







# Chapter 1: Because Her Highness Loves Aloha Shirts

*She encouraged me to take pride in my uniqueness.*

*She inspired me to embrace every inch of my body. . . .And she declared that I am her entire universe.*

**Part: Hong Yok**

At the most crucial moment in time, I'm standing here once again.

Following the conclusion of the fashion show, as all male and female models complete their walks, each designer isexpected to take the stage, express their gratitude, and perhaps deliver a speech about their inspirations.

Despite my involvement in theme development, design, sample production, and coordination with all stakeholders, regardless of the extensive efforts I put in, even though two of the nine outfits in this Fall/Winter collection are my creations, I was consistently instructed to remain back-stage, observing from the shadows where the spotlight never graced me.

*'Never let the audience see your face, ever! Is this clear to you, Hong*

*Yok?'* Our head designer[1] emphasized this to me on every occasion.

And everyone on our team agreed. It's all because of the long, unsightly scar that traverses my face. This scar boldly stretches from my right temple down to my cheek, making it undeniably conspicuous.

This scar. . .a haunting reminder of an incident from my sixteenth year.This scar. . .a nightly visitor that plagues my dreams.

This scar. . .viewed as peculiar by some, comical by others, and vexing by the rest.

For these reasons, I've strived at 'Kris.Tera' for three years without gaining acknowledgement or becoming a known figure in my own right.

Maybe it's preferable to be here, away from the spotlight and the scrutiny of hundreds of eyes. Public attention should rightfully be directed towards the exquisite garments being unveiled. News headlines should not revolve around the appearance of a designer whose face is considered a blemish on the entire team.

In my pursuit of my dream career, I'm willing to stay incognito here.I place my loosely clenched fist over my chest, where my heart resides.It's alright, Hong Yok. At least, everyone recognizes the beauty within those clothing pieces.

Kris. Tera, the fashion house I work for, may not be large, but it enjoys a respectable reputation within the industry because its founder is a superstar and heiress of a wealthy family. She's in her early thirties. one day, dissatisfied with a media question about her rise to fame due to her family, she decided to pursue a three-year study in fashion business management abroad. Then, she established a new fashion house for women. It may sound like a fabulous story of a determined woman striving to put an end to gossip and rumors through her hard work and efforts.

However, in reality, she didn't study fashion design, more like focusing on management. She just borrowed a fortune from her father to create her first collection. Yet, despite her superstar fame, she found herself unable to sell her clothes. Ultimately, she hired us, the designers, and other team members to complete her tasks instead.

Afterward, she continued her acting career and visited us from time to time, especially on the day of the new collection launch. Just a few minutes ago, Kris took credit for most parts of the collection on the stage, got into the car her family had prepared for her, and then left the event venue.

In my opinion, Kris isn't a saint, but she isn't entirely terrible either. The salary and benefits we receive from her company are quite substantial, which is one of the reasons I'm still tied to this office, even though I often feel despondent because of the working environment.

My determination and unique touch are evident in every collection produced by this brand, but no matter how hard I strive, I remain an anonymous designer in the industry. It's been this way for three years, and perhaps it will continue indefinitely. I need to remind myself that I'm walking on the path of my dreams. I'm attending a major event in the heart of the capital city, taking part in the final show that captures people's attention.

I come back to the reality before me, secretly sighing as I peek my head out to survey the now-empty hall. This signifies the end of the fashion show. The audience and the media have left. My exhaustion and back pain will gradually subside (hopefully). Liu, the head designer, returned backstage after compensating the dressers[2] we had hired.

The most senior employee among us, in terms of both years of service and actual age, appears very pleased upon seeing all the positive comments about our clothing on social media. This is why she plans to host a thank you party for all of us to appreciate our hard work.

Do you notice how smoothly everything is going today? There's a fancy restaurant across the event venue, and Liu declares,

"Let's dine here! My treat today!"

As we enter and place our orders, while the entire team waits at the long 8- person table, a lovely intern who has been with us for two months initiates the conversation with her cheerful voice.

"I was so thrilled on the stage! My legs were trembling! It felt completely different from presenting my work to professors at university."

As usual, I remain silent, often unsure of how to participate in such conversations. I take off my glasses and clean the lenses while waiting for others to respond.

Starting with Liu, our head designer, whose smile stretches as wide as the ocean due to the positive feedback, says:

"Keep practicing, and you'll get used to it. It's unfortunate, Kaew, that your internship might end before the next fashion show. Nonetheless, I'll talk to Madam Kris and see if we can have you back to contribute to your portfolio."

I put my glasses back on after cleaning them, at the same moment the man sitting across from me starts speaking.

"You should consider applying for a job here after your graduation. We're already close to you," suggests Ohm, the pattern maker[3].

They continue discussing about Kaew for a while before shifting to work related matters as our food arrives. Generally, when we refer to 'seasons,' they are divided into two categories: Spring/Summer (February-June) and Fall/Winter[4] (September- December). Naturally, clothing must be ready for sale or presentation in a fashion show before the start of each season.

Consequently, every fashion house must continuously prepare their new collections in advance. Even though we've recently launched our new collection, we're now caught in a cycle and are already beginning work on the next one.

Oh, besides these two major seasons, some brands also offer resort and pre fall collections, but Kris finds them too demanding. Our company also provides tailoring services for VIP customers, so we have no time for those additional seasons.

At this point, I assume a pivotal role. Liu tells me she has high expectations for my Spring/Summer collection. Then, someone remarks:

"It's fortunate that Madam Kris didn't judge Hong Yok by her appearance, allowing her to work with us now."

I respond with a wry smile, though I suspect everyone interprets it as my agreement to their remarks. Actually, I parted my lips, ready to retort,

*'What's wrong with my face?'*

However, before any words escape, a sudden realization hits me. I'm a woman marked by a significant facial scar. Consequently, what slips from my mouth is,

"Madam Kris really liked the dress I wore that day."

A senior team member raises a glass of soda, sipping it before recounting the event enthusiastically,

"On that day, even the human resources department messaged me, praising a beautiful dress worn by an interviewee. We were initially unaware of the brand, but later on, we discovered that Hong designed and crafted that dress herself!"

I also recall that moment. Kris, in a good mood later, confided that two candidates stood out to her that day. Both showcased impressive styles and outstanding portfolios, but she almost dismissed me because of...

*"The scar on your face was quite prominent. You wore glasses, and your demeanor seemed boring and old-fashioned. I rolled my eyes, but your self made dress left a lasting impression. I had to wrestle with myself for a moment, but I chose not to judge a book by its cover. That's why I chose you."*

Understanding social norms shouldn't be rocket science. I'm puzzled why my preference for glasses over contact lenses deems me old-fashioned and boring. I fail to comprehend why people make me feel as if receiving opportunities from them implies my inferiority and their extraordinary kindness.

*It's truly unfortunate.*

Because, up until now, I can't fathom the reasoning behind it. At the celebration dinner, my smile is anything but sweet; it carries a bitter undertone. I bow my head, silently continue eating, and lend my ears to the team's next discussion, which shifts to recent news in the entertainment industry. Over the past few years, I've been frequently asked, 'What happened to your face?' or 'Who wrecked your face?' but I'm never able to provide a coherent response.

It's not because I'm uncomfortable discussing it, but rather because a fragment of memory from my sixteenth year seems to have vanished, like pieces of a puzzle scattered across a vast penthouse, making it almost impossible to piece them together.

I distinctly recall winning first prize in a souvenir shirt design project competition during the summer. I ascended the stage in a hotel conference room to receive a certificate and a monetary reward envelope. However, at the upscale party, an accident occurred. When I woke up in the hospital, my memory became hazy and empty. Subsequently, my parents decided to transfer me to another school.

My parents never brought up the topic, opting to avoid and conceal it when I inquired about my lost memory. After experiencing these reactions too frequently, I realized that uncovering the details might adversely impact my mental well-being. Therefore, I convinced myself to let it go in the end.

"You're finally back! You returned so late tonight. Have you eaten yet? I've prepared some sour soup for you in the kitchen," my mom's voice greets me as I slide open the house door.

I smile and 'wai'[5] her before removing my shoes. As I place the shoes in the drawer, I reply,

"No worries. I've eaten. A senior in my team treated me to a feast.

Before Mom can say anything else, we're interrupted by loud footsteps on the stairs. We divert our attention and see a middle school girl wearing a student uniform blouse on top and a pair of blue shorts below. She's carrying a document as she rushes toward our mother.

She's my younger sister, 'Toey-Hom,' and there's more than a 10-year age gap between us. She's 14, and I'm 26. Despite the modest size of our two-story house, we aren't particularly close as sisters.

"Mom, I forgot to tell you that we have a parent-teacher meeting next Sunday."

"Next Sunday... Oh no! I already made plans with Auntie Nee. I promised to help her choose tile patterns for her house renovation. She's counting on me to be there."

"Ugh, what are we going to do? What about Dad?"

"Dad has to work overtime, if I'm not mistaken. He's such a workaholic. But well... What about P'Hong[6]? Can she go instead?"

I can already anticipate that Toey-Hom will vehemently refuse, her dissatisfaction evident in her voice.

"No way! P'Hong is hideous! My friends will make fun of me!"

*See?*

"Toey! Take back those words immediately! And apologize to your big sis too!"

"But it's true, isn't it? Why should I apologize? Last time, when she took me to school registration, I was teased because of her, and I still am! She's the one who should apologize! Why doesn't she consider plastic surgery? Why doesn't she wear contact lenses? She's a designer, but she seems to disregard her appearance entirely! It's so embarrassing to be seen with her!"

"Toey!!!"

"Never mind, Mom. I'll go back to my room."

I kiss my mother's cheek and offer a smile to my sister, who's still looking at me with discontent.

"I'll talk to Dad about skipping that overtime session. He needs to give his brain a break on that day as well."

Toey-Hom shrugs in response, as if this is the expected course of action. Ascending the stairs, I briskly make my way to my bedroom. I can still hear Mom lecturing my sister in the background. To be honest, I've grown accustomed to the way Toey-Hom talks about me. Initially, it stung a bit, but now my feelings are morphing into something closer to guilt.

Previously, I underwent surgery to reduce the size of the scar. In essence, my scar is used to be more severe, almost completely disfiguring the left side of my face.

The doctor minimized the scar at the expense of my father's lifetime savings. Upon learning about this, I thought, 'That's enough... If I have to undergo another surgery and deplete my family's funds, I'd rather work hard and save my own money to do it.'

However, in reality, I find myself grappling with inner conflict.

Deep down, I don't desire any change. I don't want to do anything about the lingering scar or cease wearing glasses. I don't hate myself for who I am. Yet, I lack the courage to assert myself. Ultimately, I've succumbed to the societal values that surround me.

'Because of the prominent scar, I'm considered far from beautiful.' 'Because

I don't wear contact lenses, I'm deemed boring and old-fashioned.'

These absurd rules were arbitrarily established by someone in society, and people unquestioningly embraced and enforced these uniform beauty standards. My chest tightens, but I can't articulate it. Something happened when I was 16, and it stripped away all my self-confidence...

I spend approximately 15 minutes taking a shower and drying my hair. I check the team's LINE group chat and notice there's nothing work-related. I exit the app and take my phone to another room adjacent to my bedroom.

My studio...

Initially, there were four bedrooms in this house. My parents claimed one, Toey-Hom occupied another, and I established my own personal space. The remaining room became a storage area. During my sophomore year of university, I made a modest request to my parents to convert it into a studio for designing and sewing my clothes. My dad cleared it out and sold all the unnecessary items stored within it. He also hired a contractor to build an annex behind our house for additional storage. Since then, this studio has been exclusively mine.

I'm lucky to have such supportive parents who help me to pursue my dreams. Upon opening the door, I'm greeted by the sight of controlled chaos. I'm currently working on a new office outfit for myself, having completed the design phase.

All the materials, including fabric, threads, zipper, carbon paper, and sewing machine needles in various sizes, such as number 9, 11, 13, and 16, have been procured since last Saturday and are neatly arranged in one corner of the room. My plan for the evening is to make a pattern and then tidy up the room to reclaim some much-needed space.

Even though some designers may not be skilled sewers or pattern makers, we must learn these skills and submit our handmade designs to professors for evaluation as final projects in our senior year. It also means that even though our main concentration is fashion design in the competitive industry, we all have some fundamental sewing skills.

Nevertheless, for me, constantly designing, creating, and sewing my own patterns, I've mastered all three skills. I relish every step of the process, visualizing how each design will come to life. I take pride in leaving my signature in every stitch, which ultimately transforms into a wearable outfit.

I stretch my arms and make my way to my recently acquired white-and gray radio, perched on a low table against the wall.

I prefer listening to the radio while working, as it allows me to avoid the visual distractions of television. With music, educational discussions, or even interviews in the background, I can relax and focus on my craft. I listen to everything, as I often tune in randomly.

And tonight, I stumble upon a channel discussing an all-girl band called 'The Edge of Universe,' quite popular among teenagers. Placing my drawing board on my desk and grasping a trusty pair of silver scissors, I prepare to cut the paper according to the pattern I measured and drew yesterday, all while tuning in to the radio program.

[Next, we have a question from one of our passionate fans directed at our popular member of 'The Edge of Universe.' Although there are numerous inquiries for this particular member, due to time constraints, I'll ask the most frequently posed question to Lady Note.]

*Lady...?*

I begin to ponder whether the last member of the band holds a high-society title, but her response takes me by surprise.

[Yes]

The woman referred to as 'Lady' by the radio show host responds briefly, conveying self-assuredness and charisma through her voice. She sounds youthful, her tone slightly deep and monotone.

[The fans would like to know when Lady Note will sing a song. They can't wait to hear it.]

The radio host asks for her energetically, making the listeners like me wonder as well.

[Everyone will hear me sing when I want to.]

How audacious...

What kind of person is she?

[Oh, alright then. It appears we might need to be patient since you are occupied, correct? I've also heard that Lady Note played a role in designing the headquarters for YUTrec.]

[This project involved collaboration across various departments. Let's give credit to the entire team.]

That's all she said. The host retracts his statement and mentions the company instead, although I can't hear it clearly because my phone on the desk has garnered my attention with its incessant notifications and vibrations.

*Bzzz!*

**P–Liu:** Hong Yok

It's Miss Head Designer. I put down the pattern paper and scissors to check the message. Just as I open the chat, another message from her arrives.

**P–Liu**: Don't come to the shop this Monday morning.

**HongYok**: Why?

**P–Liu**: I'll call you tomorrow for more details. Just rest tonight. You've been working hard all day long.

I glance at the clock on the wall. It's 23:59 on Saturday night. I'm certain that her Sunday is...

*Rrrrrrrrrrrrr!*

...when the clock strikes at 00:00.

I can't pretend not to see it because I just replied to her message. I sigh as I realize that my private time and space are invaded. I pick up the phone and turn on the speaker. Placing the slender device on the long desk, I refocus on the drawing board in front of me and say:

"Yes, is there anything urgent?"

[I need you to do the body measurements for a customer.]

"An evening dress order, isn't it?"

[No, just a normal daily work outfit.]

"Can't she just stop by our shop?"

[Typically, that would be the case, but the issue is that the one who placed the order is her father. He wants her to change her style. That's why he contacted us.]

"I can imagine it now. Still, I furrow my brows and can't stop myself from asking: "If his daughter doesn't want to change her style, why does he need to force her to?"

[Because that woman keeps wearing only aloha shirts to go to work, gala dinner, and every other outdoor activity.]

"..."

[Okay, that might sound really odd. But listen to me, Hong, the current situation is like... her father has repeatedly requested us to measure his daughter at her office. The first time, I went there myself because... well, her dad is a Mom Chao[7], and his daughter is a Mom Rajawongse[8]. I admit I wanted to build a connection with them, but she not only rejected me but also completely ignored me. The next time, I was busy, so I sent an intern like Kaew, but the same story repeated exactly the same way. You know what? Her father had contacted other shops before us too!]

"The fact that other shops can't deal with her means she completely disagrees, doesn't it? My visit wouldn't change anything."

[Yeah]

Huh? She seems to know that well too?

[But there's a TV program visiting our shop this Monday. They will film both the shopfront and our studio inside. I want Kaew to be there because she also contributed to this collection.]

My hand instantly stops cutting the pattern paper. I understand her now. She doesn't want me to show my face in front of the camera.

No matter how hard I tried or how much effort I put into this collection, if it's me... I'm not worthy enough to gain a reputation in their eyes.

"P...P'Liu, just send me all the venue details as well as the name of the customer that I have to measure via the LINE chat, alright?"

[Thank you very much, honey! You're the best!]

"No problem."

With peace of mind, Liu quickly hangs up the phone, leaving me alone with some kind of invisible pressure on my chest. The radio interview had already ended too.

Tonight, I'm not in the mood for cutting a pattern or tidying up my studio anymore. I just put down the scissors in silence and place a star-shaped paperweight on top of the pile of papers.

All by myself, I walk back to my bedroom, press my face down to the pillow, and cry without making any sound.

I'm good at enduring.

I'm good at not crying in front of others.

Twenty-four hours of last Sunday quickly passed. Monday has arrived in the blink of an eye. It's another morning, and I wake up before the alarm clock rings.

Due to the recurring nightmare of an event from ten years ago, which has surfaced again over the past month, teenage Hong Yok finds herself confined in a small, narrow rectangular space. Outside stands a woman, her right hand tightly gripping a long metal bar, resembling a iron rod, against the backdrop of raging fire.

I couldn't see her face clearly...

But perhaps that's for the better, considering it was a nightmare, right?

Regardless, due to that unsettling dream, I startled and woke myself up around five in the morning. Parting the curtains, I realized it was still dark. At that moment, I decided to return to my studio and continue working on the clothing piece that had been in progress; I had spent the entire Sunday on it. Now, it's around seven, and I should head downstairs to help my mother prepare breakfast. I plan to leave the house around eight.

As I approach the nearest BTS station and before I can descend the staircase, Liu calls to remind me about the details of the woman whose body I need to measure today.

[Head to the Rya Studio main office on the 15th floor of the XX Building. Let them know you're from Kris.Tera and have an appointment with M.R. Netapsorn Ruthaithewin. Don't forget to mention that Prince Napas is the one who made the appointment.]

"Aha, I remember that."

I've committed that woman's name to memory and even let it slip out during today's breakfast.

By the way, judging from what she said, the appointment was essentially made by her father, M.C. Napasdol, right? Given that, she wouldn't have agreed to have her measurements taken by us. It wouldn't be surprising if I have to sit and wait wearily in her office throughout the morning, completely neglected by her.

According to my research, Rya Studio Company Limited is an architectural design firm with very few employees. The owner, Madam Rya, whose name became the company title, is a woman in her late fifties. Online data suggests that, after 'the famous M.R.' joined the company two years ago, the studio gained prominence for designing a new shopping mall and, more recently, for a famous electronics company.

Coincidentally, the woman I have to measure at the command of my head designer is 'Lady Note,' featured in the interview I listened to last Saturday, and I can unmistakably sense her provocative humor.

Well, I now understand that the male M.R. is nicknamed 'Lord' while the female M.R. is 'Lady.' That's why the radio host called her so. Okay, fine. I'm not close to her, so I'll address her that way customarily.

Despite the overcrowding on the bus at the moment, I can't help but research more about her on my phone. I continue scrolling to satisfy my curiosity and silently study the details.

The Edge of Universe—a strangely named band—is gaining popularity among teenagers. They occasionally release albums because each member is very busy. Even so, their newly released songs consistently dominate the charts.

Riding on the bus, I browse through the designs of 'M.R. Netapsorn Ruthaithewin' while listening to songs from the band through my earpods. To attire clothes for someone, we must have a good understanding of that person, even though Lady Note doesn't sing in these songs since she's a keyboardist, and there's a 100% chance she may not agree to the measurement at all.

Then, a question emerges...

Despite having a wealthy father, why would a daughter of Mom Chao like her apply for a job at a small studio? Couldn't she easily secure a position in a renowned company or even start her own?

I tightly bite my lips, almost crushing the lower one, while gazing at her face.

If I were to describe the woman I'm approaching right now, the word 'beauty' would be the perfect definition, just as others claim. She's slender, with perfectly sculpted shoulders and an elegant neck. Her long hair is lustrous and silky, a testament to the excellent care it has received. Her facial features adhere to the golden ratio, and her eyes resemble a blend of the deep ocean and the night sky. A human being that resembles a masterpiece. She's like the perfect clothes hanger, and every designer must appreciate her.

Me too... For a moment, my heart skips a beat.

It's as if I've witnessed a design that is unbelievably present on Earth.

Perhaps due to sudden motion sickness, the closer and longer I try to look at her face, an ache develops on the right side of my head for some unknown reason. I press the lock screen button and close my eyes until I feel better.

The sharp headache is momentary, disappearing just as I'm about to reach the bus stop where I need to take off.

At 9:50 am, I disembark at the bus stop and hail a taxi, which costs a small fortune. Finally, I'm standing in front of the building that Liu informed me about. Upon entering, I realize it's an office building where various companies rent different floors. The studio where the Lady Who Wears Aloha Shirts works is on the 15th floor, as I remind myself.

*Rrrrrr!*

As I step into the elevator and press the button for my destination, my phone rings once more. In the solitude of the moving elevator, I inwardly sigh – Liu is calling again.

Why is she so anxious? The Lady wouldn't allow us to take her measurements anyway.

"Yes, I've just arrived."

I answer the call nonetheless.

[Great. Now, if you've attempted to meet her three times and she still doesn't appear, then–]

"Wait on the 15th floor and leave at noon. Then, report back to you. I won't call you around 10:30 because you have an interview with the TV program... Okay, I've got it all down."

[Ah, I'm sorry for being overly anxious. I've been like this all this time.

When I sent Kaew, I called her repeatedly too.]

"Why are you so nervous? The outcome will likely be the same."

[Because just looking at her, I can immediately tell that her body proportions are extraordinary. It would be a dream come true for me to be recognized as the designer who crafts her clothing. Moreover, Madam Kris's studio will gain even more renown. Lady Note isn't just a popular music artist but also a burgeoning architect. She's the youngest child of a prince...]

The elevator ascends from the 11th to the 12th floor. Liu, still on the line, becomes unusually talkative. She shares her desire for connections and ambition to create clothes for that woman. Adjusting the glasses on my face, I press the phone against my ear. When I realize that the elevator has reached my destination and the door is about to open, I have to interrupt her and cut off our conversation.

"Yep, I got it. Now, I have to–"

As the elevator door opens, seeing someone outside, I'm suddenly at a loss for words.

That's right. She wears a stylish aloha shirt that complements her dark, long slacks. This person can't be anybody else but 'her,' known for her unique style. Her eyes are initially drawn to my noticeable scar, and then her gaze meets mine. A strange feeling arises, as if she's certain about something in that moment, as her beautiful-colored pupils dilate.

However, what momentarily steals my voice and intensifies my headache is...

Her beautiful face in front of me overlaps with the blurry memory that used to be shattered. The memory suddenly surfaces, causing my hand to lose grip on my phone.

The incident I witnessed in my nightmare looks exactly like this scene. I feel too much pain in my head to stabilize my stance. My two hands cover my head.

Everything floods my mind randomly – someone having a fight outside, loud noises, a ferocious fire, a metal bar, an embrace, and an intense pain in my brain. Everything affirms that the nightmare that has been startling me at night really happened. Those fragments of memory flow out uncontrollably and chaotically.

But there's one thing I'm confident about.

'Lady Note' who's standing right here, right now... She's the girl.

***The girl who held the iron rod before me in the midst of the fire ten years ago.***

***Footnotes.***

1. A head designer is the creative leader responsible for overseeing and directing the design process within a fashion or creative industry.
2. A dresser is an individual who assists in outfitting models backstage.
3. A pattern maker is a professional responsible for creating templates or patterns used as guides for cutting and assembling fabric pieces in garment production.
4. The Fall/Winter season is also referred to as the 'Autumn/Winter' season.
5. Wai is a customary Thai salutation involving the joining of palms in front of the face or chest, often paired with a bow.
6. In Thai, 'Pee' (abbreviated as 'P') is the respectful form of addressfor individuals older than oneself (preceding their name), equivalent to addressing them as older brother or sister
7. A Thai royal rank and title equivalent to prince or princess. It is the lowest among the royal ranks and is typically used for the grandchild of a king.
8. A title referring to the offspring of male Mom Chao.

# Chapter 2: A Designer in the Shadows

The headache that suddenly intensifies as the elevator door opens and reveals 'her' makes me almost crumble. The woman from my nightmare gracefully steps inside with her long legs, offering support. The astonishment in Lady Note's eyes turns into sheer shock.

Her fragrance, likely infused with cherry blossom petals, wafts from the woman clad in a pine-tree green aloha shirt adorned with white and red roses. It triggers a recollection of the closeness between me and the woman in my deeply embedded memory. As my headache gradually subsides, I gently release myself from the taller girl's arm, distancing myself from her embrace.

I can't fully recollect everything yet, but... The girl who wielded the iron rod is definitely her!

A new fragment of memory surfaces just moments ago... There was blood on the tip of the iron rod.

If it wasn't mine, then whose could it possibly be?

My heart races faster than usual as I make eye contact with her, sensing that she has questions. My palms suddenly sweat. Holding my breath as if facing Satan, I open my mouth and say:

"I'm alright now."

I don't even end my sentence with 'Thank you.' I just nod and bend my knees to pick up the phone. The result before my eyes is clear and crystal — there are some cracks on its mirror screen protector. I rise up once again, put my phone back into my purse, and walk out of the square-box elevator. Her slender, soft, rosy lips are about to part to say something, but I seize the moment and present my statements all at once.

"Good morning. I'm from Kris.Tera Boutique. Liu sent me to measure you according to our appointment. If you're not available, I'll wait until the end of the morning and head back without disturbing you."

Her Highness, Mom Rajawongse, who resembles a premium clothes-hanger and matches with any kind of outfits, halts for a moment. She wouldn't have

predicted this scenario. At the same time, someone is walking past us. She's a woman in her thirties, and now she's surprised to see the tall woman standing here.

"Oh, Note! Aren't you going to take some more photos at the site?"

The woman, Note, lifts up her left wrist to look at her watch. Then, she turns to stare at me while answering the woman who initiated the conversation.

"I'll leave around eleven. Well, I have a custom-tailoring appointment." What? An appointment?

Has she ever cared about an appointment with any boutique before? And why does she have to look at me while talking with others?

Despite my immense curiosity, I'm speechless. In the next ten minutes, two of us had already moved into her personal office room.

Known for her arrogance and indifference towards others, this beauty strangely allowed me to measure her body today without giving any reasons.

Although I was a bit anxious for a minute, I quickly regained my composure and focused on today's duty. Therefore, I'm walking towards my bag on a maroon- upholstered table. I take out two measuring tapes, a notebook, and a pencil. Meanwhile, she rests her hip against the office desk filled with unfolded paper drafts, arms crossed, thoroughly observing every action I take.

I adjust the frame of my glasses, tightening it to my face, before formally asking for her permission, just as I regularly do with all my customers.

Lady Note seems to know well that we can't find her true proportions with that pose, so she shifts from leaning against the table to standing straight, making things more convenient for me.

I start by tying a measuring tape around her thin waist and then use another measuring tape to cross it down from her neck to the measuring tape on her waist – this is called the 'front vertical measurement.'

Here's a weird feeling.

As that blurry memory flashed up, I should have been frightened when touching her now. However, although there's apparel between my index finger and her warm body, I can't sense any alarming danger from her.

I argue with myself. I can't jump to conclusions that she was the one who injured me in the past, but who else could it be? In the midst of the ocean of memories, someone holding an iron rod walked towards me during the incident. Some blood droplets at the tip of the metal bar fell to the ground. Then, I blacked out. I remember that I was admitted to the hospital due to a head injury and a massive wound that left a long scar on my face.

But if it were her, why would she do something like that? Or will the event turn out to be the opposite?

Gosh... I'm here for work. I better save this for later and discuss it with my dad and mom in the evening. I shake my head to dispel the wild ideas that shouldn't take over me right now.

I note down the numbers I got from the measurements in my notebook. I walk forward to repeat the same step with her back, followed by her shoulders and front-rear delts.

We're getting closer and closer.

Whenever I have to measure her front, her eyes keep staring at me as if she has something to say. On the contrary, I'm doing my best to avoid making eye contact with her.

However, the moment I'm measuring the height of her chest, the woman who has been sneaking glances at my hands now raises her eyes and speaks to me straightforwardly.

"Do you remember me?"

Upon hearing that, my breath was halted for a brief moment. I get goosebumps on my neck, but I try to control my anxiety. I hold the measuring tapes in my left hand and turn around to pick up my tiny notebook and pencil to note down her proportions. I respond to her with an indifferent voice.

"What do you mean, my lady?"

"...."

I set aside everything except the measuring tapes and unroll them once again to measure the length of her chest to create a dart[1]. My lips part to resume answering Her Highness's question:

"If you meant 'Do I know you?', yes, I do know you as an architect and a keyboard player of the Edge of Universe band."

Following a stonewall response, she ceases bothering me, remaining silent with a thoughtful gaze. Eventually, she briefly responds in a plain voice while looking away, saying:

"Never mind. Please forget about it."

With no reactions from me, the room plunges into silence, accompanied only by the light and soft hum of the chilly air conditioning, contrasting with its effective functionality.

A knock on the door interrupts the quiet; someone is here for a work discussion. Despite appearing as a senior employee, Lady Note informs him of her appointment and then shifts her gaze to me, as if commanding me to continue with my task.

Uncertain about today's unusual circumstances, I wonder if a massive meteorite is about to hit me. Whatever leads her to succumb to me so easily remains a mystery. Nevertheless, I choose not to initiate a conversation, finding it challenging enough to avoid stealing glances at her face.

Moreover, her body proportions are truly extraordinary—like a perfect clothes-hanger, just as I thought.

Glancing at the numbers I've recorded in my notebook, I gather my belongings back into my brown messenger bag, unable to shake the impression that this woman complements any outfit effortlessly.

I turn around to convey, 'All done. Thank you for your time. Now, I have to leave. My colleague will be here to discuss the design with you later.' However, with her glamorous facial features, Her Highness swiftly interrupts me with her typical deep, monotonous voice.

"May I have your name card, please?"

Her words startle me a little before some ache and pain arise in my heart.

After all this time, I have been willing to have my own name card. But the lack of self- confidence suppresses my willingness. It keeps reminding me that...I'm just a nameless designer in this industry.

Still, right now, I have to maintain a smile of service on my face. I'm still in my working hours.

"I don't have my own name card, but I do have one from Kris.Tera."

I pick out our boutique's name card and hand it to the taller woman who looks fabulous even when she's wearing an aloha shirt. She nips it with her index and middle fingers, quickly checking it out for a few seconds, and then turns around to snatch some lavender sky sticky notes from her desk and give it to me.

I tilt my head in wonder, but my physical auto-reaction commands my body to accept it from her before asking about her intention. From a corner of her eye, the owner of this office room glances at the low table next to the sofa where 2-3 pens are kept in a pentagon cylinder.

"Pens are over there."

"Yes?"

"For your contact details."

So...you want to get my contact details no matter what, huh?

"Ah...yes."

I have no other choice because Lady Note is our boutique's VIP. I step forward to pick up a pen to jot down some numbers or letters on the first page of the square sticky notes in my palm. I contemplate whether to give her my phone number, LINE ID, Facebook or IG account, or an email address.

But then an idea sparks in my head. I decide to give her my number but replace the last three digits with 'XXX,' leaving her to guess the missing part. I add my name 'Hong Yok' at the bottom. If she's patient enough to try out numbers from '000' to '999' one by one, I'd be quite amused.

"Here you go."

I want to convey my sentiment of 'Why should I give you my contact details?' That's why my words rush out, as quick as my thoughts, laced with a hint of arrogance that contradicts my usual nervousness.

"I'll be ready to answer your call if you can figure out my number."

It's like a little mind game between us. I'm sure she remembers her past actions well, unlike me, who can't recall anything.

The woman, renowned as the youngest child of Prince Napasdol, accepts the piece of paper, reads it, and raises her right eyebrow. She doesn't voice any protest, perhaps understanding my unspoken message of 'Go figure it out for yourself. This is all I'm offering.' I'm glad she's mature enough not to hassle me. She tucks the sticky note I gave her into her 10,000-ish-baht black BALENCIAGA wallet.

I can almost see a hint of a smile playing at the corner of those cherry blossom lips. Why? Those mysterious numbers should annoy her, right? Ah... I think it's time for me to leave.

"I have to go now. Our designer will arrange another appointment with you for the design and meet you in person."

"Aren't you the designer?"

Without making eye contact, her plain voice continues to inquire.

"No, I'm not," I reply, silently adding in my head, 'although I really want to... even if the wearer would be the monster in my nightmare.'

Everyone believed that today's visit would be another waste, and we predicted there wouldn't even be a measurement. So no one has discussed the design yet; they just sent me here per Prince Napas's orders due to the filming and interviews.

Nonetheless, something inspired Her Highness to agree to the measurement, but I can't make any decisions since I haven't discussed the design with anyone on our team.

Still...

"But I want you to be my designer."

Those are Her Highness's final words before we part ways. This means all I can do is respond with a polite smile and excuse myself to leave without giving her a definite answer.

Kris.Tera is open every day from 11 am to 8 pm, offering services to those interested in trying on clothes or placing custom orders. In the front, there's a receptionist available at all times, but the designers in the back of the studio work different hours.

We work from Monday to Saturday, from 9 am to 5 pm. I don't have any issues with having one day off per week because our work schedules are quite flexible, thanks to Madam Kris, who has taken human resources psychology courses and values our freedom as creators.

"Hong! You did measure Lady Note?! Are you kidding?"

At 12.45 pm on the same day, I arrive at our studio with some simple lunch boxes as requested. Walking through the back door, I encounter an excited Liu waiting for me, bombarding me with questions as if she had won the lottery's grand prize. She seizes the lunchboxes from my left hand and even offers to help me carry them.

I muster a weary smile and say,

"She might be available by chance."

However, Liu pays no heed to my response. As we enter together, she continues to chatter about how perfect our new model is for her designs.

"For the design work, I'll give her a call and arrange another meeting soon. Next time, I'll go in person. Did you convey this to her? Like, we'll schedule another meeting for the details?"

"Yes, I did."

"How nice of you! Such a sweetheart!"

The short-haired woman (with basil-green dye at the edges) playfully pinches my cheek, not out of genuine affection but due to her joyful mood. Normally, Liu believes that a head designer like herself is too busy to help others carry things.

At 1.30 pm, after sharing lunch with everyone, we hold a brief meeting at a long table in the center of our studio.

I had expected Liu to announce the theme for the next season and the deadline for drafts, as is customary. However, with a broad smile on her face, she starts discussing dressmaking for Lady Note instead. Right now, Her Highness has automatically become our VIP client, whether she wants to or not.

She spent the first fifteen minutes asking each of us to draft two work outfits for her to consider. If Lady Note shows interest in any design, the creator will be responsible for the project and credited, alongsude Liu, who oversees it. Ohm and Tan, our pattern makers, aren't directly involved, so they don't seem particularly interested in this, but everyone else is excited.

I start to wonder... What if Lady Note chooses my designs? I can't help but imagine her interest in them and how the recognition would impact my life.

If a magazine comes to interview us, will I be mentioned as 'Hong Yok' or 'Assistant (Anonymous)'?

It's quite funny that I'm overthinking this. The answer is evident on my face.

Naturally, it must be the latter because Kris.Tera values its image and reputation above all.

Lost in thought for a moment, my attention is drawn back to the woman standing at the head of the table. This time, she's discussing the theme for the next season.

"Now, let's talk about the Spring/Summer collection we need to work on. Madam Kris and I have decided not to set a specific theme, as that can limit everyone's creativity. So, we're trying a different approach. After this meeting, each of you has to design ten pieces for the entire collection. Meanwhile, I'll oversee your progress, and Madam Kris will choose the winner by the end of this month."

A team member raises a question, "P'Liu, does this mean everyone has to assist the winner in producing the entire collection? Or do we simply need to adjust our works to align with the winner's designs?"

"We will use every design from the selected collection."

"Why? We've been adjusting our designs to fit the theme of the winner. In such a manner, everyone still has a chance to showcase our original work. Our bonuses wouldn't be too different, but this way—"

"Calm down. Don't be nervous yet. Madam Kris just wants to try new things, and this could be good motivation for all of you."

The atmosphere is tense. Many of us are discontent, but Liu seems to agree with the new method suggested by the shop owner. I remain silent as usual, listening to their heated arguments until the meeting ends. Then, everyone

just goes their separate ways and continues working at their desks.

Now, the studio has become a battlefield. Many senior members are angry, but they can't do anything. Madam Kris isn't someone who listens to her subordinates' voices. The only person who can influence her decision making is Liu. Unfortunately, Liu agrees with her plan.

That means only Madam Kris, Liu, and another designer will get credited in the collection. Others will automatically become assistants for the next season.

Everyone on the team feels offended, except for me, who's quite used to it. No matter which approach they choose, Hong Yok will never get credited alongside them.

While working in the afternoon, I start to think about something else, like the birthday gift for my younger sister in the next two months, the magazine featuring an interview with a famous designer that I'd like to buy after work, today's dinner prepared by Mom, the bitter coffee I'm having right now, and the name card that I don't dare to make yet...

At the end of the day, I can't stop anywhere because of the drizzling rain. I arrive home around 7.30 pm. Tonight, Dad doesn't work overtime. He sits in front of the TV, looking tired, but his eyes are still locked on something on his phone screen. Mom is diligently preparing our dinner.

After greeting both of them, I go to wash my hands, ready to help my mom cook. However, Mom drove me away to the living room. So, I lie on the sofa with Dad. Before me is the TV displaying some news.

While untying the white-cream ribbon under my self-made blouse collar, Dad, engrossed in some business newspapers, casually speaks up without glancing at me.

"Toey's sleeping over at her friend's place tonight. She said they have some report to do together." "Oh...okay."

My father's job revolves around statistics, with his days filled with numbers and graphs. Due to his diligence, he often puts in extra hours at his company during the weekends, not out of obligation, but because he detests idleness. Even now, he's engrossed in reading about economic matters.

Seizing the moment, I decide to talk about my sister. I get straight to the point,

"This Sunday, there's a parent-teacher meeting at Toey's school. Mom can't make it due to a prior commitment. Can you skip your overtime and visit her school, please?"

Dad is the one who usually lends me his ear in this household. He shifts his attention from the business news, turns towards me, and adjusts his business-shaped eyeglass frames.

"Toey doesn't want you to go to her school, does she?"

I also fiddle with my own oversized fashion glasses (sporting my nearsighted lenses).

"That's not it. I've got something else going on that day."

I'm well aware that Dad disapproves of my sister's attitude. If I were to say 'yes,' he'd staunchly refuse and end up lecturing Toey-Hom more than Mom. So, I opt for an answer that would spare my sister. Dad looks at me with a scrutinizing gaze, as if trying to discern any falsehood in my words. I silently plead with my eyes, assuring him that it's the truth. Dad furrows his brow, closes his eyes, and lets out a deep sigh.

"Never mind."

It implies that he doesn't buy my lies but chooses not to prolong our conversation. "How could she become like this? Did she completely forget the way she followed you around when she was young?" Dad's voice is harsh on the youngest member of our family, and those words trigger memories of when my face was still flawless.

That little girl used to follow me wherever I went, wanting bedtime stories every night and begging for hugs while sleeping under the same cartoon printed blanket. After my face got ruined by the incident, Toey-Hom, in her kindergarten age, was shocked by the scar and asked me what kind of monster attacked her big sister.

However, there was a twist when she entered primary school. Her friends started making fun of her for having an ugly sister. Her homeroom teacher even made jokes about my appearance in class. One Friday evening in September, she came home hot- headed and declared in rage:

*'I hate you! You make the whole school laugh at me!!'*

She transformed from her big sister's little baby into someone who didn't want to interact with me at all.

I, at first, was so hurt that I cried. But as time flew and years passed by, I've become used to it and no longer mind her attitude. Noticing that I'm silently lost in my thoughts, Dad stops looking at his phone and places it on the lower table in front of him. He takes off his extra-lensed glasses and asks me about my workplace and the fashion show last Saturday.

Talking about clothes brings me joy. My dad, eager to know more about his oldest daughter's job, enjoys the conversation and asks me to open the video clip showcasing the event. However, a question emerges that feels like a lump in my throat, weakening my ability to speak.

"Why weren't you on the stage when the designers appeared at the end of the show?"

I force a fake smile and tell him that there was an emergency issue I had to handle with another designer backstage, preventing us from going on stage. This time, he completely believes my words.

Another designer, huh? At that moment, there was only me watching them from behind, alone...

Today's dinner presents a variety of dishes, each one a favorite of ours, except for Toey-Hom, who isn't here today. To preserve the joyful atmosphere at the dinner table, I engage in lighthearted conversation with my parents, discussing good news and other entertaining topics. I save my doubts for later, after dinner.

I hope I can uncover more information this time.

"Ten years ago... what happened back then wasn't just an accident, right?"

As soon as I place the last plate I washed on the dish drainer, I decide to ask the question without looking at my parents' reactions. I bow my head and muster my courage for three seconds before turning around to face what awaits me. From what I see, Dad stops opening a new pack of milled rice, while Mom, who is clearing the dinner table, starts to look anxious.

"Today, I recovered some parts of my past memory."

"What can you remember?"

I recognize the nervousness in Mom's voice as she walks towards me and gently holds my arm.

I look at my parents, slowly shifting my gaze from left to right, before recalling as much as I can.

"A woman... and somewhere on fire."

"Forget about it, Hong," Dad's voice conveys a desire for me to stop recounting my past. It isn't filled with aggression but profound pain from the depths of his heart.

"Can't you just tell me, please?"

"It took me a long while to have my daughter back to her normal self. I don't want that terrible accident to haunt you anymore. Please, just believe us. Forgetting about it might be better."

I sense sincere care in their eyes. They try to bury everything under the carpet because they don't want to resurrect the memories of that gloomy day. After all this time, I never told anyone about the nightmares I experienced, not wanting to worry others. However, with that woman now appearing in real life, I can't hold back my curiosity any longer.

"I'll try..."

I say this to console my parents, but as soon as they seem convinced by my words and focus on the TV program playing in the living room, I excuse myself and head back to my bedroom. Now, Pandora's box is ajar.

I switch on my laptop and type down keywords related to the competition I joined and won a prize in when I was 16, searching for proof of her presence at the event. It's been a long time, but since it was a serious accident, I can still find some old news articles reporting it.

My hand scrolls down the webpage, and my eyes are drawn to a post headline from ten years ago. I bookmark it for quick access. 'Did M.R. Netapsorn really set the fire at the arts competition?'

*Rrrrrrrr!*

Before I click the link, my attention is diverted by the communication device nearby. It buzzes alongside the burst of a ringtone.

It's a strange number.

Part of me believes it might be a sales agent or a friend from my university years who changed her number. However, another part guesses it could be the woman in her aloha shirt...

That's impossible. Who would be free enough to keep randomizing a big set of numbers like that? She's an architect, seemingly very busy with her work. I'm just a mere designer with nothing special. There's no reason for her to try so hard to contact me...

Unless she wants to ensure I can't remember anything from the past.

This is the second time I argue with myself in my head today. I let out a deep sigh, hold my breath, click the green button, and press the phone to my ear.

[You said if I could figure out your number, you'd be ready to answer my call. It seems like that's not an exaggeration.]

Her voice is a mix of confidence and pride. It waves through the line and makes my eyes widen. I shriek at her in surprise.

"Did you really try calling me from '000' to '999'?!"

[No.]

"Then, how did you find my number?"

[I just called the number on Kris.Tera's name card and asked for Hong

Yok, the Designer's phone number.]

Oh... that's so simple. Why did I think I was so smart this morning? That's irritating.

I close my eyes to calm down, using my free hand to hold my head, regain my professional self, and grit my teeth. I ask her directly to the point without emotions.

"So... What can I do for you, my lady?"

[...]

She doesn't give me a prompt answer.

"..."

I'm waiting in silence, hearing only the sounds of the A/C.

[...]

It's been a while already.

And... I think we've been playing our mute game for too long. I'm the one who can't hold back any longer and decides to call her name with a serious tone.

"Lady Note–"

It seems like we share the same brain. Before I finish speaking, the other side brings up something important enough for her to aspiringly figure out my number.

[Ever since that day, I've always missed you.]

"Huh?"

[Will you marry me?]

"..."

[If you will, I'll ask my dad to propose our marriage.]

*What... is going on?*

Someone scarred my face when I was 16.

*I, at the age of 26, am being proposed on the phone by the one and only monstrous suspect at 9 pm.*

**Footnotes.**

[1] A fabric section used to remove excess fabric, add three-dimensional shape, and customize the fit of a garment by adjusting them in the pattern.

# Chapter 3: Same As Her

During my undergraduate years, I was a part of a lively group of six girls. We enjoyed each other's company, exploring places for tasty food and shopping for classroom supplies together. I felt delighted that they embraced me as a friend.

However, on the first day of my sophomore year, I accidentally overheard them gossiping about the scar on my face. That's when I discovered the nickname they used for me when I wasn't around:

'***Scarface'***

The incident shattered my confidence to the point where I couldn't defend myself. Consequently, I distanced myself from them without uttering a word. Strangely, those five girls didn't seem affected by my absence. It appeared as though they never truly wanted me in the group.

In my junior year, I opted for an elective course that the university had recently introduced, unrelated to fashion design. It was Astronomy, the study of celestial objects. At that time, my interest was piqued by a novel about the universe, motivating me to enroll in the course.

In my Astronomy class, I encountered 'Woon-Sen,' a confident and stylish girl unswayed by social trends. Despite others making fun of her unique hairstyles and colors, she simply laughed off their comments, treating them as a foolish bunch not worth her time. It was thanks to her initiative that we became friends, as I was too timid to approach anyone for a project partner. Since then, this bold and positive girl has consistently been the one to lift my spirits.

'Okay, listen to me. You must always remind yourself that you're the best. I know there's a self-confident designer hidden beneath this fearful facade.' Perhaps she's genuinely there, concealed in a corner of my heart. Or maybe she was lost ten years ago in that accident—the incident that online communities debated, questioning whether it was an arson committed by Lady Note or not. There's no concrete evidence, only suspicion from anonymous individuals.

I deliberately mentioned my friend 'Woon-Sen' earlier for a reason. After receiving a strange call from a royal descendant last night, I find myself unable to focus on work. But I can still fulfill my obligation of designing the next season's collection. I've drafted a knee-length dress with chiffon sleeves, featuring diagonally face-cut buttons. Yet, I can't deny that the eccentric words spoken by Her Highness have continued to distract me. Finally, at 3 pm, I can't resist reaching out to my one and only friend.

**HongYok**: Woon.

**HongYok**: Let's go out for drinks tonight.

*22.27*

We decide to visit our regular spot, a place with live music that isn't too loud. As we settle into a private corner, our conversation at the table remains audible only to us. Today, Woon-Sen is running a bit late due to a recent breakup with her boyfriend. He wanted her to wear her hair long and adopt a sweeter look, but my friend, unfazed, proudly sports her blond skinhead haircut, exuding a fierce aura.

"So, you're telling me that the woman who injured you and left you with the scar ten years ago suddenly appeared yesterday morning and proposed marriage to you at 9 pm?"

Even though we're out for drinks, we merely sip our glasses, allowing the conversation to take center stage. I adjust my eyeglasses and slowly nod, "Yes, I mean... she might be the same person from ten years ago."

"Wait! Let me ask you. Are you still not sure it's the same woman?" "It must be her, right? How could it not be her?"

Woon-Sen remains silent for a moment, her eyeliner-covered eyes scrutinizing me thoroughly. Then, she grabs some french fries, pops them into her mouth, and says,

"So, what did you say after the proposal?"

"I hung up."

"Why didn't you confront her?"

"Well... um..."

I'm at a loss due to a paradox churning in my stomach. It's challenging to discern why the flashback contradicts the peculiar sense of comfort I experience when in contact with that 'Lady'. Here's the verbal conclusion I arrive at:

"Actually, I'm not 100% certain, but because her face overlaps with the monster in my nightmare, how could I spare another thought? Could I?"

"Hong, I've been friends with you for five years. I know you as much as you know yourself. Deep down, you don't believe that she's the culprit, do you?"

"Can you change the question?"

Woon-Sen shrugs her shoulders.

"Aha, fine. Let's skip this and move on to the fact that she proposed to you, alright? Hmm, the woman just burst out that she's gonna ask her dad to arrange your marriage? Is there anything else?"

"Well, she's insane."

"Give me her name and profile. I'll search about her online."

"You know lots of singers, don't you? You should know the Mom Rajawongse in the Edge of Universe band."

My best friend's big eyes widen in surprise. She almost chokes on the drink she just swallowed.

"Do you mean Lady Note after all this time?!"

"See? You know her. Yes, she is that Lady."

"That's impossible! How could a fierce, careless woman like her call you and make a marriage proposal? Is it a dream in a dream?"

"Woon!!!"

I'm being serious right now.

"But it's true. She never cares about anyone. Haven't you watched her interview or any program that the Edge of Universe appeared on TV?"

"..."

I'm now a bit concerned that someone as nerve-wracking as Lady Note is toying with me.

***Part: Narrator Saturday***

Every weekend, the lights in the kitchen of the Ruthaithewin Manor were switched on earlier than usual, providing more time for the chefs and their assistants to prepare meals for the members of this royal house, some of whom had moved out to live privately or had married and established households with their partners. The children of Prince Napasdol and his wife, Mom Luang (M.L.) Jeerana, occasionally visited their parents, turning the event into another family gathering. At times, their grandchildren also accompanied them.

Mom Chao (M.C.) Napasdol, known as Prince Napas, was an elderly man with four children. His first three children had already reached middle age, while his youngest daughter was still in her maidenhood.

She was a late born baby who came into the world almost a decade after her siblings. All of his children had inherited the Thai royal blood and held the titles of Mom Rajawongse (M.R.), referred to honorably as 'Lady' or 'Lord' before their nicknames. If these lords and ladies had successors, only the children of male Mom Rajawongse were addressed as 'Mom Luang (M.L.)', and their nicknames started with 'Sir' or 'Madam.'

Calling them by formal titles was a practice reserved for outsiders or those with only a casual acquaintance with the royal house. In reality, family and friends preferred to use their nicknames and common pronouns when addressing them.

A middle-aged woman with dark, shoulder-length curly hair and crimson red lips entered the expansive living area of the manor. A well-trained servant promptly prepared a cup of hot americano for her, knowing well that she preferred it before breakfast. The owner of the Manor, Prince Napas, acknowledged his daughter's greeting with the wai gesture and then continued reading the newspapers in his hands.

In contrast, M.L. Jeerana, after acknowledging her daughter's salutation, quickly shifted her attention to the marmalade jumpsuit her daughter was wearing.

"Oh my goodness! Why haven't I seen this one in any collection on your website?"

"I designed it for personal use. What do you think?"

"So gorgeous, honey. Can you design another one for me too? Something similar to this. Hmm... What do we call it again? A one-piece with wide-leg harem pants like this one?"

"It's a jumpsuit."

"That's it!"

Eyes filled with pride for her middle child, she gently ran her hand through the big wave of her daughter's sleeve. Then, she inquired about her niece who lived in another Manor yet regularly visited.

"Nam didn't come with you today?"

"She has a field trip with her schoolmates, Mommy. What about P'Nopp?"

"Duh, your big brother? He's unavailable again. Someone at the hospital called for him, they needed him for some urgent surgery."

Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Nijcharee chuckles. Her assumption was right. Coming back home to encounter her older brother, who had unexpectedly become a medical professor, was quite rare.

Suddenly, her mother recalled something important.

"Oh! Several days ago, I saw a fabulous skirt in a magazine. Take a look and tell me what this style is called."

She then addressed the maid, who was about to set down her broom and fetch the magazine.

"It's all right. I'll get it myself. I have to get some exercise to stay healthy."

As her mother in her sixties swiftly walked away, a cup of hot americano was served to the middle-aged woman who had her six-figure luxury bag on her lap. The woman smiled to convey her gratitude, accepted the drink, and sipped it while glancing at her father, whose stony expression was difficult to interpret.

Several minutes passed in muteness between the two of them. When Lady Nij placed the cup and its coaster on the transparent glass table in front of her, her plain yet commanding voice broke the silence without making eye contact.

"Your little sister is in the study."

The listener paused for a brief moment before a smile reappeared on her stern face.

"I was going to ask about her."

The four heirs of the Ruthaithewin house were ordered according age from oldest to youngest as follows: First and foremost, at the age of 41,

Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Nopparuj, or Lord Nopp, was the eldest son. He didn't follow in his father's footsteps, who had expected him to take over the family businesses. Instead, he pursued a medical career and became a

specialist surgeon. After getting married, for convenience, he relocated to

his wife's mansion since it was closer to his hospital.

The management of stocks and all business activities fell under the purview of Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Nonthipak Ruthaithewin, also known as Lord Nont, the second heir. Lord Nont, one year younger than Lord Nopp, had shown a keen interest in business since childhood. He was a shrewd negotiator and dealmaker, and under his leadership, the business group experienced exponential growth each year. Moreover, he resided in this manor with his wife, greatly satisfying his father.

He would likely be the most suitable heir for Prince Napas if not for his major flaw. Lord Nont often found himself embroiled in disputes, leading to frequent clashes between him and his wife, who was always ready to take her children and leave. M.L. Jeerana played the role of mediator between her son and daughter-in-law, and Lord Nont was often called in for admonishment.

The third child, who celebrated her 38th birthday last month, was Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Nijcharee Ruthaithewin, also known as Lady Nij. She's the woman who entered the living room earlier. Married to another royal great-grandchild, she gave birth to a daughter named Mom Luang (M.L.) Mannam.

Although her husband frequently traveled abroad for his export business, it didn't affect their relationship. Lady Nij earned her master's degree in fashion design from a prestigious university in London. Upon returning to Thailand, she established a fashion house called 'Nij Greta,' which gained renown in the industry. During the startup phase, her studio received capital funds from her family, contributing to her brand's growth and current success.

The last but not least is the youngest daughter, Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Netapsorn Ruthaithewin, also known as Lady Note.

She's 27 years old, which creates a significant age gap between her and her older siblings. This rebellious woman underwent a transformation after an incident at the age of 17, leading her to defy all her father's wishes.

Despite Prince Napas's desire for her to study abroad, she chose to pursue her higher education in Thailand and moved into her own condominium as a freshman. She opted to work as an architect for a small company, rejecting her father's connections in larger corporations and his substantial wealth for starting her own firm. Most notably, her consistent choice of wearing aloha shirts to various events, including social gatherings, has been a source of humiliation for her father.

All the aforementioned factors establish the youngest child as her father's primary adversary.

To be frank, while some of his children may not always follow his wishes, Prince Napasdol valued their skills and talents. As long as they brought fame and prestige to the royal house, he was generally unconcerned with their actions. His response was usually limited to nagging, typical of any conservative old man.

The manor owner acknowledged that dealing with the spirited child of the family, like Note, could be challenging. However, her fashion choices were what he found most intolerable. Her consistent preference for aloha shirts, despite their high quality and premium prices, did not meet his approval. Consequently, he had been inquiring with famous brands to offer her new attire.

However, all these attempts had been in vain. M.R. Netapsorn purposefully ignored the visits of these prominent designer. Surprisingly, last Monday, Prince Napas received a peculiar call informing him that Kris.tera Studio had been granted permission to take Lady Note's body measurements. The head designer would visit her to discuss the design soon. The elderly man was unaware that the appointment was scheduled for this Saturday.

Typically, Lady Note resides in her private penthouse and rarely returns home on weekends. After months of absence, her mother had finally called upon her to at least make an appearance in front of her father.

Out of consideration for her mother's wishes, Lady Note had agreed spend the night at home on Friday. This resulted in a minor disagreement with her father during a work-related conversation after dinner.

Despite having been approached for modeling numerous times, she consistently declined. Currently, she sat upright and regal on the top step of the ladder in the Manor's study room. Since 5 in the morning, she had been engrossed in a book about the hypothetical history of the universe.

This reading marathon was prompted by a call from Kris.Tera's head designer, inviting her to visit the studio at a place and time of her convenience. Given that the studio operated every day and had designers available from Monday to Saturday, her response was simple:

*'I'll go to your studio.'*

In other words, she was eager to visit the studio. She had risen early, taken a shower, dressed herself, and applied her favorite perfume—all before sunrise. When her mind needed solace, the youngest member of the royal house sought refuge in this study room, climbing the ladder to explore books typically overlooked by others in the household.

