

# Chapter : Introduction

**My name is Aiwarin, and she is Mevika.**

**I am Mevika, and she is Aiwarin.**

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They met for the first time as competitors participating in a national-level duty-free mall auction.

That day was the first time they crossed paths.

The media were crowding around their fathers, as well as them, with questions asking if they knew each other. It was then that they introduced themselves in front of the press for the first time.

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**"Hello, Khun Aiwarin. I'm Mevika."**

**"Khun Mevika."**

Aiwarin repeated the name. She felt fine saying it but secretly wanted to know her nickname more.

Simply introducing her names seemed a little too impersonal. As a businesswoman who had met many important guests, Aiwarin knew exactly how to approach her with the image of a good ally, even though they were competitors.

This would highlight her position as a bidder and bring more attention, especially when paired with the other party.

Aiwarin walked towards her gracefully, extending her slender hand toward her.

"Nice to meet you, Khun Mevika."

She looked at her and could feel her gaze waiting for me to reciprocate the handshake. Slowly, she smile just enough to show friendliness before reaching out to shake her hand. **"Nice to meet you too, Khun Aiwarin."**

"Yes," Aiwarin smiled in return.

"Very much."

Neither of them spoke further. Their gazes locked, and as their hands touched for the first time, it felt as if something passed through both of their hands.

Only the two of us felt it and were left to think about it.

After the press conference that day, they coincidentally ran into each other in the restroom.

There's only the two of them.

"Even though we just shook hands,"

Aiwarin's voice broke the silence, making her look at her through the mirror, and Aiwarin returned the gaze in the same way.

"You do realize, don't you, that in the end, we will become great competitors?"

"I know," I replied.

"But that doesn't mean we'll be enemies, right?"

Aiwarin wanted to emphasize her intent, speaking subtly.

"It depends on what happens from here on,"

She answered directly, considering the possibilities in the future.

***What would happen?***

That conversation contained the undeniable truth that they were rivals.

But within that conversation, there was something hidden.

From the first moment they met, there was an invisible pull between them.

Not long after, we both realized that they secretly desired some friendship with each other during certain moments.

Secret moments that were just between the two of them.

Lying on the same bed.

Two lips that kissed passionately pulled away for a brief second.

Aiwarin pushed her shoulder, who was holding the back of her neck, gently away before she pushed her to sit up on the soft bed that Aiwarin had always slept on alone.

This was the first time that it would welcome her most special guest.

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# Chapter 01: Ally or Rival ?

The **Greater** Tower, a 7-story office building surrounded by glass on all sides, is designed in such a way that it hardly needs electricity during the day. The sixth floor, in particular, has a slanted roof design, and the entire top is made of glass.

However, there is a system that makes the glass opaque during the day to prevent sunlight from creating heat inside. The surrounding sides are made of translucent glass, and the morning sunlight that filters in helps provide natural brightness.

The only necessary electrical system is the air conditioning, which keeps the temperature comfortably cool.

It may sound like a large and magnificent office building, as its name means "metropolis," but in reality, it is just a 7-story office building.

Yet, it has everything required for a functional office, including a large meeting room, well-equipped workspaces, as well as a restaurant, a coffee shop, and co-working spaces for people who need to meet or work. These spaces are available for anyone who needs to conduct business or has something to do with the building.

**"Greater"** is not just the name of this 7-story office building; it's also the name of a massive Duty-Free shopping mall that will be built in the future once a contractor is chosen to manage its construction and operations.

This office was built to serve as a hub for important administrative work, to host meetings for potential bidders, to house the future concessionaires, and to hold press conferences related to the auction process, which is happening this morning.

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The sunlight, now nearly 9 a.m., is reflected off the shiny glass, which has been polished to a consistent sparkle since the building opened a month ago. After a month of system tests, the time has come to hold the grand press conference for the Greater Duty-Free concession auction. Representatives from major companies are here to show their interest in joining the auction.

The first and seventh floors are the most used by guests.

The first floor is a luxurious lobby with plenty of space to accommodate many guests, while the seventh floor is a co-working space with a coffee shop by the large glass windows, offering a beautiful view at night when the roof is opened to reveal a clear sky.

This area is open until 8 p.m., allowing guests or workers to enjoy a relaxed atmosphere and a late coffee break, making it the perfect time for a cup of coffee without staying out too late.

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A pair of eyes gazed out at the shimmering light reflected off the tall glass windows while waiting for the coffee that had been ordered. Some of the guests attending the press conference are on the top floor, and office staff also stop by for coffee.

Most guests wait in the lobby, chatting and greeting acquaintances, but for Ayawarin, knowing that the office has a coffee shop on the top floor meant she quickly headed up to get her morning fix.

Immediately, this was her first visit to the office, and she wasn't alone, but she had separated herself to come up here alone. "Dad doesn't need to introduce me that much,"

A young woman's voice could be heard talking on the phone as she stopped to look at the coffee menu while continuing her conversation.

"Even if someone does that, presenting it on behalf of the company is enough, right? What's the point of all the buzz? In the end, they'll judge based on the company's qualifications and capital, won't they? I understand. That person has much more experience than me. She's talented, famous, well-known, and very beautiful too. I should be competing with-"

She stopped mid-sentence when she noticed someone's gaze on her. She met the stare and stopped communicating with the person on the phone.

Aiwarin stood and looked at the woman who had stopped talking. It was true that she was staring at her first, but why was she staring back like that?

It seemed like a coincidence, but the woman was striking with her eyecatching appearance and fashionable office attire that made her stand out.

The gaze made Aiwarin instinctively smile, hoping it would make the other person feel better. When the woman saw the smile, she quickly turned her face away and quickly answered the person on the line.

"Oh, no, it's nothing. I was just about to order coffee from the café upstairs. Is Dad going to be here soon? I'll go down and meet you."

"Iced espresso, right?"

The barista said, placing the coffee cup on the counter where drinks were picked up. Aiwarin turned her attention to her coffee, pulling her gaze away from the woman who was still on the phone.

"Thank you so much,"

Aiwarin said to the barista. She picked up the coffee cup, wrapped in a light brown tissue paper, and turned back to the woman, offering another smile before walking away.

Mevika glanced back without care. The smile made her feel strange, but she chose to remain aloof, not smiling in return and not caring whether it made anyone feel awkward.

However, once Aiwarin walked away, Mevika couldn't help but glance at the tall figure, about 170 cm, dressed in a brown suit that matched the color of the coffee she ordered.

The appearance was striking, and Mevika wasn't sure which part of her-her stunning figure or her face-was more admired, as both were known to be captivating.

The reason Mevika thought that way was because...

**She knew her well.**

Of course, she knew her. Aiwarin was a well-known figure in the business world. She was the heiress of a famous national hotel chain. Her father was a businessman, owning hotels known for luxurious management that attracted tourists and wealthy clients seeking top-tier beauty and wellness services. Some of her father's hotels even included bars in the hotel chain.

It could be said that she was the daughter of a national tycoon, while Mevika herself was also from a wealthy family, though not as well known. Mevika had recently completed her master's degree and had been working for a year in her father's department store business.

She mostly worked behind the scenes, without making much of an appearance in the business media, aside from her social circles where she was known.

In comparison, her fame couldn't match the other woman's at all. Aiwarin had been helping her father manage the hotel business for seven years, even before she had graduated from university. There was a time when she, studied for a master's degree for two years.

However, Aiwarin had been learning to manage the family business seriously since her second year of university, which gave her a much longer period to gather practical experience.

In the three years since her return to Thailand, her family pushed her to be in the media and expand her social circle, presenting her as a newgeneration businesswoman with expertise. This quickly made her famous, not just for her skills, but also for the elegant and radiant image she projected.

That's why she looked back at Aiwarin like that.

It was the first time she had seen Aiwarin in person, standing right in front of her, within clear eye contact. Not only did she get to see her up close, but Aiwarin also smiled at her. Yet, she didn't respond with any expression, other than to stare back indifferently.

There was no need to be friendly. She knew it wasn't possible. Soon enough, the two of them would probably end up as business rivals.

"Hello, what would you like to order?"

The barista, noticing she had been standing for a while, greeted her.

"Oh,"

Mevika turned to smile at the barista, her eyes moving to the menu on the wall. But her eyes settled on a familiar choice that she knew tasted great. "I'll have an iced cappuccino, please."

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Applause erupted across the first-floor space, which was being used for the grand opening of Greater Tower today. The press conference would be held in the large hall inside at 10 a.m.

Outside, a wide canopy made of mirrored glass provided shade for the media and guests standing around listening to the press conference. The glass above reflected the movement of the guests below, creating a complex visual effect.

She had intended to escape the bustle but felt uncomfortable looking up at the cluster of people reflected on the ceiling's glass.

Mevika fanned her neck with her hand to cool off from the heat of the morning sun, then decided to walk into the air-conditioned lobby. But her father, who was standing nearby, called out to her.

"Me, where are you going? Wait for the group photo."

"Do I have to?"

Mevika hesitated, noticing her father's silent but commanding gaze, signaling for her to comply without further discussion, especially with so many important guests around. At that moment, the president of the event had finished his speech, so she reluctantly stepped forward and stood quietly until the formal opening ceremony was over.

The prominent guests who had expressed interest in the auction were then invited to join for the group photo.

Mevika stepped to stand beside her father. She was almost positioned directly in the center next to the president of the ceremony, but her father deliberately made sure she appeared prominently in the photograph.

The arrangement of standing positions for the photo caused some minor crowding. On her left, she was brushing against someone she hadn't even looked at because her gaze was fixed on the many cameras surrounding them.

The familiar scent of perfume reached her nose, and she realized she hadn't worn that particular fragrance today. It must belong to the person beside her. That made her turn to see who she was standing next to.

At that moment, the person standing at the far right kept inching closer, and her father had to push her toward the person beside her. In the same instant, she turned to face him.

"What?"

The familiar woman's face showed surprise before she cracked a small smile, the kind of smile that came naturally to someone accustomed to using charm.

Mevika looked at her, and the close proximity from the shoulder brushing made their faces nearly touch. Still, it didn't compare to the intensity of the gaze exchanged between them.

No words were spoken as they stood there during the ceremony, which had to keep moving quickly. Then, the loud shout from the photographer broke their eye contact.

The sound of rapid shutter clicks filled the air, likely capturing thousands of photos. Each camera recorded shots of the same scene, and in every shot, two women stood close together.

That marked the beginning of their fates, which would soon become more visible to the media from this moment on.

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The press conference in the hall concluded with the announcement of the date for the official release of the selection documents for the upcoming auction.

The attention then shifted to the businesspeople, the representatives of major companies, and the media who surrounded them to conduct interviews about their decisions to participate in the auction.

One of them was **Athiwit**, the owner of a large national hotel business, who had brought his daughter along for the event-an unusual sight. Even though they worked in the same industry, they often attended different events, meeting only for business-related matters or meetings.

Seeing them together like this attracted a lot of attention.

"We'll definitely participate in the auction. We believe we have the qualifications to do so,"

Athiwit was answering a reporter's question while surrounded by a crowd of journalists holding microphones and cameras.

Other reporters were busy gathering statements from other businesspeople, while some focused on smaller businesses that might not be as well-known as some of the major figures present.

"For this project, I may not be taking the lead role, but I'll have my daughter take charge of the auction on my behalf," he added.

"And what made you decide to have Miss Aiwarin take the lead on this?"

Asked a young reporter.

"It's a matter of trust. My daughter is smart and capable. She's a new generation that makes great decisions. Many of the services in our hotel today are her work. I believe she has the potential to take this forward."

"Our business qualifications should definitely be among the top contenders for this auction," Athiwit continued.

"And how confident are you about this?" a female reporter asked.

"Well, we're quite hopeful," Athiwit replied.

"But for now, I can't say much until we get more detailed clarification on the auction process. Once our company, Orianna, is officially listed as a participant, feel free to ask us again."

"Does Miss Aiwarin have anything to say about being chosen by her father for this role?"

Another reporter asked.

Ayawarin smiled and replied,

"It's an important responsibility, one I take seriously. It's a job that requires high accountability to ensure that we present our qualifications and manage our funding appropriately. I'll keep my answer brief for now, as the decision-making process still needs to follow the proper steps."

Before anyone could ask more, a voice called out over the crowd.

"Mr. **Nuttakorn**, over here, please!"

The reporters turned toward the new voice, following the commotion as another important businessman arrived. Athiwit and Aiwarin glanced toward the sound, curious to see who it was.

"Ah, Mr. Nuttakorn,"

Athiwit greeted, smiling and acknowledging the well-known businessman.

"Hello, Mr. Athiwit,"

Nuttakorn responded, returning the greeting. Despite being in different business sectors, the two were well-acquainted, as the business world often had overlapping circles.

They weren't close friends but always greeted each other politely.

"I brought my daughter with me today,"

Nuttakorn said, glancing at the group of reporters.

"She'll be overseeing the auction project for us."

A reporter quickly followed up,

"I've heard that your daughter completed her master's degree abroad and joined Superia. But we've never seen her in the media. Could you introduce her to everyone?"

"Sure,"

Nuttakorn said, his eyes scanning the crowd of reporters. Half of them had already moved on to interview other people, while the rest were just finishing up with Athiwit and Aiwarin. As the reporters cleared a path, Nuttakorn walked toward them, and the space naturally opened up for Aiwarin and Athiwit to face him.

"Oh, Mr. Nuttakorn! I didn't expect to see you here,"

Athiwit said, greeting him warmly.

"Hello, Mr. Athiwit. You brought your daughter today?" Nuttakorn asked.

"She's leading this project for my company,"

Athiwit replied, smiling at Aiwarin.

"Hello,"

Aiwarin greeted politely, bowing her head to Nuttakorn. "She's leading the project? That sounds very interesting,"

Nuttakorn said, his expression showing clear interest.

"Interesting that both Mr. Athiwit and Mr. Nuttakorn are sending their daughters to oversee this project,"

One of the reporters remarked.

"What did you say?"

Athiwit asked with particular interest.

"Mr. Nuttakorn is having your daughter take the lead?"

"Yes,"

Nuttakorn replied, realizing he should give a clearer answer. Initially, he had planned for his daughter to manage the project alongside him, as he didn't fully trust her to handle it alone. But now, given the situation, he was rethinking his approach.

This duty-free concession auction would be closely watched by the public nationwide, who would have the right to voice their opinions about the qualifications of the participants. Nuttakorn realized he needed to play the media game wisely.

"I've asked my daughter to take charge of managing the auction process, and I'll serve as a consultant as needed," Nuttakorn clarified.

"Congratulations," Athiwit smiled.

"I'm also having my daughter take on a similar role. For delicate matters like this, women are often better suited. I'm sure we share the same thinking. My daughter fully understands the service business, which is why I entrusted her with this. Your daughter, on the other hand, may not have as much experience yet, but you know her capabilities better than anyone." "Of course," Nuttakorn said, nodding.

"Although she's still learning, my daughter has already helped me manage and improve areas of our business. She understands modern trends and the shopping world very well. Just last year, with her help, Superia opened another large branch and two smaller markets, which was a big success. That's why I'm confident in entrusting this project to her."

A smile appeared on Athiwit's face. Though the two men had never had any major issues with each other, it was clear that, with the auction for the dutyfree franchise now beginning, they would soon become competitors.

From this moment on, their businesses would be in direct competition for the first time, despite always operating in different sectors.

This moment was akin to a small psychological battle, as they complimented each other while subtly questioning one another, and also reinforcing their own positions.

It was evident that they now saw each other as competitors, and the upcoming competition in the duty-free space would be wide open for any company that met the qualifications.

Both men understood the game being played. In the business world, anyone who couldn't read between the lines and pick up on these cues wouldn't make it far.

"Dad?"

The voice interrupted the conversation, drawing attention toward the new arrival. Mewika appeared from behind Nuttakorn and stepped forward.

"Were you looking for me? I was just speaking with Khun Phumi,"

She added before pausing, noticing Athiwit and Aiwarin standing nearby. She stopped, realizing there might be something inappropriate about interrupting at this moment.

"Ah, perfect timing,"

Nuttakorn said, guiding his daughter slightly forward.

"This is my daughter," he introduced her,

"She's been behind much of the growth in Superia's management over the past year. Before this, she worked in..."

"She's been with me for two years and went to study abroad, coming back last year. After that, she moved to help manage the areas she specializes in."

"Hello,"

Mevika waved at the reporters who were crowding around. Her sudden introduction to the media wasn't as exciting as seeing Atthawit with his famous daughter standing face to face like two large tigers clashing, with a smaller tiger standing beside them.

But when she met Aiwarin, she probably wouldn't dare to call herself a strong tigress. Perhaps she was a tigress with less experience, but still fierce.

"Have you two met before?"

A young reporter looked between Aiwarin and Mevika.

"Do you mean me and your daughter, Mr. Nattakorn?" Aiwarin asked.

"If so, it's nice to meet you. I'd like to get to know you too."

She gave Mevika a friendly glance and smile, but no one could sense the slight feeling that seemed to only the one receiving attention could feel.

"Hello, Khun Aiwarin,"

Mevika knew enough to act appropriately. She didn't hesitate to ask or double-check because she already knew. Especially after Aiwarin responded like that, she immediately replied,

"I'm Mevika."

"Khun Mevika,"

Aiwarin repeated the name. She liked it but secretly wanted to know her nickname more. Now, she guessed that her nickname might be "Me," though she could have a different one.

There could be hundreds, thousands of cute nicknames that would suit such a beautiful woman, but she was already 90% confident it was "**Me**," with 10% left for her own potential mistake.

Simply introducing names felt a bit unnecessary. A businesswoman who had met so many important guests, like Aiwarin, knew well that she should approach Mevika with the image of a good ally, even if they were competitors.

This was something that would boost her visibility as a representative in the auction, alongside the other party.

Aiwarin walked gracefully toward Mevika before extending her slender hand for a handshake.

"Nice to meet you, Khun Mevika."

Mevika looked at her face, reading the gaze that was waiting for her to extend her hand in response. She slowly smiled slightly, enough to show friendliness, and reached out to shake her hand.

"Nice to meet you as well, Khun Aiwarin."

"Yes," Aiwarin smiled back.

No one said anything else. The two gazes locked as their soft hands touched for the first time. It was as if a certain reaction ran through both hands. Only the two of them felt it and were thinking about it.

The relationship of being both allies and competitors at this moment was being observed by the media, who were witnessing the introduction of the representatives from both major companies. This image would soon be shared online in just a few minutes.

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# Chapter 02: Rivals, But Not Enemies

The bathroom door opened after the person finishing their business. The sound of high heels tapping on the polished marble floor could be heard, a material that doesn’t make surfaces slippery.

Water flowed from the golden faucet. When she reached in, an automatic soap dispenser was attached under the mirror, directly above the rectangular marble sink, making it convenient to use. Tissue paper was also placed under every mirror.

Mevika cleaned her hands and grabbed a tissue to dry them. As she was inspecting her face to see if she needed to touch up her makeup, she heard the bathroom door open and the sound of high heels stepping out from the inside.

She could see someone through the mirror, which made her pause as she pulled out a lipstick from her bag.

"Oh, it's you," Aiwarin greeted.

"We keep running into each other. It seems like today we're meeting quite often,"

She smiled and extended her hand to wash in the sink next to Mevika.

"Are you going to reapply your lipstick?"

Her gaze shifted to see the lipstick Mevika had just taken out and she commented,

"You look beautiful already. The soft color of your lips right now is just perfect. It matches well with the light-colored outfit you're wearing. If you wearing something black or darker, you could make your lips a bit more defined. It would probably suit you well." "Do you mean, like making my lips pale like this?"

Mevika questioned, arching an eyebrow.

"Hmm,"

Aiwarin looked at her lips, studying them for about five seconds before smiling.

"It's not bad at all. The shade is just right."

Mevika quickly pressed her lips together when she felt Aiwarin's gaze on them.

**It made her heart race in a strange way.**

She hadn’t expected Aiwarin to have this kind of charm in real life. She looked great in photos and videos on the media, but in person, she radiated even more.

Competing in an auction against someone like Aiwarin could make a newcomer like her give up, but that didn’t mean she would.

"If you’re going to touch up, would you like me to apply it for you? Then you’ll know how it look."

"No need,"

Mevika quickly declined. It wasn’t unusual for women to help each other with makeup, but with Aiwarin, whom she had just met, and barely she knew. Even though she has a public figure, Mevika didn’t think she would dare to get too close with her.

If they ended up becoming rivals, it would be hard to form a purely genuine relationship between them. If it wasn’t for the two of them, it would likely be the adults around them who would always plan ways to win each other. ya

It wasn’t just that... but the way Aiwarin was looking at her lips made her feel tense. If she had to let her apply lipstick, she wouldn’t know how to behave.

She knew well that besides being a capable woman, Aiwarin had great taste in fashion and makeup as well. She had done interviews with questions ranging from business to beauty and self-care, and she had appeared on several beauty magazine covers.

With her fascinating image, she could not exactly be called an entertainer, but she was a well-known businesswoman who had graced special magazine covers.

In the business world, they might not know her well, but if someone follows the business world, they would be quite familiar with her.

"No need?"

Aiwarin chuckled softly.

"Alright, then, feel free to do as you like."

After saying that, she turned to finish washing her hands and gently wiped them with a tissue.

Mevika watched her actions through the mirror. Aiwarin carried herself with the grace of a very refined woman, yet there was a certain charm that was hard to ignore.

"Even though we just shook hands earlier..."

Aiwarin's voice spoke again, making Mevika look at her through the mirror, where Aiwarin was also gazing at her in return.

"You know, **in the end, we’ll just become competitors, don’t you think**?" "Yes, I know," Mevika replied.

"But that doesn’t mean we’ll be enemies, right?"

**"It depends on what happens after this,"**

Mevika answered directly, considering the possibilities of the future.

"So, how do you want it to be? Can we still be friendly even if we have to compete in business?"

Aiwarin asked, testing the waters.

"Do you want it to be that way? Someone with your experience should know it’s not that easy. Every step doesn’t just depend on the two of us. We have our teams,"

Mevika said. The conversation through the mirror was starting to feel uncomfortable, so she turned to speak directly to Aiwarin instead.

"When you say '*team*,' are you referring to your father?"

"What?"

"Like the person you were talking to on the phone earlier."

Aiwarin turned to face Mevika and crossed her arms.

"It seems like you don’t want to compete with me."

"What are you talking about? We have to compete, that’s inevitable. And as for the phone call—"

"You mentioned about someone who have more experience, who is skilled, famous...and beautiful. It sounded like you were refuse to compete with that person,"

Aiwarin continued.

"What is this?"

What started as a friendly conversation, along with admiration for the other person’s image, suddenly made Mevika feel angry.

"Did you eavesdrop on my phone call?"

"I didn’t eavesdrop. I was standing right there, and you came over to talk. If you thought it was a business secret, you should’ve been more careful. I’m just saying this out of goodwill. It’s lucky that I was the one who overheard it, so no worries. Right now, I’m just curious who you were talking about."

Aiwarin smirked, her gaze sharp.

"So, who was that person?"

"That’s rude,"

Mevika quickly closed her bag and prepared to walk away. She wondered why no other women had entered the restroom. She knew that the female VIP guests at the event were quite few compared to the men, with a ratio of one to four, but there should have been someone else. She was irritated and that led to her asking the question.

"Hey..."

Aiwarin stopped her by stepping in front of her, just a half step, but because the other person moved quickly at that moment, they collided head-on.

Aiwarin staggered, hitting the lower edge, while the person who was bumped into also stumbled forward, quickly using both hands to brace themselves against the edge of the sink.

Now, both of them were in a position where one was standing over the other.

The two of them paused and stared at each other. Their bodies collided as they both lost balance. They were now so close that their faces were only inches apart, making them inadvertently gaze at each other. Realizing what was happening, the one who had stopped quickly spoke.

"If you're talking about someone else, I wouldn't want to eavesdrop, but unfortunately, I overheard,"

Aiwarin smiled.

"If you're talking about someone beautiful and talented, that person must be a woman. But I want to say that if I were that woman, I would be glad that you didn't want to be my competitor, but we have to do it because it's business."

"Right now, I want to compete with you, Khun Aiwarin," Mevika said, glaring.

**"Are you admitting that you're talking about me?"**

Aiwarin smiled and satisfied.

"And if I say I don't want to compete with you, what then?"

"We have to compete,"

Mevika insisted firmly because it was the truth. The auction was a competition, and her father had set the goal for her to take on this role and compete against specific people.

She admitted to herself that the person she was talking about on the phone with her father was indeed Aiwarin. That was one reason she hesitated when she found Aiwarin standing there waiting for coffee.

"Alright then. I'll compete in the auction with you, but not in anything else,"

Aiwarin said with a sly smile. But she was sure that she was sincere in every word she said.

A silence fell between them, making them both gaze at each other again. In the new restroom on the fourth floor, near the hall where people were starting to leave after the press conference, there were fewer people using the restroom.

Perhaps it was because both of them had been surrounded by reporters and chatting with guests they knew or had just met. By the time they managed to separate, there were only a few people left at the event.

Mevika could clearly smell Aiwarin's perfume. It was the same scent she used, though she hadn’t worn it today. The scent calmed her down, and it seemed like it was a charm, making her fall for it, especially since she loved this particular fragrance. But now, it was coming from someone else.

Aiwarin still stood with one foot against the lower edge as if she were being held in place by the person in front of her. She diverted her gaze from Mevika's eyes to study her beautiful face.

The shimmering eyeshadow enhanced the glow of her face, making her even more mesmerizing. There was something about this woman that drew her in. That was probably why she didn’t want to be her competitor.

But... well, if they really did become competitors, it would be quite exciting.

For Mevika, being this close to Aiwarin's face made her heart race, but she held her gaze steady. Aiwarin was too beautiful—her elegant nose made her want to speak up, but she didn’t know what to say.

Her lips were complimented, with beautiful eyes and eyebrows drawn like a work of art. Her jawline complemented the sharpness of her chin, with proportions that were just right. The nude lipstick matched perfectly with the coffee-colored suit she was wearing today.

"Can you step back now?"

Mevika suddenly realized that they had been standing in that position for quite a while, so it was time to cut the conversation short and leave. They had already been in the restroom for a long time. If her father hadn't gone back to work, he probably would have called for her by now.

"You—"

Before she could continue, a conversation from the restroom entrance made both of them quickly step apart. Aiwarin quickly glanced at the mirror, while Mevika, who was holding a small bag and ready to leave, walked out, just as two women entered.

She walked out naturally, trying not to appear out of place. She felt like she was being watched, probably because she had just introduced herself to the press not long ago. If they happened to encounter Aiwarin, who had just shaken hands with her in front of the media, there would be nothing to worry about.

If they acted like nothing happened, no one would have anything to say about it.

Aiwarin acted normal, her beautiful face reflected in the mirror. She glanced back as the two women appeared in the mirror’s reflection. They looked at her, and she smiled at them before they separated and entered different stalls.

She behaved normally as if nothing unusual had occurred—just a woman coming to use the restroom.

But in her mind, she was being troubled by thoughts of someone.

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The medium-sized handbag she had switched to that morning was placed on the table, and she dropped herself into a chair in a restaurant, clearly upset. Mevika crossed her arms, frowning as she stared at the person sitting across from her, who had arrived nearly half an hour early for their meeting.

"I told you not to meet me again,"

Mevika said, frustrated.

"But I wanted to see you. Are you really going to just leave like this? We've come this far,"

Gawin exclaimed.

"Come this far? We haven't gone anywhere. We agreed not to label anything, just talking. If it's right, we'll date; if not, we'll part ways. You agreed to that, and now, since it's not working out, we just need to separate."

"But we've been talking for almost a year."

"Because you kept pushing for it. I told you months ago that we wouldn't continue, but you insisted. Now, I don't have time for you to hold me back like before. We've never been a couple, and we're still not. So, please respect my decision, because this is how we agreed from the start, and you have to accept it."

"But I like you. You don't like me, but I've already thanked you. Don't I have the right to choose?"

"We both have the right to choose, but if the other person doesn’t feel the same way, it’s better to end things. You can’t force anyone."

"Is it because you're about to get famous? Is that why? I see your picture all over the business media—introducing the daughter of Nuttakorn, the owner of the famous department store."

"That’s nonsense,"

Mevika shook her head.

"I rejected you long ago. I thought you wouldn’t bother me anymore, but it’s actually you who suddenly wanted to meet again after seeing me on the news."

"Do you think I’m trying to ride on your fame?"

"I didn’t say that, but if you don’t stop buying gifts, you might become that kind of person."

"We can still move forward. Let’s try again."

"No,"

Mevika stood up and grabbed her bag. She didn’t have much time to meet him because she had many responsibilities to take care of, especially with the upcoming concession bidding.

"I’m asking you to stop getting involved with me. Otherwise, I’ll consider you stalking me." "What? Stalking?"

Gawin looked surprised.

"Spend your time on something productive. Stop wasting your time chasing women like this. It's better you are wasting time looking for women who fit with you. You’re not a bad person, just someone who talks nonsense. If you start thinking reasonably, you’ll find someone who matches you. Goodbye."

"Okay."

"I hope we don’t meet again. I want my space back because I also deserve to find the right person for me."

She slung her bag over her arm and left without lingering, avoiding any chance of being held back.

Mevika sighed deeply as she walked out of the restaurant.

It wasn’t the first time she had sighed after ending this matter.

But it was because it never truly ended that she kept sighing like this.

She wasn’t sure if things would get better or if the same problems would keep coming back, but she secretly hoped it would finally be over. She had too many responsibilities to deal with rather than wasting time on the same old problems.

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The figure in a chiffon blouse and black pants stood in front of a large mirror, looking out at the street below, which appeared as a thin line from a distance.

The fresh air of the morning was clouded by the reason she had been called to meet here. The owner of the room had a meeting with an important guest in the VIP breakfast room, and after sending the guest away, the owner had asked her to wait in the office.

This made her a little annoyed because she didn’t expect to spend so much time on this business.

This room is the private office of Athiwit, which is only used when he comes to work and manage the hotels in the chain. The hotel is Orianna First, the first hotel in the Orianna chain, which has now expanded into various branches, each with a different name for easier identification.

The main office is located here. The hotel started as a small business in an old alley, growing into a medium-sized hotel during his father’s time. Then, under the management of Athiwit, it became a much larger hotel with several branches.

His daughter, Aiwarin, is set to take over the business, and her younger brother is studying for a master's degree abroad. He will finish this year and return to Thailand soon.

Aiwarin's situation is similar. After finishing her bachelor's degree, her family sends the children abroad to study for a master’s degree, and then they return to work and manage the hotel business. No one objects to this plan because both parents have a deep passion for the hotel business.

However, there are some things that her father does that annoy her and have led her to feel frustrated, always looking for a way to escape.

"You've arrived, so why don't you sit down and wait properly?"

Athiwit immediately greeted his daughter as she opened the door.

"Because I have to rush back to work, I don’t want to wait for you to tell me what I need to do. I’m only here because you asked,"

Aiwarin replied.

"Well, you already know why I called you."

"Who else do you want me to meet? I’ve told you I’m not interested. Right now, I’m focused on my work. I’ve been working hard. I don’t need to be forced into anything else,"

Aiwarin said, irritated.

"Keep working, but you should also care about having a partner and a family. I’m not forcing you to marry anyone right now, but getting to know the right person now will give you time to learn about each other. In the end, you can date for a few years and marry at thirty, but you have to start meeting someone. I see you working all the time, so I’m just helping you by introducing someone for you to choose from."

"What era are we in, Dad?"

Aiwarin said in a bored tone.

"Can you stop trying to arrange things like this? I should be able to choose for myself who I want to meet and when. Why can't that just be my decision?"

"This is not an arranged marriage. I’m not forcing you into a match. I’m just giving you the opportunity to choose."

"I haven’t found anyone I like yet. There are people who seem good, but they’re still not the right one. So, please stop trying to set me up with someone. I’m begging you. I want to focus on my work. I’ve always been committed to the hotel, and I love Orianna as much as you do. I just need freedom in other matters."

"If you don’t want me to set you up, then find someone yourself and introduce them to me. If that’s what you want, I’ll stop making introductions."

"I will do that, as long as you stop rushing me. Let destiny lead the way. I have a social life and meet people all the time. If it’s meant to be, it will happen. I’m only 27. I still have plenty of time to meet the right person. Don’t worry, I’m not avoiding love. I just haven’t found the right person yet."

"I don't think you're running away, but since college until now, I've never seen you date anyone. It makes your mom and me worry that you might be so focused on work that you don't care about anyone else. It would be nice if you were interested in someone. But this time, I’ve already set up a meeting. Just go and meet them first, and see if they're better than the people you've met before."

"I’ve already been set up,"

Aiwarin sighed.

"Either way, I still have to go."

In the end, her stubborn plan to argue about it was in vain. Since he had made the arrangement without giving her a chance to agree or decline, she had no choice but to follow her father's forced appointment.

Aiwarin sighed loudly, not caring about her father seeing her resistance.

In the end, she couldn’t escape from this matter.

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# Chapter 03: A VIP Hideaway

"That guy... is he still trying to win you over?"

Nattarinee, Mevika’s close friend, asked as she twirled spaghetti on her fork.

Today, Mevika had arranged to meet her best friend for lunch since she happened to be working near Nattarinee’s office. With about an hour for their lunch break, it was the perfect chance to catch up and vent about the problems she was dealing with.

"Yeah, he's still trying,"

Mevika sighed, poking at the risotto on her plate with a bored expression, even though the food was delicious.

"I'm so tired of this. How do I escape?"

"Well, it's not wrong that you let him get close in the first place. When people are looking for a partner, they need time to get to know each other. I think you were clear with him—you gave him space, you met at a reasonable pace. But if he started taking things too seriously, that’s not something you can control."

"Exactly. I couldn’t stop him from having feelings, which is why I set the boundaries early on. Within the first three months, I was already reduced seeing him. Then I told him straight up that it wasn’t going to work because it just didn’t feel right. We agreed on that, and he seemed to accept it. I don’t think I did anything wrong."

"You didn’t do anything wrong at all,"

Nattarinee agreed.

"You made it clear when you realized it wasn’t working. He has no right to keep holding on."

"I could’ve cut it off after a month, but that would’ve been too harsh, like I didn’t give him enough of a chance. So I think I handled it fairly—not too fast, not too drawn out. He should be sticking to what we agreed on."

"This one seems like the most difficult case,"

Nattarinee said, recalling how, before leaving to study abroad, Mevika had also been talking to someone for about six months. When things didn’t progress, they had simply gone their separate ways as agreed.

"You make it sound like I’ve dated a bunch of people,"

Mevika scoffed.

"It’s just two. And I never even officially dated either of them."

"So you’re not planning to take anyone seriously? If not this guy, when am I ever going to see my friend in a real relationship?"

"I don’t know,"

Mevika said, shaking her head lazily.

"It’s hard to explain. The relationships never felt exciting. I don’t know how to turn them into real love. In the end, I just realized there’s no rush. I might as well focus on my work for now."

"Well, at least you’re lucky your family isn’t pressuring you about relationships too much,"

Nattarinee laughed.

"They’re way too protective of their daughter!"

"That's one reason why, if I'm going to be in a serious relationship, I have to make sure it's with someone I'm ready to introduce to my family and get their approval. The people I’ve been talking to—they don’t know about them yet. My family seems pretty comfortable with the fact that I’m still single. *Sigh*… but I guess that’s better than being forced into an arranged marriage, right?"

"Arranged marriages? Do those still exist these days?"

"In some cases, yes. Some families still arrange marriages for business benefits. It still happens in wealthy circles."

"If I had to be born into a family that forced me into something like that, I'd rather just be moderately rich like I am now,"

Nattarinee laughed.

"Moderately rich? Your family owns a large clinic in the city center."

"Yeah, The daughter of a big clinic owner who didn’t follow in her parents' footsteps but had the freedom to study what she wanted—and now works at a company. I think my life is pretty good. This is enough for me. At least I get to follow my own path. So, I’ll save my energy to support you instead." “Thanks a lot.” Mevika smiled.

“The only problem I have is my dad overprotective and Gawin, who won’t stop chasing after me. See? The moment I mention him, he texts me.”

She sighed.

“Just block him. You’ve already made things clear.”

“He always finds ways to contact me. He keeps getting new numbers to call. And I have to answer every call because of work...”

“Then I don’t know what to tell you. It’s not your fault if keeps insisting.”

“I know, but this time, I really won’t meet him. No matter how many times he calls, I’ll ignore him.”

“Good! You’re strong, you’re smart, and you’re amazing. Plus, you’ve recently become a rising young businesswoman, representing Superior in the auction. Since you’re about to get busy, the girls have already set up a get-together this Friday. You’re coming.”

“Wait....this Friday?”

“You don’t have any work or events, do you?”

“No.... But if I do, I just won’t go.”

“But you don’t have anything planned, which means you’re going. Yay!”

“Where is it?”

She suddenly felt like her meal tasted even better now that the topic had changed.

“The same place we’ve been going lately—because it’s the best right now. And you love it too, so we picked this place. **Angelo Bar**.”

"No...."

Mevika absentmindedly let her spoon hit the edge of her plate as she was about to take a bite of her risotto.

"Angelo Bar...."

Sure, she liked drinking there. But now, hearing that name made her changed mind.

"No, I shouldn’t go."

"Huh? Why not?"

"You really don’t know? Do you even realize where Angelo Bar is? And who owns it?"

"What?"

Nattharinee furrowed her brows in thought before her eyes widened, and she took a sharp breath.

"Oh… right! That news about you."

"Exactly. And you expect me to go there?"

"But the girls already booked a table! They love that place. It’s the hottest bar right now. Can’t you just go… discreetly?"

"Discreetly?"

"You said it yourself—most people don’t recognize you yet. No one’s going to notice. Just go, it’ll be fine."

"No,"

Mevika shook her head firmly, her voice unwavering.

"No. I’m not going."

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The rhythmic beats of the music pulsed through the luxurious underground bar of Orianna Grand, the largest hotel chain under the Orianna brand.

Located in the heart of Bangkok’s landmark district, Orianna Grand was not just another luxury hotel—it had surpassed expectations.

If Orianna First was a top-ten five-star hotel, then Orianna Grand, despite only being open for five years, had already claimed the number one spot in the country.

Beyond Bangkok, the Orianna brand had expanded its reach, boasting highend locations like Orianna Resort Pattaya, Orianna Beach Hua Hin, Orianna Boutique Phuket, and Orianna Home Stay, a new project underway in Chiang Mai and Nan.

Designated as a six-star hotel, Orianna Grand offered rooms starting at over 20,000 baht per night, with its most luxurious suites reaching six figures per night.

It catered to the ultra-wealthy and international travelers seeking the pinnacle of hospitality—unparalleled service, exclusive amenities, and breathtaking views of Bangkok, whether from its rooms, restaurants, or even its fitness center with panoramic city views.

One of the hotel’s biggest draws was its aromatherapy spa and onsen, which left guests raving about the experience, making Orianna Grand a top choice for high-spending tourists year-round, with rooms fully booked during peak seasons.

Tucked away in the hotel’s underground level was its elite nightlife hub. On one side was **Angelo Bar,** open to the public, meaning guests didn’t need to stay at the hotel to visit—making it a go-to destination for the city's social elite.

Rich people often gathered here to socialize. The venue had walkways connecting bars on the left and right.

On the left was **Ashley Bar**, a gay bar for gay men customers. On the right was a bar exclusively for women, whose main customers group of lesbians. This bar was called **Anthea Bar**.

All of these bars were created with the idea of the hotel owner’s heir.

Initially, the idea faced strong opposition from the older generation, but

after gaining approval, the three bars became widely popular and brought in significant revenue for Orianna.

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"Oh wow...is everyone drunk already? How are you all getting home?"

Mevika uncrossed her legs, placing her feet on the floor, and set her halffinished drink down on the table. She was careful not to drink too much, pacing herself so she could drive home safely.

"Do I look drunk?"

Nattarinee pointed at herself with a slightly slurred voice.

"Not too much, but still drunk,"

Mevika replied.

"Are you all planning to stay until closing?"

"Of course! What about you? You've barely had anything to drink."

"I can't drink too much. I have to drive home, and I have a store inspection tomorrow. I should head out soon."

"Are you leaving already?"

"What? Who's leaving?"

One of their transgender friends turned toward them.

"Maple, are you leaving?"

"I have work. Unlike you guys, I don’t get Saturdays off."

"Well, not all of us can be as busy as a department store heiress like you,"

Another female friend teased.

"Take care on your way home, okay?"

"Ugh, using work as an excuse. We don’t even have the guts to make you stay,"

Nattarinee pouted.

"I had fun with you all, that’s enough,"

Mevika smiled, suddenly remembering something. She glanced around. The bar was large and lively, but not overly packed—there was still space to move around comfortably. She felt slightly uneasy, but it was probably nothing.

"By the way, that picture you posted earlier… I’m not in it, right?"

She whispered to her friend.

"Nope, don’t worry. You told me not to include you."

"I’m just worried someone else might have snapped a photo of me in the background. Did anyone else post anything?"

"I doubt it. Probably just check-ins and captions about their night out,"

Nattarinee reassured her, patting her chin playfully.

"Get home safe, and call me when you arrive."

"Got it. You too—don’t stay out too late."

Mewika waved at her closest friend, then turned to say goodbye to the rest of the group. She grabbed her small shoulder bag from the sofa and quickly made her way out of the bar.

The music faded as she walked toward the bar’s entrance, but before she could reach the stairs leading up to the first-floor exit, her eyes caught sight of a familiar-looking man.

He was glancing around, looking at the "bar" signs on the partition walls, as if trying to figure out which direction —the bar he wanted to go to—was in.

Mevika flinched slightly. She quickly turned away just as it seemed he was about to look in her direction.

Trying to act natural, she pulled her phone out of her bag and headed toward the walkway connecting the three bars.

A familiar voice calling her name made her tense up again, but she pretended not to hear it. She picked up her pace, holding her phone to her ear as if she were busy talking to someone—though in reality, she wasn’t talking with anyone at all.

For a second, she thought about turning back into Angelo Bar, but it was too late. And if she stayed inside, he would just come looking for her at the table, leaving her with no escape—unless her friends helped drive him away.

She felt a brief moment of panic. She had promised herself she wouldn’t see him again. So why… why had he come looking for her here?

His voice rang out again, louder this time, and before she could react, his hand reached out and grabbed her wrist, stopping her in her tracks.

"Gawin?"

Mevika’s voice was laced with feigned surprise, as if she had only just noticed him.

"What are you doing here?"

"I saw your friends check in here, so I—"

"What?"

She cut him off, irritation clear in her tone.

"No one invited you. You just show up like this?"

"You never answer my texts. You won’t pick up my calls—"

"Because we agreed not to see each other again! When will you get that? Let go of me! I have to go."

Mevika yanked her wrist free from his grip.

"Where are you going? Do you have plans?"

"I have plans with someone else. Just go home already. Stop bothering me —please."

With that, she turned on her heel and hurried away, not even sure where the walkway would lead or how she would escape.

Luckily, a group of three women was walking toward her. Seizing the opportunity, she slipped past them quickly before they spread out into a line, creating a barrier between her and Gawin.

She half-walked, half-ran, her breath coming in short gasps. But just as she moved forward, another woman suddenly stepped into her path.

***Thud!***

She crashed straight into someone.

“Ops! I’m so sorry!”

Mevika quickly apologized, realizing she was at fault for rushing carelessly.

“Ouch! What’s this?”

The woman she bumped into gasped in surprise before suddenly breaking into a delighted laugh.

“Well, well! Look who I just ran into!”

The familiar voice made her quickly look up while the familiar scent of perfume hit her nose. She knew the answer in the same second that she saw a pair of eyes staring at her closely.

"You..."

"Who are you running from?"

Aiwarin seemed to understand the situation. She peeked over Mevika’s shoulder to look behind her and saw a man walking toward them. She quickly pulled Mevika behind her.

"Is he following you?"

She asked in a low voice, making sure the man wouldn’t hear.

"Y-Yes, I’m running from him."

"Ah,"

Aiwarin immediately played along.

"I’ve been waiting for you."

She quickly wrapped an arm around Mevika’s waist, pulling close to her.

"Let’s go inside."

The voice someone approaching stopped Aiwarin in her tracks. She turned around to look.

"Oh? And who’s this? Are you looking for someone? Sorry, men aren’t allowed in here."

She firmly guided Mevika forward with the arm around her waist.

Mevika glanced briefly at Gawin before hurrying along with Aiwarin, not even knowing where she was being taken.

It wasn’t until they reached the entrance that she noticed the logo—a silhouette of a woman with elegant, flowing pink letters.

**Anthea Bar.**

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# Chapter 04: A Secret Story in the Bar

**Anthea Bar**

The atmosphere at Anthea Bar was quite calm and had a dreamy, romantic feel. The interior was decorated in shades of pink, with lighting adjusted to keep it from being too sweet or overly warm. The design was wellbalanced, featuring soft pink clouds on the ceiling and certain sections of the walls.

The sofas were light pink, and the bar counter was white. Gentle jazz music played in the background, making it different from Angelo Bar, which was busier. Perhaps it was because Anthea Bar was a women-only bar, but it wasn’t so quiet that many tables were left empty.

Although smaller than Angelo Bar, Anthea Bar had a mezzanine level with high-top tables, where guests could enjoy drinks and listen to music in a relaxed setting. It was perfect for those who came alone or as a pair, wanting to soak in the atmosphere, especially on nights when the bar was particularly crowded.

Being a Friday night, this was the busiest time at Anthea Bar, with customers arriving in large numbers from 7 PM until midnight. After that, people would gradually start leaving, even though the bar remained open until 2 AM.

Some customers, however, would still linger, chatting and enjoying the music. Upbeat songs played between 8 PM and 10 PM, after which the music slowed down to create a more relaxed ambiance for conversation.

“Let’s sit here,”

Aiwarin said to Mevika as she guided her to an empty table in the corner by the wall. It was a table set apart from the others, offering the most privacy. It was a little past midnight, and there were still groups of three or four people drinking and chatting, as well as tables with just two people.

On the mezzanine, two individuals sat alone at separate corners, while a woman sat at the bar counter. Additionally, two out of the four VIP rooms upstairs were occupied.

“Thank you,”

Mevika said, adjusting her shoulder bag as she prepared to sit down. She suddenly became aware of the arm still wrapped around her waist and glanced to the side, signaling to Aiwarin.

“Oh, right,”

Aiwarin quickly released her hold.

“I just—”

“I understand your intentions well,”

Mevika smiled.

“Thank you very much. I’ll just stay for a little while. Are you in a hurry to go somewhere?”

“I’m not in a hurry. Have a seat,”

Aiwarin gestured to her unexpected but welcome guest, whom she had luckily run into by chance.

For her, it was a fortunate coincidence.

Mevika lowered herself onto the sofa, glancing at Aiwarin, who sat down on the same long couch, leaving a small gap between them.

“I was about to leave at first, but then I ran into you. I just didn’t have anything else to do, that’s all,”

Aiwarin said.

“Oh, I see.”

Mevika looked around with interest. She knew that Aiwarin was the heir to this bar, so it wasn’t surprising to see her checking on things. But she couldn’t help but wonder if there was another reason.

“Are you here for an inspection?”

Aiwarin laughed.

“An inspection? Well, yes. This bar is mine, as you probably know. I built all three bars here and manage them. But to be honest, I don’t visit the other two nearly as often as this one.”

“Why is that?”

Aiwarin shrugged.

“Because I like this place the most.”

“You like this place the most?”

“I’m just like one of the customers here,” Aiwarin said.

“On a night like this, I just want to relax.”

She answered Mevika’s question before turning to a staff member who had approached.

“I’ve already had quite a bit to drink. Just one more glass of wine will do. Do you want one too? It’s on me.”

“I’ll just have one glass of wine. I have to drive home. And there’s no need to pay for me—I’m already imposing on you.”

“I own the place. It’s just one extra drink on my tab, nothing much.”

Aiwarin then turned to the staff member waiting for the order.

“Get her another glass of wine. Oh, and make sure the security guards keep an eye on the entrance. There’s a man outside—don’t let him in under any circumstances.”

“Yes, Miss Ai,”

The staff member bowed and went to take care of the orders.

"Wait, you said this is your favorite bar?"

Mevika quickly brought the conversation back to the topic.

"Hmm?"

Aiwarin shifted, crossing her legs as she turned to face the one questioning her.

"You seem especially interested in this."

"Or do you not want me to ask?"

"No, no. Ask away. At least right now, we're not competing—we can talk about anything."

"Then I'll ask again," Mevika said.

"I just like it,"

Aiwarin replied, seeing no reason to be vague since she had brought up the topic herself.

"I like this place. I like this kind of atmosphere."

"This kind of atmosphere?"

**"I like women."**

As soon as those words left Aiwarin’s mouth, her gaze locked onto Mevika’s, holding her in place. The intensity made Mevika momentarily nervous.

She stared into Aiwarin’s eyes, feeling as though those words*—"I like women"—*were being emphasized through that unwavering gaze.

At this moment, silence filled the space between them, their eyes locked for what felt like an eternity. It made Mevika’s heartbeat quicken unexpectedly.

"If you're this quiet, I hope you're not looking at me weirdly,"

Aiwarin finally broke the silence after a long pause.

"No,"

Mevika quickly shook her head, snapping back to reality. She had finally escaped Aiwarin’s intense gaze, but it had left a lingering effect.

It wasn’t fear of danger—it was a different kind of fear, the kind that made her so flustered she almost forgot how to breathe properly.

She exhaled lightly before answering,

"I don’t think it’s weird. I’m just surprised."

"Surprised that I like women?"

"I don’t think liking the same gender is strange. It’s just… this is new information I’ve learned directly from you. No one has ever mentioned it before."

*"It seems like you've known me for a long time."*

“I know you from business media. Sometimes, people mention you—the successful woman in the business world.”

“Oh? That sounds impressive.”

“That wasn’t a compliment from me. It’s just what the media writes or what others say.”

“I wouldn’t dare assume you were complimenting me. If you ever do, I’ll gladly accept it then.”

Aiwarin finished her sentence with a slight smirk.

“Then why did you confidently tell me you like women? As a competitor, aren’t you afraid I might use this against you in the game?”

“Because I don’t think you’re the type to play dirty,”

Aiwarin smiled.

“You’re not like that, are you?”

Mevika studied Aiwarin carefully, tilting her head slightly as if trying to catch any inconsistencies in her words. But Aiwarin’s relaxed smile showed confidence in her own judgment—she didn’t see Mevika in a negative light.

“You’re right,”

Mevika took a deep breath.

“I wouldn’t try to win by using such tactics.”

“Exactly. After all, you’re here at Orionna’s bar despite knowing we’re business rivals. That means you’re still open-minded.”

“My friend insisted I come. I’ve been here several times before, but ever since we became business competitors, I felt like I shouldn’t come anymore. I intended for this to be my last visit. Honestly, I didn’t even want you to know I was here.”

“But you ran into me anyway. Maybe fate decided I should find out.” Aiwarin’s tone was lighthearted.

“More than anything, I’m glad we met like this—without you having to hide. And you really don’t have to. Whatever reason you had for thinking this should be your last visit, as long as I welcome you here—”

“I just don’t feel comfortable.”

“Well, I can’t force you. But even if you say that, you’re welcome to come back anytime,”

Aiwarin said, turning to accept a glass of wine from the staff and handing one to Mevika.

“By the way, what’s your nickname?”

“Hm?”

Mevika paused just as she was about to take a sip of wine.

“Your nickname. Mevika—your name is nice, but it’s a bit long.”

“Why do you need to know? This is business. Using real names is normal.”

“But I want to call you by your nickname. I wonder what it could be… ‘Me’? Or…”

**“Maple.”**

“Hm?”

Aiwarin looked surprised before breaking into a pleased smile.

“I expected it to be just one syllable. Ah… at least it still has ‘Me’ in it. Well, now I know your nickname… Maple.”

“You’re going to call me that?”

“Does it feel too familiar?”

“No, you can call me whatever you want. But when we meet for work, using my full name would be more appropriate.”

“I know. I can tell the difference.”

Aiwarin chuckled.

“But… do you really have to call me ‘Khun’?”

“Hm?”

“You could just use ‘you’ and ‘I’ with me, like how I talk to you.”

“If it’s about that… let’s wait until we’re closer. Then I’ll speak like that.”

“We have to wait until we’re closer?” Aiwarin laughed again.

“Oh no, will we even get that close?”

When they first met, Aiwarin had called Mevika “*Khun*” like most people in the business world. But tonight, the way she spoke changed as soon as they met again.

“I don’t know,”

Mevika said, taking a sip of wine. She avoided Aiwarin’s gaze, still unable to forget what she had said earlier—that she liked women. It wasn’t that she feared Aiwarin was trying to flirt with her. Liking women didn’t mean liking *every* woman—she knew that well. Unless, of course, Aiwarin was actually interested in *her*… but that was unlikely.

“Then I’ll wait for the day you call me just ‘I’ and speak to me informally.”

“You really think we’ll get that close?”

"Is it wrong to hope?"

"Why are you hoping for something?"

"I don't know."

"Are you usually a flirt?"

"Hm?"

Aiwarin paused, about to take a sip of wine.

"Me? A flirt? Not really. I just don’t get into serious relationships. I do have drinks with women sometimes, but I don’t see myself as a player. I’m single —I don’t have women ranked as first, second, third, or anything like that."

"Good to know,"

Mevika said, taking a sip of her wine.

"Why do you ask?"

"No reason. I just asked. I should be going soon—I won’t bother you much longer. It’s getting late."

"You’re not bothering me at all. Stay a little longer, at least until you’re sure you’re safe. By the way, who was that guy outside? I should’ve asked earlier."

"Someone I used to date. But we weren’t in a relationship—just dating to see if it would work."

"You *used to* date?"

Aiwarin glanced up thoughtfully.

"Then why are you avoiding him?"

"I made it clear that we would date for a while, and if it didn’t work out, we’d go our separate ways. I ended things almost a year ago, but he still insists on being with me."

"That’s awful. The deal was clear… No, actually, someone’s breaking the agreement."

"He’s the one breaking it."

"Exactly, I was talking about him."

Aiwarin was completely on Mevika’s side, and for good reason.

"Anyone can date, and anyone has the right to walk away if it doesn’t work out."

"You sound like someone who’s turned people down before."

"Of course. And not just once. It’s been a long time, though."

"Women?"

"Men, actually. And since I wasn’t interested, I kept turning them down. I only realized after college that I liked women."

"You rejected them because they were men, not just because they weren’t the right person for you?"

"Let me rephrase."

Aiwarin waved her index finger quickly before setting down her wine glass and leaning an elbow on the sofa’s armrest, turning slightly to the side.

"At first, I just thought they weren’t the right ones. Many of them approached me, and I turned them down even before dating. But I didn’t realize that I actually wasn’t into men until I was about to go study abroad. I met a woman who liked women, we got along well, and… after being with her, I realized—ah, this is what I like."

"*Cough, cough!*" Mevika choked.

"What’s wrong?"

Aiwarin quickly grabbed a tissue and handed it to her. But since Mevika was still holding her wine glass and coughing lightly, Aiwarin instinctively reached out and dabbed the corner of her lips for her, making her freeze.

"Did I say something wrong?"

"You… don’t have to share every detail."

Mevika spoke bluntly.

"Oh, really?" Aiwarin laughed.

"Why? Is it shocking that I’ve been with a woman?"

"I just didn’t expect you to say it so openly."

"It’s not strange. It’s just like men and women."

Aiwarin glanced at Mevika’s lips, noticing that she had lightly pressed them together, probably from coughing. She carefully used the tissue to dab at them again.

"I just want to make it something natural. I was talking about the moments that helped me discover myself. In case…"

Her gaze lingered on Mevika’s lips as she gently wiped the area, careful not to smudge the lipstick.

"In case you ever want to find answers for yourself."

She slowly moved her hand away, but her eyes remained fixed on Mevika’s face.

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The scent of perfume.

The tone of voice when speaking so straightforwardly.

The soft laughter, carrying an undeniable charm.

The gestures, the way she carried herself.

The things she was doing to her.

Mevika fell silent for these reasons. It had never affected her from the start. She kept her composure well, but maybe it was because she had been around it for too long.

When the woman moved closer and carefully dabbed a tissue on her lips, Mevika unconsciously held her breath and found herself staring at the woman’s lips in return. A heated image of her flashed through her mind.

*No.*

"Uh..."

Mevika quickly snapped herself out of it.

"I have to go now."

She hurriedly moved, grabbing her wine glass and finishing the drink.

"You're leaving already?"

Aiwarin shifted her hips back slightly, unsure if she had said something that made the situation awkward. She quickly tried to explain,

"I wasn’t trying to make you agree with me. I just said it in case you could find your own reason. Maybe you don’t have the same reason as I do. Maybe you just don’t like that man."

"No," Mevika shook her head.

"It’s not just him. I’ve never liked any of the men I’ve dated."

She admitted directly, setting her wine glass down on the table before standing up.

Aiwarin looked up at her in shock, not expecting that answer.

"You’ve shared a lot about yourself with me, so I just told you my own reason."

Mevika grabbed her small shoulder bag and turned to Aiwarin with gratitude.

"Thank you for taking care of me tonight."

"I’ll walk you out,"

Aiwarin quickly stood up and followed Mevika outside.

Mevika didn’t stop her.

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# Chapter : 05 .The Reason for a Racing Heart

As they walked toward the exit of the Anthea Bar, a female staff member, who was a security guard at the venue, approached Aiwarin and quietly reported in a voice that only a few people nearby could hear.

“That man has been pacing back and forth outside. I’m not sure if he’s still there or if he’s left. Should I go check again?”

“He’s still there?”

Aiwarin sighed, her gaze fixed on the closed exit door.

“It’s fine. Thanks.”

“Yes.”

With her duty to report completed, the guard stepped back to keep watch over the area in case anything else needed attention.

“I guess we have to be a couple now,”

Aiwarin suddenly blurted out after a brief pause.

“What?” Mevika exclaimed.

“This is probably the only way to handle this situation. There aren’t many reasons for you to be in a place like this. Since we’re already using this approach to avoid trouble, we might as well commit to it. Come on, I’ll take you out.”

With that, she lifted her arm, offering it for Mevika to hold.

Mevika looked down at the slender arm bent at a right angle, signaling for her to link arms. She didn’t fully understand what she was supposed to do but grasped the idea somewhat. So, she played along, slipping her arm through Aiwarin’s.

When she was pulled close, she tensed slightly but managed to maintain a natural demeanor.

Aiwarin pushed the door open and quickly scanned the area. She spotted someone waiting at a distance outside. Without hesitation, she pulled Mevika toward a small alcove beside the stairs that connected the upper floor to the Antia Bar.

“I don’t want you to leave just yet,”

She said, pretending to speak in a low voice meant for just the two of them. However, the slight intoxication made it hard to control her volume, and in the small corner, her voice carried more than intended.

The sound of their footsteps echoed, likely loud enough for anyone nearby to hear. At that moment, Aiwarin sensed movement she couldn’t see, but it was already part of her plan.

She gently pushed Mevika against the wall, locking eyes with her as if trying to convey something unspoken. Then, she leaned in and whispered softly against her ear.

“Don’t worry. You just have to act.”

“What do I need to do?”

Mevika had an idea but wasn’t completely sure. She whispered back, letting their closeness create the illusion they needed to deceive whoever was watching.

“I might have to touch you a little.”

“Mm.”

That was all Mevika said. She didn’t dare to say more, but her response signaled her consent. She stood still, tense, allowing Aiwarin to do whatever was necessary. She had no idea what would happen—until she felt the tip of Aiwarin’s nose brush against the curve of her neck.

