



# Chapter : Prologue

***Ms. Grace***, my boss, is perfect. She's beautiful, smart, and successful.

***But she has a dangerous secret.***

I'm falling for her and I know I shouldn't.

She asks me to be friends with benefits. It's a bad idea, but I say yes.

Our relationship is a secret. She makes me feel special, then ignores me. The more I try to stay away, the more I want her.

***What should I do? End things? Or keep seeing her?***

***All I can only be is the other woman.***

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*FWB with My Boss by Hojicha Studio*

# Chapter 1: Me and Ms. Grace (NC- 17)

**My name is *Pim Pimlapa.***

I’m just an ordinary marketing employee at a private company. Thirty years old, single, and currently searching for the meaning of life. The idea of a traditional male-female family has never crossed my mind—*perhaps because I like women. Just the thought of marrying a man makes me feel like throwing up.*

Tonight… once again, I found myself standing in the office bathroom, a place where the line between boss and subordinate blurred like a watercolor painting smeared with water. It was a dance we both knew we shouldn’t begin, yet neither of us ever stopped.

The cold tiles beneath my feet made everything sharper, more vivid. My heart pounded so loudly it nearly drowned out the silence. Past midnight, the office was deserted, the space entirely ours.

***Ms. Grace*** stood in the corner of the bathroom. She was beautiful, poised, and so perfect it felt almost unreal. Her piercing gaze and tall, elegant figure in a black suit left me breathless. Just imagining her stripping me bare was enough to send shivers of anticipation down my spine.

*And, God, how much I wanted her to do exactly that.*

“You’re late again, Pim.” Her voice had a chastising edge, but not entirely—and I loved the way she spoke to me.

“I’m sorry, Ms. Grace,” I replied softly, avoiding her sharp gaze that seemed to see right through me.

“Come here. Closer.”

Her short command felt less like a request and more like an order. I stepped forward, even as my legs felt impossibly heavy, burdened by something unseen. The way she looked at me, like she was consuming me whole, made my skin prickle with both fear and desire.

Her long, slender fingers tilted my chin up. The touch was gentle but left no doubt as to who was in control. She didn’t give me a chance to say a word—*there was only her lips pressing firmly against mine, stealing my breath away.*

I felt as though I was being pulled into another world—a world where nothing existed but the heat of her touch. Her hands wrapped around my waist, pulling me closer until our bodies pressed together. My back met the damp, cold wall of the bathroom.

**“You know I love doing this with you when I’m stressed... it clears my mind completely,”** she whispered, her soft voice cutting through the haze of my thoughts as if amplified.

Her hands moved to unbutton my shirt, one button at a time, exposing skin that flushed red under her gaze. I closed my eyes, surrendering entirely, letting her touch consume me. What I felt wasn’t just embarrassment—*it was an overwhelming desire I couldn’t deny.*

**“Ms. Grace... what if someone comes back?”** I tried to protest, my voice weak and uncertain, but my words were swallowed the moment she kissed me again. This time, it was fiercer, more commanding, as though she needed to remind me that I was hers.

“No one’s coming back. Trust me...” Her voice was firm, carrying a certainty that made me forget everything else. All that remained was the sensation of her hand trailing down my thigh, slipping beneath the fabric that kept her from me.

And then, she began to do what she did best—her fingers, skillful and deliberate, brought waves of pleasure that coursed through my body. I bit down on my lip, trying to stifle the sounds that threatened to escape, but my body betrayed every effort to resist.

“The meeting today nearly drove me insane,” she muttered, her voice low and husky, sending shivers through me.

“Pim, could you help me relieve some of that stress?”

Before I could answer, her lips descended on mine again, demanding and fiery, pulling me further into a realm where only she and I existed.

I clung to her tightly, struggling to keep my balance, as every other feeling was replaced by the heat of her touch—the fervent kiss, the unique scent of her perfume, and the unyielding embrace that left no space between us.

“This isn’t the first time we’ve done this in the office bathroom, you know. Why are you so tense?” she teased, her tone playful.

“I’m scared someone will walk in,” I replied softly.

“I already told you, no one’s coming back. Right now, it’s just the two of us… doing this.” She paused, her lips curling into a sly smile. “Besides, don’t you usually enjoy this? After a stressful day at work, isn’t this what you need? Relax, my good girl.”

Her voice was soft but carried a mischievous undertone, especially as her movements grew quicker. I tried to hold back, but the moan that escaped my lips gave away the truth far better than any words could.

It felt as though everything was slipping out of control. My body, once mine alone, responded to her completely and willingly. Each touch of hers pulled me further away from any semblance of restraint, leaving me adrift in a sea of raw sensation.

“Ms. Grace… ah…”

My voice trembled, and my flushed face seemed to only fuel her satisfaction. I caught a glimpse of her smile, that faint curl of her lips, as her skilled hands continued their work.

“That’s it… say my name again,” she whispered, her lips brushing against my ear, sending shivers coursing through me.

I leaned back against the wall, utterly powerless, surrendering to her entirely. The air between us grew hotter, heavier, until my body tensed and shuddered as her fingers found the deepest part of me. The rising waves of pleasure built to an intense crescendo, and I couldn’t stop the cry that escaped my lips.

“Ah… oh… Ms. Grace!”

The sound of my voice was filled with unrestrained ecstasy. My body convulsed in that final moment, and the moans I’d been suppressing spilled out, beyond my control. My strength faded, and I collapsed into her arms, letting her hold me tightly.

Ms. Grace steadied me, her embrace firm and comforting. She pressed a gentle kiss to my forehead, her hands skillfully fixing my clothes until they looked neat once more.

“Good girl,” she murmured, her voice laced with satisfaction.

“Remember this—you’re mine.”

Ms. Grace’s voice was firm yet carried a tenderness that made my heart tremble. Her piercing gaze seemed to cut through every layer of my thoughts, leaving me feeling utterly exposed. It was as though her words alone had shackled me. There were no chains, yet my heart felt tightly bound, unable to break free.

Ms. Grace wasn’t just my boss. She was someone who had completely claimed a space in my heart. The love I felt for her was overwhelming, mixed with a willing surrender to her control, without conditions or boundaries.

***But between Ms. Grace and me***, it was nothing more than a ***“friends with benefits”*** arrangement. No love. No emotional attachment. Only obsession. Our relationship was a whirlpool I had fallen into, with no way out. I knew it was dangerous, but it was also intoxicating and irresistibly magnetic.

Ms. Grace was the person I had to bow my head to and respectfully call **“Boss”** every morning at work. Yet, tonight, that title was replaced by the moans escaping my lips—moans that spoke of desire and complete submission.

“ Why do I let this happen?” I asked myself, but the answer was elusive, slipping away like it didn’t exist. I couldn’t pinpoint where it had all begun. I only knew that I had fallen too deep to turn back now.

And yet, I didn’t mind. I was willing. I allowed myself to be consumed, to stay in the shadows where no one could see us, just to remain a part of her life—even if it was only a fragment.

**“ How did love make me this blind?”** I wondered.

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# Chapter 2: The First Meeting

***Ms. Grace Kanya,*** our new Head of Marketing, was a striking woman with long black hair she always kept tied back in a sleek ponytail. She had been recruited from a prestigious rival company, renowned not only for her skills but also for her captivating personality.

She was in her mid-thirties, only a few years older than me, yet the aura she carried made her seem worlds apart. It felt as though she existed on a completely different plane, far beyond my reach.

She was beautiful… and composed. The cool intensity in her gaze had an almost hypnotic effect, making everyone around her feel as though they were caught under her spell.

*And this is the story of me and Ms. Grace.*

The secrets and the love I’ve kept hidden from everyone at work. A relationship that began with a seemingly simple, yet dangerously alluring proposal: ***FWB—Friends with Benefits.***

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**The First Time We Met**

The soft hum of the air conditioning mixed with the rhythmic tapping of keyboards in the large conference room. On the long rectangular table, laptops and documents were neatly arranged, but the atmosphere was tense, heavy with anticipation.

I sat in the far-left corner of the table, pretending to focus on the documents in front of me. For a moment, my gaze drifted to my phone lying beside me before I quickly tucked it into my bag.

**“Pim, have you seen our new team leader yet? They say she looks even better in person than in photos. Like, she’s one of those people who just don’t photograph well, but in real life? Stunning. Always wearing that sleek ponytail—so elegant, so fierce, so untouchable,”**

***Kay,*** my colleague sitting next to me, whispered as she leaned closer.

I didn’t respond, merely nodded slightly while keeping my eyes on the folder in my hands, trying to go over the information one last time before the meeting began.

Then, the sound of high heels clicking against the floor broke the silence, followed by the door opening. Every head in the room turned toward the source of the noise. A tall woman stepped in, and as soon as our eyes met, a shiver ran through me.

“Good morning, everyone. My name is Kanya, but you can call me Grace. I’m the new Head of Marketing,” she introduced herself, her voice clear and confident, exuding authority with every word.

I found myself staring at her without realizing it. The sight of her made my heart skip a beat. Ms. Grace was a woman in her mid-thirties, tall and poised, with radiant, flawless skin that seemed meticulously cared for. Her sleek black hair, tied back into a perfect ponytail, framed her striking features. Every movement she made was deliberate, exuding power and elegance. She seemed like someone who had it all—looks, personality, and a quiet confidence that needed no effort to shine through.

I felt as though every eye in the meeting room was fixed on Ms. Grace with admiration… and I was no exception. She was stunning, and I had to admit, she was exactly the kind of woman I found irresistible.

Ms. Grace began outlining her goals and plans with sharp, concise words. “I intend to elevate this department to a higher level. The project launching next month will be a key turning point.”

She stood there, tall and poised, like a statue sculpted to perfection. I had never met anyone who exuded power the way she did—someone who didn’t need to try, yet commanded attention with every word, every glance, effortlessly demonstrating her control over the room.

As Ms. Grace continued speaking, I found myself struggling to focus on the content of her plans. Instead, my mind wandered to her beauty, her presence, and the way her gaze seemed to sweep across the room, giving every individual the same level of attention.

*Or perhaps… not entirely the same.*

Because for a brief moment, I felt like her eyes lingered on me longer than anyone else. And I thought I saw her smile.

It could have been just my imagination, but that smile sent my heart racing in a way I couldn’t control.

*And that was the first time I met Ms. Grace.*

*..*

*That Afternoon*

As soon as the meeting ended, Ms. Grace disappeared with her documents, leaving behind only the hushed whispers of my colleagues. I returned to my desk, trying to focus on the papers in front of me, but my thoughts kept drifting back to her.

“So, what do you think of our new boss? Ms. Grace, right? Think she’ll be okay?”

***Kay*** asked, leaning in closer to me.

“Seems like she’ll be fine. She looks competent,” I replied casually, keeping my expression as neutral as possible.

“That’s it? Just fine?”

“Yeah.”

“Come on, give me more than that, Pim. You’re great at reading people!”

“Well… she’s beautiful. She seems like someone who knows exactly what she wants and how to get it,” I said, and even I could hear the admiration in my own voice.

Kay chuckled softly. “I heard that back at her previous company, she was a total workaholic—firing people left and right. Makes me wonder what her personal life is like, you know? Someone that dedicated to work must have a pretty interesting story.”

“How would I know anything about Ms. Grace’s personal life?” I said, trying to brush off the topic.

**“I’m guessing a workaholic like her is probably single. Not married yet, right? What do you think, Pim?”**

“What does being single have to do with being a workaholic? You’re just overthinking, Kay,” I replied.

Even as I said that, my hand instinctively picked up my phone. I searched for Ms. Grace’s name on social media, hoping to learn more about her. But I found nothing except a private Instagram account and a LinkedIn profile filled exclusively with professional achievements.

*In the end, I still knew absolutely nothing about Ms. Grace’s personal life.*

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*That Evening*

Ms. Grace called for another marketing team meeting that evening. I quickly gathered my things, grabbing my favorite notebook before heading to the conference room. My footsteps echoed softly as I followed my colleagues down the hallway.

The moment I stepped into the room, my eyes instinctively sought her out. Ms. Grace was seated at the head of the table, exuding elegance. She didn’t need to speak to command authority; her calm, composed presence was enough to draw every gaze in the room, including mine.

Her sharp eyes scanned the table as the team members filed in and took their seats. “The project we’re about to start is crucial to our department’s success,” she began, her voice clear and deliberate, unhurried yet commanding. “I expect everyone to approach this with professionalism and complete dedication. This is an opportunity to demonstrate your potential—don’t let me down.”

The room fell silent, everyone listening intently. Then, her gaze turned to me.

“Pim,” she said, her voice breaking the silence and making me flinch slightly. Instantly, every pair of eyes in the room shifted toward me. “I’d like you to take on the role of sub-team leader for this project. Do you think you’re ready for this challenge?”

I swallowed hard, my throat suddenly dry. I wasn’t entirely confident in myself, but the last thing I wanted was to disappoint her—especially in front of the entire team, who now awaited my response.

“I’ll do my best to meet your expectations, Ms. Grace,” I finally replied, my voice steady despite the nerves.

She gave a small nod, and a faint smile touched her lips. “Good. I’ll be looking forward to seeing the results.”

But what surprised me most in that moment wasn’t her decision to appoint me as sub-team leader—it was what she did next.

She rose from her seat and walked around the table toward me. When she reached me, she placed a hand lightly on my shoulder. Her touch was soft yet deliberate, and she began to gently stroke my shoulder in slow, deliberate motions.

*It lasted just long enough to send my heart racing, pounding so hard I thought it might burst from my chest.*

“ I believe you can do it, Pim,” her voice was soft and reassuring.

I looked up at her, and for a fleeting moment, our eyes met. But in my mind, that moment stretched endlessly, beyond what words could describe.

I quickly averted my gaze, feeling my notebook almost slip from my hands. I tried to compose myself, but I wasn’t doing a very good job of it.

When she let go of my shoulder and walked back to her seat, it seemed like no one else in the room had paid attention to what had just happened. But for me, it was as if the sound of that interaction had been amplified, echoing loudly in my mind.

*Was it normal for a boss to touch their subordinate like that?*

The thought popped into my head immediately. If she had been a man, I would have marched straight to HR without hesitation. But because she was a woman, I hesitated.

*Maybe it’s because we’re both women. Perhaps she didn’t think it was anything inappropriate?*

*But if it wasn’t anything… then why did it make me feel this way?*

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# Chapter 3: Come to My Car

*A New Morning*

After yesterday’s marketing team meeting, I returned to my desk the next morning with a whirlwind of thoughts circling my mind. Being chosen as the sub-team leader for the major project Ms. Grace had assigned should have been a great opportunity for me—a turning point both in my career and personal life.

But the weight of responsibility that came with it felt overwhelming. I opened my laptop, intending to prepare a plan for this afternoon’s meeting, but my chaotic thoughts made it nearly impossible to focus.

As I tried to collect myself, my gaze drifted toward the glass office in the corner without me even realizing it. There she was—Ms. Grace, seated at her desk with her signature elegance. Dressed impeccably in her tailored work attire, her sleek ponytail neatly in place, she exuded calm authority. Her focused expression and the way her fingers moved swiftly across the keyboard made her look effortlessly in control, as if she possessed a power that could stop time itself.

I found myself staring at her, watching every small movement she made. Her simplicity combined with her poise was captivating, almost like a spellbinding charm.

Realizing what I was doing, I quickly looked away, pretending to focus on the notebook in front of me—the only thing that seemed capable of distracting me from my spiraling thoughts.

**“What’s wrong with me?”** I muttered to myself, holding my forehead in frustration. **“Am I… falling for my boss? God, you hopeless lesbian. Ms. Grace probably doesn’t even like women,”** I whispered softly, shaking my head as if to dispel the ridiculous idea.

Just then, the sharp click of high heels echoed near my desk. My heart skipped a beat and seemed to stop as I slowly looked up.

Ms. Grace stood before me, holding a file in her hands, a faint smile gracing her lips.

“I’ve added some details to the project. Take a look when you have time,” she said, her tone calm but authoritative.

I nodded slowly and reached out to take the file. As I did, our fingers brushed ever so slightly, sending a peculiar warmth through me. A hint of her delicate perfume wafted in the air, so enticing that I had to consciously stop myself from taking a deep breath.

“Thank you, Ms. Grace,” I replied softly, my voice barely audible as I kept my eyes fixed on my hands.

Ms. Grace tilted her head slightly, her eyes gleaming with something I

couldn’t quite place. Then she spoke words that made my heart pound so hard I could hardly breathe.

**“It’s strange,”** she began with a small, knowing smile. **“Every time I’m near you, Pim, I notice this pleasant scent. Whoever gets to date you must be very lucky. I’d want to sit next to you all day just for that.”**

Her words froze me in place, my heart racing to the point of nearly bursting. I stammered in response, **“I… I don’t have a partner, Ms. Grace.”** My voice was barely above a whisper, my cheeks burning hot.

She looked at me for a moment longer than seemed necessary, her eyes holding something unreadable yet undeniably satisfied. Then, she smiled again—a smile as mysterious as ever.

“Noted,” she said with a soft chuckle before turning and walking back to her office.

I watched her retreating figure until she disappeared behind her office door.

*“If Ms. Grace were a man, that comment would’ve sent shivers down my spine,”* I thought to myself.

*“But since she’s a woman, maybe she didn’t mean anything by it…”*

Still, I couldn’t help but wonder. Was it just a friendly compliment, a casual comment between women? Or was there something more hidden in her words? Could it even be possible?

I let out a deep sigh, trying to steady my thoughts.

*“What am I even thinking? I’ve got work to do, and here I am, wasting time trying to figure out what my new boss thinks of me. I must be losing my mind.”*

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*Then, the Afternoon Meeting Began*

“ Is everyone ready?” Ms. Grace’s voice was filled with confidence and authority. Her sharp gaze swept across the room, as though she was carefully assessing each person. The room fell silent, all eyes seemingly drawn to her.

Until her piercing eyes stopped on me.

“ Pim, you may begin.”

I nodded, trying to steady my breathing before standing up to present the plan. My voice sounded steady at first, but the longer I spoke, the more I became acutely aware of her unrelenting gaze. It wasn’t an ordinary look —it felt as though she was reading my thoughts, as if she knew exactly what I was feeling.

I started to falter, the carefully prepared words catching in my throat.

“… And this is the strategy I believe would be effective for targeting the new customer segment,” I said, advancing to the final slide on the screen. I tried to steady my tone, making it sound as normal as possible. “Are there any additional suggestions?”

Ms. Grace raised her hand slightly, her voice calm but tinged with seriousness. “Your plan is well-structured, but it lacks some critical details, such as risk assessment. If you’re overly optimistic, the project might hit obstacles midway.”

Her words were direct, yet they didn’t make me feel uncomfortable. There was a sense of genuine care in her tone, more like constructive advice than criticism. I nodded and responded firmly.

“ Understood. I’ll make the necessary adjustments.”

“ Thank you,” she replied with a faint smile at the corner of her lips— a smile that seemed so ordinary yet made me feel as though the entire world had stopped spinning.

When the meeting ended, my colleagues began packing up and leaving the room. I remained seated at the table, slowly gathering my notes and documents, careful not to glance at her as she stayed seated at the head of the table.