Before she knew it, the tall woman in a black satin aloha shirt adorned with yellow flower prints and white slim trousers had been seated here for two hours already. It was almost time for breakfast, and her eyes had reached the final page of the book in her hands.

At that moment, a middle-aged woman entered the study. The younger woman's almond-shaped eyes briefly shifted to the newcomer before returning to the foreign alphabets. Her beautiful cherry blossom lips parted to deliver a straightforward statement.

"\*sshole."

M.R. Nijcharee paused her walk, casting a furtive glance at a servant who was retrieving an old book for repairs. Her dark red lips formed a smirk, feigning gentleness and care as she looked up at the woman perched on the ladder. Since her clenched fists went unnoticed, she began to respond.

"Dad would appreciate it if you could greet me more politely. Is this really the first thing you want to say?"

"You're not my sister, b\*tch."

"Note, do you realize how disrespectful you are?"

"..."

"You should show a little more gratitude. Otherwise, Dad might end up with only three children."

"Really? I thought you might shake this ladder to make me fall if no one were around."

M.R. Nijcharee couldn't hold back and exclaimed "Ha!" The 11-year-older sister gritted her teeth to maintain composure, refraining from uttering any unnecessary words. Just then, she was saved by the bell.

"My lady, the breakfast is ready."

That was the voice of an elderly woman whose primary responsibility was the kitchen. It momentarily ended the psychological war between the two sisters with a significant age gap. The term "my lady" applied to both Lady Nij and Lady Note.

Consequently, even though M.R. Netapsorn had no intention of having breakfast with someone here, she remained silent. The keyboardist for an up-and-coming music band popular among teenagers closed the book she just finished reading and returned it to its original place on the shelves. She descended the ladder and walked past her older sister without casting even a sideways glance.

The destination of the woman in the aloha shirt was not the dining room. She continued beyond the back gate, which led to a garage filled with vehicles from various brands. Her slender hand delved into her white trouser pocket, retrieved the car key, and unlocked the car door. The lights on her ivory Maserati flashed twice in acknowledgment. However, when she reached for the driver's side door handle, a sudden thought interrupted her actions.

Several seconds passed as the tall woman remained motionless next her cherished ride.

Then, she made a decision. Her graceful hand released the door handle, and she turned around. Her new destination was no longer the study room. Instead, she walked toward her second-oldest sibling's bedroom. A light tap with her finger on the door, and her brother appeared at the threshold, already preparing himself for the family breakfast.

"What's up, Note?"

M.R. Nonthipak asked, surprised.

"May I borrow your hair clipper, please?"

"Why?"

Although he didn't understand his sister's intentions at all, the man in his early forties disappeared into his bedroom once again before returning with what his little sister needed.

"Thank you."

She accepted it with her usual reserved tone. She quickly headed to the nearest communal restroom in the Manor. The middle-aged man contemplated asking his sister about her peculiar plan one more time, but, not wanting to dwell on trivial matters, he let it slide and proceeded to the dining room.

The woman, with a beautiful face and long, jet-black hair cascading down to her back, gazed at her reflection in the mirror. The hair clipper she had borrowed was now plugged in and ready for use. There was no hesitation in her enigmatic, dark eyes. When she turned away from her car door, she had already made up her mind about what she was going to do.

Lady Note used her free hand to slick back her soft, silky hair. Her pretty face tilted slightly, and the blade of the portable device in her hand touched her head. It was pressed and drawn in a straight line, removing the hair on the left side of her head, revealing the faint pink "scar" that had been concealed for years.

Several minutes passed, and a few strands of hair fell into the washbasin. M.R. Netapsorn gazed at herself in the mirror once again. This time, she saw the same woman with slightly different hair. It was still long and smooth on the right side, but on the left, there was a feminine undercut.

Though she had always taken great care of her dark hair and was satisfied with its length.

However, at this moment, she showed no hesitancy or fear.

The only thing that mattered to her was if Hong Yok had to reveal her scar every day...

From now on, she was going to expose her scar alongside that woman.

# Chapter 4: Reaching Her Limit

**Part: Hong Yok**

The sewing department and the designers at Kris.Tera work 36 hours a week, starting from 10 am to 5 pm, Monday to Saturday. Consequently, on Saturday morning, when most people might be enjoying their day off, I have to wake up early and head to the studio as usual.

Two days ago, I had already submitted the designs for the upcoming collection, and the one that was specifically designed for Lady Note.

Regarding the theme, I envisioned what comes to people's minds when they think of spring and summer. Many ideas emerged from this creative process. Ultimately, I selected the idea of beautifully blooming seasonal flowers and incorporated them into two clothing sketches. I presented them to Liu, and she seemed to be quite fond of them.

The first design is an off-shoulder white dress with puffy sleeves, a short A line skirt that reaches the thigh, and a hem printed with a pudding-pine pattern. It also features a layered skirt that flares out above the knees. This dress is undoubtedly perfect for a nature-filled holiday trip.

For the second design, I drew inspiration from the mountain ebony, delicate pink or white flowers with deep pink centers that bloom in summer. This piece gives the illusion of a jumpsuit, with the top and bottom sections cleverly separated.

The top features a dual-colored design, crossing diagonally from left to right. The sleeves are perforated, adding a playful touch.

A tree-branch brown belt cinches the waist, while the long pants are pure white. The primary goal is to create an outfit that complements accessories from any brand, making it versatile and suitable for various handbags and belts.

Still...the expected number of designs hasn't been reached yet. I'm still trying to figure out my centerpiece because I've had to allocate some of my time to design work outfits for Lady Note.

I maintain clear boundaries between my roles as a designer and a personal stylist. In the past week, I've invested a significant amount of time studying

her body measurements, comparing them with her profile and portraits on my laptop screen. The woman whose eyes perfectly represent her first name[1] often shows up in her aloha shirts, leading to rumors that she wears them to taunt her father.

While that might be plausible given Prince Napasdol's reaction, I believe she genuinely has an affinity for such clothing. As a result, I've made a note in my sketchbook to incorporate elements of aloha shirts while maintaining a formal touch.

This task has proven quite challenging. I've had two sleepless nights dedicated to these two designs. Meanwhile, my dear friend Woon-Sen kept calling me, inquiring about the marriage proposal incident. It has been days since the event, and Lady Note has not called, so I responded to my best friend with a hint of sarcasm:

'Yeah, did I have a daydream?'

'Oh gosh! What's wrong with you, Hong? Why don't you call her back?'

'Are you crazy? Who would do something embarrassing like that? Anyways, talk to you later. I've brought some work home. See you at our usual spot this Sunday.'

'Are you running away?!'

Since then, I've isolated myself in my home studio, using my pencils to draft the working outfits that best represent Lady Note.

The first design is a long-sleeved cream blouse. The collar and lapels have a subtle aloha pattern, featuring green leaves and the faint shadows of white bird wings on the black fabric.

These elements are intricately overlaid, with curvy lines resembling mountains sporadically incorporated. Additionally, the sleeve edges are adorned with the same pattern as the collar. In essence, I have delicately integrated the aloha elements into the collar, lapels, and sleeve edges.

Moving down to the beltline, I haven't designed a specific belt for her, as a woman of her means likely has a variety of belts at her disposal. Instead, I've focused on designing dark, slim pants that complement her vibrant, outdoor career.

For the second design, I didn't simply incorporate aloha elements; I designed the entire short-sleeved shirt with a basil-green background adorned with golden lines symbolizing waves. While it's not an aloha shirt, it exudes a similar vibe.

Moreover, it pairs seamlessly with both pants and shirts. As for the lower half, I've created fitted, white pants with slim golden stripes running down the sides, matching the pattern of the shirt.

The next day, I submit the colored sketches to Liu. She asks me to tone down the vibrancy in the designs, fearing Prince Napasdol's disapproval. Nevertheless, I smile and offer a brief response:

'I designed these for his daughter, not for the father himself. His Serene Highness wouldn't wear these clothes anyway... If you think these designs aren't suitable, why present them to Lady Note?'

The head designer slowly shakes her head, and I can't discern whether she intends to share these drafts with Lady Note. She instructs me to return to my desk, and I comply.

In the background, I overhear Liu talks with someone on the phone. I suspect it might be the lady in the aloha shirts arranging an appointment, but I'm unaware of the location.

Then, the turning point arrives. Today is another traffic-congested Saturday. I continue to adhere to Liu's directive. I enter and exit through the back gate and never set foot in the front store or dressing room, regardless of whether they are open or closed. She doesn't want customers to see my face, even though I'm responsible for that particular garment.

Perhaps she's too reluctant to ask the front office staff to explain my presence. Alternatively, she may view my scar as a blemish.

Today is a working weekend, so the atmosphere is livelier than usual. The pattern maker is singing a new hit song, and he seems to have forgotten to insert the carbon paper under the fabric when rolling it to make dashed lines. Meanwhile, an intern like Kaew is discussing her quest to find a new insulated tumbler with a senior employee, the perforation expert. Everybody seems to be enjoying themselves.

The only one who appears exceptionally excited is Liu. I can guess the reason—that Lady is definitely coming here. Liu is keen to establish a connection with the Ruthaithewins, who, besides being part of the royal family, are renowned for their successful businesses. Being a designer for these high-profile individuals means she'll have opportunities to engage with other VIP customers. In the future, she may leverage her built reputation to launch her own brand.

Placing my bag on the desk, I prepare to start drafting the third piece in my Spring/Summer collection. I've decided to use the pattern found on sunflowers' petals as the dress pattern. However, before I can begin, Prae, a senior employee from the sewing department, asks for my help with a blue evening gown for a wealthy lady who is rushing us to complete it by Tuesday. As I'm about to head into the connected sewing room, Liu's voice interrupts.

"Hong! Please buy some coffee for me!"

I halt my feet in confusion as if I've heard something strange. I turn to her with furrowed brows.

"Me?"

"Yes, please buy a cup of mocha and a box of éclairs. You can get the reimbursement from me later. I can't remember how much the éclairs cost."

Then, she turns to Kaew, informing her that Lady Note is arriving within half an hour.

Oh, I get it now. Whenever a VIP comes in, I play the role of the errand girl, who handles all the trivial tasks to facilitate others behind the scenes, despite how busy I am.

I clench my fist, calming myself down as I walk towards the head designer, who's sitting and chatting with the intern girl. Both of them turn to me with suspicious gazes, while I try my best to force a smile.

"P'Liu, I'm actually occupied right now."

The older woman lets out a brief sigh, as if that isn't a big deal at all. She gives me a smile, as if she doesn't understand what I just said.

"The coffee shop is just next door, honey."

Looking into her eyes, my smile freezes. I hope she can receive my telepathic message – 'Then, why don't you go there by myself?' and come to her senses. However, it seems like I underestimated the woman in front of me.

"Hurry up! What if Her Highness arrives early?"

She isn't bothered by it at all, as if she couldn't care less.

Kaew doesn't care about me either. What Liu has done to me all this time makes others perceive me as a designer only when necessary. Whenever we have to welcome a VIP customer, my role is always sidelined. Nothing has changed over the past three years.

I take a deep breath, my chest tightening with a rush of thoughts. I want to speak up for myself, but only one foolish word slips out.

"Okay."

I return to Prae and tell her that I'll come back to help her with the evening gown later. Then, I walk out of the studio through the back gate and head towards our regular coffee shop, a place everyone in this area knows well.

Since it's still working hours, the shop isn't crowded. I order what the head designer wants, and in less than ten minutes, my order is ready to go.

On my way back, I walk in my peachy kitten heels straight to the back of our studio. In this office, the restroom is right next to the back gate. That's why the moment I push the mirror door to enter the studio, I can hear the

conversation between two familiar voices from the female restroom.

"I really like P'Hong's designs!"

That's the voice of Kaew, the intern.

"I have to admit that, despite the kind of face she has, she's really talented." And then it's Liu's turn.

I should just walk past. It's so simple. They are just two women who are perhaps touching up their faces in front of the mirror to welcome our prestigious guest. But their next words halt my steps.

"Kaew."

"Yes, ma'am?"

"I'll tell Lady Note that I'm the one who designed them."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'll tell her that I designed both mine and Hong's. I don't want to complicate things."

"Well... Is that really okay?"

Liu snorts. "Hong wouldn't know. When the time comes, I'll let her help me. Besides, she won't be there when Her Highness tries out the clothes or when they are completed."

I'm unsure how to react—whether with surprise, anger, or pity for her— given all that she's said.

Unintentionally, I release some heavy sighs, turn around, and exit through the very same door I just passed. I'm too overwhelmed to continue working.

Sometime past nine on a Saturday morning, I lean against the wall and forget about the clock. I sip the mocha and devour all the eclairs in the box. My face is numb, and my eyes are burning.

If she wants to eat, she should go out by herself.

If she desires fame, she should create her own designs.

I'm a designer, not a subordinate to anybody. Why did I endure this for three years? From my first day of work until now, I've never felt worthy. I've hidden myself in the background, watching them on stage. I've obediently listened to their criticisms about my glasses and my face. Though not expressed directly, they make me feel like an ugly woman because of my scar.

This is so foolish, Hong Yok. Why are you enduring this?

What about this time? Will you let them easily steal your creations? That's how I arrived at my decision. Every action is as swift as my thought. I stride back into the studio. Now, Liu and Kaew are no longer waiting in the restroom. They are on standby for today's VIP guest. As soon as the head designer notices me entering the studio with only an iced coffee cup and an empty box of eclairs, she wears a dumbfounded expression, as if she's completely clueless about what's happening.

I discard everything in my hands into the trash bin next to the door and then grab my messenger bag. I advance toward the most influential person, second only to its owner, in this studio. I gaze into her eyes fearlessly— something I've never done.

"P'Liu." "Yes?"

"I quit."

"Huh!?"

I'm not sure why everyone in this room stops working and gives us all their attention. Perhaps because of my declaration? Or her loud exclamation? Or

both? Anyway, I don't care about anything anymore.

"And I'll walk out through the front gate."

Finishing my words, I swiftly turn around and hurry out of this pathetic office.

"Wait! Wait! Wait!"

The voice of the head designer follows me, but I remind myself to focus on the sound of my heels hitting the ground. I am at my breaking point, unable to even spare a glance for this chaotic place. I walk so fast, as if I can't contain myself any longer.

The curtains along the hallway leading to the front gate stand right before me. With just a reach and slide, I'll step into the forbidden zone they strictly disallow me to enter. I want to walk through it without a pause, not even a nanosecond.

However, as I open the dark gray curtains, I momentarily halt. The tall, handsome woman in her aloha shirt is standing next to the nearby hanging rail. She immediately turns to me as our eyes meet.

Lady Note... with her new undercut hairstyle on the left side. And... a faint, pink scar?

Despite her new look and the scar strikingly reminding me of something, and regardless of my desire to ask her about that night's proposal, Liu's voice following me down the hallway urges me to face reality first.

"You can't simply quit like this, Hong!"

I shake my head to dispel my hesitation, look away, and continue walking towards the door.

"Oh! Lady Note! Did you just arrive?"

Liu stops following me, as she has something more important to handle – welcoming the VIP guest. The more I distance myself from them, the more their conversation gradually fades.

"My apologies for welcoming you late, Your Highness."

"Did that woman just quit?"

"Yes? Oh, yes! It doesn't matter. Would you mind waiting in the lobby, please?"

As I push the mirror door and exit the studio, the only thing I hear is Her Highness's suddenly cold voice responding to Liu: *"Then, I suppose I have no reason to be here anymore."*

**Footnotes.**

[1] In Thai, Netapsorn (literally read "Net-Ap-Sorn") means Angel's eyes.

# Chapter 5: Wishing for the Latter

From an unknown designer to unemployed...

As I swing open the door, my sole intention is to escape swiftly. Frantically, I wave at the approaching taxi, completely dismissing any thoughts of the potential fare.

Instructing the driver to start moving without deciding on a destination, I let the vehicle pull away from the Kris.Tera studio.

An unusual sense of relief washes over me as the studio fades into the distance. On impulse, I take a glance at the rearview mirror, catching sight of Lady Note's tall figure running through the front gate. She stands on the roadside with her eyes fixated on the taxi.

Unfortunately, given our distance, I am unable to determine her face expression. Regardless, that's not my focus. I close my eyes and release a heavy exhale. At that moment, my communication device buzzes, indicating an incoming call. Knowing it must be Liu, I ignore the call and stash the phone in my bag. Allowing myself to relax in the ensuing silence, I stare out of the window, lost in thought.

Ten minutes have passed, and now I'm far away from the studio. Then, my eyes widen with the realization that the taxi fees must be sky high! I hurriedly tell the driver that the destination is the nearest shopping mall after this crossroad.

This is bad.

Today is far from my lucky day...

At this point, regret sets in. Not about the job, but about all the incomplete projects, pencils, pens, scissors, and personal stationery that I left on my desk. Emotions overcame me, and I simply left with my bag. I should've packed up before announcing my resignation. That pair of scissors cost almost one thousand baht. Darn it...

Moreover, I'm not close to anyone in my office. Over the past three years, I've been treated like an ugly, pitiable soul who received some mercy from them. Before I knew it, I've become someone who heads straight home after work. Alternatively, I go to different places alone or make appointments with my best friend, Woon-Sen. I don't care much about how the seniors or other colleagues hang out with each other. I only attend the inevitable occasional parties.

In summary, I can't ask anyone to bring my stuff to me.

The more I think about it, the more I regret that pair of scissors... Daydreaming, I take the elevator to the third floor of the shopping mall out of the blue. Perhaps without any concrete destination in mind, I follow several teenagers, both boys and girls, whose destination is this floor.

I'm not in the mood for food or desserts. I sigh, adjusting my glasses with my index finger, and then stroll along the pathway in my completely empty mind.

I move with a lack of vigor, both physically and mentally, yet a store featuring a glass wall captures my attention. I don't register the 30%discount price tag or any details. My sole focus lies on the dark navy velvet dress adorning the captivating mannequin at the storefront.

That's my design—it's sold under Madam Kris's brand, so naturally, it's copyrighted under her studio. As per the contract signed at the commencement of our employment, we all acknowledge this. However, designers typically receive due credit for their bespoke creations. In my case, despite being the designer and creator, I'm credited only as Liu's assistant. Yes, 'assistant'—they employ this term instead of using my name. Perhaps, if Madam Kris, the brand owner, personally designed entire pieces and enlisted us to assist in merely filling in the gaps, as is common in other brands, things might be less complicated.

"I like this dress."

While observing the dress I designed and painstakingly crafted the sample for, a voice startles me from behind. I turn around to face a woman in her adulthood—no, considering her demeanor and tone, she must be in her middle age. Despite her age, she looks significantly younger due to her stunning makeup and style.

Luxurious brand heels, a marmalade jumpsuit, shoulder-length curls, dark red lips, and...a sophisticated gaze.

Currently, she stands beside me, examining the same velvet dress. It's peculiar because, despite our lack of acquaintance, she spontaneously expressed her admiration. As the designer of this dress, I'm curious to learn her reasons.

"Well... Is it the velvet fabric that caught your liking?"

Her purse and shoes appear to be at least half a hundred thousand baht. I speculate she's an affluent woman with a penchant for elegant attire, and that could be her rationale. However, she merely smiles gently, shaking her head without directing her gaze toward me.

"That's not it. I believe the designer truly considered its versatility for all age groups. Picture a high school girl wearing this to a small party. Even with just a pair of silver earrings, she becomes the radiant star of the night. Conversely, if a retired lady, who enjoys flaunting luxurious accessories to showcase her affluence, wears it, I believe this dress can complement her dignified and majestic appearance."

Oh... she has a keen eye. Although Madam Kris's brand primarily caters to working women, when I crafted this piece, I aimed to design a velvet dress with no age restrictions. The pleat from the shoulder to the opposite side of the skirt is my effort to diminish formality and steer clear of a teenage vibe simultaneously. It's all about the wearer's interpretation.

Regardless, I never anticipated encountering someone who could discern my intentions.

Glancing at the woman standing at a distance while absorbing her insightful analysis, I feel an urge to say something. It would be simpler for me if she inquired whether I was a designer or posed a fashion-related question. Still, all I can manage is:

"Yeah... It's Kris.Tera anyway."

She responds with a smile as if my statement is something self-evident.

"She definitely can't afford to let go of this designer."

"Huh? Why do you think Madam Kris didn't design it herself?"

"Every collection of this brand has 2-3 unique pieces."

"How?"

*Rrrrrrr!*

The phone in her luxurious bag rings loudly, completely drowning out my question. The older woman raises her hand, gesturing for a pause. She answers the phone and engages in conversation on the other end.

"So, you're done choosing your new bag, Mom? Okay, Nij[1] will go to see you on the 5th floor."

This middle-aged woman, nicknamed 'Nij,' hangs up after scheduling an appointment with her mother. Then, she turns to me and startles for a brief moment when she clearly sees my scar. Standing on my left side earlier, she could only see that side of my face. But now, meeting eyes face-to-face, it's no wonder she reacts this way.

Nevertheless, she doesn't say anything despite her surprised gaze. We're strangers to each other, just two women from different generations sharing their fashion perspectives.

That might be the reason why she doesn't care about my scar and simply states:

"I have to leave. My apologies for mumbling all those things to you."

"No problem..."

Deep down, I'd like to say, 'Thank you for your interest in my creation.' But, truthfully, it's better this way. She doesn't need to know. Otherwise, I'd have to give her a lengthy explanation about why I no longer work for that studio. I just nod and watch her walk away until she's out of sight.

Now, what's your next move, Hong Yok?

If I go home now, my mother will undoubtedly ask me why I'm back so early. I plan to inform my family about my resignation, but not

immediately. I prefer to wait until I secure a new job or, perhaps, when we share a meal together. Anytime but not now. I know my parents will never scold me; they will undoubtedly offer comfort, but I don't want to cause them unnecessary worry.

Finally, I check my phone around noon. Having left the shopping mall, I am now at a stationary shop, looking for some star-shaped beads. A 500-gram pack would provide me with several thousand beads. Then, I suddenly desire to create two pieces of clothing with two different shapes of beads. With nothing else to do, while waiting for the shopkeeper to find the items in the storeroom, I naturally slide my phone and check the notifications on the screen.

*11 missed calls*

I open the notification. Five of them are from Liu, who probably wants to criticize me or make some harsh statements. Four others are from my colleagues—Kaew, Prae, and Ohm, the pattern maker. The remaining two are from Lady Note.

Why did she call me?

Among all the missed calls, the person I should call back the most is the head designer so that we can wrap up things officially. However, I can't help but desire to delete her number from my phone since I'm still upset about what she said in the late morning.

Meanwhile, I don't share enough memories with others to engage in conversation with them.

After finding what I need and completing the payment, my attention is inevitably drawn to the name of the woman who has a penchant for wearing aloha shirts – 'Lady Note.'

In spite of being essentially strangers, she fills my mind with question marks, be it the nightmares, the marriage proposal, or these missed calls. Before I realize it, I'm dialing a number on this walkway. After just two rings, the call is answered on the other side.

[Hello.]

With confidence that it's her, I take a deep breath and address her with an indifferent voice.

"I noticed your missed calls. What can I do for you, My Lady?"

A hesitant silence lingers. Eventually, she states her purpose.

[Can we meet? Are you available?]

"Why?"

[What do you mean?]

"Why do we need to meet?"

I know my words are too cold and direct.

"I already quit that studio, so please contact the studio directly."

[But I went there to see you.]

"..."

Despite my earlier words, her response stops me in my tracks. For a moment, I'm rendered speechless. My heart races faster than usual, and when it returns to its normal pace, a profound silence hangs before she continues speaking.

[We should talk about what happened ten years ago.]

The crucial point lights up my mind.

Ten years ago... The fire incident and the fact that she was the girl holding the iron rod in front of me.

Why does she want to meet me? To revisit what happened?

To offer an apology?

Or to clarify that she wasn't the culprit?

Without a clear reason, I find myself hoping for the latter.

I bite my lips, a surge of various emotions overwhelming me, and I make up my mind. I suppress my anxiety. Although part of me wants to cowardly refuse and escape this confrontation, another part has been anticipating this moment. Driven by curiosity, I exhale deeply with a conscience.

Since today is already ruined, nothing can make it worse. I should inquire about everything that transpired ten years ago – my scar, the fire, and her audacious proposal.

*"Where should we meet, My Lady?"*

**Footnotes.**

[1] Thai people, especially women, generally use their nickname, referring to themselves in the third person when conversing with someone older.

# Chapter 6: I Won't Fall for You

Our chosen meeting spot is a cozy little cafe not far from where I had the conversation with Her Highness. A short bus ride and a brief walk bring me to the cafe, where the bell jingles lightly as I push open the glass door. The staff behind the counter greets me warmly. Although her tone shifts a bit when she notices my scar, she swiftly turns her attention away and directs me to the available seats inside.

Surveying the area, I soon spot a woman in an aloha shirt sitting elegantly, legs crossed, enjoying her hot coffee from a pristine white cup. Her gaze has been fixed on me since I entered. Honestly, I can't deny that she embodies perfection in every way, worthy of gracing the cover of a magazine.

Despite the undercut on the left side of her head presenting a different image from her online pictures, it's so captivating that not only I but also other patrons discreetly steal glances.

"Thank you, but I already have a seat," I smile at the cafe staff member and proceed towards the great-great-granddaughter of the monarch, who reserved a table for two. On the table, there's a cup of coffee and two pre ordered glasses of water. Without waiting for her to initiate the conversation, I quickly speak up as soon as I take my seat.

"I'm only here for important matters,"

I declare as I place the pack of star-shaped beads on the table. Lady Note briefly glances at it before fixing her eyes on mine.

"Hmm" she acknowledges.

Good. She quickly grasps my point. No matter how tempting the desserts look on display, I can't simply indulge in them with the potential monster from my nightmares looming over me.

Before we delve into our conversation, laughter from the nearby table reaches our ears.

We both glance at the next table where a big roundtable accommodates five teenagers with an array of books. Although it appears like they're studying, the focus shifts to a girl in a tee and light-green dungarees who starts drawing a mocking line from her ample down to her cheek with a neon-pink highlighter.

She's making fun of my scar...right?

This realization perplexes me, and I lower my face, feigning indifference. However, Lady Note's relentless gaze continues to pierce through them, causing the wild laughter to eventually subside.

I glance at the table once again, and this time, no one is laughing. The alleged culprit raises her frappuccino, pretending to take a sip, and then discreetly points her finger to the cafe restroom, signaling her friends to look that way.

Things should've concluded here, but evidently, I underestimated Her Highness M.R. Netapsorn.

"Excuse me!"

Her stubborn, fierce voice erupts as the girl in light-green dungarees walks past us. Startled, the girl's shoulders instinctively rise, and she turns around towards Lady Note, stammering,

"Erm...me?"

With her beautiful face and a savage aura, Her Highness directs an aggressive gaze at the girl.

"There's a bookshop on the next alley."

"???"

The young girl cluelessly turns to her friends, who wear equally confused expressions. Her Highness reaches for her wallet, takes out a one-thousand baht banknote, and hands it over to the girl with her two fingers gripping it. "Go buy an etiquette book for you and your friends."

"What?!"

"If you read that and still don't get it, you may try to cook and eat it for several meals so that you can become a sensible human being."

"Your Highness!"

I quickly caution her, mind-blown by her unexpected action.

However, it seems too late because, judging from the girl's eyes and facial expressions, she looks furious. She's about to launch a verbal counterattack, but fortunately, her friend—perhaps her boyfriend—rises and pulls back her arm.

"Wait, babe! Please don't fight!"

Then, he turns to Lady Note with a serious look, attempting to de-escalate the situation.

"We're sorry."

However, the woman in her leg-crossing posture disagrees.

"Who do you need to apologize to? Me?"

He quickly realizes his mistake and turns to me instead. Before he can say anything, Lady Note interrupts again.

"Shouldn't you apologize as a group? Didn't you all laugh together?"

This time, she crosses her arms and fixes him with an obviously cold gaze that could freeze anyone to death.

Initially, the girl in the dungarees seemed ready to explode. She might have been preparing to livestream or record everything to later defame us, but one of her friends warned her loudly enough for me to hear.

"She's an idol! And she has so many fans! Also, what we did is wrong. What if the netizens knew what we had done? We might be screwed!"

As a result, the five teenagers have to offer me an apology. Some of them just want to quickly wrap it up, while some genuinely appear regretful about their actions. Only the girl in the dungarees looks discontent until the end. Finally, they all leave together.

It's only then that I realize we've become the spotlight of this cafe. Though everyone quickly hides their faces or returns to their business, I fear being secretly photographed or criticized behind my back.

Nonetheless, the woman with the undercut seems indifferent to all those around her. This woman... How should I define her?

"You are a star of a rising band. Aren't you afraid of negative comments at all?"

"Should I just let it go then?"

"If you don't react, they will eventually silence themselves."

"Alongside your gradual loss of self-confidence?"

"..."

"The issue lies not with you but with them! If you find it hard to defend your true self..."

Initially, I thought it would be another criticism, but I was wrong.

"I'll be your shield."

Her eyes, her face, and her gestures... Everything conveys that she isn't kidding or speaking lightly. A warmth grows within my chest, leading to a moment of hesitation.

Actually, I had planned to be distant and cold towards her, but with what just happened, it's paradoxical whether to express sincere gratitude to her or not... About to make a statement, a thought of suspicion arises....What if she's trying to protect me because she's the one who left the scar on my face? Maybe she's trying to make up for what she did, that's all.

That's why... it makes logical sense for me to distance myself from her.

"Please get to the point."

Her Highness stays silent for a while after I ignore what she said. Partly consumed, the coffee cup is placed down on its saucer. Once again, her eyes – a mix of deep ocean and night sky – stare at me, as if there are so many things to say.

"Fine. Let's talk about what happened... What do you remember?"

What I remember... isn't sufficiently connected. All I know is that I saw her holding an iron rod in her hand tightly. But as I want to know whether she's going to mention this or not, I just give her a vague reply. "I can only recall that there was a fire incident at the arts festival." Her brows knit together.

"What about anything before that or when you regained consciousness at the hospital? You can't remember anything else?"

"Yes, that's why if you know, please tell me about it. I've been eager to understand the cause of my frequent nightmares for years."

The mention of 'frequent nightmares' visibly affects her. I notice her trembling index finger and the mix of nervousness, heaviness, and hesitation in her eyes.

There's something she's hesitant to reveal.

"..."

As she remains silent, the pause becomes longer than before.

I start to feel thirsty, so I reach for the glass of water. When the bottom of the glass touches the round saucer, her soft voice gently utters.

"I just... happened to be there as well."

Her response catches me off guard.

"...That's all?"

"Yes, that's all."

A sudden heat rises to my head, and it might be evident on my face as I react to her statement.

"Are we are meeting just for this?"

"Normally, people who have been through crucial moments together might want to be friends or something, don't you think?"

It seems like I won't get any substantial answers today. My intention to inquire about that faint scar on her head fades away. I close my eyes to take a deep breath and calm myself. Then, I reopen them and try to speak as calmly as possible.

"Your Highness, if you're enjoying teasing me and engaging in this absurd discussion, not to mention that marriage proposal, I'm afraid I don't think it's amusing."

Her enigmatic eyes dim for a brief moment at my last sentence, but she still responds.

"I'm not teasing you, and I didn't make a joke about my call that night."

"Isn't that too absurd?"

"Because you're..."

She hides her lovely face and bites her lips, as if she needs to grasp onto something.

"You're so pretty that I couldn't think of anything else but proposing to you."

Ha! Is this some kind of patience test? Feeling mocked, I swiftly grab the bead bag and rise in frustration.

"I've gotta go."

"Wait!"

Rushing out, I leave her behind. She can't abruptly follow me as she needs to pay the bill first. So, I think, as long as I walk fast enough to the bus stop, which is only 50 meters away, I can shake her off. If I'm lucky, the bus might arrive in time. Regardless of its number or proximity to my house, I just need to take any bus and escape from the woman I just encountered.

However, the sound of a loud horn suddenly erupts behind me. Unable to dodge it quickly enough, my arm is struck by something. It's a motorcycle taxi rider illegally riding on the footpaths. To make matters worse, he scolds me:

"Piss off!"

Then, he speeds away.

The most dreadful part isn't the pain in my arm but the realization that I have nothing in my hands anymore. To put it simply, I was grazed by the motorcycle, causing the 500-gram pack of star-shaped beads in my left hand to slip out and fall to the ground.

Oh gosh...

The meticulously packed beads are now spilling from the bag. In front of me, some beads remain contained in the plastic bag, while a significant portion scatters across the footpath.

This is truly turning into a 'bad day.'

I grit my teeth, enduring the unfortunate situation unfolding before me. Clenching my fists, I recognize that there's nothing else to be done but to collect the beads under the scorching 2 pm sunlight.

Someone steps behind me, coming to a halt. When I turn around, I lock eyes with a taller woman who has a penchant for aloha shirts.

Her almond-shaped eyes focus on the scattered beads on the ground. Despite her inscrutable poker face, she doesn't utter a word. After a few seconds, Lady Note turns back and retraces her steps.

So, this is her true nature... I'm disappointed that she simply walked away upon seeing someone in trouble. But perhaps that's a good thing; it means I get to witness her genuine character.

Anyway, it doesn't surprise me...more or less. If she was the one who caused me harm back then, escaping from a situation like this would be a breeze for her.

I return to the scattered beads, sighing in anticipation of another minute of fatigue. Wrapping my skirt around me, I bend down to gather all the beads into the plastic bag, which fortunately remains intact.

Suddenly, the sunlight disappears. Initially, I think it's a cloud that's come to my rescue, but then I notice a shadow on the ground, resembling someone opening an umbrella for me. Before I can look up, a woman kneels down beside me. Her familiar scent reaches my nose. Isn't she 'Lady Note,' the one who just walked away?

The elegant woman places her black-and-red envelope bag on the ground. When she opens it, I see that it's still empty. She tears half of an A4 paper and shares it with me. I accept it in confusion before she begins to sweep all the beads into her bag.

Even though I can clearly see what she's doing—holding an umbrella for me and helping collect the beads—I still find myself asking a rather foolish question.

"W... What are you doing?"

"I'm collecting stars for you."

"..."

So, she went back to get the umbrella and all this stuff from her car? And I've been giving her a lot of covert criticisms.

"What about the bag..."

"It's mine. Just happened to have it in my car. I rarely use it."

In the afternoon, under the blazing sun, I find myself sheltered beneath the shade of a purple umbrella that someone has opened for me.

Meanwhile, she's also assisting me in collecting the stars that have fallen all over the ground.

Strange feelings well up in my chest. All I can manage is to tighten my lips and sweep all the beads into her bag. Lady Note, with her determined voice, continues cautioning pedestrians,

"Please don't step on them!"—much like she did when talking to Liu and those kids in the cafe.

She doesn't inquire about what these tiny things are for. Perhaps, she can guess based on the fact that I'm a designer. Several minutes pass, and almost all the beads are collected. Then, she surprises me by saying something without making eye contact.

"I want you to design and make my clothes."

She's so irrational, isn't it?

I'm not a famous designer, more like a working ant who recently left Kris.Tera. Why would this high-profile woman want me to be her designer? Numerous doubts flood my mind.

"My apologies. I really can't."

Her beautiful hand pauses in collecting the beads with the piece of paper.

She continues moving, mumbling,

"I got it..."

Even though refusing her makes logical sense, and I shouldn't get involved with her anymore, some sort of guilt begins to grow within me. I don't understand myself at all. Damn it.

About five minutes pass, and thousands of stars are now gathered in the zipped bag. With the two of us, things are resolved quickly. Moreover... It's a relief to have an umbrella shielding us from the scorching sun.

We glance around to double-check that there are no beads left on the ground before standing up.

Finally, I can't suppress the urge to express my gratitude. My words flow as swiftly as my thoughts.

"Thank you."

For what you did in the cafe, the umbrella, the bag, and this star collection. The unspoken sentiments I keep locked in my heart.

"No problem," she replies, umbrella in hand. She hands over the bag filled with thousands of beads. Then, she opens her free palm and glances at the piece of paper in my hand, signaling that she will dispose of it for us. I hand it over to her without resistance.

Suddenly, I notice a strand of hair on her left shoulder, possibly a stray piece from her new haircut. In that moment, I feel the inclination to brush it off from her neat aloha shirt. However, I resist that impulse and caution myself against getting entangled with her.

"I really... have to go."

"By what means?"

"By any means that doesn't involve you."

That sounds a bit too harsh, doesn't it? As soon as I realize that, I soften my voice and say,

"...by bus."

"I'll send you off at the bus stop."

I don't refuse but allow the tall woman to escort me with the sun-protective umbrella in her hand to the bus stop. The temperature in my chest strangely rises. Fortunately, I'm saved by the bus that just arrived and may take me away from this place any minute now. Just standing next to her makes me lose myself more and more.

While people on the bus gradually disembark, I restlessly tighten the bag in my hand several times. When it's time for me to board the bus, I quickly step forward. Still, her voice suddenly bursts out.

"Hong Yok!"

I halt my feet, standing still to listen, but I don't turn around.

"Have a safe ride. Tomorrow will be kind to you."

Keep calm, Hong Yok. You might not encounter this woman who may have hurt you anymore.

No need to reply.

Without a single glance at her, I step onto the bus. Perhaps because there are many people getting off at this stop, there are vacant seats available, so I don't have to stand and hold the bar among the crowd. The bus takes off when I sit down next to the window that is half-opened. The rectangular bag is placed on my lap. Then, I notice some letters forming a famous brand name.

The bag she gave me is a camera bag?

So, she lied to me about the fact that she rarely used it.

I tighten my lips, looking outside the window of the moving bus and placing one of my hands on my chest.

'If you find it hard to defend your true self, I'll be your shield.'

'Because you're... You're so pretty that I couldn't think of anything else but proposing to you.'

'I'm collecting stars for you.'

'Have a safe ride. Tomorrow will be kind to you.'

*I hate it when Lady Note spills those words. They make my heart... race for a spell.*

**Chapter 7: And I Won't Be Fooled by My Heart**

After informing my family about my resignation over dinner, my mom wears a concerned expression, and my dad, who isn't working overtime today, inquires about what happened. I make an effort to smile and explain:

"I just want to move forward. I don't feel the studio aligns with my style..."

However, they still seem a bit worried. My mom suggests that if I haven't found a new place yet, I should take this time to rest. Then, my sister, who has been quietly listening, starts to chuckle.

"Ha! You were fired, weren't you?"

"Toey! If you say that again, I'll cut off your allowance!"

Wrapping up her meal, Toey-Hom immediately fires back.

"Don't I have the right to express myself too? Why do you need to threaten me over such a trivial thing?"

"Because P'Hong has been providing your weekly allowance all this time!"

"..."

"I beg you, Toey. Please stop being so childish."

The girl turns to her dad, hoping for some support, but all she receives is a ferocious stare.

"Apologize to your sister."

It's rare to see my father issue that kind of command. His decisive voice causes my sister to clench her fists. She turns to me, grits her teeth, and bluntly says,

"Fine. Sorry."

Then, she immediately rises from her chair and stomps her feet all the way back to her bedroom.

"I don't know how to teach this kid anymore."

"I'll talk to her before bed."

I don't offer any opinion. I just sit there and have my dinner. Later, I help my mom wash the dishes and tidy up the dining table before excusing myself and heading back to my room. As I prepare to walk upstairs, my mom gently touches my arm and reassures me not to worry about our financial situation.

We still have some savings, so I can take my time and rest. I respond with a smile, though my brain is already drafting the resume that will soon circulate the job market.

Upon entering my room, before switching on my laptop, the ringtone of my phone loudly sings. This time, it isn't Liu or other colleagues but Madam Kris, our boss who rarely involves herself in the design or production process. Ignoring her call would be too rude. With a long, deep sigh, I answer and politely say,

"Good evening, ma'am."

"Are you really quitting, Hong Yok?"

Direct to the point, without any introduction, her voice sounds anxious.

I feel a bit guilty for not telling her in person.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Liu told me that you got upset because she ordered you to buy some coffee. You came back, all mad, and announced your resignation. Is that where the problem lies? Shall we have a heart-to-heart talk first? I'll help you get through this."

"Madam, buying coffee isn't the problem here."

[Then, what's the problem?]

"..."

Should I say it? At first, I hesitate, but since the other side silently waits for my response, having no explanation might make me look even worse. So, I muster my courage and speak up:

"No one respects me."

[How? I don't understand. We always focus on the outputs. Even though you have that kind of face, we never judge you based on your appearance!]

"Everyone, including you, keeps saying that you never judge me based on my appearance, but doesn't that mean you only appreciate me as long as my face doesn't RUIN my work?"

[You overthink it. That should be a compliment.]

But people can praise others without undermining their confidence... If I express that sentiment honestly, she might become furious. After working for this studio for three years, I've discerned everyone's personalities, including the owner's.

[There's a piece that you haven't completed. What you're doing is damaging others, you know?]

"In our contract, there's no clause mentioning advance notice. Legally, the resignation is auto-approved. Also... For Mrs. Nara's evening gown that I designed, there's only the sewing process left, which is P'Prae's

responsibility. If you're worried, I can keep in touch with her privately to

oversee the project until it's done. I think that wouldn't be a problem."

[...]

Silence takes over our conversation for a minute. The other side is clearly nervous as she continues:

[Hong Yok, give it a second thought, please. I know it's just a temporary temper. You're not really leaving, are you? We've been on the same team for three years. You've worked from dawn till dusk for days during the last collection. Your birthday is next month, isn't it? I've discussed with Liu what we should buy for you.]

'She definitely can't afford to let go of this designer.'

Suddenly, what that middle-aged woman said in the afternoon pops up in my head. Even though Madam Kris provides us with good welfare, no one on our team has ever received a gift from her. It's clear she's extremely concerned about my resignation, and perhaps Liu is too. She might be regretting asking me to buy her coffee. But again, that's the problem. The root cause is what she has done to me.

[What about this? Please continue working until the end of this month. It's less than ten days to go. Perhaps, after a small talk, you might change your mind, right?]

"No, thanks. I won't take this month's salary, including the bonus."

[Did you forget the day you applied for this job? I accepted you because I saw your determination to walk on this path. But now, you're easily walking away. Let me ask you frankly. Did some brand make an offer to you?]

"I still remember my first day."

Then, I continue in my head, but with Kris.Tera, I wouldn't be able to progress. Nonetheless, I don't have enough courage to say that out loud. Instead, I explain to her:

"No one has offered me anything. If I get a job somewhere in the future, that means I would've submitted my application after resigning from your studio."

[Sigh]

The other side exhales hopelessly, knowing she can't change my mind. She tries to bring up the birthday gift once more. Then, I can hear a male voice interrupting her. She excuses herself, mentioning she has to go. I guess she's spending time with her boyfriend. I bid her farewell with gratitude, but Madam Kris insists that I should carefully consider her proposal.

I cut off the line. Now, my bedroom is filled with silence and many things to reconsider. Today has been too exhausting. I should head straight to my bathroom and take a shower, but then I'm reminded of the black-red camera bag placed on the low table.

That's right... I should wash these beads first before storing them in my home studio. I almost forget.

Why did I keep thinking about that woman with the umbrella who helped me collect these star beads...?

*Three days later*

After leaving my previous workplace, I've been scouring numerous job search websites, applying for designer positions in various companies. I've submitted online applications to those in Bangkok and neighboring provinces that are not too far from home.

In the salary section, many companies state either 'commensurate with experience' or 'negotiable.'

I know it will take a while for them to reply (or unfortunately ignore my applications). Anyway, I'll continue searching for jobs while confining myself to my studio. I start sewing a new piece of clothing for which I've already made a pattern. One afternoon, my mother knocks on the door and enters with a tray of fruits. Although I'm in the middle of putting the sleeve and body parts together, I set aside my sewing machine and turn off the radio.

Then, I come to the small table to eat the sliced pineapples.

"Hong, do you want to start a business of your own?"

I do. I genuinely do. However, if I'm being honest with myself, I can imagine my mom and dad taking out loans and using all their savings to support me.

That's why I choose to smile and lie to her:

"Not right now. I'm not brave enough."

The latter part is partially true...

We continue talking about miscellaneous things, in the typical mother daughter talks. Ten minutes pass, and the clock strikes 2 pm. Mom excuses herself to watch her favorite TV show and clears away the leftover fruit since I told her I was full. The studio falls silent once again. Without hesitation, being the audiophile that I am, I turn on the radio.

Returning to my sewing machine shouldn't be difficult. I should feel relieved that I don't have to deal with her, but I still find myself getting distracted occasionally. I wonder if what I've done is too mean and cold.

Even though she wished me a safe ride and a kind tomorrow, I chose to say nothing, not even turning back to her and saying 'you too.'

What if the accident back then... What if my scar wasn't caused by her? Did I accuse the wrong person or judge her with some prejudice?

But if it wasn't her, who on earth would hold a iron rod against others like that?

My thoughts run wild. Even the sound of the sewing machine motor can't pull me back to focus on the project in front of me, but the voice of a radio DJ manages to bring me back to reality.

"The next song is by the Edge of Universe. It seems like one of the members is currently trending on Twitter.

Anyway, let's not focus on that but their masterpiece. 'Real Peter Pan' is their first song that..."

'One of the members is currently trending,' isn't it?

That not only reminds me of something but also concerns me about whether it's a positive or negative trend. But if it's something positive, wouldn't he talk about it? Five minutes have passed after I tried to neglect the Edge of Universe trending issue, but eventually, I can't hold back anymore. I grab my phone and open the blue bird application.

*#LadyNote*

That's the number one trending hashtag at the moment. My anxiety flows through my entire body. I guess it must be about what happened at the cafe, and I'm correct. With a simple click, I can view the viral video. It wasn't taken by other customers but secretly filmed by one of the teenagers who laughed at my scar without our notice.

The video portrays the scene when Lady Note told those kids to apologize. It focuses on her, so you cannot see me in it. And, as we know, she has an extraordinarily arrogant look and gesture. When combined with her sitting

posture and her royal, wealthy status, many people start to criticize her like... she's looking down upon others or insulting them, something like that.

But it's crucial to understand the underlying cause of this incident! These youngsters displayed extreme rudeness, prompting her strong reaction. While her words may have been somewhat harsh, there were no shouts or vulgar language involved. I fail to comprehend why this user posted the video with such misleading captions:

'Forcing others to apologize just because she's upset. Perhaps, Her Highness has some kind of royal delusions that she could do whatever she wants.'

My instinct proves right. These youngsters are distorting the situation despite offering an apology.

The Twitter community is now divided into two camps. The first group consists of individuals who lack information but add the #LadyNote hashtag to their nasty tweets.

Alt Acc for Gossips Only:

She's obviously a mean girl. I bet this royal b\*tch believes that everyone must bow their heads to her. The cafe is public, right? Anyone can buy coffee, chill there, or do whatever they want. Those kids probably annoyed her, so she threw a royal fit.

Drink Water and Go to Bed:

Seriously can't stand this band. The guitarist is a nightmare, and the keyboardist is just plain arrogant. No idea why they have fans.

Pui-Pui Isn't Hungry:

Wait, isn't she from that award-winning band? Totally disagreed with that decision. My favorite band's song was way better. Support my (imaginary) BF's band - five of them, all super handsome >< [Image Attached]

Ang-Ang-Chan:

A pretty, mean girl – that's her definition.

KikiShimAr:

Some people should stop deluding themselves. It's a 1-minute clip. The OP [1] didn't give any background but took the only good for herself. Why not show us the whole thing?

One Day I'll Become Tea Leaf:

Those blaming without thinking are probably fans of the band that didn't get the year-end award. Why act like some antis? Edge of Universe is self composed, our vocalist is fantastic, and their music is top-notch. Admit they're talented!

This is Kimmy:

I admit Lady Note is pretty. Been a fan since they were a cover band. She's fierce, savage, irresistable but never unreasonable. P.S. Lady Note has an undercut!?

HHHoly Cake:

Let's be neutral. Tell us what was going on first. Can't judge with just a clip.

The hashtag is still trending on Twitter. Just refreshing it, you can find a new post every second. Guilt immediately grows within me... Because of

me, she is criticized like this. She could have let it go at the cafe, as she wasn't the one in trouble.

At this moment, what should I do?

I should create a post to share the whole story. Yes, that's the right thing to do!

I start typing everything I can recall. Unfortunately, it exceeds the character limit on Twitter. Frustrated, I close Twitter and open the Notes app to write a detailed account. Once done, I take a screenshot, intending to post it with a hashtag to clear up the misunderstanding. However, just as I'm about to share it, a message arrives.

*Bzzz!*

'Don't reveal yourself or post anything.'

Reading Lady Note's message, I realize that she sent it to my phone number, as we don't know each other's social media accounts.

Knowing that this might be costly for her, I attempt to add her on LINE using her phone number, but it appears she hasn't enabled friend requests via phone number, and her profile doesn't show up.

There are only two options left: send her a message or call her. I want to let her know that since I'm the cause of the problem, I should step forward to clarify that what happened is different from what people mistakenly believe. Just as I'm about to respond, she sends another message.

'I don't want you to get involved.'

What? I'm the one who caused all this trouble and put her in this situation, isn't it? Why go to such lengths to protect me?

I really don't understand...

21.09

Today's reality check – After spending the afternoon scrolling through the hashtag, I find it impossible to focus on my work in front of the sewing machine. Coincidentally, the needle breaks. Typically, I'd simply get up and replace it with another of the same size since I have plenty on hand.

However, I decide to use it as an excuse for a break. Returning to my bedroom, I immerse myself in the ongoing trend.

Lady Note has a Twitter account, @NoTe\_NR09, with the username 'Note.'

She boasts over one hundred thousand followers, the highest count among the Edge of Universe members. This underscores her popularity, even though she rarely tweets or retweets.

The #LadyNote hashtag continues to trend, with various opinions circulating. Some criticize her, others remain neutral or express hostility, while a growing number side with her.

Two hours ago, an account posted a witness's perspective from the cafe, gaining significant attention,

MoMae-MM:

Working part-time at that cafe, let me share the whole story behind

#LadyNote from a witness's viewpoint, using the initial 'N' for her. (cont. in thread)

MoMae-MM:

Recently, a group of teenagers started coming to our cafe every day, studying from dawn till dusk. Studying alone wouldn't have been an issue, but they were consistently loud and disruptive, disturbing other customers. We requested they lower their voices, but it only worked temporarily. (cont.)

MoMae-MM:

On the day of the incident, N. visited our cafe and chose a table for two persons, waiting for almost an hour until another woman arrived for their apparent appointment; however, the atmosphere turned sour as the group of teenagers present began to laugh andengage in body-shaming directed at the newcomer. I won't go into the details, but it was a clear case of 'body shaming [2].' (cont.)

MoMae-MM:

N. called the girl over for a conversation, and though I couldn't hear every detail from a distance, it seemed like she handed the girl some money, possibly to buy an etiquette book, which angered the girl. Some friends tried to intervene, and tensions escalated. (cont.)

MoMae-MM:

One of the teenagers, not wanting the situation to worsen, apologized to N., who insisted on an apology to the victim of body shaming and requested the entire group to apologize for their collective amusement. Initially met with resistance, the group eventually complied, as seen in the video. (cont.)

MoMae-MM:

Subsequently, embarrassed, the teenagers packed up and haven't returned since.

MoMae-MM:

P.S. I'm not a fan of this band, and I'm not defending her. The cafe owner is my sister-in-law, and I obtained her permission to share this story on Twitter.

Every second, the thread is being retweeted, with some believing and others not; fortunately, the OP's history of promoting the cafe lends credibility to her account, and the conversation shifts to Lady Note's new look, especially her undercut. However, the resolution of this incident remains uncertain, leaving me anxious about Lady Note's next move. Despite the clock ticking past 9 pm, her account 'Note.' remains inactive.

As my afternoon-induced anxiety reaches its peak, I overcome my hesitation and decide to call her, feeling a bit odd about it.

She answers after a few rings, responding with her familiar voice:

[Hello.]

Getting straight to the point, I inquire,

"What are you going to do next?"

[I didn't say I'm going to do anything.]

"Huh!?"

I express surprise, my eyebrows furrowing.

"But people might misunderstand you."

[I don't care about what they think.]

"You can't..."

[I don't care about others.]

"..."

However, three days ago, your actions suggested otherwise. That's what I want to say, but I lack the courage. Silence lingers, and after a minute of no one speaking, a peculiar feeling starts to stir within my chest. Sensing that this silence could lead to an unsettling emotion, I excuse myself to end the call, and she accepts it without any apparent surprise, responding in a nonchalant manner.

However, my intention this time wasn't to be unkind. I just feel uneasy. Leaning against the pillow at the top of my bed, I stare at the dark phone screen. From the day we first met until now, I find it impossible to decipher her thoughts or comprehend her actions.

When she looks at me, her mysterious eyes make me feel like they've just discovered a long-lost treasure. The tone of her voice takes on a special quality when she speaks to me.

And those actions of hers... Are they something ordinary people would do for someone they just met?

As my thoughts race, I find myself reaching for my communication device, dialing her number once again.

She answers even quicker than before, and in my haste, I blurt out:

"My Lady."

[What can I do for you, Hong Yok?]

I'm taken aback by how her words and tone across the line manage to make me blush unreasonably.

*Thud... Thud...*

My heart races faster.

Wait, why did I call this woman in the first place?

Oh, right! How did I allow myself to lose my mind for a moment?

"I... I will make clothes for you."

That night, I can't comprehend myself at all.

If I were to offer an excuse, perhaps it's my desire to repay her, not wanting to be indebted.

**Footnotes.**

1. 'OP' stands for "original poster," specifically referring to the individual who initiated a post or started a thread on online forums.
2. Body shaming is the act of criticizing, mocking, or making negative comments about someone's physical appearance such as the shape, size, or appearance of their body.

# Chapter 8: Coincidentally

It's been a week since I agreed to design and create clothes for Lady Note.I've made a strict promise to myself – 'just one piece and only this once.' I've drafted three distinct designs for her to choose from. They

deviate entirely from my work at Kris.Tera. While I believe those initial pieces complement her well, my studio contract stipulates that all creations are copyrighted under their umbrella. Given my resignation, it seems more appropriate to craft something entirely new.

Crafting something distinct poses a challenge, but this time, I have the opportunity to gather more inspiration. I can schedule appointments with Lady Note, understanding her preferences to infuse them into my designs.

However, this endeavor also unveils more about the somewhat vexing Her Highness Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Netapsorn. In light of this, let me share an example from our recent conversations.

One day, around noon, she took a lunch break, and we met at a different cafe than last time. I brought along the camera bag to return it, despite her initial refusal. After handing it back, I smoothly transitioned into the main topic, inquiring about her preferred and disliked styles.

"Could you share a list of your favorite things? Just 2-3 items will suffice."

Her response was surprisingly open-ended,

"Whatever you recommend for me."

"Whatever' seems quite broad."

"That's correct."

The compliance in her tone puzzled me. Closing the sketchbook filled with my self- drafted designs, I shifted to a more straightforward question for the woman in the aloha shirt.

"Do you have a favorite color?"

She paused briefly before replying,

"Purple, maybe."

"Why 'maybe'?"

"Because I don't want to, but I still like it."

Was she intentionally trying to tease me? Gritting my teeth, I forced a smile and responded,

"Alright, ma'am."

I pressed for more information, hoping to gather details that could aid my designs. Additional measurements weren't necessary since her body proportions were already recorded in my journal.

This was my way of repaying my debts—I wanted to clear any lingering obligations. Later that day, upon returning home, I powered up my laptop to check my emails. Alas, there was none... Not a single company I applied to has responded, and the reasons remain elusive—perhaps my limited experience compared to other candidates or some undisclosed preference.

I don't know. Faced with this silence, a few days after completing a set of clothes for myself, I resolved to dedicate my time to crafting Lady Note's wardrobe. In essence, successful completion would provide another showcase project for my portfolio.

Two days post our meeting, I've devised two designs that I believe would complement Lady Note perfectly—band-collar shirts, often referred to as Chinese-style collars in Thailand. The design considers her style; my observations suggest she rarely buttons the first two buttons.

Introducing some creativity, I incorporated aloha patterns on the buttons and sleeves. To clarify, when worn formally, the sleeves resemble typical female office shirts. Yet, when folded, delightful aloha patterns emerge. Employing ocean green and purple as background colors,adorned with golden yellow flowers, adds a touch of subtlety. The buttons, each featuring distinct patterns forming a chronological story (requiring a special printing order), add an artistic flair.