She almost flinched but forced herself to remain still. Aiwarin was being careful, making sure not to let her lips press too close. Instead, she only let the tip of her nose graze lightly, barely making contact. When it moved up to her jawline, Mevika tensed even more.

Anyone passing by would assume they were intimately engaged, but Aiwarin knew they had to make it look even more convincing. She slowly trailed her nose toward Mevika’s cheek, positioning herself so that anyone watching from a distance would think they were kissing.

If they simply held the position, it might seem real enough. But if there was no movement, it could easily give them away.

Aiwarin brought her lips closer, stopping just before they touched, leaving only a breath of space between them—so close it was almost dangerous.

She could feel her heart pounding in a way it never had before. And it wasn’t just her—both of their heartbeats were racing. The intensity of it made breathing difficult, forcing them to hold their breath for a moment. Aiwarin had no idea how Mevika was feeling, but for her, staying still in that moment felt almost unbearable.

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“Where’s your car? I’ll take you home.”

Aiwarin took Mevika’s hand, letting the car’s owner lead the way. When they finally reached the vehicle, Mevika got in first, and Aiwarin quickly followed, sliding into the passenger seat and shutting the door with a sense of urgency. She glanced toward the driver’s side mirror and spotted Gawin standing at a distance.

That meant he was still waiting—still hoping for another chance to see Mevika.

“He’s still there,”

Aiwarin murmured, leaning closer to Mevika. She pressed the button to lower the window slightly and placed a hand on the door to steady herself. As she paused, her face ended up much closer to Mevika’s than she’d intended.

*Their eyes met.*

The same feeling from earlier lingered. Just being this close again made it impossible for Aiwarin to look away. Her breath grew uneven.

**“…Can I touch your lips?”**

The question sent a sharp heat rushing to Mevika’s cheeks. She was sure her face must have turned red by now. She barely had time to think—only a few short seconds passed before, to her own surprise, she gave an answer.

“…Okay.”

The moment she heard that one word, Aiwarin closed her eyes and pressed her lips gently against Mevika’s. No hesitation.

There was no further movement, just the lightest contact. Even that alone made their hearts pound wildly, out of sync with any sense of control.

Mevika could feel the delicate softness against her own lips—the faint pressure of Aiwarin’s touch. It wasn’t exactly a kiss. Or… was it?

She knew that if anyone happened to look into the car right now, through the slightly open window, they would see it clearly—see them, together, like this.

A thought flickered in her mind: what would it feel like if Aiwarin pressed down just a little more? She wasn’t sure she’d dare to find out. But before she could dwell on it, Aiwarin whispered—

**“…Can I kiss you?”**

“…Mm.”

No hesitation. No time to think. As soon as the question reached her ears, Mevika answered immediately, as if she had lost all sense of reason.

Aiwarin smiled and pressed her lips fully against Mevika’s, no longer holding back. She kissed her, and Mevika kissed her back. Their eyes closed, and for the first time, neither had to hold their breath—they simply let it flow naturally, carried by the moment.

Even with caution, even with the awareness that they had only just met, Mevika couldn’t deny that she had never felt this kind of excitement from a kiss before. She had experienced dull kisses, forced kisses—but this was different. It was curiosity that had made her say yes without a second thought.

She was weak to Aiwarin’s scent. Not in a way that affected her physically, but in a way that made her feel unsteady. The fragrance was one she already liked, but on a woman as captivating as Aiwarin, it was far more intoxicating than when she wore it herself.

She let Aiwarin kiss her again and again, just because she had asked for permission. Aiwarin, who liked women.

Mevika, who had never thought about what she liked. But right now, she knew—she liked the taste of this kiss.

It happened so quickly, so easily. Perhaps it was just attraction. One person who was free in relationships like this, and another who was simply indulging in curiosity.

Slowly, Aiwarin’s lips parted from Mevika’s lower lip, a soft sound breaking the silence as they separated.

Aiwarin opened her eyes gradually, finding Mevika’s face still relaxed, her eyes closed for a moment longer before fluttering open to meet hers.

She smiled—just slightly. Not with triumph, not with arrogance. Just with the quiet satisfaction of knowing Mevika had willingly given in, had trusted her enough to let this happen.

“I don’t know if you’ll like it,”

Aiwarin murmured, tilting her head slightly, the corner of her lips curving up.

“But maybe you’ll discover something.”

She narrowed her eyes playfully before continuing,

“I’m serious, you know. But whether you want to take this seriously or not —that’s up to you.”

Then, she exhaled softly, glancing outside the car. Gawin was gone. Whether the coast was clear or not didn’t really matter anymore. Mevika was already in her own car, safe.

Aiwarin opened the door and stepped out, walking around to the driver’s side. She leaned against the open window, flashing Mevika one last smile before turning to leave.

"Did tonight make you feel like we’re closer?"

"Not really."

Mevika shook her head. Just because she had allowed a kiss didn’t mean she was completely easy to win over.

Curiosity and physical attraction could override some things, but other matters needed time.

"Ah." Aiwarin smiled.

"If that wasn’t enough to make us closer, then I guess **next time, we’ll have to do something that brings us even closer**."

With that, she stepped back from the car, giving Mevika space to start the engine and leave.

Mevika met Aiwarin’s gaze for a moment. She didn’t say goodbye. Instead, she pressed the button, letting the window slide up slowly. Once it was shut, she started the car and drove off. Aiwarin stood there, watching the vehicle disappear into the distance.

The white BMW moved smoothly out of the parking lot, past the security post by the bar, and onto the hotel’s inner roads. That meant Mevika had successfully escaped whoever had been waiting to intrude on her privacy tonight.

Aiwarin felt safe in the place she owned. The security here was solid. Even if someone tried to cause trouble, officers were stationed nearby, ensuring that no unwanted eyes had seen what had happened inside the car. The only possible witnesses would be customers walking from the bar to the parking lot—or someone deliberately spying.

Now, the area was empty. No one was around.

She could only hope that Gawin had seen enough to understand—Mevika was done with him. Whatever their past had been, it was clear she had no intention of going back. Tonight, she had chosen to be with Aiwarin instead. Whether that meant anything serious or was just a passing moment, Aiwarin didn’t know. But at least, for now, Mevika had made her choice.

Back in her room, Aiwarin slipped on a deep blue satin slip dress, letting the fabric fall smoothly over her skin. She massaged a light layer of lotion onto her body, followed by her nightly skincare routine.

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Before bed, the faint scent of fragrance filled the air, bringing a sense of calm that should have made it easy to drift off to sleep. But with her thoughts still racing, Mevika knew she wouldn’t be able to fall asleep so quickly.

She reached for her iPad Air, leaning back against the headboard, and quickly scrolled through unread messages. Then, she opened Keep Merno, where she stored images and links to various news articles.

Among them were reports on upcoming business auctions and the intense competition between two women—both representing powerful corporations, both set to face off in the bidding war.

Her fingers zoomed in on a photo of the two women shaking hands in a formal introduction. The news depicted them exactly as they were—rivals, no doubt about it. Even though their unexpected meeting tonight had been outside of business, Mevika was well aware that no matter how close they got, they would always remain competitors.

She scrolled to an article featuring Aiwarin, described as an elegant and brilliant businesswoman. Even through the screen, her beauty was striking —enough to make anyone captivated. But tonight, that woman had been right in front of her.

*Close enough to touch.*

*Close enough to kiss.*

Mevika exhaled sharply, rubbing her temples as memories of that kiss flashed through her mind. She had never imagined something like that happening. What had she been thinking, letting things get to that point?

Aiwarin seemed interested in her, but that didn’t necessarily mean she was special. Perhaps she was just another woman in Aiwarin’s life, just another fleeting encounter that had happened simply because she allowed it.

Yet, just the thought of that kiss was enough to make her heart race. And in the moment itself, the thrill had been even stronger. Now, with the memory replaying in her mind, she felt restless, unable to push it away.

*“Stop it.”*

She whispered to herself, determined to shut down the thoughts.

But then, without thinking, she raised a hand to her lips, lightly touching them. The moment she did, she could hear the pounding of her own heartbeat echoing in her chest. She quickly clenched her hand into a fist, pressing it against her chest as if to steady herself.

*“Two meetings, and I already let her kiss me. What was I thinking?”* She muttered under her breath.

She needed to sleep. If she could just close her eyes and rest, maybe by morning, these feelings would fade. And Aiwarin—Aiwarin would have probably forgotten all about it by then.

Because, after all, it had just been an act. A role Aiwarin had played to help her. Nothing more.

The iPad Air screen was turned off and placed on the bedside table. Mevika rested her head on the pillow, pulled the blanket up to her chest, and reached out to switch off the bedside lamp. Darkness filled the room, ready to lull her into sleep.

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A slender fingertip brushed against the pristine white Magic Mouse as Aiwarin reviewed the reports sent by department heads. The reports were displayed on her MacBook Air, which she always carried in her bag for work. The laptop was connected to a large Apple monitor on her desk, making every detail—both text and images—clear and easy to analyze.

Aiwarin had structured Orianna’s operations to ensure efficiency across all departments. While maintaining a strong public image was important, the internal workings of the hotel were just as crucial. These reports helped her assess performance, refine strategies, and implement improvements across the entire business. As a modern leader, she focused on innovation while never neglecting the finer details.

“Ms. Ai, may I speak with you?”

A voice came through the intercom system she had installed on the corner of her desk, with a second unit placed near the office door.

“What is it, Yam?”

“There’s a schedule update. I’ll be adding new appointments for this week and next.”

“Come in.”

After pressing the intercom button, Aiwarin returned her hand to the mouse and continued scrolling through the report. Three seconds later, the office door opened, and her secretary stepped in, updating her on the new schedule.

Yolda, her secretary, was a year older than her, but they both considered themselves part of the same generation. Still, due to the boss-employee dynamic, Yolda referred to her as “Ms. Ai.” Despite the formal title, their working relationship was friendly and easygoing.

“Let me update you on the new schedule for this week first,”

Yolda began.

“The International Duty-Free Goods Committee of Thailand has invited the first group of companies purchasing bidding documents to attend a meeting this Thursday at Greater’s office. The meeting will focus on additional proposal considerations.”

Aiwarin frowned.

“A meeting for additional proposals? Why now? The bidding starts next week.”

“Yes, that’s correct. However, the Thailand Business Promotion Research Institute and the Thai Retailers Association have jointly submitted a petition to the government and the media, raising concerns about monopolization by long-established corporations. As a result, representatives from our company and Superior—who have already announced their participation in the bid—have been invited to discuss potential revisions to the bidding terms before the auction officially begins.”

"...."

“The Duty-Free Goods Committee initially rejected the petition,”

Yolda continued,

“But because this has become a widely covered news story, and since the auction is being closely watched by the public—especially with the upcoming elections and the possibility of a new government taking over— they’ve decided to allow a meeting. However, the committee will be present to oversee the discussions and ensure that the bidders don’t negotiate among themselves privately.”

Aiwarin smirked.

“Interesting. This could work in our favor. After all, we are going to win this bid, aren’t we?”

She laughed, but her voice carried a firm confidence.

“Absolutely, Ms. Ai. Orianna will win the bid,”

Yolda quickly affirmed.

“Good. Add this to my calendar.”

“Understood.”

“Oh, and you mentioned that Superior will be attending as well, right?”

“Yes, they’ve already confirmed their participation.”

"Oh, really?"

Aiwarin smiled as she glanced at the calendar on her computer screen.

"Still three more days until Thursday."

"Why? Is there something wrong?"

"No, not really."

The boss shook her head with a small smile before changing her words, adding a subtle meaning that her secretary probably wouldn't understand— something only she knew.

**"Three days isn't that long, is it?"**

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# Chapter 06: Acceptance & Differences

For almost a week, since Mevika and Aiwarin had been meeting at Anthea Bar. From last Friday night to Thursday of the following week, today was the day they would meet again.

This was due to a last-minute meeting that had been added to their schedules. The senior executives from both sides were not attending, but they trusted that the two of them could handle the meeting on their own. They had also been given some key ideas that might be necessary for presenting their proposals during the meeting.

"Is this the complete list?"

Mevika asked Jirana, her personal secretary, who had accompanied her to the meeting.

"Yes. There are also some key points regarding the complaints,"

Jirana replied. She was ten years older than her boss. She had been in this position for only a year, after Mevika returned from studying abroad and took on a more significant role in the company. Before that, Jirana had worked in the administrative department of Superior Holdings' headquarters for over ten years.

Her discipline, attention to detail, and consistent dedication to her work led to her being considered for and offered the position of secretary to Mevika, the business development manager of Superior. In the future, if Mevika gained more experience and moved up to a higher executive position, Jirana’s role would also become more significant alongside her.

After working together for a year, Mevika and Jirana found that they collaborated well. As a boss, Jirana saw Mevika as kind and pleasant.

However, when faced with problems that frustrated her, she could become a little short-tempered, requiring some careful handling.

Mevika was not scary, but it was important to approach her at the right time and offer well-thought-out advice to help her stay calm. Because of this mutual understanding, Mevika was satisfied with having Jirana as her secretary.

She was aware that she was still in an age where she was not yet a fully mature adult who had experienced many of life’s challenges. Having a calm and composed secretary nearby gave her peace of mind when she needed advice.

"Thank you very much. Let's head into the meeting room now,"

Mevika said.

"Alright," Jirana responded.

As she spoke to her secretary and took a step toward the meeting room, her gaze happened to catch sight of someone walking toward them from the direction of the elevator. The woman stood out so much that, even after glancing away, Mevika found herself turning back for another look. She wasn't the only one—others in the area also turned their heads in the same direction.

The woman walked past in a dark gray suit over a white blouse, paired with a short skirt above the knee. Her slender legs were striking, even if one wasn't intentionally looking. With a height of 170 centimeters and wellproportioned features, she was undeniably eye-catching.

Aiwarin met her gaze at just the right moment, almost as if she knew she was being watched. Even though there were other people looking as well, she didn't smile. Maybe it was because she saw that Mevika wasn’t standing alone, or perhaps it was just the serious expression she wore while working. She was not the same playful, flirtatious woman Mevika had met at the bar.

*At the bar…*

Thinking back to that night, the image of their kiss resurfaced in her mind.

No one here could possibly know about that.

"Miss Me,"

A voice called, snapping her out of her thoughts at just the right moment, as if pulling them from her head.

"Oriana’s team is here. Let’s go inside the meeting room," Jirana said.

"Alright," Mevika replied.

She quickly sent a completed message to a client who had been waiting for a response, then locked her phone and set it down on the table. As people gradually entered the meeting room, she lifted her head to look around.

The person who stood out the most was a woman in a taupe-gray dress. The fitted waist and knee-length pencil skirt gave her the appearance of a runway model.

The beautiful woman radiated confidence with her striking features—an elegant face, a well-proportioned figure, and wavy, honey-blonde hair that bounced slightly with each step she took. Mevika found herself unintentionally staring until the woman walked closer.

There were plenty of other available seats, so Mevika assumed she would choose one farther away. However, to her surprise, the woman sat directly across from her.

Aiwarin met Mevika’s gaze as she placed a fabric-covered notebook on the table, along with a pen clipped to it. Then, she took her seat and shifted her focus to her phone, quickly checking notifications before the meeting started.

Mevika wanted to greet her, but she couldn't show too much. In the business world, exchanging pleasantries wasn’t unusual, even between competitors. However, for reasons only the two of them understood, their only form of acknowledgment came through their eyes.

"Regarding the proposal to allow different duty-free operators at each airport terminal, that matter must be addressed before the next bidding process begins. Our side only handles Greater Duty-Free stores located outside the airports, so let's remove this topic for now,"

One of the auction committee members announced. He was responsible for ensuring the meeting proceeded in an orderly manner.

From the perspective of those making demands, the committee’s so-called orderliness was merely a way to maintain control and prevent any disruption to the upcoming bidding process. They weren’t necessarily open to truly understanding the concerns raised—it was more about preserving appearances.

"Then what about the other issues we raised? What are everyone’s thoughts?"

Asked a representative from the Thailand Institute for Business Promotion, glancing around the room, including at Mevika and Aiwarin.

"Regarding the concession fees, we propose increasing the existing rates applied at airport locations,"

Suggested a representative from the Retailers’ Association, presenting one of their key demands.

"And how much does Greater plan to charge this time?"

Aiwarin raised her hand to ask.

"We can't disclose this information yet. Once the bidding process begins, you'll find out. We'll also schedule another meeting to clarify the details, so please wait until then,"

The committee member responded.

"We're proposing this adjustment so the authorities can set conditions before the bidding starts,"

The representative of small retailers argued.

"We've already held summary meetings and prepared everything for a long time. This matter will be considered for the next bidding round after the current concession contract ends,"

The same committee member replied.

"But the contract lasts for ten years. Shouldn't we reconsider?"

Mevika asked.

"Are you suggesting we modify the conditions according to their proposal, Ms. Mevika?"

"If it's beneficial in the long run, I have no objections."

"I understand. If everything has followed the proper process, then whatever the conditions are, we simply have to compete under them,"

Aiwarin commented, seemingly contradicting Mevika's stance.

"In the end, all bidders must compete under the given terms because by choosing to participate, they’ve already agreed to those rules."

"Accepting the terms is one thing, but discussing potential adjustments while it's still possible is another,"

Mevika countered, irritated by Aiwarin's stance. She hadn't expected her to disagree. It wasn't that differing opinions were unacceptable, but hearing them from *her* was particularly frustrating.

Did she assume that just because they had once spoken amicably, Aiwarin would take her side?

Or was it simply because she saw Aiwarin as a significant competitor?

"In other countries, concession fees go up to 40%. If I win this bid, I’m willing to pay 40% of my revenue to the government to generate higher national income. But that has to be set as a condition from the beginning. This means the terms must be revised now,"

Mevika emphasized, making her position crystal clear.

"A 40% fee?" Aiwarin chuckled softly.

"If it’s already set, there’s no need to change it."

Even if prices for goods and services were raised to offset the percentage paid to the concession owner, she believed that, ultimately, the burden would still fall on the successful bidder. To her, this issue was secondary.

In her mind, Mevika was still inexperienced in this field. She was too straightforward in business—not that Aiwarin was dishonest, but she knew that to win, one had to be adept at maneuvering for the best advantage.

"Honestly, I think Greater should divide the bidding process by product and service categories,"

Mevika added.

"That way, other competitors would have the chance to contribute, making the duty-free system more well-rounded. Greater is already massive. A single-operator monopoly might seem efficient, but selecting the best for each category would be a better option. Though, I doubt that would happen —the bidding announcement clearly states that Greater wants a sole concessionaire."

"Are you seriously proposing that, Ms. Mevika?"

A committee member asked.

"This is a real meeting, isn't it?"

She replied without hesitation.

Her response made Aiwarin smile slightly. She had been quietly listening to

Mevika's thoughts, finding them intriguing. While she still disagreed with the increased concession fee, this latest proposal was something she secretly agreed with.

Picturing it, she could see the benefit—having multiple specialized bidders managing different areas would create a more complete duty-free experience. But she also knew it was unlikely. The committee had already planned everything in advance; making changes so close to the bidding process was nearly impossible.

Within just a minute, Aiwarin found herself seeing Mevika differently. At first, she seemed inexperienced in the business world, but she was intelligent, knowledgeable, and had more interesting ideas than Aiwarin had initially thought.

"Is Greater Duty-Free a space meant to evolve? Shouldn’t it start with a new approach instead of following old practices? Master concessions shouldn't be applied to a bidding process meant to create fresh opportunities. In other concessions, monopolies have already been..."

It had been this way for a long time—for the sake of easier management under a single concessionaire. But Greater had the chance to establish a new image.

"I agree with this,"

Aiwarin suddenly spoke up, reinforcing the idea. She smiled at Mevika, who turned to her with a surprised look, likely not expecting support from her.

"If the criteria were set as 'Concession by Category,' it could benefit Greater in the long run and also promote balanced competition."

"That would be difficult,"

One of the committee members responded.

"We've always used the same criteria."

"And will you keep using the same criteria forever?"

Aiwarin countered.

"Greater is just beginning. Shouldn’t it start with a fresh approach?"

Now, Mevika was the one listening to her instead. The sharp gaze she had earlier seemed to soften slightly. Aiwarin wasn’t saying this to please anyone—this was genuinely her own perspective, which happened to align with Mevika’s.

"These are all valid points,"

The research institute representative added.

"But let’s not forget that this bidding process overlaps with the election period. A new government might come in to oversee it. You’ll need to keep everything balanced."

"Alright, we’ll take this proposal into consideration,"

The committee finally conceded.

They had no choice but to acknowledge the proposal when multiple bidders shared the same stance. Even if they had differing views on certain aspects, whether any adjustments could actually be made in time remained uncertain.

Mevika and Aiwarin both understood that what they pushed for today might not change anything at all. But at the very least, they had played a part in shaping the discussion—before the day came when they would have to compete against each other.

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"Thanks, Yam. Please prepare the meeting summary,"

Aiwarin told her secretary.

"And don’t report anything to my father just yet. He’ll find out soon enough."

"Okay, Ai. I'll head back to the office now,"

Yada said to her boss. When she had to go out for meetings like this,

Aiwarin allowed her to use the company car for transportation. However, Aiwarin usually preferred to drive herself. Today was no different.

"Mm, take care,"

Aiwarin said, glancing at the time on her phone. It was 3:30 PM. She had no other work left for the day except checking on the bar before it opened. After that, she planned to relax there for a while. There was no rush since she had a private room on the top floor of Oriana Grand, where she stayed most of the time.

As she looked toward the meeting room, she noticed that the attendees were slowly leaving. But she was surprised not to see a particular person. It was a bit disappointing that she hadn't had a chance to say hello before they left. Just as she was about to walk toward the elevator, she saw her coming from the restroom.

"I thought you had already left,"

Aiwarin greeted her quickly.

Mevika paused mid-step, looking at Aiwarin before glancing away briefly. She figured a quick greeting wouldn't hurt. After all, they were business rivals, not sworn enemies who couldn't exchange a few words.

"I'm just about to leave. I have other errands to run."

"Is that so? I'm heading out too."

"Okay,"

Mevika replied simply and started walking again. Aiwarin walked alongside her.

"We shouldn’t walk together,"

Mevika remarked.

"Are you afraid?"

"I just think it’s inappropriate."

"We’re not walking together. We just happen to be heading toward the elevator at the same time."

Mevika didn’t respond. The two of them stopped in front of the elevator just as it arrived from the lower floors. When two people stepped out, they walked inside. More people soon followed, using the same elevator. Aiwarin stepped in after Mevika, standing separately.

She stood slightly toward the inside, while Mevika was pressing the elevator button. More people entered, standing between them. When the elevator reached the second floor, Mevika stepped out.

Aiwarin, still inside the elevator, glanced at the floor numbers on the panel. It was a bit disappointing that they had parked on different floors.

She was slightly surprised to see Mevika parking on this level, but there was no chance to ask about it today. They would go their separate ways for now, and when the time was right, they would meet again.

Just before the elevator doors closed, Aiwarin noticed a familiar-looking man stopping to look toward the parking lot entrance where Mevika had just gone. That made her suddenly more alert—she recognized that man.

She quickly stepped forward, reaching to press the open button, but she was too late. The elevator doors had already closed, taking her down to the first floor.

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# Chapter 07: Interested,just means want to try

The car key was taken out of her pocket as she was about to reach her own car, parked against one wall of the second-floor parking lot. Her mobile phone was put away in her bag so she could get into the car more easily.

As she squeezed between two vehicles, before she could reach her car door, she flinched when she heard a voice calling her from up close.

Mevika quickly turned toward the voice. At that moment, her wrist was grabbed.

"Gawin?" She looked shocked. "What are you doing here?"

"I just wanted to talk to you. You don't reply to my texts, you don't answer my calls. When I went to see you the other day, you..."

"Let me go!"

Mevika yanked her arm, but he held on tighter.

"We already agreed not to get involved with each other."

"But you got involved with that woman and that bar... that *woman's* bar."

Gawin's voice was irritated.

"Are you crazy?"

"Whatever I do, wherever I go-it's my business. You have no right to interfere."

"You saw me, but you acted like you didn't. Isn't that right?"

"Whether I saw you or not, you don't need to know. Saying I pretended not to see you-so you were following me, weren't you?"

"Then why did you go to a place like that?"

"Why I went is none of your business."

"You like that kind of place? You like women? I saw you getting close with that woman, and you even-"

"And I even *what*?"

Mevika interrupted, wondering if he had really seen anything. She casually threw the question back at him, waiting for his answer.

"You and her..."

He gestured to the side, looking uncomfortable as he spoke.

"Did you do that just to trick me?"

"What?"

"You used that woman to put on an act, to make it seem like you and her were something more. You really used a woman to fool me? Did you think I'd believe it?"

"And if I were involved with someone, does it have to be a man?"

Mevika laughed mockingly at the idea.

"You kissed that woman!"

He finally blurted out.

"Because kissing a woman doesn't mean anything, right? It's not a big deal. The truth is, there's nothing real between you two. You're just trying to push me away, even though you're not actually with her."

"Ridiculous!"

Mevika's voice rose.

"I can be involved with that woman in any way I want. Why can't I have feelings for a woman? Maybe it's just temporary, or maybe it's real. Whether it's serious or just for a while-it happens."

"Exactly."

A woman's voice cut in, making both of them turn toward her.

"Why wouldn't it be possible for two women to be together?"

Aiwarin glared at Gawin before turning to Mevika with a smile, slipping an arm around her waist.

"I told you we should've walked back together. I just went to the bathroom for a moment."

"Ai..."

Mevika knew she had to respond, not just stand there and lose the chance to escape.

"I just came to take a call. And ran into *him*."

Aiwarin shot a sharp look at Kawin.

"Why are you following Maple? Are you trying to harass her?"

"What? Me, harass her?" Gawin looked startled. "Well, what you're doing right now is exactly that. Why are you still following her? You're nothing to each other anymore, yet you're sneaking around after her like this."

"I've known her long before you. We know each other well. But who are you? Oh, right-a famous businesswoman. But I mean, what's your connection to Me? Why are you getting involved?"

"Huh? Me, getting involved?"

Aiwarin scoffed.

"I don't even know what to say. But as far as I know, Maple doesn't want to talk to you. You two are no longer involved. So why are you still following her around?"

"I'm asking *you*-what's your relationship with Me?"

"Our relationship?"

Aiwarin turned to Mevika, who was standing close beside her. She was willing to claim something if needed, but she wasn't sure how much Mevika would want her to say. So, she left the decision up to her.

"How should I put this?"

"I already said it. Ai and I are involved in the way you saw. Whether it's serious or just temporary, you don't need to know."

"Oh, you mean that kiss?"

Gawin seemed particularly irritated.

"You were just faking it."

"Think whatever you want. Whether Ai and I are something or not, it was never going to change my decision about *you*."

"Faking it?" Aiwarin laughed.

"People don't just kiss so easily unless there's something there."

She glanced to the side, as if dismissing his assumption. It was all just an act-though sometimes, playing a role required a little personal touch.

Aiwarin's words made Mevika glance at her warily. When their eyes met, she felt a little flustered, quickly looking away and sighing dramatically at the man in front of her.

"Move. We're getting in the car."

Aiwarin smirked at the word *"we."* It meant she was getting in the car too.

And it wasn't the first time she had ridden in Mevika's car.

"And if you two *really* are something-so openly like this-aren't you afraid I'll spread the news?"

Gawin laughed.

"Wow, making headlines?"

Aiwarin laughed, completely unfazed by his words. Even Mevika was surprised by how little it affected her.

"That's great. Lately, everyone's been asking what's going on between me and Maple. I haven't decided how to answer yet. If it becomes news, then I won't have to explain anymore."

Gawin looked stunned. He hadn't expected things to turn out like this. What he thought would be a threat had no effect on them at all.

"Let me tell you something,"

Aiwarin continued.

"Even if you spread rumors about me and Maple, it wouldn't affect us much. If anything, you'd just be helping us be open about our relationship. Meanwhile, you'd be the one facing harassment charges. So, take your pickhow do you want to play this? To be blunt, I have quite a lot of money. I have my family's lawyers. Maple has hers too. If we decide to report you or sue you for stalking and harassing Maple, we can do it easily. And trust me, there's no way you'd get out of it."

She glanced up at one corner of the ceiling.

"The security cameras here probably caught everything. The ones at my bar definitely did. And wherever you've been, there's proof of it all."

"Don't threaten me,"

Gawin snapped, but there was an unmistakable trace of fear in his voice. His eyes darted around anxiously.

"It's not a threat,"

Aiwarin said coolly, a slight smirk tugging at her lips.

"It's a promise. In corporate law, I've won every case I've fought."

Normally, she didn't boast about her skills, but sometimes it was necessary to state the obvious. After all, people already admired her for it. It wasn't bragging-it was just the truth.

Gawin looked between Aiwarin and Mevika, wanting to argue but knowing he was cornered. He had money, but not the kind of wealth that Aiwarin and Mevika's families had. If they really took legal action, it would be a nightmare for him. And he definitely didn't want to end up in jail. Walking away and letting this woman go was the smarter choice.

"For the record, I wasn't harassing her,"

He muttered, looking directly at Aiwarin before glancing at Mevika one last time. Then, without another word, he turned and walked away.

Aiwarin and Mevika watched him go, making sure he had truly left. Only then did they turn to face each other.

"Let's get in the car,"

Aiwarin said with a smile.

Mevika didn't respond. She simply walked to the driver's side while Aiwarin went around to get in on her own. Once they were both inside and the doors were shut, a brief silence filled the car-five seconds at mostbefore Aiwarin spoke again.

"This is the second time I've been in your car."

"....."

"Maple?"

Mevika deliberately brushed off Aiwarin's comment, because there was something else she wanted to say first. That didn't mean she had forgotten what had happened in this car before.

"Why? Can't I call you that? You *did* say we were together."

"You already know why I said that," Mevika smirked slightly.

"I was just going with the flow."

"Going with the flow, just like the other day?" Aiwarin teased.

"When we-"

"You're the one who started playing along with me."

"And *you* played along too."

Aiwarin leaned in slightly, closing the gap between them.

"I wonder... was what I said true?"

"What?"

"People don't just kiss for no reason if they don't feel *something*."

"And is that what you think?"

"I do."

Aiwarin raised an eyebrow, pretending to think.

"You *are* pretty interesting."

She rested her elbow on the seat, turning slightly toward Mevika with a sly grin.

Mevika met Aiwarin's gaze. That smirk-so full of mischief-was definitely getting under her skin. But not *enough* to be annoying.

"You still haven't answered. Do you agree?"

Now *that* question was starting to get a little irritating.

"Ai," Mevika smirked, "I guess you're somewhat interesting."

"That's a little more exciting."

"Ai..."

Mevika suddenly remembered their meeting in the conference room earlier and chuckled. She hadn't expected Aiwarin to help her out after arguing so fiercely during the meeting.

"Back in the conference room, you weren't exactly on my side."

"I disagreed with the first part, but I agreed with the second. You probably remember."

"Thanks. At least you're honest. Now I know for sure-business is business.

We really are competitors."

"I told you, I can separate things."

Aiwarin smiled calmly.

"I don't flatter people just because I know them. If I disagree, I say so. About that 40% fee-why did you even propose it?"

"I understand why we see things differently. But you probably also understand that increasing the fee means more revenue from tourists. That extra income can then be used by the government for further development."

"You're a good person, thinking about the country's benefit over your own business profits."

Aiwarin nodded slowly, as if impressed.

"But a lot of people in the industry would rather keep the percentage low, even though they know it limits their revenue."

"You already know that monopolies tend to keep things stagnant."

"I just think the senior executives won't agree to this. They want to benefit from the bidding process and maintain control over their own revenuewithout competition. That's why I didn't propose it. I know my father wouldn't approve. And believe me, your father wouldn't either." "Even if my father disagrees, I still have to stand by my own principles."

"You really are an interesting woman," Aiwarin smiled.

"Ah-I mean, your *ideas* are interesting."

"Thank you."

"But let me tell you something. Your limited experience and honesty make you too straightforward in business. That's not a bad thing-I'm not telling you to be unethical. What I mean is, you need to be sharper. Stay transparent, but learn to be strategic and, at times, a little cunning. Because you're going to face a lot of tricks from competitors. If you keep doing things the way you do now, you'd better be ready to lose. Lose *everything*. I'm not warning you just to scare you-one day, you'll see for yourself."

"You're teaching like a real teacher,"

Mevika teased sarcastically.

"Do you not like it?"

"Not at all. You speak well, and I listen. Thank you. But sometimes, I may need to use my own method."

"That's not wrong, but-"

Aiwarin shrugged.

"It wouldn't hurt to use some of my advice."

She leaned in slightly toward Mevika.

"Can you drive me down to the first floor? My car is parked there. I probably shouldn't rush out of your car just yet." "I'm happy to. Consider it a thank-you for helping me,"

Mevika said as she fastened her seatbelt.

"If it's a thank-you, I'd rather have something else,"

Aiwarin smirked, still not moving.

"Go on, then."

"Hmm."

The playful woman shook her head.

"I was just saying that. It's just a small favor-I'm not that kind of person." As soon as she finished speaking, the sound of a seatbelt clicking open filled the space. Then, the other woman leaned in closer and whispered-

"Like this kind of thank-you?"

Mevika tilted her face slightly before pressing her lips gently against Aiwarin's, holding the kiss for three or four seconds before pulling away with a knowing smile.

"Wow,"

Aiwarin whispered. She pulled Mevika in for another kiss-deeper, more intense than the first. Mevika didn't resist. As Aiwarin pressed her lips down, she responded fully, until they could hear each other's breath between them.

They didn't have much time, but in those few seconds, their hunger for each other was undeniable.

When they finally pulled away, their breaths were uneven.

Were they breathless because the kiss lasted too long? No. It was the sheer thrill of it.

They had just kissed in the middle of the parking lot at the newly opened Greater Duty-Free office. But since only relevant personnel were allowed inside for meetings or business, the area wasn't too crowded. "So, that means I must be a little more interesting to you now,"

Aiwarin said with a smirk.

"Being interested could just mean I want to try,"

Mevika replied bluntly, unfazed.

"You want to try?"

Aiwarin liked that answer even more.

"Great. So, do you want to try something more?"

Mevika fell silent at the question, simply looking at Aiwarin, who was waiting for a response. When she didn't answer, Aiwarin asked again.

"Are you starting to feel something?"

"I think I need to find out a little more."

"Perfect. Then come find out with me."

Aiwarin fastened her seatbelt.

"I'm heading to a bar tonight. If you're free, come see me there. It's Thursday, so it won't be too crowded. If you come around four in the evening, there'll still be a few customers. I want you to enjoy the atmosphere with some people around, but not too many."

"Do I have to go?"

Mevika narrowed her eyes as she turned the key to start the car.

"That's up to you."

Aiwarin didn't sound overly expectant, but she knew she would be waiting.

Mevika didn't say anything else. She drove down to the first floor and parked near Aiwarin's car.

A sleek white Audi TT stood out in the VIP parking area.

Before getting out, Aiwarin didn't extend any more invitations. Instead, she offered a suggestion.

"As a VIP bidder like you, you should apply for a parking permit on the first floor, like I did. That way, no one can follow you around like that again."

She opened the car door but paused briefly.

"Oh, and I wasn't stalking you. When you got off the elevator, I saw that man walk past and follow you. So I came back up to check, just in case."

With that, she stepped out of the car, not expecting Mevika to acknowledge her help. She had already received something tonight, even though she hadn't asked for it.

The car door slammed shut. Mevika watched as Aiwarin walked over to her own car.

Her departure granted Mevika freedom, yet her lips felt strangely heavy, as if something still lingered there.

Without thinking, she touched her fingertips to her lips, sensing a faint trace of the earlier touch. But the lingering sensation wasn't nearly as vivid as the moment she had actually been kissed.

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# Chapter 08: What She Wonders

"Thank you for letting me treat you to this meal."

Mevika spoke to a 37-year-old female client who was about to bring her own brand of products into her family's Superior Mall. The client planned to expand into multiple branches, though some locations would have to wait for lease agreements to expire.

However, a few branches were already set to open gradually, starting with the first one in the city center and expanding outward. Since today was a great opportunity to discuss business, Mevika took the chance to treat her new client who had chosen to invest in Superior.

"I'm very happy to be here! And thank you as well for the meal—it was delicious. I’ll have to excuse myself now; my husband is arriving soon."

"Of course, thanks for your time. Let’s walk out together."

"Sure."

The two women walked out and stood in front of the restaurant. A black car pulled up by the sidewalk, and they exchanged farewells. Now standing alone, Mevika watched the car drive away before tilting her head up to the sky, which had turned deep blue as night approached.

She took out her phone to check the time. There was still plenty of time for her to do something before going home. But instead of making other plans, she found her thoughts drifting elsewhere—toward someone. She had been thinking about this person ever since she left the Greater office. And so, she made a decision.

She wouldn’t spend time on anything else before heading home. Instead, she would hurry back, get ready, and then drive out again—once it was late enough.

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"Keep an eye on that table. The customer is too drunk to enter their PIN correctly in the transfer app."

Aiwarin instructed the staff inside Anthea Bar as she sat down to drink with a regular customer while also keeping an eye on the bar’s overall atmosphere. By 10 PM, some customers had already left, arm in arm, while six or seven tables still had people sitting. As usual, the crowd would thin out even more by 11 PM.

"The wine delivery will arrive at 4 PM tomorrow. If anyone's at the bar, please take care of it,"

She said to the cashier standing behind the bar counter.

"Got it, Miss Ai," the cashier responded.

"Keep an eye on that table's bill,"

She added before turning away, intending to check on other areas of the bar. But just as she was about to move, her eyes landed on a woman walking in through the entrance. Even under the dim golden lights, she could clearly see who it was.

*She froze for a moment, then smiled.*

The woman, dressed in a stunning pink bodycon dress adorned with glittering silver sequins, was walking toward her. Their eyes met, and as soon as she reached her, she greeted her with a playful remark.

"I knew I wouldn’t be alone tonight because you’re really here,"

Mevika said, the corner of her lips curling slightly.

"You won’t be alone, that’s for sure,"

Aiwarin replied with a warm smile.

"I’m so glad you came. You look absolutely gorgeous tonight."

Her gaze swept over Mevika, from her beautifully made-up face that shimmered under the light to her delicate feet in strappy high heels.

The shoes accentuated her slender legs, making them appear even more striking beneath the short hem of her dress. Her skin was flawless, free of any marks—even her ankles were smooth and unblemished.

Mevika's bodycon dress had thin straps, with delicate pleats at the bust, giving it a soft, swirling effect that subtly highlighted her décolletage. At the back, crisscrossed straps elegantly framed her smooth skin, revealing her back down to her waist. The dress hugged her figure perfectly, making it impossible not to look. And it wasn’t just Aiwarin who noticed—others in the bar had also turned their heads at the sight of her striking beauty.

"Thank you,"

Mevika replied with a smile.

"I figured this dress would go well with the bar’s vibe—pink on pink. It’s actually my first time coming here with a plan in mind, so I thought I’d dress to match."

**"*A Pink Bar?*** I like that you call it that. I'm happy to welcome you. Come here."

Aiwarin laughed. She stepped closer, as if about to wrap an arm around Mevika's waist, but then hesitated.

"Should I...?"

"It's your bar. You can welcome me however you like."

"Alright."

Aiwarin accepted that answer. She slid her arm around Mevika’s waist, now that she had permission—though her words had left just enough room for interpretation. But Aiwarin understood, and it seemed they both did. There was something between them, an unspoken understanding that ran deeper than expected.

"Sit down. I'll order you a drink. What do you want?"

"What do you recommend?"

Mevika asked, glancing at the woman sitting so close to her—close enough that even after they sat down, Aiwarin kept her arm around her. Mevika didn’t pull away. Instead, when Aiwarin shifted slightly to face her, she adjusted her posture as well, turning her hips and crossing her legs.

Aiwarin wasn’t looking down, but it was obvious she noticed. The way Mevika turned her body, twisted her hips, and crossed her legs—it was effortlessly seductive. Enough to make Aiwarin’s heart race. She hadn’t expected Mevika to show up tonight looking quite like this.

No words were exchanged as a staff member approached to take their order, already familiar with Aiwarin’s way of doing things. She simply made a subtle hand gesture and held up two fingers. That was all it took for the employee to nod and walk away.

"I'm curious—what did you order?"

"Just the usual,"

Aiwarin shrugged slightly.

"I have my own sign language for ordering drinks."

"Creative,"

Mevika murmured, nodding in approval as her gaze drifted lower, taking in Aiwarin’s outfit for the night. An oversized blazer with a plunging neckline, worn without anything underneath—just bare skin and a glimpse of her décolletage, enough to be subtly sexy.

She had seen Aiwarin dress like this in magazine photos before, exuding an intense allure. But in person, it was different. Since they'd met, Aiwarin had always dressed more conservatively when handling formal business matters. This must be what she wore for her usual work at the hotel— something that also suited the atmosphere of the bar.

Seeing her like this, so close, wasn’t just exciting—it was something else entirely. Because this wasn’t just an image from a magazine. This was real.

They were sitting very close to each other. The woman, known for her irresistible charm and admired by many in the business world, seemed particularly interested in her. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have boldly asked for a kiss like that. And there was no way Mevika was imagining it.

If Aiwarin was just a flirt and did this with many others, then that was something she’d have to figure out.

**"BYREDO Rose Noir Eau de…"**

Aiwarin pronounced the name in flawless Swedish.

"You’re talking about perfume."

Mevika caught on immediately. It was yet another thing they seemed to understand without prior discussion.

"I own that scent. I like it."

"You mean the scent on me?"

"Yes."

Aiwarin’s response was brief. She reached for the drinks the staff had just placed on the table and handed one to Mevika.

"I think I’ve smelled it on you before. But today…"

She leaned in slightly, inhaling, then pulled back.

"It seems different."

"I used a different scent today. But the one you’re wearing now—it’s my favorite."

"Your favorite?"

Mevika smiled, lifting her drink to her lips for a light sip before adding,

"Seems we have that in common."

"In common?"

Aiwarin raised a curious brow. She took a sip of her vodka martini, garnished with a twisted lemon peel. If she finished it quickly, she could order another, though they didn’t have much time to sit and drink here. Still, one more round wouldn’t hurt.

"Let’s see if you like the vodka I picked for you."

"A vodka martini?"

**"With a lemon twist,"**

Aiwarin clarified.

"The bartender squeezed a little lemon oil into it. Do you like it?"

"You’ve picked my drink perfectly,"

Mevika replied, taking a small sip before smiling.

"I like it."

"Good."

Aiwarin’s gaze lingered on her, pleased.

**"Tonight, I came for answers."**

Out of nowhere, Mevika decided to get straight to the point. They could keep making small talk, but she wanted to cut to the chase. It wouldn’t ruin the mood—if anything, it would make things more interesting.

"Go ahead."

Aiwarin pressed her lips together briefly after taking another sip of her drink before setting the glass down.

"Ask me."

**"How many girlfriends have you had?"**

"Me?" Aiwarin laughed.

"Not a single one."

"Is that true? What about the ones you’ve been with?"

"Just… been with. But never officially dated. There were reasons."

"Like what?"

"I figured out who I was before I went abroad to study. Before that, I was involved with a girl. While I was overseas, I had… encounters with two Western women. But I wouldn’t call it dating. Each one lasted only two or three months before we went our separate ways. After coming back to Thailand, I’ve been here for three years without dating anyone seriously. But if you’re asking if I’ve had only physical connections… probably three or four."

"Wow."

Mevika let out a teasing sound.

"Not bad for the heir to a major hotel empire."

"And what do you mean by that?"

"I mean, you have the right to do whatever you want. But I just wonder… does your family know?"

"They probably wouldn’t be thrilled. But luckily, they’ve always let me live freely. I can work and prove myself with my own abilities, and I can enjoy my life however I want. They don’t interfere with that. The only thing they truly care about is that, no matter how much freedom I have, they expect me to settle down someday. To give them peace of mind."

Aiwarin paused briefly before adding,

"Or to put it another way, they want an heir. But that’s not as much of a priority since I have a younger brother they can rely on. Still, as the eldest daughter, they expect one thing from me—to have a ‘*complete*’ life. That means a good husband and children."

"And the choices you’re making now… they go against what they want, don’t they?"

"I'm not exactly happy about it. I'm just ignoring the future for now. I want to do what I want. But that's why I don't lead anyone on when it comes to relationships. I don't want to make promises I can't keep. It's not that I don't want something serious."

"So you're saying... if you met the right person, you'd want a real relationship?"

"If I met someone who was right for me, then yes. I think one day, the reasons holding me back wouldn't matter anymore. When that day comes, I'll follow my heart."

"Would that mean rebelling against your family?"

"Call it rebellion if you want. But shouldn't I be honest with the person I love?"

Mevika fell silent for a moment. Aiwarin's gaze was steady, serious. At first, she had seemed playful, even a little flirty, but the more Mevika got to know her, the more she saw depth beneath the charm. People in the business world admired her, spoke highly of her, and that made Mevika believe that Aiwarin meant what she said.

It only made her more intriguing. Made Mevika want to understand her even more. But whatever was happening between them... it couldn't go too far. That was why she had used the word *try.*

"So… do you just kiss people at random?"

Mevika brought the conversation back to an earlier point.

"Hmm? Is that what you think?"

Aiwarin raised an eyebrow.

"I'm not sure. When you mentioned those three, four, five, six, or however many people, were you counting casual kisses too?"

"I don’t kiss people randomly,"

Aiwarin denied immediately.

"Everyone I've kissed was someone I was involved with."

"Then…"

"You're the only one I've kissed and walked away from,"

Aiwarin cut in, grabbing her glass and downing the last of her vodka.

"Only to meet again."

Mevika lifted her own drink, sipping thoughtfully.

"And now?"

She glanced at Aiwarin over the rim of her glass.

"Where do I count this time?"

"That depends..."

Aiwarin’s gaze flickered to the table for a second as she set down her vodka glass.

"What do you want to be?"

She shifted a little closer, fingers gently tilting Mevika’s chin up. Then she leaned in, her lips just a breath away.

"Is there anything else you want to know?" she whispered.

Mevika’s breathing grew heavier, even though all Aiwarin had done was touch her chin. Their faces were so close now. She took in every detail of Aiwarin’s features, and she couldn’t deny how much she wanted to be kissed.

She had never felt as comfortable kissing anyone as she had with Aiwarin. Even a brief kiss had made her heart race—what would it feel like if it were deeper?

Aiwarin tilted her head slightly as she closed the distance, testing if Mevika would allow it. But before their lips could touch, she paused, asking softly,

**"Do you know what you want yet?"**

"I’m still unsure,"

Mevika murmured, her voice quiet as she tried to steady her breath.

"Unsure about?"

Aiwarin exhaled sharply, her patience thinning. She gently squeezed Mevika’s chin and closed the gap, pressing their lips together—only for Mevika to turn away at the last second.

"Ah… it seems you're hesitating."

"No,"

Mevika denied, pushing lightly against Aiwarin’s shoulder and shaking her head. Then, instead of answering directly, she leaned in, whispering close to Aiwarin’s ear—so close that her lips barely brushed against it.

**"Do you have somewhere more private?"**

The warm breath against her ear, the lightest graze of lips—it was enough to send a shiver down Aiwarin’s spine.

She pulled back slightly, studying Mevika’s face, then repeated, as if confirming,

"Somewhere more private?"

. .

A few moments later, the door to the VIP room at the far end of the mezzanine opened and shut quickly behind them. The room was lit by a soft golden glow, its brightness adjustable. Right now, it was dim—just enough to see each other’s faces without being too clear.

A long sofa stretched along one side, with a low table in front of it, perfect for drinks. On the opposite side of the room…

The sofa was upholstered in fine fabric, wide enough to raise questions about what kind of guests typically used such a private space. Before Aiwarin could finish explaining, she found herself pressed against the door, her words swallowed by a kiss.

The one who had just entered the room with her was now the one taking charge.

Nothing else mattered in this moment. Aiwarin’s body was pinned against the door, the warmth of Mevika’s chest pressing into her. She didn’t hesitate to kiss back. Within seconds, heat spread through her body, the intensity of their kiss far surpassing the previous two.

*A private room allowed for more than before.*

Aiwarin hadn’t expected Mevika to take the lead so boldly the moment they were alone. But now she understood—Mevika had things she wanted to know. She had said it herself… ***she wanted to try***.

Their lips moved together, urgent and hungry, breaths mingling in the quiet space. The faint thump of music from outside reminded them that the world was still there, unaware of what was happening inside this room.

*Aiwarin and Mevika were creating a secret.*

Perhaps one man had once caught a glimpse of something between them. But no one truly knew what this was—not even the two of them. That was why Mevika had come here searching for answers.

Not to find out whether she would fall for Aiwarin—that was too soon. But to question why no one before had ever made her feel this kind of excitement.

Maybe it wasn’t that she had never felt attraction, but that she had never known herself well enough to recognize it.

There were things she liked—things she was only now beginning to understand. Things that sent a rush of adrenaline through her veins, making her heart race like never before.

That was the answer she sought.

She had never gone beyond kissing with anyone.

And not just anyone had ever kissed her.

The kind of kisses she had experienced before had never been particularly thrilling—never enough to make her heart race. But now, she felt everything.

“Don’t hold back,”

Aiwarin whispered, her tongue sliding past Mevika’s lips.

Maybe she wasn’t used to this. But with just that one instruction, she gave in, allowing Aiwarin to guide her into something new. Within moments, she became part of this kiss, moving in sync with her as if they had done this many times before.

Aiwarin pressed Mevika back against the wall beside the door, heat simmering beneath her skin, feeding her hunger to touch more of her. She traced the curve of her lips, deepening the kiss, igniting a fire between them.

And then, letting instinct take over, her lips moved lower.

“If you want this,”

She murmured against the corner of Mevika’s mouth,

“tell me what you need.”

Her lips traveled down to the sharp edge of her jawline. When she looked up, Mevika had her eyes closed, biting her lip. Aiwarin smirked, pleased by the sight, waiting for her to speak—yet teasing her by trailing kisses down her smooth, exposed neck.

“I’m curious…”

Mevika’s voice was breathless.

“Curious about what?”

Aiwarin pressed, lips brushing just beneath her ear.

“The kiss? Me? Or something?”

“All of it.”

Aiwarin smiled against her skin.

“Is that so?”

She murmured before kissing her deeper at the base of her throat. One arm curled around Mevika’s waist, pulling her even closer. Aiwarin, slightly taller, held her steady, body flush against hers, hands exploring, touch growing bolder.

If she allowed it, this night might go further than either of them had expected.

“How much more do you want to know?”

Aiwarin challenged, lips hovering near her pulse point.

“Help me figure that out.”

“I will.”

With a smirk, Aiwarin pulled back, catching Mevika’s gaze as she gently pushed her toward the wide sofa. She guided her down, hands steady, then lifted one knee onto the edge of the cushion.

And then they were kissing again.

Hot, desperate, almost unbearable.

Mevika leaned back, bracing herself against the plush seat, her arms taut with tension. Aiwarin hovered over her, drinking in the sight, knowing she was dangerously close to losing control.

But then Aiwarin pulled her lips back.

Breathing heavily, she forced herself to pause. And quickly, she spoke. "We shouldn't want this happen here."

Mevika narrowing her eyes, look at Aiwarin intently,

“If not here, then where?”

She could tell Aiwarin already had an answer, but she still wanted to tease.

Aiwarin let out a breathy chuckle, her fingers grazing Mevika’s jaw.

“Somewhere we won’t be interrupted.”

The implication sent a shiver down Mevika’s spine. She searched Aiwarin’s face for hesitation but found none. Instead, there was a challenge, a quiet dare in her eyes.

“Are you suggesting we leave?”

Mevika tilted her head, her voice smooth but laced with curiosity.

Aiwarin’s lips curled into a smirk.

“Unless you’d rather stay here…”

She glanced around the dimly lit VIP room.

“Risky, don’t you think?”

Mevika hummed, pretending to consider it. Then, slowly, she sat up, their faces mere inches apart.

“And where exactly do you have in mind?”

.

# Chapter 09: A Fiery Answer

The door to the luxurious VIP suite on the 50th floor of Oriana Grand opened, welcoming a special guest visiting for the first time tonight. The building, with its unique design, spanned fifty floors and had a wide layout.

Each floor accommodated more than ten rooms, except for the upper levels, where only a few larger suites were located. The top section of the building narrowed, creating a stylish architectural design. Here, a single suite occupied nearly an entire floor, ensuring maximum privacy.

Mevika stepped onto the plush carpet just inside the door as it closed behind her. While she took in the spacious room, the suite's owner knelt to unfasten the straps of her high heels, helping her remove them.

Momentarily distracted from her surroundings, she glanced down at the person who had been attentive from the very first gesture. Leaning against the door for balance, she lifted each foot in turn to slip off her shoes. The woman before her looked up with a smile, then placed Mevika's shoes neatly beside her own-heels that matched the suit she wore tonight. She then spoke softly, just loud enough for them to hear.

"I'll give you just one minute to explore the room."

With a teasing smile, she disappeared into the suite.

From where she stood, Mevika spotted a prominent jacuzzi tub in the far right corner of the room. A short two-step staircase led up to its edge, which was spacious enough to sit comfortably. Shelves nearby held towels, soap, and shampoo. The diagonal angle of the steps guided the way into the tub, which featured built-in acrylic seating molded into the design.

Further inside, a shower area and toilet were enclosed by glass panels, though they offered little to no privacy. Anyone using them would be in full view, making it clear that this suite was designed for either solitary stays or romantic getaways.

Only then did she notice the marble partition around the tub. A curtain had been neatly tucked into a corner, and upon closer inspection, she saw a track on the ceiling-allowing the curtain to be drawn for some level of privacy. However, it didn't seem particularly effective.

It still provided some privacy, but without a door, it only blocked the view. Anyone could walk in and out at any time.

In front of the transparent glass bathroom, there was a long glass counter with various hair care products neatly arranged-a hairdryer, comb, and other grooming essentials. Below the counter were drawers and storage cabinets. Normally, Aiwarin used them to store different supplies, along with towels and three or four sets of bathrobes.

Mevika watched as Aiwarin walked over to the sink in front of the shower, washed her hands, and then dried them on a towel hanging by the mirror. That "*one minute*" she had mentioned earlier seemed to carry a hidden meaning. Since there was still some time left, Mevika took the opportunity to glance around.

On the opposite wall from the sink stood a large wardrobe. To her left, from where she stood, was a spacious king-sized bed. The headboard wall was beautifully decorated with glossy tiles. The bed itself had a modern luxury design, with a wide, upholstered headboard in a muted taupe-gray tone.

A soft gray duvet layered over crisp white sheets, and two large white pillows rested against the headboard. Smaller gray pillows were neatly placed in front. At the far end of the room, a glass wall with drawn curtains marked the best viewpoint of this 50th-floor suite.

Everything in the room-the bed, the bathtub, the amenities-looked inviting.

Especially the bed. Even though she had grown up in a big house with a queen-sized bed, perfect for someone like her, and a cozy, well-decorated bedroom, it still couldn't compare to the luxury of this suite.

Of course, this was the top-floor suite of a hotel often referred to as a sixstar establishment.

It was considered a six-star hotel because it surpassed Oriana First, which was rated five stars. This branch had elevated the standard even further, earning its prestigious reputation.

As she walked toward the foot of the bed, wondering what she would actually use in this lavish room tonight, she suddenly felt arms wrap around her from behind. A whisper brushed against her ear.

"Time's up."

Aiwarin gently touched Mevika's earlobe.

That touch made Mevika close her eyes. Her heartbeat, which had returned to normal for about fifteen minutes-from the bar on the other side of the hotel to this suite-was now becoming erratic again.

Aiwarin's lips brushed against the back of her ear, trailing slowly down the length of her slender neck before pressing a kiss onto her shoulder.

She knew exactly what was about to happen. After all, she had willingly followed Aiwarin up to this room.

With just a gentle turn of her shoulders, she found herself facing Aiwarin, ready for the kiss that soon met her lips.

The kiss that had been interrupted in that small private room of the pinkhued bar was now reignited in this grand, luxurious suite-just two steps away from the waiting bed. She let go of all hesitation.

Whatever happened let's happened. She had chosen to come here for answers, and now she was in the arms of a woman whose every touch sent an electrifying thrill through her.

Aiwarin was an expert kisser, but Mevika refused to be seen as inexperienced. She kissed back with equal skill.

And that was exactly what Aiwarin was feeling now.

"You're good,"

Aiwarin murmured softly as she pulled away briefly, only to press another kiss onto Mevika's lips, again and again. The heat between them flared, a fire that had been lit and now burned uncontrollably.

After a moment, Aiwarin finally broke the kiss, letting her gaze drift over Mevika's beautiful face-the woman who had surrendered to her tonight. Her eyes traveled lower, past her delicate collarbone, down to the curves hidden beneath the elegant dress Mevika had chosen. At this moment, Aiwarin was certain-it had been chosen for her to remove.

Her eyes traced further down, past the graceful curve of Mevika's waist to her smooth, porcelain thighs, sending a subtle shiver through her own body.

"You look absolutely stunning in this dress,"

Aiwarin murmured, her voice filled with admiration as she prepared to take things further.

"And in this dress..."

Mevika let her gaze drop to her own outfit before lifting her eyes back to Aiwarin's with a teasing, sultry look.

"Do I look different from when I wear my work clothes?"

Aiwarin paused for a moment, her gaze locked onto Mevika's. Then, with a small smile and a slight shake of her head, she answered without words.

"I don't know... You look beautiful in both your work clothes and this dress."

Aiwarin took slow, deliberate steps forward, making Mevika retreat closer to the bed. Her voice dropped to a sultry whisper.

"But right now, I don't care what you're wearing... **Because I'm sure you'll look just as beautiful wearing nothing at all**."

With that, Aiwarin captured Mevika's lips again. As her tongue slid in, Mevika responded instinctively, matching the rhythm like it was second nature.

Her hands, once resting lightly on Mevika's shoulders, began to exploretrailing down her arms before brushing over the soft swell of her chest, where her skin peeked out from the fabric. Her fingers pressed gently, savoring the way the plush curves fit perfectly in her palm.

"Mmh..."

A soft moan escaped Mevika's lips, vibrating from her throat.

The sound was too tempting. Aiwarin couldn't hold back. She pulled away from the kiss, trailing heated kisses down Mevika's neck with growing urgency. One arm wrapped around Mevika's waist, while the other guided her to lean back slightly, giving Aiwarin better access to the curves she longed to touch.

Her fingers traced the delicate knot at the back of Mevika's dress, working it loose. The fabric loosened easily, ready to slide off at a moment's notice. But Aiwarin held back, wanting to savor every second before taking her to the bed.

Mevika's heart pounded so wildly she was sure Aiwarin could hear it. Her breathing hitched as Aiwarin's lips roamed over her exposed skin, never ceasing their exploration. In an effort to steady herself, she gripped the back of Aiwarin's neck, holding on as waves of sensation washed over her.

When Aiwarin finally pulled away from her chest to claim her lips once more, Mevika let her hands slip from Aiwarin's nape. Instead, she pressed her fingers against the firm chest now so close to hers. She let her touch drift downward, using just two fingers to trace along the valley between Aiwarin's breasts, teasing along the edge of her blazer where the buttons sat just below the neckline.

Aiwarin pulled back slightly, eyes flickering down to watch Mevika's fingers at work. Her gaze darkened with interest as Mevika applied just a little more pressure against the fabric separating them. Then, with a slow, knowing smile, Aiwarin reached up and unfastened the top button of her blazer.

Curious, Mevika hesitated for only a second before slipping her fingertips inside, barely grazing the soft skin beneath. "You're not wearing a bra."

