

# Prologue

'**Jae Vee'**, or Veetara, was the owner of a famous English language institute near Wongwian Yai. The business had been running for four years now, with an initial investment pooled together with two female friends. One of them was *Akin*, short for *'Anakin Skywalker,* 'a name given by her die-hard Star Wars fan father.

Initially, she almost got the full name Anakin, but her mother rallied the relatives to protest at home, forcing her father to shorten it to just 'Akin.'

However, Akin now preferred everyone to call her *'Kinny'* because it suited her appearance after undergoing some cosmetic enhancements. Veetara agreed and ordered announcements to be posted everywhere, from the reception counter to the student handouts, stating that their beloved Jae Kin now had a two-syllable name, Kinny, so please call her correctly. Anyone who didn't would be fined five baht each time (a punishment for staff and Aunty Aeow, who sold pickled fruits in front of the institute building) and would be denied the sour candies that they gave out during class breaks (a punishment for students).

The response was positive.

The communal fund had surged past two thousand baht, and the sour candies were so plentiful that there was no need to restock. Of course, no one intended to mock or disrespect Kinny's wishes and decisions, they just weren't used to the new name and slipped up out of habit.

Even though Kinny understood the reason, she couldn't help but sulk for a week, except for **'Salee,'** who managed to avoid the sulking by using other terms while waiting to get used to the new name.

For example, *'My beautiful Jae, could you sign this document for me?'* or Jae Vee's friend, Jae Vee is calling you to her office. Because of this, Kinny had a special fondness for Salee, appreciating her sweet talk, quick wit, and flattering nature.

This situation made Salee Kinny's favorite, meaning she had a shield to hide behind whenever Veetara yelled at her Salee had been battling the beautiful institute owner alone for the past year with no help because everyone in the office agreed that *'Salee deserves it!'*

"Don't play dumb, Salee!" Veetara shouted.

"Give me back my pen right now!" "No,"

The young girl shook her head vigorously. "You gave it to me."

"When did I ever give it to you?!"

Hearing this, Salee began to recount the event in detail: yesterday, when she brought the documents for approval, Veetara returned them with the pen Salee picked up from Veetara's desk. To Salee, this meant Veetara had willingly given her that pen to add to her collection.

"You little...!!!"

The younger girl grinned as Veetara looked like an angry demon but still managed to look stunningly beautiful and bouncy with every breath.

*Okay, you know what?*

*Jae Vee is indeed stunningly beautiful and sexy-like, really. She's flawless from head to toe.*

Today, Veetara wore a fitted work dress with long sleeves and a knee-length skirt, showing off her perfect figure. Her long hair was dyed ash-brown with slight waves, her skin was so fair it almost reflected light, and she wore red lipstick and nail polish, her body curvy. Her overall appearance was soft and cushiony, like a sofa pillow.

Veetara was twenty-eight years old, with a youthful face, firm cheeks, no crow's feet, sharp eyes, and a beautiful smile that she rarely showed because she no longer taught students herself. She didn't see the need to look kind, especially to someone who constantly teased and tricked her into raising her voice daily. Veetara was very meticulous, wanting everything to go her way, with a precise daily schedule that no one could disrupt.

Her life was like this until Salee applied to be an English teacher at the institute.

## "Call me Jae Vee, not Jae-Vee,"

Was the first thing Veetara lectured Salee on the day she stepped into the building.

She didn't like being called *'Jae'* because it made her feel older. Calling her Jae was like calling the owner of a gold shop in Yaowarat or Jae Kiew from Nakkrarachai Air, the bus transportation company.

In contrast, 'Jae' (with a lower tone) gave a sense of being an older sister, kind and gentle (?). Usually, Veetara's younger brother, Salee's ex- boyfriend, called her 'Jae-jae,' so she wasn't used to Jae and couldn't help but correct anyone who mispronounced it, saying,

'**It's Jae, not *Jae****,* every time someone got it wrong.

Salee pronounced it correctly from the start because she'd heard how Best called his big sister so many times. This was the only thing out of a billion things that Salee never upset Veetara with.

As for other matters...

"Just give her the pen."

Kinny, who'd witnessed the entire event, said as she walked back into the office after teaching an intensive class to kids preparing for exams. Salee quickly hid behind her, but Veetara wouldn't relent, insisting on getting her pen back until Salee had to agree with Kinny.

"That's right, it's just one pen."

## "One pen, my foot!"

The beautiful woman retorted, pointing to Salle's desk, where a container full of blue Faber-Castell pens, her favorite pen brand, was bundled together.

"I-I bought those myself..."

This time, the two Jaes shouted in unison at Salee. "Liar!"

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Initially, Veetara didn't know that Salee had dated Best until he called her, pleading with her to hire Salee because (1) her brother wanted to make amends and get back together with his ex after breaking up three times since high school, and (2) Salee was talented and needed. Not only did she have excellent academic records, but she was also a great teacher, friendly, and got along well with kids. She had four years of tutoring experience during university, so she didn't need to start from scratch.

Salee was twenty-three. She had a sweet, pretty face and light brown shoulder-length hair with bangs, usually tied half-up, that made her look like a cute little girl.

But that was just an illusion.

## In reality, she was a maniac!

Veetara wasn't sure if Salee's brain was normal because instead of being scared of her like everyone else in the office, Salee would approach her, smile sweetly, and flatter her for about ten minutes before sneaking off with her small items to add to her collection on her desk. From small erasers to large staplers, whenever Veetara tried to reclaim her items, Salee would come up with various excuses. Now, she'd only managed to get a few things back, and whenever she planned to take then back openly, Salee seemed to know and kept them in her bag, bringing them with her even to the bathroom.

But this was minor compared to Salee's obsession with her.

## "Love you, my Jae!"

Salee shouted through a new megaphone she bought for teaching.

On the first day, this Little Trouble claimed she was just testing it before using it in class, but on the second, third, fourth, fifth... two hundred and nineteenth, she was still testing it. Some days, it wasn't just 'love you, my jae!' but also special occasion messages like:

*"Merry Christmas, beautiful! Your gift is on your desk!" "Happy New Year! Your heart is all I need for a bonus!"*

*"Today is Children's Day! I'm still a kid. If you love kids, that means you love me too!"*

*"Happy early Songkran! I bought scented water to pour on your chest as a sign of my worship. Call me when you're ready!"*

*"I want to go Loy Krathong with you, beautiful! Woohoo!"*

## The girl was so annoying!

Veetara wanted to throw something at the person who stood behind the door daily, waiting to shout through the megaphone at her, but she never got the chance because Salee was quick as a monkey on a rocket. After shouting, she'd use her smaller size to dodge and run out, leaving Veetara to shout, **"Salee!!!"** after her every time.

Recently, she heard that Salee was making extra money by shouting messages for the cleaning lady who wanted to request funds for toilet paper after failing to get it from the finance department.

"Khun Jae, I love you so much! But today, Aunty Oun asked me to tell you that we're out of tissue paper, and P' Karn won't let her take the company money to buy more!"

(This message cost twenty baht, which Aunty Oun and her group paid, each contributing five baht.)

Veetara heard this and felt like knocking Little Trouble's head, but she couldn't catch her. She gave her own money to Aunty Oun because she didn't want to deal with the stingy finance department. This made her grumpy all day, wondering why the tissue paper ran out so quickly when they'd just restocked recently. It wasn't until Salee popped into her private office after the students had gone home that Veetara couldn't help but ask about the situation. It seemed like Salee knew everything happening around the place as if she owned it.

*I'm not sure if she's just nosy or genuinely curious.*

"I'll tell you, but you have to let me hug you for thirty seconds first." "No way!"

"Then I'm leaving. Good evening!"

Salee gave her a wai like a primary school kid did, with her knees bending and left, making Veetara call out with a frown.

"Wait,"

Veetara frowned at the younger girl, who was smirking. "Fine, but tell me first. I don't want you playing tricks." "Oh, my Jae, I'm not that kind of person."

"Yeah, right!"

Veetara stood up, about to knock on Salee's forehead with her fist, but Salee didn't dodge. She just smiled, making Veetara pull her hand back in frustration.

"Spit it out already."

The cheeky girl hesitated for a few seconds before revealing that the finance department had cut the housekeeping budget, forcing them to buy cheaper tissue paper.

"It's so thin that just a little bit of water makes it disintegrate. So, we have to use a lot of it because it's soooo thin."

"Oh,"

Veetara nodded, understanding the problem she hadn't noticed before because she always carried her own tissue and wet wipes.

"I'll talk to Karn about it. In the meantime, tell everyone to bring their own tissue."

Salee nodded. As Veetara moved away from her desk to fulfill the younger girl's request, Salee made her nervous again with a mischievous smile.

Veetara always thought Salee acted like a fan girl because she was a mischievous kid, probably wanting to tease her as the sister of her ex- boyfriend. But lately, she wasn't so sure. Sometimes, Salee didn't seem like she was just playing around. For instance, she'd suddenly smile sweetly, more to herself than at Veetara, and quickly look away, even though she usually never backed down from anything, including the staring contest at the New Year's party.

Veetara cleared her throat, pushing away her overthinking. She opened her arms slightly, letting Salee do what she'd asked. Salee stepped closer, looking up at her without saying anything, making Veetara start the conversation.

"Hurry up, I need to go home!" "Can I save it up for later?" "Save it up?"

"Thirty seconds is too short. Let me save it up until it's ten minutes, and then you can let me hug you all at once."

"You little trouble!"

This time, Veetara-knocked on Salee's forehead.

"If you're going to be difficult, forget it. You're such an annoying kid!" "Wait,"

Salee grabbed Veetara's shirt. "Thirty seconds is fine."

She mumbled to herself, and Veetara didn't know why thirty seconds felt like three hours. She stood still, letting the annoying girl who liked to use a megaphone to teach students (instead of a mic) wrap her arms loosely around her waist. Salee's sweet face, which charmed everyone from Aunty Aeow who sold pickled fruits to Aunty Oun and her group, rested against her chest.

Veetara stood there until Salee let go and left the room five minutes ago. She still stood there, feeling dizzy and afraid to move quickly as she might faint.

*What did that girl just do to me?*

*Did she really hug me?*

*Hmm, and I allowed her to do so, too.*

Veetara took a deep breath, regaining her composure. She reasoned that she allowed Salee to do something silly because it was the easiest way out.

Since Salee asked for a hug, she gave it in exchange for information about the tissue paper. It was just a simple transaction...

Veetara nodded to herself, satisfied with her reasoning.

She turned to pack her things, ready to go home like everyone else in the office. But then she noticed something odd on her desk.

The new pen she bought yesterday was missing. ". "

*That Little Trouble. !!*

## "Saleeeeeee!"

Veetara shouted in her office, but alas, no one was there to hear her, not even Aunty Oun and her group.

**Note**: Book title:

**ADORE KHUN JAE LIKE CRAZY !! BY : THEK34**

# Chapter 01

Kinny had been friends with Veetara since their freshman year. They first met at the pharmacy building because they had to take a 'Food for Health' class together. Veetara was studying languages, while Kinny (back when she was still Anakin Skywalker) was studying engineering. Not long after, Kinny switched majors to be in the same faculty as Veetara. Veetara graduated a year earlier, making her somewhat of a senior.

Kinny wasn't sure when her parents realized she wanted to be Padmé Amidala more than Anakin. So, when she confessed to her parents that she wanted to be a woman with a busty chest like Veetara, her parents didn't seem surprised or shocked. Her dad just took a few sips of water while her mom nodded but couldn't help but complain,

"We almost had Veetara as our daughter-in-law." "Almost what, Mom!"

Kinny turned to make a face to Veetara, who was laughing awkwardly. "So, no surgery on the lower part?"

"Nope."

"But you're going to do to boobs job?" "Yup."

Kinny nodded while discussing cosmetic surgery with her best friend.

Veetara supported Kinny in everything and firmly assured her that she could be whatever she wanted to be, inclúding changing her name to 'Kinny' after

getting her boobs done.

One day, Salee sat down next to her and cautiously asked about it, probably out of curiosity and a desire to understand her. Kinny wasn't the type to be outspoken about personal matters; she was quite shy about them. She was only confident regarding other people's issues, teaching, and English.

So, she told Salee to ask Veetara instead (Kinny was close enough to Salee to let her know but too shy to say it herself). She was confident that it'd be a good way to avoid the topic and ensure that Veetara would provide Salee with the correct information on how to approach someone like her and what questions were appropriate. Veetara handled it well but was a bit too straightforward, telling Salee everything about how Kinny dealt with her body and her thoughts on it.

It was as if Salee had injected Veetara with a truth serum.

At first, Kinny didn't understand the strange vibe between these two women.

Let's just say they were both nonsense. Starting with Salee.

Salee used to be Veetara's younger brother's girlfriend, and now she was loudly proclaiming around the office,

## "I'm her future wife, but Khun Jae just doesn't know it yet!"

After getting her fortune told by a famous fortune teller in Khlong San district and believing it wholeheartedly. Upon questioning witnesses, they said Salee had gathered a group from the office to eat at Lat Ya Road, then took a mini-bus to Khlong San Pier because they weren't full yet. That's when Salee encountered the fortune-teller who beckoned her over, probably because she looked gullible. She sat down, blinking her eyes, letting the fortune-teller read the cards for several minutes.

"Then the fortune-teller said..."

Onanong, who was present at the time, cleared her throat before quoting the fortune-teller verbatim,

## "I see! I see that you're going to have your boss as your husband!"

Kinny choked on her morning coffee, coughing violently. "Have the boss as a husband?!"

"And she believed it?"

"Of course, she did... as you can see now."

Everyone glanced at Salee, who was bothering other people's desks and told them,

*'Soon enough, I'll be the boss's wife. So, you better start treating me well, P' Aof.'*

*Poor Veetara!*

Kinny thought to herself, amused, until she later realized that the fortune teller Salee believed in was the top one in Khlong San (the same popular fortune teller at the one in Si Phraya), who'd even read the fortune for the former governor's wife and was known for her accuracy.

*If the fortune teller is that accurate, it's Veetara's misfortune!*

Salee's nonsense didn't end there; there was so much of it that it was hard to keep track.

For instance, Salee was half a prankster, enjoying annoying people, arguing, and winning like a child who never grew up. But the other half was incredibly kind, caring about everyone around her to the point of knowing everything about everyone who was sick, whose dog was ill, who forgot to eat breakfast, who lost an earring two days ago.

Salee knew it all and never stayed idle. She always helped everyone as much as she could. That's why people in the office couldn't decide whether

to hate or love this troublemaker.

That was what the boss, who was unknowingly going to be Salee's husband, according to the fortune teller, felt, too.

Salee managed to annoy Veetara every day.

Last Saturday morning, the two of them were arguing about something as trivial as how to pick mangosteen. Salee said to 'look at the bottom first to find the one with the most segments, while Veetara said to 'just pick the big ones' and not waste time counting segments. Kinny excused herself from listening to the rest of the argument because it was too annoying.

By the time Kinny finished teaching her afternoon class, the two of them had already made up because Veetara was incredibly low-tech. The new phone Veetara had just bought had so many functions she didn't know how to use. She got frustrated whenever she tried to adjust the settings because she didn't know why the notification numbers weren't showing on the app icons.

When Salee came back from buying pickled olives from Aunty Aeow's shop, Veetara called her over to fix the problem (according to Onanong). Salee fiddled with the phone for less than a minute, and Veetara's forty- thousand-baht phone, which Veetara used like a three-hundred-baht one, was back to normal.

"Jae Vee was so pleased she rewarded Salee with a pink Faber- Castell marker,"

Onanong recounted.

*What is it with these two and Faber-Castell pen?!*

Kinny couldn't help but frown.

But even though they made up, it didn't mean they'd stay that way. Soon enough, Veetara was shouting.

"Who changed the contact names on my phone?!"

After scrolling through her contacts, she found that Salee's name had been changed from just 'Salee' to

'Salee loves Khun Jae. Call me if you're lonely, my sweetheart'

With a photo of herself taken while she was adjusting the phone settings. "Only one person touched your phone,"

Onanong reminded her. When Veetara realized, she shouted,

## "Salee!!"

For the millionth time, but the little troublemaker girl had already run off.

Other trivial nonsense that Kinny could remember included Salee's birthday, which coincided with July 4th, so she celebrated both her birthday and US Independence Day, even though she wasn't half- American, didn't hold American citizenship, and had no connection to the United States other than liking Hollywood movies and having Emma Stone as her favorite actress.

Then there was the fact that she couldn't ride a bicycle but could easily ride a modified Wave motorcycle belonging to one of the male students.

Kinny could understand the doctor might drop Salee on the floor after her birth, making her grow up to be such a quirky, nonsensical person. But her friend, Veetara, was acting even *stranger.*

Because Veetara had always been strict and disciplined, excelling in both academics and extracurricular activities. She was so disciplined that she woke up early every morning to run on the treadmill to maintain her fit and sexy body. So, having someone like Salee constantly around should've annoyed Veetara to the point where they couldn't coexist in the limited space ace of the office. Kinny predicted that Veetara would have a reason to fire Salee within three months.

But no...

Salee had been working for over a year, and all her body parts remained intact.

When Kinny curiously asked why Veetara decided to keep the mischievous girl around, she nonchalantly replied,

"Because she's really good at teaching."

And if she waited a while and asked again, her friend would switch to saying,

"Because she's a referral from Best,"

Leaving Kinny even more puzzled about the real reason Veetara allowed Salee to continue working.

Kinny couldn't figure it out because Veetara wasn't easy to read. At least she was naturally tight-lipped, never revealing her true feelings. Even when her boyfriend of three years threatened to break up with her in front of Aunty Aeow's shop, Veetara only said, **"Then just break up,"** after he complained that she was always working, never had free time, wasn't sweet enough, and didn't consider his feelings.

(And that Veetara was too capable for a woman.) Veetara was undoubtedly an independent woman.

But she believed that her friend must've felt some pain and regret. However, she never spoke about it and never showed any signs of hurt. Even Kinny only found out from Aunty Aeow three days later,

"Veetara broke up with that guy right in front of my shop. I almost couldn't sell anything after that!"

However, Salee knew the news faster than anyone but kept her mouth shut, not making a fuss as usual.

Before Kinny realized it, she saw the little one clinging to Veetara like a playful puppy.

"So annoying! Go away!"

Veetara complained repeatedly. Every time she moved to the left, Salee followed. When she moved to the right, Salee followed again. It was enough to give anyone a headache.

Kinny noticed that Veetara did nothing but wave her hand to shoo Salee away. Kinny propped her chin on her hand, raising an eyebrow as if she understood the nonsense between the two a bit more.

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It was raining heavily today.

Luckily, it was Saturday. Otherwise, the kids who had to travel for extra classes after school would've been soaked.

Veetara closed the window blinds and walked out to check on everyone in the office. If the morning instructors were stuck in the rain or couldn't make it on time, she'd send someone else to teach the class to avoid wasting time. Everyone was present except for Little Trouble, who hadn't shown up yet.

"Has Salee arrived?"

"Haven't seen her yet, Jae, Aof said. "Call her,"

Veetara ordered Aof calmly, leaving the young man confused but obedient. Meanwhile, she pretended to walk around the office, inspecting things.

When Aof shook his head and replied, "She's not answering," Veetara frowned, thinking about how to scold Salee for being late. Just then, the person she was thinking about walked in, drenched, with water dripping from her skirt onto the floor that Aunty Oun and the team had just cleaned yesterday.

"You look like a puppy after a rainstorm!"

Aof pointed and laughed at Salee, joined by Kinny and others who took the opportunity to tease her. Veetara could only shake her head.

"Everyone, get back to work."

Veetara grumbled, waving them away before going to her office to get a towel (kept for gym days) for Salee to dry herself.

"Couldn't avoid the rain?"

Veetara asked while placing the towel on Salee's head. Salee explained that she took a motorcycle taxi as usual and should've arrived before the rain, but something unexpected happened.

"I lost my house keys."

Salee said, looking downcast.

"So, I had to ask the driver to stop."

It turned out that Salee, being chatty even with the motorcycle taxi driver, didn't pay attention and dropped her keys. She had to walk back to find them, which took a long time. Fortunately, the road there was quite small and only had small houses and shops. So, an elderly man reading a newspaper in front of his house found them and kept them for her.

"At least you got them back."

Veetara said, taking the towel back when she noticed Salee wasn't making much effort to dry herself. Salee still looked like a sad puppy caught stealing food, prompting Veetara to ask more sternly,

"What's with that face?" "Well.."

*There must be something*

"...."

"I..."

*There's definitely something to this.*

## "Well, the keychain attached with the keys I dropped was from your desk, and now the Merlion tail is broken."

"..."

*I knew it! "..."*

*"You even took my keychain?!"*

Veetara scolded, switching from drying Little Trouble's hair with a towel to shaking her head in frustration until the towel slipped off, revealing Salee's guilty face. That's when Veetara stopped.

She clicked her tongue in annoyance, wanting to knock Salee's head but couldn't because she looked so pitiful, like Aof said, a sad puppy.

"Never mind."

Veetara said, frowning.

"It was free; it wasn't worth anything." "..."

"And I never planned to use it anyway." "Consider it yours."

"But it's broken"

"So what? Never mind that."

"But it looked expensive. What a shame."

Veetara put her hands on her hips, realizing Salee wasn't feeling guilty about taking her stuff but regretting the broken keychain.

This time, Veetara knocked Salee's head hard.

"Don't take anything from my desk without asking first!"

She scolded, something she should've done long ago. Salee looked up, then quickly looked away and nodded slowly. Veetara sighed loudly. muttering,

"If you want something, just ask. There is no need to sneak it," That's when Salee perked up.

"Really?"

"No... I mean- / Really?"

Veetara wanted to bite her tongue. With Salee's sweet face pressuring her, she couldn't refuse, fearing she'd look like a mean adult punishing a kid for asking for snacks. She nodded reluctantly, intending to clarify 'only things on my desk, but Salee interrupted

## ...by sneezing right in her face.

"..."

"..."

"Salee!"

Veetara wiped the spit off her face as other people in the office started teasing,

## "Haha, Salee has a cold, Salee has caught a cold."

Which she didn't understand why it was something to tease about.

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Salee was sick

And so was Veetara.

Both started sneezing non-stop, then coughing the next day, and clearing their throats the day after. Everyone in the office suggested they take a day or two off. However, since they were stubborn, they were quarantined in a hazard zone: Veetara's office.

Salee got hit several times for spreading the germs, and Veetara was still mad about the Merlion keychain. She kept a sour face, answering curtly, making Salee hover around her desk, trying to get her attention. Salee ended up kneeling on the floor to see Veetara's face clearly.

Actually, Salee could only see her eyes because they were both forced to wear masks.

Salee remembered that Veetara always had stern eyes.

*Well.*

*Yes...*

She didn't just fall for Veetara now; she'd loved her since forever...

It started when she was a little girl with short hair in elementary school, where she played cops and robbers with the boys.

She first met Veetara in second grade.

Little Salee wasn't feeling well that day, so her parents let her take a day off. But instead of resting at home, she had to follow her mom to an all-girls high school because everyone had to work and didn't want to leave her alone. So, Salee had to hang around behind her mom's noodle shop in the cafeteria, which was too hot for a sick child.

Luckily, she was usually healthy, though small, and didn't get sick often, so it wasn't too torturous to be behind the hot pots from dawn till afternoon.

Salee realized that day that her mom's noodles were very popular, probably because of the variety of toppings, like stewed pork, beef, spicy pork bones, fish balls, crispy pork, red pork, and large pieces of fried garlic and pork cracking. Her mom also sourced various noodles from everywhere, like thin, wide, yellow, green, glass, Chan, and Vietnamese noodles. Most kids flocked to Aunty Toom's shop as soon as the lunch bell rang.

Salee watched her mother boil noodles, prepare soup, and take orders from high school students all by herself. Feeling the urge to help, she got up and mumbled through her mask.

"I'll take the orders."

She then stood at the front of the shop, wondering how her mother could remember complicated orders like 'extra, small noodles with stewed beef, tom yum flavor, no peanuts, no soup, and less spicy. It wasn't just one person who ordered such complex dishes, even with a pen and paper in hand, she had to ask customers to repeat their orders twice to get them right.

Finally, she reached the last person in line, who made her look up automatically because their order was simply, 'The usual.' It was much shorter than everyone else's.

That person was Veetara, whom she later learned was a regular customer who ordered the same every day, so her mother remembered.

"Mom, this person wants the usual."

Salee shouted to her mother, who was still boiling noodles behind the pot. "Who is it?"

"It's me, Aunty."

Veetara leaned in so her mother could see her.

"Oh, it's you, Vee. Just wait a bit. There are only six orders ahead of you."

Salee blinked at Veetara, who was twelve years old, with fair skin, short wavy hair, beautiful eyebrows, and sharp eyes. Veetara nodded to her mother, then stepped back and looked down at Salee, asking,

"Are you Aunty Toom's daughter?" Salee nodded.

"Are you not feeling well?"

Salee nodded faster. Veetara then placed her hand on Salee's head and said, "Get well soon," before turning back to her group of friends who'd taken a table not far from her mother's shop. Salee watched her go, touching her own head.

That day was Salee's first impression of Veetara. It was the beginning of everything that led her to kneel, hold onto the edge of the table, and tilt her head to look at someone who seemed uninterested in anything. Veetara just sat there, checking work for almost an hour.

Of course, Veetara didn't remember her because, after that day, they only met a few more times. Until Salee decided to take the entrance exam for the same high school after finishing sixth grade, her kind Jae was already in the eleventh grade, becoming a well-known senior among the students.

As for Salee, she was so ordinary that she was almost invisible, just secretly admiring Veetara like half the school.

"Don't you have a class to teach?" Veetara finally looked up and asked. Salee smiled, but the mask hid it. "Yes, in twenty minutes."

"Then go prepare. Why are you sitting here?"

"Why can't I sit here?"

"Don't argue with me. My throat hurts!"

Salee wrinkled her nose at the person who claimed to have a sore throat but still managed to raise her voice and scold her.

"There's no sign saying I can't sit here." "Salee!"

Veetara pushed Salee's forehead, trying to get her to move away. But when her fingers touched Salee's skin, she paused, making Salee pause, too, not knowing what that reaction meant.

"You're hot."

Veetara frowned, using her palm to feel Salee's forehead and the left side of the neck.

"You're burning up."

"Because I'm not feeling well." "I know that!"

Veetara rolled her eyes, then got up, walked around the table, and pulled Salee out of the room. Others in the office started making noises, saying,

## "Ew! Sickies!"

Probably using the same logic as sticking out their tongues at someone with eye inflection, believing doing so would prevent them from the infection.

"Khun Jae, they're saying 'ew' to you!"

Salee complained, but Veetara ignored it and dragged her to the parking lot, telling someone,

"Cover Salee's class today."

"Where are you taking me to do some naughty things?"

Salee asked innocently after being pushed into the passenger seat of a sleek Honda Civic. When Veetara answered,

"To the hospital."

And then showed her a fist after realizing what Salee had asked, Salee laughed so hard that Veetara frowned even more.

"Stop joking around!"

Veetara grumbled while moving the car out to take her to the doctor.

"Why did you come if you're not well? Did you use up all your sick days?" "You're not well, too,"

Salee mumbled. "But you still came."

"I just have a sore throat. You have a fever!" "Then don't shout if your throat hurts."

Veetara clicked her tongue in frustration when she couldn't beat Salee in the argument. She finally fell silent until they reached a private hospital that looked too luxurious. Salee knew the medical bills must be too costly, but she hesitated to tell Veetara that it was a waste of money. She thought she could just go to a local clinic. But Veetara seemed to understand and said,

"The company pays for the bills."

Before handing her over to a nurse to register her as a patient.

After that, they went up the escalator to wait on a comfortable sofa in front of the medicine department.

"Does the company really pay for this?"

Salee whispered to Veetara, who was reading a magazine. She remembered that the employment contract didn't mention covering all medical expenses beyond the set limit.

"Yes,"

Veetara replied without looking up from the fashion magazine. "But I think it'll cost more than the company's limit. So-"

"It's alright."

*Huh?*

Salee scratched her head in confusion until Veetara turned to her, annoyed, and said,

"I'm the company. I'm the one who pays. Stop asking."

Only then did Salee exclaim, '*Ooooooh',* and couldn't help but flatter and tease,

## "You're such a beautiful, sexy, and kind lady. This company is so great."

Veetara put down the magazine and slapped Salee's thigh, saying, p"Stop joking around!"

Salee smiled, not correcting that she meant every word. She let Veetara frown until the nurse called them to see the doctor.

Salee was advised to rest, wipe her body with a wet cloth if it felt too hot, drink water, and take her medicine, which included cough syrup, fever

reducer, and decongestant. Veetara got cough drops for her sore throat. These sounded normal, but the bill was still high, making Salee exclaim,

"Wow."

"Over a thousand baht?"

Salee murmured, peeking at the receipt in Veetara's hand.

"With service fees, the good environment, and convenience, it's about this much. It's worth not having to wait long."

"Well, that's just using money to solve problems."

"Exactly. If we have a better option, why choose the hard way?"

*Well, yes.*

Salee thought so, as she couldn't argue. She just wrinkled her nose at the wealthy person while following her back to the car.

"Where do you live? I'll take you home."

Veetara asked after buckling her seatbelt. Salee quickly shook her head, feeling more and more indebted to Veetara, who'd already taken her to the doctor and paid the bills.

"It's okay. Just drop me at the bus stop."

Veetara narrowed her eyes, suspicious because Salee usually tried to spend as much time alone with her as possible. So when she refused, Veetara wondered if she was up to something.

"My alley is quite small, it's hard for a car to move around," Salee explained.

"And I plan to get something to eat before going home so I can take my medicine."

Veetara nodded but drove past the bus stop. "Where are you taking me?"

"To get food."

Salee raised an eyebrow. "Are you hungry?"

"Do you need to be hungry to get food? What a silly question!"

Salee stayed quiet, smiling at the grumbling driver who was scolding her for her nonsense.

And today, Veetara brought that mischievous little girl to Talat Phlu, the market that sold a lot of food and goodies, to find something to eat before heading home.

But it seemed like Salee didn't realize she was sick. Instead of choosing porridge or something hot like noodles or soup, Little Trouble wanted shaved ice from a stall by the railway. She started whining, saying she'd be happy with just one bite since it only cost a few baht per bowl.

"I'll use my money to solve my craving for sweets." "You're just creating more problems."

Veetara said, pulling the younger girl's wrist to stop her from crossing the railway tracks to get shaved ice. She looked around for a while, still undecided on what to make Salee, who was chattering about palm seeds and coconut jelly. eat.

"Noodles or porridge?" "Shaved ice."

The young woman clicked her tongue, then lightly tapped the forehead of the one who acted unreasonably.

"Get better first, then you can have it." "But..."

"Salee."

Salee pouted but eventually walked sulkily to sit in a noodle shop not far from Talat Phlu railway station.

"One bowl of meatball soup and one bowl of wide noodles with stewed beef and lots of fried garlic, please."

Salee ordered from the old man behind the pot, making Veetara look up and raise her eyebrows.

"You're eating both?" "No, I'm having the soup."

"And what about the other bowl..." "It's for you, Jae..."

The girl stopped mid-sentence as she looked up at Veetara sitting across from her. Veetara was more surprised because Salee knew she was about to order wide noodles with stewed beef and lots of fried garlic.

"How did you know... / Jae Kinny said you like wide noodles with lots of fried garlic!"

The mischievous girl quickly interrupted Veetara, looking suspicious.

Veetara squinted her eyes at Salee again, feeling that the girl's face looked oddly familiar. It was like Veetara had seen her somewhere before besides the office. But before she could ask or press further, the girl pretended to cough heavily like she was gravely ill, then took off her mask and turned to order from the old man again.

"Uncle, can I have a bowl of rice too?"

She was clearly hiding something, but Veetara didn't feel like asking anymore. At least Salee would forget about the shaved ice with coconut jelly, bread, and palm seeds from the stall on the other side.

*You little trouble!*

Veetara thought as she watched the sick girl puff her cheeks with rice and smile sheepishly.

They ate for about half an hour, then walked around for a bit before heading back to the car parked in front of a convenience store just under the Talat Phlu bridge.

Veetara insisted on driving Salee home because it was getting dark. If she were to let the sick girl go home alone and she were to do anything strange because of her sickness at the bus stop, it'd be pitiful.

So she'd consider doing a good deed for the girl.

This time, Salee didn't refuse, probably because she was too full and sleepy to move. She only gave directions until they reached her house.

"Stop right there,"

The girl pointed to an electric pole, where there was enough space for the car to park.

"Is it far to walk in?"

Veetara asked, glancing at the alley number sign. Salee shook her head while unbuckling her seatbelt. "It's not far. It's just hard to make a U-turn." "Okay,"

The older woman acknowledged.

"Then go back home."

Hearing that, Salee gave her a wai, making Veetara instinctively extend her left hand to receive the gesture.

Both froze as if time had stopped. Then Veetara cleared her throat and said. "Take a day off tomorrow. Don't spread your germs to anyone else."

"I won't."

Salee refused. And when the girl explained, "**I want to see you, Khun Jae."**

Veetara felt like her ears were ringing, unable to hear anything clearly, and couldn't say a thing. She just watched Salee get out of the car with a tight feeling in her chest.

The young woman pressed her lips together, covered her face with her hand, and tried hard not to analyze any situation that might've happened or was about to happen.

She just felt...

Felt...

....

## "Khun Jae!"

The call and the sound of knocking on the window startled Veetara. "What?!"

The young woman pretended to snap after lowering the passenger-side window. Salee's running back had scared her, making her expect something she shouldn't. When the girl said,

*"I forgot my medicine bag!"*

Veetara finally understood how she felt. She...

## She felt like hitting this girl!

# Chapter 02

*Kinny* found that after feeling (a bit) down due to a fever, Salee recovered and was back to her usual antics within two days. In contrast, Veetara, who initially only complained of a slight sore throat, started to experience a headache and fever, seemingly worse than the one who spread the illness. When asked how she managed to get even sicker after visiting the doctor, Veetara speculated that it was because they had a meal at Talat Phlu, and Salee dipped her saliva-covered spoon into her soup to steal a meatball.

That's why Veetara looked worn out, like a wilted veggie. However, she still refused to take a day off. She continued to cough her way into the office early in the morning, just like Salee and her ever-present megaphone.

## "Khun Jae!"

Everyone covered their ears as Salee shouted encouragement to her beloved Jae.

**"You'll get better soon with my love!"** Veetara, too weak to scold, could only croak. "If you have work, go do it."

Salee obediently complied, seemingly aware that she was the reason for Veetara's state. She hoped to make amends by being cooperative. After finishing her own class, Salee returned to fuss over Veetara, treating her as if she were paralyzed, which annoyed everyone in the office.

This led to a collective decision to hide Salee's beloved megaphone, believing it'd be a favor to Veetara by sparing her from the loud shouting.

However, Kinny refused to join in. She learned her lesson after Salee's revenge for teasing her about the sickness.

Salee changed Kinny's computer desktop background to embarrassing close- ups of Kinny's face in many funny moments, which Salee had secretly captured.

Thinking about this, Kinny realized that Salee was actually a talented photographer, as evidenced by the photos she posted on social media.

Because of this, everyone agreed to let Salee take photos during the office's New Year celebration, hoping for some nice pictures to post on Facebook and Instagram without hiring a professional photographer.

However, except for Veetara, no one got usable photos; they were either blurry or missing half a face.

When confronted, Salee nonchalantly claimed, *"My Khun Jae is so beautiful that the pictures turned out beautiful too*, "which almost got her a beating.

But Veetara, who got magazine-cover-worthy photos, mumbled, "She took them for free, so let's not be too hard on her."

Forcing everyone to back off. Two days later, Salee tried to sell the good photos she'd secretly kept, saying.

"I just found some usable ones. Five hundred per photo. Transfer the money to..."

Salee got beaten for real this time, with Veetara fully supporting the idea.

But that didn't mean this annoying, precocious girl was alone. Recently, Veetara, who'd always said the kid was annoying, was quite supportive of her, siding with her in matters that weren't too trivial or annoying. This led Kinny to believe that if Veetara didn't allow it, no one should mess with Salee.

*Didn't anyone else notice this?*

"Has anyone seen my megaphone?"

Kinny rested her chin on both hands, watching Salee search the office for nearly half an hour.

"Nope, haven't seen it."

Onanong replied with a sweet smile, making Salee frown briefly before her superb instinct told her she was being pranked, knowing she'd pulled pranks on others many times.

"Who took it? Give it back now."

"Who would take it? You're the only one who uses it," Aof said nonchalantly.

Ignoring him, Salee packed her bag and headed for the door, prompting Kinny to ask.

"Where are you going?"

## "Someone stole my megaphone. I'm going to report it to the officer!"

The entire office was startled, exchanging nervous glances before Aof quickly said,

"Hey, look for it properly first. It'll turn up. No need to bother the police." "My megaphone doesn't have legs, P'Aof. How will it turn up on its own?" "It will! Just wait!"

Salee squinted, assessing the situation, then nodded. "Fine."

She scanned the office.

"I'll give you twenty-four hours. If it doesn't turn up, the police will know about this!"

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Veetara had been wondering what the commotion outside was since yesterday evening until Kinny walked in, shaking her head. She stayed here to escape the chaos.

Veetara asked, exasperated, "What's going on now?"

"The usual, pranking each other."

Veetara shook her head, feeling that since Salee started working there, the tutors at her institute had been acting like elementary school kids. She wasn't sure if Salee was spreading her mischief or if they already had it in them; they were just waiting for someone to trigger it. Lately, they'd been pranking each other many times.

"So what happened this time? Why all the noise?"

Kinny looked reluctant to answer, but under Veetara's stern gaze, she gave in, explaining that yesterday, Aof and the others decided to hide Salee's megaphone. Salee realized she was being pranked and declared that if it wasn't returned within twenty-four hours, she'd go to the police. She even prepared documents to prove ownership over the lost megaphone.

"....."

Veetara was silent for a moment.

*No wonder Little Trouble is quiet today. She doesn't use her megaphone to shout at me as usual.*

"Just have Aof return it to her."

Veetara frowned.

"If he could, he'd have done it already."

Kinny muttered, explaining that after Salee left yesterday, the pranksters tried to retrieve the megaphone but found it missing. They'd been searching the building since morning. The twenty-four-hour deadline was looming, but they still didn't find it.

"Where did they hide it initially?" "Guess."

Veetara thought for a moment and realized that the only place Salee, who knew every nook and cranny of the four-story building, wouldn't go was the men's restroom.

"The men's restroom." "Exactly."

Veetara sighed, her headache worsening. She knew Salee would be upset that her beloved megaphone was taken. Salee had often bragged about it being a limited edition, white-red metallic model.

Veetara couldn't remember the brand; it was loud, foldable, had a strap, could record and playback, and was made of premium materials supposedly used in Apollo 11. When asked where she bought it or if it was imported, Salee replied,

"I got it from Khlong Thom [\*[1]]."

Proving the premium material claim was a lie. But still...

Despite her exaggerations, Salee loved that megaphone; she used it carefully and cleaned it spotlessly.

Veetara felt exhausted, especially seeing Salee's pouty face when Aof confessed with a sheepish smile that the megaphone was truly lost.

"I'll buy you a new one, okay, Salee?"

Aof apologized, but Salee remained silent, unsure how to respond, making everyone anxious that she, the girl who rarely got angry, might really get angry over this.

"But I want my old one back." She said.

Salee seemed more sad than angry at Aof and the gang because the megaphone held sentimental value. Besides being a teaching tool, Salee had used it to shout her love for Veetara for nearly a year.

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Thinking about this, Veetara felt restless and decided to help solve the problem.

"Who hid the megaphone?"

She asked sternly, making Aof raise his hand hesitantly. "Where did you hide it? Give me a clear location."

"On the ceiling of the men's restroom on the second floor."

Aof replied, looking downcast. He explained that one of the ceiling tiles was slightly ajar because the electrician who came to fix the lights last month didn't finish the job properly. So, he climbed onto the toilet and hid the megaphone there, thinking it wouldn't be found easily.

He planned to use it as leverage, but everything went wrong when Salee threatened to call the police. When he tried to get it back, the megaphone was really gone, turning the situation into a pointless mess.

"The only people who can access the second-floor restroom are students, staff, and maintenance workers. If it's missing, someone from this group must've taken it."

Veetara said, lecturing everyone involved, including the girl standing next to her with a sullen face. Both sides were equally troublesome.

"How much did you pay for the megaphone?"

Veetara asked. Salee hesitated before answering that it cost over a thousand baht, showing the receipt she'd prepared to threaten legal action. Veetara then ordered everyone to gather twice the price of the lost megaphone. No one dared to complain, and they all gave a hundred or two hundred baht each until the amount was met.

"Use this money to buy a new one."

Veetara said, handing the money to Salee, who was still upset. She pouted like a child, stubbornly insisting that she wanted the original megaphone back, even though she knew it was impossible.

"I don't want a new one." "But the old one is gone."

Veetara said, her voice softening unconsciously.

"You have two choices: one, buy a better new one, or two, keep sulking like this."

"...."

"Well?"

Salee twisted and turned, but when Veetara offered. "If you buy a new one, I'll go with you. Deal?"

The girl immediately smiled and nodded like someone with bipolar disorder, changing her mood quickly. She then stuck her tongue out at the others, causing another round of chaos.

Veetara shook her head, too tired to waste more words. She left the office to contact the building maintenance and security departments.

Well...

It was for that Little Trouble.

Initially, Veetara was annoyed by the girl's incessant chatter, but now she was displeased that the noise had disappeared without warning. It was like an alarm clock that suddenly stopped ringing, causing her to wake up late and miss something important. That's why Veetara, despite being unwell, was playing detective to find the missing megaphone.

She started by asking the maintenance department if anyone had entered the men's restroom on the second floor yesterday. When they said no, she moved to the security office to request a review of the CCTV footage.

To ensure quick and willing cooperation, she paid a fee. She promised a bonus if any clues were found, not realizing that the money spent could've bought another high-quality megaphone for the girl.

"Please call me if you find anything," she requested.

With the security officer nodding enthusiastically, Veetara felt reassured. She returned to the fourth floor to gather her things and take Salee to buy a new megaphone as promised. But the office was eerily quiet as if no one was there. The reason became clear when she saw an uninvited guest with a large bouquet of white roses waiting for her.

"Vee."

"Who allowed you in?"

Veetara asked her ex-boyfriend sternly.

"Give me a chance. That day, I..." "I asked who allowed you in here?" "..."

No one dared to answer except Kinny, Veetara's close friend and business partner.

"I did," Kinny replied.

"Wat said he had an appointment with you, so I..." "It's okay, Kinny."

Veetara nodded understandingly.

She didn't understand why the man who'd publicly threatened to break up with her two months ago still had the nerve to show up here and lie to Kinny about having an appointment.

"Vee, I just want to apologize. You didn't answer my calls or texts, so I had to do this."

"Leave."

Veetara pointed to the door.

"This place doesn't allow outsiders."

"Then let's talk outside. I booked-a table at the restaurant."

Before Wat could finish, Veetara swatted the bouquet out of his hand, sending it spinning 360 degrees before landing perfectly in the trash can behind him.

Everything went silent as if the world had stopped for five seconds. Then Veetara, looking around for Salee, said indifferently.

## "Talk to yourself. I'm busy. I have to take someone to buy a megaphone."

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Veetara was a woman who never got boring to look at.

Her appearance, demeanor, and poise made her unique. Her aura of sophistication even made the cheap market slippers she wore in the office seem as valuable as Jimmy Choos. So, Salee wasn't surprised that Veetara was the target of well-off men with good profiles.

Salee was used to people admiring Veetara because she remembered how popular Veetara was even back in high school.

Back then, Veetara was in the 11th grade, studying the Arts- English program.

She was already popular among her peers, but when she became the 39th president of the Red House that year, she drew even more attention.

Veetara had to lead various activities and often interacted with younger students, making it natural for girls to have a crush on her. With her athletic build, love for volleyball, decisive actions, and not being overly delicate, some even mistook her for a tomboy and tried to flirt with her, only to receive a polite smile and the response:

"I have a boyfriend."

And that boyfriend was from another school.

But Salee wasn't bothered by the rumors because she never fantasized about being Veetara's lover. The reasons were (1) she admired everything about her Jae Vee, so it didn't matter who Veetara dated; Jae Vee would always be the same determined and serious person she admired, and (2) she knew it was impossible. Instead of trying to create opportunities for herself, she

found a quiet spot to watch her Jae Vee play volleyball and made sure her mother, Aunty Toom, prepared 'the usual' noodles for Veetara.

Sometimes, by the time Veetara came down for lunch, many food stalls were already sold out and closed. It was likely because she was busy with meetings about sports events.

Salee had begged her mother not to tell Veetara that she was the girl taking orders on that day, whether Veetara remembered her or not. When her mother asked why, Salee replied without hesitation.

"I'm shy!"

Salee didn't want Veetara to notice her because her only happiness was secretly watching her Jae Vee from behind pillars, along corridors, or from buildings. She didn't want to lose that chance just because Veetara knew her as Aunty Toom's daughter, the noodle shop owner she frequented. Her mother often scolded her for not using her connections to her advantage, but Salee would leave the noodle shop before the bell rang.

It became a routine for Salee.

She would arrive at school early to avoid Veetara, who sometimes had duty at the gate, checking for latecomers. She'd find a good spot to secretly watch her Jae Vee until the national anthem played. She'd go to class, come down for lunch, remind her mother about Veetara's usual noodles, and then return to class. After the last period, she'd rush to the field to watch Veetara practice volleyball.

Yes.

Besides being her house president, Veetara was also a volleyball player. Salee was thrilled to be selected for the cheer squad. She practiced every day, even though she had to stay out of sight and keep a low profile when Veetara came to check on their progress occasionally.

Salee was happy with the tasks she was assigned until, out of nowhere, a senior from the 10th grade who was in charge of the parade line came to ask

for four or five people from the cheer squad.

Salee was chosen first because she was small and perfect for leading the parade.

## "Damn it!!"

Young Salee, at that time, kicked the zinc bowl of Go (a neighborhood dog that wasn't really kept but always came around for food from her mother) out of frustration.

She was furious about being moved to walk in the parade for the sports day opening ceremony, which required lining up at the school entrance at seven in the morning instead of comfortably sitting in the stands waiting to cheer for the sports events. She didn't even realize that she wasn't the only one at the head of the parade.

The house president also led with the flag at the very front.

Salee froze when she saw her Khun Jae appear just a few was dressed in a bright red slit cheongsam to match the Chinese mafia theme of that year.

Salee was at a loss, standing there staring at Veetara, who looked stunning from head to toe-tall, fierce eyes, red lips, red nails, hair in a bun with a black hairpin. She didn't look anything like the usual energetic person Salee was used to seeing.

That was the day Salee first interacted with Veetara after so many years. "Everyone, extend your hands. I'll tie the colored strings for you."

Veetara ordered from the end of the line, tying red strings around everyone's wrists for a beautiful parade. When she got to Salee, one string was missing, seemingly because someone had taken an extra one earlier, making Veetara quite upset.

She scolded the parade supervisor several times, while Salee didn't know what to do. She hid her face because her heart was pounding so hard that her cheeks and ears turned red, and she was sweating all over.

Not long after, Veetara solved the problem by taking off her own colored string.

"Take mine instead."

Salee was extremely shy, extending her wrist hesitantly and avoiding eye contact until Veetara asked while tying the string,

"Are you feeling unwell?" Salee shook her head slowly. "Are you sure?"

This time, she nodded, but Veetara still called for someone to bring her cold water to drink, thinking that the weather before eight in the morning wasn't pleasant at all.

In the end, Salee got that wrist string and kept it in a velvet box. The real owner probably forgot about the incident years ago; only Selee remembered this memory.

"Say what you want to say."

Veetara, who was about to take Salee to buy a new megaphone, said while they were stuck at a red light.

"Huh?"

"Huh, what?" Veetara frowned.

"You have something to say, don't you? You've been quiet the whole way." "Oh, my Khun Jae!"

Salee protested loudly.

"When did sitting quietly mean I wanted to talk?" "Right now."

Veetara grumbled. Salee would usually chatter away, but now she was sitting still, seemingly searching for the right words to say.

"Nothing, I was just thinking about random stuff." "Thinking about what?"

"Just random stuff."

Salee replied, not wanting to bring the conversation back to the earlier office incident.

"Don't avoid it."

The young girl scrunched her nose when caught while Veetara cleared her throat and brought up the topic first.

"What do you think about what just happened?"

Salee hesitated until Veetara's demanding gaze made her mumble a response.

"I think... you could've done better." "Better?"

Veetara raised an eyebrow, repeating the word to herself, then started looking displeased two seconds later.

"Do you think I was mean to that guy?"

*What?*

"No, it's not like that."

"Then, what do you mean?"

Veetara asked, her face growing more sullen. "You said what I did wasn't right."

???

This time, Salee raised an eyebrow, too. She scratched her head, realizing that she and Veetara were talking about different things.

"I didn't mean being mean to that guy."

The younger one explained, gesturing with her hands.

## "I was talking about the 360- degree flower bouquet toss."

". "

"P'Aof and Jae Kinny only gave it a five out of ten because they thought it was a fluke that it landed in the trash can. I thought the same, so I was going to give it a six. But considering how stunning you looked, I'll give it a seven-point-five. "

"Salee!"

Salee didn't get to finish her explanation before Veetara smacked her thigh several times. Luckily, the Civic's door lock system worked excellently; otherwise, she might've been kicked out of the car.

*Forget about buying that megaphone.*

*.*

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*This kid deserves a beating!!*

If she didn't have to drive, Veetara would've continued smacking Salee until she was bruised all over. But it seemed the mischievous girl wasn't scared or remorseful at all. Instead, she smiled with squinted eyes, took the opportunity to grab her hand, and started rubbing it, changing the subject to ask about the hand cream she used.

## "What brand is this? It smells so good and feels so soft."

Veetara tried to pull her hand away several times before succeeding. She felt half annoyed, half exasperated, and puzzled.

Yes, she was puzzled.

Veetara felt that this was another instance of Salee joking around with some hidden purpose, making her wonder if the goofy image Salee had shown everyone for over a year was just a facade.

Veetara also suspected that the girl might have some thoughts in her mind and that she wasn't entirely the frivolous person she appeared to be.

*So, what's going through this girl's head?*

"The blue one is nice," the seller said. "I want the red one," said the girl.

"The red one is available, but it's two hundred baht more expensive." "Why is it more expensive? It's the same brand and specs, right?" "The red one is rare. There's only one left in the store."

Hearing this, Salee asked for Veetara's opinion. Both of them paused for several moments when they accidentally made direct eye contact.

In the end, the young girl was the first to look away before she could say anything.

"Never mind then,"

Salee declined the old man who was trying to overcharge them. They walked away to explore other parts of the market, finding many stores selling at a lower price than the old man's, but none had the color Salee wanted.

"Should we go back to the first store?"

Veetara suggested after walking in silence for a while.

"It's a bit more expensive, but getting the color you like is worth it."

The smaller girl scrunched her nose before replying, making her hide a smile,

"No. If I have to be taken advantage of, I'd rather use another color." "Why do you want the red one?"

"Because I like red." "Just that?"

Veetara couldn't help but ask, believing that Salee's choice of red had more reasons than just personal preference.

*Who knows?*

Sometimes, Veetara felt that the girl wasn't really as nonsensical as Kinny had accused.

"Actually..."

The young girl stopped walking and looked up at her again. "Red is a color that stimulates aggression."

"Huh?"

Veetara raised both eyebrows in surprise.

Then, she slowly smiled as Salee explained that she used a megaphone instead of a mic for teaching because she wanted the kids to feel like they were being cheered on. That way, the classroom wouldn't be dull during difficult topics. And the idea that red stimulates aggression wasn't about violent aggression but the desire to win.

"When they feel competitive, the kids will compete to answer quiz questions I insert between lessons more."

"Oh."

Veetara murmured, realizing she was smiling fully again when Salee avoided her gaze with a normal expression. However, her ears, peeking out from her hair, were bright red as if pinched, making Veetara feel a tickle in her throat.

She coughed and blamed herself for forgetting her mask in the car. "So, where did you learn that red stimulates aggression?"

Veetara tried to continue the conversation. "From the internet,"

Salee said, pretending to look at the shops along the way.

"I stumbled upon it while searching for the meaning of colors on Google." Veetara raised an eyebrow again.

"Searching for the meaning of colors?" "I told you, I like red."

Salee still avoided eye contact, looking elsewhere. When Veetara was about to probe further, asking, 'Why do you like it?' she held back, realizing that doing so would be like nagging and wouldn't benefit anyone. She couldn't even answer why she wanted to know.

"Oh, that shop has red!"

Salee pointed to a shop on the right. When they reached there, the red they saw wasn't what they wanted but a bright, noticeable red from a distance.

"Then I'll take this one." "Wait!"

The older woman called out, stopping the eager younger girl who was about to pull out money to pay the vendor immediately because she was desperate to get the item.

"Try it out first. If you take it and don't like it, I'm not bringing you back to buy another one."

Salee nodded, but she seemed as impatient as a child who'd been waiting for a new toy for months.

"You can strap it over your shoulder and fold the handle." The vendor explained as he took out a sample.

"You can record and play three different recordings, each up to five minutes long."

"Wow."

"It has built-in Bluetooth so that you can send sounds from your phone to the megaphone."

"W[owww](http://www/)."

Veetara shook her head, amused, as she waited for Salee to check the item according to the vendor's instructions.

Once Salee was satisfied with the megaphone's features and the reasonable price, she quickly pulled out the money she'd collected from her office mates and paid with a beaming face.

