting like you're in a music video?"

She joked, managing to coax a faint smile from her daughter. The mother smiled back affectionately. At least she got her daughter to laugh.

"Alright, I'll go inside. And Zo, stop staring at the sky and spend your time looking at what you really want to see."

Akhira pondered her mother's parting words. What did she really want to see? What if seeing it hurt? Should she still look? Even though she tried not to look or care. The truth Akhira knew about this matter was that looking hurt and not looking hurt are just the same. It hurt not to see her in her sight.

It hurt not to be able to look at her face like before. Was there any other way to avoid feeling like this? Akhira felt stuck, Unable to go on or return.

More than a week had passed, yet the atmosphere between the two showed no signs of improvement. Each day grew more suffocating. The silence and indifference created a growing distance between them, almost unnoticed.

The bad feelings clung to their hearts, making it hard to heal. Akhira still picked up and dropped off Dr.Panipak every day, and she still allowed it. But neither felt any happiness. Seeing each other every day but not exchanging a single word, treating each other like a passenger and a driver. No one wanted to feel this way.

"Are we really not going to talk?"

Finally, Dr.Panipak couldn't take it anymore.

"I thought you didn't want to talk to me."

"Who exactly doesn't want to talk?"

What Dr.Panipak planned to say nicely came out sarcastically, fueled by rising bad feelings. Knowing it wasn't good, but once said, she couldn't take it back. After hearing the other's sigh, her last bit of patience snapped.

"Let's not do this. If you're bored, let's go our separate ways."

She said,

"I'm not bored... I'm just tired."

"Then stop, so you won't be tired."

Akhira turned to look at the person beside her immediately after hearing that. The voice, if she wasn't mistaken or her hearing wasn't too bad, was trembling. The tall figure met the eyes of the other, filled with mixed feelings of confusion and deep pain.

"If you're tired, then stop... because I'm tired, too."

The final words sounded like the end of everything... The end, even before it began.



SunYanV

## 19. Found Out

Everything seemed to return to normal. Everyone went back to their own lives. Both Dr.Panipak and Akhira appeared somber and worked hard. They mightn't have noticed it themselves, but those around them could clearly see the changes. People who are distant often see the big picture better.

Even though everyone was concerned, all they could do was offer support from afar. Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha were also worried. Even though their friend didn't share any details, they could sense it. After all, the luxurious black car that used to pick up and drop off their friend was no longer around.

But no matter how worried they were, they couldn't say anything because they didn't want to upset their friend any further. It's true that outsiders often see the big picture, but they never know the details and the true nature of the relationship. They don't have the right to meddle in someone else's personal matters, even if that person is a close friend.

From thinking that everything would get better, it actually got worse. To this day, Dr.Ninlaneen still wonders what happened. Why did everything turn out so bad?

"Pleng, are you done with work?"

Dr.Ninlaneen peeked through the door, even though she already knew the working hours of the person inside.

"Are you leaving already, Neen?"

"Yeah, do you want to leave together?"

"It seems like I still have patients. You go ahead."

Dr.Panipak smiled at her close friend, who looked dejected at the door. Dr.Ninlaneen had to step aside as a nurse led a patient to where she was standing, proving that her friend wasn't lying.

"Should I wait?"

She poked her head in again, not giving up until Dr.Panipak gave her a stern look and said that a patient was waiting and she didn't have time to talk. Only then did Dr.Ninlaneen retreat, closing the door and smiling at the patient who had just arrived at the examination room.

"Please come in."

Before leaving, Dr.Ninlaneen still performed her duty as a good doctor by opening the door for the patient with kindness. Dr.Panipak heard her friend's voice from outside and smiled.

"Haven't seen Dr.Panipak's girlfriend around lately,"

A nurse, unaware of the situation, chatted with her colleague, not noticing that the person they were talking about was there. Dr.Panipak chose to ignore it, stop thinking, and stop caring about what she heard. The slender figure sat waiting for the bus, something she hadn't done in a long time. The black car she knew so well passed by, just like it had for many days. She didn't want to look, but when she saw it, she couldn't help but remember.

The same as Akhira. Her sharp eyes couldn't help but glance at the bus stop every time she drove by. And every time she saw that slender figure there, always in the same spot. The figure of someone she could recognize from afar. She felt bad every time she saw her sitting there, waiting for a bus that she didn't know when it'd come.

It hurt every time she could only drive past her as if she didn't care. Even though she finished work late today, she still saw her there. Dr.Panipak must've worked overtime until late, too. Akhira unconsciously slowed down, watching the rearview mirror with concern until she saw the slender figure step onto the bus. Only then did she look away, assured that Dr.Panipak would get home safely,

"Not going out today?"

KhunYing Nara looked up from the magazine she was reading to see who had just walked in. Lately, her daughter seemed to be staying home more often. She was glad her daughter was home, but there was still something that worried her. Akhira acted normal, but in reality, she wasn't..

"Today, I have an appointment with Pleng's mother. Do you want to come along? Since we..."

"I can't, Mom. I have work to do. Sorry,"

Said Akhira, leaving her mother stunned. This time, it seemed like she couldn't force her daughter anymore. Akhira looked stressed, and her refusal was more decisive than ever before. KhunYing Nara watched her daughter sit down with a bag of something.

"Are you playing with these toys?"

She asked because she glimpsed something that looked like children's toys. She understood that her daughter was from a new generation, but wasn't she too old to be playing with robots?

"No, Mom... It's for my nephew."

"Nephew? Whose nephew? We don't have any kids in our family."

Could her youngest son have a secret child abroad? But it didn't seem likely. So, where did this nephew come from?

"..."

"So, this nephew you're talking about, whose child is he? Do I know them?"

The barrage of questions came but the answers were short and vague. Akhira simply replied that it was a friend's nephew. Her mother could only blink and nod, giving up her initial curiosity. Soon, it was time for KhunYing Nara to go out, as she'd mentioned earlier, leaving her daughter alone with the robot.

Akhira spent almost the entire day in the living room. The TV had been on since late morning until evening, even though she wasn't paying attention to it. She stretched to relieve the stiffness from assembling the child's robot parts she'd promised to fix. Leaning back on the sofa, feeling tired, her sharp eyes caught sight of a magazine her mother had left behind. She remembered her mother reading it earlier that morning.

The cover featured a woman Akhira didn't recognize, possibly a famous Thai celebrity or someone of similar renown. But Akhira was more interested in the content on the cover than the person. The text highlighted an interview with doctors from a renowned hospital, and it caught Akhira's attention. She couldn't look away and eventually picked it up, flipping to the desired page.

She read through the history and interviews of Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha, each given a full page. Akhira turned to the next page, which she expected to be about. Dr.Panipak Ananwakun. A respiratory specialist. Akhira already knew this because her entire family seemed to trust her with her care. How long has it been? She couldn't say, as she never asked her mother.

The photo showed the doctor in a clean white gown coat, her face lightly made up, looking both fresh and professional. She appeared to be a beautiful and healthy doctor. Her long, silky hair was down, showcasing her beauty. A slight smile graced her face for the camera, along with a few other photos in different poses. The page was filled with text, and Akhira pondered deeply. Even though she didn't want to care, her heart often did the opposite of her mind..

Although Akhira knew a bit about the doctor's background, she read it intently. It covered her education before becoming a doctor, her responsibilities, what a day in her life looked like, advice for those interested in the medical profession, how she cared for her patients, and how she handled different types of patients.

Akhira understood everything the other person was trying to convey. She must have told these stories while she was waiting in the car. She wondered what was so special about those words that made the reader smile. Akhira read each word slowly, not rushing, until she reached the personal part,



where her smile gradually faded as she became aware. She didn't really need to read on because she still remembered that day's events clearly. But even so, her eyes continued to follow the words as if she wanted to remind herself of the entire story once more.

“Doctor, you don't seem to have much free time. What about love?”

"I think many people would want to know if you have someone special in your life."

The voice in her memory echoed, replaying like a high-definition movie. She didn't need to read to know how the beautiful doctor answered this question.

“No, I don't.”

“Really? Why is that? Haven't you met the right person yet? I think someone as beautiful as you must have many admirers.”

“Not that many.”

“So, there are people who are interested, but no one who has caught your eye yet?”

“There are a few people I talk to.”

“Then that means you're not single. So, you have a boyfriend, right?”

“Actually, no... she hasn't asked me yet.”

“Oh, I see. Well, I hope she asks you soon.”

The magazine went on to describe that the doctor didn't say anything more. She just smiled and included a picture for the readers to see without having to imagine. It was a light but bright smile as if she was accepting the well-wishes of her conversation partner. The writer concluded with praise, saying that even though the doctor seemed serious, she had a playful side that caught the interviewer off guard.

From a lifeless heart, Akhira felt her heartbeat quicken. She blinked a few times before rereading everything from the beginning over and over. Was this real? Did she really say that? She hoped she wasn't seeing things or overthinking to the point of hallucination. Most importantly, the question that lingered in Akhira's mind was.... Did Dr.Panipak mean her?

The warm atmosphere of the restaurant, combined with the falling rain, made Dr.Panipak, who was sitting alone, feel an inexplicable loneliness. Her sweet eyes looked out through the clear glass, now fogged and covered with raindrops, making it hard to see anything but blurry images.

"Here you go, doctor. Oh, it's raining,"

Dr.Ninlaneen, carrying a handful of items, grumbled as she noticed the weather outside. She didn't know when it started raining because she was busy getting the dipping sauce and ice cream to try while waiting for the meat they ordered.

"Never mind, we'll be eating for hours anyway,"

She said with a smile, placing the dipping sauce on the table before disappearing again. Dr.Panipak could only watch her two friends, who seemed very happy to be having a barbeque together today. As the dishes started to arrive, the one who ordered a lot of meat didn't hesitate to dig in.

"Pleng, stop eating just vegetables,"

They said, but Dr.Panipak kept eating only vegetables, making her friends constantly put cooked meat on her plate.

"This much it won't make you fat. Eating later than this won't make you fat either,"

Dr.Ninlaneen said with her mouth full. The slender woman could only feel exasperated. She never saw her friend act like this at the hospital. Was her friend deceiving the public? Where did the beautiful Dr.Ninlaneen go? After eating for a while, Dr.Panipak picked up her phone, feeling the vibration from the slim device. She saw that it was a message from her mother and

opened it without hesitation. She frowned slightly when her mother asked again where she was.

Normally, she'd always report to her mother about her whereabouts, whether she was returning home or had an appointment with someone. Today, she'd already informed her mother that after work, she'd be going out for shabu-shabu with friends. At that time, her mother didn't say or ask anything further. So why all of a sudden did she want to know now? Moreover, her mother was never one to pry or even press for the name of the restaurant and its location like this. But despite her suspicions, Dr.Panipak quickly typed a response to her mother.

All the details were sent correctly and completely, even down to the alleyway of the street. Dr.Panipak looked at the square screen of her phone, which now indicated that her mother had read the message. But her mother didn't reply back; she just disappeared. Dr.Panipak then put away her phone and turned her attention to her friends sitting with her instead.

Even though the table was filled with chatter and laughter, Dr.Ninlaneen occasionally noticed a hint of sadness in her friend's beautiful eyes. She tried to engage in conversation to distract Dr.Panipak from whatever was making her sad.

Time passed, and Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha were in and out, refilling drinks and sauces countless times. Various meats were ordered repeatedly until the table was full, while the staff continuously cleared away finished plates. Sometimes, the staff looked on with a mix of astonishment and curiosity. They must've wondered why this group of women eat so voraciously as if they were starving, and yet their figures didn't seem to match their appetite. They ate as if it was both their first and last chance to enjoy such a feast.

"I have something to discuss with you."

The slender figure paused slightly after hearing the familiar voice. Dr.Panipak knew who it was without having to look back. Dr.Ninlaneen, about to bite into a piece of meat, was caught off guard when she saw who

was standing behind her friend. She swallowed hard before slowly placing her chopsticks down.

"Pleng, please, come in. I'll get you some drinks."

The first sentence was addressed to the newcomer, while the latter seemed more directed at her own friend. Dr.Ninlaneen meant she'd get a drink for the tall person, but she didn't dare to directly say Akhira's name because of the silence and the other party's statement that she had something to discuss with her friend. It felt awkward to stay seated.

"Uh, I need to use the restroom,"

Said Dr.Plaifha, before following Dr.Ninlaneen out closely. Dr.Panipak watched the two, who didn't seem particularly suspicious, especially Dr.Plaifha, who had told her she was going to the restroom. Going to the restroom? Then why take the dipping sauce cup with her... At this point, Dr.Panipak still hadn't turned to look at the person standing behind her. She didn't know how the person got here or knew she was here. Or was it.. her mother?

"Please, go ahead."

Dr.Panipak spoke as if uninterested, but eventually, she had to turn around because the other person remained silent. Akhira's tied-up hair was wet, and her clothes were soaked through. The beautiful face she hadn't seen for days was framed with droplets of water, and Dr.Panipak just realized she'd been caught in the rain. Akhira might've gotten wet entering the restaurant because, even though the parking lot was close to the establishment, braving the heavy rain would explain her drenched state.

Dr.Panipak offered tissues to Akhira, unable to bear seeing her in such a state. Perhaps it was her doctor's instinct. Her feelings were a mess, too tangled to sort out. Unsure of what to feel, she was confused enough to stop all her thoughts and try to regain her composure.

She remembered the last time they spoke was in the car. It was because she couldn't stand Akhira's indifference anymore. She thought that Akhira had

changed, maybe tired of having to pick her up and do so many things for her. And because she wasn't confident in her, not sure about the things Akhira had once said, she decided to end things between them. She thought it was better than holding on and feeling worse, wasting more time on each other. If tired, just take a break; if bored with each other, just walk away.

So what happened today? What did this woman want from her again? Why did she come here? Why did she say there was something to talk about? In Dr.Panipak's mind, there were only questions of why. Aren't we done with each other? Dr.Panipak sighed softly before turning to face the person who still stood there.

"What do you want to say? Just say it."

"..."

"If you don't have any business, then I'm going to..."

*"Be with me, please."*



## 20. A Fresh Start

"What?!"

"I said, can you be my girlfriend?"

Dr.Panipak quickly stood up, grabbing Akhira's arm to quiet her down. She was speaking so loudly that people at the next table turned to look with curiosity.

"Aren't you saying it too loudly?"

"I thought you couldn't hear me,"

Said Akhira. Dr.Panipak didn't say anything else; she just sighed and sat back down, pretending to pick up a piece of pork to eat as if she wasn't interested in what the other person had said. Akhira, seeing this, didn't know how to react.

"Pleng..."

"We have something we need to talk about,"

Dr.Panipak said in a serious tone, locking eyes with the person in front of her to let her know she wasn't joking. Akhira nodded without protest and remained standing there with a dejected demeanor, prompting Dr.Panipak, who was glancing at her, to shake her head slightly.

Would Akhira realize how much her words had made her heart race? She hadn't been prepared and didn't expect her to ask her to be her girlfriend at such a time.

And to simply agree would be too easy for Akhira, especially since she'd been acting distant and cold toward her for nearly two weeks. How could she forget that and just agree to it? If they were to really date, she wanted to talk and understand each other first, but not now at least not in a crowded restaurant like this.

"Um, Ms. Akhira, please have a seat. Here's some water."

Dr.Ninlaneen returned at just the right moment. If this was a drama, she'd be right on her cue. And the reason she came at the right moment was because she'd been watching the whole time. Seeing her friend ignoring the person who came to talk, she quickly stepped in, hoping to smooth over the potentially awkward situation.

Dr.Ninlaneen served the water, moved her bag from next to Dr.Panipak, and sat on the same side as Dr.Plaifha instead. Dr.Panipak secretly sighed for her friend, who seemed too willing to help and support Akhira. Who are you actually friends with? Dr.Panipak sent a stern look her way, but Dr. Ninlaneen wasn't one to be intimidated.

Akhira thanked her and took a drink, not wanting to be rude to the person who had brought it. Dr.Ninlaneen smiled, realizing just how charming Akhira could be. Even though she didn't speak sweetly, her actions spoke volumes. It was clear that she didn't want to hurt Dr.Ninlaneen's feelings, so she drank the water. Could hear Ninlaneen's feelings, so she drank the water. Could her friend really not like someone as adorable as this? Impossible. Oh, come on, Pleng...

Akhira sat quietly, dabbing the rain off her face with a tissue. The conversation at the table didn't bother her much; she just felt out of place because she wasn't good at socializing. She wasn't good at talking unless it was about work, and she hardly ever engaged in trivial conversations.

"What brand of lipstick do you use, Ms. Akhira?"

Dr.Ninlaneen gathered her courage to engage Akhira in conversation, seeing her sitting silently and ignored by Dr. Panipak. She tensely hoped for a response as this woman seemed quite formidable. Eventually, Akhira

replied, and both Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr.Plaifha breathed a sigh of relief after getting an answer.

"I haven't found a good brand. The ones I used weren't that good."

Said Dr.Ninlaneen. It was a comment from across the table. Akhira nodded in acknowledgment, and everyone could tell how attentively Akhira was listening. The tension began to fade as they realized that beneath the stern face, there was nothing to fear as they'd imagined. She wasn't scary, just intimidating.

Both glanced at their friend, who pretended not to care but couldn't help but smile when they saw Dr.Panipak's appetite improve before their eyes. No one else might've noticed, but Dr.Plaifha and Dr.Ninlaneen saw it as clear as day. They wanted to tease her, but they were considerate of Akhira.

"I'll pay for this,"

Said Akhira

"No, it's okay,"

Dr.Panipak refused.

"No worries. This meal is on me."

Akhira said the latter sentence to Dr.Panipak's friends, prompting them to smile widely in thanks, feeling like they were little sisters to Akhira. Why was her friend's girlfriend so kind? She was both cool and kind.

"You didn't eat. Why would you pay?"

Dr.Panipak asked. Even amid the joy, there was someone who didn't quite agree with this kindness. Dr.Panipak immediately objected after Akhira offered to pay for the meal, even though she'd barely eaten anything except for water. The waiter could only stand by with a perplexed look, no different from the two other doctors.

"Then, you can pay for your share. I'll pay for your friends."



It was a solution that Dr.Panipak couldn't refuse. When she said there was no need to pay for her, Akhira didn't pay for her but instead paid for her friends. Dr.Panipak was slightly annoyed before she took out her money to pay for her share. The couple's behavior was in the sight of the two doctors the whole time, causing them to smile at the cuteness.

You're having a couple fight, plain and clear. Do both of you even realize it? And so, the matter ended with Dr.Panipak being ditched. She came with friends, but on the way back, she was left with someone else... Someone she was still annoyed with. Throughout the ride, Dr.Panipak sat in silence. Akhira didn't know what to do or say. She silently had some distraction, even if thanked the radio for providing it was minimal.

"Is something wrong?"

Dr.Panipak asked when she noticed the other person seemed restless as if something was off. Akhira was fidgeting and tapping her fingers on the steering wheel, which was unusual because she never acted like this, and it wasn't her habit. She was sure of it.

"No."

The doctor's beautiful round eyes looked for the truth, but she didn't press further. If Akhira said nothing was wrong, then that was that. Afterward, the car fell into silence until they arrived at her condo.

"Where is my stuff?"

Dr.Panipak asked when she looked at the back seat and didn't find the things she'd bought. Akhira had been carrying the bags since the restaurant, but now they weren't where they should be.

"In the back,"

Akhira replied, not quite clearly. She probably meant the trunk. Why did she put it there when her things weren't that many? There were only a few bags. Dr.Panipak raised an eyebrow slightly before getting out of the car. Akhira could only watch the slender figure walking to the back of the car

through the window. Suddenly, her heart started pounding because she'd been worried about this the whole trip.

Dr.Panipak walked to the trunk with confusion, And her eyes widened slightly at the sight. It wasn't what she'd expected. The trunk was packed full of various flowers, so full that there was hardly any space left. Her bags were placed at the front, where there was just a little space. Dr.Panipak turned to look at Akhira, who had just gotten out of the car, embarrassed and awkward. She couldn't help but smile at the sight.

"Uh, I, uh, well..."

Akhira scratched her neck nervously, then continued to scratch her nose before putting her hands in her pockets, trying to stop her own laughable actions.

"I bought them for you."

Akhira said softly to the smaller figure. She intended to apologize and ask her to be her girlfriend. But she'd been too hasty and already asked her to date and not even getting an answer. These flowers had been stressing her out the whole drive because she knew the doctor didn't like her spending money on unnecessary things. The most important reason was that Akhira didn't know if Dr.Panipak would like them. That's why she'd been hesitant. She was worried she wouldn't like them and afraid she'd reject her again.

"What are these for?"

Dr.Panipak feigned curiosity even though she had a hunch already. She never thought someone like Akhira would have this side, and it was quite unexpected for her.

"Sorry..."

This time, Akhira didn't avoid eye contact or look away. Those eyes were serious, devoid of any flicker of hesitation. Akhira locked eyes With Dr.Panipak, conveying the same meaning as the words just spoken. The doctor was instead the one who turned away and looked at the flowers.

"Sorry for leaving you to go home alone,"

Akhira said with a tone of regret, prompting Dr.Panipak to shift her gaze from the flowers to her once more.

"It's okay. Don't forget that before I met you, I used to go home alone anyway,"

Dr.Panipak replied softly, her sweet eyes meeting Akhira with a heart beating faster than ever before..

"Sorry for being unreasonable, too."

"Are you still mad about that day?"

Finally, Dr.Panipak asked the question that had been weighing on her mind. Akhira didn't say anything; she just lowered her head slightly before nodding. Dr.Panipak couldn't help but smile fondly at the dejected demeanor of the person in front of her, who, despite being grown up, still acted like a child caught doing something wrong and feeling remorseful.

"Why didn't you stay and listen then?"

"It hurt."

"I'm sorry,"

Dr.Panipak said this time. It wasn't just about this incident; she wanted to apologize for everything else, too. Akhira cared deeply about her feelings, even if she didn't always explicitly show it because she was probably the type who wasn't good at expressing herself. But still, she could feel her care and attention, not just for her but for those around her as well.

Dr.Panipak met Akhira's gaze with warmth in her heart. Upon reflection, all of Akhira's weird behavior started after that day, the day she gave the interview to a magazine. She wouldn't blame anyone in particular; if there was someone who was wrong, it'd be both of them. For not communicating. For not listening. For prioritizing their own feelings. For not considering the other's feelings. Well, the last one especially applies to her.

She took some flowers out of the back of the car, claiming that the vase in the room was empty and had Akhira carry the bag for her since she had no hands free, having brought so many flowers that both her hands were occupied.

Akhira watched as Dr.Panipak busily arranged the flowers in the vase, seemingly enjoying it quite a bit. She'd been worried if she'd be scolded. It was a pity that the remaining flowers would eventually wilt in the back of the car, but the number of flowers Dr.Panipak had brought had already nearly filled the room.

"So what do you say?"

From a distance, Akhira approached the person busy with the flowers and vases in the corner of the room.

"Say what? I think I've already answered you,"

Dr.Panipak said.

"When did you answer me?"

Dr.Panipak stopped her work and turned to face the person standing not far behind her. Akhira was really not good at reading between the lines. She'd already agreed by accepting flowers from her, hadn't she? She accepted both the apology and..

"So what do you say?"

Dr.Panipak could only look at the face of the person who kept asking her.

At that moment, she didn't know what to say. She felt shy, too.

"What did you ask me?"

"I asked, 'Can you be my girlfriend?'"

“ ... ”

"I didn't just ask; I was pleading."

Dr.Panipak couldn't help but smile at her words. Where did she learn to speak like that?

"Can I refuse?"

Dr.Panipak tilted her head and asked adorably, but Akhira couldn't fully appreciate her cuteness because she was worried about the answer. And she was making such a cute face, raising her eyebrows in a questioning look.

"If I say you can't, will you still refuse?"

This time, Dr.Panipak fell silent for a few moments before her beautiful lips slowly moved, answering the question she wanted to know with utmost sincerity.

"Then I guess I won't refuse."

The stress vanished from Akhira's face, replaced by a joyous smile that couldn't be fully concealed. She wanted to shout to the whole world just how happy she was. Her heart was pounding so fiercely inside her chest that she feared it might burst out. Akhira could only smile, and the smile she did, a smile that came from the heart, a smile that clearly showed how happy they both were.

Akhira could only gaze at the beautiful doctor's face as if in a trance, for this was the first time she'd revealed such a charming smile to her. Her mind went blank for a moment, and no other words came to her mind except 'adorable' and.... Adorable...

It wasn't a grand confession like many couples have. It wasn't romantic like those in the novels or dramas she'd seen. It was just a simple, straightforward conversation, but even so, they both felt the happiness and warmth that arose within their hearts. It was a warmth that couldn't be put into words. No sentences or phrases could describe how happy the two of them were other than the clear smiles on their faces.

"You sleep in your usual spot, okay?"

Dr.Panipak told the person standing confused beside the bed with a flat voice. Just because they were dating didn't mean she'd let her sleep with her whenever she wanted. Seeing Akhira's sad face, Dr.Panipak sighed. Couldn't she go back to being her usual stoic, emotionless self?

"I won't do anything,"

Akhira suddenly said in a soft voice. Dr.Panipak could only watch as the person in front of her pulled out a mattress from the closet, trying not to laugh.

"And what do you think you could do to me?" Dr.Panipak teased without much thought. "And do you think I could do it?"

Having placed the mattress, Akhira turned to lock eyes with the slender figure sitting upright on the bed. The seriousness in her voice made Dr.Panipak freeze, fully aware of what the others could do to her..

"I don't know,"

Dr.Panipak replied, though her heart skipped a beat.

"Don't you remember?"

Akhira asked, and Dr.Panipak could only retreat as the person in front of her was moving closer. She didn't even realize when she'd gotten onto the bed, but the next thing she knew. Akhira was right beside her.

"Wh... What do you mean?"

Dr.Panipak asked with a rather soft voice, unsure what Akhira was referring to. Did she not remember something? Or was it about that night...

"If you don't remember then..."

Akhira moved closer, causing Dr.Panipak to shrink back, her hands coming up to push against the shoulder of the mischievous woman who was closing

in on her, so close that she could feel her warm breath.

"Ms.Akhira!"

It was like a replay of that day when she'd called her like this... Akhira's face dipped to nuzzle the neck of the smaller figure, touching the spot she'd once caressed with passion. The faint scent of soap only made her more pleased, and she couldn't resist planting a soft, teasing kiss.

Dr.Panipak might've thought that Akhira was too drunk to remember anything from that night, but she was wrong. Why wouldn't she remember? It wasn't like she was so drunk that she forgot everything she'd done. Quite the opposite, she remembered it all well.

"Nghnn..."

A soft moan of protest came from beneath her, causing Akhira to ease up. Akhira pressed kisses slowly, her hot tongue tracing various spots, making the other person shiver. She exhaled deeply before lifting Dr.Panipak's shirt, moving lower to the flat stomach.

"M...Miss..."

Hot lips nibbled along the stomach that rose and fell with each breath. Akhira's hands and mouth teased the person beneath her until she was nearly out of strength. Slender hands lifted the thin shirt higher, high enough to reveal the edge of the bra Dr.Panipak was wearing, with the mouth following suit. Dr.Panipak let go of the bedsheet to touch the hair of the person who was now burying her face against her stomach.

"Ms. Akhira..."

Dr.Panipak's voice trailed off because of the other's actions. The doctor looked down, locking eyes with the one who finally lifted her gaze to meet hers.

"I'm..."

"..."

"I'm not ready,"

Dr.Panipak said. Her delicate hand caressed Akhira's ear as if to plead, trailing along the serene contours of a beautiful face, her eyes begging Akhira to stop. Because if she didn't, she wouldn't be able to prevent what was about to happen.

Akhira acquiesced to Dr.Panipak's softly spoken request, gently rising to sit up straight, carefully pulling down the other's shirt with tenderness. Initially, it was just meant to be playful teasing and nothing serious. But as they grew closer, as the touch lingered, as the sweet scent of the doctor filled the air, it was hard for Akhira to control herself. Because she was just too adorable in every way.

"I'm sorry."

Akhira braced for the doctor's anger, but what she received from Dr.Panipak was a smile. Akhira lay back down at her original spot beside the bed with a smile lingering on her face, basking in the joy of the moment. To any onlooker, they'd probably think she was crazy or was high.

"Try to speak up more, okay? Because if you don't tell me, I won't know what's wrong. I can't read your mind,"

Said Dr. Panipak.

“ ... ”

"If you don't like something, just tell me. If you have a question, just ask me so I can understand and answer you."

So that misunderstandings like the ones before wouldn't spiral into bigger issues. Akhira watched the one who leaned in to talk, responding with a smile before pushing herself up to get a clearer view of the other's face.

"Okay."

Dr.Panipak was stunned. She didn't have to get so close. Soon, their vision blurred as they drew near, their warm breaths mingling just inches apart.



And just before their lips could meet, Dr.Panipak pulled away, lying down and turning her back to the figure sitting beside the bed. Akhira blinked in confusion, staring at the slender back. What did the smile on Dr.Panipak's lips just before she turned away mean?



SunYanV

## 21. Just Realize

Dr.Panipak flinched slightly when she felt something touch her back while she was busy preparing breakfast. She had to turn and glance at the taller one who was nestling her face against her back in an odd manner. What is she doing? Does she think she was a bull or something, coming up and nudging others like that? Why is she rubbing her head against me? Annoyed, Dr.Panipak had to turn around and carefully hold Akhira's gorgeous face in her hands.

"Why is your body so warm?"

She asked immediately upon feeling Akhira's abnormal temperature. It was so warm that the doctor furrowed her brows, pushing the face that kept pressing against her to create some distance so she could get a clear look at Akhira's expression and condition.

The taller one opened her eyes weakly, prompting Dr. Panipak to scold her and tell her to sit down and rest properly. It might've been because she got caught in the rain last night. This person never thought about herself. Once Akhira sat down, she changed her position and slumped her face down onto the dining table, causing the onlooker to feel weary.

"Please don't do that. The table is dirty."

Dr.Panipak said. Even though she cleaned it every time, the dining table wasn't a place to rest one's face on as she was doing right now.

"Finish your meal so you can take your medicine."

Dr.Panipak arranged the food for Akhira and went to fetch the medicine, reminding her to finish the food. In truth, there wasn't a single time that Akhira didn't finish the food she made, but since she was feeling unwell

now, she probably didn't feel like eating much. Judging by her current expression, it wasn't far from what she'd thought.

Akhira watched the slender figure remove her apron and place it on a chair before walking out of the kitchen. She then looked down at her plate, pushing the food around. The delicious smell didn't make her want to eat because her headache was so severe that her head felt heavy, and she could barely lift it, so she just slumped her face back down onto the table.

"Lift your head, please."

Dr.Panipak instructed after she came back in. Akhira complied with her request, shifting her body to face where the slender figure stood. She opened her eyes when she felt something soft and cool placed on her forehead. Fever-reducing gel?

"Do you think I'm a kid or something?"

"It can be used with both children and adults,"

She replied. Well, this fever-reducing gel was indeed for children. It was something she always kept on hand in case her nephew, Pot, came to stay over and got sick. To be precise, it was Pot's fever-reducing gel.



It wasn't the first time the two of them had gone shopping together like this, but Akhira felt it was more special than previous times because the person beside her had become a significant person to her. She'd been significant for a long time, but now their relationship status was clearer than before.

"Do you think we should buy this?"

Akhira turned to ask the slender figure standing not far from her.

"Which one?"

Dr.Panipak looked at what Akhira was showing her with considerable interest.

“So you won't have to accept flowers from anyone else again.”

It seemed like she heard the other mumble something, but Akhira spoke so softly that Dr.Panipak couldn't quite catch it clearly. Dr.Panipak looked at the green cacti, both small and large ones scattered around. The dark green contrasted with the clean white of the small pots. They looked cute and perfectly arranged on the shelves and various spots within the store. Seeing them made her imagine how nice they'd look in her room.

"They're all green."

Dr.Panipak told the one who was bending down to look at the little plants. Soon, she turned back to look at her with a strange expression. She didn't mean to object; she was just teasing her.

"Don't you like green tea?"

She did like green tea, but did that mean she had to like the color green, too?

"It has nothing to do with green tea,"

She muttered to herself about Akhira's odd idea.

"Don't you like it? I think it'd fit your room well. If we buy this, it'll last a long time.”

Flowers in a vase don't last long before they have to be thrown away,"

Akhira complained incessantly. It was odd that Dr.Panipak, who usually saw the value in the things around her, would often criticize Akhira when she spent money on frivolous and unnecessary items. Yet, when it came to flowers, she felt the opposite. This was something Akhira herself didn't quite understand either.

"If you don't like them, I can buy you flowers instead,"

She said as she set down the carefully chosen potted plant. Dr.Panipak looked at the older woman, who seemed to have already sulked simply

because she acted as if she didn't like these green plants.

"So, you're not going to buy these for me?"

Akhira had brought her here herself, but now she was ready to walk away. Dr.Panipak knew the other was quick to take offense, but she hadn't realized it was to this extent. No wonder, in the many times Akhira had been indifferent to her, she'd thought she was displeased with something or that she'd done something wrong. But in reality, she was just feeling slighted....

From not thinking she'd care, they ended up buying numerous plants. Dr.Panipak arranged cacti in various spots, along with cute little decorations she'd impulsively bought. The vases that were once used for flowers were now put away as they were no longer needed.

If one paid a little attention, they'd notice that these vases hadn't been occupied for quite some time. Upon reflection, Dr.Panipak was quite surprised; the vases in her room were never empty. They always had various kinds of flowers she'd received. But ever since Akhira came into her life, there were no more flowers in her room. Her sweet eyes looked at the tall figure in another corner of the room, unwrapping paper to take out a plant to help redecorate. A faint smile appeared on the beautiful face, unnoticed by its owner.

A gentle touch on the shoulder diverted Akhira's attention from the bag of items. She turned to look before feeling a touch on her temple. Dr.Panipak had simply come to wipe the sweat away. Her slender hand slowly wiped away the tiny beads of sweat that had formed on her face. Perhaps because they'd just turned the air conditioning on, it wasn't cool enough yet.

"Is it hot? I'll go get you some water,"

Dr.Panipak offered. After acting sweet, she left. Akhira could only watch the slender figure disappear into the kitchen area, feeling a warmth in her heart. It was a light touch, but she could still feel the care Dr.Panipak had for her. She was standing far away, yet she could still see that she was sweating. Akhira raised her hand to rub her nose slightly with

embarrassment. It was good that the doctor hadn't seen her awkward, shy gesture; otherwise, she would've been even more embarrassed.

Indeed, she'd done more embarrassing things before, but this was the first time for such an act. Because between them, there had never been a time when the doctor would initiate or do something like this. She'd just discovered what it felt like to be so embarrassed that she didn't know what to do.

Dr.Panipak opened her eyes amid the darkness, sat up, and peered at the person lying next to her bed, who kept tossing and turning. Akhira didn't normally move around in her sleep. Could it be a fever?

Although she seemed much better earlier, and her body wasn't as warm as in the morning, Dr.Panipak hurried out of bed to turn on a dim light, enough to see but not too much to disturb the other's sleep. Her slender hand reached out to touch the forehead and neck of the person lying down and found it was just as she'd thought. That's why Dr.Panipak had to spend almost the entire night wiping down the sick person.

Akhira began to regain consciousness, managing only a slight movement before she had to open her eyes as she felt something was beside her. She saw the sweet, serene face that was just like the first time they met. She was slightly surprised to find the slender figure lying next to her. But as soon as she caught a glimpse of the small cloth on her own forehead, she could guess what had happened.

Akhira watched the delicate face of the sleeping woman, who seemed so gentle and unthreatening but was a completely different person when she awoke. She couldn't possibly be afraid of her, could she?

Her slender fingers gently brushed the hair that covered the beautiful face, smiling at the cuteness of the other as she frowned, seemingly displeased at being disturbed. Even a gentle hair stroke was enough to stir her. Is every doctor like this?

“Are you awake?”

Dr.Panipak asked sleepily. Akhira quickly withdrew her hand as the person beside her propped herself up to sit, and then she got up too, offering a smile to the slender figure who extended her hand to check her temperature as usual.

"You don't have a fever anymore, but you should still go to the hospital if you still feel unwell."

"Don't I go there every day?"

Akhira said to the person who got up to put away the equipment she'd taken out since last night, and it wasn't much different from what she'd expected when she received a stern look from her.

"I know, but I mean, you should see a doctor." "Well, I go there to see a doctor, no?"

Dr.Panipak squinted at the person, who seemed to have recovered with an accusing look. She hadn't been so talkative before, and she wasn't sure whether it was good or bad that she had become like this. She sighed at the other's teasing, not that she could argue when she said she went there to see a doctor since Dr.Panipak was indeed a doctor. Everything she said was true.

What do couples do together? They must do something special, right? But since Akhira wasn't particularly romantic, she knew little about these things.

[Akhira: I'm free tomorrow.]

[Panipak: But I'm busy. What's up?]

[Akhira: Just saying]

[Panipak: And you're not working now?]

[Akhira: Even bosses need a break. The food around here isn't great. Should I go eat near the hospital? The food there is delicious.]

[Panipak: You're exaggerating it.]

"Look at that! Someone is beaming!"

Dr.Panipak jumped slightly, then looked up from her phone screen when she realized she was the focus of her two friends' attention. She didn't know how long they'd been watching her as she'd been lost in her own world. Dr.Plaifha and Dr. Ninlaneen exchanged knowing glances and smiles, and their lunch proceeded with laughter as they always found funny stories to share, not forgetting to tease their friend, who seemed brighter than usual.



Akhira sat with her chin propped on her hands at the dining table, watching Dr.Panipak skillfully move around the kitchen like a top chef, unable to take her eyes off her. Whether it was now or before, the routine between the two hadn't changed much. Even if they weren't a couple yet, she'd still be standing here, cooking for each other every morning and evening.

"Thought you told me you weren't free?"

"I just found out I am,"

Dr.Panipak replied, sounding teasing, but it was the truth. She'd only realized she was free last night. Akhira fell silent upon hearing this, just staring at the other, her mind wandering.

They usually ate together in the mornings since the doctor didn't eat late meals. Thinking about it, she'd always been kind and caring. Has anyone else ever gotten this kind of attention? Did the others who pursued her receive the same treatment? It'd be hard for her to accept if she were as kind to others as she was to her. Just the thought of her accepting flowers from someone else was unsettling enough.

Lost in her thoughts, Akhira suddenly felt a pang of jealousy. She was surprised to discover that she, too, could harbor such feelings. She'd seen couples argue before and had wondered why they got so angry or what they hoped to gain from their quarrels. But, well, you can't truly understand something until you experience it yourself. And now, for the first time,



Akhira was experiencing the feeling of being slighted by someone she deeply cared about when she was with Dr.Panipak..

"I'll go check who it is,"

Akhira offered after hearing the doorbell ring. Who could be visiting so early in the morning? She paused mid-step when she saw the image of a young man on the small square screen..

"Why haven't you opened the door yet?"

Dr.Panipak followed, having heard the doorbell ring a second time. She, too, was curious why Akhira hadn't opened the door and left the visitor waiting outside. Seeing this, Dr. Panipak walked past Akhira and opened the door herself, chatting with the person outside as if it were the most normal thing. Akhira could faintly hear that the man had just returned from somewhere.

After the visitor left, everything seemed to return to normal. Dr.Panipak placed a medium-sized bag on the dining table. By now, Akhira had lost her appetite and was sitting with a tense expression that anyone could see meant she was upset. No one likes to see their loved one talking to someone else, especially someone with unclear intentions.

"Don't make a face like that,"

Dr.Panipak said.

"I didn't accept any flowers."

It was true she hadn't accepted the flowers the man offered, but the bag sitting there was from him, wasn't it? What difference did it make if she accepted something else instead of flowers?

"He said it's a souvenir,"

Dr.Panipak explained as if reading Akhira's mind without waiting to be asked. A souvenir, so what? Akhira's inner voice retorted as soon as she heard Dr.Panipak's words. So she accepts gifts from everyone except me?

She always brought the green tea thing up, even though it was all in the past. But the thoughts that plagued her were indeed true.

"If you don't like it, I can just throw it away,"

Dr.Panipak said, standing up and tossing the paper bag into a small trash can as if it meant nothing to her. Akhira could only watch silently. This woman... throwing away the gift without even knowing what's inside. Was this her way? She accepted things she didn't want or like just to avoid hurting the giver's feelings, but then she discarded them when no one was watching.

Dr.Panipak returned to her seat and began eating her breakfast, which was now quite late, paying no mind to Akhira, who was still looking at her. Dr.Panipak couldn't blame her if she felt upset, but she didn't show any desire to keep anything from anyone. She'd refused the flowers from that man for a long time, but he persisted with a souvenir, claiming he'd gone out of his way to get it for her during a work trip. His many reasons were relentless until she accepted it just to end the conversation and send the uninvited guest away.

"Does he come often?"

"Hmm?"

"That man, does he come often?"

Akhira chose to ask what she really wanted to know because it seemed unlikely that this was the first time the man had come to see her. Yet, she was puzzled because she'd never seen anyone visit Dr.Panipak at the front of her room like this before.

"Quite often,"

Dr.Panipak pursed her lips slightly before answering truthfully, not wanting any issues to arise later.

"I've never seen him."

"He often works out of the city,"

She replied, sticking to what she knew. But Akhira's sharp eyes lifted to meet hers before returning to her plate.

"Actually... I've known him for a long time."

She'd known him since she moved into this condo. He often came to visit, but only at the door. Akhira never met him because he was away working elsewhere. She knew that because he told her when they happened to meet. She was familiar with him enough to consider him a potentially good friend, but only as a friend.

"He's flirting with you. Don't you know that?"

Akhira spoke in a flat tone. A smart person like Dr.Panipak would surely know how he felt about her. Even she, who had only recently become aware of that man's existence, could tell.

"I don't know. I'm not interested,"

She replied, looking directly at the person across from her with sincerity.

She truly didn't care.

"Not interested, but you keep accepting his gifts."

"Can you stop being unreasonable?"

That was the last sentence in their conversation. Akhira didn't respond; she just sat quietly, eating her meal. Once finished, she washed her plate and left the kitchen. Dr.Panipak could only watch Akhira leave but said nothing. Maybe she needed to give both of them some time to cool off. Then, when the time was right, they could talk again with understanding.

"Didn't you say you had something to tell me?"

Dr.Panipak asked. Dr.Panipak sat down next to the person engrossed in her thin mobile phone. She remembered waking up to Akhira saying she had

something to tell her, but she hadn't said anything yet. Akhira looked away from the screen and turned to the slender figure before replying:

"My mom invited you to dinner at our place."

"Tonight? Let's go."

She was free anyway, and there was no reason to refuse Akhira's mother's invitation, especially when they'd kindly asked her. She'd have to go sooner or later anyway.

"Stop playing with the phone already,"

Dr.Panipak complained to the person fixated on their mobile phone. She knew Akhira was just sulking, but ignoring her and paying attention to something else was unacceptable.

"I'm not playing. I'm checking my email."

Akhira wasn't lying. She was really checking her email. The email she'd just received a few minutes ago was important enough to warrant her attention, even on her day off. Akhira's beautiful brows furrowed, prompting Dr.Panipak to ask if she was stressed about work or...

"What does this word mean?"

Akhira turned and asked with curiosity. She usually dealt with English documents more than Thai documents, and when faced with formal Thai language, even though she could read and write it, it sometimes confused her.

"Let me see."

Dr.Panipak leaned against the sofa before tilting toward the tall figure sitting nearby. The one seeking help extended the mobile phone slightly because she was leaning in and showing interest in the screen.

"Stop being mad at me first, then I'll tell you,"

Dr.Panipak said.

“Huh?”

Dr.Panipak looked up to meet the eyes of the person seeking help. Her words and gaze showed no sign of teasing.

"What do you say?"

Dr.Panipak pressed on because she hadn't received the answer she wanted.

"I'm not mad at you..."

"Are you sure?"

No... a voice in Akhira's head answered swiftly. She admitted she was feeling a bit hurt, but what could she do when she couldn't control her own feelings? To say she was angry wouldn't be right. She wasn't really mad at her, just a bit slighted. But now she was unsure how to act because the person who kept pressing for an answer was resting her chin on her shoulder and staring at her as if eagerly waiting for a response. Akhira

sighed softly, not out of annoyance or discomfort but to calm her own emotions. The doctor was acting so cutely... She wasn't used to it at all.

"I'm not mad,"

She answered to get past the situation for now. She didn't want to explain that she wasn't upset with her, but because she wasn't good with words, she didn't have many options. What else could I do....

"Good."

Dr.Panipak responded with a smile, amused by Akhira's tense demeanor. It was as if she'd never been close to her before. She then fulfilled the promise she'd made earlier. Her sweet eyes intently scanned the characters on the screen before she translated Thai to Thai for the person sitting with her.

It was only today that she realized just how bad the other person's Thai comprehension was. Often, Akhira would speak in a confused manner or mix up words, but Dr.Panipak never considered it a problem. She could communicate and read Thai, but she'd get confused by certain formal terms that were too complex. And it wasn't just Akhira; even Dr. Panipak sometimes found herself perplexed.

Dr.Panipak watched the person who was adeptly typing a response to an email and couldn't help but wonder if the sender would be confused. They sent an email in Thai but received a reply in English. She couldn't help but chuckle at the tall one who now seemed to be typing with such determination. When she focused on something like this, it made her look endearing in a different way.



## 22. A Coincidence

A broad smile appeared on the face of the elder. Akhira watched her mother, who had come out to stand and welcome her, even though her car wasn't even properly parked yet.

"Hello"

Dr.Panipak greeted. KhunYing Nara returned the greeting with a beaming smile. She was waiting to hear how Dr. Panipak would address her, but she was left hanging, as she simply said hello without calling her 'mom' or anything else as she'd hoped to hear. KhunYing Nara admired the intelligent and beautiful woman who knew how to adapt to the situation. She was confident that this woman could handle her daughter.

"Come on, dear. Today, I'll be cooking myself. I must show off my skills a bit."

KhunYing spoke with a smile plastered across her face. She was in an exceptionally good mood, so much so that one could say her heart was racing with joy. She sneakily glanced at her own daughter before giving her a look that said, 'You did very well. I'm so proud of you.' Akhira was puzzled by her mother's behavior; beneath her calm exterior, who would know that Akhira also felt a bit nervous and embarrassed?

Dr.Panipak looked at the grand entrance to the house before following the homeowner inside. Everything was perfectly arranged, minimal, and luxurious. The decor reflected the homeowner's taste well-modern yet featured legendary creatures like dragons, as many homes often featured. The golden dragons were tastefully interspersed with the white of the house, blending the old and new eras according to the homeowner's style.

But to call it a house seemed uncertain as the place she stood was much larger than her own home by threefold.

"Oh, is the doctor here already?"

The plump maid greeted Dr.Panipak excitedly as if she were a familiar guest she'd been looking forward to seeing again. Dr. Panipak smiled back and greeted her as was customary for a younger person meeting an elder. Her demeanor was polite and sweet, endearing her to KhunYing Nara and everyone else in the household.

"KhunYing said you'd be coming today. I've prepared so much. Is there anything special you'd like to eat? I'll make it for you."

The housekeeper said excitedly, prompting KhunYing Nara to shake her head with a weary smile. Just the mention of the doctor coming for a meal had the maids all excited, and it was unclear why. But KhunYing Nara couldn't blame others when she herself was just as thrilled.

"Come on. I'll be the one who cooks for her."

"As you wish, KhunYing."

A joyful laugh followed as both employer and employee bantered. It was true that she was just an employee, but the owner of this house never lorded over her or overworked her. Instead, they treated each other with respect. It wasn't just KhunYing Nara, but the master of the house, and their two children all behaved the same.

"How is it, dear?"

Before the food could even be tasted, KhunYing, who had taken to the kitchen to show off her skills, eagerly asked. Her eyes were sparkling with hope for the meal she'd prepared. Sometimes, Akhira felt a bit sorry for Dr.Panipak.

"Come on, Mom..."

"Come on, Zo..."



Dr.Panipak chuckled at the mother and daughter, who seemed to be teasing each other quite a bit, especially KhunYing Nara, who seemed to enjoy teasing her daughter all the time. In contrast, the other, no matter what was done to her, always maintained her composure, responding occasionally, but it was clear who would win. It'd always be KhunYing Nara.

"It's very delicious,"

Dr.Panipak replied with a smile, not just to please the elder. What she said was genuinely true. And KhunYing Nara, upon receiving such a positive response, felt even prouder of her cooking. It was worth it to cook regularly, and now that she could show off her skills to someone important, she was even happier.

"If you moved in here, I'd cook for you often."

"If that happens, I might be out of a job, KhunYing,"

"Wouldn't that be nice? You wouldn't have to work so hard."

"Please, KhunYing. I can't just stand by and do nothing."

The two elders conversed back and forth, seemingly unable to reach a conclusion. One was protective of her kitchen and her duties, while the other insisted on taking over the kitchen because she was eager to showcase her culinary skills. Dr. Panipak could only watch and smile.

If she hadn't known that one of them was the housekeeper, she might've thought they were siblings. The doctor's gaze shifted from the two elders to the person sitting across from her as she felt the weight of someone's stare upon her.

As expected, her sweet gaze met with a pair of intense eyes the moment she looked up. She responded to it with a faint smile as she didn't know why Akhira was looking at her or for how long. Then Dr.Panipak sent a stern look her way, signaling that it was time to eat rather than keep staring at her. She pretended to scoop food onto her plate, deciding to ignore Akhira from

then on, feeling awkward under her unwavering gaze. Is she some kind of psycho...?

Akhira couldn't help but smirk when she saw her feigned stern. To her, she was more cute than intimidating. She'd just discovered the joy of teasing her. She never realized how simple things could bring such happiness.

"Excuse me, I need to use the bathroom."

She said during the dessert wait, promptly rising from the dining table.

Akhira could only watch Dr.Panipak leave, saying nothing.

"I'll go check on the dessert in the kitchen."

Said Khun Ying Nara. Akhira shifted her eyes from Dr. Panipak and nodded at her mother. KhunYing Nara looked at her daughter with a smile before heading into the kitchen. She wondered how Dr.Panipak could tolerate Akhira, who was reserved and not very welcoming. She did as she pleased and didn't pay much attention to others. She was curious to know what the doctor saw in her daughter that made her so accommodating.



Being outside of her home at this hour wasn't a common occurrence. There were a few times when Dr.Panipak didn't return to her own condo, except when she stayed over at her parents' house. This wasn't something she'd anticipated, but now she couldn't refuse. Both KhunYing Nara and Mr.Akhin had asked her to stay the night since it was getting late.

"I don't have a foldable bed like the one you bought for me here."

Akhira mentioned to the one who had just come out of the bathroom. Dr.Panipak chuckled. She didn't expect to find a foldable bed in the room, nor did she plan to send the room's owner to sleep downstairs. After all, this was her room, and the bed was hers. It should be her, if anyone, who should feel like she was bothering her. If she made a fuss about not sharing the bed, it should be her sleeping on the floor, not Akhira..

Dr.Panipak looked at the large bed covered with a simple yet elegant gray sheet, fitting for the room's owner. Since entering, she'd seen little else besides white, black, and grey things, but the room didn't feel dark thanks to the clean white walls that brightened it, contrasting with the dark furniture. This woman seemed to prefer darker tones over bright tones, and Dr.Panipak also noticed the absence of side pillows on the bed.

"Where should I sleep?"

She asked, in case she had a usual spot so she wouldn't take her place.

"Wherever you like. I can sleep anywhere,"

Akhira replied. It was a response that Dr.Panipak could easily believe, especially considering that she slept on the floor beside her bed before... The sound of knocking on the door effectively drew the attention of both individuals before the slender figure walked over to open it.

The housekeeper had told the doctor she'd take her clothes to wash. Even though she didn't want to bother her and told her that she could wear them again, the housekeeper insisted, saying it was her duty. Thus, Dr.Panipak had no choice but to give in.

Akhira sat leaning against the headboard, working, but her gaze kept drifting to the person who had stepped out to talk on the phone on the balcony with fondness. She was probably calling her mother, reporting her whereabouts and activities. She'd be really happy if only someday the person she thought of second, after her mother, was her. She'd be really happy if there were days they didn't see each other and the doctor called her.

But a she wasn't sure if that could be true. Even if Dr.Panipak didn't call Akhira, it'd be her who would take the initiative to call.

"Are you comfortable doing that? Why don't you sit and work properly?"

As soon as she came back in, she started complaining immediately. Dr.Panipak furrowed her brows at Akhira. Wouldn't it be more comfortable

to sit and work at the desk? Sitting like this wasn't very good and would just cause sore muscles.

"I'll be done soon,"

The scolded one replied truthfully to the doctor. She was just checking something: it didn't take much time.

"Should I turn off the light?"

Akhira asked the person who was now lying with her back to her p's okay.

"I don't want you to strain your eyes,"

Dr.Panipak answered while still closing her eyes, not turning to look at the other. Akhira didn't take long to put her things away and walked over to turn off the light, leaving only the one by the headboard on so she could see the way.

The bed on the other side slowly sank under the weight of the tall figure. Dr.Panipak lay still. She wasn't yet asleep. Akhira gently pulled up the thick blanket to provide warmth. Dr. Panipak's heart raced as she realized how close the other person was to her before Akhira moved to lie on the edge of the bed on the other side, leaving space for her to sleep comfortably.

"Do you have to get this close just to cover me with a blanket?"

When the slender figure was awoken, she opened her eyes in the dark, looking at the person lying close by with a slight shock. Her body was now pressed against the one who was sound asleep. She's tossing and turning in her sleep again...

She was about to move away to return to her own side of the bed when suddenly, the person she thought was deeply asleep grabbed her waist and pulled her closer. Dr.Panipak froze, trying to move as little as possible, glancing at the person hugging her tightly as it seeking warmth from her. She had to abandon the thought of moving away when she couldn't escape this embrace.

Dr.Panipak sighed softly before adjusting her position to be as comfortable as possible. She had no choice; if she moved too much, Akhira might wake up. She didn't want to disturb her just because of her own fussiness. From resting on a pillow, she shifted to resting on Akhira's arm instead. Soon, her breathing became regular, indicating that Dr.Panipak had fallen into a deep sleep. The warmth from the other person's body made the slender figure snuggle closer unconsciously...



"Mom."

Dr.Panipak sighed when her mother still couldn't stop worrying. She wasn't going off to war; she was just going farther from home than usual. Just that made her mother anxious as if she'd never return.

"I'll only be gone for three or four days."

Her mother could only sigh. She knew well that her daughter could take care of herself. Dr.Panipak had been independent for a long time, but she couldn't help worrying as a child is always a mother's little one.

"Pha and Neen are going too. I'm not going alone."

Dr.Panipak reassured her mother, not wanting her to worry.

"I know, but still. You have to take good care of yourself, dear."

Dr.Panipak smiled teasingly at her mother, who looked as if she was about to cry. Old people can be so emotional. She was acting as if she was going far away. She was just going to the nearby province..

"Have you told her yet, dear?"

Faced with this question, Dr.Panipak hesitated, unsure which 'her' her mother was referring to. Or could she mean...

"I've already told her."

Dr.Panipak stopped to think and then answered her mother truthfully. No matter which 'her' it was, she'd informed them all. And it seemed like someone was a bit displeased because she told her so close to the departing date. She didn't intend to do that, but it was because she'd genuinely forgotten about it.

"I'll be off now. I don't want Neen and Pha to wait for me too long."

She hugged her mother goodbye. Her mother acted as if she were a child going off to a school camp. The memory was vivid because the situation wasn't much different, except that she was now going to a different place and that she was now grown up.

It was perhaps the first time that Dr.Panipak had the opportunity to come to help the villagers in their area like this. Normally, her patients were the well-to-do or those with enough wealth to afford expensive medical treatments. Her sweet gaze fell upon the uncles and aunties, the children and the elderly, all sitting in liner waiting for various services in the prepared tents. Some came for health check-ups, others for dental work. There were those with serious illnesses and many with respiratory issues. Despite the heat, it didn't diminish the doctor's determination in the slightest.

"You're such a beautiful doctor and so kind hearted, too."

Dr.Ninlaneen, who was approaching Dr.Panipak. couldn't help but smile fondly at an auntie who kept praising the doctor non-stop. Dr. Panipak looked up from her notes and smiled at the lovely auntie. This wasn't the first time someone had praised her like this. At first, she was embarrassed, but as more people said it, she grew accustomed. Even though it was only the second day, the number of patients needing medical attention hadn't decreased.

Dr.Panipak only realized how much the rural areas lacked doctors and hospitals when she saw it with her own eyes. If the villagers needed medical care or a health check-up, they had to travel to the city, which was far away. She couldn't imagine what they'd do if someone suddenly fell ill.

"Time for a break. My back is killing me."

Dr.Nilaneen complained while stretching. She had to sit and examine patients all day with hardly any rest. As soon as one patient left, another arrived.

"Why don't you stand next time then?"

Dr.Plaifhan suggested but soon groaned in pain when Dr. Ninlaneen pinched her leg where it was numb.

"Look at you, Pha. I don't want to hear that from you."

Dr.Panipak could only smile at the childish banter between the two.

"Let's go get something to eat. I wonder what they have today."

After the playful skirmish, Dr.Ninlaneen immediately invited her friends because she was feeling terribly hungry. Dr.Panipak picked up her phone to either check the time or check for a message from a certain someone. Since arriving here, she hadn't contacted that person at all.

The main reason was her busy schedule. It wasn't that there was no signal here, but she was working all day, went to bed late, and had to wake up early, which left no time to contact that person. I also kind of miss her..

She worried if Akhira had had breakfast if she returned home late, and if she had dinner, especially if she wasn't the one who prepared it. The more she thought, the more distracted she became until she finally scrolled through her contacts and made the call.

"Where did Pleng go?"

Dr.Plaifha asked Dr.Ninlaneen, who was sitting next to her. Suddenly, their friend had gotten up and left, her eyes glued to her phone.

"Probably calling her girlfriend."

At that, both of them exchanged knowing smiles before turning to look at the slender figure holding the phone to her ear. It was certain that when Dr.Panipak returned, she'd be teased by the two friends, and there was no escaping it.

"Neen."

"What?"

"I'm worried about her."

Dr.Plaifha looked at Dr.Ninlaneen. Both knew the most concerning matter about Dr.Panipak and that one day, others, including their friend's lover, would find out. They could only hope that everything would go smoothly since Dr. Panipak had opened her heart to Akhira..

"She's probably thought it through. I believe she can handle it,"

Dr.Ninlaneen replied, even though she herself was quite worried, knowing full well that...

"She might've already told Akhira. "

Well, that would be good if it's true.

She's not answering the call. Dr.Panipak chose not to make another call. If the first call wasn't picked up, it meant Akhira might genuinely be busy. Even though she was secretly anxious, she believed that Akhira must have a reason for not answering her call...

"This is for you, Doctor."

Dr.Panipak lifted her face from the prescription in hand, looking at the green tea with surprise. She didn't know they sold it around here.

"Thank you."

Dr.Panipak smiled at the nurse before her sweet eyes caught a glimpse of someone familiar.



"What are you looking at, Pleng?"

Dr.Plaifha approached and asked because she noticed her friend's distracted demeanor. After the villagers had started to leave, she followed Dr.Panipak's gaze and saw another group of people not far from them.

"It looks like they're distributing things to the villagers. I heard they just arrived today."

Dr.Panipak nodded and then went to help with other tasks.

"Excuse me, do you have any menthol inhaler?"

A man asked with labored breathing. Dr.Panipak turned toward the voice, certain she recognized it. But before she could think further, a nurse handed the stranger what he needed and inquired about his condition.

"It's not for me. Someone is fainting."

It wasn't surprising, given the strong sunbeam and the scarcity of shade. Unless one was in a tent, one could get heatstroke. The young man looked around before he saw Dr. Panipak, who had been watching him. His eyes widened before he greeted her.

"Hello, Doctor,"

He said with a wai that Dr.Panipak barely managed to return in time. He seemed older than her, and she wondered why he was giving her a wai. By now, Dr.Panipak was sure that this man was the one who had brought Akhira to her room that day. After a moment of hesitation, she decided to ask about someone, but before she could, her gaze collided with a woman she clearly recognized.

"Isn't that Ms.Akhira?"

That wasn't Dr.Panipak's voice but her close friend's. A tall, elegant figure, looking every bit the businesswoman, walked alongside another woman who, even from the side, was obviously attractive. Dr.Panipak stood frozen,

watching someone she hadn't expected to meet here, especially since that person hadn't told her anything.

It seemed the object of her gaze was aware when suddenly Akhira turned to lock eyes with Dr.Panipak as if knowing she was being watched by a group of people. And it wasn't just Akhira; the woman beside her also turned to look at Dr. Panipak. Her beautiful and confident appearance went well with the serious appearance of her tall figure beside her, making the onlooker feel uneasy.

"What's the matter?"

The woman beside Akhira asked, noticing that she diverted attention from their conversation.

"Is that all?"

Akhira turned to ask her. She flinched slightly before faltering and confirming that it was all. The tall figure nodded and then walked toward the other side, where the doctors and nurses were gathered.

She saw that Dr.Panipak was watching but didn't greet her, not even with a smile, as if they'd never known each other. Worse, she seemed to ignore her completely. In Akhira's mind, there was nothing but thoughts of how to punish the doctor.

"Aren't you going to say hello to me?"

"What brings you here? Do you need to see a doctor for something?"

"Did you get that thing?"

In the end, Akhira gave in and changed the subject. If they kept teasing each other like this, it wouldn't end soon, and she'd probably lose anyway.

"What are you talking about?"

Dr.Panipak asked with confusion. She genuinely didn't know what she could've given her since they'd just met.

"I bought green tea and had someone bring it to you."

Akhira said in a soft voice. From being confused, Dr.Panipak internally exclaimed in realization. She remembered receiving refreshing green tea from a nurse earlier that day. She'd meant to ask the nurse where she'd gotten it, considering there were hardly any shops around since she arrived at this place. But work had distracted her, and she'd forgotten about it. And now, the true owner of the green tea was standing right here before her.

"Why did you have someone else deliver it? Why didn't you bring it to me yourself?"

"Yeah, I got it. Thank you. And when did you arrive?"

"Just today."

Dr.Panipak simply nodded. Come to think of it, why did it seem like she and this person were always connected? She hadn't told her where she'd be, yet somehow, Akhira always ended up finding her. She wondered how many more coincidences would occur between them.

"When are you going back?"