The trousers are crafted with a sleek, straight design, ensuring a non-bulky fit. Cropped to showcase her well-balanced height, they accommodate the option of pairing with high-ankle sneakers.

Presently, my dilemma revolves around the shirt's color—cream or black. Each possesses unique merits, emanating different vibes. Unable to decide, I've opted to leave the choice to the wearer.

I proceed to sketch two identical designs, distinguished only by their color schemes. The straight pants, although sharing the same design, are rendered in different hues.

Subsequently, I dispatch them to Lady Note via LINE, inviting her choice and any potential adjustments. Given the time, past 1 pm on a workday, her response takes until around three.

**NoTe**: No modifications needed. They look good.

**NoTe**: I like both colors.

As anticipated, my intuition proves correct.

**HongYok**: However, I'll only be making one. So please choose. NoTe: Black.

**HongYok**: Certainly, ma'am. And regarding the fabric, you confirm that it's entirely at my discretion?

**NoTe**: Yes, please handle it.

Our conversation concludes, yet I find myself lingering on her profile picture—her back against the camera, gazing at a night sky adorned with dazzling stars. She exudes an air of loneliness, as though awaiting something peculiar.

Suddenly, I belatedly ponder—who captured this photo for her? Her lover?

But what kind of person would propose to someone already committed?

Wait! Wait! Wait!

I need to move past this!

I should be strategizing the hunt for materials like fabric and a visit to the custom button shop. Initially planning for Sunday, I reconsider, realizing the inevitable crowds everywhere, including public buses. Consequently, I decide on a weekday, perhaps Thursday.

Pahurat, Thailand's Little India, serves as a comprehensive hub for dressmakers, offering an extensive array of fabrics and materials. While I can't speak for other designers or seamstresses, my visits here always captivate me, leading to hours of aimless wandering.

This time, I decide to commence with lighter purchases such as black threads and carbon papers before delving into weightier choices like selecting fabrics. That's when I contemplate the intricacies of internal patterns, seemingly inviting trouble.

Having previously worked in a studio where my role focused on design, with a dedicated sewing department or outsourced factories handling the rest, transitioning to crafting individual garments feels financially burdensome, especially with the cost of single pattern prints.

As I mull over the challenges that lie ahead, I absentmindedly unroll a cream linen fabric with my fingers.

Damn it! I've really gotten myself into a bind!

Amidst my regret, I notice someone entering the same section. Given the store's spacious layout, customers can browse, choose fabrics, and then have them cut into specific lengths bythe shopkeepers, leading to a typically bustling atmosphere.

However, since it's a weekday morning, and still relatively late, the crowd is thinner, and certain areas stand empty. While I don't necessarily need to make way, considering the ease with which others can navigate around, my attention is drawn to a middle-aged woman heading my way, her familiarity triggering a swift recognition in my mind. I blink and discreetly slip away.

"You..."

She's the woman I coincidentally met in front of that clothing store, and she's still as stylish as ever.

The older woman halts her steps, eyeing the linen in my hand. "Huh? You again? Do you also own a tailor's shop?"

After her words, she turns to me, locking eyes as if genuinely intrigued.

"Erm... Not really. It's a special order for an acquaintance. I used to be a designer under a fashion house, but I'm actually unemployed at the moment."

Her eyebrows furrow in thought before smoothing back to their original positions. She nods slowly, as if piecing together a puzzle, as if she now understands something, perhaps the reason for my presence in front of that clothing store, observing the

Kris.Tera dress, and my subsequent resignation.

Her discerning eyes seem capable of seeing through it all. Despite her apparent understanding, she appears occupied. The older woman reaches for her luxury handbag, a different model from last time, and retrieves a piece of paper.

"Try submitting your resume and portfolio to this email I accept it reflexively. Upon closer inspection, it's a business card from a studio called Nij Greta. I've come across the name before, given my need to stay updated on the fashion industry. While it may not be as renowned as Kris.Tera, where I used to work, Nij Greta gained significant recognition after the release of its Spring/Summer collection last year.

A foreign superstar choosing to wear one of their pieces garnered media attention.

Lifting my gaze, I'm about to inquire if the studio is actively seeking newcomers, as I haven't seen any job vacancies online, but she appears engrossed. She walks away, signaling the shopkeeper to assist her in another section. Not wanting to disturb her, I keep my doubts to myself.

Could she be... a designer at that studio?

Later that afternoon, I reach out to the printing shop to place an order for the custom aloha pattern for the inner part of the shirt I designed. The cost is surprisingly high since I'm only looking for a small quantity with very few meters. As is often the case with such printing, the larger the volume, the cheaper it gets, and conversely, the smaller the order, the more expensive it becomes.

Once the order is placed, I schedule an appointment to bring the fabric and the electronic file of my design to the printing shop. It seems I have ample time to draw the pattern with my stylus. Drafting and bolding the drawing lines typically take a short while, but coloring them might be time consuming.

I fetch the business card I received yesterday, which contains the studio's contact details, including a telephone number, Facebook and Instagram accounts, and an email address. Additionally, on the reverse side, there's a graphic map illustrating the studio's location.

I open Google and type 'Nij Greta' into the search box. Within seconds, the results appear on the screen.

The first thing catching my eye is the collection that had previously stirred quite a buzz. An ad space displays a product directory, and scrolling down reveals the official website. Clicking to enter the homepage, I find it to be modern and luxurious, with designs that captivate my interest. I spend a considerable amount of time browsing and meticulously observing the details of each outfit on my laptop screen.

Surprisingly, when I click on the Brand History tab, the picture of the woman I encountered a few hours ago pops up. However, what elicits an "Oh!" from me is the revelation that...

The middle-aged woman who gave me the business card is the owner of the studio. 'Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Nijcharee Ruthaithewin.'

A second wave of shock hits me as I finish reading her name because I distinctly recall her last name. It's the same as my one and only client's at the moment. Unable to resist my curiosity, I open another tab to delve into the royal house details. It turns out M.C. Napasdol and M.L. Jeerana have four children in total: two males and two females.

The first three are roughly the same age, while the youngest daughter is much younger than her siblings by at least a decade.

In simple terms, 'Lady Nij' is Lady Note's older sister.

***What kind of coincidence is this?***

# Chapter 9: Designer-Hanger Relationship

Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Nijcharee Ruthaithewin, or Lady Nij, is the founder of Nij Greta fashion house, who earned a master's degree in fashion design from London. With several years of establishment, her studio consistently caters to an esteemed clientele, crafting garments for both madams and young ladies alike.

The studio gained significant acclaim last year when a foreign singer adorned pieces from its new collection during her concert tour in Thailand.After dedicating an hour to delving into Lady Nij's online presence, including interviews showcasing her face and podcasts featuring her insights, I can succinctly describe this middle-aged, remarkably youthful-looking woman as a gracious and self-assured aristocrat.

Her understanding of teenagers is apparent, likely influenced by her daughter's high school years. Not one to shy away from hands-on work, she is not just a fashion maven but also a skilled pianist.

It appears that both Lady Nij and Lady Note share a divine gift. However, there's something peculiar about their public presence. Despite both being well-known figures often in the limelight, there's an apparent absence of joint interviews or any mention of each other. None of the hosts or shows broach this topic, almost as if they were instructed to steer clear.

While it's reasonable not to bring up their brothers, given one is a doctor and the other the heir to a business group, the same cannot be said for these ladies. One is a fashion designer, and the other is a renowned architect.

Without their shared last name, connecting the dots between them seems improbable.

This observation sparks suspicion, but it's possibly just a whimsical thought. Attempting to avoid overthinking their personal dynamics, I redirect my attention to Lady Nij's professional demeanor. Deep down, there's a concern that it might mirror my past experiences working with Madam Kris and Liu, where their pleasant facade in public concealed a different reality.

Nevertheless, being an unemployed designer leaves me with limited options. After delving further into the workings of her fashion house, I decide to submit my application, along with my resume and portfolio, to the provided email address. Starting something new always makes me nervous, and I brace myself for the possibility of disappointment.

With two hours remaining before dinner, I seize this time to connect my stylus to my laptop and launch the Adobe Illustrator program. Initiating the drafting process for the aloha pattern on the inner sleeves, I usually accompany my work with radio tunes.

However, given my current location in the bedroom, I opt for a music streaming application to avoid the hassle of fetching a radio. Selecting the first playlist that catches my eye, I flip over my phone and position it nearby to facilitate concentration on my drafts.

A peculiar twist of fate unfolds as it appears that the first song playing is by the Edge of Universe, an all-girl band that has piqued my interest. As per my research, this band, comprising five members, was initiated by Belle, a vibrant guitarist affectionately nicknamed "Smiley Shark."

She founded the group during her freshman year at university and recruited four other members who now form the present-day Edge of Universe.

Following Belle is Nene, a left-handed bassist and Belle's closest friend, even referred to as her 'girlfriend.' In a recent interview, Nene shared that she almost didn't join the band initially, as Belle initially desired another senior as their bassist. However, unforeseen circumstances led them to perform together at a university event, transitioning Nene from an alternate to an official member.

The third member is Frang, an introverted drummer who harbors a secret love for cats, particularly evident when she's with her girlfriend. A snapshot taken at her girlfriend's bakery captures the unusual warmth in her eyes.

Moving on to the fourth member, Kliao Khluen, the band's vocalist nicknamed "Tiny," not due to her age but her petite stature. Despite sharing the same birth year as the others, she's the smallest in size, and her bandmates enjoy teasing her. Having recently graduated from the six-year medicine program, she completed her internship and returned to Bangkok to pursue specialized training in neurosurgery.

Lastly, Lady Note, a great-grandchild of the royal family, assumes the role of keyboardist (occasionally a pianist). She stands out as the most popular member, likely owing to her beauty combined with a distinctive charm. Her past interviews also reveal her vexing and sharp-tongued nature, adding depth to my understanding of her. For instance, approximately three years ago, Kliao Khluen, a band member, married a female doctor and traveled to her girlfriend's home country to formalize their union.

This was feasible because her girlfriend held dual citizenship, one of which permitted same-sex marriage. While this may seem ordinary, Lady Note found herself bombarded with questions from numerous reporters at the time due to her bandmate's marriage, coinciding with an event she had to attend.

"Your Highness, how do you think about your bandmate being married to a woman? Some other members are also dating girls. Can you accept it?"

Her response was unequivocal.

"What else should I think? I'm happy for her. Should I be saddened when my friends date girls? Why would I disagree? Do you pose these kinds of questions to everyone whose friend just got married?"

Confronted with her assertive reply, the reporter refrained from further probing. Yet, as unsettling as it may sound, watching that clip, I couldn't help but resonate with her perspective.

Consider our society; when a man marries a woman, no one inquires about his friends' opinions or acceptance. However, in the case of same-sex marriage, these questions invariably

surface.

Undeterred, another reporter persisted,

"Are you also LGBTQ+, Your Highness?"

"Yes."

"What does that mean?"

"What did you just ask me?"

While a straightforward acknowledgment like 'Yes, I am' might have sufficed, Lady Note chose to raise her eyebrow and respond with a poker face, adding a touch of complexity to the interaction.

That's just one example; we haven't delved into other cases yet.

The playback of my recollections from that interview halts as the Edge of Universe's song concludes. Returning to reality with the onset of a new song's intro, it appears I've drifted off in a daydream for several minutes while the music played, though my hand continues to maneuver on the drawing tablet.

A foolish and unforgivable notion suddenly crosses my mind. A thought akin to, 'Truth be told, this woman is pretty cool.'

What's happening to me? I should be suspicious of this woman, yet I continually defy my own directives. It's as if I can't harbor as much disdain for her as I intend to...

A surprise awaited me a week later when Kaew the Intern sent me a LINE message, proposing a private meeting and attaching an image of the paper box containing my abandoned office supplies. She expressed her intention to return them to me, specifically mentioning a costly pair of scissors, prompting my agreement to meet.

Our rendezvous took place on a weekday afternoon at a restaurant, with Kaew donning a complete college student uniform, suggesting she had university-related commitments and thus the opportunity to meet me outside the studio. Each of us ordered a glass of juice, and my words were

limited to a brief expression of gratitude for returning my belongings.

However, the young girl attempted to engage me further.

"Can you spare me ten minutes?"

"..."

"The studio has become so chaotic right now. Your sudden departure left us struggling with the workload. And... Lady Note also canceled her order."

"..."

"P'Hong, you didn't receive offers from any brand, did you? Please reconsider it one more time. Nowhere is as welcoming as here."

"Welcoming...?"

Her casual assertion about the warmth of the team is a stark contrast to my current situation.

Isn't it peculiar? She brought back my belongings, yet she's also trying to persuade me to return. As someone older, I can discern from her gestures and actions that this must be the influence of Madam Kris or Liu, orchestrating efforts to coax me back.

Kaew on the other side raises her glass and sips her juice, wearing a distressed expression.

"I think it's not too late to go back now. Madam Kris and P'Liu are ready to forgive you and welcome you back. Believe me."

"Why pretend to give me a chance when you actually need me there?"

"Huh? What did you just say?"

My inadvertent mumbling triggers Kaew's repeated inquiries as she struggles to hear clearly. Rather than providing a direct answer, I force a smile and shake my head, sipping my apple juice in silence.

Eventually, Kaew sighs, seemingly resigned to the fact that she won't receive a clear response.

"Well, let's leave it here then. You know, I have to rush to the studio after this. I had an urgent matter at university this morning, so I asked P'Liu for permission to start working at 2:30 pm today."

She then subtly applies second-hand pressure from the higher-ups.

"We're very busy. Working overtime for a week now, returning home after 8 pm on some days. I have to stay and help everyone. Everything has become chaotic after the sudden loss of a team member..."

Initially, I plan to maintain silence until the other party excuses herself as usual, but abruptly, my phone buzzes in my bag and then belts out its ringtone. Although my initial thought is to switch to silent mode due to the serious nature of our discussion, the screen displays a peculiar number.

Considering the multitude of job applications I've sent out, my eagerness for a response outweighs the prospect of enduring a difficult conversation with Kaew.

"Excuse me. I need to take this call."

"Feel free to speak here. No worries. I'll leave as soon as I finish my orange juice."

Given that the restaurant is located right next to the roadside, I'm wary of potential disturbances, so I heeded Kaew's suggestion. My thumb slid across the screen, and I pressed the phone to my ear, proceeding to fill the line with a polite greeting.

"Good afternoon."

[May I speak with Ms. Sakuna, please?]

The caller addresses me by my first name in a courteous manner.

"Yes, I'm speaking."

[Following your job application email, we're reaching out from Nij Greta. Are you available on the 30th at ten o'clock in the morning for an interview?]

So, it's Lady Nij's studio? I'm momentarily dumbfounded in surprise. The girl on the other side starts to suspect me, but I quickly pull myself together.

"Oh!? Ah, yes. I'm available."

I mentally calculate, realizing it must be a Monday. The woman, likely an administrative officer, provides me with directions to their studio in a friendly manner. She adds, "See you on Monday," before hanging up. I know this doesn't guarantee a new job, but I'm quietly full of confidence.

This studio doesn't typically solicit applications or announce job vacancies. I received the studio's name card directly from its owner. It seems my profile and portfolio satisfied her, leading to the interview invitation.

I'm uncertain about the outcome; it could go well, or I might walk back home with my head down. Nevertheless, I hold high hopes for the new opportunity and use it as a chance to bid farewell to the old place that continues to exert pressure, making it seem like I need to beg for their forgiveness.

"Kaew, please tell those who sent you here..."

The intern looks surprised and anxious, realizing I'm fully aware. She stammers, "Err... W... What do you mean?"

"I'm not going back. There's a new place that wants me to join them."

I don't know how my future will unfold at Lady Nij's studio, but I simply hope it will be an improvement over my previous workplace.

The same evening...

Kaew must have conveyed my message to everyone at the studio. What ensues could be one of two scenarios. First, Madam Kris might concede and initiate a search for a new, exceptionally-experienced designer. Second, she might personally reach out to me... once again. And she opts for the second choice.

"Good evening, ma'am."

[Well... Hong Yok, do you remember the best-selling dress with the peacock feather pattern from last year's collection? As I mentioned before, I plan to treat the designer of that piece—meaning you—to a meal. I've checked my schedule, and I think I'm free on the 30th.]

"I'm not available, ma'am. I will start working at my new place on that day."

In reality, it's my job interview day. Even though they haven't accepted me, explaining the entire situation would be too lengthy, so I simply concluded it like that.

[Can you tell me how much they're offering you?]

"It isn't about the money. One more thing, I can confirm that I applied to the new place after my resignation. No one's offered me anything."

[That means you have to start from scratch at your new place. But for our studio, you're a key player, and everyone knows each other well.]

This time, she puts forth her best efforts to persuade me that returning to her is the better choice. I endure listening to her for half an hour and then excuse myself, claiming that I have to pick up my sister from school, even though Toey-Hom would never allow that to happen.

To be honest, I have no lingering feelings for Kris.Tera. My primary concern now is whether the interview at the end of the month can secure me a position in a new fashion studio or not.

In the meantime, I devote all of my time to crafting clothes for Lady Note. Once all the necessary materials are ready, I can swiftly create patterns and sew them together within a few days. However, this time I have to wait for

the main materials like customized fabric and buttons, which extends the process.

Nevertheless, I'm grateful for the prompt work of the fabric printing house (even though I had to pay extra for the urgent project, as waiting in the queue for months with the larger printing houses was not an option) and the efficient production of the button shop.

The clothes were completed on the 28th. I sent a LINE message to Her Highness, who has an affinity for aloha shirts, inquiring about her availability. She replied that she would be free on Monday morning or any evening of any other weekday. Since that Monday is also the 30th, I believe it's a good idea to meet her first before heading to the job interview venue.

Therefore, on this free day, I utilize this short amount of time to delve deeper into Lady Nij's brand. This helps me understand her mindset as well as the brand's philosophy better. On Sunday, I sit in front of my laptop until one o'clock in the morning. I switch off the lights and go to bed around two.

That night, I dream again. It's the fire incident at the same hall. However, it's hard to categorize it as a nightmare. In this dream, I stand amid the burning fire, but there's no longer a girl holding an iron rod in front of me. Instead, I feel like I'm pressing my face against a warm shoulder, tightly embracing someone.

This part of my dream lasts very briefly, as I'm pulled into another scene shortly after.

Now, within the same dream, everything has undergone a complete transformation. I find myself in a VIP room within a hospital. In front of me lies a hospital bed, and on it, there's a girl dressed in a patient's uniform.

Her head is wrapped in a blood-soaked bandage on the left side, and her arm is encased in a plaster cast, suggesting it has been broken in an accident.

I can't discern her face clearly, but I observe her gazing out of the window, lost in thoughts.

The blaring sound of the alarm clock jolts me back to reality. I emerge from the dream, opening my eyes. Fully awake, I extend my hand to silence its persistent noise. In no time, my familiar bedroom reassumes its tranquil ambiance, and I realize it's already seven in the morning.

So, today is the day—the day I meet Lady Note and have an interview with the fashion house owned by her sister.

*09.30*

Meeting at a cafe, shopping mall, or any other ordinary place would pose challenges for Lady Note to try out the clothes. Given the need for ample space, we opt for an appointment at Her Highness's office. I bring along all the washed and ironed outfits, neatly packed in a small suitcase, accompanied by essential sewing

equipment.

As the elevator ascends to the designated floor, a peculiar feeling washes over me. There's a lingering concern that once Madam Kris and others discover this, they might accuse me of poaching their coveted customer.

However, didn't Lady Note assert on the day I resigned that she had nothing to do with the studio anymore? Apart from that, when I met Kaew, didn't she inadvertently reveal that Lady Note had canceled her order?

*Ding!*

Deep in thought, I step out of the elevator, greeted by the familiar hallway I traversed earlier this month. Gathering myself, I stride forward, the click of my peach high heels resonating. The nearest desk belongs to a regular female clerk from the studio, who, upon seeing my scar, quickly discerns whom I'm seeking.

"N'Note is waiting in her office, Ms. Designer," she informs me. Nong (N') [1] as her title?

It seems like people in this studio are quite close to each other. Wait, could she be the one who took Lady Note's profile picture? Why am I entertaining such trivial suspicions?

"Thank you,"

I offer a friendly smile to the woman, likely in her thirties, and make my way toward the office of the woman I scheduled the appointment with. I consciously shake off thoughts about the profile picture and refocus.

By the way, I've read an interview with the studio owner. She mentioned that Raya Studio prioritizes freedom of thought and allows the Tects (short for 'architects') to adjust their working environment freely.

Some Tects enjoy creating ideas collaboratively, while others need the privacy to generate fresh concepts. As a result, the office is divided into three rooms: one for a man in his forties, one for Lady Note, and the last one is empty since other Tects prefer group work and brainstorming.

Upon reaching the second office room, I knock twice with my two knuckles. With the person inside granting permission, I open the door with my free left hand. However, what I see immediately causes my eyebrows to furrow. The woman in a white aloha shirt with dark green leaf patterns is engrossed in something on her laptop screen.

"You're not available."

I state with a hint of anger, considering she has claimed to be free today. The beautiful woman continues typing for a few seconds, saves her work, and closes her laptop before casually mentioning,

"I'm available now."

"I just saw you take a break for me."

She shrugs.

"This morning is the least occupied time."

Oh gosh! Is she always this busy?

Despite glaring at her, I refrain from arguing, recognizing it would be a futile effort. Lady Note seems to know her schedule well, rising from her chair to accept the gray clothes bag from me. Our conversation is brief; I instruct her to try on the clothes and tell her that I'll make any necessary amendments and consider the project finished if everything is satisfactory. She then asks me to wait in the room before leaving, presumably to change in the studio's washroom.

The room's owner has disappeared for five minutes or less, during which time I thoroughly observed the interiors. A hanging Chinese calligraphy painting begs interpretation. The trees in tiny plant pots on her desk are fake, but the cactus on the window is real. Overall, the room boasts a well balanced composition of gray and white, notably devoid of purple.

'Because I don't want to, but I still like it.' – what could she possibly mean by that?

I didn't understand her at all. The umbrella she had opened for me that day was also purple, wasn't it?

The door reopens, revealing Her Highness in the new outfits. Keeping all my doubts to myself, I walk towards her to inspect all the details.

While observing her perfect body proportions under the clothes I designed and sewed, I secretly think she looks even better than my imagination; even every wrinkle on the fabric appears nothing but pleasant.

Alright, I can find an excuse now. I have decided to make clothes for this woman not just to avoid being indebted, but also because she is a great hanger who could accredit any designer and help Hong Yok develop her portfolio. It is nothing more than a mere relationship between a designer and a hanger. However, there is still a small issue with the sleeve – it doesn't seem to fit quite right yet.

I reach into my bag and retrieve several pins. As I delicately secure theleft sleeve, we unconsciously draw closer. Despite a peculiar sensation in my chest, I'm adept at maintaining composure at work—until I notice her scar.

In that dream... Is she Lady Note? She seemed to have a head injury as well. However, I can't recall seeing her at the same hospital. Shifting between daydream and reality, I place another pin at a different spot.

"Can you stop calling me Your Highness?"

Suddenly, the taller woman makes a statement, not a question. It sounds more like a plea, causing my hands to pause momentarily. After regaining my composure and finding my voice, I reply:

"You and I aren't that close."

"The title is still unnecessary."

"But we're still seeing each other only once more."

"..."

"I'll fix the shoulder. The trousers look fine,"

I say, glancing at the time on my tiny pink watch on my left wrist. "I've gotta go."

"You got a new job?"

"Not really. I have an interview at 10 am today."

"I thought you would open your own shop."

"I'm not that brave, my lady."

At that moment, I have a whim to test her reaction. If I mention 'Lady Nij,' what kind of facial expression and behavior would she exhibit? I pretend to remember something right then.

"And the place I'm heading to... is your sister's studio."

"Just quit."

Unexpectedly, I plan to steal a glance at her face, but she not only conceals her facial xpression but also promptly responds with her plain voice. In confusion, I tilt my head and ask,

"What?"

For a moment, her eyes divert to somewhere else, revealing a hint of coldness. Then, she blinks and returns her gaze to me. "Let's say—if you're not going to open your own shop, I'll help you find another studio or company."

"Um... Sorry, but I don't quite get it."

"You shouldn't work there."

"Why?"

"It will ruin your future."

Her voice emphasizes the first word with implicit meaning.

I can't tell whether 'it,' slipping out of her thin lips, refers to the workplace or her own sister.

**Footnote.**

[1 ]In Thailand, the title "Nong (N')" is a term of address denoting a younger sibling or someone of a junior status and is used to convey a sense of familiarity and affection in interpersonal relationships.

# Chapter 10: The Opposite

While I've contemplated Lady Note's words, it's challenging to wholeheartedly believe something heard for the first time. Turning down a job interview offer seems a bit nonsensical, and perhaps these two women have family issues, as many siblings on this planet find it hard to get along or are in constant conflict.

Her words make me uneasy, but I can't fully embrace them.

Subsequently, after departing from the supposed client's office, I find myself at Nij Greta at ten in the morning.

The ambiance in this studio stands in stark contrast to Madam Kris's. Every piece of furniture exudes luxury, with items that might cost a small fortune. For instance, the chair I sit on while awaiting my interview is from a prestigious brand and likely doesn't come cheap, easily surpassing ten thousand baht.

Lady Nij's secretary informed me that her boss is in the midst of an urgent call, and I'm requested to wait in her office. It's been around ten minutes. This call must be crucial, possibly from a VIP.

Can someone like me, who seemingly has nothing, make it?

"I'm sorry for the wait. Something happened."

The sound of a turning doorknob accompanies the apology. Swiftly, I shake my head, dispelling my anxiety, rise from my seat, and wai the owner of the office. Unlike our previous encounters, the middle-aged woman isn't dressed in trendy attire. Instead, she wears a white blouse with subtle embellishments, balloon pants, and practical flat shoes.

"No problem, ma'am,"

I reply with a friendly smile, observing how the seasoned woman makes her way to her office chair. Her mature demeanor and the short yarns on her sleeves impress me more than I had anticipated. Having worked with a desk- bound boss who claimed credit for my work, encountering someone different leaves a strong impression.

"Thank you for granting me this interview opportunity."

However, a dilemma arises. While I've prepared my introduction and various responses to expected questions, such as why I left my previous workplace (which is Kris.Tera, as indicated in my resume), her first question catches me off guard.

"So, what happened? Did Kris's studio push you to the limit?"

"Yes? Oh... No, that's not it."

At a loss for words and visibly surprised, I'm hit with another question.

"You also designed that blue velvet dress, didn't you?"

I feel like a student transparently caught by the teacher's keen gaze.

"Yes..."

My interviewer slowly nods.

"Then, I shall set aside the sensitive matters since you have no association with that place anymore."

Adorned with a thin silver bracelet on her wrist, she opens a folder containing my portfolio, which was submitted via email.

"Your resume indicates your past work at Kris.Tera, but why aren't there any designs from your time there? Your portfolio only showcases your work from your university days."

"Oh... Regarding that, my contract with them stipulates that all creations are copyrighted under the studio, so I thought it wouldn't be appropriate to include them freely in my portfolio."

"..."

Silence pervades the room for reasons unknown. Her eyes are fixed on that particular page. Lost in thought, her eyebrows knit together slightly as if she might not be aware of it. The clock's ticking is the only audible sound for a while before she closes the folder and raises her head to establish eye

contact with me.

"When will you be ready to start working?"

"Start working?"

"Yes."

Her voice carries no trace of humor.

"Tomorrow, ma'am."

"Excellent. If you have no other engagements today, I'll show you around and introduce you to the team. If you're unavailable, you can acquaint yourself with them on your first day."

"Oh – I'm available. Does this mean you've accepted me?"

She reacts as if she's heard something unpleasant, pausing abruptly. She furrows her brows and utters slowly and distinctly,

"Your Highness, Hong Yok. You must address me as 'Your Highness.'"

"My apologies."

My face feels numb. Perhaps because I recently interacted with Lady Note, who preferred a less formal address, encountering another member of the royal house who takes formality seriously catches me off guard.

"I... was surprised that Your Highness is already discussing my first day. Our interview just commenced a few minutes ago."

"Yes, the interview has concluded."

"Well..."

"That's weird. Kris studied fashion business management, and from what I've observed in our several encounters, she seemed quite intelligent. How couldn't she treat a gem like you properly?"

"I'm not at that level..."

Using such an exaggerated term makes me feel uneasy, but she turns a deaf ear to me.

"Follow me."

The confident woman stands up, and then, as if just realizing something, she raises her index finger.

"One more thing, please address yourself more informally."

"Yes, ma'am."

I reply with what I assume...the most dumbfounded expression.

What's going on? The interview was so brief, and then, out of the blue, she concluded that I'm a gem that slipped through Madam Kris's fingers. She accepted me so effortlessly. Could she have made her decision in advance? Was the interview just a formality?

The middle-aged woman gestures for me to follow her, and the introduction to my future colleagues and workplace begins right there. The first room she shows me is the working area of the designers at the back. It's vast yet full of various items.

Although there are only four people present, I feel a sense of restlessness when the owner claps to gather attention for me.

"Everyone, this is Hong Yok. She will be joining our team and starting work tomorrow."

They all seem surprised—both by the scar on my face and the sudden arrival of a new team member. Standing behind the older woman, I feel extremely nervous. Politely, I wai everyone. Lady Nij then proceeds to introduce each team member to me one by one, making me fully realize that the system here is completely different from my previous workplace. This team consists of two pattern makers, two assistants, and one head designer, Lady Nij herself.

After that, she leads me to the connected sewing room. This room is of similar size to the previous one, featuring three sewing machines and two sewers—one male and one female, both are as friendly as those in the previous room. Additionally, there's a storage room, an accounting department, and front office staff who welcome clients at the studio entrance. Lady Nij shows me around in a friendly yet proud manner, a conflicting combination that perfectly reflects her character. I believe it makes her opposite to her younger sister.

In just half an hour, I learn that she enjoys the green tea provided by her employees. She avoids wearing high heels at work because they are inconvenient. While there's a pantry available for all employees, she prefers eating alone in her room.

And... she isn't ashamed of showcasing my presence at the shopfront.

"Normally, I set the probation period for new employees at three months, but for you, Hong Yok, if there's no problem with your first month, I'll raise your pay right away."

"Why are you so nice to me... Your Highness?"

"Your past works and experiences are interesting."

Her response is direct, but I appreciate it as we're not discussing other factors like appearance. Lady Nij is aware of my history as a phantom designer in my previous workplace, and she seems to have a keen eye for

recognizing creations designed by me.

We return to her office, but the pressure that existed before vanishes now that I know I have the job. My vision expands, and I silently observe the interior details while the room owner excuses herself to respond to an urgent email.

*Purple...*

Although the walls and furniture are luxuriously black and white, most of the decorations, from small to medium sizes, are predominantly purple— flower vases, pencil and pen cases, tumblers, and more. There might be others that I can't see under the desk or in a blind spot.

By the way, her nail color is also purple, isn't it?

While the older one seems open about her favorite color, the younger one had rather said 'Maybe purple' and avoided using purple items as much as possible.

The middle-aged woman has a keen instinct and notices that I've been observing her nails. She stops typing on her MacBook keyboard, lifts her face, and I quickly pretend to turn to the left, acting as if there's nothing special. Then, I notice the black-and- white shelves adorned with small antique statues, luxurious white porcelain trimmings with gold cups for showcasing rather than drinking, and well-framed certificates in golden frames.

However, the center is left empty, implying some significance.

"I left it blank because that spot belongs to a trophy for a piano competition ten years ago."

I turn to her and give a slight smile, even though she's still focused on her MacBook screen.

"Your Highness must be multi-talented."

"It would be better if my sister didn't cheat."

Her sister cheated?

Confusion fills my face as I struggle to connect the puzzle pieces.

Nonetheless, M.R. Nijcharee takes the time to stop typing, lifts her head to make eye contact with me, and solves the puzzle.

"***Yes, I mean Note. You probably know her. She stole the song I composed, so we were both disqualified."***

# Chapter 11: From Another Point of View

*19.08*

Standing in the game arcade of a shopping mall, I hope, for a moment at least, that the ten-baht coin I just inserted won't be in vain.

Unfortunately, as always, the claw machine disappoints me once again, Its trident metal proved too weak to hold the plush lamb in place for more than a moment, allowing it to slip through.

Why is it always like this? And why do I keep subjecting myself to this kind of game whenever I visit a shopping mall or simply come across one? With a deep sigh, I step back and distance myself from the game arcade bustling with children. I better make a quick exit before a child nudges me and asks, *'Sister, what's wrong with your face?'—*a question I've grown accustomed to.

I wait at the bus stop to catch the bus home. Mom sends me a message, mentioning Dad working overtime again, accompanied by a picture of a sizzling pan of fried spicy minced meat balls salad. My spirits lift as I anticipate the delicious meal awaiting me. There's no probing question like 'How was the interview?' I know well that Mom never wants to pressure me.

**HongYok**: [Image sent]

**HongYok**: I'm waiting for the bus.

After sending her a picture of the bus stop, the other side responds with a message.

**Mom**: Safe travels, honey.

**HongYok**: [Thank-You Bear Sticker sent]

Soon enough, the bus I want to take pulls over. Some passengers disembark, while those who, like me, have been waiting get on.

Unfortunately, there's no vacant seat, so I have to clutch the bar with one hand and carry Lady Note's clothes bag with the other. I need to take it back to fix the shoulder part.

On the way home, I gaze out of the window, lost in thought.

At noon, Lady Nij shared with me that her sister had stolen her original song, both the lyrics and the instrumental, for a piano competition. More importantly, her sister asserted that she was the true composer, even if she performed later. In the end, the judges disqualified both of them because they couldn't determine the original composer.

You know what surprises me the most?

Normally, no matter how much Toey-Hom misbehaves or upsets me, I never consider shaming her in front of others. My parents scold my sister frequently, but they never let outsiders know about our family issues.

I only recently met Lady Nij. In fact, we just officially introduced ourselves today. Why did she share that story as if she wanted everyone in this world to know about it?

It's a doubt that's unlikely to be answered. Perhaps, I should let it go, considering that I'll have the opportunity to learn more about my new boss firsthand. If I were to pose a question at this moment, it would revolve around why Lady Nij chose to hire me when she already has two assistants who appear mature and experienced.

Did she perceive something unique in me?

Taking such an optimistic stance could be the most constructive approach.

Even my parents were surprised by the news of me landing the job, and I'm set to start working right away tomorrow. I couldn't provide them with a sensible explanation; I simply mentioned that maybe my new boss would just click with me.

The next morning arrives quite early. While we share the dining table, my sister, donned in her student uniform, leans in to whisper to my mother, asking if I secured the job because she wasn't at the dinner table last night.

As Tuesday morning unfolds, my employment status switches to 'employed.' I feel a twinge of nervousness as I anticipate a fresh start in a new environment, surrounded by unfamiliar faces, bus stops, and BTS stations.

I'm concerned and anxious about whether I'll perform well or encounter any uncomfortable situations. However, as I gaze through the glass window, I summon my courage in front of the studio.

Alright, I can adapt to this.

Taking a detour, I head toward the backdoor, situated next to the warehouse housing fabrics and equipment. It's precisely nine in the morning now, meaning I'm 30 minutes early since the working hours for the design department, sewing department, and storage staff are from 09:30 to 17:30. The receptionists, on the other hand, work in two shifts due to the shop front remaining open until 9 pm.

One thing I must honestly admit is that I feel quite out of my element upon entering the office and encountering my boss, who has also arrived early. She's furrowing her brow while adjusting the clothes on the mannequin. The room remains empty and silent, and with only the two of us present, my arrival captures her attention.

"I hope you're planning on consistently coming early, especially only during your first few months, not like one of my previous assistants," she teases with her tone of humor. Feeling restless and a bit clueless, I adjust my glasses and respond in a soft tone,

"I'm still getting the hang of timing because I'm not quite familiar with the directions yet..."

"Really? That's good. I don't particularly favor early birds. Just being on time is enough."

Our conversation continues as the middle-aged woman finishes fixing a long- sleeved shirt. She finally turns to me and speaks with direct eye contact.

"By the way, you still seem a bit stiff."

"Well..."

"I can sense it in the pronouns you use to refer to yourself."

"My apologies. I'm just cautious about addressing myself by my nickname or 'Noo[1]'; it might sound unprofessional, so..."

"Just go with whatever you use at home. After all, you're the youngest one here."

I want to feel glad or comforted by that, but every time I hear phrases like 'we are family' in a business context, it triggers anxiety. Madam Kris used to say similar things on our first day, and indeed, we were like a real family.

...I mean, like a family in 'The Golden Goby Tale[2].'

I respond to the older woman with a smile and adopt the name 'Hong' to refer to myself in this new office. In my first week, I engaged in various tasks, swiftly adapting to the distinct team dynamics of my previous workplace.

Though my role resembles that of Lady Nij's third assistant, it strikes me as peculiar that she consistently invites my input and calls upon me. Preaw and Ping, each with four years of tenure, regard me with an strange expression. This in itself is the problem. Being a newcomer and receiving something like that seems a bit too much.

On Friday, our head designer is absent, leaving the studio at 11:30 with minimal explanation, mentioning a business engagement with an old friend as well as a return around 3 pm. Amid what should be a typical lunch,

Preaw abruptly voices her thoughts at the table shared by us three assistants.

"You know, Hong Yok?"

"Yes...?"

"You don't belong here."

Ping, seated beside her, averts her eyes while sipping her smoothie. While part of me wishes to remain silent given my recent entry into the team, another part yearns to counter this direct insult.

"I'll do my best."

"I didn't mean it that way. If you think we're envious of you becoming Her Highness's new favorite, that's not it. I said it because, for career advancement, you don't fit with this kind of team."

Her sincere voice and gaze reassure me; it seems she isn't looking down on me, leaving me to wonder instead.

"What do you mean by 'this kind of team'?" I ask.

"The kind that—"

The oldest assistant at the table halts, perhaps unaware that I noticed Ping nudging her as a warning. Eventually, Preaw releases a deep sigh and changes the subject.

"By the way, where did you graduate from?"

"Wait! We haven't finished discussing that!"

Ping smiles and interjects,

"P'Preaw was just teasing you, honey."

By the end of the day, despite my pleas, they resolve to steer clear of the term 'team' for the remainder of the meal. It appears I'll have to uncover the answers on my own during my time here. However, judging from my observations, the working style here is systematic and well-organized, so there shouldn't be any issues, right?

Later that afternoon, my mind lingers on worst-case scenarios, such as Lady Nij potentially having a hot temper. Yet, dwelling on the unforeseen might drive me insane, so I push those thoughts aside and join Ping in discussing the latest fashion trends. Afterwards, I assist the patternmaker in fixing a flawed pattern.

Today brings more tasks than usual, even though the shop front operates seven days a week; the studio at the back closes on Saturdays and Sundays.

It's nearly the end of an ordinary weekday when an issue arises just ten minutes before clocking off.

A medium-sized overseas shipping parcel, containing accessories for decorating a client's customized dress, should have arrived at our studio.

However, upon checking, Ping discovered that its status was marked as

'delivered.'

Consequently, we embarked on a search through our warehouse to determine if it had been placed there before being input into the system. Despite spending around 20 minutes in the process, we couldn't find a trace of it.

As Lady Nij's expression darkens, Ping suddenly exclaims, as if realizing an error. She rushes back to the studio while we continue our search for the third time. Upon her return, the 29-year-old woman wears an expression of regret as she reveals that the delivery address was incorrect; the parcel was sent to Lady Nij's manor. The head designer admonishes her petite assistant for the time wasted and queries how such a mistake could happen. Ping apologizes, explaining that it might be because, on a previous occasion, Lady Nij ordered a gift from the same website for her mother, M.L. Jeerana, having it delivered to her house as a surprise.

No one remembered to change the address back to the studio. Upon hearing this, the most influential figure in the studio silently releases a deep sigh.

"While you made a mistake by not checking the address, it's also my fault for misusing this account for personal purposes. Let's consider ourselves

fortunate that we didn't lose it. It should be stored somewhere in the manor. Now, let's go home. It's already late, past clocking time."

As everyone nods in relief after the successful resolution, I feel more relaxed too. However, when I'm about to join others in packing up, Lady Nij holds me back.

"Do you have anything to do after this, Hong Yok?"

Though I had planned to fix Lady Note's outfits tonight, as I've made an appointment to deliver the completed clothes to her this Sunday afternoon, when your boss makes such a request, it usually implies they need assistance.

"Well... not really."

"Wanna go to my father's manor with me? I'll give you a ride home on the way back."

"No problem, ma'am. But you don't have to give me a ride; I'm familiar with the directions."

"I just want to know where all my employees live."

The older woman leads the way out of the warehouse, and I quickly follow her, processing her words.

Does that mean she wants me to stay with her after work mainly to find out where I live? Her statement suggests she may know the residences of other employees as well. Could she be a caring boss?

So, what was Preaw trying to tell me then?

Or perhaps it's nothing extraordinary. She might believe that I don't fit well with this team system because it's different from my previous workplace. That's also a possibility.

Late past six in the evening, I find myself seated in a jet-black Mercedes driven by Lady Nij. Initially a bit nervous, the atmosphere lightens as she engages in conversation, touching upon both serious and lighthearted topics.

Our destination is M.C. Napasdol Ruthaithewin's Manor—Lady Nij's father's house. Despite her residing elsewhere with her husband, also an M.R. from another royal house, she visits her parents and siblings every weekend, bringing her daughter along.

As the car turns to enter through the gate, the massive and splendid Ruthaithewin Manor comes into view—a fitting residence for its owner, who commands a substantial business group and numerous partnerships. Though not beyond my imagination, the road cutting through the garden seems exceptionally long, making the building appear distant.

Entering the huge building with Lady Nij, I feel myself shrink in comparison. A mere glance reveals that the statues, paintings, and even the carpet lining the way cost a small fortune. I tread cautiously, determined not to accidentally taint or break anything.

Lady Nij guides me to a room with sofas, a glass table, a large wall mounted TV, and two individuals engrossed in watching it. When the elderly lady recognizes her visitor, she reaches for the remote control to lower the volume and greets us cheerfully.

"Oh, Nij? You're home?"

The smiling lady is Lady Nij's mother, and the elderly man seated next to her is likely Lady Nij's father, M.C. Napasdol. His Serene Highness gives us a brief nod before returning his attention to the news. Meanwhile, Lady Jee engages in conversation with her daughter after accepting our wai.

"I thought you would come back on Saturday morning."

"Not really, Mom. I'm here to collect something. Tomorrow, I'll bring Nam here with me. A parcel was incorrectly delivered here instead of my studio." "Oh, is that so? Well, I have no idea; there are so many parcels delivered here. Take a look at the storage room, and I'll find somebody to help you," she says, turning to me, who is standing next to her daughter.

"By the way, who's this little girl?"

"A new employee I just hired. Her name is Hong Yok."

"Oh! Such a lovely name! And what happened to your face, dear?"

"Mom!"

The voice interrupting us doesn't belong to Lady Nij but to someone behind me. With a turn, I see a familiar tall figure entering the living room.

"I think that question is inappropriate."

The entire living room falls into silence. Amid this atmosphere, I observe each family member's reactions to the newcomer. His Serene Highness briefly looks at his daughters and then resumes watching the TV on the wall, though I sense he's listening.

In contrast, Lady Nij glares nervously at Lady Note. Then, she regains composure and offers a friendly smile, despite her younger sister completely ignoring her.

The mother appears surprised yet happy to see her youngest child today, and the question about my scar seems to fade in significance.

"Wow! Doesn't this mean everyone's all present today? Note, you aren't here just to collect things as well, are you? You're always a naughty one. If I don't call you in, you never show up." "I need to talk to you. I might stay over too,"

Her Highness, still wearing an aloha shirt, makes eye contact with me while responding to her mother. She had warned me not to work for Nij Greta. Will she be disappointed seeing me with her sister...?

Looking at it differently, if someone advised you not to work at a place without offering supporting reasons or evidence, especially when you've been unemployed for almost a month, it would be odd to just nod and follow that suggestion, right?

I don't perceive Lady Nij as a kind, splendid boss either. Drawing from my past experiences, I believe I know this world better, and so far, nothing seems suspicious, except for what Preaw hasn't finished telling me this noon.

Lady Note shifts her gaze away from me, mentioning she's returning to her room and will be back for dinner. As the slender woman turns around, her older sister seizes the moment to excuse herself to the storage room. I follow my boss – something I must do no matter what. Yet, my eyes linger on the aloha-shirt woman walking in the opposite direction.

Is she mad...?

Wait...

Why am I even thinking about that?

I don't quite understand myself in this matter. Choosing to dismiss that peculiar thought, I adjust my glasses, hastening my steps to catch up with the middle-aged woman ahead. Wetraverse the wide, long hallway to another wing of the building, serving as the storage area.

The door is secured with a thick padlock, and soon enough, an old man arrives with a key to unlock it, likely summoned by M.L. Jeerana. The uncle assists us in searching the storage room, filled with numerous paper boxes and other items. He mentions that if it's the parcel with Lady Nij's name on it, it was delivered last week, and he recalls placing it here.

Unfortunately, he can't remember its exact location.

*Bzzz!*

A chat notification rings. It's not my phone but Her Highness's. She reaches for it, expecting something business-related. However, as she unlocks the screen and reads the message, her face oddly turns calm. It's challenging to discern who sent the message or its content.

"Hong Yok, go to my car and wait there after you find the parcel," the older woman instructs in her plain voice.

"Yes, ma'am."

There's no other choice for me, right?

Fortunately, we locate the parcel shortly. I express gratitude to the helpful uncle and inquire about the route to the garage, fearing getting lost in this vast manor. He kindly provides directions, and I manage to memorize the main parts – just walk past the swimming pool and turn left.

This is how I inadvertently witness the Ruthaithewin Family's hidden issues. While walking through a shortcut outside the building, passing various ornamental plants in the garden and heading to the head designer's black Mercedes, I notice the two sisters confronting each other near the pool from afar.

Lady Nij and Lady Note...

The atmosphere is so tense that you can feel it, but an action from the younger one makes my eyebrows furrow tightly.

Lady Note pushes her much-older sister's shoulder. Although her older sister doesn't fall, given their significant age gap, it's not surprising to see my boss sway a bit. Luckily, they stand quite far from the pool, and the taller woman doesn't seem to push the other too hard. I contemplate intervening by telling Lady Nij that we found what we wanted. That would at least halt the fight, the cause of which I'm clueless about. However, there's a considerable distance between here and there, as I must walk past the connecting pathway within the main building to cross to the other side. Thus, there's a brief moment when I lose sight of them.

Though I believe I've quickly walked, almost running, it shouldn't be anything more than a verbal dispute between two siblings.

And it's been less than a minute.

Yet, when I arrive, I find every family member gathered together – Lady Note, Prince Napas, Lady Jee, and their second son. I quickly scan the scene, widening my eyes in surprise. Lady Nij is wet and soaked, choking and coughing, with a middle-aged, spectacled man supporting her.

Lord Nopp, her oldest brother, clearly relaxes when he notices that his sister regains consciousness. However, shortly after, his eyes fill with rage, especially when directed at his youngest sister. He shouts angrily with a red face:

*"Note! What's wrong with you? Why did you push your sister into the pool?!"*

**Footnotes.**

*"Noo,"* literally meaning 'mouse' in Thai, is commonly used to refer to a very young child or to a woman significantly younger than the speaker. When employed for self- reference, it indicates that the speaker is addressing someone considerably older than themselves.

*"The Golden Goby Fish,*" a cherished folktale in central Thailand, unfolds the poignant tale of Eai, a young lady whose deceased mother is reborn as a goby fish to protect her from a malevolent stepmother. This narrative takes a darker twist akin to Cinderella, featuring numerous deaths and torment.

# Chapter 12: Your Reputation

"Note! What's wrong with you? Why did you push your sister into the pool?!

According to his internet profile, Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Nopparuj Ruthaithewin, or Lord Nopp, is the oldest among the four siblings.

A regular medical professor at a hospital, he typically appears as a calm, reasonable middle-aged man. However, presently, something has him so angry that his hands shake.

He quickly seizes his youngest sister's shoulders and shakes them with full strength.

"Do you want to kill your sister?!"

Lady Note stares fearlessly at her brother, seemingly asserting her innocence.

"Why would I do such a brainless thing?"

"But it's clear that—"

"Because it wants everyone to see that way."

Her voice is cold, suggesting a pathetic situation. The pretty woman turns to Prince Napas.

"Dad, what do you think? Should I simply walk away and play the culprit role once again?"

No response from the old man.

"Ha!"

The slender woman chuckles, then removes her brother's hand from her shoulder. Stepping back, she says,

"Excuse me," and walks away, leaving chaos behind.

As soon as I regain composure, I quickly help Lady Nij stand up. However, my gaze remains fixed on the departing woman.

Afterward, everything becomes chaotic. M.L. Jeerana, the mother, is teary, murmuring,

"What's wrong with our family...?"

Meanwhile, her husband silently stares at his older daughter, his eyes are solemnly calm.

Lord Nopp angrily complains about his youngest sister's behavior, while the second child, Lord Nont, sighs slightly and advises his brother to calm down and talk rationally. I say nothing but ask Lady Nij if she's okay.

"Nij, go take a bath first. You might get sick. I'll take care of Note."

"Never mind, Mom. It's just a small argument. I might've said something disturbing to her."

Lord Nopp groans, "Ha! A physical assault for some disturbance?" Then, he turns to his mother.

"Mom, you're too kind. I'll deal with Note myself."

Saying so, he quickly follows his sister.

After that, I help Lady Nij, soaked from head to toe, to her bedroom. While my boss is taking a shower, it might be impolite for me, a new subordinate, to wait inside her bedroom, so I silently come outside and wait.

Then, the older lady, looking less cheerful than before, comes to talk to me.

"Hong Yok, I'm sorry for what happened, but may I ask you not to share this story with anyone, please?"

"...Yes, ma'am."

In fact, I have no intention of sharing this story from the beginning.

"Thank you so much."

The older woman gently presses her hand on my arm.

"Nij wouldn't be able to give you a ride today, so I asked the driver to take you home. He's waiting in the garage."

"Oh... Thank you, ma'am."

It's as if I was asked to go home out of the blue. But I understand her reasoning; it's their internal issue, and having an outsider present might lead to leaks or discomfort. I send a message to my boss for formality:

*'I don't want to disturb you, so I'm heading home. Please take care.'*

Then, I follow the man Lady Jee introduced to me as her driver to the garage.

However, when we enter the building filled with various vehicles, from big bikes to luxurious cars, my feet halt as soon as I notice the tall woman, arms crossed, standing next to a beautiful Maserati.

"I'll give her a ride."

That's why, at 8:10 pm, I find myself seated next to the driver of a car I never thought I'd have the chance to ride in. The woman behind the wheel this time is M.R. Netapsorn.

Apart from checking the GPS and providing her directions, we don't exchange words. I steal a glance at her for the hundredth time, perhaps. Are we in a silent war? I wish she would tell me about what happened at the pool. She could make an excuse or, at the very least, offer an explanation, but she remains tight-lipped. Soon enough, I can't handle it anymore. I attempt to bring up a topic for discussion—anything, indirectly.

"About your clothes, I apologize for not having fixed them yet. I'm still adjusting to my new workplace, but they will be completed by this Sunday."

"Umm. No need to hurry."

Then, silence returns. It seems like she will never broach the subject if things continue this way.

"Did you do it?"

Finally, I can't hold back and ask her outright.

"What do you mean?"

"What happened at the pool..."

She briefly glances at me and then refocuses on the road before replying:

"What do you think?"

"I didn't ask you to ask me back."

Although I give her a stare, she just smirks. That annoys me a bit.

"Won't you explain it to me?"

"I hate saying things that others won't believe anyway."

"But if you remain silent, others may perceive you negatively."

"If I had cared about everyone's opinions, I would have developed a mental disorder."

In that moment, I'm momentarily speechless. Not because I'm at a loss for words, but because I catch a glimpse of her eye from the side. Her gaze holds a history that has shaped her into the person she is today – someone unburdened by the opinions of others.

*Is her scar also accociated to this*?

"...So, do you want me to see you in a positive or negative light?"

That seems to be the only question I can muster.

And while I believe my words carry a weighty tone, she responds with,

"I wonder too."

Another perplexing statement! This woman!

I release a quick sigh and turn my face away. Gazing out the window, the dark sky looms. Perhaps, it's time to initiate the silent mode in this car.

I have no intention of becoming friends with her. She remains a suspect in my memory. Of course, it's difficult to broach the topic directly. Maybe burying the past is the best course of action.

Connecting the fire incident and today's pool incident, it wouldn't be far fetched to see her as a villain. I should have reacted like a soap opera's female lead, expressing my disbelief with 'I never thought you could be so cruel!' or 'I'm so disappointed in you,' defending my boss. Yet here I am, sitting in her white Maserati, asking her for an explanation.

Is my brain malfunctioning?

"Hong Yok."

Without hesitation, I reply,

"Yes, I'm listening."

"That day, at the cafe, I don't understand why you were upset."

Why isn't that an explanation? I furrow my brows, preparing to object, until she continues. It's like she expects all my words to be swallowed.

"But when I said you're pretty...I really meant it."

"..."

Lost, I don't know how to respond.

I feel warmth on my cheeks. My reflex is to turn away, gazing out the window. I loosely clench a fist, subtly pressing it to my chest out of habit. She always speaks with an authenticity that's disarming. I don't like Lady Note at all...

Fortunately, I informed my mother about being home late. Due to Friday's traffic, I reached home around 9 pm, accompanied by Lady Note in her aloha shirt and her magnificent Maserati. Swiftly unbuckling my safety belt, I open the door so she doesn't have to exit the car. Standing outside, I turn around and say:

"Thank you for the ride."

Nevertheless, Ms. Architect cuts the engine, unfastens her belt, opens the door, and steps outside, standing at her full height.

"Your Highness... Why did you get out of the car?"

"I just want to see you get inside."

Alright. Even though it's unnecessary for a mere acquaintance, I think it's harmless. I don't offer a reply, simply reaching for the door key. In those few seconds, my mind is suddenly flooded with thoughts.

There's something I wonder if I should share with her or not. Initially, I almost let it go and proceeded inside. Today's chaos is unrelated to me, but as quickly as my thoughts race, I decide to turn around.

"My Lady."

"Yes?"

There she goes again, answer with her sweet voice...

"I...I don't think you did it."

Her eyes instantly sparkle with a sign of confusion. Her right eyebrow slightly raises.

"Why?"

Ah... Why did she have to ask me that difficult question?

"I don't know. I just... believe so."

She remains silent, her face is hard to read. The only thing I can see is that her eyes are fixated right on me. Rarely shown to anyone else, they are sweet, as if enchanted by me.

Sheappears like a woman staring at beautiful stars, not someone with a significant scar on her face like me.

Her thin cherry lips slowly curve, making me furrow in wonder.

"Why are you smiling?"

"Because, once again, you're the only one who believes in me."

Lady Note says while turning her head low. Without meeting my eyes, the next statement sounds like self-mumbling.

***"And I fall in love with you once again..."***

# Chapter 13: Just A Little Wonder

*00.25*

It's been a while, but there's still a strange feeling lingering in my heart owing to what Lady Note said tonight. I lie on my bed, staring at the ceilings of my darkened bedroom. Restlessly rolling around, I feel sleepless, my mind replaying her images, her voice, and her words.

*I think I'm going crazy*.

Fortunately, it's a holiday tomorrow. Otherwise, I might sleep in because I finally start feeling drowsy around 1 am.

But she still invades my dreams. Damn it! This time, there's no fire or anything, just pastel smoke barely concealing her piano performance on the stage.

I wake up at 2 am. Unable to go back to sleep, I decide to find something cool to eat in the kitchen. I need to induce a food coma, perhaps. I remember I have chocolate chip ice cream in the fridge.

As I approach the fridge, I catch Toey-Hom savoring the ice cream I purchased. Instead of scolding her, I opt for something else. Fortunately, there's still a cup of yogurt waiting.

"Did your boyfriend drop you off?"

My younger sister disrupts the silence abruptly. My hand hesitates for a moment, contemplating whether she spotted Lady Note.

However, I quickly get my answer.

"I saw the car taking off. Given its brand, he must be quite wealthy."

"That's not it... Just a friend."

"No wonder. How could a guy fall in love with you?"

I decide to conclude our conversation there. Without arguing, I prepare to take my yogurt upstairs, but Toey-Hom continues with her discontented tone.