"It depends on what I wear to the bar,"

Aiwarin murmured.

"Most of the time, I don't."

"No bra at the bar?" Mevika smirked.

Aiwarin let out a soft chuckle at the teasing. She glanced down at Mevika's chest, arching an eyebrow instead of asking outright.

"My dress has a built-in bra,"

Mevika answered before Aiwarin could speak. She knew exactly what the other woman wanted to ask. That also meant that once the dress was off, there wouldn't be anything left on her upper body to remove.

Her eyes drifted to the blazer's partially undone buttons. With one already undone, only two more remained between her and the skin beneath. Mevika's hand still rested against the fabric, and Aiwarin, noticing her hesitation, spoke up.

"If you want to do something... go ahead."

She leaned in, placing a trail of kisses along Mevika's cheek and jawline.

"No,"

Mevika shook her head, leaning in to whisper teasingly against Aiwarin's ear.

"I'd rather save it for the bed."

And with that, she wrapped both arms around Aiwarin's neck.

Aiwarin smirked. That was all the encouragement she needed. There was no reason to keep teasing any longer. With a firm but controlled motion, she guided Mevika backward in sync with her movements, until she pushed her onto the plush bed.

Mevika shifted to sit at the center while Aiwarin swiftly closed the distance between them. They kissed again, this time in a seated position, with Mevika straddling her legs.

Aiwarin slid her hands under Mevika's arms, wrapping them around her back to pull her in even closer. Her fingers traced over smooth skin, finally reaching the loosened ties at the back of the dress.

She tugged at the strings, carefully unraveling them. The fabric loosened, slipping slightly as she let her hands roam over Mevika's back. Slowly, she slid one strap off Mevika's shoulder, pressing a kiss against the faint line the strap had left behind. Her lips trailed downward, her breath warm against Mevika's skin, as she repeated the motion on the other side.

She took her time, savoring the moment, gently peeling down the bodice of the dress. The cool air of the room met Mevika's heated skin, sending a small shiver through her. Whether it was from the air conditioning or the anticipation of Aiwarin's next touch, she wasn't sure.

What she did know was that the night was only just beginning.

Slowly stepping down, looking down at the person who should have seen everything from the sight that was so close. She just couldn't see her own chest because Aiwarin's head was blocking it, with those lips were touching down.

"Ah...."

Feeling the rise from the lips that were attached to the top of the chest that no one had ever touched like this before, feeling light, heart trembling, churning in the lower abdomen, and breathing erratically from getting to know her own desires that Mevika had never used before.

The second touch on the same spot made her chest tremble violently, and the third time, she felt a tight, sucking force that made her lower body turbulent. Both hands that were supporting the soft cushion were supported by only one side.

Mevika left hand was raised up to place on that head, brushing the soft hair lightly, with the sound of breathing that got heavier every time. Raising the same hand up to bite her thumb lightly. When her head moved to the other chest and did the same thing as before, the touch that wasn't rushed, but instead made her feel light and restless at the same time.

Mavika's slender arms were running out of strength, and she wanted to lie down so that Aiwarin could feel it fully. She let her lie down, but she was the one who held back.

But when she pushed, Aiwarin stopped and looking at the person who had her shoulder pressed down, she knew the answer when Mevika moved to quickly unbutton the remaining buttons of her suit jacket, spreading them open and hurriedly taking them off her arms.

She helped shake them off and dropped them at the end of the bed. Seeing the eyes looking at the upper body that was revealed for her to admire, even though she was usually not shy easily, when it was Mevika's eyes, she felt a little shy.

The emotions that were gradually being aroused by the slow touch until she had the opportunity could not be held back any longer. So Aiwarin pushed the other person down to lie down and pulled the dress that was stuck at the waist off.

Aiwarin's face was buried on the smooth neck. Listening to the gasp in the throat when her lips were touching it only aroused her even more. Mevika arched her body and tilted her head up, accepting her touch to the fullest.

Kissing under the chin that was so delicate and soft, the slender hands squeezed and kneaded the soft chest that made the person being touched even more breathless, alternating with the fingertips that sucked the sensitive spot with fun.

Aiwarin kissed her lips again, before moving down, her lips occupying the part that was allowed to touch it, lifting her head to look at the thing, whatever it was, it was given to Mevika so well, it was so beautiful and delightful.

Aiwarin touched it again, and the groan made her feel it with her until she accidentally let out a ragged breath when she pulled her lips out.

Aiwarin moved down to her stomach that she must have been exercising for a while, so it looked firm. When she moved and tensed, she saw a faint line showing the muscles on her stomach that was worth admiring, so she admired it for a while before moving down even lower.

She lifted herself up and took off her own trousers, leaned down again, pressed her lips on Mevika's stomach near the edge of the thin cloth, hooked her fingertips and pulled them down slowly, while her lips moved down, she felt a little restless movement, but it didn't cover or stop her in any way when she took off the last piece of cloth and slid it off her legs.

Mevika lifted her legs up a little higher and dropped them, before Aiwarin pushed them out and inserted herself in the middle. It was the moment that Mevika must have felt a little embarrassed, so she clamped her legs together, but she couldn't do anything more than that because she was in the middle. Aiwarin moved her face to the target position, took a quick look and smiled, but intended to save it for later.

Aiwarin pressed her lips on her front thigh. Sliding down to the inner thigh, pushing it up to kiss lower underneath, circling that part for a long time until the person being touched started to put her hips off the seat.

"Uh..."

Heard the moan sound from the person who could do nothing but wait for the owner to give her the first experience, not wanting to tease, but to create excitement between each other, until she felt the slender legs stepping on the soft cushion with repeated swaying, so she put both arms around that thigh, holding it tight and moving her face to the point she had saved for last.

"Ah...."

Mevika's voice escaped her throat with a loud gasp. After that, it became an indescribable sound, a sound that Aiwarin felt especially happy about. She pressed the tip of her tongue down gently and gradually increased the force according to the response of the person who was fighting her touch. The rise made it slippery to insert the tip of her tongue, making the person let out a loud shriek.

Smiling grimly in gratitude when she felt the hips arching in response, the moaning, and the opening for her to fully touch without shame or blocking.

Mevika always thought sex was exciting, but she wasn't ready to have it at the time. She wasn't open to letting anyone into her closed space.

When she hadn't found anyone that made her feel safe and satisfied, she had questioned it for so long that she thought she was going to die, because she had never wanted it from anyone.

But today, she just realized that she had just met someone else in the wrong place all along. Just because there was no one she was attracted to didn't mean that her unused desires had dysfunctional.

Now, Aiwarin was waking it up. From the sight, the closeness, the short time they had known each other, the set of needs from her emotions made her agree to kiss her and agree to lie down and sacrifice her body on this bed.

Her head resting on the pillows leaning against the headboard, stacked on two levels, made her look down without having to lift her head. Looking down at her body, she saw Aiwarin, who was dazzling in her eyes every time, doing something to her here.

When she looked up at her, those hot eyes seemed to burn her. She was happy to release that shameful voice without holding back because it made her feel truly released. And that voice seemed to urge the other person to have the same emotions. That's why it increased the intensity of every beat.

"Ah, ah....."

Mevika couldn't stand it anymore if Aiwarin keep touching that part of her body like this. She lift her thumb up and bite it hard and try to move her hips away, but she ended up arching her back to receive the touch.

"Khun Ai..."

Finally, she let out her name. If it will make her do something more than that, and it seems like she knows.

"Huh?"

She answered in a sweet voice before moving up to kiss the lips of the person who called her name softly. Just changing the position doesn't mean that she will stop. Because now her hand moved down, letting the tip of her finger do the job of the lips that were tasting it to the fullest.

It was ready enough for her to insert it slowly. Start with one, just one. For the first round, it should be enough.

Because tonight, she wouldn't let it end with just one round, when there was a chance to take the girl she liked to bed with her.

It was the first time that Mevika learned how desirable the taste of the touch was. She felt the rhythmic response. Just by moving her hips, just by making a sound, Aiwarin knew where to speed up or emphasize which part until she found the point that made her feel like she was hanging this raw emotion in a satisfying place. And she got there, with Aiwarin taking her there successfully.

She took a deep breath to release it. The pressure of the two pairs of breasts, one hugging and the other hugging for support, gradually slowed down and then released from each other.

Aiwarin let Mevika rest. She knew that she wouldn't get tired easily. She just had to wait for a moment to catch her breath. She kissed her lips lightly. She kissed her back before kissing her cheek and then her sweat-free forehead.

The air conditioner must have been working well. She was surprised at herself for doing this because she had never kissed anyone else's face other than their lips, but she did it to Mevika without thinking about it in her empty mind and letting her feelings take over.

"Do you like it?"

She whispered softly. When she still leaned her face close and moved, resting her arms on her side, waiting to hear the answer beside her.

Mevika squinted. She turned her body slightly to the side to talk properly. She thought that she would not know how to act, but when it passed, she was able to lie down and talk like this comfortably. It was strange that Aiwarin made everything easy for her. Easy that included treating each other naturally.

"It's not bad," she replied.

"I want a direct answer, do you like it?"

Other things she would let her play with words to avoid, but this matter she wanted to know.

"If I say I like it, what will happen?"

She wanted to answer directly, but she also wanted to go back and play hard to get. Otherwise, it would be easy.

"So I can do it again."

She turned to lie on her stomach, so it was pressed against the person lying on her side. It was just right. The head that was raised higher looked at the person lying in the lower position and helped to arrange the messy hair.

"And if I say I don't like it.."

"I'll try again until you like it."

"No matter how my answer, it seems like you'll have an advantage."

Mevika twitches the corner of her mouth.

"Well.." Aiwarin laughs.

"I don't ask everyone like that. Let me tell you."

"Then it's an honor."

You could say it's sarcastic, but it feels a little true.

"So are you going to answer or not?"

"Do you want me to answer?"

Mevika places her hand on the shoulder of the person in front of her and strokes it back and forth, lightly. She pushes it a little while moving to get up. When Aiwarin leans back to turn over, Mevika pushes her down to lie on her back under her body.

"Do you want me to answer in words or something else?"

"As you wish."

She lies looking at the person who has moved to straddle her body. Her heart beats a little faster than before as she wonders what she's going to do.

"If I don't like it, I might get out of this bed and go home right away. But right now, I don't want to go back yet."

She lowers her gaze to look at the small piece of cloth that Aiwarin is still wearing. She smiles slyly and moves down to take it off for her. With the eyes of the person looking at her, while she looked back at her with a passionate gaze, glancing at the thing she was about to throw away, and flicking it off her fingertips.

Looking at the body that was so tempting that she almost swallowed her saliva. Aiwarin's figure, when not wearing any clothes, was very good, like a valuable sculpture.

She looked from her legs up to her beautiful chest, her chin, her beautiful face that made her feel nervous whenever she looked at it. And then there was that pair of eyes that didn't seem to flinch at what she was challenging.

Slowly moving her hips past the legs that she was straddling and then throwing them there, the middle of her hips that Aiwarin herself didn't think she would put her middle part down there, before she reached out her hand to pull Aiwarin up to her.

Aiwarin understood everything easily, even though Mevika hadn't said anything yet, and of course, she understood everything correctly.

Mevika moved her arms to wrap around the neck of the person who was sitting and pressing her chest against her, pulling her closer, and then moved her hips to the perfect position again before she begged in a sexy voice.

"Make me like it even more than before."

.

# Chapter 10: Not Taking It Back

Something felt different about sleeping in her own bed last night. That feeling nudged Aiwarin awake a little earlier than usual. She was normally an early riser, except on nights when she had to stay late at the bar. On regular days, waking up at six was easy for her.

If she stayed out late, she would wake up about an hour later. On very late nights, she might sleep in a little more, but never past 7:30 AM—she had too many responsibilities to take care of.

She always set aside fifteen minutes for exercise, as she didn't have time for a full workout. Instead, she relied on consistency—just fifteen minutes a day—to maintain her health and build strength. Most of her exercises focused on her core, like planking.

After that, she spent fifteen minutes eating breakfast, then got dressed and did her makeup before leaving her room at 8:30 AM. Some days, she went to the office in the other building of the hotel. But most of the time, she had to go to the main office, which was located at the Oriana First Hotel. If she was at home, the commute took longer, but she always tried to be in her office by 9:00 AM.

This morning was different. She woke up at six even though she could have slept longer. Last night, for the first time, she had spent time in bed with a special guest—a woman—and they had been together for nearly an hour before falling asleep sometime after midnight. It hadn’t been too late, but they had enjoyed themselves so much that it left them exhausted.

The first thing that came to her mind upon waking was **Mevika’s** name. She opened her eyes, searching for her. Mevika was still asleep beside her, wrapped in the same blanket. It was a feeling she hadn’t expected to experience so soon, considering how briefly they had known each other.

Getting close to someone and taking things this far wasn’t easy. She never thought Mevika is easy. She was arrogant and reserved, yet willing to open herself up to things she was curious about. That was why, despite seeming difficult to approach, she had still allowed Aiwarin to step into her world.

But that didn’t mean things would be easy from now on.

Aiwarin couldn’t quite figure out what to make of this relationship. It could very well be just something temporary.

She had given Mevika an answer last night. Now, it was Mevika’s choice to decide what came next.

She thought she could lie in bed a little longer and wait for Mevika to wake up. But then, the phone on the pillow next to Mevika started vibrating. Aiwarin saw her shift slightly and quickly shut her eyes, pretending to still be asleep.

"Hello?"

Mevika's voice was heavy with sleep as she answered the call.

"Oh, last night? I went out drinking with some friends. I stayed over at a friend's place, so I didn’t go home."

There was a soft rustling sound, making Aiwarin wonder if Mevika had turned to look at her.

"I just woke up. I should probably head back soon. Yes, I know, I have a meeting at ten. No, I won’t be late. It’s fine, really."

With that, Mevika ended the call.

Aiwarin remained still, eyes closed, pretending that the conversation had just woken her up. She shifted slightly, as if stirring from sleep.

Mevika was still holding her phone, lying on her side and looking at Aiwarin. Her mind was processing the reality of waking up in the same bed as this woman. She had been fully aware of everything last night, even in her half-asleep state. But waking up to see Aiwarin’s face beside her felt... *strange*.

She had a moment to take in the slight movement of Aiwarin’s eyelids, the faint furrow of her brows, the elegant curve of her neck, and the smooth skin of her shoulder, left uncovered by the blanket. Then, Mevika glanced down at herself—she was in the same state.

It didn’t shock her. She wasn’t suddenly realizing what had happened. But she did find herself questioning it.

*What was I thinking, letting Aiwarin have me?*

*And I was the one who seduced her.*

*Was it just because I wanted an answer?*

*Or... did I like her?*

*No....My feelings didn’t come that easily to anyone.*

She had never given herself to anyone so easily before, either.

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Aiwarin stretched slightly and opened her eyes. She had purposely shifted to lie on her side so she could watch Mevika’s face. The moment her eyes opened, she found Mevika already looking at her.

"Mm..."

Aiwarin pretended to be drowsy as she woke up. Before she could say anything more, Mevika was already sitting up, pulling the blanket over herself.

"Wait, are you leaving already?"

Aiwarin asked.

"I need to use the bathroom. And yes, I have to go—I need to get dressed for work. I have a meeting this morning."

"You could stay for another five minutes,"

Aiwarin said with a smile as she sat up against the headboard.

"I already spent the whole night with you. That should be enough."

Mevika gathered her clothes and moved to sit at the edge of the bed.

"Do you have a towel I can use?"

Aiwarin smirked.

"You're in the top-floor suite of one of the biggest hotels in the country."

She grabbed her long blazer and slipped it on, fastening only the last button so it draped over her thighs. Then she walked toward the bathroom.

"Come on, follow me."

She glanced back at Mevika, who was still sitting at the edge of the bed, unclothed. Aiwarin stopped in her tracks.

"Wait here a second."

She disappeared for a moment and returned with a bathrobe and a fresh white towel.

"You can use the bathroom freely. If you have time, I’d recommend soaking in the tub—it's like an onsen. But judging by your schedule, I doubt you have that kind of time."

"Unfortunately I won’t get to use it,"

Mevika said as she took the robe and towel.

"You can use it next time,"

Aiwarin said casually.

"I don’t think there will be a next time."

Mevika unfolded the robe and put it on.

Aiwarin raised an eyebrow.

"Oh? What do you mean by that?"

"You do this all the time, don’t you? Never serious about anyone. I’m just another one of them. And I don’t mind."

Aiwarin’s expression remained unreadable.

"That’s not how I see it. If you ever want to come back, I’d be more than happy."

"There’s no need."

Mevika shook her head.

"I already found the answer I was looking for. That’s enough. You know as well as I do—we shouldn’t be seeing each other like this. We’re not partners. We’re competitors. I hope you'll keep this a secret. And when we see each other outside, it’ll be like this never happened." "So that’s what you intended from the start?" "I got my answer from you. And I answered myself."

Mevika's voice was steady.

"You said yourself that you don’t dare to be serious with anyone because you don’t want to drag them into your problems. You wouldn’t want to drag me into them either. And honestly, I don’t think you’re truly interested in me like that."

"What if—"

Aiwarin started but then stopped. She smiled and shrugged.

"I don’t know. I’m not sure yet which woman will end up being the one in my second choice."

"You mean the one you'd actually commit to if you found the right person?"

"You remember."

"If it’s about that,"

Mevika smiled and shook her head slowly, "then that person isn’t me."

With that, she turned and walked toward the bathroom, Aiwarin’s gaze following her.

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The first thing Mevika thought as she stepped into the glass-enclosed livingroom was how she should use the bathroom privately or just shower and turn it into seductive?

But she didn’t have time for that. Nor was she in the mood to seduce anyone first thing in the morning, especially when she had a meeting to rush to.

Looking up, she noticed a set of blinds above the glass panel. With a quick pull, the curtain dropped down, giving her the privacy she needed. She showered quickly—she had just washed her hair yesterday, and while she would’ve liked to do it again, she didn’t want to inconvenience Aiwarin. The woman probably needed to shower before heading to work too.

So she left it like that. At least today would be clean enough for another day and she barely sweated anyway.

Even last night, despite all the exertion, the air conditioning had done its job well. Her skin remained dry and smooth, not a hint of sweat lingering.

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"Are you really going to drive home in that pink dress from last night this early in the morning?"

Aiwarin, now in a bathrobe, walked toward Mevika, who was combing her hair in front of the mirror. Mevika had also stepped out of the bathroom in a bathrobe after finishing her shower.

"I was just thinking about that. I guess I’ll have to go home and change."

"You don’t have to do that. If you’re willing to wear my clothes, I think you’ll find something suitable."

Aiwarin walked over to her large wardrobe and pulled it open, revealing an array of neatly hung work outfits.

"These are just a few of the ones I keep here. My favorites are at home. Take your pick."

Mevika raised an eyebrow.

"You have a hundred outfits in here, and you’re saying none of them are your favorites?"

"Not a hundred," Aiwarin laughed.

"Maybe forty or fifty."

Mevika glanced at the collection with mild amusement but didn’t let it show. It wasn’t surprising, really. Aiwarin had a reputation for being a fashion-forward woman, so having this many clothes was expected.

"Is this just an excuse to make sure we meet again?"

Mevika asked, crossing her arms.

"Since I’d have to return the outfit to you?"

Aiwarin smirked.

"You’re idea so brilliant. I should use it sometime."

She wasn’t really flustered at being caught, mostly because she hadn’t actually thought that far ahead.

"I’d like for you to come back, but if you don’t, that’s fine too. You can keep the outfit. Or send it back with a rider if you’d rather not see me again."

Mevika chuckled.

"I wouldn’t dare trust your expensive clothes with a delivery guy."

She stepped closer to the wardrobe, scanning the selection.

"I honestly hadn’t thought about how I’d return it. But since you say I don’t have to, I guess I’ll take you up on that offer."

"Go ahead, take your pick."

Aiwarin gestured toward the wardrobe and stepped aside, giving her space.

"Don’t hesitate to choose the best one—I don’t mind. I’m going to shower now. Hopefully, you won’t run off before saying goodbye."

Mevika listened to Aiwarin’s parting remark, glancing briefly toward her. It was strange how someone could look so effortlessly attractive just standing there in a bathrobe. She turned her focus back to the wardrobe, scanning the neatly arranged clothes.

If Aiwarin kept this many outfits here, did she have an entire room dedicated to clothing at home?

She eventually settled on a camel-colored cropped blazer with the sleeves folded up just enough to reveal her wrists. Underneath, she wore a fitted white camisole that hugged her figure, tucked into wide-leg trousers that added a sleek, confident touch.

Mevika rarely wore pants, preferring skirts most of the time, but once in a while, she’d opt for a pantsuit. Since Aiwarin had quite a few stylish sets, she decided to give this one a try.

"You’re pretty good at picking a set of pants,"

Aiwarin’s voice broke the silence.

Mevika turned to see her stepping out of the glass-walled bathroom— without a lock. A white towel was wrapped around her body, droplets of water glistening on her skin. Her damp hair was swept over one shoulder, and with her height, the towel barely covered her thighs. The whole image was effortlessly sensual.

"You keep your wardrobe so organized—it wasn’t that hard,"

Mevika tried to look only at Aiwarin’s face because just looking at her beautiful figure in that single towel made her afraid that she would accidentally compliment.

"I’ve chosen this outfit. I’ll decide later whether to return it or not."

"Just keep it. No need to return it. I can buy more like it—it's not a rare collection."

"Should I be counting this as part of my… compensation?"

Mevika teased, half-smiling. "I don’t see it that way at all,"

Aiwarin answered smoothly.

"Honestly, I’d just like to have some reason for you to come back."

"That wasn’t part of my plan,"

Mevika said, glancing at the clock.

"And now, I really have to go. Thanks for last night."

"What was the answer?"

Aiwarin asked quickly before she could leave.

"An answer? You were the one supposed to give the answer. But I won’t tell you—I need to think about it a little more."

"Then if there's ever a chance, I hope you’ll come back and give me that answer yourself. Good luck. See you next time—wherever we'll meet."

She paused.

"There's probably no such thing as coincidence."

Mevika met her gaze. It was a relief that Aiwarin wasn’t pushing for anything beyond what had already happened. She wanted to see her again— not obsessively, not desperately, but just enough. And that was probably enough.

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"In the next meeting, let’s coordinate with Maple’s schedule before setting a date,"

Montita, the director of Superior Company, said, addressing the conference room. That morning’s meeting was about managing branches in Bangkok, with her daughter, Mevika, also in the meeting.

"After next week's auction, Maple will need to focus on that. The chairman has entrusted her with it. If we win the bid, there will be plenty more meetings to come."

She turned to Mevika with a warm smile.

"Give it your all, Maple."

"Yes, Director,"

Mevika replied formally. The word "Mom" was reserved for private moments.

"Good. That concludes today’s meeting. Let’s get back to work,"

Montita announced, standing up while gathering her iPad and a slim notebook. Her secretary quickly packed up her personal laptop to return to her desk.

"Are you heading out today?" "No, I’ll be at the office all day," Mevika replied.

"Okay. By the way—pants today?"

Montita gave her daughter a once-over.

"You don’t wear them often. It’s a different look, but I like it. You look great."

She didn’t notice if the outfit was new or not—Mevika always dressed well, so it didn’t stand out as unusual. Although Montita was stylish herself, her fashion sense was different, shaped by her age and experience.

"It’s practical, right? Maybe I should dress like this more often,"

Mevika said, glancing down at her outfit. She knew exactly whose clothes she was wearing. The thought of how she got them made her certain that no one could ever find out. It was a secret no one in this room would ever know.

As the high-ranking employees trickled out of the meeting room, some overheard Montita’s compliment and smiled at Mevika’s outfit.

"It suits you. You look good in anything, really. Wear whatever you like," Montita said.

"Ms. Maple is our office fashion icon!"

The 45-year-old product planning manager chimed in.

"We talk about it all the time."

"You all gossip about Maple?" Montita teased.

"No, no, not at all!"

The manager quickly denied it, looking for backup.

"We admire her, right?"

"Right! Ms. Maple looks good in everything. We’re jealous," The assistant manager added with a grin.

"She’s beautiful, but still single—her dad is so protective,"

Montita joked, shifting the teasing to her daughter.

"I wonder if anyone’s even trying to pursue her."

"Oh, true! But it’s fine. We get to enjoy her beauty for ourselves a little longer,"

Another colleague laughed. "That’s one way to look at it,"

Montita mused.

"Though I wonder if it’s really because her dad is protective, or if she’s just guarding herself too much."

Mevika hesitated. Just last night, she might have agreed. But after what happened, she couldn’t lie to herself anymore. She had always thought she was just being cautious—but maybe that wasn’t the whole truth.

"I don’t think I’m guarding myself,"

She admitted, her voice light but thoughtful.

"I just… thinking too much." "Are you thinking too much?" Montita tilted her head.

"Seems like it," Mevika smiled.

"I should get back to work. It’s almost noon. If you want to have lunch together, just text me, okay?"

With that, she left the meeting room, letting her mind shift gears. But even as she focused on work, her thoughts kept drifting back to the past 24 hours —time spent at Greater office, where work had been the last thing on her mind.

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# Chapter 11: Pretending Not to Know

The past four days had gone by slowly for a woman who loved working like Aiwarin. Holidays made time feel even slower for her, so she spent her time preparing information for the auction, where she would need to go and purchase the bidding documents on Tuesday.

Monday, however, was a busy day with her main work, making it pass by quickly.

And finally, Tuesday arrived.

She wasn’t sure if she was particularly focused because of the auction or because she was secretly hoping to see someone.

“It’s both,”

Aiwarin said to her secretary, whom she had brought with her to Greater Tower office this morning.

“Coming on the first day will draw media attention. And secondly, it shows our clear intention to participate in the auction. If we don’t show up today, people will start speculating and think we’re not as eager as we claimed in interviews.”

“If it were Mr. Athiwit, there would probably be a third reason,”

Yolada said with a smile as she walked beside her boss.

“What’s the third reason?”

Aiwarin turned to her, curious.

“Letting a competitor get ahead first—he wouldn’t stand for it,”

Yolada whispered, covering her mouth.

“You’re bold to say that,” Aiwarin laughed.

“Um… I didn’t mean to criticize your father.”

“I know. We all know what my father is like. You’re absolutely right. Yes, he would definitely complain. He always insists that we should come in on the first day to make an impression, even though buying later wouldn’t really make much of a difference.”

"Yes, exactly,"

Yolada commented with relief, glad that she and her boss were on the same page. She had only spoken her mind because she knew Aiwarin wouldn’t scold her for it. But after saying it, she briefly wondered whether it was the right thing to say.

"Are you looking for someone, Ms. Ai?"

"Hmm?"

Aiwarin quickly turned to her secretary after glancing around the lobby as they entered the office building.

"Not at all. It’s just quiet today. There are probably only a couple of bidders here, maybe two or three at most." "Or maybe we’re the only ones."

"I don’t think so. Let’s head upstairs."

With that, she casually slipped her hand into her suit pocket and walked toward the elevator.

"Why don’t you think we’re the only ones? Others might hold off until later, taking their time to make an entrance and surprise everyone at the last moment."

"Oh?"

Aiwarin stopped walking and looked at her.

"Is that what you think?"

Hearing that made her enthusiasm waver slightly. She was now weighing the possibilities in her mind.

"It’s possible."

"Then maybe I was too eager. Which floor is it?"

She reached out to press the elevator button as soon as they arrived, watching the red digital numbers display the lift’s current position.

"Third floor."

"Okay."

Just as she finished speaking, the right-side elevator arrived. She stepped in, with Yolada hurrying behind her. The lift began its ascent, stopping on the second floor.

Initially, there had been only two of them inside, but now someone else had called for it. When the doors opened, Aiwarin froze for a moment.

Mevika stood there.

Their eyes met, both momentarily stunned to see each other in this place. Mevika hesitated for three or four seconds before stepping aside to make room. Aiwarin then moved in, standing next to her.

The elevator doors closed, leaving the two women standing side by side in the center. A silence settled between them.

Aiwarin stole a glance at the woman beside her, who was dressed in a kneelength black dress layered with a white blazer. It was formal, yet undeniably stylish.

*She wanted to say something—but…*

They weren’t alone in the elevator, so keeping things strictly formal would have been easy. But because there were things only the two of them knew, their behavior wasn’t entirely natural.

“We’ve arrived,”

Yolada announced as the elevator doors opened, yet neither her boss nor the other woman stepped out.

“Mm,”

Aiwarin murmured softly before shifting slightly to let Mevika exit first. Mevika walked out immediately without acknowledging her.

Each of them headed toward the designated area for purchasing the bidding documents, where Mevika’s secretary was already waiting. “Miss Maple, I thought you’d arrive later. Was there traffic?”

Jirana greeted her boss enthusiastically.

“There was, but I planned extra travel time. Honestly, there was no rush. Coming in the afternoon would have been fine.”

“But you have a client meeting this afternoon,”

Jirana reminded her.

“Right, if not for that, I probably would have come later.”

Aiwarin overheard their conversation. Mevika’s approach was different from hers. She intended to buy the bidding documents on the first day, but she wasn’t as determined as Aiwarin, who had rushed over as soon as the office opened.

Competition was important, but to Mevika, perhaps it wasn’t necessary to be first in line.

“Shall we go ahead?”

Aiwarin asked, glancing at the staff waiting at the desk. Now seemed like a good time to proceed.

“Let others go first. I’m not in a hurry,” Mevika replied.

“You’re not going in first?”

Aiwarin asked as she passed by.

Mevika stopped and glanced at her briefly, not expecting to be addressed in front of both their secretaries. But then again, Aiwarin had always been straightforward and open in her actions.

“No rush. Please, go ahead,” Mevika replied.

“I thought I should check,”

Aiwarin smiled.

“If you’re not stepping in, then I’ll take the opportunity.”

She chose her words carefully, keeping them polite in front of both their secretaries.

She kept her tone polite and formal to avoid appearing too familiar—even though she had been speaking to Mevika this way since their very first meeting.

“Please, go ahead.”

Mevika made a small, courteous gesture with her hand. It could be seen as maintaining her professional image, but it was something she naturally intended to do. As she glanced to the side, she suddenly noticed four or five journalists waiting.

The moment Aiwarin stepped up to the table to sign the documents, the reporters stood up, cameras in hand. More journalists quickly joined in, surprising her—just moments ago, the atmosphere had seemed so calm.

“Miss Maple, aren’t you going in now?”

Jeerana asked, watching as the media swarmed around Aiwarin, capturing photos.

“Your father said he wants the media to focus on Superior as much as possible. The more attention we get, the more support we’ll have from those watching this auction.”

“Going in later means I won’t be the first one in the news, but I’ll still be talked about,”

Mevika explained, giving the most straightforward reasoning that would help her secretary understand without questioning her decision.

“Buying the documents a few minutes earlier doesn’t mean she’ll win the auction.” She smiled knowingly.

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“Thank you.”

Mevika rose from her seat after finishing the paperwork and picked up a brown envelope containing the sealed auction documents. The moment she stood, the waiting journalists rushed toward her, surrounding her while also making way for a senior figure who had just arrived to take part in the photos.

“Miss Mevika, could you take a picture with Mr. Direk? He just arrived,”

One of the male reporters asked.

“Oh, of course.”

Hearing that name, Mevika immediately recalled who he was—Direk, the chairman of the Thailand International Duty-Free Authority. She had first seen him at the press conference announcing the Greater Duty-Free auction.

That day, she hadn’t spoken to him directly since her father had been the one leading discussions with the senior executives before officially introducing her as the person overseeing the project.

“Hello,”

Mevika greeted Direk before lifting the envelope slightly, allowing him to hold it with her as the press had requested. He played along, taking it from her momentarily for the cameras.

After the photos were taken, they exchanged a few words.

“Thank you for participating in the auction. Please let your father know that Superior is just as credible as any other competitor,” Direk said.

“Yes,”

She responded, though she figured he had probably said the same thing to Aiwarin before coming over to her.

While she was busy reviewing the documents, she noticed some reporters suddenly rushing toward another area. It wasn’t hard to guess that they were going to capture Aiwarin, who had finished purchasing the bidding documents before her.

That must have been when Direk had first arrived. Now, however, the media’s attention shifted once again as they quickly made way for someone approaching her.

“Hello, Mr. Rachen,”

Afemale reporter called out to the man. As soon as one reporter greeted him, the others followed suit.

“Mr. Rachen, is Great & Grow participating in the auction today?”

One of the journalists asked.

“Yes, I’m here on behalf of Great & Grow,”

Rachen, a 38-year-old businessman, replied with a confident smile. Then, turning his attention to Mevika, he walked closer and greeted her.

“Hello, Miss Mevika.”

His charming smile was warm yet poised as he extended his hand politely.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Mevika stood still for a moment, surprised that he was greeting her so openly in front of the press. It was just a business introduction, but his overly courteous demeanor, paired with that effortless charm, felt oddly deliberate. Still, given the situation, she couldn’t just stand there. She extended her hand in return.

“Yes, hello, Mr.—”

“Rachen,” He supplied with a smile.

“You probably don’t know my name yet.”

“Ah, I remember now. I’ve heard of you,”

She replied.

“Great & Grow—a major player in the consumer goods industry. But this is our first time meeting in person.”

Now that he had introduced himself, and with the reporters mentioning his company’s name, she recognized him. Given her background in the retail and shopping mall business, it was natural that she was familiar with such a key industry figure.

Many of Great & Grow’s products were sold in her supermarkets and various stores across the country.

In terms of business size, owning multiple large-scale department stores nationwide seemed like a bigger enterprise. However, in terms of reach, Great & Grow’s business had a wider customer base.

Their products weren’t limited to a dozen or so shopping malls—they were available in every district and province, reaching consumers in every corner of the country.

“That’s great. At least you’re familiar with Great & Grow. Our products are in your stores.”

“My father’s stores,” Mevika corrected.

“You’re the owner’s daughter. I’d say that makes you an heir to the business.”

“Yes,”

She replied simply. She didn’t want to prolong the conversation, knowing it would only attract more media attention.

“I’ll take my leave now. Please go ahead and handle your documents, Mr. Rachen.”

“Of course. We may be competitors in this auction, but in business, I’d say we’re good partners.”

“Hmm.”

Mevika considered his words briefly.

“I suppose so.”

That was all she said before turning to her personal secretary, who had stepped forward to collect the documents from her. She quickly made her way toward her assistant, while the remaining reporters rushed over to capture Rachen as he sat down to sign his documents.

From another corner of the room, a pair of eyes watched the scene intently. As the commotion settled, a quiet chuckle escaped, accompanied by a slight shake of the head.

Then, with a swift motion, a slender hand crushed the paper cone used to drink cold water from dispenser and tossed it into the trash.

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# Chapter 12: The Hidden Answer

"Ms. Maple, do you have another client meeting? If so, I'll head back now,"

Jeerana said to her boss while double-checking all the documents she would personally take back to the company and handle.

"Yes, I still have some time before meeting the client. But going back to the office would take too long, so I'll probably find a café to work on the project plan,"

Mevika replied to her secretary.

"Thank you, P'Jee. Please take good care of everything. See you tomorrow at the 9 AM meeting. Has the bidding team received the schedule? This meeting will finalize all the planning."

"Everything is set. There shouldn't be any issues. I'll review everything again in the morning."

"Alright, thank you. Have a safe trip back."

"Okay."

Mevika watched her personal secretary walk away before glancing around to see if a certain someone was still nearby. However, since that woman had finished her bidding documents earlier, she had probably already left for work.

And if Mevika thought she would still be around waiting for her, she was just imagining things. A woman like her, who had plenty of choices, would probably see Mevika as just another woman passing through her life.

With that thought in mind, Mevika didn’t expect any special attention—just a temporary relationship at most.

It was now 10 AM. She still had three hours before her afternoon client meeting, leaving enough time for lunch somewhere. She headed straight for the parking lot exit. Today, she had parked on the second floor, just like last time. As she reached the elevator, she pressed the button, and it arrived just in time.

Stepping inside, just as the doors were about to close, she suddenly heard a voice call out to her.

"You parked on the second floor again?"

The voice made Mevika freeze. She immediately recognized it and quickly turned to look at the person who had stepped into the elevator after her.

"I'm heading back,"

Aiwarin said with a smile.

"Good morning. Looks like the bidding process is off to a good start today."

"It would be better if all the conditions in the proposal were revised as requested,"

Mevika replied, pressing the button for the second floor.

"You're going to the first floor, right?"

"I'm going to the second."

Mevika frowned. She remembered that when she arrived, Aiwarin had come up from the first floor. Or maybe she had parked on the second floor but had gone down to the lobby earlier.

"You should apply for VIP parking access," Aiwarin suggested.

"That way, you won't have to park on the second floor."

"VIP parking access?"

"The first floor has security guards monitoring it well. Right now, the second floor is mostly empty, except for a few visitors since the duty-free store hasn't opened yet. Only people with business here come by, so it's pretty quiet. If you're still worried about someone following you like last time, I suggest you park on the first floor."

"We're here. I'm leaving now."

Mevika wanted to respond to the suggestion, but the elevator reached her floor before she could.

"I'll walk you to your car."

"No need. It's not that dangerous." Mevika stepped out of the elevator without hesitation.

"Like last time? You really think he won’t come back? Especially with your name being in the media more often now."

Aiwarin ignored the rejection and followed her out.

"You already warned him about the security cameras. And honestly, we shouldn’t be walking together in a place like this."

"Then let’s walk together somewhere else."

"Don’t joke around. We can’t walk anywhere together. We should have ended everything that night." "Which night are you talking about?"

Aiwarin teased.

"Don't start. I don’t want to talk about it."

"So I’m supposed to forget too? That hurts. You figured things out and then just threw me away?"

"What?"

Mevika stopped walking just as they were passing through the parking lot exit.

"Are you really cutting me off like this?"

Aiwarin asked directly.

"And what else am I supposed to do? If we don’t cut things off—"

Mevika glanced over her shoulder, suddenly paranoid that someone might see them. She quickly pushed open the door and stepped into the parking lot, urging the other woman,

"Let’s go somewhere else."

"Where?"

"In the car."

She had no choice but to suggest it. Talking in private was better than standing around the office where anyone could walk by and see them.

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The sound of car doors closing almost simultaneously echoed in the quiet lot as the two women settled into their seats. Aiwarin, wasting no time, spoke first.

"So you’re avoiding people’s eyes by dragging me into your car?"

She leaned her right elbow on the seat, turning to face Mevika just as she always did.

"Remember what happened the last two times I got into your car? This is the third time."

"This time, nothing will happen. I won’t talk to you for long."

"I was just planning to see you off, but since we have a moment, there’s something I want to talk about too."

"Then say it quickly."

"Are you planning to avoid me completely? Because it wasn’t *me* who got what they wanted and left—it was *you*."

That sentence made Mevika glare at her before responding with a hint of irritation.

"You’re used to these kinds of relationships, aren’t you? You’re not expecting anything more… are you?"

"I don’t know… maybe we’re actually a good match."

Aiwarin leaned in slightly, putting on an exaggeratedly sweet expression and blinking playfully.

"Do you want to see me again? If you ever feel lonely, you can always come find me."

Mevika stayed silent for a moment, staring at that half-teasing, half-serious face. The way Aiwarin's eyes softened as she spoke was almost convincing —but that smirking, flirtatious smile made it impossible to tell if she meant it. Was she being sincere, or was this just another one of her games?

If she really went to see Aiwarin again, she already knew how it would play out. Aiwarin would welcome her without hesitation. But would it ever be serious?

No chance.

And the two of them were bound to clash. If this went any further, it would only get messy.

"We should stay in our own lanes,"

Mevika said finally.

"The bidding process has begun. Right now, we both have things to focus on. And let's be honest—we both want to win."

"That’s right. I want to win against you."

Aiwarin smirked.

"Even if it means making you come to me again."

"And if I do, that means I lose, doesn’t it? So why would I?"

"I see it differently. I think we both win."

Aiwarin’s smile deepened.

"Because you’ve already won—you got me to want you to come back. And I even admitted it out loud. If anyone’s losing here, it’s me."

"You’re not serious about any of this," Mevika laughed.

"You just like having me around for fun."

**"And if I *was* serious? Would you take me seriously?"**

Aiwarin was always this way—casual, playful, never giving away what she was really thinking. Mevika had always seen her as a strong, charismatic, and ambitious woman. But after getting to know her, she realized there were sides to Aiwarin she still couldn’t figure out. What did she *really* want?

The question made her pause for a moment before she finally replied,

"Don’t talk about impossible things. You know it’s not that simple."

"It was never going to be simple,"

Aiwarin admitted easily.

"But if you’re not planning to take it seriously, then what’s there to be afraid of? We can just… play."

She laughed softly, her voice laced with mischief.

**"We can have our fun, just the two of us. No one has to know. Sounds exciting, doesn’t it?"**

"Since you’ve been open about it from the start, I’m not really surprised by the idea."

Mevika shook her head.

"A successful, beautiful businesswoman secretly dating another woman—if people started talking about you like that, what would you do?"

"I’d say it sounds pretty cute."

Aiwarin laughed, completely unbothered. She had never shown much concern about this kind of thing. While she preferred to keep her private life under wraps, she also believed that one day, when the time was right, everything would come to light.

"Though I admit—it does sound a little scandalous."

"Scandals always seem worse to nosy people. Even when, in reality, things like this are completely normal for most."

"Exactly. So wouldn’t that mean the only ones who can make it normal… are us?"

Mevika fell silent for about five seconds, quietly conceding to Aiwarin’s straightforward way of thinking—so unconcerned with what the world thought. It made her realize just how little she actually knew about Aiwarin before this.

The images, interviews, and clips she had seen in the media weren’t enough to reveal the real person behind them.

"I think that even if I never did something like this with you… you’d have plenty of other options."

"I’m not the type to juggle multiple dishes at once."

"Wow," Mevika scoffed.

"And you’re probably not the type to go back for seconds, either."

**"If it’s my favorite dish, I wouldn’t mind eating it again."**

That answer left Mevika speechless. She searched Aiwarin’s gaze for any sign of insincerity, trying to convince herself that there was no real weight behind those words. But the way Aiwarin looked at her—it felt serious. If this was just an act, she was playing it incredibly well.

Feeling uneasy, Mevika turned away.

"It’s been days now. Do you have an answer yet?"

Aiwarin’s voice was calm, but there was an edge of expectation.

"You came looking for answers—so you should have one by now."

"An answer?"

Mevika knew exactly what she meant, but she hesitated, unsure of what to say.

"I think… it’s a good idea. And maybe I should start talking to another woman—that might make things even clearer for me."

"Even though you already have *me* to talk to?"

"In the end, it’s all about whether it’s right or not, isn’t it? Or… if it just makes things too complicated."

"You haven't even opened your heart, yet you're already saying it's too difficult?"

"You're acting like you want something serious with me all the time."

"I don't know… am I not interesting enough?"

"You act like you're just playing around, but you always do it in a way that makes me second-guess everything."

"Oh no… could I really be like that?"

"See? Even now, while we're having this conversation, you're still acting that way."

Mevika sighed.

"You're like someone who had me once and found it wasn’t enough."

Aiwarin nodded.

"Hmm. How did you know?"

Mevika's mouth fell open, stunned by the blunt response. Aiwarin was really pushing her buttons. How was she supposed to know what the woman was truly thinking?

It *should* have been flattering that such a well-known and admired businesswoman was pursuing her. But how could she be sure it was real? She didn't doubt her own attractiveness or charm, but when faced with someone *this* captivating, she started to feel uncertain.

"I enjoyed it, you know."

Aiwarin’s voice was smooth.

"Do you have any idea how amazing your first time was?"

Mevika had just shut her mouth when she nearly opened it again in shock. But this time, instead of responding, she just sat there, frozen. She was completely taken aback by Aiwarin’s shameless honesty.

"That’s why I want to know if you liked it."

Aiwarin’s smirk deepened, her gaze filled with mischief. It was a compliment, yet saying something like that so casually—and in such a nonprivate setting—left Mevika utterly speechless.

"Because I want you to like it. I want you to think it was amazing, too. But if you didn’t… well, that would be a shame."

"I don't know if it was the best or not… because I’ve never been with a man."

Aiwarin’s expression shifted slightly. The teasing air gave way to something more serious.

"Is that your answer?"

For the first time, Mevika saw a flicker of sincerity behind Aiwarin’s playful demeanor.

"Ah… you're trying to find excuses to avoid the truth. Even though you already know the answer in your heart."

"What?"

Mevika frowned, suddenly feeling like she was being cornered. Aiwarin's tone had changed, her gaze sharp with understanding. It was unsettling.

"What are you even talking about?"

"Rachen. That man has been linked to so many women. The reason a nearly forty-year-old guy like him isn’t married yet isn’t just because men can get married at any age. It’s because he’s still enjoying the thrill of the chase. Have you heard about this?"

"I’ve heard his name before, but I only just met him."

"It wouldn’t be hard for you to become a rumor with him. He’s particularly interested in you, you know."

Aiwarin leaned back against the seat, looking completely at ease. She watched as two men and a woman passed by the car before splitting up into two vehicles. Probably journalists who had finished their work here and were heading elsewhere. She stayed still, avoiding any attention. The tinted windows were dark enough to keep them hidden inside.

"It was obvious how he looked at me, even if I don’t want to flatter myself."

"If you could read the way he looked at you, then you should also be able to tell how I look at you."

"I never really thought about you liking women, even though—"

"Even though what?"

"Nothing."

She quickly dismissed it, not wanting to say it out loud. But in that moment, she remembered the first time she had noticed Aiwarin’s gaze—the way it had pulled her in. And she had looked back, probably with the same kind of expression.

If they talked about it now, Aiwarin might recall exactly how she had stared at her. Mevika didn’t remember her own face, but she *did* know that she had lost her composure more than once.

"Just be careful. Love affairs aren’t the only thing that matters—power and influence do too. Jumping into a competition this big, don’t forget to be cautious. People around you have their own benefits." Aiwarin paused before adding with a smirk, "I’m giving you this advice as an honest competitor."

Mevika raised an eyebrow. "Should I be careful of you too?"

Aiwarin smiled.

"Hmm. Maybe just a little."

She had wanted to hear a denial—some resistance—but in the end, Aiwarin accepted her own dark side as easily as ever. It was frustrating, almost exhausting, to keep up with her. And yet, Mevika still found herself talking to her for far longer than intended. She had planned for a brief conversation, but it stretched on because there was always something to say.

"Then I’ll be extra careful around you."

"Just be careful in the competition. As for everything else, you already know you can trust me. It’s our little secret. But if you want to take me on as a serious business rival, I wouldn’t recommend it. It’ll be too difficult. I always have the best insider information. Even about that guy. You’ll never keep up with me."

"Just because you have inside information, does that automatically make you better?"

"I’m telling you this so you won’t underestimate the game, not to brag. Running a business in public doesn’t mean I think I’m better than everyone else. But I speak from experience. This industry has a lot of dark corners. If you do business too cleanly, you’ll always lose. You can be transparent, but you need to be smart about it. And you should build relationships with people who can offer mutual benefits."

Aiwarin paused, then smirked.

"I’m not saying to associate with the wrong people. Just the right ones who can give you an edge. Otherwise, you’ll fall prey to those who play dirty."

"So aside from having connections with someone skilled in getting insider info—like you—who else should I know?"

"You’ll figure it out once you see who can be useful to you. If not, politicians are a good bet. Every major competitor you have knows at least a few politicians."

"Even you?"

"Of course. But I don’t deal with corrupt politicians. They might change in the future, sure, but we should judge them based on their current intentions. If they start twisting their words and backtracking, well… that’s when you cut them off."

Mevika sighed.

"Is there such a thing as genuine beneficial relationships? If there were, I might be interested."

Aiwarin chuckled.

"There are. As long as you’re genuinely strategic about it."

She pulled her phone out of her pocket.

"Give me your Line ID. It looks like we don’t have each other’s contacts yet. We've met so many times already. We should exchange contacts—just in case I end up being useful to you too."

"So I have to give it, huh?"

Mevika asked, though she was already taking the phone from Aiwarin’s hand. She typed in her Line ID, hit Add, and handed the phone back.

"M A P L E."

Aiwarin read the capitalized English letters, spaced apart, and smiled.

"Message me when you're feeling lonely."

"I’ll message you when you're useful to me."

"That still means I’m useful to you."

Aiwarin glanced out the window, checking if anyone was around. The coast seemed clear. It was time for her to go—and time to let Mevika have her private moment.

"I should get going. I said we wouldn’t talk long, but it seems like we get along pretty well, don’t you think?"

She smiled.

"Maybe next time, we should talk more privately."

"I assume you’ve run out of questions for me."

"You could say that."

Aiwarin tilted her head in thought.

"You told me you haven’t answered my question because you’ve never been with a man. But honestly, I don’t think you need to look for that answer. Because you’d never go through with it anyway."

"That’s—"

"True, isn’t it?"

Aiwarin’s knowing smile widened. She remembered their conversation at the bar, the one where they had both been almost too honest about their past relationships. That talk had led to an experiment—one that was meant to give Mevika an answer.

And if Mevika was now using that as an excuse, then all Aiwarin had to do was remind her of the very thing she had once admitted to running away from.

Aiwarin reached for the car door, pulling it open and pausing before stepping out. She turned back one last time, her voice teasing yet laced with finality.

"You reject the touch of men, yet you let yourself have something with a woman. Isn’t that answer enough?"

She didn’t wait for a response. She didn’t expect one. She had already said everything she intended to say.

Her words sealed every loophole, leaving Mevika with no way to deny it.

And it was true.

Sitting there alone with that sentence echoing in her mind, Mevika couldn’t come up with any excuse to argue back. Because the truth was—she had already found her answer that night in bed.

She just refused to admit it.

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# Chapter 13: Negotiation in a Hidden Corner

Superior Holding Group Public Company Limited has its headquarters in a high-rise building in the heart of the city. The lower floors house a major department store, while the connected tower, standing forty-two stories tall, serves as office space.

The company occupies the top six floors, while the remaining floors are leased out to other businesses on a monthly basis, making it another profitable venture for the family by maximizing the use of prime real estate.

The high-level meeting room in the building was being used for an important meeting that morning, led by Mevika. Around ten committee members, appointed to oversee the Greater Duty-Free bidding project, were in attendance.

“Our biggest strength right now is our direct experience in managing largescale department stores,”

Mevika addressed the committee. Most of them were older than her, with only three or four younger members. However, she needed to prove her capability as the leader of this project, a responsibility her father had entrusted to her.

“A duty-free store is essentially a large department store, and Greater will be an even bigger one. We need to manage both products and services, much like what we’re already doing. The only difference is the product range. Our target customers aren’t just regular shoppers—they’re tourists looking to take something back home. And since this duty-free store is outside the airport, general customers can also shop there. We need to highlight our strengths and make our qualifications stand out.”

“In terms of qualifications, we truly have an edge over our competitors,” One committee member agreed.

“Great & Grow specializes in retail products, but their expertise is limited to the products themselves. When it comes to managing a large-scale shopping venue, we have a significant advantage.”

A woman voiced her opinion.

“But we can’t underestimate them. They might have strong connections,”

Said an older committee member, a man in his fifties with over a decade of experience working with Superior.

“Connections?”

Mevika paused at that word. She had been warned about this by someone before, but if her team was also aware of it, then it was likely true. Still, she wanted more details.

“This bidding process is bound to be politically influenced since the auctioning authority is tied to the government,”

The same man continued.

“Anyone with the right connections will do whatever they can to gain special consideration.”

“This auction is happening right in the middle of the election period. They could have waited for the new government to take over and handled it then, but instead, they chose to proceed now,”

Mevika pointed out.

“They want to stay in power, and they’ll do everything possible to hold onto their influence,”

Another member added. “I need more information,”

Mevika said firmly.

“Who’s connected to whom? What plans might they have? Our proposal is the most important thing, but we still need to research our competitors thoroughly. If anyone can gather this information, report to me immediately.”

“All we have right now are rumors, but I’ll try to dig deeper,”

Said a woman in her mid-thirties.

“Thank you.”

“What about Orianna? Do you need information on them too?”

A young man raised his hand to ask.

“They may be better at service than retail management, but we can’t underestimate them either,” another woman added.

“Orianna?”

Hearing that name made Mevika’s heart race. It felt as if she was holding onto a great secret in this meeting room, surrounded by key figures whose eyes were all on her. No one could hear her thoughts or see what she was hiding, but just hearing that name spoken aloud made her feel on edge.

She was particularly cautious about this matter.

“You don’t have to worry about Orianna. I haven’t overlooked them. We won’t underestimate anyone, and we might even consider Orianna our number one competitor. But from a political standpoint, I don’t think they’re a major concern. Or… should I be extra careful?”

Mevika smiled, keeping her personal thoughts under control. Right now, she had to focus solely on the key issues related to the project.

“We can’t overlook them at all. I’ve heard they have strong connections across the industry. If I get any more information, I’ll let you know right away,” another team member said.

“Good. Gather as much information as possible,”

Mevika replied with a smile. She needed to carefully consider every important point being raised, even if it involved someone she knew personally.

“Alright, let’s put the competitor discussion on hold for now. Today, we need to finalize our presentation strategy. Let’s go over the key qualifications we’ll be highlighting.”

The meeting lasted nearly three hours in the morning and ended just before lunch. Mevika was deeply committed to this project, and knowing that major competitors were planning to use their connections to influence the bidding only made her more meticulous with every step.

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“Thank you, everyone. I’ll take care of summarizing the rest myself. At our next meeting, you’ll see the details I’ve put together, and we can discuss and refine them further,”

Said Aiwarin, addressing the ten carefully selected team members assisting with the bid. She preferred working with a small but effective team, relying on strategic thinking and creativity to make their proposal stand out. “Thank you, Ms. Ai. I’ll send over the requested information as soon as possible,”

One of the female employees said as she was leaving the meeting room.

“Great, send it over,”

Aiwarin responded casually with a smile.

“Ms. Ai, the meeting is over, right?”

Lada, who hadn’t attended, knocked on the door left slightly open, asking for permission to enter.

“Yes, it’s all done. What’s up?”

Aiwarin turned to look at her secretary.

“So, are you going to the event this Friday, Ms. Ai? I need to confirm our response.”

“What event? Oh—”

Aiwarin suddenly remembered. It was an invitation she had received just this past Tuesday evening after visiting to purchase auction items. She knew a little about it but hadn’t followed up due to her busy schedule.

Still, she had a good memory for appointments and usually didn’t need to write them down—unless there were too many events happening at once, in which case she made sure to keep track.

“You mean the event hosted by the executives at Greater? It’s not directly related to the bidding, but they invited us as participants in the auction. It’s a private gathering, some kind of housewarming or grand opening.”

“From the pictures they sent, it looks more like a mansion than just a house. What kind of organization has an estate that massive?”

“Exactly. That makes it even more interesting to check out, don’t you think?”

“You should go! At the very least, it’s a chance to make an impression and win some favor.”

“I’m good at building relationships with the right allies. Don’t worry.”

“That’s great. But there’s a high chance other bidders will be there too, right?”

“Hmm, probably.”

Aiwarin looked thoughtful, but the more she considered it, the more intrigued she became. A small smile appeared on her face.

“If they show up, that is.”

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The estate—more fittingly called a mansion—was now filled with guests mingling on the vast lawn, where the grand social event was being held. The host of the evening, Vallop, was the Vice Chairman of the International Duty-Free Trade Association of Thailand.

He had sent out invitations to his acquaintances and had personally extended an invitation to the auction participants, seemingly as a way to build connections within the business world. Whatever his true intentions were, Mevika had already decided to attend.

Tonight, she wore an elegant off-shoulder white dress with a subtle golden sheen. Carrying only a small, dazzling white clutch, she stood out effortlessly. Many male guests turned to glance at her as she passed.

As Mevika stepped out of her car and walked into the event, she knew that coming alone wasn’t unusual. She would likely run into familiar faces inside, but this particular gathering was different.

She was still quite new to this circle, where most guests were either major real estate moguls or politicians. Still, the atmosphere wasn’t uncomfortable. If a stranger or two struck up a conversation, she could handle it with ease—it was all part of networking. Her father had always emphasized that.

"Going alone isn’t a problem. Get to know influential people, but don’t fall for anyone’s sweet talk. Some of those older men already have wives and just want to find a young mistress. Don’t let yourself get tricked."

*"Not that I’d ever be interested anyway,"*

Mevika told herself as she stood among watchful, and at times, untrustworthy gazes. None of them were particularly appealing to her. But when she looked at the elegantly dressed women attending the event, she found that sight much more pleasing.

She had never truly noticed this about herself before. She wasn’t sure when the feeling started—probably from the moment someone unlocked a part of her she hadn’t fully understood.

But it was just a vague sense of admiration. No one had caught her attention in a way that truly mattered. Like anyone else, she would only be drawn to someone if she genuinely liked them.

The realization wasn’t unsettling—it actually made her more open-minded. In the past, she had never paid much attention to men, which had sometimes made her question herself. But now that she was allowing herself to notice women, the feeling was... different.

It felt right.

And yet, among all these people, none had stirred anything deeper in her.

**Until she saw her.**

Mevika froze as her gaze landed on a familiar figure entering the scene. The woman was looking straight at her, smiling, before making her way over.

And just like before, her heart pounded wildly. No one else had ever made her feel this way—only her.

“You really came,”

Aiwarin greeted with that effortlessly charming smile of hers.

Mevika didn’t respond immediately. She stood there, momentarily stunned, a little caught off guard by Aiwarin’s sudden appearance—especially since she had just been thinking about her.

Having Aiwarin walk up to her like this left her unprepared.

Tonight, Aiwarin was wearing a strapless cream dress with a two-layered ruffle across the chest. Her elegant shoulders and slender arms only added to her charm, making her look effortlessly captivating.

The slight reveal of her collarbone and décolletage was subtly alluring, and the addition of a black-banded, square-faced gold watch on her wrist gave her an air of sophistication—graceful yet striking.

*And then, there it was again.*

*That familiar scent of her perfume.*

*Did she wear it on purpose?*

Her greeting carried a certain knowingness, as if she had expected Mevika to be here.

“You came alone too, didn’t you? Should we stick together then?”

Aiwarin asked, keeping the conversation light when Mevika remained silent.

“You’re here by yourself?”

Mevika finally spoke, glancing around as if expecting someone to be with her.

“Of course. My father was invited as well, but he had prior commitments, so he sent me in his place. I did hesitate for a bit—wasn’t sure if I really wanted to come alone. But, well, here I am. And I guess you were invited too. I’m glad we ran into each other.” “We can exchange greetings,”

Mevika said, her voice measured,

"But it wouldn’t be a good idea to be seen together too much in an event like this.”

“Who’s going to turn it into gossip?”

Aiwarin laughed, glancing around the venue before turning back with a teasing smile.

“But I get it. We should just greet each other like distant allies—make it look polite but superficial. And you probably don’t even want to be near me. If you had the choice, you’d rather keep your distance, wouldn’t you?”

“I—”

Mevika started to object but stopped mid-sentence, her attention suddenly caught by someone moving through the crowd.

“Ah...”

Aiwarin’s eyes followed Mevika’s gaze and landed on the same person.

“Looks like we should split up.”

Without waiting, she turned and walked away, keeping her word—if only to make things easier for Mevika.

Mevika watched her go, feeling an impulse to follow for reasons she couldn’t quite explain. Deep down, she didn’t really want Aiwarin to leave.

But just as she hesitated, she caught someone else looking her way. That was enough to snap her out of it. She quickly turned her head in another direction—though not fast enough.

The man she had just noticed was already walking toward her. A woman had been trailing behind him, but at his subtle glance, she stopped and returned to a group of people chatting nearby.