My heart was pounding far too hard. I bit my lower lip softly, hoping the small pain might anchor me back to reality. My thoughts, which had started to spiral out of control, were difficult to pull back into focus.

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*Late Night at the Office*

Ms. Grace’s feedback during today’s meeting had me working late into the night. The once-bustling office gradually quieted down. The chatter of colleagues faded, leaving only the sound of my typing and the harsh white light illuminating my desk.

The soft sound of footsteps broke the silence, startling me slightly. I looked up, and the figure behind the sound emerged from the shadows.

“Ms. Grace.”

She walked toward me, a cup of coffee in her hand, the rich aroma arriving before she did. She placed the cup gently in front of me, a faint smile gracing her lips. “Still not done?” Her voice was calm, yet her gaze seemed to delve deep into me.

I quickly turned my eyes back to the computer screen, trying to steady my racing heart. “No, not yet. I want to make sure the plan is perfect before

I submit it to you for review.”

“Have some coffee,” she said, pulling out a chair and sitting down beside me. “It’ll help keep you awake while you work.”

Our eyes met for a moment—a fleeting second that felt longer than it should have. There was a warmth in her gaze that left me breathless.

“Thank you,” I murmured softly.

The silence in the office felt different with her presence. She pulled the chair closer, sitting right next to me, making the world around us feel as though it had shrunk until it was just her and me.

“You know, Pim,” she began, her voice low and soothing, “the first time I had to present a major plan, I failed miserably. They tore my proposal apart.”

I turned to her in surprise.

“Really?”

She nodded, her gaze locking onto mine as if she was sharing something she rarely revealed. “It taught me that failure isn’t the worst thing. What matters most is the courage to try again.”

Her words stirred something inside me, a spark of determination that I hadn’t realized was fading. Before I could respond, she leaned closer, so near that I could feel the warmth radiating from her.

“I want you to know,” she continued, her voice steady yet tender,

“that I see potential in you. Don’t let fear hold you back, Pim.”

Her smile appeared again, but this time it was different—so gentle, so genuine that I felt as though she could see right into my heart. The world around us seemed to pause. In that moment, before I could fully process the whirlwind of emotions within me, she leaned in closer.

*Before I could react, her lips met mine.*

*The kiss was both tender and assertive.*

The suddenness of it froze me in place, my breath caught in my throat. Yet the warmth of her touch seeped into me, melting away my resistance. It was a delicate balance—a soothing gentleness entwined with an undeniable yearning. It erased everything outside of her.

At first, I instinctively pushed against her shoulder, but the strength of my resistance waned. My arms fell limply to my sides as my body surrendered to the sensation of her lips.

“You’re sweeter than I imagined,” she whispered, her voice lingering close to my ear.

Before I could respond, she kissed me again, this time deeper, more fervent. Her slender fingers traced the outline of my face, a featherlight touch that sent shivers down my spine, before sliding to the nape of my neck. She held me firmly, as though making sure I wouldn’t pull away.

“Ms. Grace…” I breathed, my voice trembling as my lips quivered from her kiss. “There are security cameras in the office…”

She simply smiled, a confident, knowing smile that made my heart race even faster.

“The cameras don’t cover this angle,” she replied smoothly.

Her words left me speechless. Her eyes bore into mine, as though she could read every thought swirling in my head. Her gaze was deep, filled with a desire so intense it left me breathless.

She leaned in closer again, her breath grazing my ear as she whispered softly,

**“Let’s go to my car. The windows are heavily tinted—no one will see what we’re doing inside, no matter how close they are.”**

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# Chapter 4: Office Parking Lot (NC- 17)

In the stillness of the late-night parking lot, the faint whisper of the breeze only made my heart pound harder, as if it were about to burst out of my chest. I followed Ms. Grace in silence, every step laden with a whirlwind of confusion and burning anticipation.

I knew something was about to happen. I could guess what it might be, but the excitement was overwhelming—too much for me to prepare myself for.

“Get in,” she commanded softly, her voice breaking the silence.

She opened the door to the backseat of the sleek, luxurious car in front of us. Her tone was calm, almost casual, but it carried an undeniable authority that left no room for hesitation. I watched her climb in first before I followed, settling into the seat beside her.

The moment the door shut, the sounds of the outside world were cut off completely. My heart thundered so loudly it drowned out every other thought. Ms. Grace turned to look at me, her piercing gaze holding me in place as though I were trapped under her spell.

Her eyes were hypnotic—seductive, mysterious—like a predator studying its prey. I tried to look away, but I couldn’t.

**“Have you ever done this in a car before?”** she asked, her voice soft yet laced with a teasing challenge that made my heart race even faster.

I shook my head slowly, feeling the heat rush to my face. My hands gripped the hem of my skirt tightly as my body trembled, a mixture of fear and excitement coursing through me, impossible to untangle.

She smiled faintly, the corners of her lips curving upward in satisfaction at my response.

“That’s okay,” she said, her tone almost comforting. “It’s always thrilling the first time.”

Her words, though spoken gently, carried a magnetic pull I couldn’t resist.

*Before I could respond, her lips pressed against mine.*

The kiss was fiery, deep, and left me breathless. The hands that had been clutching my skirt fell limply to my sides as my body succumbed to the intensity of her touch.

The world around us seemed to fade away, leaving only the heat of the moment burning within me.

Her tongue slid into my mouth deliberately, the searing sensation making it impossible for me to hold back. A soft moan escaped my throat before I could stop it. Her hand cupped the nape of my neck firmly, pulling me closer, as though ensuring I wouldn’t pull away.

Her tongue teased mine with deliberate, seductive strokes. I tried to catch my breath between the fervent kisses, but it felt as if every part of me was being consumed by her touch, leaving no space for resistance.

She pulled back from the kiss, but instead of stopping, she lowered her lips to the side of my neck.

“Ah… Ms. Grace…” I couldn’t help but moan as the heat of her tongue brushed against my skin. Waves of pleasure coursed through me, leaving my body trembling.

“Say my name again…” she whispered into my ear, her husky voice sending me further adrift.

Her hands moved to unbutton my shirt, one button at a time. I wanted to say something—anything—to stop her, but the words caught in my throat, refusing to come out.

**“Did you know,”** she began, her voice low and deliberate, **“the first time I looked into your eyes, I knew for certain you liked women.”** Her hand slid up, lifting the hem of my skirt. The soft graze of her fingers on my bare thigh made me shiver. **“No, let me correct that—you liked me from the very first day we met. Isn’t that right? Your eyes told me**

**everything. They’ve been begging me to do this.”**

Her words made my cheeks flush with heat, but before I could muster a response, she moved again. Her fingers trailed slowly, teasingly, over my most sensitive spot. A quiet moan escaped my lips, unbidden and uncontrollable.

“Ah… Ms. Grace… it’s…” My voice faltered as her touch became more insistent, more intense. I could barely hold myself upright, and the sounds I made grew louder with each movement.

That’s when she looked me directly in the eyes. “Shh… You can’t be too loud, Pim. Someone might hear us outside the car.”

I tried to respond, my hands reaching for her shirt. My fingers fumbled with the buttons until they came undone, revealing her flawless chest beneath the lace of her bra. Leaning in, I pressed a light bite to her shoulder, my way of returning something—anything—as she drove me to the brink.

And then, the moment came. My body tensed, trembling uncontrollably as a cry of ecstasy spilled from my lips, impossible to suppress.

“Ahh…!” My voice was filled with pure bliss.

Ms. Grace looked at me, her lips curving into a faint smile. She carefully adjusted my clothes, smoothing them back into place, before pressing a gentle kiss to my forehead.

**“Did you enjoy that?”** she whispered softly. **“If you did, we can do this again next time…”**

Her voice lingered in the air, leaving me breathless.

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*In the Backseat*

After what had just happened, my heart raced erratically. It wasn’t just because of what occurred between us in Ms. Grace’s car but also because of the questions swirling in my mind. Did I let it happen too easily?

*Was everything between us moving too fast?*

As Ms. Grace sat beside me, I could feel her gaze fixed on me. Her expression remained composed, yet there was something in her eyes that made it impossible for me to meet them directly. It felt as if she were reading my thoughts.

“What are you thinking about?” her voice broke the silence.

I froze, unsure how to respond.

“I just… I just…” My voice trailed off, the words dissolving before I could form them.

“Are you wondering if things are moving too quickly between us?” she asked, as though she already knew what I was thinking. A small smile

tugged at the corner of her lips. “I don’t think it’s too fast.”

I bit my lip, trying to sort through my tangled thoughts.

“Ms. Grace, it’s not that I didn’t like what happened between us,” I said softly, my heart pounding harder when her smile grew wider. “It’s just that everything happened so fast. I wasn’t ready, and I’ve never been in a situation like this before.”

She looked at me intently. **“You like me, and I like you. What’s too fast about that?”**

Her words made my face flush, and my eyes dropped to my lap instinctively. “I’m… a little old-fashioned,” I admitted.

“Then it’s time to change that mindset, Pim. It’s the modern age now. If you’re okay with it and I’m okay with it, what’s so strange about us being together?”

I looked up at her, her steady gaze revealing she wasn’t joking. My heart pounded even harder.

“But…” I tried to speak, though my thoughts were still a jumbled mess. “I’ve never been like this with anyone before. I don’t know how to handle my feelings.”

Ms. Grace leaned back against the seat, a faint smile playing on her lips. “Oh, my sweet girl, you’re overthinking this, Pim.”

“But…” I started, only for her to raise a hand, silently asking me to stop.

“Listen to me, Pim,” she said evenly. “Sometimes, you need to stop using your brain and let your feelings guide you. Ask yourself one simple question: What do you want? Earlier, you wanted me… didn’t you? If you didn’t, you wouldn’t have followed me into this car.”

Her words struck a chord deep within me. I closed my eyes, trying to answer the question honestly, and the truth I couldn’t deny was… yes. I wanted her.

“Yes,” I answered quietly.

That one word seemed to satisfy her immensely. Her smile grew, and she said something that left me speechless.

**“How about we try being Friends with Benefits? No strings attached, no one else needs to know—just you and me.”**

Her suggestion was so clear, so direct, that I didn’t know how to react.

Her sharp eyes bore into mine, silently demanding an answer. That gaze shook the foundation of my morality and the deeply ingrained beliefs I’d clung to for so long. I’d never imagined myself in a situation like this, nor had I ever thought someone would speak to me about it so openly.

“Would that be… okay?” I asked hesitantly, my voice barely audible. She smiled slightly. “Do you think it wouldn’t be?”

I froze, too overwhelmed to respond. I’d never expected to face something like this, and I certainly hadn’t expected it to come from someone so confident, so straightforward.

“I just…” I paused, then decided to voice my thoughts. “I’ve never had this kind of relationship with anyone before.”

My words didn’t faze her. Instead, she leaned in closer, her eyes locking onto mine. “Then take this as an opportunity to try. Don’t you think we have amazing chemistry in… every sense? I think you feel it too.”

“Yes,” I whispered. My voice was almost inaudible, but it was clear enough for her.

Her smile widened. “Then it’s settled.” I nodded slightly, unable to say more.

*At that moment, I realized just how much I liked Ms. Grace—enough to do anything for her.*

*..*

*That Night, After Agreeing to Be Friends with Benefits with Ms.*

*Grace*

I sat in front of my laptop in my small home office. The project plan was complete, and I had just sent the final email to Ms. Grace. Yet, my mind refused to let go of what had happened in her car.

I sighed deeply, trying to shake off the thoughts that lingered, but the harder I tried to forget, the more vivid they became. The scent of her perfume lingered in my memory, as clear as if the moment had just happened.

My eyes drifted to the desk in front of me, though I wasn’t truly focusing on anything. My hand reached for the glass of water nearby, but I didn’t lift it to drink. Instead, my thoughts circled back to her once again.

I shook my head lightly, trying to snap myself out of it. Closing the laptop, I walked to my bed, hoping to escape into sleep. But the bedroom, once my haven of rest, was filled with restlessness tonight.

I lay down, pulling the blanket over me, but instead of feeling relaxed, my memories dragged me back to the car. I could still see the moment Ms. Grace leaned in closer—the warmth of her presence, the scent of her skin, the fiery touch, and the deep timbre of her voice whispering in my ear.

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*“Did you know, the first time I looked into your eyes, I knew for certain you liked women. No, let me correct that—you liked me from the very first day we met. Isn’t that right? Your eyes told me everything. They’ve been begging me to do this.”*

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Her words echoed in my mind. It felt as though she were still near me, her lips brushing against my skin, her heat lingering on my body.

I tossed and turned, the feelings inside me only growing stronger. Even with my eyes closed, the images in my head became sharper—her lips pressing against mine, her hands gliding over my body, claiming every inch of me in that fleeting moment.

Instinctively, my hand trailed to the most sensitive part of my body. The touch I gave myself was nothing compared to hers, yet it stirred the feelings she had awakened within me. My breathing quickened, my body responding to the rising tide of desire.

A soft moan escaped my lips. I couldn’t stop myself. The thought of Ms. Grace was so vivid, it felt as if she were right there with me. Her eyes, filled with longing; her husky whispers, sending shivers through me— everything replayed in my mind, a loop I couldn’t escape.

Time seemed to stretch beyond reality, and when the wave finally passed, I lay still beneath the blanket, my breathing uneven. My face was buried in the pillow, and the heat coursing through my body hadn’t entirely subsided.

*I couldn’t stop thinking about Ms. Grace and what happened in her car.*

*And I wanted her again.*

*..*

# Chapter 5 : Come Up for A Drink (NC- 17)

**The Next Morning**

At work, we acted as if everything was perfectly normal. Nothing had happened. Nothing was out of the ordinary. I carried out my duties as usual, and Ms. Grace remained the elegant, composed boss that everyone admired.

*But behind the scenes, away from everyone’s eyes, my phone buzzed frequently… with messages from her.*

Ms. Grace had a habit of sending me funny animal memes. Some were so ridiculous that I couldn’t help but laugh out loud. She was far more humorous and approachable than I had initially imagined—a stark contrast to the poised and serious persona she maintained in front of the team.

I couldn’t tell if this relaxed side of her was something she shared only with me, but it made me feel as if I were privy to a special, private corner of her world.

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*The Afternoon Meeting*

After the tense afternoon meeting, I intended to return to my desk and dive back into work. But before I could sit down, I heard my name being called from the direction of the boss’s office.

“Pim Pimlapa, come to my office, please.”

Ms. Grace’s voice wasn’t loud, but it carried a clarity that immediately caught the attention of my nearby colleagues. Their heads turned toward me, their glances suggesting that this wasn’t a trivial matter. Some might have assumed I was about to be reprimanded, but I knew that wasn’t the case.

I took a deep breath, trying to steady the nervous flutter in my chest, before standing and heading to her office.

When I opened the door, Ms. Grace was seated behind her desk, her expression composed and serious. She looked up at me, her sharp eyes meeting mine with their usual intensity.

**“Close the door, and lock it,”** she instructed.

The words **“lock the door”** sent my mind spiraling far beyond where it should have gone. I tried to maintain my composure, but my heartbeat pounded so loudly I feared she might hear it.

I obeyed her instructions silently, pushing the door closed and turning the lock. Every movement felt agonizingly slow, magnified by my own apprehension.

In my head, unbidden thoughts began to swirl—*memories of the parking lot resurfaced. There, she had done things I never imagined a boss would dare to do. And now, alone in her office, hidden from view, was there anything she wouldn’t dare?*

When I turned back, she was still seated, her expression calm, her demeanor unreadable. But her eyes… they hinted at something I couldn’t quite grasp.

“Have a seat,” she said, gesturing to the chair in front of her desk. Her voice was steady, yet there was an undertone of authority that left no room for argument.

I swallowed hard, my pulse racing uncontrollably, as I walked over and sat in the chair without uttering a word.

“The project you’ve been handling… you’ve done well,” she said.

Her compliment made me look up instantly. The faint smile at the corner of her lips filled me with a mix of pride and unease.

“But there are some areas you need to be cautious about.” Her words made me tense again.

She stood and walked over to the whiteboard behind her desk.

Picking up a marker, she began writing a few lines with precise, confident strokes. I watched in silence as she outlined a solution I hadn’t considered before.

“Try looking at it from this angle,” she said, pointing to the board. Her voice remained calm, but her explanation illuminated everything with surprising clarity.

I listened intently, absorbing her every word, my admiration for her growing with each passing moment.

“Does it make more sense now? Do you see what you need to be careful about?” she asked, turning back to face me.

“Yes, it’s much clearer now. Thank you so much,” I replied sincerely.

She gave a small smile before returning to her seat at the corner of her desk. That smile—so ordinary on the surface—carried a warmth that seeped into me, leaving a subtle but undeniable impression.

*But suddenly, the atmosphere in the room shifted.*

Ms. Grace leaned forward until her face was level with mine, so close that I could feel the warmth of her breath brushing against my skin. My heart pounded so hard it felt like it might leap out of my chest.

*Was she about to kiss me?*

“Ms. Grace…” I called her name softly, barely above a whisper.

She smirked, the corners of her lips curling into a mysterious smile.

“What do you think I’m about to do, Pim?”

Her words sounded casual, but the way her gaze bore into me and the deliberate nature of her actions left me feeling trapped in a moment I couldn’t predict.

She straightened slowly, then walked back to her chair. I let out a breath I hadn’t realized I was holding, relief washing over me.

“Nothing,” I replied quickly, trying to mask the reaction she had drawn out of me. My thoughts had gone far beyond anything I could admit aloud.

“You can go back to work now,” she said simply.

I pouted slightly before blurting out, **“Were you teasing me, Ms.**

**Grace?”**

She chuckled softly, her laughter light and disarming. Then, pointing to the door, she replied in a playful tone, **“Get back to work, Pim. If we start kissing in my office now, people might get suspicious.”**

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*That Evening*

The office grew quieter as the evening progressed. Colleagues had begun heading home one by one, leaving pockets of darkness in the corners where lights had been switched off. Only the faint glow of overhead lights remained, casting a subdued atmosphere over the space. I stayed at my desk, even though the clock had long passed closing time—*Ms. Grace had asked me to wait.*

As I focused on checking emails one last time, the familiar sound of high heels clicking against the floor broke the silence. She had finally arrived.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” she said warmly. “I was just making sure everything was in order.”

I looked up to find her standing right in front of my desk.

“Have you had dinner yet, Pim?” she asked casually. I shook my head slightly. “Not yet.”

**“Then let’s grab something together. My treat. Honestly, the real reason I asked you to wait was because I wanted to have dinner with you. I hope you don’t mind,”** she said with a small smile.

Her unexpected invitation caught me off guard, leaving me momentarily speechless. I tried to compose myself, but my heart was racing as if it might leap out of my chest. At first, I had assumed she wanted to discuss work.

“Sure,” I replied, keeping my tone as steady as possible.

“Great, pack your things, and let’s go,” she said, her voice light yet undeniably magnetic.

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*A Small Restaurant Near the Office*

Ms. Grace chose a table tucked away in the far corner of the restaurant. I followed her hesitantly, still unused to this newfound familiarity. She sat gracefully, placing her bag beside her, and picked up the menu with an air of casualness that suggested she wasn’t preoccupied with anything.

“Pim,” her voice broke through my wandering thoughts.

“Yes?” I looked up at her, my heart skipping a beat unexpectedly.