"Can you stop commenting on my IG?"

"Why?"

"I don't want to answer my friends' questions. It's embarrassing to let others know about my scarry sister."

It seems like just a few words from my sister can peculiarly shatter my heart. But the truth is, I carry a scar on my face, so I feel guilty for regularly commenting on her IG.

"Aha. I got it. Sorry. I'll only give you likes from now on."

"Please leave me alone!"

She shouts with annoyance before releasing some heavy breaths and walking away. I'm left alone in the kitchen, pondering the remnants of our conversation.

From contemplating how someone could fall in love with me to the comments on Instagram...

Lady Note... Is she genuinely in love with me and attempting to deceive me? How can someone like me catch her eye?

Ultimately, after finishing the whole cup of yogurt, I don't feel sleepy as expected. I glance at the time. It's almost five in the morning. Deciding to take a shower, I opt to head to my studio. Focusing on work seems like a better use of my time.

This Saturday, I invest most of my time in refining Lady Note's clothes, aiming to present the completed version on Sunday and conclude this project. Deep down, I feel a bit stunned, perhaps. If this project reaches its end, it implies that we won't need to see each other anymore.

Isn't that correct? Even if I believe she didn't push her sister, she remains the primary suspect of the fire incident ten years ago in my eyes. Just meeting her at the designated restaurant, delivering the clothes, receiving the payment, and parting ways...

These steps should be easy-peasy.

However, when the time comes, I find it too difficult to be that impolite because, sitting opposite me, there's the sizzling Korean BBQ grill between us. I didn't expect us to meet in this kind of place.

Fine... I'll join your Sunday lunch like this.

Secretly, I have many questions in my head. Perhaps this is a good chance to inquire about things, but I hesitate between asking about her scar and discussing those words that kept me awake last night. However, it seems a bit too late because the woman, who's flipping the meat to check its readiness, suddenly brings up something equally serious.

"I still insist that you shouldn't work for it."

Clearly, 'it' that Lady Note refers to is none other than her sister. In silence, my brain analytically processes the complex relationship between my boss and her. Then, what pulls my consciousness back is when the tongs grab the well-done meat and place it on my plate.

She doesn't have to do this...

"Alright, I can see that you have family issues."

This time, I speak up while grabbing a piece of well-done meat and putting it on her plate in return so that we're not indebted.

"But working is another issue."

"That's even worse."

"Let's say – I won't break my back for her. Anyway, this is better than being an unemployed designer."

This is supposed to be the best resolution. Well, I was exploited in my previous workplace before, so I know I shouldn't be too positive about others. Lady Nij seems like an ideal boss on the surface, but I can sense that she's quite arrogant. Moreover, it's strange that she brought up her sister's past on my first day of working...

From my perspective, it's best to sidestep those issues whenever possible. As long as they don't impact my career, they don't really matter.

On that day, from 11:30 to a little past twelve, Lady Note and I enjoyed the renowned Korean BBQ place together without bringing up anything that happened on Friday.

Between us, there was some conversation, but it revolved around basic topics for mere strangers, such as the kinds of pets we have, the universities or high schools we attended, and so on. When we were both full, we concluded things with the handover of the completed clothes and payment for the design and sewing... along with some arguments.

"Your check has two extra zeros, My Lady."

"Satisfactory tips."

"How could tips be this much?"

A six-digit check? This is overpriced! I put on a serious expression and return the paper slip to the woman sitting across from me.

"Please change the number back to my proposed price."

She crosses her arms and looks at me as if she insists on giving me that.

"Lady Note, or else I won't take it. I'll give it for free as compensation for causing you trouble on Twitter."

"Fine. I got it."

She surrenders and reluctantly rewrites the check as requested. There are still a few thousand extra, but I think it's hard to reject it, so I let it go.

After leaving the restaurant, we stand in front of the shopping mall, preparing to part ways. Despite her poker face, her eyes tell me that she doesn't want it to end like this.

"Can't you become my personal designer?"

That sounds like a request... What should I do?

"I'll think about it."

Why am I easily swayed? I don't quite understand myself.

"I'll tell you later..."

"How late?"

"I...I don't know. Maybe tomorrow?"

Ah... Walking away, just like when we first met, would be easier, but I slipped out like that.

Monday swiftly arrives after the weekend.

I am well-acquainted with the directions, allowing me to reach the studio ten minutes before the designated time. Nevertheless, the head designer arrives before me.

Initially, I assume Lady Nij might refrain from discussing her family issues again, especially since Lady Jee, her mother, suggested I ignore it. However, my boss broaches the topic while there are only two of us.

"I regret not being able to take you home on Friday. It's embarrassing to expose you to our internal affairs as well."

"No problem, ma'am,"

I respond with a polite smile, placing my purse on my desk in the corner of the studio.

According to my noted schedule, today's agenda involves a meeting for the Spring- Summer collection that Lady Nij mentioned last week.

Unfortunately, she provided no additional details beyond the theme. Given my exclusive focus on VIP custom orders for the past week, I am uncertain about their system for this particular segment.

Excitement brews within me at the prospect of trying new things. However, my anticipation turns to confusion during the meeting at 10:12.

"For this Spring-Summer collection, I expect three outfits from each of you by next Tuesday. If you anticipate you won't meet the deadline, notify me three days in advance. Once completed, upload files on Dropbox for my review."

Lady Nij issues a succinct order, omitting any mention of the theme or other essential details. It resembles a scenario where a teacher instructs you to write a report without specifying the subject.

"Yes, ma'am."

My bewilderment deepens as both Preaw and Ping unanimously agree. I gaze at them in astonishment, and Ping responds with a silent look, signaling that this is normal.

What? Am I not clever enough, or is this too peculiar?

About to raise my hand for clarification, Preaw, standing beside me, leans closer and whispers,

"I'll explain later."

"Thank you," I reply in a soft voice intended for only the two of us.

Feeling more at ease, I turn around and start walking away as the meeting concludes. My next task involves assisting the sewing department in crafting a ball-gown wedding dress for a Mom Luang, a relative of Lady

Nij.

While following the two designer assistants, my boss suddenly calls out,

"One more thing, Hong Yok."

"Yes?"

I slightly startle after being called out. Fear creeps in that I might have made a mistake over the past week.

The older woman continues, her eyes fixated on the designs on the iPad screen.

"This Thursday, you'll attend a party with me."

"Huh? Just me?"

"Yes."

The most influential person in this studio folds her iPad case and looks at me with a slight smile.

"It's a party hosted by a company where my father and brothers are shareholders. You should understand why I have to go."

I comprehend that the event will host celebrities and high-society individuals. It's a strategic move to make connections and identify potential VIP clients within our target group. However, what surprises me is why not Preaw and Ping, who have been working here longer and know her better?

"Are you sure? I think–"

"I've already chosen you. If you want to refuse, I'll accept only one excuse: you're not available that night."

Who dares to refuse her after hearing that?

"I'm available, ma'am."

That's my final answer.

"Great. I'll send you the list of guests. Most of them are celebrities and executives, but we will focus on their wives. Your duty is to study their profiles and observe their fashion styles. Figure out their regular fashion brands. Find out whether they have daughters. Note down all those descriptions and send the file back to me. I want it by Tuesday."

"Well... What about the wedding dress that I'm working on? This one needs to be done by this weekend too."

Her intense pink lips form a cold smile.

"Hong Yok, I didn't hire you to give me such a question. Sometimes, you need to manage time for two urgent projects. Understand?"

"My apologies, ma'am..."

Is this what those two assistants are attempting to hide? Is Lady Note's reluctance to have me work here due to Lady Nij's tyrannical directives? I'm unsure whether I should be pleased with this topsy-turvy situation compared to my previous workplace.

However, I can unequivocally express that cutting ahead of my seniors like this makes me somewhat uncomfortable.

Returning to my working environment, Preaw walks toward me and fulfills her promise to explain things. She informs me that whenever Lady Nij requests designs, it implies we can come up with anything freely, but we need to provide themes and detailed descriptions. This includes the concept, origin, or inspiration, as well as the meaning of colors and the rationale for materials, etc. I quickly jot down everything, fearing I might forget a single detail.

Honestly, I'm not anxious about creating designs and offering detailed descriptions. Instead, I'm rather uneasy about investigating the guests who will attend the party and the unfinished wedding dress that lights a fire under me.

*23.45*

I bring all my work back home, and a peculiar thought crosses my mind:

'Well, that's weird.'

Madam Kris, I mean... my former boss, is also a celebrity. Why wasn't she invited to this party? Her father is a famous businessman with connections

to a company in which Prince Napas is a partner.

Anyway, I shouldn't trouble myself with that. I better focus on what's currently displayed on my laptop screen. The list Lady Nij sent to me is extensive and unsystematic. Nothing has been screened yet. I filter the list, keeping only our target group. It's challenging to find everything on the internet.

Some of them frequently attend social events, while others only appear in pictures without additional details. In fact, I've been sitting in front of my laptop since 7 pm. All I've eaten is the omelet my mother made.

I've been working overtime, and now it's almost midnight. My eyes are sore, and I start to doze off. My brain reminds me that I still need to go to work tomorrow, so I work for ten more minutes before shutting down my laptop and switching off the lights.

As I throw myself onto the bed, I feel restless, as if I forgot to do something important, something that I've been planning to do since morning.

Stressed by the new missions and incomplete projects, I lie down in the dark, and then the conversation with Lady Note on Sunday flashes in my mind.

Damn it! I promised her to give my answer today! I've been too busy to remember that!

I reach out for my phone on the low table next to my bed. I'm not sure if she has fallen asleep yet, but I'll send a message to her as promised.

She'll be able to read it next morning anyway.

**HongYok**: Your Highness.

I send those two words, and I'm typing the key point. But a message bubble shows up stating 'read' in a few seconds. I'm a bit surprised that she hasn't slept yet. More importantly, she even replies.

**NoTe**: Waiting for your answer.

'*Is she even waiting...?'*

Actually, I plan to offer only one more outfit to her. Yes, I mean only once more. Because my contract with Nij Greta doesn't forbid me from having a part-time job somewhere else. From what I heard, Ping only designs clothes for her acquaintances (but of course not for other brands).

However, the current situation limits me from taking external jobs.

**HongYok**: I think I can't give you my answer within this week. This Thursday, I have to go to a party with Lady Nij, and I have another urgent project to finish on Friday. Can I give you my answer at the end of this month, please?

**NoTe**: Which party?

**HongYok**: The party under your father–Prince Napas's business group, My Lady.

**NoTe**: Aha.

That's short.

The other end hasn't made any reply. She disappears for five minutes and comes back with a link.

*Bzzz!*

**NoTe**: [Playlist shared – To. TMBPITU] What kind of playlist title is this?

The cover picture is also the confused-looking white cat from the 'Woman Yelling at a Cat' meme! Don't tell me that the songs in this playlist are ridiculously annoying! That must be it! She's trying to tease me at night! My eyebrows tightly knit together. I type a message back.

**HongYok**: I'm confused.

**NoTe**: They are songs.

**HongYok**: I know there are songs inside, but what's with that playlist title?

**NoTe**: It has a good meaning.

Ha!

**NoTe**: Sweet dreams.

That naughty royal lady simply breaks off, while I'm still blinking my eyes, looking at the weird title on my screen.

Fine. Should I give it a chance?

At first, I intend to reply to her with 'Sweet dreams.', lock the screen, and go to bed. I should be determined, but just a minute later, I feel restless as I wonder what songs are in there.

Twenty-six past midnight, I grab my phone and click the confused-cat playlist that Lady Note sent to me. The link leads to the well-known music streaming application that I'm a member of. There's only one song inside the playlist, but she might add more songs later. Nevertheless, what strangely attracts my attention the most is the long song title shown on the screen.

'From Now On, Every Love Song Will Belong To Only You' By No One

Else

I remember hearing this song frequently played by several DJs when I worked in my studio. I know the melody because it's quite catchy. My thumb unconsciously clicks the 'play' button.

As this song starts with the chorus part, it immediately stirs something within me.

'Since the first day I met you, there has been no flower that blooms as beautifully as your smile.'

While the instrumentals, vocals, and overall music play on, I flip over my phone, making it face down on the bed. Some light still leaks through, like a question arising from the bottom of my heart.

*'Since the first day I met you, there are no stars I would see in the sky, for they cannot compare with your eyes.'*

The question lingers: 'How can a song sent by somebody else give us a different feeling from when we play it ourselves?'

# Chapter 14: Someone Unquestionably Special

After uploading the guest list and other party details on Dropbox for Lady Nij, I hoped for a less hectic schedule, but that doesn't

seem to be the case. The wedding dress for my boss's relative still needs finishing with the sewing department.

Moreover, I haven't even started designing three outfits for the upcoming

Spring-Summer collection or brainstormed any ideas.During our Wednesday lunch break, after finishing a lunchbox from a nearby place, my boss calls me in for a brief meeting. The middle-aged woman sits on her ergonomic chair, reading the A4 print-outs describing everything I submitted to her on Tuesday. Without giving me a single glance, she asks,

"Have you prepared your outfit for tomorrow night?"

"Yes, I have."

"Great. Get changed and do your hair and makeup over here so that we won't waste our time."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Thank you," probably signaling 'No more discussion. Get out,' as she points to the door.

One disadvantage of urgent work is the potential for a mental breakdown, but a positive outcome is a better relationship with my colleagues. This includes Preaw and Ping, my advisors, Leng the shy patternmaker, Lek and Pong the sewers, and Aye, who manages fabric and equipment storage.

Despite questions about my scar and why I don't wear contact lenses, when I reply to them with a smile, they don't say anything like Lady Nij has generosity to accept me or probe further. Perhaps they're too engrossed in their own tasks.

Wednesday evening, when I arrive home, I iron the white dress I designed and sewed. I've washed it since yesterday. The radio plays a song chosen by

the DJ. At that moment, my mind is filled with thoughts, all because

someone sent me a playlist with a weird title a few days ago.

We have no business with each other, yet I can't stop thinking about that woman. What should I do with her...?

The Next Day 19.36

Let's chalk it up to an unlucky day. We should have reached the party precisely at 7 pm as Lady Nij planned. She intended to have time for conversations with her parents and her second oldest brother before mingling with the guests, our target group.

However, due to a car crash on our way to the party, it takes a while to navigate through that area. To make matters worse, we end up stuck in extremely dreadful traffic.

As a result, we're half an hour late.

The head designer appears upset. I can discern it from her voice when she turns to me and comments on my shoes before we exit the car.

"How can a fashion designer assistant like you wear those trashy shoes to this kind of social event?"

I stay silent, still taken aback by my boss's temper for the first time. Lady Nij seems to realize that she slip out something inappropriate.

"I'm sorry, Hong Yok. Because things didn't go as planned, I said something I shouldn't have said." Her voice, as calm as our job interview day, returns.

"Let's get inside. We better hurry up."

"Well, I'm also sorry, ma'am. I'll prepare myself better next time."

It's still hard for me to regain my composure after feeling numb throughout my veins.

Ever since that evening, the day she fell into the pool, and everyone doubted Lady Note, I started to see my boss from a different angle. I don't jump to conclusions about what happened that day, but I sense a strange feeling in the air. The best I can imagine for her is that she lost control and fell, while the worst would be...

No! No! No! If I keep thinking that way, I'll only feel awkward with her. I need to rid myself of this wild thought!

At the party, my role involves shadowing my boss during conversations or assisting her in various ways, such as presenting our studio's name card to her discussion partner or providing support when introducing new trends to affluent guests.

This marks my first appearance at a social event after spending three years hidden in the back office. While it should be considered progress, there's a lingering sense of...

"Your Highness is so kind. You don't judge books by their covers but rather give a chance to talented individuals," a lady remarks with a smile, addressing me before turning back to my boss.

And that's just the beginning of tonight. As my boss interacts with each guest, they unfailingly extend their attention to me – a designer assistant with a noticeable scar on her face. For instance:

"I can't judge people by their appearances these days. When I saw her, I didn't expect her to be your new assistant."

OR

"The technology is more advanced. Working with Lady Nij for a year, and you'll have enough money to undergo plastic surgery and Lasik. Oh! I think you should start wearing contact lenses. They will make you look more polished."

AND

"No worries, honey. You just need to work harder if you're not pretty." Their opinions align in the same direction. Nine out of ten guests my boss interacted with either inquired about my scar or suggested a visit to a beauty clinic and advised me to wear contact lenses. I forced a smile and simply mentioned that it was the result of an accident in my youth.

Yes, I am too cowardly to resist them.

However, the words of this not-quite-30-year-old son of a board committee member automatically make me furrow my brow, and I can't help but react with a sudden thought.

Do you know what this son of a board committee member, who is not yet 30, is saying? He smiles at me politely and speaks with a hint of pity.

"I'm sorry for what happened to your face, but I definitely believe that there will be a man who understands and accepts you – someone who won't judge you by your cover."

Then, he seems to remember something.

"Oh! I know a decent guy. He's in his thirties, but he absolutely has a stable job. He's my secretary. Shall I introduce him to you?"

"Well... no, thank you."

"This man doesn't care about appearance. You may not even need to save up your money for plastic surgery yourself."

He laughs as if he's looking down on someone who might miss this golden chance.

"You'll regret it. I dare say this is your once-in-a- lifetime opportunity."

I think he's been watching too many soap operas that depict a woman's ultimate goal in life as something unpleasant like that. Previously, we only discussed our business, but what's with that pathetic male-lead sympathy syndrome attitude?

Before I know it, I lose control.

"I'm sorry, but I wasn't born to beg a man to accept me as his wife."

"Hong Yok!"

Lady Nij immediately yells at me with her serious voice, causing me to gulp down what I was about to say.

Had I not received the caution, he would have been left even more speechless. I was about to express, 'And you never know whether someone you're talking to is LGBTQ+ or not.' However, even with just a sentence like that, I manage to make my boss furious. She hastily excuses herself, grabs my arm, and drags me away from that circle of socialization.

"Why did you talk like that?! Do you know who he is?!"

"..."

I don't understand. Just because he has a better background, does that give him the right to say anything to me?

"He didn't say anything to shame you! Why did you provoke him? Mr. Thach is the son of the board committee member! He also plans to open his own business during the first quarter of this year too!" The middle-aged woman covers her head in concern.

"Oh my! Did I make a wrong decision bringing you here?"

Then, she draws a conclusion,

"You don't need to follow us around anymore, Hong Yok. Give me the name cards and go calm yourself down somewhere. Later, come back and apologize to Mr. Thach for your impoliteness."

My boss is too upset to wait for my answer or an explanation of my feelings. As soon as she snatches away the toasted brown tweed purse filled with Nij Greta name cards, she walks away.

Today, I've been scolded by her three times already, including the afternoon, when we got out of the car, and right now. The first two times, I thought it was my fault for dissatisfying her, but being told to apologize to Mr. Thach? Perhaps I shouldn't have been here from the beginning.

The man called Thach is still engaged in discussions with others and looks at me with a strange gaze, as if he's complaining about what just happened to his acquaintances. As a result, I feel increasingly isolated wherever I go at this party.

People glance at me and then turn to whisper to each other. Some look at me with pity, while others try to hold back their laughter, as if they're witnessing something odd that doesn't belong here.

In this moment, I feel like an alien among the surrounding human beings. Today... is just another bad day for me, isn't it?

The MC announces that there'll be a dance session in five minutes. Those who fit the beauty standards start looking for their match to open the floor. Supposedly, I should confine myself in the washroom or find a blind spot where no one would notice me until the party ends. I'm not worthy... or belonging to anything at all.

*Rrrrr*!

The phone in my purse rings. I don't have enough consciousness to guess who's calling, but checking it out, I'm surprised to see 'Lady Note' on the screen.

What's this? Is it her?

Don't tell me that you're proposing to me at 9 pm again!

However... Answering her call at this moment might be the only thing that makes me feel more meaningful. I tighten my lips, my thumb presses on the green button, and my hand puts the phone next to my ear.

[Do you feel uncomfortable?]

She asks me as if she's seen everything.

"I... I don't like this atmosphere."

[Hong Yok.]

"Yes...?"

[Don't worry. You're the most outstanding one in this party.]

That's not true.

[You're the prettiest on Earth.]

I'm not that precious.

[And the most flawless in this universe.]

I...

[Turn around.]

Her last words make my heart race exponentially faster. Just turning around as requested, with so many reasons, I become breathless for a moment as soon as I see the familiar woman who stands tall from afar.

She's here. With some sheer makeup on her beautiful face, she looks gorgeous in that blue velvet dress I designed for my previous workplace. It showcases her fine, slender neck, round shoulders, and collarbone in the most attractive way.

Lady Note looks like a statue that's perfectly built and painted – a masterpiece skillfully crafted by God. And when it's her... The one-sided undercut looks perfectly matched with the dress unbelievably.

I'm not sure why my heart is racing—is it because she's standing here in front of me or due to those words she uttered on the phone?

She walks in my direction. Every step she takes, the way our eyes lock— muting every sound and blurring everything around us—leaves me breathless. I find myself tightly gripping the white dress. This is something I didn't anticipate for tonight.

Just then, our eye contact is momentarily interrupted by the intrusion of a young man. It's Mr. Thach, wearing a cheerful smile as he prepares to greet the beautiful royal descendant in the velvet dress.

"Your Highness—"

However, he seems unfamiliar with her or is perhaps a bit too self-assured. Not only does he receive no response, but she also stares at him coldly, as if she intends to address something with me later.

Disregarding him, she deliberately moves away and heads in my direction. Coincidentally, some lights dim to accentuate the dance floor. The musicians begin to play.

Her slender hand extends, accompanied by a statement that clearly indicates why and for whom she's here.

***"Shall we dance, Ms. Designer who crafted this dress I'm wearing?"***

# Chapter 15: Both A Dream And Reality

I used to believe that being asked as a dance partner was something beyond my reach, a dream for someone like me.

But Lady Note....She surpasses any expectations, beyond ideals. She disregards the MC's announcement, ladies and gentlemen on the floor. She pays no attention to the eyes of others at the this party. In her half cosmic, half deep ocean eyes, there is only me.

In the middle of the crowd, the earlier dreadful feeling is forgotten. Her presence and the hand that reached out to me transform the entire mood of this party. Initially, I thought I would hide in the washroom in silence and later stand in the dark corner, but now all those hundred eyes are on me.

Of course.

We are the opening dance couple.

Lady Nij, standing among celebrities of her age, furrows her brow while observing us dancing at the center of the floor.

Prince Napasdol and M.L. Jeerana also gaze at us in suprise. I don't know, they might be taken aback by various factor, raging from the fact that their daughter is all dressed up in evening dress for this party to the reality that she's dancing with another woman.

I learned the waltz in high school, back in Grade 11-F, where the number of students was odd. It didn't take a long for me to realize that I was the one my classmates, both boys and girls, avoided as a dance partner.

Who would want to dance with a girl, with a huge scar on her face? Back then, my scar was even more prominent than it is today. Eventually, I had no choice but to dance with my teacher.

I recall closing my eyes back then, imagining that one day someone would ask for my hand and dance with me, caring only about me on the floor. It seemed impossible.

But it's happening right here right now.

Our eyes meet. One of our hands holds the other, while her free hand rests on my waist. I feel embarrassed for stepping on her foot twice due to my absent mind while observing her beautiful face up close. But as the dance progress, I don't make any more mistakes.

And her body is so warm.

Other dance couples enter the floor like blurry props in this setting from our perspective.

"Why are you here, Your Highness?"

"Why not? My dad is the CEO."

All right. The joke isn't a joke, because it's the truth.

But that's not what I am seeking.

"You don't appear to enjoy this type of party.... or this kind of dress."

The woman, with a faint scent of cherry blossom perfume, remains silent. It's unclear whether she's unable to articulate her feelings or is simply immersed in the atmosphere. Even as she moves gracefully, leading our dance and turning me around, her gaze remains locked onto mine.

Her eyes narrow, lips part slightly, and a soft murmur escape her mouth, as if she's under a spell,

"You are so beautiful."

What?

How many times have you said that today? I turn my face away.

"P... please stop exaggerating."

"You are truly beautiful."

"Your Highness is.... so annoying."

It's vexing yet heart throbbing...in a peculiar rhythm.

We continue dancing until the second song concludes. Then the taller woman whispers into my ear.

"Do you want to escape from here?"

I steal a glance at Lady Nij. She glares at me resentfully, as if anticipating a lengthy discussion. I am quite certain she has some issue with her sister and may still be upset about what happened with Mr. Thach, to whom I haven't apologized. But should I feel guilty for his rudeness?

If I were alone at this party, I would inevitably comply with Lady Nij's order. However, Lady Note stands before me now, ready to rescue me from this disconcerting situation. If I only nod...

"Yes."

That's my only answer, without a hint of hesitation.

"But before we go, shall we talk to someone first?"

" No problem."

I anticipated she might want to greet her family or a friend but no. The captivating woman takes my hand and guides me to Mr. Thach, who hold glass of wine. He appears surprised by Lady Note bringing me with her, expecting perhaps on apology. He smiles as if forgiving me for a trivial matter.

"I don't hold it against her. I just want to...."

"You are a grown-up. Please mind your manners."

His arrogant expression immediately transforms into one of dumbfounded surprise as Lady Note rebukes him loud enough for others to hear.

"At this kind of fancy party, in a huge crowd like this, think before you speak. Please don't play your stupid matching games without others concern. Stop doing this."

"What?"

"I won't say it again, I know it's hard for your brain to absorb it. I just want to warn you not to mess with my girl." S..... Savage Lady Note is back!

True to her word, she doesn't care about others. Her warm hand still claps mine and see swiftly lead me to the hall gate. I gather my dress to facilitate a faster pace. I trust her to the extend that our destination doesn't concern me. Observing her waving silky dark hair, her profile resembling an unrealistic portrait and have determine eyes, she remains resolute and unaffected except when she gazes at me.

This woman.... Is she a dream true?

At every step, she remains the focal point of my vision. We reach the VIP parking lot filled with millions-dollar supercars. I recall Lady's car vividly, the white Maserati parked so close to us, as if it's ready to whisk us away as swiftly as possible.

Before we depart, the woman behind the wheel employs her index fingers to press a button. Subsequently, the sunroof of this car gracefully folds, transforming it into a convertible. I admit feeling a bit thrilled, this is something I only witnessed in movie or drama series.

An unfamiliar sensation begins to burgeon in my heart as the car moves out of the shopping complex.

It's as if the streets and view outside the car are not the Bangkok we know but a colossal universe adorned with twinkling stars. We escape from the frenetic world, journeying into the heavenly outer space beyond imagination.

No longer caged in the party. I finally burst into laughter accompanied by the gentle breeze. I cannot help but find my timid self at the party utterly ridiculous. Challenging norms isn't inherently wrong.

Why should I feel guilty?

I extend my left hand as if grasping a star from the night sky. In that moment, I liberate my thoughts amidst their breathtaking views. Seated beside me, Lady Note doesn't interrupt or demand my attention. She simply drives the car in silence, her left hand still holding my right hand.

It's been a while... quite a lengthy sightseeing ride. Lady Note notices my shift in focus from the night sky, prompting her to seek permission even though she's the one controlling the car.

"May I get changed at the gas station.. please?

"Yes, I want to get changed as well."

Fortunately, I retrieved my belongings from the reception before taking the elevator. Inside the cloth tote bag next to me are the outfit I wore to work this morning, my wallet, and other essentials. Having learned a hard lesson from my previous resignation, I made sure to prepare just in case.

Lady Note signals and turn into the nearest gas station, pulling up by the public restroom. Despite the complexity of her dress, she manages to change at an unbelievable speed. As I open the restroom door, I find her a busily removing her makeup in front of the large mirror.

"Let me help you."

I offer, seizing the makeup remover pad from her hand and starting to wipe her flawless cheek.

"By the way how did you know that I designed the perfect dress?"

"Because you are the most beautiful girl, and your art work is also the most beautiful one"

I wasn't prepared for such an answer... It quickens my heart beat. Why? Can't she simply acknowledge the unique aspects of my design? Does she have to say something cheesy like that?

I tighten in my lips, making an effort to change the subject.

"T... then, won't your girlfriend be upset about us dancing at this kind of party?"

Her beautiful brows are slightly knitted together.

"I don't have a girlfriend."

"Your profile picture seems to have been taken by someone."

Gosh, how did I let such an embrassing question slip out? Damn it!

"I went there with my friends. One of them, Frang, took it for me. She already has a lover."

"Oh...."

Why do I feel relieved? She's just explaining in detail.

"I mean it. Trust me."

" I... I got it."

I try to avoid meeting eyes with the taller woman because some heat is burning my heart and my face. I don't know why she still looking at me with the same gaze as at the party.

"Do you want to watch star and relax with me?"

My hands, my breath, and my heart all pause for a moment. I tighten my lips again to pull myself together, trying to sound as normal as possible.

"Your flirting line is too predictable."

Then, I continue wiping her face and firmly change the subject.

"Just drop me at a bus stop, My Lady."

"....."

The woman in a loose blue aloha shirt with a purple flower pattern and black slack pants doesn't argue. One aspect of her personality that I have been gradually learning about is that she won't and annoyingly bug or bother me if I refuse.

Fifteen minutes later, the fancy Maserati drops me off at the agree-upon bus stop.

The clock on the phone screen shows that it's past 10 pm already. No wonder there are only a few people here. I get out of the car and sincerely express my gratitude. However, Lady Note stops the engine and step down as well.

So, she's seeing me of like last time.

I look at her shirt collar, which isn't neat, perhaps because we got some strong breeze in the convertible car, or she didn't adjust it after changing as she was too busy with her makeup removal.

Should I reach out to adjust it? Is that weird...?

This time, the bus arrives so early that I regret not spending more time with her.

"Safe trip."

She says that, but her face tell me that she doesn't want the day to end like this.

"You too."

I reply and follow the other two passengers onto the bus. Right now, there is only her left, sending me off until we are both out of sight of each other.

Everything resembles the day she helped me collect the stars. There was a strand of hair on her shirt too, and I decided to ignore it and take a bus home.

But this time.... There is one thing different.

Because this time, instead of looking for a seat, I decide to turn around and exit the bus I just boarded. I return to the royal lady who saved the night for me. The bus never waits, it takes off and I don't feel like I am missing anything.

"I have changed my mind."

"Changed your mind?"

"Yes"

I reach both of my hands to adjust her shirt collar. Finishing that, I lift my face to look into those beautiful eyes. I then give my answer for coming back.

"I will watch the stars with you."

It becomes the night that I make an unexpected decision for myself. I slowly embrace her neck with my two arms, tipping my toes a bit, eyes closed, and press my lips on hers.

My heart skips a bit after all those action. It's hard to explain why I don't want to leave her side right now.

For a millisecond, her gaze is filled with both shock and surprise. After some brain processing, she realizes that we are kissing and that the one who started it was me.

Lady Note embraces my waist with her warm arm, closes her eyes, and tilts her face a bit so that there's no gap between our lips. Her soft tongue invades into my mouth gently. It's fascinatingly sweet.

Amidst the cool weather we dive into this tender taste together under the silver lights and the night sky.

*Tonight, I don't want to do anything else but watch stars with her.*

# Chapter 16: Under The Sky Dome

I won't be the least bit surprised if someone as affluent as M.R. Netapsorn take me to the highest floor of a penthouse. Nevertheless, the luxurious Maserati no longer convertible, set out for the outskirts of town. We have been riding on empty roads in the dark for 2 hours, heading to her seaside three-story summer house that covers a vast piece of land.

The garage is designed to have a door connected to the house. Just by entering and looking around, I am confident of something.

"You designed this house by yourself, didn't you?"

Although it's already dark, my instinct has managed to capture if ever since I saw this house from a far.

"Yep," she briefly replies. Then, she claps, and the lights in the living room illuminate due to sensor system.

"But the interior was designed by my colleagues at the studio."

Even if she didn't design the interior, the furniture and color composition reflect her style. Grey and white are emphasize, just like her office where I went to measure her body. Every item looks costly, perhaps not less than five digits each. Some of them may even cost six digits, for example, this super soft carpet.

"This way."

Lady Note they leads me to the spiral staircase. I take my eyes off those modern-style luxurious furniture items and follow the taller woman.

Then, my eyes widen as soon as I see the right side of the beautiful staircase, there are bookshelves where people can easily choose which books to read while walking past them.

This is amazing...

The first floor consists of an empty public space, a dining room, a connected kitchen, and a living room. On one side, there is access to the swimming pool. On the second floor, there are many rooms. If I have to guess, there is her bedroom, storage room and many more that I haven't been introduced to.

However the tall woman walks past this floor and leads me to the third floor. It's unbelievable. This room that she just brought me into is beyond any expectations.

"My office."

At first, it's like we walk into a dark room, but when she presses a button on the wall next to the door, I don't even want to blink before what I see.

"Wow...."

I exclaim and cover my mouth in amazement at the scenery.

The dome-curved ceiling slowly opens from the center, revealing the midnight sky full of glittering stars. I'm not sure if the source of the impression is the opened dome showing the sky through the transparent glass or the indescribable beauty of the enormous universe.

Maybe the combination of both...

Thoroughly surveying the surroundings, I realize that this resembles a spacious office, equipped with everything in architect might need. It's s meticulously designed to evoke inspiration.

Gazing at the glass dome architecture, I unconsciously exclaim with a faint voice,

"It's so unreal."

"That's why I like to come here often. Every time I work in this space, I always get new inspirations," Her Highness add, then gracefully settles onto the soft, white carpet at the center of the room.

Upon seeing that, I don't hesitate to sit next to her warm body, which exudes the scent of cherry blossoms. Lady Note doesn't look up the sky, no matter how fascinating the stars are. She turns her flawless face towards me, and then some lines from the song in the playlist she created flash through my mind.

'*Since the first day I met you, there are no stars I would see in the sky, for they cannot compare with your eyes.'*

It's just a verse making a metaphor, so how could she look into my eyes in the very same way...?

I hide my face, attempting to conceal the warmth that might have already reddened my cheeks. Fearing any cheesy remarks from the woman beside me, I decided to change the subject.

"H....how do you find the clothes I made for you?"

"I have worn them only once", she replies with her beautiful voice, then lies down on the floor.

Curiosity takes over upon hearing her response. I do the same, lying down on the floor and looking into her eyes.

"Why did you wear them only once? Ah... you didn't like them?"

"No, I'm just afraid of damaging or staining them, so I keep them in the glass cabinet."

A chuckle escapes me.

"You don't have to go overboard. This world has an invention called a

'washing machine,' you know?"

"Nah, what if it got damaged? I'm not sure if you are willing to fix it or make a new one for me."

"In some ways, you still act like a child."

The woman in the blue Aloha shirt doesn't argue, she simply lies on her side, one arm holding her head, looking at me as if lost in deep thought. My heart starts throbbing, and I divert my attention to the beautiful stars to avoid getting lost in her gaze.

Unexpectedly, a request slips out her mouth.

"Call me P'Note."

P'.....No way!! that's too embrassing!

"What's with that? You are only one year older than me!"

"Still one year older."

"P...." I cannot endure my embarrassing mouth. I really can't!

"Playful you!"

Though her attempt is unsuccessful, the older woman who requested a new title giggles with a light smile.

"You are so cute."

"Too much for 'beautiful' or 'cute'. Please stop praising me."

"I just say what I see."

"I won't argue with you...."

Because I cannot control myself, or else my heart would stop beating.

I choose to look up at the night sky. There are more shining stars here then in Bangkok. During university, I had a family trip for star gazing. That was the reason why I chose that elective class and met Woon-Sen.

"Are you interested in stars and outer space, Your Highness? Your band is also called the Edge of Universe."

"Actually, I had too much free time when I was a freshman. I just wanted to be busy. But I also like the universe stuff. The woman still enjoys observing my side profile as if it's too beautiful to bore her.

I am getting embarrassed. Let's change the subject.

"Do you have a favourite star or constellation? or is there anything you like the most?"

"You."

"I...I am not a star."

"You are my entire universe."

That's too much....That line is too powerful. I feel the heat spreading from my cheeks to my ears. I am speechless at this moment. Should I get angry because of this flirting woman? But several hours ago, I was the one who tipped toe to kiss her so that we end up staying together overnight like this.

Damn it! I cover my face with both hands. This is the first time someone has praised me like that, and I have no idea how to respond to it.

Still, I want to look into her eyes. slowly, my fingers open to steal a glance at her face through the gap. She slightly smirks as if she's adoring a cute living thing, but the problem is that I am not cute or beautiful.

She's exaggerating.

It takes a minute before I can pull myself together. As soon as I show my face to her, she begs me with her serious voice, which, once again makes my heart race.

"Can we kiss again?"

"You are so greedy, My Lady."

Our previous kiss lasted several minutes at the bus stop. Moreover, if there is a second time, tonight we might go overboard since the mood is too perfect.

Yes, I know.

But....I still let our second kiss happen willingly.

I think I'm too impressed by this woman tonight....

The vibe is pleasing under this sky dome that she designed herself. Right there, we kiss again.... long enough to absorb and embrace into my body.

Her hot breath caresses my cheeks, making me realize that this is neither a dream nor a daydream.

Her slim, rosy lips part, moving closer to my ear. With her sultry voice, she whispers,"Shall we take a shower?"

This signifies that we are progressing beyond merely pressing lips.

I can imagine what's going to happen, but I feel safe and willing to let her embrace my body. Deep down, my instinct tells me that her touch is the warmest in this world. We have reached this point anyway.

"Sure."

The massive bathroom, situated on the second floor, features a spacious bathtub, large enough for two people without feeling too crowded. This isn't just 'bathing', our soaked bodies are intimately connected. Her breasts press against my back as I sit on her lap in the warm bathtub. She rests her chin on my shoulder, her right arm loosely embracing me, while her other hand playfully pretends to bathe and massage me.

In reality, she's teasing different parts of my body, making me oversensitive, and my whole body tingles. She gently kisses the scar on my face. It feels incredible, beyond comparison.

Similar to her cherry blossom scent, her lovemaking starts with softness and sweetness. Her long fingers slowly massage my clitoris.

"Umm...."

The sound escape my throat as her fingers move up and down, causing my body to learn forward due to the spasm and contractions.

"Please don't hurry," Lady Note whispers in a joyful voice.

"The real thing is on the bed."

What? This is just a teaser?

I try not to make any weird sound throughout the rest of our bath time full of her teasing. Still, I groan when the woman behind me playfully climbs her fingers to my nipples. That sensitive touch makes me unknowingly pinch her thigh. Lady Note doesn't discourage my hands, she seems rather willing to let me relieve myself without hesitation.

When she said, 'The real thing is on the bed,' my mind was completely blank and unable to process any imagination. But when the special touchy bath time comes to an end and our naked bodies are found on the king-size bed in the huge bedroom where only the table lamp is turned on, I discovered that her gaze has totally changed.

Under the sky dome, her gaze is filled with fascination. In the bathtub, it's filled with joy when teasing me.

But now... it's sparkling with lust like a real hunter.

Her perfect curvy body straddles mine. She leans down to kiss my rising nipples. The touch is soft and caring. Once again, I can't keep my groan to myself. The feelings from deep inside automatically make my knees up.

At the same time, she touches my sensitive spot....

Unable to think clearly, a long groan comes out of my throat when she drags her lips down from my chest to my belly and gradually further to my rose petal. Her thin, soft tongue hotly presses on my clitoris.

I thought she would use only her fingers on our first night, so I didn't prepare my mind for this.

My legs open wide embarrassingly. I let her do everything most conveniently. My breath trembles while her tongue move in a slow, intervallic rhythm. I no longer pinch her thigh but the pillow on one side and the soft bed sheet on the other side

A short while later, her slender fingers inserts into my body. I roll and tremble because of the contractions. Moving in and out in the perfect

rhythm, I can't help but scream in joyfulness.

"Ah...hhh!"

My hand glides down to grab her silky hair tightly because she doesn't seem to slow it down at all.

My body has unexpectedly reached its climax. I let out a big, heavy breath.

However, the climax isn't the last, and it doesn't curtain down tonight show.

Up till now, I can't define this woman yet.

She allow me to rest for a while and then asks for the second round. She emphasizes how much she wants it.

I don't agree or refuse immediately because I am still tired. I close my eyes, considering weather I should pretend to fall asleep. Lady Note won't force me anyway if I disagree, but then I suddenly realize the fact that she hasn't reached her climax yet despite how beautifully she's done it for me.

Tonight seems longer than expected. Clothes are still unnecessary.

The second round starts after the 10 minute break.

Every action flows smoothly under Lady Note lead. We're sweating even though the air conditioners are working. Our wet sensitive spot touch each other. Her deep, low groan signals that she's fully arosed.

Fondling skin, teasingly fingers, and those lips conquering my nipples, I can see all of her muscles shining under the lamp light. I am enchanted by the sexiness of this perfect living hanger. Several minutes later, I reach my climax before her again, but this time she follows me swiftly.

That night, when the sweating and exhausted bedtime activity comes to its end, Lady Note embraces my waist from behind. We sleep under the same blanket on the same bed, bringing us some pastel dreams.

*8.27*

Pain aches throughout my body....

I open my eyes, greeted by these sensations. However, the condition of the bed sheet might convey them even more accurately. Before our intimate encounter, it was neatly stretched but after the two rounds of intimacy led by Lady Note, it now lies in disarray and wrinkled before my eyes.

Well, since we are in the countryside, it's probably too late to make it to work on time.....

I sigh incessantly when thinking about Lady Nij, who must be furious with what happened last night. Not only did I fail to apologize to Mr Thach, but I also eloped with her sister.

Nevertheless, I believe I should show up this afternoon to explain everything. While lying down, I finally realize that I have been embraced from behind throughout the entire night.

I slowly turn to face the owner of this warm touch. Lady Note is still asleep, her eyes closed with steady breathing. Her bare face remains alluring, and every part of her body-her neck, shoulder, collarbone and slightly peeking chest-are all impressive.

When we first met, I never anticipated our relationship would progress this far....

I wipe the hair strands from the forehead and let time pass, momentarily forgetting all my worries. Observing this beautiful being is so captivating that I forget all my worries for a moment.

*Rrrrrr !*

But right then, my phone loudly interrupts the peace, not only startling me but also causing Lady Note's eyebrows to knit together with irritation. She slowly opens her eyes in drowsiness.

At that moment I can't help but think that this woman, even when she just woke up with messy hair, looks as sexy as when she groaned deeply last night. Shaking off that thought, I quickly pull myself together to find my phone, intending to silence its noise. However, when I see the caller's name, I have to change my mind.

"Mom."

No matter the size of the issue, big or small, I never miss a family call. She might want to check because I didn't go home last night. I get up, covering my chest with the blanket, and then I answer the call.

[Hong... I am sorry. Am I disturbing you?"]

Her voice is trembling and choking as if she's crying. This prompts me to hurriedly reply with a question.

"What happened, Mom? Is everyone okay?"

[*Hiccup*....Toey is undergoing surgery. Can you come to the hospital as soon as possible?]

# Chapter 17: Just the Way You Are

Waking up and discovering that my family has been involved in an accident is the worst nightmare I never want to experience.

My sister, while heading to school at seven in the morning, encountered an accident just before entering the school gate. There was a construction area with a warning sign, a three-story building with ongoing construction on the top floor involving some steel bars. Due to either substandard materials or human error, a long and heavy steel bar fell precisely where Toey-Hom was waiting to cross the road.

I can't bring myself to imagine that scene. I've heard that it pierced into her ribs, and a heavy lump seems to be lodged in my throat. I try to clench my fists tightly to control the trembling. I urgently ask Lady Note to take me back to Bangkok.

Upon grasping the gravity of the situation, the owner of the summer house promptly rises, changes her clothes, and grabs everything, including the car key. She asked for the hospital's name to ensure we reached the right place with the quickest route.

Despite the daytime traffic and the busier streets compared to the quiet roads at night, her speed and efficient navigation result in us reaching our destination much faster on the return journey.

At the hospital, my dad maintains a stoic expression, but his eyes betray his deep concerns. My mom, on the other hand, still bears traces of tears, evidence of the hours she spent crying.

At this moment, I'm also on the verge of tears, just like anyone else would be. However, if I let that happen, my mother would probably be even more distressed. So, I bite my lip, suppressing all those emotions and comforting myself that my sister will be fine, despite my nearly tearful smile.

Throughout this time, Lady Note has stayed with my family. From both my father's and mother's perspectives, she appears as an unfamiliar but polite friend. During the hours of waiting for Toey-Hom in the surgical ward, she assisted with various matters, such as booking a special room and rushing to buy boxed meals for my mom, who was feeling faint as she hadn't eaten anything since morning. And... contacting a lawyer to file a complaint against that building construction team.

Regarding the last matter I mentioned, my family didn't even have the chance to think about it, as we were preoccupied with worry about the outcome of the surgery.

In the late afternoon, Lady Nij makes numerous calls to me, so I excuse myself to the nearby restroom. The sound of reprimand echoes through the phone line.

[Don't hide like this. Act professionally.]

"I had planned to go to work in the afternoon, but right now my sister is in surgery. I'm sorry, but today I have to ask for a day off..."

[What happened to your sister?]

"Well... a construction steel bar fell on her."

[And are you a doctor or something? Couldn't they perform the surgery if you weren't there?]

I freeze as my boss responds with a half-reproachful, icy tone. Unable to come up with a response, I leave a significant gap for her to continue.

[Hold on. If you come in, you probably won't be doing much work today. Compensate by working overtime on weekend, and the deadline for the design you submitted remains unchanged.]

"Yes... Lady Nij."

Before I can finish the sentence, she ends the call.

A sudden thought crosses my mind... Is working for her a wrong decision? I don't really like the boss's words, but I also don't have the courage to argue.

The surgery went well, and Toey is now out of immediate danger. Fortunately, the steel bar didn't penetrate any vital organs. However, she still needs to stay in the ICU for close observation before being moved to a regular room later. While there is some relief, as long as my sister hasn't fully recovered, my heart remains unsettled.

Dad, although stressed, manages to control his emotions well. He suggests that I take Mom back home for some rest. However, I notice signs of fatigue in his eyes and body, indicating that he must have worked overtime last night, barely getting any rest. So, I propose a different arrangement Dad can take Mom home, and Lady Note and I will handle the hospital matters.

"Your friend is very kind. Please tell her your mother and I appreciate her help."

Before stepping into the elevator, my father bids farewell with his final words. Only then do I realize that Lady Note hasn't been here for a while. As the elevator doors close, I start searching for the girl in the Hawaii shirt throughout the floor, but she's nowhere to be found. If she has already left, I don't feel disappointed or angry. Having her around all day and handling various matters is more than enough.

I pick up my phone, scroll through contacts, and find the number saved as 'Lady Note.' I dial and wait for her to answer, not letting the ringtone linger for more than three times before accepting the call.

[What's up?]

"Are you still at the hospital, My Lady?"

[Yes, I saw you talking to your parents. I didn't want to disturb, so I came to chat with a friend who's a doctor here.]

"I've sent my parents back home. They both looked exhausted."

[Alright, let me pick you up, and then we can find dinner around here.]

As she speaks like that, I suddenly realize I haven't eaten anything since

morning.

There are many words I want to convey to the person on the other end. If I were to put them down on paper, it would likely be long and contain

significant meanings. But for now, expressed through the vocal cords, the

most appropriate might be...

"Thank you."

Although I wish it were longer, "I mean, for everything..." From being protected last night, to being taken out of that place, and up until now.

The sound Ding!' from the other end of the line inserts itself, resembling the familiar tone from this morning, responding and inviting reassurance.

[It's my pleasure to help you.]

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The deadline for the draft of the extravagant and bridal gown collection for a certain noblewoman has forced me to compensate for my day-off on Friday by working overtime on Sunday. The stress takes a toll on the actual work. I made mistakes in the sewing process, and on Monday, P'Lek had to step in and help fix several aspects. Designing the Spring- Summer collection itself was also quite challenging. I admit that my mind was not as clear as it should have been. While I had some ideas for the first outfit, the other two presented problems. Normally, when sketching designs, my mind is clearer than this, or at least there is nothing to worry about.

The theme has been set to warm tones, representing the midday atmosphere when the sunlight gently fades. I could only come up with a honey-colored blouse with a split back, tied together with a ribbon, paired with flared pants at the hem. Lady Nij calls me in and complains for almost an hour about my misbehavior towards Mr. Thach. However, this time, she doesn't instruct me to apologize, maybe because she saw Lady Note holding my hand to argue with that man. Lady Nij simply leaves with this comment:

"Next time, just listen. You don't need to respond no matter what he says." As she sips her coffee, she reconsiders her words and adds,

"No, there won't be a next time where I take you to embarrass yourself."

"My apologies, ma'm."

"Go. Hurry up with your work. I need three outfits from you by tomorrow."

At noon, I press the computer's sleep button and quickly pack the essentials into my bag. It takes almost twenty minutes to walk to the doughnut shop, wait in line, and another fifteen minutes for a taxi to arrive at the destination. It's a bit later than expected.

While waiting for the elevator, I grab my phone and call my younger sister, fearing she might wander off with friends or mom, possibly being pushed around in a wheelchair down to the garden or a restaurant downstairs.

"Toey, how are you? Are you in your room? I'm about to bring some snacks for you."

The voice on the other end immediately becomes annoyed.

[Why are you coming? My friends are coming too.]

"Your friends are coming at noon?"

[That's right.]

"But I've already left work", or to be more precise, I'm at the hospital now.

"Okay, just a quick visit. Give you some snacks, and I'll hurry back."

She intentionally takes a deep breath, letting the heavy sigh come through the line.

[Hurry up then. My friends just left school. If they see my sister's face, I don't know where I'll hide myself.]

"All right, got it."

I expected this...

But anyway, my intention is to bring doughnuts for my sister. I remember every time she has to study for exams or is serious about something, she tends to order these pastries as comfort. Just as long as she gets to eat them, I don't feel bad about dedicating my time.

Waiting for the elevator, I board when it arrives, heading to the floor with the special guest room. The green open-toed high heels follow the hallway, reaching room number 532 as the destination. However, before I can step inside seconds after opening the door, the familiar voice resonates, colliding with my nervous system.

"Why did you speak so disdainfully to your own sister?"

Lady Note... her voice echoes, still sounding composed.

"Are you embarrassed that your friends will see your older sister's face?"

"Well..."

Toey mumbles, unable to articulate.

Even though I'm discreetly eavesdropping, I can't witness the scene, but based on previous encounters of her handling others, I can guess her expression.

"P'Note, can't you see the scar on her face and her boring glasses?"

Hearing those words again feels like a heavy punch to the heart, causing a delayed moment of silence. However, Lady Note's response is beyond today's expectations. She gives a throaty laugh, as if she is sympathetic to her, before saying,

"A sister who left work the whole day to watch over you when she found out something happened. A sister who changed into pajamas to come sleep by your side until you recovered.

A sister who quit her job and came to visit you here every day. And a sister who cares about you to the point of forgetting her own issues. Is that the kind of sister you're embarrassed about?"

"..."

The younger one remains silent at first before

expressing herself as if suppressing emotions for a long time.

"You don't understand how it feels to be bullied at school like me. When I was in Grade 7, my life was so miserable. Now, I don't want it to happen again. If my friends in the group see my sister's face and despise her or mock her, what should I do?!"

"What's the problem then?"

"You can choose not to associate with them or throw it back at them." The older woman seems mad but is trying to speak logically. "What you should care about the most is your sister's feelings, isn't it?"

**"Hong Yok is the most beautiful person for me, and I'll never change that feeling just because someone with a loose tongue says something."**

"....."

"I'm leaving now. I hope you can think about it."

Because I stand there dumbfounded since the previous sentence... Lady Note walks to the door, and we exchange glances. The young woman in the work outfit that I designed and sewed pauses before taking a step and changing her stern expression to a slightly softened smile.

We don't say anything to each other.

If I had to guess, it might be because she saw that I came to visit my sister, so she didn't want to disturb.

I regain consciousness after the tall figure walks out into the corridor. Fearing that if I walk toward Tae now, my sister will know that I overheard the conversation, I wait for several minutes before pushing the door in.

The person in the patient's gown is sitting on the bed, and there's a brown paper bag on the side table. It must be an expensive gift from Lady Note without a doubt. I slide my gaze back to the young girl whom I've let her hair down, a bit messy and playful.

"I bought some doughnuts for you. It's the buttercream flavor that you like."

I place the bag of doughnuts on her tray and then open my own bag to take out a comb, intending to fix her hair.

"Aren't you going to work?"

"I'll comb your hair first. Your friends will come soon."

Toey looks at me with a puzzled expression. She might think that her older sister is a bit foolish for speaking harshly in the conversation earlier, yet still offering to do her hair with a smile and suggesting to do it again. But if she takes a moment to think, she might realize that even on that day when she came home and declared loudly that she hated me for making her friends mock her, I never felt any hatred towards her.

The younger one shifts in her seat, repositioning herself to lean against the pillows to make it easier for me to stand and fix her hair. Back when we were kids, before going to school, she used to run to my room every morning to ask me to braid or tie her hair. I remember the feeling of being close during those times.

"Do you still remember that I like doughnuts?"

"Yep."

"... "

"In the evening, I'll come back again. If you want any pastries, just text me."

"...."

"I apologize for coming so abruptly. I didn't know if your friends were coming. I just thought maybe you would want doughnuts. I'll be more careful next time."

Although we can't see each other's facial expressions as I stand behind the young girl, from the atmosphere, it seems like the other side wants to say something. But she restrains herself and swallows her saliva, holding back whatever she wanted to express. After allowing a long silence, the younger one speaks with a softer and less assertive tone.

"The doctor said I am lucky that my lungs didn't get damaged. I can't imagine what would have happened if that metal had pierced through..."

I pull the hair tie from my own head to make a ponytail for her, then comb the tail, offering a small smile that seems to transport us back to our childhood.

"If it were like that, I would probably give one lung to you."

Words from my heart that weren't fabricated cause the younger one's shoulders to shake slightly. She raises both hands and covers her face, and the sound of sniffling can be heard within the room.

I glance at the wall clock in the room. Twelve forty- eight... I should quickly call a taxi to get back to work and avoid being scolded.

Lady Nij calls again, and that would be good for Toey, who will have friends visiting soon.

I walk over to stand in front of Toey-Hom. The expression on the younger sister's face is different from usual. Her eyes, which are shiny as if just realizing something, look at my chest before shifting up towards my face. I don't say a word, just about to raise my hand to pat her head and say goodbye. But before I can do that, the young girl's head tilts toward my chest first. The sound of sobbing escapes from her nose and mouth as she says:

"Sorry."

That word is delivered by her trembling voice.

"Toey..."

"I'm sorry... [*sobbing*]."

Having witnessed that reaction, my hands gradually reach out to hug her gently, as if embracing her soul. It's like the times when she complained about being cold, or when she was afraid of getting an injection and asked me to stand by her as a friend.

Was it because of Lady Note's words or our conversation or both? Perhaps, they cause Toey-Hom to reminisce and feel that she unintentionally cared about her friends' reactions and projected emotions onto me. Yet, I ended up being the one who continued to take care of her in moments like these.

"It's okay."

I gently touch her head, a light touch that hasn't been felt for a long time.

"I've never been angry with you."

She sniffles heavier than before and buries her face even further. I no longer care about the clock hands, letting them move quietly forward. However, there's another surprising event when the sound of footsteps and conversation grows louder from the door.

Turning around, I find a group of teenagers, both girls and boys in high school uniforms, some carrying bags of snacks to visit the patient.

It's so unexpected...

They stare at me with confusion, unfamiliar with my presence. The faces of each one twist in surprise, and the girl who tied her jacket around her waist turns to face Toey-Hom and then glances at me before asking:

"Well... Who's she, Toey?"

I send a smile to the group of kids and am about to answer that I'm a relative and just came for a visit.

However, the person leaning heavily on me uses her two arms to tightly embrace my waist before turning to answer her friends clearly and confidently.

"She's my older sister."

She wipes her tears with her arm and then smiles brightly.

***"Isn't she beautiful?"***

# Chapter 18: What Does Love Look Like

**Part: Narrator**

20.58

Usually, if it wasn't Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, it was rare for Prince Napasdol to meet his children...

Especially Lady Note, his youngest daughter who had been living separately in a condo since her teenage years.

Therefore, during the early evening on Monday, the middle-aged man watching the news on TV alone in the living room because his wife is taking care of his nephew in another room, couldn't help but furrow, thinking whether he sees a hallucination of a young lady with an undercut hairstyle walking towards the empty sofa.