Akhira asked the person she hadn't seen in several days. It'd only been two or three days, but it felt much longer for her. And tomorrow, the company was due to move to another village to make donations, so they mightn't see each other that day. In truth, Akhira didn't need to come, but she wanted to oversee things by herself. Plus, Dr.Panipak wasn't in Bangkok, so she decided to make the trip. She hadn't expected to run into her, but now that she had, she wanted to spend a little more time with her.

It wouldn't look good to return together with her though. It's one thing to come to work, but to leave with a lover and abandon the team, especially after insisting on handling the project personally, wouldn't be professional. Even if it was a small project, she had a responsibility to the staff. She might prioritize Dr.Panipak above all else but that didn't mean she could neglect her work for personal reasons.

"Today is the last day. I'll be going back tomorrow."

Everyone was tired from the day's work, so rest was essential before heading back to Bangkok the following day as planned. Akhira fell silent for several moments, prompting Dr.Panipak to look up from her packing, meeting her gaze with curiosity before hearing her request:

"Can you stay?"

“ ... ”

*"Stay with me tonight, okay?"*



## 23. You Don't Have To Ask

Akhira looked at the person who had just emerged from the bathroom with more weariness in her eyes than usual. Perhaps it was because she'd spent almost the entire day outdoors, so it wasn't surprising that her body would react this way. Dr.Panipak collapsed onto the soft bed of the hotel in the city, feeling twice as exhausted from the journey into town to stay with the person who had pleaded with her just a few hours ago.

"Are you feeling dizzy?"

Akhira asked with concern. Dr.Panipak didn't say anything; she just nodded slightly and lay there with her head buried in the pillow until Akhira had to put down her tablet and gently brush away the hair that covered her face.

Dr.Panipak looked at the person sitting beside her with an indifferent gaze. She met Akhira's eyes briefly before turning away to lie in another direction, feeling awkward and overwhelmed with thoughts. Her headache from overthinking, and the symptoms only worsened with the added stress.

"Do you think it's a good idea for me to open my own clinic?"

Suddenly, the person who had been lying still turned back to her and asked about the thought that had been on her mind. She'd been contemplating this for a while. It was a small dream she wanted to achieve in her life but had never spoken of it to anyone.

The dream of having her own clinic. It wasn't that the hospital salary wasn't enough, but Dr.Panipak felt the urge to do something or at least to try pursuing her own dream. However, due to a lack of time and advice, she kept this aspiration to herself, and the plan in her head kept getting postponed indefinitely.

She didn't know why she brought this up to Akhira, but she felt that this person could give her good advice. Not just because she was older or more experienced, but maybe because....

"If you want to do it, then it's a good idea."

If she only heard the voice without seeing the face. Dr. Panipak might think the response was just a mindless one. But for her, it was different; Akhira was listening with genuine interest and her eyes clearly conveyed concern and support for her.

"I know a good architect,"

Akhira said, putting her work aside, sitting up straight, and paying more attention to Dr. Panipak, who smiled faintly, though Akhira mightn't have noticed.

"I'm still not sure,"

Dr. Panipak admitted because she wasn't sure if she could really do it. She was uncertain about many things, including the location and the time she wondered how much she'd have to invest if she were to succeed on her own.

"If you want to do it, just do it,"

Akhira said, gently stroking her hair as if to encourage her. Dr. Panipak felt the warmth spread through her. The sharp eyes looking at her seemed to say she'd be there to support her, and those eyes were telling her to try and do what she wanted to do rather than just think about it and never try at all.

The gentle touch on her head made Dr. Panipak close her eyes, feeling soothed by the other's actions. She never knew she liked having her hair stroked like this. Akhira's slender hand moved gently through her soft hair, watching the face of the person with closed eyes and smiling when she saw that the doctor seemed pleased with what she was doing.

"May I kiss you?"

Akhira suddenly asked amid the silence and stillness of the person lying with closed eyes. Dr.Panipak's stillness made the asker feel nervous before the doctor opened her eyes to look at Akhira, blinked a couple of times, and then turned her face away.

"If you want to kiss, you don't have to ask,"

Dr.Panipak replied softly, turning away from Akhira, pulling the blanket over herself, and closing her eyes tightly signaling that she wanted to rest, leaving the listener sitting there....



The sound of water flowing echoed throughout the area, misty droplets veiling the large and small rocks that served as the objects of focus for the person who sought solitude.

"Thought you had disappeared somewhere."

The voice of the newcomer came from behind. Dr.Panipak, arms crossed and smiling, shook her head at the habitual complainer. Such a comment meant she must've been looking for her for a while. Dr.Panipak turned to look at the person who had stopped beside her and continued to grumble without pause.

"How can you come here alone? You should tell me before you go anywhere,"

Said Akhira.

“ ... ”

"What if something happened to you?"

"I'm fine, and besides, you found me anyway."

With that sentence, Dr.Panipak leaned her head against the shoulder of the taller person, not giving her a chance to complain further. The person about to argue was taken aback. The lips, which were about to move, kept shut

almost immediately. Akhira then moved her arm, wrapping it around the smaller figure and pulling her closer without any resistance from Dr.Panipak.

Akhira smiled contently, feeling good because lately, the person in her arms had been spoiling her. She agreed to stay together yesterday, and when she asked her to stay for another day and go back to Bangkok together the next day, she also agreed to it without a question, even though she was about to head out.

And the reason Akhira invited her along was that today presented an opportunity to take the staff out for a trip, and another reason was to give Dr.Panipak some time to relax. Opportunities like this didn't come often, but when they did, they should be seized,

"Uh... excuse me."

Both Akhira and Dr.Panipak turned toward the voice of the third person. The slender figure stepped away from the taller one, hoping the newcomer hadn't seen. but the look of surprise in their eyes suggested otherwise.

"Uh, I brought some water for you,"

The newcomer faltered.

"Why is there only one bottle?"

Akhira took the water and immediately handed it to Dr. Panipak, barely glancing at the person with good intentions.

"My apologies, I didn't know you had a guest. I'll go get another one..."

"Don't bother,"

Akhira interrupted, causing Dr.Panipak to look at her and offer a friendly smile to the woman in front of them, who looked quite disheartened after hearing Akhira's curt response silence fell around them for a moment, but soon, the chatter of a group of people grew louder, signaling their approach to the spot. Dr.Panipak looked at Akhira, who sighed, unsure of what



displeased her, while she just stood smiling at the employees who flocked to admire the view. Just minutes ago, there were only two of them.

"Let's take a picture. Would you like to take a picture, Ms. Akhira, Dr.Panipak?"

A woman asked excitedly. Dr.Panipak looked at her for a moment, recognizing her as the one who had dropped Akhira at her condo, along with another man she'd just met the other day.

"Come, come. It's really beautiful here."

Before Dr.Panipak could respond, she was quickly ushered to stand next to the stoic-faced Akhira. Cameras were raised, and a countdown began, signaling the imminent click of the shutter.



The sound of heavier-than-normal breathing made the doctor turn to look at the person playing with her phone before approaching and offering something.

"Take this,"

She said, handing over an antihistamine pill with a glass of water.

"It's just a stuffy nose."

No response. Akhira looked at the doctor, who was standing with her arms crossed and an insistent stare. She didn't want to imagine what it'd be like if she upset her. In the end, she had no choice but to comply with the doctor's order.

Dr.Panipak got the glass of water back after Akhira finished drinking it. She didn't want to witness a repeat of the morning's events. Earlier, Akhira had been sneezing non-stop, and it took a while for her to recover. Knowing that these symptoms are typical for someone with allergies, which not only

cause discomfort but can also be quite dangerous. Most people tended to think it was nothing serious and overlook it.

"You should exercise a bit more,"

Dr.Panipak suggested, sitting down next to Akhira and looking into her face.

"I don't have time."

That was the response that made Dr.Panipak just shake her head in exasperation. How could she not have time? Even a few minutes before bed would suffice.

"Just ten or fifteen minutes. Can't you spare that?"

"..."

"Take a break from your work and exercise for a bit. It won't hurt you. I don't know how else to help you,"

Dr.Panipak said and actually pulled the phone out of the hands of the workaholic, all the while grumbling non stop.

"But I really don't have time."

"No excuses. If you really wanted to, you could do it. You're free before bed, yet you still don't do it."

Dr.Panipak sighed, tired of complaining. She was at her wit's end with a patient like this. If Akhira didn't do it herself, no one could help her.

"So, what can I do before bed? Can you suggest something, Doctor?"

From someone who had been looking downcast, she suddenly became sly, both in speech and gaze. Dr.Panipak wasn't sure what the person in front of her was thinking, speaking so oddly and even calling her 'doctor. And if she hadn't looked at her that way, she wouldn't have let her thoughts wander....

"I don't know. Please, go back to your work,"

Dr.Panipak said, quickly getting up and escaping to the bedroom, unable to stand the strange atmosphere any longer. Sometimes, it seemed like she wasn't thinking anything, but at other times, Akhira seemed too cunning for her to keep up with.

Dr.Panipak had only been in the room for a short while when the person who had been teasing her earlier followed her in, causing her, who was sitting at the edge of the bed, to freeze when she heard what came out of the other person's mouth.

"So, Doctor, don't you have any good advice?"

Dr.Panipak didn't know when Akhira's hand touched her chin. Before she could think or respond, and even if many answers popped into her head, she couldn't say anything more when Akhira suddenly claimed her lips. The lips pursued a kiss as Dr.Panipak tried to find a way to escape, but no matter what, she couldn't get away and the kiss left her breathless. Akhira kissed her as if to punish her and to absorb every word she'd just complained about. She didn't know why it felt that way.

"Don't you want to help me?"

Akhira pulled away a little and spoke while their lips were still close. As soon as the tall figure finished speaking, Dr. Panipak gently pushed her away. Akhira complied, with the slender figure adjusting her sitting position as if trying to regain her composure.

"Do thirty sit-ups."

'Huh?' was the word Akhira didn't utter, but Dr.Panipak could tell from her expression, which clearly showed confusion and surprise at her words.

"Do it."

Akhira could only blink in astonishment, looking at the woman sitting with crossed arms, issuing the command with a serious tone and stern demeanor.

"Do I really have to do it?"

Akhira asked softly, but Dr.Panipak just shrugged as if to say, do it if you want, and if you don't, then whatever.

"Why did you ask me then?"

Dr.Panipak seized the opportunity for payback. Akhira sighed before sitting down on the floor, ready to do thirty sit-ups as commanded by the beautiful but heartless doctor.

"Then count for me."

Dr.Panipak almost laughed at Akhira's request, watching her exercise beside the bed with a small smile. She'd only been joking; she didn't think Akhira would actually do it. How adorable...

"Twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty."

The counting ceased, leaving only the heavy breathing of the person sprawled out below. Akhira lay still, catching her breath. It wasn't that she never exercised, but lately, she hadn't been as active. She hadn't expected it to be this exhausting.

"Can you get up?"

Dr.Panipak asked softly upon seeing Akhira struggling to breathe. Akhira sat up, and Dr.Panipak gently touched her beautiful face, wiping the sweat from her forehead with tenderness, prompting a smile from Akhira.

Dr.Panipak locked eyes with Akhira, who was sitting below her. For some reason, time seemed to stand still; the world around them ceased to move, and all that could be heard was the rapid beating of her own heart.

They didn't know how long they gazed into each other's eyes, but soon, Dr. Panipak's slender back was pressed against the soft bed, with Akhira playfully teasing her, eliciting soft laughter.

Akhira playfully sniffed along Dr.Panipak's body. Sometimes, her prominent nose would brush against the doctor's smooth skin, causing goosebumps from the tickling sensation. Dr. Panipak shivered as Akhira buried her face in the crook of her neck, her lips grazing the skin, making her twist and turn as Akhira's hand slipped under her shirt, caressing her and laughing at her reactions.

"Stop it. You stink,"

Dr.Panipak said softly with embarrassment, prompting Akhira to pull away to look at her face, which tried to maintain a stoic expression Despite Dr.Panipak's ability to hide her feelings, her flushed cheeks betrayed how she truly felt.

"You've never smelled it. How would you know I stink?"

Akhira teased, leaning in close as if to challenge Dr.Panipak to take a whiff of the scent she claimed to dislike.

“And didn't you the one who made me all sweaty?”

Dr.Panipak turned her face away quickly, wondering why she had to do something like this. She regretted saying those words because, contrary to her claim, Akhira didn't smell bad at all; in fact, she smelled quite nice. Despite their closeness on several occasions, Dr.Panipak had never done anything like this with Akhira's body before.

Seeing Dr.Panipak freeze, Akhira gently traced her lips with a finger before replacing it with her own lips. It wasn't the first time Akhira kissed her, but it was the first time she felt Akhira's passion so intensely. It wasn't just kisses; Akhira's warm tongue left Dr.Panipak feeling weak. From the lips, Akhira moved down to the stomach and it seemed the person above quite enjoyed it. Akhira spent a long time on Dr. Panipak's flat stomach, causing her to tense up. Her hands clutched the fabric of Akhira's shirt. A soft moan escaped Dr. Panipak when she could no longer bear it, bringing a smile to Akhira, who was still busy with her stomach.

"Teeny tiny tummy,"

Akhira teased. Hearing the playful tone, Dr.Panipak felt even more awkward. She wished she could just fall asleep, wake up in the morning, and be free from this situation, but that was just wishful thinking; this was reality, and she couldn't do anything about it.

She couldn't even bring herself to refuse, but she had to regain her composure when she felt something circling the waistband of her pajama pants. Dr.Panipak flinched slightly, causing Akhira to stop and look at her, Dr.Panipak was the one who averted her eyes as it was too embarrassed to meet Akhira's gaze. Unsure of what to do, whether to let go or to tell Akhira to stop, Dr.Panipak didn't even know what she wanted. I've never done something like this before...

She might have plenty of life experience, enough to fend off men and live independently. She might be skilled at dealing with a variety of people, but she wasn't adept at this. She'd never done it nor thought about it. Dr.Panipak bit her own lip as all her thoughts and feelings vanished simply because of Akhira's gentle touch. Because she was so lost in thought, she didn't realize what had already been stripped from her body until she felt the other's touch.

The softness didn't bring comfort but instead made her body burn with heat. Her slender hands gripped the shirt of the person below her with passion. She was kissing her tenderly and passionately as usual, but this time, it wasn't her lips that received the touch, but the sensitive area that had never been touched by anyone else.

"Aaahhh."

Dr.Panipak bit her lip in embarrassment as she felt the tingling sensation and twisted her body in response. Akhira performed flawlessly. Her warm tongue greeted the sensitive area as if wanting to get acquainted until Dr.Panipak couldn't take it anymore.

"Aahh, Miss..Nghnnn."

A muffled moan escaped Dr.Panipak, pleasing Akhira. The more she persisted, the more Dr.Panipak felt like she was going to die. Dr.Panipak's

hands grabbed Akhira's shirt tighter, hoping that she'd do something or stop and move away from that part of her because she was about to lose control. The desire to moan out loud made her feel embarrassed, so much so that she had to cover her mouth with her other hand. Akhira sighed, moved up to her level, and pulled her hand away.

"I want to hear you moan,"

She whispered and panted softly yet clearly. The slender fingers refused to leave her lower part. Dr.Panipak didn't know what to do and just looked away.

"I'll be gentle, I promise."

Akhira didn't promise it wouldn't hurt, but to be as gentle with her as possible. It didn't take long for the slender fingers that had only been on the outside to slowly penetrate inside. Dr.Panipak's body tried to accommodate the fingers, and even though it was painful, Akhira was still by her side.

Soon, her body adjusted and accepted Akhira's intense actions. Sweet moans rang loudly beside the tall figure's ear. Oftentimes, she couldn't help herself and had to kiss to suppress her feelings. Although Dr.Panipak was embarrassed, she couldn't resist the sweetness from Akhira's lips. Before long, her body twitched and tensed, and her breaths came in rapid gasps, making Akhira worry that the doctor might be too exhausted.

"Pleng,"

Akhira worriedly called out to the person lying still with eyes closed.

"I'm all sticky,"

Dr.Panipak said softly as if she'd lost all of her strength, even though she still lay with her eyes closed. Akhira knew well that the doctor who loved cleanliness wouldn't have the strength to get up and shower like she wanted to.



SunYan



## 24. After Contemplation

Normally, Dr.Panipak would wake up early every day, even this morning when she woke up at the usual time, despite it being her day off and there being no need to get up for work. Her slender body lay still, her long eyelashes fluttering as she tried to adjust her vision. The warmth she received from the arms of the person embracing her made her almost not want to wake up. It was the first time she felt reluctant to leave the bed.

Dr.Panipak gazed at the chin of the person still a sleeping before she felt a blush creep up her face as memories flooded her thoughts. She could feel Akhira's breath close to her. She lay perfectly still, with only her chest moving with her breath. Dr.Panipak looked at her own body under the blanket and felt relieved when she realized that both she and the still-sleeping person weren't in any embarrassing state..

But her relief was short-lived as she felt her face heat up again when she discovered she wasn't wearing her own clothes and no longer felt sticky from sweat. Without needing much time to think, the doctor could immediately tell that someone had wiped her down and even changed her into new clothes.

"Where are you going?"

Before Dr.Panipak could step off the bed, the person she thought was asleep grabbed her waist, pulling her back to the close embrace they were in before. Dr.Panipak could only sigh in response. she wasn't ready to face Akhira at this moment, but sooner or later, they'd have to be together like this for a long time. With that thought, she resigned herself to the situation.

Even though she felt so embarrassed that she wanted to sink into the ground, Dr.Panipak chose to suppress those feelings. Since she already

belonged to her, since they were lovers, she couldn't run away from what had happened, nor could she escape from this person.

"I'm getting up now. It's late."

She said to the person who was snuggling against her back lazily. She couldn't help but wonder when Akhira had woken up or if it was she who had disturbed her sleep.

"It doesn't seem late at all."

Akhira didn't think this time could be considered late; it was only seven in the morning. But it seemed the doctor didn't think the same as she tried to escape from her embrace. What started as a gentle hug turned into an small-scale war as one wanted to flee, and the other stubbornly refused to let go. Yet, despite the name, there was no real violence between them, only the sound of soft laughter escaping from their lips.

"You can let go of me now."

Dr. Panipak spoke softly as Akhira pulled her up to sit on top of her. It seemed like she should be in control, but for some reason, she felt at a disadvantage. Akhira didn't even seem to feel that she was heavy.

Instead, she appeared quite content with their position. And even though their bodies weren't bare, with the doctor wearing a long shirt, the truth was that nothing else covered her body except for this single shirt. Therefore, being in this position didn't feel very safe to Dr. Panipak.

Akhira remained calm, even after hearing the command from the person who seemed to be getting annoyed. The hands that had once held Dr. Panipak's slender wrists let go and moved to her waist instead. The person on top flinched slightly before avoiding eye contact with embarrassment.

"Ms. Akhira."

"I have a nickname, too, you know?"

Akhira didn't quite understand why the doctor insisted on using her first name. Her nickname was shorter and easier to say, yet she'd never once said it. It couldn't be that she didn't know it. Akhira looked at the person above her with curiosity.

But at this point, Dr.Panipak wasn't in the mood to argue with Akhira. However, when she tried to get up and leave, she found herself unable to do so as Akhira firmly held her in place. She couldn't understand where the person she was sitting on was getting all this strength from. Not only did she refuse to let go of her, but she also shifted from lying down to sitting up against the headboard with casual ease, leaving Dr. Panipak at a disadvantage and prompting her to protest once more.

"Stop teasing me already."

"When did I ever tease you?"

Dr.Panipak could only purse her lips tightly, feeling a sudden irritation toward this person, so much so that she wanted to pinch her tummy black and blue. All these feelings weren't out of hate or annoyance but merely from embarrassment.

"What do you want?"

In the end, it was Dr.Panipak who gave in. She sighed and asked Akhira in a serious tone as if she was discussing business or something of the sort. There was no response. Akhira just fumbled with the buttons on her shirt. Warm breath brushed against her chest, causing goosebumps to rise on Dr.Panipak's skin, and just as Akhira's lips were about to touch her soft skin, they were interrupted.

"Your phone is ringing."

Dr.Panipak ended the moment and pushed herself up from the person who had been caught off guard. By the time she realized it, the doctor had already left. Akhira, dissatisfied, could only watch as the slender figure disappeared into the bathroom, then turned to look at the troublesome mobile phone that had rung at the most inopportune time...



Returning to work after several days off meant that Dr. Panipak was relentlessly teased by her two close friends, and she had to stay on duty until late. At first everyone was concerned about how she'd get home so late, but once they remembered that the doctor had a personal driver to pick her up, everyone felt relieved, especially Dr. Panipak's friends.

After getting her things, she hurried downstairs, knowing someone was waiting for her. It was the first time Dr. Panipak felt slightly uncomfortable with a certain person in the elevator. It was as if it was moving too slowly and annoyingly.

"Will there be a bus this late? It must be such a hassle for you,"

The fellow passenger said. Dr. Panipak was silent for a moment before replying:

"Someone's coming to pick me up."

She smiled at her female colleague, whom she didn't get to see often because they worked different shifts. Although they never fought or had any issues, women often have a sense of who is a friend and who is not. This case was no different.

"I see... Nice car, by the way."

It was a comment that made the person who had already left the elevator turn back with a smile. The remark from the other party surprised Dr. Panipak before the elevator doors closed, and her colleague remained inside...

"Should I take you home?"

Akhira asked immediately as Dr. Panipak settled into the car, remembering that there was one day each week when she had to go home and stay with her family.

"No, I've already called my mom,"

Dr.Panipak replied quickly. Under normal circumstances, she would've gone back home, but it was too late in the night today, and the person who was supposed to drive her seemed to have just woken up to pick her up. Dr.Panipak watched the focused driver. The road now had fewer cars unlike the early evening traffic. She couldn't figure out what she'd do without her. Could it be that she could actually find a way home, but with someone taking care of her, she felt like she couldn't? It was funny, in a way.

"Don't fall asleep, okay?"

"Do I look sleepy to you?"

Akhira raised an eyebrow and asked, even though her gaze was fixated on the road.

"No, but you 'are' sleepy."

Akhira didn't look sleepy but was, in fact, sleepy. The listener chuckled softly after hearing Dr.Panipak's response.

"You don't have to come next time if you're sleepy. I can get back on my own."

"If I don't come, how will you get home?"

"There are plenty of taxis in front of the hospital,"

She said. Upon hearing her response, Akhira couldn't help but shake her head at the idea.

"It's dangerous."

"Drowsy driving is just as dangerous."

Will there ever be a time when she doesn't argue with me? Akhira had to admit that what Dr.Panipak said was true, but she wasn't that sleepy. And

with her engaging in a banter like this, it made it even harder for her to feel sleepy.

"If you can drive a car, I'll let you go back alone."

After saying that, Akhira turned to look at Dr.Panipak, who fell silent immediately. Akhira sighed softly. She never understood why she kept refusing to drive a car, and she never opened up about it.

"I don't know what your reasons are..."

“ ... ”

"Will you ever tell me? Because I hardly know anything about you."

After those words, everything fell into silence. The car parked smoothly in the usual spot at the fancy condo's parking lot. Dr.Panipak could only watch the tall figure walking ahead of her. After those words in the car she didn't say anything more to her. Their relationship was as unpredictable as a wild roller coaster ride.

Dr.Panipak slumped down at the foot of the bed, looking at the person lying with their back to her, feeling disheartened. She knew Akhira was probably sulking, but she wasn't good at making amends. She couldn't understand why things got so complicated when it came to issues between them. Even though she thought she should be the one to apologize, in the end, Dr.Panipak chose to stay silent.

"I don't need that."

Even though she said that, Akhira didn't want to hurt the feelings of the person who had kindly covered her with a blanket. If she were a bit more heartless, she would've thrown off the blanket she'd given her. Dr.Panipak pretended not to care, snuggling under the blanket to rest as usual. But what was unusual today was that she chose to lie close to the back of the sulky person instead of sleeping on her own side.

"I don't have a pillow,"

Dr.Panipak said against Akhira's back, causing the latter to relent. Slender arms were slid under Dr.Panipak's head, and she cooperated by lifting her head before resting it on the arm she was increasingly familiar with each day because she'd learned that no matter how far away she slept from Akhira, they'd end up close together in the morning. And it was she herself who would move closer while the other remained still. She had begun to feel for a while now that she was meant to be with her....

Having meals at the other's home had become usual thing for both Dr.Panipak and Akhira. They'd dine out together occasionally, and sometimes, they'd also have meals with their parents when they had free time. This brought everyone closer. Today was another day when Akhira had the chance to eat at Dr.Panipak's home, and today, like always, the doctor was cooking with her mother.

"Mom, do you think I should add more chili?"

Dr.Panipak asked her cooking partner, wondering if she should make it spicy as usual, fearing that someone mightn't be able to handle it. However, it turned out that the person in the kitchen with her wasn't her mother. But it was good that she came in here, so she could ask her directly and wouldn't have to worry if she could handle the spice as with many other dishes she'd made before.

"Try this and see if it's okay."

Akhira just stared at the soup on the spoon without tasting it as instructed. Dr.Panipak looked at the spoon, following the tall figure's gaze, to see if there was something wrong with it that made Akhira freeze. Then she had to take the spoon back and carefully blow on the hot soup because if she tasted it, it'd surely scald her mouth.

Akhira looked at the spoon in front of her once more before moving closer. Then, Dr.Panipak was taken aback. Her delicate hand paused mid-air when Akhira's lips weren't where they were supposed to be. The spoon of soup remained untouched, but instead, it was her own lips that were tasted. Akhira gently cradled Dr.Panipak's chin, savoring her, teasingly nibbling at

her soft lips before seeking the sweetness within as Dr.Panipak inadvertently parted her mouth.

A slight, embarrassing noise escaped, causing the listener's face to flush with heat. Dr.Panipak's trembling hand gripped the spoon tightly, unsure of what to do next as the taller person continued to press kisses upon her, moving closer until the doctor's heart fluttered, and her hands roamed restlessly over her slender waist as if pleased with it.

Akhira tilted Dr.Panipak's face up slightly to kiss her better, not wanting to miss a single angle. She moved her lips as if starved before the two finally separated. Dr.Panipak gasped for air, leaning her face against the shoulder of her playful tormentor, breathing heavily to catch her breath, refusing to look up while softly protesting against the one who seemed ready to take advantage of her again.

"My mom might see us,"

Dr.Panipak whispered so softly it was almost inaudible. The tall figure smiled at Dr.Panipak's cute demeanor and words, her right arm still wrapped around her slender waist. With her other hand, Akhira steadied Dr.Panipak's trembling spoon-holding hand and leaned down slightly to nibble the spoon, tasting the soup as she'd initially requested.

"Delicious."

"Auntie Pleeeeng,"

A child's voice suddenly shouted, accompanied by the sound of little feet running into the kitchen. The adults, who were close to each other, realized that the young boy had arrived and was rushing to see Auntie Pleng first. The sight that greeted him made the little boy slightly displeased, so he quickly wedged himself between them and hugged his favorite auntie's legs.

"Why hug Auntie Pleng? Auntie Pleng is mine,"

The boy scolded the adult who dared to steal his aunt's embrace. Akhira could only smile, suspecting that her relationship with the little boy had



diminished somewhat.

"Pot, wait for Auntie outside, okay? I'll follow soon,"

Dr.Panipak said, knowing it wasn't safe for a small child to be in a kitchen. With that, the little one was scooped up by Akhira. Dr.Panipak didn't catch what they whispered to each other, but after a moment of quiet listening, the child erupted in protest, struggling against being held, making Dr.Panipak worry he might fall from Akhira's arms.

"What were you teasing my nephew about?"

She asked, but the question went unanswered as Akhira simply smiled and carried the protesting boy outside, leaving the doctor alone in the kitchen. Now, the young boy seemed ready to confront Akhira, not only because he was upset with the sight in the kitchen but also because the toy he'd entrusted to her for repair hadn't been returned. Dr.Panipak watched the two and couldn't decide whether to feel sympathetic or amused. They'd seemed so affectionate the last time they met, so why was her nephew now scowling at Akhira?

"Pot, sit down properly,"

The boy's father commanded sternly, seeing his son disturbing an important guest.

"I sit here. Wanna sit next to Auntie Pleng,"

The boy replied, hugging his arms and tilting his chin defiantly. No one would object if it weren't that the seat was Akhira's place, and the mischievous child wasn't currently sitting on Akhira's lap. Not only was the person being sat on confused, but even the boy's own parents couldn't understand their child's behavior. He seemed displeased and unhappy, yet why did he go and sit on her lap?

Everyone could only smile fondly at the little nephew of the house, who was full of excuses, but in reality, he just wanted to be with his Auntie

Khira. However, since Pot didn't want anyone to know, the adults pretended to be oblivious and let things slide.

"I don't want you to be far from home."

After everyone had left for the living room, only the mother and daughter remained, and a serious conversation ensued. Dr.Panipak had already discussed her dream of opening a clinic with her family. Everyone saw it as a good idea and had no objections. The only issue was that she wanted to open it in a different province.

"Mom, I just..."

"I talked to your dad, and he agreed. If you want to do it, I'll support you."

The mother didn't want to oppose her daughter's wishes, but she was worried. If her daughter had to go far away, especially when they already had so little time to see each other, what would she do?

"I'm just worried."

"Mom, I'll be okay."

The mother sighed, looking at her daughter, who was trying to ask for permission. Should she let her go, or should she put her foot down on this matter?

"How about you go back and think about it again? Have you asked her yet?"

The answer was no. She'd told Akhira, but not everything. It seemed she'd have to ask for her opinion....

"Is he already asleep?"

Asked the person who had just walked into the living room, addressing the tall figure sitting on the sofa with her sleeping nephew leaning on her shoulder. Dr.Panipak sat down next to her, gently stroking the back of the

little one with affection. In the past, it would've been her being clung to like this, leaving no time to help her mother with housework. But now, it seemed someone else had taken over that role.

Akhira carefully handed the little boy over to his father, cautious not to wake him and cause another uproar. It'd been quite a struggle to calm him down.

"You're good with kids, Akhira,"

The father sincerely complimented her. Pot wasn't an easy child to handle as he was always fussy and willful, but this woman managed to deal with him. If one didn't know better, they might think she had children of her own or had experience with kids.

"Not at all."

Akhira didn't know what to say. She wasn't even aware she could handle children as it wasn't easy dealing with this one. The tender gaze that the young man saw in her sharp eyes was usually reserved for his sister, and now, his son was receiving that same look from this stern faced woman.

"Really, you're so good with kids. Haven't you thought about having one of your own? Ouch!"

Before he could finish his sentence, the young man winced in pain as he was pinched by his sister, Dr.Panipak. Not only was he pinched, but he also received a fierce glare.

"What's that for, Pleng?"

He complained to his sister, who had suddenly attacked him. He suspected he'd have a bruise for sure as she'd pinched him with full force, making him jump.

"Keep it down, will you? Pot might wake up,"

She said, her gaze shifting to the small boy in her brother's arms. The young

man wanted to argue that if his son woke up, it'd be because of her....

Akhira chose to go home, allowing Dr.Panipak to spend time with her family. Although she could've stayed at Dr. Panipak's house, where everyone was welcoming and happy to have her stay, Akhira thought it best to give the doctor some space and personal time. Even though they were a couple, they didn't need to be together twenty-four hours a day, even if deep down, Akhira wished they could.

Dr.Panipak watched the pitch-black car slowly drive away from the gate. Driving at night wasn't ideal, and deep down, she was worried. But she trusted that Akhira would be fine. From their frequent travels together, she knew her habits well. Sometimes, she might be a bit impatient or drive a little fast, but she was always mindful when driving, unlike her..



KhunYing Nara was surprised to see her daughter to come home to sleep. She couldn't help but look other woman she expected to accompany her daughter but she was nowhere to be found.

"Are you here by yourself, dear?"

The mother asked with curiosity as soon as she saw her. Akhira smiled slightly at her mother before responding.

"Yeah."

"I thought you would bring Pleng along. It's good, though. Let her spend some time with her family. You're always clinging to her."

It was typical for Akhira to be a teased, but she didn't argue or express any opinion because everything her mother said was true.

"Let's go inside. Next time, you don't have to wait for me like this, okay, Mom?"

Whenever she said she was coming home, her mother would always wait outside like this. Akhira didn't want her mother standing out in the wind like that.

"So, what's up with your brother?"

Akhira turned to her mother with curiosity as she suddenly mentioned her brother.

"What is it, Mom?"

"Well, Sun told me he'd be back next month, but he called today to say it might be several more months before he returns. No exact date."

The mother sighed with a heavy heart, wondering when their family would finally be together again.

"He must have his reasons."

"I bet he just wants to keep traveling. When he comes back, I'll nag him until his ears fall off; just you wait."

She said that, but when the time actually came, she'd probably be jumping for joy to welcome him.

"Mom, you should rest. It's late."

KhunYing Nara smiled and patted the back of her daughter, who was now much taller than her. The mother could only watch, sometimes feeling a bit confused and anxious, wondering if, when her son really came back, it'd be as she imagined. Maybe they'd be fine, or it could turn out terribly...

Dr.Panipak tossed and turned in bed. Even though the bedroom was pitch dark, the room's owner showed no signs of falling asleep. She wanted to sleep, but her brain kept working, forcing her to think about various things non-stop, especially about that person. She couldn't possibly be so smitten with her that she couldn't sleep... could she?

Dr.Panipak buried her face in the pillow before letting out a big sigh. Her mind was preoccupied with an troubling dilemma that she couldn't resolve, and it seemed she'd have to wrestle with it for a while longer.

*'Do you really want to go?*

*'If you ask me... I don't want you to go. 'But, it's up to you.'*

Akhira's tone and expression were still clear in her memory. Even though she seemed to disagree, she'd let her choose and decide for herself. Although Akhira said it was up to her and didn't object, she could still tell that she probably didn't want her to go far from here, far from her. Akhira never interfered with her life. She always accepted her actions and decisions. That's why she was having a dilemma, unable to decide what to do next...

Dr.Panipak watched the person conversing with her father. Both faces had small smiles for each other. It wasn't often that she saw her father get along with someone who was courting her. She didn't know if it was because their families knew each other and were close, which made the other person so easily beloved by her family.

But that reasoning couldn't apply to everyone. At least not to her mischievous nephew, who, for some reason, seemed to like Akhira a lot, even though they'd just met. She still couldn't find an answer to that. It was indeed strange..

"You drive today."

Dr.Panipak stood still, looking at the person not far away with a heavy heart. A bright morning had turned into a challenging one when Akhira uttered that sentence.

"I don't want to drive."

Said Dr.Panipak. Akhira thought it was time for the other person to gain confidence in this matter. She didn't know why she'd always refused to drive a car. But no matter what, there would come a day when she'd need it. She didn't want her to be without options in case of an emergency.

Even though Dr.Panipak had refused, she now found herself in the driver's seat, taking the place of Akhira. She never thought she'd drive again in her life, but for some unknown reason, she followed Akhira's order. Maybe it was because of the simple words: 'I'll teach you.'

"Do you know where the brakes are?"

"Yes,"

Dr.Panipak replied softly. Akhira knew that she could drive; it was just that she lacked confidence. And driving a car that she'd never driven before might involve learning some of its systems as each car has some differences.

"Start the car, or we'll be late for work."

Dr.Panipak looked uncertainly at the person sitting in her usual spot.

"I."

"This car is easy to drive. Don't be afraid."

The words weren't the only things that made her feel better, but also the hand that reached out to stroke her hair as if to comfort her and make her feel reassured. Akhira nodded at her, waiting for her to start the car, without any sign of worry or fear as if she had complete confidence in her.

"The roads aren't busy in the morning, but if it is, we can pull over, and I'll drive,"

Akhira said casually, making the onlooker feel inexplicably heartened. Although the driver felt anxious almost all the time, Akhira thought it was good that Dr.Panipak was constantly checking all the mirrors and windows. If it could give her a bit more confidence, there wouldn't be any problems. Sometimes, she'd drive so slowly among the hurried drivers on the road, resulting in other cars honking at her. Dr.Panipak would just turn to look at the person beside her, who was always watching her as if to offer support.

"It's okay. Don't mind them,"

Akhira said calmly, even though she felt guilty seeing her loved one's distressed face. She was quite angry at the other car but had to keep her feelings in check.

"Move to the left lane. We're going to turn."

Dr.Panipak slowly followed Akhira's instructions. Looking back, this driving experience was less stressful than her first driving lesson because the person teaching her today was incredibly patient.

"Can we stop?"

Dr.Panipak asked Akhira, who simply smiled and nodded in response, not understanding why she had to ask her first, perhaps for her own peace of mind.

More than half of the green tea was gone, but the doctor still couldn't stop smiling. Thinking about it, this driving experience wasn't so bad when she had her loved one by her side. She had to admit that Akhira was one of the best teachers. She drove as slowly as a turtle and secretly thought that someone who drove as fast as her must be somewhat annoyed. But every time she looked at her, she didn't seem to mind or feel as worried as she feared. On the contrary, she was patient and a good instructor.

'It's okay'

'Back up slowly, watch the rearview mirror.'

'Go forward first, then back up again.'

Dr.Panipak smiled to herself for several minutes, just thinking back on the recent events, the tone of voice, or the look in the speaker's eyes. She could remember it all...

After several days of contemplation, Dr.Panipak concluded that she'd continue with her plans, but the place she wanted to go to needed to be put on hold while she looked for a new, suitable location. On reflection, she still had many responsibilities, including her duties as a doctor at the hospital,



her patients, both walk-ins and those who had an appointment with her, and her parents, whom she barely had time to visit.

If she had to move further from home, she wouldn't have time to visit them at all, changing from once a week to once a month, or worse, once every three months. And then there was her loved one. She had to admit that deep down, she didn't want to be far from Akhira either.

"That place over there, dear? I think it's a good location. It's not that far from our home. It won't be such a hassle traveling there."

"I agree. And there's no clinic around there yet."

Both the father and mother agreed because it was a good location, and their daughter wouldn't have to go far. Today, the family arranged to see the land they were interested in. Although it was quite difficult to get in touch with the landowner, they eventually received assistance and got a contact address.

"I'm not selling it, sorry."

A short, simple, and to-the-point sentence was uttered under the expressionless face of a man who seemed to be considerably older than Dr.Panipak's father. His face was wrinkled, with a mustache black mixed with white appropriate to his age, and his fierce eyes stared at them before inviting them to leave, saying that he wanted to rest.



## 25. WILL

Akhira gazed at the person sighing repeatedly in her embrace. Even though she was turned away, their closeness was enough to tell that the other was still awake.

"Time to sleep,"

She whispered softly, causing the overthinker to turn and look at her with surprise, thinking she'd already fallen asleep. Akhira tightened her embrace and took the opportunity to inhale the sweet scent from Dr.Panipak's slender shoulder without any resistance from the doctor. Seeing that Dr. Panipak didn't object, Akhira's mischievous hand began to wander.

What started as a simple hug became something more. Akhira's hand slipped under Dr.Panipak's thin nightshirt, carressing with delight, causing the latter to tense up from the tingling sensation.

"Teeny tiny tummy."

There she goes again... Dr.Panipak was sure she'd heard Akhira say this before a while back when they... Well, let's just say I remember it clearly.

"Are you going to let me sleep, or are you going to keep teasing me?"

Akhira chuckled in her throat, admitting to herself that she did want to tease her, but seeing how tired she was from the day, she wanted to let her rest more. It was just playful teasing.

"Well, if you don't sleep, I'll keep teasing,"

Akhira replied calmly, prompting Dr.Panipak to turn toward her, burying her face in Akhira's neck and closing her eyes tightly, not wanting her to

touch her stomach again. Akhira laughed softly, now unsure whether she should let her sleep, considering how adorable she was.. Where there's a will, there's a way.

This was an expression Dr.Panipak had always believed in since childhood, but now her faith in this was waning. She'd always believed that if you tried hard enough at something, sooner or later, it'd succeed. But as she grew older, she learned that no matter how hard we try, it doesn't apply to everything. Not everyone who tries can succeed as there are many factors beyond will.



Now, it was time to look for a new location. Even if the start was rocky, it didn't mean that her initial intentions would collapse. Dr.Panipak began to move on and seriously reconsider what was truly important in this matter.

Her slender fingers scrolled through various messages on her phone intently. She'd looked at many locations, but each had several clinics already. If she opened another, she'd inevitably become their competitor. She wasn't focused on profit; she just wanted to open somewhere with difficult hospital access to provide convenience for nearby communities in case of emergency.

"You can get back to work. Don't worry about me."

Dr.Panipak twirled her pen, smiling at the person on the other end of the line who seemed more anxious than her. She wondered who was more stressed about this between her and Akhira.

Their conversation on the phone was brief as both had work to do, and Dr.Panipak had patients waiting. It wouldn't be right to spend work time on the phone. Although she didn't have much time for her loved one. Akhira never complained. Dr.Panipak secretly wondered if she felt neglected, especially lately, as she was busy with finding a suitable piece of land. Sometimes, they didn't see each other at all. More than that, she also involved her in this land-searching mission as Akhira always tried to help her.

Akhira leaned back in her chair, exhausted from a nearly full day of work. Her back ached from sitting for so long, and her slender fingers had flipped through countless pages. Now, her work was done, but she was still worried about Dr. Panipak. She knew all too well that starting anything was never easy and always came with obstacles.

She understood her lover's concerns as even the beginning seemed fraught with stumbles. Yet Akhira remained confident that there would be a solution. Land was easy to find many were willing to sell. But finding the right piece of land was much harder. Akhira had looked at several places and planned to take Dr. Panipak to see them when they both had a free day, hoping to expand their options...

However, their day off was anything but restful. Dr. Panipak gulped down water with thirst because she hadn't eaten much and was feeling exhausted. The sky was clearly darkening. She'd visited many places since morning, but none had felt right for various reasons. The entire day had yielded nothing but fatigue. Not just for her but for Akhira, too. Still, she felt grateful for her lover's tireless support. They could buy any of those lands right away, but the only issue was that she wasn't quite satisfied with them.

Inside the silent car, Akhira glanced at the sleeping Dr. Panipak, not surprised that her lover had dozed off from exhaustion. Her sharp eyes surveyed the road, lit by orange streetlights. Initially, she hadn't thought it'd be this difficult it was just land, after all, and she had knowledge and experience in making such investments.

She admired Dr. Panipak's determination and understood why she wanted that particular piece of land so badly. Even without being a business person, she had a keen eye for its potential, and Akhira agreed that it was the perfect spot for an investment. It was well-located, near a community, and easy to reach. If it were her, she wouldn't choose anywhere else either. But the problem lay with the landowner. They'd have to find a way to persuade him... Nothing is impossible...

Dr. Panipak tried to gather her thoughts, repeatedly questioning whether what she'd just heard on the phone was real or a dream. She tried to move on, but the landowner who had refused her that day had called back, saying

he agreed to sell her that piece of land. Previously, there had seemed to be no chance of this happening, but upon reflection, she realized she hadn't just heard an agreement to sell the land. He'd also said he wanted to discuss it again, this time with Akhira. Was that Akhira... her girlfriend? And what did she have to do with it?

Once everything was settled, Dr.Panipak looked at the documents in her hand with mixed emotions. She didn't know where to start. She'd already spoken to her parents, who were just as surprised as she'd been initially. Who would've thought...

Dr.Panipak could only watch her lover, who was busy tinkering with a toy, oblivious to everything else. She didn't know what Akhira had said or done to convince the owner to release that coveted piece of land. Despite her and her family's numerous attempts, there had been no sign of interest or willingness to sell. No matter what they offered, it was refused. So why did everything suddenly become so easy with Akhira?

"I just don't get it,"

Dr.Panipak muttered, collapsing onto the sofa next to the person engrossed in fixing a toy for her nephew. Akhira didn't respond; she just smiled, which made her even more curious.

"Don't you know you've got a business person girlfriend?"

Dr.Panipak wasn't sure if that was a question or a statement, and she didn't understand why she felt a flush of warmth at the words her lover had just spoken.

"I know,"

Dr.Panipak replied softly. Why wouldn't she know? She was her girlfriend. She knew almost everything about her. It was only Akhira who never seemed to know anything at all.

"But being a businesswoman doesn't seem relevant, does it?"

She mused with suspicion. Why wouldn't he sell to her but was willing to sell if it was Akhira? Was it because she was a doctor and the other businesswoman? There seemed to be no reason at all.

"It is."

Akhira put down the toy she was holding and turned to her with a serious look.

"As a businesswoman, I know how to make others agree."

Her sharp eyes met the sweet face that was attentively listening, but explaining it in a way that she could visualize seemed futile. A doctor mightn't understand her work, just as she didn't understand hers.

Dr.Panipak couldn't hold Akhira's gaze for long before she had to look away. She didn't know why, but whenever the other spoke in a serious tone, it always made her feel strange. And shockingly, the other seemed more formidable than ever, even though it was still the same Akhira.

"And where's my reward?"

Akhira asked.

"What?"

"I'm a businesswoman, you know?"

Dr.Panipak was confused. So what? She already knew that. Why did she keep mentioning it?

'A businessperson expects return on investment' that's what popped up in Dr.Panipak's mind. When she realized how much the other had tried to help her, it dawned on her that it was all for some gain. But that wasn't like her at all, was it? Or had the spirit of a businessperson possessed her?

"Can't you think of it as a charity?"

The question made Akhira chuckle with affection. The doctor's pouting face was endearing. It seemed she was quite annoyed. Akhira shook her head in response. Dr.Panipak stretched and crossed her arms squinting at Akhira.

She wondered what the businesswoman wanted from her. It couldn't be money as she likely had plenty. Could she even spend all his money in a lifetime?

"How about a special meal, whatever you'd like to eat?" Akhira considered the offer silently but ultimately declined.

"I already get that every day,"

Akhira reasoned. Why would she want something she already had every day? Every meal Dr.Panipak made was special. No need to accept this offer. Dr.Panipak thought about what Akhira said. She already ate her cooking regularly, that was true. So what was it that she rarely got from her? What could they do for each other that wasn't frequent...

A gentle touch on the cheek made Akhira's heart race just as much as the one who initiated it. Despite feeling shy, the doctor managed to keep a composed face as if she felt nothing from what she'd just done, even though her heart was nearly bursting out of her chest.

"Are you satisfied now?"

She was so embarrassed she wanted to disappear from the spot as quickly as possible. But it seemed the other wasn't cooperating as Akhira shook her head and tilted her other cheek toward her, clearly indicating her desire. When has she become so cunning? She kissed her left cheek, right cheek, and eventually her forehead.

"What about my lips?"

Dr.Panipak had kissed her three times on three spots, but the beautiful businesswoman seemed unsatisfied. The greedy woman pointed to her own lips. But for Dr.Panipak, this was already too much. She felt so flustered she didn't know what to do.. You greedy girl!

"That's enough. I gave you a khuap, and you want to take a sok."

Akhira looked puzzled as soon as she heard the strange words from the slender figure. What did 'khuap' and 'sok' mean? Dr. Panipak took advantage of Akhira's confusion about her words to get up from the sofa and quickly walk into the kitchen, leaving her sitting there alone without any intention of explaining what she meant...

It's hard to believe how quickly things took shape after acquiring the land. Preparations were swiftly underway, with Dr. Panipak's brother helping to oversee the site and Akhira always there to offer advice. With supportive friends and family, Dr. Panipak felt fortunate to have these people by her side. Without them, she wasn't sure if she could've succeeded.

"The plans are finished. Let me know if anything needs changing."

"Thank you."

Dr. Panipak smiled at her brother, who was quite skilled in architecture and had a quality team to execute the work as desired.

"I'll check the site again tomorrow."

He smiled fondly at his sister. He'd taken on many jobs but never thought he'd be hired by his own sister. Even if Dr. Panipak hadn't hired him, he couldn't have stood by idly; he would've offered his help regardless..

"Thank you."

"Isn't your girlfriend around today?"

"She's at work."

The older brother looked at his sister and grinned. In the past, she wouldn't have responded so readily, but now she didn't hesitate to say that. Deep down, he was still concerned, but from what he could see, his sister had chosen a good person. Akhira wasn't just decent; she was truly exceptional.

"I thought you'd end up an old maid, helping me take care of Pot,"



He teased his sister. Dr.Panipak could only shake her head at her brother's notion. It wasn't that she wanted to end up on the shelf; she just hadn't had the time or met the right person yet. She had no intention of staying single forever.

"Put your clothes in the closet. They're all wrinkled."

Dr.Panipak sighed at Akhira, hauling a medium-sized bag of clothes upstairs. Akhira often brought clothes every week as if she was always moving. She'd just leave them around, and when she wanted to wear something, she'd rummage through the luggage. That's why the clothes were always wrinkled, and if this continued, Dr.Panipak wouldn't be able to keep up with the ironing. Even though Dr.Panipak was the one giving orders, in the end, she was the one organizing Akhira's bag, separating the wearable clothes from the hopelessly wrinkled ones.

"Next time, hang them up, okay? You're grown up; why do I have to tell you this?"

Akhira felt like she was being nagged by her mother, but before Dr.Panipak could complain further, she excused herself to take a shower, a smooth escape from her girlfriend.

Dr.Panipak stood looking at the clothes. Upon closer inspection, her clothes and her partner's weren't that different in style, but it was strange how she could easily tell which ones belonged to whom. Perhaps it was because she was familiar with her own clothes, or maybe she remembered her partner's.

In the pitch-dark room, the lights were off after Akhira had finished working. Dr.Panipak shifted slightly, feeling the warm breath close by, and the troublemaker snuggled into her neck. She thought a kiss would suffice, but that wasn't the case this time.

"I have to wake up early tomorrow,"

She murmured sleepily, hoping the other would stop bothering her as she was really tired.

"Is there ever a day you don't have to wake up early?"

Akhira's voice was quiet as if she was slighted. She continued to nuzzle into the beautiful neck, inhaling the scent for a moment before pulling away. Once the other stopped pestering and returned to her own space, Dr.Panipak moved into Akhira's arms out of habit.

"Did you finish your work?"

She asked, eyes still closed, her voice revealing just how sleepy and ready to fall asleep she was.

"Yeah,"

Akhira replied. Akhira gently stroked the hair of the person in her arms, soothing her back to sleep. She thought to herself that she shouldn't have disturbed her in the first place as it was already very late. Initially, she just wanted to give her a goodnight kiss, but the sweet scent carried her away. How fortunate that she wasn't angry, or perhaps it was because she was too sleepy at the moment. If she woke up tomorrow and scolded her for this, it wouldn't be surprise at all.



A week had passed, and Dr.Panipak's clinic matter seemed to be going well. Everything was proceeding as it should, and today was like any other typical day off. After Dr.Panipak and Akhira had checked on the construction progress, they were ready to head back. However, Dr.Panipak was surprised to find that the route Akhira was taking was neither toward her condo nor her home, and certainly not toward Akhira's place either.

Yet, Dr.Panipak didn't ask any questions, thinking her lover must be taking her out for a meal as she'd mentioned earlier. When they arrived at their destination, Dr.Panipak was even more surprised. The airport...

"Would you like to wait in the car, or would you like to come with me?"

Akhira turned to ask the slender figure beside her, not wanting her beloved to tire herself out but also not wanting to leave her alone in the car.

"I'll go with you,"

Dr.Panipak replied. Waiting in the car would be dreadfully boring. She didn't know how long Akhira would take, so she chose to accompany her rather than wait in the car. While at the construction site, she'd noticed her checking her phone frequently. She should've known from the start that she had other matters to attend to, and it was now clear that they were here to pick someone up. Dr.Panipak followed quietly behind the tall figure, who was busy on the phone, probably talking to the person they were looking for.

"There,"

Akhira said, presumably having found the person in question. However, Dr.Panipak couldn't see them because she was following behind. She slowed her pace when Akhira started walking toward their destination. A tall young man with sunglasses turned toward them and smiled as if delighted to see Akhira. As Dr.Panipak walked closer, the identity of the man standing before her became clearer, and her heart raced like a drum when she realized she recognized the man standing there all too well.

*"Sun..."*



## 26. CONFUSED

Inside the car, there was only the sound of the young man incessantly chatting with the slender figure. Akhira drove in silence, her sharp eyes focused on the road ahead with curiosity. So Sun knows her? To say they were acquainted because their families were close seemed like a plausible reason.

The two were merely catching up, but what surprised Akhira was their demeanor. One smiled as if overjoyed by the encounter, while the other wore a look of utter worry. Even though it was just for a brief moment that Dr.Panipak revealed such an expression, Akhira noticed it. The contrasting emotions displayed by the two, what exactly did they mean? Akhira chose to drop her lover off at the condo first. She needed to take her younger brother home, so she wouldn't be staying over with her tonight.

"See you later,"

Said the young man, bidding farewell to Dr.Panipak, who was stepping out of the car. She turned to lock eyes with Akhira for a moment, instructing her to drive home safely without responding to the young man. Her behavior only deepened Akhira's suspicions.

"Do you know her, too?"

Once it was just the siblings left, he immediately asked what he wanted to know.

"I do,"

Akhira replied in a flat tone.

"That's good. It's better to be acquainted; it'll help you get closer,"

He said upon hearing her response. Akhira couldn't help but turn to look at her younger brother, who spoke so casually with a smile.

"I thought you said that it'd be a while before you returned,"

Akhira inquired, recalling that her brother had told their mother it'd be several months before he came back. So why the sudden return? In truth, it wasn't so sudden but rather according to the original schedule.

"I just wanted to surprise Mom,"

Sun admitted. His call had been just a playful prank on his mother. Akhira shook her head slightly at her brother's behavior. Although they hadn't grown up together, Akhira often heard stories about her brother from their mother. Before long, the luxury car pulled into the home's driveway. As the two got out, the household was taken aback to see who accompanied Akhira into the house.

"Sun!"

Their mother hurried over to embrace her son with longing before pulling back to pinch his cheeks as if to verify that this was indeed her son.

"You're not tricking me, are you?"

"It's really me, Mom,"

Said Sun. Their father, who had been watching, chuckled at the exchange between mother and son. His wife seemed to think it was some kind of joke, but it was clear that the man before her was indeed their son..

"Aren't you going to hug me, Dad?"

Sun said softly, moving from his mother to embrace his father.

"Didn't you tell me it'd be several months before you'd return?"

KhunYing Nara immediately questioned her son after she remembered what he'd said.

"I planned to surprise you, Mom. But you didn't know I was coming, did you?"

"How could I have known you were coming?"

"I thought you knew. I thought you sent Pleng with Zo to surprise me."

Sun's words made Akhira pause. It wasn't just Akhira who was taken aback, but so was KhunYing Nara. The mother glanced at her daughter, who remained impassive. However, she didn't believe her daughter was without suspicion, knowing how intelligent Akhira was. Beneath that stoic face, no one knew what she was thinking.

"Nonsense, Sun. Who would do such a thing?"

The head of the household spoke up to defuse the situation, seeing that his wife fell silent.

"And why does she have to go surprise you?"

This time, it was Akhira who spoke up, asking the question that had been on her mind for a long time. It wasn't strange for her to do that, considering she had every right to since the person her brother kept talking about was her lover. Sun turned to look at his sister, who was staring at him with a questioning gaze. He playfully placed his hand on his chin and acted as if he was pondering something. He was always this unserious.

"You just got here. I think you should rest first. Zo, you go rest too, so we can all have dinner together later. I'll cook today,"

Their mother interjected before Sun could respond, gently pushing her son away. Akhira watched with confusion. Is there something I don't know?

"Will there be a party for my return tomorrow?"

Sun asked his mother hopefully. KhunYing Nara looked at her son and sighed. Why did there need to be a celebration? Why make things complicated? She knew her son's nature, but she didn't expect it to be this much.

"You always do things so extravagantly, Sun."

The father and Akhira could only listen silently as the mother and son talked. They understood that Sun must've missed his mother a lot, which is why he couldn't stop talking since he got back.

"Please, Mom. Pretty pleaaase."

"Alright, alright. Geez, this child."

"Invite Pleng too, Mom."

"Why?"

A slightly annoyed tone cut through the air. It seemed like her brother had mentioned Dr.Panipak far too often since he returned. Sun had said her name countless times.

"Why, Zo? Is there something wrong?"

Sun asked back, his mood starting to sour from his sister's unfriendly tone. He wondered if he was just imagining things or what was really going on. This was the second time his sister had interrupted him when he mentioned Dr.Panipak.

"It's nothing. I just noticed you keep asking about my girlfriend, so I was curious."

The playful expression that had been on Sun's face vanished instantly. He tensed up when he heard the words that felt like a hammer blow to his head. Her girlfriend? How can that be possible? The shock was evident in his eyes, and he turned to look at his mother for answers. Sun didn't know if Akhira was just playing a prank orchestrated by their mother or not.

"Is everyone pranking me?"

He tried to laugh it off, but when he looked at his parents, something told him that what he was hearing wasn't a joke.

"You're lying,"

Said Sun.

"Why would I lie to you?"

"What nonsense are you talking about!?"

Sun raised his voice, slamming his cutlery down with force as he stood up, his anger evident, startling his mother.

"Sun, stop. That's enough,"

The father said, trying to calm the situation.

"It's Zo who should stop. Didn't you hear what she said, Dad?"

"I didn't say anything wrong."

Even though Akhira was being confronted, she remained calm and collected, which only infuriated Sun more.

"Stop joking about Pleng before I really get angry."

"Why would I joke when it's the truth?"

"Bullshit!"

"Sun! Enough!"

His father's shout startled the maids as the man of the house was usually very patient. Even KhunYing Nara was taken aback. Her worries were coming true, and it seemed the situation was worse than she'd feared.

"Enough, all of you. Stop this already,"

KhunYing Nara said, barely containing her frustration. They were all together again, and the family should be happy, shouldn't they?



"I didn't start it. It's because Zo keeps saying such bullshits!"

Sun spoke with anger. Akhira's cool gaze was fixed on her brother, and her icy demeanor made it clear that she, too, was angry.

"Zo...please."

Akhira turned to the sound of her mother's pleading voice. KhunYing Nara's eyes, beginning to cloud with tears, forced Akhira to halt her own thoughts simply because she couldn't bear to see her mother cry. The wrinkled hands released the arm of her daughter when it seemed she wanted to leave.

Akhira chose to walk out of the house, even though it was already late in the evening. She could hardly stand the feelings she harbored at that moment-anger, frustration, and confusion. She wished someone could explain everything to her.

After the eldest child had driven away from the house, Khun Ying Nara took the opportunity to be alone with her son to explain what he should know.

"I've explained it, and I hope you'll understand,"

KhunYing Nara and Mr.Akhin sat watching their son's reaction. She'd told Sun about the situation between Akhira and Dr.Panipak, hoping he'd accept what had happened and what was happening now. The past is the past; her son should stop clinging to it and move on. It was strange that Sun, who usually disliked routine, got bored easily and wasn't attached to anything, became so resolute and firm about this matter, even though a long time had passed. I thought he's already moved on.

"Sun?"

She asked again, unsure if her son had listened to what she'd said.

"Yeah, Mom, I'll excuse myself to rest now,"

He replied to his mother before slipping away. The parents could only watch their son with concern, truly hoping he'd truly understand and accept

it, not just acknowledge it, as he'd done in the past. Having raised him, they knew their son all too well.

For Sun, everything happened too quickly for him to process. Things didn't go as he hoped, and he almost couldn't believe what others said. But since everyone seemed serious and there was no hint of jest, it must be true. The person he thought would come back to him.. whom he'd been waiting for all this time, had now become his sister's lover.

"Didn't you say you'd wait for me?"

Akhira didn't take long to reach her destination. Since it was about Dr.Panipak, she had to be able to answer. Akhira tried to think positively, but she couldn't lie to herself. Only Dr. Panipak could tell her everything. Her long legs strode confidently down the path ahead, even though her heart didn't feel that way anymore.

Inside the bedroom, a slender figure sat on the floor with a box of something she'd forgotten about and forgotten that she'd kept it. It was something someone had given her before leaving. Her sweet eyes looked at the photo in her hand and sighed. Even now, she couldn't figure out what to do if Sun found out about her and Akhira.

And how would her lover feel? Would Akhira be angry? Would she hate her if she knew about that? The thing she never told her. The thing she didn't dare to tell, even though it was something she should've told her a long time ago.... Since they decided to be together.

"Can you explain something to me?"

Dr.Panipak, who had been sitting with her back turned, jumped at the sudden voice. She was so lost in thought that she hadn't noticed Akhira's arrival. Dr.Panipak quickly stood up, and the tall figure observed her lover's unusual demeanor.

"What's that in your hand?"

Akhira could tell Dr.Panipak was startled to see her. The thing in her hand was something she probably didn't want her to see; otherwise, she wouldn't have hidden it behind her back. Because she'd been watching her, Akhira noticed everything, even the photo frame in her hand.

"Ms. Akhira."

Akhira stood still, looking at the person who was biting her lip in front of her, waiting for her answer. But nothing came out for her to hear, not a single sentence.

"Can you tell me already?"

She didn't need to explain what she was referring to. Dr. Panipak should know it. Akhira wasn't stupid. Even though everything was still unclear and happening so fast, she was smart enough to realize that something was off. She didn't want to jump to the conclusion, but she couldn't help it.

"I..."

"What exactly is going on between you and Sun?"

Dr.Panipak could only swallow hard because she knew that the person in front of her wasn't the same. She didn't know how much the other person knew about her and her younger brother, and she didn't know what to say. Although Akhira didn't raise her voice or speak harshly, the flat tone was enough to make Dr.Panipak feel the chill emanating from the person in front of her, and she knew she was angry....

"Answer me..."

Akhira felt like she was running out of patience. Her silence only made everything worse. At the very least, she should say or explain something because she was ready to listen Anything. Even though Akhira thought this, she didn't know if she could handle the truth or the lies.

She wanted Dr. Panipak to try to speak out rather than be silent like this. But right now, no matter what she said, it wouldn't make the current

feelings any better. For a moment, it seemed like she was about to say something, but then she fell silent.

Dr.Panipak was about to say something but had to stop because of what Sun said in the past, which made her just stand there, swallowing hard. She truly didn't know whether she should tell Akhira because she hadn't thought about it. She didn't expect everything to happen so fast that she was caught off guard.

"We're just acquaintances... that's all."

Dr.Panipak answered, not quite confidently, because she was very afraid right now.

"Really?"

“ ... ”

"Just acquaintances?"

Dr.Panipak stood frozen, feeling uneasy with the indifferent tone in the other's last sentence before Akhira snatched something from her hand because she wasn't prepared. Akhira looked at the person in the photo with a flat gaze. It was clear who the two people in the picture were. One was her younger brother with a wide smile, and the other was... the person standing in front of her right now.

Akhira's demeanor made Dr.Panipak almost want to stop breathing. She didn't know what to do, only that she didn't want the other person to see that picture. But now it was too late..