“How long have you been working here?” she asked, setting the menu down. Her sharp eyes fixed on me, as though she could see straight into my thoughts.

“About two years,” I replied with a small smile.

“And do you live in Bangkok by yourself?”

I hesitated briefly before nodding. Just yesterday, she had driven me to my condo—*why was she asking again?*

“Yes, I live alone. It’s a condo my parents bought for me when I was in university.”

“Ah,” she nodded lightly before continuing, “And your family? What do your parents do?”

Her tone wasn’t demanding, but it carried enough weight to make me feel slightly pressured. Was this an interview? If I were younger, more hotheaded, or part of Gen Z, I might have retorted, *“Why are you asking about my personal life, Ms. Grace?”*

**But because it was Ms. Grace… I’d gladly answer anything she wanted to know.**

“They’re farmers in Nakhon Pathom,” I said. “They live there while I moved to the city for work.”

She offered a faint smile, as if carefully considering my answer.

“That sounds like a lovely family. Do you visit them often?”

There it was—yet another question! A small part of me couldn’t help but wonder: Do Friends with Benefits really need to know this much about each other’s personal lives?

“Not very often,” I admitted honestly. “Work keeps me busy, but I try to go back at least once a month.”

She nodded, seemingly satisfied with my response. “That’s good.

Don’t forget to take care of yourself, too.”

Soon, the conversation shifted from personal questions to more relaxed topics. She asked me about my favorite movies, the kind of food I liked, and how I spent my weekends. Her questions were simple, yet they felt deliberate—like she was trying to get closer.

At one point, she cracked a small joke. I hadn’t expected Ms. Grace to have this side to her—casual, charming, even funny. Before I realized it, I burst out laughing.

As my laughter faded, I noticed her smiling softly, a look of satisfaction on her face.

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*After a Dinner Full of Laughter*

Ms. Grace’s car idled quietly in front of my condo. My heart had been racing ever since she offered to drive me home. I couldn’t shake the feeling that this wasn’t going to end with a simple “thank you” and us going our separate ways. That thought left me both excited and nervous.

When it was time to step out of the car, I reached for the door handle, but her voice interrupted me.

“Pim…”

I turned to her immediately. Her eyes locked onto mine, a playful glint flickering within them. The faint smile tugging at the corner of her lips sent my heart racing even faster.

“Aren’t you going to invite me up for a drink?”

The words were simple, but I knew full well they didn’t mean just a drink. If anyone was about to be consumed tonight, ***it wasn’t going to be the water***—***it would be me.***

I froze for a moment, trying to gather my scattered thoughts, but I could feel my face heating up.

**“Uh…”** I stammered, struggling to muster the courage. **“Would you… like to come up for a drink?”** I finally replied, doing my best to sound composed.

Her smile widened, as if my reaction amused her. Without hesitation, she opened the car door.

“Then lead the way,” she said, her voice smooth and commanding.

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*In the Elevator*

The atmosphere in the elevator was charged with a closeness that felt both thrilling and awkward. Her gaze fixed on me, sharp and unrelenting, made my heart race uncontrollably. Neither of us spoke a word. The silence lingered until the elevator stopped at my floor.

When the door to my apartment opened, I barely had time to invite her in before Ms. Grace stepped inside unprompted. She closed the door gently, but what she did next was anything but gentle.

Before I could react, my back was pressed against the wall. Her lips crashed onto mine, fierce and fiery, stealing my breath away. Her tongue invaded my mouth without hesitation, and despite my efforts to maintain control, a soft moan escaped my lips.

“Ms. Grace…”

I whispered her name, my voice trembling as memories of our time in the car came rushing back. But this was different—more intense, rawer, igniting something deeper within me.

She paused momentarily, her eyes locking onto mine with a penetrating gaze, as if reminding me that I was entirely under her control. Her hand cradled the back of my neck as she leaned in close, her voice a husky whisper against my ear.

**“All day at the office, I couldn’t stop looking at you… I’ve been dying to have you.”**

Her words sent a shiver through me. She pressed me harder against the wall, her body molding to mine. The weight and heat of her touch were overwhelming, leaving me unsteady on my feet. My hands instinctively reached up to grip her shoulders, as though anchoring myself to her.

Before I realized it, we had moved to the bed. Ms. Grace gently pushed me down before positioning herself over me. Her eyes burned with unmistakable desire, making my heart race even faster.

She began unbuttoning my shirt with deliberate slowness, yet every touch felt like it was setting me ablaze. Soon, I was bare before her, exposed in a way that made me feel vulnerable yet electrified.

**“You’re so unbelievably sexy, Pim,”** she murmured, her voice thick with desire. Her face was so close that our breaths mingled, becoming one.

Her lips moved to the curve of my neck, and I arched into her touch instinctively. A soft moan slipped from my throat, unbidden, as her lips and tongue continued their slow descent along my body.

Her fingers traced over my bare skin, igniting every nerve they passed. When her hands found their way to just the right place, my body responded without hesitation. Every movement of hers controlled mine, guiding me into an irresistible rhythm that left me breathless.

As the tension built and finally reached its peak, I couldn’t stop myself from crying out her name, my voice soft yet sweet. My breathing came in shallow gasps as my body relaxed, a release from the day’s pent-up tension.

**But even then, I knew the night was far from over.**

Her eyes, still smoldering with desire, told me everything. It was now my turn to bring her the same pleasure she had just given me.

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# Chapter 6: Throwing reason away

*"Ever thrown your brain out the window because you liked someone so much?*

*Yeah... that’s me."*

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*Nearly a month had passed.*

The relationship between Ms. Grace and me continued to exist within the confines of three letters: FWB—Friends with Benefits. A simple term on the surface, yet beneath it lay a complexity I never thought I’d experience. I had never imagined myself becoming ensnared in a dynamic like this.

I was fully aware of how captivated I was by her. I gave in to her every whim—whether it was something trivial or something that left me uneasy. And yet, she seemed to relish the control I handed over so willingly. Ms. Grace had her own unique ways of relieving stress, ways that often ended in heated encounters outside the boundaries of a bed.

**The bathroom. The car. The sofa. The condo balcony. Even the kitchen—places I never thought of as intimate spaces.** For her, it seemed like a game of experimentation and challenge. For me? I couldn’t understand why I allowed it to happen. Was it because I loved her? Was it because I was afraid of losing her? Or was it simply because I was infatuated with her?

To everyone else, everything appeared perfectly normal. No one in the office knew about us, and we were both skilled enough to hide it behind the professional façade of a boss and her subordinate. She remained the composed and authoritative leader, and I remained the hardworking and reserved employee.

*We looked like nothing was out of the ordinary.*

At work, things were going exceptionally well. The project I had helped her lead was a resounding success. She received glowing praise from the executives, and I received indirect recognition through her approval. That accomplishment filled me with pride.

But at the same time, it left a bitter taste in my mouth.

Because in our personal lives, things couldn’t have been more different.

I was the only one exposed. Ms. Grace knew everything about me— what I liked to eat for breakfast, how I took my coffee, my favorite movies, and how I spent my weekends. She knew me so completely that I sometimes felt like there was nothing left to hide.

In contrast, I knew nothing about her. I didn’t know where she lived or what her personal life was like. I didn’t know her likes, her dislikes, or even something as simple as her favorite song.

That only made me want to know more. Was she hiding something from me? Why did her life feel so shrouded in mystery?

*Was it a wall she built to keep me out of her world?*

This nagging curiosity ate away at me every time I looked at her. The desire to be part of her life grew steadily, endlessly, like a hunger I couldn’t satisfy. And slowly, our relationship began to morph into something toxic before I even realized it.

**It made me feel like a fool for not walking away.**

**.**

*Today, We Celebrate as a Team*

The hum of lively chatter and laughter greeted me the moment I stepped into the restaurant hosting our team’s celebration. We had gathered to commemorate the success of our major project.

“Wow, the new boss really went all out with this place,” Kay, my coworker, whispered excitedly, her eyes darting around the stylish venue. I nodded in agreement. Ms. Grace had chosen the perfect spot—a warm, inviting restaurant that exuded an air of elegance, fitting for such an occasion.

My gaze drifted to the long table reserved for our team. As soon as I spotted Ms. Grace seated at the head, it felt like the entire world slowed down.

She was wearing a simple yet elegant beige dress that perfectly complemented her poised demeanor. Her face held the same composed expression as always, but tonight, there was an undeniable magnetism about her. The soft lighting in the restaurant hit her sharp features just right, giving her an almost ethereal glow.

“There she is—your gorgeous boss, waiting for you,” Kay teased, nudging me lightly with her elbow. Her playful tone was something I had grown used to. She often made comments like this, probably because I never joined in when she complained about work or Ms. Grace’s strict demeanor.

Whenever Kay grumbled about our boss, I’d usually laugh it off and say, **“Cut her some slack—she’s beautiful.”**

It was always meant as a joke. What I couldn’t tell Kay, though, was that in my head, I often added: **“And besides being beautiful, she’s absolutely incredible in bed.”**

*But, of course, I could never say that out loud.*

Deep down, I knew all these justifications—her beauty, her charm— were just excuses I clung to for accepting everything about her, no matter what.

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*After the First Dish Was Served*

As the first dish was served, the formal atmosphere of the evening began to ease. Laughter rippled from one end of the table as my coworkers shared amusing stories. I sat at the far-right corner of the table, a good distance away from Ms. Grace, yet my eyes couldn’t help but wander to her.

She sat at the head of the table, the undeniable center of attention, though she didn’t actively participate in the conversations. Instead, she listened with a small, polite smile.

Then, without warning, she rose from her seat.

I turned instinctively, watching as she walked in my direction. She stopped beside my chair, her sharp eyes locking onto mine, a soft, knowing smile playing on her lips.

“ May I join you, Pim?”

“ Yes, of course,” I replied, nodding quickly.

She pulled out the chair beside me and sat down, the faint scent of her perfume brushing past my senses. I tried to sit still, willing myself not to fidget, but her proximity made it difficult. After all, most of our conversations happened in bed, not like this.

“ How are you finding the party? Enjoying yourself?” she asked, her voice soft but low, pitched just enough to be heard over the hum of chatter.

“ It’s nice. The food’s delicious too,” I replied cautiously.

“ Good,” she said, taking a light sip of her wine, her eyes still fixed on me. “I want everyone to relax tonight—I don’t want people to think I’m too strict.”

Her words made me chuckle softly, and for a moment, the tension in my chest eased. “Honestly, I think the reason you’re strict is because you want the team to do their best, isn’t it?”

Her eyebrows arched slightly, her eyes glinting with interest. A small smile curved her lips. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

We laughed together, quietly and briefly, but it was enough to lighten the air around us.

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The music in the restaurant shifted to a faster tempo, and the room buzzed with energy. Colleagues began swaying to the beat, their laughter and clinking glasses filling the space. It was hard to believe that just this morning, we’d all been stressed about the new project assignment.

I sipped from my small glass of wine, letting myself relax into the moment. Then, her voice cut through the background noise.

“Do you dance?”

“Kind of,” I admitted with a sheepish smile. “Not very well, though.”

“Want to give it a try? No one’s paying attention—they’re all probably too drunk by now.”

Her playful remark made me laugh softly.

“If you dance, maybe I’ll think about it,” I teased, not expecting her to take it seriously.

Before I could finish my sentence, she stood up. Her smile widened, and I suddenly felt like I’d walked right into a trap.

“Then let’s dance.”

My eyes widened, my heart pounding uncontrollably. She extended a hand toward me, her gaze challenging yet inviting. I knew I had a choice, but I couldn’t stop myself from reaching out and taking her hand.

We moved to the small dance floor set up in a corner of the restaurant. The upbeat music and the sight of colleagues dancing with carefree abandon filled the room with an infectious sense of joy. I couldn’t hold back a laugh as I watched one coworker dance so wildly that I had to cover my mouth to stifle my giggles.

What surprised me most, however, was Ms. Grace. She moved with such ease, her steps natural and confident in a way I had never seen before. Every movement was effortlessly captivating, and the usually composed tone of her laughter transformed into something bright and lively.

She glanced at me as she swayed to the music, her smile warm and genuine.

“See? It’s not so hard,” she said, stepping closer.

I laughed softly, trying to follow the beat, though my movements felt awkward in comparison to hers. Yet, her smile was enough to make me feel at ease.

My heart pounded uncontrollably, and at the same time, a strange warmth spread through me. Every second near her felt like it was filling an unnamed void in my heart, a feeling I couldn’t quite describe but didn’t want to let go of.

We returned to our seats, the faint sound of music still playing softly in the background. My heartbeat, however, hadn’t slowed—it continued to race as if trying to catch up with the whirlwind of emotions. I felt slightly tired from the unfamiliar movements, but the smile on my face lingered, refusing to fade.

“You’re a great dancer,” I said, trying to steady my breath.

Ms. Grace smiled, her eyes shimmering with satisfaction. “Really? I was just moving along with the music.”

“But you looked like you were having so much fun,” I replied without thinking, laughing softly at myself for paying so much attention to her.

She leaned back slightly in her chair, her gaze still fixed on me, warm and unyielding.

“Sometimes, we need to let ourselves have a little fun,” she said calmly, her words carrying a gentle weight. “You, on the other hand, take life far too seriously.”

The simplicity of her statement somehow struck a chord deep within me.

Then, she leaned in closer, just enough to make her next words feel like a secret. Her voice softened to a near whisper. “Some things can’t be solved by overthinking, Pim.”

Our eyes met in that instant—a fleeting moment that felt like time itself had frozen. I looked into her eyes, catching a flicker of something indescribable.

It could have been a challenge, a temptation, or a deliberate attempt to throw me off balance.

I didn’t know how to respond. My thoughts clashed in my head, each one louder than the last. Not everything can be decided with logic.

Especially not love.

I told myself that, yet here I was, letting her unravel me completely. I had ***“thrown away my brain,”*** allowing her to dance freely through my heart with no reason or restraint.

..

As time passed, the party began to wind down. People left one by one, while a few lingered to chat leisurely. I slipped away to the restroom, hoping to take a moment to collect myself and untangle the mix of emotions churning inside me.

Standing at the sink, I stared at my reflection in the mirror. The polite smile I had maintained throughout the evening had vanished, leaving behind weary eyes that carried both relief and exhaustion.

*Relief that the night was almost over.*

Then, soft footsteps broke through the silence behind me. I turned instinctively, only to find Ms. Grace walking in.

Her face was as composed as ever, but her gaze—intense and unyielding—made me feel as though she was reading my thoughts yet again.

We stood facing each other by the sink. I tried to steady my breath, forcing myself to act natural, but my heart was racing wildly, threatening to burst from my chest.

“How are you getting home?” she asked, her voice soft yet laced with an unspoken expectation I couldn’t ignore.

“I’ve already called a car,” I replied with a faint smile, doing my best to conceal the storm of feelings swirling inside me.

She nodded slowly, her eyes fixed on mine.

“We can leave together. I’ve been driving you home anyway.”

Her words made me pause. I glanced at her through the mirror, seeing her reflection standing tall and poised behind me. There was an air of certainty in the way she said it, as if there was no room for argument.

**“But tonight, there are so many people around,”** I countered, turning to face her directly. **“If anyone sees you dropping me off, it might raise questions. That wouldn’t be good for either of us.”**

She stared at me for a moment before exhaling softly. A faint smile tugged at the corners of her lips.

**“Why do you always overthink everything?”**

Her words pierced me like a needle. I forced another smile, though it felt heavy in my chest.

**“Maybe it’s because I’m just your Friend with Benefits,”** I said, the words leaving my mouth before I could stop them. **“That’s why I have to think this much.”**

Her expression froze the moment I said it. Her sharp eyes stayed locked on mine, as though trying to uncover something hidden beneath my words.

She didn’t reply. Instead, she turned, walked to the restroom door, and locked it with a decisive click.

The sound of the bolt sliding into place sent a jolt through me. Before

I could say anything, she returned, her hand closing firmly around my wrist.

She pulled me into one of the stalls and shut the door behind us.

“Ms. Grace!” I exclaimed, her name spilling from my lips in shock.

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# Chapter 7: Heard You’re Married (NC-17)

The soft background music and the luxurious ambiance of the restaurant faded away the moment Ms. Grace grabbed my hand and pulled me into the narrow restroom.

The sharp click of the lock reverberated in the small space, and my heart raced so fast it felt like it would burst from my chest. I stared at her in confusion, questioning why she had to do this. But the look in her eyes silenced me.

“ Pim, why did you say that?” she began, her low voice laced with an intensity that carried a weight I couldn’t ignore.

“ Say what?” I asked, avoiding her gaze, but she stepped closer. Her hand gently tilted my chin upward, forcing me to meet her eyes.

“ The part where you called yourself just a ‘Friend with Benefits.’

Why would you say that? You mean more to me than that, Pim.”

I froze, overwhelmed by a whirlwind of emotions. Before I could respond, her lips crashed onto mine with a force that left me breathless. Her tongue claimed mine without warning, and the kiss deepened, becoming a fervent expression of possession.

“ Ms. Grace...” I moaned softly as she pulled away slightly, our foreheads still pressed together.

“ Promise me,” she whispered, her breath brushing against my cheek.

“Promise me you won’t say that again.”

“ I... I...” I stammered, the words caught in my throat.

**“ If you don’t, I’ll have to punish you.”**

Her husky voice carried a tantalizing threat as her lips trailed down my neck. Her hands gripped my waist firmly, pulling me closer until no space remained between us. Slowly, her fingers slid down to the hem of my skirt, lifting it inch by inch.

“ Ms. Grace... we can’t do this here,” I said shakily, but my words seemed to vanish into thin air.

“ Yes, we can. No one will know,” she replied with a sly smile before capturing my lips again in another consuming kiss.

She gently pushed me back until my shoulders hit the restroom wall. Her hands traced the curves of my body, each touch deliberate and masterful, leaving me powerless to resist. A soft moan escaped my lips, unbidden.

“ You’re being stubborn,” she murmured into my ear. “So now, I have to punish you.”

Her fingers found their way to my most sensitive spot, moving slowly at first, deliberately teasing.

“ Ah... oh...” I whimpered, unable to contain the sounds spilling from me. Heat spread through my body, consuming me entirely.

Her pace quickened, becoming more insistent. I clung to her shoulders for support as wave after wave of pleasure coursed through me. When the final moment came, my body trembled as her name left my lips in a cry of release.

“ Ms. Grace...”

I was left breathless, my body shuddering as she pressed a tender kiss to my forehead.

“ Remember this,” she murmured softly, her voice filled with an unfamiliar gentleness. “You mean so much to me.”

I nodded weakly, still trying to catch my breath. My body may have surrendered, but deep inside, my heart felt hollow.

Even though she said I was important, a part of me couldn’t shake the feeling that I was merely a plaything she reached for whenever it suited her.

**While my body gave in, my heart was breaking.**

**Ms. Grace used sex to silence me.**

She probably thought I didn’t notice, but I knew all too well. I knew she was trying to distract me, to avoid the conversations she didn’t want to have. And yet, I still let her.

Since that night at the team celebration, I never brought up the topic of our Friends with Benefits status again—not because I stopped thinking about it, but because I thought about it too much.

**I’ve come to realize that, between Ms. Grace and me, there could never be anything more than this.**

..