“I didn’t expect to see you here,”

Rachen greeted her with a polite smile.

“Good evening, Miss Mevika. We meet again.”

“Good evening.”

Mevika remembered his name well—especially since Aiwarin had warned her about him. That only made the name stick even more. Still, she pretended to hesitate slightly.

“You’re... Ah, Mr. Rachen?”

“That’s right. I’m glad you remember.”

His smile deepened.

“Are you here alone?”

“Oh, no. My father is on his way. He should be arriving soon.”

“Oh?”

Rachen tilted his head slightly, as if nodding, but then paused briefly before lowering his head again. “Your father is coming too?” “Yes,” she replied smoothly.

“He’s just running a little late. It’s nice to see you, but I should go greet some of the senior guests now.”

“Of course, of course.”

Rachen nodded, a hint of disappointment in his expression. He had planned to strike up a longer conversation, maybe even make a connection—but hearing that her father was coming changed things.

This wasn’t the ideal time for that. Just as he considered keeping the conversation going a little longer, Mevika swiftly excused herself.

“Alright then,”

She said, offering only a brief farewell.

She felt relieved that he didn’t try to stop her.

It was clear how his demeanor had shifted the moment she mentioned her father.

Of course, the truth was—her father wasn’t coming at all. But if Rachen ever found out, it wouldn’t matter. Plans change. People cancel. That was just how life worked.

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“It’s a pleasure to be here. This is my first time visiting, and I must say, your mansion is beautiful,”

Aiwarin said, engaging in polite conversation with Vallop. She had found a chance to greet him after noticing him exchange a few words with Mevika earlier. Now, however, Mevika had disappeared somewhere.

“Just call it a house,”

Vallop replied with a chuckle.

“It’s really just another home.”

“Oh, I see. Well, it’s a very big home,”

Aiwarin remarked, her tone unintentionally curt. She had been thinking about something unpleasant, and it must have slipped into her voice. Realizing this, she quickly hoped he wouldn’t catch the sarcasm.

“Yes, a home indeed,”

Vallop responded, seemingly unfazed. If he had picked up on her tone, he didn’t show it.

Deciding to steer the conversation elsewhere, Aiwarin continued,

“So, this celebration marks the second anniversary of this house? Congratulations.”

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Meanwhile, Mevika was considering whether it was time to leave the party. However, she now found herself actively dodging Rachen. He had clearly noticed she was still alone.

After finishing her conversation with Vallop, she saw Rachen glance her way, prompting her to act busy—engaging in casual small talk with other guests, as if she were just another friendly attendee. Eventually, she spotted an opportunity and slipped toward the restroom inside the house.

The guest bathrooms were conveniently located on the side, sectioned off from the main living areas so visitors wouldn’t have to pass through private spaces during events like this.

“Ugh, just great,”

She muttered under her breath as she stepped out of the restroom—only to find Rachen standing near the exit, right in her path. It was as if he had been keeping an eye on where she went.

Deciding to avoid him, she veered off toward the garden, where neatly arranged decorative trees lined the pathway. A few other guests had wandered there as well, some taking phone calls in quieter corners. But Rachen followed.

It was almost as if he assumed she was lonely, that she needed a companion for a casual stroll through the garden.

Determined to escape his gaze, Mevika considered slipping away—but before she could act, a hand suddenly grasped her wrist.

She gasped as she was pulled aside, led around the curve of a nearby terrace and into a secluded corner.

There was barely enough space for the two of them to stand together, pressed close in the narrow corner. This part of the house had no windows, making it a private, secluded spot. It was dim—just dark enough that the light didn’t fully reach them, but they could still make out each other’s faces in the shadows. “You really are irresistible,”

Aiwarin whispered.

“You—”

Mevika barely had time to respond before the sound of footsteps nearby made her go silent.

Before she could react, Aiwarin’s hand covered her mouth, pressing her gently but firmly against the wall. Her sharp eyes flicked toward the terrace entrance they had just rounded, scanning for any sign of movement. A voice, speaking on the phone, drifted over.

“Yes, I’m still at the event… Oh, I see. Near the staircase? Alright, I’ll head over now.”

They both recognized the voice immediately. Then came more rustling footsteps, fading as the person walked away. A quiet exhale of relief passed between them, the tension slipping away.

But now, with the danger gone, there was nothing left to focus on but each other.

Their eyes met in the dim light, their bodies still pressed close in the narrow space. Overhead, leaves and branches draped over the terrace, creating a hidden world where only the two of them existed.

Slowly, Aiwarin lowered her hand from Mevika’s mouth. But as her fingers dragged away, they lingered against Mevika’s lips.

Mevika didn’t move. She watched, her breath shallow, as Aiwarin’s fingertips brushed over her lips again—lightly, teasingly. The sensation sent her heart pounding.

Then Aiwarin’s gaze shifted, drifting from Mevika’s eyes to her lips.

A slow stroke of her thumb over Mevika’s bottom lip made it part slightly. On instinct, Mevika bit down softly on the tip of Aiwarin’s thumb.

That was all the invitation Aiwarin needed.

Their lips met.

The first press was soft, fleeting. Then she leaned in again, deepening the kiss. Cool lips, yet burning with heat, moved against hers—biting, tasting, savoring. Aiwarin kissed her lower lip, then her upper lip, finding a rhythm that Mevika unconsciously matched.

A small, breathy sound escaped Aiwarin’s throat as she pulled back briefly, just enough to gasp in a breath—before capturing Mevika’s lips once more.

*Mevika thought, I should stop this.*

*But she didn’t.*

*Because, at this moment, she didn’t want to.*

Mevika took a slow, measured breath as she pulled away, but Aiwarin didn’t let her go far. Her lips trailed downward, pressing a lingering kiss beneath Mevika’s chin, her voice barely above a whisper.

“You’re really not going to come see me?”

Her lips found the curve of Mevika’s neck, kissing deeply as if savoring every second. Mevika had given her full access, tilting her head just enough to let her continue. If they let this go any further, they would lose themselves completely, right here, where anyone could walk by. But still— neither of them wanted to stop just yet.

“Come to me,”

Aiwarin murmured against her skin.

“Or should I come to you? Just say the word.”

Mevika leaned in, her breath warm against Aiwarin’s ear.

“Do you really want me that badly?”

Her lips brushed lightly over the sensitive skin behind Aiwarin’s ear, teasing. But before she could get the upper hand, Aiwarin retaliated, making Mevika shiver.

*We need to stop. Someone could see us.*

But the thrill of it—the secrecy, the heat, the way their bodies were pressed together in this hidden space—made it impossible to pull away just yet.

“I do,”

Aiwarin admitted, her voice low and insistent.

“I want you.”

“Then find a way to lure me in.”

Mevika smirked, pushing gently against Aiwarin’s shoulders. She leaned in to plant a teasing kiss on Aiwarin’s lips—brief but full of promise. Her gaze burned with playful challenge.

“If you succeed… I’ll come to you.”

Aiwarin laughed softly, a little breathless, frustrated but entertained.

“Do you want me to seduce you?”

“Mmm.”

Mevika’s fingers trailed over Aiwarin’s shoulder, up her neck, stopping at her sharp jawline. She playfully stroked the spot with her thumb before pressing a delicate kiss there.

“That’s enough for tonight.”

She pulled back, but their bodies were still so close that her chest brushed against Aiwarin’s as she shifted. Mevika moved slowly, deliberately, making sure Aiwarin felt every bit of the contact before finally stepping away.

“I’ll be the one to leave first,”

She said, voice filled with quiet confidence.

"Wait."

Aiwarin quickly grabbed her arm. Once she managed to stop her, she let go right away and bent down to take something out of the small bag slung over her shoulder. The bag rested lightly at her waist, so light that she almost forgot she was carrying it.

"Take this," she said hurriedly.

She pulled out the item and shoved it into Mewika's hand.

"If you need to see me, you can use this key card to come up anytime. I'll be staying there every night this week."

"Wow."

Mewika held up the shimmering rose gold key card and smiled.

"I hope I get to use it."

She quickly slipped it into the small bag clutched in her hand and walked away without hesitation.

Aiwarin watched until she disappeared from sight. She would need to stay here a little longer before leaving, but she didn’t mind.

Her thoughts drifted, lingering on what had just happened between her and Mevika in this small, enclosed space. Standing here a while longer didn’t seem boring at all.

*.*

# Chapter 14: 3 Minutes of Turmoil

A figure in a shimmering gray satin nightgown shifted on the soft queensized bed in her spacious private bedroom. After sleeping for seven hours, she opened her eyes and realized that the first thing on her mind was what had happened the night before.

Many things had happened at the party last night—attending the grand gathering at the mansion alone, meeting the host, and encountering men who tried to approach her. But all those other events faded into the background because the first image that came to mind was Aiwarin’s face, looking at her up close.

Her fingertip tracing her lips. The passionate kiss that followed. It stirred the desire she had kept suppressed for over a week, and she found herself unable to escape it.

Since that night, even as she went through her daily routine—handling the overwhelming workload, meeting countless employees and customers— whenever her mind had a moment of stillness, it was Aiwarin who occupied her thoughts.

Telling herself that night had ended, that it was over, would be a lie. For her, it never truly ended. Even though she pretended that the answer she received was enough to close the chapter, deep down, it was far from over. It continued to haunt her.

Being involved with a woman as irresistibly charming as Aiwarin had once been intriguing enough from afar. But after sharing a bed with her, the intrigue only deepened. She was fiery. The praise she often received for her intelligence and sharp wit didn’t just apply to work—she had that same allure in bed.

She scattered her charm recklessly within the wide bedroom, and every touch she left on her body was so unforgettable that there was no way to erase it.

It was the hardest thing to lie to herself about, so she had no choice but to silently accept it. Yet, keeping it hidden was just as difficult. She masked it with indifference, but now, she wasn’t sure how much longer she could keep it inside.

The night before had awakened a deep desire within her—an unrestrained longing that surfaced without hesitation or second thoughts.

Just being close enough to see those burning eyes, to feel that irresistible presence, to surrender to the touch that lured her in so effortlessly—she couldn’t deny it. And she knew one thing for sure.

*She still wanted it.*

*She wanted more.*

She wanted it just as much as that night she could never forget.

For the past week, the chaos of her hormonal cycle had been enough to push aside any thoughts of seeing that woman again. But now that her desire had been reignited, she found herself wanting to run straight to Aiwarin’s room.

*"Message me. Invite me over."*

She muttered to herself, then picked up her phone and unlocked the screen. Countless morning messages filled her inbox, but none caught her attention as much as the very first one.

.

**Ai : Good morning. Did you sleep well last night**?

.

It was the first message she had ever received from Aiwarin since the day the woman had asked for her contact.

She had thought someone as internationally sophisticated as Aiwarin would have chosen a stylish English username. But instead, she had opted for her Thai name, a simple yet personal choice.

.

**MAPLE: Good morning. I slept well.**

.

She figured that if she replied now, Aiwarin probably wouldn’t respond right away. Judging by the timestamp—twenty minutes ago—Aiwarin had likely just woken up and sent a quick morning message before heading off to shower, get dressed, and go about her morning routine.

If she had to work on a Saturday, she was probably getting ready now. Otherwise, she might have gone back to sleep.

Today was a day off for her as well, though she had loosely scheduled her time. With her family’s business running every day, there was always work to do. The shopping malls they owned were open daily, meaning client meetings and unexpected issues could arise at any time.

But today, there were no pressing commitments. She planned to stop by in the afternoon to check on the construction of a small amusement park being built at their expressway-side branch.

After that, she might go shopping before heading home. The rest of the evening would be spent preparing for an upcoming auction project.

In two weeks, the list of private companies bidding for Greater Duty-Free would be revealed. A week after that, there would be a formal project briefing and contract-related discussions. Once all the details were gathered, her team would draft a comprehensive proposal for the bid, ensuring everything met the required deadlines.

Balancing these two major responsibilities had made her schedule more exhausting. But she knew this auction would only consume her time for the next two months.

Once it was over, things would return to normal. Even so, this phase of work was exciting in a way she hadn’t experienced before. It made her heart race—both with anticipation and chaos.

She unlocked her phone and opened social media to check the latest business updates, a daily habit to stay informed. The first thing that popped up on her feed was a news post—one that immediately caught her attention.

.

***A Noteworthy Encounter Between a Bidding Rival and Business Partner.***

.

“What the hell?”

She muttered, reading the bold headline.

The post featured a photo of her shaking hands with Rachen during the auction registration, a moment captured by the press. Alongside it was another image—one from last night, showing them standing together during a break. She had no idea when that had been taken.

She had assumed the media wouldn't bother covering unrelated guests, yet there it was—an image of her and Rachen caught in the background of event coverage.

There was no point in making a fuss about it; after all, it had been a social gathering with plenty of guests. At least it wasn’t a photo of her speaking with someone else… **or worse, when she had slipped away to a more private corner.**

Hopefully, no one had seen that.

Just as she was lost in thought, a message popped up—from *her*. She quickly opened it.

.

**Ai : Are you working on your day off? I’m at the gym. Can I call you?**

.

Under normal circumstances, she would have played hard to get a little longer. But with such a direct question, there was no point in pretending.

.

**MAPLE: I’ve only got three minutes.**

**Ai: That’s fine. I’m great at quick ones.**

.

She paused, reading the response twice. It made her overthink for a second, but before she could dwell on it, her phone started ringing.

When she went to answer, she noticed it was a video call. Quickly, she sat up against the headboard, smoothing her hair just enough to look somewhat presentable before picking up—before Aiwarin could assume she wasn’t available.

.

[Hey.]

.

Aiwarin greeted with a quick wave, her body moving in rhythm on an elliptical machine. The motion of the machine lifted and lowered her with each step, keeping her in a steady workout pace.

Then, Aiwarin’s eyes widened slightly.

.

[Wow.]

.

An amused smirk played on her lips as she took in the sight of Maple on the screen—still in bed, wearing nothing but a silky, spaghetti-strap nightgown.

.

"At the gym?"

.

Mavika eyed Aiwarin’s movements, nearly inhaling sharply when her toned abdomen filled the screen. Aiwarin must have placed her phone at just the right angle on the fitness machine, capturing her upper body perfectly.

Every movement flexed her muscles, making them look even more defined. It was distracting—so much so that Mavika considered turning off her camera.

She wasn’t sure what she wanted to escape from more: the sight on her screen or her own reaction to it.

.

[Yeah. Just a light cardio session. Normally, I do about fifteen minutes before work, but since it’s my day off, I came to the hotel gym instead.]

"Oh…"

.

Mavika dragged out the sound, stalling as she glanced at the timer on her screen. Had they hit the one-minute mark yet? Maybe she could turn off her camera and switch to an audio call instead. She’d even give Aiwarin extra time—just so she didn’t have to keep looking at that.

Was she really getting this flustered just from seeing another woman’s abs?

.

[And you just woke up.]

Aiwarin noted, biting her lip slightly.

[Looking pretty sexy, by the way.]

.

The teasing tone sent a jolt through Mavika. Instinctively, she looked down at herself—silky satin nightgown, thin straps, deep neckline, slightly messy bed hair.

*Oh...Oh.*

And she wasn’t even wearing a bra.

Not that it mattered. Aiwarin had seen more before. Curious, she tilted her head slightly, wondering if this could get a reaction out of her.

.

[When are you coming over? I’m free all day. Are you going anywhere?]

"I have a branch inspection and some shopping to do."

[Need a shopping partner?]

"I think I’ll be fine on my own."

[Then how do we meet up? If you won’t come to me, I can come to you. We could grab a meal or something.]

"There’s no reason for us to meet."

[What kind of reason would you need, then?]

"You’re my competitor. We’re technically rivals." Mavika smirked slightly.

"Unless, of course, you have something to offer me."

[Wow. Sharp thinking.]

Aiwarin chuckled.

"I was taught to always look for opportunities."

[Oh, I definitely have something for you.]

[Plenty, actually.]

"Then tell me."

[Why would I tell you now? We have to trade, don’t we? If you want answers, you’ll have to come find me.]

"Tell me first—what exactly do I gain from coming to see you?"

[At the very least, one thing for sure.] Aiwarin’s voice dripped with teasing.

[And trust me, it’s going to be fun.]

.

Mavika paused, carefully masking her reaction. Aiwarin’s gaze was flirtatious, brimming with a playful charm that was hard to ignore.

"Besides that, what else do I get?"

[You get me.]

"Don't joke around. I’m being serious."

[Mmm.]

Aiwarin chuckled.

[Fine. I’ll think about where to start. Then you can decide if you’re interested or not.]

"Oh? I thought you wanted me to come over no matter what."

[Where’s the fun in that?]

"Seriously,"

Mavika muttered, suddenly wondering if anyone else was around Aiwarin at the gym. She was speaking like this in public, wasn’t she? Even with AirPods in, her voice might carry.

[I’m just messing with you.]

Aiwarin laughed, clearly enjoying herself.

[Alright, I’ll text you later. Looks like our three minutes are up. I won’t bother you anymore—just make sure to reply, okay? That’s all for now.]

"Huh?"

Mavika blinked, not expecting Aiwarin to actually end the call on time. She had assumed she’d try to sneak in extra minutes, keep the conversation going. But instead, she was the one who suddenly didn’t want the call to end.

At least now, she was looking at Aiwarin’s face instead of her abs. That was manageable.

[Alright. Talk later.]

And with that, Aiwarin disappeared from the screen, leaving only her chat background—a scenic cityscape, and her profile photo. A striking image of her in a crisp white suit, neckline plunging just enough to hint at her signature style.

Mevika put her phone down on the bed and let out a long sigh. She didn't know why talking for just a few minutes used up so much energy. She had to let out a long breath as if she had just done a heavy workout with the person on the other end of the line.

She wondered how Aiwarin planned to seduce her. Aiwarin likes to make things mysterious and enigmatic.

But whatever the method, she hope her method will give her a reason to go to her, without having to pretend or play hard to get any more.

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💖💖💖💖💖 **sunyan**

# Chapter 15: A Tempting Proposal

The car door swung shut as she parked inside the gate, stepping out with two shopping bags in hand. The sight of the housekeeper watering the plants in the soft evening light made the house feel alive, running its usual rhythm. On a day like this, her parents were likely at home, relaxing— unless her father had gone out for a meeting.

As she passed the living room, the sound of the television caught her attention, prompting her to peek inside.

“Oh,”

Natthakorn glanced away from the screen, looking at his daughter.

“You’re back from checking the branch? How did it go?”

“It went well. The new amusement zone is adorable. I think it’ll attract more families looking for a fun weekend outing,”

Mavika replied.

“Where’s Mom?”

“She’s in the kitchen, peeling fruit.”

“Oh, of course. She always likes to take over Aunt Jean’s job,”

She laughed.

“That’s just how she is,” Natthakorn chuckled. “She’s good at work and good at home too. If she had to sit around doing nothing, she’d find something to keep her hands busy. I just let her be.”

“That’s great,”

Mavika said with a smile.

“At least Dad is not the kind of husband who expects his wife to just stay home and take care of him all day.”

“Women these days don’t want that kind of life,”

He said knowingly.

“And I doubt you would, either.”

“Definitely not. I like having work to do. And you said it yourself—I’m good at it.”

She grinned, taking the chance to praise herself. "You're really capable, Me. You made it on your own,"

Natthakorn said with pride.

"But I do wonder—people often ask me why you're already twenty-seven and still don’t have a boyfriend or any thoughts about marriage. I never know what to say. Twenty-seven isn't old at all. There’s no need to rush."

"You're absolutely right, Dad. No need to rush at all,"

Mavika quickly reaffirmed. But there was more to her thoughts—she just couldn’t bring herself to say it outright.

"Hmm?"

Natthakorn raised an eyebrow.

"Something on your mind? Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No, no!" She shook her head firmly.

"Nothing like that."

"Good. No need to hurry. But if you ever do, make sure you introduce him to me. And if you're talking to anyone, be careful. Don't trust people too easily."

"But what if I do take a close look, and he's someone I can trust? What would you say then?"

"You might trust him, but whether I see him as trustworthy is another matter,"

Natthakorn said seriously.

"As a man, I understand men well. There are good ones, but there are also plenty of bad ones out there. Just be cautious. Don’t rush into anything. And if you’re thinking about opening your heart to someone, talk to me first."

Mavika hesitated before asking,

"How open-minded would you be,Dad? How much freedom would I have in choosing?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean… things like age, status, career, or… um…"

She trailed off, unable to voice the real question she wanted to ask.

"Those things are just part of it. In the end, what really matters is who they are, what they do, and whether they’re good enough for me to entrust my daughter to."

Mavika hesitated, then finally asked,

"What if… I’m not interested in any man at all?"

It was the closest she could get to her real question.

"Not interested at all? That’d be great,"

Natthakorn laughed.

"I just want you to find what makes you happy. But I worry—what if what you think will make you happy doesn’t last? What if it brings you more pain than joy? I don’t want that for you. I won’t say you have to stay single forever, and I won’t always be here to take care of you. One day, if you meet someone truly good, they’ll have to prove to me that I can be at peace leaving you in their hands."

"I'm sure I'll meet someone eventually,"

Mavika smiled, deciding to set aside some of her questions for now. There was no need to rush, even though she was curious about her father's true thoughts.

If she chose love with complete openness…

She might one day date a woman seriously.

But there was no need to ask him about it now. First, she had to figure out who would truly make her heart race and who she’d want to be with for real.

"But not right now, we have more important things to focus on,"

Natthakorn chuckled.

"The auction is going smoothly, right? I heard you called a meeting the other day. You’ve been very thorough in preparing the presentation. If you can handle things this well, I can really count on you. We have to win this."

"I already set my goal to make Superior win the bid,"

Mavika assured him.

"But when it comes to negotiating the returns, I’ll need you as my advisor." "Of course, I’ll help with that," he agreed.

"Oh, and keep an eye on the competition. Orianna is no joke, and Athiwit is quite the strategist. We excel in transparency and strong qualifications, but we’re not as cutthroat. We just need to stay sharp. And speaking of competitors… Great & Grow is in the running too, right? I wanted to ask you about this—there are rumors that Rachen has been trying to get close to you. Is that true?"

"If people have noticed, then I guess it must be true,"

She replied candidly. That was the safest response. Besides, she was already looking for ways to keep that man at a distance.

"Don’t get too friendly with him,"

Natthakorn warned.

"We can’t directly clash with him since he’s a client, but that man has quite the reputation with women. Don’t let yourself fall for his charm."

"There are far more tempting people out there, Dad. I’m definitely not falling for him."

"Wait—"

Natthakorn narrowed his eyes.

"What do you mean by other tempting people?"

"Ah…"

Mavika only just realized that her words might make her father overthink. She hesitated for a moment before quickly clarifying.

"I just mean there are plenty of decent people out there. Someone like him is easy to cross off the list. I’m not interested at all."

"Good," Natthakorn nodded.

"From what I know, that man isn’t just good at charming women—he’s also good at charming influential people. He has political connections and backs politicians behind the scenes. But we won’t play that game."

"So, you don’t have any close ties to politicians at all?"

"I know some casually, but I’m not close with anyone important."

"Not important? But… do you at least know which politicians have close ties to them? It’d be useful information."

"I don’t have that kind of intel," he admitted.

"We’ve always focused on our own business. We’ve competed within the industry, but this is the first time we’ve entered a high-stakes battle like this. Once it’s over, it’ll be done. Some things aren’t worth getting involved in."

"But I think this is important."

She didn’t know exactly when this thought had taken root, but now it was firmly in her mind.

Leverage. That might be what really mattered in the end.

"Then we’ll have someone look into it,"

Natthakorn agreed.

"I’ll send a few people to gather information, but I can’t promise how much they’ll find. At the end of the day, I still believe our strongest asset is our credibility. I want Superior to win based on our strengths."

"At first, I thought that was all that mattered too," Mavika said seriously.

"But now, I realize that understanding our competitors—learning how they really play the game—is just as important."

Natthakorn chuckled.

"Since when did my daughter become so strategic? Impressive. If that’s how you see it, then go for it. Do whatever it takes to outmaneuver our rivals and win this."

"I will,"

She promised, a small smirk forming on her lips as her mind spun with new ideas.

"And I will succeed."

Mavika immediately focused on the message.

***Rachen is making deals with someone to gain connections for the bid.***

*.*

Her grip on the phone tightened slightly. She wasn’t surprised—this was exactly the kind of move she expected from him—but having it confirmed gave her an unsettling feeling.

She tapped on the attached image and enlarged it. The picture wasn’t completely clear, but it showed Rachen sitting at a table in what looked like a high-end restaurant.

Across from him was a man in a suit, his face turned slightly away from the camera, but Mavika could still recognize him.

She exhaled slowly. This wasn’t just any business dinner.

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**Maple: Who is he meeting?**

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It took only a few seconds before Aiwarin's reply came through.

.

**Ai: A politician. Not one of the big names, but someone with influence behind the scenes. I have more details if you’re interested.**

Of course, she was interested.

**Maple: Tell me everything.**

Her heart pounded slightly with anticipation. If Rachen was trying to pull strings behind closed doors, then she needed to know exactly what he was planning.

A few moments later, another message popped up.

.

**Ai: I will. But not here. If you want the full story, you’ll have to come get it from me.**

.

Mavika sighed, rolling her eyes. Of course. Aiwarin always had to make things interesting.

*I don’t just have information.*

**Ai: Rachen is sitting on the sofa, talking to two older people from a hidden corner. There’s something I know beyond this, and I think this information might be important.”**

After reading that message, she paused briefly in thought.

**Maple: And what do you gain from telling a competitor like me?**

**Ai: Gain? Haha. First of all, I just want to compete with you a little more fairly. People with little experience in this industry usually end up at a disadvantage. So, I want us to learn together. See? I’m generous, aren’t I?**

**Maple: Are you sure you’re generous?**

**AI: Yes, very. If I wanted to beat you in a way that completely crushed you, I wouldn’t tell you anything. Not a single thing.**

**Maple: Is that your only reason? I don’t think so.**

**Ai: You already know what I want.**

**Maple: Do you want me?**

**(Sticker of a character arching her hips seductively.)**

**AI: Hmm... Yes, I want you.**

**Maple: Well, I hope you get what you want.**

.

After sending the last message, she locked her phone with a smile. She turned to look at her wardrobe, wondering what to wear tonight. But then she realized she didn’t need to dress up too much—it wouldn’t make a difference.

So, she picked the easiest shirt to wear and paired it with shorts, something casual for a walk and appropriate for entering and exiting a luxury hotel, just like a tourist strolling around.

She opened her small shoulder bag, took out a key card someone had given her, and checked that it was still there. Then, she move it to another bag she planned to take out today.

Slinging the bag over her shoulder, she stopped by the wardrobe again, gazing at the outfit she had borrowed from someone. After a brief moment of thought, she smiled at it and decided to keep it for now.

"I'm going to have drinks at Nanny's condo. Tomorrow’s a holiday, so I’ll probably stay over and not come back tonight."

She told her parents as she walked downstairs, then got into her car and set the destination for where she was headed tonight—

**Orianna Grand Hotel.**

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# Chapter 16: Rose Gold Keycard

**Ai : If you want to see me, drive up and park on the 6th floor. Go inside, take the elevator to the 30th floor, then exit and turn toward the glass wall at the end of the hallway. There, you'll find a door leading to the VIP elevator. Use the keycard to take the elevator up to the 50th floor, then come to my room. You should remember the way. Just letting you know in case you ever feel like coming over.**

.

Mevika read the message from Aiwarin, as if expecting that she might come. She knew it was a test of her resolve, but it seemed that Aiwarin was just as clever as her image suggested.

Many people praised her for being skilled and intelligent in her work, but no one knew that when it came to charm, she was just as sharp.

Even though Mevika saw through her intentions, the directness of the invitation made it feel like an equal match—one that had led them both to this moment.

She parked on the 6th floor as instructed, using the keycard from the entrance of the lower-level parking area. Upon reaching the 6th floor, a security guard directed her to the VIP parking area. Then, she passed through a door that required the keycard, realizing just how important this single special card was—it marked her as a distinguished guest of the hotel.

Regular guests received standard keycards, but this special one granted privileges for convenience and security—reserved for family or those with a special connection to the owner of Orienna Grand Hotel.

The journey to the 50th floor seemed far, but the seamless access made it quick. From the 30th floor, she had to walk to the VIP elevator. It it felt as if the entire hotel belonged to her alone—a private space where people passed by or shared elevators, yet there was still a sense of security, even as she walked alone, with only the soft sound of her heels tapping against the carpeted floor.

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She had been wearing a loosely tied bathrobe for several minutes now, indulging in the freedom to do whatever she pleased on her day off.

Her attention lingered on the chat messages, waiting for a reply. She had checked a few times, but there was still no response. However, just five minutes ago, she noticed that her last message had been read.

"If you've read it, then come see me,"

She muttered to herself, sounding like someone falling for another. She hadn’t fully sorted out her feelings yet, but one thing was clear—she wanted to see Mevika. And if Mevika kept playing hard to get, she might just lose her mind.

Her gaze shifted up to their previous messages, bringing a smile to her lips.

.

**Ai: Come out. Mm... yeah, I want you.**

**MAPLE : Then I hope you get what you want.**

.

"Then I guess my wish is about to come true,"

She murmured, turning off her phone and placing it on the small table next to her private onsen. It was time to finally soak in the warm water after adjusting the temperature just right. She wanted to take her time, but if she ended up waiting in vain, she might never get to enjoy her bath as planned.

Just as she was about to step into the tub, three firm knocks on the door made her freeze in place.

She turned to look at the door from across the room, a smirk playing at her lips. Her eyes locked onto it, waiting for it to open—without her needing to take a single step to greet her guest.

The soft beep of the keycard signaled the door unlocking. As the door swung open, a wide smile spread across her lips.

“Oh? Who would come visit me this late?”

The door clicked shut gently as the keycard was lifted and waved playfully.

“Should I return this to its owner now?”

“No need,”

Aiwarin replied, shaking her head.

“Just keep it in your bag.”

“Fine.”

Mevika agreed without hesitation—she hadn’t planned on returning it anyway. It would definitely come in handy again, so she tucked it back into her bag.

“I came for answers.”

“Answers again? I thought you already got what you wanted,”

Aiwarin chuckled.

“A different question this time. But you already know why I’m here—it's about work.”

Mevika strode toward the woman who had been in her sights the moment she entered the room. Aiwarin stood there in a loosely tied bathrobe, the fabric draping casually over her shoulders, revealing just enough of her collarbone and the curve of her chest to be distracting.

“I was just about to take a bath. Hope you’re not in a hurry.”

“I’m not,”

Mevika replied, her gaze lingering on the slim figure wrapped in the robe. Just looking at her from a distance was enough to set her pulse racing, and this time, she didn’t bother hiding it. She let her eyes roam freely—and judging by Aiwarin’s expression, she was fully aware of it.

“That Rachen guy—who is he talking to? What’s he planning?”

“You say you’re not in a hurry, but you’re eager to get answers,”

Aiwarin laughed as she walked toward the steps leading to the onsen. She turned her back to Mevika, then, without hesitation, slipped off her robe and draped it over the railing before stepping into the warm water, completely bare.

*Mevika nearly forgot to breathe.*

She caught herself inhaling sharply, unable to look away from the elegant curves before her. The gentle sway of Aiwarin’s hips as she moved, the smoothness of her skin, the slow, deliberate steps she took up the wooden stairs—each motion was mesmerizing.

The polished wood gleamed beneath her feet before they dipped into the inviting water, the surface rippling as she sank in.

Mevika stood frozen, watching that flawless back disappear beneath the steaming bath.

She slipped beneath the water before resurfacing, leaning back against the edge of the onsen. The rippling water foamed lightly, concealing everything below her shoulders.

“If you want answers,”

Aiwarin said, gripping the edge of the tub and meeting her guest’s gaze directly,

“Then come and get them. The answers are right here in the water.”

It wasn’t the kind of invitation one could simply ignore or pretend to misunderstand. And Mevika had no reason to resist. If the answers were in there, she had no problem going in to get them.

“Oh? Is that so?”

Mevika stepped toward the stairs, stopping just far enough from the onsen’s ledge for Aiwarin to take in the full view of her.

“Alright. I just hope you have the best answers for me.”

With that, she swiftly undid the buttons of her shirt, one by one, all the way down. She slipped it off and let it drop to the floor in an almost teasing motion, fully aware of Aiwarin’s unwavering gaze of approval.

When she reached for the waistband of her shorts and pulled down the zipper, Aiwarin leaned in, resting her chin on her hand, watching her every move without so much as blinking.

Mevika met that gaze head-on, unbothered and confident. If that little smirk on Aiwarin’s lips meant she was enjoying the show, then that suited Mevika just fine.

Her shorts fell to the floor, and she lifted one foot free. The anticipation grew, but what would raise the tension even more was what came next. She reached behind her back and unclasped her bra, letting it loosen and slip from her shoulders.

Aiwarin felt like she was witnessing a private performance, one meant for her alone. She was utterly captivated, her breathing unsteady. Though she remained still, her eyes followed every movement as Mevika touched her own skin with deliberate ease.

When the bra finally dropped to the floor, Aiwarin caught herself biting her lower lip.

It wasn’t the first time she had seen Mevika’s bare skin, but something about this slow, deliberate reveal made it feel just as exhilarating. She watched, waiting, until the last remaining piece of fabric slipped down and joined the rest on the floor.

She hadn’t even realized she was holding her breath.

Mevika took a slow, deliberate step forward, every movement fluid and entrancing. As she reached the edge of the onsen, Aiwarin shifted aside, making space for her to step into the water.

The soft splash as Mevika descended into the bath sent a fresh wave of anticipation through Aiwarin’s chest.

Her chest rose and fell subtly beneath the water, her heart working overtime. Perhaps Aiwarin was the only one who could make it race this much, even after all the times she had been in similar situations before.

"Can you start telling me now?"

Mevika smirked. By now, she was fully submerged in the onsen, facing the owner of this luxurious bath. What amazed her was the sleek ledge inside, where a gentle waterfall cascaded down in smooth waves, making this bath feel more like a serene retreat than just another high-end hot tub.

The warm water and the circulating currents melted away tension, inviting relaxation. If she were to linger a bit longer, unhurried, she wouldn’t mind —but she couldn’t risk missing the answers she came for.

"Of course. You came all this way for answers, so I’ll tell you now. Come sit here."

Aiwarin gestured toward the space beside her.

"The rippling water will help you relax even more."

Mevika moved closer, settling against the smooth edge as invited. As soon as she did, Aiwarin draped an arm around her shoulder.

Mevika turned slightly, eyeing the woman who openly displayed her sly nature. But she didn’t mind—she was more than willing to let Aiwarin touch her as much as she pleased.

After all, she had prepared herself for this—both in mind and body.

"If I had known earlier, I would have brought some wine,"

Aiwarin mused, "to drink while we soak like this."

"Are the answers so long that we’d need to sip wine for hours?"

Mevika raised an eyebrow.

"I thought this conversation would be quick."

"Oh?"

Aiwarin chuckled, clearly pleased with the response.

"Well then, I should hurry up and tell you."

She leaned in slightly, her voice dropping just a bit.

"That man, Rachen—ah, I should say he's been secretly making deals under the name of Great & Grow."

"With politicians?"

Mevika’s expression sharpened.

"Who?"

"Chaiyanarong."

"The minister who just broke away to form his own political party?"

"That’s the one. Chaiyanarong is aiming to be part of the next government after this year's election. Word is, he has a lot of financial backers. If he gets into power, he'll return the favor by securing benefits for those investors. Right now, he’s pulling people from his old party and other factions to build a stronger base. Several provincial MPs are already being courted..."

"....."

"Wherever there were good votes, many were bought. As for those who had supported him in his old party, some of them would probably break away and come to this party too. I don’t think he is such a scary choice. He probably won’t get much support from the younger generation. But the people who will vote for his party are likely those who still believe in his sugarcoated, dream-selling policies and think he is a good person."

"A good person who creates superficial policies but cannot bring long-term sustainability to the people?" "That’s exactly his specialty,"

Aiyawarinn laughed.

"Rachen is one of the financiers secretly backing him. There's an offer that if Chainarong's party becomes the government, he will fully support them. Because Chainarong has close connections with senior officials in the international duty-free sector, it’s very likely that he will use these connections to gain inside information or special advantages—unless the people in the department are transparent and credible enough not to let any information leak to competitors."

"And what do you think the people in this department will choose?"

"Honestly, even I am still new to dealing with this department. My family business is directly related to tourism, but we have never been directly involved with international duty-free businesses. So, I’m not entirely sure yet. Do you have any information on this? Maybe we can exchange some."

Aiyawarinn smiled.

"I don’t, but if I did, I wouldn’t take advantage of you."

"Does that mean you would tell me?"

She playfully leaned in to whisper.

"A fair fight—if we’re both looking for answers to this, then yes. If I find out anything, I’ll tell you."

"Just like how I told you today, so you can be prepared for the potential backdoor dealings. It might happen, or it might get shut down and be handled transparently—I can’t say for sure. But having this information in advance means we can be smart about knowing our opponents."

"Someone as smart as you must know even more. Do you have anything else to tell me?"

"I've already told you the main points. If I find out any small details later, I might tell you. But for now, this is all there is. I’m not going to tell you everything just yet—you already know we’re still competing. But if I get some really valuable information and you want to know more, you can come to me next time. I just want to be fair with you, but I won’t be fair with every competitor who isn’t aware of these things."

"So, this is all for today,"

Mevika said, turning to face Aiwarin. She scooped some water and ran it over her arm, taking the opportunity to shift her attention away from their conversation. She should at least make good use of this luxurious bathtub— the warmth was incredibly soothing.

"Yes, if this is all you wanted to know today, then that’s it. But…"

Aiwarin crawled across the tub’s floor, then knelt and leaned closer to Mevika. Her hand reached beneath the water, tracing up Mevika’s slender leg, moving upward to her waist before gently pressing her shoulder against the edge of the tub.

"I've answered your questions, but we’re not finished bathing yet."

Her delicate fingers glided from Mevika’s shoulder down to her toned upper arm beneath the water. She pressed her knee between Mevika’s legs, then lowered her face to place a soft kiss on her lips. Mevika closed her eyes, accepting the kiss without hesitation. That meant she had already made up her mind about tonight.

Neither of them would go back on their unspoken agreement—one got the answers she sought, the other got what she desired. But Aiwarin hoped that Mevika, too, would indulge in their shared pleasure. Judging by her reaction, she seemed particularly receptive to her touch.

Aiwarin started with slow, deliberate movements, but her eagerness soon grew. She pulled away from Mevika’s lips, trailing kisses down to the curve of her neck, pressing firmly enough to elicit a soft sound from her throat.

Mevika wrapped her arms around Aiwarin’s head, letting her continue, alternating between kisses and teasing strokes of her tongue.

Aiwarin’s slender fingers traced downward, caressing before moving lower. She gently parted Mevika’s legs, her touch making Mevika shiver in response.

Mevika felt the pressure of wandering fingertips teasing her sensitive spot —caught between a wave of pleasure and an instinct to pull away. When Aiwarin’s touch deepened, a soft gasp escaped her lips.

"Ah…"

She pulled away, looking at the twisted expression on Mevika’s face, and could tell exactly how she was feeling. Though there was excitement, she might also tense up, as the water washed away any natural lubrication, which could cause discomfort.

"Sit up,"

She whispered, instructing Mevika to move out of the water. She obeyed immediately, lifting her hips onto the edge of the tub, with Aiwarin’s body positioned between her legs. Mevika looked down at her, eyes filled with desire, anticipating what Aiwarin was about to do next.

Mevika watched as Aiwarin tilted her head up to meet her gaze before flashing a small, knowing smile. Then, Aiwarin lowered her lips to Mevika’s thigh, kissing gently before pressing her face closer, her hands pushing Mevika’s legs further apart. The slow ascent of Aiwarin’s kisses up her inner thigh made her tense slightly.

Even though this was the second time, the teasing touch and skillful movements made her heart race twice as fast.

There was no point in resisting anymore. The hidden desire within her was about to be fully unleashed tonight. She had already surrendered to the pleasure, fully aware of how deeply she was falling into this sensation.

Aiwarin’s lips hovered unbearably close to the place that made her tremble.

If she delayed any longer, Mevika would lose herself entirely. Without realizing it, she shifted her legs, granting Aiwarin better access. Aiwarin glanced up at her with a sly smile before lifting her thighs higher and lowering her mouth onto her.

"Ah…"

Mevika's moan echoed through the bedroom. Aiwarin was deliberately teasing her, alternating between delicate touches and more intense pressure, bringing her to the edge. A small, breathless whimper almost escaped, but she bit her lip hard to suppress it.

At first, her hands braced against the edge of the tub to steady herself, but soon, they found their way to Aiwarin’s head, fingers tangling in her neatly tied-up hair, now disheveled from Mevika’s grasp.

One hand returned to clutch the wooden edge of the tub for support, but she soon gave up on holding back her voice. The way Aiwarin used her tongue sent tremors through her legs, making her body quake.

With the intensity of the sensations overtaking her, Mevika could no longer contain the sounds of her pleasure. The battle between restraint and indulgence was lost, and Aiwarin expertly guided her to the peak of bliss faster than she had expected—even though it had only just begun.

Aiwarin pulled away, licking her lips lightly before flashing a smile at the woman who now seemed completely drained because of her.

The way Aiwarin looked at her made Mevika’s cheeks burn with heat. That brief moment—a single second of Aiwarin licking her own lips—was enough to captivate her all over again.

It was a gesture that never failed to make her weak, sending shivers through her body. Her heart pounded even harder when Aiwarin moved closer, pressing up against her and whispering in a soft, sultry voice, **"Shall we continue on the bed?"**

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# Chapter 17: Just For Fun or Serious?

This morning, Aiwarin woke up to news articles about Rachen and Mevika, which she found amusing.

She could clearly see that Mevika had no interest in Rachen at all-she was actually trying to run away from him. Mevika probably sensed it herself, but being reminded of it by Aiwarin would only make her dislike his presence even more.

That made it easy for Aiwarin to dismiss the idea that Mevika was interested in that man.

Or perhaps... she should dismiss the thought that Mevika was interested in any man at all.

**Because Mevika had chosen her.**

And the one who should be in those headlines was her instead. No one else shared a deeper connection with Mevika than she did.

Mevika had told her that she had never trusted anyone enough to have this kind of relationship before. Even if their relationship didn't have a clear label, Mevika had chosen her.

She trusted Aiwarin enough to share this hidden bond, a secret between just the two of them.

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"Ai..."

Tonight, Mevika was in her bed. The way she whispered her name in that soft, breathy voice made Aiwarin's heart work harder than usual. More than the exhaustion, more than the breathlessness that made it feel like her strength could give out at any moment-but it hadn't, not even now.

They had already spent almost an hour in bed together. If she counted the time in the steamy bathtub before that, it would have been even longer.

"Are you tired?"

Aiwarin asked Mevika, her voice unsteady as she moved slowly.

"No."

Mevika shook her head. She was thrilled as Aiwarin kissed her slender legs, lifting them high while pressing their hips together, rubbing against each other. The slow, gentle movements gradually became more intense, drawing moans from both of them.

"Ah..."

Aiwarin let out a sound from deep in her throat. She was exhausted but refused to stop, overwhelmed by the burning desire coursing through her body. Her blood pounded, her lower stomach twisted with pleasure in a way that didn't happen every time.

Their breaths mingled, their movements perfectly in sync, pressing into each other again and again. The sound of Mevika's voice, the hunger in her own body-it all sent Aiwarin into a pleasure she hadn't felt in a long time, or maybe ever before.

Both women lay there, breathless and spent. Aiwarin didn't move away immediately. She let her body relax before shifting to lie down beside Mevika, not too far apart. Taking a deep breath, she felt her breathing steady before turning to face Mevika, who was already looking at her.

"I haven't done this with anyone in a long time. You really set me on fire." Aiwarin chuckled, stretching her arm out on the pillow, inviting Mevika to move closer. And she did.

"You made my heart race all the way down to my calves."

"Not all the way down to your ankles?"

Mevika teased, resting her head on Aiwarin's arm before pulling her in close, pressing her face against her.

"Maybe that should be you instead."

Aiwarin laughed, looking down at the woman curled up against her shoulder.

"You're the one who got all shaken up by my passion, weren't you?"

"Don't you know your own abilities well enough?"

Mevika smirked.

"I do, but it seems like they work best on you. I've never had sex with anyone and felt this excited before."

"Excited?"

Mevika laughed, pushing herself up to sit. Then she moved to sit at the foot of the bed, making Aiwarin look at her in surprise.

"Are you really that shaken just by having me in bed with you?"

"The most. I've never felt this way about anyone before."

"Would you say this is more special than with anyone else?"

"I don't know... How special do you think we should make this relationship?"

"It's only special as long as it stays a secret."

She didn't want to ruin the moment, but they both knew the truth. For now, they would let this relationship remain an exciting secret. How far it would go-that was something only time would tell.

Aiwarin lay there, watching Mevika's face, thoughts swirling in her mind, though she didn't voice them. She was content just admiring that mesmerizing face. And now, that face was getting closer.

Mevika leaned in and kissed her lips. She was the one who initiated it, doing something she had never done before. Her lips moved to the corner of Aiwarin's mouth, then she pulled back slightly, gazing at her as if she, too, was captivated.

Aiwarin wished she could know what was running through Mevika's mind. But then, Mevika took it a step further-pressing her lips to Aiwarin's neck, her delicate fingers trailing down her body, brushing past her chest.

Aiwarin arched slightly, but then hesitated, because this was the first time Mevika had taken the lead.

"Do you want to try?"

Aiwarin asked. Maybe Mevika was just unsure whether Aiwarin would be comfortable being the one on the receiving end.

"You've been through plenty of passion with me-I'd say you're experienced enough."

"I suppose I could manage... but I'm not sure if I'm good enough yet." And with that, any hesitation vanished.

Really, she shouldn't have needed Aiwarin's permission. If she wanted to follow her desires, she could. Aiwarin was always easygoing with her, and when it came to things like this, she was sure Aiwarin would give her plenty of freedom.

Mevika kissed Aiwarin's neck again, her hands gliding up to cup the soft curves of her breasts. The firmness beneath her palms made her hands linger, enjoying the sensation.

But it became even more thrilling when her lips moved downward, tasting, exploring, until Aiwarin arched into her touch.

Her breasts rose and fell heavily in Mevika's mouth, and she might have stayed there longer if there weren't still so many other things left to discover.

Her stomach, which had made her shy when she looked at it during their video call, was now being covered with kisses from her lips. Now that she could finally touch it freely, any shyness had disappeared.

She seemed to be taking her time, lingering on the feeling. The way the muscles tensed under her lips made her even more drawn into the moment.

There was still so much more for her to explore. And as she thought about it, she found herself breathing a little more heavily. When her lips moved lower, her body pressed between Aiwarin's legs.

She looked up and met Aiwarin's gaze, noticing the slight tension in her expression as she realized what was about to happen. Aiwarin then stretched her legs out, shifting into a more relaxed position, as if preparing for what was coming next.

Lowering her head, she broke eye contact. Aiwarin's eyes were now fixed on what was about to happen, watching closely as she explored, wondering if she could make Aiwarin feel the same restless anticipation she did.

There was something in the way Aiwarin waited-expectant, ready to be touched. She stared for a moment before slowly moving closer, her lips pressing in. Aiwarin's breathing changed instantly.

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The exhaustion from the previous night made Aiwarin wake up a little later than usual. She opened her eyes just past seven, finding someone still sleeping beside her.

Once again, she was the first to wake, the owner of this room-or rather, the owner of this hotel. But this time, she didn't hide the way she watched her special guest.

Just waking up to see Mevika sleeping beside her filled her with a strange sense of contentment. She only hoped that, this time, Mevika wouldn't rush out of bed to hurry home.

It was a day off for both of them-though it could easily turn into a workday.

But if Mevika stayed, she would put everything aside and deal with work again on Monday.

The fact that Mevika had come all the way to her room could mean two things. Either she had just wanted an answer for their competition, or she had come because she desired her in the same way.

At first, she hadn't been sure. But now, she was certain that Mevika wanted her just too. There was no longer a need to search for answers anywhere else.

It was real. Because now, she had chosen her. Or even if she hadn't chosen her specifically, she had at least chosen to have an intimate relationship with another woman-without hesitation or resistance.

She picked up her phone and started scrolling while waiting for her special guest to wake up. She didn't want to disturb her, especially since she had already exhausted her over and over again. Mevika deserved to sleep in and rest-just in case it happened again sometime soon.

By a little past eight, Mevika had likely gotten enough sleep. The figure beneath the blanket shifted slightly before slowly opening her eyes. The moment she became aware of the bare warmth under the covers, she realized exactly why she was lying here in this state.

"You're awake. Good morning, and happy Sunday."

Aiwarin's slightly husky morning voice reached her as she lay on her side, propped up on one elbow, watching her from close by. It felt as if she was being seduced from the moment she opened her eyes.

Mevika stared at her face, taking in the features she had seen last nightcompletely bare of makeup, yet still flawless, smooth, and radiant. Since it was a relaxing day off with nowhere to go, this was the first time she had seen Aiwarin's face without anything enhancing it.

And yet, she still looked just as captivating. Seeing her up close like this made it even harder to look away.

"You're not in a hurry to leave this morning, are you? I was thinking we could have breakfast together. I'll have the staff bring it up."

"If the hotel owner is personally prepare a nice menu, I won't say no."

"Hmm."

Aiwarin smiled. This morning, she didn't feel like playing any games. She thought it was time to build something more with Mevika-not just competition, not just business, not just the passion they shared last night.

She wanted to know her better. And she wanted Mevika to see different sides of her as well.

"Did you sleep well?"

"I slept way too well. Your room is just too comfortable. The bed is amazing-I slept like a rock."

"Did you sleep so deeply because my room is cozy? Or because you were exhausted?"

She couldn't resist teasing her.

"It's probably both. But I doubt I'd still be tired by morning. I must've recovered after the first hour of sleep."

"Oh?" Aiwarin laughed.

"So that means we can continue this morning, right?"

She teasingly leaned in closer, propping herself up on her elbow.

"Don't you have anything else to do?"

"I'm just joking. Didn't I just invite you to breakfast? Or do you want to join me at the gym?"

"No thanks. I probably shouldn't be walking around your hotel."

"The gym I use is for guests staying in the top five luxury floors. Hardly anyone uses it. But if you'd rather stay in here, that's fine too. Still, I hope one day I can show you more of the hotel."

"If only it were that easy, without anyone making a fuss about it."

Aiwarin just shrugged and changed the subject.

"Well, if my room and bed are so comfortable, you should come over more often."

"I get the feeling you'll be interested in me for a while, but once you get bored, you'll move on."

"I don't feel that way."

"Are you getting serious now?"

"I haven't thought about it yet."

She answered honestly-because she really hadn't. But one thing was certain: she had never been this eager to see someone before.

"Then I guess that means you're not serious."

"Is it that easy to decide?"

"If you were serious, you would've thought about it already."

"And have you thought about it?"

"I don't think about it because it's complicated. I already told you that."

"Reality might be simpler than whatever you're imagining."

"And if I win the auction, what happens then? Will everyone around you be happy for me?"

"If you win..."

Aiwarin trailed off, falling silent. She had never even considered that possibility before. The woman who was always praised for her sharp instincts suddenly had no answer.

She found herself yielding to the thoughts of a woman who seemed to think further and more complexly than she did. Aiwarin liked intricate thinking, but she never dwelled on what might happen in the future-except when making long-term business plans.

"I told you it would be difficult."

"Let's not talk about business anymore. It's boring."

Aiwarin quickly shut down the conversation.

"I should order your breakfast first."

With that, she reached for her phone, which she had left somewhere near the pillow after grabbing it from the edge of the bathtub. She took her time browsing the menu, selecting only the best options.

Once she placed the order, she set the phone down on the bed and turned back to her guest.

"We're close now, aren't we?"

"What?" Mevika frowned slightly.

"Since last night, you stopped calling me 'Khun' and just called me 'you.'"

"If I ever said I'd switch to that once we were close, then... fine, I guess we're close."

"There's no need to play coy. We've been close for a while-emotionally and physically. I've never let anyone sleep in this bed before. And you had the nerve to come to me here. We're closer than we realize, even if no one else knows it."

"If you want to be close to me, then I'll be close to you,"

Mevika said with a smile.

"Now, I should get ready for breakfast. I'll use the bathroom first. Ugh... where are my clothes?"

She sighed, suddenly remembering that she had discarded them somewhere last night. Thinking back on it made her feel a little embarrassed-but then again, why should she be? Aiwarin had clearly enjoyed it.

**What would happen if she actually made Aiwarin fall for her?**

The thought felt like a fleeting fantasy. Aiwarin had said she'd never seriously considered anyone before.

It wouldn't be that easy.

And she wasn't hoping for that much anyway.

"I'll get them for you,"

Aiwarin offered, shifting to the edge of the bed. She picked up a towel-the same one they had shared when drying off last night.

Aiwarin casually draped the towel over herself and guided the beautiful woman back to the bed. Once they reached it, she let the thick fabric fall to the floor, its usefulness now over-at least she wouldn't have to walk across the room completely bare like last time to grab her clothes.

Mevika watched as Aiwarin gathered all of her clothes and placed them in a neat pile at the foot of the bed. Then, Aiwarin picked up a white button-up shirt and held it open for her.

"Come here."

"Mmm."

Seeing how accommodating Aiwarin was, Mevika moved to the edge of the bed, still holding the blanket around herself. She let it drop just enough to cover her waist as she shifted forward and raised her arms. Aiwarin slipped the shirt onto her, guiding her arms through the sleeves before buttoning it up, one by one, all the way to the bottom. It was long enough to reach her upper thighs.

When Aiwarin finished, she looked up at Mevika's face, holding her gaze for a long moment-so long that Mevika had to ask,

"What?"

Instead of answering, Aiwarin leaned in and pressed a kiss to Mevika's lips. It lasted only a few seconds, a soft and fleeting touch, before she pulled away with a small smile.

"Good morning."

Her voice was calm and polite, almost teasingly so, before she turned and walked away.

Mevika was left kneeling on the bed, momentarily dazed. Without thinking, she reached up to touch her lips. She'd had far more intense kisses from Aiwarin before, yet somehow, this simple one left her feeling warm in the face. Maybe it was the casual greeting, or maybe it was that damn smile.

*"If she did this to her girlfriend every morning, wouldn't she go crazy in love with her?"*

The thought slipped into her mind before she caught herself, realizing how ridiculous it sounded.

***"I mean someone else, not me."***

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# Chapter 18: The Cruelest Person

Breakfast was set on a small square table by the balcony. Normally, Aiwarin would eat here alone, sipping her coffee. But today was the first time she used her bedroom and balcony to welcome a guest and share a meal.

"I ordered tea for you to try. *Clipper*—it's an English tea. Have you ever had it?"

Aiwarin asked while spreading a napkin over her lap. Both she and Mevika were wearing bathrobes, having only washed their faces and brushed their teeth before sitting down to eat.

"Clipper? I've heard of it, but I’ve never tried it. The only English teas I’ve had are Yorkshire and Twinings, and I don’t drink tea often."

"But you like tea, right?"

"If it smells good, then yes. But I drink coffee more."

"Okay. I like Clipper because it’s smooth and refreshing. If I don’t have coffee during the day, drinking Clipper while working helps me feel relaxed. The taste isn’t too strong. Let’s eat first, and then you can try it."

"I can already smell it,"

Mevika said, looking at the beautifully patterned cup of English tea placed on its saucer with a small spoon. She wanted to take a sip right away, but if Aiwarin said to eat first, she would do that—especially if it was better for her body. Even though she had drunk tea and coffee on an empty stomach before, she decided to follow the suggestion.

That small piece of advice made her notice the little details Aiwarin paid attention to. She had given her advice before, but this was the first time they were spending a relaxed moment together.

"It smells nice, doesn't it? At our hotel, we serve Chinese, Japanese, and English teas. Each dining area has different selections, and in our largest restaurant..."

The hotel offers all kinds of tea for guests to order. We also have a daytime lounge with a cozy tea corner where people can relax and listen to music because most guests prefer drinking tea during the day. Oh, and we also have teas imported from England, including my favorite one.

"Do you like tea more than coffee?"

Mevika continued the conversation naturally. It felt nice to chat like this.

"Not exactly,"

Aiwarin replied, picking up her spoon and fork to start eating.

"Go ahead, eat as much as you like. If you want to order more of anything, just let me know. As for tea and coffee, I like them both equally. It just depends on what I feel like drinking at the moment."

"What kind of coffee do you like?"

"Espresso. What about you?"

"Cappuccino."

"That suits you," Aiwarin smiled.

"How?"

"It's soft and smooth, just like the milk foam on top."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Your personality, your character—those little things. You come across as confident and capable, but you also have a sweet and charming side."

"Me? Charming?" Mevika quickly asked.

"Of course. Has no one ever told you that before?"

"They have," she admitted,

"But not in a long time. Ever since I started working after graduating, no one has called me cute. They only say I'm beautiful."

"That’s because your beauty stands out first."

"Am I really that beautiful?"

Mevika smiled, curious about what Aiwarin thought.

"Very beautiful. So beautiful that it makes me want to walk up to you."

"Well, you didn’t just look, did you? You actually walked up to me every time. Aren't you afraid people will notice?"

"If I hesitated, would we be sitting here right now? Or would I have taken you upstairs?"

"Ah, you're being direct again,"

Mevika muttered, turning her face away and pausing as she picked at her food.

"You’re just as direct," Aiwarin pointed out.

"Not as much as you."

"I just don’t like beating around the bush. Otherwise, things might not happen in time,"

Aiwarin laughed.

"So, how do you see me?"

"See you?"

Mevika quickly chewed the food she had just put in her mouth, swallowed, and then answered slowly,

"Well... you look good."

She pretended to focus on her food.

"That's it?"

"You really want me to say it?"

She hesitated, poking at her plate as if she were too busy to answer. But in reality, she was debating whether to be completely honest.

"Fine... You're beautiful, very good-looking, well-dressed, stylish, and stand out. You have a great image—you're talented and charming."

"That sounds like the dream type for a lot of people, doesn’t it? Don’t you like that kind of person?"

"...What?"

"I mean, you just said I’m charming. Have you fallen for my charm yet?"

Aiwarin rested her chin on her hand, watching Mevika with a playful, almost teasing expression.

"Praising you was already a lot,"

Mevika replied, trying to keep her composure. She knew she had complimented Aiwarin quite a bit, but now that the question had turned back on her, she wasn’t sure how to respond.

"No answer? Should I just assume the answer myself?"

"What do you think?"

"Do I have permission to think whatever I want?"

"Then what do you think?"

"If you weren’t even a little bit drawn to me, you wouldn’t be sitting here right now,"

Aiwarin said simply.

Mevika stared at her, speechless. Aiwarin’s words were so straightforward, yet they left no room for argument. It was the same logic as when Aiwarin said Mevika’s beauty had made her want to approach her. The same reasoning applied here.

*But beauty alone wasn’t the only reason.*

There were other things that drew them to each other. That was why they both willingly stepped closer, entangling themselves in this secret and risky relationship.

"I must be right. That’s why you’re so quiet," Aiwarin teased.

"Charm is meant to make people fall for it, isn’t it?"

"Wow."

Aiwarin rested her chin on her hand and tapped her cheek lightly, as if flustered.

"Hearing that makes me shy,"

She said, pretending to blush. She had never once felt her face heat up because of anyone. Maybe Mevika was the first woman to make her feel this way.

She had thought before that beauty might be what first attracted people on the surface.

But beauty alone wasn’t enough.

Mevika had something more—something that made Aiwarin want to get to know her better. And being close to her was fun and exciting.