Her mood had significantly improved from when she found out her old megaphone was lost.

"Do you want to buy anything else?" Salee shook her head.

"Then let's go home."

This time, the eager girl nodded, still looking down at the new megaphone in her bag. Even as they walked back to the car, Salee couldn't take her eyes off her new toy.

Veetara felt a strange sense of unease, wondering what kind of chaos the new megaphone, with its remote control functions and ability to record and replay sounds, would bring to her office. But when she saw the person next to her smiling so widely and was no longer sad about the lost one, Veetara felt an odd sense of satisfaction.

"If you want to open it, go ahead." "Are you really letting me try it now?"

Veetara nodded nonchalantly as if to say, *'Just do whatever you want.'*

Salee quickly reached into the bag, making a rustling noise as she opened the megaphone box.

"It comes with a store warranty and a manual."

The driver glanced away from the road briefly when she noticed Salee squinting at the text on the included documents. She reached up, turned on the light above the rearview mirror, and then pretended to focus on driving. Veetara didn't say anything as she listened to the person next to her mumble through the English manual.

Veetara smirked when she realized the rhythm of Salee's reading sounded like she was narrating a story.

"Oh no, it says here that it needs to be charged before first use,"

Salee suddenly complained, sounding disappointed. Veetara wasn't sure whether to be happy that she wouldn't have to endure the noise of the megaphone in the car or to feel a bit let down.

"Then charge it tonight and use it tomorrow,"

Veetara mumbled as she turned left to park at the entrance of Salee's alley. "And don't leave it lying around for someone to hide again."

Salee laughed and nodded, then put everything back in the bag, preparing to get out of the car.

"I'll go now."

"Okay,"

Veetara acknowledged, waiting until the girl got out of the car before sighing and shaking her head at herself for secretly hoping Salee would try out the megaphone with the teasing phrases she used every day.

"...."

*No, that wouldn't be good at all.*

*If that Little Trouble really shouted through the megaphone in the car, my eardrums would probably burst.*

Veetara almost slapped her face for that thought, but then the mischievous girl knocked on her window again, this time on the driver's side, making her both annoyed and resigned.

"What did you forget this time?"

Veetara asked with a frown as she rolled down the window completely. "I forgot to thank you,"

Salee said with a big smile. Then she raised her hands and gave Veetara a wai, looking like a well-mannered school kid teachers would send to a district etiquette contest.

"It's okay. Hurry home now, or you'll get hit by a car standing here."

Veetara said, pressing the button to roll up the window. But the girl outside quickly raised her hand to stop it, making her roll it back down.

"What is it..."

Veetara frowned, but before she could finish, Salee leaned in and whispered in her ear instead of shouting through the megaphone as she did every day.

## "Khun Jae."

Veetara gripped the steering wheel, her arms tense.

## "I love you."

Then, Salee walked away, leaving Veetara with butterflies in her stomach.

**Footnotes:**

***1.^ Khlong Thom Market sells a wide variety of items, usually at cheap prices.***

# Chapter 03

Salee confessed to the pen she'd stolen that she once dated Best because he looked so much like his older sister.

But Salee had no idea that the two were siblings.

At that time, Salee's heart broke when Veetara graduated from high school while she was just entering her third year there. It meant she'd no longer be able to secretly admire her Jae as she had for the past two years. Salee ended up isolating herself for a long time before finally deciding to follow in Veetara's footsteps. Veetara wasn't only her first love but also a role model for living a good life.

*I want to be as talented as Khun Jae.*

So, she studied hard to get into the Arts-English program in high school. She then took up volleyball and ran for the president of the Red House when she was in grade 11.

And she never, ever, no matter what, fell in love with anyone as deeply as she loved her Jae Vee.

She only wavered when she met a boy from another school who reminded her so much of Veetara. She never suspected that Best or Monchit was Veetara's younger brother because they had completely different last names. She only found out later that the siblings lived separately after their parents divorced.

Best lived with their father, while Veetara lived with their mother.

Salee admitted that she was swayed by Best's appearance, which reminded her of Veetara every time they met. At that time, she was too young to know

that she was using him as a substitute for the person she missed every day. She met him for the first time at a tutoring school.

He approached her first, and soon, she softened to the lingering memories of Veetara.

Salee once optimistically thought that maybe Best was her soulmate, like in some novel. Otherwise, he wouldn't look so much like Veetara in a male version. But it turned out she didn't get what she expected. Besides his looks and skin, nothing about Best could compare to her Jae Vee. She ended up breaking up and getting back together with him three times because, despite giving him chances, Best never improved himself.

She warned him since high school that he should focus on his studies or at least find a goal in life. But the boy replied, 'It's fine as it is now'. Why think so hard? Being the only beloved son of a wealthy printing business owner, it wasn't surprising that Best was complacent, not worried about his future, and just asked his father for money every day. Salee didn't see it as wrong since that money was rightfully his inheritance. But she wasn't impressed by someone who lacked enthusiasm for life.

He was sluggish.

Her Jae Vee was energetic.

He was stubborn about learning.

Her Jae Vee constantly improved herself. He was lazy.

Her Jae Vee was always busy doing something. He wasn't Jae Vee.

So she didn't love him.

Therefore, the third breakup was the final one. Salee would never go back to him, especially after she found out that the 'Jae-jae' her lousy ex- boyfriend was talking to on the phone was that woman.

The woman she didn't know when she'd stop loving and thinking about.

Salee broke up with him on the day he intended to introduce her to his father for the first time, hoping to use respect as a tool to prolong their rocky relationship. But she saw through it and refused to get out of the car, breaking up with him right there. At first, Best wouldn't accept it and threw a tantrum like a child until that woman walked out of the big house, looking annoyed. Salee was stunned, speechless, while her heart raced.

She recognized Veetara immediately.

Her heart had never beaten that fast for anyone except her Jae Vee. "Best, who is that?"

Salee asked, ignoring his drama and attempts to make her feel guilty or seek sympathy. At that moment, Salee only saw Veetara walking towards her Civic. When she noticed Best's car, she changed her path and walked gracefully towards the driver's side.

"That's my Jae-jae,"

Best answered, confused, before getting out to greet his sister, whom he rarely saw, leaving Salee alone in the car feeling foolish.

Salee placed her hand on her chest, fearing something might burst out, just like the hot tears at the corners of her eyes.

She missed her so much. But Veetara never knew.

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The English language institute taught students from high school to working adults. The office was on the top floor of a four-story rental building, with the other floors being classrooms. There were twelve tutors and two receptionists, and it operated full-time Monday to Friday, half-day on Saturday, and closed on Sunday.

However, on some Sundays, the institute organized bonding activities where students could use their accumulated points to join for free. These activities included trips to other provinces, beach outings, waterfall visits, temple visits, movie outings, mall trips, BBQ parties, etc., depending on the mood of the one who came up with the idea, which was Kinny.

"This Sunday, we're going to exercise and play sports." "Ughhh."

"What's with the groaning?!"

Kinny responded to the dissatisfied groans from Aof and the others by promoting the benefits of exercise. Using her best friend as a model, she claimed that just one Sunday of exercise would make them as fit and sexy as Veetara.

"I've been waiting for my chest to grow since fourth grade. How can one Sunday make it happen?"

Orn, unhappy with her chest size since fourth grade, protested, only to be scolded that she didn't mean the chest but a fit and strong body.

"Don't stress, P' Orn. I think Jae Vee had some work done. Your natural look is already good."

## "Hey, what do you mean by that, P'Aof?!"

Salee protested, rolling up her sleeves.

"Who can look that good without some help from a surgeon?"

## "Don't disrespect my idol! Even if she had surgery, she's still my idol!"

"I'm not; I'm stating a fact!"

## "What fact? Are you better than Conan? You haven't even proven it yet!"

"...."

This led to a division between those who believed and those who didn't believe that Salee's idol was naturally perfect.

Kinny sighed, wanting to borrow the security guard's baton to let them fight it out and end the matter. But she realized she should use this nonsense to her advantage, so she threatened the office, saying,

"If Vee finds out you guys are arguing about this..." ". "

"...."

In the end, everyone reluctantly agreed to exercise together, except for Salee, who was eager to go anywhere Veetara went. Kinny expected that even if they had to go through fire or fight dinosaurs like in the novel Petch Phra Uma, Salee would pack her bags without a single complaint.

Yes.

Kinny saw Salee's clinginess as normal, while Veetara...

She found that Veetara was acting increasingly strange "Couldn't get enough sleep last night?"

Kinny asked her friend, who was refilling her coffee in the kitchen for the third time. As she got closer, she noticed Veetara had dark circles under her eyes, even with concealer. Veetara had been like this for three or four days since Wat showed up at the office.

"Not exactly."

"Want to talk? I'm here to listen."

Veetara hesitated for a moment before letting her gaze drift past Kinny's shoulder to the work area outside. She nodded once she was sure no one would burst into the kitchen while they were discussing life problems.

"Still can't get over that guy?" Kinny asked the first question.

Veetara frowned and shook her head. "No,"

Her answer surprised Kinny, especially when she added,

"I was done with Wat the day he dared to humiliate me on the sidewalk."

Kinny had to raise her hand, gesturing Veetara to pause so that she could recalibrate her understanding.

"So you're not upset about Wat?"

Veetara avoided eye contact and then started to fidget like Salee, mumbling, "Of course I am..."

Kinny knew her friend held back the word 'maybe' to avoid feeling too guilty for not feeling anything for Wat except anger for being the one threatened with a breakup first.

"I thought you loved him."

It turned out Kinny misunderstood all along, thinking Veetara was okay with this guy, which was why they'd been together for three years.

Meanwhile, her previous boyfriends lasted at most five or six months. They were just like a free mobile app that got deleted after the trial period ended because it wasn't that essential.

Kinny never thought Wat would be just another app to be deleted without hesitation, especially since the past three years seemed happy enough. The guy even seemed to love her friend a lot. Otherwise, he wouldn't have threatened to break up because Veetara didn't have time for him.

"He was good to me,"

The young woman said with a difficult expression.

"I even thought I might end up marrying and starting a family with him. But this past year, it's been..."

Veetara explained that the guy was too clingy, showing more love and attention than she wanted.

"I felt it was too much, and he never tried to understand my job," She said, scratching her eyebrow and sighing.

"What's frustrating is he once complained about why I work so hard when he'd take care of the family in the future."

*That damn guy!*

Kinny began to wonder what kind of bad karma her beautiful friend had from a past life, making things that should go well never be in the way Veetara wanted.

If it were someone else, they'd probably be smiling, waiting for a dowry by now. She wasn't sure if it was Wat's fault for not understanding Veetara's pride and refusal to be a follower or her friend's fault for not yielding to anyone.

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*But wait.*

"Isn't *there someone she's willing to yield to, so much that it feels like she could give everything up?"*

Kinny almost blurted out the question, but Veetara suddenly started coughing, tucking her hair behind her ear, lifting her chin, and turning sideways with an oddly elaborate pose.

*"...."*

*What's she doing?*

Before she could think further, someone walked in with a smile to make a cup of coffee, silently moving between her and Veetara to grab the sugar and Coffee-Mate. Kinny didn't say anything either. She just stood there, feeling the sudden change in the atmosphere.

Once the person got what they needed and walked away, she heard her friend exhale heavily before taking several gulps of her now- cold coffee.

*Oh*

*The fortune teller was right.*

"So, you're losing sleep because of that kid?"

Veetara choked on her coffee, coughing and waving her hands. "No, I just.."

Kinny squinted, smiling slyly at her friend, who was clearly hiding something.

"I'm just a little curious," Veetara asked.

'A little' didn't seem to fit the situation at all, but Kinny nodded, not arguing, and asked,

"Curious about what?"

"Do you... know what I like to eat?" "Huh?"

Kinny wasn't sure how her friend's question related to the kid, but sincere she seemed genuinely curious, she answered.

"Since we've been friends, I know you prefer noodles over rice or anything else."

"And if I walked into a noodle shop, do you know what I'd order?"

The question left her silent for a moment. Kinny only knew Veetara liked noodles and had never really paid attention to what she ordered, especially recently when they hadn't had many chances to eat out together.

Back in university, they'd buy food separately in the cafeteria, and by the time they got back to the table, her friend would've eaten half the bowl already. Plus, it depended on what she felt like eating each day.

"Do you want me to guess?"

"No, I mean, do you already know the answer?" "No."

"You don't know what kind of noodles I like?" Kinny frowned, shaking her head before answering.

## "Who would know such a trivial thing? I'm not your wife."

This made Veetara choke on her coffee, spraying it out.

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Veetara wasn't herself.

She was annoyed by her limbs, not knowing where to place them when the kid glanced her way. Before, her hands and feet were fine where they were, and she never had this problem in her life.

Veetara felt so nervous that sometimes she wanted to avoid Salee altogether, but she couldn't help but peek to see what Little Trouble was up to. Since the night they bought the megaphone, they hadn't talked or been alone together for more than three minutes. She wasn't sure if she was avoiding confrontation or if Salee wasn't bothering her as usual.

The mischievous kid stuck to her own desk, suddenly seeming more focused on work (Veetara knew Salee was always diligent and well- prepared, but now she seemed even more so). She wasn't causing any trouble except using her new megaphone.

Well...

The kid was declaring her love and shouting random messages for extra cash, five or ten baht here and there.

Veetara knew Salee did it to joke around and liven up the office, so she didn't feel much beyond 'getting used to it. But the night before, she felt a change when the kid spoke directly to her without any device. A word could have multiple meanings depending on the context.

When the context changed, the tone changed, and so did the meaning. For example, 'I made it' could mean 'I created it', but in the context of passing a tough exam, it means 'I passed!'

Both gave a completely different meaning and feeling Veetara was good at interpreting both Thai and English. She knew the voice through the megaphone and the whisper in her ear that night wasn't the same at all. But she didn't dare to analyze the latter's meaning because thinking about that night made her uneasy.

"See you at the field at eight tomorrow. Don't be late!"

Kinny reminded everyone after successfully convincing them to join the exercise session the next day. Her friend had booked the badminton and volleyball courts two months in advance for privacy, which she agreed with. Their past activities were either traveling or taking students on food tours.

Doing something beneficial for their bodies was a good change.

Veetara locked her office before heading home, overhearing Aof talking to Salee. She pretended to choose the right key longer to eavesdrop.

"You coming with us tomorrow?" "No, I'll take a motorbike taxi." "A motorbike taxi?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't it be better if I picked you up? It's far."

Veetara accidentally dropped her keys, stopping the conversation and making her realize that Aof's daily arguments with Salee were his way of getting closer to her.

Aof must definitely like Salee.

And Veetara believed she wasn't imagining things. Salee was a cute, smiling girl, not too tall, well-proportioned, and *single.* Her qualifications fit most people's standards, and she was good at her job. So, if you ignored her mischievousness, why wouldn't a guy her age be interested?

*Maybe Aof likes Salee's mischievousness, finding it endearing. Who knows?*

"Heading home, Jae?" "Yeah,"

Veetara nodded, acknowledging Aof without looking at the girl, feeling oddly uncomfortable. She quickly left the office and headed to the parking lot. Before she could unlock her beloved Civic, she heard someone jogging behind her.

"Can I get a ride to the bus stop?"

Veetara breathed unevenly when she turned to see the girl standing nearby, arms full of documents, teaching materials, a shoulder bag, and her trusty

megaphone hanging by her side.

Veetara unconsciously tucked her hair behind her ear again. "Sure," she replied normally.

"Get in."

Salee then opened the door, sitting next to the driver with a smile. This made Veetara feel even more awkward, her limbs moving unnaturally. Every movement felt stiff and unnatural. She decided to drop the little troublemaker off at the bus stop as requested so she could breathe easier.

After nearly ten minutes of being stuck in traffic, Veetara glanced over and saw that the little troublemaker had fallen asleep, hugging her megaphone and other belongings.

*You troublemaker!*

How could Veetara make her take the bus home by herself now?

Veetara sighed and tried to think positively. At least Salee was asleep, which should ease her awkwardness.

But she was wrong. The nervousness didn't go away, especially when the car stopped at every red light. Veetara couldn't help but glance at the person next to her and then reach out to adjust her posture, gently pushing her forehead back against the headrest.

She only realized she'd been staring at Salee's face for a while when the car behind honked loudly.

Veetara was annoyed but eventually managed to drop the little troublemaker off safely at the entrance of her alley.

"Salee."

No response.

"Salee, we're at your home."

This time, Veetara reached out and tapped the back of Salee's hand resting on the megaphone.

Finally, the little troublemaker opened her eyes, slowly sitting up straight and rubbing her sleepy eyes.

"Home?"

"Yeah."

Veetara responded, trying not to think about the previous night while the small girl looked at her with confusion.

"Didn't I ask to be dropped off at the bus stop?" "You fell asleep and didn't remind me."

Veetara said, tucking her hair behind her ear. She felt frustrated with her body's uncooperative response.

"Oh, I forgot to remind you, so you drove me all the way here?" "Exactly."

Salee smiled.

It was a smile Veetara recognized as genuine, not the teasing or playful smile she usually got from Salee.

The girl smiled to herself, nodding without any argument or irritating comments that usually led to bickering over the past year. Only a thank you and a pair of blushing ears caught Veetara's attention.

Veetara felt a twinge of unease again. "Thank you,"

Salee said, giving her a wai. "Don't. It made me feel old."

"Why? You're that old you could practically be my *mommy*."

## "Salee!"

Veetara scolded Salee for the first time in days. "That's not funny!"

She raised her hand, trying to hit the little troublemaker, but Salee dodged, quickly opening the door and laughing as she stood beside the car, making Veetara frown.

"See you tomorrow."

Salee bent down and waved goodbye. Just as she was about to close the door, Veetara called out.

## "Wait."

"Yes?"

"D-Did you forget anything? Check properly so you don't have to come back later."

"I didn't. I have everything."

Salee said, showing her belongings, including the annoying megaphone. "Alright."

"Then I'll go inside now." "Yeah,"

Veetara responded, then stopped her again.

## "Wait."

"...?"

This time, the girl raised both eyebrows. "How are you getting there tomorrow?" "Motorbike taxi."

"I'll pick you up."

"Okay, I'll be waiting here at seven."

Salee agreed without hesitation, closing the car door with a smile and walking cheerfully into the alley, leaving Veetara confused in the car. Realizing what she'd done, she wanted to bang her head on the steering wheel.

That night, Veetara couldn't sleep again.

If she wasn't thinking about random things, she was sitting up. staring at the megaphone she'd retrieved the day before.

Yes.

She hadn't told Salee or anyone that she found it the day after buying a new one.

That morning, the security guard called to inform her that they found it on the CCTV footage. It showed one of the maintenance workers, Prasong, carrying the megaphone out. After questioning him, they found out that the loose ceiling tile in the men's restroom was his doing, not a result of shoddy work as Aof or others had thought.

He'd been using the space to exchange love letters with a housekeeper. Prasong had taken the megaphone home because it was in the way, and he didn't know who it belonged to, so he couldn't return it. When he brought it back to the building, Veetara happened to be looking for it.

"Why use letters?"

Veetara couldn't help but ask, believing that someone of Prasong's age would know how to use a mobile phone.

"Well, I was shy, Miss Vee. I couldn't talk for long."

He laughed awkwardly, embarrassed and a bit worried she might scold him.

"And Pook didn't want anyone to know we were seeing each other, so we had to keep it secret."

"But it's dangerous. If you fall, it could be bad."

In the end, she asked Prasong to close the ceiling tile and find a safer place to exchange love letters. Otherwise, she feared history might repeat itself, or a mischievous student might find it and cause more trouble.

Better safe than sorry.

Veetara picked up the megaphone, flipping it over with a difficult expression. After a few turns, she accidentally pressed a button, and the megaphone played a recorded message, **'Love you, My Jae!'** loudly in her bedroom, startling her. She fumbled to turn it off, but Salee's voice kept repeating until her heart raced. It took her a while to remove the batteries and stop the message, but she'd heard **'Love you, My Jae!'** about eight million times by then.

"Salee!!"

*Even when she isn't around, she can still cause trouble!*

Veetara thought angrily, realizing her mind was in crisis. Even with the megaphone off, she kept hearing Salee's voice.

She lay back on her bed, staring at the ceiling, mourning for herself all night.

The next morning, Veetara didn't want to get up because she felt exhausted from the situation. But since she had plans with Kinny and everyone, she couldn't cancel. So, she got up, showered, and brushed her teeth before the alarm even went off.

She took a deep breath, meditating for several minutes before leaving the house to pick up Salee.

Today, she felt even more awkward and clumsy than yesterday, especially when she saw the girl in a sleeveless shirt, sports shorts, sneakers, and a red backpack, waiting with a sweet smile at the alley entrance.

"It's not even seven yet. Why are you here so early?" "I was worried about traffic."

Veetara replied, though the truth was she always arrived early. Her watch was set fifteen minutes ahead, and she'd never met anyone who waited for her like Salee. Most people either arrived on time or were ten to twenty minutes late, often making her annoyed.

"But why are you here so early? Didn't you say you'd wait at seven?" "I thought you might come early, so I wanted to be ready."

The driver couldn't help but glance at the owner of that answer.

She secretly observed Salee, who had her hair tucked behind one ear. She felt a tingling sensation in her stomach and a strange sense of déjà vu as if she'd looked at her like this many times before.

With a lot of fondness. "Coffee?"

Salee asked, making her quickly look back at the road. "I bought it from a shop in the alley."

"Thanks."

Veetara said, taking a sip of the coffee. She started to feel restless because Salee had bought her favorite-Americano or lightly sweetened black coffee. She rarely drank anything with milk.

She wanted to ask about the noodles and coffee directly, but she didn't know why she was afraid. So, she pretended to focus on driving until they reached Kinny's meeting place.

Only five or six students used their passes, unlike when they went on trips or to the movies. But everyone from the office was there because Kinny had advertised something enticing (?) that Veetara didn't know about.

"In the morning, we'll play badminton, then volleyball. Whoever scores the highest wins the first prize."

Veetara looked at the prizes and saw that there were three items: a gift voucher for a three-day, two-night stay at a four-star hotel (somewhere) for third place, a multi-purpose screwdriver set for second place, and Arsenal cookies for first place.

"Why is the best prize for third place?!"

Onanong asked in confusion, echoing the thoughts of many others present, including herself. The only one who seemed more interested in the free cookies than in using the screwdriver to fix something or spending three days and two nights somewhere was Salee. Kinny simply replied that aiming for first place was too ordinary.

"And what are you carrying? That looks like you're moving!"

Kinny looked over at Salee, who was sitting on the bleachers, pulling things out of her backpack, causing Veetara to raise an eyebrow and look there as well.

"A megaphone to cheer for Khun Jae, a camera with a telephoto lens to take pictures of Khun Jae, a towel to wipe Khun Jae's sweat, a cold water bottle

for Khun Jae to drink, a handheld fan to cool Khun Jae down, and first aid supplies in case Khun Jae gets injured."

"...."

"...."

"You do realize there are like ten people here, not just Vee, right?" "Yes."

"And you didn't think to share with anyone else?" Salee looked up and answered innocently.

"No, not really."

This time, everyone grumbled in annoyance at the cheeky girl Veetara herself felt both annoyed and amused, trying to stifle her kaughter before quickly cutting the conversation short, waving everyone off to warm up around the field before the badminton match. This left her alone with the annoying girl on the bleachers. Veetara noticed Aof glancing at Salee before turning to follow the others.

Veetara pretended not to care, mumbling a question as she sat down on the field to stretch her legs.

"And what about your own stuff? Didn't you bring anything?" Salee shook her head.

"Why carry more weight?"

Veetara rolled her eyes, looking up at the high ceiling of the indoor sports arena that Kinny had rented for the day's activities.

"Like what you're carrying isn't heavy enough."

*Just the camera and the lens must weigh a few kilos.*

"It's not heavy, but if I added my stuff, it would be."

Salee said, moving to sit on the field next to her after organizing her belongings. Then, out of nowhere, the younger girl started a conversation that made her stomach churn with anxiety.

"Khun Jae, I have a favor to ask." "What?"

"Well"

Salee scratched her cheek, looking awkward, making her even more flustered.

"What is it?"

Veetara urged, not realizing her own impatience. Though she appeared calm on the outside, inside, she was screaming, feeling like someone lost in a maze. This was especially true when Salee fell silent, seemingly gathering her courage. That made Veetara even more anxious, her heart racing uncontrollably.

"Someone said that you had a boob job, but I believe that yours are natural. Oh, but even if it's not, I don't mind. I just want to know the truth. And to be a hundred percent sure."

"...."

## "Can I touch them once?"

# Chapter 04

The rules for today's activity were very simple.

Everyone was on their own. Whoever wanted a prize must maintain their ranking. There were no strict rules like in real sports championships because this was more about fostering relationships among colleagues and students than a cutthroat competition.

They started with a badminton match in the morning, pairing up randomly one-on-one, making eight pairs in total. The rule was *'whoever hit the shuttlecock into the opponent's court the most within fifteen minutes won'* for scoring.

In the afternoon, we switched to volleyball, pairing up two-on- two. This time, the top four scorers got to choose their teammates first, while the rest were paired randomly. The scoring rules remained the same, meaning even if you were on the same team, you still competed for points.

Kinny and the others started warming up for about two or three minutes when a commotion erupted from Veetara's side, causing others to glance over, looking tired. The scene showed Veetara standing up, one hand pushing away the clingy girl hugging her long legs while the other hand held onto the bleachers for balance.

Kinny felt an urge to throw something to the girl to relieve the itch in her hands.

Because the overzealous fan and her friend were equally annoying, the situation looked like a puppy playing with a mother hen.

However, the mother hen seemed to enjoy the teasing but was too proud to admit she wanted to take the puppy in.

"Let go!"

Kinny stood with her hands on her hips, watching the person who said to let go but was pushing gently as if afraid to hurt the kid. Even an elementary school kid could see it as a pointless and irrational act. If Veetara really wanted to be let go, a push (or a kick) would've sent the girl flying.

"Hey, you guys! Are you going to warm up or what?"

Kinny shouted in annoyance. Veetara took the opportunity to pull her leg back and slapped the other person's hand twice as punishment, with a force that wouldn't even kill a mosquito.

*Sigh.*

With others, she was so tough. Even when a bunch of well- profiled guys came to court her, Veetara never even glanced at them. But now, with this cheeky kid, just knowing the kid was watching or walking nearby made Veetara clumsy and awkward.

Kinny couldn't help but wonder if, besides reading horoscopes, Salee had dabbled in black magic to charm her friend, who now barely resembled the capable woman who owned a language institute. All that was left was a clumsy person who only managed to cover her embarrassment with loud noises.

"Stop filming already!"

Veetara found a moment to shout at the lone cheerleader on the sidelines while playing badminton with Onanong. But Salee kept snapping photos, lying on the ground for low angie shots, running to the other side of the court for differencn ig es, and climbing onto the referee's stand, shouting alternately,

## "Go, Khun Jae! Woo!" or "One more shot!" and

"**That last pose was fabulous, gorgeous!"**

As a result of the distraction and nervousness, Veetara didn't score much, even though she usually excelled in sports. If it weren't for the kid's constant pestering, Veetara would've led the scores since the morning and already secured the first prize, an Arsenal cookie.

"You're too loud!"

Kinny heard her friend say while raising a fist to hit Salee, but when the kid offered a cold water bottle and a towel to wipe her sweat, Veetara lost her steam, leaving only a grumpy face. Kinny guessed that Veetara lost to Onanong because she was too busy posing for Salee's camera.

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If Veetara or anyone thought Salee wasn't embarrassed by her actions, they were gravely mistaken.

She had a soft spot for Veetara since she was little, and it hadn't changed. Her constant teasing and playful antics made it easier to interact with others.

Imagine what would happen if she confessed her love seriously from the start.

Salee could guess that not only would she be rejected, but Veetara would also fire her for making her boss uncomfortable If colleagues found out about her feelings, it would create an awkward atmosphere in the office.

So, she chose to appear as a quirky, unpredictable person, making everyone think she adored Khun Jae like a fan idolizing a celebrity.

This wasn't entirely wrong because, in one aspect, Veetara was a role model and someone she admired greatly. Salee was happy that everyone saw only that side and didn't take her feelings seriously.

Salee believed she was doing the right thing. When she first started working, Veetara was still dating a guy named Wat, and she didn't want to

cause any trouble. So, she never acted inappropriately, always keeping a respectful distance.

A distance where she could secretly admire her Khun Jae every day.

Salee didn't come here to seek love but to ensure Veetara was happy and to help whenever she could.

She never thought of elevating their relationship beyond boss- employee or a sister of her ex-boyfriend because (1) it wasn't necessary, and (2) even if it was, it was impossible since Veetara had a boyfriend and mightn't be interested in the same sex. So, Salee was unsure how to act when she heard Veetara had broken up with Wat.

She was more worried than happy.

Salee didn't want Veetara to be sad, so she tried to make her smile, feeling that their relationship had become something indescribable. She began to think that maybe Veetara wasn't as closed off to the idea of same-sex relationships as she'd thought, especially when Veetara was kind to her without realizing it.

She couldn't help but think that Veetara might have some affection for her. If their feelings matched, Salee saw no problem in clarifying their relationship.

Her Khun Jae was single. Salee was also single.

So, Salee slowly shifted her behavior from 50-50 to 0-100 to not scare Veetara away and have a chance to stop or retreat if her thoughts were just fantasies.

Whatever Veetara decided, she'd follow and nevs terma anything that would make her Khun Jae uncomfortable. Because the idea that two people who like each other must date was just a myth.

Salee had moved past those ingrained beliefs. She wouldn't mind if she ended up loving Veetara unrequitedly forever.

"Alright, the top four scorers from the morning can choose their partners now."

Kinny's voice echoed, but it didn't distract her from watching Veetara toss a volleyball behind the court. She rested her chin on her hand, feeling a mix of admiration and excitement like a fan seeing her idol on stage again.

Salee was embarrassed and covered her face because Veetara's energetic demeanor reminded her of high school memories. She fell in love with her repeatedly, like humans never finding the edge of the universe (at least in her era).

"Salee, join my team,"

Aof called, making Salee frown. "No."

Salee refused. She'd forfeited her right to compete since the morning because she preferred watching her Khun Jae from the sidelines. She also sensed that Aof was increasingly interested in her in that way, which was the last thing she wanted. So, she had to decline, not letting any situation encourage Aof's misunderstanding.

"Come on, there's no rule saying you can't pick someone who didn't compete in the morning round."

The young girl looked flustered. She scanned the area for help, and when she turned to Veetara, she didn't say anything, she just kept hitting the volleyball to the ground with loud thuds.

Luckily, it seemed Kinny understood the situation and waved her hands to stop them.

"Don't pick her for the team. If she competes against we, she'll just throw the game. Pick me instead."

With that, Aof seemed to have no choice but to switch to Kinny. Since Kinny was also a boss, he didn't dare refused to agree, letting Salee breathe a sigh of relief and send a gratefur signal to Kinny, who nodded back with a hint of annoyance.

Salee got up from the bleachers and sat on the ground by the edge of the court.

This time, she didn't cheer or grab her camera to capture Veetara's graceful moves when setting the ball. She wanted to see those moments with her own eyes rather than through a lens, not realizing that this made Veetara even more distracted.

Instead of her usual loud cheering, she just sat there gazing sweetly, causing Veetara to glance over several times, wondering if something was wrong with her. Had she been hit in the head by a volleyball and gone silent?

When their eyes met, Veetara stopped moving, dazed, like she forgot she was in a volleyball match. This caused a teammate to rush over to receive the ball from the other side, accidentally bumping into Veetara and making her fall on her bottom.

Salee was startled and quickly got up to check on Veetara, just as Onanong, Veetara's partner, hurriedly apologized profusely.

"It's okay, it's okay."

Veetara said, waving her hand, only realizing her wrist hurt when she helped herself up.

In the end, the opposing team narrowly led Veetara and Onanong "Does it hurt a lot?" Salee asked.

Veetara shook her head.

"It's probably just a sprain, nothing serious." "Then sit and wait here."

Salee said, jogging to the co-op outside to buy some ice. She returned and used a towel to wrap Veetara's wrist, her face grimacing.

"P'On is so clumsy."

Salee muttered, but the person sitting higher up on the bleachers said nothing.

They were silent for several moments. When Salee looked up, she saw Veetara staring down at her and examining her. Salee quickly grabbed a bandage from the first aid kit.

The young girl felt uneasy about the situation.

She was always shy around Veetara and wasn't as confident as she appeared.

"I didn't know you could do this."

Veetara said as she watched Salee wrap the bandage around her wrist. "I've done it for myself a few times."

"Do you play sports?"

Salee nodded but didn't elaborate that she followed in Veetara's footsteps and played volleyball when she was in high school for a while.

"What sport?"

Veetara asked, seemingly to keep the conversation going. Salee answered vaguely.

"Just the usual sports in PE class."

That answer made Veetara narrow her eyes. When Veetara wanted to ask more, Salee pretended to be cheeky to cover her nervousness, as she always did.

"If you want to know more, you'll have to pay up." "I'm just curious. What do you want me to pay with?" "What I asked for this morning."

Salee said, grinding. She felt embarrassed and guilty for asking to touch Veetara's chest. But at that moment, she had nothing else to tease Veetara with except the ongoing office debate about whether Veetara had had breast augmentation.

Personally, Salee had no negative opinion about doing surgery. believing it was a personal choice. But in this case, she was sure Veetara's were natural, remembering her figure from high school.

Salee expected to be scolded or have the first aid kit thrown at her for being cheeky. But Veetara did something different. She didn't scold, try to hit her or yell at her. She just stared back, making Salee shiver. Then she stood up, using her good hand to pull Salee up, making her follow in confusion.

"Where are you taking me?"

Salee asked, but Veetara didn't answer. While others were still cheering for the volleyball game, no оnе seemed to notice them.

Veetara led her into the locker room, filled with metal lockers. "Khun Jae?" Salee raised an eyebrow.

When Veetara pulled off her Adidas shirt, revealing her fair skin and large breasts under a black sports bra, Salee's jaw dropped.

She stood frozen as Veetara grabbed her hand and placed it on her chest, making Salee lose her mind.

## "If you want to touch them, go ahead."

Veetara said.

"K-Khun Jae... I..."

Salee tried to pull her hand away, but Veetara didn't let go and even squeezed her hand harder.

"How does it feel?"

## They're so firm. The sensation is soooooo good.

"They're big... Gosh, I don't know!" Salee shook her head until her hair flew. Then, Veetara leaned in close and said.

## "I'll tell you for free. When you're embarrassed, your ears turn red like they are now."

That's when Salee admitted defeat, letting Veetara win without a word.

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Veetara wanted to know if Salee had a hidden agenda and wasn't just the office prankster as everyone thought. But she didn't want to prove or demand clarity, fearing she wouldn't know what to do if she saw that sweet smile.

A smile that wasn't fake.

Looking back, Veetara realized she might've understood Salee's smiles for a long time but hadn't paid much attention, knowing Salee was her brother's ex-girlfriend (with whom her little brother always tried to reconcile). Salee was naturally mischievous.

Veetara had been teased countless times by Salee's antics, stealing things, saying weird things like a crazy fan, or stalking her around the office,

annoying everyone. But in those moments, Salee would smile to herself, not at anyone in particular. Initially, Veetara dismissed it as a coincidence.

But coincidences happening so often couldn't be called coincidences. With other changing contexts, Veetara stopped believing it was just a coincidence. She began to suspect and let Salee's antics confuse her until a few minutes ago.

Veetara saw something...

She saw Salee sitting by the court, looking sweetly and smiling like a child going to Disneyland. Suddenly, Veetara realized something Being important to many people wasn't as significant as she once thought.

All her life, Veetara had been a leader.

Before turning twenty-four, she was the eldest child, a big sister, class president, top student, House president, class president, tutor, and owner of a language institute. These were important positions respected by many.

Veetara was happy under the spotlight, not troubled by her roles. But seeing that annoying girl by the court, her thoughts shifted like a Rubik's cube turned by a world-class expert.

She realized she didn't need to be important to hundreds or thousands as long as Salee looked at her with those eyes.

"Where did you go?"

Kinny scooted over and whispered after noticing that Veetara and the young girl had walked out of the locker room together. Veetara didn't answer directly, only giving a brief hint that she was 'teaching the kid a lesson.

After all, she wasn't exactly a pro at standing there shirtless for the girl to grab her chest like someone with no shame.

Veetara was already embarrassed enough!

But seeing that the little rascal was even more embarrassed, she felt a bit more confident this time. She used this advantage to bluff and get the girl to

reveal her feelings easily by saying, 'If you're shy, your- ears will turn red'. The girl immediately let her hair down to cover her ears, which only meant one thing: she was *genuinely shy.* Little did she know that her ears and entire head down to her neck were as red as a ripe tomato.

*'What a clueless girl.'*

Veetara thought, feeling both amused and satisfied.

She was satisfied that Salee finally got some payback after she had let the girl have all the fun for so long, especially after that last time when Salee teased her about her chest, almost making her lose her temper.

She remembered that day well. She wasn't in a good mood after having to act as a mediator between her parents, who'd been separated since Best was under five years old.

Both of them hated each other to the core. Whenever they needed to discuss anything, they'd use her to relay messages, each word chosen to be as hurtful as possible, giving her a massive headache.

Veetara accidentally carried this frustration to work, making everyone avoid her when they saw she was in a rage-everyone except Salee, who kept hovering around, making annoying noises.

Veetara felt an inexplicable irritation seeing her. Instead of being afraid of her wrath, the girl seemed indifferent, even daring to come up and borrow her correction pen (again) with a big smile. So, she pretended to be furious to scare her off once and for all.

"Why are you staring at me?"

Veetara, playing the role of a big bully, picked a fight over nothing. The result was the same as always: the girl replied,

## "Because you're sooooo beautiful today, but too bad your eyebrows are a bit crooked."

Leaving her confused about whether she was being complimented or criticized for her makeup skill. Once she gathered her thoughts, she yelled again, filling the office with her voice.

## "Get out! Don't you dare look at me!"

Veetara chased Salee away, emphasizing not to look at her (before sneaking off to fix her eyebrows during lunch break). When she returned, the girl really didn't look at her as ordered.

"Jae Kinny asked me to remind you not to forget to teach the evening class."

The girl spoke to Veetara's chest, which was at her eye level.

## "Salee!"

Veetara raised her hand, ready to strike.

"What? I didn't do anything! You can't just hit me like that!"

The girl dodged, still staring at Veetara's chest as if it were her eyes.

In the end, Veetara barely managed to hit Salee twice. She almost needed a knee check-up to get the girl to stop talking to her chest. She had to keep bending down to match the Salee's eye level for several days.

Who knows if this time, the girl would realize that she couldn't mess with Veetara so easily anymore.

Veetara hoped Salee would get the message....

"Alright, gather around here. We're announcing the scores."

Kinny left Veetara to shout for everyone to gather for the competition results. It turned out that Aof came in first, a student from the university prep class came in second, and Veetara came in third, seemingly by luck, causing the annoying bunch to cheer loudly.

"Did you cheat, Jae?" "She's definitely cheating!" "Don't accuse her!"

Salee argued with someone while still avoiding eye contact with Veetara.

"You're the one seeking attention so Jae Vee can keep her third place. You must be in cahoots to sell the prize!"

"Sell what? Khun Jae is richer than Elon Musk! Why would she sell a gift voucher?"

"How could Jae be richer than Elon?! You silly girl!" "Khun Jae, P'Karn is scolding me!"

"Oh, enough already!"

Kinny cut in, waving her hands to dismiss everyone. "Go home, all of you!"

Veetara agreed. After listening to Salee and the office seniors argue, she was getting a headache.

"Salee, how are you getting home?"

Onanong's voice rang out as Veetara was packing her things nearby.

Veetara immediately saw that Aof had sent Onanong to persuade Salee to ride with them and a few other colleagues, using them as an excuse to cover his true intentions

"Want to come with us? Aof can drop you off." "Um."

Salee scratched her cheek, glancing at Veetara briefly Seeing Veetara said nothing, she politely declined.

"No, thanks. I've already called a motorcycle taxi." "You're taking a motorcycle home?"

"He's my regular driver. Don't worry, P'On." "But is it safe to ride a motorcycle at night?" "Well...Riding in a car is safer. Come on." "I'll take her home myself."

Veetara said without looking up as she continued packing. "You're taking her home?"

Onanong raised an eyebrow.

"I picked her up this morning. How can I let her go home alone? Go on, tell Aof not to worry."

Hearing that, Salee didn't hesitate. She quickly pretended to call her imaginary motorcycle taxi driver.

## "Hello? I'd like to cancel the ride. Someone very beautiful is taking me home. Yes, okay. Bye."

The fake conversation was so unconvincing.

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Salee acted as if nothing had happened in the locker room.

*She tried* to act normal because if she acted differently, the seniors (who'd been pranked by her and were ready for payback) in the office would definitely notice and start questioning her.

And who could explain that she became weak because her Khun jae let her squeeze her chest?

Salee wouldn't let that happen. So, she continued to shout her love for Veetara every day, teasing and joking, though she felt more nervous and cautious around this beautiful woman. She sensed that Veetara wasn't the same as before, who used to yell out of irritation. Sometimes, she suspected that Veetara's outbursts were just for show.

The girl sighed multiple times a day. Just dealing with Veetara was exhausting and embarrassing enough. So, she didn't even want to think about Aof's daily attempts to woo her. Luckily, Kinny, with her seventh sense (her sixth sense was already used for lottery predictions), understood the situation. Salee had someone to confide in.

"What should I do, Jae Kinny?" "Do you like him?"

Salee shook her head vigorously. "I don't like P'Aof that way." "Then how do you like him?"

The girl frowned a bit and shook her head again. "I don't like him in any way."

"Then tell him."

"Oh, Jae Kinny, I've hinted so many times, but he doesn't get it." "Hmm, telling him directly might not work."

Kinny said, resting her chin on her hand and glancing at her friend, who seemed to walk out of the office as if on a dolly slider without anyone noticing.

Salee noticed that her beautiful Jae had been acting strangely lately.

For instance, she'd come out to check on things every two hours, making everyone uneasy, thinking they were being watched. Or she'd randomly buy premium cookies for the whole office without any reason. And her hand, injured from the friendly volleyball match, still hadn't healed after almost a week.

"I'll see what I can do about him." Kinny said.

Salee felt like prostrating Kinny in gratitude but didn't get the chance as Kinny excused herself to prepare for her next class, noticing someone standing nearby.

Veetara cleared her throat, making the girl look that way, raising an eyebrow.

"You can just call my name. Doing that often will ruin your voice." "Who called? I didn't call you."

"Oh, really? If you don't need anything, I'll go grab something to eat."

## "Wait."

Salee smiled secretly, afraid that the high-maintenance woman would get annoyed and storm off.

She stood up, fully aware of what Veetara wanted. She grabbed something from her bag and led the way into the office

The young girl held out her hand, asking for the other's hand. "Wouldn't it be better to have a doctor check it out?"

Salee asked as she unwrapped the old bandage. She remembered that she'd just changed it the evening before.

"No need. It's much better now. It'll heal soon."

It was '*much better*,', 'but I still needed to change the bandage once a day.

This wasn't a bad thing because Salee earned an extra twenty baht a day besides getting the chance to touch and hold Veetara's soft, white hand, which smelled of hand cream. She used it to buy pickled;mangoes from Aunty Aeow for free.

"Salee!"

Veetara called out sharply when Salee overstepped her duties by absentmindedly rubbing the inside of Veetara's wrist with her fingertips.

She could only laugh awkwardly and make excuses, saying, "Well, your skin is soooo smooth."

"Don't talk too much,"

The older woman said, flicking Salee's forehead with a snap. "Hurry up and wrap it so I can get back to work."

"Oh... twenty baht only gets you this fast, Khun Jae,"

Salee retorted out of habit. But the young girl started to panic when she realized the conversation might circle back to the payment Veetara had given her last Sunday. The tall figure standing over her gave a mocking smile through those stern eyes.

"By the way, you still haven't told me the details about the sports you used to play, have you?"

Salee hesitated. She quickly sped up from wrapping slowly (to prolong touching her Khun Jae).

"I already told you, I just played sports during gym class. There's nothing to. **But I already paid for you to tell me this.**"

This time, Salee choked on her own saliva, vividly recalling the firm, bouncy feel under the sweaty sports bra.

Salee lowered her head, hastily doing her job before making an excuse to leave, claiming she had a class to prepare for in half an hour. Just then, Kinny knocked on the door, whispering for Veetara before she could leave the room.

"The reception called to say your little brother is on his way up to the office."

The younger girl frowned, especially when the messenger added,

"He's probably here to see Salee. He's carrying a bouquet and a gift box." Salee could only shake her head vigorously at her Khun Jae.

*No way!*

"I don't want to see him!"

Salee grimaced, knowing that Best would cause her more discomfort than being pursued by Aof. She asked the beautiful woman in a desperate, pleading voice,

"Can I hide in here for a while?"

Veetara was silent for a few moments but eventually nodded. "Alright."

But before Salee could breathe a sigh of relief, Veetara asked, "But what will you give me for it?"

This sentence made her feel dizzy, and she instinctively stepped back until her back hit the door.

"What's your offer in this exchange?" "I... I..."

Salee stammered as Veetara's close-up face started to spin. Then, unable to think of anything, like someone drunk and out of control (lured by Veetara'as perfume), she blurted out in desperation,

## "I'll let you touch my boobs twice in return, okay?!"

# Chapter 05

This was what happened.

Salee was a young girl with a sweet face and petite body, perfectly fitting the ideal type of the average Thai man. This led to two young men (trying to) get involved with her.

One was a senior colleague at the office who, after some playful antics, ended up falling for her.

The other was an ex-boyfriend from high school, handsome and wealthy, who drove a Benz and was her boss's younger brother.

But the problem was that Salee wasn't a woman who wanted to keep both men around. Her true preference was for kind-hearted, older women who were fair- skinned, beautiful, slightly Chinese-looking, and very sexy.

Therefore, all men in the world were out of the question for her from the moment they were conceived in their mother's womb.

No, actually.

Salee might not have any special type in mind, but it just so happened that Veetara, a nearly thirty-year-old woman who she flirted with every day, was kind-hearted, fair-skinned, beautiful, slightly Chinese-looking, and extremely sexy.

No one knew this except Kinny because Kinny saw everything that happened in the office as if she had magical eyes in every nook and cranny.

Even though sometimes Kinny found the complicated relationships between Salee and Veetara (and the third and fourth parties) annoying, she couldn't deny that she mostly enjoyed observing them with her chin in her hand.

Recently, Veetara suddenly drove to a supermarket and came back with a big bag of snacks to share with everyone in the office; Salee seemed to be the happiest with genuine Belgian chocolate cookies.

No one knew why Veetara was in such a good mood. Some guessed she'd reconciled with an ex, and others thought she'd won the lottery.

At first, Kinny didn't know either, until she remembered that after the friendly sports competition last Sunday, Aof, the first-place winner, shared his Arsenal cookies with Salee because she'd mumbled that she wanted the cookies the most out of the three prizes.

This made her friend frown for several minutes before deciding to drive out and buy high-quality snacks from the supermarket to share equally with everyone, even though she really just wanted to buy cookies for Salee.

Now, do you guys understand?

## That Veetara is a show-off!

In this context, the word 'show-off' suggested more about boasting, not the kind of impressive you would want at a party.

Knowing this, Kinny could only shake her head in a mix of exasperation and amusement because she'd never seen her friend act this way before. By nature, Veetara wasn't someone who liked to win in a childish way, didn't care about trivial matters, and was very generous with her previous partners. She never checked up on them, followed them around, or tried to please them excessively.

But if her partner flirted with another woman or if another woman started bothering her partner, she'd break up immediately, without much talk, without fighting, and without taking revenge. She found it annoying and always thought that those men weren't more important than her work, money, and mental health.

Kinny knew Veetara didn't believe in the institution of family due to her parents' long-ago divorce. So, she wasn't surprised Veetara didn't want to

get married or have children, even though both sides of her family often hinted that they wanted her to settle down.

Luckily, Veetara had been independent since her teenage years. As soon as she was legally able to work, Veetara found jobs and earned money on her own, even paying back all the tuition and expenses her parents had invested in her. This closed off any avenue for relatives to demand gratitude or obedience using money as leverage.

Veetara was free from relying on others or from the trivialities of human relationships. So, Kinny found her friend's recent 'show-off behavior quite interesting.

Kinny was sure Veetara was aware of Salee's infatuation, but she couldn't help but 'show off her other qualities with Salee, which was the most unreasonable thing Veetara had ever done in her otherwise strictly regulated life.

Especially now that Salee's birthday was approaching, Veetara was even more driven to 'show off' as the second and third wheels tried their hardest to score points. Starting with Best, Salee's ex-boyfriend and Veetara's younger brother.

Best was quite handsome, having everything Veetara had except for the demeanor and sharp intelligence that made it obvious he was trying too hard to be someone he wasn't.

He brought a big bouquet of flowers and a gift box to surprise Salee for her birthday in advance.

And that was a very foolish decision because being wooed by an ex- boyfriend at work made Salee feel even more embarrassed, annoyed, and disgusted with him.

Fortunately, Veetara allowed Salee to lock herself in her office to avoid confrontation. Otherwise, Kinny thought Salee might've run out and kicked the boss's younger brother to get it over with.

"Salee went out for lunch."

Veetara came out to face Best, but she didn't know what he'd done beforehand to make his face so red, as if he'd just finished exercising.

"Oh, but the receptionist said she hasn't seen Salee go downstairs." "Then she must've used the back door."

"The back door?"

"Most of the restaurants are around there. It'd be a long way around if she walked out the front."

"Oh, I see. Then I'll wait for Salee in your office." "You can't. It's not convenient right now,"

Veetara told her brother with a normal expression, showing no signs of lying (but even if she did, she thought a fool like Best wouldn't notice).

"I'm having a business meeting with a foreign client. You should go back. Everyone is very busy. It's not a good time for surprises."

Best hesitated, looking around the office to make sure his ex wasn't there, until Veetara added,

"You can leave the gifts. I'll give them to Salee."

The young man scratched his cheek and finally agreed with his sister, who seemed genuinely serious about the business meeting she mentioned.

"Alright then."

He handed Veetara the big bouquet and gift box.

"But you have to tell Salee to call me because if you don't, she definitely won't call on her own."

"Okay, I'll tell her."

Kinny remembered that the whole incident took only three minutes because Veetara didn't give her brother any other option but to leave the gifts and go. Then, when the receptionist downstairs called to say that Best had driven off, Veetara knocked on the door to tell the person hiding in the office to come out.

"Here, Best left these for you."

Salee pouted, took the gifts, and placed them on her desk, not knowing what to do with them. She didn't want to open them even if someone hired her to do so, but she felt bad for Veetara, which was Best's sister, about throwing them away immediately. Then Veetara casually said,

"If you don't want to keep them, you can return them,"

Before walking back into her office. Salee sighed in relief while Kinny raised an eyebrow, surprised that Veetara didn't care about Best's wishes at all.

Well, then.

If she doesn't even give in to her little brother, what chance does Aof have?

Kinny wasn't wrong because when it was Aof's turn, who'd bought an expensive pen for Salee's birthday, thinking she was a pen collector, Veetara one- upped him the next day with a set of seventy-two Faber-Castell markers. Salee almost screamed with joy, beaming and running around the office all day asking everyone.

"Does anyone need to highlight anything? I'll do it for free!" Leaving Aof's expensive pen lying lonely in its box.

Kinny thought it was incredibly fun to see her friend so restless. Even if Veetara herself didn't realize it or officially admit it.

But didn't that mean Veetara was starting to care about someone genuinely?

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Salee wanted to slap herself.

## She shouldn't have let anyone touch her breasts, especially not twice!

So when Khun Jae seemed serious about teaching her a lesson for her nonsense, the young girl quickly bowed her head, her chin touching her chest, her ears burning, and feeling very thirsty. She closed her eyes tightly, not knowing the other person's expression, but she was sure they were so close to each other.

Salee found herself being closer to Veetara than she'd ever been since she first met her.

Not counting the playful teasing and the thirty-second hug she got from a little trick, this was a closeness she didn't initiate. It was Veetara who took the steps, making her retreat until her back was against the door.

The young girl was completely flustered.

She didn't know what to do, not even to move, so she just stood there, tense, breathing shallowly due to nervousness, fear, and embarrassment all at once. It wasn't until she felt Veetara pull away slightly that Salee dared to open one eye and look up, only to see that the other's cheeks were flushed, looking like two juicy, sweet peaches.

This made Salee even more at a loss. She was more embarrassed than before. Veetara's face turned even redder.

The two stood awkwardly for several moments until Kinny knocked again, signaling that she'd seen the uninvited guest. Veetara cleared her throat and told her,

"Wait here."

Then she stepped aside to open the door and greet Best, leaving behind a scent that made her insides want to breakdance.

Her heart, liver, and intestines were all in turmoil.

Salee rubbed her chest as if to calm herself down, pressing her forehead against the door because she thought just using her hand to support herself wouldn't be enough to keep her wobbly body upright.

She'd definitely collapse on the floor and even had an episode if she didn't find something to hold onto.

## Khun Jae smells so good!!

The young girl thought to herself. She wasn't sure if it was because she had her eyes closed, but the fresh scent from Veetara's body was clearer than ever before.

Salee wanted to scratch the door with her nails to release the overwhelming feelings in her heart, but she was afraid the uninvited guest would hear and wonder if there was something hiding in his sister's office. So she had to endure, take a deep breath to calm herself, and return to normal mode like someone with bipolar disorder.

The young girl went back outside after Veetara knocked on the door, signaling that it was 'safe' or something like that.