Today started off like any other workday. Yesterday, Ms. Grace had taken the day off, briefly telling me she had family matters to attend to. I hadn’t thought much of it at the time. Everything seemed ordinary—until late morning, when the answer to my curiosity arrived, catching me completely off guard.

***Kay***, my ever-enthusiastic colleague with a penchant for gossip, approached my desk with her usual lively demeanor.

“ Pim, I’ve got some juicy news for you!” she announced, plopping into the chair next to me with an excited grin.

I looked at her, amused, already anticipating one of her signature revelations.

“ What’s the scoop this time, Kay?” I asked casually.

“ Do you remember Ms. Grace taking the day off yesterday?”

Hearing her name immediately piqued my interest. I set my pen down and turned my full attention to Kay.

“ Yes, why?”

“ Well, I saw her at the mall yesterday evening!”

Her words made my heart skip a beat, a sudden unease creeping into my chest.

“ Really? What was she doing?” I asked, trying to sound indifferent while keeping my voice steady.

“ She was having dinner at this super fancy French restaurant! You know the one—it’s super famous.” Kay’s tone was brimming with excitement.

I nodded slowly, masking my growing discomfort.

“ Was she with her parents?” I asked, feigning nonchalance.

**“ Doesn’t look like it, Pim, because she was with a man!”**

**“ A man?”**

“ Yes! And not just any man. He was gorgeous, tall, sharp, the perfect mix of charm and elegance—like a lead actor straight out of a drama!” Kay’s voice rose as she gushed about the mystery man.

I froze, her words hitting me like a slap. My mind went blank for a moment, her declaration echoing relentlessly: She was with a man.

**“ But do you want to know the juiciest part?”** Kay continued, clearly proud of her revelation.

**“…”** I couldn’t muster a response. I just stared at her, waiting.

**“ The guy looked so familiar, like I’d seen him somewhere before. Then it hit me—I’d seen him in photos from a wedding my friend attended! She posted pictures on Facebook, and guess what? That guy was the groom. And the bride? Any guesses?”**

Kay paused dramatically, as if savoring the moment. I could feel the blood draining from my face as I stared at her, bracing for impact.

**“ Ms. Grace!”** she exclaimed, her words landing like a bomb. **“She’s married!”**

The world seemed to crumble around me. The noise of the office faded into the background as her words reverberated in my mind. My chest tightened, and I struggled to breathe as a whirlwind of emotions engulfed me.

“ And they look perfect together,” Kay went on, oblivious to my turmoil. “She’s gorgeous, and he’s insanely handsome. Ugh, I’m so jealous of her—her husband is a dreamboat!”

I forced a faint smile, trying to conceal the storm raging inside me.

But every word Kay said felt like a dagger to my chest.

Why didn’t she tell me? Why didn’t I suspect anything? Was I so blind to the truth?

***Ms. Grace is married.***

The phrase played on repeat in my mind, taunting me. The relationship I had imagined between us, the connection I thought we shared, was shattered in an instant.

But the most excruciating realization was this: I had fallen for her— deeply, hopelessly. And now I knew that not only was I nothing more than her Friend with Benefits, I was also just another notch on her belt.

***A mistress.***

***And I never even saw it coming.***

*..*

I walked into the restroom, feeling as though the world was closing in on me. Each step felt heavier than the last, my legs barely able to support me. I didn’t care if anyone noticed; *all I wanted was a small, quiet space where I could escape from everything.*

As soon as I shut the door to one of the stalls, I collapsed onto the closed toilet seat, pulling out my phone with trembling hands. My heart pounded relentlessly, and Kay’s words echoed in my mind, refusing to let me go.

I opened the browser immediately, my fingers typing out Ms. Grace’s full name in hurried strokes, letter by letter. A small part of me hoped the search results would prove Kay wrong, that what I’d heard was just a misunderstanding.

*But the results revealed nothing.*

Of course. This wasn’t the first time I had tried to search for personal details about Ms. Grace. I had already scoured every social media platform, desperate for any glimpse into her life beyond the office.

Her profiles were locked down tight. The only professional trail was her pristine LinkedIn account, filled with accolades and achievements, and an Instagram account set to private. Her profile picture was the only visible detail: a polished photo of her in a sleek work outfit, smiling faintly.

I stared at that picture for a long time. Her beauty felt like a thorn, pricking me over and over again—not because of how stunning she was, but because it was a stark reminder of how unreachable she truly was.

My heart clenched painfully, tears welling in my eyes. A hollow emptiness stretched inside me, vast and unending, like an ocean I could never hope to cross.

The first tear splashed onto my phone screen, followed by another and another. I buried my face in my hands, trying to stifle the sobs that threatened to escape into the silence of the restroom.

**Why did Ms. Grace do this to me? I asked myself.**

But deep down, I already knew the answer. Because I let her. I’d known from the beginning that whatever was between us wasn’t normal. I’d sensed that she was hiding something from me, but I chose to ignore it. I let myself hope—hope that she was unattached, that maybe she would look at me the way I looked at her. I had been lying to myself the entire time.

My hand clenched around my phone as waves of pain and disappointment surged through me, threatening to overwhelm me. I tried to soothe myself—stop it, Pim. Just stop.

I wanted to forget this feeling, to leave it all behind. But my heart was stubborn, refusing to let go. It clung to her, to Ms. Grace, a woman I should never have loved.

The last tear slid down my face as a faint sob escaped my lips. I took a deep, trembling breath, trying to gather myself. I told myself I had to go back to work, to act like nothing had happened. I had to be Pim, the woman everyone knew—a dependable coworker, unaffected and composed.

Wiping my tears, I stood up, my emotions a tangled mess. But deep down, I knew the truth: *nothing would ever be the same again.*

..

# Chapter 8: Woman in Your Secret

I stood in the restroom, my head bowed as I splashed water onto my face, desperately trying to wash away any trace of tears. I didn’t want anyone to know I had been crying. But then, the sound of approaching footsteps echoed through the quiet, and instinctively, I glanced up at the mirror.

**That’s when I saw her—Ms. Grace.**

She stood at the doorway, her tall, poised figure still immaculate in her work attire. Her sharp eyes locked onto mine through the reflection, carrying a mix of curiosity and concern. I quickly turned away, fumbling to wipe away the remaining tears.

“Pim…” Her voice was soft yet firm, cutting through the silence and making it impossible to pretend I hadn’t heard her.

“Yes?” I replied faintly, trying to steady my voice, though I knew I wasn’t convincing.

**“Have you been crying?”** she asked bluntly, her directness making me freeze. I hesitated before glancing back at her through the mirror. Her gaze was filled with a tenderness that only deepened the ache in my chest.

My eyes flickered to her left hand. No wedding ring. No visible sign of someone significant in her life. Of course, there wouldn’t be—I would’ve known long ago. And I wouldn’t have allowed myself to fall this far.

**“No,”** I lied, the word slipping out automatically, even though it sounded as unconvincing as I felt.

She frowned slightly and took a step closer. Instinctively, I stepped back.

“Pim…” she said again, her tone softer this time. “Is something bothering you? You can tell me.”

I averted my eyes, wanting so badly to pour everything out to her. But the words caught in my throat, refusing to come out.

“I’m fine,” I said, repeating the same hollow phrase, building a barrier between us.

She sighed quietly, then reached out to gently grasp my arm. Her touch was light, non-threatening, but it carried an undeniable warmth that made my defenses waver.

“Let’s talk in my office,” she said evenly, guiding me toward the door.

“This isn’t the place for this kind of conversation.”

I pulled my arm away, stepping back to create distance between us.

“I already told you, I’m fine,” I replied, the words spilling out too quickly, my tone sharper than I intended.

She stopped, confusion flickering across her face as though she couldn’t understand my resistance.

“You don’t have to worry about me,” I said quietly, forcing myself to steady my voice. “I can handle this on my own.”

Her expression shifted to something unreadable as she stood there, still watching me, as if trying to decipher the thoughts I wasn’t willing to share.

“Pim…” she began, her voice gentler now, “I’m only worried about you. You know that, don’t you?”

Her words brushed over my heart like a warm breeze, and for a fleeting moment, I wanted to believe her. But the secrets she’d kept, the lies she’d told, reminded me that trusting her wasn’t an option.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered, though I wasn’t sure what I was apologizing for. I broke eye contact and hurried out of the restroom, leaving her standing there alone.

I walked briskly until I found myself in the stairwell. Leaning against the wall, I tried to steady my breathing, but the tears came rushing back, streaming down my face in relentless waves.

**I knew I was running—escaping—because I had no idea how to face her, not when my heart felt so fragile.**

..

*Later that afternoon, the phone on my desk rang.*

“Pim, come to my office. I need to discuss something work-related,” her voice said evenly, devoid of any trace of the morning’s tension. But I knew. I could hear it in the undertone of her words—this wasn’t about work.

When I entered her office, Ms. Grace was seated behind her desk, her usual composed demeanor tinged with a subtle intensity. She gestured for me to sit, and I reluctantly obeyed, doing my best to avoid her piercing gaze.

**“Will you tell me what’s going on now?”** she asked, her voice calm but carrying an undeniable weight.

**“There’s nothing to tell,”** I replied, keeping my tone as flat as possible.

She leaned forward slightly, her eyes searching mine, as if trying to uncover what I refused to say.

“But you were crying.”

Her bluntness left no room for escape.

“That’s my business,” I shot back, the words coming out faster than I intended. I immediately stood, ready to leave, but she reached out, grabbing my wrist firmly.

**“Pim…”** Her voice was softer now, but resolute enough to make me pause. **“We need to talk about this.”**

I turned back to her, meeting her gaze head-on. Her expression was serious, but beneath it, I caught a flicker of uncertainty.

I drew in a shaky breath, summoning every ounce of courage I had. **“What exactly should we talk about? The fact that I’m your secret woman? Or the fact that you’re married?”**

Her expression faltered, the confidence in her eyes replaced by hesitation. Her lips parted as if to say something, but no words came.

I stared at her, the silence between us saying more than any words could. I didn’t need her to say anything—her silence was confirmation enough.

“Excuse me,” I said simply, standing and turning to leave. I walked out of her office, leaving her sitting there in the heavy quiet.

*I knew this should have been the end. But the truth was… I wasn’t ready for it to be over.*

..

That evening, I hurriedly packed up my things, moving as quietly as a shadow through the office, hoping Ms. Grace wouldn’t notice my attempt to avoid her. I headed straight to the bus stop, desperate to reach the safety of my condo as quickly as possible. All I wanted was to escape the suffocating weight of this long and uncomfortable day.

*But it seemed fate had other plans.*

I had barely been back at my condo for a few minutes when my phone rang. Her name lit up on the screen. My heart sank as I stared at it, hesitating far too long before finally pressing **“answer.”**

“Come down and meet me. I’m outside your building,” her voice was calm and steady, yet carried an undertone of authority that left no room for argument.

“Ms. Grace… please, just go home,” I tried to keep my voice firm, but the tremble in my chest betrayed me. My hands clenched tightly around the phone as I struggled to contain my emotions.

There was a pause on the other end, and then she replied with the same composed tone, her words cutting through my defenses like a blade.

**“If you don’t come down, I’ll tell the security guard that I’m concerned you might harm yourself and that I need to come up immediately.”**

Her words left me stunned. Ms. Grace was sharper than I’d ever imagined. She didn’t need to yell or threaten outright—her calm yet resolute tone was enough to back me into a corner.

“…Fine. I’ll come down,” I replied weakly, my voice barely above a whisper.

I hung up and let out a long, shaky breath, trying to steady myself. But my mind was a whirlwind of emotions—anger, frustration, and a deep, aching disappointment. As I stepped out of my room and made my way to the elevator, a single thought echoed in my mind:

*What does Ms. Grace want from me now?*

*..*

In my bedroom, Ms. Grace sat on the small sofa in the corner, her demeanor calm and composed as always. But I knew that beneath that stillness, something unspoken lingered. I perched on the edge of my bed, deliberately keeping my distance, while my mind churned in turmoil. Neither of us said a word, the silence between us thick with tension and unease.

“ I don’t want to lose you,” her soft voice broke through the quiet, cutting through the air like a blade. Her tone was gentle, but it struck a deep chord within me, one that amplified the pain instead of soothing it.

I took a deep breath, trying to steel myself against the wave of emotions threatening to surface. **“You never should have had me in the first place, Ms. Grace,”** I said, my voice trembling**. “You have a husband.”**

She froze, her usual stoic expression faltering as a flicker of hesitation crossed her face. Her eyes shifted away, unable to meet mine. She didn’t deny it. She couldn’t. I had expected as much; there were no excuses she could offer that would make any of this okay.

“ Pim…” she murmured, sighing softly. “You know how much you mean to me. Haven’t we been happy together? Are you really saying that none of this meant anything to you?”

Her words made me laugh bitterly, the sound sharp and hollow. **“You’re selfish, Ms. Grace,”** I said, my voice rising as anger finally spilled out. **“You already have someone, so why did you involve me? Is this why I’ve never been to your house? Why I know nothing about your personal life? Because you’ve been hiding it all from me!”**

Her eyes wavered for a moment before she stood and walked toward me. Her hand rested lightly on my arm before pulling me into her embrace. I tried to resist, but her grip was firm, her strength overwhelming mine.

**“ Calm down,”** she whispered softly, her lips brushing against my shoulder in a fleeting touch. **“If I had told you I was married from the start, I wouldn’t have the right to hold you like this today, would I?”** *Her words made me go still, her selfishness rendering me speechless.* **Ms. Grace—how could you be so selfish?**

**..**

Chapter 9: This Should End Here.

**“If I had told you I was married from the start, I wouldn’t have the right to hold you like this today, would I?”**

Her words made me go still, her selfishness rendering me speechless. *Ms. Grace—how could you be so selfish?*

. .

Before I could say anything, she gently turned my face toward hers, her eyes pleading with me, silently begging me to forget everything.

She cupped my face with both hands, lowering her lips to mine. I tried to pull away, but her kiss was both tender and unrelenting. It felt as though she was trying to soothe me, to erase everything I knew with her touch.

And I hated it. I hated how I couldn’t push her away. I hated how she always used her touch to silence me whenever I tried to fight for my feelings.

Her movements were deliberate, calculated—every touch seemed to anticipate where I would falter, where I would give in. She pressed her lips to my neck, trailing down to my shoulder, and I bit down hard on my lip to suppress the emotions threatening to escape.

“Stop it,” I finally managed to say, summoning every ounce of strength I had to push her away. She froze, her sharp eyes widening in surprise. I took a deep breath, trying to contain the wave of pain and disgust surging inside me.

**“How do you think I feel,”** I began, my voice trembling with anger, **“knowing that the same lips you use to kiss your husband are the ones you use to kiss me?”**

I knew my words were harsh, but they were laced with the raw pain I could no longer contain.

Her reaction was immediate, like she had been struck by my words. She stood there, frozen, her eyes reflecting a pain she couldn’t hide. But I didn’t let the silence linger.

**“Call me old-fashioned if you want,”** I continued, my voice firmer than ever, **“but I can’t accept it. Honestly, it’s disgusting, Ms. Grace.”** Suddenly, tears welled in her eyes, spilling down her cheeks as she looked up at me with a mixture of sorrow and regret. For the first time, I saw her vulnerable—completely unguarded.

“Pim, I’m sorry,” her voice quivered, breaking under the weight of her emotions. She reached out, her hand grazing my cheek lightly, as if pleading.

“I can’t live without you… Please stay with me, Pim.”

Her voice was filled with desperation, and it made me feel like I was sinking under the weight of her vulnerability. My heart wavered, but I knew I couldn’t allow myself to falter.

“Stay with me, Pim,” she pleaded again.

**“In what capacity, Ms. Grace?”** I asked bitterly, my tone dripping with sarcasm. **“As your mistress? Is that it?”**

She looked away for a moment, clearly struggling with my words, before meeting my gaze again.

“My situation is… complicated, Pim,” she said softly. “Please, just give me time. I’ll tell you everything, I promise. But I need you to be patient. Please…”

Her voice was filled with a desperation that mirrored the hopelessness in her eyes.

“No,” I responded immediately, my voice steady but laced with resolute finality.

“Pim…” Her voice quivered, fragile, as though she was on the verge of losing something irreplaceable.

**“I don’t see how it’s complicated or what truth there is left to uncover, except that you’re married, and you’ve hidden it from me all along. You’ve made me the third party in your marriage. You deceived me, Ms. Grace,”**

I said, my tone sharp with a mix of anger and heartbreak.

She fell silent for a moment, as if trying to find the right words. Her face, usually composed, now betrayed a rare vulnerability—confusion and pain etched into her features.

**“Pim, listen to me. Yes, I’m married to him, but I don’t love him. I had to marry him because of my family’s expectations, because of societal pressure. Loving another woman isn’t something that’s easily accepted in every family, you know that. Surely, you understand,”** she said, her voice heavy with exhaustion.

Her words only solidified the fundamental difference in our perspectives. If it were me, no one could force my hand. Even if someone tried, I would have broken free from that cage. Shaking my head slightly, I replied, my voice calm but unyielding.

“But if you had truly refused to marry him, no one could have forced you, Ms. Grace. You allowed your family to dictate your life. You let this happen to yourself. Don’t blame anyone else for your choices.”

“And what if your mother threatened to disown you?” she countered, her voice growing firmer, tinged with desperation.

“Then I’d let her,” I replied without hesitation. “If she couldn’t accept me for who I am, then so be it. Loving another woman doesn’t make me a bad person.”

Ms. Grace averted her gaze, as though unwilling to confront the truth in my words. “You don’t understand, Pim…”

**“You’re right. I don’t understand,”** I interrupted, my voice trembling now. **“We clearly don’t share the same values, and I probably never will understand you. But what I do understand is this—you’re married, and you have a husband. And that’s why I believe we need to end this, here and now.”**

Tears began streaming down Ms. Grace’s face, as though my words had ripped something fundamental within her to pieces. But for me, those tears did nothing to lessen the anger or heartbreak I felt.

I took a deep breath, steadying myself. There was one question I needed to ask, something I had to know before this was over. Summoning every ounce of courage, I spoke, my voice trembling slightly.

**“Do you have children with him, Ms. Grace?”**

She froze instantly, her expression shifting to one of shock. “Why are you asking me that?”

“If you do, I need to remind myself just how much worse I’ve made things by being the third party in your marriage,” I replied, my voice quivering with emotion. “I need to remember this pain, so I never think of you again.”

She shook her head, tears flowing freely down her cheeks. “No. We don’t have children.”

Her answer should have brought me some relief, but it didn’t. Instead, it only deepened the silence between us—a heavy, impenetrable wall separating us.

I drew another deep breath, making the hardest decision of my life. “Okay,” I said, my voice firm despite the storm inside me. “Then I think this is where we end things, Ms. Grace.”

**“Please leave my room.”**

The moment I said those words, I saw her open her mouth as if to respond, to say something—anything. But in the end, she said nothing. She stayed silent, and that was the moment I knew it was truly over.

*I had to walk away—not for her, but for myself.*

*..*

I arrived at work this morning looking utterly drained. I didn’t have the energy to put on even a dab of powder or tame my disheveled hair into anything resembling order.