"We should focus on the food you picked. Besides the tea, do you have any other special recommendations?"

"Oh."

Aiwarin laughed. It seemed like Mevika was ending the conversation about their charms. That was fine. Mevika had already told her what she thought, and there would be plenty of chances to meet again. Getting to know each other little by little was a good way to build their connection.

"Alright, I'll tell you which dishes are special."

And then Aiwarin realized—talking about simple things, like the food on the table, was also a way to build a connection.

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The door closed after the staff came in to clear the trays and dishes. Aiwarin had positioned Mevika so that she could comfortably enjoy the view from the balcony, making sure no one could see her special guest—here for the second time. After all, if she were just another female friend staying over…

Staying over wouldn’t be unusual. But if any staff recognized Mevika, it would be better to keep things as discreet as possible—for the sake of their relationship at this stage.

"I’ll change back into my clothes from yesterday. I only stepped out for a little while,"

Mevika said to the owner of the room, who had just returned to the balcony. She was enjoying the fresh breeze and the soft morning sunlight. The balcony had vertical gardens on both sides, with lush greenery decorating the walls. Since the room was on the 50th floor, the railing was slightly higher than usual for extra safety.

"Leaving already?"

"I'll stay a little longer, take a shower, then head home. I’ve never given my family a reason to be suspicious. If my dad thinks I have a boyfriend and I’m hiding it, he might start paying more attention. If I keep coming here like this, it might get harder to do it freely."

"Next time, huh?"

Aiwarin smiled. She sat down on the soft lounge chair she had personally chosen for the balcony—one that could withstand sun and rain.

"So, there will be a next time? That’s nice."

"I still have to return your clothes."

"Oh, that? I told you before, you don’t have to return them. But if you really want to, you can bring them back here."

"Only here, huh?"

Mevika saw right through her. No matter what Aiwarin said, it always seemed like she had some kind of plan.

"You borrowed them from here, so you should return them here."

"Fine, because I like it here."

"You like it here? You mean you like my room?"

"It’s beautiful, and the view is amazing."

"What’s your favorite part?"

"The bed."

Mevika deliberately answered that first, knowing Aiwarin would be pleased.

"Hmm."

Aiwarin smiled, just as Mevika had expected.

"Of course. My bed is soft and comfortable. If you like it, you can always come sleep here again."

"The bathtub… and this balcony."

"That’s what you like?"

"Yeah. Did you have this place built just for yourself? I never thought there would be a private suite like this in the Orienna Grand."

"When we built the hotel, we divided each floor into different zones. The bigger, more expensive rooms are on the higher floors to offer the best views of Bangkok. Since I often have to be here for work, we created a private suite for me. My dad chose to place it on the top floor so it would be completely separate from the guest areas. On the 49th floor, my parents also have a suite, but they’ve never really used it. They prefer staying at home. Maybe once in a while, if they’re hosting an event here, they might stay overnight."

"Well, it makes sense for the hotel owner to have a private luxury suite. Everything here looks perfectly designed."

"I personally decided where everything should go. It’s spacious, but everything connects because it’s meant to be my personal space. And if I ever have a partner, we could live here openly."

"A partner? You’ve never had one before. Am I the first one you brought here?"

"That’s true,"

Aiwarin admitted. There was no teasing or sarcasm in her tone—just quiet appreciation.

"Maybe you’ll be the only woman who ever gets to be here."

She lowered her gaze and took a sip from the last cup of tea on the table, the only thing she hadn’t let the staff clear away.

Mevika watched her, noticing the soft smile on her face. The meaning behind those words made her pause, choosing to stay silent instead of reacting.

"I’m going to take a shower,"

She finally said, standing up and tightening the belt of her robe before heading into the bedroom—leaving Aiwarin to finish the rest of her tea in peace.

The robe slipped from her shoulders as she stepped into the bathroom. The clear glass reflected her image as she draped the robe over a nearby rack, replacing it with a towel. She glanced up, debating whether to lower the blinds—but before she could decide, someone else appeared.

“No need to close them,”

Aiwarin said, pushing the glass door open.

“I’ll join you.”

She removed her own robe, hanging it near the entrance before stepping closer to Mevika, making her intentions clear.

The way Aiwarin looked at her left no room for doubt. Mevika already knew what was about to happen, and she let it. If Aiwarin wanted to make the most of this morning before they parted ways—without knowing when they'd meet again—then so be it.

Last night, it was in the bathtub. Today, it was in this glass-walled shower.

Being with Aiwarin was always full of unexpected excitement, and this was no exception. So when Aiwarin reached out to turn on the shower, letting the water cascade over them both, Mevika didn’t resist.

And when Aiwarin pressed her gently against the cool glass, leaning in for a kiss, Mevika closed her eyes and kissed her back—fully accepting whatever this was, whenever it happened.

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The clasp of her bra was fastened with care by the woman standing behind her. Mevika watched Aiwarin through the mirror as she secured the delicate straps over her shoulders, making sure they sat evenly. Then, Aiwarin leaned in and pressed a soft kiss against her bare shoulder.

“Come again,” she murmured.

“No negotiations, no conditions. But if I find out anything, I’ll tell you. No need to bargain.”

“If you’re offering that much, there won’t be much left to compete over,”

Mevika replied, though curiosity flickered in her eyes.

“Even if I still want to know.”

“I’m not telling you everything,”

Aiwarin admitted with a teasing smile.

“There are things you’ll never find out.”

Aiwarin smiled in amusement when she heard that answer. She looked at the powder compact in her hand, then looked up at Mevika, who was standing by the door.

"Did you leave this here on purpose?"

"Who would leave something behind on purpose?"

Mevika replied innocently, but the small smile on her lips said otherwise.

"Well, I'll keep it for you. Don't forget to come and get it next time,"

Aiwarin said calmly, but there was something playful in her eyes.

Mevika chuckled softly.

"What if I don’t come back?"

"Then I'll keep it… until I see you again."

That answer made Mevika pause for a moment before she smirked again. "Then, see you next time."

Aiwarin remained standing there, still holding the compact powder in her hand, without following to see her special guest off.

That kind of goodbye had caught her off guard.

But maybe this was enough—just this moment, just this feeling.

She smiled to herself before letting out a quiet chuckle, then murmured under her breath,

**"I think the most dangerous one here isn’t me… it’s you."**

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# Chapter 19: The Only One Who Care

A tissue was carefully unfolded and pressed against her lips. She was sitting at a dinner table with a man in his thirties, who had been described to her as well-educated, holding two master's degrees, and successfully building his own clothing brand that had gained international recognition.

It looked like she was just minding her table manners, but in reality, she was hiding a small smile behind the thin tissue. After crumpling it in her hand, she lifted her head and gave the man in front of her a polite smile.

"Is the food not good?" the man asked.

"It's delicious, but I'm full now. I don't usually eat much."

None of what she just said was true. The food was just average, nothing particularly impressive. She wasn't actually smiling, and saying she didn't eat much was a complete lie. In reality, she had a big appetite, especially when the food was truly delicious.

"Oh? You don't talk much," he observed.

"Well..."

She wanted to be honest, but then she thought about what would happen if her father found out. But then again, so what? Her father might have set up this meeting, but she still had the final say in whether she liked the man or not.

And the truth was-she didn't. In fact, she had never liked any of the men her father had arranged for her to meet.

"You already know that the person who sent me here is my father. You and I have never met before, and this isn't a meeting I came to willingly."

"You didn't want to come?"

"Of course not. Who would want to be forced into this? Do you like it?"

"I'm not exactly thrilled either,"

He admitted.

"When my family told me to meet a woman I didn't even choose myself, I wasn't excited. But now that I've met you, I think you're more interesting than I expected. You're beautiful, and..."

"My looks alone won't be enough to make you happy. And I don't like you."

"I never said I liked you either."

"Okay then. Since we don't like each other, there's no need to wait and see if that will change. I don't think I could ever like someone I wasn't interested in from the start and didn't get to know on my own."

"So, should we just end this date now?"

"That would be great. No need to waste time. You should go on dates with someone you actually fall for."

"Alright."

The man clasped his hands together as if he wanted to give a celebratory high five now that this dull dinner and conversation were officially over.

If he had tried to pursue a relationship with her, it might have been interesting, but he wasn't the type to insist when a woman clearly wasn't interested. He thought she was very beautiful, but when you meet the right person, there's a different kind of connection-something that just clicks.

With her, he didn't feel that chemistry. She was bold, direct, and not the type to fall in love easily. She had a strong personality, very much a leader. If they were to date, they probably wouldn't be a good match.

"Thank you for taking the time to meet me,"

Aiwarin said, giving her final words of farewell.

The man was easy to talk to and understood her reasoning without making things difficult. Not everyone was like that. Some men she had met tried to push for a real relationship, making the situation uncomfortable, forcing her to sit there with a fake smile, just waiting for the meeting to be over.

But when she met someone reasonable like this, she handled it the same way-honest and straightforward. This wasn't the first time she had done this. And if her father found out, she was sure she'd get an earful.

But she'd rather be scolded than be forced into a relationship with someone she had no interest in.

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"Did you met that guy already?"

Athiwit asked his daughter as soon as she finished her meeting and returned to her office. He had asked Yolda to call him when the meeting was over so he could come see her.

"Yes,"

Aiwarin replied, keeping her eyes on her computer screen. She was busy with unfinished work, and since this wasn't a topic she wanted to focus on, she chose to stay engaged with her task and let the conversation be secondary.

"How was it?"

"Not interesting. He didn't seem very interested in me either. It would be hard to continue talking."

"What? Again? When are you going to find someone you actually want to be in a serious relationship with? Or at least take time to get to know someone?"

"I've told you before, Dad. If you set someone up for me, I will never like them. I'm not going to fall for someone just because we met once."

"Then bring someone you actually like to meet me. We've talked about this before."

"Bring someone I like? You need to promise first that no matter who it is, you'll accept my choice."

"Just bring them first."

"If you don't promise, I won't dare introduce anyone to you. What if you don't approve?"

"And why would I not approve? If you're confident in your choice, then why worry? Ai, you're smart. You make good decisions. I trust that when you choose a partner, you'll have thought it through carefully. So, I'll trust you."

"Then remember what you just said, Dad. One day, I'll bring someone to meet you. And you can't reject them because I'll make sure my choice is right. Just stop setting me up with people, please."

"Alright, we'll stop for now. Take your time to get to know someone and bring them to meet your mother and me."

"You said it, Dad. Remember that."

"Exactly."

"Then let's talk about work. You came to discuss the bidding, right?"

"Yes, that's very important. You've been working hard on it lately, haven't you?"

"We have to present our qualifications well because we're at a disadvantage.

We run hotels, unlike our competitors who specialize in shopping malls. They have more experience in this field."

"You mean Superior? They may have an advantage over us, but they're not unbeatable. They have weaknesses too. From what I know, they barely have any connections. I have some senior contacts on the selection committee who I can talk to. You just focus on preparing the information, and I'll handle the rest."

"Are you planning to use connections, Dad?"

"Only to some extent. Having both strong qualifications and good connections is always better. We need to use every advantage we have. It's not unusual-everyone does it. If you don't, you're at a disadvantage. But in the end, it's just extra support. If we win, it'll be because we're the best. Orianna has been in the tourism and hospitality business for a long time. Our expertise in this area stands out."

"I've been focusing on emphasizing that in our proposal. And what do you think about Great & Grow?"

"Great & Grow is the one we shouldn't trust. Not because they're better than us, but because we know they have connections too. Oh, by the way, I saw Rachen in the news with Nathakorn's daughter. Are they trying to form an alliance?"

Athiwit chuckled.

"What's her name again? Mevika, right? She seems inexperienced. Why would they bring her in to compete with us? I think she's going to be Superior's weak spot."

"The weak spot is Nuttakorn's daughter?"

"Exactly." Athawit smiled.

"If we play our cards right, she won't be hard to deceive. A rookie like that is the easiest to make mistakes against competitors."

"That's true,"

Aiwarin agreed. She thought about her father's words, her gaze drifting as an idea formed in her mind. Slowly, she smiled.

"Don't worry, Dad,"

She said confidently.

"Orianna will definitely defeat Superior."

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"I'll have a risotto and one Blue Hawaii,"

Mevika ordered from the waiter, then closed the menu and handed it back. Across from her, her best friend stared at her, waiting for her to finish ordering so they could start a serious conversation.

"So? You said you were staying over at my place, but who did you actually spend the night with?"

Nattharinee jumped at the chance to ask. Earlier, when Mevika texted asking to use her name as an excuse, she had only replied with a sticker. Now that they were face-to-face, she was determined to get an answer.

"Well, obviously, I was with someone else,"

Mevika said casually, glancing at the notifications on her phone before locking the screen and setting it aside.

"I figured that much! But who? Who was so special that you had to lie and use my name to stay over?"

"I can't say."

"What?!" Nattharinee looked shocked.

"Are you secretly dating someone? Since when? I had no idea! And you even spent the night with them?"

"Not a boyfriend. How should I put it...?"

Mevika hesitated, unsure how to describe it. She wanted to say she felt a connection, that she was captivated, but she wasn't ready to admit it.

"We're just talking."

"Just talking? But you already spent the night with them?"

"Does spending the night always have to mean something happened?"

"I don't know! But you've never done this before. You wouldn't even let guys touch you when you were dating. You always said you weren't ready to open up that much. But now you're comfortable enough to spend the night with someone? Even if nothing happened, that means you trust them a lot. It's not just trust-you might actually be falling for them if you're willing to spend the night together."

"Falling?"

Mevika took a sip of water from the glass the waiter had just served.

"Maybe a little."

"A little?! Wow! Who is this person who managed to win over my friend

Maple? I need to know! They must be really special if they got you to change this much. Now I'm imagining all sorts of things!"

"...."

"What do you think they're like? Handsome with a glowing aura, wearing a suit, fit body, a sharp businessman-smart, quick-witted, gentle, warm, and great at taking care of you?"

"You think they're like that?"

Mevika smiled before shaking her head slowly.

"Beautiful with an aura that catches everyone's eye, wearing a suit, stunning figure, a sharp businesswoman-intelligent, well-composed, charming, and captivating. Oh, and pretty good at taking care of people too. Hmm... also great at protecting others."

She thought back to how Aiwarin had stepped in to protect her from that man. That alone was proof enough.

"Wait, what? Beautiful?"

"Mm-hmm."

Mevika chuckled softly, a teasing smile playing on her lips.

"That's all I can say for now. And don't tell anyone just yet."

"Hold on! What do you mean? Explain properly!"

"I'm about to,"

Mevika said, taking a small sip of water before setting the glass down. She knew what she was about to reveal would definitely shock her friend.

**"She's a woman. The person I spent the night with-that night-was a woman."**

"Huh?!"

Nattharinee gasped, her face frozen in shock.

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After parting ways with her friend, Mevika sat in her car, replaying their conversation in her mind. She took the moment to reflect-had she done the right thing by revealing it to her friend?

She couldn't say who the person was just yet, but confiding in someone she trusted felt like a relief. At least now she could see how her friend truly felt about it.

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*"Just hearing that it's a woman was enough to shock her that much?"*

*"Of course, I was surprised! I never knew you were into women. Or... is this something new? Are you just interested in this one person?"*

*"I never really thought about it before,"*

*Mevika admitted.*

*"But after talking to a woman in a way that feels... mutual, it just feels different. Honestly, I feel more comfortable."*

*"More comfortable?"*

*Nattharinee mulled over the words.*

*"So, is this the real reason you never seriously dated any guy before?"*

*"It just never felt right. That's why I kept hesitating for so long. I thought about seriously dating someone-so I could introduce them to my dad-but no one ever felt like the right person."*

*"I see. Well, if this really is right for you, then I don't think it's weird at all. I was just shocked because I never expected it. We've known each other for so long, and I've never seen you interested in women before."*

*"I guess I was just used to the idea that a woman should be with a man. I never considered that I might like women too."*

*"And this one? Do you like her?"*

*"Whether I like her or not... I think I need a bit more time. But I'll admit, meeting her made my heart work overtime."*

*"Then how did you even survive spending the night with her alone? You're not even sure if you like her yet, and you're not together. What do you even call this stage?"*

*"Do I really have to explain?"*

*Mevika laughed.*

*"What if I need to borrow your name as an excuse again?"*

*"Of course, you can! Spill it. If you're going to use my name, I at least deserve the details."*

*"I'll just say this-you can imagine whatever you want about how far things went. I won't stop you."*

*"Huh? If you're letting me think whatever I want, does that mean-"*

*"I don't know. Figure it out yourself."*

*Mevika smiled, taking a sip of water as if her throat had suddenly gone dry. "I'm not telling you."*

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Thinking back to that unfinished conversation with her friend, she couldn't help but laugh.

It had already been three days since she last saw Aiwarin. Since both of them held high positions in their companies, their workdays were packed, leaving little time for casual messages.

Besides, they weren't a couple, so there was no need to talk all the time. Still, it was strange that someone as meticulous as Aiwarin hadn't reached out for three whole days. The only time they'd spoken was on Sunday, when they exchanged a brief update confirming Mevika had arrived home safely. After that-nothing.

The thought made her instinctively check her phone. To her surprise, the very person she'd been thinking about had just sent her a message-only fifteen minutes ago.

*"It's not like you disappeared for long,"*

Mevika chuckled as she quickly opened the message.

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**Ai: Since Wednesday, I've been at the bar every night after 9 PM, except Thursday. In case you feel like having a drink.**

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A smile formed on Mevika's lips as she read it. Today is Wednesday, which meant Aiwarin would be at the bar tonight.

It was almost 9 PM already. She had been debating whether to head straight home since she had an important meeting about the bidding project tomorrow. But if she went for a drink, she could still head back earlydefinitely no staying over this time.

Even with those conditions, she saw no real reason not to go. So, without overthinking, she typed a reply and hit send.

**MAPLE: Then book a VIP room for me tonight. I want some privacy.**

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# Chapter 20: The Rival's Secret

**Ai: When will you arrive? I’m waiting in the Sky Room.**

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*"Sky Room?"*

Mevika mumbled softly after reading the message. She had just walked through the entrance of Anthea Bar before turning to ask the staff standing nearby,

“Is the Sky Room the one at the very end?”

She pointed upstairs, remembering that it was the same room Aiwarin had taken her to last time.

“Yes, it’s at the very end.”

“Thank you,”

She replied before quickly heading toward the stairs. She walked past other VIP rooms until she reached the last one, then pushed the door open. Inside, she saw someone sitting on the sofa, smoking a cigarette.

“I thought you hadn’t arrived yet,”

Aiwarin greeted her quickly. She had just lit her cigarette and hadn’t even smoked half of it.

“I didn’t know you smoked,”

Mevika said as she walked around to sit on the inner side of the sofa.

“Only once in a while. Being in a bar like this, sometimes I feel like having one. But I don’t smoke often. It’s just that my lips felt idle, so I asked a staff member for a cigarette.”

“Your lips feel idle?”

Mevika leaned in slightly, closing the distance on purpose. She tilted her body a little, took the cigarette from Aiwarin’s fingers, and put it out in the ashtray. Then she placed one hand on Aiwarin’s jawline and kissed her firmly.

“They’re not idle now,”

She whispered softly after pulling back just a little, then pressed another kiss onto Aiwarin’s lips.

Aiwarin smiled, pleased. She wrapped her arm around Mevika’s waist, letting her take the lead for a moment before kissing her back. Meeting like this—where Mevika kissed her right away without waiting for a greeting or conversation—was a good sign. It meant she was truly falling for her.

It was a kiss that felt natural and familiar, one that needed no hesitation or second-guessing. Mevika never thought she would find herself in this position. Back when she first invited Aiwarin to this room, it was only to satisfy her curiosity about her own desires.

*But now, she had her answer. This—this was what she truly wanted.*

“Will you stay with me tonight?”

Aiwarin whispered as she pulled away briefly, then leaned in to kiss her again.

“I can’t. I have a meeting at nine in the morning,”

Mevika replied, her voice soft between breaths. Even as she spoke, she parted her lips and continued kissing her.

“What a pity.”

Aiwarin pulled away just at the right moment, ending the kiss, but she remained close, still pressing against her.

“What about right here?” Mevika smiled.

“Don’t joke around,” Aiwarin chuckled.

“I’m kidding,”

Mevika said as she shifted to sit on the edge of the sofa. She nudged Aiwarin’s shoulder, guiding her to lean back against the couch, then moved closer, resting her body against Aiwarin’s side so she could wrap an arm around her.

“I thought something exciting was about to happen here,”

Aiwarin laughed softly, slipping an arm around Mevika’s shoulder. Tonight, she was dressed in a spaghetti-strap top with a short skirt—Mevika guessed she had worn a blazer over it for work but had left it in her car before coming to the bar. Now, without the blazer, her outfit suited the night’s atmosphere perfectly.

“You don’t have to get excited everywhere we go,”

Mevika teased, tilting her head to nuzzle against Aiwarin’s neck and cheek, making Aiwarin smile.

“How’s your preparation for the bidding going?”

“Are you trying to trick me into telling you?”

“Well, are you planning to tell me something I shouldn’t know?” “Not really,” Aiwarin laughed.

“We’re more than halfway done. There’s not much time left.”

“Someone as sharp as you probably works fast. Meanwhile, I’ve been using my brain non-stop, but even so, I won’t give up.”

“The hardest part is estimating the right annual return. For someone as skilled as Superior, who specializes in this kind of business, it’s probably not too difficult.”

“It might not be difficult for us, but we still have to think about it carefully.”

“You’ve probably set the estimate high.”

“Maybe not that high.”

“What do you mean by ‘not that high’?”

Aiwarin glanced at the woman leaning against her, curious about how she would answer.

“Duty-free stores are like shopping malls, but they target a different type of customer. Foreign tourists tend to have strong purchasing power. If we can create something truly attention-grabbing, it could generate excellent profits. Ah… I shouldn’t say too much.”

“Even if you say more, I still wouldn’t know the exact figures you’ve set,” Aiwarin chuckled.

“I like hearing your thoughts. People often say I’m a smart and capable woman, but right now, I’ve met someone even smarter.”

“I wouldn’t say I’m smarter than you, but I do consider myself someone who thinks things through carefully and rationally.”

“Like when you proposed changing the bidding terms? I admired how you had the courage to suggest it, without worrying that they might see you as difficult or that it could affect Superior’s evaluation score.”

“If they were going to judge based on that, they shouldn’t be on the selection committee for a major project like this. Anyway, I came to the bar to relax—I don’t want to talk about work anymore.”

“Alright, fair enough.”

Aiwarin pulled her closer, wrapping an arm around her shoulder.

“Do we always have to meet in places like this? Is there anywhere else you’d like to go together?”

She pressed her hand gently against Mevika’s head, guiding her to rest against her neck while lightly stroking her soft hair.

“We can’t do that—you know that already. Especially right now, it’s impossible.”

“The bidding will be over in two months. That’s not too long. Once it’s done, no matter who wins or loses, we should be able to, right?”

“I don’t know. Don’t ask me something I can’t answer right now. For me, this is already risky enough. Are you not satisfied with the way we meet now?”

“Who said I’m not satisfied?”

Aiwarin turned her small shoulders to face the person beside her.

“I’m more than satisfied. I’m happy you came to see me.”

As she finished speaking, she pressed a kiss to Mevika's temple, then slowly trailed lower.

“How long do I have you with me tonight?”

She whispered softly near her ear.

“About an hour,”

Mevika replied, turning toward Aiwarin, whose face was perfectly positioned in front of hers. She placed a light kiss at the corner of her lips.

“An hour?”

Aiwarin smiled, placing her hand on Mevika’s neck and gently pulling her closer. She kissed her soft lips and murmured,

“For tonight, that should be enough.”

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**Superior Holding Group**

“Next week, we’ll be attending the project briefing and bidding process for Greater Duty-Free. This week, we need to finalize our presentation data so we can review it afterward and make any necessary adjustments,”

Mevika said. The atmosphere in the meeting room was tenser than usual. Today, she had brought her secretary along to take notes on important details.

“I’ve drafted a preliminary return estimate and consulted with the chairman. Let’s go over it together and calculate the best possible proposal.”

“We need to analyze Superior’s current performance first to determine how much higher we should aim, considering this is a major duty-free project,” One of the young board members suggested.

“If we compare it to annual returns from airport duty-free stores, we should set our target even higher,”

Another member added.

“Greater Duty-Free won’t require travelers to check in before shopping, meaning customers will have more time—several hours instead of a rushed shopping experience before a flight. Plus, there will be local shoppers, not just tourists. We can also use past offers from other duty-free businesses as reference points.”

“I’ve heard that Royce is joining the bidding as well,”

A female board member brought up.

“Do you think there’s a chance they’ll monopolize it and be chosen due to their existing management reputation?” “That’s exactly what we need to evaluate,”

Mevika replied.

“But worrying about this won’t be as useful as having confidence in what we can offer that surpasses them. Even if we’re new to managing this type of business, Superior’s long-standing credibility is one of our strengths— and that’s how we can win.”

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**Orianna Hotel & Resort**

“Our business is well-established in the hospitality industry, but we will present that we can do more than that. While duty-free stores are retail spaces, customer service is still a crucial factor. We excel in this area, and we’ll prove that we can also be strong in product sales. Our proposal is that if we win the bid, we will establish a new subsidiary specifically to manage the duty-free business. This company will focus on both sales and product selection, ensuring high-quality offerings while delivering outstanding customer service. Everything will be integrated into one seamless experience.”

“Will you be hiring an entirely new team for this?”

Someone asked.

“There will definitely be new hires—probably a significant number,” Aiwarin replied.

“Greater Duty-Free requires a qualified team to meet its goals. If the business is well-managed and performs successfully, it will impact future bidding opportunities. But we’ll also bring in experienced individuals who are already skilled in this field. It will be a matter of selecting the right people. For now, we’ll include this in our proposal, and if we win the bid, we can finalize the detailed planning later.”

Aiwarin smiled.

“What about the annual return estimates? Should we adjust anything from the preliminary figures you mentioned the other day?”

“They’re not finalized yet. We still need to consider multiple factors, including competitor evaluations. We have to estimate what targets each bidder might set.”

“Superior has been in the retail business for a long time. They’ll definitely use their past financial performance as a reference for their bid.”

“They already have the advantage in that area. The only details we don’t know are some of their internal figures, but they publicly release their financial reports every year. We can use that data to estimate their numbers.”

“So we’ll need to compare that with projected sales, especially considering that this duty-free store will mainly target international customers.”

“We’ll also analyze financial data from major duty-free businesses in Asia, like Lotte Duty-Free, Shinsegae, and Shilla in Korea, as well as duty-free stores in Singapore. Korea has multiple duty-free companies, most of which operate large shopping malls outside airports. They’ve been doing this much longer than us and have several locations. We’ll use all that data to guide our decision-making.”

“I’ve already gathered information from some of those sources,”

One of the team members said.

“I’ll collect more and present a complete report in the next meeting.”

“That’s great. I appreciate it,”

Aiwarin replied with a smile.

“Have you heard any updates on the latest major bidders?”

One of the senior board members asked.

“It’s probably still Royce or Great & Grow. Are there any other interesting competitors?”

“Siam Arena.”

“Siam Arena?”

The name surprised Aiwarin slightly, but instead of concern, she chuckled.

“If it’s Siam Arena, then it’s not a real threat. You can rule them out—they won’t be a serious competitor.”

“They are a major corporation with significant financial resources, generating high monthly and annual revenue. But you’re dismissing them because their business has nothing to do with retail or service industries?”

The same board member asked.

“That’s just part of it,”

Aiwarin replied calmly. She had done her research. Being well-informed about surrounding businesses always gave her an advantage, even if they weren’t direct competitors.

“Siam Arena previously won a concession to operate a large exhibition center. Everyone knows them for that. But now, their contract is about to expire, and they’re preparing for a new venture…”

"A new bidding round is coming, but they don’t have the strongest track record. Even with the exhibition center they’ve held a concession for over ten years, their chances of winning the next round are slim. So what are the odds of them securing Greater?"

Aiwarin introduced the background of Siam Arena and then elaborated on why this particular competitor was not a serious threat. She detailed their weaknesses and provided a thorough analysis for everyone in the meeting room.

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# Chapter 21: Someone Who Wants to Be Serious

The list of buyers for the auction was revealed to the media today—six companies in total:

1. Orianna Hotel & Resort Co., Ltd.
2. Superior Holding Group Public Co., Ltd.

3.Great & Grow Co., Ltd.

1. Royce Trading Co., Ltd.
2. Siam Arena Co., Ltd.
3. Charmelo Development Co., Ltd.

After the CEO of Thailand’s International Duty-Free Agency announced the news to the media on Monday morning, it quickly spread to the public.

Social media became especially interested because Greater Duty-Free would be Thailand’s largest duty-free shopping center. Unlike typical dutyfree stores in airports, this one would be a massive department store in Bangkok.

"There's another buyer on the last day before the deadline—*Charmelo*. Should we be worried?"

Rachen asked this while sipping coffee with his two advisors. He was determined to win the auction, and the deadline for submitting bids was approaching fast.

"This company stepped in at the last minute. I’ve never heard they were joining. What’s interesting is that Charmelo operates in both products and services, not just one or the other."

"Charmelo is similar to Orianna and Superior. They are in the food business, own large restaurants, and have three or four well-known hotels in Bangkok and a few tourist provinces. Though their hotels aren’t as big as Orianna’s, their ability to manage multiple types of businesses makes them interesting. They don’t seem too threatening, but we shouldn’t underestimate them either."

"Can anyone find out what each company’s plan is, especially in terms of returns?"

Rachen lit a cigarette and started smoking.

"We can’t dig that deep unless we have an insider or can buy information from someone."

"Then go find out who’s on each company’s bidding team and who might be open to offers. We have the budget for it." "That’s risky. If it gets exposed, we’ll look corrupt,"

One advisor objected.

"Then make sure it doesn’t get exposed. Don’t you know how to negotiate?"

"I don’t recommend taking that risk. It’s not worth it. And don’t forget, we already have connections that can help. That’s enough."

"Hah,"

Rachen scoffed, laughing mockingly.

"Are you sure that alone will make us win?"

"We need to evaluate and eliminate competitors one by one and figure out who our biggest obstacle is."

"Superior and Orianna are getting a lot of attention. Their representatives are both beautiful women,"

Rachen smirked.

"That’s the most interesting part. Orianna’s Aiwarin seems smart. I spoke with her a long time ago, but she was arrogant and looked down on me. So full of herself. And Mevika, the gorgeous woman from Superior, seems less experienced. The media has been talking about us, and I have to admit, she’s intriguing."

"Intriguing in what way?"

"Both in business and in meeting her personally,"

Rachen grinned slyly.

"Find a way for me to meet her privately. A ‘*coincidental*’ encounter will do. Let me know as soon as you figure it out."

“It’s not easy, but there might be a way to do it. I’ll try to find a way. Give me a time.”

“I’ll give you time, but don’t take too long.”

Rachen exhaled smoke before letting out a quiet chuckle.

“I want to meet her privately before the bidding submission deadline.”

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“23 billion is probably too small number, right? I think it might still be low, but I’ll carefully evaluate it again.”

Aiwarin sat in her father’s office, having scheduled a meeting with him today.

“What made you decide on this number?”

Athiwit asked his daughter.

“I based it on the airport duty-free concession bid seven years ago. The winning bid was 12 billion. Now, seven years have passed, and in three more years, Royce’s duty-free concession will expire before the next bidding opens. This time, the offer will likely be higher.”

“Then we need to estimate how much they will propose in three years.”

“I think it might jump to 20 billion.”

“Then Greater should be able to earn even more than that. Greater is much bigger than an airport duty-free business. It offers many more services and has three times the space in the airport. Reevaluate the numbers—this amount is still not enough.”

“We’ve never done this type of business before. It’s quite difficult to analyze. We’ll need to do a lot of research.”

“So what if we’ve never done it before? We can still do it. We manage large hotels, bigger than shopping malls, with taller buildings. This isn’t too hard for us. The proposal is just what happens before we actually run the business. They are looking at us as the future—who can do it best. And we will do it better than anyone.”

"Then I’ll have to reevaluate the numbers. I was thinking, if the airport duty-free concession is auctioned every five years, how much would Royce increase its returns in the next five years from 12 billion?"

"It will definitely increase, but not by much. They have a monopoly.

Raising their offer is necessary, but they don’t need to go too high because their chances of being selected are already the highest. Besides, the selection committee sees it as more convenient to let the same company continue managing it rather than switching hands when they are already doing a good job."

"That kind of thinking shouldn’t be used at all. How can the country grow with that mindset? Other countries generate high sales from duty-free businesses, and their growth continues. Plus, multiple companies share the market, bringing in revenue from international tourists."

Talking about this made her think of someone. Now, she agreed with what that person had proposed in the meeting that day. The argument she had once opposed suddenly seemed more reasonable.

"Do you think those people care? Sometimes, we just have to seize opportunities for ourselves first."

"At least we still have ethics. We may need connections for support, but I won’t let our business get too deeply involved in certain situations."

"Like what?" Athiwit chuckled.

"If it’s an opportunity to acquire Greater, if it gives us an advantage over competitors, I’d take it. Would you really let that chance slip away, Ai?"

"There are many ways we can compete—unless we have no other choice."

"You’re smart and have always made good decisions. Our company has grown over the past three years because of your efforts. That’s why I trust you with this bidding process. I know you’ll make the right decisions and choose the best approach to win."

"Yes."

That was all she could say in response to her father.

Before she could say anything else, her eyes shifted to a notification on her screen. Only the sender's name appeared, but not the message itself. She quickly picked up her phone to read it.

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**MAPLE : Tonight, I want to return the outfit to your room.**

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The message made her smile without realizing it. She quickly picked up her phone to reply, completely forgetting that her father was sitting across from her.

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**Ai: Sure, come over. I’ll try to get back early tonight. Let me know what time you’ll come."**

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"Superior seems to be working hard. I have contacts inside, a high-ranking person there. He said they’ve been calling meetings very often."

The words passed without a response, making Athiwit frown. He looked at his daughter, who was still staring at her phone.

"Ai."

"Huh?"

Aiwarin quickly looked up at her father, trying to recall what she had just overheard. She only caught the name "*Superior*" and something about frequent meetings.

That was enough for her to continue the conversation without making it obvious she had been distracted.

"Oh, they’ve been holding a lot of meetings? You always have inside news, Dad."

She laughed.

"Our business is the most important, but we still need to keep an eye on our competitors. Interestingly, Nattakorn’s daughter seems more capable than expected. We’ll have to see how well she performs. She may be inexperienced, but don’t underestimate her."

"I won’t underestimate that woman,"

She said with a smile.

"And I should get to know her better, too."

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The suit jacket was tossed into the laundry basket, leaving only the spaghetti-strap dress she had worn to work today. Since she didn’t have to oversee the bar, she returned earlier than usual, giving her some time to rest alone. But she couldn’t resist checking on her unfinished work.

She had only been by herself for about two hours when a knock sounded at her door. She thought about getting up to open it, but before she could move, the door was unlocked, and her guest appeared in the doorway.

"I figured I should knock out of courtesy, even though I have a keycard."

Mevika stood there, smiling. She was wearing the full blazer set she had borrowed from Aiwarin, paired with her own high heels, which she casually kicked off onto the shoe rack by the door.

"Your knock is quite an exciting signal."

Aiwarin smiled, her heartbeat quickening at the sight of her special guest visiting her room once again.

"Is that so?" Mevika stepped closer.

As soon as she reached Aiwarin, she was pulled into an embrace and drawn into a kiss.

She had approached for this reason, after all. She allowed Aiwarin to touch her as she pleased. She trusted her. She liked her kisses. She liked the way she touched her. Aiwarin’s hands were now trailing over her back, the fabric of the blazer acting as a thin barrier. That was reason enough for Mevika to invite its owner to take it back once the kiss broke.

"I came to return your outfit."

She clenched her fist and extended her arms forward.

"Just like this?"

"Mmm. Take it off me, then." Mevika's voice was soft, sultry.

"Gladly." Aiwarin smiled.

She stepped between Mevika’s legs, pressing close. Her nose brushed against the soft skin of her cheek, lingering as if asking permission to touch again. Her hands slid beneath the blazer, pushing it up over Mevika’s shoulders before slipping it down her arms, with Mevika helping to shrug it off.

When the blazer slipped to the floor, all that remained was the spaghettistrap dress, baring smooth shoulders that were too tempting to resist.

Aiwarin lowered her head, pressing a soft kiss against them.

She remembered exactly where the hook of Mevika’s pants was, right at her hip. Even with her eyes closed, it was easy to find. As she pressed her lips to the soft skin of Mevika’s neck, she unhooked the pants, pulled down the zipper, and let them slip to the floor on their own.

Mevika kicked them aside and then reached for the hook of Aiwarin’s pants, undoing them just as effortlessly. The smooth fabric slid down in an instant, pooling at her feet. Then, with a gentle push, she guided Aiwarin onto the bed, straddling her in nothing but a black spaghetti-strap top and a small piece of fabric that left her long, sexy legs enticingly exposed. She leaned down, her lips just a breath away from Aiwarin’s face, and whispered softly.

"I’m not going home tonight."

"Why are you staying over?"

Aiwarin asked as Mevika rested against her arm. She slipped a hand under Mevika’s nape, making her lift her head to lean against Aiwarin’s shoulder.

"I always stay over when I come here."

"But we have a meeting at Greater at ten tomorrow morning."

"Don’t you want to go together?"

"Hmm?"

Aiwarin tilted her head down, looking at Mevika with curiosity.

"You wouldn’t do that. You’re always so cautious."

"Are you saying I’m the only one who cares? That you don’t care at all if people find out?"

"Then let them know. Let’s see what they have to say about it."

"And how exactly would we explain it? Are we just… sleeping together?"

**"I’d tell them you’re my girlfriend."**

"W-What?"

"You don’t want to be, do you?"

Aiwarin sighed.

"Ah, I see. I was the only one thinking about it. You never wanted to be serious with anyone. And you haven’t found the right person yet, have you?"

"And why wouldn’t it be you?"

Aiwarin blurted out.

"Hmm?"

Mevika hummed softly, tilting her head up to meet Aiwarin’s gaze.

"Can I ask you something? Aside from sex, do you ever think about seriously liking women?"

"I…"

Mevika averted her eyes, looking off to the side as she considered the question.

"Maybe. But right now, I just haven’t looked at anyone else."

"And what about me?"

Aiwarin’s voice held a hint of sadness.

"Have you never looked at me that way? Why bring up other people?"

"I…"

It was difficult to answer. This time, Mevika forced herself to meet Aiwarin’s eyes, and that was when she saw the sadness in them. "I’ve never let anyone come to my place like this. And I’ve never spent this much time alone with someone before."

"And what are you trying to say?"

Mevika shifted back slightly so she could see Aiwarin’s face more clearly.

"Nothing. If you don’t think or feel anything, then don’t waste your time on it. I was just asking."

Aiwarin started to sit up, but Mevika instinctively wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her back down.

"Where are you going?"

Mevika pressed her face against Aiwarin’s back in a soft, pleading gesture.

"Bathroom."

"Later."

Mevika didn’t even know why she was saying this. Her words always seemed to reject the possibility of something deeper because it felt too uncertain. Even though she had already fallen deep into this relationship, she had no idea how to move forward with it.

Her mind was filled with doubts, even as she constantly found herself drawn back to Aiwarin.

"I just feel like our relationship is too risky."

The truth was, the reason she had come to Aiwarin’s place tonight—despite having an important meeting tomorrow—was because she had spent the last three or four days buried in stressful work.

When she thought about where she could rest her mind, the first thing that came to her was Aiwarin. This beautiful room. This bed. And the comfort of being here with just the two of them.

She found that even though this space was filled with risk, it somehow made her feel safe and at ease.

That was the reason she had decided to come to Aiwarin. When she woke up this morning, the thought of being here had entered her mind immediately. So, she chose to wear the outfit she had borrowed from Aiwarin, put it on, and found an excuse to come—without even trying to be subtle about it.

She wasn’t sure if she was becoming addicted to Aiwarin’s touch or if there was another reason.

Because Aiwarin had a way of making her heart race all too often.

"It’s only risky when it’s a secret,"

Aiwarin said, still facing away as Mevika held her from behind.

"When people want to be serious, they find a way to get past the risk."

"You once said you didn’t want to give anyone false hope, so you didn’t want to commit to anyone."

"And do you not remember that I also said if I ever found someone I truly wanted to be with, I’d rebel against my family to prove my sincerity?"

"Hmm."

Mevika vaguely remembered that, but she had always focused more on Aiwarin’s refusal to commit rather than the possibility that she might one day change her mind. She had tried so hard to make Aiwarin fall for her— because she wanted Aiwarin to want her.

"I just don’t think that time has come yet."

"Why do you think that?"

"Maybe you've met people, but none of them have made you want something serious."

"And why are you thinking for me?"

Aiwarin gently pulled Mevika’s arms away from her waist before turning to face her. Moving in closer, she reached out, tilting Mevika’s chin up with delicate fingers. Her thumb brushed softly over Mevika’s lower lip before she whispered,

**"I think… I might have already found that person."**

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# Chapter 22: Special Care for Someone Special

That morning, Mevika woke up first and took a shower. The owner of the room woke up later. Out of consideration, she hurried to finish using the bathroom so that when the owner woke up, she could use it right away and wouldn't be late for her meeting because of her.

As Mevika stepped out of the bathroom, wrapped in a towel, she saw someone walking toward her, rubbing her eyes. Before she could react, she was pulled into a hug.

"Hmm... I thought you had already run away. I don't want you to leave yet."

Mevika stood still in that embrace, surprised by this affectionate gesture. She wasn't used to seeing this softer side of Aiwarin. She was more familiar with her playful and teasing nature, which felt slightly different.

She thought back to what Aiwarin had said to her last night.

*"I think… I might have already found that person."*

After saying that, she had lightly brushed her lips against Mevika's before pulling away and heading to the bathroom, just as she had mentioned earlier. After that, they hadn't spoken again, both falling asleep soon after. That's why they woke up feeling refreshed today, having slept soundly.

"I'll come again soon."

"Will you really?"

"I still can."

"You say that like one day you might not be able to anymore."

"I never said that."

Mevika pushed Aiwarin away slightly and tapped her forehead lightly, as if scolding her.

"Well, I don't know what you're thinking."

"Who knew the talented Aiwarin had this side too?"

Mevika chuckled softly, amused by how Aiwarin sounded like she was sulking.

"Why? What's wrong with it?"

Her face looked slightly sulky.

"I don't know."

Mevika shrugged. In her opinion, she thought it was cute.

"Can you be honest for once? Have you really never felt anything? You always avoid answering."

"Are you pouting again?"

"Who's pouting? I'm not pouting at all."

Her face looked even more sulky, and she turned away.

"Alright, I'll be honest."

Mevika leaned in, pressing her cheek against Aiwarin's, then planted a big kiss on it before whispering,

"It's cute."

She pulled back with a sweet smile. There was nothing more to discuss, as she needed to get dressed and Aiwarin had to shower and get ready. They had to allow time for breakfast to make it to the ten o'clock meeting on time. Meanwhile, the one who had just been kissed stood there, smiling to herself.

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"Are you drying your hair? Let me do it for you."

As soon as Aiwarin stepped out of the bathroom in a white bathrobe, she spoke up when she saw Mevika putting down the hairdryer and combing through her slightly frizzy hair, trying to smooth it out.

Since someone had volunteered, Mevika let her take over. Aiwarin picked up the hairdryer and began drying her still-damp hair. Mevika watched her through the mirror as she stood behind her.

Mevika was sitting on a chair, slightly lower in height, still wrapped in a towel. After Aiwarin went into the shower, she had gone to pick out an outfit from the wardrobe. Aiwarin had told her the night before that she could choose anything she liked.

Mevika did have a spare work outfit in her car just in case, but it seemed she wouldn't need it today-she could get dressed and head straight to the meeting.

Aiwarin's slender hands gently ran through her hair as she dried it, moving with the skill of a professional. Even when she took the comb from Mevika's hands, she knew exactly how to make the strands sleek and straight.

Mevika found herself watching her through the mirror, taking in her movements. Thinking about it, Aiwarin had always taken good care of her, just like she had once accidentally admitted to her friend that she was talking with a very nice girl.

They are related in some way. Maybe they just haven't had the chance to spend time together in other ways to get to know each other better. That’s probably why Aiwarin invited her out... but she refused.

"Just blow-drying your hair, and you're already dazed?"

Aiwarin said with a smile. She had noticed Mevika watching her through the mirror. It seemed Mevika hadn't expected to be caught, so she quickly straightened her back and shifted slightly on the chair.

"If you want this every morning, I can do it. I'm not lying. **Want to live together**?"

"What?"

Mevika burst out laughing. The truth was, she was flustered by that comment. Having someone say they wanted to do something for her every morning felt special. But more than that, being invited to live together-it felt like an invitation to share a life.

"Are you crazy?"

"Women always say '*crazy*' when they're embarrassed,"

Aiwarin grinned.

Of course, she was embarrassed.

Mevika thought to herself.

"Who's embarrassed?" she deflected.

"You are. You're blushing."

"Nonsense. I'm not blushing."

"See? You're blushing again." Aiwarin teased with a laugh. "Then stop teasing me."

"Alright, I'll stop."

Aiwarin switched off the hairdryer. It was a quiet model, making it easy for them to talk. Now that the conversation was clearer, she continued,

"I just want to say-I'm a workaholic. I love working, so I don't waste time on unnecessary things. I only take time to relax when it's needed. But if something cuts into my work time, I usually won't do it. Except for this... because it makes me happy."

"Blow-drying someone's hair?"

"Blow-drying your hair."

"You sound like you're trying to sell something."

"I'm selling the qualities of a good girlfriend."

"You keep saying crazy things."

"Crazy? You're blushing again, aren't you?"

Aiwarin laughed.

"I am not!"

"Some things can be said honestly. Even serious things-you never admit them outright."

Aiwarin gently combed through Mevika's hair, her gaze soft and careful as she handled the silky strands.

"Let me tell you something."

She glanced at Mevika through the mirror and spoke in a serious tone.

"Eighty percent of the things I joke about are actually true."

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"Charmelo is like a mix between Superior and Orianna,"

Aiwarin explained, listing the competitors from the official announcement for Mevika. They had put work aside the night before, but now that the bidding meeting was coming up, they needed to discuss and exchange opinions.

"They run restaurants, hotels, and food products, but it's not a big business. Their restaurants range from small to large, but their hotels and resorts are relatively small-not like Orianna's large-scale properties. And they don't own massive malls like Superior. It seems like an advantage, but I'm crossing them off as a major competitor. They probably entered the bidding to gain recognition or for political reasons."

"So you think only five competitors are serious threats?"

Mevika sipped her soup lightly. That morning, Aiwarin had brought her to the hotel restaurant, which was mostly filled with foreign guests. They sat in a semi-private corner.

The staff recognized Aiwarin well but likely assumed she was simply meeting a friend for breakfast, not realizing they had come down from the same room upstairs. "Even fewer than five." Aiwarin smiled.

"Maybe only two or three."

"Who did you rule out? I heard Siam Arena has a bad reputation, but I don't know much about the details."

"Siam Arena is another one I crossed off. Their management system is outdated. If it were up to me, I wouldn't consider them a top competitor. As for their bad reputation-well, they once bid on a project and..."

"They could manage exhibition venues, but their operations were poor. They let things get old and run down, barely maintaining them. Customers who used their services left overwhelmingly negative reviews. Now, the agency handling the bidding is unlikely to renew their contract. I wouldn't be surprised if, after the bidding closes, someone attacks Siam Arena over this to eliminate a competitor."

"That someone wouldn't be you, would it?"

"Hmm."

Aiwarin shook her head, then paused, deep in thought.

"But... I am not sure."

"Don't do that to me."

"What ? You mean spread bad news campaign against Superior to cut off a competitor like you?"

Aiwarin chuckled.

"Don't look at me like that. I wouldn't do that."

"Who knows?"

"Do you think people who like each other would go as far as hurting one another just to win in business?"

"Hmm?"

Mevika, about to take a sip from her straw, froze for a moment before quickly closing her mouth. She scratched her nose lightly and took a sip of her drink instead.

"Maybe it's about knowing how to separate things."

"Oh, I see. If we have to separate business and personal matters, then that means we can compete as fiercely as we want. Is that what you're saying?"

"I don't know what your definition of going all the way is. I just do my best using my own methods."

"Ah, I see how it is."

Aiwarin narrowed her eyes, pressing her lips into a thin line before smirking slightly and nodding slowly.

"In that case, I'll narrow down my list of key competitors to just two-Great & Grow, which is always ready to engage in shady dealings, and..."

She let out a short chuckle before finishing,

"Superior, which competes with integrity and ethics."

"I see Orianna as the most dangerous competitor."

Mevika smiled, letting her straw drop back into the glass.

"The most dangerous competitor?"

"Yeah, because I understand now how cunning the mastermind behind Orianna is in handling this bidding process."

She picked up a napkin, lightly dabbing her lips before setting it down. Then, shifting her hips slightly, she prepared to stand.

"It's already past eight-we should get going. I should get going now. Thanks for the stay and the great food."

Mevika smiled warmly, picking up her small shoulder bag and walking out of the luxurious restaurant on one of the hotel's upper floors.

About ten minutes later, Aiwarin grabbed her bag and headed down to her car.

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At Greater's office at 9 AM, the atmosphere was more bustling than during her last visit. Back then, bidders had come in on different days, but today was the official briefing for all participants. They would receive explanations about the bidding conditions and guidelines, with final submissions due in just ten days.

"Me."

Nuttakorn called out to his daughter as soon as she arrived. He had come to the meeting himself, planning to listen in and offer guidance as her advisor.

"Have you been here long, Dad?"

Mevika greeted him, feeling slightly nervous. After spending the night out, she was now facing her father, making her a little uneasy. She couldn't let him find out where she had been-or with whom, especially since that very person was also on her way here.

"About twenty minutes. The driver got me here early-I didn't want to get stuck in traffic."

Nuttakorn answered before eyeing her curiously.

"Did you stay over at Nanny's place again last night?"

"I finished work late, and Nanny's condo is closer to here. That way, I got more work done and can easily wake up late."

Mevika replied smoothly.

"With the bidding going on, don't get too distracted. If staying at Nanny's is more convenient, that's fine, but keep your mom and me updated. This auction is the top priority right now."

"I know, Dad. Even if I go out for a drink once in a while, the bidding is still my main focus. I've been working on it every day."

Mevika reassured him.

"So you don't have to worry. I might find time to relax, but it won't affect my work."

"Just don't stress yourself out too much. Come to me for advice anytime."

"Got it."

As she responded, Mevika's gaze shifted toward the elevator, where someone had just appeared. The clicking sound of black high heels echoed closer. She tried to keep her expression neutral as she watched the approaching figure.

She walked toward them with a smile, and that alone made Mevika uneasy. Would anyone notice? Then, she stopped right in front of Mevika's father.

"Good morning, Mr. Nuttakorn,"

Aiwarin greeted politely, pressing her hands together in a respectful wai.

"Are you here to attend the meeting with your daughter?"

"Morning."

Nuttakorn nodded and returned the smile, maintaining the etiquette in the business world. Even among competitors, good manners were essentialunless, of course, they were enemies to the point of refusing to acknowledge each other.

From Nuttakorn perspective, Oriana-especially Athiwithad never been a direct rival. But their brief clash at the auction announcement had turned into a subtle competition. Still, he had no personal issue with Athiwit's daughter, so there was no reason not to exchange pleasantries.

"You can call me Ai,"

Aiwarin introduced herself before turning to Mevika with a warm smile.

"Good morning."

Then, she turn back to continue the conversation with Nuttakorn.

"I'm not sure what to expect from today's meeting. The other day, Mevika suggested quite a few adjustments. Some of her ideas were really impressive. If they actually implement them, it'd be great-but who knows if they will?"

Mevika stood stiffly beside them, watching the woman she was secretly involved with chatting effortlessly with her father. She understood that, in business, maintaining friendly relations was smart. But was that really all this was? Or did Aiwarin have something else in mind? "It's good to see my daughter making use of her strengths."

Nuttakorn smiled at Mevika, clearly proud of her.

"She truly understands business,"

Aiwarin agreed smoothly.

"The way she researches and presents her ideas shows strong preparation. I'm sure she'll be very successful-exactly what you'd expect from the heir of a large business like Superior."

"Yeah, she's a smart one,"

Nuttakorn chuckled, nodding in agreement.

"Gaining hands-on experience is the best way to develop strong business skills,"

Aiwarin said modestly.

"Well, I won't take up any more of your time, Mr. Nuttakorn. Please, make yourself comfortable. See you in the meeting room,"

Aiwarin said with a smile before walking away.

"She's a well-mannered woman-not like her father, I suppose," Nattakorn chuckled softly.

"Smart and capable. Didn't you say you admire people like that?"

"Oh..."

Mevika froze for a split second, trying to keep her emotions in check.

"Having successful people as role models is a great source of inspiration. But soon, I'll be the one inspiring others."

She added a lighthearted remark, hoping to steer the conversation in a natural direction.

"Good. If you have an idol, strive to be just as good as them. Or better."

"Of course, Dad,"

She nodded, quickly glancing at her phone checking the time to end the conversation.

"The meeting starts in fifteen minutes. Let's get ready to the meeting room, Dad."

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# Chapter 23: The Secret Under the Table

Inside the large conference room, representatives from various companies gradually took their seats. Some exchanged friendly greetings, some simply nodded and smiled out of courtesy, while others remained silent, unwilling to even glance at their competitors.

The least sociable group seemed to be from Siam Arena—two middle-aged men, nearing retirement, sat together, while a woman in her late forties took the seat next to them.

In contrast, the loudest and most outgoing person in the room was Rachen from Great & Grow.

"Hello, everyone!"

Rachen greeted multiple people enthusiastically as he entered, exuding an air of confidence.

Accompanied by two male advisors, he walked with the presence of someone who might as well be leading the meeting himself. Just then, Mevika arrived, catching his attention.

"Ah, good morning, Ms. Mevika!"

He flashed his most charming smile.

"Good morning,"

Mevika replied curtly, offering nothing more before shifting her gaze elsewhere. She scanned the room for Aiwarin, who had arrived earlier.

When she spotted her, Aiwarin was sitting close to another woman, looking at something on a phone together.

Their heads were almost touching as they leaned in, their focus completely absorbed by the screen. The sight made Mevika's irritation flare up for no reason.

"Are you expecting anything special from today’s discussion on the bidding criteria?"

Rachen attempted to keep the conversation going.

But Mevika didn’t answer. Her eyes remained locked on the unfamiliar woman sitting with Aiwarin, whose soft features weren’t entirely visible from this angle.

Without acknowledging Rachen further, she walked straight to the seat directly across from Aiwarin and sat down.

Rachen was left standing there, his question hanging unanswered.

"Hah."

He let out a short, amused laugh, feeling slightly annoyed. Not only had Mevika ignored his question, but she had walked away from him without a second thought.

"Sitting here?"

Nuttakorn asked his daughter as he walked up beside her.

"Yes, right here,"

Mevika replied casually.

"You were just having such a friendly conversation with Khun Aiwarin earlier, weren’t you?"

She made sure to say it loud enough for Aiwarin to hear.

Aiwarin looked up from the phone screen she had been sharing with another woman from her team. The two had been reviewing some new information together.

When she noticed Mevika sitting directly across from her, she couldn't help but smile before quickly turning her attention back to Nuttakorn.

"That seat looks available," She pointed out.

"Alright, I’ll sit here then,"

Nuttakorn nodded at Aiwarin before turning to his daughter, then took his seat.

Not long after, Athiwit entered the room, scanning for his daughter. However, he was intercepted by a greeting from someone else. After briefly acknowledging them, he resumed his search—only to spot Nuttakorn.

Rather than sitting near his daughter, he changed his mind and took a seat closer to the head of the table, figuring that there was no need to sit near her all the time.

"Guess he doesn’t want to sit near me,"

Nuttakorn chuckled.

Mevika barely paid attention to her father’s comment. She hadn’t even noticed Athiwit entering.

Her thoughts were consumed by the woman sitting across from her—who was still engaged in quiet, close conversation with the same female colleague.

She tried not to stare. She pretended to check her phone, opened her meeting notebook, clicked her pen absentmindedly, and rested it on the pages.

But every so often, she would steal a glance, her eyes flickering toward Aiwarin and the other woman.

This was the first time she had seen Aiwarin so physically close to another woman right in front of her, since their own secret relationship began.

Mevika had imagined before what Aiwarin’s interactions with other women might be like when she had mentioned past involvements.

She had vaguely pictured her as someone effortlessly charming, intense, and passionate.

But now, experiencing it firsthand—seeing Aiwarin leaning in toward someone else while knowing that their own connection had to remain hidden—it irritated her. It was frustrating that Aiwarin could openly engage with someone else while Mevika had to sit across from her, acting indifferent.

"What's wrong? You look so serious—worried the conditions won’t be in your favor?"

Nuttakorn asked his daughter when he noticed her staring down at her notebook, deep in thought.

"No, nothing like that,"

Mevika quickly adjusted her expression to appear neutral. She hadn't realized how obvious her mood was for her father to notice.

"I was just going over some information in my head."

She glanced around the room, now filled with attendees. The committee members had also arrived, and within the next minute, the meeting began slightly ahead of schedule.

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"We can't change all the proposed conditions,"

The Secretary-General of the International Duty-Free Goods Agency of Thailand began,

"But we have introduced a special condition allowing for a dual-service model. If the top two bidders have a score difference of less than ten percent, they will share the concession, each managing a separate portion."

"You're saying the first and second place winners will co-manage the project?"

Rachen spoke up.

"The original condition was fine as it was—whoever wins should get the concession alone."

"Other countries with strong duty-free revenues don’t favor monopolized contracts for every project,"

A representative from Charmelo countered.

"This approach promotes better development. I support this condition." "How is that a good thing? The highest bidder should be the sole winner," Rachen argued, his voice edged with frustration.

"Even if there’s only one winner, that doesn’t mean it’ll be you, does it, Mr. Rachen?"

Aiwarin interjected smoothly, flashing a smile that made it clear she was unimpressed by his stance.

"You sound awfully confident that Great & Grow is going to win. What makes you so sure?"

"I didn’t say I was going to win, but—"

"Because you’re doing everything you can to make sure Great & Grow wins?"

Aiwarin finished his sentence for him, her tone light yet pointed.

"And you don’t want to win? Is that why you're saying this?"

Rachen gritted his teeth, trying to keep his frustration in check.

"If I take first place and you’re second, I wouldn’t want to work with Orianna either. You’re in the hotel business—why even bother with dutyfree?"

"Just because someone knows how to sell doesn’t mean they’re better at it than someone in hospitality,"

Aiwarin replied smoothly.

"Orianna is more than just a hotel, in case your understanding of business isn't deep enough. Maybe you’re too used to surface-level management and forgot to think beyond that?"

"Uh… I think—"

The project secretary tried to interject.

"Say whatever you want. But if you end up in second place, don’t come running to shake my hand."

"I wouldn’t shake hands with someone who harasses others,"

Aiwarin shot back, turning away.

"I’d shake them off before they even got close."

Rachen, who was about to retort, suddenly froze. His mouth snapped shut, and he simply glared at Aiwarin. The tension in the room was thick, and everyone had witnessed the exchange—including Mevika.

"The debate over first and second place is quite interesting,"

Athiwit finally spoke up. He had been observing his daughter argue with a man he had never dealt with directly but had heard of.

"I assume most people here would rather win outright. So, does the option for a sole winner still exist?"