She found that the beautiful one had also managed to compose herself. Therefore, the matter of blurting out that she'd let Veetara grab her chest in return was null and void, as both were too embarrassed to think about it (at least for now). So they pretended not to know anything and moved on to less embarrassing topics, though their hearts still beat irregularly.

The topic, for example, was the unnecessary victory of Veetara.

Salee felt her beautiful one had been particularly domineering lately. Normally, the other would stay in her own fortress, not meddling in her subordinates' work or trivial debates. She'd only step in during emergencies or issues requiring decisive action.

But Veetara had been casually walking around the office several times a day lately, making the previously noisy atmosphere much quieter. Eventually, she'd stand with her chin up, scrutinizing Salee's desk as if something was missing or new.

When she found Aof's Arsenal cookies next to the teaching documents on Salee's desk, Veetara disappeared from the office for about an hour and returned with a large bag of snacks, already portioned out.

Salee didn't announce that she got more than others, especially the expensive cookies that were much tastier than the Arsenal brand. She kept quiet, hiding her smile from everyone, even Veetara, who pretended not to notice and walked into her office.

The same went for birthday gifts.

The young girl received many things from her colleagues. Some gave useless items for laughs, some gave practical gifts, and some, like Aof, tried to impress her with an expensive pen in a ribbon-tied box.

Salee wasn't very comfortable, but she couldn't refuse because they were colleagues she had to stay with for a long time. So she chose to keep the gifts but not use them.

Aof misunderstood everything. Best did, too.

These two young men bought gifts without knowing what Salee really thought.

Salee didn't like expensive things.

She didn't like big bouquets. She didn't like eating cookies. She didn't like collecting pens.

She didn't like anything in particular except those that came from Veetara. The key was the giver.

Her Khun Jae should know that even if she threw a piece of eraser dust at her, she'd still keep it well. So Salee concluded that Veetara's victory was unnecessary, but she couldn't deny that Veetara's recent behavior made her heart flutter.

Quite a lot...

Because of that, she wasn't prepared. She didn't think anything could make her heart race more until Veetara decided to compete with Aof over alcohol and lost miserably on the night everyone went to celebrate her birthday at their usual hotpot place.

Her gorgeous Jae was drunk, face red, eyes glazed, smiling all the time, and confident she could hold her liquor.

This was the first time Salee realized that dealing with a tipsy Veetara was much harder than when she was fully sober!

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Today's chaos started when someone complained about being hungry. The responder then suggested going to their usual hotpot place on Lat Ya Road, not far from the office. They could take a Subaru passenger mini-truck for seven baht each, giving the seniors a chance to treat the birthday girl.

Normally, Veetara wouldn't join such gatherings because she prioritized her health and wasn't interested in street food, which might be seasoned with

ten tablespoons of MSG and questionable ingredients. She usually declined such invitations, but this time, she softened up when the young girl approached her with puppy eyes and asked,

"Would you like to join us, Khun Jae?"

Kinny rolled her eyes when her friend replied,

## "Not really, but I'll go,"

Leaving everyone confused about whether Veetara was going or not. In the end. she was ready to leave work before the inviter.

"Order whatever you want. Today, it's up to the birthday girl,"

Kinny said while they were on the small mini-truck with Salee, Veetara, Karn, Onanong, and Aof. With three other passengers, it was quite cramped, with everyone facing each other in a square formation due to the seating arrangement.

Salee nodded at her before turning to look at Veetara, who sat with her arms crossed and back straight. Salee probably hadn't seen Veetara in such a posture before, so she was interested in the beautiful one who didn't seem to fit the atmosphere.

Veetara, on the other hand, let the young girl stare without saying anything, only lifting her chin, posing, and tucking her hair behind her ear unconsciously.

Kinny noticed those actions and couldn't help but feel super annoyed because her friend's condition was worsening daily. It was evident in her unusual concern for her appearance, even though she'd inherited perfect genes from her parents. In other words, she already had everything but felt insecure about her looks.

Kinny was very confused because Veetara had always been confident. She wasn't one to care about others' opinions on her appearance. She exercised daily because she believed good health was the greatest blessing.

After a hospital stay once, Veetara never neglected her health again. So, her perfect figure was a bonus from her strict health regimen, not the main goal.

Of course, Kinny already knew that Salee was the only living being on earth capable of causing both physical and mental turmoil for Veetara. She just didn't know how or why until she noticed that the little girl always had one compliment on her lips when calling Veetara: **"Gorgeous."**

If a day went by without hearing this phrase, the next day, Veetara would become restless and oddly insecure about her body and makeup. But if the Little Trouble flattered her with something like,

## "What did you eat yesterday? Why are you so beautiful today?"

Veetara would lift her chin, acting indifferent to the praise, even though she was so happy with the compliment that she'd hum a tune for quite a while.

It seemed that being constantly praised by the kid had made Veetara feel like she wasn't just beautiful in Thonburi but might soon become Miss Universe.

"Are you hot?"

Salee asked Veetara, who was sitting still, just like the car that hadn't moved an inch.

"Yes."

"We're almost there,"

Salee said, waving a fan for Veetara. "Mm."

## Oh, how annoying!

Kinny was annoyed. Everyone was annoyed except Aof, who seemed a bit uncomfortable, unsure how to react to the scene before him. If his senses

weren't too dull, he might've picked up on the atmosphere between the two. It was just a matter of deciding whether to believe what he saw and felt.

That Little Trouble is quite clever.

If she hadn't hidden it under the guise of teasing, everyone would've easily figured it out by now.

Finally, after Salee had been sweetly fanning the honored guest for a while, the car finally sped out of the hellish intersection at Wongwian Yai.

They pressed the bell to get off in front of a mall on Lat Ya Road, then walked a bit further, turned right across the crosswalk, and walked a little more to reach the sidewalk area now lined with hot pot restaurants.

Onanong was the one who dealt with the shop to arrange a table for ten while waiting for others to join.

It didn't take long for everything to be ready: a clay pot on the stove, three large plates of pork hot pot with morning glory, Chinese cabbage, glass noodles, eggs, and spicy dipping sauce. Little Trouble Salee also ordered more food to make the most of the free meal.

As a result, the table was filled with various dishes like papaya salad, sticky rice, fried intestines, grilled pork neck, larb, nam tok, bamboo shoot soup, and many other menus.

"Khun Jae, this is delicious. Try it," Salee said.

"Mm."

"What do you want to eat? I'll get it for you." "That one."

"Do you want sticky rice too, my gorgeous Jae?"

"Sure."

"I'll boil the glass noodles for you." "Just a little, I'm full"

*Sigh!*

Kinny sighed in resignation.

She was both resigned and annoyed by the fussiness as if they were the only two people there. So when Aof cleared his throat to start a conversation, she couldn't help but smile mischievously, curious to see how Veetara would respond, given that alcohol was something she'd always avoided.

"It's not that I can't drink, but if possible, I don't want to drink at all,"

Veetara said, explaining at length that she wasn't the type to need alcohol to socialize, as an excuse many people would use on the internet. She just had a simple question to ask herself:

"Why should we do something we don't want to do for others?"

This left Kinny dumbfounded for a while because when she asked herself the same question, she couldn't help but agree,

'Why do we always have to do things we don't want to do for others?'

But this time, it seemed that 'others' were more important than ever. Her friend, who'd maintained her principles for so long, ordered someone to pour beer to celebrate the birthday person, competing with Aof, who'd already started with the first glass.

It was a battle that wasn't worth betting on but was funny, like an elementary school kid challenging a high school senior. Veetara stubbornly wanted to outdrink Aof without considering that her body, accustomed to healthy substances, couldn't absorb alcohol into her bloodstream from the first glass.

The result was a defeat, leaving her tipsy and unsteady.

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Salee could tell that Veetara was very drunk.

But no matter how drunk she was, Veetara still maintained her composure sitting straight and calm. Except now, a faint smile on her flushed face and dreamy eyes made Salee feel uneasy.

The hot pot party ended around 9:30 PM, and everyone noticed that the boss was so drunk she could barely walk straight. Salee quickly grabbed the tall woman's arm, worried she might fall, and asked for help from Veetara's close friend because she wasn't sure how to handle the situation.

She knew she couldn't let her Khun Jae drive or take a taxi alone. Kinny shrugged, her face indifferent.

"Just do whatever you want, birthday girl,"

That's what Kinny said, and she then disappeared into the car that came to pick her up in front of the restaurant, leaving Salee standing there blinking with Veetara and a few others who hadn't figured out how to get home.

Aof was one of them.

He offered to drive everyone home but was immediately refused because no one wanted to trust their lives to someone who'd drunk several beers (even though he seemed fine, not as drunk as Veetara, who was swaying against her). In the end, they decided to call a taxi through an app.

Salee asked where Veetara's house was so she could call a taxi and have it take them there. By the time everyone else had gotten a taxi, Veetara was still shaking her head slowly, repeating,

"I don't know, I have to drive myself," Making Salee sigh heavily.

"How can you drive? You can't even walk straight" "I can."

"No, you can't."

"I can. You're the one who can't."

The young girl wasn't sure what she and Veetara were arguing about until she leaned in close, making her uneasy. She quickly dodged and decided to first hail a taxi back to the office.

Salee got Veetara back to the company within ten minutes because the traffic was smooth, unlike in the evening. During the taxi ride, she tried to contact Kinny to ask for Veetara's address, but Kinny didn't answer, even though the message showed as 'read! This made Salee even more anxious about handling a drunken, smiling Khun Jae alone.

"Have you remembered where your house is yet?"

Salee asked bravely after getting out of the taxi, but Veetara still shook her head, saying,

"I don't know,"

Leaving her at a loss. Then she remembered that Veetara's Civic probably had a GPS system. She saw a glimmer of hope and quickly asked for the keys to check the console screen, hoping the home address was saved.

But there was nothing because Veetara was so low-tech she couldn't even set up the GPS. Salee sighed repeatedly, and seeing the person smiling on the passenger seat made her want to pinch those rosy cheeks out of frustration.

What a handful one.

You can't remember your own home but still sit there smiling like it's no big deal.

"Can you drive?"

Veetara suddenly asked, leaning over the gear shift. Salee quickly pushed her back and buckled her seatbelt.

"Yes,"

Salee replied, blushing, her heart racing from the faint scent of the other's perfume.

"Then drive. I'll give you directions." ". "

The young girl was stunned for a moment but eventually followed the order, thinking it was better than sitting there aimlessly.

Salee adjusted the rearview mirror and the seat to fit her body before driving off. As she drove, she tried not to look at her passenger too often, aware that the other was smiling. Veetara's smile, whether small, big, satisfied, grinning, or drunkenly unaware, always made her heart flutter. So, for safety and a smooth journey, Salee decided to focus only on the directions.

"Turn right at the next alley." "I can't."

"Yes, you can." "No, I really can't." "Why can't you?"

"Because it's a one-way street, how can I turn?!"

In the end, Veetara gave Salee the wrong directions, making her drive around the big roundabout for ages before finally getting on the right path.

Salee felt utterly exhausted. She wasn't used to driving herself, and on top of that, she had to argue with Veetara about north, south, left, and right the whole way until they reached a housing estate in the Charan Sanit Wong area, where Veetara remembered she lived.

At first, Salee wasn't sure if the drunk woman was telling the truth or just babbling. But when the security guard at the entrance greeted Veetara before lifting the barrier to let them in, she sighed in relief.

"This is the one,"

The older woman said as Salee drove up to the last house in the row. Veetara then used a remote to open the gate, allowing Salee to park her beloved Civic in its rightful place.

Salee got out of the car and helped Veetara, who still believed she could walk straight, into the house.

"Sit down,"

Veetara invited as she phlopped down on the sofa in the middle of the living room.

Salee avoided eye contact and shook her head , saying it was late and she needed to go wait for the taxi she called through an app at the front of the estate. But in the end, Veetara tugged her wrist, making her sit down next to her before she could move away.

Salee was so embarrassed she didn't know what to do, sitting there stiffly with her heart pounding like it'd never beaten before. Especially when Veetara leaned in, still smiling drunkenly, and whispered,

## "No need to call a taxi. Stay here tonight"

Salee silently swore with a scout's honor and a seventy-two color marker that she only thought Veetara was being kind, offering her a place to sleep

for the night as a thank-you for driving her home.

She didn't think for a second that she might be taken advantage of like in those immoral TV dramas after the evening news.

## Salee really didn't think about anything like that.

Believe me guys!

# Chapter 06

We had many levels of drunkenness, but the level where you woke up and couldn't remember anything at all was definitely not something that happened to Veetara.

She remembered everything.

Even if she couldn't remember everything completely, she was well aware of her actions. So when she opened her eyes and found Salee curled up like a ball of yarn on the sofa, surrounded by the remnants of popcorn they bought from the 7-Eleven at the village entrance last night, she wasn't surprised or needed to rethink what happened or why the mischievous girl was here.

Veetara was sober now.

In fact, she'd been gradually sobering up since she got home. So when she invited Salee to stay over, she was just feeling a bit dizzy, not as drunk as when she'd just consumed alcohol.

She admitted she overdid it (she meant the alcohol) and didn't think ahead that she still had to drive home. She drank glass after glass to vent her frustration at being preempted by Aof's toast at the dinner table, even though, by all rights, she, as the elder in age and rank, should've been the one to start according to proper etiquette.

But that didn't mean Veetara wanted to say much to Salee in front of almost the entire office. She didn't want to be accused of favoritism because she usually never attended anyone's birthday celebrations except for Kinny's. At most, she'd just say 'Happy Birthday' as a formality, without any long- winded wishes or serious gifts.

Veetara was very careful not to form personal relationships with anyone. She intended to be just a boss and the eldest sister of the office, nothing more than work-related matters to maintain her respectability and prevent any discord among her subordinates.

Luckily, Salee's quirky behavior had its benefits. It made everything in their relationship seem like a joke. Even with the seventy-two shade marker set she bought earlier, everyone thought she was just annoyed by Salee's habit of borrowing (stealing) her stuff, so she solved the problem by buying her a set.

No one knew what Veetara really thought, and she was satisfied with that. Last night, she kept quiet, saying nothing in front of everyone except "Happy Birthday' as she usually did with others. Then she turned to continue drinking beer with Aof, which ended in a unanimous result as seen.

She lost completely.

Veetara remembered feeling very dizzy. She gradually saw everything spinning counterclockwise. When it almost reached the same angle as six o'clock, the image would reset to the original position and loop repeatedly, making her smile because of this new perspective.

It was a strange, dizzying, and wobbly perspective, like standing on a boat in rough seas.

"How can you drive? You can't even walk straight,"

Salee mumbled after she answered that she had to drive herself to know where her home was.

Veetara wasn't lying. At that moment, she really couldn't remember which street in Bangkok her home was on. Even the name of the village was vaguely on the tip of her tongue.

She was only confident that she'd remember the way once she drove herself. So she answered Salee like that, fully believing that she was fine, walking

straight as a ruler, and it was the world spinning, not her. "No, you can't,"

Salee mumbled again.

"I can. You're the one who can't,"

Veetara argued, leaning in close to look at Salee. The image still spun, making her laugh. But it also made her see Salee in a new light, realizing, even in her dizzy state, that the girl wasn't just a cute, adorable young girl. She had a 'womanly' quality both in her looks hidden under her playful exterior and in her dependable demeanor.

She probably wouldn't have made it home in one piece without Salee's help. "No need to call a taxi. Stay here tonight."

Veetara Invited, almost ordered, as she was sobering up. She noticed the younger girl tensed up, showing reluctance and blushing up to her ears as if thinking inappropriate thoughts. So she raised her hand and knocked her forehead lightly.

Veetara smiled.

She smiled with amusement at the still-spinning surroundings and a desire to tease the girl, who seemed at a loss when she smiled instead of frowning and scolding as usual.

"It's dangerous to go home alone late at night,"

Veetara explained to Salee, pausing for a moment before adding, "I'm worried,"

Making the listener slowly turn to look at her.

Actually, under normal circumstances, Veetara wouldn't say such things. But the alcohol in her bloodstream not only made her dizzy but also

lowered her high restraint in everything, especially her reluctance to speak her mind.

Drunkenness brought balance.

Her once-high walls were lowered to the level most people have in their daily lives.

Not too much or too little, just right.

Salee stared back, seemingly searching for the truth, testing, or whatever, making Veetara realize that the world didn't stop spinning like in movies or, as people often said (and it never would until NASA announced otherwise). It was she who stopped moving.

She let everything flow naturally.

She let people on the other side of the world drive, do laundry, eat breakfast, go to work, date, and party.

As for her, she'd sit on this sofa, watching a girl with blushing red cheeks smile back until she looked away.

"If I stay here, where will I get my pajamas?"

Salee scratched her cheek, embarrassed, pretending to survey the simply decorated but luxurious living room.

Veetara smiled.

She felt oddly proud of herself for working hard to own this house, even though yesterday, it was just a plece of real estate she'd bought to live in.

"Here,"

Veetara answered lazily, resting her head on the sofa arm. "I have new clothes. Can you wear them?"

The listener paused for a moment, then joked, "Don't you have the used one?"

Hoping she'd get a scold as usual. However, Veetara just listened with a smile, leaving Salee at a loss.

"Um, I... I can wear them."

Salee stammered, rubbing her knees awkwardly as she chose the wrong time to joke.

Veetara secretly laughed.

The more she saw the once-confident girl fidgeting and blushing, the more satisfied she felt.

This Little Trouble is so clueless!

"Then wait here. I'll shower and bring them to you."

Veetara slowly stood up, and Salee tried to help, but she waved her off, signaling,

'It's okay, I can go myself.'

"Do whatever you want, or you can just watch TV,"

Veetara nodded towards the low table on the right of the sofa, where the remote for the fifty-five-inch TV was.

"Are you sure?"

Salee didn't look where she pointed but scrutinized her from head to toe, analyzing the risk of Veetara falling down the stairs before reaching the second floor.

"Sure."

"How many fingers?" "Three."

"And if you fall in the shower?" "I'll call for your help."

"But you'll be naked then."

"Well, think of it as a treat for your eyes."

Veetara walked slowly around the TV stand in the middle of the living room to the stairs behind, leaving Salee blinking at her parting words.

She saw the sweet face turning sharp red as if splashed with house paint, which was so funny she chuckled softly after carefully reaching the second floor.

Serves you right, you troublemaker.

Veetara first put the megaphone in her workroom and put it into the cabinet just in case she really fell and hit her head in the bathroom. If she called for help, Salee wouldn't see her cherished item Veetara 'confiscated' without telling the owner. Otherwise, there'd be endless questions, and she wasn't keen on returning it anyway.

Salee had a new megaphone now, so if she wanted to keep the old one here, Veetara didn't see why it'd be a problem.

Right?

Veetara finished her shower and hair wash and walked out to pick some emergency clothes from the built-in closet between the bathroom and bedroom for Salee. She grabbed a T-shirt, shorts, and underwear, one of each. It seemed like the guest would fit comfortably in them because, aside from height, their builds were quite similar in terms of agility.

As for the chest...

Veetara had noticed since the day Salee asked her to touch hers in return: the girl's boobs weren't that small, too.

"Here,"

She tossed the sleepwear to the girl on the sofa. Salee was sitting with her knees hugged, pressing the TV remote with a relaxed demeanor as if she were at home. She must've calmed down while Veetara spent almost twenty minutes in the bathroom.

Veetara smiled as she sat down next to Salee. "What are you doing?"

"Looking for a movie."

The homeowner raised an eyebrow. When she glanced at the TV screen, she saw that the other was scrolling through Netflix, searching intensely but not finding anything she liked. It was unclear whether she was picky or if there were just too many new movies this month.

Until she entered the comedy section and exclaimed, "Ooh, Burn!" with excitement and joy at seeing Emma Stone on the cover of Easy A.

"Have you seen this one, Khun Jae?"

Veetara shook her head. She rarely had the chance to watch comedies, as she usually preferred films like 'The Godfather' or 'Goodfellas'

"Then let's watch this one. You'll love it." "How do you know I'll love it?"

"Because I've watched it sixteen times and still find it fun,"

Salee replied confidently. But as soon as the other pressed play, she had to press it again to stop the movie from starting.

"What is it?"

Veetara raised an eyebrow. "I want popcorn."

"Do you think someone like me has popcorn ready to eat late at night?"

"I know you don't, but the mini-mart at the front of the village surely does."

Veetara chuckled before slowly standing up, still feeling a bit dizzy. She held Salee's small arm as they walked to the convenience store. She felt a sense of wonder at the nighttime atmosphere around the village because she'd never walked around late at night like this before, only driven through. She just noticed that the granite walkway was lit with orange- yellow lights on every slab, and the air was quite cool due to the many plants.

"I want instant noodles too,"

Salee whispered to her while waiting for the mini-mart staff to microwave the popcorn.

"Wasn't the hot pot earlier enough?" "But it's my birthday today."

"It's your birthday anniversary," Veetara corrected. "And it's already past by almost an hour."

Salee pouted, swaying like a child who didn't get her way. She'd intentionally not brought her wallet, planning for Veetara to pay for everything she wanted in the store, using her 'birthday' as a flimsy excuse.

Veetara hid a smile, nodding as if annoyed while saying, "Go get it"

As expected, Salee grabbed various snacks, ice cream, soda, and instant noodles, all of which were unhealthy.

"Salee."

"Yes?"

"Save it for the movie, or you'll finish it all before we get back,"

She remarked as the girl she was holding her arm while walking back home eagerly ate the first bag of popcorn. The birthday girl was too greedy to stop tossing the popcorn into her mouth and even insisted on offering some to Veetara.

"Try some." "No."

"It's yummy."

"It's no big deal. You don't eat it often anyway."

Veetara rolled her eyes, finally letting Salee put the buttered popcorn (meaning fat and sodium) into her mouth.

Delicious.

That was her immediate thought.

Maybe it was because Veetara hadn't eaten such things in a long time. The first bite felt heavenly. When the girl leaned in, smiling at her chewing the popcorn, Veetara couldn't help but push her head away.

"You can have more. There're two more bags." "If I eat all that, my kidneys will fail,"

Veetara argued and complained about the unhealthy snacks until they were almost home. She called out to Salee, who was excited to get back to Emma Stone.

"Salee."

"Yes?"

"Give me your hand." "Which hand?"

"The one not holding a bag."

The girl raised an eyebrow, lifting her free hand (greasy with butter from the popcorn) as requested. Veetara then pulled something from her chest pocket.

"For your birthday."

Veetara tied a finely woven red silk bracelet around Salee's wrist. "I wish for you..."

Veetara paused, changing her mind at the last second from 'I wish for your happiness', which was too cliché, to

"I wish you the chance to visit the most beautiful places in the world."

She believed that was one of the most precious gifts anyone could receive in their lifetime.

She wanted Salee to see the most stunning places on Earth. ". "

The birthday girl was silent, looking up at her with mixed emotions. But in the end, she responded by placing the snack bags on the ground, stepping forward, and placing her hands in a wai on Veetara's left chest.

"Thank you." "Yeah."

"Can I hug you for thirty seconds?"

"Suit yourself."

With permission, Salee quickly stepped up, tiptoeing until her lips touched Veetara's chin.

And it wasn't a thirty-second hug as she claimed... Not at all.

"......"

"Why do you always wear such high heels?" Salee asked, frowning as she pulled away.

She was very embarrassed but also deeply moved, forgetting her shyness after receiving such a unique birthday wish and gift, in addition to the seventy-two- shade marker set.

That's why she wanted to kiss Veetara's cheek so badly, for being so gorgeous, kind, and generous, with free Netflix to watch. But she could only reach her chin because Veetara's sandals were thicker than her elementary school textbooks.

How frustrating

"To enhance my posture,"

Veetara replied, looking away while quickly tucking her hair behind her ears.

"Height gives a sense of authority."

"But we're in your village. There's no one to impress."

Salee wrinkled her nose, feeling like she missed a big prize by one shot at a fair.

"Stop talking so much,"

Veetara poked her forehead. "Is that how you hug people?"

"You said 'suit yourself', so if I call that a hug, it's not against the rules."

The girl retorted, realizing she'd kissed Veetara's soft, white chín. She was so embarrassed she had to laugh it off. She then hurriedly grabbed the snack bags and Veetara's hand to walk back home.

Salee went to shower in the room next to the stairs first, then returned and sat on the sofa as if nothing had happened. Veetara didn't mention it either, she just kept tucking her hair behind her ears while leaning back, waiting to watch the movie Salee praised so highly. Salee still found the movie fun, funny, and thought-provoking every time she watched it.

The plot was about Olive Penderghast (played by Salee's beloved Emma Stone), a plain high school girl who couldn't even find anything when searching for her name on Google. She became popular overnight due to a lie, leading to a series of chaotic events from rumors that spiraled out of control.

It turned out Veetara was quite interested, laughing so hard at the scene where the heroine pretended to hook up with a gay friend at a party.

"I told you you'd like it,"

Salee boasted when the movie ended happily.

Veetara smiled, glancing at the clock on the left wall to see it was past 3 AM.

"T'll go prepare the bedroom,"

Veetara said, referring to the downstairs bedroom that was left vacant. It was opposite the bathroom where she'd just taken a shower and handled her business earlier.

"I don't need that,"

Salee politely declined, not wanting to trouble Veetara with preparing so many things. After all, the beautiful one should've been resting since she got home.

"The sofa is huge, and there're plenty of cushions. I can sleep right here." "How can you sleep here when a perfectly good room is available?" Veetara frowned.

"But it's comfortable here,"

The young girl said, flopping down like a wilted bean sprout. "And I don't have the energy to move now."

Veetara frowned, signaling that she'd sobered up quite a bit. Otherwise, she'd have just kept smiling, making Salee's heart race out of rhythm.

"What a kid,"

Veetara muttered but eventually got up to fetch a blanket, tossing it to Salee to transform the sofa into a bed.

"Don't blame me if you wake up with a backache."

Salee smiled secretly at the not-so-serious threat as she got up to arrange the pillows and blanket. When she turned and saw the homeowner still standing with arms crossed, watching her, she raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"Aren't you going to bed?" "I'm about to."

"Go ahead. I won't steal your TV in the middle of the night." Veetara laughed.

"You're so tiny. As if you could even lift it"

The young girl glanced at Veetara, who still hadn't moved from beside the sofa despite saying she was about to go. Salee stifled a smile, sat down on the sofa, and patted the seat next to her.

"Sit here,"

She invited, just like when the beautiful woman was still tipsy. "Not sleepy yet?"

"You know me well."

Veetara grumbled but sat down as invited. They started chatting about various topics for a long time, from the gossip about Aunty Oun's gang to the restaurant behind the building that changed chefs and wasn't as good anymore, to the regular motorbike taxi driver whose wife was about to give birth, and even about the neighborhood dog, Go, who often came by for food.

"In my alley, there're four local dogs," Salee explained.

"The leader is named Go."

Go was a Thai street dog with a ridgeback, erect ears, a pointed tail, reddish-brown fur, dark fur at the mouth, and a somewhat dumb-looking but handsome face. No one knew where Go came from, but he was likely abandoned in the community as a puppy.

"My mom felt sorry for him and fed him every day."

Go transitioned from a street puppy to the alley's guardian dog. He usually roamed wherever his four legs took him, with no fixed place. But when he was hungry and couldn't find food, he'd bark for Salee's mom to pour food or kibble into a tin bowl for him.

Fortunately, Go and his gang were smart dogs. The neighbors trusted them and let them roam freely. They never caused trouble by leaving waste

around or rummaging through garbage. Go's gang acted as bodyguards, patrols, and alarms whenever strangers entered the alley.

"Go is old now but still lively."

Veetara shifted, facing Salee with interest, especially when she continued, "Recently, he fathered a litter with a female dog from the next alley." Veetara heard this and was even more amazed.

"Still got it, huh?"

"Very much. There were eight puppies, but now only one is left, named Keng, who looks just like his dad."

"Who named these dogs?" "I did."

"You?"

Salee nodded.

"No one around there bothered to name the street dogs. Once I started calling them by names, everyone else followed."

Veetara smiled.

"What about the other dogs in the alley? What are their names?" "There's Long, Kek-huay, and Tuk-tuk."

Long wandered in from somewhere, a male mixed-breed Thai dog, short and slightly younger than Go.

Kek-huay was a high-society dog who liked to eat Chinese donuts and had a proud, aloof nature. She probably descended from noble ancestors who'd

fallen on hard times since World War II. Her fur was brownish-yellow, hence the name Kek-huay.

The last one, Tuk-tuk, was found sleeping on a tuk-tuk. When he woke up, the vehicle had already driven to the alley. Unable to find his way back, he'd been living with Go and the other two dogs for over three years. He was a purebred Thai dog with a spotted face and black fur and was as big as a bear.

"You,"

Veetara shook her head in exasperation, "Even get involved with dog matters." "Oh, come on, Khun Jae,"

Salee scrunched her nose, pouting at the teasing

Soon, the atmosphere grew quiet as they ran out of 'general' topics to discuss. The conversation naturally shifted to more personal matters, as if the previous chat was just a warm-up.

"I have something to ask."

Salee bit her lip, holding her breath nervously, unsure of what Veetara was curious about. But she nodded and reassured the hesitant woman,

"Ask away. If I can answer, I will If I don't want to, I just won't." "Fair enough,"

Veetara murmured, then immediately asked, "Why did you break up with Best?"

Salee was silent for a long moment before sighing and leaning her head back against the sofa.

"If I answer honestly, promise you won't hold it against me." "I won't."

Hearing that, Salee decided to answer, **"Because your brother is a loser."** ". "

"You promised,"

Salee reminded, feeling a bit anxious that Veetara might take offense at her criticism of her only brother. But instead, the beautiful woman burst into laughter louder than when watching Easy A.

"I probably already knew this fact,"

Veetara murmured, wiping away tears of laughter.

It turned out Veetara had guessed that the reason for their breakup was either incompatibility or Best's uselessness, which made Salee unable to tolerate the relationship any longer.

"Dad pampered Best all his life, so it's no surprise he turned out that way." Veetara said calmly.

"But honestly, he's not a bad person. Sometimes, he's even obedient" "I know."

Salee knew Best wasn't a bad person. He was dull and sluggish but never had issues with infidelity. On the contrary, he was the one who was overly jealous.

Salee found it very annoying and mentally draining.

Why wouldn't she? They often fought over trivial things, such as a guy liking her photo on Facebook, which was just a landscape picture she'd taken when she was learning to use a camera.

"Sometimes, he was just too irrational, and I couldn't take it anymore." Veetara nodded in understanding but couldn't help asking,

"Then why did you date him in the first place?" This question made Salee pause for a long moment. "Well.."

Salee scratched her cheek, unsure how to say it was because of Khun Jae that she decided to date Best. So she vaguely answered,

"Maybe I expected to get something from him." "So your relationship with Best had conditions?" Veetara raised an eyebrow.

"I thought you were the type to fall head over heels"

"Oh, come on. Just because I like rom-coms doesn't mean I believe in unconditional love,"

Salee pouted, making Veetara smile as she rested her chin on her hand. "Why not?"

"Because it's not practical."

Salee admitted that 'unconditional love' sounded great, but it was just an unrealistic concept. Even parental love was based on the reason that the child was theirs.

If you removed the word 'child, no one would spend money raising them through college. Even saints who loved their fellow humans did so because of religious teachings. So, Salee didn't see how the idealistic theory could be applied in daily life.

"If humans could love unconditionally, we'd be falling in love with everyone."

"Hmm,"

Veetara hummed in agreement. "You're right."

It seemed the beautiful woman was satisfied with the answer and didn't ask further. She just got up, stretched to relieve her stiffness, and sald goodnight.

"I'm going to bed." "Goodnight"

Salee saw Veetara hiding a smile, then waved her hand as if annoyed by the cheerful voice calling after her until she disappeared up the stairs.

"You can dream about me tonight, gorgeous. I don't mind."

Once the young girl was sure the homeowner wouldn't come back down to stand guard, she grabbed a cushion from the sofa and hugged it tightly, kicking her legs like a child learning to swim.

She felt so exhausted, as if she'd actually been swimming, that she flipped over to lie on her back, grinning widely while examining the bracelet Veetara had put on her wrist. She discovered that besides being beautiful with red silk and genuine leather, it could also transform into a wrist strap for a camera.

It's truly practical, just like Khun Jae.

Salee blushed, feeling delighted until she dozed off amidst the remnants of popcorn and snack bags that hadn't been thrown away yet.

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This morning, there was a bit of a commotion.

Luckily, it was Sunday, so Veetara wasn't in a rush or panicked when she found out the water pressure in the downstairs water heater had dropped so low it almost stopped. The young girl ran out to complain, her head still covered in white shampoo foam.

Veetara quickly sent her upstairs to use the bathroom there while she was busy making scrambled eggs (following a YouTube recipe), toast, and coffee for two, something she'd never done before, making it a bit of a struggle.

"Go into my bedroom and turn left. The new towels are in the wardrobe. Or if you want to dry your hair, the dryer is hanging in front of the mirror,"

She told Salee, who was standing damp in front of the kitchen. Salee nodded and walked upstairs, her wet feet making her steps cautious.

Finally, everything was in order. The eggs in the pan were neither overcooked nor too runny, the toast was perfectly crispy, and as for the coffee, she left it to the expensive grinder. Within ten minutes, Salee came back down, having changed into the dried clothes from last night, looking neat and tidy.

Salee grinned widely, making Veetara frown as she sat waiting for breakfast at the kitchen island.

"What's up?"

"Nothing"

Anyone who believed that was too gullible! Veetara thought but said nothing; she just slid over the plate of scrambled eggs, toast, and a cup of coffee.

"I don't have Coffee-Mate, so I put milk instead." "How did you know I drink coffee with Coffee-Mate?" The young girl asked with a smile.

Veetara just cleared her throat and dodged the question, "It's just a guess,"

Though she clearly remembered when Salee came while Veetara talked to Kinny. Salee was making coffee with two spoons of Coffee-Mate and sugar each.

They didn't talk much while eating breakfast. Once they were done, Veetara offered to drive Salee home, which she accepted with a smile, making Veetara even more suspicious of what mischief Salee might be planning.

But questioning her would be pointless and might even play into Salee's hands, so she ignored the mischievous glances Salee gave her as she drove.

"Thanks for the ride." "Yeah."

"The scrambled eggs were delicious." "Uh-huh."

## "What do I have to do to get to eat them often?"

This girl is so annoying!

Veetara felt a sudden heat rise and quickly pushed Salee out of the car, fearing her face would turn redder than her blush. Salee gave a polite wai in a way a primary school teacher would want to spank her for, then got out, standing there smiling and waving until Veetara drove away.

'She must be planning something.' Veetara thought to herself.

Luckily, there was still time to prepare before seeing Salee at the office tomorrow morning, so Veetara wasn't too worried about what tricks Salee might pull. But she was completely wrong...

Salee hadn't planned anything.

Because she'd already done something mischievous.

Veetara only realized it when she checked the downstairs shower and found the water heater working fine.

At first, Veetara was just puzzled until she opened her phone to see a message with a selfie of Salee grinning next to her bedroom wardrobe. That's when Veetara realized she'd been tricked.

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'The Victoria's Secret in your wardrobe is so hot.' Especially the red see-through panties. Ten out of ten. Love,

Salee loves Khun Jae.

Give me a call if you miss me, gorgeous.

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"Salee!"

Veetara gritted her teeth. When she called to scold the girl and said she'd turn last night's blessing into a curse:

## "May you never have underwear for the rest of your lifel"

Salee just laughed loudly before whispering back, "Love you, My Jae," and hung up, leaving Veetara standing there, blinking

In the end, she could only cover her flushed face with her hands.

# Chapter 07

Kinny had two guesses: if those two didn't end up together like in a romance novel, they'd probably fight to the death because of Salee's teasing nature.

It turned out to be the latter.

When Veetara stormed into the office early in the morning, the mischievous girl was making a face like an internet emoticon (อิ v อิ), seemingly

mocking Veetara about something. She even had a new gadget to up her annoyance and stalking level-a pair of binoculars she ordered online. When asked why she needed them, she replied,

"Khun Jae told me to stay away from her, so I'm using these to watch her from afar."

"...."

*This Little Trouble!*

*How far could she really be? The office is only so big!*

Kinny grumbled to herself but couldn't help being curious what happened last Saturday night that made Veetara so upset wit Salee, to the point of banning her from coming close. Veetara had been holed up in her office ever since. When Kinny walked in with a cup of coffee, Veetara accepted it with a grateful look, as if Kinny were a saint.

"What happened this time?" "What do you mean?"

"Don't play dumb." ". "

"You know I know "

"Lock the door."

Kinny did as her friend asked, locking the door to prevent anyone from barging in during their private conversation. They then moved to the beige sofa to the left of the desk.

"What's going on with you and that kid?"

The question made Veetara nervous and speechless until Kinny had to emphasize.

"I can see right through you; no need to hide it."

Veetara sighed, resting her elbows on her knees and covering her face with her hands before slowly turning to Kinny.

"I. "

Kinny crossed her arms, squinting at her friend until Veetara finally let her worries spill out.

"I think I'm completely outmatched by that Little Trouble." "*That's what I thought."*

Kinny mused, then asked the question that made Veetara ponder for a while. "And what's your problem? Don't you like being this way?"

"No, I. "

Veetara shook her head slowly, tucking her hair behind her ear-a gesture Salee probably knew by now meant she was 'off balance.'

*How could anyone not know?*

She did it as often as breathing. Anyone who wasn't blind could see it, especially that kid who brought binoculars to spy on Veetara like a secret agent.

"It's not that I don't like it but it feels like I'm torn between being annoyed and secretly pleased. Do you get it?"

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Kinny rolled her eyes three times at the contradictory answer before listening to Veetara explain further. Her friend didn't hate that cute kid, but Salee's cheekiness was sometimes so overwhelming that it made her want to pinch her until she was all bruised. It was a whirlwind of emotions. When she tried to glet back at Salee, she ended up being affected herself, which was no different from when Salee teased her

"You know I've never been in a situation like this before."

*Of course not.*

Salee wasn't a handsome, well-off guy like the ones before. So, her friend's experience in this case was practically zero. Veetara had mentioned that she had female juniors flirting with her in high school, but she always brushed them off, claiming she had a boyfriend from another school to avoid problems. In reality, Veetara had never dated anyone until college.

"And it's not that I'm confused about discovering I'm gay or anything at almost thirty. I'm confused that I'm losing to such silly things."

Veetara said, looking deeply troubled.

"Instead of losing to something more reasonable." "Because you like the kid."

"...."

"There's nothing complicated about it, Vee. You're fond of that kid, so even if she climbed the antenna on the roof and beat her chest like King Kong, you'd still find her cute."

"Why do you have to paint such a vivid picture?" Veetara scowled, muttering,

"King Kong? She's as small as an ant." "See?"

Kinny leaned on her hand.

"If you like someone enough, you'll inevitably see the best in their worst traits."

"Really?"

"Yeah!"

Kinny emphasized, realizing Veetara had never seen the good in anyone's bad traits before (because bad was just bad for Veetara). She sighed, feeling like she was preparing a rookie fighter to face Mike Tyson in his early twenties.

"Now, what's the problem? If you're going to talk, spill it all out."

*If I don't push her to talk, she'll just bottle it up and be tight- lipped again.*

"I want a better way to handle this,"

Veetara mumbled, confessing that if she hadn't been drunk the other night, she wouldn't have had the guts to make Salee back off. Even the last time she retaliated (in some unknown way), Veetara had to suppress her own feelings. Fortunately, the situation gave her a slight advantage; otherwise, she'd have lost completely. It sounded utterly pathetic.

Kinny didn't know whether to laugh or pity her friend, but for the sake of their long friendship, she chose the latter and gave simple advice,

"First, start with yourself."

She reached out and slapped her friend's hand, which was tucking her hair behind her ear, with a loud smack.

"Stop doing that."

Veetara flinched, confused at first, but then seemed to realize she'd been giving away her thoughts to Salee.

"Don't let her read you. And if she's playing around, keep a serious face. Don't react to her game."

"...."

"Teasers just want to see their victims flustered." "That's true,"

Veetara mumbled, agreeing with the advice, then raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"I didn't know you were so knowledgeable about this."

Kinny smiled, not mentioning that her expertise came from comparing it to her mom's cats. Her Siberian Husky was just like that Little Trouble- playful, barking to tease, and always bothering the grumpy cat. Until one day, the cat got fed up and slapped the dog with it's paws repeatedly like a combo punch in a fighting game. After that, the blue-eyed dog stayed in line and didn't bother the grumpy cat again.

*See? If you stand up seriously, the other side will back down.*

"Salee knows almost everything about you, but do you know her weakness?"

"What is it?"

"Don't you really know?"

Veetara scratched her cheek, then shook her head, mumbling. "I know very little about Salee, especially her weaknesses."

Kinny sighed deeply, then revealed from an outsider's perspective.

## "Salee's weakness is you, you dummy!"

She meant that Veetara herself was the biggest weakness because, from what she observed, that silly kid only cared about her friend. But Veetara didn't realize it (or pretended not to), so she was sitting here, troubled, even though she had the upper hand in this relationship.

"Learn to use yourself to your advantage!" "What?! I.. I'm not that kind of person,"

Veetara blushed, and Kinny could guess she was thinking far ahead. Kinny grinned.

"I didn't mean your body, but if you're thinking that far..." ". "

"You know Salee is almost twenty-five, right?"

She reminded her friend, fearing she might forget that Salee was a grown woman, not a high school kid whose behavior hadn't matured. So, Veetara didn't need to worry that flirting with this kid would be illegal or immoral.

"I know!" Veetara pouted.

"But I wasn't thinking in that way!" "Sure, you weren't."

Kinny agreed, then returned to the topic of '*using yourself to your advantage',* hoping to wrap up this life consultation session.

"What I mean is, you need to use your working woman charm, your allure, your skills, your beauty, your wealth, and your uniqueness to your advantage. But the key is you need to recognize your own capabilities first. Only then can you handle that kid. Got it?"

Veetara thought for several seconds before nodding slowly. "I'll try."

"Okay. Summarize what you need to do from here."

"Don't let her guess my moves. Stay calm, don't get swept up in the game. Remember that I have the upper hand and use it to my benefit."

"Very good, sis!"

Kinny praised and encouraged her friend, who reviewed the methods clearly and thoroughly.

As for whether it was practical in a real situation... She'd leave that to fate.

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Salee noticed that her Khun Jae had become much quieter lately, as if she was constantly deep in thought. She wasn't sure if Veetara was still angry about the see-through incident or if there were other issues mixed in, making the beautiful woman seem so serious and tense.

Just as Salee was thinking of investigating to find a solution, another problem arose. Best, her ex-boyfriend, was still trying to win her back. Despite Salee returning his birthday gift through Veetara and reiterating over the phone that 'No means no!!', he didn't seem to understand.

He kept showing up, causing everyone in the office to sigh in frustration, but no one dared to say anything because he was the boss's little brother.

Salee felt bad for being the cause of the office's discomfort. "Have some respect for others. At least respect your sister!"

She had to confront Best directly after avoiding him the last time.

"This is a workplace, not a park where you can come and go as you please!"

"Why should I? I'm just waiting for you to finish work. I'm not doing anything wrong. Besides, Jae didn't say anything. She even told me to take you home tonight."

"What?"

*Khun Jae told Best to take me home?*

Salee's face darkened upon hearing this. She pulled her hand away when Best tried to reach out to her.

"Don't push it, Best. We're over. Stop pretending like nothing happened. I don't like it!"

Best was silent for a moment before asking.

"You broke up with me because I wasn't serious about my work, right?" "Yes."

"And what if I told you I've realized my mistakes now?"

Best asked, adding that he was starting his own business and trying not to rely too much on his father's money. Salee could only shake her head and sigh deeply.

"Listen carefully,"

She tried to stay calm and explained.

"The time when I had expectations for you has passed. So, our breakup means I no longer expect or want anything from our relationship. Do you understand?"

"Can't you give me a chance to make things right?" "Don't act like I never gave you a chance."

Salee frowned.

"But you're still single..."

Best continued to search for a way, making Salee, who felt a bit guilty and sympathetic, become angry instead.

"Whether I'm single or not is none of your business."

"Wait, I mean while you're single, just give me a chance. You don't have to decide or give me a chance right away; just see..."

"No."

Best was stunned.

"I'm glad you've realized how to handle your life, but I'm not going back. You should move on too. Both of us should."

"But I still love you!"

Best's voice grew louder as if he wanted everyone in the parking lot to know what they were arguing about.

## "But I don't!"

Salee shouted back angrily.

"And you're the one responsible for your feelings, not me!" "Is there a problem, Miss Salee?"

The security guard's voice from behind was like a lifesaver. Otherwise, this might've ended with her kicking her ex and getting charged with assault.

"Nothing,"

Salee took a deep breath.

"Just a misunderstanding. Thank you."

She left it at that, turned her back on Best, and walked out of the alley, calling her regular motorcycle taxi to pick her up.

Today's troubles weighed heavily on her mind, especially the fact that Veetara had asked her brother to take her home as if trying to mend their broken relationship. Thinking back to the night before when Veetara asked about Best, combined with the current tension between her and Khun Jae, Salee became even more suspicious that Veetara might be playing cupid to reunite her with Best.

Salee felt confused, unfocused, and lost much of her confidence.

*Do I seem too childish?*

*Or does Khun Jae see me as nothing more than Best's ex, and I'm the only one imagining that things have changed?*

These questions swirled in Salee's head all week, making her behavior noticeably different. People asked if she was stressed, unwell, or sick, to which she could only shake her head and give a dry smile, saying she was fine; she just had some things to think about.

"What's wrong?"

A voice snapped Salee back to reality. Salee realized she was in the elevator, about to return to the office after her last class. The other passenger was Khun Jae, whom she didn't know had come to this floor or when.

She froze for a moment, then quickly looked away at the floor numbers on the control panel.

"I'm fine,"

She replied cheerfully.

"How about you, Khun Jae?"

Veetara didn't answer but reached out and pressed the door close button when the elevator reached the office floor. It was as if she wanted to keep Salee there until they talked things out.

"What happened?"

"Oh, I forgot to charge my megaphone today, so I had to use a mic for the last half hour."

Salee tried to change the subject, hoping Veetara would let it go. But Veetara moved closer, frowning as she scrutinized her

"That's a bit too obvious, don't you think?"

lVeetara muttered, seemingly to herself, while Salee backed up until she was against the elevator wall next to the control panel.

"Are you going to tell me, or do I have to force it out of you?" "I... I-"

Salee raised her hand to push Veetara's chest to keep her from getting too close, but the other party didn't back off. This time, Salee realized what

Khun Jae meant by saying that 'height gives authority'.

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Veetara was strictly following Kinny's advice: control herself so that Salee couldn't read her. She kept her distance (not too far, but not too close like before) and was busy with business expansion plans, giving them little time to talk. When she finally noticed, Salee seemed down and quiet, making her worried and curious.

She didn't know what had happened to make the usually loud and lively girl so subdued. Asking around the office yielded no answers, just wild guesses about losing money on the lottery, being ditched by a motorcycle taxi, or her new megaphone breaking down (since she hadn't been using it much).

All were baseless speculations.

With no useful information from the staff and Kinny away on a business trip, Veetara had no choice but to confront Salee directly.

She waited for Salee after her last class and rode the elevator with her, only for Salee to evade the question. Veetara had to use her advantage to pressure Salee into talking. After realizing she had no escape, Salee decided to lock her arms around Veetara like a boxer clinching an opponent.

"Help! Ouch!"

"Don't hurt me, Khun Jae!" "Let me go! Someone help!"

Veetara paused for a moment before trying hard to stifle her laughter, as the reflection in the elevator mirror was completely at odds with Salee's cries.

*Look at what she's doing.*

Salee was screaming like she was being attacked, but her tiny arms clung tightly, and she even pressed her face against Veetara's chest with closed

eyes, making Veetara want to pinch the girl's butt a couple of times.

However, this time, Veetara didn't respond with her usual sharp retort. Instead, she wrapped her arms around the other's shoulders, as she'd learned from her dear friend to be cautious and not fall into Salee's teasing game.

This caused the mischievous girl, who intended to create a ruckus to cover up probing questions, to be taken aback, not expecting Veetara to respond in this manner.

"Khun Jae... I... I can't breathe!"

Veetara hid her smile, suppressing her own awkward and shy feelings, while tightening her arms around the girl's neck even tighter than Salee was hugging her waist.

"If you can't breathe, then hurry up and speak."

*'This kid's so sassy'*, Veetara thought. *'Why not enjoy the view of that sexy boobs you've teased for years?'*

"No! I'm going to die!"

Salee protested, her voice muffled because Veetara had locked her head in place.

"Go ahead, if you want to die from suffocation in my boobs, then die." Veetara threatened, and Salee finally screamed for mercy in the elevator.

The young girl tapped Veetara's back to signal surrender. When Veetara let go, the girl, whose face was now beet red, quickly crossed her arms over her chest and turned her back, afraid she might be taken advantage of again.

"It's your fault, Khun Jae," Salee mumbled. "Me?"

Veetara raised an eyebrow. Besides trying to control herself from falling for Salee's teasing, she wasn't sure what she'd done to make Salee point the

blame at her. "What's that about?"

"You're trying to set me up with Best, right?" "What?"

The older woman made a high-pitched sound. When she saw the reflection on the right-hand mirror to check the face of the person standing with her back turned, she saw that Salee was pursing her lips and frowning in anger.

"Why do you think that?" "Because you support him," Salee replied in a softer voice. "I don't like this at all."

This was the first time Veetara heard the usually playful girl say she didn't like something with such seriousness, which made her anxious and confused. She couldn't recall ever showing support for Best.

Apart from the time Salee asked her to help deal with her brother the other day and the time she asked about them to clear her own doubts, Veetara hardly interfered in their relationship.

"How did I support him?" ". "

"If you don't speak, I can't explain it to you."

Veetara spoke softly, causing the person with her back turned to finally turn around and look up at her with a scrutinizing expression.

"You let him come to the office."

Veetara frowned.

"And even arranged for him to drive me home." This time, Veetara frowned even more.

"I didn't even know he was here,"

She muttered, guessing it was because she'd been holed up in her office without Kinny to keep an eye out, and no one in the office dared to mention her brother's visit. Veetara only now realized that Best had taken the opportunity to come here, knowing well when to show up to avoid being easily sent away.

*Damn it.*

"I never did that, and I never ordered anyone to take you home," Veetara declared clearly.

"But he..."

Salee protested but stopped mid-sentence, looking like she'd just realized something.

"He lied!" "Probably,"

Veetara murmured, shaking her head in amusement before reaffirming that she wasn't trying to set anyone up.

"I didn't do it. I never thought of doing it, and I won't do it."

Hearing this, the young girl pursed her lips, then looked down at her feet, nodding as if feeling guilty for misunderstanding the situation.

"He did this before. I should've remembered."

"Really?"

"Yeah... the last time we broke up, he tried to take me to see his dad."

Understanding Best's plan to use adults to create pressure on Salee, Veetara murmured in realization.

She didn't know why Best was so fixated on Salee and wouldn't try to understand his ex-girlfriend's status either. She only knew that his actions caused trouble for everyone in the office, especially Salee, who must've felt uncomfortable being harassed by her ex.

This meant Veetara herself would also be troubled, both as the sister of the troublemaker, as the boss, and as... (left to be understood). Veetara then promised not to let this happen again.

"I'll handle it,"

She said, gently ruffling the other's head. "Okay?"

"Yes."

"Good, so those people will stop worrying and guessing what's wrong with you."

"Which people?"

"The ones in the office."

"And does that include the people in the private office?"

Veetara suppressed a smile, not showing more than a slight shrug as she answered evasively.

"That includes the whole fourth floor."

This made the girl grin widely, her previous gloominess replaced with joy.

"Geez, I should've let them worry longer." "Knock it off,"

Veetara raised her hand, wanting to flick Salee's forehead, but this time, Salee didn't dodge. Instead, she stood still as if waiting for her to do so. Veetara then withdrew her hand, refusing to go along, causing Salee to wrinkle her nose in displeasure before tiptoeing closer to scrutinize her up close.

"You keep asking me, but what about you, Khun Jae? What's wrong?" "Nothing,"

Veetara denied calmly. "Nothing's wrong."

"Are you sure?" Salee pressed. "Sure."

"Then why are you acting tough?"

Veetara pursed her lips, not realizing when the other had moved so close. "Tough? I'm just fine."

Salee didn't seem convinced, as she must've noticed the changes in her too. Veetara then diverted the situation by locking the other's neck and squeezing her red cheeks hard out of a mix of affection and annoyance.

Salee responded by hugging her waist again, this time trying to lift her off the ground with some unknown strength, making it seem like she wanted to slam her to the elevator floor like a wrestler. Veetara inadvertently shouted in a high-pitched voice out of fear when her body seemed to lift off the ground.

"Let go of me!"

"You let go of me first!"

Both held their ground, neither letting go, pulling each other like elementary kids fighting over the last snack in the co-op. Until the 'ding' sound followed by the 'whoosh' of the elevator doors opening slowly, the chaotic scene turned awkward in a split second when at least five people stood outside the elevator.

Everyone's mouths were slightly open, staring at Veetara and Salee. ". "

"....."

The doors closed automatically when no one moved. Then Veetara and Salee quickly separated to opposite corners.

Veetara coughed for no reason.

Salee started singing a song that probably didn't exist.

When the elevator doors opened again, Veetara saw that the group outside was in a similar state. Some pretended to argue loudly on the phone, some pretended to read teaching materials, and some turned to each other, nodding as if discussing something important. Then, as if on cue (?), they turned to look at her and Salee again, exclaiming in surprise

"Oh, Jae Vee."