"What kind of acquaintance keeps a photo of each other?"

What kind of acquaintance took a photo together? Just by looking, you could tell how happy the man in the photo was, even though it was just a simple standing side by side, nothing more. Akhira paused for a moment before tossing the photo onto the bed, then turned to look at the person clenching her lips tightly.

"Ms.Akhira, Mm!"

Just as the slender figure was about to speak, she was silenced by a kiss from the taller person. This kiss was not as gentle as the ones she'd given before. Akhira kissed Dr. Panipak with negative emotions as if punishing a stubborn criminal before pushing her onto the bed. Although it wasn't very violent, it wasn't as gentle as before.

"Ah!"

When they parted, the person on top immediately began to kiss her beautiful neck. Dr.Panipak cried out because Akhira was hurting her. Her delicate hands tried to push the person on top away. Her sweet eyes began to tear up as Akhira was selfish and did not consider her feelings. Her increasingly aggressive actions made Dr.Panipak want to escape from her.

"Let go of me!"

Even though she said that, there was no indication that the person on top would stop. She knew Akhira was angry, but she had no right to treat her like this. Her beautiful shirt was ripped from her slender body by the force of the person on top. Dr.Panipak felt a stinging pain as the other didn't remove it gently but yanked it so hard the buttons fell off and scattered.

The hot lips played with the beautiful chest with a a ferocity that made Dr.Panipak jolt when the other deliberately bit her. No matter how much she tried to push away, her strength was not enough to break free from these arms.

"What? When my brother came back, you suddenly acting all hard to get, huh?!"

Dr.Panipak flinched with fear. This was the first time the other had snapped at her in anger. Hearing that, Dr.Panipak fought back even harder, struggling to escape the cruel grip as much as her strength would allow before flinching again at the sound of something shattering on the floor.

The picture frame that was once lying on the bed was now broken into pieces against the wall with Akhira's hand. Dr. Panipak looked between the person above her and the remnants on the floor. She didn't like how she broke things when she was angry, whether it was intentional or not.

"Do you care about it that much?"

She asked coldly. Akhira followed her gaze to the destroyed object, which must've been important for her because she was on the verge of tears all this time.

"..."

"If you care about it that much, go pick it up,"

Akhira said, stepping away from the bed with a hint of pain. It was a sarcastic remark, but Dr. Panipak took it seriously.

Dr. Panipak moved her body off the bed in pain, walked to the fallen picture frame, and quietly began picking up the shards of glass, not wanting to make a scene or cry in front of the other. But tears betrayed her and streamed down uncontrollably.

She wasn't crying over the broken picture frame but because Akhira was being so cruel to her. Her delicate hands slowly collected the glass pieces, refusing to look up until the person watching her grew frustrated. Akhira pulled her up just as Dr. Panipak was about to pick up a large shard, cutting her slender finger.

"Ouch!"

Dr. Panipak cried out in pain, but before the sting could settle, her lips were captured in another kiss like a déjà vu, only now she lay beneath her on the bed. This time, Dr. Panipak didn't resist; if this would appease Akhira's anger, she'd endure, even though she felt pain throughout her body and soul.

Akhira lifted her head from the beautiful neck, hearing a hiss of pain from below. She saw the sweet faced woman with tears and noticed the red blood

staining her shirt from where she'd grabbed her. It didn't take long to find the source.

The anger turned to guilt instantly. Jealousy had made her lose control and hurt her. Seeing her tears, Akhira couldn't bear it and wiped them away. Though not gentle, it was enough to stop Dr.Panipak's crying.

“Don't be rough with me.”

Dr.Panipak whispered pleadingly, gently stroking the chin of the cruel one. If she was to love her, she wanted it to be tender, not out of anger or hate. She couldn't bear it if Akhira became any crueler to her.

Akhira released her wrist, looking at the beautiful finger now bleeding profusely before bringing it to her mouth, sucking the fresh red blood as if starved. Dr. Panipak watched in shock, wanting to protest, but it was too late. The mix of pain and overwhelming sensations blurred, leaving her unsure of her feelings.

When Akhira released her index finger, she bent down to taste the sweetness of her neck once more. Dr.Panipak was at loss, her injured hand firmly held by the person above, who then moved to lavish her beautiful chest and her fingers attentively until Dr.Panipak trembled.

"Mmm.”

The bare body lay gasping for breath beneath another, twisting and turning as the person above playfully teased with slender fingers, greeting the intimate spot with a tantalizing touch. Meanwhile, the instigator buried their face against the smooth, flat stomach, refusing to pull away as if captivated by something. Dr.Panipak shuddered with a tingling sensation when Akhira's tongue teasingly approached the beautiful navel. All she could do was clutch at the hair of the person above, unsure where else to place her hands.

“Please, don't...”

Dr.Panipak intended to tell Akhira to stop, but the words wouldn't come out as she hardly had any strength left to negotiate anything with anyone. Akhira sighed heavily, feeling an overwhelming urge as well. She stripped off Dr. Panipak's pants as the owner averted her gaze with embarrassment before the person above rubbed their groins together. The one beneath could only look away, breathing heavily with a mix of emotions.

"Hghnnnn. Ah."

Dr.Panipak's free hand shot up to cover her mouth as soon as Akhira began to move. The novel sensation nearly took her breath away, for she'd never...never felt this way before. Even though this wasn't the first time the other had touched her body, it was the first time their bodies were pressed so closely together.

"Mmm,"

Akhira moaned with satisfaction, prompting Dr. Panipak to reach out and cover her mouth as if she didn't want any more sounds to escape. But it seemed a mistake, for not only did Akhira not quiet down, but she also captured and sucked on Dr.Panipak's beautiful fingers. The more she was treated this way, the weaker she became.

Dr.Panipak almost wished she could sink into the ground and escape. Despite her attempts to avoid eye contact, the other kept staring at her. Akhira's mouth and body worked in perfect harmony. The more she heard the heavy breathing from above Akhira, the more Dr.Panipak lost her composure. Embarrassment, arousal, and a sense of grievance all these feelings clashed, leaving her unsure of what to do.

"Miss.... Ah! I..."

Her last words were swallowed as she realized what she was about to say. Soon, the person above quickened the pace of their lovemaking, too fast for the slender body to handle, until finally, a last moan escaped along with a body that twitched in unison with the one above.



Akhira collapsed into the crook of Dr.Panipak's neck, drained of energy and panting from exhaustion. Even though everything had stopped, slender hands continued to caress the flat stomach as if to offer comfort.

Dr.Panipak closed her eyes with weariness. Sleepiness took over her as soon as everything subsided. Her sweet eyes closed down, and she fell asleep easily due to fatigue. The taller figure pulled away to gaze at the beautiful face, now peacefully asleep. Akhira, too, was nearly out of energy and soon lay down beside her, pulling the slender form into a protective embrace, unaware of what tomorrow would bring for their relationship.

Will we still belong to each other... Or what should we do from here on out...? I truly don't know.



## 27. Both The Brother & The Sister

Dr.Panipak opened her eyes to a new morning. Despite having rested, she found herself lacking the energy to rise. She glanced beside her to the spot where the cruel person had slept. She searched the empty space next to her before attempting to move slightly, feeling a soreness in her finger.

Upon inspection, she discovered a cartoon band-aid on her index finger. Evidence of care was left on the bedside table-a box of medicine. She didn't need to be told who had tended to her wound. It surprised her that she'd slept so deeply and wasn't even aware when her wound was being dressed.

Dr.Panipak looked toward the corner of the room where shards of glass had littered the floor, but now they all disappeared as if nothing had ever happened. A photo of her with a young man was placed in one corner of the room. Dr. Panipak sighed heavily with concern before walking over to retrieve the picture, intending to put it where it truly belonged.

She didn't want this picture in her room, but it seemed the person who cleaned up didn't understand, and now she had no idea where she might be. At this hour, she might've already gone to work.

After freshening up, Dr.Panipak prepared to head to work. Though she was running late, she couldn't afford to neglect her duties. Upon arriving at the hospital, before she could even catch her breath, Dr.Panipak had to deal with an unexpected visitor, someone she hadn't thought would come to find her there.

“Pleng.”

"Sun..."

The young man immediately stood up when he saw her arrive. His gaze made her feel uneasy. It'd been two years since she last saw him, two years since the issues between them had been left unresolved and it was clear she was making a mistake as everything seemed too chaotic to handle. She made a mistake in the past, and she was about to make another one now...

"What do you want, Sun? I have work to do,"

Dr.Panipak said.

"Can we talk for a moment?"

"About what?"

"About...us."

She pursed her lips slightly, weighing whether she should have a talk with him, but eventually agreed to his request. Dr. Ninlaneen, who was about to approach her close friend, paused when she saw Dr.Panipak walking alongside someone. If her eyes didn't deceive her, she was certain that person was that person from back then. The one who had disappeared for two years. The one who had left scars in Dr.Panipak's heart.

Akhira tossed her newly bought green tea into the trash without a second thought. She watched the two talking in front of the hospital with an indifferent gaze. She'd intended to come because she hadn't dropped her off in the morning and felt guilty about what happened the previous night. But seeing this, she thought it unnecessary. Perhaps Dr.Panipak would even be relieved that she hadn't dropped her off... A luxury car drove away from the hospital without Dr. Panipak knowing.

"Doctor, having another one?"

The coffee shop owner greeted as soon as she heard the beautiful doctor order her usual.

"Huh?"

The addressed doctor stood confused. Another one? What does that mean?

"What are you talking about? We just got here,"

Dr.Ninlaneen interjected, just as puzzled. Her friend hadn't eaten anything all day, and they'd just come here. No one had ordered anything before this..

"Oh, I thought you'd already had one. Ms.Akhira stopped by to buy green tea for you earlier this morning,"

The shop owner replied, leaving Dr.Panipak speechless. Had her girlfriend been here? Since when? And if she really had come, why hadn't she come to see her? After hearing the story, it wasn't long before a cell phone was taken out. And without guessing, it was clear who Dr.Panipak was about to call. No answer....

Dr.Panipak called that familiar number three times, yet there was no answer. She sat staring at the phone, unsure whether the person on the other end was simply busy or intentionally ignoring her calls. With no response, Dr.Panipak chose to leave a message instead, hoping that once seen, it'd prompt a reply.

"I saw you with a man. That was Sun, right?"

Dr.Ninlaneen looked at her friend after spooning some dessert into her mouth. There was no need to keep that to herself; the situation between Dr.Panipak and that man was well known to her. Dr.Panipak nodded, suddenly feeling her appetite wane.

"When did he come back?"

"Yesterday... Ms.Akhira picked him up at the airport."

The more she heard the answer, the more shocked she felt. It wasn't just Dr.Ninlaneen but also Dr.Plaifha, who had been listening quietly and whose eyes widened in surprise.

"What did she say?"

The two women waited anxiously for the answer, but Dr. Panipak simply shook her head..

"Does she know about you and Sun?"

"She doesn't know,"

Dr.Panipak replied softly. She was sure Akhira didn't know about it, yet unsure how she'd understand the situation. Considering last night's events, it wasn't a good sign.

"You should tell her,"

Dr.Plaifha suggested, thinking it might prevent a bigger issue. The man in question hadn't changed, which is evident from his visit to the hospital today to see her friend.

"I agree with Pha. Pleng, you're not single anymore."

Dr. Panipak sat still. It wasn't that she was chill about it. What her friend said was true. She might've been able to ignore it in the past, but not anymore. However, the young man's words from earlier that day weighed on her. If Akhira found out about her and Sun, would she be able to accept it?

"Are you dating Zo?"

"I understand."

'Zo doesn't know about us, right?"

"Then don't let her find out."

"I don't want her to think less of you, Pleng."

These words troubled her. They replayed in her mind like a song on repeat. She didn't want to think about it, but she couldn't help it. Would it really be like that? If Akhira found out, would she be truly angry with her? Could she accept it? What should she do...?

"Where have you been?"

KhunYing Nara asked immediately upon seeing her son walk into the house. Noticing he'd been out for quite some time, she couldn't help but be curious, especially since he still refused to go to work, claiming he wasn't ready and needed more rest before he joined the company.

"I went to see Pleng,"

He replied straightforwardly to his mother as if it were the most natural thing.

"Sun, we've talked about this..."

"I know. I just wanted to talk to her. If you'll excuse me,"

He said, cutting off his mother before heading to his room. He wasn't sure he could control his emotions, his hands clenched tightly. He didn't understand why his mother kept talking about this. Why did she only care about his sister's feelings when he should be the one receiving sympathy? Wasn't he the one who deserved to be pitied, the one who should be Dr.Panipak's lover, the one who should have what he deserved? If he'd known, he'd never have let her go. If only he knew someone would snatch her away.

Although Sun pretended to understand what his mother said, a person like him would never give up. No one could stop him from getting what he wanted, and even if it was difficult now, it didn't mean it was impossible. Through whatever means necessary, he'd reclaim what was rightfully his. I'll just think that I lent Zo my toy.

It was uncertain how many times Dr.Panipak had called Akhira, but she never picked up. Now, work was over, and there was no sign of Akhira coming to pick her up. This made her anxious because she knew well that Akhira would never go back to the condo without her. The only places Akhira could be were either at the company or at home. With that thought, she scrolled through her contacts to find the home number. Soon, someone answered the call.

"Hello, this is Pleng speaking."

'Oh, Dr.Panipak, is there something you need?'

The maid answered the phone, prompting Dr.Panipak to quickly ask what she wanted to know as she didn't have much time.

"Is Ms.Akhira at home right now?"

'No, she hasn't come home at all.'

"Thank you."

After hanging up, Dr.Panipak immediately headed to the front of the hospital. The first thing that came to mind was the taxi waiting outside. Waiting for a bus would take too long to reach Akhira's company.

Dr.Panipak rarely used taxis unless it was an absolute emergency, like now. Upon arriving at the company, she couldn't immediately find the person she wanted to see, so she sat in the lobby. She was certain. that Akhira was there. She also knew the reason Akhira didn't answer her call was that she had a meeting.

But still, she should've sent a message so she wouldn't have to worry. Time always crawls for those who wait, and it felt like an eternity for Dr.Panipak, who sat there for over two hours, drawing the attention of the employees in the lobby.

Her eyes scanned the area, unsure of what to do, until she saw Akhira emerge, presumably done with work. But she froze when she noticed Akhira wasn't alone and was only exchanging brief glances with her secretary before continuing their conversation, completely ignoring her. She felt like she was just air.

Suppressing her feelings of hurt, she tried to understand that Akhira must be really busy to ignore her like this. Another undeniable reason was that Akhira was still angry with her. Dr.Panipak decided to approach when Akhira's secretary saw her and nodded slightly in greeting while still talking to her boss.

"Okay, we have a meeting at ten tomorrow."

Dr.Panipak overheard, feeling uneasy about the last sentence she caught between them.

"How are you getting back?"

"Pardon?"

The secretary was confused. She didn't expect her boss to speak to her as it'd never happened before that Akhira would ask about anything other than work. But today was different, perhaps because of the long meeting and the late hour.

"I...I've called for a ride."

Dr.Panipak listened silently, watching the other woman glance at her briefly before awkwardly responding to Akhira. Akhira nodded slightly.

"Well then, I'll take my leave. Goodbye, Ms.Akhira,"

Said the secretary. She bowed slightly to her boss and smiled at Dr.Panipak, who still felt like an outsider. But there was nothing she could do except hold back her pain....

"Do you want something to eat? I can make it for you,"

Dr.Panipak offered, trying to sound normal to the silent woman who had ignored her the whole way home. She acted as if they hadn't fought.

"Did you come looking for me?"

When Akhira didn't respond, Dr.Panipak asked another question. However, Akhira remained silent, washing her glass after drinking without paying any attention to Dr. Panipak. Akhira exhaled a soft, weary sigh. Even though she'd tried to forget, when Dr.Panipak asked, it was like she reminded her of the things that always made her feel bad. Why, she wondered, why did she still act as if nothing had happened between them? Why did she ignore what had happened?





Akhira returned to the bedroom after finishing her work as usual. Her tired eyes glanced at the back of her lover before she sat down at the foot of the bed, pressing her temples because of a headache. She hadn't contacted home because she was too busy with work. She hadn't even reached out to the person she was with now. She saw that Dr.Panipak had called several times and sent messages, but she couldn't bring herself to respond. Maybe it was because of that image etched in her mind. No matter what she did, it just wouldn't go away.

Even now, so many things weighed on her mind that her head felt like it was about to explode. Akhira could only sigh over and over before shaking off all those thoughts, trying not to think about her brother and her lover anymore. She slowly lay down, choosing to turn her back to the other person, thinking she must've already fallen asleep. But the truth was otherwise.

Dr.Panipak just lay still, feeling the bed dip slightly with the weight of the other. Akhira slept at her usual place. Everything was almost the same except for her embrace, which wasn't there for her tonight. Normally, no matter how late Akhira went to bed, whether she was already asleep or still awake, she'd pull her into her arms. They'd cuddle. Tonight was different.

The rhythm of normal breathing signaled that the other had already fallen into slumber, but it was Dr.Panipak herself who couldn't sleep. Turning to look at the back of her lover with a sense of grievance, she felt the urge to cry just because she was ignoring her.

"Don't you want to hug me anymore?"

She whispered painfully. Why had things between them become so complicated? I don't like this at all.

Akhira stood waiting for her mother in front of the house as it was her day off, and her mother had called her here, probably just to go shopping and wanting some company.

"We'll have dinner at home tonight. You should stay."

Akhira turned toward the voice and saw Sun walked out. The younger man spoke with a smile, unlike someone who had had a fight just days before. The young man was well dressed, and it was obvious he was going out somewhere.

"Bring Pleng with you, or if you don't want to... I'll bring her myself."

Akhira locked eyes with him, silent. Sun smirked slightly and playfully as usual, but to Akhira, it felt like he was messing with her.

"Or Pleng can come by herself. She's here often."

"..."

"To see me."

"What are you two talking about?"

KhunYing Nara asked when she saw her two children standing together. She was wary, unsure if they were going to have another fight like the other day.

"Nothing, Mom. I'm off,"

He said and immediately walked to his car. Akhira stood frozen by the last words her brother had said before their mother came out. Does she come here often?

Until now, she could only think about it. She should've been suspicious from the start when she brought her home because everyone seemed quite familiar with her. Moreover, when she excused herself to use the bathroom, she could go by herself without anyone guiding her. So, this was how it was. She must indeed come here often...

"Zo, what are you thinking about?"

Her mother asked, seeing her daughter silent.

"Nothing."

"Then let's go. I have a lot to buy."

KhunYing Nara didn't know what Akhira was thinking, but at least she'd have the chance to talk to her daughter and tell her something she needed to know today.

"Hello,"

Akhira lifted her head from rummaging for items as soon as she heard the greeting. Even though she was certain she'd never met this woman before, she was sure she'd intentionally addressed her as no one else was near them.

"Hi, I'm In. Nice to meet you."

Seeing the other party just looking confused, she introduced herself and extended her hand to greet the person in front of her.

"I don't know you,"

Akhira said with an indifferent expression, not even bothering to return the greeting or shake the woman's hand. This left her standing awkwardly and feeling quite embarrassed before she withdrew her hand and smiled at her again.

"You might not know me, but you know Dr.Panipak, right?"

As Akhira started to walk away, the other party quickly brought up the topic, and it worked because now she turned back to pay attention to her after hearing the name. Akhira didn't know who this woman was or how she knew Dr. Panipak, and she didn't think she was a friend or close to her own lover as her gut feeling told her so.

"I work at the same hospital as Dr.Panipak,"

She said it wasn't strange for doctors at the same hospital to know each other.

"It's nice that you pick up Dr.Panipak often. It's good to see you caring for each other."

By this point, Akhira's brows furrowed as she tried to understand what this woman was saying. When she saw Akhira looking puzzled, she added fuel to the fire.

"You're Sun's sister, right? I used to see Sun out and about a lot, and now it's you."

"..."

"But now I've heard that Sun has come back, so you probably won't have to pick up Dr.Panipak anymore."

Akhira listened silently with a neutral face, but who would know that Akhira's heart was almost exploding? The things this woman was saying were probably not lies because if she didn't know, she wouldn't be able to say them. Many things became clearer, and Akhira herself felt uneasy. Many things she'd never known and had doubts about were about to be revealed, and it seemed that everything was becoming clearer without having to ask anyone.

"Please go ahead and continue shopping. I won't take up any more of your time."

She said it with a smile as if nothing had happened, and before she walked past Akhira, she couldn't help but glance back at the person who remained silent and unresponsive. Even though they were both women, she couldn't deny that the daughter of KhunYing Nara was just as captivating as her brother, perhaps even more so.

"Zo, did you find everything? I only need flour for baking. Couldn't find it. I guess I'll have to ask the staff."

Said the mother, returning to her daughter after they'd split up to look for items.

"I got everything."

"Then let's get the flour and head home."

The car was silent because Akhira was preoccupied with her thoughts, forgetting that she wasn't alone.

"Zo."

"Did Pleng come to our house often, Mom?"

Both of them said it at the same time. KhunYing Nara looked at her daughter's puzzled face and couldn't help but feel sorry for her. At this moment, she thought she should tell her daughter something.

"Quite often."

She chose to tell the truth, even though Dr.Panipak hadn't been coming over lately, except for the last time her daughter brought her, which was quite a while ago. But if it was in the past, it was undeniable that Dr.Panipak used to visit the Watcharakitkun house regularly...

"Really?"

It was strange that no one had ever mentioned this to her.

"I want to talk to you about Pleng and your brother."

Akhira sighed, clearly showing how troubled she was. Even though she didn't say it out loud, her expression made it clear to her mother.

"No need, Mom. Even Pleng doesn't think to tell me."

Her voice softened in the last sentence before the car came to a complete stop at the destination. Akhira didn't want to listen or be aware of anything from anyone else anymore. It seemed like everyone around her was trying

to tell and explain the relationship between her brother and her lover. But at this moment, Akhira didn't want to hear anything from anyone except for Dr.Panipak. She wished she'd tell her even a little bit. She wanted to hear the whole story from Dr. Panipak's own lips.



"Can I close the door now?"

Dr.Ninlaneen whispered softly when she saw someone approaching the elevator they were in. Why is she here at this hour? I don't want to see her this early.

"Isn't that a bit too cruel, Neen?"

Dr.Plaifha.

"Isn't that a bit too cruel, Neen?"

Dr.Plaifha scolded her friend playfully because she didn't want to be in the elevator with the person walking toward them either. If it weren't for the fact that this was a public elevator, they wouldn't even dream of sharing it with the person. Dr.Panipak didn't comment; she just shook her head at her two friends, who didn't seem to get along with the person who had just entered the elevator.

"It's great, isn't it?"

"What's great?"

It was Dr.Ninlaneen who responded. Besides them, there was no one else in there, so she was sure this person was talking to them.

"I'm talking about Dr.Panipak. Isn't it great?"

The person said, turned to look at Dr.Panipak, who was standing at the very back, and smiled at her. But it was a smile that felt odd and unsettling to the recipient.

"What about me?"

"Well... you get to date both the brother and the sister. Isn't it great?"

The elevator chimed just as the speaker finished their sentence, and at the same time, the person walked out as soon as they reached their desired floor, leaving the listeners stunned by the remark. Dr.Ninlaneen and Dr. Plaifha's eyes widened in shock.

"It's better to keep your mouth if you don't know anything,"

Dr.Ninlaneen muttered after the person had left. If the other party hadn't left and the elevator doors hadn't closed first, there would've been a confrontation for sure. Even though they didn't expect to encounter such an unpleasant person, these terrible people really did exist.

"What's wrong with her?"

"Well, you can guess from just her name she's quite 'In'trusive.'"

The two friends didn't understand what Dr.Panipak had done to make that woman seem to have a grudge against them ever since Dr.Panipak started working here. As they say, you can't make everyone love you. Dr.Panipak understood this well, but what she couldn't understand were the words of that woman. She didn't understand what that person wanted from her.

"Let it go. Neen."

"How can I, Pleng? If that Dr.In or whatever starts a gossip about you, the whole hospital will get the wrong idea

"Exactly, that woman has been like this since before."

The two doctors complained non-stop, and Dr.Panipak was tired of that person. She'd tried her best not to get involved or interfere with that woman, but it seemed the more she avoided, the more she met her. Her personal life was already heavy for her, and now she had to deal with this kind of people, too.

She wanted to ignore everything, including the malicious gossip. Even though Dr.Panipak was good at not taking other people's words to heart, she was still a human being with feelings like everyone else. She might be more patient than others, but that didn't mean others had the right to talk about her however they wanted.



Sunyanv



## 28. I'd do Anything

Dr. Panipak had never felt this much pressure before. She admitted that she was uncomfortable sitting at the dining table with this family under such circumstances. Fortunately, there was Khun Ying Nara, who always sent her warm smiles as if to encourage her, making her feel somewhat relieved.

"Here's your favorite, Pleng. Eat up"

The young man said with a squinty-eyed smile to Dr. Panipak, chattering away as if oblivious to the tense atmosphere at the table.

"Thank you."

Dr. Panipak replied politely, but the food the young man served her remained untouched. She glanced sideways at the person next to her, who was quietly eating with meticulous care, paying her no mind and not even bothering to look her way.

"Zo, could you serve Pleng the soup? She can't reach it."

Khun Ying Nara instructed her eldest daughter, who was eating silently, her hand pausing mid-air with her utensils.

"It's okay."

Dr. Panipak met Khun Ying Nara's gaze and offered a faint smile to confirm she was really fine before looking at her own plate, feeling slighted by her lover's indifference, which only made her feel worse.

"Zo."

The mother called her daughter's name with a stern tone once more after noticing Dr. Panipak's gloomy expression. Khun Ying Nara felt like scolding her daughter right then, but she didn't want to ruin the atmosphere.

There was no response, no conversation, only Sun was trying to engage Dr. Panipak in conversation non-stop, which she listened to only half-heartedly, or rather, in one ear and out the other. She couldn't grasp the content of the young man's stories because her mind was preoccupied with the person sitting beside her.

"?!"

Dr. Panipak looked up at the person who suddenly served her food without saying a word. Although it was a simple act, it inexplicably warmed her heart. At least Akhira wasn't being too cold toward her.

"Thank you."

She whispered, almost inaudible because she was lost in thought. Her lips curved into a small smile when Akhira finally served her food. Her feelings of being slighted almost completely vanished as she began to eat what was in front of her.

"I want to try that one."

Dr. Panipak told the person sitting next to her in a voice that wasn't too loud, out of consideration for the others. Akhira glanced at her briefly before serving her the food as requested.

From one dish to two, and then two became three and four. Strangely, all those dishes were on Akhira's side of the table, far beyond her reach. She didn't understand why she suddenly wanted to eat things that were far from her, especially since she hadn't felt hungry at all before, or rather, she couldn't stomach anything.

Maybe she didn't really want to eat much; she just didn't want her lover to ignore her. She just wanted her to serve her food. She just wanted to be pampered by her...

"Pleng, could you get me that side dish? I can't reach it," said Sun.

"What about that one next to you, hm? It's the same dish."

"But this bowl is empty, Mom."

"I'll have someone refill it."

"It's okay, I just want a little... Please, Pleng?"

"This child. You always bother her."

"Please, Pleng?"

In the end, she had to serve the food onto his plate, not because she was swayed by his coaxing, but because she wanted to get it over with. She didn't want to prolong the conversation with Sun, who kept sweet-talking her, fearing it'd upset someone even more.

"Would you like some, Ms. Akhira? I can serve you," she offered.

"It's fine."

"She doesn't like to eat the same thing with me. Right?"

"Sun!"

The mother chided her son's words. Dr. Panipak sat quietly, unable to do anything even though she was displeased. If she were to say this was the worst meal for her, it probably wouldn't be far from the truth.

Dr. Panipak wasn't sure either why she could endure staying in this house for so long. Perhaps it's because she spent most of her time with the lady of the house, which made her feel better. Because it was now very late in the evening and it was getting dark, Dr. Panipak had to stay over, accepting Khun Ying's invitation to spend the night. Even though the homeowner had invited her, Dr. Panipak wasn't sure if the owner of the room actually wanted her to stay.

*Creak...*

The sound of knocking came two or three times before the person outside opened the door, drawing the attention of the person who was sitting propped up in bed reading a book.

"Did you enter the wrong room?"

The tone was flat and cutting through the newcomer, making her freeze in place as if time had stopped. Dr. Panipak looked at the person on the bed painfully.

"You should know the rooms in this house well."

"..."

"Don't you come here often?"

She liked it when she spoke long sentences to her, but not now, and not sentences like these. When her patience ran out, and she could no longer bear it, the best option was to leave this place, to leave the room of this cruel person.

Dr. Panipak tried to hold back her tears in front of the harsh-tongued person, quickly wiping away the tears that threatened to fall before walking out of the large house without looking back at anyone. She even ignored the guard who called out to her at the front of the house. Her feelings were so intense that she forgot to consider her safety.

The path, though lit with lights, felt dim and gloomy. Dr. Panipak tried not to cry out loud, no matter how bad she felt, because if she did, her tears would blur the vision of the road ahead.

Like something out of a novel, Dr. Panipak realized she was about to be unlucky. It looked like rain was coming soon, and if she kept walking like this, she'd surely get soaked.



It was an ordinary morning at the hospital, where Dr. Panipak would come to work as usual.

But what was unusual today was that the doctor had become a patient herself.

Dr. Panipak fainted, causing a commotion that required the nurses to come to the aid of the doctor, who was about to fall to the floor.

Fortunately, there were people around; otherwise, Dr. Panipak might've been injured. After being taken to the examination room, it turned out that she had a high fever, and eventually, from being a doctor, she became a patient instead.

Her mother, upon hearing the news, rushed to the hospital immediately. She was almost breathless when she heard from her daughter's close friend that she'd fainted while working and was now being treated at the hospital.

"Pleng!"

"Why are you crying, Mom?"

"Why didn't you take care of yourself?"

Dr. Panipak hugged her mother, feeling guilty for making her worry, and sent an apologetic look to her father, who was standing not far away.

She ended up in the hospital like this because she had a high fever that caused her to faint. Luckily, she didn't hit her head on the floor. The cause might've been from getting drenched in the rain the night before, coupled with a lack of rest. She'd felt unwell since the previous night and had a severe headache in the morning, but she thought the medicine would help, so she didn't pay much attention to her condition and ended up in a hospital bed like this.

As for Khun Ying Nara, when she heard about Dr. Panipak's condition, she hurried to visit her with her family immediately. She didn't expect something to happen to Dr. Panipak. Dr. Panipak gave the elders who had

just arrived a wai, unable to move much because her nephew was still sitting on her. Her eyes searched for the cruel person and soon found Akhira, who walked in last with an indifferent expression.

"How are you feeling, Pleng?"

"I'm better now, Khun Ying."

She said that to make her relieved. Even though Khun Ying Nara wasn't her real mother, she knew well how much she cared for her.

"How are you, Pleng?"

This time, it was a young man who asked.

"Don't tush her!"

The young boy sitting on Dr. Panipak's lap brushed away the thick hand that was reaching out to touch his aunt, causing the young man to look taken aback. But Sun wasn't the type to give up easily.

"Why can't I touch her?"

He asked the little boy teasingly, causing him to pout and cling to his beautiful aunt protectively, not wanting this man to get close to her.

"Auntie Pleng is Auntie Khira's."

The little boy's words not only made everyone pause, but Akhira, who was standing at a distance, felt a strange sensation as suddenly many eyes turned to look at her.

"Auntie Khira."

The little boy broke the silence, calling out to the tall figure who stood still, refusing to move. His small hand flailed in the air, wanting Akhira to come over, while the little body snuggled up to Dr. Panipak as if reserving her entire body for his Auntie Khira alone.

"You can go home, Mom. I can stay alone."

Dr. Panipak said, ending the argument by telling everyone to go home. There was no need to waste time watching over her as she didn't want to trouble them. No matter how spacious and comfortable the room was, it still wasn't home.

"How can you stay alone, dear?"

Her mother asked.

"Pha and Neen are here, Mom. It's okay,"

She reassured her mother, and it was true that the two of them, no matter how busy, would always come to see her because they were worried sick about her.

"I can watch over Pleng for you, Auntie."

Sun spoke up, seeing this as an opportunity to spend more time with Dr. Panipak and perhaps rekindle something...

"You have an appointment with Dad, Sun. I think Zo should stay with Pleng"

The first sentence was directed at her son, while the latter was addressed to her daughter, who had been silent since entering the room. She didn't know what Akhira was thinking at the moment.

The mother knew well that the two girls were having issues. If they didn't understand each other, they had to be left to sort it out themselves. And if Akhira refused, she'd insist. You can't just let someone else take care of the person, who is your girlfriend, right? Even though she knew Akhira wasn't like that, when people are angry, they might act without thinking.

Sun looked at Akhira with a slightly displeased expression, but ultimately, he had to give in because, as his mother had said, he had an appointment with his father. His father wanted to discuss business at the company, and

he couldn't disappoint him as it might cause problems later. So, for now, he had to step back.

Dr. Panipak, who had been quietly listening, felt a bit hurt because Akhira hadn't responded or said anything to what Khun Ying Nara had suggested.

"It's okay, Khun Ying. Ms. Akhira must be busy."

he said, trying to ease the awkward situation that made everyone uncomfortable.

In the end, it was Akhira who ended up watching over the sick, sitting on the long sofa reading a newspaper, not saying a word. Although she appeared indifferent, inside, she'd been anxious and worried about her since last night. She wanted to go see her but forced herself against her will, and now she had to sit here feeling guilty.

Akhira knew that sometimes she said things without thinking out of jealousy, but since the anger hadn't left her heart, she couldn't go back and talk things out with her. That's why she chose to remain silent, fearing that saying anything might worsen their current relationship.

"If you don't want to, it's okay."

Dr. Panipak said when they were alone, thinking that Akhira agreed to watch over her because her mother had ordered it. Even though she said that, Akhira still remained silent. Did she know that she felt like she was going crazy, having to deal with the silent war?

"How are you doing, Pleng?"

A voice asked her. Dr. Ninlaneen, who had just opened the door and entered, paused slightly. She made eye contact with Akhira for a moment, bowed her head, and greeted her friend's girlfriend with a respectful smile. Dr. Panipak turned toward the calling voice and then had to give a stern look as she often did.

"You never learn how to knock, Neen."



"What's with that face?"

Dr. Ninlaneen didn't just say it but reached out and playfully pinched the cheek of Dr. Panipak, who had now become a patient, pretending to ignore the previous scolding words and quickly changing the subject. Dr. Ninlaneen immediately sensed that the situation wasn't normal. She knew she couldn't help much, but she wanted to tease her friend to lighten the atmosphere. She didn't want her friend to keep a pained expression like this.

"It's nothing..." the patient muttered.

"Isn't it because you had a fight with your girlfriend?"

Dr. Ninlaneen leaned in closer and whispered the question that was sure to be heard by only the two of them. Dr. Ninlaneen stole a glance at Akhira before turning to look at Dr. Panipak, both of whom seemed to be definitely sulking.

"I'm going to get some clothes from home," said Akhira.

"O-Okay."

Dr. Ninlaneen faltered, surprised because she thought she'd been caught, when suddenly Akhira turned to speak to her and not to the person lying on the bed. She was sure of that because of the eyes that looked straight at her while speaking. Dr. Ninlaneen thought that Akhira probably wanted her to stay and keep the patient company while she was away, but she didn't say it directly.

Why does she have to beat around the bush like this...

"She's worried about you, you know?"

Dr. Ninlaneen said that after Akhira had left the room.

"I don't know."

Dr. Panipak replied softly. From what had happened, she didn't know how Akhira felt or whether she still cared about her as she seemed to be angrier

with her than ever. Even though she tried not to show her vulnerability on the outside, inside, it was not the same.

"Is it about Sun?"

Dr. Panipak just nodded in response because even if she didn't say it, her friend knew the story well.

"Still a troublemaker, huh?."

"Neen."

"Well, it's true, Pleng. From then until now, he's still the same."

Dr. Panipak sighed, not because she wanted to defend him but because the third person they were talking about was Akhira's brother.

"You should tell Ms. Akhira...about that," Dr. Ninlaneen suggested.

Dr. Panipak fell silent before hesitantly saying:

"Mmm... I'll think about it."

"Oh, come on, what is there to think about? Just tell her, and please, tell her everything. Oh, and..."

"What is it, Neen?"

"She's sulking. Won't you make up with her? Just a little apology and I'm sure she'll soften up."

The speaker's tone and expression were mischievous, causing Dr. Panipak to shake her head with resignation, but she still kept those words in mind.

Just a little apology, and she'll soften up... Will it really be that simple?

21:39

Dr. Ninlanean's voice still echoed in her head since the afternoon until now. She still hadn't dared to talk to the person who had come to keep her company. The room had been silent for hours, and it seemed it'd continue for much longer. Dr. Panipak got off the bed and walked over to the person who was working on the sofa after deciding for a while.

"Ms. Akhira."

The name's owner glanced up slightly but didn't show much interest, which made Dr. Panipak feel even worse. Besides not getting a response, the other party continued to work indifferently as if she didn't exist.

"Is your work more important than me now?"

Dr. Panipak said, snatching the laptop from Akhira's lap with audacity, feeling her patience about to run out if she continued like this.

"What are you doing?"

Akhira asked the person who suddenly straddled her, her sweet eyes locking with Akhira's until she had to turn away, not wanting to look for fear of relenting.

"I'm trying to make you stop being mad at me," Dr. Panipak said. But because the other person showed no interest, her pain grew until she couldn't stand it any longer.

Akhira sat still, letting the doctor do as she pleased, curious to see how far she'd go when she wasn't the type to do such things.

How long can you keep it up?

Dr. Panipak turned Akhira's sharp face toward her before gently pressing her lips to her, then burying her face in the nape of Akhira's neck. Her lips did something they'd never done before, not knowing if it was due to fever or hurt feelings, but at that moment, Dr. Panipak didn't want to find an answer anymore. She only knew she had to do something, anything, to make Akhira stop being mad at her.

"Don't ignore me."

Dr. Panipak said, stroking Akhira's beautiful face with hurt feelings before pressing another kiss on her, and this time it was more than just a peck. It was passionate enough that Akhira had to tilt her head to receive the kiss from the person straddling her, unable to avoid it, feeling the kiss was incredibly pleading. The hands that had been still were seized by the person above without realizing it.

Akhira came back to her senses when Dr. Panipak moaned in pain.

"Ahh, it hurts."

This time, it wasn't Akhira who initiated it, and Dr. Panipak was inexperienced in this regard, making everything difficult for her. Dr. Panipak hesitated even though Akhira's slender fingers hadn't yet reached halfway.

"If it hurts, then stop"

Akhira said, looking up at the one on top, who was closing her eyes tightly with an indifferent voice. It wasn't that she didn't feel anything; she was just worried about her. Even though she was angry, Akhira didn't want her loved one to be hurt because of her anymore.

Dr. Panipak opened her eyes and looked down at Akhira with hurt feelings, her eyes beginning to tear up from the pain, both physical and emotional. It didn't take long for Dr. Panipak to start pressing her body down again, along with the flowing, painful tears. Dr. Panipak bit her lower lip hard enough to make Akhira worry.

Dr. Panipak's hands clung to Akhira's shoulders tightly, breathing heavily, trying hard to adjust her body to what was inside her.

"Mmm."

When she felt ready, she began to move with a slow rhythm. Dr. Panipak kept biting her lip, refusing to meet the eyes of the person she was

straddling, feeling tormented when the other party didn't think to help even a little. Akhira remained still as if she were just a lifeless statue, letting her do all the work alone. Soon, Dr. Panipak began to move faster as she adjusted.

"Hmm. Ah!"

The moans grew louder with the increased pace, forcing the owner of the invading fingers, who was leaning against the sofa, to stare at the moving figure above without looking away.

It wasn't that Akhira didn't feel anything; her heart broke, too, no different from her.

"Ah. Hnmm."

Akhira looked at the other's face with pity, for her sweet face was now covered in sweat, and her beautiful eyes were red from crying. Dr. Panipak trembled. The only thing keeping her upright was the wrists of the person beneath her.

Finally, Akhira couldn't take it anymore. Her slender fingers began to move in response, and that action made Dr. Panipak feel like she was about to shatter into pieces. The more she was stimulated, the more she moved with passion.

"Easy."

Akhira said with concern. She'd given in; she couldn't bear to see her hurt like this anymore. Knowing the other was in pain, she felt compelled to help. Akhira pulled the slender waist closer, ensuring she was in a more comfortable position, and Dr. Panipak complied easily, even though her body was still restless.

The more she moved, the more exhausted she became. The tingling sensation that arose was gnawing away at the strength of the one who was trying to make amends with her lover. As the finale approached, the slender figure paced up, aiming to reach the peak of desire. Then, everything turned

white, her body twitched and tensed, and she buried her face in Akhira's shoulder, seeking refuge.

"Please don't be mad at me anymore."

Dr. Panipak pleaded, still panting, barely able to speak from the exhaustion of what she had done. This wasn't like her at all. This wasn't something she should've done, but now she'd do anything just to have this person not be mad at her. She admitted that she was truly at fault this time.

Akhira was silent, feeling pity for the one gasping for breath. With her free hand, she gently stroked her slender back to help her relax, sensing that she was getting warmer than before.

"Mmm."

Dr. Panipak murmured, seemingly pleased with the touch from her lover, before feeling a shiver when Akhira withdrew her slender fingers from that part of her and caressed the area gently.

Would she know that the more she does that, the more I feel...

"Hmmm,"

she couldn't help but moan sweetly when the other touched the particularly sensitive spot. Her tears dried up simply because she was being comforted by her lover. Akhira flipped Dr. Panipak to lie down on the sofa, taking the top position. She looked at the sweet face covered in tear stains, guiltily smoothing them away with her finger.

"Please don't be mad at me anymore."

It was the second time she'd begged, and she thought there would be a third if she didn't get an answer. Her slender, nearly exhausted arms reached up to encircle the neck of the one above to keep her from escaping.

"I'm not mad anymore."

Akhira finally responded to the one waiting for an answer. Soon, smiles blossomed on both their faces.

"I'm not mad at you anymore."

She reiterated before planting a soft kiss on Dr. Panipak's beautiful cheek. Akhira's mischievous hand continued to stroke her flat belly, which was her favorite spot. Dr. Panipak hugged the tall figure tightly, realizing she couldn't stand Akhira's coldness and couldn't bear her indifference toward her.

If she told the truth and Akhira got mad, she'd accept the consequences because, in the end, she couldn't escape the truth. She couldn't change the past, but she could choose her future, and right now, she chose...

*She chose Akhira.*



## 29. The Last

"You're not going to work today?"

The tall figure, who was playing with Pot on the sofa, looked up at the person who had just woken up and immediately asked a question.

"Auntie Pleng, Auntie Khira made dis for Pot."

The little boy quickly climbed off Akhira's lap and walked over to the edge of his beautiful aunt's bed, showing off the item in his hand with pride. It seemed that the gift Akhira had brought was very much to the little one's liking. Dr. Panipak's slender fingers reached out to stroke his hair and ears, but the young nephew squirmed away and ran back to the sofa, feeling ticklish. Dr. Panipak took a sip of water as soon as Akhira offered her a straw.

"Why did you wake up so late?"

The slender figure looked at the person who had leaned down to whisper the question softly. She wanted to pinch the person in front of her black and blue, but she couldn't.

*Who was the reason I woke up so late...*

*If not myself...*

Thinking that, her face turned red. She didn't know why she'd been so bold and shameless last night. It might've been because of the fever or the deep feelings in her heart that made her want to appease the other person's anger. No matter how embarrassed she felt, if she could turn back time, she'd do the same. It might've made her embarrassed, but the result was more than



worth it. She never thought that she'd have to do something like this in her life, never thought that she'd have to be the one to make the move...

*In the hospital, no less.*

*How embarrassing...*

Dr. Panipak shook her head slightly to shake off that thought, even though every image and action from the previous night was still vivid in her mind.

"Who brought Pot here?"

She asked, seeing only Akhira and her nephew in the room. She thought there must be someone else visiting her, yet she found no one.

"Your mom, but she went down to have breakfast with my mom."

Akhira replied and then carefully helped Dr. Panipak to sit up against the pillow. Even though the patient had no worrying symptoms, the small acts of care made the cared-for smile without knowing, but the one being watched knew...

"Why are you looking at me?"

Even though she wasn't facing her, Akhira could see that Dr. Panipak kept staring at her non-stop. *Do I look different today?*

"Nothing."

"It's noon already. I think we should eat."

"I want to take a shower first."

"You're sick."

"I'm better now."

Akhira crossed her arms and looked at the stubborn person who kept arguing. What kind of 'Better now' is that? You still have a fever.

"Just wipe your body."

"But I really am better now."

"The doctor said you still have a fever."

"I'm also a doctor."

"I don't understand."

Akhira truly didn't understand why she was so stubborn. It's true that her condition was improving, but that didn't mean she could do whatever she wanted.

Moreover, it was the person claiming to be a doctor who had fallen ill and ended up in the hospital. Being a doctor didn't really help, did it?

In the end, Dr. Panipak had to give in when Akhira spoke firmly, not allowing her to do as she pleased because, now, she was a patient, not a doctor.

Once the nephew was taken home, only the two of them were left in the room, and now there would be no one else to disturb them. Dr. Panipak thought she should tell Akhira the truth now because she couldn't keep it to herself any longer. It was both uncomfortable and felt wrong.

"Ms. Akhira..."

"Yes?"

"I'm...ready to tell you now."

At this point, Akhira herself wasn't sure if she was ready to hear the truth from her. She'd been worried about this for a long time, and even though the truth might be hard to accept, now that it was clear that her loved one was still by her side and was ready to talk about it, she was ready to accept what had happened because, no matter what, no one can change the past. As long as they still loved each other now and were ready to move forward together...

That was enough.

Dr. Panipak had never imagined that, aside from her patients, she'd find herself having a serious heart-to-heart with someone else in her life. A small wave of stress washed over her, but there was no turning back now.

Akhira was ready to listen, and it was only right for her to speak up. Regardless of the outcome, it'd be better than letting Akhira continue to misunderstand and feel terrible for keeping things hidden like this.

"I..."

Dr. Panipak took a small breath, noticing how intently Akhira was listening. Her lips pressed together, her heart racing uncontrollably.

"..."

"I... I hit your brother with my car..."

There, she'd said it. The guilt she'd been holding was now out in the open. Dr. Panipak's heart pounded as she looked at Akhira, who had fallen silent, their eyes locked. The silence only made her heart race faster, almost to the point of exploding. She wanted to beg her to say something, anything at all.

"Is that all you wanted to tell me?"

After a long silence, Akhira finally spoke amid the tension. Dr.

Panipak tensed up, her mind struggling to process those words.

"..."

"Is this the little thing you couldn't tell me?"

Dr. Panipak was taken aback, not expecting to hear these words from her.

*Little thing?*

Those words left her unable to discern her own feelings. That means she isn't angry, right? She isn't holding a grudge for the mistake I made, right?

"Ms. Akhira..."

Akhira pulled Dr. Panipak into a tight embrace, both of them feeling the anticipation of the revelation. Would she ever know how worse she'd thought her story would've been? Once she learned what Dr. Panipak had been hiding, it was as if all the stress and worry vanished, leaving her feeling an unprecedented sense of relief.

"You have no idea how stressed I've been."

Dr. Panipak felt a pang of guilt, not realizing the extent of her loved one's anxiety. The more she thought about it, the angrier she became at herself.

"Sun told me you've been visiting our house often."

There was no longer any need for Akhira to keep her worries to herself. Now that she knew, she shouldn't jump to conclusions, and the only way to address her suspicions was to ask.

"I went there often to see Sun. That's true."

Dr. Panipak exhaled, deciding not to hide anything anymore. The truth was that she had to take care of the patient, the person she'd almost made disabled.

Sun had been unable to walk since the accident. The severity of the incident had left him in that condition. And out of guilt, she volunteered to take care of him herself. Even though the lady of the house didn't hold a grudge and she'd already compensated for the damages, she knew it wasn't enough. A person who used to walk normally was now disabled. She couldn't just stand by and do nothing.

The specialist said Sun had a chance to recover and walk again, but his constant complaints and refusal to follow the doctor's advice only worsened his condition. If left untreated, his legs, which could've been saved, would

become permanently disabled. That's why Dr. Panipak willingly did everything she could to help Sun walk again, with the dedication of a true physician. How could she heal others if she'd ruined someone's life?

"I shouldn't have driven a car."

If only a new driver like her hadn't decided to drive alone that day, the terrible incident would never have happened. She still blamed herself until these days. Akhira gently stroked the back of her lover, who was nestled in her embrace. After hearing Dr. Panipak's story, she understood everything.

She felt a deep sympathy for her partner, who was drowning in guilt and had become so traumatized that she was afraid to drive again. Even now, Akhira could sense that the weight of the incident still hung heavily on her.

Akhira sighed, not harboring any anger toward the past events. The past was the past, and there was no point in letting old issues taint the present. Accidents happen, and no one wishes for them. She hadn't intended for it to happen, and importantly, she'd taken responsibility by dedicating time to care for the injured until he fully recovered, even though she didn't have to.

*Why, then, was she so afraid that she'd be angry if she knew?*

"Do you really think I'm that unreasonable?"

Akhira asked the person in her arms, genuinely curious to know why they would think that way.

"It's not that. I was just..."

"Just what?"

"I was just afraid you'd be angry."

Dr. Panipak admitted. She should've told Akhira from the start; then, perhaps things wouldn't have escalated to this point.

The listener sighed again, running fingers through Dr. Panipak's soft hair with affection. It wasn't because she hadn't spoken the truth that she was so

furious. If she had explained from the beginning, they wouldn't have had to argue like this. She wondered why she was so afraid of this particular issue—it was just an accident that nobody wanted to happen.

"What makes you think I'd be angry if you told me?"

Her warm voice made Dr. Panipak tighten her embrace and bury her face closer to her. She just shook her head within the safety of Akhira's arms, not offering any response. The words of the young man who had spoken to her long ago still echoed in her mind as clearly as they were back then.

*'It's a good thing that Zo isn't here, otherwise...'*

*'Why?'*

*'Otherwise, she'd definitely be really angry with you.'*

*'If she flew here, you could just say you're my personal doctor. No need to tell the whole story. I don't want her to hate you.'*

Dr. Panipak chose to do as he said, not revealing the true reason behind the incident or who was really at fault. She didn't want to blame Sun as she was also to blame. Even though she was willing to share her past, she didn't tell her everything.

She told the truth, except for the part where Sun had feelings for her because she didn't want to say anything that might cause a rift between the two siblings. She didn't want her lover to feel uncomfortable because, after all, they were family...

20:00

"Looking for something?"

Akhira asked, noticing the slender figure pacing back and forth for quite some time. Since returning from the hospital, Dr. Panipak hadn't stopped moving, even though she was clearly unwell.

"I can't find my phone."

"Is it in your bag?"

"No, I've already checked."

"Have you looked everywhere?"

"I don't know where it could've gone." Dr. Panipak nodded to Akhira, the last sentence seemingly more to herself.

Dr. Panipak was certain she hadn't left her phone at the hospital; if she had, someone would've found and returned it. She remembered putting her phone in her bag before leaving the hospital, but now it was nowhere to be found. Her concern wasn't just about the missing phone but also the worry that her mother might be trying to reach her.

"It might be in the car. I'll go check for you."

"But I didn't use the phone in the car."

"It might've fallen out. Doesn't hurt to check."

They concluded that Akhira would go down to the car to look for it. They'd tried calling the phone, but there was no sign that it was in the room. By now, if it wasn't in the car, it was either lost or had fallen somewhere else.

Akhira swept her gaze across the front and back seats and even checked the storage compartments but couldn't find what she was searching for. To be certain, she decided to make another call, just in case it'd fallen somewhere inside the car.

After a short while, Akhira heard the familiar tone of an incoming call from within the vehicle. Without guessing, she knew it'd slipped into a small crevice under the seat. She wondered when it'd fallen without anyone noticing. *What an annoying phone.*

It took Akhira a moment to locate and retrieve her mobile phone. Her sharp eyes looked at the device that wouldn't stop ringing. She was about to disconnect the call but paused, struck by the name displayed on the screen.

*Incoming call.*

***Ms. Dearest***

*Ms. Dearest, huh...*

If anyone saw Akhira at that moment, they might think she was surely crazy. But who wouldn't smile upon discovering something like this? A strange warmth invaded her body, her face flushed, her whole being heated up to the point where she had to fan her shirt to ventilate herself. She never imagined her lover would list her name in the contacts like this.

If she had to guess, Akhira thought Dr. Panipak would've listed it as something ordinary, like '*Ms. Akhira*' as she usually called her. Seeing it like this was beyond her expectations. To describe her feelings at the moment, Akhira felt incredibly surprised by this revelation.

They never checked each other's phones. They respected personal space and saw no reason to constantly check them. Dr. Panipak wasn't the type to be suspicious and check phones, but it seemed Akhira might be the one with a hint of jealousy.

It wasn't that she didn't trust her, but rather she feared others might send flirtatious messages to her. As everyone knew, the beautiful doctor had admirers regularly presenting her with bouquets, though that wasn't the case anymore.

"Thank you."

Dr. Panipak said to the person who had fetched her phone before telling Akhira to go ahead and wait as she was about to prepare some food. Dr. Panipak looked at the phone in her hand, scrolled through the missed calls, and felt a peculiar sensation.

Ms. Dearest... She wondered if the number owner knew about this. She hoped not; otherwise, she wouldn't dare look her in the face for a long while. But it seemed Akhira was still unaware of this as she still acted normally.



Dr. Panipak watched Akhira stretching lazily on the sofa, alternating her gaze between her and her phone. Come to think of it, Akhira was kind of jealous—extremely jealous, even—so much so that it was unclear where the limit of her jealousy lay.

Yet, Akhira never interfered with her personal matters, never checked her phone, never instigated a fight; she only displayed jealousy and sulkiness and would give her the silent treatment. If asked whether Dr. Panipak would let her check her phone, she would... but since she didn't seem to want to check, there was no need to offer.

Akhira might be jealous, but she was also quite patient and reasonable. Dr. Panipak thought back to their arguments and realized that if she were in her shoes, she would've reacted just as explosively because no matter what she asked, Dr. Panipak wouldn't respond or explain anything. Anyone would naturally jump to conclusions and get angry. Why did she keep making the same mistakes? All it took was telling the truth, and everything would be resolved. There was nothing to fear, especially since she knew what kind of person her partner was.

After being away for several days, Dr. Panipak finally had the chance to check on the progress of her clinic once more. Everything was still in perfect order, and the work had advanced at a surprisingly rapid pace. It was only later that she learned that throughout the times she was busy or hospitalized, Akhira would often stop by to ensure everything was running smoothly and to coordinate on her behalf. Thinking about it, her lover was amazingly competent. It was like she had everything in her one girlfriend.

### *Hospital*

"Dr. Panipak, you have a visitor."

All Dr. Panipak could do was sigh, not expecting Sun to do this. Ever since she recovered from her illness, he'd often come to visit. She truly didn't understand why Sun kept doing this, especially since he knew the nature of her relationship with his sister. He acted as though he understood, but in reality, he didn't at all.

"What is your business, Sun?"

Dr. Panipak would repeat the same question every time he came to see her here.

"Well..."

"I don't have much time, Sun."

Dr. Panipak spoke the truth, not out of annoyance but because she was at work. There were patients to treat and responsibilities to fulfill. If this continued, she might run out of patience one day, as every time he came, it wasn't for anything important or because he was sick.

"I used to come here back then, and you never complained."

"You came to see the doctor back then."

She retorted immediately. It was true that in the past, after he finished his medical appointments, he'd often stop by to see her. Back then, she was happy to see him to witness his gradual improvement. Their meetings were normal as Sun had to come to the hospital for check-ups anyway. But now, it wasn't like that anymore. Why couldn't he understand this? She couldn't find the answer.

"If it were Zo, she could come, right? If it were Zo, you wouldn't say this, would you?"

Maybe or maybe not, Dr. Panipak couldn't give him an answer because Akhira never bothered her during work hours like the young man was doing right now.

Akhira seemed to understand her work and time well, knowing she rarely had free time. She might stop by during lunch, but even then, she didn't disturb her.

"If you're here to talk about this, I need to excuse myself."

"Aren't you afraid she'll find out about us? Aren't you afraid she'll get angry, or do you want me to tell her?"

Dr. Panipak, about to walk away, turned back to look at the person who had just spoken, confused.

*Is he threatening me?*

"Sun, Ms. Akhira already knows, and she isn't angry. If you want to tell her again, that's fine by me."

With that, she walked away immediately. She didn't want to waste any more time discussing this nonsense.

The young man could only stand still.

*She knows? Since when? And how did Pleng have the courage to tell her, even though she always looked worried whenever I brought this up? Why is everything all wrong?*



## 30. FALL OUT

*'Doctor, there's someone here to see you.'*

*'Dr. Panipak, it's him again.'*

*'Doctor, that man wants to see you.'*

*'Dr. Panipak, do you want to let him in?'*

*'Should I tell him to leave, Doctor?'*

*'He's back again, Doctor.'*

"Dr. Panipak..."

"Again?"

The nurse barely finished her sentence when Dr. Panipak looked up from the dark-colored file and asked in a tone as calm as any other day.

"Yes, Doctor."

Dr. Panipak sighed wearily. For the past several days, Sun had been coming to see her regularly, making her increasingly uncomfortable. She'd tried reasoning with him and ignoring him, but it seemed like this person just didn't get it. If you said Akhira was persistent, she thought her brother was even more so and quite annoying at that. His actions made her feel more and more suffocated each day.

"Do you want to see him, Doctor?"

The nurse asked again as the doctor's expression clearly showed her annoyance.

"No."

She declined before packing up her things and leaving the office as soon as work was over.

"Pleng..." *God, what a pain.*

"Sun, I'm about to leave."

"I know, that's why I came to pick you up."

Dr. Panipak stopped in her tracks, looking at the man standing before her with confusion. "Thanks, Sun, but Ms. Akhira will be here soon."

"It'd be a while before she comes. Wouldn't it be better if I took you?"

"I can wait."

"Let me take you."

"Sun!"

She was losing patience as he meddled with her belongings. Her medium-sized bag was presumptuously snatched away by the young man without her permission.

"I'll hold it for you."

"Give me back my bag."

"No."

"Don't do this, Sun. I'm your sister's girlfriend."

Everything seemed to freeze as Sun stared at Dr. Panipak with displeasure when she claimed to be Akhira's girlfriend.

"Give it back."

This time, it wasn't Dr. Panipak speaking, it was Akhira instead. She stood face-to-face with her brother with a steady gaze, reaching out to take the bag back.

As the situation turned sour and onlookers began to stare, Dr. Panipak knew she had to end it quickly. Sun reluctantly returned the bag, but instead of handing it to Akhira, he passed it over to Dr. Panipak as if to irritate her further.

"Let's go home, Ms. Akhira."

Once she got her belongings back, Dr. Panipak grabbed Akhira's arm and headed straight for the car, eager to avoid any further spectacle for the onlookers.

Sun could only watch as the two got into the car together. Why couldn't it be him instead of Akhira? He'd met Dr. Panipak first, after all. With each passing day, his jealousy grew with resentment. The more Dr. Panipak seemed to care about Akhira, the more he despised his own sister.

"You never told me,"

Akhira said, setting down a glass of water and broaching the subject once they were alone.

"About what?"

"About Sun coming to the hospital."

She spoke with certainty that the two hadn't arranged to meet, but rather, it was her brother who was bothering her. Why hadn't she mentioned this? Akhira knew, but not how often or for how long it'd been happening.

"It's okay."

Dr. Panipak replied, even though the truth was the opposite. She didn't want to say anything that might upset her partner, knowing how much she cared

for her. As long as she could handle it, she'd try to endure.

Khun Ying Nara returned home with a tense expression, prompting her husband to ask what was troubling her. Usually, after socializing with friends, she'd come back in a good mood or with stories to share, but today was different.

"What's wrong, dear? Didn't you have fun today?"

"It's Sun. He was bothering Pleng at the hospital."

She could only confide in her husband. She knew about this not because Dr. Panipak had told her but because she'd heard it from Phimwilai, Dr. Panipak's mother. She'd said her daughter always came to tell her about things that made her uncomfortable, and one of those things involved her son. If she hadn't heard it from Phimwilai, she wouldn't have known what her son had done. The reason he went out every day was because of this.

"I should talk to him."

Khun Ying Nara had already decided to have a talk with Sun to set things straight as she couldn't accept her son's behavior either. What would other people think? And what worried her the most was Dr. Panipak, who must be feeling quite uncomfortable.

### ***One week later***

What she'd heard from a friend must be true as Khun Ying Nara had the chance to go for a health check-up at the hospital and overheard what others were saying.

"Zo?"

"Yes?"

The person driving responded without turning to look at her mother. Khun Ying Nara looked at her daughter, weighing her words for a long moment before finally speaking.

"Zo, you know what Sun thinks of Pleng, don't you?"

"Yes."

Akhira replied calmly, without any hint of surprise in her voice, confirming that she indeed already knew.

"I don't know how to apologize to you and Pleng."

Akhira frowned slightly, not understanding why her mother felt the need to apologize when she had nothing to do with it. She wasn't aware of Sun's actions.

"Mom, there's no need to apologize. You've done nothing wrong."

Akhira reassured her mother. She didn't know what her mother was thinking, but if she blamed herself like this, it wouldn't be a good thing.

And even though Akhira said that, her mother still couldn't help but blame herself. If she'd raised her son better, none of these terrible events would've happened. Khun Ying Nara knew all too well that the situation between Akhira and Sun was getting worse because every time the family gathered together and every time the siblings faced each other, the dining table turned into a battlefield.

Nowadays, if Akhira was present, Sun had to be absent, and vice versa. Although no one said it outright, the actions of both confirmed it well. Akhira didn't want to come home, and Sun wasn't welcoming.

"Zo, are you angry with your brother?"

*'I don't know'* was Akhira's answer. She truly didn't know how to feel about her brother at this moment, even though they hadn't had any serious conflicts before. But now, she and her brother couldn't see eye to eye, or it could even be said they were fighting.

"No..."



In the end, Akhira chose to lie, knowing well that her mother was becoming more stressed every day, and the cause was the conflict between her children. At this point, if there was anything that could give her mother some peace of mind, Akhira was ready to do it, even if it meant lying to her.

"Would you like to have dinner here before you go?"

The mother asked as the car came to a stop. Akhira looked at the house before declining, and Khun Ying Nara knew well the reason why.