When the master of the manor was certain that she wasn't his hallucination, he cleared his throat and spoke nonchalantly,

"What wind brings you here? It's always challenging to meet you."

"I have good news to tell you, Dad."

"Ha!"

The middle-aged man made a stern sound, not entirely sure that the 'good news' from his youngest daughter would be something that would make him either pleased or upset. However, before anything else, he instructed the young lady who was sitting indifferently,

"I have something to talk to you anyway. At the party, the way you spoke with Mr. Thach I was already a serious matter. But there's also another one. Mr. Kram's family was concerned enough to call and ask what he did to make us angry, refusing to invite them to the event."

"His daughter is mean."

"Stop being childish."

"You said yourself that, in exchange for keeping that matter a secret, if anything would be done to compensate, you would agree."

Mr. Kram... He is Madam Kris's father, the former boss in the fashion house where Hong Yok used to work. Note knows that family because when she was a kid, she saw the other party trying to get close to her parents. However, once she found out what Kris.Tera did to the person she fell in love with, she felt that she couldn't allow that woman or whoever called Liu to walk into the party and worry Hong Yok.

She came straight after knowing there would be a party. *That family, anyone associated with that brand, everyone must not be at the event. And if possible, Dad shall not work with them or invest in their business anymore*. Back then, the father was annoyed by his daughter's childish act, but the young woman added, *'Why make such a face? No matter what I asked from you, you would do it to compensate for that matter, wouldn't you?'*

Prince Napasdol had no words to argue with his daughter who differs from other siblings so drastically. He took a breath, knowing for sure that bringing up this topic would allow the young woman to bring up what he promised to her.

The middle-aged man, clad in well-stitched nightwear tailored by his middle daughter, lifted a teacup before delving into a conversation that might bring him the utmost comfort this evening.

"You're dressed most appropriately in years", he remarked, even though it still retained a touch of Hawaiian style.

"The designer is your soon-to-be daughter-in-law."

"What?!"

The hot tea almost spilled from the cup.

The younger person leaned back on the sofa with a face of apparent indifference.

"No matter how much you act cute and stubborn, it depends on whether you have the ability and a presence in society. I'm satisfied as long as you have those. But when it comes to liking girls, I won't allow it."

"I'm not here to ask for permission. Just came to let you know."

"Note!"

"Why are you yelling, Dad? I'm sitting right here."

The prince believed that he had to be serious about this matter. His face showed frustration, and he spoke forcefully,

"I won't let you be with girls."

"I like girls. It's my sexual orientation. If you can't accept that, it's your problem."

"Stop! Don't talk back. You're a girl; you have to be with a guy."

"Who decides that?"

"I... it's a law of nature."

"Have you ever seen two female penguins living together? Cute, right?

That's also nature."

"You...!"

He couldn't help but raise his voice every time he argued with his youngest daughter. He ran out of words as he shouldn't yell You're not a penguin!' with a serious voice because that might sound ridiculous. He would end up laughing and lose the authoritative image he's trying to maintain. Pulling himself together, he spoke in a low voice.

"But your mom and I want a grandchild."

"When this country allows same-sex marriage, we can discuss that in more detail."

The middle-aged man ban to think that he's too tired of

arguing with this kid.

Those soap opera scenes portraying the fight between father and daughter where the father always wins would never happen with him because every time he complains, Note's too quick-witted and able to rebut him effortlessly, making him speechless.

Last time, after seeing Note give an interview and admit that she is LGBTQ+, he called her to have a conversation, hoping to change the mindset of the younger generation.

However, it turned out to be a stubborn little daughter who argued back with a sentence that made him and his wife feel dumbfounded.

*'Dad, Mom, tomorrow I want to eat chicken rice for breakfast.'*

*'Why bother telling us that? Eat whatever. We're talking about what you said to the media.'*

*'That's right. When I said about rice, you said I can eat whatever. Now about my lover, this is even more serious. So, it should be the person I like, right? I have to be with that person for a lifetime.'*

At that moment, Prince Napasdol was quite angry. He still held onto the traditional male-female love concept but wasn't sure how to respond effectively. This time was no different. Note stood out from her three siblings in various ways, showcasing a particularly stubborn nature. He had never been able to dictate anything to this child since the beginning.

Taking a deep breath, he raised the teacup for another sip, resigned to the idea that the Ruthaithewins would probably gain another daughter-in-law.

"Fine, if you like girls, just don't flaunt it to everyone."

"No, Dad. I'll announce it to the world. I'll tell anyone who asks, and even those who don't ask, just to show off. The more people know, the better."

"You, little rascal!"

Before he could formulate a criticism, he was swiftly interrupted by the younger individual.

"Even you and my older siblings have told everyone who you're dating or marrying. Why can't I do the same? Is it because my love is with a woman? How is that different? You like women, and I like women. What's the big deal?"

"Enough! Talking to you is exhausting every time."

The owner of the manor was fatigued, both physically and mentally, dealing with the persistent young woman's lengthy arguments. This must be the 'good news' she hinted.

So, he needed to decide whether to accept or reject this impending addition to the family. The middle-aged man took a long breath before making his decision.

"Bring the profile of that woman for me to review. Let me see who she is, what she does, and what she looks like."

Note smirked when she got to the crucial point, which is the reason why she returned home today.

"You saw her at the banquet last week."

The older man, lost in thought, tried to recall the past event. During the Thursday night banquet, Note didn't introduce anyone to him, but she showed up at the event and invited a woman to dance. Unexpectedly, they left the party together out of the blue. He had intended to inquire about it, but it slipped his mind. However, what mattered now was the face of the woman Note danced with.

"You mean that scarface girl!?"

"Hong Yok is the most beautiful girl. I do not pay attention to differing opinions."

With that confident statement, Note gracefully stood up, her full height on display, and walked out of the living room, leaving her father sitting there suspended, with the tea cup. It took him several minutes to regain his composure and realize that his daughter was serious about the woman with the scar. By that time, the porcelain Maserati had already left the parking lot.

"Note!!!"

**Chapter 19 : Will Love Be As Kind As You?**

**Part: Hong Yok**

After Lady Note visited my younger sister at the hospital, it's been two days. Many things have changed and happened during that short period. If I were to list them, there are quite a few.

Firstly, Toey-Hom has changed her perspective.

That day, when she introduced me as her older sister to her friends, it shocked me so much that I couldn't speak. It was as if the words Lady Note left hanging in the air had already resonated in her heart when I was brushing her hair, and we talked about the accident.

Next, I pushed my limits by accelerating the design work for my fashion collection, Spring-Summer, to be completed that very night and managed to upload all the designs to Dropbox early Tuesday morning before going to work. Even though it's been chaotic, to say the least.

And finally... Lady Nij is somewhat displeased with me.

The head designer got upset about my extended lunch break on Monday. She walked into the studio and asked bluntly. I didn't want to directly say that I visited my younger sister, as that might lead her to Toey-Hom. So, I apologized and explained that I went out for lunch far away, and the queue was long, and on top of that, the traffic was heavy. Of course, I had to endure her scolding.

The next day, she still seems dissatisfied with everything I do. For example, when I gave my opinion about the custom order from a working-aged lady who wanted a semi-formal evening dress. The client emphasized that she didn't want to showcase the right arm, but she wanted the outfit to look sexy and mature.

Lady Nij then challenged, asking for the tightest upper part and then opening the lower part instead. I raised my hand to suggest that we could just cover the right arm; it wasn't necessary to cover everything. This, of course, earned me her dissatisfaction, and she announced loudly,

"Alright, Hong Yok, you design this outfit, and I'll use the time to work on the next season's collection."

With that, she walked out of the studio. I have to take more responsibility for the work, but at least my colleagues understand and say that they will help if they can.

As for the outfit itself, because I already had a rough idea in my head, I was able to draft the design quickly.

I spent one day designing an outfit for a working woman who didn't want to showcase her right arm. Judging by the way she looked at herself in the fitting room the day she came to the wardrobe, it seemed that she thought her right arm was too big. From my perspective as a person who measures others for a living, it's not that big at all. Even if it's big, it doesn't mean she's not beautiful. However, the most important thing is the wearer's comfort.

Details of the outfit I'm responsible for, in a rushed manner, are as follows: I designed the dress with an open shoulder on both sides, leaving the left arm bare, suitable for wearing accessories as needed. As for the right arm, I designed it to be a sleeve that extends to the elbow, made with draped fabric, similar to the hem of the skirt that cascades in levels as shown in the sketch. I drew a small clutch purse to go with it, or if she chooses to use another bag on the actual day, that's fine too.

Lady Nij took a look at this piece without saying anything. She acted as if nothing significant happened, then reminded me to post pictures of the wedding dress I designed for a certain royal lady on the wardrobe's social media to promote it. Once that was done, new tasks kept coming in continuously, and it seemed like she forgot to call out the names of others. It turned into a week that I said, 'Yes, My Lady' most often.

*Bzzz!*

Around half-past three, the phone vibrates abruptly while I'm taking a break and getting some cold water in the pantry. I grab the communication device to check what is happening.

**NoTe**: [Image Sent]

Lady Note sent a photo, making me tilt my head, wondering. The picture shows a well-stocked refrigerator, but it seems to convey something.

**Hong Yok**: Yes?

**NoTe**: Out of chocolate.

**NoTe**: Please go buy some with me.

After reading that, I can't help but wear a broad smile in response to those mischievous messages. No matter which perspective of the world you consider, it's just a clear excuse. Why would someone as influential as her need a friend to go shopping with or something? I take a sip of water before composing my response.

**Hong Yok**: You can order online. There's also a convenience store near your condo, My Lady.

**NoTe**: That's true.

Why I could sense the embarrassment from those words, I don't know. I let out a light chuckle at having teased her, pausing for about two seconds before typing my reply.

**HongYok**: But Hong is free this evening.

Thinking that it might make the other party a bit uneasy, perhaps even make her blush... Well, that might be the case. She read but didn't respond for a minute or so. However, when she did, the conversation shifted to another focus.

**NoTe**: Are you willing to change pronouns now?

**HongYok**: Just calling myself by my nickname doesn't mean I have to call you 'P' or anything.

**NoTe**: Okay.

**NoTe**: So, when will you call me 'P'Note'? Then we can be P'Note and N'Hong.

It means that if I agree to change the terms completely, she will change them as well. No way. It's embarrassing just to think about it! And how come our chat turned me into the one blushing?

*Bzzz!*

The phone vibrates again. If this isn't a message from Lady Note, but instead from her older sister.

**Nij**: Hong Yok, come to my office for a moment. Right now.

I tremble a bit, wondering if I did something wrong. Because since this morning, she has been staring with eyes that seem to be looking for flaws. I habitually respond with a respectful 'Yes, my lady,' and walk out of the pantry due to her call. I politely knock the door twice, saying

"Excuse me, My Lady."

When the woman replies with her permission, I open the door and my eyes immediately widen. Because inside her office, it's not just the head designer, but also the elderly man and woman sitting on the left in the guest sofa area. M.C. Napasdol and M.L. Jeerana The parents of Lady Note.

"Make yourself comfortable, Dad, Mom", the boss turns to tell her own family and then grabs a handbag as if she has an urgent matter to attend to.

"I'll go get Nam at school first."

After that, she turns to me with an expression like, 'This is your problem,' and then exits even though she was the one who called me here. The

atmosphere here feels a bit chilly. I turn to look at the elderly man and woman who seem formidable and powerful. Even though the lady of the house sends a small smile and gestures for me to sit on the opposite side, Prince Napas, with a calm expression, makes it difficult to read his feelings. I hardly gulp down and say:

"Good afternoon, Your Serene Highness."

After sitting alone on the sofa, I raise my hand to greet both elders with a sense of shrinking. The nobleman diverts his gaze from the paper he has been reading since I entered. Upon placing it on the central table, I notice it is my resume that I submitted for the job. Did Lady Nij give him all my personal information just like that?

As it isn't work-related, this seems a bit too much, doesn't it? However, even if I think so in my heart, my pride plays tricks on me, and I don't dare to object. I just stealthily glance at the man who takes off his reading glasses and puts them in a brown eyeglass case. He seems unrushed, and that makes me feel even colder.

"How did you come to know Note?"

The first question, delivered with a strong tone and a serious look, leaves me unable to think of an answer for a moment. I blink my eyes a few times, raise my hand, and adjust my glasses before mustering the courage to respond softly.

"When...when I went to measure her body and design a dress for her, My Lord."

The man's reaction remains cold, in contrast to Lady Jee, who speaks up with a curious smile, wanting to know more about the story.

"That's strange. Normally, Note doesn't... um... doesn't want to use her sister's dressing room service."

"At that time, I was still working at Kris.Tera, My Lady."

"Oh I see"

"Yes, My Lady..."

Another silence creeps in. This time, it takes more than a few minutes. I just bow my head and gather the pleats of my skirt. The sound of the clock in the room and the air conditioner might be the only things preventing it from being more awkward.

Then, suddenly, a loud voice speaks up, hiding all the veiled words with a confident posture.

"If you're going to be with my daughter, you have to be more socially presentable than this."

The elderly man doesn't make a statement but it is an order that I have to achieve. Lady Jee, who seems more lenient, has not yet made any remarks, as if she also agrees. My mind is completely scrambled. That's difficult, and I myself have never been brave enough to accept that kind of challenge.

I don't know if at that moment, courage emerges on its own or because it's somehow related to Ms. Note. The only answer that comes out is,

"I... I will try my best."

Unfortunately, my voice sounds more strained than it should, making the other side frown and express dissatisfaction more than necessary.

"Not trying. You have to make it." What?

Someone like me... can I make it?

Moreover, in reality, I haven't become anything to Lady Note yet. Just a designer who tailored a dress for her once, a person who was courted by her, and... had an intimate relationship with her once.

But I don't want to waver in this matter. I straighten up and answer with a controlled voice, preventing it from trembling or breaking. I meet his gaze to let him know that I can do it.

"Yes, My Lord."

Well, even though it looks like he is admiring, his facial expression and tone are no different from saying that it has to be like that no matter what. The nobleman raises his hand with a silver watch, appearing dignified, then turns towards the door.

"Go back to your work."

"Thank you, My Lord."

I bow my head as gracefully as possible, raise my hand in the wai gesture to both the man and the woman who are older, and then stand up and walk toward the door as politely as possible. But just as I am about to open it, Prince Napas's voice sounds again, as if he has just thought of it.

"One more important thing."

I turn back, and before I can ask what it is, the words that stab my heart are spoken out loud.

***"Go fix your appearance. Right now, you're too ugly to be by my daughter's side."***

# Chapter 20 : A Star

Even as the evening falls, Prince Napasdol's words that afternoon linger on my mind, refusing to be shaken off. Perhaps it's because deep down, I agree with what he said...

Lady Note drives her sleek Maserati to pick me up in front of Nij Greta's studio, seemingly unconcerned about whether she and her sister get along or not. Her purpose is clear -to pick me up after work. Inside the well-air conditioned car, I try not to appear too observant, not wanting her to know that her parents are here for a conversation.

As we sit for a while, Lady Note, clad in the work attire that I designed, asks, "How is your sister?"

"Toey has improved a lot. Now we've agreed that Dad and I will take turns staying with her at night. She'll be discharged from the hospital soon, but she probably won't be able to go to school. She still struggles to walk, and I consult with my parents about whether she should drop out this semester."

"If there's anything I can do to help..."

"Your Highness, you've helped a lot already."

I also refer to how she brought my old little sister back to me. Thinking about Toey-Hom's changed voice, or how her smile makes me feel better.

At the hospital that day, Lady Note happened to learn about the not-so-good relationship between Toey-Hom and me. Though I don't want to share such a story, I decide to tell her about our improved sibling bond to prevent her from forming biased opinions or disliking Toey-Hom. The person behind the wheel accepts my words without much comment, simply saying,

"Well, fortunately, that girl isn't my sister."

"Why?"

"I might have to spank her."

"Your Highness!"

Arguing with the beautiful lady, I start to imagine what she said...

Her Highness in her aloha shirt chasing Toey-Hom. At that moment, I can't help but burst into laughter, and she, too, sneakily looks at me through the rearview mirror and then bursts into laughter as well.

Lady Note... my feelings toward her are truly diverse.

"I've given your number to the lawyer. He'll help deal with the owner of that building."

"Thank you for handling this matter."

"No problem. This girl is my friend's girlfriend's sister."

It takes me a moment to grasp the meaning. The implied message passes a bit slowly; it means... her friend's girlfriend has a sister who is a lawyer.

When I nod to show mybunderstanding, she changes the subject.

"And today, shall we have dinner together?"

The owner of the calm voice asks. However, the slightly adorned face speaks with a small smile. I ponder for a moment, realizing that my mind is strangely vacant. No, there's no need to say it; it's overflowing in a different sense. It leaves me speechless. "...Sounds good."

"What do you want to eat?"

"Anything is fine, My Lady. Please choose for me."

The aristocratic figure falls silent, her gaze wandering toward the street. It makes me think she might be contemplating something in her heart. But, indeed, that's what I mean. Because now, my mind is filled with various thoughts. Whether it's finding a way for myself to advance further on the chosen path, to be more suitable for her, or it's related to what Prince Napasdol straightforwardly said about me being too incompatible with his younger daughter...

No, no need to explain.

"Um... for me, anything is fine. Anything is really fine."

As soon as she hears that, the other side bursts into laughter lightly until I, who is rolling my eyes, manage to ask,

"Why are you laughing?"

"You look so cute when you fumble around explaining things."

"!"

"No, really, you're beautiful. Even when you fumble like that, you still look very pretty."

I'm not prepared for such an answer. From the initial concern mixed with fear that she might misunderstand, it turns into a face-palm moment.

"The most foolish thing ever..."

Blushing on both cheeks, I turn my face away from the side window of the car. Yet, I can still hear the laughter resonating through my nervous system.

Her exaggeration has gone too far...

It almost makes me believe that I am indeed beautiful...

'Anything that the royal lady chooses should be a restaurant in a department store or a roadside eatery. Because the two of us are about to go buy chocolate, right? I also don't know why, at one in the morning, I find myself gracefully descending into the top-floor luxury restaurant of a 50-story building, with no tables occupied except for us.

"If Your Highness reserved the table from the beginning, there's no need to ask."

I don't feel any discomfort, just subtly teasing her. The beautiful woman sitting across the table casually shrugs her shoulders.

"Well, maybe you want something else," she says before lowering her gaze to the menu.

Hmm, pleasing me again, I guess. Contrary to the image of a sophisticated, nonchalant character. I sneak a smile, then follow the thread of her gaze to the menu, mostly in English. The prices listed are jaw-dropping, playing it cool as I think about the times I have to pay. So, I choose a dish with a reasonable price and a basic drink like plain water.

Even so, it seems like Lady Note already knows.

She speaks up, "It's my treat."

"That's not necessary. Let's split the bill."

"Consider it a return favor for accompanying me today."

I narrow my eyes and playfully retort,

"I just wanted to go to a bookstore and agreed to come along."

"So, think of it as a thank-you for being my designer from now on."

"I haven't agreed... "

I retort with a bit of hesitation, avoiding direct eye contact with those lips. I feel like her statement carries more meaning than I can comprehend.

Various stories float through my mind, whether it's about work, the boss, or even the unexpected visit from the parents to discuss that matter...

Finally, after deciding that another round of arguments won't help and feeling a bit defeated, I order another menu item that I've wanted since I first looked at the menu. I'll use the method of competing to pay for the chocolate later. Given her financial status, she'll probably buy expensive brands and stock up her refrigerator.

I admire my plan in my mind before getting to enjoy dinner amidst the high view of Bangkok as the sky gradually darkens.

I would probably feel more awake and content if I wasn't aware that I'm not suited for something like this.

But, unfortunately, one thing that I'm a bit concerned about is that this person is beyond any expectations.

At the department store where we come to buy 'chocolate' in front of the cashier who is calculating the bill, I can't help but ask Lady Note with a surprised tone, "Just this?"

"Yes, why would we need to eat a lot?"

So, she invited me and picked me up just to buy one chocolate bar? She said that confidently too. I know it's an excuse, but I thought she might genuinely want to buy and stock it in the refrigerator. Who would know that she doesn't like it that much? The main purpose is clear: to meet me in person.

I roll my eyes and bite my lip while looking at the tall figure. As she tilts her head slightly, seemingly questioning, 'What?'

Just you wait, next time, if we go together again, I'll treat you.

Otherwise, I'd have to decline. This is nerve-wracking!

"I just wanted chocolate, but when I opened the fridge and found none, I had to invite you to buy some. What's wrong with that?"

The young woman with the undercut explains as we're descending the escalator. She responds promptly, handing me another chocolate bar that she mentioned before splitting it in half.

"Your Highness, I'm not a kid."

I reply as I hand back the pastry she offered. But when the stairs are about to reach the ground floor, my peripheral vision catches something familiar.

It's the game zone not far from this area, and the lower section is white, while the upper part is clear glass on all sides, attracting attention.

"Uh... hold on a second, Your Highness. Let's stop by the claw machine."

"Huh?"

The young lady drags out the sound in her throat, but before she can say anything, I grab her arm and lead her, half-walking, half-running, to the game zone where there are lively children.

After exchanging two twenty-baht bills for coins at the designated spot, we then approach the claw machine, where I have to stop each time we come to the mall. Lady Note gazes brightly at the contents.

"You know the result."

"Shh! Give me a moment, please."

In front of me are numerous plush toys, whether it's a fluffy bear, a cat with wide-eyed cuteness, a chubby water cat begging for a hug, or Blah Blah Blah, but what I'm most interested in and want the most is that yellow star shaped pillow. It has slipped through the claw twice before.

The first time. I've got it for two seconds before it falls back.

The second time, I grab it at the tip, but because of the thin iron, I can't lift it.

The third time, just a little more, but it seems the star is heavier than the iron claw.

The fourth time, too bad, I can't grab it even a bit.

I take a deep breath for myself, as the inner voice rightly suggests. I know the outcome, but I still hope that maybe I'll get to bring the star-shaped pillow home. When I stand there, looking at it lying alluringly in the glass cabinet, the gaze of Her Highness is fixed on me. Eventually, she speaks up.

"Wait, I'll exchange for more coins."

"No, that's enough. If I can't get it in four tries, then it's just not meant to be."

"But you want it."

"Your Highness, you said it yourself; we already know the result." I turn and offer a smile to the beautiful young woman.

"Let's head back. My father is keeping watch at the hospital today, and my mother is waiting alone at home."

She falls silent for a moment, and it's hard to gauge her feelings before she responds shortly, "Hmm."

Back home, as dusk settles in, I head downstairs for a shower. After that, I join my mother in the kitchen to help her prepare dinner. Although I'm still somewhat full from the earlier outing with Lady Note, I'm afraid my mother will feel lonely, so I sit down with her, treating my meal as a companion.

After finishing dinner, we settle on the sofa for a video call to find my father, who is with Toey-Hom. My sister is munching on snacks in her bed. Her mood seems brighter, probably because she had a friend visit in the evening.

On the other hand, regarding my father, even though he has to be with her at the hospital after work, his face doesn't show signs of fatigue as much as when he worked overtime. We chat for a while, then my mother interrupts. "Dear, you haven't told her yet."

My father, on the other end of the line, just realizes and responds,

[Indeed, Hong, your mother and I haven't forgotten. Tomorrow evening,

I'll take you out for dinner outside.]

"What?"

Before my parents can explain further, my younger sister's clear voice interrupts,

[P'Hong, let me find you something after I get better. I'll choose a surprise gift for you.]

I'm a bit confused, not entirely understanding. But seeing my sister's smile, I don't want to press further, so I simply respond:

"Uh, sure."

We end the video call around 9:30 PM.

After that, I continue chatting with my mother because I'm afraid she'll feel lonely. Until around the end of the late-night TV drama, my mother yawns, complaining about feeling sleepy. I turn off the TV and make sure everything is in order in the kitchen. Then, I take my mother to her room.

It seems to be around 10pm. I take out my laptop to complete some pending work. I fix the dress that Lady Nij designed, adjusting the pattern on the skirt to match the one on the collar. It takes a while, and when I'm finally done, it's time to shut down the computer and stretch my body to relax. Sitting on the bed, I check the time on the clock: 11:59pm. Alright, time to sleep. Or maybe watch something before sleeping?

I contemplate for a few minutes. Finally, I decide to watch Tom and Jerry to relieve the stress before calling it a night.

*Bzzz!*

**Woon-Sen:** Hong, I'm so sorry. I've been extremely busy lately. I'm almost about to take on the role of a freakin' admin, but I ordered a gift for you from the app. It should arrive in two or three days.

Reading the chat from my best friend left me puzzled for a moment before typing a reply.

**HongYok**: Hey, why did you send it?

**Woon-Sen**: Oh, dear friend, how could you forget your own birthday!!

I blink a few times, glancing up at the date above, and then have to admit, oh, it's midnight already, and I've entered my 27th year without realizing it. I've been so immersed in thinking about family, work, and other things that I forgot about it. This might be what my parents and sister tried to address.

**Hong Yok**: Well, that's true.

**Woon-Sen**: I'm so sick of you, buddy. Oh well- Happy Birthday! I'm getting older again. Let's celebrate sometime. I'll sing 'Happy Birthday' for you later. 55555+

I send a cheeky sticker back to my friend before leaning back against the soft pillows, reflecting on today's events. Could it be because of my birthday so Lady Note took me to a fancy meal?

*Rrrrrrr!*

But the doubt doesn't last long. The person in question calls at just the right moment. I grab my communication device and don't let the ringing last long. When I answer, the other end immediately asks:

[Are you sleepy yet?]

"Not yet..."

[Give me a moment.]

"What's up?"

[Try pulling the curtains aside.]

I immediately step out of bed. Every step takes me to the window facing the front of the house. My heart suddenly races with the hope of seeing...the

nerve-wracking person in that line. I don't know if I'm that important to Lady Note, and I'm not sure if my heart wants to see her right now.

However, when I open the curtains and find her standing outside the gate next to her white Maserati, my smile emerges without my awareness.

I press the end button and grab a jacket to quickly leave the bedroom. I run down the stairs and head towards the person waiting outside the front door.

This time, in her arms, not empty as it appeared from the upper angle, probably just picked up from inside the car. Lady Note is holding a star shaped pillow. I'm slightly stunned, not having the chance to say anything. Before I can utter a word, a soft voice speaks up.

"Happy Angel's birthday."

"W... What kind of birthday wish is this?"

Now, I forget what I'm about to say.Lady Note, unfazed, hands the star directly in front of me, leaving me to accept it in a state of confusion. Once I process it, I realize what I should have said earlier.

"Your Highness, don't tell me you went through all trouble just to get this to me?"

"No, I bought the machine, unlocked it, and got the star for you."

Upon saying that, she opens the back of the car to reveal the stuffed dolls. My eyes widen as I see other dolls are stacked inside.

"Y... You really overdid it."

What kind of person is she? Did she go back to buy that claw machine just to get the star pillow for me? No, it's more than one machine, considering the number of dolls in it. It's possible she bought out the entire game zone to get all the machines!

I don't know whether to be touched or complain about her. I want to scold her, but strangely, I'm more impressed than annoyed.

Oh, Hong Yok!

"Your Highness, you shouldn't have done this, but..... thank you."

I hug the star-shaped pillow she gave me close to my chest. It's a genuine pillow, but it feels like a blanket, indescribably warm. I turn to look at the many dolls piled up at the back of the luxurious car, pondering where I should put them in my house if she were to give them all to me.

"I know about my father visiting you at the studio."

The taller woman's words draw my attention back. I lift my to meet eyes with her.

"How did you know?"

"By looking into your eyes."

"......"

"Don't pay attention to what he said. I responded back to him properly."

"When did you argue with your father?"

I trail off hesitantly and then quickly change my tone to a more serious one to clarify things on the other side.

"The truth is, whatever your father said, there's a reason for it. I'm not suitable for you in any way, no matter the circumstances. And... I have this ugly face."

"I don't appreciate the way you talk."

"But it's the truth."

"Do you know, Hong Yok?"

The beautiful hand lifts to tuck the hair behind my ear, then gently lowers, approaching my lips gradually. Her cherry blossom lips don't touch mine

but linger softly around the scarred area near my lips.

My heart pounds violently. Those scars, once seen as flaws, are now seemingly highlighted by the tender touch. Until she pulls away, the sensation remains in my feelings.

*"Hong Yok, listen to me. You don't need to change yourself for anyone. My heart hurts because you are so gorgeous."*

# Chapter 21 : By Your Side

There's a note attached to the dolls:

'Happy Birthday.'

'Even though you're 27, you're still my younger sister. In a few months, I'll be 28, and if we count from the school year, I'm your senior.'

Why is she so serious about being older? I haven't fully accepted the role of her younger sister either.

All the dolls Lady Note brought, including the star pillow, add up to 60. I need to get a large bag to put them in before placing them in my studio.

Actually, there are a total of 59 dolls since the one that Her Highness was holding stays with me in bed tonight.

I'm not that excited about the gifts; I just want a pillow to support my arm.

By the way, Lady Note really went all out.

What kind of person is she? She bought the whole claw machine just to give me the dolls inside.

More importantly, she left so much warmth on my face.

I sleep on my side, with one arm hugging the star pillow and the other hand lightly touching the scar. This is the first time I feel I love it.

While closing my eyes, I can't help but think of the moment when Lady Note pressed her lips against my scar.

This time, I don't have any nightmares. On the night that transitions into my birthday, in the fantasy world, I dream that I'm dancing with a young woman amidst the white and pale pink smoke surrounding us. She is the same person who brought me a star one night.

The royal lady who proclaimed that I am beautiful...

**The next day**

I woke up a bit later than usual. The truth is, the clock woke me up on time, but my dream was too overwhelming with the warmth of that woman. Therefore, I chose to indulge a bit longer before deciding to press the off button. Luckily, my mother knocked on the door to wake me up because she saw it was past seven and I hadn't gone down to have breakfast yet.

No one at work knows about my birthday, and even though Lady Nij might have seen it on my resume when I applied for the job, I didn't think she would pay much attention. So, the atmosphere at work continued as usual, and I found myself happier than usual, sometimes smiling as if I were about to burst.

After washing the star pillow and leaving it to dry at the house, I went back to find it perfectly dry. I just wanted to have the scent to hug while sleeping. At around ten in the morning, the head designer walked into the still-busy studio. She clapped her hands to get our attention and walked towards the central board with a paper in hand.

"I've got the first outfit in the collection. While waiting for the second one... Preaw, order the materials for this pattern first", then she turns to the skillful pattern maker, "Leng, ask Pai to continue with the work you've been holding, and then expedite this pattern first."

Finally, she turns and looks at me. Her face looks indifferent like she isn't mad or has an issue with me anymore.

"As for Hong Yok, you're responsible for making the sample of this piece."

With that, she pastes the paper with key details onto the board and uses pushpins to secure it.

My forehead wrinkles slightly.

Wait a minute.

Isn't that...

The middle-aged woman announces that she has to go out for errands and be back afternoon. When the boss has left, I hurriedly approach to get a closer look at the outfit attached to the board to make sure I'm not thinking it up.

Why? Why are the works of Preaw, Ping, and me all picked up and mixed together into one outfit? Lady Nij said, I've got the first outfit in the collection,' and there's a signature of her own in the lower right corner.

This...

No matter how you look at it, it's an impromptu cut-and- paste job, isn't it?

"Surprised, Hong?"

Ping's voice rings out from behind.

"Yes..."

"You'll get used to it. That's how Lady Nij does it for every collection."

But this means that Lady Nij is taking... our ideas and turning them into her original work, and crediting herself a hundred percent.

I turn back to Preaw and Ping, who are co-designers of the same fate. However, their faces and glances seem devoid of any sorrows, not that they like it, but it's like they've gotten used to this routine.

"We're here as assistants", Preaw speaks out, quite resigned.

"No, if we sell our designs under the brand, it wouldn't be wrong. But this is taking our ideas, separating them, and... and..."

The words get stuck, maybe due to the overwhelming emotions swirling around.

"And coming out as work with Lady Nij's signature, claiming she designed it herself."

"I've told you, this place isn't suitable for you."

That's all Preaw says before taking a light breath and walking back to her own work desk. As for Ping, she remains silent, looking understandingly, then walks out of the room as if there are other things to do this morning.

My face seems to have gone numb. The reason I left the previous studio is because of the issue of secretly claiming credit for work. I didn't expect myself to shine, just to be an assistant and gradually grow or produce works under the brand name would have been enough. But what I'm facing now is not what I expected at all.

Taking the work we designed, separating it, and then assembling it anew. Then boldly claiming she's the creator....

Do I have a naive view of the world, or is her craftiness beyond measure?

It turns into a birthday where I can't smile all day.

In the evening, when I return home, the only thing that makes the corners of my mouth turn upward is coming back to collect the star pillow that has dried and now carries the sweet scent of fabric softener to place it on my bed. Look, it seems like a substitute for the night when Lady Note took me to sleep under the stars.

A sudden laziness creeps in. I don't want to do anything other than lie down and hug this pillow and then doze off with fatigue.

At around five past five, my father returns home a bit early to fulfill the promise he made yesterday: to take us out for a meal and celebrate this special occasion. However, I'm afraid that my younger sister might feel lonely, so I suggest that we should visit Toey-Hom together. We can enjoy a cake along with her, as she likes ice cream cake.

Given the tension from yesterday's embarrassment that lingered on my face, noticeable to Lady Note, it serves as a lesson for me to try to contain my emotions better.

I try to push everything that's bothering me deep down and smile the most when blowing out the candles on my birthday cake in the special room

where my younger sister and my parents sing a birthday song for me.

My father and mother don't particularly like ice cream, so they have just a little and turn their attention to the homemade curry instead. So, it is only Toey-Hom and me who share the cake. But suspecting there might be too much, we can't finish it all and have to store the rest in the fridge in this patient room.

Around 8 pm, I ask my parents to go home. As for me, I'll stay and watch over my sister. They seem concerned and want me to enjoy my birthday, but I tell them that being together with everyone is enough. After persuading them for a while, they finally leave for home.

The atmosphere in the room becomes quiet as there's no one talking. The wall-mounted TV isn't turned on. I grab my laptop and stylus, thinking I might do some work during my sister's rest. But as I'm about to turn on the computer, my sister sitting on the bed speaks up, trying to draw my attention.

"Big sister... I'm sorry."

I abandon the thought of working, put the items back in my bag, and walk over to sit in a chair beside the bed.

"Toey, you've apologized many times. What is it this time, hmm?"

The girl doesn't dare to look me directly in the eye. She lowers her head and speaks hesitantly,

"It's just... since today is your birthday anniversary, you should go eat at the restaurant you like or spend time with your girlfriend."

"Hey, where I eat isn't a big deal. But as for a girlfriend, I don't have one yet."

Hearing that, the younger one, seemingly surprised, strangely raises her head.

"Oh, so P'Note isn't your girlfriend?"

"N... no, not at all. What made you think that way?"

"Because I'm a fan of the Edge of Universe; P'Note is even my favorite. On that day, when she came to visit, I was completely surprised. I thought I was dreaming. When she criticized me, it hurt even more than when mom used to scold me as a child."

In her voice, there's a concealed delight that she gets close to the artist she admires, combined with a sense of embarrassment at being taught. But the sentence she emphasizes afterward is,

"...When P'Note had drama on Twitter, I joined the trend to support her. When I looked back at the good clips, I noticed another girl sitting on the opposite side. Moreover, a witness came out and posted that she did it to protect the person who was being body-shamed. I recognized you too, even if I didn't clearly see your face. And! And! And!... The latest news! At the party hosted by her father, P'Note paired up to dance with a mysterious girl. P'Hong, do you realize people are looking for you?"

With so many things on my mind, I didn't get to follow any entertainment news at all. I just found out now that this news from that event has spread everywhere.

"I... I was with her that day and danced together, that's true. But it's not like... being a couple, even a little bit."

*We made out once, but we still don't have a status...*

"I'm just her designer, and she's just a hanger for my clothes."

My younger sister squints her eyes,

"Okay, just a clothes hanger."

"Why do you make that face of disbelief!?"

"P'Note is indeed a good clothes hanger. Around noon, she visited her designer's sister and brought gifts as if she is a member of our family."

"Well, she's... rich. She probably just wants to spend money."

That excuse doesn't seem logical at all.

Damn it!

Most importantly, has she been visiting my sister all this time?

23.37

Toey-Hom has been asleep for a while now. About half an hour ago, after watching a series on her phone for a bit, she felt sleepy. I am sitting on the sofa set, my laptop placed on the low table in front of me. The screen is frozen on the image of the outfit Lady Nij spoke about so passionately as her creation. This is preventing me from thinking about anything else. The only words in my mind are 'I want to resign.'

However, if I do what I think, it'll be like someone who can't tolerate work.

What should I do with this lingering displeasure?

*Bzzz!*

A text message comes in. I glance at it and find that it's from a girl who likes to wear aloha shirts. She's the only one right now that I see the name and can let out my grievances behind and want to grab communication tools to check.

**NoTe**: What are you doing?

**Hong Yok**: I'm watching over my sister at the hospital.

**NoTe**: Alone?

**Hong Yok**: Yes. Yesterday, Dad came to watch, so tonight, it's my turn.

She read it but didn't type anything in response. I'm confused if she just messaged to greet me. If so, she's really weird.

I turn back to look at the laptop screen. However, I still can't bring myself to glance over to see if the royal lady has replied to me yet. In the meantime, I feel bad about imagining the designed outfits being taken away for collective thoughts. So, I shut down the working tool and pick up the phone to check fashion news on social media, hoping to relax.

Apart from updating trends both locally and internationally, there's one piece of news that makes my heart beat faster when I see the headline.

'On The Runway: Final Season' A fashion design competition...

The year before, I hesitated to apply. I went back and forth, without enough bravery. But when I saw how much prize money and reputation the winner got, my heart felt regretful.

This competition stage will be broadcast live in the final week of judging. And that's what I'm so interested in, enough for the winner to become widely known. The competition has been open for up to 5 seasons, and as recently announced, this sixth season will be the last for designers to showcase their work.

If I try to apply and happen to reach the final round, it'll likely be on TV.

Will I dare to show this face to anyone?

Will I be criticized for my scarry face...?

Or will I be made fun of...?

It seems like it will take more than half an hour to read the details of the rules. I'm hesitant about applying again.

*Bzzz!*

**NoTe**: I'm in front of the room. I don't want to knock. Toey-Hom might wake up.

A text from someone noble has been sent, taking my eyes off many texts because seeing them made my eyes squint for a moment. At first, I thought it was a girl playing tricks, but then I considered...

If it's someone like Lady Note, she might be visiting me at this time, right? I get up and walk out to open the door of this special resting room, and yes, the familiar figure is standing there as she said she would.

"Want to go down and get some snacks?"

"..."

For a moment, I'm speechless.

The truth is, I'm still full with the ice cream cake from early evening. I believe Lady Note herself wouldn't suddenly feel hungry at midnight. It's just an excuse to get me out for a walk. I know it well. However, I agree to be here. We walk slowly along the connecting path through the tranquil garden. The atmosphere is a bit cool at night, but the absence of people makes it conducive to opening up a conversation.

I want to initiate some talk myself, but it seems like my brain can't come up with anything. It's more comfortable to walk alongside the tall figure with a relaxing fragrance than to force a conversation. Then she takes the lead in narrating our story.

"You've been worrying about what my father said, haven't you?"

"Just a bit", I answer truthfully, with discomfort lingering in my chest. Suddenly, I think that if I speak to her right now, I won't have to endure the suffering.

"I just... think about launching my own brand."

"If that's what you want, I'll give you as much as you need."

That's it!

I shall stop making noise about that matter and stress myself with the task of forbidding her instead!

"That's enough. Do you think you're playing the role of a sugar mommy?"

"Well-"

"No, please don't argue with me!"

"....."

Seeing that the other side neither protests nor argues back in the slightest, I stop making the loud noise. I switch to using a normal tone to explain,

"The thing is... there's currently a fashion design competition that's accepting applications. I don't know if I can do it, but I want to try to build my reputation. I want to be known and gradually grow in this industry."

"Whether you win or lose, you and your clothes are the most beautiful."

The taller person stops walking, prompting me to stop as well. We turn to face each other under the spacious sky, the night with a few stars as it is in the heart of the city. Yet, that's not the focus. The eyes resembling galaxies and the beautiful ocean of Lady Note, combined with her words, almost make me forget to breathe for a moment.

"And I'll be right there by your side."

She said with her soft voice. I know well that in that short sentence, there is a multitude of meanings. She was about to say that she would gladly be the one to support me. This might be one of the reasons I agreed to reveal the stories in my heart to her only.

.....because I was confident that no matter what, this woman would support and believe that I could do everything.

Having someone with whom you can share your difficulties and receive a nice response from is quite wonderful. Thinking back to that argument at the swimming pool, the moment I believed she wasn't the one responsible, she must have had the same nice feeling in her heart as mine

Because there's only me who stays alone with her. While the whole family shows that they believe in Lady Nij.

Hmm, Lady Nij...

When I think about the head designer, I instantly feel a surge of anger. When I consider pushing the matter of today's work out of my mind, suddenly, a question that stirs deep within arises, and I can't prevent myself from asking directly.

"My Lady."

"Hmm?"

My expression is more serious than it has been all day.

"If I ask about something, would you mind giving me an honest answer?" She pauses for a moment, then sighs softly.

"Go ahead."

It's a matter that I gather from her personality and... some kind of instinct.

"About ten years ago, Lady Nij... was the one who stole a song you composed, right?"

# Chapter 22 : Her Playlist

I don't know if asking directly like this will prompt the other side to choose not to answer, as Lady Note is not the type to share stories about the past. Different from her elder sister; it's quite strange that Lady Nij mentioned this in a completely different way.

I should trust my boss, who seems more reliable. Still, looking at the middle-aged woman, I think she might be lying...

And the real victim is probably the woman in front of me.

"About ten years ago, Lady Nij-she was the one who stole a song you composed, right?"

I asked the question, but she hasn't responded. Her eyes flicker down as if pondering whether to speak or not, as if making a silent promise to someone not to discuss this matter. But perhaps because I am the one she trusts, finally, she looks back at me and answers.

"Yes." As expected...

"That b\*\*\* stole the song that I composed."

----

When we delve into the background of someone, can we truly act as if we know nothing...? I used to think that I could conceal my feelings well enough. But no, after realizing that Lady Nij has been deceiving us all along, I can't look at her with the same gaze as before.

"What is bothering you about me?"

Without realizing it, I stared at the middle-aged woman longer than usual with eyes that might have... changed. This prompted her, who just came in to inspect the first patterns of the collection, to ask outright loudly.

But if I had inadvertently revealed my displeasure, Lady Nij must have been scrutinizing her own younger sister. So, I feign a smile, "Nothing, ma'am." And then I change the subject to what I've been wondering about.

"I simply wanted to ask you about something work-related."

"Why use such distant language?"

"...."

"Hong Yok, are you upset about something with me?"

"Sorry, I just used the wrong word unintentionally because my mind was elsewhere."

I quickly correct myself as smoothly as possible. Then, I shift the conversation away to make me feel less uncomfortable.

"I didn't mean to be disrespectful, but... I'm curious. If I were to compete in the On The Runway show, would it conflict with the contract with Nij Greta?"

The head designer remains silent. She pretends to focus on the pattern that Leng is sketching on the paper. As I tilt my head to get a better look, it is evident that she's contemplating the weighty decision of whether to grant permission or not. The show is well-known enough for almost every designer to recognize, and each season's winner has a promising future, from establishing their own clothing brand to collaborating with renowned Thai and international labels.

My decision to seek permission to compete is, in a way, an attempt to step onto a field that can potentially lead to more significant opportunities than being the one who has ideas stolen. I want to know how she would respond. After a few minutes of contemplation, the middle-aged woman turns back to meet my eyes.

"I'm not that narrow- minded. Apply if you wish. If you win and gain recognition, I'll be happy for you."

She speaks in a way that, despite her words, conveys a hint of displeasure in her eyes.

"Thank you."

I pretend not to notice that and then walk back to my table to resume my work.

That night at the hospital... Lady Note only mentioned that about ten years ago, in an event with hundreds of people, the song she spent months composing and rehearsing was suddenly snatched by her elder sister to play in the competition.

When I dig deeper into the matter, she evaded further answers and redirected the conversation to other topics. At that time, my mind needed time to contemplate and connect the dots. I decided to review it later instead of pushing it further. And yes, now I feel discomfort in my workplace.

Ping is the one who notices and, during lunch, she asks me in private if I still feel bad about having my ideas taken. I nod. However, I won't elaborate that, in reality, I am also displeased with the way the boss treated her younger sister back then.

When the ambient at work are like this, shouldn't the time at home be a time to relax? But no, I return home with a heavier heart than before, thinking that tomorrow, I'll have to wake up early and face the head designer again. It becomes a routine.

With this, will there be enough inspiration to compete? If I lost, there wouldn't be any other way to climb up. I wouldn't gain enough reputation to satisfy Prince Napas. I wouldn't have anything left...

At 16.40, I'm still on the bus stuck in traffic. I rub my temples, feeling overwhelmed with thoughts and emotions. I raise my hand, massage my forehead, and then grab my phone and earphones, hoping to play a song that can soothe my worries.

As I open the streaming app and scroll through the playlist, the last list suddenly pops up. I tap quickly, hoping to find a song that matches my current state of mind. Surprisingly, the playlist is titled 'To. TMBPITU' with a new addition: 'All I Ever Need' by Austin Mahone.

I've heard this song once when randomly playing songs on the bus, but I don't know who would send it to me intentionally. Will the feelings change while listening?

The playlist is oddly named by a royal lady who looks annoying on the surface, but there's another angle of her that only I can see and feel.

Before I know it, I smile as I listen to the familiar song in my earphones.

*You don't understand how much you really mean to me.*

*I need you in my life.*

*You're my necessity.*

*But believe me, you're everything that just makes my world complete.*

This time, it's her again... saving me from another bad day.

19.30

Because Toey-Hom left the hospital in the morning, this is the first dinner we've had together in a decade where my younger sister hasn't been at odds with me. That, at least, brings some joy after facing stressful events at work all day.

Certainly, two things make me so happy:

The first one is the new song in Lady Note's playlist.

Second, smiles at the family dining table.

Dad brings up about the progress of the legal case involving the building owner and the construction team that caused Toey-Hom's injury. The lawyer had contacted him to update the progress of the lawsuit. She used the media to our advantage and made it a topic on social media. Attention was drawn to this, and we started to gain the upper hand.

The lawyer's name is 'Mai Tree,' a petite and cute young woman with an aura of confidence and an unbelievable mind. She has lost a lawsuit only

once, but big companies have been vying to have her on their side consistently. If there's any lawsuit related to damages, she's often called upon, resulting in a significant reputation.

All combined, it sounds impressive, right? I agree, but that's the truth. The reason we got her to handle Toey-Hom's case is that she is the sister-in-law of Kliao Khluen, a close friend and bandmate of Lady Note herself. We must thank Her Highness for helping to arrange this... everyone in the family feels the same way.

"Why don't you invite your friend to have a meal at our house?" Suddenly, at the dinner table, Dad suggests. I blink my eyes a few times. "What?"

"Ask Lady Note to come having a meal at our house. I heard Toey saying that she visits regularly. Just a few days ago, she went to the hospital and stay with you, right?"

Huh? I turn to look at the young girl who is scooping rice onto a plate.

However, her mouth has a sly smile...

That day, Lady Note returned to her place at early dawn. But the fact that my sister narrated it to Dad like that meant she witnessed the event.

Mom adds, "This Saturday is a good choice, dear. I'll be to the kitchen a bit early in the afternoon. It's up to your friend whether she will agree or not.

Toey told me that she's a noble from a royal house and extremely wealthy... Is she a snob?"

"N...No, my friend isn't like that."

I hesitate before responding that she is my friend. She is not just a friend! I am in a romantic affair with her. I avoid direct eye contact with my parent and respond ambiguously,

"I'll invite her...".

After responding, I turn to look at my younger sister with a hint of threat in my eyes. Meanwhile, she smiles mischievously, seemingly pleased that her mission has been accomplished. Toey-Hom is a big fan of the band and her favorite is Lady Note.

It's not surprising at all that she would try to have her favorite idol to dine with us.

After helping Mom tidy up, I send my younger sister, who hasn't fully recovered yet, off to bed. I head to the studio to design a shirt for myself and have to make a call to the beautiful aristocrat who I have no idea what she's doing at this hour. Believe me, she never keeps me waiting in line.

This time is no exception.

[Hello.]

Her voice breaks the silence, and I don't wait to be prompted.

"Are you available this Saturday evening?"

[Shall we go buy some chocolate?]

"No, not that."

[...]

She remains silent, waiting for my response. She must be somewhat disappointed. Well, I intentionally make her wait a bit to tease her. Now I have a cute aggression.

"Um... My family would like to invite you to have dinner at our house."

[Yes, of course, I must be available.]

She responds immediately with a calm tone.

[But now I have to go.]

"Oh! Are you busy? I apologize for disturbing you."

[I'm not doing anything. But now I have to go out. I have to buy the proper outfit to wear to your house on Saturday.] [That's it for now. Have a good night, Hong Yok.]

Umm... How should I feel right now?

That she's been super enthusiastic since the minute I called to invite her like this?

# Chapter 23 : Love-Stricken Woman

**Part: Narrator**

20.19

LINE Group Chat - Edge of Universe (5)

**NoTe**: Hello.

**NoTe**: Hi.

**NoTe**: Available?

**Note**: I knew both of you were free. Belle, Ne, you two are in Bangkok, right? I heard you will be back to Phetchaburi tomorrow. Frang, I know you finished helping your GF close the shop. Kliao, you are not on duty today.

**TKB**: Note, what was wrong with you? You typed, then you answered yourself. Did you hit your head or something?

**No Te**: Urgent matter, please help.

**Frang KY**: What?

**Nene:** What's going on?

**Kliao K**: What is it, Note?

**NoTe**: Come help me choose an outfit. I had an important appointment this Saturday.

**Note**: Must be tonight. It's urgent. Impatient, anxious. Can't sit still.

**Note**: I am coming down from the condo and heading to the car.

**Nene**: Huh? What's going on? And that fancy Maserati car of yours can't fit more than two people, right?

**NoTe**: Yes, but I'll switch cars at home. Just a moment.

**Kliao K:** Wait! Why are you so agitated? What kind of appointment was that?

**Frang KY**: Can you explain?

**Note**: I'll pick each of you up. Thanks.

Out of the blue, the friend who usually doesn't care about the world just messaged in the group chat at 8 pm and said, 'Going to buy clothes, help me choose now. I'm about to pick up you all.' Belle, Nene, Frang, and Kliao Khluen all confused and had to read the message over and over.

That night, Note drove her favorite Maserati back to the manor and borrowed the 5-seat BMW from her father's garage to pick her friends up one by one. The seating was arranged as follows: Kliao Khluen sat next to the driver, while Nene, Belle, and Frang sat in the back.

Nene mumbled while staring at the person behind the wheel,

"You must've gone crazy."

That was loud enough for Note to respond calmly:

"I'm usually like this."

Belle was also surprised and asked,

"Is this really you? Are you swapping bodies with someone?"

"Silly head."

Frang frowned, "Are you possessed by a ghost?"

"Don't overreact."

Kliao Khluen was the calmest and quietest person, discreetly observing the royal lady's beautiful face and all her reactions. Everyone in Edge of Universe band knew that she's not keeping secret that she likes women.

However, she showed no interest in anyone during her time at college or at work. After considering Note's extremely happy mood and overwhelming

passion, along with that glowing glance, Dr. Kliao Khluen confidently affirmed:

"Note, you've got a girl."

And the quiet person's lack of argument confirms that the answer is yes.

The atmosphere in the car became subtly awkward for a moment. This was because the other three bandmates were still connecting dots together.

The person who cared so little about the world and wasn't bothered by the dramatic trending on Twitter. She let others make their judgments, while these four friends of hers had to answer about the rumors instead.

This woman had so many past stories; for example, she wore an aloha shirt to her mother's posh party during her junior year and even stole the oven from her father's palace despite having enough money to buy it herself, among many more.

Those stories were enough to describe Her Highness M.R. Netapsorn, who was ready to break all rules and boundaries.

*"So... were you... in love?"*

After a moment of silence in the car, Frang was the first to regain consciousness. Goosebumps rose on her skin as she caressed her muscular arm, either from the chilly air or the imagination that her friend might be falling in love with someone.

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Nene, suddenly realizing something, said, "Don't tell me...The news that you danced with a woman at the party..."

"Yes, that's her", the woman behind the wheel admitted.

"Don't ask me anything right now. I'm being all serious at the moment.

Where should we stop by for shopping first?"

The first suggestion comes from Belle, the lively shark of the group. She recommends heading to a familiar place, a store well-known for its wide

variety of styles. She suggests exploring romantic and stylish outfits and emphasizing vibrant, playful looks.

Belle herself looks great in those outfits. However, when Note stood near a mannequin wearing the outfit. The other three also unanimously agreed with Nene's words.

"Should we try a different style?"

But Note doesn't buy her idea.

"I'll buy everything. Hong Yok has to like at least one style."

"..."

Nene can only smile. Summing up the reasons they gathered together, each of the four has to help her find all possible clothes and then she'll choose the best one again. Frang, still goosebumps, mumbles in a drifting manner,

*"A beautiful name..."*

That is why the friends in the group feel like they are experiencing the world's wonder. Normally, Note isn't the type to impulsively rush out of the condo late at night, nor is she the kind of person who would walk around choosing clothes. When after all these years, she has been wearing aloha shirts to challenge her father every day. On that night, after shopping in the place Belle recommended, they go to explore other areas together. It didn't matter if it was a brand-name shop, a fashion boutique, or a street market; Note chose and filled her car with shopping bags, making her four friends help carry them to the condo's penthouse.

The digital clock on the wall showed 22:37 when they dumped all the shopping bags on the floor of the living room. Belle flopped down on the sofa, leaning on it, then announced.

"Well, I've decided. I'm not going back until Note spills out who that woman is, what she's like, and where she's from!"

"I'll drop you off."

"Hey! Don't change the subject too quickly!"

Frang, who stood staring, seriously said as she needed to get the answer no matter what.

"Okey, you nosy dogs!"

"Hey, Note!" Frang shouted.

"Hey!"

Belle and Nene, who spoke out simultaneously, were looking at each other in agreement. Then, once again, Dr. Kliao Khluen broke through the silence with a sentence that made the other friends turn and look at her alone.

"It's the woman who needs a lawyer, right?"

After that moment, M.R. Netapsorn, who wasn't good at explaining anything, had to tell them about how and where she meet 'that woman.'

At first, she reluctantly told them because she wasn't sure how to describe her. But as soon as she mentioned the name 'Hong Yok' once, the stubborn woman couldn't help but talk about her loved one more and more.

Now Note suddenly became more articulate. Her words became more persuasive.

What she said was that Hong Yok is beautiful, talented, and excellent in every way, number one in all areas. And she can go on forever.

**Friday**

**11.40**

In her middle age, Raya is a famous and well-seasoned architect. She used to work in a well-known company but often faced discrimination and judgment because she didn't conform to the traditional image expected of women in that workplace. Eventually, when she had enough money, she

decided to leave and start her own architectural design company.

Although not widely recognized initially, Raya Studio gradually grew, with both interns and employees working together with compassion and kindness. However, two years ago, something unexpected happened as an odd young woman surprisingly applied for a job here.

Her name was M.R. Netapsorn Ruthaithewin. Despite having a good family background, enough money to start her own business, and an outstanding portfolio from her school days, all of these made Raya wonder why this young woman chose to work with her.

Raya still vividly remembered about two years ago when she interviewed the girl with a heavy heart. What if the girl answered like she just wanted to challenge herself or live a life without her family's support? Then, she would need to give this young lady a small lecture about this cruel capitalist world.

However, it turned out differently.

On the day of the interview, Lady Note simply said:

'I think you are so cool.'

"That I like to be a boss in a small studio, instead of working for a big company?"

'Yes.'

Lady Note answered with her honest looks, never avoiding eye contact. 'I know you from Open House during high school. Back then, you were with the team from the company you used to work for.

Everyone else was male, and you, the only woman, didn't say much. They didn't pass you the microphone even once. So. I started to question... In that kind of discriminated working environment, how skillful must you be to be able to stand over there? That's when I became interested and chose to study architecture too.

That was the answer that convinced Raya to accept Note.