"Hello, Jae."

"Thought you went home already."

"We were just about to leave. Goodbye" ". "

Veetara said nothing, just nodded along as everyone pretended not to see anything. She walked out of the elevator with Salee, who was still singing

(which she later found out was a Digimon theme song sung incorrectly). Then the group, led by Karn from accounting, rushed into the elevator, smiling at them while pressing the close button repeatedly as if eager to leave the area.

Leaving just Veetara and Salee standing quietly in front of the office door. ". "

"...."

"It's your fault, Khun Jae!"

Salee broke the silence after what felt like an eternity. "No, It's because of you!"

Veetara stepped closer, itching to give the other a good smack. But this time, Salee dodged like Keanu Reeves in The Matrix. Veetara had to give up within seconds, knowing she couldn't catch the girl no matter how hard she tried.

She stood with her hands on her hips, watching Salee dash into the office to grab her things, then run out and disappear down the stairs to avoid her, still standing guard by the elevator.

Veetara sighed, frustrated with herself.

Kinny's plan to deal with the girl hadn't gone as well as she'd hoped. But before she had to sit down and rack her brain over this mess again, she decided to handle her troublesome younger brother.

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She went home to confront him and gave him an ultimatum, "Don't use my name recklessly again."

Leaving the young man speechless for a moment.

"How did you know I used your name?"

Veetara didn't answer because she didn't want Best to know (at least not yet) that something was going on between her and Salee.

It was too awkward. More importantly, the young man would never understand that his 'ex-girlfriend' from a year ago had the right to start a new relationship with anyone, even his own sibling.

And that's not even considering the fact that Veetara was a woman.

Veetara wasn't ready to deal with this headache. Just handling Salee alone was exhausting enough, not to mention the unfinished business expansion plans. So if drama erupted because Best couldn't handle her relationship with Salee, she hoped things would settle down a bit before dealing with it.

Otherwise, Veetara might just lose her mind. "Khun jae, I brought this week's teaching report,"

A chirpy voice snapped her out of her thoughts. Veetara looked up at Salee and frowned, noticing she seemed much taller.

*What did she do this time?*

She thought with a mix of amusement and irritation. Standing up and leaning over her desk to look at Salee's feet, she saw that Salee was wearing sneakers with soles as thick as the Baiyoke Tower, and she'd even brought a red laundry stool from home to stand on.

"My latest gadget,"

Salee proudly presented, making Veetara want to laugh out loud. "Do you really want to be tall that much?"

"Height gives people authority, right?" Salee said with a smile.

"Now we're the same height. You can't use that authority with me anymore."

Veetara hid a smile, seeing an opportunity. She walked around to lock the door before returning to the short stool where Salee stood.

Salee grew nervous, unable to guess what Veetara was thinking. She started to get off the stool but was too slow for Veetara's naturally long legs.

Veetara reached her, causing Salee to lose her balance and sit down hard on the edge of her desk.

"By the way, last time I helped you deal with Best, I didn't get anything in return,"

Veetara said,

"K-Khun Jae, wait... wait a minute."

## "What were you going to pay me with? Two boobs squeezes, right?"

Veetara looked down at the second button of Salee's shirt, placing her hands on the desk to prevent Little Trouble from escaping

"I was joking!"

"How can you joke about that?" Veetara suppressed a smile.

"This isn't a game. You might harm the company's reputation." "Wait!"

Salee protested softly, worried that the curious colleagues who'd been eyeing them lately would gather outside the office door to eavesdrop.

"The company has nothing to do with this!"

Veetara ignored her, saying,

"Just pay up. It probably feels like when high school girls chase each other around, grabbing each other's chests."

"Khun Jae!"

Salee exclaimed, feeling utterly defeated.

Salee sat with her shoulders hunched, her neck retracted, and she leaned back, making Veetara feel satisfied that the girl had left such a golden opportunity open.

Veetara smiled.

After being taken advantage of for so long, getting a little payback from Salee today was better than nothing, right?

# Chapter 08

Every woman had breasts.

Of course, not everyone had the same size, but breasts comprised about four to five percent of the body's total fat. Veetara never thought that another woman's breasts would feel so different from her own until things reached a certain point.

The point where she'd reclaim everything (except for her countless stationery items) by grabbing the bust of the younger woman. Veetara was both amazed and embarrassed for a while before other feelings followed, led by the satisfaction of the soft, full sensation in her hands.

Veetara felt like her eyes had been opened.

She immediately understood why someone might be fond of women's breasts. *'Ah, so this is what it's like',* was what she thought.

Veetara placed both hands over the rounded shape hidden under Salee's shirt, causing the girl's face to turn bright red. They both fell into a silent trance until Salee cried out loudly because she'd leaned back so far to avoid Veetara that she almost lay flat on the table, getting poked in the back by the pens in the pen holder Veetara had to let go of both breasts and help the younger woman sit up straight again.

"Khun Jae!"

The mischievous girl pushed Veetara's shoulder before quickly crossing her arms over her chest to protect herself with a grumpy face.

Veetara raised a finger to her lips, signaling for her to lower her voice. By now, the office staff outside were probably pressed against the door and

walls like geckos, having heard the loud "Ouch!"

"I'm going to give the Women's and Children's Rights Foundation a ring!"

Salee, unable to do anything, threatened to report to anyone she could think of.

Veetara smiled and leaned closer, enjoying the feeling of having the upper hand.

"You're going to report me?" "Yes."

"And mutual consent is a big enough issue to report?"

Salee pursed her lips, then uncrossed her arms to cover her face instead, continuing to make excuses.

"I didn't consent. I resisted with all my might but couldn't fight off your force, Khun Jae!"

Veetara placed both hands on the edge of the table, stifling her laughter until her body shook.

*Resisted with all your might? More like just for show.*

"That's enough. Go back to work,"

The older woman cut off the conversation, making the younger one pout even more.

"Then, you have to step back."

Veetara didn't do so, letting Salee think hard about how to escape the 176- centimeter wall plus two-inch heels. Realizing that her usual tricks wouldn't work, Salee switched to sweet-talking to cover up her defeat.

"Please let me go back to work," Salee pleaded.

"If I'm late for class and the students talk about it, it could damage the institution's reputation."

Veetara smiled.

"How many more classes do you have?" "Two, and they're both difficult."

"What topics?"

"W-Well... Indirect speech." "Hmm,"

Veetara hummed but still didn't step back. She leaned closer until Salee raised her hands to shield her face again. Only then did Veetara stop.

"That's too close." "Too close?"

She mumbled against Salee's hands, then added, making the younger woman lower her head even more

"This is as close as when you come to bother me." "Well, at that time, I..."

Salee stopped mid-sentence, but Veetara guessed she was about to say, *'I was the one approaching you, not sitting here being harassed like this',* making her stifle her laughter, unsure whether to pity or mock her.

"What about now?"

"I don't know anymore!" "And now?"

## "I'm going to die!"

"What's going to kill you this time?"

## "A heart attack!"

Salee said, leaning back and closing her eyes tightly again. Veetara, feeling both exasperated and amused, finally stepped back, letting the 'heart attack' victim escape to the door.

Salee turned to glare at her with a face as red as a ripe tomato, making Veetara pretend to step forward, causing the girl to hurriedly open the door and bump into someone, creating a loud commotion for several minutes.

Veetara shook her head as she returned to her work with a smile on her lips.

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Kinny had returned from America after handling business for Veetara, giving her the chance to shine solo for the first time. With the language institute's business stabilizing, it was time to expand and keep up with the social media-driven world. Otherwise, if they kept teaching only in classrooms, they feared the institute would be outpaced by quicker-adapting competitors.

The expansion plan had three main points: (1) Create educational content online to promote the institute, (2) Offer online classes, both live and recorded, for students who couldn't come to the institute after school or those who worked and couldn't travel, and (3) Collaborate with schools abroad (teaching Thai to foreigners), with their institute acting as a coordinator for students wanting to study summer courses there, including teacher exchange programs.

Kinny and Veetara hadn't decided who to send yet, but the foreign school had already selected their tutor and was ready to send them as soon as they were ready.

"I want everyone to be involved."

Veetara said in her office after summarizing the report.

"We'll start by announcing the details. Anyone interested in the exchange program can submit their portfolio. We'll set a presentation date for everyone to watch and submit their comments You and I will make the final decision."

Kinny nodded and implemented Veetara's plan. After several days, she noticed a change in the office atmosphere. It wasn't much, but for someone familiar with the place, it was noticeable.

She wasn't sure why everyone seemed overly polite and curious. so she asked Onanong, the office gossip, and found out,

"It's because of the rumors about Little Precious Salee." "Rumors?"

Kinny frowned.

"What's this new name about?"

"Oh, you've been back for days and still don't know?" "Know what? Just spill it."

"Well,"

Onanong began, clearing her throat before continuing with a serious expression. The 'rumor' started one evening after the last class ended. It was said that about five or six staff members (names not disclosed) saw a strange sight while waiting for the elevator to go home.

"Everyone said they saw Jae Vee and Salee doing it in the elevator!" Kinny's eyes widened.

"What?!"

Everyone stopped what they were doing to look, so Kinny waved them off. "Go on, get back to work. What did you say? Doing it in the elevator?"

"Yes, you heard right. Everyone saw it, but when the elevator doors closed and opened again, they were standing in opposite corners!"

Onanong continued with an excited and fearful tone as if telling a ghost story.

"What's scarier is that Jae Vee was coughing non-stop like she was seriously ill, and Salee was singing something like a chant!"

"...."

"...."

"When the rumor spread, everyone started noticing the odd behavior." "Odd behavior?"

"Yes, they seemed to have switched roles," Onanong gestured.

"Salee avoided Jae Vee while Jae Vee clung to Salee like she was under a love spell!"

So now everyone believed Veetara was under Salee's love spell. Recently, there was another incident with a loud 'Ouch' in Veetara's office the day before Kinny returned, scaring everyone.

They were so curious and respectful that they changed Salee's nickname from *'Little Trouble Salee'* to *'Little Precious Salee',* 'fearing they might offend the new queen of the area.

"Now that you know, keep it to yourself, Jae Kinny. Don't tell anyone I told you!"

*You gossip girl!*

*The whole office believes in the supernatural powers of that Little Trouble because of you!*

Kinny thought to herself before deciding to confront the source directly to find out what was really going on. She believed there had to be some truth in Onanong's story; otherwise, how could the entire office be brainwashed if the rumors were baseless? It turned out this mischievous girl had blown things out of proportion by playing along.

"I took a Japanese cartoon song and turned it into a love spell to give to P'On and the others."

*What?*

"And they believed it just like that?"

Salee nodded earnestly, explaining with an innocent face that the spell was just a simple gamble. If someone used it and felt it worked, everyone would start believing it. But if it didn't, the rumor would die down and be seen as just another prank of Salee.

"Luckily, someone in P'On's gang used it on a guy who already liked her, so it seemed like my spell worked,"

Salee grinned widely, leaving Kinny unsure whether to praise or scold her for being clever in such a nonsensical matter. In the end, Kinny could only grumble internally and probe for more information.

"And what about the elevator incident? Tell me everything."

This time, the person being questioned turned from smiling to frowning in a split second. Kinny had to coax and encourage,

"Come on, tell me. Maybe I can help,"

Confident that the other person was troubled by something.

Initially, Kinny hadn't realized that the cause was her own advice to Veetara until the girl confessed,

## "Jae Vee suddenly became super bold and aggressive, and I couldn't keep up!"

Kinny almost burst out laughing but managed to hold it in. Otherwise, Salee would've known that she was an accomplice in this grand scheme.

Salee then briefly recounted how they resolved some issues about Best in the elevator before Veetara started acting strangely, leading to a situation where her friend and the mischievous girl ended up 'doing it'. However, it wasn't the Fifty Shades of Grey kind of 'doing it' that Onanong exaggerated but rather a childish scuffle between two women who, despite being adults, had the minds of elementary school kids.

"And the other day..."

Salee mumbled, hesitating and blushing for long before finally admitting, "Jae Vee grabbed my boobs."

Kinny blinked, unsure if she'd heard wrong or if the girl was just babbling nonsense.

"Se grabbed your boobs?"

The girl nodded shyly, then switched to a pouty face, shaking Kinny's arm. "Jae Kinny, you have to help me! You promised!"

*Wait, what?*

"When did I even promise you that?" "Just now."

"I didn't say anything." "But I heard it!"

Kinny rolled her eyes, knowing well how good the girl was at playing innocent. In the end, she had to think positively that helping someone in distress was a good deed.

More importantly, Kinny couldn't deny that being involved in Salee and Veetara's situation was quite entertaining and gave her a sense of satisfaction in playing cupid for her friend, who suddenly wanted to date a younger girl at almost thirty.

"Fine, I'll help,"

Kinny said, pulling her arm away in annoyance before whispering, "But you can't tell Vee that I secretly guided you, got it?"

"Got it,"

The girl nodded eagerly, while Kinny felt like a double agent selling secrets from one person to another.

*This is exciting and challenging, but if I get caught, it'll be the bad end.*

"Here's the thing,"

Kinny cleared her throat to get Salee's attention.

"Vee has a period each month when she's particularly emotional." The girl raised an eyebrow.

"Emotional?"

"Yeah, during that time, she's bipolar. Sometimes she's nice, sometimes she's mean. When she's mean, she's very aggressive, but when she's nice, she's really, really nice. Sometimes she's like a tame chick, easy to talk to,"

Kinny explained in a storytelling tone. Seeing the hopeful look on Salee's face, Kinny hid a smile and continued,

"You should approach her during this time because she'll be less confident than usual."

Salee smiled widely but then paused, thinking of a question. "But how will I know which days are good and which are bad?" "Take a gamble. Don't you like that kind of thing?"

"Oh, Jae Kinny!"

The girl whined when Kinny teased her. Then she started asking more questions, like a clueless puppy seeing food for the first time.

"Why does my beautiful Jae get emotional for a few days each month?"

*Sigh...*

"Think for yourself why Vee would be emotional for a few days each month."

"Is it a mourning period for her dead pet or something?" "Of course not!"

Kinny put her hands on her hips, but internally, she couldn't help but analyze that this girl might be so carefree all month that she didn't even notice her own body's cycles.

Even though she wasn't a real woman, Kinny knew that females had to deal with certain things every month.

"How could you not know?"

"I'm not Nostradamus," the girl pouted. "Nostradamus wouldn't know this either!" Kinny whispered in a harsh tone.

"Because it involves a uterus, which men don't have!" ". "

"...."

"Is my Khun Jae. suffering from a uterine disease?"

Salee's face turned pale, forcing Kinny to scream the truth to snap her out of her cluelessness.

## "It's the time before her period, you idiot!"

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Salee received valuable help from Jae Kinny but couldn't immediately use the information because she didn't know when Veetara's troublesome period would come. So, the girl had to find out exactly when her last month's period was, which wasn't easy to pry as it was a personal matter.

If caught, Veetara would surely crush Salee to pieces.

Therefore, Salee spent all her free time analyzing and figuring out her own approach for several days while avoiding Veetara, who now liked to hover around Salee's workspace and classroom. Normally, Veetara would stay on the fourth floor. This made the girl anxious and fearing another confrontation. She stuck with her group, not wanting to be alone, so Veetara would hold back and not give her strange looks too openly.

Even though Salee both liked and disliked Veetara's new behavior.

Maybe because Salee was an ordinary human with conflicting feelings, part of her feared the new, bold Veetara, while another part couldn't deny being thrilled by Veetara's new, spicy demeanor.

But too much of anything wasn't good for her health.

People her age could still have sudden heart attacks, after all. So, Salee was even more determined to find Veetara's menstrual cycle.

She started by listing three things to observe, based on common female experiences with that time of the month: (1) frequency of bathroom visits,

(2) carrying suspicious items likely to be sanitary pads, especially the highly absorbent winged ones for heavy flow days, and (3) a calendar for tracking periods. These were the facts that Salee had just realized after Kinny scolded her for being an idiot at that time.

Salee spent months observing because this mission couldn't be rushed. Fortunately, after Kinny returned, her beautiful one seemed even busier with business matters, leaving her less time to chase Salee seriously. She only hovered around occasionally, giving Salee ample opportunity to do the mission. Finally, Salee discovered Veetara's bathroom patterns.

Veetara did almost the same thing every day: she went to the bathroom twice in the morning and once or twice in the afternoon. This was probably because she liked to sip water, tea, and coffee while sitting at her desk, which made her need to go to the bathroom often.

This meant Salee could never know if Jae was going to the bathroom because of the annoying P.M.S. or because she drank too much water. Unless, of course, she went more often than usual or carried a small bag for her sanitary pads that Salee could notice.

Salee hoped she'd be lucky.

Especially with her plan to sneak into Veetara's office after hearing that she had to meet someone from abroad with Kinny in the afternoon and wouldn't

be back at the office. This gave Salee a perfect opportunity to execute her plan.

The young girl believed that the calendar on the desk might hold the answer to the mysterious case that had been bothering her for months.

As everyone knew, Veetara was incredibly low-tech. She preferred jotting notes with a pen on paper rather than typing them into her phone. This was evident from the neatly arranged Post-it notes around the computer screen, in notebooks, and on documents returned to her for corrections.

So, it was likely that she'd also written down her menstrual cycle. Besides, Veetara was a health-conscious woman who'd surely keep track of her periods for thoroughness.

*Right?*

But to get into the fortress when the queen was away, Salee needed a key, of which there were only two in the office: one with the fortress owner and the other with Aunty Oun.

Aunty Oun was responsible for cleaning Veetara's office as per her instructions. Most of the time, Veetara would handle the dust herself, only asking Aunty Oun for help when she was really busy.

Salee, pretending to be a messenger, approached Aunty Oun with a bright smile,

"Aunty, Jae Vee asked if you could clean her office this evening."

Aunty Oun agreed as if programmed to believe that 'dust is my enemy'! Salee then added,

"Please don't lock the room after cleaning, Aunty. I need to organize some teaching reports as per Khun Jae's instructions, and I'll lock up afterward."

Aunty Oun hesitated slightly, worried that Salee might mess up the room and get her into trouble. Salee reassured her, insisting it was Veetara's order

(while silently apologizing for lying) and promising to leave everything neat and tidy. Finally, Aunty Oun nodded.

Salee felt a triumphant smile forming inside her. She waited until most of the staff had left for home, then stood up, stretched, and turned to see Aof, who seemed quieter these days, perhaps accepting that she wasn't interested in his advances.

She waved goodbye to Aof when he said, "I'm heading out."

He looked like he wanted to say more but decided against it, leaving her alone in the quiet office with Veetara's mysterious room.

Salee peeked to ensure Aof and the others were really gone before sneaking into the fortress of her beautiful lady, who was probably home by now, showering and having dinner.

She surveyed the room without turning on any lights, relying on the glow from the sign on the building across the street.

This was her first chance to examine the items in this room closely. Usually, suppose she wasn't delivering a report. In that case, she'd come in just to annoy Veetara, leaving no time to notice the details around the desk.

Even on the days she hid from Best, she was too distracted to do anything. Now, standing in the space where Veetara spent most of her time, undisturbed, Salee couldn't help but smile. Every inch of this room reminded her of Veetara and matched her Khun Jae perfectly.

The room, about ten square meters, was decorated in white. It gave a spacious and airy feel. The large glass window behind the desk chair made the room seem even bigger, especially when the blinds were fully raised.

To the left of the desk was a beige sofa that could seat three, with a low glass table for placing items or tea and coffee cups. Opposite the sofa was a bookshelf filled with dictionaries from various publishers, including

English-English, Thai-Thai, Thai-English, and English-Thai, which any tutor could borrow for teaching.

The shelf also held many document files and a few small abstract sculptures for decoration.

Salee leisurely examined the items on the shelf, confident she had plenty of time. However, she didn't touch anything beyond her mission. When she was satisfied looking there, she moved to Veetara's desk, standing beside the swivel chair to the view Veetara saw every day: the sofa on the left, the bookshelf on the right, and the door leading to the main office area.

Salee glanced over the desk she was familiar with (having often stolen pens from it) and found everything in its usual place: the computer monitor and keyboard at the same angle, the metal pen holder that had poked her before, the desk calendar, and the direct phone line to the reception downstairs.

Salee smiled, appreciating Veetara's neatness, which showed her orderly and responsible nature, even in small matters. It was no surprise that Veetara was successful in life and work before turning thirty.

After silently praising Veetara, Salee leaned in to check the calendar, seeing that Veetara had indeed written notes in her handwriting. For this month, there was only one marked date: today, when Veetara had to meet someone with Kinny. There was no note about her period, so Salee decided to flip back to last month's calendar to find the clue.

She spotted a red asterisk and a note on July 4th saying, *'Little Trouble's birthday',* which made her pause before smiling even wider.

"Well,"

She murmured to herself,

"She even noted it on the calendar?"

## "What note?"

A voice from the sofa, in the part of the room the light didn't reach, made Salee jump.

She instinctively backed away from the desk, one hand clutching her chest, fearing her racing heart might leap out.

"K-Khun Jae?!"

"What's up?"

"When did you get here?"

Salee tried to stay calm, though her mind was screaming,

*'I'm so busted!'*

Veetara didn't seem angry about her snooping in the office. Instead, she stood up, turned on the light, and smiled teasingly at her.

"I've been here since you started sneaking around before coming in." '*Oh shit!'*

Salee thought, realizing she'd been so engrossed in the dictionaries that she hadn't noticed someone entering the room. Veetara used the darkness to her advantage, sitting comfortably on the other side of the sofa, meaning she'd seen everything Salee did in the office!

"Khun Jae!!"

Finally, the older woman laughed out loud. "Did you think you were a spy?"

"Don't tease me!"

Veetara didn't stop and teased Salee even more, making Salee fume with frustration. She was annoyed that her plan had failed before she got the

crucial information and embarrassed that Veetara had been watching her for so long.

At least she hadn't scratched her butt or picked her nose while exploring. Otherwise, this humiliation would be remembered for generations.

"I'm heading out now. Goodbye!"

Salee raised her hands in a hasty wai, but before she could walk past the person standing between the desk and the exit, Veetara spread her arms and pressed her palm against Salee's forehead, stopping her in her tracks.

"Did you think you could sneak out that easily?"

Veetara's amused smile turned into a mischievous grin, making the young girl laugh nervously.

"Well... Salee dragged out the word, trying to come up with an excuse. "I didn't see you getting mad, so I thought I was off the hook."

Veetara let out a 'hmph' from her throat before threatening, "Whether you're off the hook or not depends on your next answer." This made Salee hunch her shoulders and shrink her neck in fear. "What were you doing in here?"

"I... I came to borrow a pen,"

Salee quickly made up an excuse, closing her eyes tightly as Veetara switched from pressing her forehead to pinching her nose like an adult bullying a child.

"Yeah, right!"

Veetara pinched harder, seemingly enjoying it in a strange way. She then muttered that it was a good thing Aunty Oun had called to report this, which

made her suspicious, so she returned to the office because she hadn't been given any such instructions

"Oh, Aunty Oun!!"

Salee exclaimed in a muffled voice as Veetara still hadn't let go of her nose.

"Don't bring Aunty Oun into this. Tell me quickly, what were you doing in here?"

"I wasn't stealing anything, I swear!" Veetara smirked.

"Then why did you say you came to borrow a pen?" "Borrowing isn't stealing."

Veetara squeezed her nose even harder, making Salee yelp loudly in the office. She then let go, allowing Salee to rub her nose in pain.

"Fine, don't tell me. But if you try to explain later, I won't listen." 'Oh no'.

Salee thought. This was a threat from a reasonable adult. She knew Veetara meant what she said. So, she needed to clear things up right now about why she'd entered her private office. Otherwise, Salee would never ever get any future trust or opportunities from Veetara.

Salee looked downcast before raising her hands in a wai to apologize to Veetara for intruding and for using Aunty Oun's innocence.

"I came to look at the calendar on your desk." "The calendar?"

Veetara asked, puzzled.

"Why?" "Well..."

The young girl hesitated for several seconds before reluctantly answering without daring to look at Veetara,

"I wanted to know when you had your period last month." ". "

"D-Don't go silent on me! I'm already nervous!"

Salee finally looked up after the room was filled with an awkward silence, seeing Veetara frozen in place, her face turning red.

That's when Veetara shouted in a high-pitched voice, "What kind of inappropriate thing are you planning?!" *Inappropriate thing?*

"What inappropriate thing?" "Don't play dumb!"

The more Veetara spoke, the redder her cheeks became.

"Why would you want to know my menstrual cycle if not for !!"

"For what?" "Salee!"

"Ouch! I really don't know!"

Salee couldn't dodge Veetara's hand in time. She stood there, confused about what was so inappropriate about tracking someone's menstrual cycle. According to her plan, based on information from Kinny, if she knew when

Veetara's PMS would occur, she could take advantage and turn the situation around so that she could tease Veetara again. She didn't see how that was inappropriate.

## "You're trying to move things forward too quickly, and it's too soon for that!"

Salee made a face at Veetara, who was convinced she was playing dumb. In reality, she wasn't as naive as she seemed, but she hadn't thought of what Veetara was thinking. When she changed her approach and asked

"Then what should I do first?" Veetara froze again.

This time, it was the gorgeous one who hesitated, nervously tucking her hair behind her ear.

*She's really embarrassed now.*

Salee hid her smile, and seeing a golden opportunity, she stepped closer until their toes touched.

## "What's the first step I should take, Khun Jae?"

She asked again, looking up until Veetara's eyes dropped to her lips in close proximity.

The younger girl finally realized what the *'first step'* she shouldn't skip...

# Chapter 09

"I'm not ready."

Salee spoke up, looking shy as if she already knew what Veetara was thinking.

"My lips aren't in good shape. Sometimes, they get dry and flaky."

This made Veetara blush even more, unsure how their conversation had ended up here. Their relationship wasn't at a level where they could freely discuss such intimate matters as if they'd already agreed on everything.

*This girl...*

*She sure knows how to push buttons!*

"You're talking nonsense!"

Veetara dismissed her with a flushed face, then pretended to end the conversation by pushing Salee away.

"Go home already."

"Hmm, how should I get home? It's dark now, and the buses are probably crowded. My usual motorcycle taxi driver is off taking care of his pregnant wife. It'd be nice if a beautiful woman could drive me home."

Salee teased, making Veetara frown. She pinched Salee's waist a couple of times.

"Why beat around the bush? Just ask me to take you home." "Could you please take me home?"

Salee repeated obediently, making Veetara feel a bit better. But within two seconds, she was back to her teasing self.

"By the way, I'm not beating, but dancing around the bush!" Making Veetara shout.

## "Salee!"

The girl laughed, her eyes sparkling, as she dodged Veetara's attempts to pinch her. Then she took the opportunity to grab Veetara's hand, her mischievous demeanor returning after throwing Veetara off balance with the earlier 'step."

Veetara turned her face away, unsure how to handle Salee's smiling face. She knew this time Salee wasn't trying to mock or tease her into a fit of rage. It was the same sweet smile she'd seen during the friendly sports competition. Seeing it up close now made Veetara's heart race. She cleared her throat and said briefly,

"Let's go."

Before tightening her grip on Salee's hand, which had been playfully groping hers for a while now, and leading her out of the office to the elevator, heading to her beloved Civic in the parking lot.

"I'm hungry."

Salee said as Veetara drove out of the alley onto the main road. This time, Veetara nodded as she was just as hungry. After meeting with the foreign tutor who'd just arrived in Thailand, Veetara had gone straight back to the office without stopping for a meal as planned.

"What do you want to eat?"

"Hot pot."

"Okay."

Veetara agreed without objection since it was a healthy vegetable soup with low fat, which she liked. She asked which restaurant Salee wanted to go to, but Salee couldn't decide, possibly because they'd already passed the major shopping malls. Salee didn't want to go back to the crowded area. So Veetara suggested.

"How about we make it ourselves?"

The younger girl looked at her, raising an eyebrow slightly. "Where?"

"Do you have a place to make a hot pot at your house? If so, we can make it there."

Veetara replied while looking in front. When she glanced back, Salee was fidgeting with her hands, making Veetara's heart, which she'd suppressed, race again. She tried to cover it up by asking sharply.

"What nonsense are you thinking about?!" "Nothing, really."

Salee denied innocently. But when. Veetara reached over and pinched her, Salee quickly confesse.

"Well, it's just that having a charming person like you come to my room is a bit nerve- wracking."

*What do you mean?!*

*You're talking like I'm going to do anything bad there!*

Veetara frowned but didn't prolong the conversation. Instead, she asked.

"So, can we make it at your house?" To which Salee nodded.

"Yes, but it's a bit messy."

"That's fine. I don't expect your house to be spotless like a proper lady." The girl paused for a moment before protesting.

"Hey!" after Veetara's little revenge jab.

Veetara hid a smile and focused on finding a place to buy the ingredients. She remembered a small supermarket along the way to Salee's house. She slowed down and changed lanes to the left. Soon, they arrived, and Salee, who'd been complaining about hunger, beamed with joy at the sight of their potential dinner.

They got out of the car, each grabbing a basket from the stack by the automatic sliding door. Veetara picked various fresh vegetables like Napa Cabbage, Chinese Morning Glory, cabbage, pumpkin, carrots, daikon, and various mushrooms. Meanwhile, Salee headed straight for the meats, especially the fatty sliced pork and bacon she loved. Veetara had to remind her to get some seafood too, so Salee grabbed some squid and shrimp.

"Which dipping sauce do you like?"

Salee asked as they entered the sauce and seasoning aisle.

"There's pink fermented bean sauce, Cantonese sauce, and seafood sauce." "Which one do you like?"

"I like them all."

"Then let's get them all."

They ended up with two large bags of ingredients. When Veetara offered to pay for the meal, Salee quickly stopped her and told her to put her credit

card away. "I'll pay."

Salee said, swiftly handing her card to the cashier. When Veetara protested that they could split the bill, Salee used the excuse.

"I want the reward points."

The older woman smiled secretly, impressed by Salee's quick thinking. She knew how to make Veetara back down on money matters, understanding that if they kept arguing out of politeness or repayment for past favors, they'd still be standing there with empty stomachs, arguing at the cashier. It was better to end it by saying she wanted the reward points.

*Well, this girl really knows how to handle the situation.*

"Can I park inside?"

Veetara asked as they approached the entrance to Salee's alley. "Yes."

Salee nodded, reminding her that it might be tricky to turn around because the alley was narrow. Veetara didn't mind and turned left into the alley.

When Salee pointed out the spot, she parked her beloved Civic in front of the white gate on the right.

Veetara turned off the engine and got out with the bags of vegetables while Salee carried the dipping sauces and meats. She unlocked the gate, which was as tall as herself, for Veetara.

Veetara didn't follow her in immediately. She wanted to take a moment to survey the surroundings. The buildings were old two-story townhouses, each with four units, likely older than herself. Each building faced each other with a public road in between, stretching the length of the alley. The houses and gates looked similarly old, making it hard to distinguish in the dark, except for Salee's house, which was newly painted white and combined two units, making it the most noticeable.

Veetara stood there, lost in thought, reminiscing about her childhood home. It was a townhouse like this.

Back then, her parents were still in love, even though they often argued. They seemed to find a way to resolve everything with her as the bond. But after her mother gave birth to Best, business problems with their new printing company caused tension at home. Her father became irritable, and her mother was short-tempered. Veetara remembered sitting cross-legged on a chair, listening to them argue at the dinner table while covering her little brother's ears as he munched on fried pork.

She wasn't sure how flexible the Thai language could be, but her parents seemed to find endless ways to hurl vicious words at each other every day. What started as financial problems eventually escalated to issues involving her father's relatives, who took turns criticizing her family and giving unsolicited advice as if they were experts in solving world problems.

Veetara vividly remembered someone suggesting they cut 'unnecessary' expenses by stopping her tuition payments and focusing on Best instead because at least he was a boy who could carry on the family name.

Meanwhile, a daughter like her was deemed useless except for fetching a dowry from a future son- in-law (according to the so-called expert relatives at the time). That was the final straw for her mother.

Veetara never liked her mother's blunt and harsh nature, but she loved her mother, and her mother loved both her and Best equally. However, that incident forced her mother to choose her because she was confident that Best would be well taken care of by the father's expert relatives. Her mother stood up and pointed fingers at everyone who dared to stick their nose (her mother used that exact phrase) into her educational matters.

Normally, her mother would stay silent, listening without saying a word to outsiders, and if there was a fight, it'd only be with her father. But that day, her mother had enough and called each relative out, leaving them embarrassed. She then turned to her father and ended with,

"I want a divorce!"

Before she knew it, Veetara found herself living with her mother at her grandparent's house.

This was the first time she'd stepped into the two-story townhouse since her parents separated.

## Woof!

The young woman jumped at the sound of a non-human greeting. Two seconds later, she realized it wasn't a greeting but a bark at a stranger.

"Stop barking, Go!"

Salee quickly left the inner door and came to Veetara, facing an old, loud- mouthed dog with erect ears and a ridgeback. Despite its age, it barked as loudly as if it had a megaphone.

"Never seen a pretty girl before!? Go away!"

The petite girl shouted, then hurriedly pushed Veetara inside the house before turning back to deal with the other two neighborhood dogs that had joined in, using food to quiet them.

Veetara remembered Salee's descriptions, so she guessed the one sniffing behind the leader was named Kek-huay, followed by Long, while Tuk-tuk was probably too busy to join in the fun. Salee sacrificed only three pieces of fresh chicken to keep the gang of four-legged friends from barking at Veetara, a stranger, any further.

"Shoo!"

The girl waved her hand, and Go trotted away with the chicken, ignoring the scolding voice behind. This made Veetara smile, but she quickly composed herself before the homeowner turned back. She removed her high heels and walked inside after the dog encounter ended peacefully.

## "Hey, kid!"

This time, a greeting came from across the street, likely from a familiar uncle. Salee responded politely, raising her hands in a respectful wai until the uncle shouted,

## "You bringing your boyfriend home?"

Making Veetara nearly fall over a misplaced fan cord.

She didn't hear Salee's response, but within ten seconds, Salee closed the gate and followed her inside, raising an eyebrow at her frozen stance.

"Is my messy house that shocking?" "Well... not exactly."

Veetara replied, unsure how to explain that uncle's question was so loud that all the people in this alley could hear him.

"Sit and wait, I'll get the pot and bowls." "I'll help."

Veetara offered, not wanting to sit idly and also to explore Salee's home. Despite Salee's claim of messiness, everything seemed orderly and clean (except for the misplaced fan). The rooms were spotless.

Starting with the first area, there was a dark sofa in the middle. an all- purpose shelf opposite it with a flat-screen TV and signal box, and a table with two chairs for dining behind the sofa that was against the wall. Further in, a glass cabinet and bookshelf were on the left, while the right had a hallway leading to the kitchen at the back. The first-floor bathroom was under the stairs.

"Do you live alone?"

Veetara asked while washing the vegetables in the sink. Salee, preparing soup at the stove, nodded.

"Yes, alone. My parents have left."

"Left!?"

Veetara repeated in shock, unsure of the meaning, Salee laughed and explained.

"I mean, they've left Bangkok."

Salee explained that her parents were from the other province and had moved to the city for work when they were young. After saving enough, they settled here, running a small food business to support their daughter through college. A few years ago, they decided to return to their hometown permanently because (1) their mission to educate their daughter was complete, (2) Bangkok was a stressful city for those who grew up in nature, and (3) their parents were aging, and they wanted to care for them closely before it was too late.

"At first, they asked me to go with them." "Did you want to go?"

Veetara asked, still focused on the large bunch of morning glory she'd just taken out of the bag.

"I did."

Salee admitted that she didn't like Bangkok as much. The place seemed unfriendly to some people's mental health.

"But you're still here?"

This time, Veetara raised an eyebrow at Salee, who was smiling.

"Because I got a job before they asked, so I couldn't go. I visit them once a month to ease the homesickness."

Veetara felt a strange pang, imagining if Salee ever left Bangkok for good, her office would feel desolate.

*And I would*

"The soup's ready,"

Salee announced before Veetara could think further. She hurriedly washed the morning glory, cut it into bite-sized pieces, and arranged it on a plate with the Napa cabbage, roughly chopped cabbage, and carrot slices. The daikon had already been added to the soup pot.

Veetara carried the plates of vegetables and meat out of the kitchen while Salee brought down a Japanese table from the second floor to set up the electric stove and a two-liter hot pot. They agreed that sitting on the floor would be more comfortable than using the small glass table behind the sofa Soon, Veetara realized she hadn't eaten this much in a long time. Despite feeling full from the vegetables and seafood within the first fifteen minutes, she kept eating while listening to Salee's lively chatter, switching topics like a parrot.

What she initially thought would leave a lot of leftovers turned out to be just a few pieces of pork and chicken. Both of them ended up with 'food babies.'

Salee leaned back, one hand on the floor, the other rubbing her stomach. "I'm so full,"

She groaned, and Veetara couldn't argue, having eaten just as much. "I'll do the dishes."

"Oh, no need. I'll do it. You just rest and digest, or you won't be able to drive back."

Salee insisted. Veetara didn't argue, not wanting to make her host uncomfortable. She sat back against the sofa as Salee suggested, and about fifteen minutes later, Salee returned from the kitchen after cleaning the dishes and hot pot.

Salee sat down beside her and started asking questions only she'd ask.

## "Do beautiful people like yourself burp like normal folks?"

"...."

Veetara frowned at the cheeky brat, feeling the urge to pinch Salee until she turned blue.

*No, better pinch her until her skin peeled off!*

"What kind of question is that?!" "Well, I'm curious,"

Salee said, rubbing her belly again.

"I feel so bloated. I burped a lot while washing the dishes earlier, but I never heard you burp, Khun Jae."

"Who would sit around burping for others to hear?!" Veetara smacked Salee's thigh with a loud slap. "Didn't you sneak off to the kitchen to burp yourself?" "Sneak? It just happened to come up at that moment."

Veetara sighed. In this whole wide world, it seerned only this Little Trouble could bring up such an embarrassing topic out of the blue as if they'd run out of normal topics to talk about today.

Veetara scowled but eventually answered that she was human too. She burped and farted like everyone else. Most people had an image to maintain and wouldn't do such things in front of others to avoid gossip.

"Not even with Jae Kinny?" "Never."

Hearing that, Salee fell silent for a moment before stringing together a sentence that left Veetara unsure whether to laugh or cry.

"Khun Jae, you don't have to be like that with me. Even if you burp loudly or fart, I'll still love you."

Veetara burst into laughter, then quickly snapped when Salee laughed along. "Stop laughing!"

She elbowed Salee's side, making her yelp dramatically. Then Veetara stood up, ready to head home, thinking that the conversation would only get more nonsensical if they kept talking. Salee offered to walk her out and stood by encouragingly as Veetara took a minute to back her car out. Once she succeeded, Salee clung to the window.

Veetara rolled down the driver's side window to say goodbye "Drive safely."

"Yeah,"

Veetara nodded, but before she could take her foot off the brake, she rummaged through her bag on the back seat.

"Take this,"

Veetara handed something to Salee without looking at her. "What's this?"

"Lip balm." ". "

## "You said your lips are chapped, right? This one is good. Apply it morning and night, and they'll heal."

Salee stood there, stunned, while Veetara felt both embarrassed and reluctant to admit she'd reached a point of desperation to offer such a blatant gesture.

"Alright, I'm off."

Veetara cut the conversation short when Salee didn't even thank her for the gift. But before she could drive away, a nosy neighbor from the adjacent house called out,

"Hey, Salee, whose car is that?"

It was likely one of those aunties who wanted to know everything happening in the neighborhood and would jump to conclusions without waiting for answers.

## "Must be your boyfriend!"

Veetara choked on her saliva, unsure if the aunty didn't see her in the car because it was late or if she was just hoping Salee had brought a man home, which could be a gossip topic.

Salee grinned, a smile that made Veetara realize Salee's mischievous nature wasn't confined to the office but could happen anywhere, anytime, even with the nosy neighbor.

## "Yes, Aunty."

". "

"It's my boyfriend's car." ". "

*Salee, you little devil!!!*

## "Give me back the lip balm!"

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Two hours earlier, Veetara had demanded the lip balm back, but Salee refused, claiming she had a right to it as if she'd paid for it herself.

She ran back into the house without waiting for Veetara to ask again, then did aerobics with a YouTube clip for about half an hour to digest the hot pot meal in her stomach (she'd heard that eating late and going straight to bed could cause acid reflux, bloating, and restless sleep). After cooling down, she showered and got ready for bed as usual.

But Salee couldn't sleep.

Her nerves were still buzzing from the evening's events: being caught by Veetara in the office, talking about '*chapped lips*, shopping together, making a hot pot at her place, and ending with the free lip balm. Salee wasn't sure if she was reminiscing or dreaming because, looking back to her high school days, she never imagined that ten years later, the senior she admired and had a puppy love crush on would be within reach.

Salee lay on her side, staring at the pink round lip balm on the pillow next to her, feeling a mix of emotions. The more she replayed Veetara's words, *'Apply it morning and night, and they'll heal',* the tighter she hugged her pillow, unsure how to express her overwhelming feelings without alarming the neighbors into thinking she was being murdered. Just then, her phone buzzed under her pillow, and she picked it up, wondering who'd call at this hour. Seeing the name 'My Beautiful One' with a photo on the screen, Salee sat up cross- legged immediately.

She almost didn't answer in time, feeling flustered. "Khun Jae?"

She said awkwardly into the phone. Veetara had never called her this late before, especially not after they'd just parted less than three hours ago.

"Did you forget something? Or are you calling about the lip balm? If it's about the lip balm. I..."

"No,"

The voice on the other end cut her off, not letting her guess any further. "I just... dialed the wrong number."

*Wrong number?*

"Ohhh,"

Salee responded with a smile, playing along. "In that case, I'll hang up now."

But Veeyara quickly stopped her, saying,

**"Since I already called, we might as well talk."** Making Salee smile and fall back onto her bed. "We talked a lot earlier tonight."

"So, you don't want to talk now?" "That's not it."

Salee quickly denied, afraid Veetara would misunderstand. She fiddled with the edge of her blanket to ease her shyness.

"I just can't think of anything I haven't already bragged to you about." "There're still many things."

Veetara murmured.

"Like your school days, things not related to Best."

Salee paused for several moments, thinking Veetara had forgotten about those things. But it seemed she'd had been waiting for the right moment to ask since the time Salee avoided answering directly about what sports she

used to play. Salee wasn't sure if she should be worried about being interrogated or happy that Veetara seemed to want to know her better.

"I went to a school nearby."

Salee opened up but didn't go into detail about the school's name. Luckily, Veetara let her continue without interrupting, perhaps not wanting their first phone conversation (outside of work) to be too pressured. Veetara only responded with 'Hmm' as Salee started recounting everything from trivial matters to her grades and quirky high school antics.

"I once skipped class to look for a hamster with my friends." "A hamster?"

Veetara repeated, intrigued.

"Back then, it was trendy to have hamsters. Some even secretly brought them to school,"

Salee reminisced, explaining that one of her trend-following friends had a hamster too. But not wanting to bring a cage to school and risk getting caught by teachers or senior students on duty, she used a side bag, usually for gym clothes or thin books, lined with sawdust as a makeshift cage, keeping sunflower seeds and a water feeder separate.

Salee remembered that the first two days of bringing the hamsters, Chaba and Brownie, to school went smoothly. But on the third day, Brownie escaped during a 'Science' class taught by a female teacher nearing menopause, with frizzy hair, a tall and skinny frame like a single chopstick, and a face resembling Cruella from 101 Dalmatians.

Her name was Dueanphen (though Salee didn't share this with Veetara, believing that Veetara would immediately recall studying science classes with this very teacher). Everyone was terrified of her. Even the rowdy Red Lips gang at the back of the class, who were usually noisy, fell silent. It was unclear whether it was due to her strict and often fierce teaching style or the

rumors that she spent her after-school hours talking to the skeleton in the science building's display case.

When Brownie went missing during Dueanphen's class, her group of friends panicked, especially the owner, who was already worried that her beloved pet might be dissected or used in a ritual to bring the fake skeleton to life.

Salee had to take on the role of rescuer to find Brownie. After secretly passing notes to classmates to check under desks and on the floor, they still couldn't find the troublesome hamster.

"The group thinks Brownie might've left the classroom," Salee said.

That class wasn't held in an air-conditioned room but one with ceiling fans and both front and back doors wide open. Given the circumstances, it made sense that Brownie might've escaped.

"Now, instead of worrying that Brownie would be used in a ritual, everyone was afraid he might get trampled to death because the next period was lunch break

"

Salee paused for a moment before asking.

"Can you imagine how hungry kids waiting for lunch since eight in the morning would be?"

"Yeah" Veetara responded, "I can picture it clearly."

They hoped Brownie would be safe until the lunch bell rang. Salee and her friends discreetly sat on the floor when the teacher turned to write on the whiteboard, then crawled out the back door.

Veetara laughed at this part of the story. "So, did you find him?"

"We found the student discipline room and the student council gang instead,"

Salee said, unable to recall the senior's name from that year. After Veetara graduated, she didn't pay much attention to the student council or house presidents until she decided to follow in Veetara's footsteps.

"We hid in the bathroom and had to find a way back to class before the period ended because sometimes the teacher liked to do a random roll call again."

"Did you make it back in time?" "Just barely."

Salee laughed as she reached the end of her story.

"We eventually found Brownie. He hadn't gone far at all."

Her friend found him later that evening (after crying because she thought Brownie had been trampled to death). The gluttonous hamster had sneaked into another bag full of sunflower seeds. Skipping class that day was pointless, they almost got sent to the student discipline room.

"That's the end of tonight's story." Salee concluded.

Veetara laughed, unable to resist commenting on how Salee had always been so troublesome.

"I agree."

Salee said before falling silent when Veetara suddenly changed the subject by asking,

"Do you have plans for tomorrow?"

She couldn't guess if Veetara was just making conversation or genuinely wanted to know her plans for Saturday afternoon.

"I have to teach at the institute." Salee tested the waters.

"I mean after work."

Salee's heart raced, her face heating up as she began to understand the implied question.

"I don't have any plans."

She replied, turning to lie on her stomach, pressing her left cheek against the pillow.

"Do you have something in mind?"

Veetara was silent for a few moments before speaking again. "Do you want to go see a movie?"

She asked, quickly adding,

"But if you don't want to, that's fine. Just asking,"

In a tone that was uncharacteristically awkward, making Salee blush even more.

"Sure,"

She replied, her voice muffled by the pillow. "What do you want to watch?"

"You pick."

"The person who invites should choose."

"What if I pick a boring one?"

"That's no big deal. If it's boring, we can just walk out." "True,"

Veetara murmured, then excused herself, leaving Salee wide awake and unable to sleep all night with the parting words,

"Don't forget to apply the lip balm."

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Veetara hadn't planned to pick up Salee from her house, but she did, surprising the girl who'd just walked out of the alley. Salee didn't ask many questions, she just opened the door, sat in the passenger seat, buckled her seatbelt, and smiled the whole way, making Veetara clear her throat, feeling a bit alarmed.

"I was just passing by, so I thought I'd pick you up." Veetara explained.

The girl next to her, dressed in an oversized white T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers, nodded.

"You're just passing by my house, huh?" "Yeah,"

Veetara replied. Glancing to her left at a red light, she saw Salee still smiling to herself, which made her tense face relax automatically.

When they arrived at the institute, the younger girl asked about the possibility of people noticing they came together. Veetara usually kept her personal relationships private to avoid any unpleasant office gossip. But

now, the situation seemed unusual since everyone still believed Salee had some charm that made Veetara fall for her...

"If anyone asks, just tell them you summoned me to pick you up through your magic,"

Veetara said. ". "

"...."

"Seriously?"

Salee asked, half-believing that Veetara would use this to her advantage. Veetara nodded before getting out of the car, locking the doors, and heading to the elevator, with Salee following closely behind.

They agreed that once Salee finished her teaching duties, she'd text Veetara, who'd then prepare to leave the office. The younger girl nodded. When the elevator reached the fourth floor, Salee went to her private office, leaving Salee to face the colleagues who'd undoubtedly bombard her with questions about arriving with Veetara.

Veetara found the morning unusually long, and her body language clearly showed her anxiety. Kinny, who came in to discuss work, couldn't help but ask,

"What's got you so worked up, girl? You're pacing like a cat on a hot tin roof."

Veetara bit her lip, feeling awkward and embarrassed, but finally admitted to her friend,

"I asked Little Trouble to go to a movie this afternoon." "Oh my,"

Kinny exclaimed, eyes wide.

"And what did she say? Did she agree?" "She agreed."

"So why are you so restless?" "Because I haven't planned anything."

Veetara meant she hadn't planned what to do, in what order, where to go, how long it'd take, or what time to start. Without a plan and being inexperienced in such matters, Veetara feared the 'date' wouldn't be perfect or, worse, something might go wrong, making her anxious and restless.

"It's just a date, not an international gravel trip!" Kinny said.

"You can't turn everything in life into a travel itinerary!" "But what if something goes wrong?"

"Where are you going to see the movie?" "At a mall around the Siam Square area." "It's just that far!"

Kinny looked like she wanted to scream, then counted on her fingers the potential problems: (1) the Silom line train breaking down or being delayed, which was unlikely since Veetara was driving her car, (2) no parking spaces, (3) the projector malfunctioning during the movie, (4) long queues at the restaurant they wanted to eat at, and finally, (5) for the truly unlucky, encountering A high school gang fight.

"Other than that, I can't think of any other problems you might face." Said Kinny.

Veetara sighed deeply, still worried. She'd never paid attention to what made a good date. More importantly, this time, her date was a cute girl with a stray dog named Go as her bodyguard, unlike her past experiences with boys who tried to win her over.

"Stop overthinking, you busty girl,"

Kinny called out to snap Veetara out of her thoughts when she noticed Veetara had been sitting quietly for a while. Then, as she got up to prepare for her next class. she left Veetara with a piece of advice,

"Just do what you and that little trouble of yours want to do."

Then, she left Veetara alone in the quiet office with her unresolved thoughts.

*Do what I want to do?*

Veetara sat with her chin in her hand, pondering what she actually wanted to do. She had no idea how much time had passed until she heard a knock on the door. Then, a girl who lived in the alley with the tricky turn appeared, smiling broadly at her.

Veetara raised an eyebrow.

"Are you done with your classes?" Salee nodded.

"Yes. Didn't you get my message?"

Veetara picked up her phone and saw the message from '*Salee loves you. You call me anytime, my beauty had been sent half an hour ago.*

"Sorry, I got caught up in work,"

Veetara said as she stood up, quickly gathering her things. She felt annoyed with herself for seemingly messing things up before they even started.

When the younger girl walked around to help her pack miscellaneous items into her bag, Veetara sighed again.

She mumbled as she leaned her hip against the edge of the desk. "The movie might not be fun after all."

"You haven't even seen it yet. Don't judge too quickly." "Or should we skip it and do something else?" "Something else? Like what?"

"I don't know. Anything better than watching a movie."

Salee squinted her eyes and looked up at Veetara with a smile. "What could be better than watching a movie with you?"

"...."

"I don't know what movie you booked, but if it's a horror movie, I'll make the most of it."

Veetara frowned but then smiled. "You talk a good game."

"Seriously, especially those with lots of jump scares."

Salee said, mimicking exaggerated gestures of hugging and kissing Veetara. But when Veetara pulled her wrist and brought the girl closer for a kiss, Salee turned into a stiff board in a split second before melting into a puddle on Veetara's lap as she leaned against the desk.

"....."

"...."

They were silent for a long time as if they'd both rocketed off to a place far away from any sound, millions of light-years away. But finally, they both blurted out at the same time, pointing out different things:

## "My lips are still chapped! / Why do you taste weird, like spicy pickled stuff!?"

**"I just ate Aunty Aeow's spicy pickled star gooseberries! / I don't see any chapped lips!"**

## "Yes, they are chapped! / We're about to go on a date, and you're eating pickled stuff?"

**"How was I supposed to know you would... / They're not!"**

Veetara wasn't sure when they started talking about the same thing again, but she guessed it was after Salee made her realize that eating pickled stuff wasn't as bad as she thought.

Because it was funny, tangy, spicy, not chapped, and very tender.

☘

# Chapter 10

The first thing that happened when Veetara kissed Salee was shock. Then, Salee's body tensed up as if all her tendons were tightening. Finally, she turned into a shapeless liquid, her legs giving out so much that she had to hold onto Veetara to keep from collapsing.

They were silent for several moments, and each lost in their thoughts. When Salee realized that it was her first kiss with Veetara, she lost her mind because (1) she'd just eaten a variety of pickled foods from Aunty Aeow's shop, which her colleagues had bought for a party at the office (the pickled star gooseberries were very yummy), and (2) she wasn't confident about the feel of her own lips at all, thinking they were rough, flaky, and not soft or moist enough, which might irritate Veeetara's plump, juicy lips.

The young girl was very embarrassed and wanted to blame the one who'd acted rashly, even though she already said yesterday that she wasn't ready. Veetaraa should've known that lip care wasn't something that improved over a day. But the woman, much more beautiful than Miss Universe, seemed to forget that fact, making their first kiss seem like a complete failure.

However, what Veetara considered a problem with the kiss wasn't the lip health that Salee was worried about, but the fact that Salee had the nerve to eat pickled foods before their 'date.'

"So, are we going on a date?" Salee asked.

"Isn't that what we're doing?"

Salee was taken aback by this question. Given Veetara's aloof and stubborn behavior, she thought Veetara just wanted to watch a movie together, not

considering it a '*date*'. Since they hadn't officially agreed on anything, Salee didn't dare to think too much about it. She tried to stay relaxed and not dress up too much, but she was coaxed into eating pickled star gooseberries by her colleagues, who'd been persuaded by Aunty Aeow while waiting for Veetara to respond to her text message.