"Then drive safely, dear."

All she could do was watch the car slowly pull away. The older woman walked into the house after Akhira's car was out of sight, just as her son was coming down from the second floor.

"Where are you heading out, Sun?" She asked, even though she had a good idea of her son's destination. If she wasn't mistaken, Sun was probably heading to the hospital. It was time for her to have a serious talk with her son.

"I have somewhere to go, Mom."

"And is the '*somewhere*' the hospital?"

His smiling face fell instantly. Sun hadn't expected his mother to know where he was going, especially since he'd never told her. Had someone informed her?

"Why would you say that?"

He tried to smile, deflecting, not wanting to engage in conversation with his mother.

"This is not funny, Sun. Why do you go to the hospital every day? What business do you have with Pleng?"

"Did she tell you that, Mom?" Sun bit his lip in frustration and asked his mother with an unconcealable tone of dissatisfaction.

"No one told me anything."

His mother looked at him seriously, wishing Sun would finally stop being like this.

"Is that so?"

Sun chuckled under his breath, thinking that if no one had told her, his mother wouldn't have known. And the only person who would've told her had to be his sister.

"Still such a tattletale."

"Stop talking about your sister like that."

"Why shouldn't I? It's the truth, isn't it?"

"The only truth I know is that you've been bothering Pleng to the point of making her uncomfortable," Khun Ying Nara said with increasing intensity as her son continued to spout nonsense, refusing to accept reality and trying to shift the blame to others, like a child.

Sun was stunned into silence after his mother's stern words. He'd never been scolded like this before. Why is she raising her voice now? All he could think was that it was all because of Akhira. Now, no matter what he did, it was wrong in others' eyes. If it weren't for Akhira, everything and everyone wouldn't be like this.

"Don't do this again, Sun. I feel sorry for Pleng."

"..."

"Don't go see her anymore. If you can't let go, then you should just stay away from her."

She said this because she knew full well how Sun felt about Dr. Panipak. She didn't want her son to stay in the past, where he believed his love could one day become reality. Sun needed to stop dreaming and wake up to accept

the truth that such things would never happen. If they were meant to, they would've happened long ago, not now.

"Please stop this, Sun. I'm begging you."

"What did I do?"

He feigned ignorance, though deep down, he knew exactly what his mother was referring to.

"Enough, Sun. Don't make your sister uncomfortable.

"I don't want your sister to get hurt anymore. Whatever you're doing or planning to do, I want you to stop. Can you let them be?"

"And what about me...? Do you think I'm not hurt seeing the one I love loves someone else!? Have you ever thought of that!?"

Sun fell silent for a moment until he could no longer contain all his feelings.

"..."

"Have you ever loved me? Why!? Why is everything always about Zo? You even gave the company to her."

"..."

"You never loved me. You and Dad gave everything to her, no matter what. You even gave her a woman, even though she's not a man!!"

*Smack!*

The mother's hand struck her son's cheek with a pained heart, tears streaming down her cheeks from the sorrow of hearing such words from her son. How could she not love her own son?

"Pleng is not an object. I didn't give her to anyone!"

Her aged hand trembled with both anger and guilt for having struck her own child, but when her son spoke disrespectfully of others, she felt the need to discipline him.

"Why? You should know how I feel about Pleng. Why!?"

The young man shouted at his mother, his inner turmoil erupting when he couldn't have what he desired.

Khun Ying Nara could only look at her son with pain. How could she not know what her son felt for the doctor who used to take care of him every day? And she, who had experienced more of life, could also see that the doctor had never harbored any feelings beyond professional care for her son and saw him only as a patient. If only she'd told him to move on back then, none of this would've escalated to where it was.

"Enough, Sun!"

The head of the household's voice was like the sound of a boxing bell. The arguing had reached even the second floor of the house, alerting the father. Mr. Akhin wasn't a man of many words, but when he spoke, no one could contest him. He'd listened patiently for too long and could no longer bear it when he saw his son shouting in the face of his mother.

"Just go wherever you want to go. Stop being ridiculous."

The father said, dismissing his son to calm down while pulling his crying wife into his strong embrace.

"You both only love that bitch!"

The young man stood with clenched fists, his words quiet but cutting deep into the heart of his mother, who overheard him referring to his own sister as *'bitch'*... Sun looked up into the eyes of his mother before his gaze shifted past her, leaving Khun Ying Nara feeling a pang of loss when she turned to see her daughter behind her.

Akhira stood still as her younger brother approached with a disdainful glance, her right shoulder jolting from the impact, yet she showed no reaction for her mother to see.

"Zo."

Khun Ying Nara called out to her daughter with a trembling voice and teary eyes. Akhira met her mother's gaze before looking away, not wanting to see her tears. She'd just driven back to bring something her mother had forgotten, never expecting to encounter such a scene.

The mother could only feel regret. She'd repeated her mistakes by keeping her children in the dark and never telling them about Dr. Panipak's story. If she could turn back time, she'd prevent the current chaos and at least improve the relationship between her two children.

The parents could only watch as their children walked away on separate paths, their hearts constricting with the realization that their children didn't love each other. Who says siblings must always love each other?

Sometimes, those who are kind to us may not be family. Just because they shared the same blood didn't mean they'd love each other, especially when both had grown up in different places. It's no wonder their sibling bond wasn't strong.

Akhira had gone abroad for studies since she was young, while Sun stayed with his parents in Thailand. When Akhira returned, the son had the chance to study overseas. They may not feel the sibling bond as others do. They were aware of each other's existence, but each of them always felt like they were the only child. Yet deep down, the mother knew that Akhira still had a sisterly love for her brother.

If anyone was to blame, it'd be herself for not raising her children well enough.

"What's wrong?"

Dr. Panipak asked as she was suddenly embraced by her lover, who buried her face in her stomach as if seeking comfort. Under normal circumstances, she might think she was being affectionate, but not now, not at this moment.

"Are you stressed about something? Do you want to tell me?"

She said soothingly, stroking her lover's back. She didn't like seeing Akhira this stressed as it made her feel terrible, too.

"Let me check on you, my patient."

The doctor teased, lifting her partner's beautiful face to meet her eyes. A faint smile appeared on her face at her playful words. Her slender arms tightened around her slim waist, holding on as if she were a child.

Dr. Panipak grasped the beautiful face, turning it left and then right as if the other person were a child. She locked eyes with the one who wasn't feeling too well, offering a smile to Akhira, who smiled back, feeling encouraged by her lover's presence. In times of exhaustion, when in need of support, the person Akhira wanted by her side was Dr. Panipak.

Despite some worries about her lover's relationship with her younger brother, as long as she was here, right beside her like this, Akhira was ready to wholeheartedly believe that she'd chosen her and no one else.

The sweet face leaned down, warm breath caressing the forehead of the person sitting at the edge of the bed. Lips pressed a soft kiss on the forehead before pulling away slightly.

"Feeling any better?"

Akhira shook her head, pulling Dr. Panipak closer than before. When the patient indicated that she wasn't feeling better yet, the doctor had to continue her treatment, moving from the forehead to plant a kiss on the left cheek.

"Still not better."

Akhira told the beautiful doctor, who was trying her best to make her feel better. Akhira then tilted her right cheek, causing Dr. Panipak to feel a slight irritation. Nevertheless, she easily complied with a kiss on Akhira's right cheek.

"How about now? Better yet?"

Akhira shook her head, then teasingly replied to Dr. Panipak once more.

"You're not a very skilled doctor, are you?"

Dr. Panipak narrowed her eyes at her lover, who seemed to be getting more vocal by the minute.

The back-and-forth banter indicated that she was feeling better.

"This doctor isn't very competent. I might have to find a new o..."

Before she could finish her sentence, the complainer was silenced with a kiss. Dr. Panipak stroked the neck of the one beneath her, lips pressing firmly in annoyance, and she playfully bit the lips of her lover who had suggested changing a doctor...

Well, then, let's see what will happen if you do.

Dr. Panipak wanted to take control of the game for once, but as Akhira kissed back with vigor, the strength she had before almost vanished.

"Mmm..."

Akhira's satisfied moan was audible. It was rare for her to moan like this. As if it were a stimulus, Dr. Panipak tilted her head slightly to better receive the kiss from her lover.

Their bodies began to shift positions as Akhira's warm hands slid under the shirt, caressing the flat stomach with a thrilling touch.

"Teeney tiny tummy."

Her lover teased as they broke away from each other, nearly out of breath. Dr. Panipak was caught off guard as Akhira buried her face into her stomach. She felt the hot lips nibble all over, making it nearly unbearable to stand still against the teasing. But she couldn't move away when the other held her so tightly.

"Hmmm."

Akhira's hot tongue flicked across the center of her stomach, invading her navel until Dr. Panipak had to pull away again. At this moment, she felt both ticklish and thrilled. Her slender hands stroked the soft, long hair of the one who kept burying her face into her stomach, occasionally squeezing the other's shoulder when she felt she could no longer endure...

Dr. Panipak shifted slightly, looking at her lover's face, who was now sound asleep, with concern. Akhira seemed more stressed every day, and it troubled her. Even in sleep, she could see the unhidden suffering on her face.

Though Akhira didn't say it, Dr. Panipak could feel it, and she knew that Khun Ying Nara was also stressed—so much so that she had to go to the hospital—and that she herself was somehow involved. She knew, yet felt helpless. Even though this was Akhira's family issue, she was the root of the problem.

Her slender hand gently stroked her lover's face. If she could make a wish, she wanted Akhira to be happy forever. If Akhira had any troubles, she wished she'd share them with her; even just half of them would be enough.

Dr. Panipak's lips touched Akhira's temple. It was a feather-light kiss that made Akhira feel good even in her sleep. Dr. Panipak snuggled closer, and Akhira tightened her embrace as if on cue. The warmth spread throughout her body, and combined with her exhaustion, it wasn't hard for Dr. Panipak to drift off to sleep.





sunyanv

## 31. Worse

As the days passed, the situation within the Watcharakitkun family worsened. Sun refused to go to the company and spent his days instead going to the hospital to see Dr. Panipak. This sparked rumors among the hospital staff, suggesting that the doctor was involved in an affair. But what was even more troubling was the fact that the two were siblings by blood.

The gossip, combined with the ongoing feud between the two siblings, which had reached a point where they could barely look at each other, weighed heavily on Khun Ying Nara's mind, affecting her health and leading to frequent hospital visits.

From a once joyful home, the Watcharakitkun residence had turned into a place of sorrow. Khun Ying Nara avoided social interactions, both outside and within the household, especially with her son, as their encounters inevitably led to arguments.

"Take the meal up to Khun Ying upstairs today."

"Poor Khun Ying. Her son is such a bad ki- Ow!"

Before the speaker could continue, they were interrupted by a pinch from the elder.

"Don't gossip about the masters."

"I didn't. That's just the truth. Ever since Mr. Sun returned, no one has been happy, right?"

The old maid tried to ignore the complaints but couldn't deny the truth. The house, once peaceful, was now ablaze with tension, making it uncomfortable for everyone, including the eldest daughter, who used to visit

often but now stayed away. Even the maids could feel the negative energy. How would the Master and Khun Ying feel?

"Ms. Zo is kind. She should've stayed here instead."

"Enough of that. Get back to work, or you'll get fired."

"Aw..."

"Mr. Sun used to be a good kid back then. How did it come to this?"

"What's that?"

A younger one asked, having caught a snippet of the elder's lament. No clear answer was given, only a stern look from the elder.



*20:11*

"How is she feeling?"

Dr. Panipak immediately asked the taller one who entered the kitchen where she was preparing food.

"Not great. My dad said she's been eating less."

"Let's visit her together later."

Akhira nodded, trying to appear as normal as possible. She didn't want her loved one to feel bad, too, so she had to be strong, even though she knew her mother's condition was due to the issues between herself and her brother. Despite their cold indifference to each other, it wasn't enough to ease their mother's worries.

"What are you cooking today?"

Akhira approached, curious about the day's menu. She was ready to enjoy whatever was prepared as long as Dr. Panipak was the cook. She wasn't sure if she liked the food or the person making it.

"You'll see when it's done."

Dr. Panipak teased, enjoying the playful banter, though it seemed she was the one getting teased.

"Is there anything I can help with... my dearest?"

The person addressed with the endearment paused, her movements halting abruptly as she looked at Akhira with a racing heart. Just one word had such an effect on her. Why did she suddenly start calling her that? She'd never done that before. Could it be that she knew...

"Don't tease me."

Dr. Panipak quickly changed the subject, pretending not to hear the word.

"I'm not teasing. You cook, and I'll just stand here."

Akhira teased the smaller figure, moving from beside her to stand behind her, resting both hands on the kitchen counter, watching the food preparation with interest.

Dr. Panipak sighed softly. Why had this person become so mischievous? Even without a hug, she felt as if she was being embraced from behind. Dr. Panipak turned to look at the taller figure, who showed no signs of backing down, then quickly faced forward again as the other person seemed about to steal a kiss. But she wouldn't let it happen. She wouldn't let this teasing person get the better of her again.

However, that wasn't a problem for Akhira. Even though she couldn't kiss her on the lips, she could still kiss her in other places. Her lips gently touched Dr. Panipak's shoulder before pulling away. She could kiss her all over; it didn't have to be just on the lips.

"Tomorrow, you have to drive, okay?"

"Again?"

Dr. Panipak replied with a soft whine. Although she could drive now, with so many cars around, she wondered if she could really handle it. She felt incredibly nervous.

"It's okay, I'll be with you."

Akhira reassured her. With just those words, Dr. Panipak was ready to agree to anything. She knew that as long as Akhira was by her side, she'd be fine...

"Mmm... my dearest."

A soft voice escaped from her beautiful lips. Dr. Panipak turned away from the person teasing her, unaware that she'd inadvertently let something slip. Akhira smiled when she heard Dr. Panipak's words, thinking she must still be half-asleep to call her that. And she was right; as soon as she stopped teasing her, Dr. Panipak fell silent immediately. Seeing her like this, she decided to let her sleep a little longer.



*10:00*

Dr. Panipak glanced at the clock as the appointed time approached. She decided to ask the young man to meet so they could have a heart-to-heart conversation. If nothing was done, nothing would improve, and the ones who would suffer the most would be Khun Ying Nara and her own lover.

Even though Akhira didn't say anything, Dr. Panipak knew how stressed she was about the whole situation. She tried not to think about it, but ultimately, she couldn't deny that the current mess was because of her.

It didn't take long for the person she was waiting for to arrive...

Sun was secretly pleased that Dr. Panipak had asked to meet him today, but his joy diminished when he saw that her friends were also in the room.

"I thought you didn't want to talk to me anymore."

He said immediately upon arrival. Even with a third person in the room, Sun didn't care. It wasn't that he didn't know them, but her friends always seemed to have an attitude, which naturally led to mutual dislike.

"You want to meet me. What's up?"

He inquired, curious because she'd been ignoring him and seemed unwilling to talk lately. But today, she was the one who had asked to meet.

"I just want to talk to you about Ms. Akhira."

The young man's demeanor changed instantly when Dr. Panipak mentioned his older sister. He couldn't understand why everyone, both his mother and the person in front of him, kept bringing up his sister.

"I want to talk to you to make you understand. What you're doing isn't good for anyone."

"It's good for me."

The listener could only shake her head because the current situation really wasn't good for anyone.

"Why do you have to do this? Why do you have to fight with Ms. Akhira over me?"

"And why do you have to date Zo?"

Sun shot back sharply. She kept asking questions but never looked at herself. What was a good mood turned sour because of a few words from the person in front of him.

"Why don't you answer? And all that you said before was just a lie, right?"

"What did I lie about?"

She asked, not understanding what she'd supposedly lied about.

"Didn't you say you would take care of me? Why not keep your word!"

"But you're better now."

Dr. Panipak retorted immediately. She'd said she'd take care of him, but that didn't mean she'd do it for the rest of his life. She thought Sun should understand that when she said that, it meant until he was well again.

"So what? You won't take responsibility for what you said!?"

When things didn't go his way, the hot-headed and easily irritated young man began to show his displeasure. He spoke out of anger, his voice loud, startling the listener with his sudden outburst. And as his temper flared, Sun could no longer control himself.

"You almost killed me. You ruined my life!"

"..."

"Have you forgotten that I couldn't walk because of you!?"

"Stop using that as an excuse. You know deep down that you're the one at fault, not her!"

Dr. Ninlaneen said with frustration. It was a mistake, an accident that no one wanted to happen. She couldn't bear that he kept repeating that story. She thought he should get over it already, considering her friend had been taking care of him for years until he fully recovered and could walk again. Wasn't that compensation enough?

Besides having to make amends for a mistake she didn't commit, Dr. Panipak was also drowning in fear that had been scarring her for years. After that major accident, she couldn't drive anymore. The images and sounds haunted her memory until she decided to solve the problem by giving up driving altogether.

It wasn't just Dr. Panipak who was scared. Dr. Ninlaneen also vividly remembered the scene: her friend's car was wrecked on the left, and not far away was a big glossy black bike, reduced to just a heap of metal,

unrecognizable from what it'd been before. She remembered the bloodied figure and the trembling hands desperately performing CPR on the one clinging to his life.

Dr. Panipak cried non-stop in the arms of her comforting friend until his relatives arrived. There were no reproaches, no harsh words thrown, but rather a mix of concern for their own child and empathy for her. That day, they met Khun Ying Nara and learned she was a friend of Dr. Panipak's mother. Dr. Ninlaneed still remembered the shaky sobbing voice that repeating the same words over and over by heart:

*'I'm scared he'll die.'*

Dr. Ninlaneen took a deep breath, trying to suppress the rising anger, striving to stay calm in the face of this selfish person. If it weren't for him running the red light at high speed, none of this would've happened.

"Stop hurting her already!"

"..."

"You're just selfish. You say you love her? Is this what you do to someone you love? You've been threatening her, keeping her in misery. Is this what you do for someone you claim to love?"

"..."

"Let me tell you something, what you're trying to do... it's ridiculous."

"..."

"You don't know how to love anyone but yourself."

"I wasn't talking to you. Stay out of it!"

"I'm sorry, Sun."

Dr. Panipak finally spoke up after listening to everything for so long, long enough that she wanted to put an end to it all. If anyone was to blame, it



was probably her. She wanted to apologize to him, too, because she'd never revealed how she truly felt. Even though she knew deep down that the young man had feelings for her, she never spoke up out of pity and guilt for what had happened.

It was her fault for never telling him.

"So what? What does this matter when you said you'd wait for me? If you can't do it, then why did you say it!"

He'd always hoped that when he returned, they could start anew together. But when he found out she belonged to someone else, he couldn't accept it, especially since that someone was her own sister. Sun felt betrayed as if he'd been tricked by both his family and her.

"I'm asking why!"

Sun seemed to be losing his mind, bringing up another topic when he realized he couldn't control the situation.

"I never said that."

Dr. Panipak truly couldn't recall ever promising or discussing this with him. She never made promises she couldn't remember, especially not about something this important. It wasn't true; she had no reason to make any promises to the person in front of her because she never felt anything for him, not even a little.

"You're lying... it's because of Zo, isn't it? That's why you're like this!"

"Even without Ms. Akhira... I don't love you."

It was the first time Sun felt that she was so cold she could freeze him in place. Why is she being so cruel?

"I never said I'd wait for you."

"..."

"So, please don't be angry and fight with Ms. Akhira anymore."

Dr. Panipak also wanted to mention that his mother was ill, but because she thought it was too much interference in someone else's family affairs, she didn't say it. She just kept it to herself, hoping that the person in front of her would realize it—if not for anyone else's sake, at least for the sake of his own mother.

"Don't want me to be angry? Don't want me to fight with her, right? Then, break up with Zo. Break up with her and then date me."

"..."

Everything fell silent after his statement. Dr. Panipak stood still. She truly didn't know how to feel or what to say next. In her head, there were only flashes of memories: the arguments, the image of Khun Ying Nara crying, and the image of her lover, who seemed to grow more tired every time. Maybe she should address the root of the problem, which was her...

"If you break up with her, I'll stop."

Sun said again when he saw no response from her. He really would if he got what he wanted.

"What do you say? I won't fight with her anymore if you agree with that."

"I can break up with Ms. Akhira, but I can't date you."

"..."

"Don't make this harder for me."

Dr. Panipak replied softly after a long silence. She was troubled to have to agree to Sun on this matter, but if this was the way to make everything better, she'd accept it. She just wanted to clear things up with him and find a solution to this mess. However, the solution she found was so painful that her heart felt like it was shattering. Just the thought of having to break up with Akhira...

"Don't ask for more than this, Sun. This is already hard enough for me."

Sun felt like he'd been struck in the head with a massive hammer. The young man could only watch Dr. Panipak walking away, followed by the woman who had been scolding him incessantly earlier. He wanted to argue as he always had, to bring up every reason he could to get what he wanted. But he couldn't, all because of those eyes.

So many words were held back by the lump in his throat. Those eyes, no matter how he looked, were filled with pain. And her words, which clearly came from the heart...

*'I can break up with Ms. Akhira, but I can't date you.'*



Dr. Panipak tossed and turned, her head aching so much it felt like it'd explode, not to mention Sun's words, which weighed heavily on her mind. He spoke as if he was so sure. She didn't refuse that she said she'd take care of him because she'd really said it.

She thought Sun should know that she'd take responsibility and care for him only until he recovered, not for a lifetime as a lover. She was a doctor, and he was just a patient. But that wasn't the main issue. The sentence that kept her awake was because of those words.

*'You said you'd wait for me.'*

Dr. Panipak was sure she'd never said that sentence, not even once. So what made him thinkband believe that? As far as she remembered, the last time they met, there was only...



*On a day when the hospital was incredibly busy and patients were coming in non-stop, the doctor who usually stayed with her had taken the day off. So, The heavy burden fell on Dr. Panipak. She was so busy that she didn't even have time to drink water.*

*"Pleng"*

*"Sun, I'm really busy. Can we talk later?"*

*"It's okay. I'm leaving now. I just brought you something."*

*A box was handed over, and Dr. Panipak took it hurriedly because she had to go check on the next patient.*

*Dr. Panipak had known beforehand that Sun was going to study abroad, and she was happy for him, happy that he could walk again and that he was about to further his education.*

*"Have a safe trip."*

*"Thank you."*

*He accepted the wish with a broad smile. He knew all too well that Dr. Panipak was busy, for even as they spoke, she was engrossed in reading through a file of documents. But Sun was just stopping by. He wanted to see her and say goodbye.*

*"I'm going then," he said.*

*"Okay," she replied.*

*"Doctor, your patient is here."*

*A nurse called out, approaching them. Dr. Panipak hurriedly followed the nurse, and the two paused to talk for a moment. Sun could only watch before deciding to call out to her once more.*

*"Pleng!"*

*His voice was loud enough to make the owner of the name turn around. He was about to say something else, but...*

***Dr. Panipak couldn't hear him...***

*The bustling crowd and her lack of focus meant she only caught her name being called. The rest of the sentence was lost to her. Her delicate eyebrows furrowed slightly in confusion, but ultimately, she nodded and gave the young man a smile, waving at him slightly because she could read his lips on the last word he said:*

*Bye-bye...*

"I didn't say it."

She whispered softly, realizing only when she heard the voice of her girlfriend.

"Can't sleep?"

Akhira pulled Dr. Panipak closer when she noticed her tossing and turning. Dr. Panipak buried her face in the embrace of the other, hugging back like she always did. Her thoughts shifted from the young man to Akhira.

Could she bear it if she really had to say those words out loud? She didn't know what she'd do next. The mere thought made her feel so choked up she couldn't speak.



## 32. Further and Further Away

"Are you really going to do that, Pleng?" It wasn't just Dr. Panipak who was stressed about it; even her friends were concerned about her decision.

"I don't know, Neen." If there was no other way, she'd be the one to walk away. She didn't want her beloved to continue drowning in sorrow anymore. After all, those two were family, and she was an outsider. If someone had to leave, it should be her.

*You haven't broken up with her?*

That was the question Dr. Panipak often heard from Sun, and each time, she could only respond with silence. During a recent visit home, her mother had also expressed concern for Khun Ying Nara, whose condition seemed not to have improved at all.



"Changed your work schedule?" Akhira asked softly one morning.

"Yes, I had to," Dr. Panipak replied. She truly needed to lie to her. No one had actually changed her work hours; it was she who had requested to swap shifts with another doctor. She'd negotiated with the hospital until they agreed as this was the only way to see them less—both Akhira and her brother.

Akhira went silent, not saying anything further. Just the thought of spending less time with Dr. Panipak made Akhira feel uneasy. If Dr. Panipak had to work at night, it meant she'd have no time for her. It meant... they'd hardly see each other at all.

"It's okay," Akhira finally conceded, knowing there wasn't much that could be done.

Dr. Panipak looked at the Akhira before continue eating as usual. She felt terrible for having to do this. The emptiness of not having Akhira to hold her at night was unbearable, and she couldn't even begin to imagine how bad it'd be. She kept those feelings deep inside, knowing that once a decision was made, there was no turning back. On the bright side, she'd have time to check on the progress of her own clinic.

*Maybe this is for the best...*



Even though her life schedule had changed, Akhira tried hard to spend as much time as possible with her loved one. She often returned to the condo during the day because if not, she wouldn't see Dr. Panipak at all. The two of them would always eat together, but sometimes, when Akhira came back, she found no one there. Sometimes, Dr. Panipak would avoid meeting her.

"You don't have to come every day," Dr. Panipak said after they'd been eating for a while.

"Am I bothering you?"

"No, it's just that I think you're wasting your time," she replied. The answer might've seemed considerate, but Akhira didn't feel good about Dr. Panipak's response at all. Suddenly, she felt a certain feeling in her heart. Was she overthinking it, or was her lover starting to distance herself?

"I'm not wasting my time, but if you don't want me to come, it's okay."

It wasn't just a feeling of being slighted; Akhira could sense the change this time...

In fact, she'd started to notice it for a while now.

Weeks passed, and Akhira still couldn't adjust to the change. Since Dr. Panipak had changed her work hours, her life felt disrupted without her by her side. It was difficult not just physically but also emotionally;

*Akhira felt their hearts were growing apart.*

Would Dr. Panipak feel the same? Even though she'd thought the growing distance between them wouldn't matter, she was now becoming uncertain. When Akhira came back, Dr. Panipak would be off to work. Dr. Panipak was at the condo during the day, while Akhira was there at night.

Akhira bent down to gently kiss the cheek of Dr. Panipak, who was sound asleep, cherishing this moment as the only time she'd see her lover's face. In a few minutes, she'd have to leave for work. By night, she'd return to this condo alone. Her slender hand stroked Dr. Panipak's soft hair gently, trying to understand her work schedule. Deep down, she felt slighted, but she couldn't do anything more than accept and understand it.

"Sweet dreams," Akhira whispered before walking out of the room. Despite her deep desire to stay and cuddle with Dr. Panipak, she had responsibilities to attend to, just like Dr. Panipak did. Akhira had no idea when the doctor had returned; she only realized it was morning when she'd typically find her sleeping on the other side of the bed.

Once she was certain Akhira had left her condo, Dr. Panipak opened her eyes. She didn't want to do this, but she couldn't bring herself to break up with her at this moment either. How could she bear it if she had to say those words? Keeping her distance was the only option she felt she could take right now. If she gradually created distance and got used to not having each other in their lives, when the day came when she was ready to let her go, they wouldn't hurt as much. At least it'd buy her time to mentally prepare herself for it. It might seem selfish, it might seem cruel, but she truly felt she had no other choice.



**Akhira:** When are you going to work? I'll swing by and drop you off after I clock out.'



**Panipak:** It's okay, I'm already at the hospital.

Akhira stared at the phone, the screen showing a message from her lover. Before, Akhira had tried to send several messages, but Dr. Panipak rarely responded until the last message, where she offered to drop her off at the hospital, which was quickly declined.

Akhira could only sigh to herself, leaning back in her chair and closing her eyes. In the past, she would've hurried out of the company to pick her up at the hospital, but now there was no need to rush anywhere without her...

Her strength was replaced by weakness and weariness. With each passing day, she felt more disheartened. Work and family stress was already enough, and now her lover was acting differently. Akhira felt tired, both physically and emotionally.

The lights in the room were bright, and her beautiful eyes surveyed the room, where everything remained the same except for the room's owner. Akhira slumped down, exhausted. This was another night that she had to spend alone...



The hospital at night was distinctly different from the daytime, with fewer patients to attend to. Dr. Panipak thought working at this hour would help her cope, but it only made her feel worse. With no patients to care for, she often found herself with too much free time, which made her miss someone even more.

Being away from friends and having to encounter colleagues like Dr. In regularly made her feel suffocated. Even though they were in different departments, it didn't mean they didn't see each other. She turned off the phone, not wanting to see any more messages from Akhira...



**"I said no!"** The green tea cup fell and splashed across the floor. Akhira watched Dr. Panipak silently, not understanding what she'd done to displease her so much. Dr. Panipak paused, equally startled.

She hadn't meant to...

"What's wrong, Pleng?" Akhira asked in a plaintive tone to the person sitting across from her. Akhira didn't scold her for the mess; she just quietly bent down to clean up the clutter on the floor, feeling an inexplicable sharp pain in her heart. Suddenly, she felt so vulnerable.

Akhira looked at the floor and went to find a cloth to clean up. She felt terrible. She'd woken up early to buy her green tea, planning to spend the day off together. But when Dr. Panipak saw her, she acted as if she was annoyed by her presence. Akhira felt worthless like never before. She'd never felt so weak.

Dr. Panipak could only turn her face away before getting up and walking into the bedroom, unable to bear the sight of her lover cleaning up the mess. She slumped against the door and began to cry heavily. The tears she'd been holding back streaming down her face like a river.

It'd be far better if Akhira scolded her instead of stooping to clean up what she'd done. She didn't want to treat her like this. She longed to apologize and embrace her, but at this moment, all she could do was raise her trembling hand to cover her mouth, holding back the sobs so they wouldn't escape. She didn't want anyone outside to know she was crying.

00:20

Akhira looked at Dr. Panipak's slender back. If she turned around, she'd see the weariness in her eyes. Akhira gently lay down, careful not to disturb the one she thought was already asleep. It was strange that she was still in the same place, the same bed, with the same person, yet nothing felt the same.

Not anymore.

Though they were in the same room, they didn't cuddle, didn't say goodnight, or anything else. Dr. Panipak didn't snuggle into Akhira's embrace, and Akhira didn't insist on holding her anymore. A biting cold was consuming both their hearts. No matter how much they wanted to hold each other, neither was willing to make the first move.

Deep down, Dr. Panipak hoped she'd pull her into her arms, but Akhira didn't do as she wished. She was tormented every time she wasn't in the warm embrace of her lover. From now on, she'd have to get used to not only the absence of her arms but also the likelihood that Akhira wouldn't come to sleep here anymore.



Everyone's patience has limits. Akhira intended to talk it out with Dr. Panipak. The luxury car turned into the hospital. Her sharp eyes glanced at the watch, thinking Dr. Panipak might've just arrived and probably not yet started working. There should be enough time for a word or two.

Upon reaching the desired floor, the nurse immediately led Akhira to Dr. Panipak, knowing her relationship with the doctor and that the latter was still free. It wouldn't hurt to let Dr. Panipak's lover visit her.

"You're here already, Pha?" Not turning to look, Dr. Panipak thought it was a close friend stopping by. The smile on her face slowly faded when she saw who entered the room.

"Ms. Akhira," she said. Akhira's spirit deflated at the sight of Dr. Panipak's clear expression...

"Am I bothering you?"

"No, there's still time," Dr. Panipak replied with a rather quiet voice. She didn't dare send Akhira away or say anything harsh because she wasn't strong enough to do so. Akhira nodded, understanding that at least they could still talk.

"I just need a moment. I want to talk to you," said Akhira.

"What about?" Though apprehensive, Dr. Panipak steeled herself, trying to do something else while she was about to talk to her, simply because she didn't dare look her in the eye.

"What are you mad about, Pleng?"

"Nothing."

"Don't say there's nothing because it isn't."

It was rare for her to speak to her with such seriousness yet with a trembling voice. Dr. Panipak didn't answer her question but showed displeasure as if she wasn't listening and was frustrated with something she couldn't find. However, Akhira knew she heard her question.

"What's wrong?" Akhira asked softly as Dr. Panipak acted as if she didn't want to talk.

"Please don't do this to me."

"..."

"Just say it. Why are you mad at me?"

Akhira couldn't bear the current situation any longer. She didn't even know why or what she'd done to upset her. She knew Dr. Panipak had been avoiding her for a while. Did she realize how much the growing distance between them and the way things were now were torturing her?

The loneliness of not being able to hold her in her sleep was worse than anything else. In the morning, Akhira had to work and didn't have time to see Dr. Panipak, and at night, she was at the hospital. Even if Akhira used her lunch break to visit Dr. Panipak, it seemed like she was just bothering her. She couldn't bear this feeling any longer, so she had to talk to Dr. Panipak and clear things up today.

"Did I do something to upset you? Can you tell me what it is?"

"I think we need to reconsider our relationship."

After letting Akhira speak her mind, Dr. Panipak finally spoke up, but Akhira thought it would've been better if she hadn't said anything.

"Let's take a break for a while, okay?"

"Why?" Akhira didn't understand what was happening, and even though she didn't want to admit

it, she couldn't deny that she felt and was always aware of the other person's attempts to create distance between them.

"Maybe..."

"Maybe you don't love me..." After Akhira's words, everything fell silent, so quiet that the only thing

both could hear was their own breathing.

"You want to break up with me, don't you?"

Akhira asked painfully. Even though Dr. Panipak didn't say it directly, the meaning wasn't much different. She could only look at the slender back of the person, who wouldn't even turn to face her. Would she know how she felt? And would she realize how much pain she was in?

Dr. Panipak bit her lip hard enough to feel pain. She could only suppress her own emotions. Tears streamed down her beautiful cheeks uncontrollably. She couldn't say anything, only trying to stop herself from sobbing out loud, forcing herself not to look back because she knew... She knew that Akhira was crying...

Akhira looked at Dr. Panipak in pain. She turned her back to her without any intention of looking back. Silence was in itself an answer, wasn't it?

Are we really going to break up?

"Why..."

"..."

"Why are you always so cruel to me, Pleng?"

Dr. Panipak struggled to keep herself from sobbing out loud. Her slender frame shook with crying, and all she could do was stand still and listen to the quivering voice with a shattering heart.

*Why?*

*Why does it have to be like this?*

Akhira nodded slowly, reminding herself to understand the whole situation that was unfolding, even though she didn't even know what she'd done wrong. Her lover was in front of her, just a few steps away, just an arm's reach from an embrace. But at that moment, Akhira felt an overwhelming distance.

She was so far away...

Her heart was drifting further and further away.

She was so tired, more tired than she'd ever been before.

Too tired to hold on to her any longer.

With slender hands, she wiped away her tears, bringing the blurred vision back into focus. She looked at Dr. Panipak for the last time, wanting to hug her, plead for everything to return to how it was, for her to love her, but she knew it was impossible. It'd never happen.

No words nor sound were louder than the footsteps of the person walking away. Dr. Panipak endured the sound of each step growing further and further away. It was as if they were stamping and trampling on her heart over and over again.

They went further away, more distant, until it finally disappeared...

With only emptiness remained...

"Pleng..."

"Pha"

Dr. Panipak let out a cry as soon as her close friend came in for a hug. She collapsed into her friend's arms and cried heavily. The sobs she'd been holding back broke through, along with tears that wouldn't stop. Every emotion was flowing out. Dr. Plaifha could only stroke her dear friend's back with sympathy.

"Please don't cry, Pleng."

She comforted her without knowing what had happened. Just before this, she'd only seen her friend's lover walk out of the room. When she entered, she found Dr. Panipak crying. She had no clue why.

"I broke up with her, Pha." The sobs made it difficult to speak clearly. Dr. Plaifha was taken aback. Although she didn't want to believe it, the current situation confirmed that what her friend was saying was no joke.

Why did they break up when they loved each other that much? Even now, she couldn't understand. Was this really the state of someone who truly wanted to break up?

There are many things in this world that one can't understand, including this situation. She wanted to scold and remind her friend, who acted so rashly, but seeing her cry so hard, she couldn't bring herself to be harsh. She didn't know Dr. Panipak's reasons, but if she made the decision, she had to accept the consequences...

**"Ms. Akhira or Sun. Who do you like?"** Dr. Ninlaneen asked.

"Neen..."

"Don't, Pha," Dr. Ninlaneen shot a stern look at her friend, knowing how soft-hearted she could be, but that wasn't the case for her. If her friend did something wrong, they needed to be called out on it.

"Have you thought this through, Pleng? Why are you doing this?"

"..."

"Who do you really love, Pleng? But seeing that you're distancing yourself from Ms. Akhira like this, you probably love Sun."

"No..." Dr. Panipak immediately countered upon hearing Dr. Ninlaneen's words.

"Then why did you do this? What you did is as good as choosing Sun because you're dumping Ms. Akhira."

"It's not like that... I didn't choose anyone." Dr. Panipak knew well that she didn't love Akhira's brother, but with the mess that had arisen from her actions, what else could she do? If she didn't do this, there was no other way.

"What are you trying to say, Pleng?"

"They're siblings, Neen."

"So what?"

"They fought over me. Not to mention Khun Ying Nara's health. I don't want Ms. Akhira to have problems with her family. After all, they are siblings."

"But Ms. Akhira loves you, Pleng." This time, it was Dr. Plaifha, the one who had been told to stay silent, who spoke up. She didn't want to take sides or cheer anyone on, just to speak on what she saw and knew.

"Seriously, Pleng, do you truly love Ms. Akhira? Or do you just love yourself?"

"..."

"She's willing to give up everything. She fights with her brother and chooses to be with you. That

means she loves you a lot, doesn't it? Then why are you being selfish? If you think walking away



will make things better, we'll see."

"..."

"And I'll cheer on if two of them really can reconcile. You'd be happier then, right? You want Ms. Akhira to be happy without you, right?" The words from Dr. Ninlaneen were sharp, repeatedly piercing Dr. Panipak's heart.

In times of hardship, when Akhira needs someone to offer support and stand by their side, Dr. Panipak chose to step back, distancing herself from the person who needed her love and support the most, thinking that this was the solution, even though she wasn't the real problem.

Dr. Ninlaneen looked at the person with swollen, tear-stained eyes, not wanting to add to the pain but feeling compelled to say something deep down, not for anyone else but for Dr. Panipak herself.



## 33. Go Separate Ways

The once radiant and lively beautiful face had now turned somber and dull, with eyes that were unmistakably swollen from heavy crying.

"Should you head back first, Pleng?" Dr. Panipak's friend asked with concern, uncertain if her current mental state was fit for work. And if they left before her, who would she be with? Wouldn't it be worse to leave her alone?

"I'm okay," Dr. Panipak reassured her two friends, but at this point, no one would believe her 'I'm okay' anymore. It was evident she wasn't okay and was struggling even.

"Are you sure?"

"I'll be fine, really. You guys can go home."

It was getting late, so she told her two friends to head back. Fortunately, there were no patients yet, or she would've had to examine them through tears. While Dr. Panipak could separate work from personal issues, sometimes the weakness from personal troubles could still affect her work.



The luxury car drove along the usual road, the view before the driver blurring as Akhira wiped away tears repeatedly, not even realizing she was crying. It was just something obstructing her vision, making it hard to see clearly. Before she went to see her, she was certain she'd seen her brother's car driving past. Or perhaps this was the reason Dr. Panipak had changed.

"You're back already, Ms. Zo?" The maid asked as soon as she saw Akhira enter the house.

Akhira didn't respond; she just silently walked upstairs.

"Ms. Zo..." The maid watched the back of the eldest daughter of the house. Although she hadn't raised her, she had a fondness and love for Akhira that was no different from anyone else. Seeing her like this made her uneasy.



Several days later.

Dr. Panipak's sorrowful face worried the nurses and those around her. They'd never seen her like this before. No matter what her friends and others did, Dr. Panipak remained the same. Even though a smile could still be seen, it wasn't one of joy.

Sun also continued to visit, though he didn't get to see her often, and Dr. Panipak truly noticed the changes in the young man. Even though she no longer contacted that family, her mother still did, so she was kept informed of various matters. Deep down, she wanted to ask about that person, but she stopped herself, knowing it probably wasn't right, and certainly, the incident between Dr. Panipak and Akhira was known to everyone in the family. The parents were aware, but no one dared to speak of it.

"Pleng, dear."

"Yes, Mom?"

"The sugar is going to burn if you're not careful."

Dr. Panipak looked down at the pot as her mother had instructed. Phimwilai was deeply concerned for her daughter. Her daughter's frequent absent-mindedness made her uneasy. Even though Dr. Panipak didn't share the details and tried to act normal, a mother could sense the sadness in her eyes.

"Are you full already, dear?"

"Yes, Dad."

"You seem thinner. Are you eating enough?"

"I'm full, Dad. I'll go upstairs now."

She collapsed onto the soft bed, wanting to fall asleep quickly to avoid thinking about the exhausting matters. She tried not to think about that certain someone anymore, but no matter how hard she tried, the truth always confronted her. The truth that she still missed Akhira.

Missed her terribly...

But life had to go on. She had many responsibilities, including the clinic that would soon be completed. She was thankful for being so busy that she didn't have time to rest because at least she wouldn't be idle enough to think of her.

Akhira sat in silence for a while after discussing her younger brother with their father. Her father sighed repeatedly, weighed down by concern because things weren't going as he'd hoped. His youngest son seemed to have no interest in work and avoided taking a role in the family business.

"He told me that he's not ready to work yet," said the father.

"..."

"I won't force him to do anything if he has his own career."

The father was always ready to understand and support his children. He accepted that if they didn't want to continue the family business, that was fine. He'd let them follow their dreams or pursue work they enjoyed. But it seemed Sun was unwilling to do anything at all, spending his days playing around and claiming he'd manage the business when he was ready.

How would the employees respect him if he acted like this? The father couldn't fathom how the company would survive without Akhira if she stepped down. It wasn't a joke; whoever took over needed to work hard because they'd be responsible for the employees. They couldn't sit in an executive chair just because they were the owner's child.

It wasn't that Mr. Akhin cared more about the company than his children, but he knew that if one day he couldn't take care of them, he wanted them to be able to survive in a highly competitive society. Even with wealth, if they lacked the wisdom to increase it, the money could eventually run out.

"Where will he get money to spend if he doesn't work and one day me and your mom are not here to take care of him?"

Akhira could only reflect on her father's words because Sun was no longer a little boy; in a few years, he'd be thirty, yet he still relied on his parents' money.

"Don't worry too much, Dad."

"How will your brother live if he continues doing this? I'm afraid he won't make it."

"If that day really comes, I'll take care of him," Akhira said calmly but firmly to her father. Despite their arguments, she'd never abandon her family because a sibling is still a sibling, no matter what. Sun might still be lost. Sometimes, a person who never lacked anything and was spoiled failed to understand that no one could take care of them forever.

Sun, with his hand on the doorknob, stood frozen in front of the door after overhearing the conversation. Although the voices inside the room weren't loud, he could hear everything clearly enough to be sure of what he heard.

After the talk with her father, Akhira didn't forget to visit her mother, whose health was gradually improving and who was eating more than before.

"Do you think I'm disabled or something?" Her mother teased, seeing her daughter fussing over her as if she were bedridden. Akhira smiled slightly at her mother's words.

"So, are you buying a new condo? Why not come back and live at our house?" Her mother asked. She wanted her daughter to return home. She knew Akhira always had her reasons, and this decision was well-considered, but as a mother, she just wanted her daughter close.

"The area is convenient for commuting, Mom," Akhira replied truthfully, even though it wasn't the whole reason. Khun Ying Nara nodded, looking at her daughter's face for a moment before deciding to ask something.

"Why did you break up with Pleng, Zo?" The mother's question struck a chord, leaving Akhira silent, and the mother realized she'd said something she shouldn't.

"Mom!... Hi, Zo."

The young man came to see his mother but found his sister there, too, so he greeted her. Akhira returned the greeting to her brother, who had arrived just in time as she herself didn't know how to respond to her mother's question.

"Why does he have to be so loud?"

She could only shake her head at her son's behavior. Lately, her son had become more endearing. Even though he still refused to work, at least she saw some positive changes in him. A few days ago, Sun came to apologize and promised to improve himself, which gave his mother some peace of mind.

It wasn't complete reassurance, but at least it wasn't like before, including the relationship between her two children. They might still ignore each other, but Sun no longer antagonized Akhira as he used to...

After a lengthy debate about which restaurant to dine at, the three friends finally decided on Japanese cuisine as they hadn't had it in a while. Importantly, Dr. Ninlaneen had booked a table in advance.

"Why did you ask us when you've already booked a table, Neen?"

"I'm asking for your opinion. You can't eat here without a reservation, you know?" Dr. Ninlaneen quickly said while Dr. Plaifha could only shake her head in exasperation. With such a popular restaurant, how could they eat without a reservation? Everyone knew that already.

Dr. Panipak watched her friends argue back and forth incessantly. Having these two around made her feel much better than being alone. She was right not to decline her friends' invitation.

Soon, the three arrived at the restaurant. The staff's thank you echoed as someone walked past them. Dr. Panipak froze, her eyes looking down, avoiding eye contact. Even though she knew the other person wasn't looking at her, her heart beat weakly as if lacking the strength.

It was only a fraction of a second that they passed each other, but Dr. Panipak remembered it well. She could still recall the faint scent of the other's perfume, or even if they were much farther apart, she'd never forget. Dr. Ninlaneen and Dr. Plaifha were also taken aback, exchanging glances without saying a word.

"Order whatever you want."

"Are you treating us?"

"We'll go Dutch. Duh." She tried to joke, but it seemed ineffective. Dr. Panipak had remained silent since entering the restaurant.

Dr. Panipak kept thinking about the person she'd just encountered. She wasn't sure if the other party had seen her, but she thought probably not as Akhira was busy with someone else. The image of the petite, fair-skinned woman with a non-Thai face walking alongside Akhira hit her hard. Even though she was the one who wanted distance, seeing this made her heart sting. In the past, she could've asked who that person was, but not now. She no longer had the right. She had no right to even feel hurt.

"Thank you," Akhira smiled in response to the thanks from the sweet voice that spoke Thai with an accent but tried hard. Today, she had to treat the other to a welcome meal. Although she didn't understand why this place was chosen, she didn't say anything. Why would they choose a Japanese restaurant to treat a Japanese person to a welcome meal? Luckily, this restaurant had a Japanese chef, so it constantly received praise that the food was as good as the one back home.

It wasn't long before they had to go their separate ways. Akhira had her secretary take care of sending the other back to their accommodation while she went to rest. Even though she was with someone else just now, she couldn't stop thinking about the slender figure she'd just met.

Akhira walked past a toy robot store, which reminded her of a little kid who always begged for toys. She then shook off all thoughts, not wanting to dwell on the past. Akhira wasn't angry or hateful toward her ex-lover. In the future, they might become good acquaintances. It was just that she wasn't ready yet.

Two months later...

After completing the morning merit-making ceremony, the evening was set for a small party to celebrate the opening of the clinic, coupled with a birthday celebration for Dr. Panipak, the new clinic owner. The event was small, with only family members, close friends, and a few guests in attendance. Naturally, the family of Khun Ying Nara was among the important guests invited to join.

"Congratulations, Pleng," said the young man she knew well, handing her a beautifully wrapped gift.

"Thank you, Sun."

"And this is for your birthday, Pleng."

"Isn't this too much? I feel bad."

"Not at all. The first box is for the new clinic opening, and this one is a birthday gift."

She couldn't say anything else, accepting the gifts she couldn't refuse. The Watcharakitkun family had already given her many things, not to mention taking the time to attend both the morning and evening events.

"You really don't have to."



"It's no big deal when it's for you," he tried to convey with his eyes, but Dr. Panipak just gave him a smile of courtesy, showing no special feelings that might please the young man.

"Thank you so much," Dr. Panipak smiled at the young man again, feeling awkward because Sun had been there since the morning, unlike a certain someone.

Deep down, Dr. Panipak really wanted to see her the most. She wanted her to join her in making merit on the day of the new clinic opening and share in her joy because half of this success was due to her help, advice, and encouragement.

But she didn't come.

Dr. Panipak took the gifts to store with the many others she'd received, secretly thinking that if there were items she wouldn't use, she would ask permission to donate them to children or people who could truly benefit from them.

She looked out over the lawn where the event was held, now adorned with small lights, balloons, and even a barbecue party—they were all her friends' ideas. Initially, she just wanted a merit-making ceremony, but the others wouldn't have it, and so the party came to be.

Everyone seemed happy. The laughter and smiles on the faces of her parents made her smile, too. When she heard them say they were proud, Dr. Panipak felt encouraged. Even though it was quite a hassle, she'd made it. From now on, her time would be even more limited.

Not far away, a little nephew was running around, happily playing with balloons and bothering one person after another, causing his parents to be dizzy with the task of looking after their mischievous son. Dr. Panipak couldn't help but smile. Her eyes turned to other guests, who were talking with her mother with smiles—she'd already had the chance to thank them but still felt indebted. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves, except for the hostess...

"Would you like a drink, Doctor?"

"I told you no," Dr. Panipak chided her friend. She'd made it clear from the start that no alcohol or intoxicating substances were allowed.

"I didn't bring them. A guest asked me to give it to you. It'd be rude for you not to accept, no?" Dr. Panipak shook her head slightly. It was okay to accept it, but not to drink it like this. "My nephew is here."

"Pot is with Pha now. If he comes, just say it's grape juice. It's not a big deal." Dr. Panipak sighed.

It was true what her friend said, but it still wasn't appropriate.

"Then we'll drink later," she told her friend, who gave her a look, before walking outside. As the hostess, it wouldn't be good to sit inside alone.

Hours passed, and people began to leave. Among them was Dr. Panipak's brother, who had to take his sleepy little troublemaker home to bed. Dr. Panipak gently kissed her nephew's cheek to say goodbye, not wanting to think about how much he'd fuss when he woke up because she'd overheard her brother lying to her nephew that if he wasn't naughty, Akhira would come to see him. That made Pot happy, playing until his energy ran out, even though he never got to meet... Yes... her nephew still hadn't met Akhira.

Akhira glanced at her smartphone screen and let out a small sigh when she saw another message from her mother, who had previously said they were going back home and asked her to come pick them up because her father and brother had been drinking. But upon arrival, Khun Ying Nara told her to go to the event first, saying:

*'I can't come back yet, and you should come to see the hosts for a bit. They went to the trouble of inviting us. It'd be rude not to.'*

Akhira couldn't do anything but sigh. Her eyes looked down at the land in front of her, a place she'd often visited, but now it seemed more complete than ever. Everything had turned out really well.

The decorative lights made it easy for her to spot her mother, who was standing in a visible spot.

"Oh, Zo, you're here."

Khun Ying Nara called out to Akhira, causing those standing nearby to turn and look, including a group of three girls and Sun, the only man in the group, and especially the host of the event, who seemed particularly interested in the new arrival. The sweet eyes sparkled with the light and the effects of alcohol, fixating on one of the guests who had just joined the party.

"Where's the gift? Didn't you bring Pleng something?" Khun Ying asked.

"It's okay. I'm just happy you all came."

"How can it be okay, Phim?"

Phimwilai could only look at Akhira with a mix of heavy feelings and sympathy. She was forced by her own mother to come here. It didn't really matter that there was no gift because just this person's presence at the event seemed to make someone particularly happy as her daughter was already staring in this direction.

Just that was enough to know how happy her daughter was.

Eventually, Akhira had to return to her car, where the gifts she'd prepared were. She didn't know

how many times she'd sighed, only that she felt incredibly suffocated now. Seeing Dr. Panipak standing and chatting with others with a smile made it even worse. She felt so suffocated that she could hardly breathe. And most importantly,

Without her, Dr. Panipak seemed perfectly happy.

Would Dr. Panipak still want this when everything Sun brought her for her was all quality stuff?

Why wouldn't Akhira know when they were siblings?

"Planning to come only after the party's over?" A familiar, sweet voice teased with a hint of sarcasm in her tone let Akhira know she must've had a drink or two.

"Hmm? I'm asking if you planned to come only after the party's over?" Dr. Panipak asked again, and Akhira's internal answer was no... Actually, she hadn't planned to come at all. No one wanted to see something they didn't want to see. If she had a choice, she wouldn't have come.

"..."

No words came from the lips of the one being questioned. Akhira was silent and indifferent, causing the onlooker to bite her own lip. Dr. Panipak watched the tall figure searching for something in the car without even glancing her way. Soon, Akhira closed the car door.

"Where are you rushing off to?"

Seeing that Akhira was about to walk past her, Dr. Panipak stepped in front of her, pushing the taller figure against the car. Then Dr. Panipak wrapped her arm around the other's neck to prevent her from escaping and did something Akhira hadn't expected.

The slender arm pulled Akhira's head down, and their owner pressed a passionate kiss upon her. The beautiful lips kissed repeatedly as if trying to absorb and search for something she desired. Even though the other was just standing still, she believed that the familiarity between them would make it easy for Akhira to give in to a sweet kiss. Dr. Panipak sighed with frustration before grabbing Akhira's hand and placing it on her own slender waist as the other just stood there.

Didn't you like to hold my waist when we kissed?

When provoked by the sweet scent of the slender figure and the luscious taste of wine lingering on the tip of her tongue, Akhira couldn't help but grip the slender waist uncontrollably.

"Mmm."

Dr. Panipak moaned softly as she felt the familiar gentle squeeze she always received from her. It was a touch that was neither too strong nor too light, a touch that easily sent her into a whirlwind of emotions, no matter when she received it.

They say that the finer the wine, the sweeter it is, sweet enough to make one lose themselves in its fragrant taste until they become intoxicated without realizing it. Dr. Panipak's warm tongue invaded Akhira's mouth with a passionate sweetness, causing her pain at times. It was as if every emotion she had was being transmitted through this kiss.

The kiss was pleading yet punishing at the same time. Akhira responded softly to Dr. Panipak's touch, allowing the other to have their way, slightly startled when Dr. Panipak ended the kiss with a bite on her lower lip before resting her face on her shoulder. Slender arms were still wrapped around Akhira's neck, and her sweet face nuzzled close and remained there.

"Where's my gift?"

Dr. Panipak's sweet voice playfully asked for her present. Since they'd known each other, it was rare for her to ask for anything, or to put it correctly, Dr. Panipak never wanted anything. Even the many gifts at the party didn't matter. She didn't want anything from anyone except for this one woman. She'd willingly trade everything she had for just one thing from Akhira.

A small square box wrapped in light-colored paper with a cute bow was handed to the pouting recipient. Dr. Panipak took the item, tilting her head slightly to get a better look while still leaning on the other.

"Oh, you're here. I thought you'd disappeared." A deep voice came from behind. Dr. Panipak sighed softly before slowly pulling away from Akhira. She didn't care about the person who had come looking for them; it was Akhira trying to distance herself from her when Sun walked in.

"What's up, Sun?"

"It's time to blow out the candles. Let's go," the young man said, paying no attention to his sister standing there. Dr. Panipak nodded in acknowledgment, understanding what he meant, and thought it was best to hurry as their parents were waiting for the cake-cutting ceremony. It'd be rude to keep them waiting.

"Please join us."

Dr. Panipak slowed her pace, turning back to the silent one before walking into the party. Although the path lay ahead, her sweet eyes often glanced back, anxious to see if Akhira would follow. It'd be the saddest birthday candle-blowing if she wasn't there.

The birthday song ended, followed by applause from everyone joining in the celebration. Dr. Panipak felt a bit embarrassed. She wasn't used to celebrating with so many people. She regretted that her brother, sister-in-law, and mischievous nephew weren't there. She didn't take long to make her wish before blowing out the candles, thanking everyone, and holding the cake herself.

"What did you wish for, Pleng?" Dr. Ninlaneen playfully asked. Dr. Panipak's eyes immediately glanced at the stoic figure across from her. Without a word, she smiled, bowed her head, and shook it slightly. Her wish, upon reflection, seemed both funny and selfish.

But even though Dr. Panipak didn't answer her friend's question, everyone seemed to know the answer already. Dr. Panipak's gaze wasn't well hidden, not even from Sun himself. For the first time, he could sense what the feeling he was having was, and although he didn't want to admit it, he couldn't deny that he knew what she'd wished for. Dr. Panipak gazed toward his sister as if to plead...

Plead for Akhira to come back.

"Shall we cut the cake, dear?"

"Yes."

The medium-sized cake was cut, divided, and distributed to everyone in equal-sized slices. But no matter how hard Dr. Panipak tried, it just wasn't enough. The size of the cake didn't match the number of people. In the end, the birthday girl had to be the one to sacrifice. Even though her friends offered their own portions to her, Dr. Panipak wouldn't accept them, insisting that as the owner of the cake, she had the right to every piece and she wouldn't take any back. Sharing her parents' portion was out of the question as they had only taken a single piece. Dr. Panipak didn't regret it; she was content as long as everyone was happy.

Dr. Panipak scanned the room before a perfectly triangular piece of cake on a paper plate was presented before her, causing her slender frame to pause. She was about to refuse but fell silent when she remembered exactly who this piece belonged to. She'd cut it for her herself. Dr. Panipak looked up at the tall figure who had offered the cake without a word.

"You can have it," Dr. Panipak said.

"It's fine." Akhira thought it was a bit odd for the birthday girl not to get to eat her own cake, so she decided to return it to her.

"I gave it to you, and I won't take it back," Dr. Panipak said, unclear whether she meant the cake or something else. Despite her words, Akhira insisted on giving the piece back to her.

"Then, let's split it in half," Dr. Panipak finally relented. Compromising and splitting it seemed like the best option. She picked up the knife and cut the cake into two parts. By doing this, Akhira seemed quite satisfied. She walked away and didn't come close to her again after they'd shared the cake.

To say that this piece of cake was the most delicious would be true, and to say it was the most bitter would also be true. A single piece of cake contained both the tasty and the tasteless parts. It was probably like her love, which was a mix of joy and sorrow.



## 34. Lingering Feelings

Even though some time had passed, Dr. Panipak still wasn't used to it every time she had to encounter Akhira. Sometimes, they'd pass each other by. Sometimes, just seeing the other's car drive past the hospital would secretly stir her feelings. They both lived their lives and carried out their responsibilities well; everything seemed to be getting better except for the deep-seated feelings in her heart.

Dr. Panipak didn't know if Akhira had found someone new, but it'd be difficult for her to find someone to replace her because it couldn't be just anyone. It still hurt every time she accidentally saw Akhira with someone else. It hurt that she had to hear about Akhira through others without being able to do anything.

Sometimes, when she heard her parents talking about Akhira, Dr. Panipak would find an excuse to leave because the more she heard, the more she missed her. She thought time would heal, but it doesn't always work. Even though she no longer cried herself to sleep like she had on many previous nights, the pain in her heart hadn't lessened at all.

Did Akhira miss her as she missed her? Since that day, they hadn't met or spoken again. The gifts she'd given her, she didn't dare to open. She just left them on her bedside table as if to keep all the memories intact. She wanted to know what was inside, but in the end, she chose not to look. After that day, one thing she was certain of was that Akhira didn't hate her to the point of not wanting to see her face as she'd once feared.

Her delicate hand gripped her phone so tightly it was damp with sweat. Her heart raced every time she heard the waiting signal for the other party to respond. Her body tensed, lips pressed tightly together. She almost gave up when the call was finally answered as if sensing her impending resignation.



*'Hello...'*

Because Akhira used to stay here regularly—or, to put it correctly, she'd moved into this condo with her—it wasn't strange that her belongings were here. There mightn't be many, but everything was essential for daily life: clothes, perfume, work documents, even the laptop she often left there, so she wouldn't have to carry it back and forth.

At first, Dr. Panipak wasn't sure how to deal with her things—leaving them as they were made her feel terrible because everything was just as it'd been before when she was here. Every day, she had to come back and see these things. Even though she pretended not to care, sometimes she'd inadvertently think that Akhira was still there with her. These things made her miss the person who had walked away, which was why she decided to return them to their owner.



Dr. Panipak stood watching the tall figure packing clothes into a bag, ignoring her presence. Akhira was indifferent as if she was alone. There had been no conversation since she'd called to tell her to come and collect her belongings. Akhira had said nothing more than 'okay,' and even now, she remained silent and cold, making her feel slighted.

"You're done?" she asked, even though she knew the answer. Akhira didn't spend much time with the wardrobe before turning to collect her personal items from the white vanity table.

Many things were gone, and the space looked empty, so empty that she almost wanted to tell her to leave everything as it was. But all she could do was think because, at that moment, she couldn't do anything but watch Akhira pack everything into her bag.

"I'll go get your toothbrush..."

"It's fine. Just throw it away." Dr. Panipak barely finished her sentence when Akhira said with a calm, steady voice—the one that she'd heard countless times before. The tone was no different from usual, but why did it

feel more painful than any other time she'd heard it? Dr. Panipak pursed her lips slightly as if trying to suppress the feeling of being hurt, but what else could she do when things were like this because she'd chosen it herself?

Everything was almost packed. The last important thing was the tool that Akhira always took out to work with before going to bed. Akhira took longer than usual as she couldn't find what she was looking for.

"What are you looking for?"

"Nothing." Akhira couldn't find her charger. It wasn't in the bag where she kept her laptop, and she didn't know if she'd placed it somewhere or forgotten it. Usually, after finishing work, she'd keep everything in the drawer beside the bed, but now it was nowhere to be found. And if she were to look for it, it might take a long time, so she chose to lie to Dr. Panipak like that.

To be accurate, she didn't want to stay here for another minute. The longer she spent time here, the more she missed Dr. Panipak, the more she heard her voice, and the more she longed for her. She wanted to hold her and beg her to come back to how she used to be. It'd be better to leave this place quickly.

Akhira stood up when everything was packed up. A bag of clothes and a laptop bag were held firmly in both hands. Her long legs stepped forward, hoping to leave this place as quickly as possible, but she had to pause when her arm was pulled back.

In just a few seconds after Akhira turned around, Dr. Panipak pulled the tall figure's neck down for a kiss. Although it wasn't the first time she initiated a kiss like this, this time it was different. Her lips pressed repeatedly as if afraid the person in front of her would fade away while Akhira began to respond.

When oil is near a flame, how can the fire not spread? Even though Akhira wasn't prepared to defend herself, it didn't take long for her to react. Familiarity made both of them almost forget everything, forget their status, forget how much they'd been hurt before.