Of course, he wanted to win the bid alone. The idea of co-managing a business with a competitor didn’t sit well with him—he had never needed to rely on anyone in business before. "Yes, the option for a sole winner remains,"

The secretary confirmed.

"If the first-place bidder scores more than ten percent higher than the second place, they will win the full concession. For example, if the firstplace bidder scores 95 and the second-place bidder scores 84, the difference of 11 points means the first-place bidder takes it all." "That makes things very interesting. It’s a fair condition,"

Mevika commented.

"Even if it means co-managing the business with a competitor who take care of different area?"

Athiwit asked.

"We’re only competitors in this bid, Mr. Athiwit, not in business itself. Each company has different strengths. If we end up managing different sections based on what we’re best at, that could be a smart partnership. That could work,"

Mevika replied.

Aiwarin smiled, pleased that Mevika spoke politely to her father. She hoped that he would find something to like about this woman. "So you're saying that Superior and Orianna should team up?"

Athiwit asked.

"That could be a good partnership. Better than working with someone who might not manage things transparently. Not pointing fingers at anyone, of course,"

Mevika answered with a chuckle.

"I mean in case where we end up having business with someone unexpected or… less trustworthy."

"So you must think Orianna is a good company, then?"

"Isn’t it?"

Mevika smiled. Since Aiwarin had already started build connection with her father—this was her chance to try the same with Aiwarin’s father.

She wasn’t sure if he had any hidden thoughts beyond what he showed, but it was worth a try.

Athiwit simply smiled in response without saying anything further.

Then Nuttakorn interjected.

"Wouldn't it be better not to be too aggressive as competitors?"

"Aren’t you being aggressive yourself, Mr. Nuttakorn?"

"Depends on who starts first. If they go easy, so do I."

"Guess we’ll see which way things go—who ends up first and who’s second."

Athiwit chuckled under his breath.

The conversation stirred mixed reactions from the attendees. Among them was a representative from Royce, who had been quietly listening but didn’t like the new conditions.

Royce had a history of winning concessions outright. Finally, their heir— now in his forties—spoke up confidently.

"Or perhaps there will only be one winner. Greater Duty-Free might be managed by a single company after all."

"Uh…" The secretary quickly cut in.

"Let’s move on to the other details, shall we? We don’t want to waste anyone’s time. Everyone is still welcome to share their thoughts, but let’s keep the discussion productive for all parties involved."

"Let's continue,"

Athiwit cut in, bringing the focus back to the committee leading the presentation.

Mevika turned her attention away from the debate at the head of the table— only to meet a pair of eyes watching her from across the room. Aiwarin was leaning on her elbow, chin resting on her hand, staring right at her.

Mevika held her gaze. Aiwarin's lips curved into a teasing smile.

It was an indescribable feeling. Was she flirting? Or was this just another way she played her usual charm? Mevika had no idea how often Aiwarin did this with others, but right now, she was fully focused on her. And then— Mevika felt it. A light touch, something pressing against the tip of her shoe.

She almost thought it was accidental—until Aiwarin’s foot dragged slowly up, grazing her calf. A barely-there friction, a secret sensation hidden beneath the large conference table. The movement was subtle but deliberate, sending a thrill through her skin.

No one else in the room could see what was happening. To everyone else, they were nothing more than rivals, two businesswomen locked in fierce competition. But under the table, hidden from view, they were something far more intimate.

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After the meeting, standing in the lobby of the fourth floor, Nuttakorn turned to his daughter.

"Are you heading back to the office?"

"I don't think so,"

Mevika replied, glancing around for someone.

Just then, she overheard voices passing by.

"I'm heading upstairs to the café before leaving. Want to grab something before you go?"

Aiwarin asked her team member.

"I’ll just take mine to-go."

"Alright, sounds good."

Hearing that, Mevika instinctively turned her head.

Well… she had been thinking about getting a coffee herself. On a normal day, she wouldn’t have gone out of her way to run into Aiwarin like this.

But today, she wanted to.

"You're heading home, right, Dad? I'll see you later."

She said quickly, then turned to follow.

"Alright, get home safe. You're coming back tonight, right?"

"I think so. But if not, I'll text you."

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"That’ll be 240 baht,"

The café cashier said as Aiwarin handed over her credit card.

"Thanks," Aiwarin replied.

"By the way, are you heading to the office today?"

The female employee asked.

"Maybe, maybe not. I might stop by Grand for an inspection, then check on the bar in the evening. It’s Friday, after all."

"Got it. See you Monday, then."

"Mhm."

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"One cappuccino, please."

Hearing the familiar voice, Aiwarin instinctively turned toward it.

There, standing at the counter, was Mevika. She was placing her order, but Aiwarin could tell—she already knew she was being watched. And sure enough, Mevika slowly turned her head, eyes meeting hers.

Aiwarin smiled. She hadn’t expected her to show up here.

"Hello, Khun Ai,"

Mevika greeted smoothly.

"Bringing your team for coffee?"

For a split second, Aiwarin hesitated.

It surprised her—Mevika openly acknowledging her like this, in front of others. Until now, she had been the one who insisted on keeping things under wraps.

But then again, to everyone else, they were simply business rivals—cordial ones, at that. There was nothing suspicious about a casual greeting.

Recovering quickly, Aiwarin returned the smile.

"Hello, Khun Mevika. Yes, I brought my team along for the meeting today."

Then, turning to the woman beside her, she added,

"Your drink is ready. You can go ahead if you’d like."

"Sure, Khun Ai,"

The woman quickly grabbed her drink, which had been wrapped in a napkin and placed on the counter. Then she turned back to Aiwarin.

"I'm heading off now. See you at the office."

"Mhm,"

Aiwarin replied, waving her off before turning her attention back to Mevika —who was staring at her intensely.

"I thought you were going to introduce us,"

Mevika said as she moved around Aiwarin, positioning herself near the drink pickup area, where the coffee machine conveniently blocked the barista from view. "Introduce my employee?"

Aiwarin raised a brow.

"Or introduce you to her? How would I even do that? Should I say, **'This is**

**Maple—my girlfriend'?"**

"Then say it."

Mevika's voice was low but firm—loud enough for Aiwarin alone to hear.

"What?"

Aiwarin blinked, caught off guard. That stiff expression, that sharp gaze— Mevika wasn’t just teasing. She was actually upset. At first, Aiwarin had thought she was just trying to maintain the usual business-like distance they kept in public. But this was different. This was something more. And then a thought made Aiwarin let out a soft laugh.

"Do you want me to introduce you as my girlfriend?"

"You won’t dare."

"I dare to say more than you think,"

Aiwarin countered, her tone confident.

"As long as someone gave me permission to say it, I wouldn’t hesitate. In ten days, we’re submitting our bids. Who knows what the outcome will be? But I don’t care. Personal matters will stay personal."

"Fine. Then let’s go on a date."

"...Excuse me?"

"After work. Pick me up for dinner. I’ll leave my car at the office." Aiwarin’s eyes widened in surprise. This was unexpected. And it only confirmed what she’d just suspected.

"Wow," she mused, grinning.

"Khun Mevika is asking me out on a date? And you want me to pick you up? Now, how could I possibly say no to that?"

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# Chapter 24: A Heart Beginning to Open

The nearly empty coffee cup, with only ice left inside, was tossed into a trash bin near the walkway leading to the elevator. Then, a hand reached into a pocket to pull out car keys, ready to head to the car.

But before even reaching the parking lot exit, someone's hand suddenly grabbed hold.

"Parking on the second floor again? I told you to get a VOT parking card,"

Aiwarin said as she followed behind the person who had just excused herself to return to work. She couldn't help but trail behind at a distance, keeping an eye on her.

"Everytime I come here, I always leave early. I haven't had time to get one yet."

Though surprised to see Aiwarin here, Mevika tried to come up with an excuse.

"It doesn't take long. The system here is pretty fast. Do you have your ID card?"

"Yes."

"Then come with me."

Without waiting for an answer, Aiwarin grabbed her hand and led her toward the service counter, which was right here on the second floor.

It wasn't far at all, and Mevika already preferred parking on this level.

Still, parking on the first floor would be much more convenient than having to drive up. It would also ease Aiwarin's worries-there wouldn't be a repeat of the last time when someone had followed her.

"And you're just holding my hand and walking like this in Greater?" Mevika muttered softly while walking slightly behind Aiwarin.

"Maybe you should let go. Just walking together is already enough."

"I told you-I don't care anymore."

"At least wait until the auction is over."

"It's suffocating."

Aiwarin tightened her grip and urged Mevika to keep up. She only let go once they reached the service counter.

"Ms. Mevika is a bidder from Superior. She needs a first-floor parking permit."

"Sure. May I have your ID card, please? Also, could you fill in your car's brand, model, and license plate number on this form?"

The female staff member spoke sweetly as she handed a small piece of paper to Mevika.

Mevika opened her bag, took out her ID card, and handed it to the staff. She picked up a pen and wrote down her car's brand, model, and license plate before passing the paper back.

Then, she turned to look at the person with her leg crossed leaning against the counter, staring at her.

"What are you looking at? And why did you follow me? Didn't you park on the first floor?"

"I was worried. I said I'd walk you here, but you wouldn't let me."

"There was no need. No one's following me anymore."

"How do you know? I don't trust it. No one's allowed to bother you now. You're mine."

"Sshh.."

Mevika whispered softly. Her hand accidentally slap Aiwarin's hip-a little lower than where it should have landed.

*Slap each other? They must be really close.*

"You're hitting me in the middle of Greater?"

Aiwarin laughed. She noticed the staff member was busy with something behind the counter, likely not hearing their conversation.

"What would people think?"

"Enough. You're the one saying weird things. Who said I was yours?"

"You." Aiwarin grinned.

"At first, I just wanted to help. Now, I'm worried about you... and protective."

"What"

Mevika muttered. She was speechless when she heard Aiwarin say the word 'protective'?

*Is she jealous?*

"It's done!"

The staff turned back and handed over a platinum-colored card.

"Your information is now in the system. You can park on the first floor from now on-your license plate is registered."

"Thank you."

Mevika took her ID card and the VOT parking pass, which Aiwarin had dragged her here to get. And just as she had said, the process was quick-so quick that it cut short their ridiculous conversation.

"Make good use of it," Aiwarin smiled.

"Now that you have a first-floor parking pass, you'll feel more at ease. I won't have to walk you to your car anymore since we'll be parking on the same floor. Or, if you come alone, the security guards will take good care of you. But today, let me walk you to your car first."

"If you want to follow, suit yourself,"

Mevika said, no longer resisting. Truthfully, having someone look after her wasn't such a bad thing. She had just been afraid. But Aiwarin's fearlessness was starting to make her feel less afraid-less cautious.

Or maybe... maybe she just wanted to spend more time with her, freely, without worrying about anything.

Even just being together in public like this, for a short while, made her feel good.

Aiwarin took care of her so well-so well that Mevika almost wanted her to hold her hand and walk her to the car. But that was just a thought. Doing that in Greater might be too risky. There were other places where they could spend time together more freely.

And as for the risk Mevika was worried about-nothing turned out to be as bad as she had feared. But someone did take notice.

From a distance, Athiwit's secretary spotted her and was surprised. He knew both of them well, but seeing the boss's daughter walking with Aiwarin caught him off guard.

"I already informed them. I'll head to the office soon,"

He said to Athiwit, who had asked him to handle some business with an important figure at the firm. Athiwit had left just a short while ago.

"Uh... Mr. Athiwit?"

The secretary blurted out after seeing Mevika walk away.

Athiwit, about to end the conversation because of an incoming call, was interrupted before he could say anything.

"Never mind, sir. It's nothing. I'll see you at the office-we can talk then."

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A car pulled up in front of an office building near Superior's headquarters. Mevika had deliberately waited for Aiwarin there. She had parked at Superior's building but had walked over to this nearby one instead.

She had even informed the security guard that she might leave her car overnight-just so he wouldn't panic and report it missing if she disappeared for a while.

She hadn't officially told anyone she wouldn't be going home yet. And if she really didn't return to pick up her car tonight for any reason, she would contact her father-just as she had promised him.

"This is the first time I've driven my own car to pick you up,"

Aiwarin said as she greeted Mevika, who had already settled into the passenger seat.

"I've only ever been the one sitting in your car. We've never actually gone anywhere together like this before."

"Well, here I am. Take me wherever you want,"

Mevika replied while fastening her seatbelt.

"Alright then. I'll take you on a date to the best Thai restaurant."

With that, Aiwarin pressed the accelerator and drove off. She usually considered herself a good driver, but today felt different. Having someone special sitting beside her made her even more determined to drive carefully.

The restaurant was beautiful-elegant white-carved wooden panels adorned the walls, along with tasteful artwork in calming tones. The seating was upholstered with fine fabric, giving the place an air of nobility.

"This place is really nice. Have you ever brought someone here on a date before?"

Mevika asked as she took in the atmosphere.

"What kind of question is that? I've never taken anyone on a date before,"

Aiwarin answered, adjusting Mevika's glass of water so she could reach it more easily.

"I told you-I've never been serious about anyone. So why would I have brought someone here?"

"I mean, like... you've taken someone out for dinner before, right? Before... other things?"

"You mean like what I plan to do with you tonight?"

Aiwarin smirked mischievously.

"I was talking about other people!"

Mevika quickly lifted her glass to her lips, using it as a shield.

"There's only you,"

Aiwarin said firmly.

"I've only ever gone out for drinks with people, then moved on. I've never taken anyone on a proper date like this."

She wanted Mevika to understand this clearly.

"You're the first woman I've ever taken on a real date. And you're the only one I want to keep seeing-however many times you want."

"Really?" Mevika bit her lip.

"You haven't seen anyone else lately? Just me?"

"If I already have you to see, why would I need anyone else? Sometimes, I don't even know if you'll come, but I still wait anyway."

Aiwarin pouted slightly as she spoke.

"That's the right thing to do. I don't like sharing, just so you know."

Mevika tossed the words out casually, turning her face away.

"Then be clear with me,"

Aiwarin's voice softened, carrying a seriousness mixed with uncertainty.

"I know I always invite you over at those times, but it's not just about that. I want to see you like this too... or do other things together."

"Like what?"

"Dinner, movies, trips, shopping together... or maybe a date at the beach, just the two of us."

"Are you serious?"

Mevika asked gently, her tone just as sincere.

"If I am... would you believe me?"

"I..."

It should have been an easy question to answer. The response was right there, but somehow, she hesitated.

*Why?*

*Hadn't she already accepted that she was open to being with a woman?*

*Or did she still see Aiwarin as a rival-someone she couldn't possibly be with?*

*Or was she just afraid? Afraid that Aiwarin was only playing with her, just like she had with others before?*

*No... that wasn't it.*

The truth was, she simply hadn't expected to grow this close to Aiwarin.

Aiwarin had always seemed like someone untouchable-standing tall, shining brightly. Even though they were both in high places, Mevika couldn't help but wonder...

Why would someone like Aiwarin genuinely like her?

She chose to ask again, just to be sure.

"I'll ask one more time. Are you really serious about this?"

"How do you want me to say it?"

"What if I say no?"

"No?" Aiwarin pouted.

"Well, I guess I'd have to find another woman to go on dates with. Maybe there's someone I'd like even more than you."

She was only teasing-she didn't mean it at all.

"No way! You can't do that!"

Mevika reacted instantly, looking even more flustered than before.

"Why not? I'm single, aren't I?"

"I already told you-you can't be with someone else at the same time!"

"Oh? So... does that mean you're with me now?"

Aiwarin's frown disappeared, replaced by a soft smile.

"Of course not! I meant-"

Mevika hesitated again. She wanted to reject the idea, but she was starting to feel trapped. In the end, she let out a deep sigh, pausing to gather her thoughts before finally speaking.

"I don't even know what I'm afraid of. Being in my position means I have to think about so many things-my family, my work, the business. And the fact that we're competitors... just thinking about it is exhausting."

"Then why don't I feel that way at all?"

Aiwarin said simply.

"I think you shouldn't overthink it. Maybe it won't be difficult at all. This part might be hard, but we'll get through it."

"What if only one of us wins the bid?"

"If you win, I'll support you,"

Aiwarin said gently, her voice warm, her smile steady.

"You'd support me?"

Mevika asked, her voice softer now.

"And if you win?"

"That depends on whether you'd want to support me,"

Aiwarin replied casually, lifting her glass to take a sip.

"That... wouldn't be so hard, I guess."

Mevika looked away, her thoughts in turmoil.

Her gaze landed on a group of women sitting at a nearby table. Suddenly, a thought crossed her mind-what if Aiwarin took someone else on a date instead? What if she chose someone else?

But why would she?

Aiwarin had already chosen her.

If Aiwarin really wanted to be serious with her, then that should be her good fortune.

Aiwarin Mitarn, the charming and capable woman, might not have shown her many different sides yet, but every time they met, she always took good care of her. If they spent more time together, it would surely be even better.

This talented, successful woman didn't treat everyone this way but she treated her special.

If Aiwarin ever treated someone else like this... she would definitely be jealous.

*So, does that mean I really like her in that way?*

I need to find out.

"Do you want to take an overnight trip somewhere together?"

The words left her lips suddenly, accompanied by a smile.

"Ai?"

"Hmm? What did you just say?"

Aiwarin looked unsure if she had heard correctly. "A simple date like this isn't enough, don't you think?"

Mevika laughed.

"We should plan a road trip to the beach. I want to go with you."

"The beach?"

Aiwarin raised an eyebrow, looking genuinely surprised by the invitation. Then, a smile spread across her face.

"Let's go."

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"I've been staying at your hotel so often it's starting to feel like I'm crashing at... um, someone's condo all the time now,"

Mevika muttered as Aiwarin pulled into the familiar parking lot of the hotel where she frequently parked her car.

"You were about to say 'girlfriend's condo,' weren't you?"

Aiwarin laughed, turning off the engine.

"I heard you almost say it."

"I was not!"

Mevika quickly shook her head. But in reality, that was exactly the word that had popped into her mind first-she had just stopped herself before saying it out loud.

"F-Fun," she stammered instead, hastily changing the subject.

"Just say it-say you're coming to your girlfriend's condo."

Teasing her a bit more lifted Aiwarin's spirits. She wanted Mevika to be more straightforward with her, but sometimes her stubbornness was endearing, like a woman who couldn't help but let her true feelings slip out.

"We're not even a couple yet."

"True. But do you want to be?"

Seizing the moment, Aiwarin playfully teased, unbuckling her seatbelt and turning to face her companion with a sly smile, eager to hear how she'd respond.

"We still need to spend more time together,"

Mevika replied, a bit more serious this time. She wasn't dodging the question but rather reasoning it out.

"Exactly. That's why I want to spend more time with you. Now we just need to find more time for each other-beyond just late nights."

Aiwarin's playful tone made Mevika frown slightly. Seeing this rare expression, Aiwarin's mischievous grin softened into a tender smile. She leaned in, wrapped an arm around Mevika's neck, and gently pinched her cheek.

"You're cute."

"Hey, I-"

Before Mevika could finish, Aiwarin's lips pressed against hers, silencing her. The kiss left her entranced; she let it linger until Aiwarin was satisfied. When Aiwarin parted her lips, Mevika responded, welcoming the renewed kiss.

They couldn't resist each other, their desires intertwining, making it hard to distinguish between pure want and genuine affection. Perhaps it was a blend of both.

"If we spend more time together, I'll get to see more of your adorable side,"

Aiwarin murmured, pulling back slightly.

"Do you know how to be charm?"

"Huh?"

"Have you ever charmed anyone?"

"I've been sweet with my mom, and a bit with my dad, but not often."

"You never had a serious relationship, so you've never been flirted with your partner. Well, you can flirt with me."

"Flirt with you?"

"Mm." Aiwarin nodded seriously.

"I'm not doing that."

"Hm? Why not?"

The one asking sounded disappointed.

"Because that's something you do with a girlfriend or someone you really want to be affectionate with. Like... how do I put it? You have to *want* to be affectionate first before doing it."

"So... does that mean we have to be a couple first?"

"Maybe....Then... can I be your girlfriend?"

"H-Huh?"

Mevika suddenly felt her cheeks heat up at the direct question.

Ah... what's this?

She didn't intend to refused, but being asked so suddenly like this... Did this mean Aiwarin seriously wanted to date her?

Or was she just casually joking around again?

"Fine, fine. You can do it whenever you feel like it. It's not something anyone can force, anyway."

And once again, Aiwarin brushed it off to keep Mevika from feeling pressured. It had happened many times already.

*She wonder... does she ever feel tired of me?*

"I..."

Mevika tried to say something, but Aiwarin cut her off.

"Let's go. Let's head to *our* room." Aiwarin opened the car door and got out.

*Our* room?

And just like that, she threw out another line that made Mevika feel special, despite brushing things off just moments ago.

Mevika hurriedly got out of the car and followed. Aiwarin waited for her to catch up, then wrapped an arm around her waist as they walked toward the entrance together-unaware that a pair of eyes was watching them from another car.

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# Chapter 25: Traps and Pitfalls

This morning, Mevika woke up before Aiwarin. She lay on her side, looking at the owner of the bed, who was still asleep. Even while sleeping, she looked so beautiful. A few strands of hair covered her face, and Mevika couldn’t resist reaching out to gently brush them away. Suddenly, she found herself smiling.

Waking up to Aiwarin’s face on the same bed put her in a good mood. She thought about everything Aiwarin had done for her. The more she got to know her, the more she saw a different side—less serious, more playful, even a bit clingy. She wasn’t as composed as she had seemed at first. And honestly, it was really cute.

***Is she cute....?***

Besides being incredibly good-looking, is she also making me fall for her cuteness?

Hmmm...

Mevika stared at her peaceful face. She was warm, caring, and dependable. It made her want to snuggle closer. But just as she was about to move toward her, she hesitated.

*Wait… do I want to cuddle with Aiwarin?*

She quickly pressed her hands against her warm cheeks, then flipped onto her back, trying to clear her mind.

*If you want to do it, just do it. Why hesitate? She already told you it's okay.*

*She gave you permission.*

*Sigh…*

Mevika told herself this in her head, then turned back onto her side again.

Seeing Aiwarin’s peaceful, sleeping face once more made her heart flutter.

A sudden thought popped into her mind.

***What if I'm Aiwarin’s girlfriend?***

***What if I'm dating Aiwarin?***

Just thinking about it made her cheeks burn. She quickly placed both hands on her face—firmly.

*Me? Dating a woman this beautiful and talented?*

Just the thought of it made her whole body feel hot.

“What am I even thinking?”

She mumbled to herself, not realizing she had woken Aiwarin up.

"Hmm?"

Aiwarin squinted sleepily. That made Mevika cover her mouth in a panic and turn away—but before she could escape, she was pulled into a hug.

"Mmm… you're awake? Can you go to work a little late today? Stay here and let me hug you first."

*What…?*

Mevika froze as Aiwarin’s arms wrapped tightly around her from behind. She could feel the warmth of her embrace, and somehow, that calmed her racing thoughts.

She let Aiwarin hold her like that. It felt so nice that she wanted to drift back to sleep in this warmth. She was in Aiwarin’s arms, and she liked it. In her drowsy mind, a thought crossed her—

***So… having a girlfriend feels this good?***

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Throughout the week, Aiwarin came to the Orianna office almost every day, except when she had to inspect hotels. Every few months, she had to travel to oversee Orianna Resort, Orianna Boutique, or Orianna Homestay. Each branch had a general manager in charge and a team that sent regular reports —either weekly or daily if something urgent came up.

This morning, Aiwarin wasn’t scheduled for any site visits. She was at the office as usual, focusing on wrapping up an important auction deal within seven days. She wanted to avoid a last-minute rush nine days from now when the submission deadline arrived.

“Is there something urgent?”

She asked Lada, who had just entered her office.

“When you came in late, did you stop by for an inspection first, Ms. Ai?” “Oh,”

Aiwarin knew exactly why she was a little late. But it was only by an hour. Normally, she arrived at the office by nine, but today, she got in a little after ten. Her consistent schedule made it easy for people to notice any changes.

“No, I didn’t go anywhere. I just woke up late.”

“You? Waking up late? I’ve never seen that happen, even when you stay out late inspecting the bars.”

“Well, I might be late again in the future. I work until midnight, you know that. People always say it’s okay to come in a bit late sometimes. So, being an hour late isn’t a big deal, right?”

“No one minds at all. Everyone knows how hard you work—unless it’s Mr. Athiwit asking.”

“Hm? My dad asked about me?”

"Mr. Athiwit arrived just before ten. He was looking for you and said to let him know when you got in. Should I go tell him now?”

“And what did you tell him when I wasn’t here yet?”

“I said you probably stopped by for an inspection this morning.”

“Oh, thanks.” Aiwarin smiled.

“Yeah, go ahead and tell him. He probably wants to discuss the auction. He’s been very focused."

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"There must be a reason for me to come see you in person."

Athiwit's face and tone were slightly tense. He walked over, sat in the chair across from his daughter, and placed his phone on the table with a small but noticeable thud.

"What reason would that be?"

Aiwarin glanced at his large hand resting on the phone. His expression and body language made her wonder what he was about to bring up.

"Have you been taking someone to stay at the hotel recently?"

"Huh?" Aiwarin blinked.

"What did you just say?"

She kept her voice calm and composed, trying not to show any reaction. "Just be honest with me. Don’t bother denying it—I already know."

"I didn’t take any man there, if that’s what you’re thinking."

"You took a woman. She stayed overnight. And you both left together in the morning."

Aiwarin froze. That was all true. And if he meant the most recent time, then it was just this morning. She had taken Mevika to the hotel, and since Mevika hadn’t driven herself, she had stayed the night. In the morning, they had left together, and Aiwarin had dropped her off at the same spot she had picked her up from the day before.

"Did someone see us? Or did you see it yourself?"

She had already decided she wouldn’t care if anyone found out. This could even be a good chance to admit it. Still, now that she was caught, she felt a little nervous. But she had to keep her cool.

"Since the night at Greater, right? Someone saw you with Nuttakorn’s daughter. You two seemed close."

"And? What else did they say? What exactly did they tell you?"

"That’s all they said. But I got suspicious, so I sent someone to check the bar, thinking you’d be there. But last night, you weren’t."

"Are you sure they checked the right bar?"

"You only go to Anthea, don’t you?"

"Wow… so you really do know everything. How long have you known?"

"That's why I kept introducing you to men, hoping you’d take an interest in someone. At first, I thought you just weren’t interested in dating at all. But later, I figured it out—you like women."

"You know more than I expected."

Aiwarin sighed.

"I used to think maybe someone told you, but you were so calm that I couldn’t tell what you were thinking. I assumed you didn’t care, as long as I agreed to meet the men you introduced."

"It was all for the same reason. But now, that doesn’t matter as much as who you’re involved with."

"And if it’s her? What will you do?"

"Then tell me—what exactly is your relationship with her?"

Athiwit's tone grew firmer.

"We're just involved, but we're not together yet. Is that the answer you’re looking for? Do you want me to admit that she and I are something? That she means something to me?"

"And this woman—she’s okay with being involved with you like this? What's her name again? Maple? Does she like you? Does she even like women?"

"And what if we do like each other?"

Aiwarin challenged.

"But that’s not the answer, because I don’t know if she likes me yet. I still have to find out."

"It’s surprising that she’s gotten this close to you. When did you even talk? How did this happen?"

"I’m not telling you that."

Aiwarin leaned back.

"What I do want to know is—what are you planning to do? If you're here to stop me, let me make one thing clear: ***you can’t***. I've dedicated myself to working for this company. I've never let you down. But if you're going to stand in the way of something I want for myself, then I won’t agree to that."

"I haven’t even said what I’m going to do yet."

Athiwit chuckled.

"I’m not exactly stopping you. I just have a proposal."

"A proposal? For me?"

"You can stay close to her. I won’t stop you. Meet her however you like." "Huh?"

Aiwarin frowned and let out a soft chuckle, confused by his words.

"I'm letting you date that woman—if it benefits us. This is the only deal I'm offering. Use this chance to get as much information about the bidding process from her as possible and make sure we win against Superior." "What?!" Aiwarin blurted out.

"Don't be so shocked. I'm giving you a great opportunity here. Take it. If being with that woman is useless to you, then stay away from her. But if you're going to keep seeing her, then get valuable information from her. And if you help us win against Superior and the other companies, I'll stop interfering in your life—completely."

"The thing that bothers me the most is you forcing me to meet men!"

"Exactly." Atthawit smirked.

"If you don’t want to do that anymore, then beat Superior. After that, you can date whoever you want. I won’t oppose you. You’ll have complete freedom, and I won’t meddle in your personal life ever again."

Aiwarin stared at her father in silence, deep in thought. She didn't give him an answer. He simply left the room, leaving his words behind for her to decide. It wasn’t a question that needed a response—her actions would be the answer.

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"Ji, I'm at the Japanese restaurant. Which table did the client reserve?"

Mevika called her secretary, who had arranged her schedule for the day. She had the appointment noted but hadn't received the client's final confirmation yet.

"Oh, the Kansai room? Got it. Thanks, Ji."

She ended the call, slipped her phone into her handbag, and walked toward the staff who greeted her in Japanese.

"Hello, I have a reservation for the Kansai room."

"This way, please."

The waitress led Mevika through the restaurant to a private room with sliding doors. The floor inside was slightly elevated, in traditional Japanese style.

The room had floor cushions in traditional Japanese style. It seemed like the client hadn't arrived yet, as both seats were still empty.

"You may take a seat," the waitress said.

"The person who reserved this room hasn't arrived yet?"

Mevika asked quickly. She knew the client was from a company called

GoProps, which was interested in renting space to display their products at Superior Department Store. They had chosen this restaurant for the meeting because it was close to the client's office.

"Not yet, but they confirmed the reservation about thirty minutes ago and said they’d arrive on time."

"I see. They must be on their way. Thank you."

Mevika smiled at the waitress and watched the sliding door close before pulling out her phone to check the time. It was 3:55 PM—five minutes until the scheduled meeting.

She scrolled through the flood of chat messages, replied to two clients, and then saw a message from Aiwarin, sent half an hour ago. She had been driving at the time and hadn't checked it until now.

A smile formed on her lips when she saw Aiwarin’s name on the screen. She tapped on the message and read it.

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**Ai: I miss you. Are you free tonight? I want to see you. Even if you're busy, just 30 minutes is enough.**

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"Miss me, huh?"

Mevika chuckled, feeling a little shy. It was the first time Aiwarin had ever sent a message like that.

*"Trying to make me feel clingy, is that it?"*

Her thoughts drifted back to that morning, when she had stayed in bed, dozing off for another half-hour while Aiwarin held her. When they finally woke up, they had spent a few moments playfully teasing each other before getting up to shower.

It had made them both a little late for work—not that it mattered much to her. She had only planned to stop by one of Superior’s branches without a fixed schedule. It had been a relaxed workday: lunch, a couple of hours at the office, and now this client meeting at 4 PM.

*"Half an hour? That’s not nearly enough,"*

She mumbled to herself, about to type a reply.

But before she could, the sound of the sliding door caught her attention. She lifted her gaze from her phone to see who had just entered.

Mevika's eyes widened in surprise when she recognized the person stepping in.

He closed the door behind him, walked over to sit across from her, and smiled before greeting her.

**"Hello, nice to meet you, Miss Maple."**

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# Chapter 26: Let Me Ask

A phone was tightly held in her hand as she walked quickly across the tiled floor inside a large karaoke bar. She looked around for the room mentioned in the message from Khet.

Once she found it, she pushed the door open and saw someone sitting there, staring blankly. A music video was playing softly in the background, and it seemed like the microphone hadn't even been picked up from the table near the TV screen.

"What’s up with you? Coming to a karaoke bar alone?"

Mevika asked with a chuckle as she walked toward Aiwarin.

"I didn’t think you’d even have free time—"

Before she could finish, Aiwarin suddenly pulled her into a tight hug. Mevika stood frozen in surprise. Aiwarin was acting strangely—pressing her cheek against Mevika’s stomach while she was still standing, not even bothering to sit down. That only made Mevika more curious.

"Just let me stay like this for a bit."

"Hmm?"

Mevika tilted her head, looking down at the girl speaking in a quiet, sad voice.

"Are you okay?"

Aiwarin didn’t answer. She stayed silent for at least a minute, maybe two. Mevika had no idea what was wrong, but she let Aiwarin hold onto her. If she was feeling troubled and just needed someone to lean on, Mevika didn’t mind.

After a while, the silence felt too long, so Mevika finally spoke up.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?"

"Mmm."

Aiwarin lifted her face to look at Mevika, resting her chin against her stomach. Her eyes were sad, blinking slowly.

"I'm just feeling a little stressed. I just… wanted someone to be here with me."

She gave a small, sad smile.

"You’re stressed? About what? Can you tell me?"

Mevika asked gently, her voice soft and careful.

"I had a little conflict with my dad,"

Aiwarin said with a soft laugh.

"Or maybe not so little… I don’t know. I’m just trying to sort out my thoughts."

"So, I guess that means you can’t tell me?"

Mevika asked. She wasn’t just being curious. After spending so much time around Aiwarin, she genuinely wanted to help. Aiwarin always seemed so positive, like she never had any worries.

Seeing her stressed like this made Mevika wonder what could be bothering her so much. And honestly, she wanted Aiwarin to trust her enough to talk about it—even though they were technically rivals.

"There’s something I can tell you,"

Aiwarin said as she let go of the hug and took Mevika’s hand, pulling her to sit beside her. Once they sat down, Aiwarin leaned her head on Mevika’s shoulder.

"The one thing my dad and I always argue about is him trying to set me up with men he thinks I might fall for. That’s something I’ve never been okay with. At first, I thought he just wanted to see me married, have a family— maybe he was worried that I’d spend my whole life working hard for him. Or maybe he wanted a grandchild to inherit my skills. But that’s not really the main issue. It turns out… he already knows I don’t like men. When we started disagreeing on some things, we ended up arguing about this too. And yeah, he’s known for a while now that I like women. He’s known all along that I go to Anthea Bar a lot."

"He knows you go there?"

*Mevika wondered if anyone had seen her there too.*

"Not when you were there. I mean, before that. He must’ve known for a long time but pretended not to. He just kept trying to set me up with men, but it never worked."

"This is what you're having issues with him about?"

"Once one problem starts, other arguments follow. Work got involved too, but I can’t tell you everything about that. I guess I just dealt with too much from him today, and it was exhausting. I needed to go somewhere, so I came here to drink. I didn’t want to go back to the hotel or to my bar. And tonight… I’m not going back."

"Huh? Then where are you going if you’re not going back to the hotel?"

"I don’t know,"

Aiwarin said, sitting up straight. She turned to Mevika and smiled.

"Maybe I’ll sleep at your place."

"Are you crazy?"

Mevika wanted to scold her for joking at a time like this, but at the same time, she was glad to see Aiwarin smile—if only for a moment. But just as quickly as it appeared, the smile faded again.

"I'm thinking of driving somewhere. I just need a little break. Tomorrow’s a day off anyway, so I’ll deal with everything later."

"Driving somewhere? Where?"

"Probably Pattaya. It’s close."

"With who? Are you going alone?"

"Yeah, of course. Who else would be free to go with me all of sudden like this?"

Aiwarin laughed and stood up, so Mevika stood up too.

"That’s all I needed from you. I just wanted to see you for a bit. Thanks for coming. I won’t bother you anymore tonight—you should head home. I’ll go pay the bill."

"You called me here just for that?"

"Why? Do you want to stay with me again? You haven’t been home for two nights now,"

Aiwarin teased, wrapping an arm around Mevika’s waist and poking her forehead gently.

"Are you getting too attached to me?"

She chuckled.

"Go home tonight, okay? So your parents won’t scold you."

She pulled Mevika along, but instead of walking with her, Mevika stood still. Aiwarin stopped and turned around with a frown.

"I’m not letting you go alone,"

Mevika said, grabbing Aiwarin’s wrist. She looked at her seriously, her mind already made up. She hadn’t needed long to decide—but she was sure of it.

"I’m coming with you. We’re going to the sea together, right? Then I’ll go with you."

"You’re coming with me?"

Aiwarin’s frown deepened in surprise. She hadn’t even dared to hope that Mevika would say something like that.

"You mean… right now?"

"Mmhmm."

Mevika nodded with a smile.

"I’m going with you."

Aiwarin stared at her, surprised by the expression Mevika rarely showed— genuine care. Lately, Mevika had been more patient with her, and now, she was showing real concern. She wanted to be with her.

And Aiwarin wasn’t going to say no.

Mevika turned to look at Aiwarin, who was still smiling playfully. She sighed, shaking her head.

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"And how exactly do you suggest we do that?"

Aiwarin glanced at her briefly before focusing back on the road.

"Maybe we stop dancing around it and just say it out loud."

Mevika hesitated.

"Say what?"

"That we’re together."

Aiwarin’s tone was casual, but there was something deeper behind her words.

"That you like me. That I like you. Simple as that."

Mevika opened her mouth, then closed it again. She wasn’t sure why she was hesitating. It wasn’t like she didn’t know how she felt. But putting it into words… making it real… was different.

Seeing her pause, Aiwarin chuckled softly. "See? Harder than it looks, huh?"

Mevika let out a breath, crossing her arms. "It’s not hard. I just… I don’t want to rush things."

Aiwarin nodded, her expression understanding.

"I get it. And I’m not pushing you. I just want to know if you’re thinking about it the same way I am."

Mevika was quiet for a moment before finally speaking.

"I am."

Aiwarin smiled, reaching over briefly to squeeze Mevika’s hand.

"That’s enough for now."

And with that, they continued their drive toward the sea, the night air cool around them, the road ahead open and full of possibilities.

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"We're really doing this right before we submit our bids for the most intense auction?"

"Looks like it," Aiwarin laughed.

"So, after the auction, we’ll talk about this again, right?"

"I think that would be better."

"Alright then. We’ll come back to it later. At least for now, we get to spend more time together."

Aiwarin reached out her free hand while keeping the other on the wheel.

Mevika placed her hand in Aiwarin’s, watching as their fingers intertwined. It was strange how something as simple as holding hands could make her heart race.

*It felt like a moment that couples shared.*

"What did you tell your dad? Won’t he be upset that you’re not coming home?"

"I sent him a message,"

Mevika replied, glancing at their joined hands.

"Honestly, I am a little worried. He might notice I haven't been home much lately. And now, suddenly, I’m leaving town too. But I wanted to come. I just wanted to do something for myself, for once. I've never really stepped out of line before."

"Are you saying you're stepping out of line because of me?"

Aiwarin chuckled as the car stopped at a red light. The streets were quiet, with only a few cars passing by at this late hour.

"You sound like a spoiled girl."

"I'm just... I am into women," Mevika smile broadly.

Aiwarin laughed, clearly amused.

"Did you just say that?"

"I did. Ugh... am I really like this now? I never imagined myself saying something like that."

Mevika laughed at herself.

"You’re into me, Mevika,"

Aiwarin said, her voice playful but warm.

"The woman you're thinking of is me."

She squeezed Mevika’s hand gently before letting go of the wheel completely. Taking advantage of the red light, she reached out, cupped Mevika’s jaw, and leaned in.

Then, she kissed her.

Mevika kissed her back.

There, at a quiet intersection, as they waited for the light to change, they shared a kiss—just the two of them, in their own little world.

And just as the light turned green, they pulled away, breathless, just in time to keep moving forward.

A soft laugh broke the silence, making the other person laugh along. It was a trip with no plan, yet it felt so freeing—like letting go of the heavy thoughts in their minds.

Even though they enjoyed working so much that it never felt like a burden, taking a break made them realize that maybe they had been working too hard. Allowing themselves to rest and find comfort in someone else’s presence was incredibly relaxing.

It would be nice if every stressful day could end with a feeling like this. That would be real happiness.

But for now, that was just a thought. This wasn’t the time for them to have a clear answer.

Not until they made it through this intense competition.

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The sound of ocean waves greeted them the moment they opened the car door. Just hearing it for the first time filled them with excitement and a sense of peace. The car was parked along the road, right above a stretch of empty sand.

The beach at night was quiet and private, yet it didn’t feel lonely since they were near a hotel area with a bar and restaurants not too far away.

Aiwarin shut the car door and quickly walked around to Mevika’s side. She took her hand and led her toward the beach.

“We’re walking in high heels on the sand?”

Mevika asked as they neared the shore.

“Then don’t wear them,”

Aiwarin said with a smile. She guided Mevika to stand on the edge of the pavement before stepping onto the sand. Then she turned around, pulling Mevika down to sit on the ledge.

“Sit,”

She said, and Mevika obeyed. Aiwarin crouched down, gently held Mevika’s ankle, and slowly removed her high heels one by one, setting them beside her.

Mevika smiled at Aiwarin’s simple yet thoughtful solution. She stood up, letting her bare feet sink into the soft, fine sand before crouching down in front of Aiwarin. Then, with a playful push, she made Aiwarin sit on the ledge and began removing her high heels just the same.

She quickly placed the shoes beside hers before dashing backward across the sand, inviting Aiwarin to chase her.

“How about a little exercise?”

Mevika said with a playful smile before turning and sprinting across the wide beach.

“I’m in!”

Aiwarin shouted back, taking off after her. She ran until she almost reached Mevika, but Mevika twisted away at the last second, avoiding her grasp. That only made Aiwarin chase her harder, though she was surprised at how fast Mevika could run.

“You’re really flying, huh?”

Aiwarin pushed herself to catch up, but Mevika stayed just out of reach.

Then, as they neared the shoreline, a sudden wave rushed up higher than expected. Mevika wasn’t prepared for it, and when she swerved to avoid the water, Aiwarin finally caught up.

Mevika let out a loud squeal, trying to wriggle free, but it was useless. Aiwarin might not have been as fast, but she was strong.

“Gotcha! That was way more exhausting than I thought,”

Aiwarin said, locking Mevika in her arms. She leaned in and whispered teasingly,

“You sure you want to waste all your energy? What if you don’t have any left for tonight?”

“Huh?”

Mevika quickly pulled her head back to glare at Aiwarin, narrowing her eyes.

“What do you mean by that?”

Aiwarin shrugged, laughing.

“Nothing at all. I just meant we don’t even have a place to stay yet. What if we end up with nowhere to sleep?”

“Oh, really?”

Mevika squinted at her, clearly not buying it.

“I swear, that’s all I meant! But if you want to think otherwise, be my guest.”

“You always think ahead, don’t you?”

“Of course. I’m a businesswoman—I have to have vision.”

Aiwarin smiled.

Mevika watched that mischievous expression, knowing exactly how cunning Aiwarin could be. And yet, it was a side of her that Mevika liked— maybe even loved. Was she the only one who got to see this part of Aiwarin?

The thought sent a sudden rush of emotion through her. Without hesitation, she wrapped her arms around Aiwarin’s neck and pulled her in for a kiss.

Aiwarin’s eyes widened in surprise, but then she smiled, feeling genuinely happy to have Mevika here with her, in this moment.

“You’re smiling and laughing now. Feeling better?”

Mevika asked, tilting her head slightly as she looked at the woman who needed comfort tonight. Her arms were still wrapped around Aiwarin’s neck.

“I didn’t even realize it,”

Aiwarin said with a smile.

“It’s because of you.”

She slipped her arms around Mevika’s waist, pulling her closer.

The two of them stood on the beach, with the waves washing over their feet. Their eyes met, locked in a soft gaze, before Aiwarin whispered,

“Thank you for staying with me tonight.”

Mevika smiled.

“Well, if I wasn’t with you, who else would I be with?”

Aiwarin let out a small laugh. She loved when Mevika said things like this —simple, direct words that somehow made her feel incredibly happy.

“I told you, there’s only you. Just you.”

“Alright, I’ll believe you.”

That one word—"*believe*"—made Aiwarin happy, but it also made her nervous. She tried to push everything else from her mind and focus only on the happiness in this moment. Their eyes stayed locked, neither one looking away.

Aiwarin leaned in, pressing a soft kiss to Mevika’s lips, then deepening it as the feeling took over. Mevika kissed her back, their lips moving together passionately as the waves crashed behind them. The sea breeze, the twinkling stars, and the glowing moon all seemed to set the perfect scene.

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The door to a resort room swung open. They had checked in last-minute, bringing no luggage or essentials—just a small handbag that was carelessly tossed onto the table. Aiwarin flicked on a single light near the bathroom, casting a dim glow over the bed.

Mevika pulled Aiwarin toward the foot of the bed, kissing her again. She reached for Aiwarin’s shirt, pulling it off in one swift motion. Aiwarin did the same for Mevika, their hands working quickly, their urgency causing the clothes to slip off and land in a messy pile on the floor.

Aiwarin whispered as she slid Mevika’s shirt off,

“Did you know when you wear this dress, that you wouldn’t be the one taking it off?”

“I didn’t think about it,”

Mevika replied in a sexy whisper.

“But lately, I haven’t had to take it off myself for three nights in a row.”

She unhooked Aiwarin’s bra and tossed it aside.

“Having someone do it for you must be convenient, huh?”

Aiwarin teased as she tugged down Mevika’s skirt—the very one she had picked out for her.

“It is pretty convenient. I wouldn’t mind if someone took it off for me every day.”

Aiwarin narrowed her eyes slightly, shaking her head with a smile. She liked this playful side of Mevika—maybe more than she should.

“Then I guess you’ll have to be my girlfriend. That way, I can take off your clothes every day.”

She said it while pushing Mevika gently onto the bed.

Mevika let out a soft laugh.

“What are you talking about?”

Mevika giggled. But before she could say more, the last piece of fabric on her body was pulled away. Aiwarin guided her onto her lap, pressing a deep kiss to her lips before moving to her neck, then moved down to nibble on the sweet flower tip. The way she took her time made Mevika feel like she was savoring every moment, every touch.

“Aah…”

Mevika let out a soft sigh, her fingers threading through Aiwarin’s hair, urging her closer. Then she gasped when Aiwarin’s hands slid up her thighs, lifting her slightly.

Every touch, every movement, sent shivers through her that made her breathe harder before Aiwarin inserted her touch, making her move her hips to the slow rhythm, with a sound from her throat. They had barely had a chance to explore the beachfront resort, yet here they were, completely lost in exploring each other instead.

“F-Faster…”

Mevika whispered breathlessly, grazing her lips over Aiwarin’s ear, teasing her and stimulated Aiwarin as well. Aiwarin exhaled a slow, heated breath.

“Sure,”

Aiwarin whispered back. Another reason why she likes Mevika even more this time.

"You can ask me."

"What?"

"Ask me again if I like it,"

Mevika said in sleepy voice.

"Can I ask?"

"Mhm...Ask me. Go on."

"Do you like it?"

Aiwarin whispered, her voice barely audible. She waited eagerly for Mevika’s answer—she wanted to hear it, clear and honest. And once she did, she would give Mevika everything.

"I like it,"

Mevika answered, her voice shaky, breathless. She tried to speak more clearly.

"Thank you very much...I like it a lot."

Her breathing grew heavier.

"Do it again."

Aiwarin smiled, kissing her softly before replying,

"Of course."

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# Chapter 27: The Person I Want to Wake Up to Every Morning

Her eyes slowly opened when she felt well-rested. The cool morning air made her curl up slightly. As she fully opened her eyes, she saw someone lying nearby, propping herself up on her elbow, smiling at her.

"Good morning,"

Aiwarin greeted her cheerfully, as if she had been awake for a while.

"Mmm," Mevika smiled back.

"Have you been up long?"

"I've been awake for a while. I've been watching you sleep, waiting for you to wake up."

"Why were you watching me?"

Mevika laughed.

"I don't know… **maybe I fell in love**," Aiwarin said with a grin.

"Oh? Must be a deep hole you fell into."

"Yeah, I think so. Want to help me out?" Aiwarin playfully held out her hand. "Nope. I won't pull you out. You fell in, so you stay in there."

"Aww," Aiwarin pouted.

"You don’t want me to get out? Sounds like someone wants to keep me there."

"I never said that. I just don’t want you falling for someone else."

"Ooh, sounds like someone’s jealous. Maybe that means you do have feelings for me?"

"Mmm."

Mevika scrunched up her nose, then moved closer and wrapped her arms around Aiwarin, who was lying on her stomach, slightly on her side. As she nestled in, her face fit perfectly into the crook of Aiwarin's neck. It was the perfect spot to snuggle in and be affectionate.

"If I really do have feelings for you… will you take care of me?"

"Of course! I’m super rich, you know? I'm about to inherit a whole hotel from my dad. How many rooms do you need me to give you? Maybe the whole floor?"

Aiwarin teased, taking the chance to show off a little—after all, she really was wealthy. "Are you serious?"

Mevika laughed.

"You're using a whole hotel to lure me in?" "It didn't work, did it? Tempting you with money?"

Aiwarin hugged Mevika tightly.

**"Then, I'll just give you my heart instead."**

"What? People just give their hearts away like that?"

"This one's special. Don't you want it? It might not have as many rooms as my hotel, but it still has four."

"Huh?"

Mevika tilted her head up to look at the person who kept flirting with her.

"My heart has four chambers."

Aiwarin made a tiny heart shape with her fingers over her chest, then held it out to Mevika.

"Take it." She pouted.😘😅

"Huh?" Mevika burst out laughing.

"Wait, Aiwarin, are you seriously making jokes like this?"

She laughed even harder.

"Ugh."

Aiwarin, the one being teased, smiled awkwardly.

"Why? I can’t?"

"You can."

Mevika tried to hold back her laughter but failed.

"That was so funny. You did great. It was cute."

She clapped lightly.

"Cute?"

Aiwarin leaned down to get closer to Mevika’s face.

"How cute?"

"Cute—ah, don’t block my view!"

Mevika whined as Aiwarin pressed their foreheads together, blocking her sight.

"Why? Do you want to look at me? If you have feelings, just admit it."

"Ugh, there you go again!"

Mevika giggled, playfully pushing Aiwarin's shoulder. But before she could react, Aiwarin leaned in and kissed her.

A soft kiss—just once—before pulling back to look at her face. Mevika met her gaze and smiled sweetly, feeling incredibly happy. It was the first time she had ever woken up to someone and felt this way.

And then, Aiwarin kissed her again.

They shared several light kisses before their lips met in a deeper, more passionate embrace, filled with love and longing.

It was desire. It was longing. And the truth was, they were completely captivated by each other.

"I want to wake up and see you like this every day,"

Aiwarin murmured after pulling away from the kiss. She lay there, absentmindedly playing with Mevika’s hair, wanting to savor this private moment for as long as possible.

"Are you planning to take care of me then? Will you wake up together every morning? Can you cook for me?"

"Of course! I can cook. I’m really good at it. When I studied abroad, I had to cook for myself all the time."

"Wow, so you’re good at your job and good at cooking too? You’re good at everything, huh? Smart, good-looking… and pretty good in bed too. Whoever dates you is gonna go crazy for sure."

Mevika smiled dreamily, unintentionally voicing her admiration.

"Whoever becomes my girlfriend will probably go crazy. So… do you want to go crazy?"

Aiwarin asked, tilting Mevika’s chin up.

"Ah…"

Mevika immediately realized her mistake.

*Yes… it was you. You are the one who is going crazy, even though you trying to hide it for so long.*

"Hmm?"

Aiwarin teased, noticing Mevika’s flustered expression.

"So, will you go crazy for me first? Or will I go crazy for you?"

"Ugh, stop it!"

Mevika squirmed, trying to escape.

"Maple, you’re blushing."

Aiwarin laughed, tightening her arms around Mevika as she tried to wriggle away.

"You are, aren’t you?"

"Stop teasing me!"

Mevika finally stopped struggling, letting Aiwarin hold her. She didn’t really want to escape. The warmth of this embrace was too comforting. "Mmm."

Aiwarin hummed softly, resting her cheek against Mevika’s head.

"I told you, 80% of the things I joke about turn out to be true. And just now, I said a lot of things that were true."

"Like what?"

Mevika pulled back slightly, looking at her, ready to listen.

"I’m serious about this."

Aiwarin gave a soft smile, looking straight into Mevika’s eyes.

"After the auction, I’m going to ask you to be my girlfriend."

Mevika felt a sudden heat rise to her face the moment Aiwarin said those words. She was probably blushing—Aiwarin could probably see it, too.

Aiwarin’s gaze remained steady, unwavering. There was no teasing in her eyes. She meant every word.

"And I want us to make another promise."

Her voice was gentle yet firm. She took Mevika’s hand and pressed a soft kiss to the back of it.

"Promise me that no matter what happens with the auction, our relationship will stay the same."

Mevika didn’t answer right away. She held Aiwarin’s gaze, thinking for a moment—but there was no hesitation. Then, she smiled.

"Alright. I’ll keep everything the same between us… if you do too."

"Of course."

Aiwarin chuckled softly, happiness evident in her voice. She leaned in, wrapping her arms around Mevika without any pretense, as if she were seeking comfort. This was what Mevika wanted—to see Aiwarin show her feelings more freely.

Aiwarin gently kissed Mevika’s forehead, lingering there for a long moment.

At that moment, both of their hearts were racing. Beating fast—together, in the same rhythm.

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"What’s this?"

Athiwit laughed as he scrolled through the tablet his fifty-year-old secretary had handed him.

"Nuttakorn’s daughter is making headlines with Rachen?" He let out another loud laugh.

"A private dinner together, huh? Anything special about it?"

"You don’t think they’re making a deal about the auction, do you? If they’re trying to be first and second together,"

The secretary commented.

"Hmm, it’s something to consider. But would Superior really choose to make a deal with Rachen? That doesn’t seem like the smartest move. They should be sharp enough to see that… or are they underestimating him?"

"Hard to say."

"In my opinion, if we and Superior hadn’t viewed each other as direct competitors from the start and had already figured out the conditions to secure first and second place, we might actually be the best option for them."

Athiwit smiled.

"That’s why I had Ai do something. If she succeeds, Great & Grow is out of the game."

"So, it’s possible that Great & Grow made an offer, but Superior turned it down?"

"Who knows? Honestly, I’m not sure whether Rachen is more interested in the auction… or in Nuttakorn’s daughter." "I’d say the latter might have more influence,"

The secretary chuckled.

"But the auction plays a role too."

"No problem. Let them be in the headlines for now—it’s a good distraction."

Athiwit smirked.

"The media won’t even notice that the real person who currently having a relationship with that woman… is actually my daughter."

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"The food’s good. Don’t you think so?"

Aiwarin asked casually as she and Mevika enjoyed their breakfast at the hotel.

They had left their room around ten in the morning, still wearing the same clothes from yesterday. After eating, they took a stroll through some nearby shops by the beach.

There, they bought matching patterned pants—Aiwarin chose navy blue, while Mevika picked orange. Now, both of them wore the same white tank tops, unintentionally ending up in coordinated outfits.

While wandering around, they also bought a comfortable button-up cotton shirt each, to have as a spare for their trip back to Bangkok the next day. After walking around for a while, they returned to their room to change before heading out for lunch together.

"I'm full. That was delicious."

Mevika said, quickly putting another bite of food into her mouth. As she chewed, she thought about something she had been meaning to bring up with Aiwarin since last night. But since Aiwarin had seemed stressed, she had decided to wait. Now that she looked much better, it seemed like the right time.

"Yesterday, I ran into someone. Well… I should say it wasn’t on purpose."

"Who?"

"Rachen."

"What?"

Aiwarin immediately put down her spoon.

"You saw him? Where?"

"At a Japanese restaurant. He booked a private room and made an appointment through my secretary. He came under the name of a company called GoProbs. I didn’t realize it had anything to do with Great & Grow at first. Later, I asked my secretary to check, and it turns out it’s a business his younger brother started, dealing with sports equipment and accessories. Since he used that company name, I didn’t know it was him."

"Thanks for telling me… and luckily, you’re safe."

Aiwarin sighed, pausing her meal.

"Why do you say that?"

Mevika frowned.

"I know he’s a flirt—people have warned me—but it sounds like you know something more."

"He’s the type who can’t stand being rejected. The more someone ignores him, the more he wants to win them over. He doesn’t always succeed, but he tries hard at first… which is probably why he hates me by now."

Aiwarin laughed, shrugging it off.

"Why would he hate you? Don’t tell me you…"

"Of course." Aiwarin rolled her eyes.

"Guys like that are disgusting. He’s exactly the kind of man, women should stay far away from."

"I had a feeling he was interested in me, but I wondered why he wasn't after you instead. You're beautiful, confident—anyone would want to get close to you."

"You think I'm strikingly beautiful?"

Aiwarin’s serious expression shifted into a playful smile.

"So, does that mean everyone wants to get close to me… including you?"

"Don't joke around right now."

"Okay, okay. I’ll keep telling the story. Where was I…?"

She narrowed her eyes, thinking for a moment before continuing.

"Ah, right. It was around the time I had just returned from studying abroad. My dad took me to a lot of social events to introduce me to people in the business world. At one of those events, Rachen was there. And let me tell you, out of all the women in that place, he made a straight beeline for me."

"Well, that makes sense. You’re… okay, never mind, I won’t compliment you."

"What? Were you about to praise me?"

"Just keep going with the story."

Mevika quickly redirected the conversation.

"Alright, so he came over and started chatting with me. I just talked to him out of politeness because there were a lot of people around. That night, he asked for my contact information, but I told him we should only exchange contacts if we ever had actual business to discuss. That was his first

rejection. After that, I ran into him at other events. It was almost like he knew where I would be—he’d approach me the moment I walked in. Then he even sent me an invitation to one of his private events. I took one look at it, handed it back, and told him straight up that I wasn’t going. He looked so offended that I left right away, so he wouldn’t have to force a smile." She chuckled before continuing.

"The third time was at a friend's bar during a late-night gathering. Turns out, he knew my friend too. Later that night, while I was chatting with someone who was about to head home, Rachen suddenly staggered toward me, acting drunk, and leaned on me like he needed support. Then he tried to wrap his arms around me like some wasted guy looking for balance. So, I shoved him away—hard enough that he stumbled back and landed on the floor. I don’t know if he was actually drunk or just putting on a show, but he definitely wasn’t expecting me to throw him off like that. While he was still on the ground, I crouched down next to him and said—"

Aiwarin paused, recalling the moment vividly in her mind.

"'I don’t know if you’re really drunk or just pretending. And I don’t know what makes you think you can flirt with any woman you want. The ones who’ve fallen for your tricks—I feel sorry for them. And as for those who get swept up in your shallow charm… well, I’m not one of them. Not now, not ever'. A guy who thinks so filthily about women… If you’re drunk, you probably won’t even remember this tomorrow. But I hope you remember what I just said."

Aiwarin smiled as she recalled the words she had thrown at Rachen that night. She hadn’t wanted to make a scene from the start. If he had just left her alone after the second time, that would have been the end of it.

But by the third time, he had deliberately planned a way to get handsy with her, thinking he could break past her boundaries. She had never let him get closer than a single step and had never entertained his advances.

It wasn’t just because she didn’t like men—it was also because if a woman were to like a man, he certainly shouldn’t be the kind of man who thought he could manipulate and take advantage of women just because he was rich. Maybe plenty of people fell for his wealth, but Aiwarin saw right through him. All he had was a hollow shell.

And that night, she realized he wasn’t even drunk. When she finished speaking and stepped back, he immediately got up, steady on his feet. There wasn’t a single sign of dizziness. His eyes burned with resentment as he stared at her, but he didn’t say a word. Instead, he turned and walked away, fast.

Since then, whenever they crossed paths—like at the recent auction meeting —he would pretend not to see her. He had already moved on to a new target. But little did he know, that woman was secretly have a relationship with Aiwarin.

He probably thought they were just business rivals. In reality, they were two women looking out for each other, both smart enough to keep their distance from him because they saw him for what he really was.

Mevika had always been wary of men who approached her with ulterior motives. And with Aiwarin’s warning, it became even clearer—there was no way she’d be interested in Rachen.