"A new pickling recipe that's twice as delicious!"

Onanong, who might secretly be Aunty Aeow's PR, had advertised. So, Salee joined her colleagues in devouring the pickled foods after discovering they were indeed very yummy, flavorful, and high in sodium.

Salee had eaten several pickled star gooseberries, not knowing that the person in the private office, who was stressed about something, would suddenly pull her in without warning.

It was like a scene cut in a movie; the next thing she knew, she was feeling Veetara's warm, soft lips.

"...."

"It's not, is it?"

Veetara muttered after a long silence, prompting Salee to quickly shake her head.

"No, it's not!"

"It's okay."

"No! I didn't mean 'not' like that,"

Salee said, her hands curling in frustration as communication seemed increasingly difficult in this situation, especially with Veetara's mood swinging like a Viking ride at an amusement park-one moment anxious, the next sighing, then frowning. Unable to resist, Salee checked the desk calendar again and found the red-inked note she'd been looking for the night before (but missed because she was caught). After counting on her fingers for about five seconds, she understood the mood swings.

*No wonder she's so irritable today. Her period is coming!*

"Khun Jae, if you want to call it a date, then I'll call it a date."

Salee explained sweetly, realizing that someone whose period was about to start in a few days might be easily irritated or annoyed by the smallest things.

"But you should've told me before I left the house so I could dress nicely and not eat pickled foods while waiting."

Veetara paused for a moment, then looked Salee up and down, making her face flush.

"Dressing like this is fine. It's not bad,"

Veetara said with a half- frown, half-smile expression as if she couldn't decide how to respond.

"But it's not beautiful either, right?"

Salee teased, feeling braver now that Veetara's mood had settled. She didn't expect the usually reserved and contradictory woman to respond seriously.

## "You're beautiful."

". "

"I-I mean, the clothes. They're simple, not too flashy, easy on the eyes, and suit you well."

"Khun Jae-"

Salee bit her lip to hold back a smile at the long explanation, then took the opportunity to use Veetara's words against her.

"Just saying 'beautiful' would've been enough. I understand what you want to say."

Hearing this, Veetara frowned and pinched Salee's nose like twisting a piece of bread before standing up to prepare for their 'date'. But as Salee was about to lead the way out of the room, Veetara quickly stopped her with a flushed face, saying.

## "Wipe it off first. You have my lipstick stain on your lips."

Salee then realized that Veetara hadn't just stolen a kiss but had also left her own vibrant lipstick as a memento. They spent a while wiping and rubbing her lips until the red mark faded but didn't completely disappear. Veetara then instructed Salee to head straight to the car without chatting with anyone, while she'd follow later to avoid making it look like they were intentionally going somewhere together.

Finally, Salee managed to sneak past her colleagues, who were still enjoying the pickled foods, and made it to the parking lot. By the time Veetara joined her and they navigated the Saturday afternoon traffic from Wongwian Yai to a famous shopping mall, the theater doors were just opening for the movie Veetara had booked.

"A movie about dogs?"

Salee looked at the movie ticket she'd just gotten at the counter with interest while waiting to buy popcorn and a large soda.

"Yeah,"

Veetara nodded.

"Out of all the movies showing right now, this one seemed the most interesting."

Salee spun around to look at the movie posters and realized Veetara had made the right choice for their date. The other movies were either action- packed with violence or overly sexy, neither of which was her style.

After buying snacks, Salee and Veetara headed to theater number one.

At this point, Salee realized that Veetara had booked 'sweet honeymoon seats' in the back row, making it impossible for her to hide her nervousness. The seats were like a sofa, close together, with a gap on either side and in the row behind, making it feel like they were watching the movie alone in a huge theater. Fortunately, the dim lighting provided some cover, otherwise, both of them would have been awkward about each other throughout the movie, as they could see each other's faces.

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Veetara had boyfriends before and was almost thirty.

Veetara had boyfriends before and was almost thirty. 'Kissing' shouldn't be a big deal. Following hand-holding or hugging, kissing was one of the first steps in physical interaction in a relationship. She'd been through that stage, both in terms of accepting that kissing was a common human behavior and in terms of her past experiences.

She didn't count how many times she'd kissed her ex-boyfriends, only knowing it felt the same, started the same way, and ended with the same words.

She should be used to kissing because, even though she'd been single for almost a year, it didn't make her forget the steps of kissing. It was like riding a bike or swimming, even if one hadn't done it in a while, one still remembered how. Sure, one might be a bit rusty, but with a little adjustment, it was good to go.

However...

The kiss two hours ago was completely out of the ordinary. It started without any warning, and it was the first time Veetara did that out of her own desire. Veetara gave the kiss as a thank you to Salee, who'd gone out of

her way to act silly and make her smile after noticing that she'd been stressed out with her formless thoughts for a long time.

It wasn't just the hormones pushing her, besides, the girl had no beard, only smooth skin that felt nice to the touch, allowing her to press her lips repeatedly without feeling any irritation. Reflecting on it, Veetara realized the kiss lasted longer than she thought, but she couldn't be sure whether it was long by the clock or by feeling. She only knew it was long enough to make both her mind and body feel weak.

And when they broke the kiss once to argue about something unrelated, they were pulled back together for a second time. This time, she discovered that the girl's funny taste wasn't bad at all when combined with her softness and sweetness.

*Hmm...*

Thinking back to this, Veetara had to swallow hard, keeping her hands from wandering like they did in the office. Meanwhile, the person next to her was fidgeting, seemingly unable to find a comfortable position. But Salee seemed very happy with the caramel popcorn. She ate it non-stop, making Veetara want to try it too since they had split the cost. She reached into the paper bucket to grab a piece, but instead of popcorn, she found Salee's hand, making her jump as if she'd touched something hot.

Veetara quickly pulled her hand back, her heart racing up. Salee just cleared her throat and offered the popcorn bucket to her again to ease the awkwardness. Finally, Veetara got to taste the popcorn. It was rich, sweet, and enjoyable. As the movie progressed towards the end, both of them forgot about the snacks and the lingering embarrassment from the kiss, as they were completely engrossed in the story. When the main character, a guide dog for the visually impaired, died from a disease, the young girl cried her eyes out, just like Veetara, who had to keep wiping her tears with the back of her hand throughout the rest of the movie.

When they left the theater, Veetara noticed that other viewers also had swollen eyes.

"Sorry,"

She apologized, because instead of a cheerful 'date,' Salee ended up crying buckets over the Labrador.

"I didn't think it'd end so sadly." The young girl shook her head.

"Even though it ended sadly, it was a good movie,"

She said with a sweet smile as if she knew what Veetara was worried about. She reassured her again that the movie was enjoyable and thought- provoking about the mutual dependence between humans and animals.

Crying over a sad ending wasn't so bad since she usually watched rom- coms (especially those starring Emma Stone) or mainstream movies. It was nice to watch a life drama for a change

"Go must thank you for taking me to see this movie, Khun Jae.a" "What?"

"Yes, because I've decided to throw a chicken party for all the dogs in the alley today!"

Veetara smiled and asked if Salee wanted to go somewhere or do something else. She initially thought Salee might be hungry since a small bucket of popcorn wouldn't be enough for her. But instead, the younger girl grabbed her hand and sniffed it, making Veetara blush. She couldn't scold her because they were in a public space, with people passing by, and she didn't want to cause a scene.

"Salee!?"

"I asked what hand cream you use, but you didn't tell me."

Veetara raised an eyebrow, remembering that Salee had indeed asked when they went to buy a megaphone, but she hadn't answered, thinking Salee was just changing the subject.

"Are you going to buy it for yourself?"

Veetara asked. When Salee nodded, she took her to browse cosmetics and creams, turning their conversation to skincare, which Salee was more interested in since she didn't wear much makeup. Veetara, on the other hand, was knowledgeable about both, so she recommended what was good or suitable for Salee's needs. Salee nodded and listened attentively, especially about the hand cream she seemed particularly interested in.

"I use this brand,"

Veetara said, showing her a sample tube.

"There are many scents, mostly light fruity ones. It makes my hands feel soft."

"Which scent do you use?" "Peach."

"Then I'll use peach too."

"There are other scents. Try them first, you might like one." "No,"

Salee refused, twisting her hands. Then explained, "I want to use the same scent as you."

Veetara felt a warm flush from her head to her chest, not knowing how to handle this shyness. She ended up playfully hitting Salee's shoulder, making the atmosphere even more awkward until a staff member approached them.

"Feel free to ask if you can't find a product."

Salee didn't respond, she just handed the staff two tubes of peach-scented hand cream and walked away to pay, leaving Veetara biting her lip to hold back a smile. When she looked at other products while waiting for Salee,

her smile faded, replaced by a tense expression as she narrowed her eyes at someone approaching her.

"Vee." "..."

She silently looked at her ex-boyfriend, Wat, who broke up with her in front of Aunty Aeow's pickle shop.

"Long time no see." "Yes."

"What are you doing here?"

Veetara didn't want to roll her eyes at him, but she almost couldn't help it because his question was so annoying.

*Use your eyes. Seeing me in a cosmetics store, what else could I be doing? Digging for treasure?*

"I'm about to leave,"

Veetara replied, which seemed to make Wat understand that she didn't want to talk. But he didn't want to miss the chance because once she left, he couldn't contact her again, not by phone or at work, as she'd instructed the security to escort him out without notice if he showed up.

"Are you alone? I came here to buy some groceries. We... could walk together, maybe you..."

"Khun Jae!"

Salee's cheerful voice came from behind. Two seconds later, she was standing next to Veetara, ignoring Wat, who hadn't even finished his sentence.

l"Who are you talking to?"

*Huh?*

Veetara didn't understand what she meant until Salee added, "I don't see anyone."

She looked around as if Wat was invisible, making Veetara realize her tactic.

Veetara then nodded and said,

"I must've imagined someone calling me." Salee responded,

"Oh, let's go then,"

And grabbed Veetara's hand, leading her out of the store in the opposite direction, leaving Wat standing there, blinking in confusion.

When they were far enough from the store, they stopped, looked at each other, and then burst into laughter, not expecting to use such a tactic to avoid an ex.

"Thanks,"

Veetara said with a smile. When Salee replied, "I'm always happy to help,"

She smiled wider, realizing that the younger girl wasn't just good at being playful but also reliable when her own leadership faltered, whether due to alcohol or her fluctuating emotions. If not for Kinny's advice on heart matters, Veetara hadn't relied on anyone for a long time, feeling strong and too proud to ask for help. But today, she wanted to be weak and lean on someone.

And the feeling she got in return was incredibly heartwarming.

"I owe you one,"

Veetara began, pausing briefly before continuing,

"So if there's anything you need my help with or want to ask. for something, just let me know."

The listener paused for a moment, then raised an eyebrow. "Anything at all?"

"Yeah,"

Veetara nodded, already bracing herself for another one of Salee's usual odd requests.

But instead, the girl moved closer and stood on tiptoe to whisper in her ear.

## "Can I get a do-over for what happened this afternoon?"

This made Veetara feel a tightness in her chest, a knot in her stomach, and a shortness of breath. The sweet, earnest face that pulled away looked determined yet shy, with no hint of joking.

Veetara replied, **"Sure,"** because today she was too tired to keep up appearances with someone so adorable.

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*Khun Jae always smells sooooo amazing.*

She must've smelled good since birth because Salee vividly remembered that the first time they met, Veetara smelled wonderful. When Veetara tied a string around her wrist up close, she smelled great again. Sitting next to her in the cinema or in the car, the scent was even stronger. At any time, Veetara smelled so good that Salee couldn't help but sniff discreetly, especially when it came to her soft hands, which seemed to radiate a sweet

fragrance constantly. This often led Salee to find excuses to touch them playfully.

But today was special because Veetara didn't pull her hand away. They'd both decided that this was a date, so holding hands or linking arms was perfectly reasonable.

*Hmm...*

Actually, compared to what happened in the afternoon, holding hands (and sniffing them) seemed trivial.

"Is there anything else you want?"

Veetara asked after agreeing to Salee's whispered request.

Salee was so embarrassed she wanted to hide under the escalator. But when she thought about how an ideal kiss should be memorable for more than just the taste of pickled star gooseberries and leftover spicy chili, she couldn't bear it and had to ask for a redo. Otherwise, she'd consider this as a lifelong regret.

Imagine having a beautiful, fragrant, and well-endowed person she loved so much pull her in for a kiss, only for it to taste weirdly funny (as Veetara had said).

"I want to fo buy chicken meat. I need it to feed the dogs." "Oh, a chicken party,"

Veetara acknowledged. Then the two of them made their way down to the supermarket, with Veetara allowing Salee to hold her hand and cling to her arm like a koala hugging a eucalyptus tree. At one point, Salee wondered if this was real or if she was dreaming somewhere with drool on her pillow.

But when the scent from Veetara's sleeve reached her nose, she was sure it was all real. No dream could smell this sweet.

*Next time, I should ask her which brand of fabric softener she used.*

Veetara led Salee to buy chicken in the fresh food section, then they headed back to the car because there was nothing else to do at the mall. More importantly, Veetara didn't want to risk running into her persistent ex again. They agreed to go home, but the date wasn't entirely over. Veetara insisted on helping with the chicken party for the dogs before leaving, as if she wanted to linger with Salee a bit longer but didn't want to say it outright.

That was her usual composed style.

"Aunties and uncles next door might get curious again. Are you okay with that, Khun Jae?"

Veetara glanced at Salee with amusement.

"I don't live around here, so I don't have to deal with nosy neighbors every day. You should be the one answering that question."

"I'm fine. I've been here long enough to get used to it. I'm just worried you might get annoyed."

The driver smiled, unable to resist asking how the neighbors reacted when Salee jokingly told them.

'This is my boyfriend's car'.

Salee giggled because the neighbors believed it and spread the rumor so widely that someone even called her mom in the countryside to report it.

"They called your mom?!"

Veetara was shocked because most families wouldn't accept their daughter being the subject of gossip like that. Luckily, Salee's mom knew how gossipy and tattletale the neighbors were, so she didn't take it seriously, just acknowledged it and hung up.

"What did your mom say?"

Veetara asked, sounding anxious. Salee smiled and used the opportunity of the date to grab Veetara's left hand.

"She didn't say much. Mom knows me well, both my mischievous side and that I wouldn't settle down with any guy."

Veetara raised an eyebrow, alternating between looking at Salee and the road.

"Wouldn't settle down with any guy?"

Veetara let Salee play with the back of her hand.

"Doesn't your mom want you to get married and have a family?" "She does,"

Salee leaned her head back and explained that her mom, like most moms, wanted to see her daughter settle down with a good man and have grandchildren. But that was just her mom's wish, not hers.

Salee's mom understood how hard it was to fight for the life you wanted. Her parents had opposed her relationship, so her mom didn't want to impose her expectations on Salee like the older generation had done to her.

"Mom said at least I'd have an easier life."

This time, Veetara raised an eyebrow in admiration.

"So your mom knows you have no interest in marriage and starting a family?"

Salee paused, unsure how to explain that she once thought she might end up with Best until he acted foolishly and she reconnected with Veetara. She went home to tell her mom that the 'Vee' who used to buy noodles from her every day had grown up, was very beautiful, very fair-skinned, and very well-endowed, and said,

"Mom, I love her!"

Her mom got annoyed because Salee acted no different from when she was a middle school stalker.

"If you love her, go tell her!"

Her mom said, waving her away in annoyance. Then, she muttered to Salee's dad about how Best looked familiar as if she'd always suspected that Salee had chosen him because he resembled someone she had a crush on since she was young.

Salee scratched her cheek, trying to rephrase the truth slightly.

"Mom knows because I always said I couldn't marry someone like Best." "Uh-huh,"

The driver acknowledged. Salee added,

"And lately, Mom knows who I've been clinging to, so starting a family isn't a big deal anymore."

Veetara got so embarrassed she had to look away, quickly turning back to the road to hide her blushing cheeks, which weren't very visible in the dark, but Salee could still feel the sweat on the hand she was holding.

"Your mom knows?" Veetara repeated softly. "Yes."

"And she doesn't mind?" "No, she doesn't,"

Salee replied with a smile, stroking Veetara's soft hand to ease her worries. Veetara let out a big sigh of relief. They had to let go of each other's hands as they arrived at Salee's home Veetara turned the car around to avoid dealing with the curious neighbors on the way back.

"Well,"

Salee put her hands on her hips, looking at the neighborhood dogs gathered in front of her house as if they knew there'd be a treat. When Go saw Veetara get out of the car, it didn't bark aggressively like yesterday but wagged its tail, which puzzled Salee.

Normally, the old dog only recognized people from the neighborhood. Even the ice delivery guy, who came often, got barked at every time. Salee concluded,

"You see a beautiful person, and suddenly your memory improves, and you naturally remember her, huh?"

Which seemed like a reasonable explanation (?) until Veetara calmly corrected her.

"It remembers the scent." "The scent?"

Salee raised an eyebrow.

"But even with the ice delivery guy, who comes often, it doesn't remember. How could it remember you after just two encounters?"

"I didn't mean my scent." "Oh?"

Veetara cleared her throat when she saw that Salee was still standing there, confused. Then she revealed the mystery of how the dog recognized her, saying,

"It's your scent. By now, it's all over me."

That's when Salee finally understood and remembered that they'd been unusually close since the afternoon.

"Oh, I see,"

The young girl nodded.

"Because the ice delivery guy didn't get all cozy with the coffee seller." "Salee,"

Veetara's voice turned stern as she raised her hand to twist Salee's waist, partly to hide her embarrassment.

"Stop joking around. Aren't you going to feed the dogs?" "Ouch, yes, I am,"

Salee dodged Veetara's hand and quickly unlocked the house door to bring the chicken into the kitchen. She divided it, boiling half and leaving the other half raw, then mixed them together and portioned them out onto zinc plates for each dog: Goh, Long, Kek-huay, and Tuk-tuk. Finally, the gang of street dogs was well- fed and seemed to enjoy their meal so much that they licked their plates clean.

After the chicken party for the dogs was over, Veetara showed no sign of leaving. She continued to sit neatly on the steps in front of the house, even though she initially said she'd go home after feeding the dogs.

"...."

"...."

A moment of awkward silence ensued as both were shy in their own ways. Salee wasn't quite sure what made Veetara so embarrassed She'd never imagined that one day, Veetara would purse her lips, blush, and repeatedly tuck her hair behind her ear just from sitting next to her while feeding the dogs.

But Salee was shy about everything concerning Veetara. She admired her determination, constant self-improvement, maturity, and reasonableness. She also couldn't deny that Veetara was exceptionally beautiful, especially

her well-toned figure, which resulted from genetics and disciplined exercise. Her clean, well-maintained skin and appropriate dressing added to her charm.

How could Salee look at anyone else? "So..."

Veetara finally broke the silence after several minutes of awkwardness.

## "What about the redo you were talking about?"

Salee felt like she'd been hit over the head with Go's zinc plate because she hadn't planned to make it today.

It wasn't that she didn't want to kiss Veetara.

Just look at those plump, juicy lips. Even if Salee were out of her mind, she'd still want to kiss them. But she needed more time to prepare herself, maybe tomorrow or the day after, to let her heart rest before facing another heart-pounding situation.

*Just look at her. She talks like she's asking for a pen I took from her!*

"My gorgeous, I think... um, this place isn't quite right for that."

Salee said, trying to avoid the situation. It was true, though, because there were four street dogs as witnesses, and nosy neighbors might

pop out and spread the news. Veetara, however, pressed on. "What about inside the house?"

"Well, um..." Salee hesitated for a moment before coming up with another excuse.

"It's not good either because, compared to you, the atmosphere inside the house feels depressing. I think we need a more pleasant place."

"...."

Veetara listened quietly but sighed deeply a few seconds later. "It's okay,"

She said, scratching her cheek awkwardly. "I'll head back then."

"Khun Jae,"

Salee stood up as soon as Veetara did. "I..."

Before Salee could explain, Veetara smiled, placed a hand on her head, and said,

"See you on Monday,"

Before turning to leave, followed closely by the gang of four-legged friends. Salee's heart pounded as she watched the familiar Civic drive away, still standing there, thinking about how to 'make it up' to Veetara. It seemed she'd upset the beautiful woman who was about to have her period soon.

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Veetara wasn't upset that Salee didn't kiss her to get it over with. She was frustrated with herself for losing control, much like someone who couldn't resist eating at the wrong time, knowing it was bad for their health.

In her case, she knew how to behave appropriately in her relationship with Salee, but she still pushed too hard, even though Salee had already said she wasn't ready. Maybe Salee wanted to take things slow, to get to know each other better, even though they'd been working together for two years.

But Veetara felt anxious.

She'd been observing Salee for a while, so when their feelings aligned, she wanted everything to move quickly. Her fluctuating emotions made her even more intense, turning her into something unrecognizable.

*A demon named "Veetara wants to hurry up and get that Little Trouble before she gets too old," perhaps?*

Thinking about it gave her a headache.

Veetara increased the speed on her treadmill, hoping the exhaustion and adrenaline would clear her mind. But her Sunday evening workout was cut short when the doorbell rang, followed by a familiar, cheerful voice.

## "My gorgeous lady! Yoo-hoo!"

*That's Salee!*

## "Is my beautiful lady home today?"

"Yes!"

Veetara responded with a frown, jogging down the stairs to the door. "What are you doing here?"

She asked, surprised and confused about how Salee, who looked unusually cute today, ended up in her neighborhood.

"I'm here to see you."

Veetara saw Salee's toothy smile and felt a mix of warmth and nervousness. She quickly wiped the sweat from her face with the towel around her neck, worried that her post-workout appearance wasn't very graceful.

"How did you get in here? Did you sneak past the security?"

"Sneak? No way," Salee scrunched her nose. "The security guard let me in."

*What?*

Veetara frowned, confident that the security at the village gate wouldn't let outsiders in easily. If they did, it'd be with the homeowner's permission, and she hadn't heard her phone ring.

After some questioning, she found out that Salee had befriended the security guard at the village gate. The night when Salee had driven her home, the same guard greeted them and opened the gate.

"The security guard remembered me, so I told him I was here to see the beautiful lady at the end of the village. He said, 'Oh,' and we chatted about food in Talat Phlu because I smelled chive dumplings from his booth. I recommended which stalls were good, which weren't, and which ones falsely claimed to be a second branch of some famous stalls at that market."

*They're talking nonsense!*

Veetara frowned, placing one hand on her hip but still opening the door wider to let Salee in.

"So, what brings you here?"

She asked while wiping the sweat from her neck and hairline. Salee didn't answer immediately as she was- too busy staring at Veetara.

"So fair... I mean, um..."

Salee paused for a long moment.

"I came to invite you to eat at Khlong San." "Khlong San market?"

Salee nodded, but her eyes were still glued to one spot- Veetara's chest under her sports bra. Veetara blushed and had to push Salee's face away.

"Stop that!"

She scolded lightly. She couldn't help but ask why Salee hadn't called or texted first. If she'd been out, it'd have been a waste of time.

"I came in person, so you couldn't easily refuse," Salee said. ". "

And now she gave Veetara a smile that looked just like this internet emoticon.:)

"Smart girl!"

Veetara said, trying to pull her hand away, but Salee grabbed it and sniffed it like a puppy.

"You still smell nice today," said Salee.

Veetara wanted to pinch Salee until she was all bruised.

Salee had no idea that her affectionate behavior made Veetara's heart waver so much.

"Wait here. I'll go shower."

That's when Salee finally let go of her hand, and Veetara walked briskly upstairs. Once out of sight, she leaned against the wall, exhaling deeply, her face burning like a hot pan. She looked at her hand, which Salee had probably sneakily kissed.

*What a cheeky girl!*

Veetara stood there for a long time, trying to gather her thoughts and catch her breath. By the time she finished showering, scrubbing herself clean, and getting dressed, she went downstairs to find Salee lounging around, watching Netflix as if she were at her own home.

Seeing her like this made Veetara want to pinch her cheeks even more! "All done."

She called out, making the girl, who was busy with the remote, look up and turn off the TV. She then sprang up with a smile. At that moment, Veetara noticed why Salee looked particularly cute today.

She was wearing a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves and an old rose- colored chiffon skirt that reached her knees. Her hair was left down, not tied up in her usual girly half-up style.

*Hmm...*

"Should we take a taxi? There's no place to park around there,"

Salee suggested as Veetara was about to grab her car keys from her bag. Veetara nodded and decided to leave her beloved Civic at home and take public transportation to Khlong San Pier.

Khlong San was a district on the Thonburi side of Bangkok, not far from Wongwian Yai, where the language institute was located. From there, one could take a songthaew, a minibus that ran along Lat Ya Road (a hotspot for local grilled dishes) straight to Khlong San Pier.

Veetara knew the area well because she used to study around there. Khlong San Pier was a popular destination for high school students in the vicinity after school. It was bustling with famous food stalls and clothing shops and served as a crossing point to Phra Nakhon, where you could catch a van to the Siam area. Before the convenience of the current BTS Skytrain, Khlong San Pier was a popular route by default.

Veetara hadn't visited the area in a long time, but when she arrived, memories of hanging out with friends during her high school days came flooding back, making her smile.

"I want to try the fried pork with sticky rice from that stall. The smoothies look delicious, as do the salted egg yolk bua loi... Oh! Bubble tea!"

Veetara shook her head, letting the trip's instigator drag her here and there. Eventually, they ended up with their hands full of food (mostly Salee's).

Then, Salee's attention shifted to the clothing shops. As they walked deeper, they saw alleys branching left and right, both leading to the ferry pier.

They strolled leisurely, eating and digesting, holding hands tightly as the crowd grew with the setting sun.

Veetara was enjoying the sights, sipping the bubble tea that Salee had insisted on buying (so Salee could also drink it, as she couldn't finish one by herself). Suddenly, Salee stopped abruptly, causing Veetara to bump into her.

"Khun Jae,"

Salee called out playfully.

Veetara raised an eyebrow as Salee turned to her with a mischievous smile. "Want to get your fortune told?"

Before Veetara could respond, a middle-aged woman in a gypsy- like outfit waved them over to a small table covered with a blue velvet cloth.

"Wait, I don't believe in this stuff."

Veetara whispered to Salee, who was nudging her toward the fortune teller. "It's okay if you don't believe. We'll just do it for fun, for the experience." *More like the experience of getting scammed out of money.*

Veetara sighed but couldn't refuse Salee, who was eager to do everything at Khlong San Pier like it was an amusement park. She finally agreed to let the fortune teller read her fortune for 200 baht. However, Salee sweet-talked and used her connections (often bringing in customers from their superstitious office) to get a discount, reducing the fee to just 100 baht.

Veetara knew that such professions required a mix of skills, including observing the client's appearance and attire and crafting believable statements. Even if they didn't know the truth, they could make it seem like

they did. Fortune tellers often relied on guesswork, and while some might be accurate, others just made 50-50 guesses with walk-in clients. Hence, Veetara was always skeptical about these things.

She listened quietly as the fortune teller spoke about her life, finances, and career. Most of the predictions were general enough to apply to many people, meaning that if it were Kinny or the frugal Miss Karn from accounting sitting there, they'd likely find the predictions accurate too.

Then came the topic of love.

## "I see... I see that you're going to get a subordinate as a husband!"

Salee, who was listening nearby, spat out her bubble tea pearls like a machine gun while Veetara choked on her drink, tears streaming down her face.

## "No, no,"

The fortune teller shook her head.

## "A wife! You're going to get a wife!"

"Miss Fortune teller, I think..."

Veetara waved her hands to stop the reading, but the fortune teller furrowed her brow and shook her head.

## "No, it's a husband. That's right." "No, a wife! You're getting a wife!" "Wait, it's a husband!"

"The fortune teller is malfunctioning!"

Salee quickly placed the money on the table and dragged Veetara away, fearing that people around them might accuse them of doing something to cause the fortune teller's malfunctioning.

"...."

"...."

Finally, Veetarą and Salee stood silently at the bus stop at the entrance of Khlong San Pier. Once everyone else had boarded the bus that just left, they burst into laughter.

"What did you bring me here for?!"

Veetara scolded, wiping away tears of laughter. "I don't know,"

Salee shook her head, covering her face as she laughed. "The fortune teller has never been like this before." "Maybe she's overworked and confused."

Veetara took a deep breath and sighed before asking. "So, where to next?"

"Home." "Whose home?" "Well..."

Salee lowered her hands, biting her lip before answering. "If you still want me to make it up to you about that..."

Just that made Veetara's heart race more than when she was exercising. She didn't say anything, she just hailed a taxi and gave the driver a destination not far from Khlong San. Salee raised an eyebrow in surprise because it wasn't the way to her home.

When they arrived, Veetara explained,

"This place is beautiful. The atmosphere should be better than at your house or mine."

"Your condo?"

Salee looked around in awe at the luxurious surroundings, fitting the price and riverside location.

"Yeah, I was going to rent it out, but I changed my mind."

Veetara had bought it during the first pre-sale phase, so the price wasn't exorbitant. She also got promotional furniture and kitchen appliances. Initially, she planned to rent it out, but the beautiful view and convenience made her decide to keep it. She'd occasionally stay there when she worked late and didn't want to drive home

She led Salee to the fourteenth floor Her room faced the Thonburi area without a river view, but it was still beautiful. The room had a modern loft design with high ceilings featuring two floors. The lower floor had a kitchen, living room, small bathroom, and a workspace next to a balcony as wide as the room. Turning right to the second floor, there was a bedroom, wardrobe, dressing table, and a large bathroom.

"What do you think?" "It's... nice."

Salee stammered, placing the food bags on the kitchen counter. She then wandered around, exploring before stopping at the living room's glass wall, which stretched from floor to loft ceiling, offering a full view of the scenery.

"If it's nice, then..."

Veetara said, walking towards her. Salee raised her hand to call a timeout, which caused Veetara to put her hands on her hips and frown.

"What now, huh?"

## "Can I... brush my teeth first?"

"Brush your teeth?!"

Veetara repeated as Salee pulled out a toothbrush and toothpaste, making her pause, unsure whether to laugh or cry at the sight of Salee carrying such items in her bag while walking around Khlong San.

"Have you been carrying that all along?"

Salee nodded proudly, saying she was well-prepared today. Veetara chuckled, waving her off to do her business, then turned back to the Thonburi view outside.

She leaned her left shoulder against the glass wall, trying to steady her racing heart.

It wasn't long before Salee returned, looking shy and blushing all the way to her ears.

"Are you okay now?"

Veetara asked again to be sure. The younger girl responded by lifting both hands and pulling her face close without saying a word.

## Mmm...

The young woman made a pleased sound. When she pulled her lips away for a moment, she frowned and couldn't help but mutter,

"It tastes like toothpaste."

Salee frowned too, but her face turned even redder. "You talk like you've eaten it before, Khun Jae." "Of course I have."

Veetara replied softly before being pulled down again. This time, the kiss lasted longer. When they parted again, she asked,

"Didn't you ever accidentally swallow toothpaste when you were a kid?" "No, never,"

Salee shook her head slightly.

"But I did eat my friend's eraser once."

The young woman burst into laughter, making the one who was earnestly trying to 'redo' protest,

"What's so funny? Eating toothpaste is just as silly!" "Yeah, equally silly."

Veetara admitted. Then she promised herself not to talk during a kiss again. She relaxed and let the young girl guide the kiss slowly and gently, making her stomach feel light and her heart race as if it'd drop into her lower abdomen.

She didn't know when she was pushed against the glass wall, only that the small tongue tasted like cool, tingling toothpaste, playful and mischievous like its owner. It made her unconsciously respond with pleased sounds at various moments.

When she opened her eyes and saw the sweetness and the gentle touch from the smooth-faced girl, Veetara's heart softened even more. She lifted her arms to wrap around the girl's neck, not wanting to part easily.

They intended to just kiss properly, but when Salee whispered that she smelled nice, Veetara didn't mind gathering her long, wavy hair to the back as the other girl lowered her lips to her jawline, under her ear, and the nape of her neck.

She felt ticklish, like a small puppy nuzzling her. Except this little pup had two hands-one holding her above the hip and the other slipping under her

short-sleeved T-shirt. The pup lightly stroked her stomach with all five fingers, both absentmindedly and enjoyably.

Veetara's emotions surged. She wanted to hug the girl closer, but then an unwelcome sensation, especially in such a situation, made her push the other girl away slightly.

"No."

"S-sorry, I..."

"Not that '*no*, 'I mean yes, but not now!" "It's coming."

"Who?"

### "My period, who else?!"

Veetara squeezed the cheek of the girl who stood biting her lip with a forlorn look. Then, the two of them had to scramble around, believing there wasn't a single sanitary pad stocked in the room.

# Chapter 11

One of the strange things about humans was that when someone tried too hard to act normal, they often got caught easily, revealing that they were hiding something from those around them.

In this case, Kinny was referring to her dear friend and the young girl she'd lured in.

She was both curious and not curious about what had happened in the past three or four days, which made both Veetara and Salee try so hard to act normal that it was almost laughable. It started with a morning greeting through a megaphone, followed by the young girl playing the role of a puppy teasing a mother hen.

They engaged in a polite banter before going their separate ways to work. In the afternoon, they coincidentally wanted a cup of coffee at the same time, so they had to stand next to each other in the kitchen, boiling water. When it was time to leave work, Salee left the office first, while Veetara followed exactly seven minutes later, like someone with OCD.

This was their normal daily routine that wasn't normal at all. Kinny noticed from the second day that Salee wouldn't spend more than three minutes alone in the office with Veetara. It was as if she'd drop off a report, chat a bit, and then quickly leave.

It was like she worried that the others would sense some energy in the room. Finally, after observing for almost a week, Kinny caught them red- handed, realizing that their (not so) normal behavior was because their relationship had taken a step forward.

She didn't intend to pry or play a bigger role than being an advisor, but it so happened that she forgot a book she needed for teaching a new foreign tutor at the office. So, she had to take a taxi back, only to run into Veetara and Salee coming out.

"...."

"...."

"...."

The three of them stood blinking at each other in silence for a long moment. Her dear friend and the young girl were in quite a *disheveled state,* noticeable from Veetara's lipstick on the young girl's lips and the crumpled and wrinkled collar of her shirt.

"Working late, huh?"

Kinny broke the silence first, to which the two responded in different ways, "Just clearing some work... / Khun Jae did this to me!"

"Don't talk nonsense!"

Kinny rolled her eyes. Salee ran down the stairs as Veetara shooed her out, leaving Kinny and her dear friend facing each other.

"So, what's the deal, sis?"

Veetara hesitated for a moment, then ran her hand through her hair and sighed, knowing she couldn't avoid it. She had to admit that she stayed late to clear work, but the young girl stayed with her because she wasn't good at taking the bus home alone lately. So, Veetara had to drive her to the end of the alley, which she didn't mind because it gave them a bit more time together after trying to act normal all day.

"Wait, so you two are officially together and did it now?" "No!"

Veetara blushed. "Not to that step." *Not to that step?*

Kinny frowned as she examined her friend again. This time, she noticed that the lipstick smudged on the young girl's lips, and it also stained Veetara's shirt and neck.

*So, what step is this?!*

"Well... how should I put it?"

Veetara stammered, trying to find the right words to explain.

Finally, Kinny understood when Veetara explained that they hadn't officially declared their relationship. They hadn't said, *'You're my girlfriend, and I'm your girlfriend'.*

They just understood each other through some unspoken connection. Or, to put it like a celebrity, they were '*getting to know each other'*, which meant they were basically together but not officially calling it that. In Salee and Veetara's case, they weren't worried about public perception like TV personalities because they understood each other, and the terms of their relationship weren't a big deal.

"So, you've been making out a lot, huh?" "Just kissing!"

Veetara glared. "Only kissing!"

"Alright, alright, kissing it is,"

Kinny agreed, not wanting to prolong the conversation as she had her own business to attend to. She let Veetara go down to chase the young girl, not

forgetting to tease,

"So, who was the top just now?"

Veetara blushed and quickly closed the elevator door.

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Even though they hadn't officially declared their relationship, Salee and Veetara's relationship wasn't open like some couples. They weren't broad- minded enough for that, especially Veetara, who'd poke the girl's eyes out if she looked at anyone else. Not that it'd happen because, besides Veetara, Salee saw everyone else as just a blur. Only her beautiful Veetara was special, a glowing light in her life visible from three hundred meters away.

She had eyes only for Veetara, but Veetara didn't know because Salee never expressed her feelings in a speech. Their relationship had only recently become clear. So, it wasn't surprising that Veetara felt insecure when someone got too close to Salee.

There were only a few people who fit that category: Aof, who'd recently given up, realizing Salee wasn't interested in him; Kinny, who didn't count because they both knew Kinny was the advisor of the 'Get the Young Girl with my Friend' organization; Best, the ex-boyfriend who Salee had already chased away, and Thee, a young boy who'd recently become a significant topic.

Thee was a high school junior from a nearby school and one of Salee's students.

This story was complicated but not risky or worrisome for Veetara because Thee didn't like her in a romantic way like Aof or Best.

Months ago, when Salee first taught Thee (and when she and Veetara weren't this close yet), Thee was almost seventeen, with dark skin, sharp features, and tall. He was a street racer who rode a modified Wave to

evening classes. Despite his rough appearance, he was smart and ranked top in class tests, surprising Salee.

Initially, Salee didn't know Thee personally; he only liked to ask questions and take notes diligently. One day, she found him sitting on the steps of a 7- Eleven, holding his head, and couldn't help but check if something was wrong. She feared he might be in a difficult situation typical for his age and had no one to talk to.

Salee wasn't a saint, but she cared for her students. Deep down, she wanted them to use the knowledge from Veetara's institution throughout their lives. So, she thought it'd be better if her actions helped a student through a tough time, even if she might be told off for meddling. It turned out Thee wasn't a big troublemaker, he was quite polite, contrary to his street racer image.

"What's up? Why are you sitting here alone?" "Nothing, I just don't want to move,"

Thee answered, still holding his head. Salee didn't press further but asked,

"Do you want anything from 7-Eleven?"

"Some shrimp wrapped in seaweed would be nice."

That day, she bought him shrimp wrapped in seaweed, a red pork bun, and a bottle of water. Thee thanked her and devoured them hungrily.

It wasn't that he was starving without money, but, as he said, he didn't want to move.

Salee didn't say much to him, just,

"I don't know what's bothering you, but if you want to talk, call the reception and ask them to connect you to my desk,"

Before leaving, understanding that Thee probably didn't want to talk to anyone at that moment.

And that was the beginning of her relationship with Thee, who carried the typical teenage confusion and stress.

The young boy returned the money for the snacks the next day. They then chatted about various topics that didn't touch on the problems he was facing, as if he wanted to gauge what kind of person she was, how trustworthy she was, and whether she was suitable to give advice.

This was the right approach. Salee thus had the chance to learn about the experience of riding a modified Wave motorcycle at that time, which led Kinny to critique (when she showed off her riding skills in the parking lot), 'It doesn't make any sense!' because, she couldn't even ride a bicycle but somehow managed to ride a loud, smoky Wave.

Salee and Thee got to know each other better, but not to the point of being close friends. She was always cautious about relationships that might lead to misunderstandings. The easiest way to avoid this was to make sure the students in the class knew she was a cheerful person who got along with everyone, not just with Thee alone. In other words, she tried to reach out to all students equally. Most of the students called her 'P Salee' without the 'Teach' prefix, like other tutors.

She mostly talked about lessons with Thee in class, and he never mentioned why he was sitting alone holding his head in front of 7- Eleven again. Until a few days ago, there was a call from reception saying, 'A student wants to talk to you'. Salee immediately knew it was time for the young boy to share his heavy-hearted problems with her.

She and Thee arranged to meet in front of the same 7- Eleven branch.

It turned out the young boy was indeed in a tight spot, as she'd guessed. But it wasn't as serious as fighting with rivals from other schools, drugs, or racing modified motorcycles at night and getting chased by the police. It was about his identity and puppy love.

"I'm tired of keeping it a secret,"

Thee said this to her, and 'it' was his long-hidden identity.

This sharp-featured young man knew he was gay since elementary school but didn't dare to show it, especially to his father, a strict, high-ranking military officer.

Thee was the only son in the family, so he had to bear many expectations. The soft-hearted young man built a shield with a rough and rebellious image, riding a Wave, being a street racer, and looking like a thug at first glance to prevent anyone from discovering he was a gay boy who preferred makeup over modifying motorcycles. He also didn't want to be bullied like other gay boys in school.

"Actually, everything was going well before,"

The young man said in a softer voice, making Salee notice that he'd been speaking in a deep voice to everyone all along.

"But now I can't take it anymore."

Thee explained that he planned to use his university years to escape far from home and the people he knew. He felt like he was running out of breath after holding it underwater for so long. The young man wanted to breathe freely and be himself without worrying about his family or schoolmates. So, he needed to endure a bit longer because it was less than a year before he could apply to universities (Thee was only interested in institutions with campuses in other provinces).

He was ready to leave as soon as he could.

Until her class led the young boy to meet someone, all his patience seemed to vanish sooner than expected.

"He's from another school."

Salee rested her chin on her hand, thinking*, 'I knew it*, 'because she'd been through similar situations before. Having feelings for someone wasn't

unusual for young people. The problem was that sometimes, confused kids couldn't handle their feelings when they found themselves unlucky, falling for the wrong person, at the wrong place, or at the wrong time.

In Thee's case, it was the latter two because the other boy approached him first.

"He likes me."

"And do you like him?" "Yes,"

Thee admitted sadly.

"He's the first one who seems to understand me."

They liked each other, but the problem was that Thee couldn't reveal his feelings until he left this place. He had to deny and insist to the boy from another school that he was straight, fearing that anything could happen since kids from nearby schools knew each other.

Most importantly, rumors spread faster than wildfire thanks to social media (thanks to Mark Zuckerberg). He adhered to the principle of 'safety first because if anyone at his school found out, it wouldn't be long before his family knew, too.

And when the young man denied his own desires, the conflict within him grew until he felt like his world was collapsing.

Thee was almost at his limit in hiding his identity, especially when the other boy showed no signs of giving up on him.

"Persistent ones, aren't him?"

Salee said with a smile at the enthusiasm of the youth. Then she fell silent for a while, thinking of ways to relieve Thee's frustration so he could hold on until university. Finally, an idea came up, but she couldn't do it alone because Salee couldn't say she deeply understood Thee's pressure. Or at

least not as much as someone who'd been a young boy (and almost named Anakin Skywalker) before. So, she hurried to Kinny as soon as she explained and got Thee's permission to share his story.

"Here's the thing, Jae,"

Salee explained the whole situation from the beginning to the solution, which was to find a space for Thee to express himself, like gradually releasing accumulated stress. The person she thought was most suitable to advise the young man was Kinny.

"You really know how to find trouble!"

Veetara's best friend put her hands on her hips and complained in a high- pitched voice. But after being persuaded for about fifteen minutes, Kinny sighed and agreed. After all, the young man was a student of the institute, and not helping when she could wasn't something a beautiful person like Kinny would do.

It turned out that her and Kinny's brainstorming to solve the young man's problem led to a misunderstanding with Veetara.

At first, Salee didn't realize that Veetara's dazed behavior, like she hadn't slept enough, meant she was so jealous she didn't know what to do. Because those behaviors were quite strange and contrary to the common sense she knew, if someone felt jealous, they'd mostly sulk, argue without listening to explanations, or stay silent and not talk at all.

But Veetara wasn't like that.

Kinny called this behavior '***shadow jealousy***, 'short for 'the shadow of someone who'd never been jealous in almost thirty years of life.'

Veetara happened to overhear Thee's story one evening. Then she started feeling uneasy and curious about who Thee was and why Salee had to discuss him with Kinny, who had now become a consultant for all sorts of issues.

A few days later, Salee found that Veetara was following her around every corner she had to go, whether it was in front of the women's restroom, the elevator, the classroom she had to teach, or the small room borrowed from the housekeeper to create a space for Thee to relieve his stress with an expert after school.

Finally, Kinny couldn't stand it and had to shout for her to deal with the **'shadow jealousy'** standing by the pillar, watching silently because it gave her goosebumps. Moreover, Veetara's fair skin, red lips, and red nails made her look even more like a vengeful spirit.

## "My beautiful one isn't a ghost!"

Salee protested, only to be chased away by Kinny's raised fist again. She had to dodge and quickly slip out to find the shadow jealousy standing by a pillar of the building.

"What are you doing here alone?" Salee called out, smiling sweetly. "I don't know,"

Veetara replied in a normal tone, devoid of any anger, sulkiness, or resentment. The beautiful woman herself didn't know what she'd gain by standing there clinging to a pole and staring at her.

When asked, "Then why did you leave me standing here alone?"

Salee was taken aback and almost couldn't answer. She'd never officially told Veetara about Thee because, first, out of courtesy, she needed to ask the young man's permission before discussing it, but she hadn't had the chance yet. Second, Salee thought Veetara didn't need to worry about this boy, as there was no romantic risk like with Aof or Best.

But she was *wrong*, so she had to take Veetara's hand and lead her back to the office to confess.

Luckily, after the tutor ended, the students and staff had all gone home, so the two of them could sit and talk privately for as long as they needed.

"Thee is having issues with his gender identity."

Salee began, but she didn't go into as much detail as she had with her co- conspirator.

"I thought Jae Kinny could help, so I suggested they talk after school whenever they had the chance."

She also explained why she hadn't mentioned it earlier. Veetara nodded silently until Salee added,

"But you don't have to worry about it being inappropriate. I'm very careful, and Thee doesn't like girls anyway."

Veetara let out a big sigh, got up from her \chair, and squeezed Salee's cheeks several times.

"That's not the right way to think." "Really?"

Salee asked, frowned as Veetara explained, and listened intently.

"Think logically. If I can like you, why can't someone else, regardless of their gender, like you too?"

Of all the long sentences, Salee only heard, "I like you." Realizing this was the first time Veetara had expressed her feelings, Salee placed a hand on her chest.

"Y-You like me?"

## "Yes."

"You like me??"

Veetara clicked her tongue as Salee kept repeating the question. "Are you deaf?"

"But... but..."

Salee stammered, still in shock. Even though she knew Veetara had feelings for her, she never expected to hear it so directly, especially from someone she'd admired from afar since she was young. She never dared to hope for something that would make her heart race and her stomach flutter like this.

"I..."

Seeing that Salee was too stunned to speak, Veetara shook her head. "I like you. You're a good, kind, and polite girl,"

The older woman said, placing one hand on the edge of the table and using the other to brush Salee's bangs aside. She then kissed Salee's forehead and held it there for several seconds before continuing,

"Others could feel the same way I do. So assuming someone will only ever like men and never women or other genders is wrong."

Salee understood Veetara's lesson.

She touched her forehead where she'd been kissed, and her heart started racing like a clumsy boy she used to play with in elementary school.

"Do you understand now?" Salee nodded.

"Good. Next time, don't be so careless."

After explaining everything, Veetara understood what Salee and Kinny were trying to do to help the student. However, the beautiful woman still asked Salee to be more cautious to avoid any unnecessary complications, fearing the sensitive boy might develop feelings for her.

Once they cleared up the misunderstanding and made peace, Veetara prepared to leave and pack her things. But Salee wouldn't let Veetara escape. She quickly wrapped her arms and legs around Veetara like a koala, making the woman squirm uncomfortably.

"What are you doing now, huh?"

## "That's a good question; what should I do with you?"

Salee teased, pressing her cheek against Veetara's chest and tightening her grip until Veetara protested, pretending to be out of breath, even though she was blushing and didn't know where to hide her face.

After pretending to think for a moment, Salee nodded and teased Veetara until she almost fainted from the embarrassment, saying,

## "You're so beautiful and busty and jealous. I should just ravish you!"

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Salee's idea of ravishing was....

Like a villain in a Thai drama or the hero in "Sawan Biang," with loud noises, force, and fake nuzzling before the camera panned to a lamp to cut the scene.

Veetara sighed in relief when Salee only pretended to do this. Otherwise, she might've fainted and needed to be taken to the hospital before anything really happened. She knew she wasn't young anymore and couldn't handle anything too wild, especially not in the office like in some Western movies.

If she were to be ravished or decided to ravish Salee out of sheer affection, she preferred it to be somewhere more appropriate for such activities. She couldn't bear the embarrassment if her colleagues came in the next day to find the office had become a monument to her lost innocence.

But even thinking that way...

Veetara felt it wasn't the right time because (1) Salee was a cute but mischievous young girl, making her feel like she was about to take advantage of someone who hadn't even finished high school. Despite Kinny's constant reminders that **"she'll be twenty-five next year, with breasts as big as yours!"**

Veetara hesitated to take anything more than a few kisses and touches. And

(2) she hadn't resolved the issue with her brother, Best. She feared that if her relationship with Salee progressed and Best found out, it'd cause unnecessary complications as Best was practically still an inexperienced kid.

Best had always gotten what he wanted since childhood. He probably still believed he had a say in Salee's life, even though simple logic dictated that an ex was an ex.

For Salee, Best was a past tense ex, meaning their relationship ended in the past and had no bearing on the present. But because Best liked to complicate things by involving many variables, Veetara needed to resolve this issue before advancing her relationship with Salee.

His male pride wouldn't allow him to accept that his ex- girlfriend, whom he still loved and hoped to reconcile with, was now dating his sister. But Veetara wasn't afraid of having problems with her brother because she believed any conflict wouldn't stem from immoral actions.

She didn't steal Salee from anyone.

And Salee broke up with Best because of his own actions.

So, if she ignored the fact that she and Best shared the same parents, Veetara saw nothing improper about the situation except for some awkwardness when facing each other. And that wasn't a big deal because they rarely saw each other. Recently, they both had their own work, and their phone conversations had dwindled.

She had no reason to take Salee to see Best, which might make Salee misunderstand and think she was trying to mend their relationship (unless

the world was as small as the day she accidentally met Wat).

*Why would I want my own girl to meet her ex-boyfriend who hasn't moved on, right?*

Veetara spent many moments pondering how to reveal her relationship with Salee to Best in the gentlest way possible without causing chaos. But before she could figure it out, a new problem arose.

And that problem was the new foreign tutor.

Jan was her name. She looked somewhat like Emma Stone but with a fuller figure. She had blonde hair cut in a bob and was thirty- three years old. Jan was a true American, born and raised in West Hollywood, California. She was learning Thai because she loved Thai food and tourist spots.

She applied for an exchange program for a year as soon as she heard about the offer from the institute. She was assigned to be looked after by Kinny, both during and after work hours, since this was her first time traveling to Thailand alone without friends or family. She might need a guide or someone to give her small tips about living in a country where motorcycles can legally ride on the sidewalks behind pedestrians.

"Good morning, Veetara!"

The American woman rushed to hug Veetara on the first morning of work, looking fresh and energetic. Meanwhile, the colleagues were buzzing with excitement, lining up to shake hands and get to know Jan. Because this foreign woman was friendly with everyone, the office atmosphere was filled with joy, especially among the men, who were quite thrilled.

One day, when the team decided to have lunch together, Salee brought Veetara in jealous mode along. Veetara felt uncomfortable that Jan was way more busty than her, and she looked like Emma Stone, Salee's idol. They were all taken aback when Jan cut off a young tutor who was subtly asking if she was single.

"Sorry, boys. I'm single, but I like women,"

Jan said in Thai with a foreign accent, then added, making Veetara look up from her dry noodles,

## "Someone like Veetara is totally my type."

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From then on, the jealousy shifted to Salee, who was already pouting.

Veetara learned that Salee had a possessive nature, like a child not liking anyone to touch her belongings, especially those she didn't get along with. In this case, it was the fake Emma Stone. Salee locked everything on her desk in a drawer to prevent Jan, who seemed to lack teaching materials, from borrowing them like she did with others. She was particularly annoyed whenever the foreign woman approached her with a cheerful face.

Jan didn't have to worry about the rules of personal relationships between bosses and subordinates because she was only here for a year. Technically, Jan wasn't Veetara's subordinate but a guest sent by a partner. Meanwhile, the institute had to send a tutor as well, and that person was none other than Onanong, the gossip queen of the team.

"I want P'On to come back soon,"

Salee mumbled on the night of Onanong's farewell party to America after Jan had been working for a week. The gossip queen was moved to tears because, despite their frequent teasing and quarrels, Salee was a lovable girl. Everyone adored her like a younger sibling (except for Aof, who took it a bit too far). Onanong later realized that Salee's sad puppy eyes made her homesick even before the plane had taken off for ten minutes.

"Veetara, can you take me home today? I don't want to take a taxi alone,"

Jan asked with a playful smile, half-joking, half-drunk from drinking several beers at Onanong's farewell party.

"Where's Kinny?"

Veetara asked hesitantly, glancing at Salee, who was sitting to her right, talking to Aunty Oun, who'd been invited to join the party. She noticed that Salee wasn't looking at her because she was engrossed in a conversation about bathroom cleaners with Aunty Oun, but she seemed to be aware of everything with a frown; she just couldn't do anything about it.

"Veetara?" ". "

"Hello, did you hear what I said?" Veetara snapped back to attention, "Sorry, what did you say?"

"I said Kinny had an urgent call and rushed out of the restaurant."

Veetara raised her eyebrows in surprise because she'd been too busy observing Salee's mood to notice Kinny leaving. She wanted to call and check on her friend but couldn't because Jan was waiting for her answer. She reluctantly nodded, but before Jan could grab her arm, she called out to Salee, who was still arguing with Aunty Oun, probably becoming an expert on bathroom cleaners by now.

"Salee."

The young girl raised her eyebrows at her in surprise. "Yes?"