With just a few steps backward, both bodies touched the soft bed. Akhira didn't let the other person rest and continued kissing her. Dr. Panipak didn't think to retreat either. Her trembling hands moved to unbutton Akhira's shirt while their lips were still touching. After dealing with the buttons, her mischievous hand moved to the waistband of the pants, but before she could touch anything, a moan sounded when she was invaded.

"Mmm." Dr. Panipak tilted her head slightly to allow the person above to do what they were more adept at. Her beautiful neck was delicately tasted. It was almost unbearable. If Akhira continued to play with her like this, she might just die.

Their naked bodies were exposed before Akhira bent down to fervently claim the beautiful chest.

It wasn't just sucking, but sometimes Dr. Panipak felt like she was being punished. Akhira couldn't help but bite down gently.

"Hngnn. Ow."

Akhira heard the complaint but didn't pull away, just slightly easing the biting force. Dr. Panipak almost melted into the bed. The tumultuous feelings made her twist her body. Akhira's mouth and hands continued to torment her. The naughty fingers circled the center of her body, refusing to invade further until Dr. Panipak had to lift her hips toward her, hoping Akhira would put her fingers in.

Akhira sighed heavily, leaving a kiss on the beautiful chest with a loud sound, stretching up to change positions before the sensitive parts of both were aligned. The sound of their heavy breathing became rhythmic as the two bodies moved together.

"Ah, my dearest."

The words slipped out from the beautiful lips for the person above to hear. It wasn't often that Dr. Panipak would inadvertently say something like this. She'd usually blush whenever she accidentally called Akhira with such

sweet words. But now, Dr. Panipak didn't care about anything else except the person right in front of her.

Akhira buried her face in the beautiful nape, yearning to hear the voice she'd missed so much. Her heart swelled upon being called, just like when they were deeply in love. Their bodies moved passionately, and Akhira couldn't help but reach out to stroke Dr. Panipak's flat stomach.

"Hgnnn." Dr. Panipak writhed, embracing the person above tightly with passion. Despite the air conditioning still running, both their bodies were drenched with sweat, especially as the person above continued to play with the beautiful chest, even while their bodies were moving.

Dr. Panipak felt overwhelmed. One of her arms wrapped around the neck, while the other hand reached up to caress the ear of the person above, eliciting an uncontrollable moan from Akhira. Dr. Panipak opened her eyes to look at the person above, unable to resist running her hand over the slightly muscled stomach as Akhira's eyes stared back at her. They locked eyes with a multitude of feelings. Akhira almost didn't want this moment of love to end.

"I...I can't take it anymore. Ah!"

It wasn't just Dr. Panipak, but Akhira felt the same.

Before they reached the final crescendo, Dr. Panipak pulled Akhira down into a tight embrace, letting out a final moan that signified she'd reached the peak of passion, and Akhira felt no different.

Breathless pants competed in the stillness while everything else came to a halt. Akhira rolled over to lie beside the smaller figure, and Dr. Panipak didn't hesitate to immediately snuggle into the warm embrace. She hooked her arms around Akhira's waist possessively, fearing she might disappear. The exhaustion that came with the familiar embrace soon lulled Dr. Panipak to sleep within minutes.

Akhira inhaled the sweet scent of the person in her arms with love. Although her mind told her she didn't want to see her, didn't want to be with

her for even a second longer, nor want to encounter someone as cruel as her again, the truth was different.

Her mind and her actions totally contradict each other. Akhira rationalized to herself that her stuff was important to her. Hence, she had to come back for them. But deep down, she just wanted to spend time with Dr. Panipak. She could've sent a subordinate to collect the items, or even if she threw them away, it wouldn't have troubled her. But Akhira chose to come here. If she felt nothing, she wouldn't have come.

Akhira's nose brushed against Dr. Panipak's forehead. She tightened the embrace before closing her eyes to rest, trying to hold onto this feeling as much as possible because in the days to come, there mightn't be another chance to hold her like this...

Dr. Panipak opened her eyes with weariness. The empty space on the bed next to her told her that the other person was no longer there. Even though Dr. Panipak and Akhira were no longer what they used to be, what happened last night wasn't a mistake.

Akhira's stuff had been taken away, leaving a void that was almost heartbreaking. Dr. Panipak glanced and saw a bag that she was certain had never been in her room before. Curiosity only lasted a moment before the sound of a phone rang as if the caller knew exactly when she'd wake up.

"Yes?"

'It's Pot's.' The voice on the other end said just that. When she didn't respond, the caller hung up. Dr. Panipak sat against the headboard and examined the contents of the bag. They seemed important as they were neatly arranged in a sturdy paper bag.

*A robot, huh...*

She remembered this was the toy that Akhira often fixed for his nephew whenever she had time.

A faint smile graced her beautiful face. No matter what, she was always kind. How could she bear it if one day she was kind to someone else?

Someone else that wasn't her and her nephew.

Akhira let out a small sigh after hanging up the phone. She had to travel early today. She wanted to let Dr. Panipak know, but upon reflection, she concluded it wasn't necessary.

Akhira wasn't going far, just flying out to attend a meeting. She'd be back soon, and it seemed she would've to travel abroad more frequently due to the expanding scope of her work. Perhaps the frequent travels might help her forget someone faster. She could only hope for that.

With increased responsibilities, Dr. Panipak often had to adjust her work schedule, juggling between the hospital and her own clinic as she hadn't resigned from the hospital.

What used to be leisure time and days off had turned into endless workdays, causing concern for her health among those around her. But stubborn as she was, Dr. Panipak continued as before.

You can't really change one's habits.

"Pleng."

"Oh, Sun, come on in."

"Have you taken a break today?"

"I have patients to see this afternoon. What's up?"

"I'm taking Mom to the doctor, so I just stop by."

"How is she doing?"

"The doctor says she's much better. I...I've done what I promised you, Pleng. I can do it for you."

Dr. Panipak paused as if pondering something, then nodded to acknowledge his intention and

was glad that Sun had kept his word. It seemed he wasn't lying as his family's situation had

genuinely improved, especially Khun Ying Nara's health. She hoped Akhira wouldn't have to stress about her anymore. At least there were some good developments after they took a break from their relationship.

"Sun."

"Yes?"

"What you did, you did for yourself, for your mother. Please don't think you did it for me."

Dr. Panipak spoke calmly, emphasizing that the improvements were due to Sun's own efforts to better himself. She didn't want him to think that everything he did was for someone else. She wanted him to understand that he did it for his own family, not anyone else.

"Okay," Sun finally agreed, unable to deny that he felt much better than before. There were no more quarrels with his mother and sister, no more causing trouble for others. He had to admit that this feeling was genuinely better.

Much better than before.

"Sun."

"Yes?"

"Are you still waiting for me... If you are, I want you to reconsider."

"..."

"Don't waste your time on me," Dr. Panipak spoke with exasperation. Although the young man before her no longer demanded or pressured her

since she and Akhira had separated, she wanted to reiterate for him to understand. No matter what, a relationship between them was impossible, now or in the future. It'd never change...

"Don't waste your time on me," Dr. Panipak spoke with exasperation. Although the young man before her no longer demanded or pressured her since she and Akhira had separated, she wanted to reiterate for him to understand. No matter what, a relationship between them was impossible, now or in the future. It'd never change...



As time passed, Sun's happiness seemed to diminish. He couldn't understand why he felt this way, even though he told himself he'd start anew with both Dr. Panipak and his sister.

No matter what he did, his relationships with Dr. Panipak and his family showed no signs of improvement, only growing more distant. What was happening was destroying his life and spirit, with nothing to mend it. And Sun didn't know what to do.

Even though Sun visited Dr. Panipak every day, hoping for some encouragement, her unhappy expression only disheartened him. True, she always smiled when they met, but it was a smile of courtesy.

Moreover, their conversations were almost entirely about other people, whether it was his mother's health or work matters. It seemed like she was just talking to get it over with so he'd leave. Worse yet, the relationship between Sun and Akhira showed no signs of improvement, not in the slightest.

Everyone deliberately avoided him, whether it was Dr. Panipak or even his own sister. As time passed, it only weighed on him. He was feeling terrible, worthless even.

There were also the hospital gossipers, slandering Dr. Panipak, him, and his mother with various accusations.



*'She breaks up with the sister, then dates the brother.'*

*'Didn't she break up with the brother first, then date the sister, and then go back to the brother?'*

*'What kind of a person must Khun Ying Nara be, letting a woman date both her son and her daughter?'*

*'I can't believe a nerdy like her can do something like this.'*

*'Disgusting.'*

*'She fucks both the sister and the brother.'*

Even though Sun wasn't living and working there, he was aware of all this. He didn't want to imagine how the people being gossiped about must feel.

If anyone was to blame, it was probably him. The things others said weren't true at all, except for one fact: Dr. Panipak was dating his sister. Why had he been so indifferent, not considering others' feelings, while everyone else tried to make things better?

"Isn't it about time?"

"Time for what, Dad?"

The young man snapped out of his world at the sound of his father's firm voice. Sitting at the head of the table, his father clearly didn't speak to anyone but him as they were the only two there.

"For you to stop doing this."

"..."

"I never taught you to be selfish and inconsiderate."

"..."

"My son doesn't have such bad habits."

"Dad..."

"Accept the truth, and everything will get better."

The truth was that Dr. Panipak and Akhira loved each other, and they shouldn't break up just because of one person's selfishness. Importantly, since the incident, Sun'd never once apologized to Akhira.

"I didn't want to say this because I thought you were grown enough to figure it out on your own."

Even though he spoke in an even tone, every word from Mr. Akhin was meant to make his son understand the current situation because no one was happy now, not even Sun himself.

As silence fell over the room, the father folded his newspaper and stood up from the dining room, leaving his son alone to reflect, hoping that perhaps Sun could come to his senses on his own.



## 35. Reconcile

Even though they lived under the same roof, they rarely saw each other. A home should be a place one comes back to and be happy, but it seemed that this house wasn't destined to be such a place ever since the family's son returned, and Akhira chose to stay at her newly purchased condo.

The one who caused her sister to leave was well aware of it. Sometimes, Akhira would even fly abroad without Sun knowing.

The young man stood watching his sister's luxurious black car as it pulled into the driveway. Soon, the owner would walk into the house. Sun knew that Akhira would be coming home because she had an appointment the next day; she had to run errands with their mother early in the morning.

He straightened his posture, took a deep breath to muster courage, and thought about what to say to avoid making things worse. It was true what everyone said: he was a grown man, but he still acted like a hot-headed teenager who would throw a tantrum when things didn't go his way, causing trouble for others. It was no wonder that Dr. Panipak liked his sister and not him.

Zo was loving, caring, and respectful, unlike him, who always took advantage of her, whether through words or actions. He even used threats and harsh words to hurt her. It must be ridiculous as her friends had said. If he had to compare, his love was no match for his sister's.

Perhaps he only loved himself. Between them, they could be nothing more than friends. He also knew it deep down as, throughout all this time, Dr. Panipak had never shown any sign of returning his feelings. Yet, he still made excuses for himself, perhaps because Dr. Panipak was kind and attentive, which made him fall in love and become jealous. He didn't want

her to belong to someone else, yet he forgot that he was nothing more than her patient.

“Zo...”

The person entering the house stopped abruptly, not expecting to encounter her brother at this time.

"I want to talk," Sun said when he saw that she remained silent, indicating his intention right away. He understood that Akhira probably didn't want to talk as their conversations always ended in arguments. But this time was different; it wouldn't be the same anymore.

"What about?" Akhira looked at her brother with an indifferent gaze. If he was here to start a fight, she was too tired to engage in such matters anymore. And now, no matter what he did, she wouldn't care.

"I want to talk about Pleng."

Akhira almost wanted to walk away. She thought that the whole matter was over and didn't want to hear or know anything about that woman anymore.

"If you're going to talk nonsense, I'm going to bed," Akhira said. Despite her cutting the conversation short and cold tone, Sun, stubborn as ever, wouldn't give up. He had to have this conversation with his sister.

"I'm not going to talk nonsense."

And this time, it'd be the most meaningful conversation he'd ever had.

Sun looked at Akhira, who stood silently but expectantly as if to say,

'If you have something to say, say it quickly.'

The young man had never felt so intimidated before, realizing just how formidable his sister could be when it was just the two of them.

"You and Pleng..."

"We have nothing to do with each other anymore. You should know that."

Akhira interrupted before Sun could finish his sentence, not willing to wait to hear what he'd say next. Sun took a deep breath, knowing that their breakup was his fault—because of his foolishness, selfishness, and stubbornness. He was the sole reason for their pain. If he was the cause, then he should be the one to fix it. He should take responsibility for everyone's feelings.

"You and Pleng should get back together."

Many times when Sun visited Dr. Panipak, he'd seen that she was more troubled than ever before, and so did Akhira. Even though he didn't say it or show it to anyone, he could sense that no one was happy.

Not a single one, not even himself.

"Please, since you still love her..."

"Why?"

The short question caught the young man, who was trying to persuade his sister, off guard. Akhira didn't understand what her younger brother was doing at all. Shouldn't everyone be satisfied by now? What more does he want? She'd had enough with all this stuff.

"I want to make it right... I'm sorry."

"..."

"It's my fault. I forced her to do this. It's all my fault. I told her to break up with you. I told her that if she agreed, I wouldn't argue with you anymore."

"..."

"She cares about you a lot. Please don't be mad at her. She didn't want to break up with you... but because of me, because I was selfish. I told her to leave you and be with me instead. But she wouldn't do it."

Sun chuckled bitterly to himself, feeling disgusted at his actions. That day, he acted as if he had no other choice and resorted to dirty tactics, but no matter what he did, she was unyielding. She even said something he never thought he'd hear from her.

*'This is already hard enough for me.'*

"Pleng and I... it never happened. There wasn't a single moment when she had a feeling for me. Not even once did she look at me...the way she looked at you."

The young man spoke everything from his heart, his gaze steady and direct at the person standing motionless. Akhira gave no response or showed any reaction. Even though she remained silent, Sun chose to speak all the truths he should've said long ago.

He'd seen it all, for a long time, that Dr. Panipak had no feelings for him, not even a little. He just didn't want to admit it or give up because he was too weak and cowardly. Now, he could only hope that his sister would understand. Whether he was forgiven or not wasn't important. At least he'd spoken it out.

"Whether you believe it or not, but..."

"I believe you."

"..."

"But she made her choice."

She chose to say they should take a break. At that time, Akhira didn't know the reasons behind her decision, but even now that she knew, it didn't mean she should go back to her. If Dr. Panipak truly loved her, if their love were strong enough, she wouldn't have chosen to do that in the first place, no matter the reason. She'd made it clear that she'd continue to love her, but Dr. Panipak chose to throw their relationship away.

It wasn't to say that the younger brother had no part in it, but in the end, it was a matter between two people, wasn't it? For Akhira, there would never be a day when she'd break up with Dr. Panipak just because someone else forced her to. If she didn't want to leave, could someone else really force her like that?

There was no need to go back and reconcile with her just because her brother told the whole truth. If Dr. Panipak truly loved him, she wouldn't let them be apart like this. At this point, Akhira was too tired to get back together with her again. All this time, it felt like she was the only one trying to maintain the relationship, but in the end, it didn't work out. It was like she was having unrequited love.

She was tired.

Too tired.

"I need to rest. Excuse me." Akhira walked past her younger brother indifferently, not out of anger or hatred but simply out of the need to rest. However, before leaving, she turned back.

"That you said sorry... I forgive you."

Akhira smiled sincerely at her younger brother with no malice or hatred in her eyes. Since Sun felt remorse and apologized, Akhira was ready to forgive.

"Zo!"

It wasn't an ordinary call but a loud shout that echoed through the house. Sun rushed in to hug his older sister, tears streaming down his face. He was sure if anyone saw him, they'd tease him for being a crybaby. But even so, Sun didn't care anymore. This is enough, really enough for me.

"Waah, Zo," he sobbed like a little child.

"Are you a kid or what?" Akhira could only laugh at the man in front of her. He was physically bigger, yet here he was, hugging and crying on her.

All this time, Akhira had also felt uncomfortable with this discordant relationship between her and her brother. Now, she didn't know what to say. She just felt happy to have her lovely brother back. Akhira patted her brother's back gently to comfort him.

Even though her love life wasn't going well, as long as the family was, it'd be okay. At least one worry was gone. As for the certain someone's matter, it'd have to be left to time. She could only hope that everything would get better.

"Stop crying now, dear. The kids will see us," Mr. Akhin told his wife, who had been secretly watching her son for a while and even used his shirt to wipe her nose. He couldn't help but chuckle.

"Now I know where Sun gets his crybaby tendencies from."

Khun Ying Nara thought of pinching her husband for teasing her. She also wanted to tease back that she'd seen her husband tear up as well, but she couldn't argue with what he said.

Sun was like her, while Zo was like her husband: quiet, stoic, seemingly arrogant and cold, but in reality, a kind-hearted person who respected others, steadfast, and truly devoted. She wondered how similar these two were, with the only differences perhaps being their looks and gender. Because when it came to beauty, their daughter surely got it from her.

"Let's go back inside, dear."

"Yes," she replied to her husband with a smile. For a mother, what could be better than seeing her children love each other? Besides hoping for their good lives, she also hoped they'd love and take care of each other. They only had each other; if they didn't love each other, who else would? At least, when their parents were gone, the children would still have each other.

Akhira returned to her room with a different feeling, feeling like this was home again. The lingering concerns had faded away with a simple apology. Sometimes, people do things without thinking, just because of love. She



didn't blame her brother for being that way as she herself sometimes acted without thinking.

As for love, Akhira chose to let go. Even though she often wanted to reconcile with Dr. Panipak, she was truly out of strength to pull her back into her life. Thinking she couldn't keep her, she chose to let go, no matter how much she loved her...



"She shouldn't have been so greedy. In the end, she let both the brother and sister slip through her fingers."

The unwanted gossip reached the ears of the three doctors walking together. Lately, no one had visited Dr. Panipak or picked her up, so the hospital rumor was that the beautiful doctor had been dumped by both her old and new lovers. And when that happened, those who wanted to rub salt in the wound always found their chance.

But it probably wasn't a good opportunity for that person because before Dr. Ninlaneen could retort for her friend, someone else's voice interjected.

"Please watch your words."

"M...Mr. Sun."

"Didn't you used to like me? You're picking on Pleng because you liked me, right? And now you've changed your target?"

Sun had heard everything this woman said, and he knew she had feelings for him a long time ago. He could say this because he'd seen her trying to flirt with his sister whenever they accidentally met outside. It was a good thing Akhira didn't play along.

"And if someone wants both the brother and sister, I think it'd be you, yet you end up with neither." Dr. Ninlaneen couldn't help but chuckle at the sentence she heard from the young man. Although she wasn't particularly

fond of Sun, at this moment, she felt a sense of satisfaction. It might sound cruel, but a woman as wicked as that deserves it.

"And don't let me find out you're bothering my sister's girlfriend again, or I'll make sure to deal with you."

As soon as the young man finished his sentence, the doctor quickly walked away. She couldn't bear being confronted with the truth, and if she stayed any longer, she'd be too shameless to face herself. Even though the uninvited guest had left, and it seemed like Dr.

In wouldn't bother them anymore, what bothered Dr. Panipak was the phrase '*my sister's girlfriend*' that the young man had mentioned earlier. She just looked at him, puzzled.

"Pleng..."

"Here you are again. Are you going to say you have something to discuss with Pleng?" Dr. Ninlaneen preemptively asked before the other could finish, knowing full well that whenever this person came, he always wanted to talk to her friend.

"Yes, just for a few minutes, really."

"And what if I say no?" Dr. Ninlaneen didn't want her friend to go through anything unpleasant anymore. Even though she'd heard that the young man had improved and become a better person, she still didn't trust him.

"You can stay. Everyone can. I just want to apologize to Pleng and everyone."

"For what?" Dr. Panipak asked.

"She asked you that because she probably can't think of what you'd apologize to her for. There are just so many things you wronged her."

Even though he came with the intention to apologize, he still couldn't avoid getting sarcastic words from Dr. Panipak's friend. Sun felt as if he'd shrunk to just two inches tall.

"Well... I apologize for everything, especially what involved Zo."

When she heard Akhira's name, Dr. Panipak felt herself slipping back into old feelings that she couldn't seem to erase from her heart, no matter what.

"It's okay, Sun. It's all in the past," she told him sincerely. She wasn't one to hold grudges, and in this matter, Sun wasn't the only one at fault; it was all of them.

"Have you seen Zo lately?"

Dr. Panipak shook her head in response. How could she have seen her?

"And... how is she doing?" Dr. Panipak finally asked what she'd always wanted to know. She wanted to know if Akhira was doing well and if she still had her allergies. She had to admit she was worried about this because it'd been a long time since Akhira had seen the doctor. Her medication might've run out, or she might already be resistant to the medication.

"She's not doing too well; it's the same old thing. Mom tells her to see a doctor, but she refuses." Dr. Panipak fell silent upon hearing this, not knowing what to say next. No matter how much she worried, she had no right to interfere in someone else's life. Especially in Akhira's life...



The sound of conversation and laughter from inside the house brought joy to everyone. In the kitchen, they hurried to prepare food because today Akhira was coming home for dinner, and the person most excited was none other than Khun Ying Nara.

"Oh wow, you're cooking so much food. Is Zo bringing her girlfriend home or what?" Sun blurted out without thinking and was immediately reprimanded by his mother with a sharp look and cutting words:

"Normally, she does bring hers. Is it not because of you that her girlfriend left her?"

Sun's face paled as he readily accepted the blame. It wasn't just about accepting fault; he was determined to make amends for his mistakes.



*'Mom, I felt bad for Pleng. People in the hospital say such inconsiderate things. If it were me, I wouldn't be able to stand it there.'*

*'People talk. That's just how it is, Sun. But if you hadn't pursued her, would this have happened?'*

*'Even if I kept pursuing her, Pleng only sees me as a friend.'*

*'Oh, I didn't know you even realize that.'*

*'Of course I do. And I've come to terms with it. But Pleng shouldn't have to go through something like this. I don't know how to make amends.'*

Akhira sat quietly eating her meal, her mind preoccupied with the conversation she'd overheard between her younger brother and their mother. Even though it was just a casual chat, when it came to anything about Dr. Panipak, Akhira paid close attention to every detail.

This behavior didn't escape the observant eyes of Khun Ying Nara, who knew that Akhira was concerned, yet she managed to remain indifferent. It was a trait she undoubtedly inherited from her father.

"Quite the expert at looking indifferent, aren't you?"

"Hey, what did I do?" Mr. Akhin was utterly baffled when his wife suddenly turned to him with a sharp remark out of the blue without any apparent reason or provocation, leaving him clueless about what he might've done wrong.

"It's all because of you," Khun Ying Nara accused her husband. Akhira had gotten this trait straight from her father, and if Khun Ying Nara wasn't going to blame her husband, then who else could she blame? In this room, no one

else could better be the target of her emotions than the man who was the father of her children.

"Speaking of which, Zo, how about we go see the doctor tomorrow? I think you haven't been feeling well lately."

"Well..."

"Tomorrow, I'm going for a health check-up myself. Come with me and keep me company." Before Akhira could protest, her mother had already decided everything for her. With that, Khun Ying Nara turned to serve herself some more food and engaged in conversation with the others, pretending to be uninterested in any further discussion.

Left with no choice, Akhira could only let out a soft sigh. When her mother gave her the order like this, what else could she do?



## 36. What If?

"Insufficient rest only weakens your body. You should get more rest. I recommend finding some light activities to do alongside that," the doctor advised.

"Thank you so much, Doctor."

"I'll prescribe the same medication for now. If anything comes up, feel free to come see me anytime."

"Okay, Doctor. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Dr. Panipak gave the patient a wai with a friendly smile, but as soon as the patient was out of sight from the examination room, the smile slowly faded away. Despite feeling exhausted, she had to maintain a cheerful demeanor, which only added to her fatigue.

Dr. Panipak could encourage others but found it hard to encourage herself. She could heal others but seemed incapable of healing her own emotional wounds, just like someone once told her when she was ill that even as a doctor, she couldn't heal herself.

With a mix of worry and a slight thrill, Dr. Panipak flipped through the next patient's file, unsure how to act when they met. But there was no time to dwell on it as the nurse outside soon ushered the patient in.

Even though they weren't alone, and the room wasn't quiet with the sounds of Khun Ying Nara and Dr. Panipak conversing, the atmosphere felt suffocating. It wasn't just Dr. Panipak and Akhira who felt it; even Khun Ying Nara seemed to sense it.

Dr. Panipak wasn't sure who was the sick one as the patient remained silent, letting her mother speak about her symptoms as if she were still a child. It seemed every visit to the doctor was a struggle for Akhira as she was always coerced to come by her mother.

Dr. Panipak glanced briefly at the person sitting next to Khun Ying Nara before quickly averting her gaze as the other's impassive expression nearly drained her of confidence. Her heart, which once beat vigorously, withered. Khun Ying Nara's phone rang, interrupting the moment and bringing everyone back to reality.

"Just a moment, dear. I need to take this call. Zo, once you're done with the check-up, wait for me outside, okay?"

The first sentence was directed at Dr. Panipak, while the latter was for her daughter. Hearing this, Dr. Panipak felt even more awkward, especially since the other still referred to her with affection despite the emotional harm she'd inflicted on her daughter.

The tension in the room multiplied when the elder who once made Dr. Panipak calm left, leaving just her and the person in front of her. She felt she needed immense concentration and patience for this appointment.

"May I?" The doctor moved closer, placing the stethoscope on the patient's chest to listen to the heartbeat. Her hands trembled slightly from nervousness, and she scolded herself internally for her lack of focus, especially when she was near her. With any other patient, she wouldn't have felt this way. In no time, Dr. Panipak pulled away and returned to her seat.

"I'm going to change your medication," she said, concluding from the overall symptoms that the patient had likely become resistant to the medication. It wouldn't do anything to keep prescribing it.

"Take care of yourself. Eat regularly, get enough rest, and, importantly, find time to exercise."

"..."

"I've told you before that if your body is weak, your allergies will flare up again," she said, writing as she spoke, not looking at the patient across from her. Perhaps she was focused on her work, or maybe she just didn't dare to meet the other's gaze.

"All done."

Once everything was complete, Akhira, who had been silent the whole time, didn't seem to say anything. Dr. Panipak looked up at the patient standing up from the chair, not even offering a farewell. She felt the sting of tears at the edge of her eyes; she was always vulnerable when hurt. The patient's coldness gnawed at her heart until she felt utterly drained of energy.

*I hate this.*

"Ms. Akhira..." The call wasn't loud, but it was enough to make the person who was about to turn the doorknob pause. Akhira turned to look at the one who called her with a trembling voice. Their eyes met, but from Dr. Panipak's perspective, the figure before her was blurred by the welling tears. She quickly wiped them away, not wanting the other to see her on the verge of crying. Akhira looked back with an equally pained expression.

But when Dr. Panipak didn't speak, Akhira turned to leave the room. It was the second time the doctor decided to speak up to stop her. This time, Akhira chose to stop and listen without turning back.

"You might be angry with me, but the truth is I..." The speaker hesitated slightly but eventually forced the words out.

"I don't want to break up with you." The voice was so faint that if the room hadn't been completely silent, Akhira wouldn't have heard what she said.

"..."

"I'm sorry for acting like this," she said, hoping that if things really couldn't continue between them, she wouldn't have to regret never apologizing to her.



"I just want you to forgive me for once."

If possible, she wanted to start over again...

Just once more time.

"We... we haven't broken up, have we?"

No one knew how long the room had been silent. The tears Dr. Panipak had been holding back finally flowed freely. The more Akhira turned her back on her, the more it hurt, so much so that she foolishly asked the question, even though she was the one who suggested they take a break.

She'd always acted selfishly, never considering her feelings. But when she acted as if she didn't care, as if she didn't love her anymore, it was she who couldn't accept it.

Dr. Panipak had come to terms with everything. Even though what she deeply hoped for mightn't be possible, at least she wanted the chance to speak, to let the other know that she felt guilty. That's why she wanted to apologize to Akhira, regardless of whether she accepted it or not.

"I thought you wanted to break up with me," Akhira said.

Akhira didn't know when Dr. Panipak had come close, only that the petite one now hugging her from behind was trembling from crying.

Eventually, Akhira had to turn around and embrace the weeping doctor, who buried her face and refused to look up. Her sweet face shook gently in denial of what Akhira had said. She didn't want to break up with her, not one bit.

"Quiet now," Akhira soothed, stroking her hair gently. Her heart, which had been beating slowly, came to life again.

"Don't cry," she said, but the more she comforted, the harder Dr. Panipak cried. Her emotions were a tangled mess of happiness and guilt. Especially when she heard the comforting voice, it overwhelmed her. Why was she always like this to her?

When it was Akhira, Dr. Panipak couldn't be herself. It took several minutes for her to stop crying, but even then, she refused to lift her face from Akhira's chest like a child, making Akhira's heart softer.

"Come pick me up this evening," came the muffled voice from within her arms, along with a soft snuffle, making Akhira smile. She knew Dr. Panipak was clingy but never got used to it.

No matter how many times Akhira never won against Dr. Panipak. It felt like a repeated knockout, but love wasn't a sport. She didn't need to compete with her. Because of this, she let her win every time. They often hurt each other's feelings, and even though they got angry, it never lasted long because the love they had was greater than anything else—so much so it made them fools, allowing the other to hurt them over and over again.

And no matter what anyone said, if Akhira was willing to be a fool to find happiness again, then so be it. The pain of not having Dr. Panipak by her side was far worse than anything else. When the opportunity arose, she wanted to seize it, refusing to let pride blind her and devour the joy she deserved.



"You look much brighter after seeing the doctor," the mother teased, unable to resist poking fun at her own child. Ever since the two kids had fallen out, the mother had been uneasy, sharing in their unhappiness. Even though the problem stemmed from within the household, with siblings at odds, it was clear to the adults whom Dr. Panipak had chosen. In truth, there was no need to think about it. Dr. Panipak had never harbored any romantic feelings toward her son, not even once.

It was only Sun who tended to get carried away with his own thoughts. But for Akhira, it was obvious that the doctor had feelings for her.

However, to say that her son was the only one who jumped to conclusions would be incorrect, for her eldest daughter was just as prone to overthinking, adding layers of complexity to her thoughts. She truly felt sorry for Dr. Panipak.

One thought she had a feeling for him, but in reality, she wasn't.

Another was the one she loved, yet she believed she didn't.

*What clever kids...*

She'd long wished for the beautiful doctor to become her daughter-in-law but had to let go of that hope when it became apparent that she showed no interest or affection toward her son. Believing that one cannot force love, she still held a fondness for her, even if she wouldn't become her daughter-in-law.

Then, one day, she had hope again when her eldest daughter, who seemed to dislike the doctor at first sight, suddenly started courting her. Who would've thought that her daughter had been smitten with the doctor from the start, just hiding behind a tough exterior? And to top it off, she succeeded in winning her over, especially when Dr. Panipak was known to be hard to get. It was a mystery how Akhira managed to win her over. Akhira mightn't have been the most eloquent, but when it came to wooing women, it seemed she was quite skilled... just like her father.

It was indeed a most efficient day off for Akhira. Besides visiting the doctor for her illness, she was dragged here and there by her mother for nearly the entire day. Her day off turned into a day of indulging her mother's whims. But even though her life was being orchestrated by another, Akhira felt it was a very good day indeed. She might have to thank her mother for helping her regain something she'd lost in her life. She now understood the saying,

‘Trust your mother, and everything will be alright.’



"Don't tease me. I'm cooking for you here," Dr. Panipak told the person who had been teasing her non-stop since entering the room, her face hiding in the crook of a beautiful neck, causing the slender figure to shrink away from the persistent pestering.

"Ms. Akhira." Dr. Panipak turned to face her, her delicate hand urging her face to look up into her eyes.

"What?"

"I'm cooking for you," she said in a serious tone, wanting her to eat something first, and then she wouldn't object to anything else.

"..."

"Please, or you'll get a stomachache."

"I've missed you," she said, and all the hundreds of reasons she could've given melted away with those simple words. In the end, all the reasons Dr. Panipak could muster were reduced to the only one she'd accept because she loved her, and she missed her just as much.



"Ms. Akhira..."

"Hm?" Akhira lifted her head from the belly of the person beneath her, looking into a sweet face that seemed to be in no small amount of torment from being teased.

When she greeted her flat stomach with her tongue, Akhira moved lower, her warm breath causing goosebumps on Dr. Panipak's sensitive skin. Her delicate hand gently stroked Akhira's cheek as she just watched...

"Mmm." Her sweet eyes closed with pleantry, instinctively tilting her head back as pleasure overwhelmed her.

"Ah... Don't tease me," Dr. Panipak whined to the one who kept teasing her relentlessly. Akhira's hot, mischievous tongue nearly drove Dr. Panipak out of her mind. Her slender body tensed as the one below her lavished her most intimate spot with her tongue.

"Ah. Hgnnnnnnnn." She tried to suppress her moans. Even though it wasn't their first time together, Dr. Panipak still felt embarrassed. She even had to

raise her hand to cover her own mouth, fearing she might let slip a moan or an embarrassing phrase.

"Ah, I...I can't take it," she told the person who still refused to lift her face from her lower half. She heard a soft chuckle in the other's throat, even as her mouth continued its flawless work. Akhira could feel the torment the other was enduring. Her slender legs tried to close to escape the overwhelming pleasure, but they couldn't as the taller figure remained wedged at her midsection, refusing to move away.

Dr. Panipak almost reached the peak of pleasure, only to be yanked back down unexpectedly when the person below suddenly slid up to press a kiss on her lips, which were about to utter something.

Dr. Panipak might've been preparing to scold the tease, who was now relentlessly playing with her. Even though Akhira's mouth had left that spot, her slender hands continued to roam without pause. Part of Dr. Panipak wanted to flee, yet another part wanted her lover to continue to the end.

"Don't tease—" She couldn't even finish her words when the lips that almost made her crazy broke away from hers and claimed her nipples instead.

"Ah... I said don't bite me." She'd told Akhira that many times before. Why wouldn't she listen?

Was she a sadist or something?

"Sorry," Akhira apologized sincerely, having truly lost herself in the moment. She pulled away from Dr. Panipak's chest to look at the sweet face glistening with sweat, seeing the doctor pout slightly because she'd been left hanging. She knew well that in a few moments, the slender body would reach the climax, yet she still teased her.

"No more teasing," said Akhira. The hand that had been circling below pressed in closer, eliciting a moan from the person beneath. The taller figure then removed her hand and replaced it with the same body part.

"Mmm," Akhira moaned softly the moment they touched each other.

"Ah, my dearest." A sweet moan escaped from Dr. Panipak as soon as the person on top began to move their lower half gently. From a slow rhythm, she gradually increased the pace, faster and faster. Akhira was both fierce and tender at the same time...

"Hngnnnnnn." Dr. Panipak tilted her head back slightly to allow the person on top to come closer and press against her comfortably, knowing well that the other liked it. Below, she felt an almost unbearable pleasure as her slender waist was caressed by the hot hands of her lover.

Akhira let out a moan as she neared the gate of heaven, pulling away from the beautiful neck while her slender waist continued its duty. She then stretched up, adjusting themselves into a sitting position.

Akhira caressed Dr. Panipak's flat stomach, which was her favorite spot, and the more she touched, the more moans she heard from those beautiful lips. The rhythm of love accelerated with the desires of both until they finally reached their destination.

"Hngnnnnnnnnnnnn." Their final moan echoed and mingled together. Dr. Panipak tensed and twitched, hands gripping the bedsheet tightly until Akhira collapsed on top of her again. Her face buried close, inhaling the scent of her lover again and again. Dr. Panipak lay panting, her slender hands gently stroking the bare back of the person on top.

And even though they'd both reached the climax, Akhira still didn't stop teasing her. Although their body had stopped, Akhira's lips showed no sign of rest, causing the slender body to cringe away when nibbled softly on the earlobe.

"It tickles."

A fond laugh sounded next to her ear. This was clearly intentional teasing.

"Where is your teeny tiny tummy?" Akhira shifted to lie down before pulling the slender figure into her arms, her hand stroking the small stomach while asking about it.

"Have you been eating? Why are you so thin?" Akhira said while stroking Dr. Panipak's flat stomach like an old, nagging woman because she preferred it when the other was plumper. Dr. Panipak pulled the arm of her lover up to hug her with a sly grin because now Akhira was lying behind her. She couldn't help but laugh at the other's whining.

*What teeny tiny tummy?*

She looked like this since forever. The belly she mentioned wasn't much different from now. It was just that she might be a little thinner. More than that, she was like this because of her. She'd just learned what it was like to be unable to eat or sleep.

"Poor teeny tiny tummy."

"What are you talking about? Do you want me to get fat?" Dr. Panipak asked the person behind her in a not-so-serious tone.

"Well, that would be good," she replied. Dr. Panipak wondered if Akhira really wanted her to gain weight.

"If I get fat, you won't like me anymore."

"How do you know I won't like you?"

"Well..." Indeed, she didn't know either...

"Well? How do you know I won't like you?" Akhira didn't just ask her; her face began to nuzzle her back and shoulders again, causing Dr. Panipak to admonish her.

"Enough. I'm tired." It was as if her words were a commandment; the tall figure immediately stopped her fervent actions. Akhira was so adorable that Dr. Panipak couldn't resist turning around to hug her as a reward for her obedience.

"Sleep well, my good girl."

The gentle touch on her forehead was warm enough to fill her heart, allowing the exhausted Dr. Panipak to fall asleep easily after their recent activities.

The air conditioning was cool but not cold enough to chill her to the bone, not when she had the warm embrace of her loved one. Akhira's hug was warmer than anything else. Without her, she felt the cold she'd never noticed before. Even though she was covered with blankets, they didn't help.

The reason Dr. Panipak couldn't sleep every night was the lack of this warmth, but from now on, she'd sleep comfortably because she got this warmth back and would never let it go again...



Having just reconciled not long ago, Dr. Panipak was plagued with worry again when her lover had an accident. She didn't know what she'd done to end up with a broken left arm and had to come to the hospital. Because of this, the doctor had to take time off from her own clinic to go to the hospital immediately.

“Ms. Akhira.”

The tall figure looked at the person who came to her with concern, barely holding back tears in her beautiful eyes. Seeing her like this made her feel even more guilty for her carelessness, as it caused the beautiful Dr. Panipak to come to her when she should've been at work.

At first, Akhira was going to drive herself home, but after calling Dr. Panipak, she scolded her, saying,

'How can you drive with a broken arm?'

Because she was reprimanded by her lover and was strictly forbidden to do so, Akhira had to wait at the hospital for Dr. Panipak to pick her up.



"You can drive by yourself now?"

"Yes."

"Good job."

Just a short compliment from her lover made Dr. Panipak feel inexplicably happy.

"It's because my girlfriend taught me."

"Really... since when?"

"What do you mean?"

"Since when can you drive by yourself?"

"It's been a while. I had to go places alone, like the hospital and the clinic. My girlfriend wouldn't pick me up, and there were no buses late at night, so I had to drive myself."

Akhira smiled as she listened to Dr. Panipak recount her life during their time apart, ending with a playful jab that was adorable no matter how you heard it. True, she'd taught her until she became more confident, but every time she drove, she always had her or someone else accompany her. Akhira had just learned that Dr. Panipak could now drive anywhere by herself.

Dr. Panipak cringed her neck slightly when Akhira reached out with her uninjured hand to gently ruffle her hair affectionately.

"Mmm," she protested, grabbing Akhira's hand to stop her from teasing her. It was good that they were at a red light; otherwise, she would've scolded her good for startling her.

"I love you," Akhira said. Dr. Panipak stopped resisting the moment she heard the word 'love.' Her eyes turned to look at the person next to her, who was giving her a warm smile, with a pounding heart. No matter how many times she heard it, she never got used to it. And why, all of a sudden, did she say '*I love you*' now?

Silence enveloped the car as their eyes met. Akhira's face moved closer and closer until Dr. Panipak could feel her warm breath, just before the doctor regained her senses and turned her face away.

"My car windows don't have the same kind of dark tint as yours," Dr. Panipak said softly to the other party. Akhira could only laugh with affection, tucking her hair behind her ear in an adorable gesture.

"I know," she replied simply, and with that, the conversation ended. Akhira wasn't the type to push for an advantage or sulk because Dr. Panipak wouldn't allow a kiss as she was mature and reasonable. Upon reflection, Dr. Panipak realized that Akhira almost always yielded to her wishes. If she said no, she wouldn't do it. A simple prohibition from her was enough for her to comply. As long as she provided a reason, Akhira was ready to believe.

Akhira was always gentle and respectful toward her. Whatever she did, she was considerate and always thought of her feelings first. Even when they argued, she never raised his voice or spoke harshly to her. Except for that one time, the first and last time. It was usually her who was petulant and willful, sometimes carelessly doing something regrettable, only to feel sorry later.

They never behaved recklessly or showed too much affection in public because she'd once told her lover that others might look down on them. While expressing love wasn't wrong, and she wasn't embarrassed about it, she believed in respecting the place and other people. She thought Akhira understood this well.

They always walked side by side, but Akhira rarely held her hand or wrapped her arm around her waist. Love didn't need to be displayed for outsiders to see; it was about respecting each other.

She didn't care about others' opinions more than she cared about her, but everything had its limits and appropriateness. Public displays of affection like kissing were out of the question, and besides, she didn't want others to see it because she was afraid they'd find out...

Find out just how good a kisser Akhira was.

She didn't want Akhira to show her affection for her in front of others because she feared they'd see the lovable side of this woman. It was better for others to see her usual stoic, world-weary face rather than her adorable side...

Because she'd be jealous.

At this point, Dr. Panipak could only wonder why she was so fortunate. What if they'd never met?

What if Akhira had chosen to walk away from her? What if they'd remained just friends as she'd initially asked of her? What if she'd given up? If she hadn't been so patient with her, she didn't know if she'd be as happy as she was now.

What would she do if she hadn't loved her?

"Ms. Akhira," Dr. Panipak called out to the person sitting next to her, busy with her phone, with the formal title she always used for her, accompanied by a bright smile. This prompted Akhira to turn and look at her with a raised eyebrow in curiosity.

"Ms. Akhira..."

"Why are you calling me?" she asked.

"I love you."

Had anyone ever told Akhira that Dr. Panipak absolutely adored her name? Probably not, because even she herself had never realized it. Akhira had wanted Dr. Panipak to call her by her nickname and had often asked her to do so, but she always refused, leading her to give up and stop insisting.

She even asked if she was tired of using her full name with the title 'Ms.' every time. Dr. Panipak's response was simply that she was used to calling her that way, but the truth was that she loved Akhira's name. And the reason Dr. Panipak didn't want to use Akhira's nickname was just a silly reason.

She was just embarrassed to do so...

Because Akhira's nickname always reminded her that she couldn't leave her.  
Because she was 'Zo' or a 'chain,' tying their hearts together until the end of time...

-END-



Sunyan

## Special Chapter 1

"It's all spilled. Be a bit more careful, Pot."

Because she let her little nephew eat by himself as he wanted, Dr. Panipak had to follow him around, wiping and cleaning up the mess the little one made. And now, her nephew's Auntie Khira couldn't be of much help as she could only use one of her arms. Dr. Panipak just felt a headache coming on, unsure whether to look after the child or the grown-up first.

"What's Auntie Khira wearing?"

"Auntie Khira has a broken arm," Dr. Panipak replied to her young nephew, who was only interested in the tall figure. The little one leaned in with his tiny face curiously.

"Broken arm?" Pot looked confused, not understanding what a broken arm was since he'd never experienced one himself. Akhira ruffled the little boy's hair playfully, causing the younger one to whine and pout from the adult's teasing.

After sitting for a few minutes after the meal, Dr. Panipak had to take her young nephew to bathe, but it seemed that it wasn't going to be as easy as she'd hoped.

"Pot, don't run, or you'll fall."

The little one's mischief made the person working on the sofa smile. It was unclear what got into him to cause such a ruckus, making his aunt run around after him.

Dr. Panipak stood panting at the door, exhausted from the effort of getting the child bathed. She left her nephew in the room because suddenly he was

out of energy, sucking on his milk bottle and then falling asleep in no time. Dr. Panipak walked out to find the person standing in the corner of the room, observing a small plant they'd bought together a long time ago with interest.

"Is it dying? Why aren't you taking care of it?" Akhira sked.

"I am taking care of it," Dr. Panipak retorted instantly. Why wouldn't she? She'd been taking care of it so well she didn't know what more to do with it. It was a special gift from someone special; she couldn't let it die.

"This plant looks neglected."

"I take care of every one of them," Dr. Panipak said. Before, Akhira helped her, but during the time they were apart, she had to do everything alone. It was impossible for someone as busy as her to give a hundred percent attention to everything.

"Ms. Akhira," Dr. Panipak called with a serious tone. Akhira, who had been interested in the plant, turned to face the person who called her.

"Don't be careless again."

Dr. Panipak gently stroked the cast on the other's arm. It was good that

Akhira wasn't seriously hurt; otherwise, she would've been in much more pain. She was already worried enough.

"I know."

"Ms. Akhira."

"Yes?"

"Ms. Akhira."

"What is it?"

"Ms. Akhira."

"Hmm?" Even though she knew she was being teased by the doctor, Akhira didn't complain and just went along with it, allowing her to playfully bother her.

"Ms. Akhira..."

The tall figure locked eyes with the one who kept calling her name, her slender hand pulling Dr. Panipak closer by her waist until there was no air left to pass between them. The name owner raised an eyebrow, waiting to see if she'd be called again. Dr. Panipak smiled sweetly, enjoying the close view of her loved one's face. No one said anything for almost a minute until Dr. Panipak eventually spoke again, but this time, it wasn't to call the other's name but to express the feelings in her heart.

Feelings that had never been shared, for Dr. Panipak was unsure of what the other would think and if this person would be confident in their love because she herself had never once assured her of her feelings. But now things were different. Dr. Panipak didn't want to hide her feelings any longer. Even though actions were important, and she believed Akhira could feel it through her actions in the past, she wanted her to be sure.

Just a little more sure.

"I love you."

"..."

"I love only you."

"Waaaaaaaah! Auntie Pleng!"

The little boy's crying made Dr. Panipak immediately pull away from Akhira to attend to her little nephew.

"Auntie Pleng doesn't luv Pot aneemor," the little one in dark blue pajamas with cartoon patterns sobbed while rubbing his eyes. He was fussing because he woke up to find no one around and had to deal with the

heartbreaking news that his beautiful aunt no longer loved anyone else except Akhira.

"Of course, I love you. Why wouldn't I love you?"

Dr. Panipak tried to pick up the little one, but she was met with resistance. The young boy struggled with all his might, clinging tightly to Akhira's leg, refusing to let go because he was already upset with Dr. Panipak. It was up to Akhira to take matters into her own hands and lift his nephew into her arms.

Dr. Panipak looked at Pot, who was content being held by Akhira, and felt weary. She suspected that her nephew was truly upset with her. It seemed she was in for a long session of making amends. This time, she wondered if it'd take a robot, a doll, or even a ball house to win him over.

"Auntie Khira, Aunt Pleng doesn't luv me," the child immediately complained as soon as he was in her arms, snuggling his face into Akhira's shoulder.

"Who says I don't love you?"

Dr. Panipak asked softly. She was tired of dealing with so many sulky people in her life. Having a lover who was easily slighted and a nephew who was extremely petulant.

"Auntie Pleng said she only luv Auntie Khira."

Akhira just laughed, earning a stern look from Dr. Panipak. The tall person tightened her grip to hold the little boy better. She thought she was strong, but carrying a child with one arm wasn't easy, and now she was starting to feel a strain in her arm. Yet the little one kept snuggling against her shoulder, unwilling to be apart from her as he seemed truly upset with Auntie Pleng. She couldn't let go now, or she'd be accused of not loving him, too.

"Such a sulky child, whose nephew is this?"



In addition to teasing Pot, Akhira also made a playful jab at the person in front of her. Why was this child so petulant, almost like a woman like this? Perhaps he'd been spending too much time with Auntie Pleng.

"He's your nephew," Dr. Panipak quickly retorted, feeling annoyed. Akhira could only smile in response, feeling so pleased with the short sentence Dr. Panipak had said that she was unable to contain her grin.

"He's your nephew [\*]," Akhira replied back, not understanding why the listener felt a flush of warmth at that sentence, even though she'd simply said, 'Our nephew.'

In the Thai version, this phrase is written as "เขาเป็นน้อง." This can be translated as both "He's your nephew" and "He's our nephew."

"Auntie Khira, do you love Pot?" Suddenly, the little one looked up and asked, his eyes and expression filled with worry, softening the hearts of the adults, who couldn't resist his plea. When it came to being cuddled, he was second to none. "Of course I do."

"And do you love my dad too?"

"I...I do."

"And my mom?"

"I do."

"And my grandmother?"

*Do you love my grandfather too? What about my great-grandmother? What about Mr. Robot?*

*Do you love them, Auntie Khira?*

After being bombarded with a series of questions, Akhira was stunned, while Dr. Panipak just chuckled without offering any help.

Nevertheless, Akhira didn't want to disappoint the mischievous child and answered him:

*I love everyone.*

Upon hearing this, the little one was satisfied but still reminded his Auntie Khira that it was okay to love everyone, but she must love him the most. Akhira agreed quickly because, after all, it was true. She loved this child the most.

21:50

"It's time for your bath," Dr. Panipak said. Having finished putting her nephew to bed for the second time, she now had to deal with her lover, who was still working non-stop without taking a break.

"I'm not a child anymore," Akhira protested.

"I know, but you should go now," Dr. Panipak insisted, telling Akhira to take a bath since it was getting very late and it might make her sick. Her health wasn't great, and it wasn't like Akhira was always well; one moment, she'd sneeze, and the next, her nose would be running.

"Help me unbutton my shirt, please."

"Didn't you say you're not a child anymore?"

"I'm not. I'm an adult," Akhira replied, shaking her head. Although she wasn't a child, she sure acted like one. Dr. Panipak's delicate hands moved to unbutton the shirt of the person who had stopped in front of her. Dr. Panipak knew full well that Akhira was perfectly capable of doing it herself, but seeing her awkwardness, she felt sorry for her and didn't want to let her struggle.

"You're still like a child," Dr. Panipak said.

"I'm an adult with a broken arm."

"I don't want to talk to you," Dr. Panipak said sincerely. She didn't want to stand there arguing with Akhira anymore. Whether she was a child, an adult, or whatever, it didn't matter.

Dr. Panipak stopped assisting the person with the broken arm, thinking that she'd helped enough and the other person could continue on her own. Dr. Panipak walked into the room and flopped down to lie in bed, hugging her nephew, leaving Akhira standing alone where she was. Akhira smiled slightly. Teasing Dr. Panipak made her feel so good. Lately, she'd taken a liking to teasing her often because when the doctor got annoyed, it was adorable...



"Are you not going to unwrap my gift?"

It'd been several days since Akhira saw it still lying there. This prompted Akhira to ask Dr. Panipak, wondering why she hadn't unwrapped it yet while the other items had all been opened.

"What did you buy for me?" Dr. Panipak asked back with a teasing grin, making Akhira think it was too much for her. Dr. Panipak's cuteness was just too overwhelming.

"Call me 'Phee' [\*] first, then I'll tell you."

The word "Phee" (พี่) in Thai means "older sister." However, it isn't exclusively used to refer to or address a person in one's family. Rather, it can also be used by a younger person to call someone older but still relatively the same age as them, even though they're not related to each other. It gives off a casual tone in a conversation.

Since she wanted to know, there had to be a negotiation, a trade-off. As a businesswoman, Akhira couldn't afford to lose out.

"Phee..."

"..."

Just that... Even though she waited, Dr. Panipak said nothing more than that. She was willing to call Akhira that, but it seemed more like teasing. And why did Akhira's heart beat so fast just because of the word 'Phee?'

Just that... Even though she waited, Dr. Panipak said nothing more than that. She was willing to call Akhira that, but it seemed more like teasing. And why did Akhira's heart beat so fast just because of the word 'Phee?'

"Say my name, too," Akhira bargained further, thinking she was about to get what she wanted.

"Ms. Akhira."

"No, I want you to call me 'Phee' and then my name."

It was unclear who was more confused, the speaker or the listener. Dr. Panipak thought for a moment about what the other had said, looking into the eyes of the slightly older person before her thin lips moved to utter words that left Akhira stunned:

"Phee Ms. Akhira."

*Oh, come on...*

She wanted to scream in frustration. She thought she'd get to tease her, but instead, the doctor turned the tables on her. Dr. Panipak chuckled lightly when she saw the other's expression because Akhira looked genuinely funny after hearing her say that. She knew what Akhira wanted her to call her, and why should she comply so easily when she could just open the gift herself? Even if Akhira didn't tell her, she'd know eventually. She just went along with it just because.

"You never call me 'Phee,'" Akhira started to complain, making a pitiful face at the other who could only stand still, watching her lover put on a drama.

"..."

"You never call me by my nickname either," Akhira said, playing the role of the pitiful victim. Dr. Panipak knew the other was just joking, not really upset or hurt by her, as she was trying to show. She also knew that even though it was just in jest, deep down, she really wanted her to say that word at least once.

That being her nickname.

"If I call you that, will you be able to handle it?"

Akhira paused, taken aback by the serious look on Dr. Panipak's face as she asked. And, of course, the answer in Akhira's heart was that she wouldn't be able to handle it, and she might even die of a heart attack first. She was used to being called by her real name, and although she wanted to try a change, upon further thought, she mightn't be able to handle it after all because she'd be too embarrassed.

Dr. Panipak looked at the one who had gone silent. She asked Akhira that because she really wanted to know. She was aware that Akhira would be just as embarrassed. So, in this matter, no one had the upper hand; if the caller was embarrassed, so was the callee. She'd be willing to indulge her if Akhira really wanted to hear it.

"I don't know... You've never called me that," Akhira let the silence linger for a moment before replying softly. It was true that she mightn't be able to handle it, but she still wanted to hear it just once. Akhira just looked into Dr. Panipak's eyes quietly after finishing that sentence, and no one said anything more. Dr. Panipak was silent, weighing her thoughts, while Akhira's heart raced uncontrollably as she, too, eagerly anticipated.

"What's your name?"

It was as if Akhira's heart was a big pink balloon that was fully inflated, only to be pricked by a cruel person with a sharp needle, causing it to explode and the remnants to scatter beyond recovery. Akhira had thought she misunderstood the rumors about Dr. Panipak being cruel, but now she knew for sure that this doctor was truly cruel—heartless even.

"You're too cruel to me," accused Akhira.

Dr. Panipak could only smile wryly, feeling a mix of pity and amusement. Why does she have to be so adorable?

*She's just like Pot.*

"Do you want me to call you that from now on, or do you want me to call you that once?"

Akhira didn't know why Dr. Panipak was dragging this out. Maybe she was trying to gather courage. For others, just calling their loved one by a nickname might be easy. She might be the weird one. She could call others by their nicknames, but not her own lover. If it wasn't her, no one would understand how difficult it was because she had more issues with her lover's nickname than anyone else.

"Just once is fine."

That was the final answer. Even just once was good enough for Akhira.

"..."

"..."

"Phee Zo..."

*Jesus..*

Akhira thought she truly saw Jesus.

"Don't be so dramatic."

Dr. Panipak could only sigh at the person who kept smiling incessantly since she uttered that word. Even though they'd arrived at Dr. Panipak's house, Akhira still hadn't stopped smiling.

"My mom will think you're crazy." Dr. Panipak was so tired of her. Lately, Akhira had been acting strange. She thought someone must've stolen her

old Akhira away.

*Someone, please help...*

"I'll help you."

Dr. Panipak paused, turning to look at the person who had just entered the kitchen. Akhira carefully took the knife from her hand and immediately lost interest in Dr. Panipak as soon as she got what she wanted. Akhira focused on chopping the ingredients. Initially, Dr. Panipak wanted to object, but seeing the other person's genuine intent to help, she let her be without any objections. Dr. Panipak didn't know why, but every time she chopped vegetables or used sharp objects, Akhira would interfere or volunteer to help.

She wasn't sure if it could be called volunteering because if she refused, the other person would insist, and to this day, she still couldn't find an answer. Before, she used to do it regularly, and Akhira never complained, but now, she couldn't even use scissors to cut something if Akhira was around. Akhira would let her do anything except for using sharp objects, no matter what.

*Why is that?*



"Can you work like this?"

Dr. Panipak asked out of genuine curiosity as the other person was holding her hand like this while working.

*How will she be able to work comfortably?*

"You go to sleep. It's late."

Dr. Panipak lay there, looking at the person who had taken her hand. She wasn't used to it because Akhira never used to hold her hand or do anything like this with her before. It wasn't annoying; she was just curious.

*'No need. I'll do it.'*

*'I'll do it myself.'*

*'Just stay put, I'll handle it.'*

Dr. Panipak was getting used to it. She'd put down the knife every time she remembered. She didn't touch sharp objects at all, and Akhira permanently took over the task of chopping vegetables in the kitchen. Whether it was dinner or breakfast, if there was any menu item that required sharp tools, Akhira wouldn't let her do it herself.

"What are you keeping here?"

Akhira asked the person who was changing the pillowcase with curiosity because she'd seen this thing in the closet for a long time.

"They're photos," Dr. Panipak turned back slightly before answering. It was this photo box that her brother had given her, and because she'd taken it out to look at it that day, that incident happened...

"Can I look at them?"

Even though they were lovers, Akhira still asked for permission.

"Sure," Dr. Panipak answered without hesitation. Inside were only pictures of her family. Why wouldn't she let her look?

Akhira carefully opened it. The first photo she saw was that of Dr. Panipak with her family. Next was a picture of Dr. Panipak with a woman Akhira knew well. A small smile crept onto her face after seeing it, and finally, there was a picture of her with a young man, a photo Akhira had once seen before.

The two people in the photo remained the same, but what had changed was the missing glass from the frame. The smile that once adorned her face faded instantly as the terrible old memories resurfaced.



The memories were so vivid that her heart withered. The images, the sounds, and the tears of her loved one circled back into her mind. Akhira couldn't help but repeatedly ask herself why she'd done what she'd done back then.

It was the guilt that never seemed to fade. Despite her intentions to protect and care for Dr. Panipak, she ended up hurting her instead. It pained her every time she saw the fading scar on those beautiful fingers. It was a reminder that the emotional scars would never truly disappear. She should never have hurt her, whether it was intentional or not.

"What are you thinking about?"

Noticing that Akhira had been silent since looking at the photo of her with Sun, Dr. Panipak was worried. Was Akhira still troubled by this? Akhira turned to look at the doctor and avoided eye contact when she noticed her gaze.

"Is something wrong? Can you tell me?"

Dr. Panipak asked worriedly with a sweet voice as the other's unusual demeanor concerned her.

"I'm sorry..."

"..."

"Did it hurt?" Akhira's slender hand reached out to grasp Dr. Panipak's wrist, gently stroking it with remorse. Even though the physical scar had faded significantly, there was still a mark that reminded her of the incident.

Akhira had felt guilty ever since that night when she wounded Dr. Panipak. Even the morning after that incident as she went to work, the thought consumed her to the point where she had to leave the company and buy green tea as a form of penance for her wrongdoing. Unfortunately, it never reached her.

Dr. Panipak remained silent, understanding what her lover meant.

"It's healed up. I'm fine."

Akhira brought Dr. Panipak's hand to her cheek. Although she said she was fine, the guilt never left, just like her scar. If only she could turn back time, she'd never have done it.

Akhira brought Dr. Panipak's hand to her cheek. Although she said she was fine, the guilt never left, just like her scar. If only she could turn back time, she'd never have done it.

"Ms. Akhira," Dr. Panipak said softly after seeing Akhira's beautiful eyes brimming with tears. She couldn't deny that what Akhira had done also left a scar on her heart, but since it'd happened, she was ready to let it be a thing of the past. People make mistakes, but they must learn to improve and correct their past wrongdoings, and Akhira had learned a significant lesson from this.

But no matter if it was now or decades later, what Akhira had done would remain deeply etched in her heart. Akhira wanted to apologize to Dr. Panipak a thousand times over for her actions, but no matter how guilty she felt, she could never undo them.

"Ms. Akhira..."

Dr. Panipak called softly. It wasn't often that she saw her lover cry. Her free hand reached out to gently wipe away the tears. How many times did she have to say that she'd forgiven her? Was this why Akhira always liked to hold her hand? Often, when she held her hand, she'd gently stroke her fingers, and it was always just one hand that Akhira would hold. Even when they cuddled in bed, she'd hold her hand.

Even when she was working, Akhira would often spare one hand to hold hers. And it was probably for the same reason that she never let her handle sharp objects. At first, Dr. Panipak was just curious. She never imagined it was because of this. Knowing this now, she couldn't help but feel sad.

"Don't cry, okay?" Dr. Panipak smiled at Akhira, trying to make everything normal again as soon as possible because she herself could hardly bear it

and wanted to cry with her.

Akhira pulled Dr. Panipak into an embrace with all her heart. Even though she was forgiven, guilt still lingered within her. Dr. Panipak was her everything, her entire world. She vowed that from this moment on, she'd never hurt her again, neither with words nor by actions.

*No more.*

*That furious, raging Akhira is no more.*



## Special Chapter 2

Dr. Panipak thought she was ready to open Akhira's gift because the latter had been incessantly nagging her to do so. It wasn't just Akhira who wanted her to open it—she was also curious about what was hidden inside.

Dr. Panipak slowly peeled away the wrapping paper, piece by piece, with great care, as if fearing she'd tear it. It might seem a bit overacting, but she really couldn't bring herself to rip it—it was a special gift from someone important, after all. How could she just tear into it?

A perfectly sized box appeared before her. Dr. Panipak glanced at the person sitting across from her, her heart racing. Having come this far, if she didn't know what was inside the box, she might as well call herself a child.

An innocent child.

Dr. Panipak slowly opened the box to find a shiny silver ring that was just the right size. She wasn't surprised by the box's contents, but what surprised her was that there wasn't just one ring inside...

"Why are there two rings?" Dr. Panipak asked with curiosity.

"Well... at first, I bought one for you and one for me."

"..."

"But at that time, we..."

*We broke up.* Dr. Panipak could fill in the blanks without Akhira having to say it.

"Yes, I understand."

"So I just put both rings in."

Akhira thought it wouldn't be appropriate to wear one of the couple's rings when they'd already parted ways. And not knowing what else to do, she gave her both because he never thought they'd get back together. Asking for the gift back and rewrapping it would've been odd. So she just let it be because no matter what, they were hers. Both rings belonged to her. Dr. Panipak smiled at the person in front of her before picking up one ring and handing it to the other.

"This one is yours."

Akhira accepted it with pleasure and said:

"I'll put it on for you."