As time passed, the young lady became close to everyone in the studio, and they could call each other by nicknames. And because of the close bond and mutual understanding, it made Raya wonder today when she saw the strange actions of the royal girl.

The middle-aged woman aimed to ask Note about the office building blueprint that the young lady was asked to amend for the following reason: *The fortuneteller said the window shouldn't face out this direction. I... I'm so sorry. I know that I already accepted the first plan and I shouldn't ask for the amendment, but can you please help?"*

"Note, what's wrong?"

"Just stressed, P'Raya."

"Don't worry too much. This isn't the first time we've fought with the client's fortuneteller. Moreover, Mr. Vichien has given us more time to amend the plan. It's not as urgent as last time."

"That's not it. I'm just stressed about choosing what to wear for this

Saturday's important appointment."

"..."

Raya remained silent, words stuck in her throat. She could only look at her beautiful younger colleague as if she were still in shock. Although the client had initially confirmed, Note was ordered to correct the work. However, she didn't seem stressed at all. But she worried about choosing the wrong outfit? And when did young woman who liked to wear only aloha shirts start worrying about clothing?

So many questions started popping up above the experienced architect's head. Even when Note's eyebrows no longer knitted together, her eyes were still filled with anxiety. Observing this, Raya walked out of Note's workspace silently with a confused look.

As she stepped outside and closed the studio door, Chan, a 35-year-old architect with a playful personality and good communication skills, happened to walk by. Holding piles of cardboard paper for making models, he couldn't help but ask his boss.

"Hey, why are you making such a face?"

The middle-aged woman turned to face the young man with an expression that still seemed shocked.

"You should pay more attention to your juniors. She looks sick."

Just by hearing those words, the young man immediately knew whom Raya was referring to. He looked back cautiously before walking towards Raya, whispering,

"Well, she's been like that for several days already. I don't know what's wrong with her, but Kan also senses something."

The listener was so shocked that she accidentally raised her hand to press her chest. It had only been a week since she returned from an overseas business trip. She wouldn't mind some chaos after returning, but since her teammate was acting weird...

"So, should I tell her to take a break?" Chan quickly nodded.

"That's a good idea. She only used her sick leave once. I think she had to help someone's sister who was admitted to the hospital. You should give her a break. Perhaps, she might return to normal."

*Crack!*

Suddenly, the sound of the door opening interrupted Chan and Raya's conversation. They both turned quickly to see with the tall, slender figure of Note coming out of her workspace.

She grabbed the car key from her shirt pocket and met eyes her seniors. Seeing him for the first time in several days, she bowed her head to greet Chan and then turned to her boss.

"P'Ya, I'd like to take a half-day leave today."

"Oh... Of course, great. I also want you to take a break. Are you going to the hospital?"

"No, I'm going to buy some gifts for my future wife's parents-in-law."

Note explained briefly and then wai, signaling the end of the conversation. Then, she quickly walked toward the elevator.

"..."

Leaving the two architects with an age gap standing and looking at each other in silence. Time passed by, and Raya finally could find her voice.

"Did Note us the wrong term? Or am I too slow to catch up with the world?"

At that moment, in Chan's mind, he recalled an article on social media that even someone like him, who rarely engaged in Facebook or Twitter, had a glance at. The post was about Prince Napasdol's business banquet, but it was entitled 'M.R. Netapsorn Dancing with a Mysterious Woman.' The online community and the Edge of Universe fans were starting to make some observations.

In the picture, the other woman wasn't clearly captured, possibly because it was from an angle where she averted direct eye contact. Apart from that, it was a shot from behind as Note guided her towards the hall gate. Nevertheless, the photo was clear enough to circulate widely, especially when coupled with Note's previous interview where she openly identified herself as LGBTQ+. This led people to speculate that the woman in the picture was more than just a friend or an ordinary acquaintance. Chan cleared his throat a bit and then leaned in to whisper to his boss again.

"I think... the reason why she acts weird isn't because she's sick, but because she's love-stricken."

# Chapter 24 : Scar And Singing Voice

**Part: Hong Yok**

I'm not particularly excited about today's plans.

I just wake up when the alarm clock goes off at 4:30, even before the sun rises. Then, I sit in front of the mirror, dry and straighten my hair, making sure that it is straight and shiny. Not satisfied with that, although I have chosen today's outfit since yesterday evening, I take all the dresses out of the wardrobe, both the bought ones and the self-sewn ones, just to figure out which one suits me the best.

*What's wrong with you, Hong Yok? This is your own house! Why bother dressing up?*

Even though I try to regain my senses with such a self- admonition, I loop back and sit there choosing an outfit until 7 am.

Lady Note, on that day, seemed genuinely enthusiastic. But, she probably isn't excited about anything... Perhaps, I'm the only one being anxious here.

I go downstairs to help my mom cook, those who are excited don't just include me. Toey-Hom is cheerfully excited too. During breakfast, she never stops talking about Note, who's a famous musician, with our parents listening attentively.

"Today P'Note will come to dine with us. I have to take a selfie with her, get her autograph, and ask her this question that always bothers me."

"A question?" I ask curiously.

"Yeah! About P'Note's scars."

"Nobody knew about it before, but when P'Note had her undercut, people noticed it.

In the fan club group, suspicions arose, but P'Note never came out to explain what happened. Whatever it is, I have a chance to get close to her. I have to ask her!"

"Toey, P'Note shouldn't have to explain anything about this matter."

My serious tone and expression make my younger sister suddenly shut up.

"Oh? Why? I'm not going to share it with anyone. I promise to seal my mouth"

"Well... I think it's Note's private matter", Dad intervenes, trying to warn. With his intervention, I don't have to explain further.

My younger sister turns to Mom, and Mom herself nods in agreement that she shouldn't ask Lady Note about that. Toey bows her head with her saddened eyes. However, with her newfound maturity, Toey doesn't act as childishly as before. After some time passes, she lifts her head.

"I won't ask her that, but I still want to a selfie and her autograph."

Seeing her returning to her cheerful self, I can't help but pinch her cheek gently.

"That's fine. No one will stop you."

On the surface, I pretend to feel indifferent about her scar.

However, deep inside, I start to doubt. What if... it's me who asks her directly? Will she explain what happened?

Our relationship goes beyond what people know. She openly admits that she likes me, and we've...shared intimate moments together. Sometimes, between her and me, there might not be any barriers to things that need to be kept secret. At two in the afternoon, I sit in my own studio but can't work on anything specific. The pattern paper is still unfolded, and the sewing machine is still untouched because this designer is listening to the playlist that the royal lady just added new songs to, along with moving a needle from one pin cushion to another.

"Ask... Not ask... "

And then I act like the female lead in a soap opera.

In a soap opera, female actors guess their fortune by counting flower petals. I, on the other hand, use needles daringly, threading them in such a way, and the conclusion is:

"Ask."

The cooking grandioso of my mom begins a little after three in the afternoon, with Dad and me as her assistants (though I'm not particularly skilled). Dad's main tasks involve peeling fresh shrimp, mincing pork, and trying his best to grind the chili paste, something Mom insists we do ourselves instead of buying pre-made.

As for me, I'm in charge of washing and chopping vegetables, keeping an eye on the simmering soup, and calling Mom over when it's ready for seasoning.

Okay, I admit that I can cook, but I'm not very good at it. In the past, I did simple dishes to lend Mom a hand, but today she's gone all out - Steamed shrimp with lime, Green curry, Stir- fried meat with yellow curry paste, and two more dishes that I'm not sure about. That leaves me somewhat in the dark about my assigned tasks.

However, the three of us managed to finish preparations well ahead of the scheduled time. The meeting with Lady Note is set for five in the evening, and I know for sure that she will arrive right on the dot.

As expected, a sleek white Maserati smoothly pulls into the alley and parks by the wall of my house, just before I receive a text message saying:

**Note**: I'm here now.

I, sneaking a peek from behind the curtain, wait a little. et one minute more before I reply that I would go down to open the door. Then, I hurriedly rush to check my reflection in the glass.

Alright, looking good - a light pink shirt with a chiffon texture, loosely clinging sleeves, paired with long trousers in a cloud-like shade. Minimal makeup to give the appearance of not wearing any. Hair nicely straightened, a bit wavy at the front. Well, that seems alright.

No one can tell that I put in a lot of effort. However, as I walk towards the front door and see a familiar figure stepping out of the car, waiting for me, I can't help but blink repeatedly.

I mean... I have to admit that she is a perfect clothes hanger, always looking stunning no matter what she wears. Today, it is certain that the woman facing me remains beautiful without a doubt. But, what is with the different dressing style?

The white Oxford shoes, checkered pants alternating between light and white, the upper part inside is a turtle-neck white shirt fitted. However, it is covered with a long brown overcoat more suitable for cold weather. And that's not all. Her head is adorned with a beret. Not to mention the small silver earring only on her left ear and the delicate wrist bracelet.

"Well... Where are you planning to go for your fashion walk, My Lady?"

"....."

The aristocratic lady hesitates for a moment, seemingly caught off guard that someone noticed how much she fussed over her outfit. Her beautiful face blinks a couple of times in quick succession before she utters an explanation that isn't quite clear.

"Well... I need to dress accordingly as I'm going to the designer's home." I let out a small smile.

"Take off the coat and the hat; it's hot."

"....."

Sometimes, she behaves like an obedient puppy. As soon as I suggest that, the young lady obediently removes her hat, folds it in half, and tucks it into her bag. Then, she takes off the long coat, drapes it over her arm, and replaces it with a short- sleeved one.

However, her grand opening is not over yet. Initially, I thought that the items in the paper bag were probably small gifts given as a courtesy to my parents. Still, when Lady Note came in to greet us and had a chat in the living room, she took something out from the bag, and it turned out to be... a Tiffany & Co necklace?

Didn't she think for a moment about what my parents would do with a diamond necklace worth tens or hundreds of thousands?!

The luxurious box and the jewelry itself radiated extravagance, even to the naked eye. My mom smiled tactfully and said softly,

"I'm afraid I can't accept this..."

Meanwhile, my dad remained silent, observing Lady Note as if trying to discern something, alternating his gaze between her and the white rose bouquet on my lap... the gift for me.

"This jewelry set is intentionally chosen for both of you. I selected it by myself, and if I had to take it back, I would feel just as disappointed..."

Her soft-spoken words, accompanied by a melancholic smile, pierce through me instantly. Oh my gosh! The person who bought the claw machine just to get a pillow inside as a gift for me...

I should know that this person must bring an unusual gift with her. My father's eyebrows slightly knit together, as if his mind is raising some questions, but he keeps silent in the conversing circle.. It's only my mother who tries to find words to refuse the gifts.

Unfortunately, Lady Note's graceful gestures indicate the inevitable acceptance of these gifts.

Perfectly timed, Toey-Hom, descends the stairs with a huge paper box. My younger sister, lively yet not fully recovered, brings all the albums, posters, pocketbooks, and even magazines that feature the Edge of Universe with her and asks Lady Note to sign them. This changes the atmosphere in the living room dramatically.

But I wonder, does the air around my father seem a bit heavy?

What confirms that I'm not imagining it is what happened at dinner.

At that moment, the clock indicated almost ten minutes to six. My mother chatted with Lady Note, mostly revolving around her favorite topic retelling my childhood stories. Normally, my mom talks like this with my close friend, Woon- Sen, or I mean my real friend. I usually find it a bit embarrassing.

But with this person...

Gosh! She isn't close to the word 'friend' at all. Now she puts on a smiley face when talking to adults. This means she's probably heard a lot about me. And, to make matters worse, my naughty younger sister adds embarrassing details to my past.

Until a certain point when it seems like my dad, who's been eating in silence for a while, can't bear it anymore. He leans forward, determined, to deliberately draw everyone's attention before speaking forcefully, stronger than ever before.

**"Are you two really just friends? What kind of friend brought a bunch of roses?"**

While everyone else at the table remains stunned, Toey, who is sitting at the dining table with us, smiles subtly, as if she is dying to declare that between me and Lady Note, there is... something serious. Indeed, how can I forget? Currently, my dad is a person who loves his family very much and works hard. However, in his youth, he was the ultimate playboy before he met my mother. This has made him afraid that his daughter might encounter someone like him in his old days.

To the point that he once declared that anyone who came courting me or Toey had to pass through his test first or else, it was a definite no. Now, the sharp looks that my father is locking on Lady Note are filled with the caution of... a future father-in-law? Yes, like the look of a father who cherishes his daughter a lot and doesn't make things easy.

I choke, unable to think of any words at that moment, and just blurt out,

"We're just talking, Dad."

"Talking?"

The tone of my father's rough voice conveys the harsh reality. Even my mother's face shows signs of doubt.

"Um... by 'talking,' I mean..."

Without waiting for me to fall into a longer silence, the young woman, who is today's guest in our house, retreats from her chair to stand up. This makes everyone's attention focus on her. She makes eye contact with me first, and those eyes then shift to connect with my father and mother alternately before raising her hand to 'wai' in a polite gesture and bowing down as if seeking permission.

"May I date your daughter, please? Father, Mother?"

Wait a minute! How could you ask them that so casually? My dad isn't an old-fashioned adult at all. It doesn't matter whether Miss Note is male or female, but what's important is that my dad takes a certain stance toward everyone who comes to court his daughter.

In the past, before he became more mellow, I used to think it was just a joke, but now it's clear and he means it seriously...

Initially, he was the one who said that we should invite her because he understood that she was a friend. When he learned the truth, he made a dramatic transformation. He even wore square-shaped glasses to make himself look more serious. The kindness in his eyes was replaced with intensity and sternness.

This doesn't sit well with me, my mom, and Toey.

It turns out that after finishing dinner, my dad suddenly announces that he will take responsibility for washing dishes and sweeping the kitchen

himself. He also casually glances towards a certain aristocrat like he wants to ask, 'You should know what to do next.'

This makes me hold my breath for a moment. But then, Lady Note smiles and turns to tell the rest of us that she will help my dad with in the kitchen. Hmm, she'll be thoroughly interrogated for sure. And I can't help but think that she somehow deserves it...

**20.24**

If I were to admit embarrassingly, today I spent a considerable amount of time tidying up the room and studio to make it as neat as possible. However, it turned out that Lady Note didn't have a chance to join me at all. She was held back by my dad, and then Toey invited her to take pictures and have her sign autographs. That took about an hour.

Seeing that the sky had darkened and her condo was on the opposite side of here, I thought it was time for her to leave. As for our time together... well, let's leave that for later.

We finally have time together when I walk out to see her off at the front door.

"Dad said something to you, right?"

"Kind of an impromptu interview, but ten times harsher."

As predicted, I burst into laughter, but she turns around and looks at me with a slight frown.

"Are you laughing at me?"

"Yes, why? Don't you deserve it? Can't I say anything?"

"No, you can... I haven't said anything yet."

Her softer voice turns my mocking smile into a faint smirk. From laughing, I feel a slight unease in my heart. My lips become straight because I'm... losing myself. Lady Note, seeing that, raises her smile, still at the corner of her mouth.

However, she doesn't tease me further. She takes out the car keys and unlocks her Maserati, which is parked not far away.

"Well, then, I'm heading back."

Huh, isn't that too early? No. There's something I've been worried about all day, and I decided this afternoon that I wanted to ask her. Given how far our relationship has come...

"Well... wait a moment. I have something to ask you." The tall woman looks puzzled.

"What question could make you look so hesitant?"

Even though I feel a reluctance rising within me, when my gaze shift and see the scar on her face, various feelings instantly well up in my chest. I wish to be someone who can share every experience with her, understand both her happiness and sorrows, and be in a place where we have no secrets from each other.

"If possible, I'd like to hear you sing, My Lady." "Sorry, but that might be the only thing I can't grant you."

As expected... But that isn't the question I truly want to ask.

I raise my hand and gently trace my fingertip along her faint pink scar.

"It's related to this scar, isn't it?"

The eyes of the taller person suddenly become colder. She raises her hand to pull mine away, the touch still soft.

"Let's stop talking about this."

The aristocratic tone of her voice is no different from usual, but the explicit rejection in her actions and words brings me back to reality, dispelling the fantasy. She takes a step back, creating more distance between us, then turns towards where her car is parked to leave.

Lifting my hand, I touch my chest instinctively, a gesture I have become accustomed to. I don't want our day to end like this because it would mean I still wouldn't understand her past or our future. And I wouldn't know if this woman has truly opened her heart to me or not.

In an instant, a sudden and sharp pain explodes in my head. It's not severe enough to make me collapse or raise my hand to cradle it, but it does momentarily blur the front view, causing me to squint and wrinkle my brows. As a sentence echoes from a distant corner of my brain, it's my own voice from when I was sixteen.

*"...because the melody you play is beautiful. No matter what anyone says, I believe that you're the one who composed it and can play it the best."*

Why is this vague memory resurfacing now? And did I just speak to someone who is currently walking away? Maybe... maybe I should be more direct.

"I wants to develop a relationship with you, P'Note."

"..."

My words halt her steps. The tall woman stops walking. Her hand pauses before opening the car door.

**"But, I want to know about what happened ten years ago. Can you please tell me?"**

Because I've never been in love before, this is the first time I've experienced the feeling when the other person hesitates before opening the car door and drive away, and it breaks my heart so badly.

I stand there, watching at the departing Mercedes, which is slowly going away. I'm not sure what expression or sentiments the woman within has, but one thing I know is that she cares about me. Yes, she cares enough about me to stop the car just before it reaches ten meters, open the door, step out, then run to stand in the same location.

Those deep, dark eyes radiate pain and regret, and for the first time, I see her vulnerable emotions.

"I'm sorry for saying something hurtful to you earlier."

"...."

"But can you give me some time to overcome these feelings?"

I feel a small lump in my throat. Couldn't find something to say. Little by little, I seems to realize that my eyes are welled up with warm tears.

"Yes, P'Note, you are cruel."

I look away and use the back of my hand to wipe away these unexpected tears. In the past, regardless of how disappointed or sad I was, I would keep it to myself and cry silently alone. Why did it have to reveal such vulnerability to her this time?

Perhaps it's because the woman in front of me is the one I care the most.

"Let's meet again when we can talk about this, okay?"

That's all I leave behind before walking home without looking back at her again.

# Chapter 25 : A Cruel Woman

**Monday**

It's a boring workday. My mood sinks low, and a sense of gloom engulfs me as soon as I walk into the studio.

The second outfit from the collection for the upcoming season is displayed, and my eyes unconsciously drift toward the paper pinned on the board.

This time, it's not a mix of Preaw's, Ping's, and my work anymore. It is my dress design with a floral pattern in light pink, resembling the petals of a blooming flower. The waist is cinched, and the sleeves are in a ballroom style.

Unfortunately, it has been modified in terms of color and some parts of it, and now bear the signature of Lady Nij, labeled as the designer.

My mind is already filled with the argument with Lady Note, so seeing that picture left me speechless. I manage a short, stifled chuckle, for the pathetic head designer of this fashion house.

Just beginning, this week doesn't look promising at all. I stand there, looking at my modified work for a moment before heading to my office desk. On the side, Ping is already seated. She turns her chair in my direction, as if she's waiting to say something, and I'm right about that.

"Young Miss Nam will stop by after finishing her school today."

"Young Miss Nam?"

I repeat, puzzled.

"Yes, Lady Nij's daughter. She studies in high school. Unfortunately, our boss is so proud of her aristocratic status, so everyone has to address her kid, who is a mom Luang, as 'Young Miss. She insists that we all call her daughter 'Young Miss Nam.' What a foolish custom!"

" ..."

I remain silent. It's not like I disagree, but the words Young Miss Nam' and 'Mom Luang' trigger a strange memory. ...

Madam Nam may be young, but she holds a noble title. You have to address her as Miss' even though she's just a child!' On that Saturday night, that voice was my own voice. But if it's the voice in my head just now... it can't be Lady Nij's voice, can it? No, it can't be.

Even if, hypothetically, she once met me in the past and now can't remember, my scars are the one distinguishing trait she cannot ignore.

"Hong, did you hear me just now?"

I snap back to reality when Ping calls out, slightly startled.

"Uh, yes? I heard you."

"Um, so... after hearing it, what do you think, Hong?"

One should remain silent if gossip is happening, especially when the person being discussed is walking in at that very moment.

Ping follow that rule. She straightens herself up and quickly turns back to her desk. Meanwhile, I become annoyed to death when I look at the not-so remorseful face of that middle- aged woman. I clench my fists and respond, although Ping probably doesn't want to hear it right now.

"I just thought this studio is weird."

I deliberately make my voice loud enough for others in the room to hear, and at that moment, it seems like everyone does. Lady Nij turns towards me with a cold, piercing look, while the others in the room look back and forth between me and her as if they are witnessing an unprecedented event. "What do you mean, Hong Yok?"

She makes a grave look, arms folded across her chest, straightens her back, and tilts her chin defiantly.

I don't know if it is because of Lady Note's stolen song, the memories that are being dug up, or my idea that is stolen once again. All these pressures

seem to be my last straws, ready to explode in the blink of a eye.

I smile defiantly, then stand up to face the older woman.

"Hello, My Lady."

"Answer me now! I allow everyone to work fairly, allow everyone to participate in the projects, and provide fair compensation even to newcomers like you. So, what's the issue with the system here? You dare say it's weird?"

My fake smile remains, and with a raised eyebrow, I reply,

"According to me, weird might mean good. Your Highness believes that the system here is excellent, why worry about the negative connotation?"

She fumes. I observe her tightly clenched jaw. Despite this, she maintains a smirk and laughs calmly down her throat. She then raised an eyebrow at me.

"You're pathetic, Hong Yok. You still don't know your place."

"Someone who steals others' work and then claims it as their own, like you, can't speak of humility, can they?"

"Hong!"

It's Preaw, Ping, and Pai who call my name in the chorus as if to stop me from saying another word. However, it's impossible at this moment. I continue to stare at the middle-aged woman and speak again.

"Even your younger sister, who is more gifted, capable, and superior to you in every aspect, does not conduct herself with such arrogance."

These statements seemed to set off her reactions.

"Leave, right now!"

Her face flushes red as she shouts with a thunderous voice.

"Your Highness, please calm down", Preaw attempts to ease the situation, although it shouldn't work amid this emotional warfare. However, Lady Nij's angry glances seem to suggest she's contemplating something, perhaps thinking about the consequences if she were to kick me out for real.

To quell her emotions, she closes her eyes for a brief moment. Opening them again, after some consideration she says:

"Listen carefully, Hong Yok. Go home or wherever you want. Then, return tomorrow with a sincere apology that truly shows remorse... Otherwise, I'll have to kick you out."

**21.35**

My close friend Wun Sen has never broken her promise. On my birthday, she insisted on singing 'Happy Birthday' to me in front of everyone. She spontaneously invited me to hang out from around noon, and I, who happened to be wandering at the mall after being kicked out by the head designer, agreed without much thought.

Finally, on Monday night, we're sitting at our usual place, listening to my friend singing while clapping at our favorite bar.

"...Happy birthday to youuu!!!"

As the last verse concludes, I only shake my head slowly, wearing a smile on my face.

"Are you embarrassed? Other tables are all looking at us, anyway... thanks for remembering my birthday that night."

"I'm different from those at your old office. They were afraid you would quit, so they tried to please you by saying they would prepare a birthday present for you, ha! When the time came, they just forgot about it." Woon-Sen purses her lips when thinking about Madam Kris's studio.

"But what's wrong with you today? It looks like you don't know what to do with your life."

It appears that my pal can see through my ruse. Perhaps because today I don't have the mood to choose anything. I let her decide on both the drinks and the food. I take a deep, elongated breath. Having a close friend like this is indeed a good thing.

"Well, this morning, I...smart-mouthed my boss."

"Whoa, whoa, that's odd. Normally, you don't get emotional easily, right?" Woon-Sen observes, raising an eyebrow.

"This time, it seems like your patience has really run out. Hmm... I think this could be a good opportunity for you to consider creating your own clothes brand."

"I haven't been fired yet. I'm not sure what will happen tomorrow."

"I'm glad you're more assertive now. Stand up for yourself, girl!"

The confident and assertive girl, known for her personality, says as loudly as she sang earlier. I feel second-hand embarrassment, but I smile because of the sincerity and support I got from her. Woon-Sen changes the subject,

"So, what about you and Lady Note? Any progress?"

My smile fades immediately.

"I'd rather not talk about it,"

"Oh, are you two fighting?"

"...."

"So it's true? What have you done?"

"Forget it. Let's take a selfie together and show the world that we're still happy together."

I shrug, unlock my phone that has been faced down, opening the camera app.

"Oh! She follows your IG too, right? You want to show her that you don't care or feel sad, but actually, you care about her a lot, don't you?"

"You talk too much, Woon. Move your face into the frame!"

"Savage girl..."

The person sitting across from me complains but move closer to fit into the frame. I deliberately frame the shot to make it look like we don't care, as my friend suggested.

Maybe Lady Note will see it and feel a twinge of jealousy... or maybe not.

After uploading the photo to my IG story, I put away my communication device as usual. I just realized that my best friend didn't order a drink with any alcohol content. The intention to get drunk tonight has been shattered from the beginning. I can only lift a glass of fizzy fruit drinks instead.

Woon-Sen still seems bothered by my relationship with Lady Note. She crosses her arms, frowning, but just as she's about to ask, an irritating, piercing sound interrupts us.

*!!!!!!!!!*

Not only was she shocked, but both I and the people in the bar were also startled because the loud noise was the 'fire alarm' signal. Everyone inside the bar immediately jumps up; no one can sit still at this moment.

Woon-Sen quickly grabs my arm, as if trying to lead me out, even though we still can't see where the fire was or if there was any smoke. However, at that moment, the manager of the shop rushes out and competes with the alarm, trying to calm everyone down.

"Everyone,don't worry! A staff member misunderstood and accidentally pressed the fire alarm. We sincerely apologize for causing you any distress, but please feel free to sit down and continue enjoying your drinks", he said, apologizing and bowing repeatedly to try to control the situation and prevent customers from panicking.

"I apologize again on behalf of the pub. Please, everyone, have a seat." I stand there, observing the unfolding events with a foggy mind.

A series of overlapping events flash in front of me. Once upon a time, ten years ago...

Long time ago, the sound of this alarm used to echo through my brain However, at that time, the surrounding area was filled with smoke and fire. The memories were lined up in a row until they came together, allowing me to understand the story.

An art competition.

Two similar songs were being played.

A young girl quarreling with an older person.

An iron rod... Blood on the head...

The spreading fire. A door that, no matter how much it was smashed, wouldn't open.

And her touch...

"Hey! Hong, what's wrong with you? Are you okay? Should we go to the hospital?"

My concerned friend raises both hands, trying to help, and seems ready to support. Just then, the annoying sound of the alarm stops suddenly. "Woon, I remember now..."

"Huh?"

**"The incident ten years ago... I remember everything now "**

# Chapter 26: Despite The Same Song

**Part: Narrator**

**Ten years ago**

An art competition was held at a spacious hall, starting from six in the evening on a Sunday.

Although it was announced that the competition was intentionally organized to promote various forms of art, it seemed more like a gathering of influential adults referred to as sponsors.

It wasn't surprising to have two different atmospheres in the same event.

On the front stage, adult men and women dressed elegantly entered the event, accompanied by both journalists and interested spectators, including celebrities from various entertainment circles, such as actors, singers, and artists. Those invited often served as judges for categories related to their field, unlike business owners or major shareholders who participated as sponsors.

On the flip side, backstage was chaotic, with staff having to organize the sequence of competitions-announcing which category would take place first and instructing participants from other categories to wait in their designated zones.

The first competition category was costume design and tailoring, divided into two formats: traditional costumes for men and women. Although judging criteria and panels differed, the common rule was that participants had to individually design and sew one costume and present various concepts associated with the costume.

It was regrettable that the competition allowed the participation of those who were 20 years old and above only, making it necessary for participants under the age of 20 to compete in another category. That category was the souvenir t-shirt design competition, where participants didn't have to sew the t-shirt themselves. Judges focused on the creativity of the design of the souvenir t-shirts for a charity project.

Hong Yok, who was once a lively young girl filled with confidence, prepared herself well to present the inspiration for each part of the design on the stretchy souvenir shirt. Her family and friends had to watch her on television, but that didn't make her nervous.

The category she competed in was the second order. After sitting behind the stage for about an hour, the young competitor and the group of people in the same category were called to stand by for their turn on stage.

The young girl also couldn't understand why this event gathered various art competitions in one place. While it garnered considerable attention in terms of ratings, she felt that each category had to compete fiercely, leaving less time for other types to take the stage. Perhaps it was advantageous for the reputation of the sponsors.

Why? It was somewhat surprising that the parents or relatives of the competitors couldn't participate, but there was a backstage area reserved for fans of celebrities to come and show support.

On the contrary, it seemed that the spotlight was on the judges more than the competitors. But at that moment, she could only look at the surroundings and shrugged to herself.

At the backstage area, participants from other categories were waiting.

M.R. Nijcharee in her 28s and M.R. Netapsorn, 17 years old, were assigned consecutive numbers for their piano performances, placing their chairs side by side.

"I don't understand why Mom had to secretly enroll me in the competition. Why let us compete with each other?"

The youngest participant in this category complained, thinking about the event a month ago. Suddenly, M.L. Jeerana walked in with a bright smile and mentioned that she had submitted the name of her youngest daughter for the competition.

The youngest one who didn't like the crowded atmosphere couldn't help but stand up to argue. In the end, she ended up accepting her fate here. The older sister turned to smile at the younger one.

"Mom only found out later that I also entered this competition."

"In that case, maybe she should withdraw my name."

"It's not a big deal, right? You like playing piano anyway. Every time I took

Nam home, we heard you play regularly."

"But I don't want to compete with so many people like this..."

Nij remained silent, although a smile appeared on her lips. However, in her gaze, she looked at her younger sister with a hint of concern. Note didn't see it because her eyes were locked on the large TV screen showing the atmosphere in front of the stage.

"This event is quite strange. The camera focuses more on the famous judges than the contestants", the younger one said, her eyes still fixated on the screen.

"P'Nij, do you think the judges might make an unfair judgment against other contestants just because of our last name?" Nij stopped looking away from her sister's face and then straight up her back, gazing at the same point.

"Isn't that normal?"

The younger one raised her eyebrow.

"Then, this event is disgusting."

"Note, right now, you're a bit naive. The on-stage competition is just a show for the adults. They benefit from this event in many ways, from publicity to the brand image. It's like a gathering for people of the same status", someone who had a background in management spoke based on her deeper understanding of the grand event.

"The winners in all categories today have already been decided. Well... there might be some categories that are not lobbied to prevent some criticisms, but that's it. That's the reason why Mom enrolled you."

Maybe Note was too naive that day.

"If you already know that, then why join this competition?"

The older sister smiled mysteriously.

"You don't want to guess?"

M.R. Nijcharee, at the age of 28, was a confident young woman who had completed her business administration degree. One year after her graduation, she got married to a fiance from another royal lineage, whom her father had arranged since she was a child. After less than a year of marriage, she got pregnant and gave birth to her daughter - M.L. Mannam.

Now, the young girl was almost six years old, and every time they visited her father's manor, Aunt Note would always come to play with her. Nij thought about her family and still maintained a small smile on her face, even though the feelings inside her were on different ends.

The competition in various categories passed, and it was time for the piano competition. Nij and Note were in the middle of the ranking, and there was a TV screen next to the stage. The two siblings, of different ages, sat watching other contestants showcase their abilities one by one. When the young man received comments from the judges and finished, he walked down, and it was Nij's turn to go up.

Note turned to smile at her older sister and raised both her fists to encourage her. However, she couldn't help but feel a bit uneasy because the other side had a still face and showed no sign of looking over, even a little.

M.R. Nijcharee, who had changed her last name to her husband's but still used Ruthaithewin as a middle name, gracefully stepped up to stand in front of the grand piano.

"The song I composed, both the melody and lyrics, is named Purple of the

Cosmic Halo."

The title of the song left the young girl sitting next to the stage puzzled.

Note's eyebrows started to furrow until they almost touched. Unable to sit still, she stood up quietly without attracting much attention. Nij, standing on

the stage, radiated confidence with a smile as the spotlight adorned her face. The judges asked her to start playing, and as her fingers touched the keys, the melody she had composed filled the hall. Deep in her mind, she thought back to the reason she had made that decision.

Over time, M.C. Napasdol Ruthaithewin, their father, had always preferred talented children who shone brightly and were suitable for portraying their royal family.

M.R. Nopparuj, the eldest brother, had been always stubborn. He didn't follow the path set by the family but chose to become a doctor, achieving numerous accomplishments that earned him the satisfaction of his father to the point that he eventually stopped imposing restrictions.

As for the younger brother, M.R. Nonthipak, he was known for his charisma and occasionally created scandals in the entertainment industry. He was a playboy and a womanizer, but his exceptional talent lay in his impressive business acumen. There was no reason for his father to object to anything.

Even when Lord Nont refused his blind date with the woman his father arranged for him and proudly introduced another woman to his father as his girlfriend, his father welcomed her and arranged an exquisite wedding for them.

However, when it comes to Lady Nij... M.R. Nijcharee was not particularly outstanding in any aspect. Her abilities did not excel in any area, making her just an average person who could do everything at a moderate level.

Yet, because of this, her father had always looked at her with a cold attitude, as if the gaze was saying that if she could gain recognition, he would accept her just like his other children.

Especially when the youngest sister, 'Note,' was born. As she grew up and demonstrated excellence in piano playing, academics, along with outstanding appearance, all of these compensated the defiance of the youngest daughter, making the father satisfied and considering her praiseworthy.

Every time Note won an award or did something that pleased her father, the man would surreptitiously glance at Nij every time. He didn't say anything, but that look seemed clear as if he was telling her to do something to establish a better status for herself.

So, Nij decided to participate in this competition. She knew that the judges would be respected both the old and the new family of her husband, enough to grant her the winning position.

Nij had previously learned piano during high school. She thought she could compose a song for this stage without any problem. However, it turned out not to be the case. Later, she realized that she couldn't do it. The young woman thought of withdrawing and pretending to have a stubborn health problem.

However, on that Friday when she took her young daughter back to visit her father's palace, she happened to hear some piano music played by Note. She could not remember how long it took her to decide at that moment - to steal this song to be her own.

The notebook used to jot down the lyrics and music notes of the song was in Note's bedroom. It was easy for sisters who were so close to each other to sneak in and take pictures.

If her younger sister found out after the live broadcast, she would request to keep this a secret... Nij, in her younger years, still naive to the ways of the world, merely hoped to win a prize to please her father. Perhaps, he might accept her entirely and support her in every aspect.

However, what changed everything was the day she came to tell her mother about entering the competition.

"Oh no! Are you entering the piano competition? I didn't know and already submit Note's name in... What should I do now?"

Perhaps, Note would not choose to play this song. In that notebook, there were about six completed original songs. Even if Note decided to play this song, seeing this performance would likely make the naive girl play another song instead.

That was her thought...

The young lady admitted that this action was no different from that of a loser. Nevertheless, she proceeded to play the piano with her fingertips flawlessly, striving for perfection. However, her assumptions were completely wrong.

Note, with her beautiful eyes welling with tears and anger, walked up on stage after her sister's performance ended. She sat down on the grand piano chair... the musical instrument she liked the most. Then, she turned to speak to the judges and the silent audience waiting for the introduction.

"The song I will perform tonight is called '*Purple of the Cosmic Halo*.'"

A buzz of amazement filled the room immediately. Everyone remembered that it was the same name as the song played just before, and this song had received praise from all the judges.

"I composed this song because, in my imagination, the universe I see is tinted with purple... my favorite color."

When she finished speaking, Note pursed her lips tightly to suppress all emotions. She tried to keep it as deep as possible because, at this point, the most important thing she should do is confirm ownership of this original, which she wrote from her heart. Note, at the age of seventeen, hoped that when everyone heard her music, they would know who the real original composer was. However, as Nij put it, Note was still too naive to this world... the world that was not kind to everyone.

It all started when someone in the fan group shouted out booing sounds. Then, there were several more voices joining in.

*"Boo! This is a copied song, isn't it?"*

*"Why let her continue playing? Is the show preparing to call attention?" "This kid is too arrogant!"*

While the adults appeared calm as still water, the young girl tried desperately to control her expression and not to cry. Everyone in the room looked at Note, who was playing her sister's song.

The charming melody was drowned out by mockery and booing throughout the room. It was impossible to know if anyone was actually still listening. However, with delicate fingers, the beautiful young girl continued to play the piano and sing the song she composed while lying down and gazing at the stars at night.

Amidst the jeers and insults, she proceeded to play the song *'Purple of the Cosmic Halo.'*

At the same time, another girl, who was the winner of a shirt design competition, stood looking from below without any reaction, unlike the others. Hong Yok still proudly held her certificate. Her eyes glanced discreetly at Note's delicate fingers when she sang the song with the most beautiful voice ever heard.

*'Is it the same song as earlier?'*

She pondered, looking at the beautiful face from the profile of the person sitting at the piano.

*Why is this version more impressive, both in terms of singing and music?*

# Chapter 27 : The Witness Girl

Descending from the stage, the booing and jeers from the audience made Note feel embarrassed and disheartened about her singing. However, what angered the young girl the most was the sight of her adult sister, who stood waiting and sent a smile as if nothing had gone wrong.

Despite her young age, her height and intensity were beyond ordinary. With determination, the girl clenched her teeth and reached for Nij's arm to pull her away for a confrontation, not caring where it happened, just ensuring there were no people around. Note stopped and released her hand from the firm grip, turning with a face that was now filled with warm tears in her eyes.

Because she cares about her family members the most, Note couldn't help but burst out, despite her best efforts to restrain it.

"Why did you do that?!"

"......"

Nij had no immediate response. When she intended to compete with a song composed by her younger sister, she already knew it would come to this. The older sister thought that she might apologize her young sister and ask her to keep it a secret. However, the reactions from the audience and the judges went beyond expectations.

She stood in a corner, slightly sloping towards the restroom. Then a female stepped out casually. Even though she didn't glance at the two sisters' expressions, Nij was fully aware that most of the conversation just now had been overheard.

From the start, her smile for the younger sister was never sincere anyway.

As the situation progressed to this point...

Nij pretended to look sad and confused.

"I'm the one who asks. Why did you steal the original song I composed? Why did you copy my work?"

"What?"

The younger one was shocked by what her older sister said.

"How could you lie with such a straight face like that?"

The older woman, still pretending, sighed like she wanted to let it go.

"What's the big deal? When you came down the stage, the judge said we were both disqualified. Being angry with me wouldn't make anything

better."

"P'Nij!"

"But anyway, I just want to warn you that claiming someone else's work is not a good thing. Mom, Dad, and our brothers who were watching TV must have felt terrible by now. I don't know if they're still upset or not. But... I'll tell them to forgive you because you're still a kid."

M.R. Nijcharee concluded and turned to leave. With a smile in her heart, she almost walked away. However, her two feet suddenly had to stop when her younger sister spoke up.

"Huh! If you insist like this, I have no choice but to prove that I'm the one who composed it."

*Note has evidence?*

*What? She just wrote it in the notebook, didn't she?*

*How could she prove that she's the composer? If that happens... I'd be screwed.*

She came too far to turn back so she hold her younger sister's hand and plead.

Cold sweat seeped out of temples. Her eyes searching for the way out.

Nij's heart darkened when she noticed an iron rod lying against the storage room next to the bathroom.

*If I smash this kid before she complains to Dad... If only Note dies, it will be the over....*

But that was just an evil thought, considering it was just a fantasy, and she knew there was no way she would dare do such a thing.

Then, a man's shout resounded.

"Fire!!"

*!!!!!!!!!!*

A few seconds, an alarm sounded throughout the place, causing everyone to panic. Both of them looked at the horrifying scene where people screamed and rushed towards the fire exits. The smoke and flames rising from the stage indicated that it was not just someone accidentally pressing the wrong button.

Note regained consciousness, realizing that she should grab her sister's hand and run towards the fire exits. But the moment the warm hands touched, Nij let the dark and sinister thought to take over her. She grabbed the iron rod quickly. The young woman turned and aimed it toward the person she despised.

*Thud!!*

The impact on the head caused Note to fall immediately. The intense pain made the young girl confused and unable to get up.

Her front vision was blurry, but if she had the clearest sense, it would most likely be the fresh crimson blood from the left side of the head, mingled with the smell of burning smoke.

Nij widened her eyes at what she had done unconsciously. Now she realized that this wasn't just her imagination. The woman breathed rapidly, hoping to throw the iron rod away. But when she lowered her eyes, she saw a person standing with raised hands and a shocked expression.

Before this, Hong Yok went to the bathroom and heard the fire alarm, so she rushed out. But what she saw was a young child being struck on the head right in front of her eyes. Because of the shock, her legs couldn't move, and her head couldn't figure out what to do.

For the abuser, it is the opposite. Nij felt the chills running up her spine. The fire alarm signal continued. Nij's brain appeared to be quickly aroused by the sound that penetrated her mind. She didn't let go of the iron rod but held it firmly instead. In the next split second, she thought that the 'witness' girl was a threat. She ran to close the main bathroom door and then used the iron rod to block the girl who witnessed the incident inside.

Hong Yok had just regained consciousness. The certificate in her hand fell because she hastily ran to try to push the door open with all her might.

*Thunk! Thunk!*

"Wait! What are you doing?! Open the door!!"

The loud screams mixed with the sound of someone trying to slam the door open.

*Thunk! Thunk! Thunk!*

Nij took a deep breath, still unable to believe she had done such a thing.

"Sis..."

A weak, desperate voice caused her to turn her gaze away from the bathroom door. She look at her younger sister, who, although conscious, still lay amidst a pool of blood. At this moment, Nij had just grasped the enormity of her actions. The sound of a burning fire and the smoke that began to cover the surroundings, compelled her to flee from this location, this spot, this incident.

*"I didn't kill my own sister... Note is still conscious... It's the fire that is about to kill her."*

These were the thoughts racing through her head as she left the hall engulfed in flames.

# Chapter 28 : Unforgettable Scene

The raging flames consumed the art competition hall, illuminating the nighttime sky in shades of orange that were visible from a distance. Firefighters and rescue units responded quickly to this incident. Nij, now in a safe location, observed the chaotic scene. Her heart instantly grew lighter, but she was also struck with fear.

The relief that her daughter wasn't with her today.

And the fear of being seen. Was there anyone else besides that girl who witnessed the moment when she struck Note's head with the metal rod?

The paramedic hurriedly approached to transport her to an ambulance as they noticed the injured woman stumbling, her knees bleeding from the fall during the escape from the fire.

*Rrrrrr!*

Nij's phone vibrated in her pocket. Calls had been ringing throughout her escape, but now was not the time to find out who was calling. The device buzzed heavily as she pulled it out. The panic had subsided, replaced by the understanding that she had survived. She left the flames behind and answered a call from a number saved as 'Mom.'

[Nij! Are you and your sister okay?!]

The voice on the other end quickly pulled her into attention. Nij just realized that the live broadcast of the competition meant her family would quickly know about the situation. The problem was... she didn't have an answer. M.L. Jeerana was questioning her about Note too.

"I... I am okay."

[What about Note?]

Her mother inquired anxiously. How could she explain that at this moment, Note was probably already burnt or suffocated by the flames? Nij, unable to find the right words, hesitated.

She couldn't say 'I don't know' as it might raise more suspicion.

[Answer me, Nij! Is Note safe too?!]

The voice on the phone demanded a response. Nij, holding the phone tightly, turned back to the blazing inferno. Those girls... They might have died, because of either the fire or smoke. Therefore, she started a new act. She held the phone tightly, turning to the rescue personnel who were still holding her arm.

"You... Could you please help? My... My sister's trapped inside!"

But no matter what, she didn't want them to find Note alive, and she wasn't confident that her sister had died yet.

"She should be behind the stage!"

She lied, hoping that no one would find her sister alive.

Note was temporarily paralyzed by the severe agony in her head. She couldn't get up or understand the situation she was facing. The young girl became aware of the blood flowing down the left side of her face, the heat from the spreading fire, and the difficulty in breathing as the smoke filled the air. When she tried to lift her arm, she found herself collapsing again.

I can't make it...

*Thunk! Thunk! Thunk!*

"Help, please! A... Anyone, help!!"

She heard someone desperately banging on the door, screaming for help. Note's eyesight dimmed, and she noticed a blood-stained metal rod on the other side of the door. Note didn't have enough consciousness to realize that the blood belonged to her.

"Help, please! I... can't... b... breathe..."

*Fire is raging here.*

*I should escape quickly.*

*But... someone is trapped inside.*

The injured girl, struggling with the head wound, heard the muffled sound of the other side. She tightened her grip, pressing her nails into the flesh, gathering all the strength to try to get up once more.

The situation inside the bathroom had worsened. Hong Yok was running out of strength, and the smoke was making it difficult to breathe. She coughed several times, but she refused to give up trying to break open the door. Her brain wasn't getting enough oxygen, causing her thin body to collapse on the ground. She can't support herself.

*Thud...*

At a time when she thought she might not survive, the sound of a lock being released on the main door echoed. Hong Yok, still coughing continuously, managed to look at the source of that sound, and at that moment, the door swung open by someone.

The girl, who had been injured in the head a while ago, was holding the metal rod that caused her to be trapped. Then she dropped it onto the floor with a loud 'clank!'

Hong Yok vowed herself that she would never forget the image of the person in front of her in this lifetime. However there was not much time to ponder about anything. Suddenly, it appeared that something big hit the right side of her head, causing her unconsciousness in the blink of an eye.

After recovering in the hospital, Hong Yok discovered that the ceiling above had collapsed and a massive steel beam had fallen, causing significant cuts on the right side of her face.

The girl with similar wounds helped her out of the collapsed building and escorted her out of the burning hall.

Note felt as if she had slept longer than she had ever before. But instead of waking up feeling refreshed, she was greeted by a throbbing headache. Her legs, still numb, stung as if they were in pain.

A bright light flashed into her eyes, forcing her to squint and eventually recollect where she was.

It was a hospital, and she was lying on a bed in a VIP room.

As she looked around, she saw her family members sitting anxiously on a sofa set. They hadn't realized she had awakened yet. Her father, mother, both brothers, and... her older sister.

The patient's eyebrows furrowed as she stared at his "older sister", who was wearing a sad expression. Then her memories slowly restored.

She recalled trying to lead another girl out of the flames. Every step felt shaky and uncertain.

She remembered being disoriented, just like everyone else, but the cry for help that she heard had spurred her to go on.

Now she realized that her own sister, the one she trusted and confided in the most, was responsible for everything. Whether it's stealing her original song, lying with a straight face, deliberately hitting hard items on her head, or trapping witnesses in the restroom.

**"You b\*tch!"**

Note screamed, her voice full of agony and rage. Blood trickled from her hand, the needle fallout from her dash to attack her sister. The girl jumped on her sister, indifferent about her body pain, causing Nij to collapse.

Note's eyes that were normally shine brightly were red and teary.

Nij, second only to her mother, was the person Note felt most close to and trusted. She had always viewed of the middle. sister as the one with the least age gap from her, allowing her to talk about anything with Nij. As a result, the wrath caused by betrayal and hurt escalated significantly.

Family members were stunned to find Note strangling Nij like she was extremely angry.

Prince Napasdol froze for a moment before exploding in rage.

"What are you doing?!!"

Then, the eldest brother came in to pull Note away, glaring at the younger brother,

"Call the nurse right now! This girl is insane!"

# Chapter 29 :The One And Only in This Universe

Hong Yok returned home-to recover. The doctor scheduled follow-up appointments to monitor the healing progress but made it clear that although the overall recovery would be good, there would be a noticeable scar on the right side of her face. At this point, she and her parents had to decide whether to undergo additional cosmetic surgery.

During this time, the girl who won the souvenir shirt design competition was not interested in the scar at all. There was another issue that weighed heavily on her mind. A piece of news was circulating on social media.

'M.R. Netapsorn stole her own sister's song.'

The face in that news was the same person who had saved her life. When she was in the restroom, she overheard a conversation about this. And as she also heard the same song twice during the competition, she was so bothered by what she read in the news.

Additionally, there was a post that appeared to be created to spread false rumors, 'Did M.R. Netapsorn intentionally set fire to the art competition?"

When she clicked to read more, there was no evidence or motive, as if someone just raised a big question without any substantial information.

Feeling overwhelmed, she couldn't stay at home anymore.

Back then, Hong Yok was still confident and brave in facing everything. She told her mother she was going to visit a friend, but in reality she went to the private hospital stated in the news where Note was being treated and prayed that the person there hadn't already left.

The problem was that when she asked at reception, the nurse was unable give the room number because there was nothing linking her to the patient. Life is not as easy as it appears in novels or dramas, and she would have returned home empty- handed that day if it hadn't been for a girl sitting in a chair who drew her attention.

"Hey, take me to the restroom."

The girl with the bandaged-face pointed at herself in confusion.

"Are you talking to me?"

"Yes, are you dumb? Can't you see that you are the only one person here?" The little girl gestured as if giving orders, supposedly accustomed to it.

Hong Yok was not one to give in easily to others. Even if the other individual was an elementary school kid, "Little girl, if you want help from someone, you should try to ask more politely"

"Young Miss Nam", an irritated voice interrupted Hong Yok who was still speaking. A woman walked in with a disdainful look, "Even though she's still a child, she is a Mom Luang. You should address her properly as "'Young Miss'!"

This woman... Hong Yok remembered well that she was the one who deliberately locked her in the restroom. However, Nij couldn't recall the face of the young girl at that moment, as everything was chaotic, and now the right side of the head and face of the Hong Yok were covered, making Nij think that Hong Yok might have been shocked to see her, a royal descendant from a well-known lineage.

Nij turned back to her little daughter, "Nam, let's go to Aunt Note's bathroom together."

The girl hesitated before responding with a small voice, "Yep."

Then, she turned to give a contemptuous look to Hong Yok.

Seeing the daughter walk straight to the elevator with her mother, Hong Yok realized that in the sentence that woman spoke earlier, she mentioned going to the room of someone named 'Note.' Even though she didn't know the nickname of Netapsorn, who had helped her, who else could that woman visit besides her younger sister?

**Room 643**

On that day, both older brothers were not available for a visit. M.R.

Nopparuj had to go to the hospital where he worked as a medical specialist. As for M.R. Nonthipak, he had an important meeting.

This made the room occupied by three people, M.C. Napasdol, M.L. Jeerana, and the patient, M.R. Netapsorn.

The middle-aged man sighed loudly after the younger daughter insisted that she was framed and almost killed by her older sister.

"Stop talking nonsense. Don't think that because you're the youngest child, your father will believe you without reason. The files on the

computer that you claimed would prove that you composed that song yourself, actually don't exist!"

At that moment, M.R. Nijcharee led her little daughter into the room. Note was sitting on the bed, looking at the person whom she now hated from the bottom of her heart.

Because that b\*\*\*\* destroyed all the evidence!"

"Stop calling your big sister like that, Note", the mother scolded when she heard that her younger daughter changed the pronoun she used to address her sister.

The tension escalated further when Note saw her elder sister pretending to have a hard time. Note, still a young girl, whose emotions were not well controlled, burst out with explosive emotions.

"Everyone is crazy here!"

"Note!" her father shouted, hoping she would stop.

However, this only made Note feel hurt because no one believed her words and didn't trust her. Her tears flowed because of anger.

"When I said that b\*\*\* took my song, no one believed me. When I said someone wanted to kill me, no one believed me. I have no reason to lie about these crazy things. She is the one who lies!"

*Slap!*

"Why did you do that to your daughter!?"

M.L. Jeerana rushed in to hold the cheek of her youngest daughter, which was red from being slapped. She turned to her husband and asked,

"Are you out of your mind?!"

The middle-aged man turned to his wife and said, "Our daughter was shocked to the point of going insane."

His expression towards Note was chilly. He had never looked at her like this before.

He only cherished his children who shone brightly. For Note who stole others' works and acted insanely like this... she became nothing but an incompetent person.

Nij observed the situation all along, briefly smiling with satisfaction before quickly changing her expression to pity for her younger sister and advising,

"Dad, I'm not angry with her-"

"Excuse me, I've come to visit Mom Rajawongse Netapsorn."

A loud voice from the doorway attracted everyone's attention. A thin girl with bandages around her head and right cheek appeared. The tension in the room didn't completely dissipate but eased slightly. Prince Napasdol frowned emotionlessly at the intrusion.

"Who are you?"

Hong Yok didn't care about the audible tension but focused on the person sitting on the bed. But first, the girl turned to M.R. Nijcharee.

"I'm the one who was locked in the restroom by that woman until I almost got burned alive. Because I saw her hitting her younger sister with an iron

rod."

The individual being accused froze, yet her mouth continued to work.

"Talking nonsense!"

"That issue should be resolved by the law. I heard the news this morning. They said that the CCTV had been broken, yet everything captured before to that point might still be recovered. By then, we will be able to determine if it is true or false."

The middle-aged guy and woman listened, astounded. The new girl, on the other hand, paid no attention to anyone. Hong Yok turned to face the person she had come to see today- M.R. Netapsorn. Two sets of eyes locked. One was determined and sharp, while the other was fading and disintegrating due to her lack of faith in her words.

"Thank you for saving my life."

"But what I want to say the most is that I don't believe that you're a song thief. It's not about the kindness you showed to me, but because since I heard it with my own ears twice, I realized that the original must be yours."

"......"

The girl continued with her bright smile,

"Because the melody you play is beautiful. No matter what anyone says, I believe that you're the one who composed it and can play it the best."

Family should be the ones who believe you the most, but not in this case. The girl in front of her was the only one who believed in her. She spoke about how beautiful and original her song was.

Note cried her heart out...

But it was a mix of torment and relief, knowing that at least someone understood her. There were many words she wanted to respond to, but she couldn't think of any.

Instead, she looked at the girl and burst into tears, releasing what had been held back in her heart.

"Thank you again. I'll come to visit you again for sure, but today I have to ask to be excused."

Hong Yok didn't provide any reasons why she had sneaked away from her mother to come here today, thinking that it would be better if they talked more when they were alone.

Note memorized every sentence from that girl accurately. She watched the girl, whose name she didn't even know, smile at her before leaving the room. Note reminded herself that if they met again, she had to ask for her name, smile back, talk more, and express gratitude.

However, the girl never returned to see her, despite her promise.

Note felt no bitterness whatsoever. She did her best to stay in the hospital as long as possible, and when the doctor told her she could go home, she made it clear to the hospital that if anyone asked about her, they should contact her right away.

For those who wait, time always seems to stretch endlessly.

Before she realized it, Note frequently looked up at the stars in the sky and remembered the bright smile that appeared to have saved one person's life.

One month passed, she was still convinced that a phone call was on the way, even if it would take some time.

Two months later, she returned to school as usual, and her father begged her to assist him in keeping a certain matter confidential.

Three months later, it was obvious that her personality had altered. No one ever heard her sing or compose another song.

Note began writing a diary. Its first page was loaded with her innermost thoughts-she wanted to send a message to the anonymous girl, to reassure her, if only little, that everything was okay.

*To: The most beautiful person in the universe,*

*Since that day,*

*nothing in this world has any meaning anymore, except for you.*

*You are so precious that I can't imagine if the worth of a million galaxies could compare to yours.*

*Even if it's another year, five years, fifty years, or more from now, just getting a glimpse of you again,*

*I am confident that I will remember you. Because you are my entire universe.*

*From: Me, the person who thinks of you every time she looks up at the*

*stars.*

# Chapter 30 : Answer To That Question

**Part: Hong Yok**

At that time... I, at the age of 16, promised to go back to her.

However, many things had happened after that day. Unfortunately, I was unable to return to P'Note. It all started when I returned to school, attempting to distract myself by being with my friends. They were supportive, understanding my situation. Everything seemed normal until one day someone in the class started calling me 'One-Eyed,' because at that moment my right eye was still bandaged with gauze. Soon, everything started to get worse and worse.

'Scarface'

'Female Freddy Kruger'

And many other mocking comments echoed around; some of them were even said by the teachers who were also laughing along.

I was drowning in jokes that I didn't enjoy. I was just pretending to be fine.

However, what disturbed my life more than anything was the PTSD[\*1] that occurred after being trapped in the fire that day.

I began waking up in the middle of the night, trembling and calling out for help, as I imagined myself trapped in the flames and unable to breathe. It became progressively severe, to the point where seeing a fire scene or drama on television made me tremble in horror. Aside from that, I was afraid of being alone behind a closed door. My parents were distressed to see me like that. The surgery to correct and erase my scars had to be postponed. A psychiatrist provided counseling, and the family offered emotional support. At that time, my sister and I didn't hate each other yet, and I had to take a break from school for a while due to this ordeal.