"Come with us. We haven't finished discussing the intensive class curriculum,"

Veetara used work as an excuse in front of the remaining colleagues. Salee got up, gave everyone a wai, and walked over to her. Salee didn't say anything else, even when Jan took the front seat, joked with her, or told funny stories. Salee could only smile awkwardly, making Veetara uneasy.

She sped up to drop Jan off at her condo near Wongwian Yai as quickly as possible.

"I'll drop you off here."

"Do you two want to come up for a party in my room?"

Jan invited, her face red from drinking, making Salee quickly shake her head.

"I need to go home. My mom will scold me if it's too late." Hearing that, Jan asked with a playful smile,

"Oh, but didn't you two say you had work to discuss? Hmm?"

"We can talk while driving. Her house is far, and we should be done by the time we get there."

The short-haired woman paused for a moment, then nodded before leaning over the gear shift to kiss Veetara's cheek in a typical Western manner, catching her off guard.

"Thanks for the ride, Veetara."

Veetara stiffened, and after Jan got out of the car, she shivered, feeling uneasy. When she looked at Salee, who was pouting like a crying emoji (T^T) in the group chat, she felt even worse. She patted the seat next to her to call Salee to sit beside her.

"Come sit here."

Salee slowly moved, climbing through the gap to the front passenger seat. After buckling her seatbelt, Veetara asked,

"Where should I drop you off?"

Giving Salee the choice of going home or spending more time with her.

Veetara was anxious about the answer, fearing that the usually cheerful girl, who had been down lately, might be upset.

Luckily, Salee was reasonable enough not to sulk and wanted to go home immediately. Otherwise, Veetara would've spent the night feeling miserable.

They decided to hang out at Veetara's condo, which had become their usual spot after work. Salee's neighborhood was noisy with barking dogs and gossiping neighbors, while Veetara's house was far, making daily commutes difficult. Salee had suggested taking a taxi home, but Veetara worried about her safety. So, the riverside condo became the best option, with a city view and common areas on the twenty-third floor, and an area on the rooftop for a walk.

"Do you have any makeup remover here?" Salee asked as they reached the door. "Huh?"

Veetara raised an eyebrow, surprised by the question since Salee wasn't wearing any makeup.

"It's on the vanity. Why?" "To wipe my cheek,"

Salee frowned at her left cheek, explaining with a puzzled look. "That January girl left her lipstick on your cheek."

*Oh, great.*

Veetara quickly rubbed her cheek, but the person next to her stopped her, explaining that the more she rubbed, the bigger the smudge would get. In the end, the two of them found themselves busy in front of the mirror by the bed on the second floor, trying to erase the traces of Jan's colonization.

*'Someone like Veetara is totally my type.'*

The younger girl mimicked the foreign woman with exaggerated gestures and a high- pitched voice, lifting Veetara's chin with one hand while using a cotton pad soaked in cleansing solution to wipe the nude lipstick stain off her cheek. This made Veetara burst into laughter, pulling the person standing over her closer.

"You're acting tough now,"

Veetara teased, wrapping her arm loosely around the girl's waist. "But at the office, you're all quiet."

"I'm not quiet at all,"

Salee protested, scrunching her nose. She knew this was a sensitive topic because Jan resembled her in many ways-cheerful and easy to get along with. Salee might've felt overshadowed, but that wasn't the main issue. The real problem was Jan's open interest in Veetara.

The issue was that they couldn't openly say they were dating.

Veetara and Salee understood the workplace decorum and Jan's status as a guest, which couldn't be compromised as it might affect future partnerships. Telling Jan directly that she was already seeing someone could lead to rumors and disrupt the office atmosphere. More importantly, it could damage Veetara's credibility as a boss who shouldn't have personal relationships with subordinates. They had both decided they didn't want that.

Veetara thought their current situation was perfect.

She'd just realized what it felt like to want to go to work every day, even when sick.

Yes, she wanted to see Salee, just like Salee had said before when she was told to take a break because she was unwell:

*'I want to see you, Khun Jae.'*

"All done,"

The younger girl said, tossing the cotton pad into the trash under the mirror. She then lifted Veetara's face to inspect her left cheek.

"Good as new, no blemishes."

Veetara half-laughed, half-sighed, noticing that the girl seemed in a much better mood. Salee even started interviewing her like a gossip columnist.

"How did you feel when you were ambushed with a kiss?" "Weird."

Veetara answered honestly.

"It tickled like a squirrel doing a jig on my nerves!" Salee burst out laughing.

"That's such a weird way to describe it!" Making Veetara frown and playfully smack her.

"Still joking around? Aren't you jealous that I got kissed like that?" "Of course, I'm jealous! I've been waiting forever to kiss your cheek!"

Salee said in a high-pitched voice, rolling up her sleeves as if ready to fight.

"If it weren't for the need to maintain the institution's reputation, I'd have pinched Jan's lips right off her face!"

*Aw, that's so scary for a little girl.*

Veetara shook her head, smiling, but was intrigued by Salee's *'I've been waiting forever'* comment. She asked casually,

"Really? How long have you been waiting?"

Salee nodded absentmindedly. "Since-"

Then she stopped short. When Veetara pressed, "Since when?"

Salee hesitated, not giving a clear answer.

Before Veetara could ask more, Salee diverted her attention by saying. "Give me your cheek,"

And leaned in to reclaim the kiss on Veetara's left cheek. Unlike Jan's kiss, Salee's was soft, sweet, and comforting.

"Salee."

"Yes?" "About Jan..."

"It's okay,"

Salee said with a smile, sensing Veetara's worry that Jan's presence might disrupt their simple relationship. Even though Veetara wouldn't be swayed by Jan, too much drama could easily affect Salee. Veetara imagined that if Jan (or anyone else) were to flirt with Salee instead of her, she wouldn't tolerate it for long and might hide Salee from everyone.

But Salee reassured her.

"I do get annoyed when Jan flirts with you, but she's not a bad person. Besides, she's only here for a year, right?"

Salee mumbled, shifting her attention from Veetara's cheek to her lips.

"I bet she'll be back before we know it."

Veetara couldn't help but smile, feeling like she won the lottery. "You,"

She murmured, pulling Salee closer and letting her reclaim her rights from Jan.

How could Veetara resist that sweet, mischievous smile? "Are you staying over tonight?"

Veetara asked, pulling back to whisper after noticing Salee had settled comfortably on her lap. Salee looked startled, placing a hand on her chest in genuine surprise.

## "Khun Jae, if you're planning something naughty, you should schedule it in advance."

Veetara paused, then laughed loudly.

"Who said I was planning anything naughty?"

"Well, you were sneaking your hand under my skirt, so I had to assume you had some wicked intentions,"

Salee said, clasping her hands in mock prayer. "Salee!"

Veetara blushed, realizing she'd indeed done that. She quickly withdrew her hand and placed it on her lap.

"I just meant staying over!"

Salee finally nodded, accepting the explanation. "Oh, in that case, it's fine."

Veetara felt a mix of amusement and exasperation. She felt like teasing the girl, so she leaned in to kiss Salee playfully, like when adults teased babies.

"What do you need time to prepare for that you need advance notice?"

Veetara didn't want to imagine how long Salee would take to prepare for such an event, considering how hesitant she was even about a simple kiss.

When Salee answered,

"I need to wax every hair on my body and wear sexy lingerie like Onanong taught me."

Veetara wanted to pinch Onanong, who was probably packing her bags and crying over leaving her hometown.

"Sexy lingerie?"

"Like the ones I found in your closet."

Veetara frowned but couldn't help but laugh at the thought of Salee in such attire, looking like a high schooler trying to be sexy.

"Alright,"

Veetara concluded.

"I'll schedule it another time."

Salee, sitting on Veetara's lap, gave her two thumbs up and went to change into Veetara's clothes, leaving her smiling at her own unexpected life.

*If I'd known it'd be this good, I wouldn't have played hard to get.*

Sitting there, Veetara remembered she hadn't contacted Kinny to find out why she'd left the restaurant so abruptly. She grabbed her phone and called her repeatedly, but there was no answer. She started to worry, as Kinny usually called back within five to ten minutes or at least sent a message explaining she was busy.

"Is something wrong?"

Salee asked when seeing Veetara frowned. She was coming out of the bathroom with a towel around her hair.

"Kinny isn't answering her phone,"

Veetara explained. Jan saw Kinny take a call before rushing out of the restaurant, which made Veetara worry that she might be in danger. Salee sat beside her, helping her try to contact Kinny through calls, texts, and social media, but there was no response.

"Do you have any idea who Kinny might've been talking to before she left?"

Salee asked.

"If it wasn't her parents, it might've been her boyfriend." "Boyfriend?"

Salee raised an eyebrow, as she'd never heard Kinny mention her boyfriend before.

It wasn't surprising, though, because Kinny was known for being quite private about her personal life. Even Salee only knew that her boyfriend was Tar, a guy introduced by a junior from Kinny and Veetara's university days.

Veetara remembered meeting him once or twice when they first started dating.

"Who does Jae Kinny usually stay with?" Salee asked.

"She stays with her boyfriend, but sometimes she goes to her mom's house." "Maybe we should try calling her parents instead."

"That's a good idea."

Taking the suggestion, Veetara called Kinny's parent's house to check if everything was alright. She used the excuse,

"My phone is about to break, and I lost Kinny's number along with most of my office contacts. If she comes home, please ask her to call me,"

To avoid worrying them.

After hanging up, she shook her head slowly at Salee. "Her parents are fine, and Kinny hasn't gone home." "Then we should ask Tar."

Veetara sighed heavily.

"I don't have his number."

"Do you remember what he looks like?" "I think I'd recognize him if I saw him." "I'll handle it."

The young girl opened the Facebook app on her phone. She navigated through several pages until she reached Kinny's limited list of friends.

Salee handed the screen to Veetara, who scrolled through the profile pictures until she saw a smiling man with a buzz cut.

"That's him."

Veetara confirmed, noting that his Facebook name included "TAR." Both Veetara and Salee were confident they had found the right person.

The young girl messaged him to ask about Kinny, but his response was less than polite. He did admit that Kinny was 'packing up her stuff in the room,

which annoyed Veetara.

When Salee asked, *'Where is Jae Kinny going?* he replied curtly, *'How should I know? We broke up. Don't message me again. It's annoying.*

Both Veetara and Salee sat in stunned silence, feeling like they'd been frozen by Elsa from Frozen.

"Well... I think Jae Kinny probably wants some time to herself right now,"

The young girl murmured after a long silence, and Veetara agreed, deciding not to bother her friend any further.

"Damn it,"

Veetara muttered wearily. Salee wrapped her arms around her, sticking to her like glue to comfort her. Veetara was grateful to have her there at such a moment.

"I believe Jae Kinny is stronger than a rock. So, your friend will be fine. Don't worry."

"I hope so, too."

She leaned her head on Salee's shoulder until Salee yawned and excused herself to snuggle under the blankets on the bed. Veetara watched her with a smile, feeling much more at ease. She then got up to take a shower. When she returned, she found the younger girl still wide awake, seemingly excited about sharing the bed for the night.

Veetara found it amusing but didn't say anything. She simply turned off the light and lay down next to Salee, who seemed to tense up even more.

'*Such a brave girl.'*

Veetara thought with a hidden smile. She then playfully brushed her foot against Salee's warm leg under the blanket, causing the girl to jump and tense up even more.

# Chapter 12

Kinny just broke up with her boyfriend.

She didn't want to move or do anything, not even pack her things out of the apartment she shared with Tar for three years.

Even though she was well aware that lately, things between them hadn't been going smoothly-whether it was work, lifestyle, money, or something that changed over time -she never expected her boyfriend to break up so suddenly, without any warning.

The whole event was abrupt and happened very quickly. He called her and said,

"Come get your stuff. I've already packed mine."

Because the lease was ending in five days, Kinny hurriedly left Onanong's farewell party to return to the apartment, which was now half-empty, making it clear that everything between them was over.

She wasn't sure of Tar's reasons, but if she had to guess, Kinny thought he probably found someone better- someone who was a real woman and could fulfill matters that she couldn't, like legally marrying him or starting a family without having to rely on adoption.

Kinny felt hurt and worthless, but she could understand that since their relationship couldn't progress as he wanted, it meant they'd reached a dead end. Tar wasn't wrong for wanting to find someone who could make his life better.

The fault lay with her for being born this way.

Kinny was lost in thought for a long time. When she finally came to her senses and checked her phone, she was shocked to see fifty-three missed calls and nearly thirty messages from chat apps and social media. This oddly alleviated her initial sense of emptiness.

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### It was 4:07 AM.

*By now, Veetara and that troublesome kid must be fast asleep.*

"Busybodies,"

Kinny muttered to herself with a small smile. She texted them back, saying, 'I'm okay, 'Thanks for worrying,' and 'I'll call in the morning. Then she started to gather her belongings, piece by piece, as much as her physical and mental state would allow. When the sky began to lighten, Kinny was exhausted and decided to lie down on the bed she'd shared with her boyfriend for the last time.

Kinny could say she still loved Tar and would be sad about this breakup for a long time. But this wasn't the first time she'd been heartbroken. She wasn't destitute; she had money, a job, family, and friends, especially those two who would keep her company until she could convince them to get together. So, she'd never sit and wallow in despair forever.

Never. "Jae!"

Salee's loud voice rang out after Veetara came down to get Kinny and bring her up to the condo in the afternoon. The little troublemaker, who could transform into a gecko, jumped on her, nearly knocking her over.

"We were so worried! We thought someone had kidnapped you for a hundred-million-dollar ransom!"

Kinny tried to push Salee's face away, yelling,

"Ransom my foot!"

Veetara had to step in to separate them before they disturbed the neighbors any further.

"Go finish your breakfast first,"

Veetara waved off the person she'd secretly brought home last night to deal with the scrambled eggs on the dining table. Then she dragged Kinny to the sofa, starting to question her about the previous night when she suddenly lost contact. Veetara also confessed, somewhat uncomfortably, that she and Salee were so worried about her safety that they might've overstepped.

"I contacted both your mom and Tar."

Kinny raised an eyebrow, more surprised than angry. as Veetara had feared. "You have his number?"

"No,"

Veetara denied, explaining that Salee had snooped on Kinny's Facebook profile and found Tar through her friends list.

"You're really good at this kind of thing!"

Kinny couldn't help but criticize the young girl, who was still eating breakfast made by her beloved Veetara.

"What happened?" Veetara asked softly.

"Do you want to tell me?"

Of course, Kinny wanted to tell her. Since they'd known each other, Veetara was the only friend she could confide in about her life problems, just as Veetara trusted her with hers. But this time was different because there was an extra girl involved, and Kinny didn't mind that the little brat would hear

her story, too. So, she waved to Salee, who was peeking curiously, to hurry up and join them.

"Are you letting me listen too?"

"Even if I didn't, you'd hear it anyway sitting over there."

The young girl laughed awkwardly, caught trying to eavesdrop. Kinny rolled her eyes, and when everyone was ready, she began to recount what had happened, starting with the issues between her and Tar over the past two years and ending with the sudden event last night. He moved out just days before the lease ended without a proper goodbye or explanation.

Salee listened with a frown, and seeing that Kinny wasn't angry at what Tar had done, she became even more agitated, as if she'd been dumped herself.

"It's infuriating!" "Yes, it's infuriating," Veetara agreed.

"At least he should've talked it out." But Kinny shook her head.

"No," she murmured. "Maybe this is for the best."

In her life, she'd been heartbroken three times before, including this one, making it four. Not to mention the unrequited crushes here and there. This had given her a peculiar perspective that differed from common sense: breaking up without having to explain anything was the best.

She wasn't the type to sit and argue with an ex about why the relationship ended. She might already know the faults, and sometimes the reasons weren't the truth but excuses that a man could come up with to tell someone like her.

*A breakup is a breakup.*

*Falling out of love means just that*

Kinny was tired of listening to explanations and thought a clean break was a good option. At least she wouldn't have to dwell on harsh words fueled by emotions, which could lead to hatred and resentment later on.

Salee and Veetara sat quietly for a while before they both hugged Kinny, offering comfort like parents consoling a child who didn't get into their desired school.

"Yeah, it's for the best." "I'm proud of you, Jae!"

Kinny acknowledged the young girl's presence on her left and the busty one on her right for a few seconds before she let out a sharp cry to mask her emotions,

"Proud of what?!"

And pushed them away.

"I came to tell you this so you wouldn't worry and keep calling non-stop," Kinny pretended to give them a glare while fixing her clothes and hair.

Seeing that it was a good opportunity with both of them present, she changed the subject from herself to the two troublemakers as soon as possible.

"But what about you two? Have you done it yet?" "Kinny!"

"Jae!"

They both cried out in unison, embarrassedly waving their hands like volunteer traffic controllers in front of the condo.

"What?"

Kinny pretended not to know that talking about sex among the three of them created an awkward atmosphere, like a parent meddling in their child's love affairs.

"How can I not think anything when you two are living together like this?" "Jae, you need to go to the temple and make merit,"

Salee suggested.

"It'll clear your mind of impure thoughts!" "You already slept with Vee!"

**"Sleeping together doesn't mean we have to 'woohoo'!"**

'**Woohoo'** in Salee's sense meant sex, a slang term from the game The Sims, a life simulation game where players created and controlled people from birth to death on a computer, which many kids around the world, including Kinny in the past, spent a lot of time on.

Kinny remembered that the young girl had once secretly played this game in the office. When she stood nearby with her hands on her hips, she saw that it was the latest version, with the special feature of creating realistic characters with adjustable body shapes.

And guess who Salee modeled in the game...

## "This is Jae Vee, the busty, slim-waisted, perky- butt, slightly six- packed, and most beautiful woman in The Sims neighborhood!"

Salee introduced Veetara in The Sims (version 4) to Kinny. "And this one is me."

"...."

"We've already woohooed and are getting married in three days."

*And you still have the nerve to brag about it?!*

Kinny didn't know whether to laugh or cry for Veetara because, at that moment, Veetara was still trying to chase Salee in a fit of rage. Kinny didn't get a chance to tell her friend how everyone in the office had been tortured by Salee in The Sims, especially Veetara's character, which Salee had commanded to '*flirt,' 'kiss, 'talk,* and '*woohoo*' repeatedly with herself.

It was clear that Salee was cheeky and not as innocent as Veetara worried, fearing it might be like taking advantage of a minor.

And yet, here she was... "Enough, enough,"

Veetara raised her hand to stop the argument about '*woohoo*, which hadn't even happened in real life. She then changed the subject to ask about Kinny's new place. If she had to move out of her old place and hadn't found a new one yet, she could temporarily stay here. That way, she wouldn't have to rush or go back to her mom's house, which was far from work.

Kinny hesitated for a moment, not wanting to intrude on their love nest. But when Veetara insisted that she accept the offer and not worry about her and Salee having no place to be lovey-dovey after work, she couldn't refuse.

She thanked them and ended with a wish for them to get intimate soon, as that'd be the best consolation prize for a heartbroken person like her.

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The saying 'When it rains, it pours' meant that when one trouble arose and hadn't been resolved, another one popped up, making things even more complicated.

Veetara had been in such situations only a few times. But even if she'd combined all those times, it wouldn't compare to what was happening now.

Instead of just two troubles, as the saying goes, she could count three.

**Three** issues, not counting Jan's chatty nature, which she and Salee had already discussed once.

And these three issues were even more chaotic due to Veetara's selfishness.

Veetara had become very selfish lately. She used to think she was already greedy and eager to build a stable life for herself. But now, with Salee as a significant factor, she wanted even more. This might be a period of role reversal for the two of them.

Veetara had become the one who wanted to be close to Salee as much as possible.

Initially, when the troubles hadn't piled up, everything seemed reasonable. They had feelings for each other and seized every opportunity to spend quality time together despite the limitations.

Kinny said she was infatuated, obsessed, and probably hopelessly in love like never before.

Veetara didn't deny any of the accusations.

"If you keep staring, I'll start charging you a baht per minute," Salee said without looking up from her teaching materials.

It was Sunday, and Salee had been at Veetara's house since yesterday afternoon. Kinny was temporarily staying at Veetara's condo while looking for a new place. Meanwhile, Salee's neighborhood was still gossiping, so they had to move their private time here.

Hearing that, Veetara got up and handed a gray banknote to Salee, who was still engrossed in her book on the sofa. Finally, Salee looked up, half- frowning, half- laughing.

"Are you really going to pay?"

"Yes,"

Veetara nodded with a smile, making the younger girl finally close her book and scoot over to let her sit beside her.

"I won't charge you anymore. You can look at me all you want like a VIP member,"

Salee said, sweeping the books off her lap and turned to face Veetara. Her one leg crossed and the other dangling, with her elbow resting on the sofa back.

Veetara chuckled and then touched Salee's cheek, asking something she'd never wanted to ask anyone in a romantic relationship before,

"How are you? How's your day going?"

Salee was surprised for a moment before her cheeks turned a cute shade of pink. Veetara asked because she genuinely wanted to know how Salee was doing, whether it was obvious or something affecting her emotions.

She wanted to know everything about Salee. "Overall, I'm okay,"

Salee replied, making Veetara unable to stop smiling.

"The neighbors are still curious but don't say much anymore because they probably got scolde when they called my mom to complain about someone picking me up for work almost every day. As for the dogs, they're still as mischievous as ever. Yesterday, they chased the new mailman away."

Veetara could imagine the gang of four dogs chasing someone because she almost had a run-in with them the first time she visited Salee's neighborhood.

"And what about that kid? How is he?" "Thee?" Salee asked.

Veetara nodded.

"Thee said he's feeling much better, thanks to Jae Kinny for transforming into a teacher to teach him the power."

Salee explained that the boy had spent time being himself to relieve stress, doing makeup and hair, and not having to deepen his voice all the time like before.

"Now he calls me 'mommy' and Jae Kinny' mom." "That's good,"

Veetara laughed.

"Suddenly, you have a daughter." "Only temporarily,"

Salee said, sniffing Veetara's hand on her cheek out of habit.

"Once he goes to university, we probably won't see each other anymore." "Not necessarily,"

Veetara pulled her hand back and tugged Salee closer until there was no space between them.

"People who are meant to meet will meet. Remember how we ran into Wat that day?"

This question didn't need an answer because as soon as she asked, Salee wrapped her arms around Veetara's neck, snuggling like a puppy seeking attention, halting their casual conversation to do something else instead.

Veetara didn't know when she'd picked up Salee's clingy habits, but now she was stuck to her like glue and was about to become even stickier. Even after they parted, she followed Salee everywhere like a ghost, as Kinny had once commented. Even when it was time to leave, she walked Salee to the front

of the village with an umbrella after Salee refused her offer to drive her, citing Veetara's heavy workload about online content for the institute and the constant traffic.

Veetara wanted Salee to stay over, but with more work came more problems, especially with Jan, who seemed to have noticed something. They had to be extra careful, avoiding going to work together, which frustrated Veetara.

"How can someone look so beautiful even when frowning? But you'd look even better with a big smile,"

Salee teased, hugging Veetara's waist in front of the village. Veetara didn't smile because she still wanted Salee to stay, even though she understood the reason.

"How about we go on a trip next week?" Salee suggested, catching Veetara's interest. "A trip?"

"Do you still have the gift voucher from the friendly sports competition?" Salee asked.

Veetara paused for a moment and then nodded.

"It should be in my study. I'll look for it when I get back."

"If you find it, let's go there. Saturday is a holiday, and Monday is a substitute holiday. If we go early Saturday, we can have a three-day, two- night trip."

Hearing that, Veetara's mood gradually improved, and she smiled. She nodded and murmured,

"A little break would be nice,"

Making Salee beam. Then, Salee stepped back and waved down a yellow- green taxi that appeared just in time.

"Bye," Salee said with a wai.

"Okay, let me know when you get home," Veetara replied.

Salee nodded and waved until she got in the taxi, closed the door, and even after the taxi drove off, she kept waving through the back window, making Veetara chuckle and wave back until she couldn't see the taillights anymore. Then she turned and walked back into the village, unaware that she was about to face an unexpected problem.

He stood firmly at the gate, next to the familiar Benz that Veetara had just realized had turned in when Salee called a taxi a moment ago.

"Best."

## "How could you do this to me, Jae?!"

The situation happened so suddenly that the young woman was confused.

She only remembered Best saying he came to see her because Wat had contacted him (they knew each other when Wat was still dating her) to ask,

*'So, is your sister a lesbian or what?'*

Veetara wasn't sure if Wat genuinely wanted an answer or just wanted to stir up trouble in her family for his own satisfaction. If it was the latter, he succeeded because that question came with some clues to prove he wasn't making it up.

"Wat said every time he visited you, you were always with a girl from work, and you two seemed very close."

Best began shouting at her.

"I never knew you liked girls, but that's not my business. What I care about is that the girl Wat described sounds a lot like Salee!"

Best started explaining that, at first, he wasn't sure if it was Salee or not and was coming to ask her himself. But when he drove to the village's entrance, Best confirmed with his own eyes that the 'girl' in Wat's description was indeed his ex-girlfriend. Even if she denied it strongly or claimed Salee was just there to discuss work, Best wouldn't believe it because he'd seen their close behavior.

Veetara sighed. "So what?"

She asked, causing her brother to pause, as she didn't deny it at all. The young man turned red with anger.

"Salee is my ex- girlfriend!"

"Yes, Salee is your ex. So that means your relationship with her ended ages ago, Best."

"Jae!"

"If you're done, go home. I have work to do." "Jae, You took my chance away!"

Veetara sighed again as he stubbornly clung to the idea that. '*She stole his ex'.*

"Is that why Salee refused to get back with me?"

Best blamed Veetara for luring Salee with whatever she could, making her raise her hand to stop him from speaking. Otherwise, she might've slapped Best to wake him up to reality.

"I think you should blame yourself for being so pathetic and unworthy of a smart girl like Salee."

"..."

Best was stunned for several moments, as he'd never heard such harsh but straightforward words from her before.

He got even angrier.

His face turned red with rage, but Best eventually managed to control his emotions before retorting.

"That's right. You're better than me in everything: smarter and more successful in work. No wonder Salee chose you... Oh, wait."

The young man paused for a breath, then continued to fuel the fire. "I should say you're just my replacement."

Best smiled.

"Since I'm a failure, Salee just upgraded to a sibling who looks similar but is better. Am I right...?"

Veetara stood still.

And yes.

This was the **first major problem** she had to face.

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Salee found that her office life was harder than she thought. Still, she tried to endure the annoyance caused by Jan, the foreign woman who liked to flirt with Veetara whenever she had the chance, as if she wanted to see chaos. Jan seemed to instinctively sense (somehow) that there was

something special between Salee and Veetara, even though they tried hard to hide it.

Salee was used to being the third person who had nothing to do with Veetara's love life since high school. But now, she wasn't that little girl anymore. She had her own space, but she couldn't relax and be herself, like when she felt her home wasn't her own when guests visited.

It was frustrating enough to want to send those guests away quickly, but she couldn't.

Even though she told Veetara not to worry about it.

Salee started to get angry at her own dwindling patience. She tried to accept the situation several times a day, but whenever she thought she could, Jan would act interested and touch Veetara openly in front of her. Even though Veetara tried to stop her, Jan would use the excuse, '*I'm just teasing,* 'with a playful attitude, making Salee's head throb because she couldn't voice her objections even though she had the right to.

It'd be better to go back to when she had nothing. At least Salee could enjoy small things like secretly admiring Veetara's success without worrying about unsolvable problems like this.

But even though she thought that her selfishness as a lover had developed, it was impossible to watch Veetara anymore. She loved Veetara a lot and wanted Veetara to love her back. She wanted to have exclusive rights to Veetara, not letting anyone else touch or bother her like Jan was doing.

She could tolerate small things.

But it seemed the longer Jan stayed, the more intense her actions became. Until one day, Salee's patience ran out, causing trouble and leading to the cancellation of a three- day, two-night trip they had planned. She later learned from Veetara that this was the '***second and third major problem'*** Veetara prayed never to encounter again in her life.

The trouble started when Salee brought in her work and found Jan learning the process.

Everything seemed to be going smoothly, but then the foreign woman invited her to stay after she finished her task to chat about random things in English (because it was Jan's mother tongue) with Veetara, taking the opportunity to say. "Since that party night, we haven't been together as a trio again," making Salee and Veetara exchange uncomfortable glances. It got even more awkward when Jan suddenly asked Salee without any preamble:

## "Salee, I want to know what you think about romantic relationships in the workplace?"

"...."

Jan smiled when she saw Salee freeze, then cleared her throat and explained the reason for her question.

"I was assigned to assess the office situation for future collaborations. So if you can answer, it'd benefit Veetara a lot."

"Jan, you're here as an exchange tutor. You can't just interrogate my staff like this,"

Veetara interrupted with a stern voice, making the foreign woman raise her hands in surrender and apologize.

"You're right. I forgot that it's rude. Good thing you reminded me. So let's make it official."

She then took an envelope from the inside pocket of her blazer and handed it to Veetara. The content stated that Jan's institution requested (demanded) an interview with the staff to evaluate their work, attitudes, and opinions about the organization to see if they were suitable for future investments.

The two institutions were only collaborating on an exchange program, with no official investments yet. Salee knew Veetara had high hopes for this

business expansion, so it wasn't surprising that she looked so stressed and uneasy.

Jan continued smiling as she explained,

"Even though I'm just a language tutor, my institution is reputable. We work efficiently and have a clear hierarchy."

"...."

"So we don't want that hierarchy to be disrupted by personal relationships between colleagues or between bosses and subordinates."

"....."

"It'd distract us from teaching effectively."

Jan leaned towards Veetara, clasping her hands on the desk like an executive making an offer.

"But from what I've observed, it seems that many people in your our office don't agree with this strict rule."

Salee pressed her lips tightly, not daring to say anything at all. She feared that the words that might slip out would turn into profanities that, besides being unpleasant to hear, would also be unkind and unworthy of the praise Veetara had once given her, saying,

'*You always speak so nicely'.*

When Jan began to be serious, as expected, Salee had to suppress her anger, which made her body tremble. She stood up, excused herself, and calmed down outside. She couldn't tell if Jan was just teasing her or if she really meant what she said.

## "We can benefit from it. I don't need to report the truth, and your subordinates won't have to answer difficult questions. So, you and I, let's spend a night consulting together. By morning, these annoying

**issues will disappear as if they never happened. What do you think, Veetara?"**

.

.

In her life, Veetara had never screamed out loud.

Even when riding a roller coaster with her high school friends at an amusement park, Veetara never screamed, only scrunching her face behind the safety lock. But in this situation, she wanted to scream to release her pent-up frustration at the cause of this conflict. However, she could only sit tensely, watching Salee, whose face was a shade of anger she'd never seen before until she closed the office door behind her.

"Wow, Salee is so angry she ran away," Jan chuckled.

"See how fragile relationships can be and how much trouble they can cause us?"

"....."

"Come on, Veetara. I've been on this earth for over thirty years, had no less than ten relationships, and countless bed partners. Do you think I can't see how you and Salee look at each other and how close your body language is, even when you're standing apart?"

The American woman pushed herself from her chair to sit on the edge of Veetara's desk, smiling.

"It's not good to secretly date in the workplace, you know."

"I'll consider that you didn't just make that ridiculous offer. So, don't let there be a second time."

"Or what?"

"I'll report back to your institution that you have sexually harassed me." "Hmm," Jan acknowledged.

"And what will you do about the report on office romances? Don't forget that it could cost your institution a great opportunity."

"I have high hopes for the joint venture expansion, but I don't like being blackmailed to reduce my bargaining power. So, if I have to lose the opportunity, then so be it,"

Veetara replied curtly.

"I hope the higher-ups over there will understand."

Jan didn't seem fazed at all. Instead, she smiled with satisfaction as she said, "I like you, Veetara. You're very decisive"

## "Don't worry about losing any opportunities. I was just joking, though I did hope you'd fall for the trap and accept the offer a little."

"?"

"And if you want to report anything, you don't have to go through the trouble of emailing the higher-ups over there. Just walk over to my desk and tell me directly because you'll be talking to the owner of the institution."

Veetara blinked in confusion as she watched the foreign woman move off the desk. She was puzzled, wondering if Jan was joking again. But when Jan added with a smile,

"I handed over the management to my big sister because I prefer teaching,"

It seemed she knew Veetara was questioning why she hadn't seen Jan's name on the board of directors when researching the institution.

It turned out Jan wasn't lying. Later, when Veetara searched for the founding history, she found that Jan was indeed the founder of the language

school. Jan graduated with honors in Thai language from a prestigious university in Thailand at the age of seventeen. This meant that the foreign woman wasn't visiting Thailand for the first time as she claimed and understood Thai very well. The odd accent was just another playful act.

"Oh, there's one more thing you should know,"

Jan said, almost reaching the door but then turning back to Veetara's desk.

"Besides you, I also want Salee. That girl is cute. She seems smart and is a great teacher. It's a shame she seems to hate me now."

Hearing that, Veetara's heart raced, but outwardly, she could only sit and listen to the provocations with a calm demeanor. She didn't want to give Jan any more reasons to target her, so she didn't respond, letting Jan continue,

"But we all know nothing is certain in this world. Maybe one day I'll become 'Khun Jae' to Salee, right?"

"...."

Veetara pressed her lips tightly together after the office door closed, leaving her alone, clenching her fists in frustration, not knowing how to release her accumulated anger. Just the thoughts triggered by her brother's words were already giving her a headache. Now, she had to deal with being humiliated further. Veetara's mood grew even more furious.

The young woman felt utterly exhausted.

Regarding the problem Best had thrown at her the other day, she couldn't help but question why Salee had turned to like her, the sister of her ex- boyfriend. In reality, if someone broke up with another person for unpleasant reasons, they would want to stay away from anything related to their ex. Especially family members. No one would want to face someone who almost became their sister-in-law. But Salee, instead of being bothered by this fact, tried to get close to Veetara every day in a subtle way.

Veetara thought about it over and over but couldn't figure it out.

She tried to calm down to find an opportunity to ask Salee as she should. But when the opportunity arose, something always prevented her from asking. She feared her useless brother might be right. And with the current situation in the company, it was even harder for her and Salee to find time together.

So, Veetara decided not to ask, fearing that if something went wrong, she'd waste valuable time and make Salee upset over nothing if Best's assumption was incorrect.

Now, everything made Veetara paranoid.

There was only one thing that could comfort her and clear up her cloudy thoughts a bit: Salee's warm presence and smile.

That evening, Veetara drove to see Salee after she'd asked to go home immediately after work.

She wanted to check how the young woman felt about that day. It turned out that the problem Jan left was bigger than she thought, as it could make someone as cheerful as Salee so angry that she couldn't hide her expression, even hours after the incident.

"Khun Jae,"

The younger woman began as they hugged each other tightly. Veetara had to pull away to listen to what Salee was about to say.

"I told you not to worry about Jan flirting with you because I could handle my emotions, right?"

"Yes."

"But I don't think I can do that anymore." Veetara flinched, especially when Salee added, "It doesn't seem to work."

The older woman quickly reasoned that Jan was just joking. Except for the fact that Jan was the owner of the institution, which made Veetara decide that once the exchange program contract ended, it'd be over. She wouldn't invest with someone as cunning as Jan to avoid further mental stress. But Salee still shook her head.

"It's not just about Jan anymore," The young woman sighed.

"It's about maintaining our relationship in the long run." ". "

Veetara sat still, listening to Salee explain that their relationship was always at risk, like standing on the edge of a cliff. This was because neither of them could exercise their rightful relationship openly. They couldn't even reveal it fully. Even with their colleagues, they had to hide it to some extent.

With Jan's arrival, Salee realized that their relationship wouldn't survive if workplace rules continued to limit their freedom to express themselves. She believed that even if they got past Jan, there would still be opportunities for others to cause similar chaos.

The young woman bit her lip, realizing that Salee's analysis was entirely accurate. She agreed.

Until the girl mumbled about the only way to solve the problem, Veetara froze, then shook her head, refusing to accept the decision. The accumulated chaos forced them into a heated argument, leading to the final conflict.

And yes, what Salee told her was...

## "I think I have to quit."

But no matter what, she'd never let her go.

# Chapter 13

Kinny could only describe the current situation between Veetara and Salee in one word: *chaotic!*

She had no idea what happened at first because suddenly, the atmosphere between Veetara and Salee became tense and strained. It wasn't until Salee found an opportunity to unofficially inform her, as another senior in the office, *'I'm going to resign, Jae*, that Kinny was both shocked and confused. When she tried to ask what, why, and how, Salee had already walked away, seeing Jan approaching them in the kitchen.

*Or could it be...*

"Hi, Kinny."

Kinny nodded in greeting, her mind filled with suspicion, wondering if this foreign woman was the cause of the conflict. From her perspective, Kinny didn't see much possibility of that.

The relationship between Veetara and Salee seemed too strong for anyone to come between them, especially someone who didn't seem serious about life and liked to socialize, joke around, and chat with everyone. However, she forgot to consider one crucial fact in her analysis:

Jan was also a human.

And humans were creatures full of tricks and countless deceptions (case study: her many exes). If Jan intended to play dirty, anything could happen.

"It's strange that you were assigned to look after me, but we haven't talked much,"

The foreign woman started a conversation, leaning her hip against the counter next to her coffee cup.

"It's not strange at all because you've adapted so well that I thought you didn't need any help."

"Oh, Kinny, you're jumping to conclusions too quickly," Jan feigned a not-so-serious complaint.

"I still need help in many areas, like grocery shopping, for example." Kinny raised an eyebrow slightly.

"Grocery shopping?"

"Yup, I'm interested in cooking for myself now," The foreign woman smiled.

"You know, the food stalls you guys take me to during lunch breaks, while delicious, aren't exactly healthy, right?"

Jan referred to the overly oily cooking methods and the occasional heavy- handed use of MSG when the vendor was in a bad mood.

"My condo has a kitchen, so I thought I'd try cooking for myself. But I don't know where to buy affordable ingredients besides the supermarket. Can you help me, Kinny?"

She crossed her arms and leaned in as Kinny was about to make another cup of coffee for Veetara.

Lately, her dear friend hadn't left her office since arriving, seemingly avoiding any confrontation with the younger girl, which worried her enough to find an excuse to investigate.

*They were so close to being together!*

*If I let this continue without intervening (meddling), my goal of playing Cupid would surely be ruined.*

Kinny was so preoccupied with matchmaking that she seemed lost in thought, not answering Jan's question. The other woman touched her wrist to get her attention, making her jump, and Jan seemed startled as well.

"What did you say?"

Kinny asked as Jan pulled her hand back and crossed her arms again.

"I asked if you could take me to the market. I don't want to buy tomatoes for a hundred baht each at the supermarket."

Kinny pondered for several seconds, and when she realized Jan was the prime suspect in the current mess, she agreed. Kinny believed that, besides having the chance to observe Jan's suspicious behavior, she could also prevent the foreign woman from adding more tension between Salee and Veetara.

"Alright." "Great!"

"Let me know when you want to go..." "Today!"

Jan said enthusiastically, pleased with Kinny's response. She arranged to meet Kinny after work and then left the kitchen, leaving Kinny frowning and feeling uneasy about Jan's sly smile. The electric kettle beeped, signaling the water was boiling, snapping her out of her thoughts. She poured hot water into her coffee cup and Veetara's.

She went to Veetara's office, only to find her friend leaning back in her swivel chair, hands clasped on her stomach, staring at the documents on her desk without moving. It was clear that she was deeply troubled.

"I made you some coffee."

"Thanks,"

Veetara muttered, not reaching for the cup, Just letting her place it on the desk.

"I just found out that Salee is resigning." "Yeah."

"What do you think?"

"What I think doesn't matter."

Veetara said indifferently, reaching into a drawer to pull out a white envelope and sliding it across the desk for her to see.

Kinny was stunned. When she took the liberty of pulling the letter from the envelope and reading it, she found that Salee would only stay for another half month to finish her work, and the reason given for her resignation was *'personal issues'.*

"What did I miss?"

Kinny asked, looking up at her friend, who remained silent, indicating she didn't want to talk about it. Kinny sighed deeply Just by looking, she could tell Veetara was in a state of emotional turmoil and quite 'sensitive. This relationship was almost like a first love, making Veetara clumsy and unable to organize her thoughts. Unlike her previous relationships, where she dated exes at appropriate times in her life, when the relationship faced turmoil, Veetara simply let go without feeling much more than wasted time.

But with Salee...

Kinny believed Veetara couldn't let go of the younger girl, but she was still used to certain patterns, pretending everything was under control when, in reality, she was deeply troubled and didn't know what to do next.

*For heaven's sake!*

Kinny sighed again, then muttered, making Veetara look away,

"I don't know what happened, but if you two break up over something trivial, no one here will be happy, including me."

Veetara stayed silent, but she showed signs of discomfort when Kinny emphasized,

"Do something quickly. the time left is very short."

Kinny then left her friend to spend time alone, and Veetara chose to remain stubbornly silent.

Until Veetara realized she was the one who started it, and Salee wasn't the type to 'sulk unreasonably and couldn't be easily appeased (because the younger girl had moved on to the 'angry + hurt' stage now). By then, it seemed too late to fix things.

*Why, you ask?*

*Just think about it. Veetara managed to anger a girl who'd always been attentive and agreeable.*

*What else could it be if this isn't called a chaotic (almost) beyond-repair event?*

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Veetara let fifteen days pass in vain.

She kept to herself, avoiding confrontation, and believed that their argument was both their fault for letting emotions override reason. So, she decided not to back down until Salee made the first move.

In the end, Veetara found that Salee had cleared her desk on her last working day, leaving only a box of pens and other stationery that she'd playfully taken from her.

Veetara sat on the edge of the desk, one arm crossed, the other hand holding her temple, as the office was silent and dim. The staff had gone home, looking sad after Salee informed everyone at the end of the day that it was her last day working.

Everything came to a standstill for a long time. Then, the young girl was bombarded with questions and complaints about why she gave such short notice, ending with their well-wishes, which Veetara didn't see who was the one saying because she was hiding, gripping the doorknob tightly behind her office door.

She didn't say a word to Salee, even though part of her always thought about the girl. But another part of her was too proud of her own reasoning, leaving her sitting alone in the office at eleven o'clock in the evening, feeling lonely. Finally, the silence forced her to recall the night Salee declared her intention to resign.

Veetara kept replaying that event over and over again, and she couldn't deny that each time, she thought of countless other possibilities. For example,

*'If I hadn't been so hot-headed, by now, we'd probably be lounging around watching Netflix at home, not avoiding each other's faces like this. Or, 'If I'd calmly persuaded her instead of picking a fight, saying she shouldn't quit just yet and look for other solutions together, she wouldn't have to pack her things and prepare her teaching materials to hand over to her replacement within fifteen days.'*

Eventually, as her thoughts began to settle, Veetara had to admit that her own selfishness had worsened the situation ever since Best showed up.

That day, she lost control of her emotions and used harsh words with her younger brother, which led to a sharp retort that left her speechless.

The same went for Jan. She had many options to prevent that foreign woman from meddling in her relationship with Salee. For instance, she could've lied, saying,

*'I already have a boyfriend and have never been interested in women, so don't waste your time'.*

This tactic had worked well in high school to fend off younger admirers. But she didn't do it because she was too proud of Salee to hide this fact from anyone. She didn't want to lose her own foolish pride. Despite knowing from experience that a white lie could make things easier, she didn't act decisively.

She could've shown that the business proposal wasn't that important since there were many other institutions to work with. But Veetara clung to the expectation that the plan was about to succeed, so she compromised with the future partner out of politeness, leading to an awkward situation. And the reason for this was that she wanted Salee to see her success soon.

Veetara craved Salee's admiration, even though Salee always looked at her that way. But she was too greedy. Besides the hugs, kisses, and presence in her life, the look of admiration, as if she were someone important and exemplary, made her feel more valuable than anything or anyone else could. That's why she bluntly rejected Salee's suggestion to solve the problem by quitting.

Because Veetara was selfish and wanted to be important to Salee's life at all times.

And not just to anyone, but only to Salee.

This led to a conflict in what should've been a simple conversation to find a solution together, as they had done before.

The issue started when Veetara stubbornly argued that quitting might not be the only solution. But when Salee asked what the other solutions were, she couldn't answer and only declared that she wouldn't accept the resignation letter.

"Where will you work if you quit? Will you work for a competitor?"

Veetara tried to point out that even though Salee was a skilled and well- known tutor among students, finding a new job wouldn't be easy, especially with a competitor. No other place would offer as good a deal as her institution.

"I'll raise your salary and do anything to make you stay."

"It's not about the salary at all, and I'm not going to work for your competitor either,"

Salee frowned, her voice starting to show anger. "What kind of person do you think I am?"

"If not working for another institution, then what will you do?"

The rising tension made her forget that Salee's question deserved an answer. Otherwise, it'd linger in her mind that she saw Salee as someone who could be bought with money or ready to benefit a competitor. Salee had always considered Veetara's best interests and still did.

Veetara missed this point entirely. "I won't be a tutor anymore,"

Salee replied calmly this time, then mumbled something that left Veetara stunned. Salee admitted that being a tutor wasn't her dream job and wasn't something she planned to do as a career from the start. A 'travel photographer' was her true calling, which explained her photography skills and the camera equipment she had.

"I always thought that one day I'd have to quit, no matter the reason,"

Salee confessed. Since she started as a tutor, she prepared herself for the possibility that she might not do this job for long, expecting it to last at most a little over a year. But it'd exceeded her expectations, lasting over two years as their relationship developed rapidly.

But that confession made Veetara's pent-up emotions explode before she could ask or listen to any further explanations. She assumed Salee had planned for Best to get her a job while also preparing an escape route in case the 'plan to approach her' as a sister, who was better than Best in almost every way, failed. Or in case things got too complicated, like now, Salee could quickly escape the chaotic relationship, just like she did with Best.

Veetara believed that at her age, with her looks, abilities, and charming personality, Salee would still have many options after leaving her. Salee didn't need to stop at her alone.

So, instead of a calm conversation, the emotions and tension made her accuse Salee based on her own understanding. This left Salee silent for so long that she didn't dare count the seconds until the young woman stood up, her eyes and nose red and her arms crossed as she instinctively stepped back from her. Veetara realized at that moment that she made a mistake.

*I messed up again.*

"I don't know where you got this idea, but does this mean you never believed me?"

Salee asked, not expecting an answer.

"No matter how softly, loudly, or daily I spoke, you never believed me." ". "

Veetara pressed her lips together, and that made her too slow to respond when the younger woman cut her off, saying,

"Go home, Khun Jae. I'll submit my resignation letter tomorrow."

Just before the door closed, Veetara noticed that those red eyes were now filled with tears, which Salee would never let her see falling.

Just as Salee would never see her current state either.

Veetara still sat on the edge of the desk where the young woman had worked for over two years, except now her hand, which had been holding her temple, was pressing her palm to wipe away her own tears.

She felt... lonely, and she missed Salee terribly. "Vetara."

She jumped when a voice came from the office door.

Veetara quickly wiped the tears from her eyes and sniffed to clear the burning sensation. Luckily, the office was almost entirely dark, so the foreign woman couldn't see clearly that she'd just been crying.

"Jan,"

She greeted in her usual tone. "Did you forget something?" "About Salee, I..."

"Don't,"

She cut her off sharply.

"Don't say anything. Just finish your business and leave." "I'm sorry, Veetara,"

Jan continued as if she hadn't heard what Veetara said earlier. She explained that she didn't intended or expected Salee to resign like this.

*Yeah, I didn't expect it either.*

Veetara thought.

"If you're staying, make sure to lock the front door when you leave. Good night,"

Veetara concluded, grabbing her bag and walking past Jan. She had an important job tomorrow, so she needed to save her energy for work rather than listen to anyone's apologies, which were useless since everything had already happened.

No one could go back and fix it, not even the person who caused it all.

Veetara went home, showered, and lay down, hoping that the important job' of filming the online English teaching program for the first time tomorrow would go smoothly. Fortunately, she was familiar with the filming location.

## Because it was the all-girls high school she'd attended.

Salee was born and raised in Bangkok, but both her parents were from the provinces. When they were young, her parents told her a few times about the love story between Little Miss Toom and Mr. Krai, which wasn't easy.

Yes.

Before becoming Aunty Toom, who sold all kinds of noodles at an all-girls high school, she was once Little Miss Toom. Her parents were well-off from farming, agriculture. and livestock, which made them prosperous. This resulted in their youngest daughter being raised like a rural princess.

She had better food and clothes than others, always had a servant following her around, and could act as she pleased because no one wanted to mess with her father and Uncle Tu (Toom's oldest brother), who always sided with her.

Salee's father, Krai, added that even though Little Miss Toom looked quite proper back then, she was actually very mischievous and liked to pick fights, especially with him. He'd just moved to the area with his grandparents, who ran a noodle cart in the market.

Toom and Krai fought and bickered constantly because they couldn't stand each other. But over time, Little Miss Toom changed her mind when she saw how hardworking Krai was. He helped his grandparents with the

noodle cart before school and took over selling noodles until late at night after school, which affected his grades.

Toom saw an opportunity and offered to help him with his homework and teach him what he didn't understand. The conditions were that he had to agree to be her servant, take her to school every day, and let her eat noodles for free once a day. Krai, who didn't have many options and needed a scholarship to ease his grandparents' financial burden, had to agree.

"And then your mother took advantage of me and finished me at the hut..." "Dad!" Salee protested.

"I don't need to know that much detail!" But that's how it was.

In the end, Toom was determined to win Krai over, and he eventually softened because he'd secretly liked her from the start. But when they first met, Toom was more annoying than cute, so Krai pretended to be indifferent.

And that was the beginning of their challenging journey. Even though they loved each other, love alone wasn't enough. Their relationship connected to many others -family, friends, and those around them. This interconnectedness meant no one could be truly free because even small actions could have ripple effects. They faced opposition from their guardians.

Salee wasn't sure how common arranged marriages were back then, but it seemed as popular as posting food pictures on social media today. Her father told her that families with beautiful daughters often did this, especially if they were wealthy. They wanted a son-in-law of equal or higher status to ensure financial prosperity.

With Little Miss Toom, it was no different. If there were a chart of the hottest girls in the district, Toom would be in the top three. Her parents intended to find a good husband for her, not the son of a noodle vendor in

the market. But Toom had already chosen her own husband. This caused chaos and conflict between the two families, arguing every other day.

Toom's parents tried everything to make her and Krai break up. When that didn't work, they threatened to disinherit her from the family estate, which included farmland, orchards, a pig farm, and fish ponds. They hoped this would make her reconsider, as she'd always lived comfortably.

But if former Little Miss Toom had been afraid of leaving her comfort zone as her father hoped, she wouldn't have eloped with Krai to find work in Bangkok right after high school. By the time they realized it, they had Salee and their they proved they could make it work through hard work, understanding, and patience. People often said grandparents loved their grandchildren more than their own children, which seemed to hold true.

Her mother told Salee that Salee's grandfather used to be stern and unemotional, even with Toom. But when Salee was born, he became a cheerful old man, smiling widely. He'd wait at the house entrance whenever Salee's mother called to say they were visiting. He spoiled Salee and gave her money for snacks. Her grandmother and grandparents from Salee's father's side also made peace, with Salee as the glue.

Salee was happy about that.

But now, she wasn't sure if she should be upset that her grandparents and parents seemed to get along too well, conspiring to make her rush back home after her grandfather fell ill (he was pretending, though) while her issues in Bangkok remained unresolved.

Salee was upset.

She wanted Veetara to apologize, even though she knew Veetara wasn't the type to do that.

Salee wouldn't apologize either, feeling that she'd always loved and cared for Veetara, but Veetara either didn't see it or had forgotten all her past actions. Veetara didn't reflect, reconsider, or try to improve the situation.

Instead, she remained indifferent. On Salee's last day of work, Veetara didn't say a word to her, as if she'd already decided that Salee was trying to escape the complicated relationship, just like she did with Best.

*But who would want to run away from someone they secretly loved for so long?*

Salee had already explained that she wanted to leave her job to fully express her love, but Veetara wouldn't listen, arguing that it wasn't the only way to solve their problems and would only make them more distant. Salee didn't see the difference between being apart because of different jobs and being close but unable to be intimate.

She preferred the first option, where she could fully express herself when visiting her friends at the institute.

"Sigh."

"Eighteenth sigh now." "Dad!"

Salee pouted as Krai, the husband of former Little Miss Toom, who was reading the newspaper behind her, commented for the eighteenth time.

She was sitting at the top step of their traditional Thai house, which was on a high hill. From there, Salee could see the vast green fields stretching to the horizon, with tall palm trees lining the edge, resembling Veetara's curves when lying down. Despite the serene and beautiful natural scenery, far from the chaos of the city, she kept sighing repeatedly.

"Nineteenth." "Dad!"

"What good does sighing do?"

"Exactly, you're acting heartbroken like a primary school kid."

"Mom!"

Salee squirmed in frustration. "Can't you let me sigh in peace?"

Both her parents refused simultaneously, annoyed by her dramatic behavior like a 90s music video heroine. Instead of siding with her after she explained what happened between her and "Vee," they exchanged knowing glances and concluded in unison,

"You should reconsider your actions." This made Salee even more agitated.

She pouted as she lay back on the warm wooden floor, her legs still dangling over the steps.

"I've always been good to her, always caring, always trying to help, and I tell her I love her every day,"

She whined.

"What more could I have done, Mom?"

This time, her mother sighed. Former Little Miss Toom put down her needlework and sat beside Salee.

"The problem isn't with your current actions," Her mother began.

"Don't forget that you dated Best before, and you've never explained the beginning of that relationship to Vee."