Kay, my ever-observant colleague, noticed immediately. Mistaking my pallor for illness, she piled an arsenal of medication onto my desk— painkillers, fever reducers, and an array of vitamins.

**“You should take a rest, Pim. You look so pale. If you’re not feeling well, just call in sick,”** she said, her voice full of concern, making me feel guilty for the lie I was about to tell.

I nodded weakly, forcing a small smile, even though her kindness couldn’t soothe me. I wasn’t physically sick; I just hadn’t bothered with makeup, and last night, I’d cried so much my eyes were still swollen.

Ms. Grace arrived at work as if nothing had happened. She was as composed as always, showing no trace of the turmoil we had faced the night before. It was as though our confrontation had never taken place. I tried to mirror her demeanor, acting as though I wasn’t hurting, as though I hadn’t spent the night drowning in tears.

We were both professionals. We kept work and personal matters neatly separate, maintaining a façade so seamless it bordered on flawless. I smiled and laughed with my teammates as usual, answered emails, and completed my reports on time. No one in the marketing team had the slightest clue that inside, I was battling a storm of emotions.

**But the truth was, I wasn’t okay. I’d been contemplating resigning ever since last night.**

I thought about drafting my resignation letter, handing it to HR, and cashing in all my remaining vacation days. I wanted to escape—run far away where I wouldn’t have to see her face or hear her name ever again.

Yet, the more I considered it, the more I realized it wasn’t that simple. This job was a good one. My colleagues were kind, the salary was decent, and the office was conveniently close to my condo. Most of all, I hadn’t done anything wrong. I was the one who had been deceived. Why should I be the one to leave?

**It was that thought that made me decide to stay—to endure, to keep showing up at the same office, facing Ms. Grace every day.**

This was the life of someone like me—middle class with limited options. If I were wealthier, maybe I could afford to quit and take a long break, breathe deeply, and let time heal me before finding new inspiration to work again. But I wasn’t. No matter how hard I cried, I still had to get up and go to work.

*Even if it meant sneaking off to cry in the bathroom on another floor during my lunch break.*

I locked the stall door, grabbed a tissue, and dabbed at my tears silently, doing my best to stifle the sobs that threatened to escape. Taking a deep breath, I tried to pull myself together.

“You’ll get through this, Pim,” I whispered to myself before stepping out of the bathroom, putting on my mask of composure, and returning to my desk as though nothing had happened. The pain, carefully hidden, stayed behind that locked door.

As I settled back into my seat, Ms. Grace passed by my desk. She didn’t even glance my way. But just seeing her walk by made my heart pound painfully, memories flooding back with ruthless clarity.

“It’s okay, Pim,” I whispered to myself again, even though I knew it was far harder than I wanted to believe.

*..*

# Chapter 10: The Other Woman

After work that day, I walked to the bus stop as usual. Even though I owned a car, I chose not to drive. The reason was simple—my condo was close enough to the office to make commuting by bus practical. Driving through traffic in this congested area felt pointless, not to mention the parking fees I’d have to pay. So, I stuck to the old, familiar bus, even though it was worn down, reeking of stale air that seemed to cling to every corner.

I sat at the bus stop, waiting for a bus that was never on time, trying not to dwell on the awkwardness of the day at work. Then, the hum of a car engine pulled my attention. A sleek black car pulled up beside the stop, its window sliding down.

**And there it was—the face I least wanted to see: Ms. Grace.**

“Pim, get in,” she said, her voice clear but not commanding. Our eyes met for a fleeting second before I made a decision.

I stood up—but instead of walking toward her car, I turned and headed in the opposite direction. I hoped she’d give up and stop following me, but the sound of her car engine persisted behind me. A sharp honk from her car made heads turn, drawing the attention of everyone around.

My face flushed with embarrassment, heat rising to my cheeks.

Mortified, I turned to glare at her, my eyes filled with irritation. But she remained unbothered. Her composure was intact as she rolled the window down further and spoke again.

“Please, get in. I’m not leaving until you do.”

Her voice was steady, laced with a stubbornness I knew all too well. She meant every word. I stood there, torn, for a moment before letting out a long sigh. The curious stares from the people around me made the situation even more unbearable.

Wearing an expression that made my displeasure obvious, I walked over to her car.

As I got in and shut the door, she didn’t speak right away. She simply gave me a small smile before starting the car.

“You shouldn’t do things like this,” I said, my tone edged with frustration.

She glanced at me briefly, her voice soft as she responded, “Please,

Pim. Just give me a chance.”

..

The atmosphere inside the small car was suffocating, as if half the air had been sucked out. I sat motionless next to Ms. Grace, my eyes fixed on the scenery outside. The streetlights streamed past in a blur, but they did nothing to fill the void I felt. The silence in the car stretched each second unbearably long, and even the soft music from the radio failed to ease the tension.

I shifted slightly in my seat and took a deep breath before finally speaking.

**“Ms. Grace, where are you taking me?”**

She didn’t turn to look at me, her eyes steady on the road ahead.

**“I’m taking you to meet someone,”** she said.

Her response left me momentarily stunned. I turned to look at her, trying to decipher the meaning behind her words. Her expression remained calm, but there was a determination in her demeanor that I couldn’t quite understand.

“I don’t want to meet anyone,” I said firmly, my voice rising slightly to convey my seriousness. “Stop the car, Ms. Grace.”

She sighed softly and glanced at me briefly. Her gaze wasn’t harsh; instead, it carried a strange gentleness, as if she wanted to explain herself.

“Pim, please. Just come with me,” she said, her voice softer than I expected.

I bit my lip and inhaled deeply before repeating myself, this time with more resolve.

“Ms. Grace, I said stop the car.”

This time, she fell silent for a moment, as if grappling with an inner conflict. Then she spoke again, her tone tinged with urgency.

**“Pim, please. It’s important to me. Really important.”**

Her words made me pause. I turned to face her fully, catching a glimpse of her eyes. There was something in them I hadn’t seen before— something raw and heavy, as if she was carrying a burden too big to articulate.

I stared at her for a while, my mind wrestling with indecision. And then, without saying a word, I chose silence. I didn’t agree, but I didn’t refuse either. My lack of response seemed to be enough of an answer for her.

She glanced at me once more, and this time, a faint smile appeared on her lips—a smile that seemed almost relieved.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

She turned her focus back to the road, and I watched her profile as she drove. Her face carried an air of unease, as though weighed down by countless thoughts she kept locked away.

I didn’t know who she was taking me to meet or what awaited us. But one thing I knew for sure at that moment was this:

*I had given in to Ms. Grace again. And this time, it was entirely willingly.*

*..*

Ms. Grace brought me to an upscale restaurant on the outskirts of the city. The ambiance was so quiet it bordered on eerie, with only soft classical music playing in the background and meticulously arranged dining tables. I sat across from her, my gaze fixed on the plates of food that filled the table, yet I had no appetite whatsoever.

She tried to make conversation, talking about the most trivial topics— movies currently in theaters, Netflix and HBO series, even the fluctuating price of Bitcoin. It was as if we weren’t sitting in the middle of an atmosphere heavy with tension.

I listened to her with growing confusion, my expression carefully neutral, though inside, my emotions were swirling in a chaotic storm. *Then, a man entered the restaurant. He was strikingly handsome, tall, with a clean and polished appearance. Every detail of his attire was immaculate, as though he’d stepped right out of a business magazine.*

*In that moment, I knew exactly who he was.*

I turned to Ms. Grace immediately, my eyes brimming with unspoken questions and barely contained anger. She met my gaze calmly before speaking.

**“Pim, this is Win, my husband.”**

Her voice was steady, but her words struck like a bolt of lightning straight to my chest. I shot up from my chair, the legs screeching loudly against the floor. The sound caught the attention of a few diners seated far off, who turned to look in curiosity.

“Ms. Grace!” I exclaimed, her name slipping out as a cry of frustration. My voice shook with fury. What on earth was she thinking?

How dare she bring her husband to meet me?

“Pim, please calm down,” she said, her tone measured, but I wasn’t having it. I glared at her, seeing someone I no longer recognized.

The man—***Mr. Win***—turned to me. He stood and raised his hands in a gesture of peace, as if trying to defuse the situation.

“Pim, please, let’s not get upset,” he said, his tone unexpectedly gentle and courteous.

But it only made things worse.

**“I don’t think there’s anything to explain,”** I retorted sharply, my voice like steel. Tears began to well up in my eyes, but I fought to hold them back. **“This is absurd, meeting like this. It’s insane.”**

**“Pim,”** Win interjected quickly, his expression sincere. **“It’s not what you think. I’ve known about you and Grace for a long time. I’m not here to be angry or place blame. I’m here to talk—to explain.”**

His words made me pause, but only for a second. I glanced between him and Ms. Grace, who sat there silently, her face unreadable.

“Fine,” I said, my voice cold and unyielding. “Say what you need to say. Let’s clear this up right now and make sure we never cross paths again.”

. .

**"The bottom line is, Grace and I had to get married because our families approved of it,"** Win explained, his voice calm and steady. **"But neither of us loves the other. I’ve always been attracted to men since I can remember, and Grace prefers women. It’s something we’ve mutually understood from the start."**

His words echoed in my mind long after he had finished speaking. I tried to process everything he said, but my emotions churned relentlessly.

Finally, I responded in the coldest tone I could muster.

**"Alright,"** I said curtly, but the frustration boiling inside me refused to stay contained. **"But that doesn’t justify your wife going around having Friends with Benefits arrangements while hiding the fact that she’s married. That’s not right."**

I turned to meet Ms. Grace’s gaze as I spoke, making no effort to soften my words.

"Pim…" Ms. Grace began, her voice carrying a note of defensiveness, but Win held up his hand to stop her.

"Don’t blame Grace," he interjected politely, his tone aimed at diffusing the tension. "I have someone, too. I’ve been in a relationship with my boyfriend long before I was forced to marry Grace. And she’s fully aware of it."

His explanation hung in the air, leaving a stinging wound in my heart that only deepened. I looked at the two of them, my mind swirling with emotions—anger, betrayal, humiliation. Their story sounded like a convoluted drama script designed to create chaos, and I wanted no part in it.

*They could understand each other all they wanted, but I had no desire to understand.*

"Enough," I finally said, raising my hand to stop them from continuing. "I know relationships like this exist. Maybe the three of you understand each other and can live with it. But I don’t, and I don’t want to try."

I turned to Ms. Grace, whose eyes betrayed hesitation. Her lips pressed into a thin line, as though she was holding back words.

"Pim…" she whispered my name, but I didn’t let her continue.

**"Ms. Grace,"** I cut her off sharply, my tone icy. **"Why did you have your husband explain this to me? Surely you don’t think I’m going to become a fourth party in this marriage of yours, do you?"**

She froze, her eyes wavering, the confidence that once radiated from her replaced by uncertainty. Her lips, which had once spoken words I hung on to in the past, now remained silent.

**"Pim, if you want to be with Grace, I have no problem with it,"** Win said, his tone almost casual, as though he was discussing a trivial matter. **"All I ask is that you keep it discreet. Grace still has to be my wife."**

..

# Chapter 11: Quit My Job

Win’s tone was flat, as if he were discussing something trivial without the weight of any moral consideration.

**“No matter what, I have to maintain this marriage with Grace. Next year, I’m running for a local political position. If the truth about my relationship with a man gets out, my career will be over. My father will kill me, Grace—you know that, don’t you?”**

I turned to look at them both, my gaze heavy with a storm of emotions—anger, disappointment, and deep pain. Feelings they would likely never fully comprehend. I couldn’t understand how I managed to sit through those words without walking out right then and there.

But eventually, my patience snapped.

**"Let me be blunt,"** I said, my voice cutting through the tension. **"I still stand by what I said earlier—I know there are people who can accept relationships like this."**

I turned to Grace, locking eyes with her. Her gaze held worry, and perhaps even a tinge of regret, but I refused to let that weaken my resolve.

**"But for me, I cannot accept it,"** I continued firmly. **"Win’s partner might be okay sharing someone they love. They might be okay living in the shadows. But I’m not.”**

Ms. Grace opened her mouth as if to say something, but I didn’t give her the chance.

"Being Friends with Benefits with you, Ms. Grace, already feels like hell for me. And now, you expect me to share you with someone else? I can’t do it. I won’t."

My voice trembled, but it was laced with a truth I could no longer bury. The very thought of being in such a relationship made me feel sick to my core.

**"Win and I have never been intimate with each other,"** Ms. Grace interjected, her voice tinged with desperation, as if begging me to understand.

Silence filled the space between us, pressing down like a weight. I closed my eyes, inhaling deeply to steady myself, before opening them to meet hers once more.

**"Even so, Ms. Grace,"** I said, my tone laced with quiet agony, **"that still makes me your mistress, doesn’t it?"**

The words escaped my lips with a bitterness I hadn’t intended to reveal. But they were the truth—the raw, ugly truth I couldn’t ignore any longer.

"Ms. Grace," I said softly but firmly, "let me go."

With those final words, I stood up, grabbed my bag, and walked out of the restaurant without waiting for a response. I didn’t care what they had to say anymore. Each step away from them felt like a battle against the gaze of curious onlookers in the restaurant, but I didn’t care about that either.

Tears welled up, blurring my vision, and I knew that tonight would be another sleepless night of crying myself to exhaustion.

*But that didn’t matter anymore.*

*If crying was what it took to move on, then so be it.*

*..*

*The next day,*

I went to work as usual, but I made a conscious decision to start fresh. I dressed up, put on makeup, and tried to bring back the bright version of myself that I had lost. I refused to let this heartbreak destroy me any further. Even though my heart still felt heavy, I told myself that starting over was the only way forward.

In stark contrast to me, Grace seemed entirely different. She appeared more disheveled than I’d ever seen her. Her hair was unkempt, not styled as immaculately as usual, and her normally flawless face bore visible signs of exhaustion. And yet, she still looked good—just not as radiant as she always did.

Later in the morning, I received a message from her asking me to come to her office. I told myself it might be about work, but deep down, I knew better. As soon as I entered the room, she stood up and immediately locked the door.

“ Pim...” Her voice trembled. “Last night, I called you, but you didn’t pick up. I texted you, but you didn’t reply. Please, Pim, tell me what I need to do to not lose you.”

I let out a long sigh, the exhaustion I had been trying so hard to suppress crashing over me once more.

“ Ms. Grace, if you called me here to discuss personal matters again, I’m afraid I’ll have to leave without further notice,” I said in the calmest tone I could muster. I turned toward the door, but she grabbed my arm.

**“If I end with Win, divorce him, will you come back to me, Pim?”**

Her question stopped me in my tracks. Her voice carried a pleading note that made my heart waver.

I stood still for a moment before responding. **“I never wanted you two to separate, Ms. Grace. You both have your own circumstances that I’ll never fully understand. You made that choice from the beginning. You don’t need to change anything for me because I don’t want anyone to suffer.”**

“ But I don’t want to lose you, Pim. Please,” she said, her eyes fixed on me, filled with desperation.

I gave her a faint smile, though it was tinged with bitterness. “And why shouldn’t you lose me?” I asked softly. “When you came into my life, you chose to hide the truth from the start. So, if one day we lose each other, isn’t that to be expected?”

My words rendered her speechless. The confidence that usually shone in her eyes had been replaced with emptiness.

“ You’re crueler than I thought, Pim,” she whispered, her voice barely audible.

“ And you’re the cruel one,” I replied, my voice firm even though I could feel my heart shattering inside. “You chose to deceive me from the start. You’re the one who put me in a position to bear the consequences of choices I never made.”

With that, I turned and walked out of the room without looking back.

I knew I had done the right thing.

But why did doing the right thing hurt so much?

..

*A Week Later*

I spent the past week reflecting on everything, repeatedly asking myself if I could separate my professional life from my personal feelings.

*The answer was clear: I can’t.*

I might be able to pretend for a short while that nothing ever happened, but doing so for years—or even the rest of my career—would be impossible. It’s too much for any ordinary person to endure.

Every time Ms. Grace’s gaze met mine, it felt as though she was crushing me under the weight of her eyes. Sadness, disappointment, and something else I didn’t dare to interpret shimmered in her expression. It only made things harder for me. I was still hurt by what she had done, and by the truth she chose to conceal.

*Finally, I decided to resign—not on a whim, but after carefully considering every word I would write.*

The day I submitted my resignation letter, I walked into Ms. Grace’s office. She was seated behind her desk as usual, but when I placed the document in front of her, she froze. Her expression went blank for a moment before she looked up at me.

“I’m not signing this,” she said in a calm yet resolute voice.

“Ms. Grace, I’ve thought this through,” I replied firmly.

She stared directly at me, as if searching for something. “Is it because of me?”

Her question hit me like a sharp blow. I stood still for a moment, then answered as honestly as I could. **“It’s because of me. Not you, Ms. Grace. I’m the one who can’t handle this. I’m not strong enough to see you every day.”**

I paused briefly before continuing, “**You can call me unprofessional if you want. Yes, I admit it—I’m not professional at all.”**

She remained silent for a long time. Her eyes reflected hesitation, and when she finally spoke, her voice was softer.

“Think about it again, Pim. I’ll give you more time.”

She slid the resignation letter back to the edge of her desk, as if to tell me she wasn’t accepting it—not yet.

“Ms. Grace…” I called her name softly.

“Go and think it over,” she said, cutting me off. Her gaze stayed fixed on mine, as if she were trying to convey something I didn’t want to understand.

I stood there for a moment, then turned and walked out of her office.

..

*Three Days Later*

I returned to her office with the same resignation letter in hand. This time, my resolve was stronger than ever because I knew that if I didn’t make my decision crystal clear, I would never truly be able to walk away from her.

She sat behind her desk as usual, her face impassive but her eyes filled with questions and an unspoken tension. I placed the document on her desk, taking a deep breath before speaking.

“Ms. Grace, I’ve made my decision. Please respect it,” I said in a calm, steady voice, even though my heart was in turmoil. “I love this job. I love our team. But I can’t keep working under these circumstances

anymore. And you know why.”

She stayed silent for a moment, as if searching for the right words to say.

“At the very least, you should have another job lined up before you leave,” she finally said, her tone measured but laced with worry. “I know someone as talented as you won’t struggle to find something new, but I don’t want you to take unnecessary risks. The economy isn’t great right now.”

“I have enough savings to last me almost a year,” I replied without hesitation. “I’ve managed my finances carefully, and this resignation isn’t just about leaving. It’s also a break for myself. I’ll look for something new when I’m ready.”

Her gaze lingered on me, unreadable yet filled with a quiet conflict. It seemed as though she was grappling with her thoughts before she finally gave a small, reluctant nod, as if conceding to the inevitability of my decision.

She reached for a pen, and the moment she signed her name on the document, it felt like my heart was being squeezed painfully tight.

“Good luck, Pim,” she said, her voice unsettlingly calm. But in her eyes, I caught a flicker of something—sadness, regret, or perhaps resignation.

“Thank you,” I replied simply, then turned and walked out of her office.

Every step I took felt unbearably heavy, as if I were trudging through the weight of all the accumulated pain. But I knew I had chosen the best path for myself.

Even though my heart still raced at the thought of her, I understood that letting go of this relationship—one that could never truly fulfill me— was the only way forward.