"You're not proposing, are you?"

"And if I were to propose, would you agree to marry me?"

*Silence.*

It was a question without an answer. Both fell silent until Akhira finished putting the ring on Dr.

Panipak. The room was so quiet it was almost disheartening.

"I'm not ready yet," said the doctor.

And Dr. Panipak knew that Akhira wasn't ready either. If she were to truly propose, it wouldn't just be said casually like this. They'd been together for so long; how could she not know her character? It was true that Akhira loved her, and they loved each other, but this was a big matter that required time to think, and until the day they were both ready, she'd wait.

"Thank you," she said, looking down at the ring on her finger. Her heart pounded because she truly liked it. She liked Akhira's gift more than anything else.

Akhira could only smile in response to the thanks from her lover, happy that she liked this gift. She hadn't bought the ring with the intention of claiming her as her own because she wasn't an object. Akhira just wanted to give it to her, and whether she wore it or not, she had no intention of forcing her.

Dr. Panipak felt a bit strange with a ring on her finger as she usually didn't wear any jewelry except for a watch. Having something on her finger like this felt unfamiliar, but it was cute—a matching ring with her love. Thinking about it, since they'd been together, they never really had anything that signified they were lovers, except for the aprons that Akhira had bought. But she wasn't sure whether that counted as matching aprons as it seemed Akhira had just bought aprons of the same color rather than intending them to be a matching set.

00:25

Akhira felt something was disturbing her, and when she turned, she found Dr. Panipak snuggling up to her, burying her face against her side while she sat working on the bed.

*I thought she's already fallen asleep.*

"Aren't you asleep?"

"I am," a drowsy voice announced audibly. Dr. Panipak responded without even lifting her head to look at Akhira. The older one could only smile affectionately. Akhira had learned that if she wanted the doctor to be affectionate, she herself had to play it cool. Often, she'd be the one to hug her first, but the other would just hug back as usual. She wouldn't cling to her like this.

Dr. Panipak must've done this inadvertently. She often liked to approach Akhira, like when she was working or if she felt she wasn't getting enough attention. She'd be the one to come over and be affectionate, as she was doing right now.

"You're asleep but you can still answer me?"

"I'm sleep-talking," she replied. She was affectionate and humorous. The listener could only laugh at her response as it wasn't often that Dr. Panipak said something like this. It seemed she might actually be sleep-talking as she claimed.

"Ms. Akhira?"

"Hmm?"

"Why do you like me?"

Akhira met the gaze of the one who had looked up at her with curiosity. The one being asked thought for a moment, then finally answered the question her lover was eager to know.

"I like that you care about others, love your family, and..."

"That's not what I meant. I meant, back then, why did you like me?"

"..."

"Why did you like me then?" Dr. Panipak really wanted to know, and she needed to hear it from the other's own mouth. At first, it seemed like Akhira didn't think much of her at all, even acting aloof and arrogant, making her think she didn't even like her. Akhira fell silent after hearing Dr. Panipak's question.

*Indeed, what made me like her?*

Even she didn't know and couldn't find an answer. Personally, Akhira had never felt anything special for anyone before, especially not for another woman. But since she had these feelings, Akhira chose to accept them and follow her heart.

Perhaps it was because she grew up abroad, in an open and free country, that she didn't see it as strange to have special feelings or be attracted to another woman. Regardless of gender, everyone is equal. Humans are

humans. Akhira was just another person who happened to fall in love with someone else. It just so happened this someone else was a woman. It just so happened to be her.

Her... the one who could steal her heart from the very first sight.

"I don't know... I just..."

"Just what?"

"It's nothing."

Dr. Panipak immediately frowned upon hearing her lover's subsequent response. There had to be a reason. People can't just randomly like someone out of the blue without any reason.

"It's okay if you don't want to tell me," Dr. Panipak said, seemingly understanding, but her tone and expression didn't match at all. Akhira could only smile at the other's cuteness, loving how she pouted and sulked. Was this normal? Because she liked to make up with her just as much.

"I don't have a reason. I just saw you for the first time and liked you."

Was it love at first sight, then? But even love at first sight has its reasons. It's not that she didn't believe in love at first sight, but she just wanted to know why it was her. If Akhira had met someone else before her, would she have liked that person the way she liked her?

She just wanted to know the reason why one person could be so impressed by a stranger. For Dr. Panipak, such a thing had never happened before, even with the person right in front of her. "So you just liked me out of the blue? There's no other reason?"

"I don't know."

"..."

"Well, maybe because you're pretty...?"



*Not just pretty, but gorgeous.*

It was the first time that Dr. Panipak noticed Akhira becoming flustered during their conversation. The latter's voice was so soft it was almost inaudible. She regretted asking that question; had she known the response would be like this, she wouldn't have asked. Despite their usual intimacy, her heart raced every time Akhira spoke sweetly to her. It was a rare occurrence to hear such words from her as she wasn't one to sweet talk, but whenever she did, it always made her blush.

Dr. Panipak's gaze met with the one above her for only a moment before the image of the other person began to blur until it was no longer visible. She could feel the breath that fanned her face, indicating how close the other person was. Soon, their lips touched, and although it wasn't a passionate kiss, it made her heart beat just as wildly as it always did. Akhira pulled her close like always, causing Dr. Panipak to grip her shirt tightly until she finally pulled away and looked down at her with a smile.

"Is this position comfortable for you?" she asked, concerned that Akhira might have a sore neck. She already looked uncomfortable bending her neck down to work. Dr. Panipak feared that one day, Akhira might need to see a doctor for that.

"It's alright, but we can change positions if you want," Akhira replied, leaving her speechless and blushing, unsure of where to put her face.

*What does she mean by that...*

*Months later*

As soon as Dr. Panipak arrived at the hospital, she hurried to find her brother. Anxious and concerned for her family, she feared something might've happened.

"What happened?"

She asked with concern, having heard that her brother's wife had fainted. She feared it might be serious as her brother often mentioned that his wife had been experiencing strange symptoms, but they were still unclear about the cause. And even though she was a doctor, without a thorough examination, she couldn't make a diagnosis.

"It's nothing serious now," her brother reassured her with a beaming smile, his eyebrows raised as if he was about to share some news.

"So, what was it?"

"Just as you suspected."

Dr. Panipak's eyes widened slightly. She asked her brother again for confirmation, and when he nodded, it meant that her sister-in-law was expecting their second child.

"Congratulations."

She smiled happily at her brother. This meant Pot wouldn't be lonely anymore.

"Don't you want to have one too?"

Dr. Panipak fell silent upon hearing the question. She'd indeed thought about having a little one of her own, but...

"I haven't thought about it yet."

Even though she'd considered it, Dr. Panipak didn't hold out much hope, knowing well that nature didn't design women to have children together. The idea of having a child was far-fetched for her. Even with advanced technology, it was still a difficult and serious decision to make as raising a child to grow up well wasn't easy.

Her family might be supportive, but it was truly challenging. She didn't want to think too far ahead or hope for too much, especially since Akhira had never once mentioned the topic, not even marriage, since that day.

Truth be told, she never really dreamed of being a bride, but sometimes she couldn't help feeling a bit slighted. Even though her current situation was wonderful, her love for Akhira grew day by day. She didn't understand why, but whenever someone brought up their relationship status, she felt particularly sensitive.

Truth be told, she never really dreamed of being a bride, but sometimes she couldn't help feeling a bit slighted. Even though her current situation was wonderful, her love for Akhira grew day by day. She didn't understand why, but whenever someone brought up their relationship status, she felt particularly sensitive.

"What are you thinking about?"

Akhira approached and wrapped Dr. Panipak in an embrace, noticing her silence since they were in the car. Akhira wondered if she was stressed about something, perhaps because her sister-in-law had been hospitalized, or maybe it was something else.

"Nothing... My sister-in-law is expecting another baby," she replied.

"So Pot is going to have a sibling then."

"Yes."

"Should we make one, too?"

"Make what?"

Dr. Panipak tilted her head, looking back at the person hugging her from behind with curiosity, unsure what Akhira meant by that.

"Make a baby."

"Are you crazy?"

Dr. Panipak playfully slapped her lover's arm in annoyance. She knew Akhira was just teasing because if it were really possible, they would've had a child long ago.

"Do you really want one?"

Dr. Panipak asked the person, embracing her again with excitement while trying to appear nonchalant, even though her heart was racing at the thought.

But Akhira fell silent, so silent that it made Dr. Panipak's heart wilt. The taller one tightened her embrace slightly before responding to Dr. Panipak.

"I do want one, but it's okay if we can't."

Akhira knew it was possible with modern technology but didn't want to put her beloved through any hardship or pain. To be honest, she was feeling a bit regretful. Just imagine how wonderful it'd be to have a little child resembling Dr. Panipak, seeking affection from the other. Their lives would be much, much happier.

"What about you?" Akhira asked.

"What?"

"Do you want a baby?"

Akhira's mention of a baby made Dr. Panipak blush. It was her warmth that made her want the baby they talked about. And she knew Akhira would be good with children, great even, if only she could curb her indulgent tendencies a bit.

"Taking care of Pot is exhausting enough," Dr. Panipak joked, trying to lighten the mood and not wanting to burden Akhira with the thought like her. Although they mightn't be ready now, who knows about the future?

In the future, they might actually have a baby of their own...

Every morning, Akhira would wake up to the beautiful face of Dr. Panipak close by, and this morning was no different. Those sharp, beautiful eyes

watched the sleeping figure with affection until the sound of a phone interrupted. Akhira reached out to silence the phone immediately, not wanting to disturb the still-sleeping person, but it was too late. The figure in the embrace was beginning to stir.

"Mmm," Dr. Panipak made a sound, then opened her eyes, blinking a few times before shifting slightly. Seeing that the one who was embracing her was awake, Dr. Panipak asked the question she always did every morning.

"Do you want to sleep in?"

She wanted her lover to rest more because Akhira always woke up early to drive her to the hospital every day, even though it wasn't necessary. Even though Dr. Panipak could drive now and was getting better at it, Akhira still insisted on driving her. They'd talked about it but to no avail.

"I'll shower first. You go back to sleep," Akhira said, gently stroking her hair as if to lull her back to sleep. Akhira knew the doctor worked hard from dawn till dusk and wanted to give her whatever little respite she could afford.

Dr. Panipak closed her eyes again after Akhira had gone into the bathroom. She knew Akhira was concerned and wanted her to rest more, but what could she do when she herself barely had time? She'd have to do something soon because she didn't want her to worry too much about her.



*"One green tea for the doctor and one coffee for Ms. Akhira."*

"Thank you," Dr. Panipak replied to the café owner before turning to look at the person walking in. She'd decided that, from now on, she wouldn't let Akhira keep buying green tea for her. Instead, she'd be the one buying coffee. She believed Akhira might like it if it came from her. Even if she wasn't the one making it, just ordering it for her would make her happy. At least, that's what she thought.

"I already ordered for you."

"Why didn't you order for your friends, too?"

"Those two arrived even before us," Dr. Panipak replied with a smile. How kind can she be? Akhira was just as she'd always been. She didn't buy drinks for her friends to score points or to win her over. To be honest, she might've thought about it in the past, but now she had to admit that this was truly Akhira's nature. Not only did she care for her, but she also cared for and paid attention to those around her just as much.

"Ms. Akhira?"

"Hmm?"

"Why didn't you order green tea that time?"

Dr. Panipak thought it was something quite easy to guess since there were only a few popular drinks, and she didn't drink anything too complex or strange. If she'd guessed randomly, she would probably have been right, but Akhira had ordered something else entirely, which made her laugh because Akhira ordered almost everything except the green tea she liked.

The person being asked seemed to ponder. It seemed like nothing to order a drink, but Akhira had her own reasons, reasons that Dr. Panipak herself had never known.

"Have I ever told you about this?"

Dr. Panipak shook her head. If it was about ordering drinks, Akhira had never told her; otherwise, she wouldn't be asking.

"Your order is ready," the shop owner's voice interrupted their conversation. Dr. Panipak smiled, thanked her, and proceeded to pay.

"Would you like to try it?"

Dr. Panipak offered the glass of green tea to the tall figure, who then shook her head in refusal.

"I don't like green tea."

Dr. Panipak just found out this...

Was this the reason why Akhira didn't order green tea then?

"..."

"You asked me why I didn't order green tea. Well, it's because I don't like it... so I didn't order it."

"Others might like it even if you don't. I don't get it."

"I just think that I shouldn't order something I don't like for someone I like."

This unexpected answer made the listener smile uncontrollably.

*Why is she always so adorable?*

"So why did you end up ordering it?"

She was curious. If Akhira had thought that way, what had inspired her to choose green tea for her at the last moment?

"I don't know."

Akhira answered truthfully because she really didn't know why she'd ordered green tea for her at the last moment. But this incident taught her something new: that sometimes, what we dislike, others might enjoy. We shouldn't center ourselves and make judgments on our own.

At that time, Akhira had no intention of ordering green tea for Dr. Panipak, but she didn't know why she'd ordered it that day or why she'd chosen it as the last option. Maybe it was fate.

The shop owner could only listen and smile as if she were Dr. Panipak herself, feeling so blushy she couldn't concentrate. Even though the two customers weren't flirting, their conversation made those who overheard blush with them.

Moreover, she felt happy for both of them. She'd seen from the beginning how Akhira pursued the doctor, and eventually, they ended up together. Nothing could be better than this. She truly felt happy for both of them.



SunYanV



## Special Chapter 3

*One year later*

"In the twenty-four hours of your day, how many minutes am I in there?"

Akhira said with the obvious slight, making Dr. Panipak feel sympathetic because it was rare for the other party to bring up this matter. Akhira was a reasonable person, but if she ever expressed herself like this, it meant she really felt terrible.

Akhira knew well that her lover's work was important, but sometimes, she couldn't help feeling neglected. In a day, she only got to talk to her for a few minutes. The time they spent together was almost nonexistent, not counting the time they slept. They were together then, yes, but they hardly did anything together except for having breakfast.

As time went on, the feeling of being neglected grew, especially on days off from work when she had to do things alone. Sometimes, she felt lonely, and a significant reason was that Akhira was concerned about her lover's health.

Dr. Panipak was well aware of this. She didn't blame Akhira for feeling neglected or for bringing it up because it was all true. The truth was that she barely had any time for her. But what could she do when her job was like this? She was a doctor, a public servant. She had to devote a lot of time to others, and because of this, the time left for her loved ones was reduced. She tried her best, but in the end, this was all she could do.

She felt guilty every time she missed an appointment with her lover because of a patient, but she couldn't choose Akhira over her patients. And every time it happened, Akhira would say it was okay. But today, Akhira might've reached her limit. Knowing the other was tired of waiting for her, would it

be better if she dated someone else? Someone who had time for her, not a doctor like her.

"I'm sorry."

"I'm not angry, but I wish you had some time to relax," Akhira simply wished they could have dinner out together at least once a month. Dr. Panipak sighed inside. She wished she had an extra ten or twenty hours. If that were possible, she promised that all her time would be devoted to her family and Akhira.

Dr. Panipak used to have some time, but as her responsibilities increased, her time became almost nonexistent. Activities like going home or shopping with her mother every week had to be unavoidably cut out. Fortunately, Akhira volunteered to take over, so Dr. Panipak didn't have to worry too much about her mother.

Akhira looked at Dr. Panipak and sighed. She didn't want to start a fight, knowing that the other was already tired from the day. If Akhira were any more annoying, their relationship wouldn't last. Dr. Panipak was grateful every time the other picked her up and felt good seeing her lover's face when she got home. She was always touched when the other took care of things for her, no matter what.

"Shall we go on a trip?"

Dr. Panipak asked the person sitting on the sofa with a soft voice. Akhira turned slightly before replying in a barely audible voice:

"You probably don't have time."

"When are you free?"

Dr. Panipak sat down next to the older, grumpy one, resting her chin on the other's shoulder with an adorable gesture that made Akhira's heart soften.

"Are you serious?"

Dr. Panipak nodded. She could take time off because she'd hardly taken any leaves in the past year. She sometimes even had to cover others' shifts, which made Akhira complain.

"Tell me when you're free, and I'll request time off in advance."

That was the last sentence before Dr. Panipak told the other to choose the place and time because she was willing to fully indulge Akhira.

Whether it was a domestic or international destination, she didn't mind. As long as she was with her, she could go anywhere.



*Japan...*

"I don't want to go to Japan."

"Why not? You said it's up to me."

Akhira chose this country because she'd been there quite often, knew many tourist spots, and could take her anywhere without fear of getting lost. Moreover, she herself said she'd indulge her, but why, when she said she'd take her to Japan, did the doctor say she didn't want to go?

"Why does it have to be Japan?"

"I like Japan."

*Hmph...*

"Do you like Japan, or do you like someone in Japan?"

Akhira could only sit there, confused. Suddenly, the doctor seemed to be upset with her for no apparent reason.

Dr. Panipak walked away into the room. She didn't want to be unreasonably upset, but she knew that Akhira often associated with Japanese people,

especially that woman—the one she remembered so clearly at first sight.

Even though she knew they did business together, sometimes she couldn't help but think that she talked to Akhira less than that woman did. But who could she blame other than herself for not having time for her? And about going to Japan, she probably thought she was familiar with it. She knew Akhira flew there often.

She must've visited every place by now.

Akhira followed Dr. Panipak into the room, clearly seeing that her lover was truly in a bad mood.

Even though she didn't show any unpleasant behavior, because they'd been together for so long, Akhira always knew what it was like when Dr. Panipak was sulking.

"If you don't want to go, we can change our plans."

"We already booked the tickets. How can we cancel them?"

Akhira looked at the person who was packing her bags. Even though she seemed displeased, she still packed her bag.

"It's okay, I'm rich."

Dr. Panipak had to shake her head at that statement. She really didn't like this habit of hers. Being wealthy didn't mean she should waste money without a good reason. Even though the cost of the plane tickets wouldn't bankrupt her, it'd still be too much if she canceled them for no good reason or just because of her pettiness and selfishness.

"What do you say?"

Akhira sat down next to Dr. Panipak and asked again, insisting that if she really didn't want to go, Dr. Panipak could choose where they'd go instead. The place wasn't the problem; as long as she was there, even if it was just in this room, Akhira would be happy. They didn't have to travel or go far. Just being together was enough for her.

Dr. Panipak was silent, neatly folding clothes. Soon, she leaned against Akhira without saying a word, making the latter adore her. Akhira felt luckier than anyone else because it wasn't easy to see this side of the doctor. On the outside, she might seem indifferent, a beautiful doctor who might even come off as arrogant, but who would know that she was just a needy person...



This was the first time they went on a trip together.

It wasn't exactly the first time because if you count the previous accidental meeting in another province, this would be the second time. But she chose to consider it their first. It was the first time it was just the two of them.

"Akhira?"

A voice called from behind, causing the person standing there to turn around. They greeted each other warmly. Dr. Panipak, seeing that Akhira was engrossed in conversation with the newcomer, didn't want to interrupt and chose to walk away quietly. Even though she felt a bit hurt, there was nothing she could do.

They didn't plan to meet, did they?

Akhira looked at Dr. Panipak, following what the one she talked to had said before, and they both chuckled a bit. Soon, they had to part ways. Akhira didn't hesitate and quickly followed Dr. Panipak because she'd already walked quite a distance. She was afraid she might get lost.

"You didn't wait for me, and you didn't tell me when you left."

"Well, I saw you were having a good time talking, so I didn't want to interrupt," Dr. Panipak replied with what she thought, even though it wasn't entirely true.

"Are you jealous?"

*It worked...*

The one who had been walking ahead without waiting stopped abruptly upon hearing that question. Dr. Panipak just looked at Akhira.

*Am I jealous? Not at all. I'm just... I don't know, just something.*

Seeing that Dr. Panipak wouldn't answer, Akhira decided to tell her the truth, whether she was jealous or not because she didn't want her to worry or feel uncomfortable about it. She wanted her to know that she only had her.

"Ms. Rika is already married."

Oh...

Dr. Panipak felt as if she was a fool. And that she often one-sidedly sulked at her left her feeling utterly exposed. Even though Akhira had no idea what she was upset about. Every time she talked to that Japanese woman, she never hid it or sneaked around, not even once.

*I should've known.*

*How embarrassing.*

The decorative lights were lit all over the city, and the orange glow of the lamps reflected beautifully with the pristine white snow. The scene before them was so stunning that everyone visiting the place couldn't help but raise their phones to capture the atmosphere with awe. Dr. Panipak was no different.

Numerous photos were captured and saved on her phone. Even though she wouldn't share them on social media like others often did. At least they served as memories, and Dr. Panipak made sure to preserve this particular memory as well.

Her lips curved into a smile as she looked at the phone screen, which displayed someone caught off guard. She didn't know how people posed for those beautiful internet photos to make them look good and natural, but she

was sure that if anyone saw this picture, they'd want to borrow the person in it as a model.

While she was smiling at her phone, Akhira approached without her noticing.

"Want me to take a picture for you?"

"No, that's okay." Dr. Panipak startled slightly before quickly turning off her phone screen, afraid that she might see.

See that she'd secretly taken a photo of her...

Akhira smiled before standing beside Dr. Panipak, observing the people walking by, some posing for photos, others chatting. There were both groups and couples. It seemed that this place was quite popular at night.

"Ms. Akhira?"

"Hmm?"

The tall figure turned at the sound of her name. Dr. Panipak moved closer and looped her arm around hers. The hand that Akhira had previously captured tightened its grip as she began to feel the cold.

"Do you get you tired of me?"

She asked the person standing next to her, curious about her thoughts. Their relationship had nothing to worry about except for the lack of time they had for each other.

"Why would I get tired of you?"

"Because I don't have time for you," she replied honestly. She hardly knew what Akhira did every day or who she met or talked to. To put it bluntly, if Akhira had someone else on the side, she'd never know.

Akhira just smiled, knowing well that there was no way she could get tired of Dr. Panipak. In fact, she missed her more than ever. How could she get

tired of her? Akhira thought that the ones who might get tired of each other were those who spent every day and every moment together.

"I made peace with it when I realized I liked you," Akhira said and chuckled lightly. She'd prepared herself for the doctor's busy schedule and was always ready to accept it. But when faced with the reality, she had to admit she felt a bit slighted. Yet, this was good in its own way. Even though they didn't have much time together, when they did, they treasured every moment and wanted to make it as happy as possible.

Their relationship was neither overwhelming nor nonexistent, not so close that they felt suffocated. They allowed each other personal space to reflect on their lives. Akhira thought this was quite perfect.

Their relationship was neither overwhelming nor nonexistent, not so close that they felt suffocated. They allowed each other personal space to reflect on their lives. Akhira thought this was quite perfect.

"It's getting late; we should head back," Akhira suggested, knowing the temperature would drop further into the negatives. She didn't want Dr. Panipak to get sick. She could handle the cold as she was accustomed to this weather, but Dr. Panipak mightn't be. Even with several layers on, she was shivering.

Akhira pulled the smaller one closer. This was the first time they were this close in public, but who would care? No one would pay attention to two people trying to keep warm, and Akhira didn't care about anyone else either.

As she entered the room, Dr. Panipak felt warmth envelop her. A hot cup of tea, skillfully prepared by Akhira, who had volunteered to make it, was placed before her.

"I think I'll stop by the store on the way back to pick up some things for your mom. I'll buy something for Pot, too," said Akhira.

"My mom and Pot will love you more than they love me now," Dr. Panipak said with a weary sigh. It was the absolute truth. Everyone at her home



seemed to adore Akhira more with each passing day. Soon enough, she'd become irrelevant in the family.

"And my mom loves you more than she loves me now," Akhira replied with equal honesty. Dr. Panipak could only smile wryly at her words. It was as she said.

"Pleng," Akhira suddenly called out to Dr. Panipak with a more serious tone, her beautiful eyes locking onto her with intensity.

"Yes?"

"Do you remember when we talked about marriage, and you said you weren't ready?"

"I remember," she replied. Being the one who said it, she could never forget, no matter how much time had passed.

"What about now?"

"What do you mean?"

Dr. Panipak asked, her gaze following Akhira as she moved closer. She gently took her hand and caressed it as if pondering something deeply.

Akhira's eyes lowered to the silver ring she'd bought for Dr. Panipak long ago, which still remained on her finger. She knew Dr. Panipak always kept it close because it made her feel good—very good—to know she cherished it more than anything.

"You never take it off?" Akhira suddenly changed the subject, catching her off guard.

"Why should I?"

"I want you to take it off."

"..."

Dr. Panipak's breath hitched, her heart sinking. She didn't understand what Akhira meant. What was she trying to tell her?

"I want to know why," she decided to ask directly. By now, there was nothing left to hide. If her reason was to break up, she would've to accept it and return the ring.

Silence filled the room for several long minutes. Dr. Panipak was uncomfortable as Akhira remained silent. Finally, she saw her take a soft breath as if gathering courage before she spoke the next words, which made her heart race:

"I've bought a new ring for you."

"..."

"Are you ready to change it?"

A perfectly sized diamond ring appeared before her eyes. As tears blurred her vision, the sparkle of the object in front of her intensified. She'd never imagined she'd say something like this. She'd always thought it'd be nice if it happened one day, but it wouldn't matter if it didn't. She never dreamed of being a bride; she just wanted to spend happy times with Akhira.

"What do you say? I'm waiting for your answer," Akhira said. She'd waited a year for her to be ready. They might've been unsure of their love and did nothing, but now Akhira was sure. It wasn't just infatuation or a fleeting passion; she truly wanted to spend her life with Dr. Panipak, to consult her on everything. They might argue, but that would help them grow and learn more about love.

She knew marriage wasn't the end but a new beginning. Things were already great, but deep down, she wanted to make it right and official. She wanted to honor her even more.

Dr. Panipak didn't say anything. She just nodded slightly, and that was enough for Akhira. Her acceptance, whether verbal or non-verbal, meant she agreed to it. Her agreement was all she needed.

"I've already told your parents. When we go back, let's get married right away," Akhira said with a smile, slipping the new ring onto her left ring finger. Then she reached for her other hand, intending to remove the old ring, but Dr. Panipak quickly pulled away.

"I don't want to take it off..."

Even though she'd received a new ring, Dr. Panipak didn't want to throw this one away. It held both good and bad memories for her. She truly didn't want to remove it.

"Can I keep it?"

Her sweet eyes met those of the person in front of her as if pleading for understanding. It was rare for her to use such a tone, but if she did, it meant she really didn't want to take it off. And what could Akhira do when she'd never resisted her request for as long as she could remember? How could she possibly refuse that...

In the end, Akhira relented. Dr. Panipak smiled in gratitude, making Akhira's heart swell until it felt like bursting. She wondered just how adorable her doctor could get, praying she wouldn't become any more endearing because she mightn't survive it—she'd surely die of a heart attack.

"Thank you," Dr. Panipak said, expressing her gratitude to Akhira with all her heart, thankful for everything that had passed between them. She'd never believed in fate, but now she felt luckier than anyone to have Akhira by her side.

She was truly fortunate that Akhira loved her.

To say that her love was like something out of a novel would be accurate, and it was a story that ended beautifully. She didn't know whether, in another year, two years, or ten years, their love would remain the same. But the one thing she knew was that right now, at this moment, they still loved each other, and that was enough. Her love couldn't be given to anyone else but the person standing before her right now.

Only her Akhira.

Dr. Panipak tilted her head up slightly as her lover moved in closer until she could feel her warm breath. Their lips touched gently, the cold replaced by the warmth from her love. It was warmer than any thick clothing. Just by being together, neither of them feared the cold anymore.

"I love you," Akhira said.

"..."

"I love you...so much I don't know what to say."

Dr. Panipak met Akhira's gaze with a smile. She knew she loved her... she'd always known that.

She'd known that for a long time...

"I love you too."

*I love you...*

*So much I don't know what to say either.*

*"Good thing you didn't give the ring I gave you to someone else."*

*"Good thing you didn't give the ring I gave you to someone else."*

*"Aren't you exaggerating it a bit much?"*

*"But you really do like to do that."*

*"..."*

*"You like to give away things I give you to someone else."*

*"But this is a ring. How could I give it to someone else?"*

*"Even the green tea I gave you, you gave away to someone else."*

"..."

It seemed Akhira was ready to start anew in every aspect, except for the green tea incident. No matter how much time passed, she could always bring it up, and it appeared this mistake would forever be on Dr. Panipak's wrongdoing record.

*This is totally your fault, green tea-*

END





# Chain



## Chain Special Chapters 1

The morning birds chirped joyously, as if they were greeting each other, and they extended that greeting to the homeowner, who was still sound asleep. The person lying on the soft bed began to stir. The slender figure moved slightly before her beautiful eyes opened to welcome the morning sunlight filtering through the curtains.

Dr. Panipak lay still for just a moment before getting out of bed with vigor. She immediately went to the bathroom to freshen up. She spent about half an hour showering and getting dressed before heading downstairs.

"Oh, Pleng, you're up? Perfect timing. Breakfast is ready. Go sit and wait for me," her mother said.

"Mom," Dr. Panipak said, crossing her arms and watching her mother, who was meticulously dusting and cleaning her wedding photo. At first, she thought her mother would only be excited about it for a short while after getting it, but it had been almost a month, and the excitement still hadn't faded. The photo her mother had ordered to be displayed in the house was enormous. She had asked for just a small picture, but her mother wouldn't listen. She didn't understand why her mother was so excited about it. Honestly, it made her feel a bit strange.

Well, she was also embarrassed. Even the one at her condo wasn't as gigantic as this. And it wasn't just the one at her mother's house—the one at Madam Nada's house was probably the same. Her mother had mentioned that they ordered the photos together.

The two close friends sure got along well. Didn't her mother think she'd be embarrassed? It wasn't just family members who would see it; other guests would see it too.

It wasn't because she was embarrassed about marrying a woman; it was for other reasons. She'd never kept it a secret. Everyone at the hospital knew who her partner was.

*That person was Akhira*, who had been seen as her girlfriend from the start, even though they weren't together at that time. But people spoke as if they knew the future. Back then, she vehemently denied that there was no way this person would become a part of her life. But look at her now.

They were married. They were in love. And she missed her so much that she didn't want to stay alone in her condo while her partner was abroad. She came back to her mother's house because she feared being lonely during the holidays. She wondered how her partner was doing

and whether her work was going smoothly. Even though she wanted to know, she chose not to call her, fearing she would disturb her partner's work.

"When will Zo come over for a meal? Haven't you invited her, Pleng?"

"She's busy, Mom. I'll invite her when she's free," Dr. Panipak replied with a slight smile. Both she and Akhira rarely had matching free time. It was hard to find time. Like today, it was her day off, but her partner was abroad.

Finding time to relax together was already difficult, let alone bringing her partner over for a meal. It wasn't just her mother who mentioned this; she'd heard Akhira's mother wanted to meet her too. She wanted to meet them more often, but time didn't allow it.

Many thought that after getting married, she'd reduce her workload, spend less time at the hospital, and focus on her clinic or her partner. But nothing changed. She still worked at the hospital, maybe not as much as before, but not significantly less either.

Holidays or happy times always seemed to pass quickly, but Dr. Panipak didn't feel that way, maybe because she was waiting for someone to return. The time that others said flew by felt like long days for her.

"I'll have the nurse prepare your medication," she said softly, her gentle voice and slight smile comforting the patient. Dr. Panipak looked up at the patient again and smiled as a farewell. Soon, the room fell silent as she was alone.

She glanced at the desk calendar nearby. It had been almost a month since she and her partner got married and started their life together. They had been living together before, but it officially started after the wedding. If asked if it felt different, not much had changed. Their social status was clearer, but everything else remained the same.

She used to think that people who wanted to be together had to get married first, but times had changed. Besides, how would you know if you would be compatible in the future if you didn't try living together first? How much could you tolerate each other's habits? Honestly, she hadn't



planned to live with her partner before marriage, but it just happened, and she went along with it.

*And now, it seemed she couldn't back out.*

"The last patient is here, Doctor."

Dr. Panipak looked up, nodded, and smiled before glancing at the clock. Seeing that it was the end of her shift, she sighed softly. Her beautiful eyes looked at the door that had just closed, wondering why the nurse hadn't brought the patient's file. Soon, the door opened again, but it wasn't who she expected.

The slender figure at the desk smiled at the new arrival. This must be the last patient the nurse mentioned, and a special one at that—no wonder the nurse didn't get her the patient's file.

The tall figure sat opposite the doctor with a smile, and soon their conversation began.

"What's your condition?" Dr. Panipak asked.

"I'm head over heels for a doctor. What should I do?" the patient replied.

"Well, break up with her, and you'll be alright."

"Pleeeeng!" The playful expression vanished from Akhira's face upon hearing the response.

Dr. Panipak smiled and shook her head, feeling superior, knowing she'd win this round. She was just teasing, but every time she said something like this, Akhira would pout, even though she knew it was a joke.

The tall figure got up and walked over to the teasing doctor, pressing her nose into the soft hair of the smaller woman with affection. Dr. Panipak sat still, letting her partner kiss her, but when Akhira tried to do more, she stopped her. The beautiful lips paused as the doctor gently pushed her partner's face away.

"It's unhygienic here," she said softly, pushing her partner's shoulder gently again. Though she hadn't been outside, the hospital wasn't free from germs. She met patients all the time and didn't want her partner to get too close. Despite Akhira looking healthy, she had a chronic illness.

"Wait outside. Let me go to the restroom and get my things," Dr. Panipak said, taking off her outer coat and signaling her partner to leave.

"Let me pack for you while you go to the restroom," Akhira offered, and she wasn't just saying it. She immediately started packing the doctor's belongings, knowing exactly what was needed without being told.

They walked out of the doctor's office together under the envious eyes of the nurses. Even though Dr. Panipak and Akhira weren't showing affection or holding hands, just walking side by side, they looked perfect together, making them seem adorable to others.

"How did you get here? Who picked you up from the airport?" Dr. Panipak asked.

"I drove. Let's go home together," Akhira replied.

"I can't. I drove here," Dr. Panipak said.

"Leave your car here. I'll drive you tomorrow," Akhira suggested.

"No, I don't want to leave my car here," Dr. Panipak insisted.

"Then let's take your car, and I'll come back for mine tomorrow," Akhira offered.

"No." Dr. Panipak firmly rejected the idea. Leaving a car here wasn't an option. Wasn't she worried about her car one bit? Even though the hospital had security cameras everywhere, she didn't agree with leaving the car at the hospital.

"You've worked all day. Wouldn't it be a good idea if I drove?"

Dr. Panipak shook her head. She should be the one saying that. The person who had just gotten off a plane and came straight here had no right to say that. Even though traveling by plane wasn't physically demanding, any form of travel was exhausting.

"No, drive back to the condo. I'll drive my own car," she insisted.

"I shouldn't have taught you to drive," Akhira muttered softly, making Dr. Panipak turn to look at her.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"Nothing," Akhira replied.

*In the end, she had to give in.*

Akhira already knew that she couldn't go against Dr. Panipak, so she stopped arguing and obediently did as she was told. It might seem like she was always at a disadvantage, always giving in, but that wasn't the case. There were things she could compromise on and things she couldn't. No one was above the other; they just considered the matter case by case. And in this case, Akhira had to give in because she didn't have enough reason to argue back.

"Are you full already? Why did you eat so little?"

"You can keep eating. I'm full," Akhira replied, neatly gathering her utensils. Even though she said that, she continued to sit and watch the other person without getting up.

"Is it not tasty?" Dr. Panipak asked with curiosity. Normally, Akhira ate a lot. No matter what she made or how much there was, she'd finish it, but today was different.

Akhira just smiled at her and shook her head slightly. She was quite straightforward. If the food weren't good, she'd say so. And when the food in front of her wasn't to her taste, she didn't see the point in continuing to eat.

"Should I make something else for you? What do you want to eat?"

"No, it's okay. I'm full."

"Really?"

"Yes, I had some on the plane."

"I'm sorry. Next time, I'll cook," Dr. Panipak said with a gentle, guilty tone. She felt tired today, so she decided to buy food from outside instead of cooking, thinking it'd save time and allow both of them to rest. But it turned out that Akhira ate so little that she became worried.

Akhira smiled slightly at Dr. Panipak when she saw her worried face. In truth, she could eat very little if it wasn't food the other made. She didn't know if it was because other people's cooking didn't suit her taste or if she'd become so accustomed to Dr. Panipak's cooking that nothing else satisfied her. No one could cook as deliciously as she did.

**23:05**

"Go take a shower already. Why do I have to tell you this every day?" The person stretched out on the sofa working had to turn to the voice with a slight start. There really wasn't a single day that Akhira didn't get scolded by Dr. Panipak about this.

But even so, she still pretended to be oblivious, tilting her cheek toward the person walking toward her. This time, however, she was surprised because Dr. Panipak didn't perform her usual duty.

"No, I don't want to kiss someone dirty."

"Pleng... I'm not dirty," Akhira said softly, pretending to be sad when accused of being dirty. Dr. Panipak just shook her head at the childish behavior. When she was with others, she seemed so mature, but with her, she always acted like a child.

In truth, she wasn't disgusted or anything; she just said it to tease her. If she gave in, Akhira would never go take a shower. If left alone, she'd probably work all night. This was the best way to handle her stubbornness, a method she discovered herself.

"You still have to go take a shower. Otherwise, I'll go to bed," Dr. Panipak reiterated, making Akhira put down her work immediately.

"Okay, okay, I'll go. But wait, I'll be quick."

Even though Akhira asked her to wait and promised she'd be quick, she was too late. The sight before her showed that the person on the bed was already fast asleep.

Akhira walked closer, gently pressing her nose to Dr. Panipak's beautiful cheek. Her slender hand softly stroked Panipak's hair before pulling the blanket up a bit and stepping away to get dressed. Even though she missed out on a kiss from the beautiful doctor tonight, there was always tomorrow. She could make up for it then.

Tonight, she let her sleep because she seemed very tired. The nurse had mentioned that she had examined patients from morning until the end of her shift. Akhira didn't know if she had time to rest or eat. Today must have been really exhausting for her.

It was clear that she tried to do everything quickly to rest. Normally, she'd cook, but today, she suggested buying food from outside. She probably didn't have the energy to cook like usual. Akhira understood and didn't push. In fact, letting her rest was good. She felt like she had been taking advantage of her lately somehow.

Even though they cooked together, someone who wasn't good at cooking, like Akhira, could only help by chopping vegetables. It just reduced the time and steps but didn't really lessen Dr. Panipak's burden.

When the lights went out, Akhira carefully slipped under the same blanket as the doctor. Her long arm gently hugged her lover as she did every day. Her beautiful face nestled against her back with longing. Even though they'd been apart for only a few days, for Akhira, sleeping alone was something she wasn't used to.

The scent of the other person made her inhale deeply, like an addict. Soon after, Akhira succumbed to sleep, following Dr. Panipak with a smile on her face.

*She hoped that they'd continue to be this happy.*

*And she hoped it would only get better.*

## Chain Special Chapters 2

Dr. Panipak began to stir as something disturbed her sleep. Her long, beautiful eyelashes fluttered slowly before she opened her eyes to take in her surroundings. Just as she suspected, the source of the disturbance was the person lying next to her.

"Awake already?"

"Mmm," she murmured softly. It wasn't a response but rather a groan that clearly indicated her drowsiness. Dr. Panipak buried her face deeper into the large pillow as the person behind her playfully nibbled at her neck. The mix of sleepiness and a tingling sensation greeted her that morning, even though she wasn't fully awake yet.

Akhira's slender hand caressed the doctor's smooth stomach, slowly moving downward until it reached her lower abdomen. It wouldn't be long before it slipped under her pajama pants if the other didn't stop it.

"I have a stomachache."

The doctor spoke while grabbing Akhira's wrist to halt the action, her eyes still closed. Akhira immediately straightened up, her expression changing. Her beautiful eyebrows furrowed with concern as she quickly withdrew her hand and sat up straight.

"What's wrong? Do you need to see a doctor?"

"It's just a dull ache in my stomach. I think my period is coming," Dr. Panipak replied, opening her eyes to look at her partner's worried face. She then sat up after feeling fully awake, gently cupping Akhira's face and giving her a light kiss on the cheek as an apology.

"Maybe another time," she said before getting out of bed and heading straight to the bathroom, leaving her worried partner sitting alone with a pout.

Akhira could do nothing but watch the bathroom door close with a slight sense of dejection. Since her partner said so, she had to give up. Nature sure has its way of intervening. She wasn't angry at nature for interrupting them but was upset because it caused her lover pain.

"Are you sure you don't want me to drive you to work?"

"Yes, I have to go to the clinic this evening. It's more convenient if I take my own car."

"Alright, drive carefully and stay away from others, okay?"

"I know. I've always done that," the slender figure replied calmly, bringing a smile to the listener's face. It was unclear whether she meant the car or people, but Akhira concluded that Dr. Panipak meant both.

Akhira smiled at her partner again before opening the car door for her to get in. She gently closed the door and waved goodbye before heading to her own car to drive to work.

The phone ringing beside the seat caught the doctor's attention. She shook her head slightly when she saw the caller's name. After a brief pause, she answered with a small smile.

"What's up?"

[Have you arrived there yet?]

"Not yet. I'm stuck at a red light. What is it?"

[I want to ask if you want green tea.]

"Why?"

[Well, I'm going to buy it for you.]

"I can stop by and get it myself."

[Oh...] The voice on the other end sounded disappointed. The speaker couldn't help but smile at the other's effort. They'd just parted less than ten minutes ago, and she already called her.

*What's with her?*

"Or do you want coffee, Phee Zo? I can order it for you, and you can pick it up."

Dr. Panipak asked softly. She didn't even need to wait for an answer because she knew Akhira wouldn't refuse. As expected, Akhira quickly agreed as if waiting for this question.

"Alright, I have to go now. I'll order it for you and pick it up at the shop. And don't drive fast to catch up with me," she said before hanging up, preemptively warning Akhira. If she didn't, Akhira would likely speed and weave through traffic to catch up with her.

*This woman. She needs to calm down.*

Oh, right, another thing... She started calling Akhira "*Phee Zo*" because the latter insisted on it as a wedding gift, which she couldn't refuse. She was still getting used to it, but it was better than the first few times. Thinking back, it was amusing.

It was funny because she always had a reason for everything, but when it came to her partner, she often did irrational things. She even made a big deal out of small matters, like refusing to call her by her nickname for a year for some personal reason.

*How strange of her.*



But sometimes, we don't need a reason for everything in life. If something makes you happy and comfortable, just do it. There's no need to find a reason. Besides, whether it's a real name or a nickname, it doesn't matter. It's just a matter of getting used to it. Other than that, everything was the same. She was still the same Akhira.

"Ouch!"

"Neen, what's wrong?" Dr. Panipak was startled when her close friend suddenly cried out in pain and acted strangely, covering her eyes as if in agony.

"The glint of the diamond ring on your finger blinded me," Dr. Ninlaneen opened her eyes and smiled teasingly at her friend, her eyes twinkling mischievously. The concern Dr. Panipak had moments ago vanished upon hearing her friend's words.

"Come on, Neen. You scared me. Are you a kid?"

"Pleng, you've been so cheerful since you got married. Actually, it should be since Akhira came into your life. The woman who used to be all about work and seemed to have nothing else on her mind has noticeably changed. She's still a workaholic, but now she appears more vibrant and lively," Dr. Ninlaneen observed.

"Really? I feel the same," Dr. Panipak replied.

"Yeah, yeah, of course. I really want to know what Akhira feeds you to make you smile so often."

"Didn't I smile before?" Dr. Panipak asked her friend, genuinely curious. Being told this made her realize she might've been quite serious and stern before. Her mother had mentioned it, but she hadn't believed it then.

"You did, but not as often as now."

"Is that so? She doesn't give me anything special," Dr. Panipak replied seriously, thinking about it until Dr. Ninlaneen almost laughed at her friend's sincerity.

"Come on, tell me what she feeds you to make you so adorable."

"Maybe she feeds me with her hands and feet."

"Wait... Are you saying Akhira hits you?" Dr. Ninlaneen exaggeratedly widened her eyes in shock.

They stared at each other for a moment before smiling, understanding each other.

"Time to get to work. Isn't Pha off today?" Dr. Panipak changed the subject as it was almost time to start working.

"She took a day off—probably to treat her eyes. She also mentioned that your ring's gleam blinded her."

"Enough, get to work already," Dr. Panipak said again, and Dr. Ninlaneen had to give in and leave the room, allowing Dr. Panipak some alone time. She shook her head in amusement at her friend. Although she'd been with her partner for a long time, her friends still teased her as they used to. Maybe it was because she'd just gotten married that she became a target again. But it added some color to her life, reminding her of the past.

Lately, people had often remarked on her smile. It must be true, as many people have said. When we are happy, we tend to smile unconsciously. It wasn't that she had nothing to stress about now; she still had many things to think about. But those worries often faded away when she was with the person who made her happy. She had to thank her partner for turning ordinary, boring days into good ones.

Today's work went smoothly. There were patients, but not as many as the previous day. It made Dr. Panipak feel more at ease, even though there were still many patients. Yesterday had been particularly tough, so after getting through that, everything seemed easier. Her entire day was spent working as usual.

The slender figure noted down the details of her last patient on paper, handed it to the nurse, and glanced at the clock. When it was time, she packed her things and left the hospital without delay. She had an important errand to run and didn't want to keep the person she was meeting waiting.

**Dr. Panipak greeted the elder with a respectful wai as soon as she arrived.** The older woman smiled warmly, accepting the greeting with affection, and then told her driver to wait in the car so she could have some private time with her daughter-in-law.

"Have you eaten, Mom?" Dr. Panipak asked when they were alone.

"Yes, I have. How about you, Pleng? You just got off work. Do you want to eat something first?" Khun Ying Nara asked with a smile.

"No, it's okay, I'll eat with Phee Zo later."

The elderly woman smiled warmly at the sweet words, feeling a sense of joy she couldn't quite describe. She'd been waiting for her to call her by a more intimate title for the longest time. But Dr. Panipak had always stuck to calling her 'Khun Ying.' Even when she was openly dating her daughter, she still didn't stop calling her that. It wasn't until the two got married that Dr. Panipak finally changed the way she addressed her.

But it was worth it. Before, she'd only asked to be called 'Auntie,' but now she called her 'Mom' without hesitation. It was worth the wait. To be honest, her eldest daughter never failed her expectations. Even the daughter-in-law she found was to her liking.

"In that case, you should go. I don't want you getting home late."

"Okay."

It wasn't just about worrying that Dr. Panipak would get home late. Another reason to hurry was Akhira. Who knew if she'd be upset that she borrowed Dr. Panipak without prior notice?

## 21:47

It had been almost three hours that Akhira had been waiting for Dr. Panipak in the room without the latter contacting her. Calls went unanswered, so Akhira assumed she was busy with patients. But she couldn't understand why she was so late today. Despite her anxiety, Akhira, being mature, managed to keep her composure and control her emotions well.

She just sat quietly, waiting for the other person to return. Even though she was worried, she knew deep down that Dr. Panipak wasn't a child. She was an adult who could take care of herself. But thinking that didn't calm her mind much.

She sighed repeatedly before jumping up from the sofa when she heard the front door opening. It was a sign that the person she'd been waiting for had finally returned.

"Why are you so late?"

"I had some errands to run. I had my phone on silent, so I didn't hear it. I'm sorry I didn't tell you," Dr. Panipak replied, observing the other's expression, fearing she might be angry. But Akhira just nodded and sighed in relief, seeing her return safely.

"Next time, let me know first so I won't get worried." Dr. Panipak didn't respond; she smiled at her before heading to the kitchen. In truth, she hadn't put herself in any danger, she'd just gone out with Akhira's mother but hadn't told her.

"We're having fried rice tonight, okay?" Dr. Panipak informed the person who followed her into the kitchen. She quickly washed her hands and started cooking, knowing the other person probably hadn't eaten yet. And, of course, Akhira was responsible for chopping the vegetables.

The tall one took her position and started handling the vegetables that Dr. Panipak had prepared, knowing the routine well. Meanwhile, the doctor quickly put on an apron and began cooking.

The room was silent, with no conversation except for the sound of the knife hitting the cutting board. Soon, that sound ceased, followed by Akhira's calm voice.

"Pleng."

"Yes?" Dr. Panipak looked up from her task, turning to the taller figure with curiosity, waiting for what she'd say next.

"Well, I... Nothing." Akhira seemed hesitant before denying it. She washed the knife after finishing cutting the vegetables and quietly left the kitchen, leaving the doctor to cook alone.

Dr. Panipak watched Akhira leave with concern. She didn't understand why people with something on their minds always said it was nothing. Maybe she was worried about that. She thought she'd figured her out this time. Even though they'd agreed to share and ask about everything—not to assume—in this case, she probably didn't want to trouble her, so she chose to keep quiet.

From cooking together to finishing dinner, Akhira remained silent, not talking to the doctor as she usually did.

Dr. Panipak glanced at the person leaning against the headboard for a moment before moving to sit at the vanity after she had just showered. Tonight, she didn't have to tell Akhira to shower

because she'd already done everything before she got home. Even though she didn't have to tell her to shower tonight, it seemed she had to do something else instead.

The tall figure, working, had to look away from the screen to see what was disturbing her. Akhira reached out to gently stroke her lover's hair when she snuggled her face into her side affectionately.

The one doing it didn't say anything, just continued to snuggle, wrapping one arm around Akhira's waist as if afraid she'd disappear.

"What do you want for your birthday this year?" The muffled voice made Akhira look down at the person snuggling against her with surprise.

"You remembered? I thought you forgot." The last sentence was said softly, but because of their closeness, Dr. Panipak heard it clearly. She knew her lover probably wanted to talk about this for days but hadn't found the right moment.

She probably wanted her to be there for her birthday but was too considerate to ask. As everyone knew, her job didn't allow for spontaneous breaks or plans.

"Your mom is throwing a party at home tomorrow, right?" she asked, even though she already knew. She knew almost everything that would happen because she'd talked to Akhira's mom. The reason she was late was that she went shopping for the party with her, but she didn't want to tell the birthday girl.

"That's what she said, but I might not be free that day." Dr. Panipak looked up at Akhira, puzzled.

*Not free? What did she mean?*

"Why not? Is your work that busy?"

Akhira didn't answer. In truth, she could make herself free, but what was the point of celebrating her birthday without her lover? It's not that being with family wasn't good; it was, but she just wanted it to be better. She wanted everyone to be together.

"I was thinking of asking Mom to postpone it. It doesn't have to be on the exact day."

"Why?"

"..."

"Is it because of me?"

"I just want you to be there. We can celebrate when you're free." Akhira's words made her feel a pang in her chest. Dr. Panipak knew she didn't have much time, and on a special day, Akhira probably wanted her to be there.

"So... what do you want for your birthday this year?" the doctor sat up, looking at her seriously.

"I don't really want anything."

It wasn't an unexpected answer. She'd anticipated this response. Finding a birthday gift for Akhira was the hardest task. What more could someone who had everything in life want from others? She couldn't think of anything.

Because Akhira never asked for anything from her and she had enough money to buy almost anything in the world, finding a gift she'd like was very difficult.

Still, sometimes, people overthink and forget many things.

It was true that Akhira had enough money to buy anything she wanted, but Dr. Panipak forgot that there were some things money couldn't buy.

"Is there really nothing you want?"

Akhira thought again before answering with a calm voice but with a hint of hope. Because what Akhira wanted did exist, but she didn't know if the other person could give it to her.

*What she wanted most.*

"I want your time." After that sentence, both fell silent, and their eyes met. Akhira looked at her with a pleading gaze. That was what she truly wanted, but if she couldn't have it, it was okay because, besides her, she didn't want anything else. If she could ask for one thing, it'd be for Dr. Panipak to stay by her side.

"I'm always here. I'm not going anywhere." Even though she knew what Akhira meant, she pretended not to. She knew well that what she wanted was her free time, to go on trips together, to spend more time each day together.

"Let's sleep; it's late." Akhira smiled slightly and told her to rest, seeing it was very late. She chose to drop the trivial matter. She didn't feel that hurt because she understood the doctor's situation well.

"And will you sleep now, or will you continue working?" It might sound like a normal question, but Akhira knew it had another meaning. If she said she'd continue working, someone here would surely sulk and turn her back on her.

"No, I'll call it a day." She immediately put her work down on the bedside table to confirm her words, showing her she wasn't lying. She got up from the bed, turned off the lights, and returned to lie down as before.

Akhira lay down on the bed, arms open wide, waiting to embrace the slender body moving closer like she always did every night. Akhira tightened her embrace slightly, her prominent nose pressing gently into the soft hair of the person in her arms with love, before closing her eyes to let both herself and Dr. Panipak rest.

Under the large blanket in the pitch-dark room, two people lay cuddling, sharing warmth with each other. The steady rhythm of their breathing indicated that the owner of the embrace had already fallen asleep.

The beautiful eyes of the slender figure slowly opened. In no time, her eyes adjusted, allowing her to see things more clearly. The most prominent sight at this moment was the body of her lover. Even in the darkness, Dr. Panipak could see Akhira's face clearly.

Normally, she would've fallen asleep with her by now, but perhaps because something was still weighing on her mind, she couldn't sleep. The reason she was still awake was because of Akhira's words. Time—that was what she wanted most from her. She understood that well, but she wasn't sure if Akhira understood what she'd told her earlier.

Her slender fingers gently brushed the other's cheek, causing the dreaming woman to furrow her brows slightly and try to move her face away as if annoyed, making the observer smile.

Akhira was a smart person, but when it came to love, she was straightforward—so straightforward that sometimes she didn't understand. Her blunt words often left her at a loss, like the conversation they had today. She'd asked what she wanted for her birthday, expecting her to ask for something tangible. But her answer was something she couldn't quite grasp.

*For a birthday gift, she said she wanted her time.*

*Her time.*

Dr. Panipak smiled slightly, looking at her lover's face with a gentle smile before whispering a sentence that Akhira would never hear.

"I've already given you my whole life."

*It might not be much, but it was enduring.*

### Chain Special Chapter 3

This morning was a surprising one for Akhira. When she woke up, she found the person in her arms still sleeping soundly beside her. She glanced at the clock for a moment before furrowing her eyebrows. Her brain was processing something. Normally, at this time, Dr. Panipak would have already showered, dressed, and prepared breakfast. But why was she still in bed today?

"Pleng,"

"...."

"Aren't you getting up for work? It's getting late." Akhira whispered to the peacefully sleeping person.

There was no reply. Instead, Dr. Panipak turned away, burying her face into the large pillow as if annoyed. The more Akhira saw her behavior, the more curious she became. Dr. Panipak wasn't a lazy person. She didn't seem sick either; she didn't have a fever or any other symptoms.

"In that case, I'll go shower first. You can sleep a bit more," Akhira said, getting out of bed and heading straight to the bathroom to save time—not for herself, but for her lover. If she delayed, they'd both be late.

She could clock in at any time; it wasn't an issue for her. But for the doctor, it was different.



Akhira didn't take long in the bathroom. She came out fully dressed, only needing to do her hair and makeup to be completely ready. In contrast, Dr. Panipak seemed to have just woken up.

The slender figure sitting quietly on the bed met her gaze for a moment before walking into the bathroom without a word. The doctor's unhurried demeanor puzzled Akhira. Not only did she seem unconcerned, but she also appeared relaxed, not in a rush as she usually would be.

It was hard not to be suspicious. It was already past seven, but why was the beautiful doctor acting as if she had no work today? Or maybe Akhira was overthinking it.

*Maybe she planned to go to work later today.*

But when Dr. Panipak came out of the bathroom, she still looked unhurried. She sat in the vanity, doing her hair and makeup leisurely. Akhira could only sit quietly at the edge of the bed, watching her.

"Can you take me to the mall today? I want to buy something," Dr. Panipak said.

"Do you want me to pick you up after work?"

"No. I mean this morning."

"This morning?" Akhira's confused face made Dr. Panipak chuckle a bit before she smiled at her, who seemed clueless.

"Oh, I forgot that you aren't free today. Never mind then," she said when she saw Akhira was still silent.

"I'm free! I'm free," Akhira quickly replied as soon as she gathered her thoughts. Even though she didn't fully understand, her request indicated she wasn't going to work today. How could she miss this opportunity?

"Didn't you say last night that you weren't free?" Dr. Panipak smiled, amused by Akhira's reaction. Finally, Akhira realized she was teasing her.

"Why didn't you tell me you took the day off? And when did you request leave?"

"A while ago. If I didn't, someone around here would surely whine."

"I'm not whining."

"Really?" Dr. Panipak said, shaking her head slightly at Akhira's denial. Last night, she looked so downcast.

*You surely did.*

Akhira was about to say more but decided to stay silent when she remembered something. Arguing wouldn't change anything. Besides, her lover had taken the day off for her; why should she question it? The reason was clear. Even if she didn't say it outright, Akhira knew the answer.

The reason she took the day off was that today was her birthday.

This doctor could be quite sly. She didn't give her any advance notice and let her think she'd be busy on her birthday.

In truth, Akhira hadn't celebrated her birthday in a long time, either in Thailand or abroad. With her responsibilities, special days had become just ordinary days. But this year was different because her mother wanted to organize a celebration for her. As a daughter, she couldn't refuse and disappoint her.

*That's why this year's birthday was being celebrated.*

"I'm ready," Dr. Panipak said, turning to her lover, who was waiting nearby. But she paused when the final step didn't go as smoothly as expected. Something felt off, and she looked down at the empty perfume bottle in her hand.

She sighed softly. This was her regular perfume; she only had one bottle. *Why does it have to run out today?* But then again, she'd been using it for a long time. It wasn't surprising that it ran out; she just hadn't noticed.

"You can use mine," Akhira suggested immediately upon noticing that. Dr. Panipak looked at her for a moment before glancing at the perfume bottle nearby. She picked it up and sniffed it, even though she already knew the scent.

She'd never used Akhira's perfume before; she only smelled it on her. Honestly, it smelled different from the bottle than it did on her. She thought Akhira's scent was even better than the perfume itself.

"Or do you not like it? Is it not to your liking?" Akhira asked, seeing her hesitation.

"No, it's nice," Dr. Panipak replied. It smelled nice on Akhira; it wasn't just nice but very pleasant. But if she used it, it might not smell as good. She wasn't sure if it'd suit her.

It's true that people choose perfumes, but perfumes also choose people. The same scent might not suit everyone.

"I'm just not sure if it'll suit me," she explained, seeing the other's confused expression. Akhira probably wondered why she said it smelled nice but took so long to decide and seemed reluctant to use it.

"Just try it. If you don't try, you won't know," Akhira encouraged. Because of her words, the doctor reluctantly agreed. But she used it sparingly, as if she just wanted to test it. Dr. Panipak lightly sprayed it on her neck.

Before she could process the scent on her skin, Akhira approached with a strange look on her face, making her frown.

"What?" Dr. Panipak asked.

Akhira didn't answer but leaned in close, causing her to pull back. But it was futile; her nose was already touching her neck.

She pressed her nose against her soft skin a few times, inhaling the faint fragrance before pulling back to look at her.

"I think it smells nice. Why are you making that face?" Akhira asked.

*Uh...*

She wasn't sure if Akhira was teasing her or what. Her startled expression was because of her sudden move, not the perfume. Didn't she realize she was surprised by her action? She would have smelled it from a distance; there was no need to get so close. Her action was more like kissing than smelling. She thought they wouldn't be able to leave the room this morning.

*Is this how people test perfumes nowadays?*

"Are you sure you don't want breakfast first?" Dr. Panipak asked again as they were about to leave the room. She'd asked Akhira that several times, and her answer was the same. Yet, she kept asking, hoping she might change her mind.

"We can eat out. I don't want you to get tired," Akhira replied.

"It's not that big of a deal."

"What?"

"I said it's not that big of a deal."

Making breakfast for her lover wasn't a hassle. She was happy to do it and felt good every time Akhira complimented her cooking. She liked it when Akhira said the food was delicious and finished it all. Akhira was the one overthinking, being unnecessarily considerate. She'd been cooking for her for a long time.

"So, where are we going?" Akhira asked.

"To the temple."

"The temple?"

"To make merit for your birthday," she explained.

**The temple was bustling with people, even though it was a working day.** Despite the crowd, Akhira felt an inexplicable sense of peace. She had to admit that this place was quite foreign to her.

"Let's buy some offerings first," Dr. Panipak said, leading her to a stall selling items for temple offerings.

"How much for a set?" she asked.

"One hundred baht per set," the vendor replied.

"I'll take two sets," she said.

Akhira watched silently as she paid for the offerings. She didn't know what to do, so she just followed her instructions. She took the items from her and followed her quietly. Besides flowers, incense, and candles, she bought several other items to offer to the temple.

"Light the candles here first," Dr. Panipak instructed. Then, they went to pay respect to the Buddha statue. There was no conversation. After praying, Akhira sat quietly, waiting for her to finish her silent prayer. She held the flowers, incense, and candles until the doctor opened her eyes.

"Put the flowers there and light the incense," Dr. Panipak whispered to the person sitting beside her. Her beautiful face, adorned with a slight smile, shook a little at her lover's clumsy actions. If she didn't tell her, she wouldn't do it. She was probably afraid of making a mistake, so she just waited for her instructions.

How strange... She was Thai, but she looked so nervous and unsure if what she was doing was right. Today was the first time Akhira seemed so jittery.

"Have you ever been to a temple before?" Dr. Panipak teased her lover as soon as they walked out of the building. She wasn't asking to criticize her; she just found it amusing.

"I don't usually do this kind of thing."

Of course, she grew up abroad. How could she visit temples often? She herself hadn't even gotten the chance to come often nowadays. Since starting work, she's been so busy that she couldn't find the time. But today, coming here felt really good. It was a sense of peace she couldn't quite explain, and being with the one she loved made it even better. She thought it was one of those good days.

Before they could step out of the temple, Akhira noticed something that caught her interest.

"That's a donation box. You can put money in it for merit," the slender figure told the person who seemed curious about her surroundings. She thought she probably knew what it was, but she said that out of habit. Usually, if there were something Akhira didn't know or understand, she'd explain it to her. Hearing that, Akhira didn't hesitate and went straight to the donation box, pulling out some money.

"Don't you have smaller bills?" Dr. Panipak was about to take out a hundred-baht bill from her purse, seeing that she didn't have any change, but she stopped herself.

"It's okay," Akhira said, and Dr. Panipak fell silent. She wasn't even sure if Akhira had ever used "smaller" bills, but it didn't matter. She was wealthy enough that even if she put in her whole wallet, it wouldn't be a problem. She was just asking out of curiosity, not to discourage her act of charity.

Dr. Panipak stood nearby, waiting. When she saw that Akhira had finished putting money in the box, she prepared to move on but was stopped.