Salee thought about it and frowned. In truth, the term 'beginning' had to be traced back to the first day she met Veetara in the cafeteria. From that moment on, she'd always admired and followed her. Her relationship with Best was simply because he bore an unforgivable resemblance to Veetara.

"Is it necessary?" she asked. "Absolutely," came the reply.

"But they say the present is more important than the past,"

Salee argued. She believed that past events weren't as significant as the present, which shapes the future. She was confident she'd done her best, but it was Veetara who was paranoid and distrustful.

Thinking about it made her both sad and frustrated that she wanted to squeeze Veetara's chest to relieve her anger!

"And who is this 'they'?"

Her father interjected, not looking up from his newspaper. "Are they in the same situation as you?"

Salee looked up at Krai and realized he wasn't teasing her as he usually did to make her yell like when she was a kid.

"Such theories only apply to certain people or specific situations,"

Her mother elaborated with a weary tone, having to give relationship advice for free.

"Everyone's circumstances are different. In your case with Veetara, I think it started with your trustworthiness, Salee."

Salee sat up straight and repeated the word, "My trustworthiness?"

"First, you asked Best to help you get a job," Her mother began counting on her fingers.

"That means you took advantage of your past relationship with him for your own purposes, but Veetara never knew what those purposes were."

"Second, you approached her half-heartedly, which was useful for you because it gave you a way out. But for Vee, it might've created lingering doubts that you were never serious from the start."

Salee was taken aback.

"Third, you think you have every right to feel hurt because you've loved her longer. But just because her feelings developed later doesn't mean they are any less significant than yours, right?"

"...."

"So if Vee has doubts or feels wary about your secretive behavior, it's normal for someone who expects love from us and wants to be sure they're not second to anyone. But you jumped to the conclusion that she didn't trust you... Imagine if she felt nothing; you'd be in trouble."

Listening to her mother's explanation, Salee was stunned. As her thoughts settled, she saw her own major mistakes. Aunty Toom's words shattered her previous anger and sadness. From feeling down like a heartbroken person, she became so anxious that she stood up quickly, feeling dizzy and almost falling down the stairs.

"Be careful!"

Her mother scolded, but Salee was still restless. "I can't stay here anymore!"

She declared at the front of the house. "I have to go apologize to Khun Jae!"

She then packed her things with determination, but her father stopped her. "Wait, you need to hold off on making up with her,"

Krai said, folding his newspaper and taking off his glasses. "Do you know why you're here?"

Salee raised an eyebrow. "Because Grandpa is sick."

Her grandmother called her last week, saying Grandpa was bedridden, prompting her to rush back to this traditional Thai house to care for him. But Grandpa's condition improved significantly once she arrived, her smile cheering him up.

"Grandpa is fine, Salee," Her father corrected her. "Very fine,"

Her mother added, explaining that her grandfather was still strong despite being nearly ninety. The illness was a simple plan to bring her home.

Knowing she was recently unemployed, her grandparents, along with her paternal grandparents, who built a new house nearby, conspired to set her up with the district officer's son.

**"A setup**?!"

Salee exclaimed. She was about to run, but her mother, who stood up without her noticing, grabbed her collar.

"Did you conspire with Grandpa too, Mom?" she asked. "Of course not,"

Her mother, the former Little Miss Toom, knocked her on the head. "Then let me go!"

Her mother refused, explaining that if she ran away today, she'd have to keep running. It was better to settle things now. Otherwise, her grandparents, wanting to introduce her to a well-off man out of good intentions, would be even more determined to get her married.

Salee was shocked, feeling like crying and wanting to run back to Veetara's arms immediately!

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Since Veetara went to oversee the filming of an English teaching show at her old school, Kinny noticed her friend's mood had plummeted. She didn't know what happened there, but others who went with Veetara said the work went well. The professional filming team had minor issues since it was their first online content, but everything went smoothly. contrary to Veetara's current demeanor.

Everyone noticed it. From Karn, Aof, Onanong, to Aunty Oun's gang and the building's security guards, everyone knew Veetara and Salee had something going on for a while. No one said anything and just played along with the story of the fortune-teller and black magic.

Everyone loved and cared for (though sometimes annoyed by) Salee like a younger sibling. Even Aof, who once had a crush on Salee but moved on, agreed that their relationship was beneficial. Since Veetara had someone to pamper her, she became a more pleasant boss, easier to please, and less demanding about teaching reports. She even gave everyone bonuses.

"So you're worried about the bonus?"

Kinny rolled her eyes at the group during a secret meeting at a hot pot restaurant after work.

"We're worried about everything, Jae!"

Onanong, who joined via video call, corrected.

They then discussed how to help Veetara reconcile with Salee, believing the office would be dull and lifeless without her. At least, if Salee didn't want to return to work, they hoped she'd make up with Veetara to ease the increasingly tense atmosphere.

Kinny agreed with Onanong's idea and encouraged Kinny agreed with Onanong's idea and encouraged everyone to suggest ways for Veetara. Seeing her friend so distressed, it seemed Veetara was desperate to get Salee back. So, it didn't matter who was right or wrong; Veetara just didn't know how to start making up because of her pride.

"Alright, let's hear it,"

Kinny said, opening a small notebook on the table and letting everyone contribute.

Kinny wasn't sure if it'd work, as most suggestions revolved around using Veetara's allure and charm.

"Teach Jae Vee to pose seductively like a Victoria's Secret model."

"When they meet, have her walk slowly and seductively, then tease Salee with her chest!"

"Have Jae Vee fake cry."

"Promise Salee that she'll let Salee touch her chest every day."

"If she doesn't relent, press her face into her chest until that Little Trouble gives in."

"Make Salee see her as the ultimate hot mommy!"

"Or we could suggest her to get a breast augmentation for a change, then..."

## "Enough!"

Kinny meant for everyone to stop, and Veetara's size was already more than enough!

She sighed, thinking that if her friend saw these suggestions, there'd only be two options:

One, beat them up one by one.

Two, Veetara could drop her tough act and make sure that pesky little girl couldn't escape by transforming into a super hot mommy, just like they suggested!

# Chapter 14

Veetara didn't need to investigate anything about Salee. It took her just about three minutes to look up at the honor board next to the student discipline room. She found that Miss 'Ratima Prakobsuk had studied at this school there. Her picture and real name were just four slots away from *'Veetara Santitranon,'* answering all her previous questions about why the girl seemed so familiar.

But that wasn't the main point.

The main point wasn't that Salee had always known who Veetara was or what their shared past at this high school was.

The main point was about Veetara.

Veetara leaned back, resting her head against the chair's backrest. Her eyes stared blankly at the dim ceiling of her office.

She thought back to her high school days, which, if she counted the years on her fingers, would find that two hands weren't enough. Her memories had faded with time. It was normal for people to only remember the big picture and significant events or things that were important to their lives at that time.

But for Salee....

Veetara never let the memories involving Salee fade away. But because the girl had grown up so much, she couldn't recognize her. The last time Veetara saw her, Salee was just a second-year middle school student. So, it was no wonder that her appearance had changed so much.

Salee probably had braces back then, and there was a rule against middle school students having long hair. So, she never saw Salee with shoulder- length hair like in the honor board picture before she graduated.

Yes, Veetara knew Salee.

But not personally. She didn't know her name or ever had long conversations with her.

Their interactions were only in passing and subconscious.

The story began when Veetara realized that someone was secretly watching her every day.

Especially after she became the center of attention among seniors and juniors for being chosen as the red team house leader. Veetara became more alert to being watched or intercepted in the hallways between classes.

Because of this, she could usually avoid awkward situations in time.

The patterns of people trying to approach her could be divided into two types: the shy ones who peeked at her from a distance and the bold ones who sent gifts or directly approached her.

Until Veetara noticed Salee clearly for the first time when a teammate missed a volleyball, and it almost hit the girl's head.

She was very surprised at that moment.

She was surprised to learn that even though the girl had been watching her since the beginning of the eleventh grade, she didn't feel uncomfortable at all.

Maybe because Salee kept her distance and never intruded on her daily life like other kids tried to do.

The girl just stood by the post, watching her practice volleyball, sometimes hiding in the crowded hallway behind the field or sitting on the school building's balcony, looking down.

Salee might've been a peculiar kid.

But it was that peculiarity that made Veetara feel comfortable and even fond of her in a way someone with only a younger brother and no younger sister would.

Veetara loved Best as a family (at least she believed so), but she never liked him, not now or ever.

He was a noisy boy who liked to play rough. Sometimes, he misbehaved so badly that she wanted to quit being his sister. Most importantly, she felt that Best had taken many things from her.

She knew such thoughts were inappropriate because he was her brother, born from the same parents. But the precarious family situation made her think that if he weren't there, her parents wouldn't have to 'choose' who should get the best or 'choose' who would take care of whom. With financial constraints and nosy relatives, they didn't have enough resources to split in half.

But they would have more than enough for just one child.

Veetara thought so, but it didn't mean she blamed her parents for wanting another child. No one could've foreseen the economic crisis that would affect the family. She was just trying to comfort herself by imagining a parallel world where things would be better 'if' he weren't there.

Her parents wouldn't have to fight, everyone would be together, and she wouldn't have to struggle to prove herself as the 'daughter' who was always less valued than the 'son' to her father.

In that parallel world, she'd probably be managing her father's printing house, having dinner together, and openly discussing that she wouldn't marry into another family but would stay to take care of them until the end. And maybe she'd introduce Salee to them that day.

The atmosphere might be a bit awkward, but she believed that Salee had a way of charming adults, and she didn't even know where the girl learned it

from. It'd be very useful, and eventually, her parents would accept Salee into the family, along with adopting the four-legged gang after Salee suggested that the expanding printing house needed more security, and Go was very good at barking (even though he was very old).

If Veetara's parents didn't have Best, everything would be better.

So, it wasn't surprising that she felt even more fond of Salee in high school. Because Salee was Salee.

Salee was a small, round-faced, well-behaved, and cute girl who never made a fuss like the other middle school girls with their tiny uniforms.

Salee was cute for her age, perfect for being the 'little sister' she didn't have to share anything with. Veetara didn't have to be the 'big sister' or feel guilty when not sacrificing small things.

Salee was always there, cheering her on in everything she did, making her realize that she wasn't just trying to prove herself to her parents but also to show her *'little sister*, 'who she never officially met, that she was capable, hardworking, and a good role model.

Veetara knew the girl was watching, so she had to keep improving so that this little girl would also improve.

Veetara didn't dare stray off course, not even to swear like other teenagers in high school, fearing that the well- behaved and cute girl would see it as a good thing.

Thinking about this, Veetara could only cover her face with her hands.

*I should've known.*

*I should've realized it from the day I saw Salee looking at me with sweet eyes during the friendly sports competition.*

No one had ever looked at Veetara like that except that girl.

The girl looked at Veetara as if she were the most important person in the world, making everything she'd tried to prove to others almost meaningless.

*Damn it.*

Comparing herself to the word dumb, Veetara still felt sorry for the word.

How could she be so gullible with a troublemaker like Best when it was clear how Salee felt about her?

Veetara made an annoyed sound in her throat, looking away from the ceiling and standing up.

She decided she had to apologize to that girl first. Whether Salee would forgive her for being slow to realize her feelings for ten years was up to fate.

Veetara grabbed her phone and dialed the number for

*'Salee loves you. You can call me anytime, my beauty but just as she was about to press the call button, the screen changed to an incoming call, making her frown, especially when it showed the caller's name as 'Best.'*

*Best calling me at 1:12 AM?*

Veetara was surprised because, since their argument, she and her brother had lost contact. No one tried to apologize first, only the tense situation between family members, even though they were far apart, could still be felt. So, his call was very unusual.

Veetara answered the call with a bad feeling. "What happened?"

She asked, knowing something must've happened for him to call her at this hour.

"Dad's in the hospital."

She clenched her fist, trying to control her panic as she asked, "What's wrong?"

"Stroke,"

Best answered with a trembling voice, reminiscent of the time he cried his heart out because his mother and Veetara had to move out of their father's house.

'Jae!"

He clung to the barred door, shouting to Veetara until his voice was hoarse. 'I want to go with you, Jae! I'll go too!'

"I'll be there soon," said Veetara.

The person on the other end of the line made a muffled sound as if trying to hold back tears.

Veetara hung up the phone and took long strides out of her office, heading straight to the private hospital where her father regularly received care.

It turned out that her father felt symptoms of facial drooping, slurred speech, and weakness in his limbs since around 7:30 PM. A few workers who were working overtime quickly took him to the hospital just in time before things got worse.

The diagnosis revealed that her father had a stroke, but he was now under the care of a team of specialists. This gave Veetar and Best some relief when the doctor said it was fortunate they arrived at the hospital quickly, increasing the chances of recovery from partial paralysis through physical therapy.

He might not be the same 100%, but he'd definitely recover if he strictly followed the medical advice.

Finally, after meeting with the doctor and handling the expenses, Veetara and Best could take a breather.

"I shouldn't have gone out,"

He mumbled, starting to blame himself for going out with friends today. He only heard the news from the workers when his father was already at the hospital.

"Dad is safe now,"

Veetara replied softly, fearing she might disturb her father, who was sleeping on the bed.

"And you didn't cause the stroke. It was those cigarettes. So please, stop acting like it's your fault."

With that, the room fell back into its eerie silence. The young man couldn't bear the tension any longer; he got up from the seat next to Veetara and pulled out his wallet to take out two twenty-baht bills.

"I'm going to get some drinks from the vending machine in the hallway. Do you want anything?"

"If there's coffee, get me some."

Best nodded, starting to understand that he should stop feeling guilty and let things pass peacefully as they should.

He tossed his wallet onto the sofa, not wanting to carry it and make his jeans pocket bulge. After all, the vending machine was just down the hallway by the elevator.

The young man walked out of the recovery room, leaving her with the silence and her father on the bed. As Veetara shifted to relieve her stiffness, she noticed Best's wallet on the sofa.

What caught her eye wasn't the expensive brand logo, the multiple credit cards, or the large amount of cash typical of a spendthrift. It was a photo

tucked in front of his ID card.

Veetara frowned because it was a photo of Salee from middle school.

*That's when Salee was in seventh grade.*

*But they met in high school, and someone like Salee wouldn't give out a photo meant for official documents to Just anyone.*

*Or...*

Veetara didn't feel guilty or hesitant as she picked up the photo to examine it. Her heart raced as she flipped the 3x4 cm photo, expecting to see a number written in blue ballpoint pen on the back.

And there it was.

Though it faded with time, it was there. Veetara knew it'd be.

## She knew because this photo belonged to her.

"Jae,"

Best returned with her coffee and his soda. He froze at the door, seeing her staring at the photo she'd taken from his wallet. He couldn't shout about her invading his privacy because their father was sleeping.

She did him a favor by standing up and leading him out to the fire escape so they could talk without disturbing other patients.

"What is this!?"

He whispered as loudly as he could once the fire escape door closed. "That's mine!"

"Where did you get this photo?"

He scoffed.

"From her, of course, when we were in love..." "Liar."

'Liar' was a serious accusation. Veetara wouldn't say it unless she was 100% sure. But because she knew the backstory of this photo so well, Veetara asserted with a firmer voice, making him flinch.

"You're lying, and you know it." ". "

## "This photo has never been yours and will never be, Best."

She didn't raise her voice, but it was enough for her brother to sense her turmoil, ready to explode at any moment.

Veetara took a deep breath and began to explain, so he would stop being a foolish, troublesome brother.

She started from when she noticed Salee in eleventh grade, then quickly moved to the sports day, which could be considered their first direct interaction.

"Salee was very shy then. She didn't even dare look at me,"

Veetara recalled that day because she never forgot her success in managing the red team and the 'little sister' who stood blushing in the parade.

'Everyone, hold out your hands. I'll tie the ribbons,'

Veetara ordered, spotting the girl from the end of the line. When she reached Salee, she complained to the organizer that a ribbon was missing.

But it wasn't.

The last ribbon was in her pocket so she could say, ***'Take mine instead'.*** It was the only way she could give Salee something as a token of appreciation.

She appreciated that Salee was a good, well-behaved girl who consistently respected her without crossing the line to ask silly things like, *'Can we date?' or 'Be my girlfriend'.*

## "Order doesn't matter, but remember, Best, you didn't meet Salee before me,"

Veetara wanted him to remember this. She emphasized that even though they never got to know each other formally, she'd always imagined their relationship.

She imagined it.

She thought about it.

She wanted to contact that girl after graduating high school.

That's why Veetara once had this photo, which Best had stolen through some unknown means.

She explained to her now awkward-looking brother that,

"I'm not someone who would directly approach anyone to say I wanted to know them, wanted their contact, or their phone number. I had an image to maintain, and I valued my privacy, even with my closest friends at the time."

Yes.

Veetara admitted she had a lot of pride. So she had to do something roundabout, like claiming that as the former house leader, she wanted to make a personal 'photo album' to remember the event before graduation.

She asked her friends on the committee to help gather activity photos, personal photos, and names of members from each grade, with names,

phone numbers, and photo numbers written on the back for easy identification. In reality, Veetara wasn't interested in anyone else but the 'little sister' she hadn't officially met. She asked for other kids' names to hide her true intention.

"It was a complicated process," Veetara mumbled to Best,

"But I finally got this photo."

Salee's photo was in the 'eighth-grade' pile, which meant she was in seventh grade the previous year.

Veetara didn't rush to find Salee's photo the first day she got it because she believed she had plenty of time to gently show Salee she wanted to talk.

Not in a flirty way like teenagers dating, but she wanted to know her without specifying a role. Salee was very young, so thinking about romance like in movies wasn't appropriate.

In other words, she didn't need to rush because once the relationship started, exploring possibilities at the right time wouldn't be too late. Plus, Veetara was busy with university entrance exams and didn't realize the opportunity she worked hard for could be snatched away anytime.

"I went for an interview for just one day. When I got home, almost the entire stack of photos was gone."

It wasn't just the photo of Salee that went missing. The full stack of photos from eighth-grade kids, which she'd left on her desk at her mother's house, hoping to sort through them after her university entrance interview, had almost completely disappeared. The list of names was also gone, leaving only the scattered bottom photos on the desk.

"Mom said you didn't close the window, and they might've blown away because of your carelessness."

Veetara remembered being very upset. She was angry and furious and blamed everything when the photos and the list of names, which included Salee's nickname, real name, and phone number, went missing. She even checked around the house four or five times, hoping they might've blown onto the lawn under the window, but she didn't find a trace.

Veetara could only sit and hold her head in her hands. Going back to school to find Salee was no longer an option since she'd already graduated.

According to safety measures, entering the school required a valid reason and prior approval from the school. Using her grades as an excuse was also out of the question because her grades were perfect in every subject, with nothing needing correction.

In the end, Veetara had to let it go. Although she initially felt regret and couldn't help but be angry at her misfortune, the chaos of university life soon took over, leaving her little time to think about that incident or the cute girl she hoped to chat with about grades, exams, gossip about math teachers, or exchange stories about their activities.

She looked forward, believing there was still much to do and fight for in the near future. The disappointment was just a colorful part of life.

But if she'd known even a little...

If she'd known that the girlfriend Best had mentioned was that girl, Veetara wouldn't have been so indifferent until now.

"How did you get the photo?" "..."

Best pressed his lips together.

"You visited Mom at home, then sneaked into my room and had Mom cover for you, right?"

Veetara guessed based on Best's childish and thoughtless nature, combined with their mother's desire to avoid sibling conflicts, especially since they

were naturally distant. And she guessed right.

Her brother's silent gaze confirmed it.

Seeing this, Veetara lost the will to be angry. She simply put Salee's photo into her shirt pocket and said to him,

"From now on, you have no right to accuse me of taking opportunities from you."

Veetara touched her brother's cheek with a mix of frustration and firmness.

"I love you, Best, as much as a sister can love a foolish brother, which means I don't love you enough to sacrifice important things in my life just for you."

She paused to make sure he was listening.

## "Especially Salee. I won't give her to you. I won't feel guilty, won't step aside, and won't yield to your petty tricks. You stole an opportunity from me long ago. Now, I'll take it back, and you must remember that I love Salee more than you. So, act like a decent person, Best. You know what I can do when I'm really angry. Otherwise, you wouldn't have asked Mom to cover for you back then, right?"

He nodded. "Good."

Veetara lowered her hand while Best still pressed his lips together, looking down at his feet like a scolded child, his shoulders shaking, his chest heaving.

Then he said just one short sentence, "I'm sorry, Jae,"

Signaling mutual understanding that from now on, their conversations would only involve their father, mother, and the printing business, which would be without its main pillar for a while.

There would be no more talk about Salee or any annoying behavior. If there was any mention, it'd only be about introducing her to the family officially.

Veetara agreed with Best that she'd handle the medical expenses beyond what insurance covered for their father. As for their mother, they'd tell her in the morning since it was already past a reasonable bedtime.

The night of turmoil passed smoothly.

Instead of rushing to contact that girl to apologize for her unkind behavior, Veetara found herself busy nursing her father and helping Best manage the printing business. Fortunately, Best was competent enough, so the burden didn't fall entirely on her shoulders. Her job at the language institute was already demanding enough that even Kinny was worried.

"Take a day or two off, Vee,"

Her best friend, who knew about her father's illness, suggested. "I'll handle things here. Don't worry."

"No, I'm fine."

"No, you're not. And everyone, including Aof, has voted that you should take a vacation like everyone else because it makes everyone uncomfortable when you don't."

Veetara listened and then smiled for the first time in days. "You're right,"

She murmured, leaning back. "I could use a break."

"Thank you for understanding!"

Kinny said sarcastically, rolling her eyes. As far as she remembered, she'd begged Veetara to take a break many times, unsure if it was just for her health or to prevent her from dying at her desk and leaving unfinished work.

"But I won't go far. If anything comes up, you can call..."

Veetara tried to tell Kinny she'd stay nearby in case the office needed her, but she was startled when her phone vibrated with a rhythm someone had set specifically for her call.

The rhythm mimicked a heartbeat, *BA-DUM BA-DUM BA-DUM* just like her pulse now.

Veetara quickly answered and walked away from everyone, hiding in the bathroom.

"H-Hello,"

Veetara tried to keep her voice steady, but it was difficult, especially now that she understood many things.

## "Khun Jae."

Her heart almost burst right there.

*How long has it b*e*en since I heard that cheerful voice? A month, maybe?*

"Where are you?"

Veetara swallowed to moisten her dry throat before continuing impatiently, not waiting for an answer,

"I'm sorry, Salee. I miss you."

"I... I didn't expect to hear you say that. Honestly, I didn't think you'd even answer. But it's good. It's really good to hear your voice again."

"Yeah, I finished work early today. Where are you? Can I come pick you up?"

"Out of town." "What?"

"I mean, I'm at my grandparents' house in the countryside," The younger girl laughed nervously.

"I'd love for you to come, but it's..." "Send me the location. I'll find it." "What?"

They both exclaimed in surprise until Veetara confirmed again, "I'll come to you."

The other end hesitated, explaining that it wasn't just the distance from Bangkok but also some family issues, mainly the elders trying to set her up with someone's son.

"I called because I wanted to apologize and ask if we could try to reconcile. If we can, I'll chase that guy away. But if not, I won't even have the strength to feed myself."

Veetara was silent for several seconds, feeling both laughing and crying. Imagining the other's exaggerated reluctance made her smile, but thinking about someone else bothering Salee made her almost tear up in frustration.

*Why are there s*o *many obstacles when I'm trying to get together with this girl?!*

"Of course, I'll do anything." Veetara replied softly.

"Why-- why so easily?" "You know, Salee,"

Veetara raised her hand to her face, "you know I lo..." "Wait, don't!"

"Saying something like this over the phone is---"

Veetara realized what the girl meant and scratched her cheek awkwardly. "Uh... okay, send me the location. I'm heading to the car," she said, walking out of the bathroom. As she reached the door, she found a crowd of nosy colleagues gathered there. Some scattered when they saw her, some pretended to whistle and look at the ceiling as if they weren't interested in their surroundings, and some openly giggled with delight, commenting like, 'You're done for!' This prompted Veetara to raise her hand, ready to beat them up one by one until they finally went back to work.

And the ringleader of this mob was none other than her best friend. Kinny didn't say anything; she just shoved a pink paper

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And the ringleader of this mob was none other than her best friend. And the ringleader of this mob was none other than her best friend.

Kinny didn't say anything; she just shoved a pink paper bag into her free hand before hurriedly shooing her away with a '*Just go wherever you need to go'* gesture until the elevator doors closed.

Veetara didn't know what was inside the bag because the tape tightly sealed the top. But she guessed that if it wasn't some weird item her colleagues had specifically chosen to cause trouble, it was probably something that could be somewhat useful.

# Chapter 15

Her mother told her to stop putting on makeup while waiting for Veetara. After all, there were only cows, buffaloes, and small creatures like crickets, frogs, and fish in the ditches around here. There was no need to compete with anyone in beauty or cuteness.

"Mom!"

Salee protested, stomping her feet. She then pouted at everyone who was holding her back from returning to Bangkok until she met the district officer's son, *'P' Arnon*,' on the upcoming Saturday. This made Salee so anxious that she finally mustered the courage to call Veetara first, hoping that the blurry stance from her recent heartbreak would become clearer, helping her handle the chaotic situation better.

Salee had prepared herself for the possibility that Veetara might not answer or answer the call to brush her off coldly. But it turned out to be beyond her expectations.

There was no anger in Veetara's voice at all.

It was as if time had passed, and all the heated thoughts and emotions had settled. She only noticed the weariness in Veetara's voice when she said, '*I miss you*', as if she wanted to rest her body and mind after a long day at work with Salee like she used to.

It seemed like things were busy on Veetara's end too.

Salee used a map application on her phone to estimate that she'd arrive in about an hour and a half after calling back to report that she'd picked up a change of clothes from her condo. This time, Salee sensed the urgency in

Veetara's voice and asked her not to drive too fast. She worried that Veetara might be in danger from driving too fast.

Veetara promised to drive safely

After hanging up, Salee went showering and getting dressed. Once ready, she walked out to the main road to wait for the beautiful girl from Bangkok, who likely had trouble with the navigation system all the way.

It turned out Veetara did speed, just as Salee feared.

When Salee walked to the alley entrance, she saw the familiar license plate getting clearer, even though she'd estimated that Veetara would arrive in another fifteen minutes.

Her heart pounded wildly when the driver stopped the car and opened the door.

Even though the streetlights weren't very bright and there was no light from cars passing by like in the city, Salee could still clearly see Veetara's radiant aura, confirming that this was indeed the real Veetara.

*She looks just like an angel sent by the divine!*

Salee gave Veetara a wai as the older woman walked around the headlights to her. Veetara returned the gesture with a smile mixed with an indescribable expression. The atmosphere filled with a warm sense of longing and shyness, significantly diminishing Salee's confidence, which she'd built up by dressing up herself.

Especially when Veetara took the opportunity to pull her close to check if she was well, Salee felt even more embarrassed. She closed her eyes tightly as Veetara leaned in for a kiss, even though they'd just been talking about *'clearing things up'.*

*Isn't this a bit too fast?*

"Khun Jae,"

Salee whispered softly, worried that her face was now smeared with red lipstick.

"I would love to stand here and make love with you, but the mosquitoes..."

Veetara blinked and then laughed sweetly, making the quiet street seem instantly brighter. But still, she didn't let Salee go easily tightening her embrace, laughing again, and burying her nose in Salee's cheek.

"How have you been? Are you okay?" "Not okay at all,"

Salee replied honestly, hiding her face in Veetara's soft chest. Her lips and cheeks were bruised from the kisses.

"Our fight made my life terrible." "Hmm,"

Veetara hummed in agreement, hugging her tightly for several seconds before finally deciding to let go and open the car door for her. Standing by the roadside in the evening didn't seem very safe, even though very few cars passed by.

Salee felt inexplicably better as she sat in the clean leather seat and smelled the cool air, not the sweet, overwhelming scent typical of the other's car.

"Turn here,"

Salee directed, letting the driver take her right wrist to check with relief that the red bracelet was still there and hadn't been thrown away after their fight.

"So..."

Veetara began as she let the car move slowly along the single-lane concrete road. Besides the darkness on both sides, Veetara probably went so slow to extend the time before they reached Salee's house, about three hundred meters away.

"Do any elders on your side know about us?"

"My parents know, but others just think you're a colleague I invited to visit,"

Salee leaned her head back and smiled teasingly. "Are you scared?"

The driver sighed loudly.

"I'm a bit nervous with so many of your relatives there."

Hearing this, Salee smiled and reassured her that her relatives weren't as strict as she imagined. Any decisions about her life were solely her parents' decision. The only thing her grandparents were enthusiastic about was matchmaking. They were so eager that they forgot all their joint pains.

"Do you have a plan?" "I have some."

Salee replied wearily, unconsciously lifting Veetara's hand to her nose. "Like what?"

"Like playing the parent card,"

She paused before explaining that her parents didn't approve of the matchmaking at all. However, they couldn't let her run away without reason, or her grandparents would play the 'poor old people unloved by their grandchild' card against her. So, Salee had to stay and wait for the matchmaking day (which her grandfather claimed was just a regular meal) to figure out what to do next.

"Or hope that P' Arnon isn't as good as everyone thinks." "P" Arnon?"

Veetara raised an eyebrow as she gently braked the Civic to a stop. She believed there wouldn't even be a motorcycle passing by by that time.

"Have you seen him before?"

"Grandpa said we met when we were kids, but I don't remember anything." "And if he's really good?"

Veetara asked as she turned on the overhead light, pulling a thin cloth from the back seat to wipe off the red lipstick marks on Salee's face. She feared going inside in this state wouldn't look good to the elders. Even though Salee's parents knew, Veetara was always prepared, cautious, and meticulous.

"If he's really good, we should be able to agree because no good person would support forced marriage, right?"

"Hmm, I hope so,"

Veetara hummed, ensuring the lipstick marks on Salee's cheeks, lips, and forehead were gone before pulling away, taking a deep breath, and focusing back on the road.

Salee sensed that Veetara was quite nervous. When they reached the large Thai house, she couldn't hide her smile as the older woman repeatedly adjusted her hair and clothes.

"Do you think I'm okay now?"

Veetara asked softly after opening the car door "You look perfect,"

Salee smiled, observing Veetara from head to toe, noticing she was still in her work attire-a long-sleeved white shirt buttoned to the collar, paired with a knee-length black pencil skirt, looking very neat and dignified. This was part of Veetara's unique charm, not just about clothes, status, or maturity, but also her demeanor and conduct.

Veetara was the type who, even in shorts and flip-flops, would still seem more credible than those politicians.

"Khun Jae,"

Salee called before they went inside.

"You might be a bit surprised when you see my mom, but I promise to explain everything."

Veetara raised an eyebrow in curiosity but didn't ask what she meant. She just nodded trustingly and let Salee lead her inside.

The young girl introduced her relatives, which included her parents, grandparents, Uncle Tu, Uncle Tu's wife, Aunty Kaew, and Tam and Ton (Uncle Tu's twin sons), to her 'former boss. She kept a close eye on everyone's reactions and noticed that Veetara paused slightly upon seeing her mother, a sign that she recognized 'Aunty Toom' or at least found her familiar. Despite this, Veetara maintained her composure, respectfully greeting the elders with a wai, even bowing almost forty-five degrees to P' Tam and P' Ton, who were actually two years younger than Veetara but held the status of her older brothers.

"Have you eaten yet, Vee?"

Salee's mother asked with a smile after the introductions. When Vee replied, "Not yet," Salee's grandmother immediately instructed the grandchildren and daughter- in-law to set the table.

Salee stifled a smile, thinking that either Veetara handled the situation better than expected or her relatives were simply mesmerized by Veetara's mysterious aura.

"Hey, Salee,"

One of the twins, either Tam or Ton, whispered while Veetara was talking to Salee's grandfather about work.

"Is Vee from a wealthy family?"

"No."

Salee replied, placing a piece of crispy fried fish on Veetara's plate for her to try.

"She's just from an ordinary famıly."

The young man frowned, seemingly unconvinced, as Veetara's demeanor often led people to assume she was from a wealthy or influential family. Salee then whispered, boasting a bit, that Veetara was actually of Thai- Chinese descent, her father ran a printing business, and the respectable demeanor everyone saw was entirely self-made, not inherited from anywhere.

"Is she single?"

## "No!"

Salee snapped, glaring at her cousin.

"She's taken, and they're crazy about each other. So don't even think about it, P' Tam."

"I'm Ton!"

"Yeah, I meant both of you." "Whatever,"

Ton (or maybe Tam) grumbled.

When Salee's father asked Veetara a question about Salee's job, everyone at the table fell silent, waiting to hear the answer.

"Salee is very responsible," Veetara said.

"I've never had to worry about her work."

Salee wanted to poke her own eyes out with a fork, feeling embarrassed by Veetara's dazzling smile and the unexpected praise. She scratched her head and ears nervously.

"Oh, Khun Jae, you're flattering me."

"Considering the benefits you've brought to the company, I wouldn't call it flattery,"

Veetara replied softly.

Then, Salee's grandmother took over the questioning.

"And what about other things? How is my granddaughter? Is she well- behaved?"

"She can be a bit loud, not exactly well-behaved, but she's very polite and speaks nicely,"

Veetara said naturally, turning to the grandmother. The twins burst into laughter.

"Here, she's a real tomboy. She never speaks politely to us," One of them said.

"That's right." "Ton!"

"My name's Tam, dear." "Don't tease your sister, Ton!" Kaew scolded her son.

Now Salee was sure the one speaking next to her was Ton, not Tam, as only Aunty Kaew could correctly distinguish her twin sons (or at least she was better at it than anyone else).

## "Does anyone try to court Salee?"

Salee's grandfather asked next.

Salee quickly waved her hands and loudly changed the subject, "Oh no, the food is getting cool!"

Making her parents and Kaew nod in agreement, knowing that otherwise, Salee's grandparents would keep interrogating her and Veetara, delaying their dinner.

Salee sighed in relief after surviving dinner. Veetara also seemed more relaxed as the relatives dispersed. Luckily, the large traditional Thai house had plenty of rooms, divided into left and right wings, a central area, and a back section, giving each family member their own space.

With Salee's middle uncle (Uncle Tao) and his family having moved out, the house felt even more spacious. So, Salee didn't worry about privacy, especially with Veetara staying over. Everyone avoided intruding into the left wing, which was her family's area.

"I've prepared a room for you, Vee,"

Salee's mother said sweetly to Veetara, making Salee wonder why her mother was so fond of Vee. It couldn't be because she was a regular customer, as many kids bought her mother's noodles daily, but none received special treatment like Veetara. Her mother never objected to or discouraged her admiration for Veetara, either.

Her mother always wanted her to live freely, and she saw gender as no barrier. But back then, she was so young. At least her mother should've been worried about her being too forward...

Salee wondered but had no chance to ask as she had to take care of Veetara as both a guest and in many other capacities, starting with showing her the room.

"The light switch is here, and the air conditioner remote is there. If you want to feel nature, you can sleep with the windows open. It's cool at night, but there are a lot of mosquitoes, so you'll need a mosquito net. I'll..."

Before Salee could finish, Veetara pulled her close, making her quickly cover her mouth, anticipating another playful attack from the unusually fierce Veetara.

"We just had fish,"

Salee mumbled, but Veetara ignored her, trying to remove her hand. Salee closed her eyes tightly, but when she felt Veetara only examining her face, she opened her eyes in confusion.

"Khun Jae?"

"Can you sleep with me?" "What?"

Salee was shocked, almost collapsing, until Veetara added, "I have a lot to talk to you about,"

Making Salee sigh in relief and a bit of disappointment. If not for respecting her elders, she'd have gone along without question (of course! She missed Veetara so much!)

"Okay,"

She agreed, stepping aside shyly to let Veetara put her belongings in the wardrobe. Then, she led the older woman to the separate bathroom on the ground floor of the left wing. It was a modern bathroom added after Salee's parents moved back, with concrete walls, non-slip tiles, a hot shower, and separate toilet areas, unlike the main bathroom her grandparents insisted on preserving with a basin and dipper.

They'd only stop using that main bathroom until our humanity was doomed with dengue fever (Salee suspected most mosquitoes that bit her at night

came from one of those basins in the main bathroom).

"Mom wanted to build a new bathroom for them, but they both refused. One feared electric shocks, and the other said it wasn't as clean as using a dipper,"

Salee shared family quirks with Veetara while waiting outside the bathroom. Veetara's laughter, mixed with the shower sound, made her smile.

Soon, the special guest finished her shower and changed into pajamas. Salee told the older woman to wait upstairs while she freshened up. She took extra time scrubbing herself clean, feeling confident to face Veetara again. Earlier, Veetara had eyed her for a long moment before walking back upstairs with a sly smile.

Veetara believed she knew everything about Salee's past. But when she saw Salee's mother up close, she had to rethink. She never imagined that the kind-looking middle-aged woman was the same 'Aunty Toom' who made noodles for her almost every day during high school.

The more she observed closely when Aunty Toom waved her over to chat after Salee had sent her upstairs, the more she understood why she felt a familiar connection with Salee. It wasn't just because of past memories but also because Salee and Aunty Toom had similar mannerisms in some way.

Sure, their faces might not be identical, making it hard to notice at first. But if you stood them side by side, Veetara thought nine out of ten people would immediately recognize them as mother and daughter, or at least related by blood.

"Vee,"

Aunty Toom greeted with a smile, reminding her of the times she stood in line for noodles in the school cafeteria. Veetara remembered Aunty Toom as a cheerful and patient person. Even when taking orders non-stop or being rushed by customers, she never frowned.

Instead, she smiled and apologized, asking them to wait a bit longer. Many kids softened and patiently waited for her delicious noodles, even if it meant standing in line twice as long as other stalls.

Veetara was one of those kids.

She became a regular customer from the start of her school years and had noodles for lunch almost every day. Even when she came late due to her duties as the Red House president, Aunty Toom always saved her a bowl of beef noodles with extra garlic.

Veetara sat with Aunty Toom, or in another role, Salee's mother, on a wooden bench at the end of the hallway before the door separating the left wing from the central part of the house.

"I don't know what to say,"

Veetara said shyly, making Aunty Toom laugh. "I understand," she replied.

She made space for Veetara to sit more comfortably and reached out to touch her, checking how much she'd changed since they last met.

"I never thought we'd meet again until that kid started bragging about you." Veetara raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"You knew all along that Salee..."

Aunty Toom nodded, explaining that she knew about Salee's obsession with her since middle school. But Veetara never realized they were mother and daughter because Salee, being shy and naive, hid her identity as *'Aunty Toom's daughter',* fearing it'd make it harder to secretly admire Veetara.

"So, I had to pretend not to know you, as Salee requested," Aunty Toom said.

Veetara listened quietly, biting her lip. When she realized it, she was already looking around for Salee, her heart pounding.

*This girl...*

Aunty Toom smiled fondly at her nervousness and then said, "I'll go to bed now. If you have any questions, ask her yourself."

Veetara felt even more embarrassed and quickly stood up to say goodbye before Salee's mother walked into her room. As soon as she left, the cause of her heart's turmoil appeared at the end of the hallway.

Salee walked closer, her brown hair damp, matching the towel around her neck. She cleared her throat and asked shyly,

"Should I sleep with you, or will you sleep with me?" "Which is better?"

Veetara asked. "The latter,"

Salee replied softly, explaining that her room had a balcony facing the eastern fields. At night, the stars were especially clear. The city was on the opposite side, so there were no lights to disturb the natural sky. In the morning, the sun would rise over the mountains, greeting them instead of an alarm clock.

"My room has the best view in the house,"

Salee continued, not wanting the atmosphere between them to get too intense.

"It used to be my mom's, but now Grandpa loves me more, so he gave it to me."

Veetara smiled, not surprised that Salee was the family's favorite.

*With such charm and sweet talk, how could they not love her?*

Veetara looked around as Salee turned on the light, noticing that the room had been renovated to accommodate air conditioning, just like the guest room Aunty Toom had prepared for her. Salee confirmed this, explaining that the house was originally all wood, with only the central area and kitchen.

When Salee's grandparents had their youngest daughter, they expanded the house, adding more space.

"When the grandchildren came, they added more comfort. P' Tam, for example, couldn't stand the heat and would sweat with the slightest movement. So, Grandpa installed air conditioning throughout the house to avoid complaints when he visited."

Veetara smiled wider as she followed Salee to the balcony, feeling amazed by the twinkling stars. When Salee went back to turn off the room light to reduce the glare, Veetara was even more stunned by the beauty of the night sky, something she couldn't find in the city.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Salee asked. "Very,"

Veetara nodded, feeling the stress from Bangkok melt away in the cool, pleasant air. She hoped she could stay like this forever.

"How's the office now?"

Salee asked, moving closer until her cheek brushed against Veetara's arm. "Good,"

Veetara crossed her arms and leaned on the railing, saying, "Still noisy as ever, just not as lively."

"Everyone's doing well?"

"Yes,"

Veetara paused before adding, "except me," making Salee smile under the dim starlight.

"And Jan?"

Salee asked, pressing her cheek closer to Veetara's right arm. "Does she still bother you?"

"No."

Veetara swallowed her dry throat and explained that Jan had sincerely apologized, realizing her prank had gone too far, causing the company to lose a valuable employee.

"Jan didn't think you'd quit, so she probably feels quite guilty," Veetara said.

"Guilty for making the company lose a tutor, but not for causing a rift between us, right?"

"Probably,"

Veetara chuckled, seeing Salee's annoyed face.

"But you can relax because Jan likely has a new target now." "A new target?"

Salee perked up. "Who?"

"Guess."

"P' Karn?

"No."

"Aunty Oun?" "Seriously?"

"Jan isn't predictable. Maybe she shifted her target to the older women. Who knows?"

Veetara laughed and shook her head. "She'd chase her with a mop."

"I'd like to see that." Salee grinned. "But who is it, then."

## "It's Kinny."

". " "....."

They both fell silent. When Veetara look at Salee, she saw her frowning, mouth agape, and eyes wide, as if solving a complex math problem that those in the field of language weren't keen on.

"I'm not joking, Salee." "But. "

Salee mumbled, stuttering, then quickly gathered her thoughts.

## "But Jae Kinny hasn't had surgery down there yet, right?! And Jan. "

Veetara didn't know whether to laugh or cover Salee's mouth for loudly mentioning the word *'down there.'*

"As you said, Jan is unpredictable,"

Veetara half-smiled.

"People's tastes are diverse. So, if she turns her attention to another gender, it's not that surprising."

The young girl still looked confused until Veetara explained,

"Because at least Kinny has breasts, which meets Jan's minimum requirement."

Only then did the girl accept the fact that the relationship between Jan and Kinny wasn't entirely impossible. Jan's preferences might be focused on a woman's shape, curves, and softness.

Kinny had all those qualities-a slender figure, hourglass waist, breasts that would make Onanong cry, and round hips from who knows where. The only difference was that Kinny had male genitalia...

## "Oh, like the concept of a 'trap' in cartoons!"

This time, Veetara choked on air because the term sounded so unfamiliar to her. When Salee was about to explain the concept of a 'trap' further, Veetara had to quickly lock Salee in a hug to stop her from speaking. Otherwise, she'd be thinking about this all night.

"You really are something else!"

Veetara complained, but she didn't feel the cute aggression like before. Instead, she hugged the younger girl affectionately. Salee didn't try to defend herself or argue, either.

The younger girl wrapped her arms around Veetara's waist and rested her head on her chest as if she'd been waiting for this moment for a long time.

"I'm sorry... for never explaining anything to you."

Veetara raised an eyebrow. Salee had opened up the topic herself, and she decided to play along, even though she already knew what Salee meant.

"Explain what?"

The young girl hesitated, probably trying to find a better way to say, 'I've been spying on you since high school! Finally, she chose a sentence that'd make Veetara smile all night.

"I think I've loved you a lot since before we even met each other."

Veetara couldn't help but smile. The smaller girl was hiding her embarrassed face against her chest and couldn't see that smile.

"What do you mean?" "I mean..."

Salee held Veetara's waist even higher

"it might sound creepy, but I've never had bad intentions toward you. I just... just..."

"Calm down,"

Veetara comforted, feeling both amused and sympathetic. The usually talkative girl was now struggling to speak.

"Take your time."

She heard the younger girl take a deep breath and remain silent for a while before finally gathering the courage to say that she'd attended the same school and had feelings for Veetara since way back then.

"It all started when you patted my head and told me to get well soon in front of my mom's noodle shop."

Veetara was taken aback. She couldn't remember the first time she met the girl because she was only in middle school, which felt like long ago. She only remembered being watched by a cute, well-behaved girl every day when she was the Red House president.

*So, she's been holding onto those feelings longer than I've realized?*

Veetara was lost in thought and didn't notice the expression on the girl in her arms until the younger girl looked up with a worried face, clearly visible under the dim moonlight. Veetara tucked the girl's hair behind her ear and gently kissed both her cheeks, making the younger girl both confused and shy.

"Are you not mad at me?" "Why would I?"

"Well,"

Salee thought while letting Veetara pull away slightly,

"for spying on you and following your life when you were younger." Veetara laughed.

"You're still spying on me now, aren't you?" "It's not the same."

"How is it different?" "Because now you know."

"And how do you know I didn't know then?" "Huh?"

Salee raised an eyebrow, but Veetara didn't elaborate. She wanted to ask something first.

"And what about Best? Can you tell me how you two met?"

Salee bit her lip and nodded. She wanted to explain how her relationship with Best began in the first place.

"I agreed to date him because he looked a lot like you."

The young girl looked down, feeling guilty for what she'd done to Veetara's brother. She then explained that she met Best at a famous tutoring school in Siam. The boy was in the same class, and because he looked so much like Veetara in a male version, Salee was curious about him. But she didn't approach him first.

It was Best who found a way to talk to Salee through a mutual friend who'd been in the same class since middle school.

"That friend knew both of us, so we ended up in the same group."

After that, Best made it clear that he liked Salee and pursued her until she agreed to date him. They broke up and got back together three times because of his irresponsibility.

"The last time I was about to break up with him, he took me to his house, hoping I'd be too polite to do anything. That was the day I saw you again after you graduated high school."

Salee confessed.

"You came to talk to Best by the car, and I... I never knew you and Best were siblings. So I just sat there, frozen, not daring to greet you because you didn't know me. I only knew that I missed you a lot. In the end, I decided to use him to get into your company. So if you're mad at me for that, I..."

*Oh dear, my poor Little Trouble.*

Veetara wasn't mad at all. She felt sorry for the girl who was sniffling, her eyes red, fearing her reaction.

"And what?"

Veetara leaned down, asking softly.

The younger girl replied in a small voice,

"Then I guess I can't do anything but accept it." Veetara hid her smile.

"Do you think I'll be mad at you?" "Maybe."

"Why?"

"Because I did something bad. I used your brother for my own benefit." "I'm not mad," Veetara replied.

"But you have to remember that doing that isn't right, and it'll stay with you forever."

Salee looked up with sad eyes. When Veetara added,

"So from now on, if you need to do something bad, tell me. I'll do it for you so you can stay a good girl... okay?"

The younger girl nodded and hugged her tightly. It was tighter than ever before.

Veetara hugged her back to warm her and to fend off the cold wind blowing from the fields.

They stopped talking for a while, wanting to savor the peaceful moment as long as possible. When Salee started to fidget because Veetara's hug was making it hard for her to breathe, Veetara loosened her arms and pulled away slightly, smiling.

"Hey."

"Hmm?"

"I have something else to explain."

"Okay."

"The reason I prepared to resign from the start wasn't because I wanted to escape the chaos like you thought,"

The younger girl said softly.

Finally, Veetara understood Salee's statement,

"I always thought I'd resign someday, for whatever reason."

It was because Salee had impulsively applied for a job at Veetara's company without a long-term plan. She just wanted to watch her like she did in high school. More importantly, Veetara hadn't broken up with Wat at that time.

Salee never expected their relationship to progress, so she had to prepare an exit strategy, fearing that her presence would cause trouble and discomfort for Veetara, both as Best's sister and as someone constantly teased.

"But you never fired me like I expected," The young girl smiled dryly.

"So I stayed until after the second year." "And do you know why I didn't?"

"Um... Jae Kinny once said it was because I was good at teaching, so you wanted to keep me around and made me work like a slave."

"That's one reason,"

Veetara paused, then took something out of her pajama pocket and handed it to the younger girl.

Salee raised her eyebrows, then furrowed them as she squinted at the small photo in her hand, realizing it was a picture of her from school.

The young girl looked up at Veetara, confused.

"Where did you get this photo?"

Veetara didn't rush to give an answer. Instead, she pulled the face of the person blinking in confusion closer and kissed the slightly parted lips, which opened automatically despite the bewilderment, showing no sign of understanding anything at all.

She smiled at the familiar taste of Salee's toothpaste lingering on her tongue.

"I'll explain this only once, so listen carefully,"

The woman said, lowering her gaze to the photo in Salee's hand. Then she began to recount slowly, starting from the first time she noticed the girl secretly watching her during their school days to the reason why she had this photo and even the time when her younger brother took it away.

"I only found out recently when I went back to school to film an online English teaching program,"

Veetara said, gently touching Salee's face, which still seemed frozen. The girl still didn't quite believe that everything she'd just heard was true.

"I didn't recognize you because you've grown so much. Your face isn't as round as it used to be, and your face seems more elongated. Plus, you have long, brown-dyed hair now."

"....."

"....."

"Say something,"

The older woman murmured softly when she saw no reaction from the other person.

"I..."

Salee hesitated, still not fully regaining her composure, but enough to ask questions to confirm her understanding of what she'd just been told.

"You knew and even thought about contacting me?" "Yes"

"Why?"

The young girl frowned.

"Why would someone like me deserve your attention? Someone like me..." "Because you're a good kid,"

Veetara interrupted before the other could finish.

"Whether now or back then, you've always been a sweet, good girl to me."

Even though Veetara had never realized that Salee and the little girl who used to stand behind the volleyball court post were the same person, the atmosphere and feelings she got from having the girl around in both periods were no different. That's why Veetara always had a soft spot for this Little Trouble.

And it was only for Salee.

"I intended to contact you after graduation, but as I said,"

Veetara pursed her lips, still annoyed at her brother who almost made her miss Salee twice.

"Best took the photo and the list with your name and phone number."

Veetara wasn't sure what happened after Best rummaged through her room at their mother's house.

She didn't know why he took those photos or what he did with them, but according to Salee, they met at a tutoring school in high school. She could

guess that Best might've taken a liking to Salee, so he kept the photo and phone number he took from Veetara. When the time was right, if he didn't 'accidentally' meet Salee himself, he probably arranged it through a mutual friend.

Veetara thought it was the latter.

Because a lazy kid like Best wouldn't ask their father for money to attend extra classes and accidentally meet his dream girl.

Veetara didn't know the details until Best told her later when everything had become a funny yet frustrating memory. He said that the day he visited their mother at home, he sneaked into her room and found a stack of photos of many girls, along with a list of names.

At first, he only intended to peek out of curiosity, but the mischievous boy got an idea and took her stuff with him, not forgetting to leave the window slightly open to make it look like the wind was at fault, leaving only a few photos at the bottom. He also didn't forget to ask their mother to cover for him.

His mischievous idea was to show the photos of cute girls to his male classmates. Whoever was interested would pay (or do his homework) in exchange for the name and phone number to try their luck at courting the girls. The only photo Best never showed anyone was Salee's.

He kept Salee's photo with him out of affection, as Veetara had guessed. When he got to high school, he decided he had to meet her at least once. That was the beginning of him calling Salee's former classmates from the list to find out where he could meet her.

He eventually learned from a mutual friend that she was attending a tutoring school in Siam. Best then enrolled there, leading to their acquaintance and eventual relationship.

"It's the same this time," Veetara murmured.

"Best made me doubt you by saying I was just a better version of him." "Ugh!!"

Salee exclaimed loudly, startling Veetara.

"If I say I want to strangle him, would you do it for me?"

Veetara didn't know whether to laugh or feel something else, so she comforted the girl and told her to stay calm because, at least, their chaotic situation had finally been fixed.

"I'm sorry for believing him... when I should've known that you could never be what he accused you of. I made you sad."

"Because I didn't explain myself properly,"

Salee shook her head, refusing to let Veetara take the blame for this dispute. "And it's also because that guy never grows up!"

Veetara nodded with the latter statement but didn't say more than necessary. "And..."

She began softly, biting her lip slightly in nervousness. "What would you say if I asked us to get back together?" "And what about you, Khun Jae? What do you think?" "I... I almost lost you twice,"

Veetara exhaled slowly, suddenly feeling a tightness in her chest as she thought about the times Salee was away and the thought that they might never meet again.

"So if there's a third time, I wouldn't be able to stand it because if you go,"

Veetara raised the heel of her hand to wipe the warm tears from the side of her nose,

## "you'll take the best part of me with you, and I'll have nothing good left."

"Khun Jae..."

"Can we make up? Forgive me this once, and don't disappear again."

Salee pulled the hand Veetara was using to wipe her tears away from her face, then stood on tiptoe and leaned her neck down to her.

"Okay,"

The answer before the kiss made Veetara sigh in relief. When Salee whispered,

"I'll cling to your condo post and watch your Netflix for free until I die,"

Salee laughed before they walked back into the room, clinging to each other like glue, and lay down on the soft mattress.

They didn't do much more than hug and kiss to make up for lost time because both Veetara and Salee were well aware of the time and place. They didn't let the whispers from their lower bodies lead them to disrespect the elders in the house. This was another matter Veetara had come to address specifically.

*I'll make Salee my lover properly.*

*As for that Arnon guy, by the time he realized it, he'd waiting in vain.*

# Chapter 16

## 9:00 AM

Salee still couldn't open her eyes. She'd only fallen asleep around 4 AM because she and Veetara had officially made up. So, if they spent the night chatting sweetly and occasionally kissing, it wasn't against any rules.