*For my own sake... I had to let her go.*

*..*

# Chapter 12: Move On

*Resigning was hard, but the 30 days that followed were even harder.*

The final 30 days of my job felt like the most grueling test of my professional life. It wasn’t just about fulfilling my duties—it was a daily battle with my own emotions. I knew I had to leave, and I knew there would be no coming back.

Every morning, as I walked into the office, it felt like I was stepping onto a battlefield. My heart ached each time I passed Ms. Grace’s office door. She seemed so close, yet impossibly far away. I tried to act normal, to smile at my team, and to focus on my tasks like nothing was wrong. But inside, I was consumed by an overwhelming emptiness.

I used every remaining day of my vacation leave, personal leave, and sick leave. On some days, I requested to work from home. Each time I submitted a leave request, Ms. Grace signed off without a word, without hesitation. She didn’t ask any questions, didn’t try to dissuade me. For the first time, she seemed to accept that my time here was coming to an end. On the days I did come into the office, I gave my all to my work. Every file, every project was meticulously organized and handed over to ensure that the marketing team could carry on seamlessly after I was gone. I didn’t want my departure to burden anyone.

Ms. Grace only spoke to me about work. Even though she walked past my desk numerous times, our eyes never met again. She remained the composed, authoritative leader she had always been. But in her eyes, I saw cracks—a silent brokenness she was desperately trying to hide.

..

*The Last Night at the Office*

I quietly packed up my belongings from the desk drawer, my movements slow and deliberate. The office was empty, and the silence was almost deafening. My eyes wandered around the space, taking in every corner, every detail. I remembered every moment I had spent here, every laugh shared with my colleagues.

When I reached the exit, a familiar voice called out from behind me.

“Pim…”

The sound of her voice made me freeze. My heart skipped a beat, but I didn’t turn around.

I stood there in silence, waiting for her to say something more.

Instead, I heard a soft sob escape her lips. Ms. Grace was crying.

I stayed rooted to the spot, unable to move. Tears welled up in my eyes, threatening to spill over. I wanted to turn back, to say something, to comfort her. But deep down, I knew that if I did, I would never be able to walk away from her life.

Clenching my teeth, I lowered my head, hiding the tears that began to stream down my face. Summoning every ounce of willpower I had, I forced myself to take a step forward. Then another.

*Finally, I walked out the door.*

*At last… I was free.*

But this freedom came with a pain so profound I wasn’t sure I could ever erase it. Because even though I had walked away, I knew I had left a part of my heart behind.

*And it was in a place I could never return to again.*

..

The sound of laughter and the clinking of cutlery filled the lively restaurant, yet it felt as if everything around me was moving in slow motion. This evening should have been filled with happiness, but my heart felt unbearably heavy.

It was a farewell dinner for me and a welcome for **“Suchada,”** the new hire who would take over my position.

*Suchada seemed warm and capable—*a single mother who was both admirable and resilient. Talking to her made me reflect on how quickly time had passed. I was no longer the young woman I used to be. Many of my peers had started families, taken the next steps in life, and yet I never saw my life as being **"stuck."** I didn’t think marriage and children defined progress. I had simply chosen a different path. How was that not moving forward?

I sat quietly at the corner of the table, letting the conversations swirl around me like the wind. My thoughts wandered back to **"Ms. Grace,"** the woman who had once made my heart soar. She was six years older than me and married.

In hindsight, I should have known she was likely married. But something in me had chosen to overlook it. Maybe it was because I had projected my ideals onto her, assuming she was like me. How could I have known she was married?

*And yet, the unexpected happened. Ms. Grace appeared.*

She walked straight to me and asked if we could talk privately. I followed her to a quiet corner of the restaurant, where the dim lighting cast soft shadows over her face. She looked more tired than I had ever seen her, her expression filled with worry.

**“Pim, I’m sorry,”** she began, her voice gentle. **“For everything that happened between us. It was wrong of me not to tell you from the start that I was married. I was selfish to do that to you. I’m truly sorry.”**

I froze for a moment. This was the first time I had ever heard an apology from her since everything between us had ended. I looked at her with a neutral expression and replied simply, “Okay.”

My response wasn’t filled with anger as it might have been before. It was calm, though not forgiving. The wound she had left still lingered, dulled but not healed.

“Are you still mad at me, Pim?” she asked, her voice laced with guilt but free of pressure.

I met her gaze and replied, “If you were me, would you still be angry?”

She let out a soft, rueful laugh, a sad smile crossing her face. “If I were you, I think I’d hate myself for what I did.”

Her words struck me, and for a moment, I saw the regret and pain reflected in her eyes. It was genuine, but it didn’t instantly mend the scar she had left on my heart.

I offered a faint smile but didn’t say anything. She, too, fell silent. We sat together in a quiet tension, heavy with emotions we couldn’t fully express. We couldn’t rewrite the past, and no words could erase the memories.

Finally, she broke the silence again. **“Even though I hid my marriage from you, what I felt for you… that was real. You truly mean something to me, Pim.”**

Her hand reached out to gently touch mine. The warmth of her touch was impossible to ignore. I looked at her hand, and a wave of feelings I had tried so hard to suppress surged back.

Tears threatened to spill, but I tilted my head back, staring at the ceiling, willing them to stay put. I didn’t want to cry in front of her.

Slowly, I pulled my hand away and whispered, “Thank you.”

I stood up, offering her a small smile, and walked away, leaving her alone in the quiet corner.

Each step I took out of the restaurant felt unbearably heavy at first, but the weight began to lift as I approached the door. The cool night air greeted me as I stepped outside, and for the first time in a long while, I felt like I could breathe again.

I didn’t know if I would ever see her again. Perhaps I would, or maybe tonight would be our final goodbye. But one thing I knew for sure was that I had loved her with all my heart—more deeply than I had ever loved anyone before.

And though I still loved her, I had to accept the truth. She was a married woman, and I needed to let her go.

Looking up at the star-filled night sky, I knew the pain in my heart wouldn’t vanish overnight. But I was ready to move forward.

**Goodbye, Ms. Grace.**

**Goodbye, my beautiful, heartbreaking love.**

*..*

*Two Weeks Later*

After taking a two-week break, I began searching for a new job in earnest. It didn’t take long—just a month—and I landed a position at a new company. I knew starting over wouldn’t be easy, but I didn’t expect it to be this difficult.

In my new team, the camaraderie I had once known was nowhere to be found. Instead, the atmosphere was steeped in fierce competition. Colleagues seemed more interested in outdoing one another than in collaboration. Backstabbing, jockeying for position, and a survival-of-thefittest mentality ruled the day.

I kept reminding myself, “The workplace isn’t a place to find friendship.” But anyone who has been in a similar situation would understand how isolating it feels.

Even so, I had made the choice to leave my previous job. There was no turning back, and I couldn’t afford to give up now. I had to keep pushing forward.

The first month at the new job passed in fits and starts. It was a struggle. But amid the chaos, I found one small source of light—a person who made things a bit more bearable.

Her name was **“Jira,”** a charmingly tomboyish colleague from the IT department, about my age.

Jira’s warm and genuine personality stood out in the cutthroat environment. She was the kind of person who made me feel like I could let my guard down, at least a little. While most of the office felt cold and transactional, Jira’s friendship offered a sliver of comfort—a reminder that sincerity still existed, even here.

*But what about Ms. Grace?*

*How was she doing now?*

I didn’t know if she had tried to reach out after I left. I had changed my phone number and blocked every possible channel of communication with her.

Then, in the second month of my new job, I received news I never expected to hear.

“Kay,” an old friend from the marketing team, sent me a message.

**“Since you left, Ms. Grace’s performance has plummeted,”** she wrote. **“The CEO even scolded her in front of everyone.”** I stared at the message, emotions swirling inside me.

**“Things haven’t been the same without you,”** Kay continued. **“The team’s morale is at an all-time low.”** I didn’t know what to feel.

*..*

# Chapter 13: He and I are divorced

Kay told me that no one in the team dared to comment on how much Ms. Grace had changed. Everyone stayed silent, stifled under the growing pressure she exerted. She pushed the team hard to meet deadlines, but the work produced was increasingly subpar, weighed down by the stress suffocating everyone.

Listening to Kay, I felt something stir inside me. Even though it wasn’t my business anymore, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for my former teammates—and, to some extent, for Ms. Grace herself.

At the same time, I was busy trying to navigate my new team.

Although I found most of my coworkers less than pleasant, I gave it my all.

Eventually, I managed to pass my probation period successfully.

The person who genuinely celebrated this milestone with me—not out of obligation or a forced sense of camaraderie, but with heartfelt sincerity— was none other than Jira.

*She took me out for a congratulatory dinner.*

..

After finishing our barbecue dinner, Jira and I parted ways. She rode off on her motorcycle, while I opted to take the same old bus back to my condo. The satisfaction from the meal left me feeling a bit lighter—but only for a brief moment.

When I arrived at the condo, I walked into the lobby, exhausted, longing for the soft embrace of my bed. But then, a voice from behind stopped me in my tracks.

“Pim.”

The voice was unsettlingly familiar. I turned around slowly, and there she was—***Ms. Grace.*** I never thought I’d see her again, least of all here. I had no idea how she’d found me or how long she had been waiting.

“Ms. Grace…” I murmured, barely audible.

Before I could fully process the situation, my legs moved instinctively, carrying me away from her without a word. But after only a few steps, she reached out and grabbed my arm.

**“Can we talk, please?”** Her voice was filled with a plea I hadn’t heard before.

**“There’s nothing left to talk about, Ms. Grace,”** I replied without looking at her, forcing my tone to remain cold.

“Please, Pim,” she pressed, her tone firm yet desperate. “If it’s uncomfortable here, let’s go to the coffee shop across the street. I just want to say something… I’m begging you.”

That word***—"begging"—***from her lips made me freeze. I had never heard her say anything like that before. It sent an involuntary tremor through my heart. I tried to remind myself that her words shouldn’t affect me anymore, but the truth was… they still did.

Taking a deep breath, I pushed all my emotions down and replied in a steady voice.

“Just this once.”

I saw her exhale in relief, a faint smile of gratitude appearing on her face. But I didn’t respond. Instead, I turned and walked ahead of her, crossing the street toward the dimly lit coffee shop that awaited us in the quiet of the night.

..

Ms. Grace placed a cup of coffee on the table in front of me without saying a word. She simply slid it toward me, and I glanced at the cup, slightly taken aback.

*It was a lightly sweetened latte—my favorite.*

" You still remember?" I murmured softly, my eyes fixed on the cup.

Her gentle smile appeared, carrying a kind of warmth that was hard to ignore. "It’s something I’ve always remembered."

I wasn’t sure how to feel—whether to appreciate her thoughtfulness or to feel burdened by the fact that she still remembered such small details.

But I didn’t have time to dwell on it.

" What did you want to talk about, Ms. Grace?" I asked, cutting straight to the point, trying to keep my tone as neutral as possible.

She looked up at me, her eyes filled with emotions I couldn’t quite decipher. There was a brief silence before she asked a question I hadn’t anticipated.

" Who did you have barbecue with tonight?"

Her question made me freeze for a moment, my mind blanking out briefly before I could formulate a response.

" How do you even know that?" I asked, my voice laced with both shock and irritation. **"Were you following me?"**

I tried to keep my voice steady, but the disbelief and anger in my tone were unmistakable.

" I'm sorry," she responded immediately, as if realizing her mistake.

" Ms. Grace, you're scaring me," I said bluntly, my tone firm and sharp.

She looked down slightly, her expression betraying a mix of shame and regret. "I’m sorry for what I did. I just… I’ve been trying to find a way

to talk to you, but you’ve given me no chance."

I sighed, attempting to calm the storm brewing inside me.

**" Let me be clear—I don’t like being followed like that. It’s not okay,"** I stated firmly.

**" I understand. I won’t do it again,"** she replied, her voice tinged with genuine remorse.

Gathering myself, I spoke with measured calm. "Is that what you wanted to talk about today?"

" No," she said, shaking her head slightly.

" Then get to the point," I said, crossing my arms and fixing her with a composed but detached gaze. "I don’t have all night."

Ms. Grace met my eyes, and I could see hesitation in hers. It was as though she was summoning every ounce of courage she had. Finally, she pulled a brown envelope out of her bag and placed it on the table in front of me.

" What’s this?" I asked, picking up the envelope with curiosity.

Before I could open it, she spoke, her voice steady yet heavy with meaning.

**" Win and I… we’re divorced now. That’s the divorce decree."**

..

The sound of water from the showerhead echoed off the tiled walls, as if trying to drown out the whirlwind of thoughts racing through my mind. But the streams cascading over my face and body only seemed to clarify everything further. The more I tried to let the water wash away the weight pressing on me, the clearer the truth in my heart became.

I stood under the shower with my eyes closed, letting the water flow over my head and face, as if hoping it could cleanse the confusion clouding my mind.

"What should I do?" I whispered to myself.

The image of Ms. Grace at the coffee shop replayed vividly in my mind, as if it were on an endless loop. She sat across from me, placing a brown envelope on the table. Her face and voice carried a mix of seriousness and tenderness.

. .

*"Win and I… we’re divorced now. That’s the divorce decree."*

*“I want to start over with you, Pim.”*

*. .*

Her words still echoed in my mind. I hadn’t responded then—not because I didn’t have anything to say, but because I didn’t know which words would suffice.

I never wanted her to do this. I didn’t wish for her and Win to end their marriage, even though I had always known they didn’t love each other. It wasn’t something I had asked for or expected. Her decision left me speechless—not out of joy, but out of pain.

I closed my eyes again, revisiting everything that had transpired. A relationship built on secrecy and dishonesty had left deep scars on my heart. Scars that wouldn’t fade, no matter how much time passed. Now, even as she offered a fresh start, it felt like trying to build a house on a fractured foundation.

. .

*“Pim, just give me a chance to start over with you. I promise I won’t hurt you again.”*

*. .*

She had said those words before we parted. I could still see her face and the earnestness in her eyes—so filled with hope and sincerity I’d never seen from her before.

Ms. Grace had asked me to think it over and let her know my decision. But deep down, I knew I didn’t want to keep her waiting. Not because I wanted to end this quickly, but because I knew the truth:

*We couldn’t move forward together.*

This love, however real it may have been, had begun with lies. And no matter how hard she tried, I couldn’t trust her again. A house built on a shaky foundation is doomed to collapse, no matter how beautiful its walls might seem.

And so, under the steady stream of water, I let the tears mix with the droplets on my face, quietly bidding farewell to a love that was never meant to last.

..

**Finally, I decided it was time to say what had been weighing on my heart.**

Three days later, I met Ms. Grace at a small restaurant after work—a place we had once visited when our relationship was still filled with warmth and hope.

As usual, she arrived before I did and chose a seat by the window. The faint glow of the streetlights illuminated her face, which appeared calm, though I knew her mind was likely far from it.

When I sat down, we ordered light dishes, more out of formality than appetite. The conversation began with small talk. She asked about my work at the new company, and I answered politely, keeping my eyes away from hers.

But I knew I couldn’t avoid the inevitable. Taking a deep breath, I looked directly into her eyes.

**“ Ms. Grace,”** I began, my voice trembling slightly. **“I really appreciate everything you’ve done for me, all the effort you’ve made. But after everything that’s happened… the most I can offer you right now is friendship—and the respect I once had for you as my boss.”**

The words came slowly, each one carefully chosen and spoken clearly. I watched her expression change slightly. Her eyes held a flicker of disappointment, one she tried hard to conceal, but I noticed it nonetheless.

For a brief moment, she remained silent before smiling—a smile that seemed to be fighting against her own emotions.

“ It’s okay,” she said softly, her voice tinged with a bittersweet undertone. “At least you don’t hate me.”

Her words hit me like a blow to the chest, but I remained silent, letting her continue.

“ If it’s as friends, then let me treat you to this meal,” she said, her smile attempting to brighten, though I could see the strain behind it.

..

We shared a meal together, the conversation drifting back to light, mundane topics. She was still the Ms. Grace I had known—graceful and captivating. But behind her smiles, I could see cracks forming, ones she tried to hide. I knew my words had left a scar in her heart, just as hers had once left in mine.

When we finished, she walked me to the front of the restaurant.

Before we parted, she extended her hand toward me.

“Thank you, Pim,” she said.

I held her hand briefly before letting go. “Thank you for understanding.”

We exchanged smiles—smiles laden with unspoken emotions. Then, I turned and walked away, leaving this chapter of our lives where it belonged.

*And deep in my heart, I hoped that someday she would find the happiness she truly deserved, even if that happiness wasn’t with me.*

**..**

# Chapter 14: Oceans Between Us

I think of Ms. Grace as a child who falls while running, cries, but still gets back up and keeps running. She really seems like that type of person— persistent, no matter how many times she’s rejected. I’m not sure if it’s because she has a purpose driving her or if she’s just naturally tenacious.

Her idea of **“friendship”** seems to involve seeing each other far more often than usual. She would frequently invite me to do something together every weekend—whether it was eating out, watching movies, taking short trips near Bangkok, or even visiting temples for merit-making.

When she ran out of ideas, she once invited me to see **“Moo Deng”** at the Khao Kheow Open Zoo in Chonburi. Yes, Moo Deng, the pygmy hippopotamus. I remember letting out a soft laugh when she said that, but my answer remained the same—*I declined, as I did almost every other time.*

I couldn’t help but wonder if Ms. Grace ever felt discouraged by the constant refusals. After all, she must have known that my answer would almost always be **“no.”**

But eventually, her persistence paid off. After two months of rejecting her invitations, she changed tactics.

In the third month, she invited me to the **"** **Kaset Fair"** at Kasetsart University in Nakhon Pathom. This time, her reasoning was more compelling.

“Pim,” she said, “this is an event I’ve never been to myself, and you’ll also have a chance to visit your parents who live in the area.”

I admit, her argument struck a chord. She mentioned my parents, whom I hadn’t visited in a while.

“All right,” I finally agreed.

The smile on Ms. Grace’s face at that moment spoke volumes about how happy she was. She didn’t say much more, but her eyes sparkled with joy—like a child who had just received the biggest gift of her life.

*..*

*Saturday morning,*

Ms. Grace picked me up in front of my condo. She was dressed casually in a white shirt and loose jeans, looking for all the world like a Chinese tourist strolling through Icon Siam in the latest trendy outfit.

I stood there for a moment, watching her, before opening the door and getting into the car. The first thing I noticed was a coffee cup sitting in the holder. It was from my favorite café. I turned to look at her, and she offered a small smile.

“I stopped to get it on the way,” she said. “Thought you might want one.”

I didn’t respond, but inside, I could sense how much effort she was putting into making me feel at ease.

As the car rolled out of Bangkok and headed toward Kamphaeng Saen in Nakhon Pathom, Ms. Grace played soft music through the car’s speakers. At first, I wasn’t paying attention, my eyes fixed on the changing scenery outside. The city’s cluttered skyline gradually gave way to fields of green.

Then I glanced at the car’s small console screen and saw the name of the song playing. It **was “Oceans” by Seafret,** the acoustic guitar version —a song I hadn’t heard in years.

*The lyrics flowed out, carried by the strumming of the guitar I had always loved.*

*.*

*.*

*“We hide our emotions*

*Under the surface and tryin' to pretend*

*But it feels like there's oceans between you and me.”*

*. .*

I closed my eyes, letting the song’s words echo in my mind. They captured our relationship with uncanny accuracy. We had both tried to bury our emotions, to act like nothing was wrong.