“Wait a moment.”

“What is it?”

“I’m putting some in for you, too.” Dr. Panipak watched as the tall person took out her wallet again and dropped a thousand-baht bill into the donation box.

“Let’s put some in for our family, too.” Naturally, that statement didn’t end with just one bill; a few more followed. If she really put one in for each member, it’d probably be a dozen.

Dr. Panipak couldn’t help but smile at Akhira’s sweet gesture. Ever since she could remember, whatever she did, she always thought of her and others. Maybe that’s why she always gave in to her, and now she couldn’t imagine being without her.

*How could she not love someone so adorable?*

After leaving the temple, the couple headed straight to the mall as planned. Their breakfast was at a restaurant there. Nothing was special, but they were content and happy with their simple life.

After eating, they did a bit of shopping. When they reached the perfume section, Dr. Panipak, who was walking ahead, turned to look at her lover when she gently tapped her from behind. Akhira pointed inside, making her turn to look.

*Oh, right, I forgot that my perfume has run out.*

If Akhira hadn’t mentioned it, she would’ve walked past it. Even when it came to her own needs, she needed her lover to remind her.

"Does this one smell good?" Dr. Panipak asked, handing a paper strip to the person beside her to get her opinion. The taller person bent down obediently. She'd been choosing for a while and was starting to feel dizzy, unsure whether to stick with her usual scent or try something new.

"It smells nice."

Dr. Panipak bit her lip slightly before deciding on two scents: one was her usual brand, and the other was a new one she thought might be the best for her.

"Just these two? Why not buy more?"

"This is enough," Dr. Panipak replied with a smile. The sooner they bought it, the sooner they could leave. They'd spent quite a bit of time here, and she was worried Akhira might get bored. Besides, Akhira didn't seem to be very fond of these perfumes.

True, Akhira could use them, but from what she observed, her perfumes were always mild, and she only had one bottle. People with allergies often react to chemicals, and she might be allergic to something in certain perfumes. Since she didn't know what the manufacturers put in them, some ingredients might be too strong. So, she thought it best to choose quickly and move on.

"I'll pay for it." Before Dr. Panipak could pay for the perfume, she had to put her wallet back when the tall person beat her to it.

"They say buying perfume for your partner is a bad omen, you know?"

"Why?"

"Haven't you heard of it? They say their love will fade like the scent of perfume."

She was silent for a moment, her sharp eyes meeting hers before looking away and speaking softly.

"It's okay."

"....."

"My money is like your money. If I buy it, it's like we bought it." If everything belonged to both of them, it meant no one was buying for anyone. Whether that belief was true or not, Akhira didn't want to dwell on it.

Dr. Panipak fell silent after hearing that. Even though they didn't have a joint account for their daily spending, it didn't feel much different from having one. It was hard to explain. Maybe because they were married, they felt that everything belonged to both of them.

*No matter who bought or owned something, it was theirs.*

She didn't bring it up to discourage her. It just popped into her head. Even though she didn't believe in it much, she felt a bit worried. But hearing Akhira's words made her feel better.

Let beliefs be beliefs. She and her lover would do what made them happy. Today, Akhira was happy to buy her perfume and would gladly accept it.

If one day their love faded, it wouldn't be because of perfume. Some people follow every belief, avoid all taboos, and fear even the smallest things, yet they still break up. Clearly, those things don't cause it. It's their feelings that change, making love fade.

*Don't blame the perfume. If you have to blame something, blame yourselves.*



"Pot, wait! Don't run, dear!"

The voice of an elderly woman followed closely behind a little boy, causing Dr. Panipak to turn and look when she heard her mother's voice. Soon, the small boy came running into the Watcharakitkun house in a hurry, his voice cheerful.

"Auntie Pleng!"

There he was—her nephew, carrying a present. As soon as he saw his beautiful aunt, he clung to her legs to get her attention. But before Dr. Panipak could bend down to pick him up, the mischievous boy quickly let go of her and ran straight to another tall figure, asking to be picked up.

"Auntie Khira!"

"Hello, Mom," the tall figure who had just walked out greeted the elder with a wai before lifting the mischievous child up to her chest.

"Pot was rushing me, saying he wanted to see you as soon as possible. He ran straight into the house. He probably misses you a lot," Dr. Panipak's mother said after returning Akhira's greeting. Dr. Panipak could only listen and watch her nephew and Akhira playing together. She wondered if her nephew was so excited to see her or if he was more thrilled to visit Auntie Khira.

"This is a gift from us. I hope you like it."

"Thank you very much. Actually, just coming here and having a meal together with us is enough," Akhira said, smiling at Dr. Panipak's mother while extending a hand to receive the gift.

"Dis is Pot's. Pot geevs it to Auntie Khira," the little boy quickly added, eagerly handing over what he was holding. It was a heartwarming sight for those watching.

"What did you get for Auntie?" the tall figure asked curiously, making the little boy beam with pride, thinking the adult was excited about his gift. He then shyly buried his face into the tall figure's shoulder, acting all cute, which made Akhira smile at his adorableness.

Pot came with his grandparents today since his parents couldn't make it. Akhira understood well, knowing that Dr. Panipak's brother and sister-in-law had a baby to care for, making frequent travel inconvenient.

"Mom and Dad, let's go inside. They should be almost done preparing in there," Akhira suggested as she saw another elder approaching, not wanting to waste any time.

"Oh, you're here! Come in and relax. Please make yourselves comfortable," Khun Ying Nara, who bumped into them, quickly arranged a place for the guests. Even though they were friends, since they came as guests, they deserved a special welcome.

"Zo, why don't you take Pot to get some snacks?" she instructed her daughter before heading inside. Akhira complied, and Khun Ying Nara watched her daughter's back with a happy smile.

This was the first birthday party for her eldest daughter in years. Although it wasn't anything extravagant as Akhira had requested—she just wanted everyone to enjoy a good meal together—her mother couldn't help but go against her wishes a bit by organizing a small party with the help of her son. After all, a birthday should have some celebration, and a dull atmosphere wouldn't do. But it seemed the birthday girl wasn't that thrilled about it.

Perhaps it was because her daughter had grown too mature to get excited about such things. It made her feel a bit sad and regretful. Although there were times when she flew over to celebrate birthdays together, it wasn't often. Time passed, and Akhira grew up. If she could turn back time, she would've done more for her daughter.

But since she couldn't change the past, she did her best in the present, just like she was trying to do now.

"Mom," Dr. Panipak's voice brought Khun Ying Nara back to reality. They held hands and walked inside together. Dr. Panipak also missed them. Even though they'd just met recently, she still had many things she wanted to talk about with them.

**To be honest, this wasn't something Akhira was used to.** She might be the most awkward birthday girl ever. From the moment Dr. Panipak brought in the cake to when she was blowing out the candles with Pot, she still felt tense. Even though the people in front of her were all family, she couldn't help but feel strangely embarrassed.

As expected, the large piece of cake would end up with the youngest member of the family, Akhira's favorite nephew.

"Auntie Khira, Pot wants to eat that," the little boy pointed to a delicious-looking piece of meat on the barbecue grill, even though he already had a plate of cake and juice in his hands.

"Wait a moment, Auntie will get it for you," the tall figure told the child, who was always causing trouble, gently patting his head with affection. She then glanced at two people chatting nearby. Although they seemed close, she didn't feel any jealousy. In the past, she might have, but now she didn't mind. One was her sibling, and the other was her wife. If she couldn't trust them, she wouldn't be able to trust anyone.

The two chatted for a while, with Sun mostly initiating the conversation while the other listened. Dr. Panipak chuckled at something Sun said before excusing herself to bring more food to her mother.

"Mom, do you want anything else?" she asked both Madam Nara and her own mother, placing a plate of food in front of them.

"I'm fine. My teeth aren't great. Help yourself, dear," Madam Nara replied kindly. Dr. Panipak then turned to her own mother.

"I'm good, too. Why don't you give some to Zo? She hasn't eaten anything because Pot keeps bothering her."

Dr. Panipak glanced at Akhira with her nephew for a moment, then continued chatting with the elders for a bit before returning to the taller figure, who was now taking the grilled meat off the grill and placing it on a plate for her nephew.

The little boy's eyes sparkled as he was about to get what he wanted. He handed his cake and juice to Dr. Panipak before eagerly taking the plate of food from the adult with a big smile.

"Be careful. It's hot. Blow on it first," Dr. Panipak warned her nephew, worried that the hot food might burn his mouth. Pot obediently blew on the food with such determination that the onlookers feared he might pass out before getting to eat the delicious treat.

"Let me help you," she said, taking the plate from the child's hands.

"What were you talking about with Sun?" Akhira asked, glancing at her lover. As soon as the question was asked, Dr. Panipak smiled, making Akhira wonder what was so funny about her question.

"You're siblings. Shouldn't you know?" she teased.

"What should I know?" Akhira frowned slightly, wondering what exactly the other was trying to say and why Sun hadn't mentioned anything to her.

"Sun was asking for advice about something," she explained.

"Asking you? About what?"

"He said he has a crush on a girl, but it seems she isn't interested. So he asked me what he should do."

"Sun didn't tell me anything," Akhira replied truthfully. Even though they didn't see each other often, they still talked occasionally. Sun had never mentioned or asked her for advice.

"Maybe he thinks he can only talk to you about work."

"If it's about flirting with someone, he should definitely ask me," Akhira said confidently, feeling a bit upset that her brother had overlooked her.

"Why should he ask you? You aren't that good at it, are you?" she teased.

"But I managed to make you my girlfriend," she replied, making the other fall silent. Akhira seemed to be claiming that she was good at flirting because she'd successfully made Dr. Panipak fall for her.

"Then please give him some advice," Dr. Panipak said, trying to change the subject. It seemed the more they talked about it, the more cornered she felt.

She knew well that she was quite hard to approach, difficult to flirt with, and not very interested in anyone, which was why she'd been single until she met Akhira. It was probably a matter of timing that brought them together. Akhira gradually won her heart bit by bit until she had to admit to herself that she couldn't refuse this person any longer.

She wasn't sure if Akhira was really good at flirting or not because it was hard to judge. If asked for her opinion, she'd say Akhira was rather straightforward and sometimes did things that annoyed her. But in the end, she couldn't help but give in to her, perhaps because the other was sincere and harmless.

"Aren't you going to eat?" Akhira asked again, realizing she hadn't seen her eat anything except juice.

"I'm waiting for someone around here to grill it for me," she replied.

If you asked when Dr. Panipak would be affectionate with Akhira, the answer was when she least expected it. She could never predict when her lover would switch to a cute mode or act all sweet. Some people only got affectionate when they wanted something, hoping the partner would buy it then. But Dr. Panipak wasn't like that. She rarely got affectionate, and when she did, it was always a surprise. But the unpredictability added a bit of color to life.

Even though Akhira loved her partner's affectionate side, she didn't need it all the time. Just having her be herself, as she was now, was more than enough. Sometimes, she was strict; sometimes, she was cute; sometimes, she was indifferent; and sometimes, she was so affectionate it made her melt. It was this mix of traits that Akhira found charming about her.

"Auntie Khira, Pot wanna drink," her nephew's voice called out, drawing Akhira's attention away from Dr. Panipak. She looked over to see her nephew pointing his small finger at her glass.

"You have your own drink, sweetie," Dr. Panipak said, noticing that her nephew was eyeing another drink even though he hadn't finished what was in his hand.

"Want a drink," the little one whined, prompting Akhira to hand over the soda that wasn't far away. Once he got the new drink, the little boy didn't forget to swap it with his own juice.

"He's had a lot of snacks today, Phee Zo," Dr. Panipak protested as her partner handed the soda to their nephew.

"He wants it. It's okay. Just once in a while."

"But soda isn't good for him."

"Just a little bit."

Sometimes, Akhira thought Dr. Panipak was too strict. Sure, soda isn't good, but having it occasionally shouldn't be a big deal. Kids get their nutrients from other foods anyway. Besides, it seemed like the little one didn't get to have soda often, or he wouldn't be so adorably persistent, making Akhira give in.

"Alright, but just one glass."

"Yes, just one glass."

*It didn't end with just one glass.*

"Auntie Khira, Pot wants more," Pot asked again, and of course, the indulgent aunt couldn't refuse. But this leniency was a double-edged sword, hurting both the aunt and the nephew.

"Didn't you say just one glass?" Dr. Panipak gave Akhira a disapproving look. She'd promised just one glass, but every time the nephew asked, he got more. Even with her watching, she couldn't control it because whenever she looked away, both the child and the adult would act immediately. Instead of feeling guilty, she tried to negotiate with her.

"But Pot wants to drink it," she replied softly, as if knowing she was in the wrong.

"You said just one glass, but he's had a lot already. Why do you always spoil him?"

"Just for today."

"Ms. Akhira."

"...."

Akhira fell silent as soon as she heard her full name. She used to like it when her lover called her that, but now it was different. When her lover called her by her full name, it was a warning sign. Akhira had learned from living with Dr. Panipak. She used to gauge her mood by her tone, but now, if she said "Ms. Akhira," it usually didn't end well.

*If she wasn't getting the silent treatment, she was getting scolded.*

Dr. Panipak looked between her tall partner and their nephew, sighing softly in resignation. At this point, there was nothing she could do. Besides, it was her birthday, and she didn't want to ruin the mood. But sometimes she just couldn't help it.

Akhira was good with kids, but her flaw was being too indulgent. She's talked to her about this before, but changing someone's nature was hard. She worried that in the future, Pot might become even more spoiled if Akhira continued to be like this.

**21:00**

"You should stay the night."

"We can't. This troublemaker has school tomorrow," Dr. Panipak responded.

Madam Nara smiled at the response, looking fondly at the child snuggled against Dr. Panipak. The little one looked downcast, probably because it was late and he was tired, or maybe he just didn't want to leave. It wasn't just Khun Ying Nara who wished her parents could stay the night; Dr. Panipak felt the same. But since Pot had school the next day, they couldn't.

"Pot, we're leaving. Did you say goodbye to Auntie Khira?" As soon as Dr. Panipak finished speaking, the little boy pulled away from his aunt's embrace, extending his arms for a hug from Auntie Khira while still in Dr. Panipak's arms.

"I'll come pick you up for another visit soon, okay?" Akhira promised, seeing the little one looking sad. Her words seemed to work. The boy nodded and smiled brightly, happy with the promise. Akhira gently patted her nephew's back before stepping back with a smile.

Soon, the boy was handed over to his grandfather. Dr. Panipak gave him one last hug before hugging her parents again.

"Drive safely. You should've let me drive you," she said.

"My eyesight is still good, Pleng. Don't worry," her father replied.

"I know."

Even so, she couldn't help but worry. Part of her wanted to drive them herself, but her parents had firmly refused. At least she could take comfort in knowing her father was still strong and had good eyesight for his age.

Once Dr. Panipak's family car was out of sight, those who had come to see them off went back inside to rest.

"You two can go up to your room. I'll finish up a few things and then head to bed," Khun Ying Nara said to Akhira and Dr. Panipak before walking away, leaving both of them to themselves.

**21:11**

"I'll take a shower first, okay?" Dr. Panipak said.

The person who followed her into the room nodded, letting her shower first, understanding that she probably felt smoky from the grill. Akhira felt the same but could tolerate it. Besides, Dr. Panipak didn't take long showers, so waiting wasn't a problem.

"I'm done."

Akhira glanced at the person peeking out from the bathroom door before heading in, passing the one who was drying her hair in front of the mirror. Her sharp eyes briefly took in her figure in a bathrobe before she went to clean up with Dr. Panipak still in the room.

The bathroom was divided into dry and wet zones, with a partition for privacy, so neither felt awkward.

The sound of water hitting the floor lasted for a while before it stopped. The tall figure emerged in the same state as Dr. Panipak had been minutes earlier. The doctor watched her through the mirror, then turned off the hairdryer and stepped away from the counter.



"Come here, I'll dry your hair," she said, pulling her to stand in front of the mirror in her place and starting to towel-dry her wet hair. Akhira could only smile happily at her lover's actions.

"Are you going to help or tease me?"

"What are you talking about?" Dr. Panipak asked innocently.

Akhira grabbed the doctor's hands to stop her, feeling something was off. It was fine at first, but then she started drying so vigorously that her head was shaking. She wasn't sure if she was genuinely helping or something else. The doctor feigned innocence, acting like she didn't know what Akhira was talking about.

A sly smile crept onto her face when she realized she'd caught on. Had she just noticed? She'd been drying her hair roughly for a while now, but she only just mentioned it. Maybe she'd been too gentle at first.

Akhira held her hands and turned to face her, her sharp eyes scrutinizing her like a detective catching a suspect.

"You can continue drying your hair. I'm going to get dressed," she said, placing the towel on Akhira's arm and preparing to leave the increasingly unsafe situation. But before she could step out of the bathroom, Dr. Panipak was pulled back by the tall person.

In an instant, she found herself lifted onto the counter without realizing it. Akhira's long arms braced against the counter, trapping her.

Dr. Panipak was bewildered by Akhira's sudden strength. Sure, she was smaller, but their strength shouldn't be that different. The person in front of her smiled, but it was a smile she didn't want to see—*that mischievous smile*.

Even though she knew she might be punished by her lover, she didn't try to escape. Her beautiful eyes locked onto Akhira's face without saying a word. It'd been days since she'd looked at her lover this closely.

They locked eyes for a moment before Dr. Panipak was "punished." Her lips were stolen in a kiss, starting gently but quickly turning passionate as they were drawn to each other like a spark igniting a flame.

Akhira couldn't help but kiss the doctor repeatedly. The hands that had been supporting the counter had now moved to the other person's body instead. It must've touched a sensitive spot because Dr. Panipak jolted in surprise.

The one doing the action also paused, her eyebrows furrowing slightly before she reluctantly pulled away from the sweet lips to look at her with curiosity.

"Didn't you tell me you have a period?" Akhira asked, remembering that the day before, Dr. Panipak had said she had a stomachache because her period was coming. But now...

"When did I say that?"

"That time."

Dr. Panipak mentally exclaimed 'oh' as she remembered that morning. Akhira wanted to be intimate with her, but she felt strange, so she turned her down.

"I was just saying I might have a period, but I didn't say it was for sure."

It might sound like a flimsy excuse, but at that time, she really thought she was going to get her period. It felt that way, but it didn't come. This wasn't her fault because she didn't know. The body's natural mechanisms were unpredictable and beyond her control.

Lost in thought, Dr. Panipak didn't realize how much she was at a disadvantage. It seemed the tall person wasn't interested in her answer anymore as the hot lips began to nibble on her smooth shoulder insistently.

The doctor could only sit tense, breathing unevenly as the other person expertly aroused her. No matter how many times, she never got used to it. Her heart pounded so hard on the left side that she feared it'd be loud enough for the other to hear.

Dr. Panipak inadvertently gripped the tall person's shirt tightly as she felt the other's lips touch her neck and move down to her chest, making her anxious. Underneath the robe, there was nothing but her smooth skin.

The robe that had been properly on her body now slipped off one shoulder, revealing a beautiful bosom. The beautiful chest was nibbled on, making the owner shudder. The doctor raised an arm to grasp the shoulder of the person in front of her.

"Ah," a sweet voice escaped as she felt a slight pain in the sensitive area of her chest. The slender body exhaled heavily as the invasion intensified.

The smooth stomach under the robe was revealed as Akhira parted the robe. Dr. Panipak jolted again as her beautiful stomach felt the hot, moist lips of the other.

Akhira nibbled down the smooth skin, stopping to tease the beautiful navel for a moment until she felt a pain in her shoulder from the slender body inadvertently digging her nails in. But the

slight pain didn't bother Akhira. Her beautiful mouth continued its task, moving lower. The increasing pain told her how the person above was feeling.

Dr. Panipak could only close her eyes, tilting her head back to receive the sensual touch from her lover. One hand left the shoulder to grasp the other's soft hair uncontrollably.

"Phee Zo..." The broken voice called the name of the person below with a trembling tone, making the owner of the name feel triumphant. The sound of breathing and soft moans grew louder as the slender body approached the peak of ecstasy.

Soon, the final moan echoed, accompanied by the body trembling. The tall person pulled away from the beautiful thighs after bringing the other to heaven's gate, then moved up to meet the blushing person's eyes. The doctor averted her gaze, unable to meet the other's eyes.

Dr. Panipak breathed heavily, trying to steady her breath, thinking the night was over. But she paused again as Akhira didn't stop there. The gorgeous face moved in to kiss her lips lightly before moving to her neck, lulling her into a trance before she felt something invading her sensitive area.

The fingers moved in and out, making the slender body shudder. She grabbed the other's neck, hugging and burying her face in the tall person's shoulder. The faster the other moved, the more Dr. Panipak tensed, sometimes biting the other's neck to release the overwhelming sensation.

After that, the moans in the bathroom grew louder. It was unclear when Dr. Panipak would get to rest, maybe in ten or twenty minutes, or until Akhira was satisfied. It seemed the two would have to shower again before going to bed.

"Phee Zo, I want to sleep."

The sweet voice protested as she was disturbed again after just getting some rest. Akhira's prominent nose trailed kisses down the back of the person lying with her back turned until Dr. Panipak turned around, grabbing her neck to hold her still.

If Akhira wanted to resist, she could easily do so. But seeing the other so exhausted she could barely keep her eyes open, she felt pity. Even though she wanted more, Akhira was content to lie on Dr. Panipak's chest, allowing the other to rest.

## Chain Special Chapter 5

Dr. Panipak opened her eyes to a new morning. Her long eyelashes fluttered as she adjusted to the morning sunlight. A small smile spread across her face when she saw Akhira still asleep in her arms.

Usually, she would be the one nestled in Akhira's embrace, but holding her like this felt good in a different way. Even though Dr. Panipak had been awake for a while, she didn't move. Her slender hand gently stroked the hair of the person snuggled against her chest.

She was holding her just like that day.

Dr. Panipak smiled at the thought, glancing around the room as if checking that everything was in its place. Her beautiful eyes caught the sparkle of the diamond ring on her slender finger, the sunlight making it glimmer, drawing her thoughts back to the past.

***On the wedding day.***

*"I'm so nervous."*

*"Why are you nervous? The bride isn't even nervous," Dr. Plaifha said, shaking her head at Dr. Ninlaneen, who was fidgeting restlessly as if she were the bride herself.*

*"I don't know; I can't explain it. My hands and feet are ice cold," Dr. Ninlaneen said, sighing at herself. Honestly, she felt a bit sad that her friend was getting married and leaving the single life. The mixed emotions created a knot in her stomach—happiness for her close friend, fear, and anxiety all at once.*

*"What about you, Pleng? Are you nervous?" Dr. Plaifha turned her attention from Dr. Ninlaneen to the bride of the day.*

*"I am, but probably not as much as Neen," Dr. Panipak said with a small smile. Of course, she felt nervous; it was her big day, after all. She just hid it better.*

*"It's quite surprising. Who would have thought you'd be the first to get married?"*

*"I know, right?" The three friends exchanged happy smiles. Dr. Panipak herself hadn't expected to be the first.*

*When it came to marriage, everyone thought Dr. Plaifha would be the first, followed by Dr. Ninlaneen, with the stoic doctor being the last. It wasn't just their opinion; even if you asked the entire hospital, they'd likely say the same.*

*Dr. Panipak was hard to approach, always focused on work, and wasn't interested in anyone. Who would've thought someone could win her heart and that she'd decide to spend her life with them?*

*As they say, no one knows what the future holds. Nothing is predictable. Take this wedding, for example. Everyone thought Dr. Panipak would never marry—not because no one was interested in her, but because she never chose anyone. But now, the person everyone thought would remain single was walking down the aisle in a beautiful wedding dress.*

*"All done. You look stunning, Pleng," the person helping the bride dress said when everything was ready. Her friend looked truly beautiful today. She was already pretty, but the wedding dress made her even more radiant.*

*"Thank you. You both look beautiful, too," Dr. Panipak couldn't help but compliment her friends. It wasn't just flattery; they really did look great today.*

*"As your bridesmaids, we can't be outshined," Dr. Plaifha said proudly. She'd chosen her dress carefully to look her best for her friend's big day. She mightn't be as beautiful as the bride, but she was at least a close second.*

*"Auntie Pieng pretty," said a young boy in a handsome suit, munching on snacks nearby, drawing smiles from the three women.*

*"And you also look very handsome today," Dr. Ninlaneen replied on behalf of the bride, gently pinching the boy's soft cheek. Dr. Panipak smiled at the adorable scene.*

*Soon, the little boy made his way to his aunt and hugged her lightly, surprising Dr. Panipak. She raised her hand to gently stroke his hair with affection, making everyone else melt at the cuteness of the aunt and nephew. Then, Dr. Panipak turned to ask her friend something.*

*"So, when are you getting married, Pha?" The question made the listener pause, but only for a moment.*

*"I haven't even found anyone to marry yet, Pleng." The questioned friend laughed dryly. Let alone marriage, she didn't even find anyone she was interested in.*

*"With how picky you are, I doubt you'll ever get married."*

*"Yeah, says the one who's not picky at all."*

*"Come on, you two..."*

*Dr. Panipak shook her head at her two friends, who loved to tease each other. If she were someone else, she might think they were fighting. Some of their words seemed like jabs, but as close friends, they knew it was all in good fun. They didn't take small things to heart; importantly, they never got seriously mad at each other.*

*"It's almost time. Let's go."*

*Both Dr. Ninlaneen and Dr. Plaifha called a truce when they saw it was nearly time for the bride to meet the guests. They gently held Dr. Panipak's soft hands in a gesture of support.*

*Even though Dr. Panipak didn't show her feelings, they knew she must be just as nervous as anyone else. It was her wedding day, after all. If even others felt nervous, how could the bride not be?*

*The venue was elegantly decorated, fitting for the occasion. Everything was arranged perfectly—not too elegant, not too simple. Most of the guests were relatives, close friends, and important people for them.*

*Whether invited or not, everyone understood and shared in the joy. It wasn't feasible for Dr. Panipak to invite the entire hospital. Just having a few close doctors and nurses take the day off would already cause chaos there.*

*Akhira didn't have many guests either, as she had few close friends in Thailand aside from her colleagues. But she did have a best friend who flew in from abroad just for the wedding.*

*The evening event was simple, as the formal ceremony had taken place in the morning. Now, it was time for the couple to share a few words—nothing special or different from other weddings.*

***"What impressed you about Ms. Akhira, and why did you love her?"** the emcee asked the couple standing nearby with a smile of admiration, just like that of everyone else in attendance.*

*"Well... I didn't think it'd be her," Dr. Panipak replied, glancing at her tall partner. The audience chuckled softly, knowing the couple's story hadn't started smoothly. It wasn't that they'd had a falling out; it was just that the beautiful doctor hadn't paid any attention to Akhira's advances.*

*That's why her words, **"I didn't think it would be her,"** made everyone laugh. Dr. Panipak was still Dr. Panipak, and the audience found her straightforwardness endearing.*

*Both Dr. Panipak and Akhira answered a few questions each, and they did so well. Their words about each other were honest and respectful. Even without revealing too many details, they left no doubt about their love.*

*Of course, the highlight everyone wanted to see was the couple's public display of affection. The anticipation grew as they couldn't leave without fulfilling the crowd's request.*

*Their eyes met briefly as they turned to face each other. The tall figure smiled happily, gently lifting the smaller one's chin before placing a soft kiss on her lips. It was brief but enough to make the audience blush.*

*Though they didn't do anything more than that, their sweet display was enough to make hearts flutter.*

*Dr. Panipak herself didn't know what she was feeling—excitement, happiness, and embarrassment all at once. Her heart pounded loudly, competing with the noise of the crowd, making it hard to tell which was louder.*

*Even though Dr. Panipak and Akhira had already greeted most of the guests, there were still some important ones left, mostly from Akhira's side. She understood; Akhira's family ran a big business, so it wasn't surprising they had many important guests.*

*The doctor walked beside her tall partner, greeting the guests with a polite wai. She chatted only briefly with Akhira's guests, leaving the rest to her.*

*Her beautiful eyes turned to look at her lover's reddened face with concern. Despite the room's full-blast air conditioning, sweat was clearly forming on Akhira's face. Dr. Panipak gently dabbed her temples with a tissue, prompting Akhira to turn and smile at her, thanking her softly.*

*"How about we take a break," she suggested.*

*Dr. Panipak's patience had finally run out. Her concern for Akhira outweighed her concern for the guests at the event. She didn't want to be rude, but if Akhira kept pushing herself, it would be bad...*

*Because today, Akhira wasn't feeling well.*

*And she didn't agree with her pushing herself this hard. From morning until evening, she hadn't taken a break. Even Dr. Panipak, who was in perfect health, felt tired. How exhausted must Akhira be? Yet, she stubbornly stood there, smiling and chatting with everyone as if she weren't sick.*

*Dr. Panipak couldn't do much but stand by Akhira's side and perform her duties as best as she could, just like she was doing.*

*Even as the hosts of the event, they needed some private time. Now was a brief moment for the two brides to take a break, leaving the guests to enjoy the party. The high rooftop of the luxurious hotel, used as a viewing point, had now become their break room. Akhira's condition was starting to deteriorate, so the doctor had to tell her she needed a break. If she hadn't, Akhira would've continued entertaining guests without following her.*



*"Why didn't you listen to me?" Dr. Panipak scolded her lover as soon as they were alone, handing Akhira a drink.*

*"I'm fine, really," Akhira replied, taking the drink with a smile. She wasn't upset with Dr. Panipak's stern tone because she knew it came from a place of concern. But what could she do?*

*"It's okay to take a break. Don't push yourself."*

*"This is our special day."*

*"Then why did you have to get sick on our special day?"*

*Dr. Panipak's calm tone carried an air of authority that made Akhira immediately feel subdued. She walked closer and rested her head on Dr. Panipak's shoulder, seeking forgiveness.*

*Everything today had gone perfectly. Akhira was happy with everything except for her sudden illness. Canceling the wedding because of it was out of the question. Everything was prepared, guests were invited, and everything was set. She couldn't cancel it just because she was sick. She didn't want to do that.*

*Today was the day she'd been waiting for so long. She wouldn't let anything ruin it.*

*"If you are at your limit, take a break," Dr. Panipak said again, feeling the heat radiating from her lover.*

*"I'm fine."*

*"...."*

*"The event will be over soon. Please don't scold me."*

*No matter what, the stubborn one remained stubborn. Dr. Panipak felt exasperated by her lover's behavior.*

*Akhira was like a stubborn patient, which was particularly frustrating for Dr. Panipak, being a doctor herself. This was how doctors feel when dealing with uncooperative patients...*

*But Akhira was right.*

*With just a bit more patience, everything concluded beautifully and perfectly. Tears welled up in the eyes of the slender figure in her mother's embrace as she thought about everything that had led to this moment. She wouldn't have had this day without her mother's support and encouragement.*

*The mother gently cupped her daughter's cheeks with both hands, gazing lovingly at her before looking at her daughter's lover, who stood waiting nearby.*

*"Take care of her for me," the mother said, even though she was confident that this person could take good care of her daughter. A mother's heart couldn't help but worry.*

*It wasn't just Dr. Panipak's mother who said this. Madam Nada also entrusted Dr. Panipak with Akhira's care. The most important thing was that they took care of each other, helping and consulting each other. By now, there wasn't much left to entrust, as the two had learned many lessons from their past.*

*Finally, the couple had some time alone after everything was done. Dr. Panipak looked around the room, decorated with flowers and beautiful items, before looking at the person sitting at the edge of the bed.*

*"Get some rest," she said, gently pushing the shoulders of the person sitting on the bed, who complied easily, likely due to already being weak. With just a little push, Akhira lay down obediently.*

*While she rested, Dr. Panipak tidied up. Soon, she returned, ready to take off her wedding dress. She paused when she felt the heat from the person helping her. Dr. Panipak sighed at her stubborn lover, who still insisted on helping her undress.*

*"Thank you," Dr. Panipak said softly, turning to face her taller lover.*

*"Turn around. I'll help you," she offered without being asked first, knowing that Akhira couldn't easily take off her own wedding dress either. Akhira accepted the help and turned around obediently.*

*Dr. Panipak carefully unzipped the dress, admiring how beautiful and elegant Akhira looked today. Initially, she'd worried about their outfits, fearing they might be too extravagant. But in reality, they were perfect.*

*Their dresses complemented each other beautifully, looking luxurious yet simple, not flashy but still attractive. They had to thank the tailor for making dresses that pleased both of them.*

*"Get changed, take your medicine, and get some rest, okay?" Dr. Panipak instructed after unzipping the dress enough for Akhira to manage the rest herself. She then excused herself to take a shower.*

*Though this was their wedding night, nothing special happened. It was special in feeling, but everything else remained the same as every other day. After her shower, the person waiting went in next. Then, they both rested, exhausted from the day's events.*

*The room went completely dark, but the newlywed bride couldn't sleep. Her beautiful eyes watched her lover, lying a bit away, with mixed emotions. Though they were the same, she felt something more now, perhaps because their status was clearer.*

*Dr. Panipak gently stroked her lover's arm with concern, feeling the heat from Akhira's body. Akhira rarely slept away from her, but tonight was an exception. She always kept her distance when she was sick or felt she was getting sick.*

*Even though the doctor told Akhira it was okay and that she wasn't easily sick, Akhira still insisted, making her think she was worrying too much. Despite the distance, they were drawn to each other out of habit.*

*Akhira didn't initiate the embrace, but she moved closer unconsciously, and Dr. Panipak pulled her into her arms to keep her warm.*

*She remembered it well, that chaotic yet important day when Akhira had a high fever but refused to rest, insisting on staying until the event ended. She only rested when they were finally alone.*

*That night, she barely rested, tending to her as her fever spiked in the middle of the night. Despite the exhaustion, she was happy.*

*Those were her wedding day memories. Though there were some hiccups, everything turned out better than expected. The only downside was Akhira's illness, which kept her worried and unable to take her eyes off her. But looking back, she saw how they both supported each other to make everything perfect.*

They couldn't have done it without each other and the support of their families and friends. She wanted to thank everyone who made that day special...

***Especially her Akhira.***

## **Chain Special Chapter 6**

Dr. Panipak had no idea how long she'd been lost in her thoughts about the past, but it must have been long enough for the person sleeping beside her to wake up.

Akhira stirred slightly before fully waking up. Feeling a touch on her head, she smiled contentedly. How could she not be happy? She could smell the sweet scent of her lover and was snuggled against her soft chest. She didn't want to get up or leave the bed at all. If she could stay like this all day, she would. But that was impossible because the owner of the soft body wouldn't allow it.

Akhira's high-bridged nose sniffed the body, followed by a gentle kiss, making Dr. Panipak aware that the person she was holding was now awake and, as usual, seemed intent on teasing her.

"Don't. I'm going to cook with your mom today," the slender figure said, pulling away and sitting up, not giving Akhira a chance to do as she pleased.

"But..."

"No buts. No negotiations. I've already made plans with her."

"She can wait."

Dr. Panipak had to turn and give her a stern look upon hearing that. This person could be annoying at times. She felt like pinching her. Last night, Akhira had taken advantage of her multiple times, leaving her exhausted. And now, this morning, she was being a nuisance again.

"Just a little while," Akhira said again, resting her face against Dr. Panipak's back, even with a thick blanket between them.

"No."

Dr. Panipak had to refuse. She couldn't give in because she'd already made plans with Akhira's mother. It would be rude not to follow through, even if she didn't mind. It wouldn't be good to leave her waiting.

Besides, she knew that if she let Akhira do as she pleased, it would go too far. The phrase 'just a little while' never meant anything to Akhira. She never did anything for just a little while.

And when her lover stood her ground, Akhira couldn't do anything. The morning ended with Dr. Panipak getting up to shower, dress, and go meet Madam Nada as planned, while Akhira took care of herself and followed later.

"When are you two going on your honeymoon?" Akhira's mother asked. It had been about a month since Dr. Panipak and Akhira got married, but they hadn't gone on their honeymoon yet. They were always working. She wondered if they'd go crazy if they didn't work for a day.

"We've been busy with work. We haven't thought about it yet," Akhira replied honestly. Both she and her lover were very busy. They might find a day off, but finding a long break wasn't easy.

Her mother sighed at her daughter's answer.

*Are all young people like this? Being serious about life is good, but being too serious won't do you any good. She wanted her children to have time to enjoy their lives, to have fun traveling, and not just bury themselves in work.*

"Working hard is good, but both of you should find time to relax," Madam Nada said, turning to look at Dr. Panipak, who was sitting nearby.

"Do you understand what I'm saying?" the elder asked again, seeing the two young women sitting stiffly. Dr. Panipak was the first to respond.

"Yes, Mom."

It was the first time Dr. Panipak felt like she was being scolded by Madam Nada. It felt no different from being scolded by her own mother. She wasn't angry; she understood that her mother-in-law was worried, and that's why she spoke up.

"So, when are you going?"

"Probably soon."

Though she said 'soon,' it wasn't as soon as she hoped. It took a while for Dr. Panipak and Akhira to clear their schedules. But it was worth it because they finally had time to go on their honeymoon without worrying about work and had several days to enjoy.

*Some things might take a while, but they're worth the wait.*

"Thank you," the slender figure said, accepting the flowers from the staff, who welcomed them with a small smile. She then walked inside with someone to help carry their luggage.

This was Dr. Panipak and Akhira's first honeymoon after nearly two months of marriage. It took a while for them to clear their schedules.

"I'll handle the rest. Thank you," Dr. Panipak told the staff when they reached their room. She then took care of their luggage, waiting for Akhira to finish her business.

Dr. Panipak opened the wide balcony to let in the breeze. The view was beautiful, and it was private. The open pool overlooked the stunning sea. Everything was exciting, but she probably

wouldn't swim because it was quite cold, and she hadn't brought a swimsuit. Even though they were at the beach, she hadn't prepared one, knowing she wouldn't swim.

Dr. Panipak looked out at the gorgeous scene outside. She rubbed her arms to keep them warm. She wasn't sure if it was a good idea to come to the beach in such cold weather, but it didn't matter. What mattered was the person she was with. If it was with Akhira, she'd go anywhere.

"Do you feel cold?"

A gentle voice spoke up, along with the warmth spreading through her body as she was hugged. Dr. Panipak leaned back slightly against the taller figure. How did she know she was thinking about her? She didn't even know when she'd come in.

"Are you done with your business?"

"Yes, I just had to change our plans a bit," Dr. Panipak nodded, understanding what Akhira meant. Due to the weather, some plans had to be canceled.

They stood there hugging for a while before Dr. Panipak gently removed Akhira's hands and pushed her to stand in front of her. Akhira was puzzled by her actions.

"What is it?" Akhira asked, trying to turn around, but Dr. Panipak stopped her and hugged her from behind, just as Akhira had done earlier, making her freeze.

"It's cold. I don't want to stand in front," she said. Akhira couldn't help but smile at the smaller figure hugging her from behind. She gently rubbed her lover's arms, standing as a shield against the cold wind until she was satisfied.

She didn't know if she did this because she wanted to hug her or to shield herself from the cold. True, she wasn't much bigger, but her height allowed the doctor to hide behind her.

"This is the low season."

"So?"

"With fewer people, I'm worried you won't have fun. And it's too cold to swim."

Dr. Panipak fell silent after hearing Akhira's concerns. She knew the other was worried about bringing her to the beach in this season. She was probably stressed, but she thought it was fine. She preferred places with fewer people because they were more private. They didn't need to follow others; as long as they were happy, that was enough.

"The beach and cold weather have their charm. I like it."

"Really?"

"Have I ever lied to you?"

True. Akhira smiled, feeling relieved. She'd been worried about that since before they came, but the beautiful view, delicious food, and nice accommodation made her want to bring the doctor here. She wasn't sure if Dr. Panipak would like it, but seeing her happy made her feel better.

**She didn't know what the original travel plans were because Akhira hadn't told her, and she'd arranged everything.** But now, she was being teased and held captive, unable to go anywhere. Hours had passed since they arrived, and it seemed Akhira wasn't satisfied yet, ready to take advantage of her again. It would've ended that way if she hadn't spoken up.

"Phee Zo, stop. It hurts."

"Hurts?"

"You always do it too hard."

"What did I do hard?"

"Stop. That's enough," Dr. Panipak pulled Akhira's hands away from her body, covered herself with a blanket, and turned her back to end the conversation. But the stubborn one didn't give up.

"Can't I?" Akhira asked, snuggling against her shoulder with a pleading voice, only to be rejected again.

"No."

Dr. Panipak sighed softly at her lover's behavior. When she teased her, Akhira would feign innocence, and when scolded, she'd be all gloomy like this. She didn't know how to handle her anymore. If she kept giving in, it'd always be like this, and Akhira might become spoiled.

Actually, it was her fault. She knew that, yet she always gave in. But today, she wouldn't be the kind Dr. Panipak anymore. Besides, since they arrived, neither of them had eaten anything. If she let Akhira have her way, they might end up starving.



Maybe she'd been too lenient, which made Akhira act like this. Today, she'd be firm so the other would realize the situation. It might seem a bit unreasonable, but it was necessary. In a relationship, there had to be a balance of firmness and leniency to keep things interesting.

*That's what she thought.*

She didn't know how it was for other couples or how often they had intimate moments, but for her and Akhira, it was frequent. Frequent for the doctor, but maybe not for Akhira; otherwise, she wouldn't keep bothering her like this.

Even though Akhira wasn't satisfied and wanted more affection, when the doctor firmly refused, she had to let it go. The doctor lay down for a while before getting up to take a refreshing shower.

She was tired and wanted to rest, too, but she'd become her prey if she did. Besides, they had a chance to travel together, and she didn't want to stay cooped up in the room. She wanted to feel refreshed and ready for good things.

**15:40**

"Phee, Zo."

"What?"

"Shall we have seafood by the beach tonight?" She'd noticed many restaurants by the beach when they arrived. The atmosphere seemed nice and interesting, so she asked for her opinion.

"What did you say?"

Dr. Panipak frowned immediately when she turned and saw Akhira sitting on the sofa, engrossed in her phone. It seemed she wasn't listening at all because if she had, she wouldn't have asked again. She'd spoken clearly and loudly enough for her to hear.

"Are we going or not?"

"Call me again."

"Ms. Akhira."

Uh...

"If you don't call me Phee Zo, I'm not going." Akhira looked away from her phone and glanced at Dr. Panipak casually, acting as if she had the upper hand. She'd heard every word she said but was playing hard to get, hoping the doctor would follow her command. This time, Dr. Panipak would give in.

*Or so she thought.*

"Suit yourself."

She was stunned when Dr. Panipak cut her off coldly, showing no interest. Despite her sulking, the doctor remained indifferent, making Akhira feel the chill from her words spreading through her skin to her bones.

What is this situation? Despite her sulking, the doctor didn't seem bothered if she refused. Wasn't she too cold? Wouldn't she try to make up with her?

"Would it be fun to go alone? Would the food taste good? Would you struggle without me peeling the shrimp for you?"

"I can peel it myself, or... someone else can do it."

"Don't even think about it." She walked over, grabbed her arm, and pulled her closer possessively. Akhira's sharp eyes stared deeply into hers, but Dr. Panipak remained unfazed, looking innocent as if she didn't know what was going on.

"Let go of me. If you don't want to go, it's fine."

She pulled her arm away easily since Akhira didn't hold her tightly. She wasn't being sarcastic; she meant it. If Akhira didn't want to go, she'd go alone.

And when she said someone else could peel the shrimp for her, she meant it. She wasn't lying. But the 'someone else' she meant was the staff. Even without Akhira, she had money and could pay someone to do it or do it herself. It wasn't a big deal for her.

In the end, Dr. Panipak left the room, with Akhira following closely behind. She looked around before sitting across from her, smiling at the person taking their order.

Of course, she ordered seafood: shrimp, shellfish, crab, and fish—the usual dishes people ordered. Soon, she looked up from the menu to look at Akhira, who sat silently.

"Do you want fried rice, too? Or something else?"

"Whatever you want. I'm fine with anything." Akhira replied, letting her order whatever she liked because she could eat anything. She wasn't allergic to seafood.

"Then just this for now." She smiled at the person taking the order before turning back to her lover.

"We could've ordered from the hotel. They have a lot of options."

"I know, but I just wanted to come outside." Dr. Panipak replied, looking into Akhira's eyes to confirm her words. It was true that ordering room service was convenient, but she just wanted to get some fresh air and change the atmosphere. They'd probably use the hotel's service for the next meals anyway.

"Next time, let's eat upstairs."

"Don't you like coming outside?"

"It's just that it's windy in the evening. I'm just worried you might get sick." Akhira replied softly. It wasn't that she didn't like it. She enjoyed every activity and place as long as Dr. Panipak was there. The atmosphere was nice, but she didn't want her to catch a cold.

"I'm a doctor. I don't get sick easily."

Akhira shook her head at her words. She always used her profession as an excuse, even though she knew doctors were human, too. They didn't have any special immunity and could get sick like anyone else.

After chatting for a while, the food arrived. Since there weren't many people, they didn't have to wait long. Dr. Panipak immediately served fried rice to Akhira out of habit. She liked doing things for her before herself. Akhira smiled and prepared for the next dishes.

Today, Dr. Panipak seemed different. She ordered an unusually large amount of food. If Akhira had ordered this much, she would have scolded her for ordering too much for just the two of them. Maybe she got carried away or something.

"Let me peel that for you," Akhira said, taking the shrimp from Dr. Panipak's hand. She couldn't stand seeing her beautiful hands get dirty. Even though she knew the doctor could do it herself, she couldn't help but peel the shrimp for her.

"Go ahead and eat. I'll peel it."

"No, you need to eat. You ordered so much; don't leave any leftovers." Akhira diverted her attention from peeling shrimp, and it worked. Her expression showed she had just realized how much she'd ordered.

It wasn't often Akhira saw the doctor look so surprised. She smiled and continued peeling shrimp, feeling relaxed. Today, she wouldn't get scolded for ordering too much food. Even if they didn't finish it, she wasn't the one who ordered it, so she was safe today. The only one who was worried was the meticulous doctor. She wondered what she'd do since she ordered all this food herself.

*If she didn't finish it, it would be interesting.*

Akhira might think she had the upper hand, but she didn't. While she peeled shrimp for her, Dr. Panipak was peeling crab, fish, and other things, putting them on her plate without her noticing. She ate and peeled shrimp, unaware of how much she was eating. She might have eaten more than the doctor did.

It was true that Dr. Panipak wouldn't let food go to waste. Once ordered, they had to finish it. Her helper was the person sitting across from her. She knew Akhira liked eating everything from her, so she wasn't worried about leftovers.

Dr. Panipak shook her head slightly with annoyance as the wind blew her hair into her face. She wanted to ask for help from the person across from her, but both their hands were dirty.

Despite that, Akhira kindly helped, using her wrist to fix her hair awkwardly. Dr. Panipak realized she wasn't as meticulous as she thought, unlike Akhira, who had tied her hair neatly in a ponytail as if she'd planned ahead.

"Do you want mine?" Akhira offered the hair band she was using. It seemed like the other person didn't bring one; otherwise, she would have already dealt with the hair that was bothering her.

"No, it's okay," Dr. Panipak replied before returning her attention to her meal. Her hair had settled in a way that no longer annoyed her face. Dr. Panipak secretly glanced at her, making sure she didn't notice.

She didn't understand why her lover had to be so kind. She was ready to give everything she had to her if she needed it, no matter what it was. It was endearing, and she felt good every time Akhira showed her such care. But sometimes, she wished she wouldn't love her too much.

She wanted Akhira to be a little selfish, at least for her own sake. She wondered if she was like this with others, too.

*If that were the case, it would be bad.*

The two of them had been eating for a while when Dr. Panipak started to feel full. She took her time cleaning her hands with a napkin, quietly absorbing the peaceful atmosphere. Her beautiful eyes then caught sight of a group of people.

True, there weren't many people around, but it wasn't completely empty either. That group was probably tourists like them.

She glanced at them briefly before turning her attention back to her lover, who was enjoying her meal, oblivious to the people around them. Dr. Panipak watched her for a moment. Soon, Akhira looked in the direction the doctor had just been staring.

"What is it?" Akhira asked, turning back when she saw nothing unusual. She noticed she'd been looking that way for a moment but didn't know why. Everything seemed normal, just a group of teenage girls eating and a few families beyond them.

"They're pretty, aren't they? Not interested?" she teased.

The listener raised an eyebrow slightly before understanding what she meant. If she guessed right, she was referring to the group of girls. She didn't know exactly who she meant, but it had to be one of them.

"Why should I be interested in anyone?" she asked back, curious about her response. What reason did she have to be interested in someone else?

"Don't you like pretty girls?" Dr. Panipak said casually, though deep down, she was anxious about her answer.

Akhira wiped her mouth and looked at her lover. It seemed she misunderstood something. She didn't like every pretty girl—just her. It was just a coincidence that she happened to be beautiful.

"You're pretty, too. Why should I be interested in others?" she replied nonchalantly because that's what she truly thought. Why would she look at someone else when her beloved was right in front of her?

*Why would she be interested in anyone else when she already had someone so wonderful...*

## Chain Special Chapter 7

"I'm so full."

Dr. Panipak couldn't help but smile when she heard what Akhira said. She followed her inside and saw that the tall figure had already sprawled out on the sofa. She must really be stuffed. She had kept piling food onto Akhira's plate, and Akhira had eaten so much. But it couldn't be helped since she was willing to eat it, even though the doctor was the one who had ordered all the food.

"My belly has grown a lot bigger," Akhira said, looking sadly at her stomach under her shirt. She'd never had such a big belly before. It felt strange. She had probably really eaten too much.

"Let me see." Dr. Panipak walked closer and slipped her hand under her lover's shirt, gently touching her stomach.

"I'm getting fat."

"You're not fat at all," Dr. Panipak said, giving Akhira's belly a playful slap before walking into the bedroom, leaving the tall figure sitting alone with a pout. Her words would have been more convincing if she hadn't laughed like that. Akhira could only sigh at her own actions.

Several minutes passed, and the doctor disappeared into the room without coming back out. Akhira realized that Dr. Panipak must have gone to take a shower while she continued to sit and wait for her food to digest.

Dr. Panipak spent some time in the bathroom and soon returned to the living room area, but Akhira was nowhere to be found. She walked to the balcony and, as expected, found the person she was looking for standing there, enjoying the breeze and the view.

The tall figure smiled when she felt the thin blanket the other person had draped over her. She pulled it off and placed it over the doctor's shoulders instead.

"You take it. I'm fine," Akhira said, pulling the smaller person into her arms. Dr. Panipak might have forgotten that she'd lived abroad for a long time. This kind of cold weather didn't bother her at all. Compared to the cold abroad, Thailand's weather was nothing. This was very comfortable.

"Phee Zo."

"Yes?"

Dr. Panipak moved slightly, pulling away from the warm embrace to face the taller person. Then, something was handed to Akhira. She was puzzled by the gesture but accepted it nonetheless.

"What? For me?"

"Yes," she said, her eyebrows knitting together slightly as she opened the box to see what was inside.

"Why?"

"It's a birthday present."

"But didn't you already give me a birthday present?" Akhira asked, confused. She'd already received a gift from her, the one she'd asked for. So why did she want to give her another one, especially since her birthday had already passed?

"It's a belated gift."

That was just an excuse. In truth, Dr. Panipak had come across it and thought it suited Akhira well, so she wanted to buy it for her. Besides, she noticed that Akhira's watch had recently broken, and she hadn't worn it for a while. She just wanted to buy her a new one.

"Do you like it?" The sweet voice asked again as her lover took the watch out of the box. Even though the person in front of her was the same old Akhira, her heart pounded as if this was the first time she'd bought something for someone she had a crush on.

"And if I don't like it, what will you do?" The tall figure asked, a slight smile playing on her lips as she watched her reaction. She wanted to see how the doctor would respond.

From a heart that was pounding uncontrollably, the feeling quickly vanished. In just a split second, she felt her heart drop to her stomach. The slender figure regained her composure and replied.

"If you don't like it, I'll use it myself."

That's it. If Akhira didn't want it, she'd use it herself. No harm done, even though she'd be a bit disappointed that it wouldn't be on the other's wrist.

"How can you use it? You said you bought it for me."

"If you don't like it, why keep it? I can wear it myself."

"You always take my stuff."

Akhira pretended to complain quietly yet loud enough for the person in front of her to hear. Lately, Dr. Panipak had indeed been using her things often, like her shirts in the closet. She wondered if Dr. Panipak realized it. Well, she wasn't actually possessive about her things; she just wanted to tease her.

Dr. Panipak had nothing to say. She couldn't deny it because everything Akhira said was true. She had often borrowed her shirts. The first time was accidental, but the subsequent times were intentional.

She never thought she'd like those kinds of shirts, but they were comfortable and went well with her medical gown. So she often wore them, not thinking she'd notice. But never mind, the important thing now was the watch. They could talk about the shirts later.

"So, you don't want it, right? Then I'll take it back."

"How can you take it back after giving it to me? I'm not giving it back," Akhira said, dodging as Dr. Panipak tried to snatch the item from her hand.



*Why would I give it back? I wouldn't give up such an important gift.*

Dr. Panipak glared at the taller person. Why did she have to make her feel anxious when she clearly wanted it? She always made her feel uneasy with her antics.

*So annoying.*

"Put it on for me."

"It's late. Where are you going to wear it to? If you want to wear it, put it on yourself."

You reap what you sow. Because Akhira teased her too much, Dr. Panipak cut her off coldly. Not only did she refuse her request, but she also left her standing alone. But even so, the person left behind stood there smiling happily. Her heart swelled with joy when she received a gift from her lover.

Akhira smiled at the beautiful watch in her hand. This wasn't a belated gift, as she claimed. It was too late for a belated gift. She must have noticed that she hadn't worn a watch for a while because her old one broke.

Akhira knew how stubborn Dr. Panipak could be. She'd never admit the real reason she bought her the gift. But that was fine. She liked her just the way she was. She didn't need to be any more adorable because she might not be able to handle it. As it was, her heart could barely take it.

Today was the second day that Akhira and Dr. Panipak were on vacation together. No one knew what was happening in the outside world, but today was certainly a bright day for someone, especially Akhira.

She'd woken up and showered early in the morning like an excited child. When they arrived at the beach, she hurried Dr. Panipak because she wanted to get to the other island quickly. She'd shed her calm executive demeanor and turned into a full-fledged child.

"Come here. Why aren't you wearing it properly?" the doctor said.

"I can swim."

"Whether you can swim or not, you need to wear it properly."

Dr. Panipak shook her head at Akhira, pulling the taller figure closer to adjust her life jacket. Akhira stood still, behaving like a good kid.

Even if they weren't planning to swim, they still needed to wear it for safety. They were going into the sea, and no one knew what could happen.

*She's not a kid anymore. Why is she acting like this?*

"Be careful."

"Thank you," the sweet voice said softly, letting go of her lover's hand once she was safely on the boat.

"Be careful."

"I know." Dr. Panipak smiled at the tall figure who had been repeating the same words since she stepped onto the boat until it set off. She understood that Akhira was worried, but she was sticking so close to her. What else was there to be careful about?

Dr. Panipak scanned the island, noting the few people around. Today, she had come to explore the other side of the island. She was quite impressed. She never thought that such a small piece of natural beauty could be so relaxing.

"You didn't wait for me at all."

"Stop whining. You're not a kid anymore," she said, shaking her head at her lover. She had only walked a little ahead, and already Akhira was complaining, acting like a child left behind.

"You didn't wait for me."

"Do you want a picture? I'll take it for you."

"I don't really like taking pictures. Let me take one for you instead."

"I don't really like taking pictures either." It might have sounded like she was copying Akhira's words, but that wasn't the case. Dr. Panipak didn't intend to mimic her; it was just the truth. Both she and Akhira shared many similarities, but a clear difference was probably their instincts.

It seemed that the other person didn't realize she was becoming the center of attention. Meanwhile, the doctor had noticed for a while that someone was watching her lover. If she

wasn't mistaken, it was the group of teenagers they'd seen at the restaurant the previous evening.

She used to think that Akhira was just good-looking but didn't realize she was so attractive to others. She had only recently discovered how charming she was. Akhira could draw attention from many people without even realizing it.

It was kind of surprising that she'd never felt this way before. Maybe it was because she hadn't had any special feelings for other women back then. So, Akhira was just someone with a good personality and looks, but she didn't find her attractive at all.

But now, things had changed. She understood what it was like to have a crush on someone. It was probably the same way Akhira had liked her back then, but she hadn't understood it as well as she did now.

When people often stare at your lover, if you ask if she was jealous, well, sometimes she was. No one liked others staring at their lover for too long, and knowing how those people felt made it even worse. But she thought it was okay as long as Akhira didn't care.

And it was clear that Akhira wasn't aware of it. She never looked at anyone else but her. Because of this, her jealousy wasn't so intense that she needed to show it. She had enough reason not to do anything foolish or act badly toward those interested in her lover. Besides, who would know that they were a couple? Others might think they were friends or siblings.

Dr. Panipak stopped paying attention to others and kept walking, admiring the beauty of nature. The water parted, leaving a small path, which amazed the viewer. Is this Thale Waek that everyone talks about? Even though she'd heard about it, this was her first time seeing it with her own eyes.

Dr. Panipak seemed to be enjoying nature a bit too much because when she turned around, she couldn't find the person she thought was following her. With just a quick glance, she spotted her lover. But she froze when she saw Akhira talking to a woman she remembered often staring at her.

It seemed like the person being stared at had noticed because, in just a moment, Akhira turned and smiled at her. The round, clear eyes of another girl looked at her curiously before awkwardly bowing her head. Shortly after, Akhira quickly walked over to her with a small smile on her face.

"Is something wrong?"

"That girl asked for my number."

"...."

"But I told her we're married. She was shocked and kept apologizing."

The tall figure spoke with a smile, making Dr. Panipak smile back at that warm smile. She could sense the fondness Akhira had for that girl. It wasn't romantic fondness but the kind an adult had for a child. Plus, she told others they were married. No wonder the girl looked at her, pale and surprised.

"She's cute."

Dr. Panipak smiled genuinely. She thought it was really cute. It was a cute moment. That girl's love probably started and ended so quickly. Who knows what will happen to her next?

But she thought Akhira would remain in that little heart for a long time. One day, that girl might tell others about confessing her love to a married person. Who knows?

*Life doesn't always go as planned, but every story is a memory.*

It's the third day of their honeymoon, but it doesn't seem to be going smoothly. All plans for the day had to be canceled because of the uncooperative weather. Akhira sighed at the rainy weather. It wasn't even the rainy season, and yesterday had been so sunny.

*Well, that's Thailand for you.*

Dr. Panipak glanced at her lover, who seemed a bit frustrated. She understood why she might be upset; it wasn't surprising. They had prepared to go out, but it started pouring just as they were about to leave, and it hadn't stopped since then.

So, they both agreed to stay in the room today. Personally, she didn't mind. It was a good chance to rest fully without traveling. For her, just seeing beautiful places yesterday was worth it. Besides, the accommodation had a great vibe. Staying in all day wouldn't be boring.

Akhira stared at the pool outside through the large glass door. The clear water rippled from the rain, creating a splashing effect all around. This kind of weather was perfect for lounging or napping, but since she had a good night's sleep, she didn't feel sleepy.

Akhira exhaled with a relaxed feeling. It would be lonely if she were here alone. Just thinking about it was boring. Luckily, that wasn't the case.

"Do you want to swim?" A teasing voice came from behind, snapping her out of her daze. She turned to see the small figure standing behind her.

Akhira pretended to frown, furrowing her brows slightly before pulling the doctor into her arms, making Dr. Panipak think she was about to be punished for saying something silly. But she was wrong because Akhira's expression and tone were entirely different from her expectations.

"Are you bored because we can't go out?" The speaker looked so down that Dr. Panipak couldn't help but find her endearing.

"No, I'm not. Why do you always ask that?"

"I should have let you choose where you wanted to go."

Akhira sighed. Every time they traveled together, she was always the one who made the decisions. Whether she liked it or not, Dr. Panipak never complained or disagreed. She always went along with everything.

"Don't overthink it. Anywhere is fine."

"Do you really think so?"

"Or are you the one who's bored?" Dr. Panipak didn't answer but asked Akhira instead. It seemed like she was the one who was bored. Akhira probably felt down because their trip wasn't going smoothly.

"I'm a little bored, but..."

"But what?"

"But if you're with me, I'm not bored. And... I think I know what to do." Not only did Akhira's expression change, but Dr. Panipak's smile also faded quickly, sensing the danger in her lover's eyes.

But there was no escaping now. She'd willingly walked into the lion's den, and now she was held tightly, with no room to move.

"Phee Zo..." Before she could say more, her lips were captured, leaving no room for resistance. In no time, Akhira's expertise made Dr. Panipak give in.

Perhaps it was their familiarity that made them sync so quickly. The tall figure smiled slightly when Dr. Panipak clung to her neck tightly, her lips responding to the kiss with a dreamy sigh, making her heart race.

"Mmm..." The tall figure reluctantly broke the kiss, moving to her neck, making Dr. Panipak moan softly.

Akhira inhaled Dr. Panipak's scent from her neck while their lips kept kissing. The doctor tilted her head back, feeling the sensual touch, her nails digging into Akhira's shoulder. But Akhira didn't stop; she intensified her actions.

Akhira's slender hand caressed the doctor's waist under her white T-shirt, making her shiver. Soon, the thin shirt was lifted, revealing the bra on her beautiful chest, which quickly came off without her noticing. Without hesitation, Akhira moved from her neck to her chest.

"Ah, Phee Zo," Dr. Panipak sighed, her body trembling as she felt a slight pain in her chest, which quickly turned into pleasure as Akhira's hot tongue worked its magic, making her weak in the knees.

"Phee Zo, I..." Dr. Panipak bit her lip, feeling overwhelmed by the sensation.

"What is it?"

The tall figure looked up at her sweet face with a smile. She didn't know what the doctor wanted to say. She called her but didn't say anything more, just like before. Every time she tried to speak, her voice was swallowed, leaving only soft moans.

"What is it? Why did you call me?" Despite being asked, Dr. Panipak couldn't answer. She tried to hold Akhira's wrist, but it was useless. Her body was ready for anything, allowing Akhira to easily slip her fingers inside.

As the intruding fingers moved in and out, Dr. Panipak could only lean on Akhira's shoulder, seeking support. Her once steady legs now trembled uncontrollably.

Not long after, the doctor moaned for the last time before her body jerked slightly. She could only hold the other person tightly, breathing heavily over and over again.

Akhira allowed the person in her arms to catch her breath for just a moment. Soon after, their lovemaking resumed, with Dr. Panipak unable to resist at all.