Truthfully, she had never been interested in any man. When she entertained conversations with them, it was more about curiosity—trying to understand feelings she had never experienced. That was, until she met Aiwarin.

"No wonder he never dares to come near you again. You were bold to say that to him."

Mevika laughed after hearing Aiwarin’s story.

"Yeah. He was completely sober, and I’m sure he hates me for it. But even so, I doubt my words truly sank in. He’s still chasing after women like always. He’s the type to keep playing his little games. That’s why I want you to be extra careful with him. Don’t meet him again, no matter what."

"I have no reason to meet him anyway. That day was just a mistake—I didn’t know it was him. He’s really cunning, isn’t he? Even went as far as using another company’s name just to set up a meeting with me."

Mevika picked up her glass of water, took a sip, and set it down.

"Did he do anything? How did he act?"

"Well… at first, he just talked about wanting his younger brother’s company—which owns a large store—to rent space in Superior. He said it would make it more convenient for customers to shop, and eventually, they could expand their branches. The conversation was normal for a while. We were eating while talking, though I only ate from my own plate. He ordered a lot of food and kept inviting me to try some, but I didn’t touch anything. After I finished eating, I told him I had to leave. That’s when he stared at me and moved around to my side."

"Huh? Why did he move?"

Aiwarin’s face immediately turned pale.

"He said I had a grain of rice stuck in my hair. So I instinctively reached up to brush it off, but he said it was still there. The room was a traditional Japanese-style seating area, so he got on his knees and started crawling around to my side. The moment he leaned in, I rang the service bell. Loudly. He was startled by how hard I hit it, and within five seconds, the staff opened the door. Then I said, ‘Check, please.’"

"Ugh! He really tried that on you?"

Aiwarin gripped her spoon tightly.

"I handled it,"

Mevika reassured her with a smile.

"When the staff arrived, he quickly said he’d pay for everything. But I didn’t want to owe him anything, so I left 500 baht for my one dish, grabbed my bag, and excused myself. I told him I had another appointment in the evening. Then I went straight to see you. The traffic was a bit heavy, so I arrived late. I wanted to tell you right away, but I was more worried about you at the time."

"Even though you had just gone through that?"

Aiwarin set down her spoon and reached for Mevika’s hand on the table.

"Thank you. Next time, if anything seems even slightly off—or if he tries anything again—you have to tell me, okay? I’m worried about you. He won’t stop bothering you until…"

"....."

"Eventually, he’ll have to realize he can’t win. But until then, you need to shake him off completely. Just ignore him—it’ll be even better that way. And since the bidding process isn’t over yet, you might still have to run into him."

"Mm." Mevika smiled.

"I’ll be careful and take good care of myself."

"But… if I can take care of you instead?"

Aiwarin intertwined their fingers, holding Mevika’s hand tightly, as if making a promise.

Her eyes met Mevika’s with unwavering sincerity.

"I’ll take care of you."

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# Chapter 28: A Secret Plan

"Oh look..there's news about you and that guy!"

Aiwarin said while lying on the bed in the afternoon, scrolling through her phone. The two of them were relaxing together, avoiding the sun. Later in the evening, they planned to go for a walk and drive out to a seafood restaurant a little way from the hotel.

"How did someone even see us?"

Mevika looked away from her own phone, where she had been reading emails, and leaned over to see Aiwarin’s screen.

"I think he probably told someone to take pictures so it would become news,"

Aiwarin laughed.

"I’m not happy about it, but I don’t know if you’ll agree… Maybe this news will distract people from talking about us for a while."

"I don’t really want to be in the news with someone like that. But let’s just leave it for now. It’s not true anyway. One day, people will figure that out."

"You mean they’ll figure out that I’m the real one?"

"You’re impossible."

Mevika playfully tapped Aiwarin’s forehead with her fingertip before leaning against her shoulder.

"Well, you are mine,"

Aiwarin said in a straightforward tone. She wrapped her arms around Mevika’s neck and pulled her into a tight hug, holding onto her possessively.

"Oh, right. Besides this news, I’ve noticed that people have started sharing stories about how Siam Arena hasn’t been managing their concession areas properly. Remember when I told you they’d get criticized for this? Now, we don’t even need to push the news—social media is doing the work for us."

"As expected from you,"

Mevika praised her. She had always admired Aiwarin’s sharp instincts since they first met.

"Your predictions are always spot on."

"It's not that hard. We just have to make predictions. Having a lot of information is a good thing—it helps us think and make decisions more easily. Is there anything else you want to know about the bidding process? Maybe I can help answer it."

"You make it sound like we’re not even competing against each other." "Well," Aiwarin laughed.

"Some things can be shared. I already told you—I don’t want to have an unfair advantage. I want a fair competition."

"But I also have something that gives me an advantage over you,"

Mevika smirked. "And I can’t use it to help you either."

"Hmph." Aiwarin pouted.

"So, have you finalized your bid yet?"

She asked calmly.

"I think so. On Monday, I have to go back for a full review meeting, just like a real presentation, to see if anything needs to be added."

"Twenty billion might be too low, don’t you think?"

Aiwarin casually threw out a number.

"Hmm? Is that the number you estimated too? Of course, it’s too low. Ah— but I just remembered, we probably shouldn’t discuss numbers too much."

Mevika quickly stopped herself from commenting further.

"Yeah, you're right."

Aiwarin chuckled softly before mumbling to herself,

"Maybe I should set it at thirty billion instead."

"Wouldn’t that be too high?"

Mevika blurted out her opinion before she could stop herself.

"Too high?"

Aiwarin repeated, then grinned.

"Oh, I was exaggerating. The price will probably jump anyway."

She lowered her voice, then quickly changed the subject.

"Ugh... Afternoons like this make me so sleepy."

She loosened her arms around Mevika, who shifted to lean against the headboard. Aiwarin lay down with her head on a pillow, quietly scrolling through her phone.

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For a while, they were both lost in their own worlds, busy with their phones. Since this last-minute trip didn't give them time to bring much tech equipment, Aiwarin had left her iPad in the car.

That meant all they had for work was their phones—just enough to handle basic tasks. Anything that required serious brainpower was left behind in Bangkok, waiting for them to deal with it tomorrow.

After about fifteen minutes of silence, it turned out that Mevika was the one who got sleepy instead. She shifted down onto the pillow, trying to fight off her drowsiness as she continued looking at work files on her phone. But eventually, she dozed off, letting her phone slip from her hand.

Aiwarin glanced at her and smiled when she saw the phone still in her hand, its screen left on. She intended to take it and set it aside properly so Mevika could sleep comfortably. But as she reached for it, her eyes caught sight of the spreadsheet left open on the screen.

Curious, she leaned in closer and carefully pulled the phone from Mevika’s hand, making sure not to wake her. She checked to see if Mevika was deeply asleep, then secretly scrolled through the file.

The spreadsheet contained well-analyzed numbers arranged neatly in tables, but there wasn’t a final summarized figure on that page. It was probably on another tab. She didn’t scroll far enough to see everything, but the information she did glimpse was important.

Even without the final number, this was valuable enough for now.

Aiwarin quietly locked the phone screen and placed it beside Mevika’s pillow. As she lay back down on her own pillow, Mevika stirred, rubbing her eyes sleepily before blinking up at her, realizing she had dozed off.

Seeing Aiwarin watching her, Mevika scooted closer, snuggling up to her with a soft, affectionate murmur. "Mmm... So sleepy. Hug me."

Aiwarin shifted slightly to make it easier for Mevika to cuddle against her. She wrapped her arms around Mevika, a happy smile forming on her lips at the rare moment of affection. This—this was what she wanted from Mevika, and now she had it. She gently stroked the soft hair in her arms and whispered,

"Be this sweet to me more often, okay?"

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The car moved smoothly along the open road, with only a few vehicles traveling in the same lane at a comfortable distance. The drive was relaxed, accompanied by soft international music playing in the background. From time to time, their conversation filled the quiet moments. "Do you think anyone will recognize us here in Pattaya?"

Aiwarin suddenly asked, bringing up the topic.

"I haven't thought about that at all. Being able to do what I want... I completely forgot about those worries,"

Mevika said with a smile.

"If you forget your worries when you do what you want, that means you're happy,"

Aiwarin glanced at her and smiled.

"Fine, I'll admit it. Yes, I'm happy. Just the two of us on this trip—I feel relaxed."

"I'm glad I finally got to do what I wanted with you. Thanks again for coming with me."

"Let's come again sometime,"

Mevika said this time, inviting Aiwarin directly. She seemed to have stopped resisting the idea.

"Hmm, let's come again,"

Aiwarin agreed, feeling happy to hear that.

"But what if someone writes about us? Are you worried?"

"I'm fine with it—definitely better than being in the news with that Rachen guy. But I’d rather it be after the bidding is over."

"If anyone writes about us, I won’t deny it. I’ll admit it openly."

"You don’t think they'll twist it into some kind of scandal? Ugh… That’d be scary,"

Mevika squinted, imagining the headlines.

"Something like… 'A five-star businesswoman secretly dining with the heir of a famous department store!'"

"What?!" Aiwarin burst out laughing.

"A five-star businesswoman? You mean from a hotel, right?"

"Well, it's a subtle hint. Just calling you a businesswoman is too vague, but if they say five-star…"

"You don’t mean five-star as in looks, do you?"

"Actually, I do,"

Mevika teased, leaning in to glance at Aiwarin as she drove.

"You're complimenting me openly now?"

"Hmm,"

Mevika stretched the sound, pretending to think before chuckling.

"I've been thinking it for a long time."

"Really?"

Aiwarin laughed and reached out her hand toward Mevika.

Mevika took it without hesitation. Aiwarin squeezed her fingers gently. She was thinking about everything waiting for her when they got back, but right now, she didn’t want to talk about any of it. She just wanted Mevika to be her support, even without words.

Aiwarin knew that Mevika had a lot to carry when she returned— responsibilities, expectations, and challenges. But before they parted, she wanted to give her even just a little encouragement.

"This coming week, both of us are going to be really busy. We might not see each other much,"

Aiwarin said.

"So, keep going, okay? You have to win against Great & Grow. Before everything wraps up, make the best decisions you can."

"Hmm."

Mevika nodded before flashing a smile. "And what if I want to beat Orianna too?"

"Then..." Aiwarin chuckled softly.

"Go ahead. Beat me. Beat Orianna. Take first place."

"Of course! Superior is definitely going to win against Orianna!"

Mevika declared loudly, her voice filling the car.

Aiwarin smiled but turned her gaze back to the road as a thought crept into her mind. She let out a quiet sigh and stole a glance at Mevika. A faint smile still lingered on her face, and she stared out the windshield, filled with hope.

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When they arrived, Mevika stepped out of Aiwarin’s car, carrying a fabric tote bag she had bought from a beachside shop. She hadn't brought any extra clothes, but since she had picked up two new outfits, she had to take her old ones home to wash.

Her friend, who had been waiting for her, immediately grabbed the bag to help.

Mevika waved at Aiwarin with a big, toothy smile, looking as if she were trying to build goodwill. Once Aiwarin’s car drove away, she turned to her friend with a sharp look.

"Before you go get your car, you have to talk to me first."

She quickly slung the tote bag over her shoulder, then grabbed both of her friend's arms, pulling her close.

"What is going on? You and Aiwarin—aren't you supposed to be business rivals for the auction?"

She paused, struggling to find the right words, before blurting out,

"Are you... secretly have a relationship with her? The woman you stayed over with—it's her, isn't it? And now, you've even gone on an overnight trip to the beach together?"

"Oh, come on."

Mevika sighed and gave a dry smile.

"You've already asked and answered everything yourself. What else is there for me to say?"

"No way! You have to answer. Answer so we can be clear. Are you dating her? Are you two a couple?"

"Wait! I already told you, not yet. We're just... umm, how should I say it? Seeing each other?"

"Seeing each other? Like, sleeping together too?"

Nattarin let go of her friend’s arm and covered her mouth with both hands.

"Oh my—!"

"See? You answered it all by yourself. Why are you even asking me?"

"You slept with her? With Aiwarin, the famous and gorgeous businesswoman? Hey, I know her because of you! A long time ago, you talked about her. You said she was your idol, right? You admired how smart and beautiful she was. That’s how I know about her!"

"Yeah,"

Mevika said, thinking for a moment.

"Sleeping with someone who’s your idol isn’t wrong, right? She likes me, after all."

"Are you seriously admitting it just like that?"

Nattarin covered her mouth with one hand.

"You used to admire her, and now you..."

"Enough, enough! What are you even saying?"

Mevika laughed, teasing her friend.

"I just admire her for being smart and a great role model for modern women, that’s all. As for why we got involved, well, there were a lot of reasons that brought us together. We keep our business rivalry separate from our personal relationship. But no one knows about this yet. I’m telling you because we’re close, so don’t go spreading it around until the bidding process is over."

"And then what?"

Nattarin’s eyes widened with curiosity.

"Oh,"

Mevika dragged out the word, thinking of how to phrase it.

"Well… we’ll decide then what we are to each other."

"So this isn’t just a casual thing anymore, is it?"

Nattarin bit her lip, shaking her head slowly with a look of concern.

"I told you from the start, if this relationship is real, I’ll support you. I really hope it works out because you’ve never given your heart away this easily before."

"Mm, thanks. Yeah, you’re right. I’ve never let myself feel this way so easily before. But for someone like me, this time… it just feels a lot easier than ever."

Mevika smiled.

Mevika stepped forward and hugged her friend tightly.

"Thank you so much for supporting me. I'm really hoping that this decision will be the right one for me."

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Monday mornings at work are something many people wish they could avoid. Most employees start their week feeling unprepared and would rather go back home to sleep. But for Aiwarin, she had never felt that way. Work was a fun and essential part of her life.

However, this morning felt different. After waking up next to someone for four days in a row, today was the first morning she woke up alone in her hotel room. She found herself zoning out a little.

And there was something else on her mind—something making this morning feel uneasy. Still, she couldn’t afford to let it slow her down. This week was far too important.

Aiwarin stepped into the elevator inside the Orianna First office building. She stood next to an employee who recognized her. Since she often spoke casually with staff, many people saw her as approachable, even if she carried an air of authority. The woman quickly turned to her and greeted her politely.

"Good morning, Ms. Ai. Going up to the fifteenth floor?"

"Good morning. Yes, I am. Thank you."

"Alright."

The elevator doors were about to close when someone pressed the button to reopen them. The person who stepped in was Athiwit, who had probably just arrived at work as well. "Oh, same timing as always,"

Athiwit remarked casually.

The female employee quickly gave him a respectful wai and then pressed the button for the sixteenth floor, knowing her role well. She then stepped forward to stand by the control panel, giving the father and daughter space to talk.

But instead of a conversation, they each spoke separate sentences.

"It’s just part of my usual routine,"

Aiwarin replied in a neutral tone, making sure the employee wouldn’t pick up on any tension between her and her father.

Athiwit simply smiled in response, saying nothing more. A long silence filled the elevator until it reached the twelfth floor, where the employee stepped out, leaving just the two of them alone.

Now, they had a brief moment to talk before the elevator reached the fifteenth floor.

"Looks like you haven’t been back to the hotel for two nights. Were you with that woman? Is everything going well?"

Athiwit smiled.

"Of course,"

Aiwarin replied firmly, irritated that her father seemed to be supporting her relationship with Mevika. But she knew it wasn’t genuine support—it was just a convenient acknowledgment, nothing more. "Then you should understand what you need to do,"

Her father continued.

"That’s all I want to remind you. No matter what else is on your mind, when it comes to work, you’ve always been great. This time, you just need to be even better. The only difference is that now, we have to be smarter. Don’t think of it as doing something wrong—we just need to be quicker than everyone else."

"If you’re trusting me to handle this, then let me make my own decisions— no matter the outcome,"

Aiwarin said, looking at her father seriously just as the elevator doors opened. They had reached her office floor, while his was on the next.

As she walked past her secretary’s desk, the woman greeted her and immediately reported on her scheduled appointment.

"Good morning, Ms. Ai. Mr. Non has arrived and is on his way up."

"He’s early. Let him in as soon as he gets here."

"Understood."

Aiwarin pushed open the door to her office. She set down her bag, turned on her computer, and sat in her chair. While waiting for the system to boot up, she checked her phone. It wasn’t long before there was a knock on the door, and someone stepped inside.

"Good morning,"

She greeted her guest.

This wasn’t their first time working together—she had hired him for several tasks before. But today, he was about to take on something more urgent.

"I need your help again, gathering information like before, but this time, you’ll have to be extra careful."

"Understood, Ms. Ai,"

Non said as he stepped up to her desk, ready to receive his instructions.

"You remember how we discussed having a trusted contact inside Great & Grow’s bidding team? I’ve heard whispers that they’re negotiating something with one of the senior committee members..."

"Find out what Greater is up to for me."

"Do you need specific numbers as well?"

"No, not for Great & Grow. I want to beat them with my own capabilities and decisions, not by copying their answers. But since they’re using connections to gain an advantage over us, we just need to stay ahead of them. That’s all I need."

"Understood. If that’s all, I’ll investigate as quickly as possible."

"We have to close this deal by the end of the week. I need the information within two days."

"Got it. I’ll handle it within two days."

"Thank you. Oh, and this stays between you and me. Don’t tell anyone at Orianna—not even my secretary or my father. Report directly to me only. I don’t want anyone’s opinions, just the information so I can decide for myself."

"Understood. I’ll do exactly as you asked."

"Good. That’s all. You’ll need to move quickly."

"Of course. I’ll take my leave now."

The man, in his mid-thirties, gave Aiwarin a slight bow before swiftly exiting her office, moving with urgency as if he had already started working on the task the moment she gave the order.

Aiwarin rested her elbow on the desk, pressing her fingertips to her temple as she stared at the closed door. She let herself sink into her thoughts before exhaling softly and whispering to herself:

"I can’t let anyone else win this bid."

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# Chapter 29: Keeping a Secret

The large office door closed as Mevika stepped inside. She saw her father pouring tea into a cup on his desk, so she walked over and sat on the guest sofa, waiting. He glanced at her and frowned slightly when he saw her sitting quietly without saying anything.

“Feeling stressed already? It’s only Monday,”

Nuttakorn asked as he picked up his tea and walked over to sit on the sofa across from his daughter.

“Well…”

Mevika hesitated. She felt a little nervous since her father had called her in after she hadn’t been home for four nights.

“Not too stressed… maybe just a bit tense from a busy week.”

“I see. I thought taking a trip would help you relax. Didn’t expect you to go on vacation during such an important time. But if you needed a break, I understand. You prepared a lot of information already.”

“Just need to review everything internally and finalize the numbers one more time.”

“So, who did you go with? You said you went to the beach with friends. Was it Nanny?”

“Uh… yes.”

Since she had been using that friend’s name as an excuse, she had to stick with it. She was confident she could answer if her father asked more questions.

But he never really pressed her—she was just afraid he might start getting suspicious since she had been going out a lot and avoiding home lately.

“Hmm… was there anyone else?”

He raised an eyebrow.

“I get the feeling you might have… someone you’re seeing?”

He shrugged.

“A boyfriend, maybe?”

“Uh—”

Mevika was startled. Did he really suspect something?

“Why do you think I have a boyfriend?”

“Well, when people are in a relationship, they usually want to spend a lot of time together. I get that. But I just want you to tell me if you’re dating someone. I know I used to be strict, but—”

"....."

“I do want you to find someone, but I just realized—you’re already 27. It’s about time you had someone in your life. I just want to be sure you meet a good person,”

Her father said.

“Well…”

Hearing his last sentence, Mevika suddenly had the urge to blurt out,

**“What if that person is good… but not a man?”**

“Hm? Not a man?”

“Uh—”

She quickly gathered her thoughts, realizing what she had just said. She wasn’t ready to confess yet, especially not before the bidding process was over.

“I was just saying hypothetically! Since you said you just want someone good, I was just making up a scenario. Nothing serious.”

“A hypothetical, huh?”

Nuttakorn thought for a moment.

“Well, I guess the word ‘*good person*’ can be tricky these days. People often claim to be good while hiding their true intentions. But what I mean is simple—I want someone who is sincere to you, who understands you, who isn’t a player, and who won’t hurt or disappoint you. I don’t want you to end up with someone selfish, someone who’s only with you for their own gain… or just because you’re beautiful.”

“I understand. I have to admit, people often approach me because of my looks. It’s usually the first thing that attracts them, which is normal. But that alone isn’t enough. There are many other reasons that make me accept someone—like when I realize they care about me more than I expected and genuinely take good care of me.”

“You’re talking like you’ve already met someone like that,”

Her father said, narrowing his eyes slightly.

“Are you?”

“Let’s just say… I’ve found the kind of person I want to meet.”

Mevika smiled.

“The kind of person you want to meet? Well, that sounds exactly like the kind of person I want you to meet, too,”

Nuttakorn chuckled.

“If that’s the case, then bring them to meet me. If they really are that person, I’ll have to accept them. I just need to see for myself.” “I do want to introduce them to you… when the time is right,”

She replied.

It was both a feeling of relief and worry at the same time. She truly felt she had found someone like that. But there was just one problem—who that person was.

If she wasn't Superior's rival, things would be easier. And she could only hope that when the time came, her father would accept the fact that the person she wanted to be with… was also a woman.

“Good.”

Nuttakorn took a sip of his tea and set the cup down.

“Oh, speaking of which… Jirana already told me about you meeting that Rachen guy. So, he really tricked you into having dinner with him? And now you have to be in the news with him too?”

“Oh, yes. He did that. But I managed to get away from him. He’s really not someone to be trusted.”

“He’s untrustworthy in both the bidding process and personal matters. It’s good to keep your distance. If anything else suspicious happens, let me know. We probably can’t take legal action since he approached you as a customer, but if it happens again, we’ll have to talk.”

“I’ll be very careful. But… I think if I just ignore him, he might lose interest in me eventually.”

She remembered what Aiwarin had told her and hoped that was the case. But if he didn’t stop bothering her, she might have to use the same method Aiwarin had used.

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Thursday arrived quickly. Not seeing a certain someone for four days made time feel slow, but with work piling up and deadlines approaching, the days seemed to pass in a blur.

Aiwarin was right—this week, she and Mevika barely had time to see each other, and that’s exactly how things turned out.

The upcoming Monday was the deadline for submitting the bidding documents. Three days after that, the technical proposals would be opened.

Then, on the following Monday, the financial proposals would be revealed, along with the announcement of the highest-scoring bid. Everything was happening in a short timeframe, meaning there wouldn’t be much room for changes or new decisions.

Two days ago, Aiwarin had uncovered new information—Rachen, under Great & Grow’s name, was secretly pulling strings to win the bid. She had also found out exactly who he was using his connections to influence.

That person was Phuwadol, one of the selection committee members for the Greater Duty-Free concession bid. He was the last member appointed to the committee and had ties to Chainarong, the former minister who had just resigned from the ruling party to form a new political party for the upcoming elections.

“If we don’t get first place, we might still have a chance at second,”

Her advisor commented. He was already aware that Rachen had been using his connections—this had been discussed in a previous meeting. However, he didn’t know that Aiwarin had sent someone to investigate and uncover names.

Today, only a small group had been called into Aiwarin’s office to discuss the matter, and the debate quickly heated up.

“Second place isn’t an option. And losing first place is even worse,” Aiwarin sighed.

“But can a single person’s vote really have that much influence?”

“If he’s persuasive enough.”

“They’ll definitely use their experience in logistics and distribution as their main selling point. And I’m sure they’ll present an overly ambitious business plan. But when it comes to real expertise and experience, we have the upper hand. What concerns me is the financial proposal. No matter how much we try to predict their numbers… it doesn’t matter. We have to secure the technical advantage first. As for the financial aspect—”

She paused, lost in thought.

“Alright, that’s enough discussion for today. Tomorrow, we’ll go through the final document check before submitting on Monday. Make sure all the paperwork is thoroughly reviewed.”

Her team acknowledged the instructions and left the room. Once Aiwarin was alone in her office again, she picked up her phone and checked a message that had been sitting there for a while.

She had sent a simple text earlier:

***“I miss you.”***

And now, there was a reply.

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**MAPLE: I miss you too.**

**We’ll see each other again soon, right?**

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Seeing those words made her smile. Not only had she been missed, but the message also hinted that the other person was looking forward to seeing her as well. Without hesitation, she quickly typed a reply.

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**Ai: Are you really busy? I really want to see you. Are you free for an hour tonight?**

**MAPLE: Tonight…? My team wants to go out for drinks. They invited me along.**

**MAPLE: We’ve all been working hard lately, so they just want to grab dinner and have a few light drinks. I thought I’d treat them a little.**

**Ai: Drinks on a Thursday night?**

**Ai: Where are you going? I’d love to stop by and see you. No one has to see me.**

**MAPLE: I don’t want anyone to see… but I also really want to see you.**

**Ugh…**

**MAPLE: Are you really coming? I’ll send you the location. I’ll find a moment to sneak out and see you.**

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Aiwarin smiled when she saw that Mevika had agreed. A moment later, a message popped up with the name of the restaurant and a location link. She quickly typed her reply.

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**Ai: That’s great. I’ll head over soon.**

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The sound of live music filled the air as Aiwarin parked her car outside the bar. It was almost 10 p.m., and Mevika had just messaged her, saying that her team was still drinking and would probably head home by midnight since they had work in the morning.

Sitting in her car, Aiwarin waited after making a call to say she had arrived. A few moments later, the person she had been longing to see finally managed to slip away from her colleagues.

"Someone missed me so much that she had to drive all the way here,"

Mevika teased as she got into the car.

"And didn’t someone else miss me too? Otherwise, why would she agree to meet me at a place full of her own employees?"

Aiwarin reached out and gently pinched Mevika’s cheeks before pulling her into a hug and giving her a light kiss on the lips.

"Mmm."

Mevika smiled, feeling like the kiss wasn’t enough. She leaned in and kissed Aiwarin again, and when Aiwarin kissed her back, it turned into a deep, lingering kiss.

Four days apart had built up their longing for each other, and this moment was a way to make up for the time they had missed—and possibly for the days ahead when they wouldn’t be able to see each other until Monday. They took their time before finally pulling away.

"I missed you so much,"

Mevika whispered.

"Hmm?" Aiwarin smiled.

"That was so sweet. You’re finally letting yourself be affectionate with me. Do you know how cute that is?"

"Really?"

Mevika grinned, hoping she’d be seen as even cuter.

"Good."

Aiwarin was completely charmed, but something else crept into her mind, causing her expression to shift.

"What’s wrong?"

Mevika noticed immediately. The soft, happy look on Aiwarin’s face had turned into something more serious.

"It’s nothing,"

Aiwarin quickly shook her head.

"Why do you think something’s wrong?"

"I don’t know… You just don’t seem as relaxed. Or are you still stressed about your dad?"

"No, not really. There are just some things on my mind. And maybe I’ve been too buried in work lately."

"Ah, then make sure to get some rest, okay?"

Mevika reached out and gently stroked Aiwarin’s head, hoping to bring her some comfort.

"You’re really adorable,"

Aiwarin said, her previous stress vanishing in an instant. She tried to smile, feeling warmth from Mevika’s gentle care. Maybe that was why she had been so distracted earlier.

"Alright, I think I can only borrow you for this long. If you stay out too long, won’t someone come looking for you?"

"It hasn’t been too long yet, but some of my team might start heading home soon. I should get back inside since I don’t plan to stay much longer either."

"Hmm, go on then."

Aiwarin glanced outside the car and saw a small group of drunken men stumbling out of the bar.

"Ah… there’s a bunch of drunk guys walking around. Let me walk you in."

"You want to walk me in?"

"It’s fine. I need to stop by the restroom anyway. No one’s going to recognize me by chance, right?"

"Who knows?" Mevika chuckled.

"Probably not. We won’t have to keep this a secret for much longer anyway."

"That’s true."

Aiwarin nodded as she opened the car door.

"Let’s go."

She walked around the car and wrapped an arm around Mevika, guiding her past the group of drunken men and into the bar.

They reached a narrow walkway leading toward the back tables, where a turn in the path led to the restrooms. Mevika stopped and turned to Aiwarin. "You can leave me here. See you on Monday."

She glanced around to make sure no one was watching before leaning in to plant a quick kiss on Aiwarin’s cheek, then stepped back with a sweet smile.

"Miss me a lot, okay?"

"Hmm."

Aiwarin blushed. After all the kisses they had shared, a simple peck on the cheek still managed to fluster her.

"K-Khun Maple!"

A startled voice made both Mevika and Aiwarin freeze. Their eyes widened in shock as they turned toward the source of the voice.

"P'Ji..."

Mevika gasped, blurting out her secretary’s name. She had no idea when Jiranaa had arrived or how much she had seen.

"W-When did you get here?"

"Uh… I got here when…"

Jiranaa waved her hands uncertainly, looking flustered.

"When you…"

She twirled her finger in the air, struggling for words.

"When you just did… whatever that was."

She was clearly still in shock after walking in at the exact moment her boss had pulled in another woman for a kiss on the cheek. And now that she saw the other woman’s face clearly, her shock only grew.

"What is this…?"

"P'Ji!"

Mevika quickly stepped forward, grabbing Jiranaa’s wrist.

"Were you coming to the restroom?"

"I was looking for you, Khun Maple! We thought you might be leaving and wanted to know if we should handle the bill. Then I found…"

"Okay, come with me first."

Mevika immediately pulled Jiranaa along, also grabbing Aiwarin’s hand and dragging her with them. They walked until they reached a small photo spot with seating, where Mevika urged Jiranaa to sit down while Aiwarin stood nearby, waiting with an unreadable expression.

Mevika needed to say something before Jiranaa's thoughts ran too far.

"So… when exactly did you get here?"

"Right when you kissed her."

"Okay!"

Mevika cut her off immediately as Jiranaa started pointing at Aiwarin.

"You’re Aiwarin, right?"

Jiranaa asked, glancing at the woman standing before her, arms crossed with a slightly bemused look.

"Yes, that’s me," Aiwarin confirmed. "You’re Maple’s secretary—I remember you."

"I remember you too," Jiranaa replied.

"Okay, so we all recognize each other,"

Mevika interrupted, raising her hands like a referee calling a time-out.

"P'Ji, please don’t tell anyone. About Khun Ai, or what you saw just now— please keep it a secret, okay?"

"Keeping it a secret isn’t hard, but… which part am I keeping secret?"

"You mean…?"

"Your secretary is asking whether she’s supposed to keep secret the fact that we’re close despite being business rivals… or whether she’s wondering what kind of relationship we actually have,"

Aiwarin answered for her.

"Yes, yes! Exactly that!"

Jiranaa forced a nervous smile.

"I was just wondering how you two got so close. And… what exactly is the relationship between you and Khun Aiwarin, Khun Maple?"

"Well, we’re very close. Like, um… really close, I guess?"

Mevika laughed awkwardly.

"Uh, how should I put this—"

"Maybe we can explain more later?"

Aiwarin suggested.

"Whatever it is, for now, we just need you to keep it a secret. Can you do that, Khun Ji?"

She hesitated slightly over the name, having picked it up from how Mevika addressed her earlier.

"It’s Jiranaa," the secretary corrected.

"Oh, got it—Jiranaa."

Aiwarin tested the pronunciation before smiling.

"Can I call you Gina instead?"

"Oh?" Jiranaa laughed.

"Wow, an international nickname? Gina, huh? Sure, if you’d like!"

"Alright then, Khun Gina, please keep this between us for now," Aiwarin said.

"It won’t be a secret for much longer, so don’t worry. But during the bidding period, we still need to keep it under wraps."

"You make it sound like you’ll go public right after the bidding ends,"

Jiranaa blurted out, then immediately clapped a hand over her mouth.

"Uh—"

"Whether you take it that way is up to you, P'Ji,"

Mevika said, now serious.

"Just keep it quiet for now. All you need to know is that Khun Ai and I are business rivals—but we’re also friends. That’s all, okay?"

"Oh, I see. But I do know that you and Khun Aiwarin are ‘*friends*’ to the extent of kissing cheeks and telling each other to think about one another,"

Jiranaa teased, grinning.

"But don’t worry, I’ll keep that to myself too."

"P'Ji!"

Mevika gasped, caught off guard by her secretary’s bluntness.

"Okay, okay, I won’t say anything more,"

Jiranaa said with a chuckle.

"It’s just… I’ve worked with you for years, and I’ve never seen this side of you before. It’s kinda cute, honestly. Anyway, I’ll head back to the table now and make sure no one notices I’ve just witnessed something… interesting."

With that, she got up and walked off, leaving Mevika and Aiwarin exchanging looks—one embarrassed, the other amused.

"Your secretary is pretty funny,"

Aiwarin chuckled.

"I feel like treating P'Gina to a drink."

"Treat me to a drink?"

Jiranaa raised an eyebrow.

"No way,"

Mevika quickly stood up and gave Aiwarin a light shove on the shoulder.

"You should head back now. P'Ji and I will go back to the table. If we both disappear for too long, the others will start getting suspicious."

"Alright, alright, I’ll go,"

Aiwarin relented.

"But don’t stay out too late. Get home safe, okay? And message me when you get there."

"Hmm, I’ll text you,"

Mevika responded with a sweet smile.

Their conversation unfolded right in front of Jiranaa, who sat watching the two with narrowed eyes. The way they talked, exchanged smiles, and lingered a little too long—it was impossible for her not to see it. So, she couldn’t help but comment.

"Oh my god...."

She said, bringing a hand up to cover her mouth playfully.

"At first, I thought maybe I was just imagining things… but now, I don’t think so anymore."

That one remark made both Mevika and Aiwarin immediately snap out of their moment, quickly putting some distance between them.

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# Chapter 30: Leaked Information

"Just do it the way I told you."

Aiwarin was sitting in her car, talking on the phone. After parting ways with Mevika and walking back to her car, she got a call from the hotel manager in another province. They needed advice on some urgent problems, so she had been sitting in the car for half an hour already.

She could have driven off, but she chose to stay and finish the call first— probably because Mevika was still here. She didn’t feel like leaving just yet.

"Try it first. Whether it works or not, call me again tomorrow,"

She said while glancing up. That was when she saw Mevika walking out of the bar. She instinctively wanted to jump out of the car and go to her, but then she noticed Mevika was with two female employees. So, she stayed in her car quietly.

"I'm planning to fly there soon as well, but I have to wait until the auction is over. Once I have a suitable schedule, I'll let you know."

As she spoke on the phone, she kept watching Mevika. It looked like Mevika was heading toward a car parked on the inner side of the lot. She must have thought Aiwarin had already left since she didn’t glance in her direction.

When the two employees got in the car with her, Aiwarin assumed Mevika had offered to give them a ride somewhere. Either way, it wasn’t convenient for her to go over now, so she let it go.

A while later, she saw Mevika’s car drive past just as she was about to hang up the call.

"Alright, no problem. If it’s really urgent, you can call me, or just send a message. I’ll call back when I can. Okay, goodbye."

After finishing the call, she waited for the other person to hang up first. Then she checked the time on her phone—10:30 PM. It wasn’t too late for someone like her, who often stayed at the bar until late at night.

But by the time she drove back to the hotel, took a shower, and got some rest, it would probably be past midnight.

She figured it was time to head back, so she grabbed her car keys and was about to start the engine when…

Aiwarin’s eyes shifted, noticing someone walking out of the bar. Even though she had only met this person once, she immediately recognized her —it was Jiranaa, Mevika’s secretary.

Jirana looked a little disheveled, and from the way she swayed, it was clear she was already drunk. She must have stayed to drink for another half hour after Aiwarin last saw her.

Considering she had already had quite a bit before that, the alcohol had probably taken full effect by now.

Watching her, Aiwarin wondered how Jirana was planning to get home. She saw her looking around, as if searching for a car, but her steps were unsteady. Without hesitation, Aiwarin opened her car door and walked over.

"P'Jiranaa,"

She called out quickly, hoping no one else Jirana knew would come out of the bar right now.

"Oh! I was wondering who that was,"

Jiranaa slurred, her voice clearly affected by the alcohol.

"Hmm… You’re Ai—uh, Aiwarin. Such a pretty name!"

"It’s kind of like your name too, Gina."

"Gina? Oh wow, what a creative name!"

She seemed to have forgotten that Aiwarin had been the one to give her that nickname just half an hour ago.

"Yeah… So, how are you getting home? Why are you standing here alone?"

"Uhh… I called a car, but I have no idea where it is now."

Jiranaa looked down at her phone, gripping it tightly as if afraid it might slip from her hands.

"Huh? What’s this?"

She squinted at the screen as a notification popped up.

"Canceled?"

"Oh, looks like your ride got canceled,"

Aiwarin said, glancing at the screen to check.

"What should we do? Call another one, or—"

She paused to think.

"Where do you live, Gina?"

"Not far… Just in a street near Sena Nikhom Station."

"Sena Nikhom? That’s not too far!" Aiwarin decided quickly.

"Alright, I’ll drive you home."

"Huh? You’re gonna take me?"

Jiranaa, now drunk, had dropped the formal way she spoke earlier.

"Yes, it’s close by. It’s no trouble at all. And you’re really drunk—you shouldn’t go alone. Let me take you home."

"You're so kind! We just met, you know,"

Jiranaa said playfully, waving her hand dismissively.

"Hmm… I should pretend I don’t know anything… don’t know… what again?"

"Yes, just pretend you don’t know,"

Aiwarin replied with a small laugh.

"Come on, let’s get in the car. This way."

She gently took Jiranaa’s arm, helping her walk steadily toward the car. Once inside, Aiwarin made sure Jiranaa was settled, closed the door for her, and started driving. Since their time in the car wouldn’t be long, she decided to start a conversation—if Jiranaa was sober enough to talk.

"Have you been working with Maple for a long time, Gina?"

"Working? Hmm… One year,"

Jeerana answered, her speech slightly slurred but still understandable.

"After Maple graduated, she took a big position in business development."

"Oh, but you two seem really close,"

Aiwarin said with a chuckle.

"Must be super busy with the auction these days." "The auction? Not really anymore. It’s already done,"

Jiranaa laughed.

"That’s why we celebrated today."

"The deal is closed already?"

Aiwarin was surprised to hear this. No wonder Mevika had taken her employees out for drinks. She had finished her work earlier than expected —even faster than some seasoned professionals.

Or maybe Aiwarin was just overthinking things. Was she taking this too seriously for some reason? Trying to buy time until the final bidding day?

"Superior must have made a really strong offer," Aiwarin said casually, laughing.

"Twenty billion might be too little for them."

As she mentioned this, a nagging thought crossed her mind. It wasn’t a good feeling, but there was something compelling about it. If she could use this moment to her advantage…

Mevika’s secretary was right here with her—drunk. Jiranaa could still answer questions, but she didn’t seem to have the awareness to filter her responses. This could be an opportunity.

"Twenty billion? That’s too low!"

Jiranaa waved her hand dramatically, as only a drunk person would.

**"Twenty-five billion! Superior can do it. Superior *will* win!"**

She gave a big thumbs-up before clapping her hands three times enthusiastically.

"Twenty-five billion?"

Aiwarin was surprised to hear Jiranaa slip up and reveal that number. This was exactly what she wanted.

"That’s a good number,"

She said casually as the car stopped at a red light. She turned to Jiranaa with a grateful smile, though Jiranaa was too drunk to notice its true meaning.

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As the auction day approached, discussions on social media became even more intense. The project was about developing a massive duty-free shopping mall in Thailand, which attracted a lot of public interest. Conversations about it had been ongoing, much like political debates.

Right now, the hottest news was about the questionable qualifications of *Siam Arena*. Someone had posted photos of a venue that *Siam Arena* had managed under a long-term concession.

Instead of maintaining it properly, they had let it deteriorate over the years. Complaints about poor event management had also surfaced. This issue was bound to hurt *Siam Arena*'s credibility and bidding score. Analysts no longer saw them as a strong contender.

Instead, attention shifted to the remaining bidders—whether a monopoly would form or if a new player would emerge as the winner.

Aside from the auction, another unexpected topic had caught people's attention—Aiwarin’s fashion style. Many admired her work and presence, making her a role model for professional fashion. Her outfits, hair, and overall look became a trend among certain groups.

Now that Mevika had entered the competition as a rising female executive with an eye-catching image, people started watching her fashion choices too.

Eventually, some sharp-eyed followers noticed something curious—two or three of Mevika’s work outfits looked strikingly similar to ones Aiwarin had worn before. Photos from media events and hotel functions provided clear comparisons.

"What the heck?"

Mevika muttered, staring at the latest news. Once again, a side-by-side image of her and Aiwarin had surfaced.

Ever since their handshake at the event, people had been watching them closely. That attention had faded for a while, especially after the rumors about Rachen and her took over. But now, here they were—back in the headlines together.

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"You’re in the news with Aiwarin now,"

Jiranaa told Mevika as she entered the office, still feeling a bit lightheaded from last night’s drinks. She wasn’t fully awake yet, and something was nagging at her.

"I know… Good thing you found out first, so I have someone to talk to. Otherwise, I wouldn’t know who to discuss this with,"

Mevika sighed.

"Yeah, I just found out too,"

Jiranaa chuckled dryly.

"So… is this good or bad? I mean, how did you end up wearing the same outfits as Aiwarin?"

"Uh…"

Mevika raised a hand to scratch her forehead, partially covering her face.

"It wasn’t an accident."

"Don’t tell me… those are actually Aiwarin’s clothes?"

"You could say that,"

Mevika admitted with an awkward smile.

"Ohhh,"

Jiranaa let out a knowing laugh.

"By the way, Aiwarin… she’s a nice person, right? I mean, she’s a good rival, isn’t she?"

"Of course! She’s really wonderful—there’s nothing bad I can say about her."

Mevika smiled. Saying it out loud to someone else felt good. It was only the second time she had spoken about Aiwarin like this, the first being to her close friend who had just found out as well.

"Oh, that’s nice. So… what exactly *is* your relationship?"

Jiranaa asked, hesitating a little.

"It’s nothing like that!"

Mevika quickly corrected.

"We’re just really close."

She smiled, but her words weren’t entirely convincing.

"Close enough to borrow work clothes from each other? And not just once? Sounds more like when you stay over at your *partner’s* place and borrow their clothes."

"What partner?!"

Mevika laughed, blushing slightly.

"Don’t jump to conclusions! Just… keep it a secret for now, okay?"

"Got it. But… doesn’t she see you as a competitor? I mean, you *are* competing. Shouldn’t you both be trying to win? Did you two make some kind of deal or something? You’re close, but you still trust each other?"

"It’s normal to compete,"

Mevika said simply.

"We just try to keep things separate."

"Oh."

"Why?"

Mevika was a little curious because her secretary had been asking strange, repetitive questions for a while.

"P'Ji, you seem very wary of her because she's our competitor. I understand. At first, I thought the same—it seemed impossible to get along. But after getting to know her more, I see her differently now. Or do you still think she's untrustworthy?"

"Oh—uh, no, not at all!"

Jiranee waved her hands and shook her head quickly, then added jokingly,

"Well, she is a competitor, so it's normal for me to be suspicious."

She quickly changed the subject before Mevika could start questioning her behavior any further.

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The sound of high heels echoed as someone entered the meeting room. The door shut firmly behind them to ensure no outsiders could interfere with the confidential matters discussed inside.

Documents were neatly stacked on the large central table, while laptops were placed on smaller tables around it. A projector displayed data from a laptop—final financial figures that would soon be reviewed. The atmosphere was tense as everything was reaching its conclusion.

"Alright."

Aiwarin clapped her hands together and looked around at her team. Her voice was more serious than in previous meetings.

"There’s a lot of information that forces us to make decisions based on our competitors. Some use underhanded connections, while others have qualifications that might be as strong as ours—or even better. So, qualifications alone won't be enough. Returns on investment also play a big role in securing our advantage. We may not need to change much today, but there are a few key points we need to reconsider. We can’t let Great & Grow win by using unfair methods."

"And you can't let Superior win either, right?"

Someone called out and many others nodded in agreement.

“Superior?”

Aiwarin paused for a moment. She thought for a bit, then nodded slightly and answered with a smile.

The sound of knocking on the door made Mevika, who was working, look away from her computer. She saw her secretary walk in with a pale face, looking worried about something. Mevika quickly asked,

“P’Ji, what’s wrong? Why do you look like that?”

“Khun Maple, I have something I need to tell you,”

The secretary said.

“It’s my fault. I was too drunk and lost control… I made a mistake.”

“Something you need to tell me? Drunk and lost control?”

Mevika frowned. “What do you mean?”

“It’s about Khun Aiwarin.”

The secretary finally decided to confess what she had accidentally said.

“That it's…”

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# Chapter 31: No Excuses

The phone was dialed again and again—ten times now—but still, there was no sign that the person on the other end would pick up. Not even a reply to the messages sent hours ago.

The longer she couldn’t reach her, the more anxious she became, afraid that what she feared might actually be true.

By evening, she couldn’t sit still anymore. Even though it wasn’t the right time to meet, she rushed to the hotel room anyway. But when she arrived, the lights were off. It seemed like the room’s owner hadn’t returned yet.

Thinking she might still be at the bar—it was Friday night, after all—she quickly headed downstairs, making her way to the back where the bar was located. And there she was.

“Ai,”

Mevika walked up to Aiwarin, who was sitting at the bar counter.

Aiwarin was slightly stunned to see Mevika here at this hour. She already knew what was going on from the messages Mevika had sent and the multiple missed calls. She could guess why she had come.

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MAPLE: I have something to ask.

MAPLE: Do you already know Superior’s numbers? You didn’t take Superior’s secrets and give them to Orianna, did you?

MAPLE: I trust you. Read this and reply.

MAPLE: Ai, Don’t stay silent like this. You’re really making me paranoid.

MAPLE: You’re reading my messages but not replying. You’re not even picking up my calls.

MAPLE: What’s going on?

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That was the message Mevika had been sending over and over since this afternoon.

Yes, Aiwarin had read them all—but she didn’t reply. She deliberately ignored the calls too.

“What are you doing here so late?”

Aiwarin asked in a calm tone. Her face was stern, unlike the usual times when she was happy to see Mevika.

“I came to see you. I called you so many times.”

“Mm... What's wrong?”

Aiwarin asked, still looking serious.

“Did you really do it? Did you take Superior’s data?”

“Oh, no. I didn’t do anything. Your secretary let it slip on her own.”

“And you…?”

Mevika felt even more uneasy seeing Aiwarin’s indifferent expression.

“Did you trick my secretary into talking while she was drunk? Or…”

She didn’t want to think that way, but looking back, she couldn’t help it. “That time, when you tricked into asked about the numbers—whether they were high or low…” “That’s just business,”

Aiwarin said casually.

“You said it yourself—we’re competitors. To win, we just have to survive.” “What?” Mevika looked disappointed.

“I thought we could separate business from personal matters. Even if we’re competing, I thought we’d still support each other.”

“Monday is the deadline for submitting our bids. This isn’t the time for compromises or playing games. We need to take this seriously—unless you want to lose?”

“I don’t want to lose! But I thought that no matter who won or lost, we could still be good rivals. Maybe even support each other. But what you did… it makes me feel disappointed. Did you really do it, Ai? Are you competing with me using dirty tricks?”

“I already told you—it’s business.”

Aiwarin laughed.

“You should understand that.”

“Even if it ruins our relationship? What about us? Were you just fooling me this whole time?”

"I..."

Aiwarin was momentarily stunned when the topic came up.

"I didn't—"

"You tricked me. You set a trap and lured me in, just for some numbers? You have so many ways to beat me, but you chose this? Or was it because you never took me seriously in the first place, so you never cared? No matter how small the information you got was, if you really think you can beat me this way, then go ahead."

"We should talk again after the bidding is over. That way, we’ll both have clearer minds."

"Clearer minds? What do you even mean by that?"

Mevika let out a bitter laugh.

"Right now, my mind is the clearest it's ever been—because I finally see who you really are."

"Maple—"

Aiwarin reached out to grab Mevika’s arm, but Mevika yanked it away and pushed her back.

"Don't touch me. I've never been close to selfish people like you. If you think you can beat me, go ahead. I'll be watching to see if you get what you want."

Mevika’s voice dripped with sarcasm before she turned and stormed off, her face full of anger.

Aiwarin stood frozen, watching Mevika walk away. She didn’t follow. She didn’t try to explain. She told herself this was the best decision. Now was not the time to be weak.

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The small meeting room, with only six chairs, was locked shut when Mevika stepped inside. She walked to the front of the room, looking at the three employees she trusted the most—people she had called in urgently today. Then, in a serious tone, she began to speak.

"I'm sorry for disturbing your day off, but this is an emergency." "It's no problem at all, Ms. Maple. It looks like something serious,"

Ine of the female employees said.

"It's very serious. We're revising the numbers again. Even though we’ve already finalized them, we haven’t submitted them yet. So I want to make changes."

"Revising the numbers again?"

One of the sales staff, whom Mevika had called in because of the trusted exclaimed.

"Yes. We’ve run into a trust issue, so I want to adjust the numbers a bit more."

"Are we increasing the proposed benefits?"

"Something like that. I heard Orianna is submitting a bid of 27 billion, right, P'Ji?"

Mevika turned to ask her secretary, whom she had invited to this urgent meeting.

"Oh... Yes."

Jiranee nodded. She was the one who had told Mevika everything. That night, when she was drunk, she had carelessly blurted out Superior’s numbers to Aiwarin in the car.

Aiwarin had said something to her too, probably thinking she was too drunk to remember.

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*"25 billion is a good number, but I think Superior is going to lose to Orianna,"*

Aiwarin had laughed.

*"Right now, Gina is drunk. You just told me Superior’s numbers, so if I tell you Orianna’s number, you won’t remember anyway."*

*"Oh...Superior won’t lose that easily,"*

Jiranee had mumbled.

*"Oh? Why not? Superior is only bidding 25 billion, while Orianna is bidding 27 billion. I don’t know who has the better qualifications, but now I know exactly how much Orianna should bid to win—without going overboard. So, 27 billion sounds just right."*

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That was what Aiwarin had let slip, thinking Jiranee wouldn’t remember anything after sobering up. But she did. The next morning, on the way to work, Jiranee pieced everything together—how she got home, what happened, and, most importantly, the conversation in Aiwarin’s car.

She hadn’t forgotten a single word.

"Thank you very much. I thought smart people were supposed to be more careful, but I guess everyone slips up sometimes."

Her voice was laced with mockery.

"Since someone willingly spilled the numbers to us, it wouldn’t be fair to call it cheating, would it? Let’s adjust our numbers a little more."

She opened the file on the projector screen, displaying the latest revised figures for everyone to see.

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The sealed auction documents were carefully unloaded from the company’s van. Aiwarin had personally come to oversee the process, accompanied by her secretary and two male employees. Following close behind was Athiwit's car, which had been tailing them the whole way.

When they arrived at Greater’s office, Athiwit stepped out and took charge of handling the documents himself, ensuring everything was in order.

"It’s ready. Take it inside,"

He ordered the two men who had come with him.

"Go in first."

He told to the other employees. Then, he turned to his daughter, who was standing by, watching the auction documents being submitted.

"Are you sure about the numbers you gave me?" he asked.

"I made the best decision. Now, it’s up to the committee to decide."

"We’re taking a risk by submitting a high bid. I just want to be sure it was the right choice. I trust you, Ai. If you say their bid is 25 billion, then our 27 billion should be enough."

"As long as they didn’t adjust their numbers at the last minute,"

She replied.

"I only had information up until the day before the bid submission. But even so, if Superior presents better qualifications, the numbers are just one part of the decision. Since our bid isn’t significantly higher, it could go either way."

"Are you saying that they did better job than us?"

Athiwit asked.

"Who knows?" Aiwarin shrugged.

"Nuttakorn’s daughter is even more talented and more meticulous than we had estimated from the beginning. If they win, it won’t be surprising. I’ve done my best for Orianna—it’s up to you whether you’re satisfied with that or not."

She sounded exhausted. The whole bidding process had drained her, and now that it was over, she felt completely burnt out. After weeks of intense preparation, she no longer had the energy to discuss it.

There was nothing more to change. In just a few days, they would find out who had won.

"If you really want to win next time, just let me submit 30 billion. That should secure the deal,"

She said with a short, sarcastic smile that quickly faded. Then, without waiting for a response, she walked ahead of him, her face cold and emotionless.

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Today was the official bid submission day. All six companies that had purchased bid documents had successfully submitted their proposals.

Their representatives were all present, making the atmosphere a mix of anticipation, tension, and calculated professionalism. With the media covering the event, everyone was putting on their best image, but there was a clear sense of rivalry.

No one exchanged pleasantries with their competitors—it was as if this was a battlefield where alliances didn’t exist.

Among the crowd, Rachen seemed to be the only one willing to acknowledge his rivals. He waved at the media, greeted Greater’s staff warmly, and casually scanned the area for someone. Eventually, he found her.

Mevika was standing with her father. That was enough reason for him to hesitate. Every time he glanced her way, he noticed Nuttakorn’s sharp gaze in return, making it clear that an approach wouldn’t be welcomed.

Even though he was technically a business partner of Superior, the tension was unmistakable. Instead of greeting her, he pretended to focus on something else.

That was when he noticed Aiwarin. She was intently staring in one direction. Following her gaze, he realized she was looking at Mevika—who had just turned her attention toward Aiwarin as well.

The moment Mevika noticed Aiwarin’s stare, she looked away, completely ignoring her. After a brief whisper to her father, she walked off, seemingly heading toward the restroom.

This was his chance. If he wanted to talk to Mevika alone, now was the perfect time. He started making his way toward her, but before he could weave through the crowd, he saw Aiwarin moving in the same direction— following Mevika.

Rachen stopped in his tracks, observing from a distance. He watched as both women walked toward the same hallway leading to the restrooms. The bidding venue was spacious, and the restrooms were located quite far away, making that area relatively empty except for a few passersby.

He saw Aiwarin disappear down the corridor leading to the restrooms, where there was another turn. He couldn't tell which way the two women had gone, but one thing was certain—he couldn't follow them into the women’s restroom. And he definitely couldn’t let them see him lingering around suspiciously.

Rachen took another path, turning toward the service elevator meant for employees. As he walked closer, he suddenly heard voices—two familiar ones.

"So you really followed me,"

Mevika said, her voice edged with knowing amusement. She had deliberately turned this way to avoid prying eyes, just to test if Aiwarin would come after her. Despite claiming she didn’t care anymore, Aiwarin still followed.

"Just wanted to congratulate you. The bidding process is finally over,"

Aiwarin replied casually, stuffing both hands into her pockets as if keeping her emotions in check.

"Save your congratulations until we know the winner."

"You mean I should be congratulating you?"

Aiwarin asked with a small smile.

"Or do you think you’re the one who's going to win?"

Mevika smiled.

"Is there something you want to tell me?"

"What do you mean?"

Aiwarin stepped closer.

"You mean something like **‘I miss you**’?"

Mevika scoffed.

"Eighty percent of what you joke about is true. So the remaining twenty percent must be lies. I don’t have time for lies. If you have something real to say, say it now—if you want to explain yourself."

"Explain myself?" Aiwarin chuckled.

"I have nothing to explain right now. Let’s talk after the bidding results are out."

"By then, I might not give you the chance."

Aiwarin was speechless. She looked at Mevika, holding her gaze longer than necessary before a faint smile crossed her lips.

"I have nothing to say."

She shook her head.

"Not right now."

"Is that so?"

Mevika’s smirk turned cold.

"Good. Then I won’t waste any more time."

She gave Aiwarin a final look—one filled with disappointment—before turning to leave. But as she stepped away, a slender hand reached out and grabbed her wrist.

Mevika glanced at the hand for only a second before yanking her arm free, forcefully shaking off the hold.

Aiwarin remained standing there, unmoving, as Mevika walked away without looking back.

For almost half a minute, Aiwarin stood there, motionless, before deciding she should return and finish her tasks for the day. As she turned back toward the main hall, she caught sight of someone she wasn’t particularly fond of —standing there, smirking. She simply furrowed her brows and walked past him, uninterested.

"So, does Orianna have secret meetings with Superior too?"

The casual remark made Aiwarin stop in her tracks. She turned sharply to find Rachen watching her with an amused smile, making it clear he was speaking to her. She faced him directly.

"Like how Great & Grow has secret deals with someone inside Greater?"

She shot back, lifting an eyebrow.

"Is it a secret deals?"

Rachen asked as if she was trying to figure out how much Aiwarin actually knew.

"What are you talking about?"

"People who cheat never admit their mistakes easily. That’s why they’re called cheaters."

Aiwarin smiled.

"They cheat in business, manipulate women, and steal other people’s secrets. Maybe deception is just a core business skill for some people."

"And who exactly are you talking about?"

Rachen’s expression darkened.

Aiwarin laughed.

"I have no idea. Do you feel guilty about something?"

Her amusement only fueled his irritation, so she continued.

"She doesn’t care about you. Maybe it’s time to stop bothering her. Smart women know better than to get involved with a man who..."

She paused, leaving the sentence unfinished. There were many words she could have chosen, but she decided to leave them unsaid. Instead, she just laughed.

"What kind of man ?"

Rachen was visibly frustrated now.

"Watch your mouth. Oh.. What kind of relationship you are in now, you better be careful."

"What kind of relationship?"

Hearing the sentence, Aiwarin didn't feel challenged at all.

"I don’t care what you or anyone else says. I am warning you. You should be the one careful about that. If there’s anyone people should be wary of, it’s someone like you."

She smiled again.

"Good thing I warned Mevika about exactly what kind of man you are. No matter what you try, she’ll never look at you twice."

Aiwarin cast a sidelong glance at the man she had just accused as she spoke her final words. Staying here any longer would only lead to pointless arguments, back-and-forth questions, and wasted time. So, without sparing Rachen another look, she turned and walked away.

Rachen stood there, jaw clenched, fists tightening at his sides. His frustration burned as he watched Aiwarin leave. The anger bubbling inside him made him want to do something—anything—but all he could do was hold himself back and let his thoughts churn.

"So, the reason Mevika is ignoring me... is because of you?"

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# Chapter 32: Sadness and Deception

Three days after submitting the bid, the list of qualified candidates was announced. These companies would move on to the next round, where they would present on the technical aspects. Out of the six companies that submitted bids, one was disqualified. The remaining five companies advanced to the next stage.

The company that failed the qualification process was Siam Arena Co., Ltd. This was due to negative reports about its management over the past week, which affected the preliminary evaluation.

"Eliminating one competitor doesn't make me feel any better,"

Nuttakorn said to his daughter as she sat reviewing the information she needed to present the next day.

"Yes,"

Mevika replied, her eyes fixed on her laptop screen, her face tense with concentration.

"Is something wrong with you lately?"

Nuttakorn asked. He had noticed that his daughter had been unusually quiet for several days. Now, he was sure—she seemed distant and not as cheerful as before.

"Is the bidding process stressing you out too much?"

"No, that's not it,"

Mevika said quickly. Hearing her father’s concern, she lifted her gaze from the screen and tried to adjust her expression. But it wasn’t much of a change.

"It's nothing." Her voice was soft.

"I don't think that's true,"

Nuttakorn said, sounding doubtful.

"Before this, you seemed like someone in love. For a while, I hardly saw you at home—it felt like you had someone special. But now, you just stay home, keep to yourself, and don’t seem happy at all."

"There's no such thing as love,"

She said. But as soon as the words left her mouth, she looked even more lost. Thinking about it made her feel worse. She had moved past the anger, but now she was simply sad—mourning the happy moments she had lost.

Her father was right. Even though she had tried to hide it and not show her feelings, somehow, he had noticed that she used to be more energetic and happier.

She felt sad that she could no longer spend time with Aiwarin like before. She didn’t know whether to be angry, resentful, or something else, but what she did know was that she wanted to see Aiwarin—just to be sure that

Aiwarin had never meant her any harm and that they could still be together.