But the truth was, there had always been an **“ocean”** separating us— vast, deep, and impossible to cross.

Deep down, I couldn’t help but wonder… Did Ms. Grace still harbor hope? Did she believe she could find a bridge between us? A bridge she thought could be built if she just tried hard enough? Was that why she was trying so much, so often?

*But perhaps what she didn’t realize was this:*

*Maybe… I had already burned that bridge to ashes.*

*..*

During the drive, Grace shared stories from her past. Her tone was steady, but some words carried an undercurrent of emotion I couldn’t quite define.

"I’ve never been to the Kaset Fair at Kasetsart University’s Kamphaeng Saen campus," she said casually.

I raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Never?"

She smiled faintly, her eyes fixed on the road ahead. "Never. I was born and raised in Bangkok, and the university I went to was right in the heart of the city. After classes, my friends and I would always head to places like Siam Center or Paragon."

I nodded lightly, listening as her voice shifted slightly, as though she were reminiscing about old memories.

"Back then, I was secretly dating someone," she added with a soft laugh, as if the memory still lingered fresh in her mind.

I turned to her, intrigued. **"Was it a woman?"**

She nodded, her smile revealing a mix of nostalgia and unspoken emotions. **"Yes. My family didn’t know I liked women back then, so I had to keep everything hidden."**

"What was she like?" I asked, though I felt I might be treading into personal territory. My curiosity, however, got the better of me.

Grace hesitated for a moment before replying, her voice warm yet tinged with melancholy. "She loved art. She would often take me to galleries and exhibitions. My college life was more about visiting art spaces than attending events like this."

I paused for a moment, digesting her words. "That sounds like a really fun life."

She gave a faint smile but didn’t respond immediately.

"And you?" she asked eventually, her eyes still on the road. "What was your college life like?"

I thought for a moment before replying plainly, "Pretty ordinary. I went to class, returned to my dorm, did some activities with friends now and then, but mostly, I just went through the motions. Nothing exciting like yours."

She chuckled softly. "Sometimes a simple life can be the happiest."

I didn’t say anything, letting her words hang in the air like the soft music playing in the car. They didn’t need a response, and I didn’t want to disrupt the calm they brought.

"I’m glad you agreed to come with me today," she said after a pause.

I glanced at her curiously. "That big a deal?"

She laughed lightly. "Well, you’ve been turning me down for two months straight."

Her words made me reflect on her persistence—how she had kept trying despite all the rejections. I couldn’t fathom where her patience came from.

"I wanted to see my parents," I replied, shifting my gaze out the window, watching the scenery change as we left the city behind.

She nodded slightly**. "Whatever the reason, I’m grateful you came."**

Her voice was gentle, sincere, and carried a warmth that I couldn’t ignore. Though her words were simple, they were imbued with a meaning that reached deeper than she let on.

..

## “The Kamphaeng Saen Kaset Fair”

The annual event at Kasetsart University is a grand celebration of agriculture, showcasing everything from plants and food to innovative agricultural technologies that could hold anyone’s interest for hours. Initially, I thought coming here would be like revisiting my childhood memories, a nostalgic stroll through familiar grounds.

But what happened was quite the opposite—*Ms. Grace seemed to enjoy the fair far more than anyone else.*

She shopped tirelessly, especially in the ornamental plant section. I watched her carefully select tiny plants—cacti, bonsai, and other decorative greenery—until the trunk of her car was nearly overflowing.

“Do you like plants this much, Ms. Grace?” I couldn’t help but ask as I noticed her eyes light up every time she passed rows of plants.

She looked up from the pot she was inspecting and smiled warmly. “A lot. I think they make a house feel alive and help bring a sense of peace.”

Her response made me pause for a moment. I didn’t say anything but instinctively pulled out my phone to capture a photo of her as she thoughtfully examined a plant. The focused expression on her face, paired with the gentle gleam in her eyes, was so endearing that I couldn’t resist saving it.

Apart from plants, she also bought a variety of traditional Thai snacks —crispy rice crackers, thong ek, sanae jan, ja mongkut—and even unusual fruit juices like nam ma-muang haow ma-now hoh (hog plum and lime juice).

“You actually like hog plum juice? It’s super sour,” I teased, holding back a chuckle.

She took a sip and replied casually, “It’s unique, but it’s good.”

I laughed inwardly. She might find it **“good,”** but to me, it was the quintessential **“drink for the elderly.”**

What I hadn’t anticipated was when Grace, with genuine earnestness, asked, “What do your parents like to eat? I’d love to get something for them as a friend of their daughter.”

Her question caught me off guard for a moment, but I managed to respond, “Dad likes fermented fish, and Mom loves kalamare candy, but only from Khao Yoi in Phetchaburi. She’s really picky about it.”

She nodded immediately and went off to pick out the fish and candy, carefully selecting the best options based on my suggestions.

Throughout the fair, I caught glimpses of a side of Grace I hadn’t seen before. She was gentler and more considerate than I’d given her credit for. Every purchase she made was deliberate, every choice thoughtful. She smiled easily, moved with a relaxed grace that seemed unlike her usual self, and for a moment, it felt like I was seeing a different person entirely.

Perhaps this trip wasn’t just about wandering through stalls, buying snacks, or admiring plants. It was about seeing a version of Ms. Grace that was less complicated, less controlling—a version that felt almost… pure.

And as she carefully examined her final plant of the day, deciding whether it would fit in her already-crowded car, I stood there watching her.

One thought echoed in my mind:

*If we had started with a relationship this straightforward, without pretenses or complications, maybe things could have been different. Feels like there's oceans between you and me.*

*..*

# Chapter 15: Begin Again

My family home wasn’t far from the Kamphaeng Saen Agricultural Fair. When we arrived, I introduced Grace to my parents, explaining that she was a colleague from work and that I had brought her to this famous annual event in our province.

Ms. Grace didn’t come empty-handed. She brought gifts from the fair —local produce and handmade goods. My father was delighted to see someone from Bangkok supporting local farmers. He was so enthusiastic that he went to our backyard and picked bags of guava for her as a token of gratitude.

That evening, I took Ms. Grace and my parents to our family’s favorite restaurant. The atmosphere was filled with laughter, and my father seemed particularly fond of Ms. Grace. The two of them hit it off immediately, finding common ground in almost every topic they discussed.

But the pleasant evening took an unexpected turn when my mother suddenly clutched her stomach in pain during the meal.

I froze, unsure of what to do, but Ms. Grace and my father kept their composure. Ms. Grace quickly offered to drive my mother to the nearest hospital. I sat in the back seat, holding my mother’s hand, trying to comfort both her and myself as Grace navigated the dark roads with calm urgency.

At the hospital, I learned a truth I had never known, a truth I should have been aware of as my parents’ only child.

My mother, who had successfully quit drinking white liquor years ago, had started again in the past two years. At over 60, her body could no longer withstand the toll of alcohol. The reason for her relapse wasn’t social indulgence or friends but stress.

The failing economy, foreign investors buying up local land, and the increasingly unfair competition from industrialized farming had created unbearable pressure for my parents.

I sat in the hospital corridor, my mind churning with everything I had just learned. My heart felt like it was being squeezed. I had been working in Bangkok for ten years, so consumed by my job and my own challenges that I had overlooked the struggles of my family.

My parents had never shared any of this with me. They didn’t want to add to the stress they knew I already carried from work.

*That night, we didn’t return to Bangkok. My mother was admitted to the ICU, and Ms. Grace stayed with me. Her presence gave me a semblance of strength I didn’t realize I needed.*

Financially, our family wasn’t well off. As farmers, we couldn’t afford annual health insurance premiums. My mother was admitted under the government healthcare scheme, which meant being placed in a shared ward.

Ms. Grace firmly insisted on covering the cost to move my mother to a private room. Her voice was resolute, and her intentions were genuine.

“Pim, please let me help. At least let your mother rest in a private room where she’ll be more comfortable.”

I shook my head slowly, speaking as calmly as I could.

“It’s okay, Ms. Grace. The government provides good care. We can manage.”

She opened her mouth to argue again, but I cut her off with a firmer tone.

“I’m not refusing out of pride, Ms. Grace. I just… I can’t accept your help. If I do, I’d feel even guiltier than I already do.”

*She fell silent, her eyes locked on mine as if trying to decipher the turmoil within me.*

*. .*

After a moment of silence, she spoke again.

“ Then how about this, Pim?”

Her voice softened, but it still carried a steady determination. “ Yes?” I replied, unsure of what she was about to say.

“ If you’d prefer for your mother to stay in a private room, I’m more than willing to help. And if you’re worried about feeling guilty over the costs I’d cover, you can simply repay me bit by bit. Would that work for you?”

Her words were simple, yet they tore down the walls I had been trying so hard to build.

I nodded, but the word “okay,” which I struggled to say, caught in my throat. Before I even realized it, tears started streaming down my face.

I quickly raised my hands to wipe them away, but the emotions I had been holding back spilled over, leaving me sobbing softly.

Ms. Grace said nothing. She simply reached out and gently took my hand. Her touch didn’t come with any words, but it radiated a warmth that was oddly comforting.

In that moment, I felt a vulnerability within myself that I had long denied. At the same time, I realized the depth of her sincerity—a sincerity that had never wavered.

Sometimes, help isn’t about money or material things. It’s about the reassurance that we’re not facing difficult times alone.

*And today, Ms. Grace was the one standing by my side when I needed someone the most.*

..

*That night, I realized something I had forgotten for so long.*

I had been a daughter who had distanced herself from her family for far too long. I used to believe that sending money home was the best thing I could do, but I had overlooked the fact that my family didn’t just need money—they needed me. They needed me to be there by their side when things didn’t go their way.

My mother had to stay in the hospital for nearly a week. Her symptoms resembled cirrhosis, and there was a risk of kidney disease, which forced me to take leave from work in Bangkok. I could only manage two days of leave, and for the rest, I had to shuttle back and forth between Nakhon Pathom and Bangkok.

*What I never expected was that Ms. Grace would accompany me every single time.*

On the days I stayed with my mom in Nakhon Pathom, Grace would drive back to Bangkok in the morning for work, then return to Nakhon Pathom in the evening. The following morning, she’d drive back to Bangkok again. This routine continued for an entire week.

I had told her to take a break, that she didn’t need to exhaust herself like this, but she always responded with unwavering determination and a gentle smile.

“I want to be here for you, Pim. At least with me around, we can share the burden.”

Her simple words left me speechless. I could only watch her back as she walked over to help my mom with her things.

Finally, the day I had been waiting for arrived—my mother was discharged from the hospital. I was so overwhelmed with joy that I could barely hold back my tears. Seeing my mom smile again after everything that had happened felt like embracing hope once more.

*In that moment, I realized that this experience had changed me forever.*

I began to think about my life in Bangkok—the life I had poured so much of myself into. I worked tirelessly but had neglected the family that loved me the most. I started questioning whether it was truly worth trading time with them for a future that felt so uncertain.

My mom still needed care, and the family farm still needed hands to help. Even though I was the kind of farmer’s daughter who couldn’t even keep kale alive, it was clear I had to step up.

Thankfully, Grace kept me grounded. She didn’t tell me to abandon everything. Instead, she suggested that I try helping with the farm on weekends. That way, I could maintain my income from my full-time job while learning how to manage the farm alongside my parents.

“Give it a try, Pim,” she said gently. “If you don’t try, you’ll never know if you can do it. Besides, keeping your job will still give you financial stability. It’s better than walking away from it all at once.”

Her words, simple as they were, lit a spark within me.

At first, it was exhausting. The adjustment was harder than I anticipated, but every time I returned to Nakhon Pathom on the weekends, Ms. Grace was there with me.

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**Three months passed.**

I began learning more about farming from my parents— understanding the small yet crucial details of planting, tending the soil, and harvesting.

To be honest, my parents had never wanted me to grow up as a farmer like them. They always said it was too hard and wished for me to work in an office instead. But they probably never realized that working in a Bangkok office wasn’t as easy as they imagined.

Deep down, they had hoped I would become a teacher—a profession considered the most secure by many in rural areas. Yet, when I chose my path, they didn’t oppose it.

As for Ms. Grace, she seemed determined to help me in her own way. Using her marketing expertise, she helped promote my parents’ farm. It turned out we made a great team in this area, likely because marketing had always been our profession.

Today was no different. We were working at Ms. Grace’s house, planning a social media strategy for the farm. We spent almost the entire day brainstorming. Grace had countless ideas, suggesting platforms that fit our target customers and crafting simple yet heartfelt content.

“At first, I thought about hiring someone to help with your online media,” she said casually, “but if you want to do it yourself, I’ll be here to support you.”

Her words made me smile. They weren’t grand or elaborate, but the fact that she chose to stand by me through every step made me feel I wasn’t walking this path alone.

Over the past three months, my relationship with Grace had surprisingly grown stronger. Since my mother’s hospital stay, I’d gradually opened my heart to her. I’d seen a side of her that was genuine and transparent.

She no longer seemed like someone keeping secrets from me. She’d welcomed me into her home freely and prioritized our connection, giving me a sense of stability.

**And Ms. Grace… she decided to ask me for another chance.**

It happened one afternoon when I was sitting in her backyard. She was arranging small plants under the shade of a large tree, the warm atmosphere wrapping us like a gentle embrace.

“Pim, could you hand me that plant?” she asked with a soft smile.

I stood, picked up the small potted plant she’d pointed to, and walked toward her. As I lifted the pot, I noticed a small gift box nestled at the base of the tree.

“What’s this?” I asked, looking at her with curiosity.

She smiled knowingly, as if expecting the question, and said simply,

“Open it.”

I carefully opened the gift box to reveal a delicate, understated necklace and a small, neatly folded note.

Unfolding the paper, I read the handwritten message inside, my heart pounding as I took in the words:

**“Please give me another chance. Pim, will you be my girlfriend?”**

I looked up at her, finding her smiling with hope. She didn’t say anything further, didn’t try to explain or justify her feelings—she simply stood there, waiting for my answer, her eyes holding a vulnerability I’d never seen before.

*It was unbelievably romantic.*

At first, I thought of playfully pretending to be indifferent, to see how she would react if I declined. But the truth was… I couldn’t do it.

Everything she’d done over these past months—the sincerity she’d shown, the way she stood by me during my weakest moments—it was enough to dissolve all the doubt in my heart.

I glanced at the necklace in my hand and, finally, a smile broke across my face.

**“If you truly mean it,”** I said, locking eyes with her, **“then I won’t run away from my feelings anymore.”**

Her smile widened, her relief shining through her eyes. She didn’t say anything else but stepped closer and gently held my hand.

*In that moment, I knew we were starting over—and this time, it would be different.*

*..*

# Chapter 16: My life with Ms. Grace (NC-17)

*My life with Ms. Grace is going well.*

We’re like two orbits perfectly synchronized. From Monday to Friday, we focus on our respective careers. On weekends, I head back home to Nakhon Pathom, and sometimes Ms. Grace joins me. Other times, she returns to her own home.

My parents have no qualms about my relationship with Ms. Grace. They’ve known since my high school days that I prefer women and have always let me choose my own path without pressuring me.

Ms. Grace’s family, however, is the complete opposite. Every time she talks about them, I can sense the tension in her voice and see the strain in her eyes. She once told me how they forced her to marry Win, despite it being obvious that one of them was gay and the other sapphic.

*Because of this, Ms. Grace doesn’t feel ready to introduce me to her parents.*

Recently, I learned that she co-owns a restaurant near a university with a friend—a business she’s been running for years. It’s been thriving, as if everything Ms. Grace touches turns to success.

I think back to the evenings when we’d sit down to dinner together. She would smile naturally, her eyes reflecting a quiet sense of pride but never arrogance.

She’d talk about her restaurant, the challenges of managing it, and the hurdles she faced. Her confidence in her work shone through, but what struck me most wasn’t her achievements.

It was the simplicity and sincerity in her words. She wasn’t speaking to impress or make me feel small. It felt like she was sharing her story to show that everything she had accomplished was driven, in part, by me being in her life.

That realization made me understand something important: even though Ms. Grace seems like someone who can do everything on her own, she chooses to walk this path with me.

I’ll admit, there was a time when I thought our relationship wouldn’t survive. Yet, this chapter of my life has turned out to be one of the best— filled with balance between love, work, and family.

Of course, there are still challenges we’ll have to face together.

*But as long as she keeps holding my hand and we continue moving forward side by side, I’m confident there’s nothing we can’t overcome.*

*..*

*Our sex life... well, it’s still the same. Ms. Grace remains Ms. Grace— fiery and always seeking excitement.*

Our relationship as girlfriends has deepened our trust, allowing us to explore new things together. Especially at her house—a place where I’ve come to know Ms. Grace on a more intimate level.

The marble countertop in her kitchen has become an unusual yet thrilling setting. Like now, as she lifts me onto it with ease, her playful smile igniting a spark in the air. Slowly, she begins to unbutton my shirt, one button at a time, her gaze fixed on me with an intensity that makes my heart race uncontrollably.

“Ms. Grace…”

I whisper her name, trying to form coherent words, but her lips find mine before I can finish.

Her kiss starts tenderly, but it doesn’t take long before it grows deeper, more consuming. My eyes close as I surrender to the moment, letting her touch guide me. Her hands glide over my waist before gently cradling my face. She has this way of making me feel as though time itself has paused, leaving only the two of us in the world.

**“The kitchen again?”** I manage to murmur between breaths as she pulls back just enough to meet my gaze.

**“You didn’t seem to mind last time,”** she replies, her voice soft yet teasing. That sly smile at the corner of her lips tells me she has no intention of stopping anytime soon.

She leans in again, her kiss growing more passionate, more urgent. Her fingers trail from my neck to my shoulders, then slowly lower to my waist, the deliberate pace of her touch sending shivers through me. It feels as though I’m floating in a dream, one I never want to wake from.

“Shouldn’t we lock the door first? What if the delivery guy shows up?” I ask softly, my voice shaky yet amused.

“The delivery guy isn’t coming into the house,” she counters with a mischievous grin. “If he calls, we’ll just tell him to hang the food on the gate.”

Her tone carries a stubborn confidence, and her hands remain on me, tracing paths that make it clear there’s no stopping her now.

I placed my hands on her shoulders, pulling her closer until I could feel the soft rhythm of her breath against my ear.

“Ms. Grace, go lock the door,” I said again, this time with a firmness that made her pause.

She looked at me for a moment, her eyes narrowing slightly as if considering whether to argue, before letting out a quiet sigh. Without a word, she hurried off to lock the door, her footsteps brisk as though afraid I might disappear the moment she turned her back.

“It’s locked now,” she announced as she returned, her voice tinged with playful defiance. “And you’re not interrupting me again.”

With that, her mischievous smile reappeared as she leaned in once more. Her hands found their way to the soft curves of my body, squeezing with deliberate intensity.

I couldn’t help but melt under her touch, the way she kneaded and explored with a confidence that sent shivers racing through me. I liked it. *No, I loved it—the way Ms. Grace never held back, the way her touch claimed me completely.*

“Ms. Grace…”

Her name slipped from my lips, a soft expression of satisfaction. This weekend, I decided to let everything unfold exactly the way Grace wanted.