## Chain Special Chapter 8

"Thank you so much, Doctor."

"Doctor, you really didn't have to."

"It's nothing, just a little something."

Dr. Panipak smiled at the other person before walking away. Today, she had brought souvenirs for almost everyone in the hospital. The gifts varied in size and type, depending on her relationship with the recipients and what she deemed appropriate. This act of kindness made everyone around her happy, as they felt special knowing the beautiful doctor had kept them in mind.

Today might have been a bad day for some, but meeting Dr. Panipak and receiving her positive energy always left everyone smiling. The doctor was just that charming. She often offered small gifts and rare smiles that could brighten anyone's day.

No one knew if something wonderful had happened during her honeymoon, but since her return, Dr. Panipak had been noticeably more radiant. This newfound brightness had doubled the cheerful atmosphere in the hospital. It had already been lively before, but now it was even more so. Thanks to Akhira, Dr. Panipak seemed incredibly happy.

"Are you married, Doctor?"

The doctor, who was busy writing a prescription, looked up when the patient sitting across from her asked with a surprised expression.

"Yes."

"Since when? I haven't been here for a while, so I didn't know," the elderly woman asked again. She hadn't noticed at first, but the ring on the doctor's left ring finger caught her eye.

"Two months ago."

The beautiful doctor answered straightforwardly. She remembered this elderly patient well, as she came here often. They chatted about various topics, but they hadn't seen each other much lately. Dr. Panipak had been splitting her time between the hospital and her own clinic, so she wasn't at the hospital every day like before.

"When will you have kids? I'd love to see your children; they must be adorable," the elderly woman said with a genuine smile. The doctor was so beautiful, and her children would surely be cute.

"I haven't thought about that yet," the doctor replied with a slight smile. She hadn't considered having children yet. Her life was happy as it was. Only Akhira occasionally brought up the topic, but they'd never seriously discussed it.

"Having kids would be nice. So you won't be lonely," said a nurse who leaned in to whisper, making Dr. Panipak give her a slightly stern look.

"I agree," the elderly woman added.

"Well... thank you. We're done for today. Please wait to receive your medication," Dr. Panipak said, changing the subject as she handed the prescription to the nurse. She slightly bowed to the elderly woman, who thanked her and left the room.

"Dr. Panipak, having a child would be nice. I wonder if they'd look like you or your partner," the nurse teased as she left, making Dr. Panipak shake her head.



The slender figure shook her head at the nurse before the door closed. Once she was alone, she sighed softly, picking up the documents on her desk. But she couldn't focus, her mind drifting back to the conversation that had just taken place.

**18:59**

"Not going to the clinic today, Pleng? How come you're working late?" It wasn't just late; she even had time to sit and have a drink with friends after work. This was the first time in a year that she seemed to have more free time, making her friends curious.

"I'm not going to the hospital tomorrow, so I had to work a bit longer."

"Is the clinic not busy today?"

"Not too busy," Dr. Panipak replied to her close friend, Dr. Ninlaneen, who nodded in understanding. Dr. Plaifha, who was resting her chin on her hand, kept staring at her as if intrigued by something, making the other raise an eyebrow in question and giving her a chance to speak.

"Aren't you tired, Pleng, working both here and at the clinic?"

"It's the same as always. I just have to manage my time."

"But it seems like you're working more."

"You think so?"

"It's not just my thought; it's the truth."

"Should I quit the hospital and work only at the clinic then?" Dr. Panipak teased, making Dr. Ninlaneen, who had been listening quietly, look shocked and immediately protest.

"No! Don't quit, Pleng. It'd be so lonely without you."

"But Pha is still working here with you."

"It's not the same. It'd feel lonely without you," Dr. Ninlaneen said, and Dr. Plaifha agreed. They'd always been together. If one left, it'd really feel lonely. The hospital without her would feel like something was missing.

Even when she hadn't quit, just splitting her time between the hospital and her clinic, patients and nurses still asked about her. If Dr. Panipak really left, the whole department would feel lonely and have to work harder.

"But if it's more convenient for you, then it's okay." Dr. Ninlaneen finally conceded, supporting whatever made her friend happy.

"Why do you look so sad? Now, I don't think she can leave." Dr. Plaifha shook her head, looking at the slender figure who smiled back.

"Or why don't you both come work with me? The clinic needs more doctors."

"Oooh! I'm being recruited," Dr. Ninlaneen exclaimed dramatically, placing a hand on her chest as if shocked, making the others shake their heads at her antics. She'd been sulking a moment ago, and now she was acting silly.

The table was filled with laughter. Their long-standing friendship allowed them to talk for hours without getting bored, even though they saw each other every day. The enjoyment made Dr. Panipak lose track of time, just like her two friends.

"Oh dear! It's past eight already."

Dr. Panipak quickly checked the clock in the restaurant upon her friend's remark and then her phone, finding several missed calls as expected. She had put her phone on silent mode, so she hadn't heard it. By now, the caller must be quite upset.

"Will Ms. Akhira be mad?" Dr. Plaifha asked softly, noticing her friend's worried expression after checking her phone.

"Probably not," Dr. Panipak replied, calling her partner back, but there was no answer.

"We should get back. Excuse me, can we get the check, please?" Dr. Ninlaneen called for the check immediately, not wanting to waste any more time.

"Get home safe."

"You guys, too."

After saying their goodbyes, the three friends went their separate ways. Dr. Panipak tried to hurry as much as she could, but she wasn't a fast driver. Her journey was further delayed by unexpected traffic, making the trip take almost an hour, even though her condo wasn't far.

**Dr. Panipak opened the door to her condo, immediately looking for her partner but not finding her.** She assumed Akhira must be in the bedroom, seeing the lights on.

As she expected, Akhira was lying on the bed. She walked around to her side, noticing that Akhira was lying on her side with her back turned.

"Are you asleep?" There was no response. Dr. Panipak gently pulled the blanket over her before heading to the bathroom to freshen up.

She returned quickly.

She glanced at her partner's face. She was probably upset, judging by the distance she kept on the bed. Akhira never slept so close to the edge. She'd have to make it up to her.

After finishing her personal routine, she turned off the lights and prepared to rest. But instead of going to her side of the bed, she squeezed into Akhira's arms, even though there was barely any space.

Akhira was lying so close to the edge that if she moved any more, she might fall. But Dr. Panipak persisted until she managed to cuddle her.

The space was too narrow, so she started to whine a little, not knowing if Akhira could hear her.

"Phee Zo, I'm about to fall off the bed," she said softly. That was enough for Akhira to move back, giving her more space. Dr. Panipak knew then that Akhira wasn't asleep; she just didn't want to talk to her.

"Still not asleep?"

"...."

"Were you waiting for me?" the doctor asked in a sweet voice, looking up at the person she was cuddling with a pleading expression. But despite her efforts, Akhira remained silent. Even though she had to talk to herself, she wouldn't give up.

"Have you eaten?" Dr. Panipak asked again, feeling guilty for not coming back to cook for her partner. But even if she didn't cook, she wouldn't starve because the fridge was stocked. Even though Akhira couldn't cook, there were frozen meals she could heat up.

"Phee Zo..." The words she intended to say were swallowed back when Akhira showed no sign of opening her eyes. Finally, Dr. Panipak had to give up.

Maybe she would make it up to her tomorrow. It seemed like talking tonight wouldn't get anywhere. But for now, just being allowed to sleep in her arms was okay. The situation wasn't too bad. She knew Akhira was upset with her, but she also knew she could handle it.

**07:20**

"Can you drop me off at the hospital today?"

The tall figure who had just walked into the kitchen paused slightly, looking at the slender figure taking off her apron without saying anything.

Akhira ate breakfast quietly while Dr. Panipak kept serving the food. But the room remained silent, devoid of any conversation between the two.

"Yesterday, I went out to eat with friends. I didn't go anywhere else, and the traffic was bad on the way back, so I came home late."

In the end, it was Dr. Panipak who couldn't stand the silence. She used to be very patient and was able to go a whole day without talking to Akhira. But now, she couldn't do that anymore.

She didn't like being ignored, so she chose to start the conversation. After all, it was her fault. If she'd just answered her call or called her first, it would've been fine, but she forgot.

*It was all her fault.*

"If you don't believe me, you can call and ask Pha and Neen. After separating from them, I didn't go anywhere else." She spoke confidently, ready to let Akhira verify the truth because everything she said was true. If she didn't believe her, she had witnesses. But her confidence faded when Akhira responded coldly.

"Why do I have to call someone else?"

"...."

"If you had called me yesterday, it would've been fine. Or you could have just answered my call. Was that so hard?" Akhira put down her spoon and voiced her thoughts.

*It wasn't just about this. Even if she didn't call me, it wasn't a problem because I'd call her anyway. But she couldn't even answer my call. Why does she always make me worry?*

"I'm sorry, but... I called back, but you didn't answer." Dr. Panipak spoke softly, unsure if what she said was good or bad. It sounded like she was trying to blame Akhira instead.

"You're always like this." Akhira sighed lightly. She knew Panipak wasn't lying. She even knew why she didn't answer the phone. It was because Panipak liked to put her phone on silent mode. Akhira understood why she did it during work, but couldn't she turn it on or check it after work?

"I didn't mean to. Don't be mad, okay?"

"...."

"You're almost thirty and still sulking."

Not just speaking, but she also got up from her seat, walked over to Akhira, and cupped her cheeks. Akhira stopped her by holding her hands and gently pulling her closer. She leaned in and kissed her lips lightly without hesitation.

"So, will you drop me off, or should I go by myself?"

Actually, Dr. Panipak was just asking for the sake of asking. She knew Akhira would agree. It wasn't just her who gave in easily; Akhira was the same.

**"See you this evening."**

Dr. Panipak said as the car stopped in front of her clinic. But before she could get out, Akhira held her back, making her turn to meet her eyes. The doctor leaned in and kissed her cheek lightly again. Normally, she wouldn't do this, but since Akhira was upset, she had to pamper her a bit. But after pulling away, Akhira still didn't let go of her hand.

"Is that not enough?"

There was no verbal response, only Akhira's lips pressing against hers as an answer.

And if you thought Akhira would just give a light kiss like she did, you were wrong. If she started, it usually wouldn't end easily. And now, it wasn't just lips. Dr. Panipak felt her arm wrap around her waist. Before she ran out of breath, she gently pushed Akhira's shoulder to let her know.

Akhira pulled back willingly, leaving a lingering kiss that made Panipak blush and look away.

"I'll be late," Dr. Panipak said softly when Akhira seemed to want to come closer again. If she didn't stop her, who knew when she'd be satisfied? Besides, they were in the car, and it wouldn't be good if someone saw them.

Akhira glanced at the clock and finally let her go. But not before giving her a final kiss on the cheek before sitting back straight.

"I'm going now. Drive safely."

Even though Dr. Panipak's words went unresponded to several times this morning, she knew her lover was no longer angry. Akhira's actions were evident. But if she was still upset, she wouldn't try to make up anymore.

*Because whenever she had to make up with Akhira, she always ended up at a disadvantage.*

### Chain Special Chapter 9

It had been over two hours, and the meeting room was filled with tension. The tall figure sitting at the head of the table remained silent, listening to what others had to say without showing any emotion. Even though there were issues with the work, Akhira believed that everything would eventually have a solution.

Instead of worrying about what she was hearing, she found herself distracted by the elegant watch on her wrist. It was almost time for Dr. Panipak to finish work, but the meeting showed no signs of concluding anytime soon.

"How about we call it a day for now?" A calm voice interrupted the ongoing arguments in the room.

Everyone fell silent immediately when the person at the head of the table spoke up. Despite the room being filled with people of various ages, everyone listened to Akhira. Some were displeased, but due to their positions, they could do nothing but comply.

"I suggest each department hold their own meetings again. Resolve any disagreements before the next meeting."

"...."

"Once everything is settled, we can discuss further."

The tall figure stood up as soon as she finished speaking. Her decision was final, and no one could oppose it. Akhira shook her head slightly as she left the meeting room. She disliked anything unclear, and today's events had left her feeling frustrated.

The meeting had lasted over two hours without any concrete results. It seemed like everyone was more interested in arguing than discussing progress or solutions. Akhira couldn't bear to listen any longer, especially since she had more important matters to attend to.

She pulled out her smartphone from her pocket and quickly dialed her lover's number. The call was answered almost immediately, as if the other person had been waiting.

"Hello... Yes, I might be a bit late."

Akhira acknowledged the response briefly before heading to her office to gather her belongings. She left the company promptly, worried about keeping the other person waiting, especially with the unpredictable traffic. She had no idea how long it would take to reach her destination.

Though it wasn't as quick as she'd hoped, Akhira finally arrived. The sleek black car pulled up in front of the clinic. She glanced at the illuminated glass windows for a moment before stepping out of the car.

She noticed a luxury car parked nearby and wondered if it belonged to a patient. Dr. Panipak had mentioned she was done with work during their phone call, so it was unlikely she'd say that if she still had patients.

Akhira decided to ignore the car. Whether there were patients or not, it didn't matter. She walked toward the building but had to stop when someone walked out, causing her to step aside.

The tall man looked at her and smiled politely, making brief eye contact before nodding apologetically for almost bumping into her.

If it had been any other woman, she might have melted at that smile, but Akhira felt nothing. No matter how good-looking the person was, he was just a stranger. She continued inside, coinciding with Dr. Panipak stepping out of the examination room.

"Was work busy today? You clocked out late," Dr. Panipak asked with a caring smile as soon as she saw her.

"A bit. Are you done with work?"



"Yes, shall we go? I'm hungry."

Dr. Panipak immediately tried to be affectionate toward Akhira, knowing she was still at fault. She'd promised herself not to be the one to make amends, but she couldn't help it whenever she saw her.

## CONDO

"Do you usually have many male patients?"

"What?" The person cleaning up the dishes turned to ask again, not having heard the question.

"Do you have many male patients?"

"Just the normal amount," Dr. Panipak replied nonchalantly. She didn't keep track of how many men or women she saw each day. "Why do you ask?"

After putting away the dishes, Dr. Panipak turned to question her lover. Akhira usually didn't meddle in her work, but today, she was asking a strange question.

"I was just curious if anyone might be hitting on you."

"Who would hit on me?"

"Your patients."

"My patients? What are you talking about? Those people come to see me because they're sick. If they weren't sick, they wouldn't come."

Dr. Panipak tried to explain calmly. Since becoming a doctor, she'd never seen anyone fake being sick just to see her. If that ever happened, she'd know. No one could fake being sick and lie to a doctor, except for Akhira, who wasn't sick but liked to visit her.

"If there isn't, that's fine. I was just asking," Akhira said flatly, getting up from her chair and leaving the doctor to watch as she walked away. If she wasn't mistaken, Akhira was probably

upset with her again. She'd just explained, but it seemed she didn't see it that way. The old issue wasn't resolved, and now there was a new one.

It looked like she was going to have a hard time making up with her.

**00:00**

"Phee Zo...."

"...."

Dr. Panipak, who was about to speak further, fell silent when the tall figure put down her work and lay down, turning her back to her as if ignoring her.

"Are you mad at me again?" she asked, knowing the answer. Dr. Panipak sighed softly before moving closer to the person who had turned her back on her, wrapping her arm around her waist and resting her face on her back.

"Are you asleep? Why won't you talk to me?"

"Do you need something? I'm going to sleep; I have an early meeting tomorrow." Though she said that, both knew it was just an excuse.

"There wouldn't be any issue if someone here wasn't mad."

"I'm not mad."

"Are you sure?"

"....."

"Stop being mad at me. Why are you acting like Pot?"

"Whatever I do or say, I'm always wrong, aren't I?" There it is. She said she wasn't mad, but her actions and words said otherwise.

Dr. Panipak sighed softly before tightening her embrace. She thought it wouldn't be hard to make amends with Akhira, but she needed to offer something. Businesspeople liked deals. If

there were benefits, they were willing to invest. That was why she thought it'd work. Someone like Akhira would relent if she got a good offer.

"Phee Zo, you're not wrong. It's my fault. Please stop being mad."

"...."

"If you stop being mad... I'll do whatever you want."

"...."

"I'll let you ask me for anything you want. Are you interested?"

"Really?"

Knew it. As soon as Dr. Panipak said that, Akhira turned to look at her with interest, making the doctor nod in agreement while still hugging her.

The tall figure turned back, a small smile forming on her lips at what she heard. Since she'd offered, there was no way Akhira would refuse. She already had something in mind.

*Opportunities like this don't come often, so why would I let it slip away?*

Since that day, it seemed Dr. Panipak used her car less and relied more on Akhira for rides. She didn't want to trouble her, but if it made her happy to spend even a short time together in the car, it was worth it. Plus, she'd promised to do whatever she wanted if she stopped being mad. Akhira used this to negotiate, and since then, she stopped being mad, with the added agreement of picking her up and dropping her off. She wasn't sure who was at a disadvantage. She only gained from this, while Akhira had to go through the trouble.

*What kind of deal is this?*

How could a businessperson offer a deal that put her at a disadvantage? It was something Akhira would never do in her professional life, but Dr. Panipak knew she was an exception.

*Akhira would do anything for her, no matter the cost.*

"Hello, Ms. Akhira. Are you here to pick up the doctor?" As soon as the tall figure walked into the clinic, someone greeted her.

"Yes."

"The doctor is with the last patient. Would you like a drink while you wait?"

"No, thank you."

The woman smiled at the guest's response before returning to her duties, leaving Akhira to her own devices. Though she hadn't worked there long and didn't know the clinic's owner well, she knew the relationship between this woman and the doctor in the examination room.

Akhira walked over and dropped herself onto the sofa in the guest area, glancing out at the sleek black luxury car parked next to her own through the large glass window. If she remembered correctly, she'd seen it before, and not just anywhere, but here, at Dr. Panipak's clinic.

Her sharp eyes flicked to the clock briefly before she looked up at the sound of footsteps approaching. Her brows furrowed slightly as she watched a tall, slender man exchange a few words with the nurse before walking out of the clinic.

And just as she thought, that car belonged to that man. Akhira turned back to the scene before her, waiting patiently until Dr. Panipak emerged. Seeing her, she stood up and immediately walked out to wait by the car, leaving Dr. Panipak puzzled.

"What's wrong with him?" The moment the slender figure opened the car door, she was hit with the question.

"Who?"

"That man, your patient." Hearing the words "that man," Dr. Panipak instantly knew who she was referring to. There was no one else it could be but the man who had just driven off.

"Just... general stuff, nothing serious."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Then why does he come to see you every day? Do healthy people visit the doctor every day?"

"He doesn't come every day."

"You say that, but I see him almost every time I come to pick you up." The change in Akhira's tone made the doctor pause. Akhira was starting to get annoyed after hearing Dr. Panipak's response.

*Is it reasonable to say that? It sounds like she is making excuses.*

"...."

"I asked why he needs to see a doctor every day and why it has to be you treating him when there are other doctors."

"I can't choose patients. If they come, I have to treat them. How can I say no?"

"Is he that sick that he needs to come this often? If he's that ill, why isn't he in a hospital?"

"I don't know."

"How can you not know when you're the one examining him? Is it really appropriate for him to come to the clinic this often?"

The speaker was getting a bit irritated. If he isn't that sick, why does he come so often? Maybe not every day, but it wasn't just two or three times. She saw that man almost every time she came to pick up her lover. She didn't come here often, yet she still saw him frequently. What about the time before this?

Dr. Panipak chose to stay silent, sensing the unusual atmosphere. She knew that if she kept arguing, it wouldn't lead to anything good. But was it fair to be on the receiving end of her anger when she hadn't done anything wrong? Just working late every day was exhausting enough, and now she had to deal with her lover's harsh words.

The current situation was making her feel frustrated.

"You're just picking a fight with me." Dr. Panipak turned to look out the window instead of at her partner. She didn't want to talk to Akhira right now. If she wasn't going to be reasonable, there was no need for her to explain.

Akhira glanced at the doctor briefly before swallowing her words when she saw the latter's irritated expression. Shortly after, the car started moving, and no one said anything. When they

reached Dr. Panipak's condo, they still hadn't spoken at all, and it was Akhira who had to give in.

Akhira watched her lover quietly clean the room, sighing as she calmed herself down. She knew she'd let her emotions get the better of her and had unreasonably pressed her for answers.

Dr. Panipak didn't like that kind of behavior; she was well aware of it. Yet, she couldn't control herself at that moment, leading to the conversation escalating into a fight. Not wanting her to stay mad for long, Akhira decided to make the first move to apologize.

"Dearest." The endearing term from Akhira could probably make many fall for her, but it didn't work on the cold-hearted doctor. The slender figure paid no attention to the person on the sofa, walking past her as if she hadn't heard her words. Akhira fell silent because she was ignored.

Akhira sat there feeling dejected. True, she'd started the argument, but she deserved an explanation, didn't she? She hadn't done anything wrong. She was just jealous. If Dr. Panipak had explained the situation a bit, it wouldn't have been like this. But the doctor cut her off, and it sounded like she was defending and siding with that man. Moreover, she acted as if she was annoyed with her.

*How am I supposed to feel?*

Even though she wanted to make up with the doctor, Akhira chose to stay silent. The doctor didn't even want to look at her. She wanted to apologize, but the doctor ignored her.

*You're getting tired of my face, aren't you?*

*Maybe you want to save your eyes for that handsome guy instead, don't you?*

## Chain Special Chapter 10

Since Dr. Panipak and Akhira had an argument three days ago, neither of them had shown any sign of wanting to talk to the other. Although they still lived together and went about their daily lives, they hadn't exchanged a single word.

Today was another day Dr. Panipak had to wait for her partner to pick her up. She glanced at the clock on the wall briefly before returning to her work, puzzled by Akhira's absence. Normally, Akhira would call her before arriving, but it was almost time for her to finish work, and she still hadn't called.

True, they were currently in a fight, but Akhira wasn't the type to be unreasonable or act out of spite. Even when she was angry, she never did anything harmful. Forgetting was out of the question since she'd dropped Dr. Panipak off that morning. There must be another reason for her delay today.

After some time had passed, Dr. Panipak decided to wait for her partner outside the hospital. She couldn't reach her because she wasn't answering her phone, but she chose to wait anyway.

"Are you waiting for your partner, Doctor?" a voice from behind made Dr. Panipak turn to look at the speaker.

"Yes."

"If you don't mind, would it be okay if I wait with you?" The kind man offered with a friendly smile, but Dr. Panipak didn't think that was a good idea.

"Uh, thank you, but it's alright. They should be here soon," she lied, using Akhira as an excuse to fend off further insistence.

"Oh, okay then. I'll be on my way."

"Yes."

She smiled politely at the man before turning back to look ahead, relieved. Lately, she'd been dealing with enough issues, and adding another one wouldn't be good. Even though it was just a normal conversation, if Akhira had seen it, she might not have thought so.

She knew Akhira was possessive, but since the incident with Sun, she hadn't had any problems with anyone else. It had been a long time since Akhira showed any signs of jealousy until the other day when she seemed particularly upset. Something must have triggered those feelings.

Dr. Panipak stopped overthinking and focused on the road ahead. A familiar car pulled up, and she quickly got in, not wanting to block others. Even though the person in the car didn't greet her, she felt better than she had in the previous days.

At least today, she didn't have to face an awkward situation because she wasn't going to the clinic, meaning Akhira wouldn't have to see the man who upset her.

"Can we eat out today?" Dr. Panipak broke the silence after a long period of tension. She glanced at the driver briefly. Akhira showed no reaction other than remaining silent, but when they reached an area full of restaurants, she asked in a flat tone, "Which restaurant?"

"The one up ahead is fine."

After that, silence resumed until the car parked at the restaurant. Dr. Panipak quietly followed her partner inside.

*Even though they were angry with each other, Akhira still indulged her.*

They were seated in a relatively private area since it was just the two of them. The staff eagerly attended to them, but the silence and negative atmosphere made the person standing by the table feel tense and uneasy.

"W... Would you like to order anything else?" The young waitress asked hesitantly, her bright smile fading due to the strange and intimidating vibe from the couple.



"Just this for now."

After ordering, Dr. Panipak smiled slightly at the waitress, noticing her discomfort. The person across from her was sitting with a stern face, silent like a robot. Anyone would feel uneasy—even she, as her partner, felt troubled.

They knew each other's habits, good and bad, but that didn't mean they were used to every situation. Normally, Akhira was sweet to her, so seeing her genuinely upset like this was naturally unsettling.

Despite the pleasant atmosphere of the restaurant, it didn't help ease Akhira's mood. There was no conversation throughout the meal. Even though they were at the same table, it felt like they were strangers who happened to sit together.

This was the quickest meal they'd ever had. When they returned to the condo, Dr. Panipak went straight to the bedroom. She took a medium-sized suitcase from the closet and started packing.

Since tomorrow was a rare day off, she planned to visit her parents. That's why she wanted to save time and chose to eat out instead of cooking at home.

She picked up her phone, tapped the screen a few times, and held it to her ear while continuing to pack. Soon, the call was answered, and she smiled upon hearing her mother's voice.

She chatted about various things until she mentioned her plan to visit home. Her hands stopped packing when she couldn't do as she wished.

"Can't I come now, Mom? I want to go tonight."

[You can come tomorrow, dear. It's late now, and I don't want Zo driving at night.]

"I'll go alone."

[Why alone?]

Her mother's question made her pause. It wasn't normal for her to visit alone without Akhira.

[Did you two have a fight?]

Phimwilai asked directly. It wasn't usual for her daughter to come home alone.

Dr. Panipak bit her lip, hesitating before softly replying, knowing she couldn't lie to her mother. "A little, Mom."

[What do you mean by 'a little'?]

Phimwilai pressed on, sensing it wasn't just a little fight since her daughter was in such a hurry to come home alone.

The daughter sighed softly, stopping her packing and sitting on the bed, feeling exhausted. "We fought over some little thing, Mom. Something silly."

[And what was this 'little thing'?]

"Just a small matter that she made a big deal out of."

[Was it also you that made it a big deal?]

The listener fell silent at her mother's words. It might seem like her mother was siding with Akhira, but deep down, Dr. Panipak knew she also contributed to making the small issue bigger.

[Sometimes, we need to put ourselves in the other's shoes, dear. Talk things out calmly.]

"But she..." Dr. Panipak sighed again, biting her lip. Despite her frustration with Akhira, she didn't want her mother to think badly of her, so she kept her thoughts to herself and said something else.

"She makes me frustrated."

[People are like that, dear.]

"..."

[Your father and I often argue, too. I get frustrated when he's unreasonable, but we've stayed together all these years. Arguing isn't bad, but we need to let go of our pride, listen, and forgive.]

"..."

[I don't believe Zo wouldn't try to make up with you. You're the stubborn one.]

Her mother's words were spot on. It was true that Akhira had tried to talk to her, but her emotions made her ignore it, rejecting her attempts and leading to their silence over the past few days.

[So, will you tell me what this 'little thing' is?]

"Well... She got jealous over me and my patient."

[You've been a doctor for so long. Why is she jealous now?]

The more her mother questioned, the more cornered Dr. Panipak felt. Finally, she had to explain everything.

"Recently, she's been picking me up, and she often sees a man at my clinic. She got worried, thinking that man might be interested in me, so she got upset."

[You mean your patient?]

"Yes."

[And is what she thinks true?]

"No... it's not," Dr. Panipak replied softly. Even though she said that, deep down, she knew what had been happening to her lately.

[Then why don't you explain it to her?]

"At that time, she was in a bad mood. I didn't want to talk to her."

[And now, is she in a better mood? Why don't you try talking to her nicely?]

"I don't know if she'll believe me. She probably thinks that I and that guy..."

[Telling me won't help. I don't know how to help you. I can only suggest you talk to her.]

"Yes, Mom. I'll try."

[And don't drive alone tonight. It's late. Come see me tomorrow, okay?]

"Yes, Mom. It's late. You should rest now. I won't bother you anymore."

[Alright, see you tomorrow, dear. Oh, and I want to see Zo, too. Don't forget to invite her.]

After hanging up the phone with her mother, Dr. Panipak could only ponder hard about what to do. She walked over to put the packed suitcase back into the closet. She could wait until tomorrow morning to go. She'd never been like this before, never made decisions based on fleeting emotions. But part of her urgency was really because of Akhira. She had to admit that.

*Sometimes, feeling slighted makes us do irrational things.*

At **7:24 AM**, Akhira woke up feeling down. It had been like this for several days. The tall figure slowly sat up after being awake for a while. Her sharp eyes glanced at the empty space beside her before noticing the neatly packed suitcase.

That made her realize where the other person was going today because last night, Dr. Panipak's mother had already called her. But now, where had she gone? If she'd left, the suitcase wouldn't still be in the room. After a brief thought, she quickly went to take a shower.

If she guessed correctly, Dr. Panipak should still be in the kitchen.

She was probably making breakfast for them...

Akhira walked into the kitchen as usual, but what she saw made her a bit displeased. The slender figure was intently chopping vegetables. She'd already told her she'd handle that part, but the doctor simply wouldn't listen.

Dr. Panipak glanced at the person who had just walked in. Because she took her eyes off what she was doing, the knife that should've been chopping the green vegetables instead sliced into her delicate finger.

"Ouch!" The pain shot through her finger as bright red blood flowed out. Dr. Panipak immediately let go of the knife in shock, just as Akhira quickly walked over to move the knife away and grabbed her hand to check the wound.

Akhira quickly placed the slender hand under the running water. Dr. Panipak bit her lip, suddenly feeling her eyes well up. Maybe it was the pain from the wound, or perhaps it was the pent-up feelings inside her that were now bursting out.

She had to admit that even though she acted indifferent, she felt hurt every time her lover ignored her. Seeing Akhira show concern like this made her wall even more vulnerable. The mix of emotions was so overwhelming she didn't know how to explain it.

"Stop the bleeding first. I'll get the medicine to treat the wound," Akhira said in a concerned voice before hurrying off to get the first aid kit.

Akhira's eyebrows furrowed in worry as she saw the blood that wouldn't stop flowing. Slowly, the bleeding was brought under control. Akhira gently bandaged the wound, afraid of causing more pain.

"Does it hurt?" she asked, looking up at her. She paused when she saw her face. Dr. Panipak shook her head slightly, avoiding eye contact. The tears welling up in her eyes made her heart ache.

"Why are you crying?" Akhira asked warmly. Dr. Panipak shook her head again, still looking down. Akhira sighed and gently pulled her into her arms.

Dr. Panipak rested her face on Akhira's shoulder. The warmth made the tears she tried to hold back flow freely. She didn't know when she'd become so sensitive.

Akhira gently stroked her back, understanding immediately why she was crying. The pent-up feelings they both had reached a point where they overflowed.

Akhira rested her cheek against Dr. Panipak's soft hair with love. She missed this feeling so much that it was hard to put into words. The past few days, the silence hadn't made the situation better. She admitted she was angry and hurt, but in the end, she couldn't stay that way any longer.

She didn't know how long they'd be like this or how long they could endure the tension. But honestly, she didn't want her to apologize. At that moment, the frustration was so overwhelming she didn't know how to handle it.

The room fell silent until the tall figure slowly stood up and walked over to clean up the mess. The sharp knife was washed and put away. Akhira took care of the remaining vegetables herself, letting the injured person rest.

Dr. Panipak sat quietly, looking at her hand, thinking. Her uninjured fingers gently touched the bandaged wound, and she sighed softly. She was a doctor. She knew what to do if she got hurt, but at that moment, she stood still, letting the blood flow until Akhira rushed to help.

"Have breakfast first. I'll drive you to your parents'."

"How do you know where I'm going?" Her voice was slightly nasal as she turned to look at her lover's back, busy at the counter.

"Mom told me." Even though her response was brief, Dr. Panipak could still sense the gentleness in her voice. The natural conversation eased the tension between them.

"I'm sorry for not telling you first."

"It's okay."

Dr. Panipak smiled slightly after hearing that. No matter what happened, whether she did something wrong or even when they were upset with each other, Akhira always said it was okay.

She didn't know if others felt the same, but for her, Akhira suited that phrase perfectly. Every time she heard it, she thought of her because if she said it was okay, it really would be.

Sunyanv

### **Chain Special Chapter 11**

"I have to go to work now. I'll come by in the evening," Akhira said, handing over a bag of clothes to the person waiting.

"Are you staying at my mom's house tonight?"

"I can stay."

"Why didn't you tell me earlier? I could've packed your clothes."

"It's okay. I'll stop by the condo to get them."

"Do you want to see Dad and Mom first?"

"I'll see them in the evening. Tell them I say hello." Dr. Panipak nodded understandingly. The distance from her house to the other person's company wasn't short; it would take at least an hour or faster if there was no traffic.

Dr. Panipak stood watching Akhira until the luxury car gradually disappeared. At the same moment, Phimwilai walked out of the house.

"Has Zo already left? I heard the car."

"Yes, but she'll come by in the evening," her daughter replied, shaking her head slightly. It seemed her mother really wanted to see Akhira, just as she'd mentioned. Even while talking to her, her mother didn't even look at her. She just kept craning her neck to watch the luxury car until it was out of sight. It kind of made her annoyed.

With Akhira, not her mother.

"So, you two have probably talked things out, right? Since she came to drop you off."

"Something like that," Dr. Panipak replied to her mother to ease her worries. She didn't want her mother to be concerned about her. In truth, they had talked, but not about the unresolved issues.

Even though that matter hadn't been cleared up, she and her lover were no longer sulking at each other. That was a good thing. The situation between them was returning to normal, and she believed it would get even better soon.

"Come inside, dear. Let me help."

"It's okay, Mom. I can carry it myself."

"I'll carry it," Phimwilai insisted, taking her daughter's suitcase and leading the way into the house.

"I'll put my things away first," the doctor said, taking her suitcase back and preparing to go upstairs.

"There are clothes in your room. You didn't need to bring more."

"I wasn't sure if they'd still fit, so I brought some just in case."

"Well, suit yourself. Go relax. I'll make a new dessert I just got the recipe for. If it's good, I'll make it for Zo when she comes in the evening."

"Okay, Mom," Dr. Panipak shook her head slightly at her mother. It seemed she was being used as a test subject. It looked like her lover was more important to everyone in the house than she was.

She wondered who the real daughter was.

She began to understand Akhira's feelings. Akhira often complained that Madam Nada loved her more than her. At that time, she argued that a mother couldn't love someone else more than her own daughter. But now she had her answer. She just realized it was like this.

*But it was kind of cute.*

## **21:32**

The sound of the TV in the living room was the only thing keeping the person on the sofa from feeling lonely. Dr. Panipak kept glancing at the clock and then out the window, waiting to see when the person she was waiting for would arrive. But there was still no sign of her.

Dr. Panipak sighed, gripping her phone tightly. She was worried because no matter how many times she tried to call her lover, there was no answer, which made her anxious.

The TV's sound occasionally reached her ears, but she couldn't focus on it because her mind was preoccupied with other worries. With nothing else to do, Dr. Panipak had no choice but to wait anxiously.

This must be how Akhira felt when she didn't answer her calls. She thought it was a small matter, but experiencing it herself left her speechless.



Finally, her anxiety ended when the headlights at the front gate signaled that the person she was waiting for had arrived. The slender figure quickly got up from the sofa and walked to the gate to open it for the newcomer.

"Why are you so late? I called, but you didn't answer," Dr. Panipak asked immediately as the tall figure got out of the car, catching the other off guard.

Akhira bent down to grab her suitcase, then turned to face her lover, who was staring at her. Her eyebrows furrowed slightly at the question. She turned back to the car to look for something but couldn't find it.

"I think I left my bag at the condo," she said, meeting her lover's eyes. She must've forgotten it while packing because she was focused on the suitcase.

"Are you senile already?" the slender figure asked teasingly with her arms crossed.

"Are you picking a fight with me?"

"No, I was just asking. You forget things often."

"Not that often."

"Yes, not often, but it's becoming more frequent. That's how old people are."

Akhira shook her head at her lover's words. She couldn't argue because she knew she wouldn't win. Besides, if they talked about age, she was at a disadvantage since her lover was indeed younger.

"Mom made some dessert, but since you were late, I put it in the fridge. You can have it tomorrow."

Akhira nodded and asked as they entered the house, but they didn't see her parents.

"Are Dad and Mom asleep?"

"I told them to go to bed. They wouldn't go, saying they wanted to see you," she said, taking the taller person's suitcase while she was distracted and leading the way upstairs after turning off the TV in the living room.

"Go take a shower. I've prepared everything," the doctor told her lover again after entering the bedroom. She watched as the tall figure obediently walked into the bathroom with a smile. It seemed the atmosphere between them was improving and almost back to normal.

Even so, she still had unresolved issues in her heart, and Akhira probably felt the same. She could let it go without explaining, but if she didn't tell Akhira the truth, it might happen again in the future.

She spent a long time thinking about whether to speak up. Finally, she decided she had to make her understand. Otherwise, they'd continue to misunderstand and feel hurt. She knew Akhira was still worried, but she cared about her more and chose to overlook it.

Despite her kindness, she was afraid of something unreasonable.

**22:00**

The person lying on the bed opened her eyes immediately when she felt someone on the other side of the bed. The person who was about to lie down stopped, thinking she'd woken her up.

"I'm not asleep yet," Dr. Panipak said softly, turning to face the tall figure now lying beside her. Her beautiful eyes watched as her lover reached to turn off the lamp. Every move was in her sight, making the person being watched turn to meet her gaze.

"What is it?" Akhira raised an eyebrow in curiosity, pretending not to notice she was being watched.

"I'll let you ask one question."

"What question?"

"Anything you want to know."

"I have nothing to ask you."

"How about the man?"

"....."

"Don't you want to know about that man anymore?" Though she asked her directly, Akhira remained silent. Even though it was something she wanted to know before, now that the doctor gave her the opportunity to ask, she didn't take it.

Dr. Panipak stared at her lover, seeking answers, wondering what she was thinking. She thought about what had happened between them.

In truth, Akhira had only met that man three or four times, but she quickly became suspicious. She had many regular patients, but her lover never had a problem with them. But Akhira was suspicious of that man. She had to admit Akhira had a good sense.

That man was genuinely sick, but it was a minor illness that most people wouldn't see a doctor for. Even so, she knew he had ulterior motives for coming to the clinic.

She could tell he was interested in her. Even when he saw the ring on her finger, he didn't care, and that made her feel disgusted.

But as a doctor, she couldn't refuse him. If they met outside or anywhere other than work, she wouldn't be so polite.

And Akhira was a strange one. When someone liked her, she didn't know. But when someone was interested in the doctor, she was quick to sense it.

"So, do you want to know about that man or not?"

When Dr. Panipak asked but got no answer, the room fell silent again. Akhira was startled when the person lying beside her suddenly sat up and straddled her.

Dr. Panipak even reached out to pinch the cheeks of the person beneath her playfully, causing the other to frown. Yet, she didn't resist, making the instigator feel triumphant.

"Stop teasing me already," the taller person said, gently removing the hand from her cheek.

"Why didn't you answer my question?" The doctor tilted her head cutely, making the other turn away.

"I don't want to talk about it," Akhira said, confirming that the issue was far from resolved. Akhira hadn't forgotten about it and still thought about it constantly; she just chose not to speak about it. Even when given the chance to ask, she showed no interest.

"You're so stubborn."

"I'm not stubborn."

“Really?” The question was asked in a playful tone. Since Akhira claimed not to be stubborn, Dr. Panipak might have to test whether that was really the case.

Dr. Panipak locked eyes with the other in the darkness. The eyes that could once intimidate her now seemed a bit dull, perhaps due to some troubling thoughts or because she was being teased. Dr. Panipak withdrew her hand from the grip, gently caressing the cheek of the person beneath her before planting a soft kiss and slowly pulling away.

“Hurry up, I'm giving you a chance to ask.”

“I don't want to know anymore.”

“Really? Then don't come asking me again.” The words from above made Akhira pause in contemplation. The intense gaze made her feel pressured until she finally decided to ask what she wanted to know.

“Was that guy really sick, or was he just coming to see you?”

“He was really sick, but it was nothing serious. About him coming to the clinic often, I have to admit... he does come frequently.”

“.....”

“But it's not like I'm the only one who examines him. Other doctors do, too, depending on the time. And besides, I don't specifically choose to treat him.”

Seeing the others remain silent, Dr. Panipak quickly clarified, even though she hadn't done anything wrong, to prevent Akhira from overthinking.

“What is he sick with?”

“I really can't tell you.”

Dr. Panipak replied softly. She had no intention of lying or hiding anything, but since it was someone else's information, someone who was a patient, it was her duty to keep that secret. It wouldn't look good for a doctor to discuss or reveal a patient's details to someone not involved.

“.....”

“You should know that doctors shouldn't disclose patient information to someone else.”

“Not even to me? Am I someone else?”

"If answering as a doctor, then yes, even to you."

Akhira nodded in understanding. When it came to work, she couldn't argue with her because she knew what Dr. Panipak was like and how dedicated she was to her profession. Therefore, she should respect her work as well.

"If you understand, then stop sulking."

"I'm not sulking."

The listener felt exasperated by that statement. Even though she said she wasn't sulking, she'd been giving her a cold shoulder for several days.

"Good, and stop overthinking. I'm already married," Dr. Panipak said seriously, hoping Akhira would understand what she meant. If she didn't want to settle down with anyone, she wouldn't have chosen to marry or commit to anyone as she had now.

Akhira stared at her intently. Even though the room was dark, she could still see her clearly. She understood and believed her without a doubt, but if asked whether her jealousy would disappear, the answer was no. Dr. Panipak mightn't be interested in others, but that didn't mean others wouldn't be interested in her.

Their eyes locked for a minute before the hand of the person below slipped under the other's shirt, causing the slender figure to tense her stomach. Akhira gently caressed the smooth skin without saying anything, making Dr. Panipak raise an eyebrow and ask a question she thought was foolish.

"What?" In such a situation, it should be obvious, but the darkness reduced her embarrassment, allowing her to speak even though she already had an answer in her heart.

Akhira remained silent as if playing a guessing game while her hand continued to move. Dr. Panipak didn't resist because she'd willingly entered the lion's den. If she were to be eaten, it wouldn't be surprising. But then, she was surprised when the other withdrew her hand.

Akhira lifted the doctor's waist slightly, signaling her to return to her original position. She didn't want to take advantage of her too much. Even though it was always consensual, today was a rest day, and she didn't want to disturb her.

"Let's sleep." The listener smiled immediately at her lover's words. The slender figure moved off Akhira and snuggled into her warm embrace.

Sex might be a part of their relationship, but sometimes they don't need it. Akhira didn't think about it all the time. She just let everything be as it should. Just being close and taking care of each other like this was already very fulfilling.

**06:25**

This morning, Dr. Panipak woke up early again, but she didn't get up. Instead, she kept staring at the sleeping person as if she were something fascinating. She reached out to gently stroke the arm of the person sleeping higher up.

Luckily, she woke up in the middle of the night. Otherwise, her lover would've had a numb arm all day. She might never complain, but she knew without her saying because it often happened. She saw her grimace frequently upon waking. Seeing that made her feel sorry for her. Having someone use the arm as a pillow all night must've been quite painful.

Dr. Panipak kept looking up at her before getting a playful idea. She gathered her long, beautiful hair like a brush and gently brushed it across Akhira's face as if painting on a canvas.

Her face lit up with a smile when she saw Akhira frown in her sleep, her eyebrows knitting together as she turned away in annoyance. The slender figure chuckled at her successful prank. Eventually, the disturbed person woke up. Seeing this, Dr. Panipak stopped everything, closed her eyes, and pretended to be asleep.

Akhira frowned as soon as she opened her eyes, glancing slightly at her still partner. Her half-awake brain slowly processed the situation. Soon, she sat up, staring at her without blinking. The annoying sensation couldn't have been anyone else's doing, as only one person could do that at this time.

*Pretending to sleep after pranking me.*

"I know you're awake."

"....."

"Why did you prank me?"

"What prank? I just woke up, too. What is it?" With no other choice, Dr. Panipak slowly opened her eyes. Her sweet voice sounded hesitant, making the listener look at her suspiciously.

"You can confess now that you pranked me so your punishment won't be harsh." Dr. Panipak's eyes widened slightly at her words, wondering where she'd learned such a phrase. Maybe she watched too many dramas.

"I didn't do anything."

"You woke me up."

"Where's the evidence?" The slender figure spoke nonchalantly, unlike her usual self. She even feigned ignorance, making Akhira feel like she wanted to tease her, too.

"Really?" The sharp, beautiful face leaned in close before pressing her nose to her lover's soft cheek and pulling away.

"If you don't admit it, I'll keep kissing you until you do." The sharp eyes looked at her with a warning. When the doctor remained still, Akhira stole another kiss on her cheek. But even then, Dr. Panipak stayed still, meeting her gaze as if nothing had happened.

Seeing this, Akhira pressed her nose to the doctor's cheeks repeatedly until she couldn't take it anymore and finally laughed. The slender figure turned her face into the pillow, pulling the blanket up to shield herself from the relentless kisser.

"Enough, I confess, I confess."

"You started it."

"Phee Zo, I said enough."

A muffled voice came from under the large blanket. True, Dr. Panipak could order Akhira around, but not always. This time, her command didn't work as she tried to snuggle in and kept trying to kiss her.

"Phee Zo, that's enough. Get up now." The serious tone came from Dr. Panipak's mouth as she sat up, signaling Akhira to stop.

"Where should I go? I don't want to go anywhere; I want to sleep more. But you woke me up, so I'm awake." Oh, come on. She said she didn't want to wake up, but instead of sleeping, she chose to bother her. Full of excuses, this person.

"Go shower now, or should I go first?" Akhira's face soured immediately at her command.

Dr. Panipak looked at her sulking face for a moment before remembering something she hadn't told her. She was sure that once she did, Akhira would jump out of bed without hesitation.

“If you don't go, I'll go first. We might be late for the little one.”

“?”

“My brother is coming today, and the little one is coming, too.”

Just hearing the word 'little one', Akhira immediately sprang up from the bed, just as Dr. Panipak had expected. She shook her face slightly at her lover's hurried actions as she rushed ahead of her into the bathroom, even though she'd just told her she wanted to sleep a bit longer.

*What an annoyingly cute person.*

**Chain Special Chapter 12**

***Cute***



That was the first word that popped into Akhira's head after seeing her little niece up close. Although she'd visited Dr. Panipak's sister-in-law after the birth and had seen the baby before, she hadn't been this close.

"You can hold her," the mother smiled at the tall figure standing next to Dr. Panipak before handing the adorable baby in a pink outfit to the doctor.

"Did she just wake up, or is she still sleepy? She's not fussy at all."

"Maybe she's confused about why Auntie Pleng is so pretty." The playful comment made everyone smile as Dr. Panipak carefully cradled the baby close to her chest.

"Do you need help carrying things?" the doctor asked as she looked outside and saw her brother unloading items from the car.

"I'll go help him. Can you and Ms. Akhira watch the baby for a bit?" The mother smiled at the tall figure, who was standing still, looking at the baby with a gentle smile, before walking out to help her husband, as she'd said.

"Do you want to try holding her?" Dr. Panipak asked her partner when they were alone. Earlier, she'd been in a rush to meet her niece, but now she stood there shyly, not daring to hold her.

Akhira gently stroked the baby's cheek before taking her from Dr. Panipak. She cradled the small body carefully, her awkward movements making the onlooker chuckle.

Even though she knew how to hold a baby, this time, she seemed unusually anxious and tense. Perhaps it was because she'd never held such a small baby before.

"She's so cute," Akhira said as the baby rested her chubby cheek on her shoulder. She turned slightly to let the person standing next to her see the baby's face, who was not crying nor showing any fear of strangers.

Dr. Panipak could only smile at her partner. As time went by, everything became clearer. Akhira must really like children, even though she never said it. Her actions and expressions spoke volumes.

But it wasn't just Akhira who was smitten. This little one was as adorable as Pot, just in different ways.

"Isn't Pot coming, too?" Akhira asked, looking outside to see if her favorite nephew was around.

"He's at school today, so he couldn't come." The answer might not have pleased her, but Akhira understood that Pot had to go to school.

"And aren't you working today?" Dr. Panipak asked the taller one, who was playing with the niece, curious because today was her day off, but it wasn't Akhira's. Plus, it was getting late, and if she didn't leave soon, she'd be late for work.

"I can go in late."

"How late are we talking? It takes a while to drive there."

"I'm an executive; I can go in whenever I want." Dr. Panipak was puzzled by her answer. She'd never heard Akhira say anything like this before. Normally, she wasn't one to neglect work or do things on a whim. People really do change easily—just seeing a cute niece made her not want to go to work.

In the end, she didn't go to work at all. Akhira stayed and played with the niece until the evening because she was just as excited as everyone else. The baby was cooperative, staying awake and laughing when teased, making everyone in the house fall head over heels and unable to do anything else.

Even Akhira, who said she'd go back to her place, didn't go. So today, she took an impromptu day off because of her cuteness.

**20:28**

By the time the couple returned to their condo, it was already dark. They had dinner at Dr. Panipak's house. Akhira kept smiling happily, having played with the niece to her heart's content. In truth, Akhira wasn't satisfied yet. She wanted to stay with the niece longer, but various circumstances didn't allow it.

"I didn't know she'd be there, so I didn't buy anything for her. You didn't tell me," Akhira complained to her partner, realizing she hadn't bought anything for the niece despite the rare opportunity to meet her.

"I forgot. You can buy something for her next time."

"I want to see her again. Can we visit them when we're free?"

"Of course," Dr. Panipak smiled at her partner sitting at the end of the bed.

"Then tomorrow..."

"I'm not free tomorrow, and neither are you."

"But I..."

"No more excuses. You already took a day off today." Dr. Panipak interrupted immediately, knowing exactly what Akhira was going to say. She knew her too well, and that made the tall figure pout.

\*I knew she'd pout like this.\*

"She isn't going anywhere. We can visit them another time. We'll go on a real holiday so we can see Pot, too."

"Alright."

Dr. Panipak looked at her partner with amusement. She was just pretending to scold her because she knew it'd be like this.

Akhira had always been like this. She was just as excited about Pot. Now, with a niece, the doting aunt would want to see her all the time.

And from the time they were at her parents' house until they returned to the condo, Akhira hadn't stopped smiling, constantly saying how cute the niece was. It seemed she was very fond of the little one.

"Doctor."

"What?" The slender figure frowned slightly when her partner suddenly called her by a different title.

"I want to have a baby, too."

"What did you say?"

"I want to have a baby, too. How can we do that?" Akhira asked again, looking at her partner with hope, genuinely wanting to know if it was possible. But the answer she got wasn't quite what she wanted.

"You have to work hard then," Dr. Panipak teased, knowing that no matter how hard her partner worked, they couldn't have one naturally. She was just joking, but she forgot that the other person wasn't in the mood for jokes.

"Are you teasing me again?" Akhira pouted, knowing she was being teased. She'd asked seriously, but she got a playful answer as if the doctor wasn't taking the question seriously.

*Someone like this needs to be punished.*

"Phee Zo... I was just joking," Dr. Panipak said softly when her partner looked serious and stepped closer, making her unable to move.

"Really? You were joking... but I'm serious."

With that, Akhira's words were followed by Dr. Panipak's small protests as she tried to negotiate and apologize, saying she wouldn't do it again. But it was too late; the aggrieved party wasn't letting it go. In the end, the one who teased was punished accordingly.

**07:00**

Dr. Panipak blinked slowly and turned to look at the empty space next to her with surprise. She sat up for a moment before heading to the bathroom to freshen up.

The new day started freshly. Even though her body was tired, it didn't affect her daily life. But she was still curious about where her partner had gone.

The doctor walked out of the bedroom, looking around the living room but finding no one. She was sure Akhira hadn't left for work yet, and her bag was still in the bedroom. If she had to guess, she was probably still in the condo, and there was only one place she hadn't checked.

**THE KITCHEN.**

Sure enough, she wasn't wrong. But what she saw made her even more surprised. Her eyes scanned the tall figure standing in front of the stove, wearing an apron. She didn't say anything; she just watched as Akhira prepared breakfast.

"Do you know how to cook?"

Akhira, focused on the food, glanced at her briefly. Instead of answering, she asked for her help.

"Can you get me a plate, dearest?" The tall figure extended one hand, waiting for what she'd asked for without looking at her. Her other hand was busy stirring the food in the pan, so Dr. Panipak had no choice but to get her a plate.

"Sit down. Breakfast is ready."

The slender figure obediently sat at the table. Soon, the aroma of hot food filled the air.

Dr. Panipak examined the food on the plate in front of her. It wasn't much, just one plate, but it had many components. Fried rice with a sunny-side-up egg, bacon, and vegetables on the side made the dish look even more appetizing.

"Thank you. Where did you learn to cook?" the doctor asked as she took the fork and spoon from the taller figure who was watching her.

It was true that Akhira often helped her cook, but only as an assistant. She never did anything serious. At most, she'd handle the vegetables or cut the meat. Seeing her cook a full meal on her own was surprising.

"I watched it on the internet."

Akhira answered honestly. She wasn't very good at cooking, but in this world, nothing is too difficult for one to handle. Besides, if you don't know how, you can find someone who will tell you. And because she wanted to try doing something for her loved one, she chose to do it herself.

Akhira moved to sit opposite her lover. When she saw the other person start to use a spoon to take food into her mouth, her heart pounded like a drum set. Even though she'd tasted it before, she wasn't sure if it'd turn out well.

"Is it delicious?" Akhira's voice broke the silence when the beautiful face across from her showed no reaction after the first bite. She never thought that just cooking for her loved one would feel this stressful.

"It's... edible."

"Just edible?" Akhira sighed, sounding disappointed. From sitting up straight, she slumped her shoulders, making the doctor smile when she saw her lover's expression.

"Look at your face. I didn't say it wasn't delicious." The doctor reached out to gently lift the chin of the person across from her.

"But you said it's just edible."

"Edible means it's good enough to eat, not that it isn't delicious." The doctor shook her head at her lover, smiling. She understood. It was Akhira's first time cooking alone, so she probably had high expectations.

It's not surprising. Even when she cooked for her every day, she always wondered if it would suit her taste, especially when trying a new recipe.

"Really?"

"Try it, and you'll know if I'm telling the truth or lying."

"I already tasted it."

"And how was it?"

"It was... edible," Akhira answered softly. For a moment, she was surprised that her words matched her lover's. The breakfast was edible. It might not have been the most scrumptious, but it was enough to fill the stomach.

After that, the couple didn't argue about the taste anymore. They just had a light conversation, and Dr. Panipak learned that Akhira planned to start cooking more often because she wanted to help her more.

For Dr. Panipak, it was endearing. She felt good every time she was cared for, no matter how small the gesture. Some things others might overlook, but not Akhira. She cared for her the most.

*Even now, she still stood by what she said... that she was really lucky to be her lover.*

*Several days later*

### ***Hospital***

"Your hands are full, Doctor," a nurse teased, making the doctor turn and smile. Her beautiful face, with a light touch of makeup, smiled, trying not to show her embarrassment.

The teasing nurse grinned mischievously, mocking the beautiful doctor whose hands were full of items, including a bouquet and a glass of green tea. It was obvious who they were from since she'd witnessed the scene herself.

If she didn't know they were married, she would think they were still in the honeymoon phase. It's rare for married couples to still do such things. Every morning and evening, Akhira brought her things, like today's flowers, making everyone around blush.

"Aren't you going to put the flowers in a vase, Doctor?"

"No, it's fine."

The nurse just said it to tease her. The plump nurse smiled as she watched the beautiful doctor walk away. It had become a routine for her to tease the doctor.

Before, if Dr. Panipak had flowers, she'd give them to the nurses to take care of, but flowers from Akhira seemed to get special treatment. Dr. Panipak would take them to her office as if they were precious to her.

"What are you carrying, Pleng?"

Dr. Panipak sighed as soon as she heard the voice from the room, turning to face her two friends.

"You're early."

"Didn't you tell us to come?" Dr. Ninlaneen feigned innocence, making Dr. Panipak shake her head in exasperation. She handed the drinks to her two friends after placing her things on the table.

"Thank Madam Nada for me, Pleng. She's so considerate," Dr. Plaitha said after receiving a glass of the drink.

"It's fine. Phee Zo was happy to do it."

"Aww, you're calling her 'Phee Zo' now, huh? Back then, you always called her 'Madam Nada.'" The friend's words made Dr. Panipak feel a headache. Her face flushed for the second time that morning. Besides dealing with teasing nurses, she had to face her teasing friends, too. It was exhausting.

"Both of you, get back to work. I just asked you to pick up the stuff, not slack off."

"Yes, Doctor. How strict. Anyway, tell her I said thank you," Dr. Ninlaneen said, and Dr. Panipak nodded, watching her friends leave before sighing again when everything calmed down.

She moved the bouquet to a less cluttered spot on her desk, biting her lip to stop herself from smiling. She shook her head slightly to clear her thoughts.

"Why does she have to do this?"

She whispered to herself. She didn't understand why her lover always did these things. Since she returned to work, she acted like it was the old days or even more than before when she was still flirting with her.

She was surprised. She didn't know what got into Akhira to buy her such a big bouquet. At first, she thought it was just a one-time thing, but she'd been doing it for three days now.

Sometimes, Akhira let her drive to work herself as requested, but she'd still bring flowers to the hospital before going to work. That couldn't escape the watchful eyes of others, and she ended up being teased. Not that she didn't like it, but she wanted to tell Akhira that she could get embarrassed, too.

The door to Dr. Panipak's office closed, but the smile on the face of the person who just left didn't fade.

"How cute." Her two doctor friends were still talking about the couple. Their cuteness made Dr. Plaifha admire them.

"Madam Nada, right?"

"Yes, even after marrying Pleng, she still acts like when she was in the honeymoon phase."

"Maybe to make their status clear and ward off others?"

"Probably. Even after marriage, people still try to flirt with Pleng. It wasn't this many before," Dr. Plaifha muttered, and Dr. Ninlaneen nodded in agreement. It seemed her friend had become more popular after marriage.



But those people were strange. They could see the ring on her friend's left finger, yet they still wanted to get to know her. Just getting to know her was fine, but bringing gifts was inappropriate. Maybe it's true that married women are more attractive. Seeing Dr. Panipak, it seemed likely.

One week later

"Are you leaving, Doctor?" A nurse asked when she saw the slender figure walking out.

Dr. Panipak nodded and gave a short reply, surprised by the nurse's mischievous look and embarrassed smile. She turned to look at the reception area.

She smiled when she saw her lover walking toward her with a beautiful bouquet. Dr. Panipak now understood why the nurse acted that way.

She noticed a regular male patient sitting not far from Akhira but didn't pay much attention. Today, she clocked out early, so another doctor took over her remaining patients.

The third person watched the two women intently, but they didn't notice. The couple walked out together. Everything was clear today, but she didn't know how much he'd understand.

Dr. Panipak hoped that person would give up after seeing her real partner come to pick her up. It's true that she didn't have any feelings for him, but knowing someone else's feelings when she couldn't reciprocate made her uncomfortable.

She wanted to be a better doctor, treating patients with all her might without any distractions. She hoped that person would understand that he was just a patient to her and could never be more.

"Thank you."

Dr. Panipak said when she was alone with her lover. She looked at the bouquet in her hand with a smile before remembering something. Her slender hand gently opened the bouquet, then she pulled out a single white rose and handed it to the tall person sitting there, looking confused.

"Here you go."

"What is it?"

"A flower for you." The doctor smiled sweetly, but the person looking at her was still puzzled.

"Eh?" Akhira furrowed her brows slightly. Could this really be considered a gift? After all, the flower she handed over came from the bouquet she'd bought herself.

"Why do you look like that? Don't you like the flower I gave you?"

"But this is the flower I bought for you."

"Well, it's mine now. I can do whatever I want with it," Dr. Panipak smiled while looking at her lover, who now had a sulky expression like a child who didn't get their way.

"That's not nice," the tall figure grumbled at the beautiful but stingy person. Who takes a flower from a bouquet someone bought for them and then hands it back like this? If you're going to give flowers, at least buy them yourself.

"What's not nice about it? When you bought me the flowers that were supposed to be offered to the Buddha, I didn't say a word." No matter how much time passed, that mistake was always brought up. It was just one slip-up.

"You remember things like this so well."

"I remember everything," Dr. Panipak turned to meet the other's eyes as if to confirm her words. She really did remember everything, if it was about Akhira, no matter the time or event.

Even the first time they met, she still remembered every image, sound, and feeling, even though she didn't feel anything for her back then.

Her beautiful lips curved into a small smile before she leaned her head on the shoulder of the person next to her, lifting her hand to cling to Akhira's arm as if seeking comfort. This surprised Akhira quite a bit because the doctor didn't do that often. But what surprised her even more was what she was hearing.

"I love you, Phee Zo."

Akhira smiled at the words with joy. Even though the other person didn't say it often, deep down, Akhira knew she loved her because if she didn't, they wouldn't have been together until now. There was a clear difference between Dr. Panipak then and Dr. Panipak now.

Love and not love.

Even though the beginning was rough and painful, looking back now, Akhira never regretted what happened. It might've taken some time, but it was worth it because, in the end, she had Dr. Panipak's love, and she was glad to be that person for her.

And no matter what the future holds, whether it gets better or worse, she wouldn't regret it because just having Dr. Panipak by her side made life feel complete. Just having her was enough.

"Pleng."

"Yes?"

"I love you."

"From now on, you don't need to tell me that."

"Why..."

"Because I already know that you love me."

"What are you looking for?" Dr. Panipak asked when she saw her lover walking back and forth, moving in and out of rooms as if searching for something. Since they had returned to the condo, she hadn't stopped pacing around.

"I can't find my phone," Akhira replied.

The doctor paused for a moment before reaching into her own bag and taking out Akhira's phone to hand it to her. Akhira fell silent, realizing she had given it to the doctor to hold while they were shopping.

"Why have you been forgetting things so often lately? You gave it to me yourself, didn't you?"

Akhira didn't answer the question but instead questioned herself internally, growing more worried. With her lover's frequent remarks about her forgetfulness, Akhira began to lose confidence in herself.

Am I really getting old and forgetful?

"Pleng."

"What?"

"If I become even more forgetful, will you still stay with me?"

Akhira wasn't sure why she asked the doctor that question. She was just a little worried, but hearing the doctor's answer made all her worries vanish.

"If I don't, who will remind you where you put your things?"

Dr. Panipak smiled at her lover. She didn't know what the future held for them or how long they'd be together, but for now, she was happy. And she wanted to stay like this for as long as possible.

*Or at least... until she was too old to remember Akhira.*

*Because even if they ever had to part ways, she knew she could never forget Akhira.*

*She had already loved her with all her heart, and she couldn't imagine doing anything else.*

Sunyanv