One night, I thought I was getting better, but I woke up in the middle of the

night again, surrounded by nightmares that felt too real. I began gasping for breath, even though my mother came to my room to hugged me and comforted me to sleep. But before an hour had passed, I woke up again, gasping for breath. It continued like this for nights, until... until the dawn of that day. I, who had not slept a wink, suddenly sat up in bed. I covered my ears with both hands and screamed so loud it made my throat ache. My brain felt like it was about to explode into pieces, and then I fell back asleep once again.

That morning, I found myself pulled into the vortex of memories, pushing the vivid recollection of the fire down into the depths of my subconscious. It's become a blurry, frightening dream that occasionally surfaces. I forgot about individual personalities, the people at the festival, the cruel woman slamming doors to lock me in the bathroom, and the young girl who saved

my life.

I even forgot the vows I made to go back to her...

Then, when I saw her again, I even suspected her.

---------

"Hong, why are you crying?"

The voice of Woon-Sen brings me back to the present, shaking me from the grasp of the past. I just realized that the warmth of my tears is streaming down my face. At this moment, my emotions are overwhelming, but one thing is certain-I just want to talk to P'Note right now. I lift my head, smiling through the tears, to assure my friends that everything is okay. Okay in a way it has never been before. Then, I pick up my phone and dial P'Note's number.

But this time, I hear the signal that waiting for a response. There's still no answer. It's okay; I try pressing the call button again.

Why isn't she picking up?

Or is it because she's angry with me?

When I'm about to dial her number for the third time, the voice that echoed from the microphone on stage makes me pause.

"...Today we have a special surprise for everyone, the band *The Edge of*

*Universe,* will debut their latest unreleased song for us."

The Edge of Universe... They're here?

My seat is facing away from the stage, so I swiftly turn to watch. The individual speaking is the same one who told us about the alarm signals earlier; his face is virtually exploding with happiness. Some of the audience applauds passionately. I blink, confused. Then the chat at the next table helps me understand more.

"This band was supposed to play at this bar next week, right. May be it's because someone wants to proclaim her affection for the first time. The band members always write love songs for their own lovers."

The new song that has never been revealed anywhere...

Before I can ponder what's going on, the event organizer put microphone back to the mic stand, giving the stage the five females' group. I know all of them well: Belle the guitarist, Nene the bassist, Frang the drummer, Kliao Khluen the vocalist, and... Note the keyboardist.

"The last one doesn't come to play with a stationed keyboard as she brings her own keytar"[\*2].

My gaze captures the tall woman who's wearing the outfit that I designed and tailored for her. The sound of applause and cheers from others in the audience fills the air.

Kliao Khluen, the tiny girl, tests the microphone before adjusting the mic stand to match the compact height. She greets the crowd with her cheerful voice.

"Hey, everyone! We are *'The Edge of Universe'.* Actually, as shown on the

Facebook page... our turn to perform is actually next week."

She glance at her friend on the side, M.R. Netapsorn.

"But just an hour ago, my naughty friend called and told us that we have to play here right now."

Amidst the chit chat between Kliao Khluen and the audience, other members prepare to perform. Frang, seated behind the drum set, makes a signal that everything's ready. The petite figure using one hand to hold the microphone turns towards the crowd and continues speaking.

"Another thing I'd like to mention is that this song has never been played anywhere before. We've only practiced it together a few times recently, so we're feeling a bit nervous. But that's not a problem at all because my today's role is to sing the chorus and play this baby."

The girl holding the tambourine and raises it for everyone to see, then proceeds with a lively voice,

"The singer today is the lady who composed this original song."

*Thud... Thud...*

My heart instantly races, the excitement indicating a positive kind. I stare at the tall figure carrying the keytar, who walks up and switch her position to stand in the center stage. She adjusts the microphone to match her height perfectly.

"I composed the lyrics for this song a while ago. But it took me some time to overcome my stupid fear and decide to sing it for someone to hear."

No.

She isn't stupid at all. It's me.

So this thing used to make her afraid to sing. I should have remembered and accepted her suffering. I should not have forced her to answer my question last Saturday.

She is now looking directly at me rather than around the entire pub. Customers begin to look at me, too. Her sweet voice spoke gently into the microphone.

"This song is called **'Hong Yok'**."

After that, her keytar starts the intro to the song. I can't stay seated here anymore. Woon-Sen no longer confines me, and I jump out of my chair. I ignored the whole crowd. No, I would rather say I ignore the whole universe.

Her gentle and melodious voice fills the air as she sings a song with profound lyrics. She compares a certain woman to a star. The most unique and priceless star in the vast night sky. The entire galaxy cannot compete with this woman.

Every word she sings, every sentiment she transmits with her hands, her pair of eyes are fixed on me. I am still in wonder, my hands involuntarily moving to embrace my chest, bringing warmth and comfort unlike any other melodious moment in my life.

Before, my self-defense mechanism shielded me so well that I escaped to hide in the sanctuary of my subconscious. But my true feelings never deceived me. Even when we first met again and I jumped to the conclusion that P'Note was the one who hurt me, it's not surprising that when I touched her and got close to her, I strangely felt safe without any reason.

Because she is that girl-the one who opened that door in difficult times, the one who led me out of the fire.

And I was the only person at that time who believed that she's the one who composed that original masterpiece.

I hate myself for having distanced myself from her. Why couldn't I remember quickly enough?

As the 4-minute song comes to an end, the applause resonates loudly throughout the bar. I still vividly remember every melody and lyric, etched into every corner of my heart. I am determined never to forget anything about to her again.

She removes the keytar from her shoulder and steps down from the stage, walking directly toward me. Her eyes are filled with an expression of pleading.

It's a bit late to respond to the call on that day. But today, I have an answer,

without any hesitation.

Thin lips, adorned with subtle tones of cherry blossom, appear to be trying to say something. But, in this moment, my emotions rise, and I answer quickly to the question that she doesn't have a chance to finish her sentence.

"I'm sorr-"

"I will"

"......"

**"If it's you, yes, I'll marry you." Footnote:**

\**1.PTSD, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, is a mental health condition that can occur after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic even' natural disasters, accidents, or violent personal assaults.*

*\*2."A keytar is a musical instrument that is a cross between a guitar and a synthesizer. It is typically played with a strap around the neck and shoulders, and the keys are played with the fingers. Keytars are often* used in pop, rock, and electronic music.

# Chapter 31 : Secretly Smile When Looking At Your Face

Tonight, I didn't ask Woon-Sen to drop me off as previously agreed. Instead, I found myself sitting in a Maserati and holding the warm hand of the driver throughout the journey. My heart is overflowing with happiness.

Yes, warm hands. Because P'Note's hand, providing comfort while driving, warms my heart.

And I'm honestly delighted to share this touch with her.

Now I'm melting like an ice cream cone, seemingly falling in love with her over and over with every inch of my being. Thinking about the song she just performed makes my head almost explode with passion.

"I... I remember everything."

"You mean the accident ten years ago?"

When she speaks softly, my blood boils all over.

"Yes..."

I answer, my voice trembling, because blushing is inevitable at times like this. And I restrain my emotions and ask, "Why didn't you tell me?"

The beautiful woman gazes at me through the rearview mirror for a brief moment before returning her attention to the dimly lit road.

"That day at the cafe, you said you had nightmares. So I thought... we shouldn't revive such a heart- wrenching story because it would hurt you all over again."

So, she's concerned about my feelings and that's why she chose to keep everything to herself?

P'Note holds my hand more firmly. She goes on with a sentence that makes me want to cry again.

"Love can't be forced upon anyone just because a story is told."

That's probably why she didn't approach me too much; she was afraid it would become oppressive. From the beginning, when I showed my displeasure, P'Note never suddenly touched me but kept a good distance between us. She never went overboard without my consent.

Alas! I made the mistake of suspecting the wrong person.

In the past I pushed you away and turned towards Lady Nij instead. That woman is not worthy of being referred to as such an honorable status, even though she's close to my mother's age.

There's another question that I couldn't help but ask.

"After that, what happened to you and... um... that mean woman?"

"That mean woman?"

"Nij."

"Ah! You've always called her Lady Nij. She's your boss, isn't she?"

The person behind the wheel chuckles, teasing me intentionally. I immediately frown.

"I won't do that anymore. Tomorrow, I will resign and bring everything on my desk back home. I can't work for that cruel woman. She not only stole your song but also hasn't given up that habit until now" P'Note remains silent, seemingly buried in thought, as if she did not want to talk about the past again. I promise her that I remember everything. I'm simply wondering if her family knows the truth yet. Finally, P'Note sighs and begins to describe what happened after her release from the hospital.

Because I barged into her patient room that day and told them what Nij had done. Prince Napasdol, despite his silence, had explored the truth by reviewing CCTV footage. He even requested a private conversation with P'Note, asking her to keep everything silent. Beginning with the incident in which Nij stole her song, physically abused her, and locked me up.

He was concerned that it would harm the reputation of both royal houses, particularly Nij's current status and the fact that she still uses her maiden name as part of her surname.

That means only the three of them-their father, Nij, and P'Note know the truth.

"It is not fair at all. The stature of both families is so important that we need to cover up that woman's misdeeds?"

"My father respects and embraces people with reputations. He chose to conceal the situation because it could have far-reaching consequences for both sides. So he asked me to uphold the family's reputation."

"Why did you have to agree? It makes people perceive you negatively."

"Back then, I wasn't like this..."

The somewhat lower voice invokes empathy in me. She was not indifferent to the world as a child. She was an innocent kid with a pure heart.

"At the time, Dad never asked anyone for anything and even made me a promise about something. When he mentioned that, I was speechless. I felt compelled to agree."

"That's unfair!"

I was becoming angry, and it looked like a furious fire that was about to erupt.

"But, what is the vow you're talking about?"

"He stated that whatever I want in this lifetime, he will not object to. Instead, he will support me."

Perhaps it was the reason when P'Note called to propose to me that night, saying that if I agreed, her father would arrange the wedding for us. She was confident that he would have consented to it, and that vow was also the reason for everything else.

*"I know my father visited you at the studio. Don't pay attention to what he says. I fought back against him already."*

No surprise, that night, she managed to clear things up with her father quickly, making him accept me.

"And what about Nij? What were the repercussions for that cunning woman?"

When she returned to discussing her sister, she cast a frigid look down the street.

"Dad sent that bitch abroad to study for a master's degree. She initially planned to study music with the intention of returning to Thailand and opening a music school. But that was it; Dad called her 'shameless' and forbade her from being involved in the showbiz again. After that, I didn't contact her. I just know she became a designer after she returned."

"As for the pool scandal, she deliberately fell into it herself, right?"

"Yes, she purposely went down alone... Dad understood it well. He simply did not want to discuss it."

"Huh?"

"At the manor, there are security cameras everywhere. Dad ordered to install more without her knowing, as she moved out for a long time."

Today, I learned all about her family's problems. Then I also found out that night, P'Note didn't call her over for a talk, but it was that woman who sent a message saying that there was something they needed to discuss.

She wanted me to spread bad rumors about her sister, but sorry, ma'me, I believe in P'Note. I didn't say anything to anyone.

Just thinking about her makes me angry with myself. Why couldn't I remember?

"P'Note, are you angry with me...?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I broke the promise with you ten years ago. When we met again, I did so many bad things to you too."

"I've never been angry."

Even so, I continue speaking.

"I'm sorry."

She smiles gently.

"I'm also sorry for making you upset for almost two days."

Our hands clasp together with a sense of understanding, conveying warmth and our shared past. Our destination is her penthouse. I want to go there as well... and I know I'll fall for her again, just like I did before. I use my free hand to grab my phone and text my mom.

**Hong Yok**: I am not coming home tonight. Don't worry.

**Mom:** Are you having a sleepover at a friend's place?

**Hong Yok**: I'm heading to P'Note's condo.

**Mom**: Oh, okay. Safe trips, dear. My mother's never a problem. But it seems like she shares this news with my father, so in less than a minute, he texts me too.

**Dad:** Share the location.

He became so concerned so I had to send him the location. Last Saturday, I noticed P'Note had left him her phone number and contact information. I smile at my father's protective behavior. I respond with a sticker and then follow his order when the expensive Maserati arrives at the condominium's

underground parking lot.

The Penthouse is a special unit in the condo, with a living space similar to a single house. It is bigger than other units, uniquely designed, and often situated on the top floor. This requires us to take the elevator to the 35th floor, the highest level here (and it's a private lift!).

Just by saying so, I can already tell how exorbitant the price would be. When I see the walkway, the dining area that differs from the lower floors, coupled with the interior design and expensive furniture that stand out, I can guess it has to be above...

"Fifty million?"

"Times three."

The answer from P'Note makes me widen my eyes.

Oh my Lord... Her Penthouse is even more expensive than I could imagine. A hundred and fifty million baht, this is beyond my wildest expectations!

The owner of the room looks at my shocked expression with a faint smile and then walks to the kitchen area with a dining zone. Unfamiliar, I can only place my bag on the sofa in the living room and follow the tall figure. I see her rolling up her sleeves and washing her hands at the sink.

"Hungry yet?" P'Note asks without looking up.

"A bit, yes."

It's because I'm stressed out about various issues during the day, especially in the evenings. When I am anxious, my appetite falls. When I finally sat down to eat at the bar, I ate only some snacks and a drink, which I sipped just slightly. I tighten my lips when the perfect living clothes hanger washes her hands and then wears the white apron, signaling that she's going to cook.

I sit on the barstool, looking at every swift gesture of hers. She seems to cook often. There's silence between us because the royal lady is busy organizing ingredients picked from the refrigerator. Soon enough, she returns with two dishes of grilled fish and veggie salad.

I'm responsible for holding and placing them on the table. She, on the other hand, takes off her apron and picks up a cold bottle of water and two glasses. Her cooking tastes better than I expected. Despite her aristocratic appearance as a true royal lady, she manages to prepare a low-calorie dish that tastes so excellent that I automatically exclaim, "Mmmmmm."

"I learned from Nene", she explains briefly. And, if I'm not mistaken, Nene is the left-handed bassist of the Edge of Universe.

The atmosphere between us has changed drastically compared to every other meal we've shared before. In fact, before today, even when I couldn't remember much, I was falling in love with this woman. It turns out that I usually maintain a distance and a certain level of formality.

But now, it seems like that wall has completely crumbled. Just knowing that she is the one...

The more I look at her now, the more certain I am that I have fallen for P'Note multiple times.

The first time was when I heard her song during that competition. The second time was when it felt like I was about to die, and then the door was opened.

After that... I fell in love again, even though I couldn't remember the first two times.

I secretly smile throughout our meal. Sometimes she raises her brows with curiosity, but I act like there's nothing significant because I am too happy to keep my smile inside.

After finishing the meal, we head towards the kitchen. P'Note suggests that she'll take care of the cleaning, but since my family frequently helps each other with chores. Even Dad, who works full-time and overtime, often assists Mom, and they continue to take turns helping each other. So I've developed the habit of having everyone help with the cleaning after dinner.

Then, well... Truth be told, I have something to talk about while washing dishes together.

"P'Note."

"Hmm?"

It sounds a bit embarrassing though. "Tonight... would you like to do it together?"

But I want it to happen.

However, washing a glass, the older woman puts on her innocent mask and asks:

"What does that mean? Explain more, please."

"L... Like what we did when we went to the beach house together."

"You mean star gazing, right?"

"N-no, not that."

"Bathing together?"

"Not exactly, just a bit of that."

"A kiss, then?"

"More than that, please!"

Well, that's really embarrassing. I feel the tension rising, and I stay quiet, not saying anything more. Perhaps because she feels that I've already surrendered my heart to her, P'Note, seeing my silence, turns to face me and speaks up.

"Are you thinking about the 18+ thing?"

"No, not anymore. Is there a guest room here? Can I stay tonight?"

When she heard my determined voice, the taller woman finishes what she's doing and walks towards me. She uses both arms to hold my waist and rest her chin on my right shoulder. Her voice filled with a sensual touch that one can be felt just by listening.

"I haven't objected yet."

When she uses that tempting tone, I surrender every time. Just like now, I don't think about moving away, at least for a while.

P'Note reaches her hand over to help with the task I'm responsible for, and then, taking advantage of the moment, presses her warm nose against my cheek. I blinked several times because she caught me off guard. She leans behind me and chuckles before getting to the topic we've been discussing.

"I just wanted to say that, coincidentally, the two of us happened to be thinking about that kind of thing at the same time."

I shouldn't have brought up that 18+ issue.

As when the tables turned, I am now too shy to do anything.

# Chapter 32 : Beautiful Melody

We shower together, but not like before. I bathe in the tub, while she uses the shower. There's a curtain dividing us, allowing only shadows to be seen. Still, my heart races as I catch a glimpse of her silhouette.

P'Note is the first one to finish her shower. She told me I could use the clothing in the room on the left. I murmured yes and sat in the warm water, my heart pounding.

I don't know why I'm so excited when this is not the first night that we have been together.

Perhaps it is because the sentiments of falling in love are stronger than ever before.

I sit in the bath, lost in thought for about twenty minutes until I decide to get up and grab a towel to dry pmyself off. Her bathroom is on the second floor of the unit. Stepping out, I'm faced with a dressing room full of closets on the left side.

Inside, it was mainly filled with aloha shirts, but there were other clothes in various styles.

Hmm, did she go on a shopping spree? Some of these don't seem like her style at all. Perhaps her friend chose them for her.

I open the door one by one to find a nightgown. The ones P'Note usually wears are plain, like cream or navy blue, with no elaborate patterns. And most importantly, there's no purple clothes among them, even though it's her favorite color.

Purple was the theme of that event. The song 'Purple of the Cosmic Circle' was composed based on her preference for the cosmos, mixed with her favorite color. After it was snatched away, and no one believed she was the composer, it turned the teenage girl into someone who didn't like that color. But deep inside, she still liked it, and her heart hadn't changed.

As I'm thinking about this, my eyes are drawn to a nicely folded pair at the bottom that appears to have never been used. You won't notice until you pay close attention. The purple nightgown features a butterfly motif on the shirt pocket.

I stiffen my lips. Please wait. I will assist you to completely overcome your past...

I chose to wear a plain cream-colored outfit with no frills. As I step into the bedroom, I notice that we both picked the same style. It's not planned, but it's perfectly matched.

In the dimly lit room, illuminated only by the table lamp, P'Note is sitting, leaning against the pillow. She has not picked up a book, held her phone, or done anything at all. It's as if she's deliberately waiting for me to finish my bath so that we can start our time together. Even though her face remains calm, there's some sparkle in her eyes that I can see.

"I shouldn't bother wearing anything. It seems like someone is eagerly waiting for me to take it off."

"Exactly."

The woman with an undercut hair responds while narrowing her eyes.

As annoying as always.

I walk towards the bed to check my phone, which I took out from my purse downstairs earlier, along with a box containing the glasses I wore. As I sit down, P'Note cuddles up and hugs me from behind, planting gentle kisses on the back of my neck, making me shiver. At first, I thought she was being sexual and overly forward with these fast gestures, but I was mistaken; she only wanted to cuddle. It appears that I'm the one with dirty ideas.

"You're so beautiful..."

"W-What do you mean, beautiful?"

"Every part of you."

Since we got to know each other, I've lost count of how many times this woman has complimented me.

As for her, am I that beautiful? Those eyes seem to sparkle with happiness when she hug me as if I'm precious.

I look at the faint, scarred lines on her head. It's a silent testament to the challenges we faced together.

"Thank you."

For everything, for the hugs, and for making me feel warm and secure.

Without the need for further explanation, the woman understands me. She hugs me tightly and smiles gently.

"Thank you too for descending from the sky and coming back to me." She's excellent at making metaphors.

I feel like I have another attack of cute aggression. I grin and move my face to gently nip her delicate lips teasingly. But it seems like a mistake because P'Note retaliates, determined to explore the edge of my lips as well. I burst into laughter and playfully escape from her embrace.

It feels like two children playing a game of chase on a bed. As the laughter peaks, I find myself surrendering to the joy, outmaneuvered by P'Note's agile movements and infectious laughter.

I'm still smiling, even when lying beneath her. But the winner starts to make a serious face.

"Hong Yok."

"Yes?"

**"I love you, Hong."** *Thump... Thump...*

My heart races faster, echoing the room, spreading the joy and the desire.

"I did not make any jokes about my proposal."

I try to retain my emotions, move my lips closer to her ear, whispering my response.

"I did not make any jokes about my answer either... because I love you too." My response makes the royal lady smile once again.

After that, our lips came closer together. She leaned in, pressing her soft lips against mine. The kiss wasn't as playful as my kiss. However, it was a sweet and emotional kiss. I can't see the color of P'Note's face because I'm in a trance, allowing her to lead the way in this love sonata.

Again, the kisses are the introduction, and our love melody continues.

When our lips part, the fabric of the silky satin shirt I just put on less than fifteen minutes ago is unbuttoned one by one by P'Note, since I don't wear a bra during my sleep, my bare chest is exposed before her eyes. I can't help but look away with embarrassment.

"Don't cheat... You need to take it off too."

"Yes, ma'me." Her honeyed voice combines with her stunning face, causing my heart to race faster.

P'Note leans down again, but this time, the goal isn't my lips but my left nipple. She kisses softly, gently using her warm tongue to caress, creating a sensation of tender affection. My toes tightened due to the flood of internal feelings.

Our nightgowns are discarded. Some are scattered on the bed, while some are on the floor. contact. Before I know it, we're both naked, allowing skin-to-skin.

Her delicate, supple tongue explores the warm cleft between my thighs, resulting in a rhythmic dance that increases sensitivity to touch. My body responds, and I can't help but moan her name.

"Ah...P... P'Note."

My voice from my throat is dry. Overwhelmed by the powerful feelings, I sweat all over my body. I have to let out a helpless cry, accompanied by a tight clenching, in order to contain my excitement as the lovely figure teasingly nibbles that area.

She is playing with my clitoris, and I am electrified. P'Note doesn't allow me to catch my breath. With warm fingertips, she explores my slipery love canal, making my thoughts spiral out of control and plunge into the magnitude of cosmic bliss. I don't remember how loud my moans were; all I know is that they echoed across the room.

Even without me realizing it, I reach that point, the highest point... under the skillful hands and tongue of P'Note, who withdraws her two fingers, glistening with the color of desire, and charmingly licks them.

We continue to perform the love duet together. She conveys warmth and tender affection with her gentle tongue, and I return with quivering fingers. And... P'Note, as greedy as always, desires more of it. She appears to like the sight and sound of my moans, even getting up in the middle of the night to ask for another encore. With her gorgeous face, she offers to clean my love fluid with her tongue.

Normally, she is a calm woman, but on the bed, she's super hot. Gosh...

**The next day**

P'Note took me home early in the morning. My father himself was waiting, arms crossed, just like the protective father- in-law, when P'Note got out to say hello. I had to pull up my shirt collar to hide... the kiss marks on my neck. Otherwise, she would surely be heavily beaten for doing that to his daughter.

In fact, last night, she planted kisses and sucked all over my body. When I looked at myself in the bathroom mirror, I could see those traces. I immediately pick up the phone and type a message to someone whom I'm not sure if she has arrived home or gone to work yet.

**Hong Yok:** You're so naughty!

The other side might not know what I'm angry about, but she managed to send a smirking emoji back.

Hmm, I wonder if I should wear a turtle-necked shirt to my office today.

Don't be fretting.

I'm not going there to bow my head and continue working for that inhumane, malicious woman. No way. The purpose of going is simply to collect everything into my box, not leaving even a single rubber band, and then bravely resign before her eyes.

I was so foolish to work for the woman who tried to kill me ten years ago. If I had believed her from the beginning, I wouldn't have become such a frequent job quitter. Everything proceeds as usual, like any other working day. I arrive at Nij Greta around twenty minutes past six. In the past, I would have just started working without hesitation. However, today, I chose to stop by and buy a cup of coffee in the neighborhood.

Sipping, I'm checking the hashtag *#LadyNotesings* and saw several clips from last night.

Oh, I should mention, the second most trending hashtag is **#Hong YokIsNotJustASong.**

Some clips show my face, and I can hear myself saying, "*I will... If it's you, yes, I will marry you."*

Seeing myself from last night, I feel... a bit embarrassed. Scrolling down with a smile on my face, the time at the top left corner of the screen tells me it is already 9.30 am, the clock-in time.

I wait for another ten minutes, wanting to see everyone in the studio. Then, I throw the empty coffee cup, with only some ice left, into the trash bin in the corner, then head to the office.

Well, when I arrive at the studio, I take out the brown paper box that was kept in my bag. This time I won't forget to gather my things into the paper box. Nothing will be left behind. P'Preaw is the first person who sees me organizing my belongings. She gets up from her desk, intending to walk toward me. Before she reaches me, she stops when the voice of the most powerful person in the room speaks up from behind the door.

"Ready to apologize?"

It's her voice...the head designer who likes to steal other people's work.

I turn back to face the woman in her middle-aged, observing her kind but seemingly insincere demeanor. She can't recognize me, the witness, because back then, everything was chaotic, and when we met again at the hospital, my scars were concealed.

I force a dry smile and say, "Do I need to apologize?"

The atmosphere among the team mer even more tense as if the level of or confidence my voice and on my face, is completely different from how it use to be. Even Nij looks confused for a moment, but in fear of embarrassment, she speaks arrogantly.

"Ha! So, you don't feel guilty for whatever you did yesterday."

She still doesn't know that P'Note has built up my self-esteem.

And she probably still doesn't understand the profound hatred that has grown in my heart.

This sneer on my face now clearly conveys my disgust.

**"What about you, Nij? Don't you feel guilty for what you did ten years ago?"**

# Chapter 33 : Her Definition

*"What about you, Nij? Don't you feel guilty for what you did ten years ago?"*

That phrase not only makes her feel embarrassed, but it also causes uncertainty in others. Everyone looks astonished and perplexed, attempting to comprehend what I just said.

I purposefully paused speaking so that the woman in her mid-life could experience one brief moment of awareness. Nij's eyes are filled with fear. She tightens her lips, concealing the emotions that are about to emerge.

"Hong, I'm not your playmate."

"You don't remember, huh? I'm the one who nearly burned in the fire because you locked me in the restroom."

Her face becomes pale immediately. She stammers,

"Wh... what are you talking about?"

"It's about the day you stole the song, physically assaulted your sister, and tried to kill the person who witnessed everything, and that's me! You don't experience an acute Alzheimer's attack, right?"

"Stop talking nonsense! You are fired-"

"I've already decided to leave. I would be pretty dumb if I stayed here any longer."

Even without her plagiarism habit, this woman is not a good boss anyway, judging from her behavior at the party or even on the day my sister was admitted to the hospital.

"And don't forget, I'm the one who decided to leave. Don't alter my words or anyone's ever again."

With that, I turn around and pick up the paper box containing my belongings. While others in the team are shocked and wondering about what will happen next, I won't say anything more at this moment. I leave a time bomb like this for others to question in their own time.

Before walking out of this studio, I don't bother turning back to face her again.

"Sorry for accidentally leaking the truth from the past. Can't help it. I'm so sick of your arrogance."

Now I feel like that wasn't me....

Or maybe, in some way, that's the real me that I had lost.

Since I got the scar on my face, friends, teachers, and others around me have treated me as if I were inferior. My once- strong confidence has dwindled over time. Only Hong, who is timid and insecure, remains.

Until P'Note appeared in my life, reminding me that I am beautiful and have qualities that others overlook. She looks at me with sincerity and affection. She even kisses the scar that others might criticize. All of that makes me stop belittling myself and encourages me to stand up for what I want to do in this world.

My resignation this time is different because at least I took all my belongings from the studio and confronted that malicious woman in front of everyone. That definitely ruins her image in the eyes of her employees, more or less.

In addition, another thing that feels like a direct hit on Nij's face is the fact that P'Note parked her car, waiting for me near the studio. I can see her follow me to the shop front and look at us with a displeased expression.

"I will focus on the On The Runway during this time", I say as we're in the car together, far away from Nij's studio. Today, P'Note had field work at the construction site in the morning, so she could come to pick me up.

"Do you get to choose your own model?" The woman wearing the light shaded aloha shirt asks, eyes on the road.

"In the previous seasons, the designers were allowed to choose their own models. Why? Are you interested in becoming my model?"

"Yes", she responds straightforwardly.

In truth, I do want her to be the one wearing the outfit I've designed. Therefore, I feel genuinely happy, lay back, and enjoy imagining her trying on the outfit I designed myself. The more I think about it, the more spirited I am.

It's not like I'm going to leave and let others take over the work because the next day, I contact Preaw and Ping in our LINE group chat and send them the remaining designs that I haven't finished yet. I apologize for this sudden decision, which both of them are fine with. Still, they have other concerns.

**Sassy Preaw**: Hong, what did you mean by what happened ten years ago?

**Ping-Na**: Please explain to us. I'm also curious.

**Hong Yok**: I don't how to explain it properly.

**Ping - Na**: Should we have a group call?

**Hong Yok**: That might make me someone who intentionally resigned and talked behind her back.

**Hong Yok**: You guys should try to investigate the issue between Nij and her sister on the internet. You know your boss's habits. The truth is subject to what you think.

That's all I say because both of them have worked for Nij long enough to know what kind of person she is.

I spend some time throughout the day clearing my remaining work and sending an email to those two assistants. Then, I return to being

unemployed once again... The year is not over yet. Well, my leave this time is really different from the first time. First, there's money transferred into my account, equivalent to half of my monthly salary. I guess she doesn't want to owe me anything. Second, when Toey-Hom knows what happened, instead of hammering it, she encourages me.

As for Mom and Dad... I decided to let them know that I remember everything now and P'Note is the one who saved my life.

Mom is shocked by this news, raises her hand and rub her chest repeatedly and says 'thank God'. She looks impressed with P'Note even more than before and tells me to invite her to our house again. On the other hand, Dad simply nods and maintains his fierce father-in-law look.

Beyond that, I continue to mention that I've applied for a fashion design competition. If I win or advance to the final round, I'll start planning to launch my own clothing brand or open a small boutique. My parents are supportive.

I feel so lucky to have such a loving family. After my registration, I received an email about the competition, providing details about the first round requirements. The main task is to design two outfits that showcase my talent. There's no need to create a pattern or do any sewing at this round.

The only condition is to send the designs within this month and provide a detailed explanation of each design. The challenge makes me ponder. Every season, the first runway round allows designers to go freestyle with their creations. After this round, the judges will set the theme for each round. So, I write down my own specific theme on the whiteboard in my

studio: 'P'Note

Yes, every outfit I design for this show revolves around P'Note. I'll design them specifically for her.

Although the requirements are small in number, thinking is something that takes time, especially with a freestyle theme. Because presenting my unique identity is crucial, I need to shine and make it outstanding.

My plan is, the first outfit will be an office outfit since I'm good at designing and sewing my own. As for the second outfit... Well, that's the problem for several days. I can't figure out what to do, and I don't know if I accidentally reveal my serious look during dinner or not. Mom notices and invites me to go out tomorrow to visit Dad's family in another province. It can be a relaxing trip for me.

I agree because ideas can pop up anywhere. Inspired, I decide to go out on a trip with my family - Dad, Mom, and Toey. I walk out to the sedan parked nearby, a vehicle that we rarely use (the reason why both Dad and I choose to go to work by public transport is to avoid traffic and save the gas money).

Dad is driving, Mom sits next to him, while Toey and I are at the back. Toey-Hom easily gets motion sickness, so she chooses to lie down on my lap and take a nap. She's been asleep since leaving Bangkok... I haven't been in such a kind of atmosphere in years.

I take out my phone to take a selfie of me and my sister together and send it to... P'Note. She might be busy, so half an hour has passed before she makes a reply.

**Note**: Where are you going?

**Hong Yok**: Going to my dad's hometown in Prachinburi. I won't stay over; I will be back in the late evening.

**NoTe**: Shall I follow you as your bodyguard?

**Hong Yok**: Why would you do that? No need. We aren't going that far.

**HongYok**: We are going to buy chocolate together tomorrow anyway, right?

**NoTe**: Alright, drive safely then.

**Hong Yok**: Thank you. Then I'm reminded of something.

**Hong Yok**: Now, Mom and Dad know that you saved my life. Mom feels so touched that she asks to invite you for dinner again.

**NoTe**: What about your dad?

**Hong Yok**: I can't read his mind.

Because of P'Note, I start to have doubts, created by the mysteries beneath Dad's placid exterior. Does he harbor some dislike or hidden resentment toward P'Note? I keep these doubts to myself as we continue our journey.

When I finally meet my relatives, everyone has their questions. Everyone is curious and ask questions that make me a bit uncomfortable.

For example, when will I get married or have a child. As I'm turning thirty in a few years, they wonder if I'm dating someone. I have to thank my father for his perfectly conclusive statement:

*"My wife and I are taking our children for a holiday trip. I won't let anyone interview my family. This is my daughter's private life. Only she can talk about it when she wants."*

My grandmother, aunts, and uncles suddenly become quiet, and Mom quickly changes the subject to change the atmosphere.

I sneak a glance at my father. He's a reasonable man, but right now, I can't help but feel a bit uneasy. Is there something he doesn't like about P'Note? Is there some unspoken discontent?

In the end, I can't contain my curiosity anymore. In the evening, as we go home, Mom stops to get some snacks. Toey wants to buy a fizzy drinks, leaving Dad and me to be on our own.

"Dad, do you dislike P'Note?" Dad furrows his brow.

"Why would you think that?"

"It just seems like you don't appreciate her." He exhales heavily.

"I don't dislike Note. She's a good person, straightforward. What I did just show how much I care for you. I don't want her to play with your feelings or treat it as a game. Otherwise, she'll regret it no matter who she is - a noble or a commoner."

"So, now you know the fact that... I... well... like girls?"

"Yeah", the guy I admire the most in the world responds with a deep, heavy voice.

"Your mother and I didn't have children to fulfil our expectations. Why would I intervene in your private life? All I want to know is that she's serious about you or not."

"And from what you observe, is P'Note okay?"

"Let's see how it goes first. She's a good-looking idol, so she must have a lot of fans. Her hairstyle gives off a casanova vibe, so I don't trust her."

Oh, what is this now?

Dad perceives her undercut as a charming tool?

I don't know, but the truth is, I like it so much...

I smile when I learn that my father doesn't care about any particular aspect of P'Note's identity. The relief replaces all the anxieties, making me feel cheerful again. We decide to help Mom with her shopping.

We stop by the local shop for too long and Dad slowly drives us back home, so we arrive home around eight in the evening. I step out of the car, ready to unlock the gate for Dad to park. But my heart is racing when I find the lock laying on the ground as if it had been forcefully removed.

"P'Hong, what's going on?"

Toey-Hom lowers the window and leans out.

"Is something wrong, honey?"

Mom also gets out of the car because she noticed the abnormality.

I feel uneasy. Looking inside the house, which is completely dark, my heart races with fear. As I carefully observe, I notice that the door is slightly ajar, as if someone had intruded.

Obviously, when we were outside, someone broke into our house.

# Chapter 34 : Unexpected Result

Every room has been ransacked, including the upper floor. The bedrooms and my studio are completely messed up. Despite the police investigating the scene, they find nothing stolen.

As soon as P'Note knew about the incident, the royal lady promptly arrived without hesitation.

"It's weird.", P'Note says, glancing towards my studio.

"What's wrong?"

Observing carefully, she notices, "If they were thieves, why did they search every room in the house but deliberately ransack your studio without stealing anything?" I have no idea...

"Is it a set up?"

The tall woman murmurs, her eyes filled with thoughts of something that bothers her. She turns to me and says, "Hong, there are no security cameras in the house, correct?"

"What about the public ones?" I slowly shake my head.

"There's none because we decided not to continue the contract with the security and surveillance system agencies years ago. As this estate is close to the police station, we thought we could take care of ourselves."

"Has 'that b\*\*\*\*\* given you a ride here before?"

The only person she calls 'B\*\*\*\*\* is her older sister. I keep my head low, thinking, and then answer.

"No, but I did give her the map to my house along with my resume. Do you think it's her?"

She doesn't confirm or deny; her expression remains uncertain.

"Well, I'll investigate it again. It might take some time."

Before I can thank her for her consideration, the person who came here in pajamas covered with a long coat calls me with her serious voice.

"Hong Hok!"

"Yes?"

"I don't know whether you will move out and stay with me or not. But your parents and your younger sister are still here. So, starting tomorrow, I will take charge and handle the matters related to the security guards and the estate facilities for you."

"Uh, well..."

"For your safety."

As she is under stress due to the break-in, I am now stressed about dealing with her instead.

This woman... She is someone who is really good at solving problems with money.

The police said there were no fingerprints from outsiders on the doorknob or anywhere else. The intruder must wear gloves and be cautious. This occurrence makes me concerned about my mother and younger sister. My father canceled his overtime and went straight home from work. We seem to be on high alert all the time. We don't know who did it that day or if it will happen again.

As for P'Note, she is seeking cooperation from various neighbors and nearby shops and housing estates to see their security camera records on the day of the incident. Some agree and willingly to help, while others have to go through the process of requesting permission first. In the meantime, our house has been installed with cameras in every corner, as well as security guards hired by... that's right, P'Note, our sponsor.

With this, I can rest assured and leave my mother and sister at home. The two outfits I submitted to the On The Runway show also passed through the first round. They sent an email back, asking me to go to the 21st floor of the XXX building to sign a contract for the weekly shootings. When I received this message in the email box, I felt so confused that I had to call the number provided.

"Um... excuse me. I'm the applicant who passed the audition. I received an email asking me to go and sign the contract for the weekly shootings. Does that mean I'm not just waiting for the finale but also appearing on TV every week?"

[Well, this is the final season, and the company decided to make some changes to involve the audience. We'd like to ask you to sign the contract on the appointed day and explain it more in detail. However, if you feel uncomfortable, you can forfeit.]

"Oh... Thank you very much."

Now, who would willingly forfeit such a chance?

I remembered the detailed conditions before applying. There was a note mentioning that the terms and conditions could be changed. Still, I never expected these adjustments. Well, I don't have problems with time, but I'm quite concerned about revealing my face. I'm not sure whether the social media responses will be positive or critical.

Despite my worries and those sleepless nights, the results are completely beyond my expectations. After the first Episode was on-aired, not only were the hashtags related to the show trending, but another hashtag that also gained popularity was...

#HongYokIsNotJustASong

Everyone remembers that I'm the girl P'Note sang a love song to that day!

There's a small part that talks about my scar. I read them and feel a bit depressed, but most people have already looked past that and commented or

posted positively thanks to Her Highness, the keyboardist. I'm overwhelmed as the contestants who received the most attention. I play along but don't know how to carry myself. Moreover, on Instagram, I'm rapidly gaining followers. I'm confident that most of them are fans of the Edge of Universe.

"You're becoming famous."

Soft and sweet voice whispers into my ear. I blink several times and return to reality. Tonight, I'm sleeping over at P'Note's condo because tomorrow morning I have a packed schedule for the On The Runway show next episode. The mission is to shop for second-hand clothes and recreate them into new outfits under the given theme. My beautiful woman volunteers to drop me off at the studio, so I end up here.

I drop my phone onto the bedside table and take a look at the royal lady who's resting her chin on my shoulder with naughty eyes. She seems to enjoy cuddling me from behind.

"Actually, my followers are your fans."

"Without me, people will discover a star like you anyway."

"You are eloquent as always."

Well, I have to admit, for me, managing cameras and dealing with crowds can be challenging. But because there's someone like her providing support she's an inspiration, a lover, and the central theme that is pushing me forward- I successfully completed the first episode and am now ready to take on new challenges.

"Unfortunately, this season's missions was changed. I already designed the evening dress for the finale, and it's for you to wear... in case I pass to that round."

"Why did you think they looked for an evening dress as the finale?"

"Um, it seems like they do that in every season. Last week, there was an exhibition of skill for designing evening clothes. I asked them about it, they said this season is similar, but with an addition. The production team said the models will be prepared by the program."

"That's quite a shame", the warm-body girl speaks softly.

I've intentionally designed the evening dress for her since I thought about the theme. Strangely, the other dresses took me a long time to come up with, but with this one, it's as if my ideas came out spontaneously. I could already see the design even with my eyes closed. I had designed it since the first day I written the theme, 'Note', on the whiteboard.

It's a dress in a light purple mermaid silhouette. The tight-fitting bodice gracefully flows down to the floor with delicate lace details. The two tails at the hem are cut and sewn to look separate, but it's actually one piece, creating a unique texture.

The back has a crisscross of thin straps, and there are arm cuffs with intricate details left open for additional embellishments. I'll leave it as it is, waiting for any specific themes or instructions the judging panel might have. Still, my heart is ready. I'll sew it meticulously to the last detail.

That night, nothing 18+ happened. It seems like P'Note didn't want me to get exhausted. I'm glad that she respects my boundaries. From the beginning, if I maintain a bit of distance, everything will stay in balance. She allows me to make the decisions in this relationship. Irritating and daring against the whole world, but she's just a puppy when she's with me.

And her embrace is so warm...

Now, the competition is progressing into EP.9, and I can hardly believe that I've tackled various challenges like making a second-hand shirt into a new outfit, creating a fancy dress with just one piece of fabric, and designing and sewing a uniform. Now, I'm entering the final week.

My confidence rises with every appearance and judgment session. I see the votes from my dedicated fans move up to the top three rankings and hear the hosts call my name to step forward into the contestants' side for the final round.

In this round, where only 10 contestants remain, the mission is different from the other rounds. The competition will break for two weeks, allowing us time to design and sew our evening dresses. To prevent cheating, the designs and materials must be assembled only in the designated studio, assuring fairness. They will also provide us with all the necessary equipment.

I think the time period that they gave us is nerve- wracking, but it's also a challenging experience. The audience themselves express their excitement, wondering if the designers. can create something remarkable under the pressure. However, all the designers have mostly pre-designed their evening dresses, making the task easier in that regard. What genuinely challenges us is transforming it into a distinctive and full ensemble.

The model I drew turned out to be half Thai-half English, and I must thank the heavens that her height is similar to P'Note's. I only needed to make some adjustments in proportions, but the overall design of the dress remained unchanged.

In the fourteen days of working at the show's studio, P'Note has been giving me a ride. Sometimes, she makes a stop to buy things for my family's refrigerator. In this time, my father has started to see her as a reliable person, and he has finally given up on complaining about her alleged flirting undercut.

Anyway, P'Note is a naughty one. Whenever her hair grows, she shoves it back to the same undercut style.

I smile to myself, recalling those enjoyable moments. Now, On The Runway EP.10, the final week, is about to air as a live show, and the excitement is building up. The other contestants sit, waiting behind the stage. Each one has been informed of our queue. It's a bit of a relief to know

that my turn is coming at the appropriate time.

Tonight, the show are opening for five hundred people from outside to join in the studio. No need to guess; you'd know just how excited P'Note would be. She bought tickets for my parents, my younger sister, my close friend, and invited everyone in her band and their girlfriends along. That's not all her kindness extends, inviting the entire entourage of fans to join us. What a scene! Since those front-row seats also cost thousands each!

Now, let's talk about the competition.

As for the upcoming competition, each 7/24 k quite a while on stage since every turn starts by portraying eac of nine models in the past week costumes. Then concludes with the latest evening dress of the final week, never seen before anywhere. Afterward, the designer will step forward to explain the concept, inspiration, and various meanings behind their creations.

At this point, I have to admit that my confidence has grown significantly. Before, I would shy away. But now, I ignore those negative comments on my social media-some criticizing me for being ugly or scarred. However, there's one woman who praises my beauty repeatedly. I don't think I look boring just because I'm not wearing contact lenses but glasses. I won't change my appearance just for someone else's approval because now I have the woman loves me for who I am.

Tonight, I'll try my best to secure the winning position with all the dresses that I have imagined she'll wear proudly. As the models wearing my designed dresses gradually ascend the runway, I accidentally raise my hands to clasp them on my chest as a habit. This time, it's not because I feel pain or have a worried heart, as when I had to hide in the shadows. Instead, it's a feeling that I can't believe I'm walking up there as a designer, announcing to everyone that this is my creation.

I sneak a glance at the faces of the judges and the audience below when the evening dress, 'Cosmic Butterfly,' is revealed. The applause from the audience warms my heart. The judges seem impressed, except for one young man among them who furrows his brow.

That's fine. I call upon my inner strength and step onto the runway after the models have returned. The large screen behind me displays the outline from the moment it was just a sketch to into the fully colored image of that wedding dress. Being up here like this makes me realize another truth: Prince Napasdan and M.L. Jeerana have come to the show. The elderly man's eyes appear to be waiting to see whether or not I could achieve victory.

Alright then.

I just have to do my best.

However, as the production team hands me the microphone, and I'm about to start talking about the inspiration behind the dress, suddenly, a judge who seems displeased with my design raises his hand. His serious expression indicates that he has an important question to ask.

"According to your profile, you used to work at Nij Greta Studio, right?"

"Yes, but I resigned several months ago."

"In that case, can you explain this?"

He picks up his phone and calls the nearest staff to come forward.

"Please take this webpage and display it on the large screen."

Waiting with bated breath, not sure what to think about the situation, I then look at the large screen where my evening dress should be displayed. To my surprise, it's replaced with a website format that I'm quite familiar with.

I freeze as I turn and find...

**"Why does your evening dress resemble the one released by Mom**

**Rajawongse Nijcharee this morning?"**

# Chapter 35: Faux appearance

The numbness begins from my toes and gradually spreads up to engulf me completely. I stiffen as I stare at the dress that seems almost identical to

mine on the huge screen behind me. There are only minor differences in the intricate patterns compared to my 'Cosmic Butterfly.' Other than that, every single bit seems to suggest it's the same outfit.

*What is going on here?*

*Nij?*

*Did she... steal my work?*

*But how?*

Or was it when someone broke into my house that day? Was she purposefully coming in to steal my designs off the laptop?

When I look down, Prince Napasdol, with his incomprehensible eyes and face, has risen and walked away, appearing indifferent, leaving his wife to reluctantly follow. The audience's murmurs become unclear, but I can make out the essence of certain statements.

"What's happening!"

"Is it a fashion brand's work being showcased in the competition?"

"This woman is truly disgusting, both in appearance and character!" So this is the feeling... the one P'Note had to face ten years ago. We are wrongfully accused of plagiarism, despite the fact that we are the creator. On that day, how could she endure until the end of the song?

Now, I can't withstand the ridicule and harsh gazes, especially when another judge grabs the microphone and comments, cutting me off.

"Did you submit the work from Nij Greta's brand for this competition?"

"No, I didn't."

"But you used to work there, right? Does this mean the brand is copying your work?"

Her voice is accusing, and her gaze seems to be scrutinizing a liar.

"This doesn't sound reasonable at all."

I'm overwhelmed with emotions. My spoken response doesn't seem trustworthy to anyone. Because when they decide what to believe, no matter what I say, They see a nobody, unknown designer who may secretly exploit the work of a famous brand in order to seek opportunities. At this moment, I understand why P'Note, back then, grew up to become someone who stopped caring about the rest of the world.

However, I don't know if I can be that strong. If I stand firm that I'm the creator, would the accusation against me be worse than before?

And at that moment, P'Note is the one who saves me from another bad day once again... Her tall figure that has been sitting since whenever suddenly runs from the back. She interlaces her fingers to clasps my hand, and stands in front of me. P'Note sweeps her eyes across everyone and stops the chilly stares before declaring:

**"Hong Yok is the one who designed this outfit. There's nothing that can change this fact. I will find evidence to prove and expose what that shameless fashion brand did. When that time comes, I hope you will apologize sincerely to her."**

Concluding her statement, P'Note tightens the grip of her hand that she holds firm before leading me to the backstage. She leaves the commotion of the crowd behind. The cameras that are broadcasting quickly come closer, aiming to capture images of the two of us about to leave the event. However, the person who is leading me raises her hand to block the unsatisfied gaze of the camera lens.

The two of us exit the event in Her Highness' luxurious Maserati. The feeling is similar to when she led me out of the banquet. However, the difference is this time that this problem is much bigger that...

"Don't worry. I will find the evidence myself."

My sight wanders ahead. The dusk sky in the center of the city makes it almost impossible to see the stars.

"Alright..."

Other than that, I am at a loss for words. Several days have passed since the grand finale of the On The Runway show aired, and the winner has been announced eventually. However, the social media drama has turned into an accusation that I stole a design from the famous fashion brand.

This is really bad...

Normally, P'Note isn't someone who pays attention to people's comments on social media. However, when it comes to me, she is the one who contact a lawyer to prepare for legal action against many social network accounts that tried to defame me. She also uses Twitter and Instagram to take action and confirm that I am innocent.

Am I giving her a hard time? The one who should be upset is the one wh all of this! I've spent time at home with the support of my family and P'Note, who regularly visits me. One day, I couldn't control my emotions anymore when I saw Nij being interviewed, saying she didn't hold any grudges against me. That evening, I just wanted her to apologize.

I picked up the phone, dialed her number with a heart full of anger, and said:

"Are you not ashamed of what you did?"

When she answered, I poured my frustration into the phone. However, she didn't easily get upset.

[I want to ask you too. Why don't you feel guilty at all? When you resigned,

I willingly transferred money to you without hesitation. But now, you plagiarize my work.]

It was easy to guess that someone like her wouldn't admit it. I lowered my voice.

"Someone like you is truly disgusting and unforgivable."

Nij fell silent for a moment and then burst into laughter.

[You're no different from my little sister. Thieves are alike, no matter what. That's why they match well.]

Someone like her, I wasn't sure if she secretly recorded the conversation to use it against me later. Even though I wanted to burst out 'You f\*cking b\*tch!", I had to calm down and hold it in.

I clenched my fist, cut off the call, and deleted that evil woman's number.

Is there any evidence that can prove she's the one who copied my work?

Even though I posted on social media yesterday, opened the file to show the creation date, and provided detailed information, they still don't believe me. Those comments... They not only criticize me but also P'Note. *'Accept the truth and apologize. Stop pretending. Anyone can cut and edit.' 'This girl desperately wants to have a place in the industry this much.' 'Go search for the history of that Lady Note. There was news ten years ago that she stole work from her sister. Now I understand; birds of a feather flock together. That's why they fall for each other.'*

*'How lame! You b\*tch Hong Yok!'*

'*When I compare and look at those gorgeous clothing, I can tell who owns them. One has never worked in the industry, but the other has been in the business for a long time, has a reputation, qualifications, and even established her own brand.'*

*'I'm not trying to belittle anyone, but I want to only is her appearance ugly but also her inside.'*

I placed my phone face down on the bed and sobbed alone.

So, is it true that in the real world, people rate our reliability based on our appearance?

# Chapter 36 : Incoming Call

It's been a week since Nij intentionally released that dress before I did mine during the On The Runway show. The news agencies have stopped mentioning it after P'Note handed it over to Mai Tree, her lawyer, to handle. Even on social media, they don't directly bash me with vulgar words anymore. Instead, they resort to teasing. If someone is noticed with bad behavior, they'll say:

*'Hey, don't act like Hong Yok.*

They defined my name in a negative light.

My friend, Woon-Sen, took a day off from work to be with me. We had some sukiyaki together, which helped me relax. My parents have been attempting to comfort me, concerned that I may become depressed like the last time. Toey-Hom came to stay for a few nights, hugging me and promising me that P'Note would certainly help us.

P'Note keeps sending me messages and calling me throughout the day, in the morning and at night, sometimes during the day, evening, and even late at night. In the last two or three days, she seemed occupied, and I hadn't seen her in person. However, I don't mind because I know that, besides work, she is busy gathering evidence to prove my innocence.

But then, one night, I got a call that shattered my tolerance for criticism.

It was past midnight, and I still couldn't close my eyes because I had received harsh comments on Instagram earlier. The phone suddenly vibrated briefly. The screen showed that I had an email, and it was from P'Note. I was somewhat surprised because just at 4 am, she had called me to wish me good night.

"Hong, I've uploaded the evidence in the attached file. If anything happens to me, contact the same lawyer and show her these clips."

What did she mean by that?

My heart is pounding with worry of imminent trouble. I quickly try to call Her Highness, but the call goes directly to voicemail. I can't sleep because I keep trying to contact her by messages and phone calls, fearing that

someone like Nij might harm her younger sister again.

At one in the morning, there's a call from an unfamiliar number. I don't know if it's a scammer or someone familiar who changed their phone number. Still, considering P'Note's strange email earlier, I press the green button without much thought.

[Is this Hong?...]

The voice is unfamiliar.

"Who is this?"

[It's Note's mother.]

Lady Jeerana? Before I can respond, the older woman continues with a weakened voice.

**[Can you come to the hospital right now? ...Note is in the emergency room.]**

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01.28

Every second feels stressful. Even my father, who offers me a ride, appears concerned about P'Note. According to Lady Jee's brief call details, P'Note was driving one of the cars out of the manor's parking lot, and Nij was with her. Before anyone could provide any additional information, someone called to inform their mother that the younger sister had smashed her vehicle into a pedestrian strolling on the sidewalk, hit her own head, and lost consciousness.

What? Is this some kind of a twisted fairy tale?

When my father's car arrives at the hospital, I opened the door and rushed out like my life depended on it. In front of the emergency room, a group of people stand with anxious faces. Her oldest brother, Lord Nopp, isn't here. He's a doctor at another hospital, so he might be on duty and still unaware of this news. However, her second older brother, Lord Nont, stands there, looking tense, comforting his mother, who is crying in despair.

As for her father, Prince Napasdol, he is sitting on a chair, listening to what his middle daughter is saying.

"It's my fault. We shouldn't have argued while in the car. Dad, I told her to slow down, but she didn't listen. In the end, she lost control and hit the person standing by the side of the road."

I can't take it anymore. I bite my lip and run to that b\*tch, pulling her shoulder to make her turn and...

*Slap!*

**"Stop lying!"**

I slap her in the face. I'm sure she is lying. There is no way it could happen like that. P'Note sent an email with evidence files, saying something that sounded like she was in danger. Was she the driver? Seriously?

Nij's voice and eyes are also deceitful. Those who can't notice that must be so foolish!

Now everyone's attention is on us. Lord Nont and his mother are shocked by my actions, except for the most senior person here, Prince Napas, who looks at me with a blank expression.

"You... How dare you slap me!"

But at the moment when the middle-aged woman clenches her teeth and prepares to fight back, she suddenly looks past my shoulder and quickly suppresses the tension that showed on her face with a feigned nonchalance.

I turn back to look and find two police officers in full uniform walking straight toward us. I sense that their attention is directed at Nij, and it turns out to be true when they stop and exchange glances with her.

"Are you Mom Rajawongse Nijcharee?"

"Uh... yes."

"Please come to the station with us. We have received a report that you were driving and caused someone to be injured."

Nij becomes clueless for a while. Surprised and restless, before she can answer anything, the shameless woman inadvertently steps back one step. It takes a moment for her to regain her composure and retort,

"You misunderstood. My younger sister was the one driving that car. I just happened to be a passenger. And who said that? It's a false accusation. You can see for yourself that when the rescue team arrived, my sister was on the driver's side."

Before she finishes her statement, there's no need for the two police officers to say more than this. The quiet one, her father, Prince Napasdol, speaks up assertively.

**"I was the one who reported."**

# Chapter 37 : Always Beautiful

What Prince Napas said surprised all of us: Lady Jee, Lord Nont, and me. We all turn to look at him with wide-eyed astonishment. It's only Nij shoots him with an inquisitive look and says,

"What do you mean, Daddy?"

The man takes a deep breath, visibly distressed.

"Before, I protected you because I was concerned about the reputation of both families, forgetting that I was encouraging my daughter to attempt to kill her sister. It's been a long time, and I thought you would realize it by now, but you haven't changed a bit."

"But I didn't do anything! Note was the one driving. My... my sister might have been intoxicated. Yes, at the garage, she forced me to sit there and said she had something to discuss. I remember there was a smell of alcohol!"

The tall man scrutinizes his middle daughter. He stands up and turns to the police officers who were the ones he called,

"I'll have someone send the footage from the CCTV in the house to you." Nij was stunned upon hearing this.

After that, anything she said was no longer trustworthy. Lady Jee raises her hand to touch her chest, surprised, and she turns to ask her husband about what happened.

Lord Nont also alternates his gaze between his mother, who seems shocked, and his sister, controlled by the police. Eventually, he decides to ignore Nij and holds his mother to stand still.