That day, we lingered in her cozy little kitchen, the cool marble countertop serving as our playful stage. Ms. Grace had a habit I’d long noticed—*she always preferred it when I made the first move to tease her.*

*And I always obliged, without hesitation.*

I don’t think she realized it, but the way her eyes looked at me, filled with unguarded desire, was intoxicating. That gaze of hers wasn’t just alluring—it consumed me. It ignited a fire within, making it nearly impossible to keep myself in check.

..

After our steamy encounter in the kitchen, Ms. Grace and I moved to the front garden to work. The afternoon heat was stifling, but the shade of the large trees provided some relief, making the atmosphere feel more relaxed.

**Then, something unexpected happened.**

The sound of heels clicking against the pavement grew louder until a middle-aged woman in a perfectly tailored outfit came into view. *It was my first time meeting Ms. Grace’s mother,* and judging by her expression, I could tell immediately that she wasn’t someone I could easily win over.

*I watched as Ms. Grace’s face turned pale the moment her mother appeared.*

. .

**“So, this is the woman who made you divorce Win?”** Those were the first words out of her mouth.

The statement dripped with disdain, and her judgment of me was already clear from the moment we locked eyes. I felt rooted to the spot, unsure of what to do or say.

Ms. Grace turned to look at me, her eyes filled with worry and an unspoken apology. She then reached out, gently taking her mother’s arm, and said something in a calm tone before leading her away.

I stayed in the garden, waiting with no idea how their conversation was unfolding. The silence around me only amplified the thoughts racing in my head.

I couldn’t hear what they were saying, but from the glare and tone Grace’s mother had used earlier, it was clear she didn’t approve of me.

Time passed slowly before Grace’s mother finally left the house. Her parting glance at me was sharp and filled with disapproval, as if she were grappling with something she couldn’t bring herself to accept.

When Ms. Grace returned to me, she sat down beside me and began to explain everything.

She told me how her mother had never supported her for liking women. From the moment Ms. Grace’s secret was revealed, her mother had threatened to cut her off entirely unless she ended her relationship with her then-girlfriend.

Over time, her mother’s disapproval only grew stronger, eventually leading to Ms. Grace being forced into a marriage with Win, the son of her mother’s close friend. Both families were fully aware that Win liked men and Ms. Grace liked women, but the marriage happened anyway—for the sake of **“propriety”** in the eyes of the elders.

After sharing her story, Ms. Grace took my hand gently. Her face showed exhaustion, but her voice was steady and resolute.

“I’m sorry for the inconvenience this caused,” she said softly. “But don’t worry.”

I didn’t respond immediately, but deep down, I knew her words weren’t just an attempt to comfort me. They were a promise—a vow that she would protect what we had built together.

..

# Chapter 17 : The Third Hand

*Ms. Grace’s mother wasn’t ready to give up. Dissatisfied with our relationship and failing to persuade Grace, she decided to approach me instead.*

That day, I was at the office as usual, reviewing documents in the quiet of the afternoon. Everything changed when a receptionist came to inform me that someone was there to see me.

I stepped out into the lobby, and for the first time, I saw Grace’s mother in my office. She hadn’t given any prior notice of her visit. Her expression was resolute, with a hint of disapproval that she made no effort to conceal.

We sat down in a small café on the ground floor of the office building. The air between us was heavy with tension. I knew she wasn’t there to extend a friendly greeting.

She began speaking in a firm but pressured tone.

“I came to see you today because there’s something I need to discuss.”

I nodded slightly, trying to remain polite, even though my heart raced with unease.

Ms. Grace’s mother launched into her views on how unsuitable our relationship was. She stressed that **“same-sex love”** wasn’t stable or widely accepted in society.

“You’re already thirty,” she began, her tone even but laced with pressure. “I think you’re old enough to understand these things. I’ve had friends from my all-girls school who dated women back then, but eventually, they all got married to men, had kids, and started families.

Same-sex relationships aren’t widely accepted in society.”

She paused briefly before continuing, her voice growing more serious.

**“They don’t last. It’s easier to break up when there’s no family or children involved. And what about appearances? How do you explain to others, to elders, that your partner is the same gender?”**

I listened to every word, staying silent despite the stark contrast between our beliefs.

I studied her face—a woman who deeply loved her daughter but, perhaps unknowingly, expressed that love in ways that hurt her.

*I didn’t make any promises, nor did I show outright resistance. I chose to remain quiet, listening with as much composure as I could muster.*

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**Family interference often feels like the most formidable obstacle in a relationship.**

It’s no longer just about the two people involved but also about expectations, ties, and responsibilities that weave together in complex ways.

Deep down, I had to admit that I was afraid. Afraid that Grace wouldn’t love me enough to protect what we had. Afraid that her mother would eventually find a way to break us apart, as she had with Grace’s past relationships.

But amidst my fear, I couldn’t help but feel grateful for Grace—her calm, her maturity, and her unwavering stability, more than I had ever expected...

When I returned home that evening, the weight of the encounter bore heavily on my mind. Sitting beside Ms. Grace in the living room, I felt an overwhelming need to share the burden I carried.

I recounted everything—her mother’s words, the pressure she exerted, and the emotions I had suppressed during the entire conversation. I left nothing out, knowing that our relationship couldn’t afford secrets.

“Ms. Grace, I want to build a life and future with you. But if our love brings you and your mother unhappiness, it weighs heavily on my heart,” I confessed, letting all my thoughts flow honestly.

As I spoke, Ms. Grace listened quietly. Her face didn’t show anger or disappointment, but I could see a flicker of sadness in her eyes—not sadness for me, but for the fact that she couldn’t change her mother’s perspective.

I understood how much her mother meant to her. Ms. Grace had told me about her childhood and how her mother had always been her pillar of support—except in one aspect: her love for women.

When I finished speaking, I looked up and met her gaze.

**“I don’t want you to feel like you have to choose between your mother and me. I’ve never wanted that. I just wanted you to know,”** I said sincerely.

Ms. Grace remained silent for a moment, but in that stillness, I could sense the depth of her feelings. She reached out and held my hand firmly— a touch that conveyed more than words ever could.

Leaning back against the sofa, she sighed softly before speaking, her voice tinged with sorrow but resolute.

“Don’t worry, Pim. We’ll have each other, no matter what. My mother may need time—maybe a long time—to understand. But I believe that day will come when she sees what I see in you, how special you are.”

..

*Since that conversation, Ms. Grace has shown me through her actions that she’s committed to keeping both me and her mother in her life.*

Having endured one of the worst moments of her life—***being forced into marriage with Win***—Ms. Grace has learned the hard way that allowing others to dictate her life is something she’ll never let happen again.

She firmly believes that one day, her mother will accept and understand the path she’s chosen, despite the challenges that come with breaking free from traditional norms.

*What I appreciate most about Ms. Grace is her unwavering reassurance that I don’t need to change or prove myself to gain her mother’s acceptance.*

She wants me to remain as I am, confident that if her mother ever opens her heart to the truth, she’ll see that Ms. Grace’s choice brings her happiness.

*I could thank Ms. Grace a million times over.*

She believes in our love and the purity of what we share. She once told me that the people who stand by her are the ones who love her unconditionally—and that’s what truly matters.

Every day, she reminds me that love isn’t about changing for someone else but about embracing who we are and moving forward together.

The road ahead may not be easy, but as long as we hold onto our belief in each other, I know we can overcome anything.

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# Chapter 18 : Finally (Ending)

*Years passed, and I watched the world change for the better. Though they were small steps, to Grace and me, they were monumental.*

Eventually, Grace’s mother came to accept the truth—that we were no different from any other couple, that we weren’t an anomaly compared to the norms society once imposed.

I believe we owe a lot to the changes happening during that time. We owe gratitude to the Girl Love series that told heartfelt and sincere stories about women loving women. These stories weren’t created merely for commercial appeal; they served as echoes of truth, showing the world that love is love, no matter its form.

We also owe thanks to the younger generation who boldly embraced their identities and had the courage to tell the world that there’s nothing wrong with women loving women or men loving men. They demonstrated the power of authenticity, of standing firm for love and sincerity.

I still remember the first time Ms. Grace’s mother spoke about me in a positive light. Her words, though brief, felt like the first flower blooming in the garden of our relationship. It wasn’t just because of what Ms. Grace and I said or did, but because of the gradual shift in the world’s perspective —a broader understanding that helped convey the truth we’d longed for her to see.

**This acceptance wasn’t just a small victory for us; it felt like a doorway opening wide for our love, a bridge connecting us to the family bond we’d always hoped to build.**

It was a triumph not just of love, but of understanding and patience— an affirmation that when hearts are open, even the most steadfast walls can eventually come down.

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*As the years have passed,*

my life has undergone a profound transformation. No longer am I an

office worker caught in the relentless pace of city life. These days, I spend most of my time developing my family’s farm in Nakhon Pathom.

This farm isn’t just a typical agricultural space—it’s a thriving blend of farmland and a lively tourist destination. We grow a variety of fruits, with every crop tended to meticulously, from planting to harvesting to processing.

At the heart of the farm sits a small café that Grace and I designed together. It’s my favorite spot, as well as a beloved corner for many visitors.

The café’s signature menu is built around ingredients sourced from our farm—freshly squeezed juices, cakes adorned with fresh fruit, and baked goods with naturally sweet flavors. Every time I see customers savoring our products and smiling with satisfaction, I feel the deep reward of our hard work and dedication.

From a life once dominated by the chaos and pressures of the city, I’ve now found peace and happiness in being close to nature, building something I’m proud of, and sharing my life with someone I love.

This isn’t a success measured by numbers or titles—it’s a success defined by the joy in every day spent here.

My father remains as strong and active as ever, his daily vigor bringing me constant reassurance. Despite his age, he tends the farm with the same energy as always, seemingly untouched by time.

My mother, though occasionally dealing with health issues that come with age, hasn’t faced the decline I once feared. Every morning, I still see her sitting under the large shade tree on the farm, holding a warm cup of coffee, gazing at the surrounding trees with a gentle smile. Though she now rests more than she works, she remains my greatest source of encouragement.

Her proud gaze whenever I share stories of the farm’s or the café’s little milestones assures me that returning home to nurture the farm and live close to my family was the right decision.

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Ms. Grace, meanwhile, has fully embraced her role as a businesswoman. Managing her restaurant has become her passion, and her dedication has paid off. She recently opened a second branch, which has been warmly received by customers. Most significantly, her mother, once her greatest critic, is now one of her strongest supporters.

I never imagined there would come a day when Ms. Grace’s mother would accept and be a part of our lives, but everything has changed in ways I never thought possible. Not only has she come to terms with our relationship, but she’s also actively involved in helping Ms. Grace’s business thrive.

I remember the proud smile on her mother’s face during the opening of the new restaurant branch. She moved confidently from table to table, greeting customers like an invested owner. She spoke of Grace with admiration and referred to me as Grace’s **“significant other,”** with warmth that felt almost surreal.

Now that the restaurant is well-established, Ms. Grace often spends time with me at our home farm in Nakhon Pathom. She always says that this is where she feels most at peace and true to herself.

The farm we’ve built together has become a place full of life—a fruitful orchard, a cozy café, and even a cactus garden she lovingly created as her personal sanctuary.

I often watch her as she moves through the garden, carefully arranging her beloved plants. Every time she looks up and smiles at me, I’m reminded of how far we’ve come—how our love and our lives have grown into something deeply fulfilling.

Living together in our own unique way has given every day new meaning. Despite the fatigue that comes with work and running a business, we always find strength in each other.

I never thought we’d reach a point where our relationship would be embraced with understanding, both from our families and ourselves. But now, I know that the patience and sincerity we’ve shown one another have made everything possible.

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**As the sun set on yet another ordinary day,**

I found myself engrossed in arranging small pots in a new corner of the garden, preparing a space for customers to enjoy.

The cool evening breeze brushed against me, but the day’s fatigue dulled my awareness of the surrounding serenity.

Then, the sound of light footsteps approached. I looked up to see Grace walking toward me, holding a glass of juice freshly blended from our own produce.

She handed me the glass with the warmest smile. “Take a break, Pim.

Don’t lose track of time working like this,” she said, gently chiding me.

I took the glass from her hand and sat down on a wooden bench in the garden. My eyes followed her as she stood under the day’s last light, her face softly illuminated like a painting come to life.

*In that moment, as I watched her, a thought crossed my mind...*

Our life together may not be perfect. At times, we argue. Sometimes, we need to adjust to one another. But everything we’ve built together—the love, the understanding, the sharing—makes this life more meaningful than anything else.

**And every day, I’m grateful that we’re here, together.**

Throughout my life, I’ve never experienced a partnership as fulfilling as this. Though our beginning wasn’t smooth or romantic like the stories in novels, our relationship, which started as Friends with Benefits (FWB), gradually evolved and grew into a lasting partnership.

Along the way, we’ve faced both joy and sorrow, challenges and beautiful moments. But we’ve held hands and weathered them together.

Looking back, this love story is filled with trials, mistakes, and imperfections. Yet those very flaws became lessons that allowed us to grow. The honesty and effort we’ve put into this relationship have been the foundation that keeps us strong.

I still remember the days when we had to confront the judgments of family. But Grace always held my hand tightly. She never let me feel alone.

Most importantly, I’m thankful for Ms. Grace. Thankful that she’s been both my strength and my partner, never abandoning me no matter what.

She’s the one who has made me believe that true love isn’t about seeking perfection, but about embracing each other’s imperfections and choosing to keep walking forward together.

Everything we’ve been through, whether joyous or challenging, has made us stronger.

And every day, I’m grateful that she’s still here, never once letting go of my hand.

*I hope it will always be this way.*

I hope we’ll keep holding hands every day—through beautiful days and through the storms that test our resilience.

I hope we’ll continue living a simple yet meaningful life, in the garden we’ve built together, nurtured by the love that sustains us until the day we grow old, all the way to life’s final chapter.

***- The End -***

# Chapter 19 : Special EP

*My name is Grace Kanya. I was born in 1988, and I’m now 36 years old. I grew up in an era when the word* ***“sapphic”*** *was unheard of, and even the term* ***“lesbian”*** *was barely recognized. For most Thai people back then, the only terms we knew were* ***“Tomboy”*** *words that carried layers of misunderstanding and confusion.*

When I was 14, I began to notice feelings I couldn’t explain. I had a crush on an older girl at my high school. She was beautiful, gentle, and had a charm that captivated me in ways I had never felt before.

At the time, I didn’t even understand myself. Was I drawn to her beauty, or did I like her in a way one person loves another? The answer was never clear.

I kept everything to myself. I never told anyone because society then wasn’t ready to embrace such differences. To protect myself from questions and suspicious glances, I dated boys, using the relationships as a shield.

It wasn’t until I entered university that I experienced my first true love, a relationship that taught me more about myself. My first girlfriend showed me that love wasn’t confined to the boundaries society imposed. In our relationship, there was no one trying to be the “man” or the “woman.” We were simply two people who loved each other.

But that love didn’t last.

My mother discovered our relationship, and she was furious. That was the beginning of a very difficult chapter in my life. I was forced to break up with her. My mother told me, “This isn’t normal,” and worried about what people would say about our family.

I can still feel the pain from that time. My first love ended not because we wanted it to, but because it wasn’t allowed to exist.

Yet, within that pain, I learned something important. Accepting myself as a woman who loves women wasn’t going to be easy, but it was who I was, and no one could change that.

Years passed after my first love ended, and I didn’t date any women again—not because I didn’t want to love, but because I knew those relationships would always end the same way.

I tried dating men, as my family and society expected, but forcing myself to smile and show affection in ways I didn’t feel was excruciating. I pitied myself for living a life that wasn’t true to who I was.

*Eventually, I allowed myself to drift into the world of one-night stands. It was simple and without commitment. I lived that way until I was 34 years old.*

*Deep down, I think my mother always knew, even if she never said it out loud.*

Around that time, I started a Friends with Benefits (FWB) relationship with a coworker from my old job. We were both team leaders, and we each respected the boundaries of our arrangement. It wasn’t love—it was understanding.

But then she found someone who was ready to love her openly and completely. Someone brave enough to declare, **“I love women,”** without caring how others perceived them.

I smiled and stepped back. Even though it hurt, it was a clear sign that it was time for me to start over.

At that same moment, my mother asked me to marry **“Win,”** the son of her close friend.

It felt like a cruel joke. Both families had always known the truth about their children: *one liked men, and the other liked women. Yet the adults thought marrying us off would solve everything.*

Win and I made a quiet agreement. We wouldn’t have a physical relationship, wouldn’t have children, and would live our lives separately. He had a boyfriend he loved, and I—though I had no one—wasn’t looking for anyone either.

We also agreed on one more thing: **“If the day ever comes when our families accept the truth, we’ll divorce.”**

After the wedding, I changed jobs. That move changed my life.

*At my new workplace, I met her.*

*Pim Pimlapa.*

The moment we met, I knew Pim was interested in me. She was effortlessly charming. She seemed gentle and soft on the outside, but her eyes held a strength that belied her appearance.

I wasn’t wrong—she liked women. And that was what led me to propose an FWB arrangement to her.

At the time, I admit I was selfish. I approached her without fully considering her feelings.

Though my marriage to Win was in name only, on paper, I was still a wife, and he was my husband. We lived in separate homes and lives, a truth our families didn’t know. Because of that, I didn’t think the marriage mattered.

What I failed to consider was Pim’s heart.

She wasn’t someone who could accept a relationship without clarity. She might have seemed agreeable on the surface, but her heart was far stronger than I realized.

When she ended things, I realized just how much I loved her.

The farewell party we held for her was the day my world shattered. I watched her walk out of my life, tears streaming down my face, unable to stop them.

I didn’t know when I started loving her, but I knew for certain that without her, I couldn’t go on.

That was when I found the courage to do something I’d never done before: defy my mother.

*I decided to divorce Win.*

*I told my mother clearly: I was 36 years old. I was old enough to choose my own path. I didn’t want to live a life dictated by others. I wanted real love.*

**Signing those divorce papers felt like a victory.**

For the first time in my life, I felt the freedom of making my own choice. I wasn’t sorry about facing my mother’s disapproval. It was the start of a new life with someone I loved—a chance I refused to let slip away.

When I went back to ask Pim for another chance, I knew there was a possibility she’d say no.

Pim was steadfast and sure of herself. She wouldn’t easily let something back into her life, especially something that had hurt her before.

Even so, I chose to try. I couldn’t give up.

Maybe it was the way she looked at me. Her words were firm, but her eyes held a trace of something—an echo of the love she once had for me.

And I believed that she still loved me.

When Pim gave me another chance, I promised to make the most of

it.

This opportunity was a gift I knew I didn’t deserve. I had hurt her, made her cry, yet she still chose to give me this chance.

*I’m endlessly grateful to Pim for everything. Thank you for opening your heart to me again.*

*If it weren’t for her, I wouldn’t have known what true love really meant, nor would I have the chance to prove myself.*

I made a vow to myself and to her: I would not squander this chance.

I would love her with all my heart and care for her as if she were the most precious thing in my life.

*Because for me, this love isn’t just a new beginning—it’s a lesson that has shown me that to love and be loved is what makes life complete.*

*..*