The two of them exchanged stories about what had happened since Veetara graduated high school. Salee told the beautiful woman lying next to her that she'd been influenced by Veetara in almost everything-studies, activities, and responsibilities. The only thing comforting and making her feel like Veetara was still close was following in her footsteps.

"I wanted to know how Khun Jae felt being the president of Red House, so I ran for the position myself,"

Salee said, slipping her fingers under Veetara's shirt because the air conditioning was too cold.

"I wanted to know why you liked playing volleyball, so I joined the volleyball club."

"Oh,"

Veetara responded as if recalling something.

"Is that why you never told me what sport you played in school?" Salee smiled awkwardly.

"I was afraid that if I gave too many details, you might figure out we went to the same school."

Veetara raised an eyebrow.

"Why didn't you want me to know?"

Salee scratched her nose with her free hand.

"I was worried that if slipped that I was a peeping Tom in middle school, you'd think I was a stalker who followed you to work at the institute."

Veetara was silent for a moment, then suddenly laughed, making Salee frown.

"But you already seem like that kind of person" "Khun Jae!"

Salee pinched Veetara's waist in response to the teasing, but the older woman didn't budge

She kept smiling sweetly, making Salee feel even more embarrassed, especially when Veetara moved closer, resting her head on Salee's neck and whispering,

"If you only knew how much I need those looks from you..." Salee felt like she might suffocate right then and there.

*Khun Jae's affectionate behavior is just...*

*.*

"I think we should sleep now,"

Salee said, clearing her throat and changing the subject as soon as she regained her composure. Veetara didn't argue and murmured in agreement. Salee reached over to turn off the bedside lamp, hoping that without the light, she wouldn't be so distracted by Veetara's beautiful face.

But it wasn't that easy.

Salee lay wide awake, staring at the dark ceiling, her pulse racing. Veetara kept moving closer every two minutes, and her shapely body made Salee sweat every time Veetara (seemingly) intentionally brushed her weapons against her arm.

Finally, Salee solved the problem by turning on her side and hugging Veetara like a body pillow, preventing her from moving and keeping Salee awake.

Salee didn't know when she fell asleep, but the last time she glanced at the digital clock on the bedside table, it was well past 4:00 AM. That's why she woke up late, letting the sunlight poke at her eyes.

*Hmm?*

*Where's Khun Jae?*

Salee groped around the bed with her eyes still closed, realizing that Veetara's soft, warm body was no longer there. She sat up abruptly, her mind racing with the fear that yesterday's events were just a dream.

*Well, I can't help but feel that way.*

*Khun Jae had driven all the way from Bangkok to make up with me and hinted that she'd been interested in me for a long time.*

*How's that even possible?*

"What are you panicking about now, huh?"

Her mother asked when she saw Salee running around the house, looking for someone.

"Where's Khun Jae?" Salee asked, tense.

The former Little Miss Toom nodded towards the kitchen and said,

"Probably helping your grandma with breakfast."

Salee sighed in relief and smiled, walking over to kneel by her mother, who was sewing (a typical hobby for those rich ladies) on the same wooden bench, to ask about something that had been on her mind since yesterday.

"Do you like Khun Jae, Mom?"

Her mother smiled, pretending not to know where she was coming from. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, I want to make sure there won't be any problems with you and your daughter-in-law later."

"You're something else."

Her mother tapped her forehead.

"Vee is such a good person. How could I have any problems with her?" "Why do you think she's good?"

Salee persisted.

"I don't think about anything in particular."

Her mother finally put down her sewing to talk to her.

"I'm sure Vee is a good person, both to me and to my daughter."

Salee raised an eyebrow but didn't ask further. She let her mother explain that back when she sold noodles at school, there was *almost* a serious problem with her shop.

And it was serious because it involved someone trying to ruin their reputation.

"It might be because we were the most popular stall at the time,"

Her mother said quietly.

"The other noodle shop, which had been there before us, wasn't happy. They thought we stole their customers."

It was a plan to sabotage and discredit them.

Someone had done something to the soup pot her mother had left simmering early in the morning while she stepped away

"If I remember correctly, they put a death rat in it. "

## "What??!"

Salee was quite shocked.

## "A death rat?!"

Her mother nodded.

"Yes. A death rat, cockroaches, and other dirty things I didn't even know about."

Just hearing about it made Salee feel nauseous. She couldn't imagine what'd happen if a student found those things in their noodle bowl.

"Did they really have to go that far?" Salee asked, incredulous.

"Luckily, they only did that much,"

Her mother said, patting her head affectionately.

"Because the people who planned and executed it wouldn't have hesitated to do something worse."

"What did you do then?"

"I didn't do much." She smiled.

"I was lucky."

Young Veetara was there, having arrived at school early to continue her midterm study from the previous night.

"Vee was sitting in the cafeteria with her friends, right next to my shop.

Veetara was a regular customer, so if she came early, she'd sit near Salee's mother's shop to be first in line for noodles.

Veetara noticed someone acting suspiciously. Someone sneaked behind the shop with a small black trash bag and came out within fifteen seconds, the bag neatly folded.

Veetara didn't hesitate to warn Salee's mother.

"She told me what she saw, and I found those things when I checked."

Her mother closed the shop that day to deal with the issue and immediately informed the school authorities. Veetara and her friends who witnessed it willingly testified, helping to identify the culprit.

"That's why I'm sure Vee is a good kid. She isn't overlooking the wrongdoings. And she's someone you can rely on,"

Her mother said, picking up her sewing again.

"So you let me admire her because you were impressed?"

Salee asked, laughing. Her mother didn't answer. She just smiled and told her to go away so she could finish her sewing.

Salee backed away from the bench and went downstairs to wash up. When she came back up, she heard Aunty Kaew announcing that breakfast was ready.

Veetara was there, too, looking as stunning as ever.

Veetara bent down and scooped rice onto plates for Salee's grandparents; they were chatting and laughing heartily. Salee couldn't help but raise an eyebrow in surprise, just like her cousins, Tam and Ton. It was a rare sight to see their elders this lively ever since Salee learned to say "Grandpa and Grandma' for the first time.

"This morning, she went to the market with me,"

Salee's grandmother cheerfully recounted after everyone had eaten more than halfway through their meal.

"People were staring at us. They thought she was my granddaughter-in- law."

Salee nearly choked on the sour soup with long bean she'd just swallowed. "And what did you say, Grandma?" Ton (or maybe it was Tam) asked.

She replied,

"I told them she wasn't. Ton or Tam couldn't possibly find someone as beautiful and good as this girl to be their wife."

Making both young men look deflated. "Oh, Grandma!"

"We're not that hopeless, you know."

"Yup, you can ask Vee. As a woman, do you think the two of us are decent enough?"

Ton asked. "P' Ton!"

Salee protested.

"I told you, she's already taken!" "What? I was just asking."

Ton (maybe?) argued, while Tam agreed,

## "Yeah, you're acting like you're her significant other."

Everyone at the table fell silent, with no denial from Salee, implying that what Tam said was true.

"...."

"...."

"...."

Salee believed this was the longest dead air of her life.

That's when Veetara began her plan. She placed her spoon on the plate with a composed yet serious demeanor as if negotiating a national economic issue. Salee finally understood why her mother said Veetara was reliable.

She survived the tense situation without breaking a sweat. She handled everything so well.

"I must apologize to Grandpa and Grandma for not saying earlier that I came here to ask for Salee's hand."

## Wait, whaaaaaaaaaat?!

Salee screamed internally, confused and stunned, just like her parents, grandparents, Uncle Tu, Aunty Kaew, Ton, and Tam, who were all left gaping. When Veetara asked to fetch something important from her room, all eight pairs of eyes turned to Salee simultaneously

"She probably means she wants Salee to go back to work with her, right, Dad?"

Ton asked his father. "What's going on, Tum?"

Uncle Tu asked Salee's mother.

"Stay calm and listen to what she has to say first, Dad," Salee's mother supported her future daughter-in-law.

Salee's grandparents scratched their heads in confusion.

Salee was equally puzzled, silently waiting for Veetara at the table. After about a minute, Veetara returned with a large brown envelope containing important documents.

Salee's father was the first to stand, suggesting they move from the dining table to the common area for the discussion, as everyone was still at a loss.

The breakfast turned into a full-fledged family meeting. "These are my educational certificates and transcripts." "And this is my six-month bank statement."

"This stack is copies of documents showing ownership of all my assets: house, car, land, condo, and stock market shares."

"..."

Salee and her relatives could only blink.

"Every piece of paper is proof that I can take care of Salee. So, if you consider my qualifications and don't mind, I'd like to ask for the opportunity to have Salee."

"Khun Jae!"

## "I promise not to make her sad or let her suffer. Even if I die or become disabled, she'll still get every best of everything from me."

"...."

"....."

Everyone fell silent for several seconds, but eventually, Salee's grandparents almost placed Salee on a silver platter for Veetara. Salee coming home this time wasn't meant for an arranged marriage, as Salee thought.

Her grandparents just wanted her to be more proactive. Since breaking up with Best, Salee hadn't shown any signs of a new relationship.

The truth was, the elders were worried, as loving grandparents often are, fearing that if they didn't push now, they wouldn't have the chance to vet her future partner.

They wanted to ensure someone would be there for Salee when they were gone, even if it meant arranging a marriage with the district officer's son, hoping it'd either prompt Salee to find a partner or that she might genuinely fall for Anon.

"Anon is good, but if you love her, I don't think I can object you two,"

*Of course.*

*With such impressive qualifications laid out, who could object to a beautiful, sexy, and wealthy woman from Thonburi?*

Veetara thanked them gracefully after the elders nodded in approval, quite pleased that Salee would officially be off the market.

"In that case, may I take Salee back to Bangkok today?"

Salee raised an eyebrow, placing a hand on her chest at Veetara's eagerness, while her grandfather immediately nodded without a word of objection.

"What do you say? Do you want to go back? If not, just say so. We don't want to keep her waiting,"

Salee's father teased, making Salee scowl before standing up abruptly and saying:

## "I'll go shower and pack up my things!"

Salee had been ready to go anywhere with Veetara since they'd locked eyes yesterday.

*It's time for me to stop playing hard to get now!*

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While waiting for Salee to pack, Veetara was bombarded with questions from Salee's relatives, especially the twin brothers, who couldn't believe their little sister had a beautiful girlfriend before they did.

"What does Salee have that you like, Vee?"

Ton (or maybe Tam) asked with a puzzled look. "All I see is a clumsy monkey."

Veetara scratched her cheek awkwardly, unsure how to explain that she was blind to Salee's clumsiness, loudness, or antics. She found it all endearing.

Especially now.

"Actually, I'm happy with how she's just like this," She replied shyly.

Salee's grandparents, listening, seemed to understand. They laughed and nodded with the reason. Then, they took turns recounting Salee's childhood antics, saying their '*Little Salee'* was naughtier than the guard dogs.

"She loved playing in the mud and giving random names to the cows and buffaloes we raised."

"When she was naughty. I'd threaten to spank her, and she'd hide behind her grandmother. When her grandmother scolded her for stealing coconut shells for firewood, she ran to me for help. No one could do anything to her, especially not Tam and Ton, because she was a tattletale who knew how to charm people. Even Kaew sided with her over her own sons."

Veetara imagined a tiny, round-faced, chubby-cheeked Salee running around the Thai-style house and smiling sweetly. She wanted to hear more about Salee's childhood mischiefs but was interrupted by Salee herself, who entered with a scowl on her face and a suitcase in her hand, sensing she was being roasted by her relatives.

The twins saw her annoyed face and wanted to tease her more. They quickly spilled embarrassing stories before losing the chance.

"She once played with dog poop!" "She ate an eraser!"

"She dressed as a mermaid for a kindergarten event!" "She had an imaginary friend named Poom!"

"She stole Grandma's snittoon to use as a hat."

"When her baby teeth fell out, she thought she was dying and cried so loudly that people miles away could hear her!"

"Stop it right now!"

Salee was about to hit the two men, but Veetara quickly intervened, fearing more chaos might happen. She then excused herself to pack up. Most of her

things were still in the suitcase she'd brought from Bangkok as her main goal of visiting had already been achieved.

After a short packing session, Veetara emerged from her room to bid farewell to everyone who warmly welcomed her.

"I'll visit again soon and also meet her father's parents."

The elders smiled when they heard Veetara, pleased with her serious and reliable demeanor. They wished her a safe drive and entrusted Salee to her care. Veetara firmly agreed, causing the younger girl, who'd been listening quietly, to blush and lower her head to avoid the teasing of her two older brothers.

Veetara chuckled because even after driving far out onto the main road, the girl was still shy and flustered.

"How are you feeling?"

Veetara asked her passenger while they stopped at a red light. "How am I feeling about what?"

Salee mumbled, looking both embarrassed and dazed, as if she hadn't fully woken up from a dream because of everything that had happened earlier.

Veetara began to worry when she saw the younger girl's strange behavior. "Are you okay?"

"Not at all,"

The girl answered, but before Veetara could feel alarmed, she continued, "At least you could've given me a heads-up so I could dress better!"

"I didn't expect to have to ask that while you were in your pajamas," Veetara smiled.

"But what could I do? The situation just led to it."

"You're so impatient, Salee observed, and Veetara had to admit it was true. "Yes,"

Veetara reached over to tuck a strand of hair behind Salee's right ear. "I wouldn't risk letting Arnon or anyone else meet you."

She knew Salee was the type of person who could easily make others fall in love with her. If another suitor appeared, Veetara might just go crazy.

"And..."

The smaller giri began, grabbing Veetara's hand and holding it tightly, her cheeks still red.

"When did you have time to prepare all those documents? I remember we only talked briefly yesterday, and then you came straight here."

"I've had them ready for a long time." "What?"

"I wasn't just playing around with you,"

Veetara said seriously as she shifted gears when the light turned green, then returned her hand for Salee to hold.

"I plan to be with you. But because we're both women, it puts us at a disadvantage. Many people might not be used to this, and when they're not, they can't picture and understand it. Even I wondered what our future relationship would look like because I'd only dated men. I didn't think we could easily start a family. I expected people might pressure us and view us as less legitimate than legally recognized couples. That's why I wanted to prepare early."

"....."

"Luckily, my life is stable now, so it wasn't too much trouble. Just making copies of documents and keeping them in an envelope was enough,"

Veetara explained, her thumb gently stroking Salee's palm She added jokingly but sincerely,

"The only thing I didn't show off was the life insurance policy with you as the beneficiary."

The smaller girl gasped and turned to look at Veetara with wide eyes. "Khun Jae?"

"I did it before we even had our fight," Veetara said firmly.

"I wasn't lying to your grandparents. No matter what happens, you'll always get the best from me."

"How can anything be the 'best' for me if you're not around?!"

Salee cried out, tears streaming down her face as she clung to Veetara's hand like a koala hugging a eucalyptus tree.

"Why are you so good to me?"

*Oh no.*

*This Little Trouble!*

Veetara didn't dare laugh because she saw that Salee was struggling with overwhelming emotions-gratitude, love, and anger at herself for causing so much trouble. She irrationally thought that if Veetara didn't love her, Veetara's life would be easier.

"Whether it's easy or hard isn't the point,"

Veetara said, wiping away Salee's tears and possibly some snot with the back of her hand.

"I told you last night that you're the best part of my life. So why can't I give you the best?"

"...."

Salee didn't respond but hugged Veetara's left arm instead.

Veetara placed her hand on Salee's lap and patted it comfortingly. Then she changed the subject to distract Salee, realizing it was a good opportunity to take a vacation after their previous trip was canceled due to unforeseen circumstances.

"Let's go on a trip." "?"

"Kinny told me to take a long break,"

Veetara smiled at the girl who looked up from her arm.

"Since we're already out of Bangkok, why don't we find a quiet place to stay for a few days?"

Salee nodded eagerly, and although sitting like that wasn't very comfortable, she insisted on leaning against Veetara despite the seatbelt's resistance. It wasn't until Veetara reminded her to sit properly for safety that the girl let go of her arm and started looking for accommodations on her phone.

They eventually found the last available villa at a resort by the Srinakarin Dam lake for three nights.

Veetara took about an hour and a half to drive to their destination.

She found the place perfect for relaxation-shady, quiet, and very private. Their lakeside villa was the innermost one, far from the others.

The villa was mostly wooden, with separate living and sleeping areas. The long balcony extended into the lake, where they could sit and enjoy the view of the mountains in the background.

"What do you want to do first?"

Veetara asked her roommate after she'd unpacked her things (which included a suitcase and a peculiar paper bag from Kinny).

"Take a nap or go find something to eat?" "I'm hungry but too lazy to go out," Salee said, sounding reluctant.

"Can we order room service instead?"

Veetara nodded and was about to call and order stir-fried pork with basil and a fried egg for the hungry but lazy girl when she pulled Salee close. The girl was ready, wrapping her arms around Veetara's neck, standing on tiptoe, and nothing letting her lips go free for nearly ten minutes.

"Mmm."

Veetara started feeling dizzy, and before she knew it, Salee's quick hands had pushed her onto the bed.

The girl was about to unbutton Veetara's shirt with a determined but flushed face.

"Are you sure?"

Veetara cleared her throat and asked When Salee replied, "Sure thing!"

She couldn't help but laugh and feel a bit embarrassed about the new experience awaiting them.

But then, their stomachs growled in unison, reminding them to eat first before they began their love war. Salee reluctantly pulled away. sighing loudly, unsure if she was disappointed or relieved to have more time to prepare herself (her confidence earlier was just a lie).

But Salee thought it was probably both. "Let's eat first,"

Veetara said softly, amused. She then reached over the bed for the phone and ordered food and drinks for two. The person on the other end said the food would be delivered within fifteen minutes, so Salee snacked on some chips from the minibar while watching TV in the living room.

Meanwhile, Veetara stayed in the bedroom, wanting to take this chance to see what Kinny and the gang had put in the pink paper bag.

Veetara carefully peeled off the sealing. Although she didn't expect anything sensible from them, she was still taken aback to find a package of **sexy lingerie**, an English **magazine with tips and tricks on bed** coming with illustrations (Onanong sent this from LA), and a few **women's pleasure accessories**. It took her a while to muster the courage to inspect each item before finally opening a handwritten letter.

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*'Dear Friend,*

*I know you love Salee very much.*

*Everyone knows this (but pretends not to). So, if you reconcile with her and return to work happier, we'll all be very grateful.*

* + 1. *Tell the girl we all miss her.*
    2. *Have fun with the goodies in the bag, sis.*

*With love,*

*Kinny*

. "....."

"Khun Jae!"

Veetara jumped, quickly folding the letter back. "The food's here. Where should I put it?" "Anywhere is fine."

The young woman hid the bag behind her suitcase, taking a deep breath to steady herself. Her pulse was racing, and what had been a slight embarrassment turned into a significant awkwardness. The image of the lingerie (ranging from beginner Mommy to extra premium Mommy) was still vivid in her mind, along with the explicit magazines of Onanong and those bizarre accessories.

*This is crazy!*

Veetara exclaimed to herself. Despite the intense discomfort, she couldn't deny that these items were quite tempting.

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They decided to change the atmosphere by having dinner on the balcony. One reason was to enjoy the view they paid thousands of baht for each night, and the other was to prevent the smell of the food from fingering in the room all night.

After a while, Salee noticed that the beautiful woman seemed unusually quiet. She guessed Veetara was probably contemplating strengthening their

relationship. Salee didn't interrupt because she had her own thoughts to ponder.

It's not that she wasn't ready.

**She was itching to get started,** and she promised not to hesitate when the time came. However, the waiting made her mind wander.

It was like standing in line for a thrilling roller coaster ride.

Salee knew what to expect, yet she still felt a bit scared, a bit shaky, and a bit excited, making her palms sweat just imagining the stomach-churning drop. That's why Salee wanted to skip the line and get it over with as soon as they arrived at the villa. She was sure that the sexual tension between her and Veetara was bigger than an Airbus A380.

"..... "

They sat in silence for a while, and by the time Salee snapped out of her thoughts, the sky had turned a pinkish-orange.

*I guess It must be past five o'clock.*

"Shall we go inside? The mosquitoes are getting bad."

Veetara nodded and got up from the wooden table to gather the dishes, letting Salee go take a shower and change first.

Salee felt so anxious that she washed herself multiple times, adhering to the belief that tonight (or any night from now on), she had to be ready and confident for Veetara.

It seemed like Veetara knew her thoughts well as she raised an eyebrow, smiled contentedly, and beckoned her to sit together in front of the TV after she came out of the bathroom.

"Easy A is on this channel. Want to watch together?"

The younger woman wrinkled her nose unconsciously because, lately, the actress from Easy A was no longer her favorite Hollywood star. If anyone was to blame for this misfortune, it was jan, who looked like Emma Stone, making her reluctant to watch the movie she once loved even once more.

"Let's change the channel."

Veetara raised her eyebrows but changed the channel without asking. They stumbled upon a Star Wars marathon starting from A New Hope, and Salee immediately told her to stop changing channels.

"I want to watch this,"

She said, adjusting herself comfortably on the sofa. She was glad that at least something could distract her from overthinking while she waited for 'that thing' to happen.

"Have you ever watched it?" "I've only seen bits and pieces,"

Veetara replied, moving closer but doing nothing more than tucking her hair behind her ear, a sign that she was feeling shy about something. Salee guessed it was probably because she smelled like she'd been marinating in the soap for three days and nights.

"The first episode released was Episode Four, right?" "Yes,"

Salee nodded, explaining a bit about the Star Wars franchise to Veetara, mentioning that the movies were divided into three main parts: the original trilogy (Episodes 4-5-6), the prequel trilogy (Episodes 1-2-3), and the sequel trilogy (Episodes 7-8-9).

"Why is it like that?"

"From what I've read, the numbering was added later. Originally, it was just called Star Wars. Everyone, even George Lucas, expected the movie to flop.

Only Steven Spielberg believed it'd be a hit, and it was." Salee said, inching her hand closer to Veetara.

"When it became unexpectedly successful, George Lucas, who already had ideas, made more movies, adding Episode Four to the first movie, followed by Episodes Five and Six because this trilogy was meant to be in the middle of the overall story. After Episode Six, they went back to tell the origin story in Episodes One, Two, and Three. where Natalie Portman was

criticized for her stiff acting."

Veetara nodded, remembering that she'd seen those episodes before while staying over at Kinny's house to work on a university project. Kinny's father was a die-hard Star Wars fan, known to rewatch the movies from the first to the latest whenever he had free time. This gave her a chance to watch the movies too, but only in passing, as she had to rush to work with 'Akın' (whose name was inspired by Anakin Skywalker, a key character from Star Wars).

"So, which episode is this?"

The older woman asked, not really looking at the TV, especially as she placed her hand on Salee's fair thigh peeking out from under her skirt.

"The Empire Strikes Back, Episode Five."

Salee felt a tingling in her mouth that she needed to bite her lip lightly, while Veetara kept staring, swallowing, tucking her hair, and breathing through her mouth as if she'd just finished a workout.

"Um... Do you want me to. "

The young woman began hesitantly, knowing only that her pulse was racing fast and her body was starting to shiver from the cold air in the room.

"You watch the movie first,"

Veetara mumbled, avoiding eye contact.

"I'll go take a shower,"

She said, getting up and grabbing her clothes. Then, she headed to the bathroom next door, leaving Salee sitting there, tense and unsure of what to do. From feeling cold a moment ago, she suddenly felt hot and sweaty, realizing that her 'first time was imminent.

*Just thinking about it makes my throat dry!*

Salee swallowed hard.

She jumped up from the sofa to grab a drink from the minibar under the TV, pulling out Coke, Fanta, Mirinda, Pepsi, and every can she could find. She gulped them down in hopes of calming her nerves.

She returned to her seat just as the movie reached its famous plot twist, a legendary scene in the film industry in which Luke Skywalker confronted Darth Vader and learned that the black-clad villain with the iconic Imperial March theme and heavy breathing, was his father, Anakin Skywalker.

*"If you only knew the power of The Dark Side! Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father."*

*"He told me enough! He told me you killed him!"*

### "No, I am your father."

*"No... That's not true. That's impossible!" "Search your feelings. You know it to be true."* "***NOOOOOOO! NOOOOOOO!"***

Salee stared at the TV, still amazed by the legendary scene every time she watched it, barely hearing the call from behind her. Veetara had been out of the bathroom for a while, but it wasn't until she cleared her throat loudly that Salee turned around.

She was so shocked that grape-flavored Fanta, which had been discontinued but brought back for a campaign, spilled out of her mouth. Veetara stood at the doorway between the bedroom and the living room, looking like she'd stepped out of a Playboy magazine.

Curvy, voluptuous, and fair-skinned, Veetara wore a fancy black two-piece lingerie set made of sheer lace that left little to the imagination. The top was tied with a ribbon between her breasts, like a bow on a gift box.

But that didn't make Salee feel overwhelmed or like everything was too much. Veetara must've felt a bit shy, too, which was why she wore a black chiffon robe with an orchid pattern that reached her thighs. It almost brought tears of joy to Salee's eyes.

She playfully thought that if she'd forced the scene from Star Wars where to Veetara, saying, *'No, I* ***am your mommy'*,** it would've made her scream across the galaxy, competing with Luke Skywalker.

### YESSSSSSS! YESSSSSSS!

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Veetara walked the middle path. She chose to wear middle-level lingerie for Mommy because the beginner-level lingerie felt too ordinary (like wearing a regular bra and panties from Victoria's Secret).

The extra-premium level lingerie, on the other hand, felt like wearing nothing at all, as it didn't cover anything important, leaving only a few pieces of fabric on the body.

The middle level was just right.

She thought so until she saw Salee acting strangely, letting purple soda spill out of her mouth and staring at her in shock and embarrassment; the girl didn't even know what to do next. Veetara lost her confidence, quickly hiding her blushing face, wrapping herself in the chiffon robe, and heading back to the bathroom.

She thought she was foolish for deciding to do something so shameless. But then, the younger one moved like a rocket, jumping over the sofa to grab her arm.

"Where are you going, gorgeous?"

Salee smiled, looking both shy and pleased, her eyes sparkling. "To change,"

Veetara said, embarrassed.

"There's no need to change; you'll be taking it all off soon,"

The younger girl said sweetly, making Veetara bite her lip, swallow, and take several seconds to regain her courage.

Veetara turned to face Salee, letting the chiffon robe fall open to reveal her body again. Salee pulled her down for a kiss, having waited hours since their first attempt.

*Mmm.*

*This kiss is as thrilling as grape soda.*

Veetara's breathing quickened with her pulse as the younger girl moved one hand to her chest and the other to her hip. Then, guiding her to the bed.

Salee made her sit on the edge as before, not letting the kiss break. She moved from the lips to the chin, then slowly down the jawline.

Veetara's heart raced. The kissed spots felt hot, contrasting with the cold air from the air conditioner.

When Salee removed her chiffon robe to kiss her shoulders more freely, Veetara shivered, her body temperature seemingly unstable.

"Khun Jae." "Mmm?"

"May I?"

lThe younger girl, now standing, asked shyly but didn't stop kissing and touching her. Salee, then, sat on her lap with a blushing face. Veetara helped pull off her oversized white t-shirt when she couldn't do it herself; Salee was busy with her neck.

*Oh...*

Veetara had known for a long time that the other girl didn't wear a bra to bed.

Tonight was no different.

So she felt parched when she finally got to see Salee's delicate, sweet body clearly, without worrying or waiting for the right moment.

Salee was slim but not skinny, with a soft, curvy body. Even Veetara, who never cared about other women's figures, couldn't help but enjoy looking and touching her.

Eventually, she couldn't resist.

Veetara pulled Salee close, kissing under her chin, then moving down to her soft spots, which were now just as sensitive as hers.

Salee shivered when Veetara's lips touched her sensitive spot intentionally while one hand moved under her small elastic shorts. Then, Veetara gently laid Salee down on the bed. Salee's face and body were red with embarrassment, but she wasn't protesting, making Veetara smile as she lay on top of her, her hand still in place.

"Are you scared?"

Veetara asked, and when the girl nodded, admitting she was a little scared, she kissed her softly and gently.

"Me too."

Veetara murmured to comfort Salee, letting her know she wasn't the only one nervous about this. Although she was also a bit scared, she felt confident enough to lead this first time.

As for the next time, they could figure it out later...

Salee wrapped her arms around Veetara's neck, adjusting her body. "If you're not okay, tell me."

"It's okay,"

The younger girl murmured, blushing. "I think I'm okay."

Veetara smiled, kissing her cute lips, which now looked especially adorable. "Okay."

She whispered then slowly moved her hand into her short, not rushing, hoping to make her feel good and happy with the touch.

Veetara swallowed as she felt the readiness of the body beneath her. Warm, hot, moist, and soft.

Salee took a deep breath, then let go of her neck. Using both hands, she held Veetara's face for a kiss, easing the tension below. Veetara moved her hand slowly, carefully, watching the girl's satisfaction until her body relaxed. She sighed in relief that this first attempt to form a sense of comfort for the girl had gone well.

Salee immediately covered her face in embarrassment. "So, was it okay or not?"

"That was super duper okay."

Veetara laughed at the murmured response, then was startled when the seemingly weak girl suddenly sat up, making Veetara sit on the girl's lap.

With Veetara being taller, the position was quite advantageous for the smaller girl.

Veetara looked down at the cute face level with her chest. "Let me help," Salee said.

"Mmm."

Veetara made a sound in her throat, feeling quite uncomfortable from the various factors making her desire meter tremble. But she wouldn't tell Salee how much her face and low moans had driven her wild.

Veetara just let the girl help her with great satisfaction, especially since those small hands were both playful and clumsy, making her pulse race, fearing her heart might jump out of her chest.

Veetara found that their shyness hadn't decreased after a while, but their courage and familiarity had increased. They both understood that this bed activity wasn't as scary as they thought and was just another way to strengthen their relationship. So, if they went all out now, it wouldn't be strange.

Yes

Going all out from the second round wasn't strange at all.

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If Salee were destined to die in Veetara's chest, she'd die smiling, eyes wide open.

She'd die with her eyes open, appreciating and touching the soft, warm, heavenly boobs.

Salee had no idea what good deeds she'd done in her past life, but if she had to guess, it might be from helping people or building temples or fighting for her country. That's why she got to experience such wonderful things in this life.

Now, she and Veetara were so tangled up that she couldn't remember when they moved from the bed to the sofa or how much time had passed. It wasn't until Salee looked up at the Star Wars on TV that she realized it was the Revenge of the Sith episode.

That meant they'd been at it for about five or six hours, including breaks, since Darth Vader's 'I am your father' scene with his son.

Salee wanted to smile through her tears like that one emoticon on the internet. Veetara was sitting on her hand and seemed to have boundless energy to strengthen their relationship. It was as if she'd saved herself for almost thirty years, and when she finally let go, it was like a wild flood.

"Um, Khun Jae, I think..."

The younger one began, sweating a little. "Maybe we should take a nap?"

Veetara, seeing the girl's exhaustion, probably felt pity and nodded, even though her beautiful face and sharp eyes clearly showed she still wanted more.

Salee finally got a chance to catch her breath.

When Salee woke up again late in the morning, Veetara, who'd been awake for a while, brought a breakfast tray to the bed with two fried eggs, three pieces of bacon, one sausage, and a cup of coffee as if trying to please her.

The young girl raised an eyebrow and smiled, finally understanding what people meant when they said that after such activities, something (or many things) would change noticeably.

For Veetara, it seemed to be her facial expressions, gestures, words, and actions, as if she'd thrown away all her pretense.

"Have you eaten, Khun Jae?" "I had rice porridge earlier."

Salee stifled a smile. The person who'd gone to the trouble of bringing the breakfast tray didn't seem to let her eat anything, as she kept nuzzling her cheek and neck. The young girl took this opportunity to look at Veetara from head to toe and found that she was wearing a large black shirt over hot pants, looking much more decent than last night.

She couldn't help but ask out of curiosity where Veetara had prepared such an outfit, as she believed someone like Veetara wouldn't have the mind to think of such lingerie while they were still tense with each other.

"I got it from those know-it-alls at the office," Veetara mumbled in response.

"Who else could it be?"

Then Salee was introduced to the *'Mommy Bag'*, which was full of naughty items like magazines ranking popular sex positions, sexy lingeries, and adult toys from Japan, curated by Jae Kinny and her crew to help Salee and Veetara reconcile and have fun.

Salee broke into a sweat because it seemed Veetara was quite into it, asking her opinion on such things. She could only give a half-hearted response, saying, '*It's okay,'* but for some of the popular positions (?) and some toys in the box that she didn't want to describe, she decided to keep her thoughts to herself.

The only thing of value was the sexy lingerie package, which came in three levels: plain, normal sexy, playboy (which Veetara wore last night), and the final level, which was so advanced that it barely covered anything.

But no matter which one she chose, Veetara was still incredibly hot, especially during the remaining two nights of their vacation. She was constantly nudged by the beautiful one, either to be seduced or to get up and jump at Veetara, who was in naughty lingerie with references from Onanong's magazine.

That's why Salee said...

If she were to die in those sexy boobs, she'd die happily with a smile through her tears.

# Epilogue

The current situation between Veetara and Salee had returned to normal.

That meant they were back to being lovey-dovey, with the added detail that they were now intimate, making their behavior even more annoyingly affectionate.

Kinny admitted she might be bipolar because when those two fought, she got all worked up, but when they made up and flaunted it, she got irritated. Especially now that Veetara and her little lover no longer have to worry about workplace romance.

Yes.

Salee didn't return to work at the language institute after talking to Veetara, saying that she wanted to pursue what she loved instead: photography and videography. Her new office was just across the street in the same alley, not that far from her old office.

Moreover, the company was the same studio that the institute hired to produce content and film online English lessons. So, the little troublemaker and Veetara still saw each other often because Salee usually dropped by and gossiped with the team during their lunch breaks. Or if she finished work early, she sat around waiting for her dear Veetara with a big smile.

"Can't you go home by yourself?"

Kinny frowned at the person who'd taken Onanong's empty chair. And she received such an irritating reply,

"No, I'm staying over at Khun Jae's tonight."

Kinny rolled her eyes but still pulled up a chair to sit next to Salee for their usual daily gossip.

They started with news from Thee (their adopted daughter), who'd contacted them via that app to share the good news that she got into her dream university and would soon be free from all her frustrations. She wanted Kinny to help her pick out some fabulous outfits for her grand opening soon.

Next was about Aunty Aeow, who'd started pickling everything under the sun to sell. Recently, seeing the bubble tea craze, she created a new menu and forced the team, who had to pass by her shop every day, to be her guinea pigs.

"Yuck!"

Salee made a face, and Kinny nodded in agreement. Then they gossiped about Onanong, who seemed to be living a happy life in LA.

"P'On has a new boyfriend again?" "Yes, this is the fourth one" "Really?"

The young girl asked.

"But she hasn't even been there a year, and she's had four boyfriends?"

Kinny shrugged, implying that small breasts probably weren't a big deal for the guys over there. But even so, the hot girl of Los Angeles still hadn't found anyone she really liked, so she kept changing boyfriends.

"As for Karn---."

"Have you been here long?"

Kinny's gossip was cut short because the busty one opened the office door from her workspace.

"For a while now."

The young girl replied with a sweet smile. When Veetara walked over and sniffed (kissed) the top of Salee's head, Kinny's face scrunched up with an indescribable feeling.

"Why does your head smell? It smells like grilled pork"

"Well, I just stood buying grilled pork from the smoky shop at the end of the alley, Salee said, raising the tightly tied bag of grilled pork for her lover to see.

"I was planning to have it as a snack while watching Netflix tonight." "Oh, a new series is out, huh?"

Veetara sniffed the young girl's head again, even though she'd already complained that it 'smelled'.

### I haaaaaate them.

***I'm over their lovey-dovey nonsense!***

"I think Kinny is getting annoyed with us." Salee said.

"Well, you know!"

Kinny rolled her eyes, making both Veetara and Salee smile. They even had the nerve to invite her to have homemade sükiyaki at their condo because Salee had been craving healthy food like boiled vegetables with lots of sliced pork for days. But making it for just the two of them seemed odd, especially since they knew Kinny was living a lonely single life lately.

At first, Kinny was going to decline. She didn't want to sit and watch the newlyweds being all mushy-gushy, making her feel even lonelier. But then a woman who'd just burst into the office after finishing her class made her change her mind immediately.

"Alright, I'll go," Kinny whispered. "Let's go now."

She didn't deny to anyone that she was avoiding Jan.

Because everyone knew that the feisty woman had shifted her target from 'Veetara' to her. Just like everyone knew that her best friend and the little troublemaker were secretly flirting, but no one said anything. The cause of this awkward situation could only be blamed on Jan's flexible preferences.

Kinny slipped behind Salee (who now had the courage to face Jan) as they walked to the elevator, with the American woman smiling sweetly, blocking their way.

"Where are you three going to party?"

Kinny pursed her lips, not answering, but pushed the burden onto Salee

"We're not partying, we're going to eat sukiyaki. And we're not taking any more guests because there are only three sets of dishes at the condo!"

Jan smiled, leaning towards Salee with a flirtatious gesture.

"I didn't say I wanted to go with you guys, but hmm or maybe you secretly want me to join, Salee?"

She raised her hand, intending to poke the young girl's cheek, probably to tease her. But Veetara cleared her throat loudly and stepped up to shield the girl, making jan step back. Then, jan muttered something that made Veetara grab Kinny to use as a shield.

"How are you, Veetara? We haven't had a one-on-one chat in a long time. I think..."

"Stop right there!"

Kinny cut in as her friend and Little Trouble pushed her to the front. "We have to go. You probably have things to do too, so goodbye." "Wait."

Jan presumptuously grabbed Kinny's wrist. Those two traitors took the opportunity to escape into the elevator, shouting before the door closed, 'See you at the car! making Kinny want to scream but holding back, fearing it'd make the remaining colleagues curious about what was happening.

"You're avoiding me." "I'm not."

"Yes, you are. Everyone knows it, right, Miss Karn?"

Jan asked the stingy Miss Karn from the accounting department, who was about to walk by.

"Yup,"

Karn replied.

*Yes, my ass!!*

"See? I'm not imagining it."

Kinny frowned, trying to twist her arm free before asking curtly. "What do you want from me?"

To cover up her own slip-up. "You know that well."

"I don't."

Jan squinted at Kinny for several seconds before finally letting go of her arm.

"You didn't consider my words at all, did you?" ". "

"Kinny stayed silent.

The American woman also stayed silent. She abruptly ended the conversation and walked away, leaving Kinny with an inexplicable feeling.

They parted there. jan went to pack her things to go home while Kinny took the elevator down to meet Veetara and Salee, who were waiting in the car.

"Are you okay?"

The driver asked uncertainly, noticing she'd been unusually quiet. Kinny shifted and shook her head slowly, not wanting them to worry. "I'm fine."

But even as she said that. Kinny started to get a headache, unsure if she was really fine' as she claimed. Especially when she found her appetite significantly reduced, constantly thinking about the gloomy face of the foreign woman earlier, making her so anxious that Salee noticed as soon as they started eating sukiyaki.

"Sorry for leaving you alone earlier." Salee began, followed by Veetara.

"They seemed to have discussed the need to talk about this. We didn't know your issue with Jan was this serious."

"Are you having feelings for her?" "I'm not."

Kinny wanted to deny it but then frowned, closed her eyes, and sighed helplessly, realizing that lying to Veetara and the little troublemaker was pointless. They were probably the people who loved and cared for her the most after her parents. So, no matter how much she tried to hide it, someone would eventually find out.

"Not exactly."

Kinny frowned at herself. "But I think I'm confused."

Veetara and Salee exchanged glances automatically. "Since when?"

"When you two were fighting." Kinny sighed.

"I tried to keep jan from stirring things up more, so...we had a bit more alone time than usual."

At that time, Kinny didn't think she'd become a target. She knew well that she wasn't a real woman and she'd only undergone breast surgery. But suddenly, after jan asked her to take her to the market and then took the opportunity to come back and cook for her as a thank you, the Western woman began to aggressively pursue her without hiding it.

Jan even said that she'd been interested in her since the first time she saw her when she went to handle work for Veetara at the institute over there.

"You're so beautiful that I can't believe you have 'Mr.' in front of your name."

Jan said, moving closer and cornering Kinny until she had to back up to the kitchen counter.

"The first thought of hitting on you got delayed, but now I..."

"Wait, wait,"

Kinny tried to raise her hand to stop the other. Her pulse raced with excitement because, since she was born, she'd never encountered a woman who pursued her so boldly, disregarding her sex or gender status.

But when Kinny realized Jan wasn't pursuing her because of a misunderstanding, thinking she was a full man, but because she was beautiful and caught the eye of a top-tier lesbian, Kinny became even more confused and speechless. In that split second, Jan took full advantage of it by pressing her lips down and not letting Kinny move away until she was satisfied.

Kinny lost her composure.

She lost it because she'd never kissed a woman before but immediately knew that something was happening, and the sensation wasn't as bad as she thought. To be honest, she quite liked Jan's kiss.

Listening to this, Veetara mumbled a question. "Because a woman's lips are soft, right?" "Yeah."

"They feel sweeter than you thought, huh?" "Yes."

"And their skin is smooth, no stubble." "Uh-huh."

"Okay, I get it,"

The naturally busty woman gestured to the girl, which could only refer to the troublemaker still eating sliced pork while listening to her problem.

"Because I'm the same as you."

"It's not the same." "It's not?"

Salee looked up from the hot pot to ask. "Well, I..."

Kinny bit her lip. "I'm like this."

She meant her 'neither fully woman nor fully man' status, which was very confusing. Born male, but as she grew older, she became a woman. Now, she had something going on with a Western woman she'd known for less than a year. Kinny felt her identity was being heavily shaken, and couldn't find a stable ground for herself.

"Can I ask something personal?"

The young girl asked for permission, making Kinny pause for a moment before she agreed.

"Did you decide to change your appearance to match your inner self because you like men?"

Salee asked cautiously.

"I mean, sometimes our identity and external factors that define us are separate issues. For example, I'm a woman, both mind and body. When I love Khun Jae, who is also a woman, it doesn't make me want to be a man. So, I think you wanted to be a beautiful woman out of personal satisfaction more than anything else. Now, try to see yourself as a woman by heart since birth."

Kinny tried to follow Salee's explanation until Veetara concluded,

"You're a woman, Jan's a woman, so we're all categorized by the world as women who love women."

Kinny then exclaimed in a high-pitched voice,

**"What?!"**

*What? I'm totally confused!*

"You're a woman who used to date men, but you're now interested in women. It's nothing complicated, Salee smiled with chubby cheeks.

"Jan probably understands the same as me, which is why she's openly pursuing you."

Kinny bit her lip, pondered, and sighed again when she recalled the moment after being kissed the other day. No matter how loudly she protested or said things that should have made the other person back off, Jan was unfazed, finding excuses to counter everything.

*'I don't care if you like men or have that thing or not. I like you, and you know something's happening between us. So, think about it, okay?'*

Was what the Western woman said.

This made Kinny even more confused and disoriented. Since then, Kinny had been trying to avoid Jan, only approaching her for work or when absolutely necessary. In contrast, the other kept trying to get close to her, so much so that everyone in the office knew something was happening between them.

"You can be anything you want to be,"

Veetara reaffirmed the same sentence she'd told her before, adding a bit more this time.

"You can love anyone you want because it's your rightful choice."

Kinny was stunned, then sighed deeply for the hundredth time, realizing her friend's words were entirely true.

It was as true as her heart wanting to give Jan a chance.

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"I'm worried about Jae Kinny,"

Salee frowned while eating her second skewer of grilled pork after Kinny had left.

"About what?"

"About Jan, of course,"

The young girl answered with a frown.

"That woman is unpredictable. If she messes around and makes Jae Kinny sad, it'd be terrible."

"I believe Kinny can handle it."

Veetara replied, handing a paper napkin to the big eater to wipe her messy mouth.

"She has enough experience and judgment. So, just supporting her as needed should be enough."

Salee's frown eased, but she couldn't help but preemptively blame the Western woman,

"If she mistreats Jae Kinny, I'll pinch her boobs off!" "Hey now,"

The older woman protested, pulling the other into a hug before whispering, making the listener laugh out loud.

"Before touching anyone's boobs, be considerate of me, too."

"Oh, my Khun Jae. If I pinch Jan's boobs, it's out of anger," Salee said, laughing.

"But if I pinch yours, it's out of love and respect."

Veetara couldn't help but laugh along. She kissed the cheeky girl's greasy lips (from the grilled pork) and then reminded her that they had to wake up early tomorrow for a family breakfast. The young girl agreed, negotiating to watch one more episode of the series before showering and going to bed as Veetara wished.

Yes.

Veetara had a family breakfast appointment for the first time in decades, which stemmed from her father's illness.

Of course, a stroke wasn't pleasant for either the patient or the caregiver. But in that misfortune, some good things happened. Her parents' pride softened, and the bad things they had done to each other faded. They became more empathetic, and perhaps they reminisced about the days when they were healthy but chose to always waste time arguing, losing a part of their lives for nothing.

Now, realizing they had little time left to be good to each other before parting ways due to old age, they decided to end all disputes and become good friends for the long-lost peace of the family.

Veetara could hardly remember the last time her parents stood in the same room. But for the reasons mentioned, she finally saw them together again. One lay watching TV, waiting for physical therapy, while the other quietly read a magazine without any harsh words.

She informed them about Salee in advance. "Next week, I'll introduce my girlfriend to you." She said without leaving room for questions.

"She's a woman, five years younger than me, and if the law allows us to register our marriage, I'll marry into her family."

"..."

Her father couldn't speak well due to his illness "..."

Her mother was stunned, not knowing how to respond.

"I'm not asking for permission; I'm just informing you in advance." Veetara cleared her throat.

"So, if you want us to have good times together like this, please be kind to Salee for me. She's a lovely girl. You don't have to worry about anything except opening your hearts."

"O... Okay,"

Her father tried to respond, while her mother nodded, still slightly confused by her sudden entrance and long speech about bringing a girl to greet them.

But still...

Everyone was okay (or maybe they had to be okay, Veetara wasn't entirely sure either).

"Are you excited?"

Veetara whispered to the younger girl, who was dressed neatly today in a white dress that reached her knees and had long sleeves. It looked formal yet sweet in a way she couldn't quite describe.

"Very much," Salee replied. "It's okay. We'll go together."

Veetara said, holding Salee's hand to reassure her that no matter what happened next, she wouldn't disappear and would always be there to back her up. As it turned out, the situation was more pleasant than she anticipated. Veetara felt completely at ease, especially when Salee's special charm, '*being liked by those nearby,* kicked in. The adults found Salee even more delightful than Veetara had advertised.

Veetara had intended for it to be this way because she wanted everyone to see for themselves how charming Salee was, both in her words and her ability to adapt to her surroundings. Even her usually reserved father couldn't help but laugh when Salee shyly recounted her mischievous childhood and how she came to know Veetara.

Veetara hid her smile, letting the talkative girl entertain her parents while she enjoyed her meal in peace until the end of the event.

Everyone was happy except for her younger brother, who still had some unresolved issues with Salee.

They saw him driving into the house just as they were about to leave. "Can I talk to Best for a moment?" Salee asked.

Veetara smiled and patted her cheek, nodding.

"Go ahead. I'm sure he has something to say to you too."

Veetara let them talk without interruption. About ten minutes later, Salee returned to the car and, after fastening her seatbelt, said,

"It's all settled." "All settled?"

Veetara echoed, seeking details. Salee explained on the way home that she apologized to him first. Although both had wronged each other in various ways, the root cause was that Salee had used him as a stand-in for Veetara from the beginning.

"I'm not sure if he'll forgive me for that, but for everything he did wrong to us, I forgive him."

Salee said, hugging and kissing Veetara's hand affectionately. Then she added,

"Even though I still kind of want to strangle him," Making Veetara shake her head with a smile.

"Things might still be tense today, but I think with time, everything will get better,"

Veetara said, holding Salee's hand to her cheek.

"Look at my mom and dad. They used to fight like cats and dogs, but they eventually made peace."

"That's because your dad is sick,"

Salee replied with a pout. Veetara had never told her that her father had a stroke and was partially paralyzed. She'd only mentioned it in the morning, an hour before they got to the family's house.

"I didn't want you to worry. He's safe now, just needs physical therapy." Veetara said softly and apologetically, making Salee sigh.

"It's okay this time, but next time, can we share the worries too?"

Salee asked, raising an eyebrow. When Veetara looked puzzled, she added, "We share the good things, so for fairness, we should share the bad things too."

Veetara couldn't help but smile, pressing her hand to her mouth to hide it. "Agreed."

'*I'm all in for you.'*

Veetara said and kept the other sentence in her mind. Then, a call came in. She released Salee's hand to answer it.

After a brief conversation to give directions, she hung up. "There's a delivery coming. I ordered something for you." Salee raised an eyebrow.

"For me?"

"Yes."

"What is it? And for what occasion ?" "No occasion. Just because I wanted to."

Veetara didn't give any details about the order until Salee discovered it herself. The large box waiting at the front of the house contained a red bicycle with a ringing bell.

Salee blinked in surprise.

"But, you know I can't ride a bike" "I know."

"What?"

Salee raised her eyebrow as if to ask, 'Then why buy it?"

She scratched her head in confusion as Veetara pulled her into a hug.

"I didn't mean to tease you. I just wanted to teach you how to ride a bike. Salee looked even more puzzled.

"Do you want to take me on a health-conscious cycling trip?" "No."

"Then?"

"Anything you don't have, anything you want," Veetara said shyly.

"Whether it's tangible, intangible, knowledge, or skills, I want to give it all to you. So teaching you to ride a bike is on my list of things I want to do for you."

Salee bit her lip, silent for a long time, then suddenly jumped to hug Veetara.

"My darling!"

She cried dramatically, then quickly let go and turned to the bike with determination.

"It's just a two-wheeled bike. How hard can it be, right?" But despite her bold words...

Veetara didn't want to admit she was looking for entertainment in Salee's bike-riding lessons because she knew Salee wasn't as skilled as she claimed. Her experience with motorbikes didn't help either.

They spent weeks dragging the bike around the neighborhood. When Salee seemed to balance for five to ten seconds, she'd almost fall again.

Salee sat sulking in front of the house after her umpteenth failure. Veetara, feeling sorry for her, went to get a cold drink and brought out something that made Salee's eyes widen in surprise.

## "The megaphone?"

Salee took the old megaphone, which the manufacturer claimed was made from the same material as Apollo 11, and examined it in surprise.

"How did you get this?"

Veetara scratched her cheek awkwardly.

"I found it after we bought a new one, so..." "So...?"

Salee narrowed her eyes. "So I kept it,"

Veetara admitted, feeling her face heat up. Even after dating for a while, Salee still made her heart race.

"Sorry, it feels like I stole it from you." "Khun Jae-"

Salee leaned in with a smile.

"I also often borrow your pens, but how did you keep this megaphone?" Veetara tucked her hair behind her ear.

"Well..."

She hesitated for several seconds until Salee kissed her cheek, leaving a warm, sweet mark. Veetara finally admitted,

"It has your recorded voice. Sometimes, I play it to feel close to you, especially when we're not on good terms."

"Oh, the *'I love you, my Jae!' recording*?" Salee asked. "Yes."

"Then why return it now?" "Because I don't need it anymore,"

Veetara said, pulling Salee close for a kiss on the lips. "Now that you're here, I hear that phrase all the time."

"Wow,"

Salee's eyes widened even more than when she saw the megaphone.

"I tried not to say it, but you still hear it? You're not only sexy but also amaaaazing!"

Veetara, seeing Salee's teasing look, prepared to attack her in mock anger. But Salee slipped away, claiming she needed to practice riding the bike.

Veetara shook her head, amused, wondering how far the so-called Graet Salee would get.

Surprisingly, this time, Salee managed to balance correctly, riding farther than ever before.

"I did it!"

Salee shouted, laughing with joy

Veetara stood with her arms crossed, a smile spreading across her face. She realized that the girl riding the bike with such pride wasn't just the best part of her life.

Salee was her entire world. "Salee,"

Veetara called out to the girl ringing the bell down the street. When Salee turned to look, Veetara said loudly,

## "I love you."

Salee blinked, then sat still as if in a daze, letting the bike wheels stop until she fell over.

Veetara was scared out of her wits. She was terrified that her loved one might've broken a bone or something, so she quickly ran over, knelt down, and leaned in close. But then she saw the girl looking back at her with sparkling eyes, not showing any sign of pain at all.

"What did you say just now? Can you say it again?"

Hearing Salee speak so clearly, Veetara let out a sigh of relief, nodded, and repeated with all her heart, **"I love you the most."**

Veetara smiled and pressed a kiss on Salee's forehead, which was now upside down from the fall.

In a whisper, she pledged to uphold her promise to the girls and her family for all time.

## "You're my whole world."

# Epilogue 01

Salee's eyes welled up with tears.

She was probably so overwhelmed by the love confession that she couldn't hold back her emotions. It wasn't until she cried out loudly, **"Ouch!"** that Veetara realized the other girl was just trying to act all sentimental while actually being in a lot of pain.

After all, her elbow hit the ground, her arm was scraped, her foot dragged on the ground, and on top of that, a bike that was bigger than her ended up falling on her.

"My gorgeous, please help me,"

The young girl cried out as if she'd been hit by a truck.

Veetara then helped Salee stand up, her face a mix of amusement and annoyance. She didn't say anything; she just went along with it, comforting the girl, who'd probably use this injury to get pampered by her for the rest of her life.

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## ------THE END-----