Prince Napas raises his hand, touching his face tiredly. Knowing that he has reached the point that he has to tell the whole story to his son and wife. But a situation like this is more suitable to be discussed at home or in private.

He remains silent, speechless until the nurse comes out to look for M.R. Netapsorn's relatives and informs that she is safe now.

I, who still don't know the details of the injuries much, breathe a sigh of relief. Tears of relief seem to well up. Because I couldn't afford to lose her - the lady who made me realize how precious I am.

After that, I later learned that on that night, P'Note obtained footage from a CCTV camera in a shop near my house. She noticed a familiar-looking white sedan and recognized the license plate, so she left her condo and headed straight to her father's palace to find that car. Yes, it was hidden in a corner of the parking lot.

The young woman went in to search for the memory card that recorded the footage from the front camera of the car, hoping to use it to proof that the car was driven to my residence that day and my design was stolen by Nij. Unfortunately, on that night, Nij came back home and noticed everything since her sister's Maserati drove in.

Nij was so nervous she couldn't bear it. It was true that she deliberately borrowed her father's rarely used car for some mischief, but because she did it alone, she forgot about the little things that could lead to trouble. At that time, the middle-aged woman probably wanted to negotiate with her younger sister first. She rushed to the garage, asked P'Note to have a talk with her while sitting in the car together. Of course, it was that car.

What confirmed that Nij was the driver throughout the journey was the CCTV inside the garage and the front camera recording the conversation between the two siblings. Initially, Nij started to negotiate, promising to compensate me for the losses in exchange for P'Note not disclosing anything. But P'Note did not accept any offer. She rejected all of them outright and even tried to provoke her older sister to speak the truth as much as possible. These conversations were not only recorded on the front camera but also on the audio that the young woman had recorded.

But Nij could never manage her impulsiveness in crucial situations. Once again, she lost her senses and couldn't control her emotions.

Three minutes before the accident, there was no more negotiation. The car was accelerating at high speed, P'Note tried to warn the older sister but it was futile. She then sent an email that attached the CCTV footage from the store that she had previously uploaded and added the latest recording. Then she delivered it to me.

The excessive speed beyond the legal limit, combined with the driver's uncontrollable anger, led to an accident. Their car collided with the side of the road, hitting a man waiting for a taxi, and it continued to crash into another body. Not only that, the vehicle also hit a pole.

Both were shaken from the impact, but Nij, the woman who was driving, feared the consequences. The middle-aged woman who was the driver, quickly got out of the car and swapped seats with her younger sister just in time before rescuers arrived. Then, they continued with the drama as usual.

Without the surveillance cameras from the parking lot and the car's front camera recording everything, P'Note might have been wrongly accused, just like ten years ago.

Now, the entire Ruthaithewin family knows the whole story after Prince

Napas stopped keeping secrets from the past and revealed it. Lady Jee, Prince Napas's wife, was shocked when she learned the truth. On the other hand, Lord Nont, the second brother, was not too surprised, as he always tendency to believe his youngest sister. The reaction of the eldest, Lord Nopp, who frequently reprimanded and blamed P'Note, was different. He felt profoundly guilty.

I had the chance to talk to him a bit when we met at the hospital, and he truly showed remorse. I couldn't completely blame him, knowing that it could be due to his overwhelming fear of losing his social image. In the end, Ruthaithewin and the surname of Nij's husband are heavily attacked in social media after the truth is exposed.

'*If you don't say it's true, it feels like a soap opera after the evening news. The woman is too awful. Her father knows, but he just lets the wrongdoer get away for several years.'*

*'Did her parents never teach her a lesson? Or did her true color start to show after getting married?'*

*'I've encountered the real deal. She used to come to eat at the restaurant where I used to work. She was so picky. If you called her Madam,' she'd get mad. Back then, she loudly announced who she was and insisted that we address her as 'Lady' all the time.'*

*'The brand with the abbreviation N, right? I once went to try on wedding dresses, but they rejected me without any proper reason. I suspect they only cater to celebrities or high-class people.'*

*'Strange attitudes. In the latest interview, I couldn't endure it for more than five minutes. It's as if this auntie has a complex that she's superior to others.'*

*'What about that purple evening dress? How is she going to take responsibility?'*

When people on social media started questioning, the trending hashtags shifted from attacking me to

#*NijDramaQueen* and

#*NijTheCopycat*.

The situation intensified when a Facebook user posted a lengthy, derogatory message that gained traction through shares, comments, and screenshots shared with trending hashtags on Twitter.

'*Hello, I'm one of the assistants of the N brand that is currently a hot issue. I've been contemplating whether I should post this story or if it will affect my job? But I consulted with another assistant and decided to resign because continue to work here is pointless.'*

P'Preaw is someone who has endured the boss stealing her creations over and over again. ...

*'Today, I will share my work experiences over the past several years and gladly explain what happened about the controversial evening dress.'*

After that, she told the story of how she applied to work as an assistant in Nij's studio and had her work credited to that woman. Furthermore, P'Preaw revealed an event from a few months back in which Nij sent a draft of an evening dress to the patternmaker and requested him to copy it, then ordered P'Preaw to sew it and post the photo on the website on the day the final round of the On the Runway competition aired. There is also proof that she urged P'Preaw through chat messaging.

With twists and turns, it's evident that Nij had a suspicious plan, giving rise to two new hashtags:

*#Apologize ToHong Yok and*

*#Sorry Hong Yok*

People who used to criticize and misunderstand me came out to post apologies and shifted to condemning Nij. But the lawyer named Mai Tree, whom P'Note contacted directly from the beginning called me and said that she still intended to proceed with the lawsuit as P'Note had affirmed earlier that they must learn a lesson.

I believe in her capabilities because, in the case where the metal bar fell onto Toey-Hom, Mai Tree could demand an outrageous amount of compensation from the owner of the building, making the other party even move the construction site away.

That's one reason why I've been silent on all social media platforms until the truth emerges. In the meantime... I visited P'Note at the hospital as usual. Today, I bring a large lunch box that my mother has prepared for the patient. Walking through the hospital corridors in sandals, chosen for their comfort over high heels, I want to look after P'Note conveniently.

At the elevator, I encounter a couple of parents who come to visit their youngest daughter as well. Both could only be none other than Prince Napasdol and Lady Jeerana. We take the elevator together. I greet them with a wai and press the floor button.

Inside this square box, we become engulfed with silence until the deep voice of the elderly man speaks up.

"You're the girl who broke into the patient room ten years ago."

I'm slightly surprised at how he could just recall it, but as it comes back to me, I figure it might be because Nij, who is currently stressed about the lawsuit, must've told him about me. I turn to the elder and respond.

"Yes, back then I was the only one who believed that P'Note composed the song herself."

The eyes of the old woman standing beside him seem gloomy. She barely says anything upon learning the deep-seated issues between her daughters. She only offers me a faint smile.

M.C. Napasdol slowly nods with a calm expression," I'm the one who made it escalate to this point."

For someone accustomed to holding onto a reputation and admitting a mistake like this, acknowledging that he's wrong is probably not easy. Before he can speak the next sentence, there is a moment of silence, heavy with emotions.

"I sincerely apologize that my middle child stole your work."

"Actually, I'm more upset with the fact she hurt P'Note."

I state with a serious voice, sharing my intention without asking for permission.

"And I will continue with the lawsuit regarding the dress."

He slowly nods one more time, "Well, she deserves it."

*Ding!*

The elevator reaches the designated floor. The doors open. I step out, leaving some distance as a matter of courtesy, then walk out.

But in that instant, in my mind, there are still unresolved matters, and somehow, I feel compelled to speak them out.

"Your Highness."

"..."

The old man stops, causing his wife to halt her steps as well. Lady Jee turns to look at me with a curious expression, but her husband continues to keep his head high without turning back. However, I know he's listening. I take a deep breath.

"Earlier, you mentioned... I'm ugly."

"Yes, I said that."

In the past, while I constantly undervalued myself, P'Note was the one who consistently tried to build confidence in me. Now, it's time for me to have confidence and see my worth.

**"I'm not ugly."**

I am...

I am just... not conforming to the beauty standards that people dictate. But I believe that a woman who looks back at me in the mirror every morning is not lacking in beauty at all!

**"If someone sees me ugly, it's their problem with their perception."**

There's no such thing as ugly in this world. After all, Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The person, who said I was too ugly for his daughter, has been silent for so long that it's hard to guess what he is thinking. However, finally, the muffled voice comes out without turning back as before.

"Please don't mind that old man; he's realizing his mistakes... including this one." I didn't expect Prince Napas to admit that he was wrong. I just intended to speak my mind. Therefore, the sincere and low- pitched tone of his voice is beyond expectations.

I lower my head and smile to myself. It seems that when we start with self respect and enough confidence, it brings happiness like this.

Before, why couldn't I think of myself this way?

I can't imagine who I would become if I hadn't met P'Note.

I take another step forward to follow the old couple as our destination is the special room where their youngest daughter stays. As I enter, I find a young woman with bandages on her head and left arm. She looks so bored when she feeds herself with the hospital congee. However, she immediately becomes happier as soon as she sees me.

"Hong Yok."

"We entered first, didn't we?"

Her father can't help but teasing. The young woman turns to look at both of them and intentionally calls out halfway, "Dad, Mom."

"Huh!" The father clears his throat.

I let P'Note chat with her family. Meanwhile, I prepare the food for her. I open the lunch box and pour some ice into a glass, followed by orange juice, and then serve them to the tough patient who is now pushing away her hospital food.

P'Note tastes the spicy mixed vegetable soup first before making a sound in her throat, indicating that it is delicious. Then, she turns to me and asks, "Did you cook it yourself?"

"No, my mom did. I only squeezed the orange for you."

"Just by carrying it already made it so delicious!"

What? She's over exaggerating again!

I try my best to suppress my smile. At the same time, I can hear Lady Jee's voice from the sofa.

"Our daughter is insane...

"At this point, I totally agree with her.

The person in the light-colored hospital gown finishes eating and drinking juice, with me helping to facilitate things since one of her arms is injured. P'Note apologizes, saying that she seems like a burden, but I wave it off, explaining that she got injured because of me.

We chat for a while, and then she seems to have something on her mind. P'Note turns to where her parents are sitting and says, "Dad."

"What is it?"

"Even though its crime might be revealed by now, please don't forget the promise you made. I won't consider it as void."

The 'it' referred to must be her older sister. And the 'promise' likely concerned our wedding, which P'Note wants her family to bravely accept, attend with joy, and share it with the world.

The elderly man doesn't respond or reject. Instead, he chooses to ask back, "Are you aware that no matter how grand a wedding is, the marriage of two women is not legally supported?"

"Then, please push forward the same-sex marriage right. Maybe one day our country will have that."

"Speaking as if it's an easy matter."

"Dad is the president of a big business group. Supporting this campaign shouldn't be that difficult, right?" In the end, the one who ends the argument is the older party, exhaling unwillingly, "Fine, I won't object to anything. If you want to get married, go ahead."

"At that time, you still looked dissatisfied."

"From then until now, how many months have passed? You didn't expect me to feel regret at all?" He speaks bitterly with a frown,

"You've got strong genes from your mother, indeed. Always talk back to me."

This sentence was too annoying for his wife to hear.

"Really! Actually your blood should be stronger. You broke off an engagement with the princess and then married me. Isn't that right?"

"....."

"Remember your words back then? You declared to your parents that the only woman's name on your marriage registration must be Jeerana. Well... It's no different for your daughter now. You're equally insane."

"Enough!"

"You started it yourself!"

I and P'Note look at the couple, the husband and wife who are arguing. In the end, the one who appears to have a disgruntled face is on the losing side and falls silent. Uh... It seems like he himself is embarrassed when he's in front of the young ones like us. So, he clears his throat and persuades his wife to go back home.

After both of them leave, in the private room, there remain only P'Note and me. Because I am thinking of establishing my own brand using the compensation from the lawsuit, I don't go submit applications anywhere. Instead, I spend time visiting and taking care of the patient.

The previous conversation just now confirmed how serious P'Note is about our relationship. However, today I have something I want to say,

accompanied by an explanation.

"P'Note"

"What'sup, babe?"

Not just sweet words but those beautiful eyes resembling her name" lean in closer. I blink my eyes, forgetting what I was going to say for several seconds until I regain composure.

"About our wedding... Can it wait for now?"

"..."

The expression in those eyes wavers like disappointment. However, she remains silent, waiting for me to explain further.

"...Will you be angry if I want to open my own studio first. I want our wedding dresses to be under the brand created by my own hands."

Yes, that's what I envision. I want to take pride in designing our wedding dresses under the brand that I have founded. I know it might take some time, but it could be the most suitable time. By that time, our lawsuit against Nij will probably be resolved, and we can smile happily in the wedding party without worries.

At this point, after hearing the reason, P'Note's disappointed look no longer persists. The young woman reveals a gentle smile, "Okay, I understand."

Then, she lifts her right hand with slender fingers to gently tuck my hair behind my ear and says,

"Then, right now... Will you be my girlfriend, Hong Yok?"

The question that arises out of the blue is beyond my expectations. It makes my heart beat rapidly, and I then realize that, though being close and being in love with each other, we don't have a clear status yet.

Now, looking into those beautiful eyes, I think I can define this woman in front of me.

It seems like my love... might resemble 'M.R. Netapsorn Ruthaithewin.' And for her, my answer has already confirmed.

*"Yes, I will."*

# Chapter 38: Hong Yok

Since the day the police arrested Nij in the middle of the night because her father reported to the police and provided evidence, a full year has passed. Many things have happened and changed significantly during the past three hundred and sixty- five days. If I were to tell the whole story, I would have to go through each event respectively.

Let's talk about Nij first. The case I filed against her was for the theft of my dress design. There was evidence from the CCTV of a certain store that captured images of the sedan she was driving, which matched the one she collided with someone, coupled with an audio clip that leaked out from the email that P'Note sent to me that night, indicating that she was the culprit.

As a result, Nij had to pay me a substantial amount - eight digits. I don't know how Mai Tree the attorney managed to achieve that amount, but in the end, Nij had to compensate me with that.

Furthermore, there was also the case that Nij drove recklessly, causing the man a serious injury. The actual sentence was three years in prison, but the court decided to grant her probation instead. Of course, she wouldn't hire the dream team lawyers for nothing.

It can be assumed that seeing Nij in prison would be difficult. At least, her Nij Greta studio and herself barely no longer have a standing in society. Moreover, she was exposed to having claimed other people's ideas, and not long after, her fashion studio was closed. Her husband decided to send their daughter, Mannam, to study abroad to avoid adverse effects on her.

Prince Napasdol also declared unequivocally that he would never forgive his middle daughter. Nij wasn't allowed to visit the Ruthaithewin manor on weekends anymore.

After that, the stories from the past gradually resurfaced. Both the posts that Nij had accused her own younger sister of arson and other small incidents were dug up and criticized heavily. Additionally, she gained a nickname along the way.

'Lady Nij the Copycat.'

And the joke that people incorporated my name like, *Don't act like Hong Yok!'* is replaced with, *Don't act like Nij!'* instead.

Next, those who used to post insults against me, well, all thirteen of them got sued. P'Note wanted to demand the full amount, like if they dared to insult, they should dare to pay. However, I stopped her and opted for them to post apologies on their social account instead. Except for some who I both demanded the money and an apology because they insulted P'Note. Well, they deserved it.

Getting insulted makes me cry, but if they target P'Note, I won't stand for it.

Well, I'd like to thank P'Preaw for deciding to come forward, revealing everything, and providing various evidence to prove that Nij stole my work. Now, P'Preaw got an offer from a brand and P'Ping went abroad to further her studies with the money she saved from working for many years. She's expected to establish herself there.

Speaking of pattern designers, seamstresses, and employees under other departments, when the Nij Greta fashion studio closed, they certainly had to separate and find new jobs. However, Leng, who is usually shy and quiet, messaged me, saying,

'*Hong, if you open a shop or create your brand and need pattern designers,*

*I'd like to say that I'm interested in working with you.'*

That's why when I invested in creating the 'Hong-Yok' clothing brand and opened a clothing studio, I got Leng to join as the first employee, along with another recent graduate who came in as an assistant.

Later on, both Lek and Pong from the cutting and sewing department followed. This forms an old team that, at least, we know each other to some extent.

Being a head designer has made my workload multiply many times over. This includes coordinating deals with manufacturing factories, contacting various storefronts for placement, and designing custom outfits for some customers, with me being the one to cut and sew them. It turns out that even on some days off, I still drive to the studio to work alone.

Despite how busy it gets, I still find time to design and sew outfits for one particular woman - that woman is P'Note.

Whether it's work uniforms, outfits for events, or clothes for leisure, I design and sew them all for her. But that's not enough; she buys every outfit I put up for sale and wears them on every occasion possible. It's like she's afraid that others won't know she's the owner of this brand.

My studio is open from Monday to Saturday, and we have store staff taking shifts. The head designers only work from Monday to Friday. Nevertheless, I, alone, always like to come in on Saturdays and Sundays to speed up the work. Almost every time, P'Note comes to keep me company. Sometimes, she brings a book to read on the sofa, occasionally she brings a Nintendo Switch to play Pokemon, or sometimes she brings work to do alongside me.

I have to admit, all of this fills my heart.

Especially when combined with the fact that the Edge of Universe just released a new album with the title song being 'Hong-Yok.' Even though it's sung by a different singer and P'Note sings the chorus, I get a nice feeling in my chest every time I hear it.

As for Kris.Tera, owned by Madam Kris, the first place I ever worked, I heard some rumors that they are currently hiring two new designers because Liu, one of the designers, resigned to open her own studio. However, it seems that after six months, she got discouraged by the laborious job and went back to applying to work for a company instead.

We haven't contacted each other, and I don't plan to. I only know this news because Chompoo, a recent graduate with great enthusiasm whom I hired, is the one who told me.

Enough talking about me, let's talk about P'Note.

P'Note is still working at Raya Studio, and most recently, she successfully sold her design to a large company who came to open a branch in Thailand.

I can't help but boast about having a successful partner of my own. During an interview about founding my brand and challenges, I couldn't resist showing off my love. I proudly expressed how proud I am of her.

However, someone took opportunities to showcase me even more. There was one time when she posted a picture of our interlocked hands as her Twitter cover photo. In the bio that should have been reserved for self introduction, she wrote, "HongYok is."

Instagram is the worst. Every photo was a couple shot, and she selectively chose pictures where I looked outstanding. Anyone stumbling upon it without prior knowledge would think I owned that account for sure.

Once, I jokingly complained to her.

*'P'Note, if you're going to flaunt me this much, why not announce in the newspaper that we're dating!'*

However...

*"Even if I bought the front page, it wouldn't be enough to present your beauty. Otherwise, I'd do it."*

Oh gosh, I was at a loss for words at that time.

In the end, it turned out just as expected. A whole year has passed, but she hasn't toned down her flaunting even a bit.

*Rrrrrrrr!*

The ringing phone snaps me out of my thoughts, and my hand instinctively leaves my stylus. The name 'N'Pu' appears. My assistant's calling me, and that's a bit strange since today is Sunday. Usually, if there's something to discuss, she messages instead of calling. This might be really urgent.

I quickly pick up the phone and answer while grabbing the stylus to continue working.

"What's up, Pu?"

[P'Hong]

The soft voice of the younger woman hints at something heavy, disturbing her mind.

[Can I take a half-day leave tomorrow, please? My aunt isn't feeling well. She needs to go to the hospital.]

My hand immediately pauses. This situation exactly resembles the time when my younger sister went to the hospital. The other side seems to notice that I fall silent for a moment. She quickly adds.

[But I will make it in time for tomorrow afternoon, P'Hong.]

"Pu, feel free to take the whole day off or until your aunt recovers."

[I... Is that okay? We have a dress that needs to be urgently completed for the event.]

"It's alright. We can manage it on time. Pu, take care of you aunt. Regarding the medical expenses, if there's any trouble, send me the numbers."

[P'Hong... *sniff.]*

A younger girl, about six years younger than me, sobs. I can tell from the tearful voice that it is tears of joy. Poo has lived with her aunt alone after all this time, so with her aunt admitted to hospital must have been a burden on her. The best thing I can do now is to reach out to help this helpful assistant.

Chompoo keeps saying 'thank you' and mentions that she has some money saved up, but she genuinely appreciates my offer. I still reaffirm that she can contact me anytime. After that, she has to hang up, as the nurse looks for the patient's relatives.

Once the call has ended, I just happen to glance at the clock hanging on the wall in this studio. It indicates that it's almost 7 pm. Honestly, it seems like I was so engrossed in my work that I forgot about the time altogether.

On a regular Saturday or Sunday, P'Note usually stays with me. However, today she went to supervise a construction site in another province. She sent a chat saying she might reach Bangkok around 8 pm. She told me to head

back to her penthouse, take a shower, and have dinner.

Well, she went in the same car with Mrs. Raya, who is the owner of the company. They might be coming back together. I shutdown my computer and pack up, feeling satisfied as today's work progressed smoothly. One more thing I'm delighted to do is to walk out through the shopfront. During the twilight hours, I lock the door, then take a couple of steps back to look at my studio. Once, this was a dream... that I thought extremely difficult to achieve.

The letters 'Hong-Yok' emphasize that I have successfully overcome both obstacles and my own timidity to become a designer, proud of my work and proud of myself in every aspect. Seeing it become a reality is quite wonderful.

Now, I thought, I am ready.

My hand picks up the phone from my bag and dials a number that I often call, a favorite on my contact list. I wait for a short moment.

The other end answers. I immediately smile and say what I am about to say.

I feel so happy right now.

"P'Note, Hong is ready to make *our dresses*."

# Chapter Epilogue

As for the wedding arrangements, I am responsible for the dresses, while the rest is taken care of by the royal lady who volunteered for the task. I don't have any objections because I've invested my time in designing and sewing two bridal dresses by myself.

But I secretly guessed that she wouldn't organize a simple event. And I was right. I anticipated correctly because the venue she chose was the summer house, where she once brought me to sleep under the sky dome. When I found out that we would have the event here, I must admit I was quite excited. Perhaps because I already liked being there.

It's strange. Falling in love with the architect is not enough. I also fell in love with the house she designed. Vice versa, she believes that the clothes I designed are beautiful too. Two weeks before the event, I declined any dress order with a straightforward reason to our generous clients,

'*We're genuinely sorry if you're interested in the Hong-Yok dress. Could you please contact us again after the 15th? Because... well, the designer has to make her own wedding dress and her bride's too."*

I'm not going to complain about P'Note anymore about her frequent love announcements because it seems like I shoot myself in the foot. Before I knew it, I had sent invitations to my close friend, Woon-Sen, my colleagues, somewhat connected friends, and some close customers.

I'm not crazy about it... not at all!

As for the wedding dress I'm going to wear, I designed it initially as an empire style with an off-the-shoulder design. However, since it carries the Hong-Yok brand, it can't be that simple. The skirt that should be left to look elegant is designed with large diagonal waves, accented with the burgundy color. It's the same color as the ribbon I'll use to tie my hair. The reason it has to be this color... is that I want it to represent the red thread that has connected us until we meet again.

As for P'Note's wedding dress, it's a sheath style with delicate lace details on the skirt (I designed the pattern myself every inch). In addition, there is a white outer shoulder covering, but the inside is purple. This means that if you look from the front, you will see her favorite color subtly blending into the dress. Purple... represents her preferences, her song, and our universe.

Therefore, our wedding dresses aren't plainly white. They are also embellished with mixed meanings and symbolism. Speaking of head accessories, P'Note doesn't like anything attached to her head, and I'm not keen on the seriousness of this tradition. So, we didn't plan to use it.

For a full two weeks, I've invested my utmost abilities and meticulous attention to every detail to meticulously sew both dresses, completing them impeccably. As a result, I am so drained by the time I hand them over, nearly collapsing on the bed around 9 pm. The outfits remain the same, but I can sense that P'Note helps me change them into nightwear.

And then, there is a warm touch, surrounding me throughout the night, as usual....

**The next day**

**18.25**

P'Note used to say that she could do anything if that would make me happy.

Her words are not just an exaggeration; she seems to reside in my heart, knowing what I like.

Our wedding was purposely arranged to convey an easygoing mood, embraces the beauty of the landscape. It is not held in a hotel or a church. While the sky transitions from day to night, the soft orange light blends with the sound of waves and the gentle sea breeze. I don't know how my lover makes everything fall perfectly into place in the utmost romantic way. Everything looks like a painting she sketched and colored. I like it all; the decorations, the chosen color tone, the photo booth, the cocktail-style dining tables, to the flower stand where we're standing and exchanging rings.

At this moment, I feel my cheeks burning hotter than ever in my entire life. P'Note, with her flawless makeup and dressed in the gown I created, looks outstanding and incredibly breathtaking. Confronted with the gaze of my partner from such a close distance, I don't know how to keep myself from blushing. I try to conceal my feelings by bringing something up out of the blue.

"You seemed to spend a lot."

"It's incomparable to your beauty today. Believe me."

It turns out that the response from her makes me blush even more.

After putting on the beautiful rings on each other's left ring fingers, the guests whom we invited gave us a big applause. On my side, as mentioned earlier, there are close friends, my teammates, some close customers, and of course, my family - Dad, Mom, and Toey-Hom.

But on P'Note's side, it is more grandiose, with members of the royal house, including Prince Napasdol, Lady Jeerana, her older brothers who brought their wives and children, her colleagues and senior-iunior coworkers, and, of course, the members of Edge Universe... and their lovers.

It might look like a sophisticated event, but it is not ostentatious. However, Note told the photographer we hired specifically that when the pictures were ready, they would send the files to her immediately because she wanted to post them on social media.

Oh gosh! More than a hundred thousand of her followers on Twitter alone, and on Instagram, it's a million. When an idol like her gets married, hashtags will have to trend again soon.

Anyway, I have started to get used to it.

Because on her social media, no matter which platform, she regularly posts our couple photos or pictures of me. The party ended around half past two. After that, time belongs to the two of us. Some guests return to Bangkok, while others stay at nearby hotels, such as P'Note's family and mine. Members of the Edge of Universe also take this opportunity to enjoy the sea view as night falls.

Initially, I thought P'Note might go socialize with her friends, but that wasn't the case. She said, This is our time now.' She wanted to do things together like removing makeup, taking a bath, having a late-night snack, or just lying on the soft carpet, looking at the night sky under the starry dome in this summer house.

We are both in satin pajamas. Mine is a simple beige color, while P'Note is purple. Now, she can honestly say that she likes it. We've been fulfilling each other with confidence and calming our hearts.

She was the one who helped me regain self-confidence and dare to do many things.

I, in turn, was the one who added her favorite color to all the clothes I designed for her. Eventually, P'Note picked up the pajamas that I had folded and kept for her and put them on again.

I secretly glance at the side profile of the person holding hands with me, then look back at the stars. Tip P'Note decides to break the silence.

"Hong Yok."

"Yes?"

"The stars are beautiful tonight."

I'm about to say, 'I think so.' but the owner of that gentle voice turns to me and continues.

"But they are incomparable to you."

Oh... She's so good at making me blush.

"That's weird. Why does the universe need this bunch of stars when you already exist?"

"Y... You exaggerate things again."

I can't handle this. This woman creatively comes up with new phrases to compliment my beauty.

Perhaps, P'Note herself wouldn't expect that she would end up with the girl she fell in love with on that day ten years ago. She turns her gaze back to the vast night sky. Inside this glass dome, silence returns, and we spend a long time lying side by side, sharing warmth.

The clock ticks at five minutes past midnight; we're approaching the new day.

I think... There's something I want to tell her today, the day we exchanged rings.

"P'Note"

"Hmm, what is it, honey?"

"I just want to say... I'm happy that it's you."

It's a feeling that has been inside me for a long time, and I can't express exactly when it started.

"I'm happy that the person I will spend my life with is you, P'Note."

Because I can't imagine, if it's not her, who else could I fall in love with or what kind of person could I be with? Whenever I fall asleep and dream of love, warmth, or sanctuary, in that dream, she would appear right in front of me.

This woman has prolonged my life. She is always by my side, supporting me until I become who I am today. Even though love cannot be seen with the eyes, I realize that her feelings are as vast as the universe and cannot be measured.

P'Note smiles softly, only for me, before raising our clasped hands and gently kissing the back of my hand. That touch reaches straight to my heart.

"**I'm also very happy to be with the most beautiful star in this universe, like you."**

**-The End-**

# Chapter : Special 01

**Love-Stricken Diary**

After our important night about a month ago, I found something that belonged to P'Note.

That day, she had to work in another province, and by the time she could return, it was already dark. Mrs. Raya decided to book a hotel for the night, so they would come back to Bangkok the day after. The royal lady called me to complain and groan about the boredom of not being able to sleep beside me. But wait... Ever since we started dating, there were only a few times that we didn't sleep in the same bed. P'Note got used to being close to me.

But...

Honestly, sleeping alone in the king-sized bed at the penthouse also made me feel a bit lonely.

It turns out that I was the one who couldn't sleep around midnight so I got up to find something to do, hoping to get tired and fall asleep, like organizing things.

We agreed to move in together permanently after getting married. There were many stuffs, both hers and mine, that we had just moved here after that day. There were several unopened boxes in the storage area. It was perfect timing for a night when I couldn't sleep well.

Yes, just opening the first box, I found a dark purple diary. I was not nosy or intrusive, but its title was:

*'Maybe you'll read it someday.'*

And I'd like to know who the 'you' in her handwriting refers to.

'If it's another woman, there must be consequences!'

That was my thought back then. I flipped open to the page and started reading in silence.

*To: The most beautiful person in the universe,*

*Since that day, nothing in this world has any meaning anymore, except for you.*

*You are so precious that I can't imagine if the worth of a million galaxies could compare to yours.*

*Even if it's another year, five years, fifty years, or more from now, just getting a glimpse of you again,*

*I am confident that I will remember you. Because you are my entire universe.*

*From: Me, the person who thinks of you every time she looks up at the*

*stars.*

It was... a diary written about me, truly.,

My heart suddenly felt empty when I thought back to the fact that I didn't return to her as promised which would make P'Note wait for so long.

It'd been a decade.

More than three thousand six hundred days, to be precise.

*'I'm sorry, P'Note, for making you feel lonely like that.'*

Moreover, when I met her again, I deliberately treated her harshly because of my misunderstanding.

I held back that feeling of sadness and let it out with a sigh. Then, I flipped to the next page to read.

*To: The most beautiful person in the universe,*

*Today, I met you again, and I found out your name:* ***"Hong Yok****."*

*Your name is perfectly apt, and you look even more beautiful than before. I don't know what happened, but it seems like you don't remember me.*

*It's okay, maybe it's been a long time. At least, I can remember you well. But I think I should try calling you tonight.*

*Will I be able to hold back... my marriage proposal?*

*From: Me, the person who wants you as a designer for life.*

This page must have been written on the night she called to propose to me.

At last, she couldn't hold back.

Thinking about it now, I can't help but smile. She must've been nervous before making the call.

I felt like I was fascinated with this important diary, so I changed the plan to organize things and ended up holding this purple notebook, sitting on the sofa in the living room to read it attentively.

*To: The most beautiful person in the universe,*

*Tomorrow, I will go to see you at the studio. I hope we can talk longer.*

*From: Me, the person who thinks your voice is so enchanting.*

Oh... what a pity. You went on the day I resigned. But we still met

again.

*To : The most beautiful person in the universe,*

*Actually, I wanted to hug you and tell you about our past, but I was*

*afraid it would trigger your pain.*

*Whatever you feel is the most important.*

*Today, the only thing I could do was stand and watch you get on the*

*bus.*

*From: Me, the person who had an undercut to show my scar along*

*with yours.*

Why was I... so irritating back then?

*To: The most beautiful person in the universe, Once again, you are the only one who believes in me.*

*From: Me, the person who fell in love with you countless times.*

I guessed this one might be about the incident where Nij stepped down into the pool on purpose to make others believe that P'Note

pushed her.

*To: The most beautiful person in the universe,*

*Hong Yok, every inch of your body is beautiful. Even the stars in the*

*sky can't compare to yours.*

*From: Me, the person who sleeps hugging you all night.*

It might be somewhat embarrassing, but I believed this must be a retrospective diary from the night we... um... made love for the first

time.

No, no, I shouldn't let my embarrassment reach my ears right now.

Let's continue recalling.

On that night, I delved into the stories of us from P'Note's perspective.

Whether it was the day she was angry with Toey-Hom as my sister hurt my feelings or the day she bought a claw machine to seize a star-shaped pillow in it for me.

Even on the day we didn't see each other, she still wished me sweet dreams.

The latest recorded entry in the diary is on our wedding day.

*To: The most beautiful person in the universe,*

*You drove me crazy today.*

*Normally, you are beautiful to the point that my heart aches, but today, you wore a wedding dress, and your makeup was different than usual*.

*What's the point of finding a beautiful place to organize the wedding party?*

*Why bother organizing it when just looking at you makes me believe that there's nothing else as beautiful as you?*

*I can't believe we get to belong to each other.*

*I love you, and the dress you designed for me is amazing.*

*From: Me, the person who wore the ring on your left ring finger.*

This woman is a real deal. Oh my goodness, although those sentences were written in the form of letters, they still made my heart so warm.

That's why I could hardly fall asleep... since there wasn't a gentle hug from her or the sound of her voice.

I gently closed the diary and placed it on the headboard in our bedroom before lying down, holding onto the pillow, and picking up the phone to send messages to someone with longing, even though we bathed together in the morning.

*HongYok: Are you asleep?*

*Hong Yok: If not, I want to have a call.*

*Hong Yok: With you, my love-stricken architect :)*

# Chapter : Special 02

**I'm Hers... Ms. Architect Over There**

I'm not that good at cooking. I rarely step into the kitchen. I either buy or order food, as cooking is usually P'Note's domain. However, today is a special case-special in the sense that even though it's a workday, I left my studio with Chompoo and Leng and drove back home to plead with my mother:

"Mom, could you please teach me to make a cake? Pretty please!"

Upon hearing this, my mother frowns in surprise. For a hundred years, I've only shown interest in clothes, or at best, played a minimal role in the kitchen. Today, announcing my desire to learn how to make a cake is quite unusual. So, my mom immediately notices that this must be a special occasion.

"I see. Her Highness's birthday is approaching earlier than I thought."

"Huh? How did you know, Mom?"

"Last year, I was all in a frenzy helping you pick her gifts. Remember?" Indeed, it's not surprising that my mother guessed right.

I chuckle before embracing her, "But this year, it won't be as troublesome. Teaching me to make the cake is enough."

"I'm not very good with sweets, though."

"It's okay."

It will definitely turn out tastier and more attractive than what I make alone.

That afternoon, I spent my time in the kitchen preparing a cake for the surprise birthday of a royal lady. Initially, my mom and I agreed to make a cheesecake, but we soon realized it was too challenging for both of us. So, my mother adapted a cake recipe that she knew it would turn out nicely. Finally, that evening, I had a beautifully crafted melon cake in hand, looking so perfect that one would think it was ordered from a high-end bakery.

I drive back to my condo and park my car before calling a taxi to the office building where Raya Studio is located on the 15th floor. I need to park my car first so I can come back with her, and I choose a taxi because I want to ensure the safe transport of the handmade cake. It wouldn't survive the bus or skytrain journey with all its decorations.

Arriving ahead of schedule, I decide to wait in the lobby and text her:

**Hong Yok**: P'Note, my car broke down. I parked it near my studio. I'll ask the mechanic to look at it tomorrow. Can I go back with you today? Smooth, right?

Gotta be smooth. In a matter of minutes, she replies:

**Note**: Got it. Aren't you at your studio right now?

Well, I'm not great at lying.

What excuse should I come up with? I ponder for a moment before settling on what I think is a reasonable answer:

**Hong Yok**: Well, P'Leng dropped me here on his way home. I asked him to give me a ride. I'm waiting for you in the lobby down here.

**Hong Yok**: [Image sent]

Not bad, right? The excuse seems convincing. But then, P'Note shoots back with a question:

**NoTe**: Don't you usually finish work later than this?

Oh no, I forgot that I usually finish work later than her. That's why she's stopped by at my studio quite often.

Well... I'm sorry, P'Leng, but I have to use you as my excuse. I'll confess my sin to P'Note later.

**Hong Yok**: P'Leng had to pick up his kid from school.

**NoTe**: He doesn't have a wife, does he?

Oops! Am I too bad at lying or is she too smart?

**Hong Yok**: I mean... his sister's kid.

**NoTe**: I see.

**Note**: Wait a sec. I'll finish talking to P'Ya and come down soon.

**Hong Yok**: [Acknowledging with a sticker]

The melon cake box is placed in a white paper bag with the brand logo Hong-Yok. When P'Note walks down to join us, she probably doesn't suspect anything. She might think I've brought something to fix at our penthouse or some other equipment.

As soon as we sit in her luxurious Maserati, I'll take out the cake box and start singing '*Happy Birthday to You'* and present the imported earrings as a gift to her.

Just thinking about seeing her with a surprised expression makes me excited. I sit there, smiling to myself.

However, my joy is soon disrupted...

Two man in well dressed shirts exit the elevator and walk over to table, continuing their private conversation as if they are killing time waiting for someone. At first, I pay them no attention, but suddenly, the guy in the light blue shirt changes the topic, and I find myself tensing up.

"Hey, bro, I have a crush on a girl. She's extremely beautiful. I'm thinking of giving it a shot."

"Huh? Who are you going after?"

"Lady Note, on the 15th floor."

Okay, it feels like someone lit a fire inside my chest. He's talking about my girl. My eyes widen as I overhear the conversation. I glance at them and see the guy in the white shirt looking startled.

"Hey, crazy dude, she is married, isn't she?"

"What the hell, man? It's not that difficult. She probably hasn't met the right guy yet. If she finds a good guy, she'll change her mind. No matter what, you have to yield to the law of nature."

Imagine someone just poured water on my face-I believe I could handle it better than this. When it comes to P'Note... After enduring his ridiculous rambling for a while, I finally decided that I've had enough. I stand up abruptly, holding one hand with the paper bag and the other clenching my skirt. I force a smile towards the guy with underdeveloped brain cells.

"Excuse me."

"Yes?"

The culprit turns to me with surprise, then his gaze falls on my scars right away. His eyes widen as he seems to recall who I am.

Certainly, P'Note has been making that kind of announcement, and the entertainment news spreads across every channel.

Without giving him or his companion a chance to speak, I bring up the issue with a cold smile.

"This idea of trying to woo a lesbian, especially when she already has a girlfriend... I think you're having a cognitive thinking issue in your life. If you can quit, you should."

"Uh-"

"I don't want to hear what you have to say. Just consider this a warning. And by the way", my hand grasps tightly, not because of nervousness, but to prevent any vulgar comments,

"I happen to be the wife of the person you're talking about. So..."

Even I myself realize my icy tone, and my eyes are piercing the open mouthed man before me.

"Don't mess with my wife."

The man, who seems to be a new employee, sits in silence, startled by the loud and resounding voice that just announced my purpose in disrupting their conversation. His senior, in response, attempts to defuse the situation with a dry smile.

"Sorry about that. My junior has a big mouth. It's just guy talk, you know.

Sometimes it's not meant to be taken seriously."

"But it's not pleasant to my ears as the wife of the lady you're talking about",

I conclude with a chilling smile.

"Vee!"

He turns to whisper to his junior. I don't know if the menacing aura radiating from me is supposed to be scary or what, but the man scolds his junior through his eyes as if to ask the person who started it all to say something so that I can feel better.

Still, I refrain from saying anything, just looking at the guy named Vee, who looks somewhat embarrassed at the moment.

"Uh... sorry, ma'am."

A quick glance shows me that the elevator has opened, and the familiar figure steps out gracefully. I give them a cold smile and stern gaze one more time, then walk towards P'Note as I don't want to engage with them any further.

I don't know if the guy named Vee is genuinely apologetic or just mouthing off because the senior is pressuring him. But whatever was said earlier has,

toned down the excitement of surprising P'Note on her birthday. It turns into

a mix of annoyance and discontent, as I'm worried about the bugs that might bother P'Note.

Okay.

I'm quite a jealous wife... or more than that. Well, let's say I'm very jealous. Even P'Note, who comes halfway to meet me, seems to raise an eyebrow and ask while looking at those two men.

"Did they say anything to you?"

The tone is highly assertive. If I had just murmured a bit that those two made me uncomfortable, she would have attacked them. However, because I have already criticized them earlier, I just shake my head slowly.

"No, they didn't do anything."

"Really? You look upset."

"Please forget about them. Let's go home."

I try to dismiss the remaining tension on my face and pull P'Note's hand to signal that I want to go to the car. The girl narrows her eyes before casting a fierce gaze towards the two men, as if to say, 'We'll talk later to clear things up', and then raises one hand to gently encircle my waist, guiding me towards the parking lot.

The miscalculation is that, instead of following the plan, once I sit in the familiar Maserati, I take a deep breath, exhaling slowly. Before I can change my mind, I say something that I still can't get out of my heart. "P'Note."

"Yes?"

"If anyone tries to flirt with you, please reject them outright." The older woman laughs a little.

"Of course, why did you say something strange like that?"

"Nothing."

I remark because otherwise, I'd transform into a granite statue that breathes fire from my mouth.

The car pulls out of the parking lot in the building, heading towards the route that will take us back to our love nest. I cross my arms, expressionless, pondering what will happen if someone flirts with her and I don't know about it. This time, I fortunately overheard it. However, there are still so many other companies in that building.

Just thinking about it makes my heart feel tense.

The royal lady subtly glances at me through the rearview mirror. The car remains silent, not even a song playing.

We know each other well after being together for so long, and she gazes at me, piercing through everything.

"Those two, right? The guys who upset you?"

"...."

Her eyes express confidence that my silence is an acknowledgment. And yes, that's exactly it. Once an irritated feeling arises, it's quite hard to eliminate it. Nonetheless, P'Note continues to act kindly and smile, not overlooking or ignoring my paranoia.

She's even boosting my self-esteem...

"Don't worry too much. Unless it's you, I can't imagine myself falling in love with anyone."

That's it. That's why I turn my face away, hiding my smile. It's the victorious smile of Hong Yok who defeats whoever's aiming at this architect girl.

Being loved passionately like this is good for the heart.

But still, I have to try to contain myself.

The car stops at a red light, stuck behind a long line of vehicles. I lift my arms to cross, then look ahead silently, not showing any facial expression. I don't want her to know that I'm falling for her sweetness again. But the next words P'Note says make me lose my composure.

"But... don't you want to surprise me, Hong?"

"Huh!"

The paper bag in my hand... Damn! Opening the box, I find a handmade melon cake inside become...

"T...The cake looks a bit ruined."

All the fruits I carefully placed for decoration are now scattered, not in the shape I intended. Before, I kept crossing my arms and placing it on my lap, but hold on... I quickly turn to lock eyes with the person behind the steering wheel.

"How did you find out?"

"That's right. How did I know it?"

The young woman teasingly repeats some words, raising a little smile. At that moment, I realize that perhaps she knew from the beginning, like ever since that absurd excuses. Still, after pretending not to know for so long, she starts to wonder why I haven't surprised her.

Moreover, I kept swinging the paper bag back and forth, making it impossible for the cake inside to survive. That's why she asked.

Indeed... My plan fails every year.

Last year, I happened to run across to her while shopping with my mom. This year, there's another unexpected incident.

"You made this yourself, right?"

The soft voice of the architect, who wears a work outfit that I designed, brings me back to reality.

"Mom taught me..."

"Take the first bite."

"Huh? Don't you trust that it's edible?"

"Come on. Hong, try the first bite."

I find myself in a slightly confused situation, blinking my eyes. However, I pick up the plastic spoon from the paper bag and scoop a piece of the homemade melon cake to taste. I'm about to say, It's 'edible', but suddenly, the girl sitting next to me releases the seatbelt and leans over to kiss my lips.

A soft, supple tongue slips into my mouth, and a surge of sweetness with the scent of her signature cherry blossom perfume reminds me that we are... kissing... and because we're stuck at a long traffic light with motionless cars in front of us, the kiss lasts longer than usual.

She savors the sweetness to her satisfaction before withdrawing her lips and returning to her seat as if nothing happened. She also pulls out the seatbelt and fastens it with a smile that signifies utmost satisfaction.

"Tastier than any cake."

"..."

I'm still in shock, almost unable to process what just happened.

"Thank you for the birthday surprise, Hong Yok."

Wait... did she just taste the cake from my mouth? It was when the car moved forward again that I regained my composure.

Why do I feel like it's a reversal? The one who should be surprised should be her, the birthday girl right?

Now, it seems like I'm the one who got surprised instead.

She's always number one... in terms of making my heart race.

# Chapter : Special 03

**Next to You, I Always Feel Warm**

Well... what should I say?

I used to view the members of the Edge of Universe as same-age people and casually call them by their names in my head all along. I remembered later that I used to address P'Note with 'P' when I was a kid and learned later that, well, everyone is a year older than me. After that, I had to look at them as my seniors. Initially, I felt a bit embarrassed. It was similar to the time I had to address my girlfriend 'P'Note' for the first time.

On one hand, I thought it was just a one-year difference but on the other hand, since I started to call her 'P'Note,' then I needed to call her friends the same way, and the conclusion turned out to be just that. Let's get to the point now.

After releasing the song 'Hong Yok,' the Edge of Universe hasn't released a new album for many years. The members themselves haven't taken on any performance or public appearances anywhere because everyone, now being adults, has different focuses. P'Belle, who plays the guitar and is the leader of the band, works in an accounting office in Phetchaburi.

Even though she regularly updates her social media and responds to fan club comments, she rarely comes to Bangkok.

The same goes for P'Nene, the bassist. She currently resides in the same province and has moved in with P'Belle (because they're a couple). However, she succeeded a car care business from her father, and there's news about opening a new branch. She seems busy and successful, but she still comments on every Instagram photo of her girlfriend.

The vet and the drummer, P'Frang also has a good news. She opened her own pet clinic three months ago in the downtown area. Um, it's near her girlfriend's bakery, if I remember correctly. She barely updates anything on social media, but sometimes she pops up. However, she always manages to take her girlfriend on trips during weekends without fail.

As for the lead vocalist, P'Kliao Khluen, the most petite member of the band but as old as the others, she has become a neurosurgeon after

specializing in neurological surgery. It feels like this woman almost has no time. Her social media is almost inactive, and she rarely appears. However, when she does, it's mostly pictures taken by her fan club, and also... her girlfriend is a doctor too, although they're in different fields. I really wonder how they find time to be together.

As for the last member, P'Note, my architects. she's been frequently contacted for entertainment industry jobs but has declined them all. She says she's afraid of what those might take away from the time she could spend with me. She only models for my clothing brand, Hong-Yok. Well, it's not surprising why fans call us the scent of love' or give her a nickname like *'the love-stricken royal lady.'*

But... I like it. I like that I matter to her this much.

Well, having a flawless clothes hanger to model for my brand only, why wouldn't I be so happy?

However, what made me think, 'Is she spoiling me too much?' is when, one night, I scrolled through my tablet and casually said,

"Milan Fashion Week seems interesting..."

The next day, she came back from work and said,

"I had a chat with my friends. They all think it's been a while since we traveled together. It's a good opportunity."

"Huh? P'Note, what do you mean?"

Her tall figure gracefully approached, and she pressed her nose against my cheek before heading to the bathroom and saying,

"Milan Fashion Week, dear."

Everything happened so quickly. The next day, she took me to apply for a Schengen visa, along with other members of the Edge of Universe who also needed it.

And... that's it. One month later, I find myself sitting in the first-class section of a plane with Milan, the fashion city located to the north in Italy, as the final destination. P'Note gathered the members of the Edge of Universe and invited them to travel together as a group, and she asked them to bring their partners along.

That means we're going on this trip with a total of 8 people: Belle, Nene, Frang and her girlfriend, Kliao Khluen and her girlfriend, and P'Note and me. But... with this number, do we really need to charter the entire first class section?

This airline has 12 seats in the first-class zone, but there are only 8 of us. Do we have to charter the whole class for privacy? The price for each seat is quite a sum.

Well... but someone like P'Note, the one who bought a claw machine just to give me the dolls inside, then drove to pick me up at midnight to surprise me on my birthday. Anything can happen.

However, I didn't expect that just a casual statement would make my beloved so enthusiastic.

It took a little over ten hours to travel through the skies. We arrived at our destination, Milan Malpensa Airport.

P'Note took care of buying local SIM cards at the airport and had them activated, so we didn't have to stop by any stores. Instead, we hopped in a car straight to the hotel she had booked in advance. No need to waste time guessing because, in any case, someone like Lady Netapsorn would undoubtedly book a luxurious hotel, which is close to a metro station. "Our group trips are always adventurous", Belle, the one with the brightest smile and the most lively personality in the group, said to me as we both stopped to buy ice cream together.

"The first time, we did volunteer activities in the countryside. It was tiring but made us closer than ever. The second time, we went to Phu Kradueng. My legs were sore for days. The third time, we went yachting. Totally worth it, we got to swim and stargaze in the middle of the sea. And this time, we traveled abroad! She suddenly sent us a message saying she wanted to take you to a fashion week. She's a real deal!" "I apologize for causing you and everyone trouble."

"What trouble? No! No! We're all excited to death."

Belle waves her hand playfully, accepting the ice cream from the vendor.

Then Belle spills the beans to me, explaining that, back in school, P'Note wasn't engaged with anyone and didn't bother with anything until she asked her to join the band as their keyboardist. At first, she tried to persuade P'Note by giving her sweets and post-it notes, but they didn't work. The only reason why P'Note agreed to join the Edge of Universe was just to give herself an excuse to avoid her father.

Hmm, she's quite arrogant.

But I've never seen that part of her. That's probably why Kliao Khluen teasingly said that she's cold to the whole world except me, her girlfriend.

Thinking about it, I can't help but giggle. We're currently in a car heading to the hotel. P'Note, who is sitting next to me, turns and tilts her head curiously.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing", I reply with a coy smile, making P'Note raise an eyebrow suspiciously.

At the luxurious hotel that she managed to book before we flew in, we have separate rooms as couples, without any doubt. But we agreed to meet before mealtime or before the tour tomorrow even if we decide to separate and move around.

At half past nine on the first night, P'Frang came in, informing the group that she would take her partner to stroll around for street food. As for the other couples, they didn't communicate anything. Probably they're either tired or resting. I also want to do the same because, the next day, we have a plan to explore the fashion street.

While typing and chatting with Woon-Sen about my excitement in bed, suddenly, a warm touch envelops me from behind. It's P'Note coming in for a hug, leaning her chin on my shoulder as she always does. However, today, the beautiful lady seems to have a hidden agenda.

"Want to warm up our bodies together?"

"How so?"

"You can easily guess it."

The gaze she directs towards me, combined with the coquettish words, makes me realize what the other party means.

"Just one round, okay?"

"Yeah!"

The lady responds with the sweet tone in her throat before gently kissing the base of my neck.

Honestly, I know that P'Note would request something like this when we arrive in Italy, but I miscalculated, thinking she'd ask on a night other than the first. Who would have known that someone would want a 'recharge' before a trip? She's also cleverly using the term 'warming up the body,' even though it's currently winter, and the temperature outside at midnight is only in the single digits.

However, due to the heater in the room providing warmth, it doesn't matter how cold it is outside; it doesn't hinder our activities on the bed.

I suddenly think that I want to tease P'Note a bit because normally, when it comes to things on the bed, she is always the one initiating.

I suppress the excitement in my heart before turning around to face her, smiling mischievously, and then raising my hand to unbutton her

nightgown. I then lean down to kiss her sweet lips passionately.

"Hong, ah-"

P'Note doesn't get to finish her sentence again because after nibbling and playing, I tease her with my tongue, making her who used to lead us grabbing the bedsheet tightly.

My mouth's still on her nipple, while my hands remove the tangled nightdress. P'Note emits a soft sigh as she reluctantly follows the melody that I begin to play. I continue to savor her well-filled chest for a while, transitioning from using my teasing tongue to gentle suction, while the sounds of her moans grow louder than before.

Um... Warming up the body is not a bad idea at all, right?

Not long after, P'Note's sheer nightgown is removed by me and piled up at the end of the bed until there's nothing left but her naked body lying on the soft bed.

I slowly drag my tongue down, passing through the flat abdomen, and come to a halt at the center of her halfway button. She lets out a breath through her slightly parted lips, intensifying my feelings more than before. I caress her sensitive spot with my tongue.

P'Note...is flawless in every way.

The temperature of her body.

Her rose petals.

And her nectar...

I smile, thinking that I've taken control of the game tonight. However, after P'Note takes a moment to catch her breath, lying on her back, she draws her arms around my waist, lying next to me. Then, she slides her cunning hand into my nightshirt, seeming to stir up emotions in my body without much effort.

"P... P'Note, I said just once."

The lady leans in until her lips almost touch my ear, whispering sweetly,

"It's 'once' for each of us, isn't it?"

Realizing this, I should set a clear condition that tonight, I'll be the one leading.

Oh gosh, in the end, it goes beyond the word 'warm up.'

She starts with her slender fingers, teasing the tips of my breasts playfully, creating sensations within. Then, it transforms into gentle caresses, not too forceful but full of affection. The other hand slips into my pajama pants, using two warm fingers to enter and move back and forth, exploring the area that is moist due to the gentle caresses, as if tasting and soaking in the essence.

It feels like my back is sweating, but that doesn't matter as much as the enchanting moans that escape when P'Note plays her game.

Hot... I feel so hot. P'Note performs her love song, making our night longer and hotter. As a result, my plan to wake up early was ruined completely.

Before I know it, it's already ten o'clock.

**The next day**

As mentioned, we woke up late because of the warm up that P'Note didn't take it easy. And in the Edge of Universe's group chat, there are ten messages and several missed calls.

While on the plane, I remembered that P'Note had told her friends that if anyone was still asleep, they should pair up and go out to explore the town separately, then meet up again in the evening. Thinking about this, I imagined a naughty architect coming up with a plan to warm up on the first night since we were on the plane!

Nene and Belle messaged to say they were going sightseeing and taking photos. Frang and her partner said they were going to the church and various scenic points. Kliao Khluen and her partner didn't clearly state where they were going; it's possible they might walking around to many places. I saw their latest photos, possibly in front of the famous opera house in Piazza Della Scala.

As for our couple...

We have a main purpose that made us fly here, and that is the Milan Fashion Street.

Because the event of the brand that we have seats for is happening tomorrow. Today is more of a freestyle sightseeing. P'Note doesn't complain or look bored, not even a little when I held her hand and led her around. Whether it's a world- renowned brand store or the various shops of Italian designers.

Around two in the afternoon after we had lunch (which was delayed by an hour), I wanted to change the atmosphere a bit. So, I suggested to her that we go to a high viewpoint. As agreed, we will explore Milan today and tomorrow, then take a train to Venice, which is famous for its romantic atmosphere. So, we need to make the most of Milan first. Besides the fashion street, I hardly know anything else, so I need help from P'Note to make decisions.

She takes me to the Duomo. Besides the beautiful sculptures to admire by the thousands, you can also go up to the top of the roof for a 360-degree view there.

But we have to choose between climbing 250 stairs or taking the elevator. P'Note follows my lead without hesitation, and of course, I choose the latter choice.

Because it's winter in February, even though the snow has melted since January, the temperature, of just over ten degrees Celsius in the midday sun makes me feel cold. Even if I wear a long coat, it's still chilly.

Well... normally, in Thailand, encountering a bit of coolness is enough to make me shiver a little. This temperature drop right now is even more intense. At the top, I gaze at the view behind me, rubbing my hands together to warm myself.

"Cold?"

P'Note, standing next to me, turns to look at me with concern in her eyes.

I smile like it's nothing.

"A bit chilly. My left hand feels numb, but it gets better soon."

P'Note, who has diligently kept her undercut, doesn't say anything. She just extends her warm right hand to interlock my left hand and inserts them into the pocket of her coat. This gesture not only warms up my cold hand but also includes my two cheeks, ears, and the heart that is currently pumping blood vigorously.

My left hand's gradually recovering its warmth. Maybe because there is someone who constantly embraces and shares warmth, skin to skin. I glance at the beautiful side profile of the woman who has become everything to me, making this day possible-the day when someone like Hong Yok's confident enough to face challenges.

P'Note is someone who pushes, supports, and walks alongside, whether the path is difficult or easy, and makes me proud of myself. And most importantly, she is someone who stands by me no matter how cold the weather is, warming my heart eternally.

-The End of Special Chapters-