"Still denying it, huh?"

Nuttakorn sighed.

"You didn’t go to the beach for two nights with your friends, did you?"

"What?"

Mevika was startled. She had always thought her father didn’t know the truth about that trip.

"Aunt Jib went for a checkup at Nanny’s parents' clinic. She said she saw Nanny there, but they didn’t greet each other."

"Aunt Jin saw Nanny?"

Mevika turned toward the house entrance, shocked that their housekeeper had run into her friend. That meant her father had known for days but had chosen not to ask her about it.

"I didn’t want to ask because you were busy with the bidding process," Nattakorn admitted.

"Who did you stay with, Me? You know I worry about you. But at least I can be relieved that you’re not interested in Rachen. You've been in the news with a few people lately."

"No way! That Rachen guy? I would never like him."

"And you’ve been in the news with a woman too,"

He continued.

"People are saying you wore clothes that looked just like Aiwarin’s. These days, people seem to pair others up so easily just because of little things like that. In the past, no one would have thought about it—they’d just say it was copying. But it was just a coincidence, right? You like fashion, and it just happened to look similar to hers."

He smiled as he spoke.

"And what if it wasn’t a coincidence?"

Mevika said, her face blank, her mind elsewhere.

"What do you mean? Are you saying you borrowed them from her?"

He gave a dry laugh, unsure of what to think.

"Well..."

Mevika could only say that much before she stopped. She pressed her fingers to her forehead and closed her eyes, trying to steady herself. The thoughts that had been bothering her for days, along with a question she had always wanted to ask her father, made her feel uneasy. But now, she wanted to say it.

"Dad."

"Yes?"

"I have a question."

She had never dared to ask this outright before, but now, she didn’t want to keep it to herself anymore.

"If I had a partner… would it be okay if I was with a woman? I think I like women. Maybe that’s why I’ve never really felt serious about any man."

"Being with a woman?"

Nuttakorn looked surprised. He thought for a moment before answering,

"That’s fine. Honestly, I might feel more at ease than if you were with a bad man. So, if it’s a woman, I guess it’s not a problem."

"Dad… you really don’t mind?"

Mevika was excited by his response. She had asked him casually before but had brushed it off. Her father had once told her that if she ever found someone kind, understanding, and sincere, she should introduce them to him. She wanted to do that—but right now, she wasn’t sure.

"Are you dating a woman? Are you saying the rumors are true?"

"I don’t even know how to answer you,"

Mevika lowered her head, feeling like she might cry. She had carried this question and this uncertainty alone for days.

In her trust, there was doubt.

In her longing, there was emptiness.

In her need to believe in her own thoughts, the person she wanted answers from had refused to speak to her—even when she had asked directly.

She didn’t want things to turn out like this.

She had been so sure that Aiwarin was sincere with her, that she had been the kindest person to her, that she had cared for her so well.

But now, she was just sad that Aiwarin wasn’t here with her anymore. It left an emptiness inside her, making everything feel lifeless.

"I really do have someone…"

Mevika's voice trembled as tears welled up in her eyes. She quickly wiped them away before continuing,

"But I don’t know if she is the kind of good person that you’d accept."

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The atmosphere in the open technical presentation meeting at Greater was serious. The first company to present was Charmelo, followed by Great & Grow, whose proposal seemed a bit too extravagant—like a politician making dreamlike promises.

Some of their ideas were feasible, but others seemed exaggerated, as if meant to impress rather than being truly necessary. Their proposed framework included elements that, if removed, wouldn’t make much of a difference in execution.

Superior was the third to present, and everything went smoothly—at least from Mevika’s perspective, as she was the lead presenter. Royce was next, and Orianna would be the last.

That morning, Mevika saw Aiwarin in the meeting room. Their eyes met briefly before Aiwarin quickly looked away. Her face looked tired, lacking its usual energy. Mevika couldn't tell if something was wrong or if Aiwarin was just trying to keep her distance.

As she listened to Royce’s presentation, she found herself glancing at Aiwarin, who was seated directly across from her. Aiwarin had chosen that seat first—Mevika was the one who had intentionally sat opposite.

Feeling a little bored, she stretched her leg out just enough for the tip of her high heel to tap against Aiwarin’s shoe.

Aiwarin looked up at her.

Their eyes met, holding each other’s gaze for a moment. Aiwarin’s expression looked even more lifeless than when Mevika saw herself in the mirror.

But then, Aiwarin looked away with a sorrowful expression and turned her attention back to the Royce representative. Moments later, it was Orianna’s turn to present.

And suddenly, the dull, lifeless expression Mevika had seen earlier was gone.

For the first time, she saw Aiwarin in her element—presenting with confidence, her voice steady, her pacing perfect.

Aiwarin's voice was clear and confident. Whether she was explaining complex information or simple details, there was an intelligence in the way she presented. It was no wonder people remembered her as a capable woman—because she truly was.

She completed her presentation without showing much emotion. Maybe some people would see her as indifferent, but when it came to her responsibilities, she never took them lightly. No matter where she wanted to stand in the final results of this bidding, she never treated it as just a game.

She just wanted this to be over. She was tired of playing this role. But if she had to do it, she would do it well.

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As always, after the meeting ended, participants gathered outside the conference room. Mevika had taken her time coming out, and because of that, someone had waited to speak with her.

"Miss Mevika," Rachen greeted her.

"Finally, the bidding process is over. Now, all that’s left is to wait for the results. It would be great if we both won and got to handle this concession together."

"I thought you wanted to be the sole winner, Mr. Rachen,"

Mevika replied with a slight smile.

"Of course, who wouldn’t? Or are you saying you wouldn’t want that if you were the only winner?"

Rachen laughed.

"Anyway, today’s a good day, so I’m going out to celebrate. I’d like to invite you to join. I’ve booked a VIP karaoke room at Villa Night. Here’s a pass for you—just hand it to the staff, and they’ll let you in. The rooms there are really nice. You should check it out."

Mevika took the long, card-like pass, which felt more like a sturdy coupon.

"Do I really need a card just for a quick dinner invitation?"

"Printing these at my company is easy. My graphics team works fast and designs things well,"

Rachen chuckled.

"Thank you for the invitation, but I won’t be going,"

Mevika declined directly. She was sure Rachen already knew why. She wanted him to understand clearly that she wasn’t interested in him. After what happened that day, she trusted him even less.

"Do you want the card back?"

"No, it’s fine. Just in case you change your mind."

"Alright then, I’ll take my leave."

Mevika gave him a brief smile before walking away.

Rachen watched as she left, his eyes filled with unspoken thoughts. He murmured softly to himself, "So she really turned me down?"

Then he chuckled under his breath.

"Then that's a good idea."

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"I won’t be going back to the office today. And I probably won’t stop by the bar tonight either. I think I’ll just go home and rest."

Aiwarin informed her secretary, who had been waiting for her to finish the meeting before heading back to the office.

"Of course, Miss Ai. You’ve seemed really tired lately. It’s good to get some rest. Take care of yourself, okay?"

Lada said with concern.

"I’ll be going now."

"Alright. Thanks."

Aiwarin watched as her secretary left before making her way toward the parking lot.

She hadn’t even walked far from the lobby when suddenly, a woman ran up to her and called out.

"Miss Aiwarin!"

"Yes?"

Aiwarin turned to look at the unfamiliar woman.

"I work for Miss Mevika. She asked me to give this to you."

The woman handed her a small item.

"Miss Mevika also said she really hopes you’ll come. That’s all. You can check what’s inside yourself. Oh, and she specifically told me not to let anyone else see it."

"Alright."

Though still confused, Aiwarin accepted the blue coloured item. She turned the card over in her hands, tempted to open it right there, but decided it would be better to check it in her car. She quickly made her way to her vehicle and opened the card.

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**"Come meet me at Villa Night tonight. I want to see you in private. I booked a room—we have a lot to talk about. Please come."**

**Mevika**

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Aiwarin read the message printed on the card, then flipped it over to find the venue details and room name. It was surprising that Mevika had gone as far as booking a private room just to meet her.

Then again, maybe it wasn’t so strange. If Mevika wanted to talk in private, she probably wasn’t ready to visit the bar and risk being seen together just yet.

Still, what was even more surprising was that Mevika had invited her at all.

Aiwarin had expected Mevika to still be angry, maybe even refusing to speak to her.

And that was exactly why she had to go.

She wasn’t going to sit alone, overthinking everything anymore.

Because she missed Mevika.

She missed their private moments, their closeness—something they hadn’t shared for days.

And that emptiness was one of the reasons she had been feeling so down.

She had to see Mevika tonight.

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**translate by:sunyan**

## Chapter 33: Untrustworthy Night

A glass of water was lifted for a sip and placed back down after finishing dinner. After a morning meeting, Mevika had an appointment with a client alongside her father in the late afternoon. By evening, they went to a restaurant to have dinner together.

"It's nice to have a meal out together. It's been a long time since we last did this,"

Nuttakorn said to his daughter.

"We should bring Mom along next time,"

Mevika replied with a smile. She had finished eating shortly after her father and was feeling full.

"That would be good. Ever since you started helping at the company, we've all been busy with work and hardly eat out together anymore-except for the rare times you come home for dinner." "I'll try to come home for dinner more often."

"It's not easy to have regular family meals once you're not single anymore," Nuttakorn said with a teasing smile.

"But I *am* single."

"Are you sure?" he countered.

"You seem like someone who's keeping things on hold with someone." "Dad, you act like you know everything. And what if I'm not holding back anymore? Would you stop me?"

"Are you ready to tell your father? The other day, you started talking about it but you still haven't told me."

"I have nothing more to say,"

Mevika shook her head quickly. She glanced at her phone screen and was surprised to see a message pop up-from Aiwarin.

**Ai: I'm here. Haven't you arrived yet?**

Mevika frowned at the message. She didn't understand. What did Aiwarin mean?

She didn't think texting back and forth would suddenly make things easier, especially after a week of tension between them. But she still had to reply.

**MAPLE: What? Where are you?**

**Ai: At the place on the invitation you sent me. I'm already waiting in the room.**

"Waiting in the room?"

Mevika frowned in confusion. She hadn't made any plans.

"What's wrong?"

Nuttakorn noticed his daughter's odd expression and asked.

"The invitation..."

As soon as she said the word "invitation," she remembered the one she received today. And then it clicked.

"It can't be..." She quickly typed a reply to Aiwarin.

**MAPLE: I never sent you an invitation!**

**MAPLE: Where did you get it? Go home right now!**

Mevika waited for Aiwarin to read the message immediately, but this time, there was no sign that she had opened it. Just a moment ago, Aiwarin had been reading messages right away. "No... Read it! Hurry up... read it now!

"Mevika, what's wrong?"

Nuttakorn was growing concerned as he saw his daughter looking more anxious than usual.

"Dad," Mevika blurted out urgently.

"I think I have to hurry and go find someone."

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The sound of the doorknob turning made Aiwarin tense. She had been waiting to finally see the person who had invited her here. She quickly locked her phone and slipped it into her small shoulder bag. Then, she lifted her head-just as someone stepped into the room and closed the door behind them.

The distinct *click* of the lock echoed in the quiet space. "Well, well... Look who I have as my special guest tonight." The familiar voice and face made Aiwarin freeze in shock.

*Rachen?*

"You... How did you get here?"

Her first thought was *What is he doing here? How did he get here? And why is walking towards her?*

But as he stepped closer, a chilling realization hit her.

*I've made a mistake.*

"Of course, I'm here. I booked this place myself," Rachen said smoothly.

"I got a nice corner room-very private. Perfect for a gathering of up to fifteen people. But I only booked it for two. Plenty of space for just the two of us. Sounds perfect, doesn't it?"

"I didn't make an appointment with you. I'm leaving." Aiwarin quickly stood up and moved toward the door.

Rachen quickly grabbed Aiwarin's arm, pulling her back.

"Hold on. Don't be in such a rush. Sit down and talk with me first. I have a lot things to discuss with you."

"But I have nothing to talk about with you,"

Aiwarin said loudly, trying to yank her arm free.

"But I have. And you have to stay." Rachen forced her to sit down.

"If you sit and talk nicely, I promise I'll be a perfect gentleman."

"Gentleman? You? That's just an act. Don't force me. Let me go!"

"I'm asking you nicely. Don't be rude to me. It's been a long time since we've seen each other, and it's rare to get you alone like this. Sit properly."

He slid his arm around Aiwarin's waist, pressing closer, but Aiwarin quickly moved away. Rachen grabbed her again-this time, he gave her a little space but spoke in a low, threatening tone.

"You humiliated me before. Then you messed things up by running around telling people-especially Mevika. And I'm very interested in her right now. I think you owe me, don't you? If you make it up to me, maybe I'll be very kind to you."

Aiwarin froze. His words were polite on the surface, but the threat underneath was clear. She wanted to run. She needed to get out of here. But Rachen's grip kept her in place. She had to find another chance to escape.

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"Two kilometers left,"

Mevika said while staring at the GPS anxiously.

"Dad, I don't want you to speed, but... I'm scared we'll be too late. I don't know what's happening right now..."

Her voice was tense, and her thoughts were racing.

"I got it. I'll go as fast as I can safely."

Nuttakorn pressed the accelerator a little more.

"Good thing we weren't far from there after dinner. What's the place called again? Villa Night, right? I'll look for the sign-just guide me properly."

"Yes, Dad,"

Mevika answered softly. She kept glancing at the map, then back at the road, anxiety twisting in her stomach.

Nuttakorn noticed his daughter's growing distress. He could see how worried she was, so he spoke up, almost to himself...

"He messaged you to say where she is. Seems like you two know each other well?"

Mevika, who had been staring out the window, froze for a moment. She thought back to the times she and Aiwarin met often. Then, she decided to be honest with her father.

"Yes, we know each other well,"

She admitted. There was no point hiding it-soon, her father would probably find out even more about her and Aiwarin.

"We know each other very well."

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"There's something interesting I've been curious about,"

Rachen said as he casually used the remote to select a slow international karaoke song. He was still sitting close to Aiwarin, pressing against her slightly. Meanwhile, she stayed silent, trying to stay calm and find a chance to escape.

This wasn't a completely private place-it was a karaoke bar with other rooms occupied by customers. But the walls blocked any view from outside, and this room was tucked deep inside the building, away from the others.

Outside the room, there was a small balcony with a table for smoking. But Rachen didn't seem like he was planning to step out anytime soon.

"You and Mevika seem pretty close. I wonder what kind of relationship you two have. Ever since that day you went off to talk in private, I found it... interesting. More interesting than that whole auction deal you two were arguing over. It felt like there was something else going on." He smiled.

"So, I had someone look into it. Turns out, you run three bars. But there's one bar you like to be at all the time. A bar for women who like other women. That was surprising. If you like women, then Mevika probably doesn't feel the same way, does she? I mean, what are the odds that two beautiful women would share the same taste? Wouldn't that be a shame?" Aiwarin's eyes darkened.

"What century are you living in? You still think like that? Wow, your brain is so outdated."

She smirked mockingly.

"Don't judge my way of thinking. You're the strange one. There are plenty of men out there, yet you choose to like women. That's not normal." His voice turned smug.

"Do you want to know what normal really is? You keep rejecting it, but if you never try, you'll never know."

"So, you're saying that what you do is 'normal,' but what other people like isn't?"

Aiwarin laughed coldly.

"Honestly, the most 'abnormal' person here is you. The only thing you have going for you is your money. All you do is use it to satisfy your own desires.

The rest of you? Completely useless. Empty. If you ever got control of Greater, this country would be doomed-having someone as backward thinking as you in charge."

"Don't look down on me," Rachen shot back.

"Plenty of women want a rich man. Take them to one expensive dinner, and they'll fall right into your arms. The only reason you're different is that you already have money. Makes you acting arrogant all high. Or maybe... Are you acting like a man like me?" Aiwarin scoffed.

"Me? Want to be like you?"

She made an exaggerated gagging noise.

"I'm perfectly fine being me. And I like what I like. You're the last person I need to explain that to." She narrowed her eyes.

"Tell me, aside from using your connections to dig up dirt on others just to win, what exactly are you good at? You inspire no one. No smart woman would ever want you as the father of her child."

"What the hell are you talking about now? What 'connections'?"

"You know exactly what I mean. If you do win, it won't be because of your intelligence. It'll be because you cheated before the competition even started. That's why you're doing everything but using your own brain to win." Rachen's eyes darkened.

"You know too much about me."

He took a sip from his drink, then slid another glass toward Aiwarin.

"I'm not drinking. And I'm leaving."

"I'm not ready for you to leave yet."

Rachen smirked.

"You've rejected me too many times. Sure, I tried to move on, but I regret letting you go. And now, when I started paying attention to Mevika, you got in the way. So, I changed my mind. I think I'd rather focus on you instead." He leaned in, his voice turning amused.

"Let's see what I can do with a woman as arrogant as you." Aiwarin's jaw clenched.

"Do whatever you want-it won't change my mind."

"Just have a drink with me for a little while. I won't keep you long. Just one drink, and then I'll let you go. Help me make this special room reservation worth it,"

Rachen said, handing Aiwarin a glass.

"Drink."

Aiwarin hesitated. She didn't want to take it, but she had no choice. She accepted the glass, pretending to sip lightly, even though she felt uneasy about drinking it at all.

She had seen him pour from the same bottle in front of her-nothing looked suspicious. But that didn't mean she trusted him. Still, given the situation, she had no other option.

"Good,"

Rachen smirked, satisfied as Aiwarin finally took a drink.

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"Dad, I'm going in first,"

Mevika told her father, glancing at the card she had gotten from Rachen.

"I need to find this room. Please hurry and follow me."

She was anxious-though they had finally arrived, she still couldn't shake the fear that she was too late. "Be careful going in alone."

"I'll ask the staff for help."

"Alright, I'll be right behind you."

"Okay."

Mevika quickly got out of the car, shut the door, and rushed into the building. She went straight to the front desk.

"Where's the Blue Sky room?"

"It's at the very back. It's currently reserved."

"I'm here for that room."

"That room is booked for a private dinner and business discussion. The guest requested that anyone who comes asking must be announced first."

"Then go and report it. I'll come with you."

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to wait here. I have to get permission first-it's the customer's order."

"Don't you realize how suspicious this is? A private karaoke room where the customer orders not to be disturbed? If something goes wrong, no one would ever know. My friend was tricked into coming here-I don't even know if she's okay right now!"

"Your friend was tricked?"

The staff member asked, looking surprised.

"What's going on?"

Another female staff member approached, noticing the situation. Seeing the tension, she quickly went to call the restaurant manager. At that moment, Nuttakorn arrived after parking the car.

"May, how was it?"

"How is it?"

Mevika sighed heavily, turning to her father before glaring at the staff, who still stood there clueless, making no effort to help.

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"I am going back."

Inside the room, Aiwarin reached to set her glass down and stood up, ready to leave. But Rachen blocked her path with his arm. "Finish your drink first, then you can leave."

"I don't want to drink anymore. Stop forcing me."

She managed to put the glass down after only taking two sips.

Rachen smiled, setting down his own drink.

"I don't like rejection, but fine, if that's your choice." He turned to her, shifting closer and leaning in.

"What are you doing? Back off!"

"I think we should have some fun first. After all, it's just the two of us here. You came all this way to see me in private."

"I didn't come to see you. I came for Mevika."

"You must really like her, huh? So, you're serious about her? That makes things even more interesting. It's kind of like me being interested in her... or in you. I think I understand what it's like to be drawn to a woman. But you're a woman yourself. It's a shame if you waste your beauty and fire on the wrong thing. I'm really curious-if the woman you like is anything like you, just how fiery can she be?"

"Take your disgusting, vile hunger somewhere else!" Aiwarin spat as she scrambled away on the sofa.

"If that's how you see me, I can't change your mind. So instead of wasting it, I'd rather share it with you."

"Get away from me!"

She pushed him with all her strength, but he grabbed her wrist and pushed her down onto the sofa.

She struggled until she broke free, then quickly grabbed the glass of drink that she hadn't finished and threw it at the door with all her strength. The loud crash of glass shattering filled the room.

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Outside, Mevika whipped her head toward the sound. She had been arguing with the staff, who insisted on notifying the room's occupant before letting her in. They were still negotiating when the noise interrupted them.

"Dad, that sound-!" Mevika gasped.

"Move aside, we're checking it ourselves!"

Nuttakorn snapped at the staff, his patience gone. The employees, startled by the crash, quickly stepped aside, following as Nuttakorn strode toward the room, with Mevika running behind him. "What the hell do you think you're doing?!"

Rachen shouted, furious at Aiwarin for throwing the glass. He pinned her down harder.

"I thought I wouldn't have to use force once the drug kicked in, but I guess I'll have to change my approach." "Let me go, you evil bastard!"

Aiwarin twisted, then kicked Rachen's crotch with her high heel just as he leaned in closer. She quickly turned to crawl away from the sofa.

"Ouch...!"

Rachen let out a pained groan, doubling over, but he still managed to grab onto her suit jacket as she tried to crawl away.

At that moment, the door burst open with a loud bang, slamming against the wall. Rachen's head snapped toward the sudden intrusion.

"Rachen!"

Mevika ran straight at him, teeth clenched in fury. She threw a punch, landing it squarely on his face. "What the hell are you doing?!"

"Ouch...!"

Rachen groaned for the second time that night, collapsing onto the sofa. He twisted around to see who had barged in. When he spotted Nuttakorn storming in, followed by three staff members, his face paled.

"Why are you all here?! I'm just using the room I paid for!"

"Using the room?"

Nuttakorn marched up and grabbed Rachen by the collar, yanking him up.

"Scum like you belong in a jail cell, not a private room!"

"Ai...."

Taking advantage of the chaos, Mevika rushed around the sofa toward Aiwarin, who was struggling to sit up, keeping as much distance from Rachen as possible.

"Maple..."

Aiwarin whispered, called out that name softly. She hadn't expected Mevika to be the one to come for her.

She was exhausted, her body trembling from shock. The moment Mevika reached her, Aiwarin lunged forward and clung to her tightly.

"Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

Mevika hugged her back, gently running a hand over Aiwarin's back, feeling the slight tremors in her body.

"I..."

Aiwarin tried to speak, but her voice faltered.

"It's okay. You're safe now."

Mevika cut in before she could struggle with the words. She focused on calming Aiwarin down, sensing just how shaken she was.

It was the first time Mevika had ever seen Aiwarin truly afraid.

Right now, nothing else mattered-she just needed to be the person Aiwarin could lean on.

## Chapter 34: Defeated by You

The car moved along the quiet road, with only a few other vehicles around. The journey was peaceful. Nuttakorn was driving, while his daughter sat in the back to take care of someone else they had brought along.

Mevika sat hugging Aiwarin. Aiwarin leaned into her, finding comfort in the embrace. But as time passed, she started feeling unwell. Just at that moment, the car arrived at Mevika's house.

Nuttakorn drove through the gate, which was opened remotely by the housekeeper. He glanced at his daughter and the other young woman through the rearview mirror from time to time.

When the car finally stopped inside, he looked at them again and spoke gently, careful not to startle Aiwarin.

"You should stay here tonight. Don't worry about it. I'll call your father and let him know,"

Nuttakorn said. Aiwarin didn't answer. She simply lifted her head to look at the older man who had been kind to her.

She was now in his house, unexpectedly being allowed to stay the night. But before she could respond, she started feeling worse.

"Maple..."

She buried herself in Mevika's arms, pressing her lips against Mevika's neck as if she needed to do so. Then she whispered,

"I feel hot."

"You feel hot?"

Mevika asked quickly, her mind immediately thinking of possible reasons.

"Let's get out of the car and go rest in my room."

"Mm..." Aiwarin rested her forehead on Mevika's shoulder, gritting her teeth as Mevika helped her out of the car and into the house.

Inside, they met Monthida, who had come to check on them after receiving a message from her husband a while ago.

"Maple, how is she?"

"She's okay, Mom,"

Mevika replied quickly, though her eyes remained full of concern as she hugging Aiwarin close.

"It's hot... I feel so hot..."

Aiwarin dug her fingers tightly into Mevika's arm.

"You feel hot?"

Monthida looked surprised.

"I think..."

Mevika paused for four or five seconds, then let out a sigh.

"Ai might have been drugged."

"Drugged? What should we do?"

Her mother's face filled with shock.

"It's okay. I think I can take care of her. I'll take Ai upstairs to rest first.

Maybe she needs to cool down, take a bath, or-"

"Oh... um, okay. Go ahead,"

Monthida quickly stepped aside, letting her daughter take their special guest upstairs. She then walked over to stand next to her husband, who was silently watching over everything.

Seeing her daughter supporting a young woman she knew as a brilliant newgeneration businesswoman, Monthida wasn't sure what to think. She turned to her husband and asked,

"What kind of drug do you think it is? Don't tell me it's some sort of... um..."

"It could be,"

Nuttakorn cleared his throat lightly.

"But..."

His lips pressed together, trying not to say too much.

"Maybe it wasn't that bad. I'm not sure how serious it is, but Maple should know how to handle the effects of this drug."

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The bedroom door swung shut as Mevika struggled to close it properly. She locked it quickly and rushed to help Aiwarin onto the bed, gently pushing her to lie down.

"Mm..."

Aiwarin grabbed onto Mevika, stopping her from leaving.

"I need to get a towel to cool you down."

"No... I want you here. Just you,"

Aiwarin murmured, pulling Mevika into a tight embrace.

"Alright...Are you okay? How do you feel?"

Mevika asked, hugging her back and softly rubbing her back in comfort.

"Not good... I..."

Aiwarin buried her face in Mevika's neck.

"I feel..."

"It's okay, you stay with me."

She pressing her head to the person who needed her to rely on the most. There was only concern more than thinking about the things that made her angry and gloomy. And in fact, she missed Aiwarin a lot.

"Do you want me to help you?"

She loosened her hug and looked at her face.

"Yes."

She nodded repeatedly, using her hands to brush and rub her neck when it started to get heavier.

"Help me."

"Go lie down on the bed properly."

Pushing her shoulders to move to the middle of her bed, which she had just had the chance to welcome Aiwarin for the first time, and was also the only person who had ever slept on her bed.

She moved to straddle her slender legs, helping to take off that fitted suit jacket, leaving only a black camisole, and leaning in to kiss her to heal her emotions. She kissed her back passionately.

She was not prepared for meeting her tonight, but it was okay. If she could help her, she would be more than happy to.

She reached in to unhook her bra, pulled the straps off her shoulders, and pulled up the camisole. She leaned down to help manage Aiwarin's thirst that she had to feel. Joining in to satisfy her desires.

She pulled her hand down, below, then unhooked her skirt, pulled it down a little and inserted her hand through the edge of the fabric, pressed down on her waist until she groaned, increased her weight to make her feel the most satisfied.

Her lips opened to taste the sweet nipples, there was a slender hand pressed against her head to help satisfy until the soft chest trembled frequently.

She let her breathe fully for a while before moving down to take off the skirt and the small piece of fabric and slide down lower. It was her own desire to do it. When she started, the emotions in her body called for the touch of the woman she felt the most affectionate with.

She thought of her, she desired her body, even though she did not imagine it this way, but just having her together, whether it was when she touched her or she was the only one touching her, she wanted it all.

"Ah..."

Aiwarin cried out when she felt the soft touch that made her squirt. She felt it all over her body, both the sweat that formed on her forehead, the sweat that formed on her body. And the lower part that Mevika was helping her with,

"Umm... Maple,"

She felt something enter her. Instead of that soft touch, Mevika helped stimulate and heal her body's emotions. She was very satisfied and pleased with it. She couldn't imagine how she would get through this night if Mevika wasn't here with her.

Mevika helped her through the first stage of her emotional struggle. She moved up to kiss her, pressed her forehead down, and whispered.

"I miss you."

Aiwarin met Mevika's eyes. Her eyes were moist and sparkling. She smiled faintly and whispered back.

"I miss you too. I miss you so much."

She lifted her head up to kiss her, letting her kiss her. She opened her lips to accept the kiss. It was a kiss that she felt love, passion, and tenderness. She knew that there was still the effect of the drug that she didn't want to happen in her body.

She always wanted Mevika, even though there was no drug to stimulate her. She might not have drunk much, and it wouldn't feel any more than this. But the thoughts, the desires that she always demanded from Mevika were circulating in her feelings. She wanted Mevika to touch her fully.

She reached out to help unbutton and take off Mevika's shirt. Wanting to hug the body she had been yearning for for many days with closeness, she wanted to squeeze her body close to her all night, a night where they would talk with only body language until they fell asleep together.

Aiwarin looked at Mevika who had taken off all her clothes. She pulled off the tank top that was hanging on her body and squeezed her body down to her. She hugged her, buried her face in her neck, brushed her hands all over the soft body that she loved the most, and did things that would help satisfy the passion of both of them until the time she wanted to stop it herself.

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When the morning approached, the light came in and a slight strange feeling made Aiwarin feel awake. She was hugged in Mevika's arms, under a soft blanket that made her want to back asleep immediately.

But it was good to open her eyes and be with this feeling. So she snuggled herself in that embrace the person who was willing to come back and hug her.

She didn't know how Mevika could help her, but she was glad that the person who helped her was Mevika, even though they both still had problems. But she knew what she was facing. She cared about her, concerned about her, came to see her, and took good care of her.

Last night, it was because of an unintended desire, but Mevika made her feel like it was a natural desire. She herself thought about her, desired her, and touched her with love.

If she felt.... she had feelings for her like the people who loved each other.

Mevika realized when she was pressed against her body, but she went back to sleep. Last night, she had wiped her body before going to bed, brought a shirt with a wide shoulder cut, long enough to cover her thighs, and put a blanket on her so that she could sleep at the right temperature.

She took a shower, put on her nightgown, a smooth fabric with buttons in the front, and slept next to her, hugged her, and fell asleep together.

It was a time when she truly felt that it was a time when lovers treat each other.

She intended that after the auction, they would have a chance to meet, and she was still willing to give her a chance.

"Are you awake?"

The loud voice made Aiwarin turn to look at the face of the person who had woken up and looked at her. She reached out to grab her cheek and gently stroked it.

"Are you feeling better? Do you have a headache or... How are you feeling?

"Nothing at all. I'm feeling better," Aiwarin replied.

"Oh, really?"

Mewika smiled. She moved to lie on her side and leaned forward to look at Aiwarin comfortably. She was glad that she had been able to take care of her and make her feel safe all night until she felt better.

"I couldn't sit still when I went to see you. I was afraid I wouldn't make it in time."

"How did you know I was there?"

"Luckily you sent a message. It's unusual because I wasn't the one who made the appointment with you. But it just so happened that that evil guy came to invite me to have dinner there after the presentation was over. But I refused. He gave me a card. On it was the name of the place and the room name. I threw it away in the car. When you sent a message and disappeared, I was able to follow you."

"Thank you so much for thinking fast and coming to help me in time." She gently squeezed the hand resting on her cheek, feeling grateful.

"You were amazing. Last night, I felt so stupid for getting lost there and not being able to protect myself."

"You're not stupid. Sometimes people make mistakes. You've always been smart, but problems can happen, and it's not about being clever or not. You had your reasons for going there. You...,"

Her voice softened as she hesitated to talk about herself.

"You went there to find me, right?"

"Yeah. I wanted to see you. When I thought you were the one who set up the meeting, I just rushed to you without thinking."

"So, was it me who made you let your guard down like that?" Mevika smiled.

"That's not a stupid thing at all-wanting to come see me."

"Yeah, you're right."

Aiwarin smiled. Hearing Mevika's kind words made her feel so much better.

"I'm really glad you came to help me. I thought your anger would make you ignore me, that you wouldn't care anymore. But you still came."

Her eyes welled up with tears, and she quickly wiped them away.

"I've been so worried that we wouldn't talk or see each other the same way again."

"Why? Because you made a mistake? You think that would change everything between us?"

"I..."

Aiwarin shook her head. She sat up against the headboard and held both of Mevika's hands, as if confessing something.

"Why did you come to help me? Even after what I did to you?"

"Because I don't believe you did it just for your own benefit. Maybe you were forced to... or had a reason. That sharp mind and cunning side of yours -you used them on me, but I don't think you really meant to deceive me."

"Do you really think that?"

Aiwarin looked at her with sad eyes. She let out a relieved sigh before hugging Mevika tightly.

"I was planning to explain everything to you after the auction results were announced."

"Even if I misunderstood you? Even if I won against you? You weren't afraid things would turn out that way?"

"I was scared."

Aiwarin loosened her hug and looked at her with worried eyes.

"I've been anxious for days. I had no way of knowing how things would turn out until that day. I didn't know if you'd still give me a chance. But I just had to do it. I didn't want you to lose, and I hoped you'd fight until the very end."

"So, there was a reason why you wanted to win so badly?"

"It started with my dad. He found out about us on the day I was feeling down... when we went to the beach. He made me a deal-I could date you, but I had to bring him some information. But honestly, he probably knew I wouldn't get much from you. Technical details are a company's specialty, but what I could access were the numbers. Even though numbers don't tell the whole story, they're an important factor in decision-making. My dad said that if I could beat Superior and win this bid, he'd stop interfering in who I date. He'd give me complete freedom to be with a woman."

"And if you won against me that way, would we still be together? Or was it just about having the freedom to date any woman?"

"No. I only want to be with you." Aiwarin shook her head firmly.

"I had to follow my dad's conditions, but I tried to do it in a way that hurt you the least. Then I changed my mind-I wanted to do whatever it took for you to win this bid. Even if I lost and didn't meet my dad's conditions, we would still be together."

Mevika's face turned red as Aiwarin confessed. They weren't even officially dating yet. Aiwarin had told her that after the bidding was over, she would ask her out. Now, it was clear-she truly wanted to be with her.

"I heard that jerk got information from someone inside Superior. They needed Superior's numbers. Besides using connections and overhyping their technical presentation, they also adjusted their bid just slightly higher than Superior's-just enough to win without making their numbers look suspiciously high. When I found out Superior's numbers a few days before the submission deadline, I figured they might have adjusted theirs too. But I couldn't just tell you outright. It would've been weird if I walked up to you and said, ‘Hey, raise your numbers because I want you to win.’"

"So you went to ask my secretary and then purposely said the numbers out loud while pretending to be drunk?"

"It was the only way. If you didn't adjust them, then it would have just been Superior's fate-whether you won based on technical merits or not. But believed you could do it. And you did. On the presentation day, you were amazing. Better than any other company. After seeing that, the numbers really became secondary. But just in case the committee wanted to give extra points..."

"And P'Ji remembered what you said when she sobered up."

"I practically wrote it on her palm," Aiwarin laughed.

"The don't you want to win yourself? Or did you already adjust your numbers after finding out mine?"

"Of course, I wanted to win. But at this point, I'm happy as long as I beat Great & Grow. Being second place is fine. If Royce wasn't still strong because of its old reputation, I would've wanted us to win together. But now I'm not sure-it might come down to Superior and Royce. As long as it's not Great & Grow, I'm fine. My numbers are actually higher than Superior's, but after figuring out a way for you to adjust yours, I think Orianna might fall behind."

"I raised my numbers, but I don't know if it's enough."

"It's probably enough to beat me."

"You really don't want to win against me? We already agreed that competition is separate from our relationship. No matter what happens between us, we still have to compete." "I don't want to win against you anymore."

Aiwarin leaned in, resting her head on Mevika's shoulder, wrapping her arms around her as she whispered her true feelings.

"I lost to you a long time, Maple. I've already lost my heart to you. If it means I get to win you -your heart and all of you-then I'm happy not being the winner."

Mevika froze at that confession, her heart swelling with warmth. Having someone feel this way about her, willing to give their whole heart even if it meant losing-it was overwhelming. Someone as brilliant as Aiwarin wasn't the type to lose easily, but she had willingly surrendered to her.

Gently, Mevika lifted Aiwarin's chin so their eyes met. Seeing the soft, affectionate gaze looking back at her made her smile, feeling happier than ever. She leaned in and kissed her gently, full of tenderness.

Mevika smiled and pulled Aiwarin into a hug, wanting her to know just how happy she was-to be loved by someone so precious.

## Chapter 35: A Heart That's Accepted

A small towel was gently used to dry the other person's hair until it was just slightly damp. Then, she helped blow-dry it-returning the favor from when the other girl had done it for her before. But this time, as the owner of the bedroom, it was her turn to do it.

"Smells so fresh,"

Mevika murmured, pressing her nose lightly against Aiwarin's jaw after drying her hair completely. Now, Aiwarin was dressed in a simple white tshirt and comfy shorts-clothes Mevika had chosen for her to wear at home.

Aiwarin had said she wasn't going home yet and wanted to stay with her a little longer. So, Mevika had sent a message to her dad, letting him know they'd be coming down for breakfast a bit late.

Normally, on holidays, her parents had breakfast together at 9 a.m., but today, they were willing to wait so they could eat with them.

"The soap you use smells really nice. I thought hotel soap smelled great, but yours is even better. Next time, maybe you should help choose new scents for the soap and shampoo at Orianna for our guests."

"As what? Daughter-in-law?"

Mevika chuckled and walked away. Aiwarin smiled at her words before following and gently grabbing her hand.

"So, you're really saying you want to be Orianna's daughter-in-law?"

"Well... I don't know."

"Come here."

Aiwarin pulled Mevika to the edge of the bed and pressed down on her shoulders, making her sit. Then, she knelt in front of her.

"I was planning to say this after the auction... but I don't want to wait anymore. I think we're more ready now than ever. Our parents... they already seem to know how close we are."

"They know even more than that. What are you going to do about it?"

Mevika smiled teasingly, waiting for Aiwarin to speak. If she didn't, Mevika was ready to say it herself.

"Let's be together."

Aiwarin gently took Mevika's hand and kissed it softly with love before continuing,

"Be my girlfriend. I want to be serious with you. You're the person I truly want to commit to. I don't want our relationship to be a secret anymore."

"I don't want to hide it either. I want to be open about us," Mevika admitted.

"And now, nothing is difficult anymore. The only thing left is for me to answer you." Aiwarin smiled.

"So, what's your answer?" Mevika laughed.

"Honestly, sometimes I feel like we've already been together for a while." She squeezed Aiwarin's hand.

"But if not, then let's make it official from now on. I want to be with you. I like you."

She placed her hand over Aiwarin's and held it tightly before lifting it to kiss softly. "I like you."

Aiwarin wanted to confess her feelings too. She leaned in and placed a soft kiss on Mevika's lips, then pulled back, closed her eyes, and kissed her again this time more gently, more meaningfully.

When she looked at Mevika again, her eyes were filled with warmth.

"I love you."

"I love you too."

It wasn't just a response-it was a feeling she truly wanted to express. The moment Aiwarin said those words, Mevika wanted her to know that she felt the same. If Aiwarin spoke with such deep affection, she wanted her to understand that her feelings were just as strong.

"I love you, Ai."

"I love you, Maple."

Aiwarin closed her eyes with a soft smile, tilting her head slightly in anticipation of another kiss. Mevika leaned down, closing the space between them.

Their lips met perfectly, melting into a kiss that was tender, sweet, and filled with more meaning than ever before.

Because this kiss marked the beginning of something new-something clear and undeniable between them.

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Fingers intertwined, they walked down the stairs together. Both were dressed in comfortable home clothes, embracing the slow, easy morning of a holiday. Aiwarin blended into the home so naturally that it felt like she had always been there. But as they neared the bottom of the stairs, she felt a slight nervousness creep in.

She was about to face Mevika's parents-with their hands still firmly held together.

Mevika's parents were standing right there, and now that Aiwarin was fully aware and clear-headed, she realized what she was about to face-the parents of the woman who was now officially her girlfriend. She hoped with all her heart that they would like her and accept her.

"Mom."

Mevika greeted her mother, who was standing near the staircase. Her mother turned around at the sound of her voice.

"Oh, May, you're both up? I was just about to wait for you at the dining table."

"Good morning, Mom... uh, or how should I address you?" Aiwarin asked politely, feeling a little nervous.

"Just call me whatever you feel comfortable with. It's fine." Monthida smiled warmly.

"Come on, let's have breakfast. I'm starving. Are you two hungry?"

"I am, Mom."

Mevika glanced at Aiwarin, giving her a reassuring smile. There was nothing to worry about-her mother was acting completely normal, and she was sure her father understood everything as well.

"Come on."

She gently pulled Aiwarin's hand, leading her toward the dining table, where her father was sitting at the head of the table, scrolling through his phone.

"Dad." Mevika called out.

Her father looked up and smiled.

"Good morning, sir,"

Aiwarin greeted him with a polite smile.

"We've only met at work before. This is the first time we're meeting like this,"

Nuttakorn said in a friendly tone.

"Yes, Mr. Nuttakorn. And... thank you so much for helping me." She respectfully raised her hands in a wai.

"It's nothing. It was lucky that I was with Maple at the time-she was so worried about you. She was really afraid something would happen to you. Good thing we got there in time."

Then he added,

"Oh, by the way, I already called your father last night to let him know what happened. I told him you were safe and staying here. He sent people to check on Villa Night, and I arranged for my team to handle the police report and gather evidence at the karaoke bar. Your father also sent his own team to join in. You might need to go give a statement to the police and get a medical check-up this morning. That guy drugged your drink, right? Getting examined will help strengthen the case against him."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Nuttakorn. You've really helped me a lot,"

Aiwarin said sincerely, feeling grateful for everything he had done.

"No need to call me Mr. Nuttakorn. You can call me Dad or Uncle - whatever feels comfortable for you."

"Alright... Uncle."

Aiwarin smiled politely. "You can just call him Dad," Mevika teased with a grin.

She guided Aiwarin to sit beside her at the dining table and placed their hands together on the table for the elders to see. Then, she spoke clearly, looking directly at her parents.

"I have something to tell you both. Now that Ai is here with me, I want to make it clear."

"Go ahead,"

Nuttakorn said casually, as if he already had an idea of what was coming. He gestured for her to continue while his wife, Monthida, sat down at the table across from their daughter.

"Ai and I are dating,"

Mevika stated firmly, squeezing Aiwarin's hand gently.

"We're a couple."

"So, it really is Ai,"

Her father said with a knowing smile.

"Honestly, I already figured it out last night... or maybe even before that, when you told me you liked women. And with all the news about you and Ai being paired together, I had my suspicions. Your mom and I even talked about it."

"Yes," Monthida added.

"We talked and decided that if you and Ai wanted to be together, it wouldn't be a problem. Even though you're competing in business, it's not forever. The auction will be over soon. If this is what makes you happy, then there must be a reason why you chose to be with Ai."

"Thank you, Mom. Thank you, Dad,"

Mevika said gratefully, smiling at both of them. She hadn't expected things to go this smoothly, but everything had fallen into place.

Her father had often brought up the topic of her future partner, and little by little, she had given him hints about her feelings. Now, seeing their acceptance made her incredibly happy.

"Ai has been so good to me," Mevika continued.

"Even with the auction, she's been giving me advice and guidance. I don't have as much experience as she does, and she's helped me a lot."

"You're already capable," Aiwarin interjected.

"I just shared some extra information to help."

"I can't believe it-you two were supposed to be rivals, but somehow, you ended up getting close instead."

Nuttakorn chuckled. Then, he sighed lightly and admitted,

"I used to wonder how two people of the same gender could fall in love. But now... I don't really care. I can see that you and Ai truly care for each other. I've always told you that I want you to be with someone who makes me feel at ease. If she's someone who supports you and helps you grow, then... even though Orianna and..."

His words trailed off, leaving the conversation open for what was to come next.

"Superior and Orianna aren't really competitors. It just depends on who wins the duty-free concession. No matter how much I want you to win this bid, May, we'll have to accept the results fair."

"Ai has helped me so much, Dad. Honestly, she wants me to win more than she wants to win herself," Mevika said with a smile.

"Letting go of the competition for love?" Nuttakorn laughed.

"That won't do. Business is business, May. Don't think like that."

"I'm not giving up, Dad. I'm fighting," Mevika assured him.

"But I also want to support Ai's intentions."

"Ai said that Great & Grow is cheating to win. That's why she wants to step in and stop their plan."

"If I can help, I will," Aiwarin added.

"And if Great & Grow loses, maybe there's a chance for us to join hands. If we're lucky, we can both win." She smiled.

"So they're cheating? That Rachen guy... looks like we'll need the media on this. Your father won't let this slide," Nuttakorn said seriously.

"Has he contacted you yet?"

"Not yet. He told me he understood that I was overwhelmed and needed time to rest. He asked you to look after me while he handles other matters." "Mom texted to check on me," Aiwarin added.

"I already replied that I'm doing fine and that I'll stay here with Maple for now."

"They already knew about you and Maple? They don't seem surprised."

"They only found out recently," Aiwarin admitted.

"Honestly, it wasn't exactly a great conversation. My dad made a deal-he said if I could beat Superior, he'd let me openly date women."

"But you're clearly not following that deal," Nuttakorn noted.

"I just told him I had information on Superior so he'd think I was doing what he wanted. But I didn't actually do anything. I'd rather help Maple." Aiwarin said calmly.

"If I meet your father, we'll need to have a serious talk," Nuttakorn said firmly.

"I hope he's changed his mindset by now."

"I hope so too,"

Aiwarin said with a small smile.

"He did leave me in your care, after all."

She turned to Mevika, who was smiling beside her, and squeezed her hand.

"Hmm, let's eat first. There might be things we need to deal with this morning,"

Nuttakorn told everyone at the dining table as the housekeeper finished serving all the food while they were talking.

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Later in the morning, Nuttakorn took Aiwarin to give her statement to the police. The police had contacted them after he sent his men to check on Villa Night last night and had the drinks Rachen ordered tested.

The glass Aiwarin threw away was the one Rachen drank from, while the one left on the table was hers. The test confirmed that a sedative had been added to the drinks. Fortunately, Aiwarin only took a small sip, so she didn't ingest much of the drug.

However, there were still traces of it in her system when she was tested at the hospital, which became solid evidence. There was also a video taken by the staff at Villa Night when they opened the door and saw her struggling to escape from Rachen in the karaoke room.

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When they returned to Mevika's house, they saw that her car was parked outside. Nuttakorn had his men bring it back from Villa Night, where it had been left since last night.

He was also incredibly considerate toward her, even agreeing to talk to her father to help resolve the situation without holding onto any grudges from their past business rivalry. Around noon, her father requested to visit the house to see her.

"Thank you for letting me visit. I won't take up much of your time-I just wanted to check if Ai is okay,"

Athiwit said to Nuttakorn. He seemed friendly today, with no sign of hostility.

"I'll also coordinate with the police. Even if that bastard has political connections, I won't let him get away with this easily."

"Orianna is a big company. Connections can only help so much. We can take full legal action against him." Nuttakorn said.

"At the very least, his reputation will be ruined, and he should be disqualified from the bidding process. If he wins, I won't stand for it."

"Looks like social media is already working on that. His reputation is as good as gone. Now, we'll have to see how Great & Grow responds. I've been trying to reach-" Nuttakorn laughing

"I went to talk to Rachen's father this morning since their products are sold in my mall. I wanted to see his reaction when he found out about the trouble his son caused."

"I heard that Rachaphong, Rachen's father, hasn't made any public appearances. He's probably avoiding the media. I'm also waiting to see how he responds."

"Yes, I'm waiting too."

"Have you heard the news about Greater? On Monday, they'll reveal the returns and announce the results. They finished scoring yesterday, but after this issue reached the board members and social media started questioning the qualifications, they decided to closely monitor the situation. They even scheduled an emergency meeting for tomorrow."

"You sure get information fast. That's what I'd expect from a major businessman." Nuttakorn smiled.

"Orianna specializes in fast information-that's our strength. But in other areas, I'm not sure if we're better than Superior. You're our toughest competitor, I'll admit that. And honestly, I'm always looking for ways to beat you."

"Let's see if Orianna can beat Superior," Nuttakorn chuckled.

"I'll be watching-unless Royce swoops in and takes the win. If that happens, I might as well let Orianna win. Or if we're lucky, we might even join forces." Athiwit laughing.

"I wouldn't mind joining hands with Superior, as-" Athiwit paused for a moment.

"I see you as a good ally. Winning has become a secondary concern for me now. No matter what happens, I just want Great & Grow to be disqualified. But the most important thing I want to say right now is... thank you for saving my daughter. Business is important to me, but my daughter is more important."

He turned to Aiwarin, who was sitting next to Mevika, listening to the conversation. Their mothers were sitting together on another sofa nearby. "I should get going now-I still have to deal with Rachen." He looked at Aiwarin and smiled.

"I'd like to talk to my daughter for a bit."

Then he nodded to both his daughter and wife.

"Ai, let's talk for a moment. You can stay here with Maple if you want. I won't take long."

"Okay,"

Aiwarin replied to her father. She glanced at Mevika before getting up and following her parents outside. Her father led her to a small grassy area, a quiet spot where they could talk comfortably.

"I'm so relieved that they were able to help you, Ai. I never thought you'd have to go through something like this. But I won't ask too many questions -I don't want to make you feel worse. Just know that if you ever want to talk about anything, your mother and I are always here to listen."

"Dad, are you really okay with me making my own choices now? Even after what happened, I don't hate men or generalize them, but I don't want to be in a relationship with one. I feel more comfortable being with a woman. And I don't want to have a family either. You don't have to worry about heirs-there are so many ways to make sure Orianna is taken care of properly."

"Having an heir was never my main reason for wanting you to get married. It was just something that came with it. Your younger brother already told me he'd take on the role because he knows his big sister doesn't want to get married. But I won't force you either. As long as you both can work at Orianna comfortably and show your talents like you always have, I'll be happy."

"Are you serious?"

"I want to win the bid-that's something I've been serious about. But right now, I realize that we already have Orianna, and even if we don't win, it's still the best. Because I have a daughter who runs the business brilliantly. I've never built this company by cheating anyone. I might use strategy, but I've never needed to fight anyone for it. We grew on our own. The bidding process just made me competitive for a while. Now, I don't mind if we don't win-it's really okay." He shrugged.

"And what if we do win?"

Aiwarin asked with a teasing smile.

"Then of course, I'll take it!"

Athiwit answered quickly, laughing loudly.

"If we win, I'll make sure to give you all the credit for your brilliance. But win or lose, I won't use it as a condition to control your choices. You can be with whoever you want. Maple is a lovely girl. I still don't know how you managed to win her over. My daughter just has to be great at everything, huh? Even when it comes to charming the person she likes."

"We both like each other. And I guess I have some good qualities too, just like Maple does. That's why I'm interested in her."

"That's great! Then follow your heart, Ai. Nuttakorn doesn't seem to have any problem with you and his daughter being together, so of course, I'lI support you too. As for your mother..."

He turned to look at his wife, who had been listening.

"I've always given our daughter complete freedom," Hathairat said to her husband and Aiwarin.

"She's done so much for us. I've never stopped her from doing what she wants. Just take good care of each other, okay, Ai? Maple is a lovely girl and really capable too-she made it in time to help you. I have no doubt that you two will look after each other. I trust that Ai can take care of Maple, and Maple will take good care of Ai as well. And bring Maple over to the house sometimes, okay? Don't just stay at the hotel all the time."

"Oh, Mom! It's just more convenient for work. But okay, I'll bring Maple to visit often. And... thank you for understanding me."

She stepped forward and hugged her mother, who immediately wrapped her arms around her in return. Then she turned to look at her father, who was watching them. He hesitated fora moment, but in the end, she opened her arms to him too.

"Come here, Dad."

Athiwit smiled at his wife and daughter before stepping in to join the hug.

Their family had always been warm and supportive in many ways, though there had been moments of tension and disagreement.

But now, Athiwit had let all of that go. And in doing so, he realized that this choice-the choice to fully accept and support his daughter-made him happier than anything else.

## Chapter 36: Business Couple

Soft laughter filled the cozy bed, with a thick comforter bunched up at their feet. The two young women playfully teased each other on this relaxing day off, enjoying the rare moment of just being together.

After dealing with all the morning's troubles, they finally had plenty of time to themselves. It was an indescribable excitement-knowing that their relationship was now accepted by both families.

No one wanted problems that needed fixing anymore. The cooperation of their parents, who wanted to protect both their own daughters and each other's, made everything fall into place so easily.

It was seen as both a show of goodwill in business and simple, human decency that should always be practiced.

"I'm posting our couple photo,"

Aiwarin said, resting her head on Mevika's shoulder. They had just taken a picture together, leaning against the headboard.

"Hmm, a couple's photo without matching fashion outfits,"

Mevika chuckled. Right now, both of them were just in comfy white t-shirts and shorts.

"Sometimes, simple moments like this are nice too, just like a real couple. And technically, I am wearing your shirt-just not a work outfit."

"We're already borrowing each other's clothes. Looks like we'll be sharing even more in the future."

"Won't that just fuel more rumors? People are already pairing us up."

"Well, it's not just a rumor anymore, is it? We're a real couple now."

"The power couple who no longer needs to hide-because we're about to make it official,"

Aiwarin laughed as she opened her Instagram to upload their picture.

"You're ridiculous," Mevika giggled.

"You called me crazy? Are you shy again? Ah, so cute."

She turned and poked the shy girl's nose lightly while choosing a photo to upload.

"What's your Instagram? Let me follow you. I'll tag you."

"Come here."

Mevika took the phone from Aiwarin's hand and typed in her account.

"Here, this one." *@maple.moevi.*

"Maple Moevi?"

Aiwarin smiled when she saw the username, then raised an eyebrow when she noticed that Mevika was already following her.

"Huh? Why are you already following me?"

"Ah... oh no, the secret's out!"

Mevika quickly grabbed a cushion and covered her face, mumbling,

"I totally forgot I was secretly following you."

"What? You were secretly following me?"

Aiwarin snatched the cushion away to see her face.

"Since when? I never noticed."

"I didn't just follow you recently. I've been following you for a long timejust like everyone else who follows you, Miss Famous Businesswoman."

Mevika covered her face with both hands, peeking through her fingers in embarrassment. But since their relationship was already revealed, she decided to just admit it.

"You've been following me for a long time... Does that mean you already know a lot about me?"

"Who doesn't know you in this industry? I'm just like everyone else who knows you. And I needed someone to be my role model in career since I had to step up and help my family business at a young age too."

"Wait, what? I'm your role model?" Aiwarin smiled.

"Well then..."

Mevika stood up, took Aiwarin's hand, and pulled her off the bed, leading her to the bookshelf beside her work desk. She took out a book and left it halfsticking out from the shelf before quickly walking away to sit at the edge of the bed, watching Aiwarin.

"This is... me?"

Aiwarin picked up the magazine and looked at it. The cover featured a photo of her from a business interview she did four years ago. When she pulled out the other magazines stacked behind it, she found five or six more covers with her face on them.

"These were all taken over the past three or four years, ever since you started gaining attention after helping manage the Orianna Hotel in your first year back from studying abroad. You kept gaining more experience after that."

Aiwarin flipped through the magazines.

"You bought every single issue? And they're all just my covers-no one else's?"

"Well, I only admire you. Why would I buy someone else's?" Mevika crossed her arms and sat up straight.

"You only admire me? What's this?"

Aiwarin quickly moved closer to her girlfriend, sat down beside her, and wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

"May, have you been secretly crushing on me for a long time?"

"I meant as a work idol, not the kind of liking I feel now."

Mevika hurried to clarify. Back then, she hadn't really thought about Aiwarin in that way-she didn't even fully understand herself yet. But that was also why she was so flustered when they first met and talked.

"In one way, I saw you as just another person I happened to meet. But at the same time, you were this talented and beautiful businesswoman with great fashion sense. I looked up to you as a role model for both work and personal image. The day I first saw you at the Greater Café, I was stunned. When we shook hands... and then met up close in the restroom, I had to hold back my reaction so much."

Mevika continue,

"But then, when we started talking, I instinctively built a wall between us because I saw us as rivals. I thought we could never be allies. But you kept approaching me, and we kept running into each other. Eventually, I realized I couldn't avoid you."

“...”

"I liked it-every time you talked to me or got close to me, I felt something. I had to act indifferent, tell myself not to think too much, not to believe that someone like you would actually like me. It was almost unbelievable that a talented, capable woman like you would want to date me."

"But you couldn't resist, could you?" Aiwarin smiled warmly.

"You like me, Maple. And I'm happy to know that you've been flustered by me since back then. I could sense that you were interested too. You tried to push me away, but you never really did."

"...Yeah, I like you."

Mevika thought back and realized how much she had enjoyed those moments with Aiwarin.

"I got excited every time we were close. And when you asked to kiss me... I was surprised at how easily I said yes."

She laughed softly, glancing away to hide her embarrassment.

"So that's why you called me beautiful when you were on the phone with your dad?"

"You mean at the cafe, the first time we met?"

"Yeah."

"Well... you really are beautiful. So beautiful that my heart kept racing. Ugh, this is so ridiculous. What have you done to me?"

"That means you probably already knew the answer without me having to tell you. But I guess I just helped quickly things up for you."

"You helped me realize my feelings faster," Mevika admitted.

"Yeah... you made me discover that I like women. And I really, really like a woman like you. It feels amazing to truly understand myself... and to like you, love you, and be your girlfriend."

"Welcome to the world of love that lets you be yourself." Aiwarin playfully shook her girlfriend's chin.

"A love where I get to date a beautiful, talented, kind, caring, and super sweet woman."

Mevika wrapped her arms around Aiwarin's neck, snuggling close.

"I'm so happy."

"I'm happy too. And I don't think I even need to tell you why I like you, because I've been open about how much I was interested in you since the first time we met. I'm so glad you agreed to be my girlfriend, and that I get to be yours."

"Was there any reason why I wouldn't be your girlfriend?" Mevika laughed.

"Exactly. Then what reason would there be for us not to be lovers?"

Aiwarin smiled widely, eyes locking with Mevika's, who gazed at herjust as lovingly. Their faces slowly drew closer until their lips met in a soft, gentle kiss. Mevika kissed her back, a thought crossing her mind-she wanted Aiwarin to kiss her like this every day.

Every single day, as the perfect couple they were meant to be.

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On Sunday evening, Aiwarin had to return to her place to prepare for the announcement of the concession auction results for Greater Duty-Free.

On Monday morning, she met Mevika again. It was the first time they could openly be together without any hesitation. The moment they saw each other, their hands instinctively reached out and held on.

They exchanged smiles-it felt so freeing and uplifting, almost like a silent encouragement for the big announcement ahead.

"No matter the result, we're not rivals anymore," Aiwarin said.

"We're partners," Mevika replied.

"And a couple."

Aiwarin laughed, but her attention soon shifted to her father, who was walking in with his team. She also spotted Nuttakorn, who was talking to someone before turning and greeting her father. It was the friendliest exchange they'd ever had in this place.

"Our families seem to be getting along well. Maybe getting married in the future won't be so hard," Aiwarin teased with a smile.

"M-Married?"

Mevika's eyes widened, and her face suddenly turned red.

"W-What are you talking about? You're already thinking that far?"

"Who knows?"

Aiwarin squeezed her hand gently and gazed at her with deep affection.

"Don't you want our future to go far enough that we can really spend our lives together?"

She didn't care if the media captured the moment-there was no reason to hide anymore.

"Of course, I do."

Mevika admitted honestly. They had just officially started dating, so hearing the word *marriage* caught her off guard. She hadn't thought about it yet, but now that it was mentioned, she couldn't help but start imagining it.

"Let's see today's results first and find out how we'll be supporting each other from now on."

"Yeah."

The auction result announcement was held in the same grand hall where the bidding event was first introduced.

This was the same place where Aiwarin and Mevika had first shaken hands as rivals. But after two months, everything had changed.

Looking back, they both knew-they had never truly been rivals. Instead, they had been quietly building a connection. And now, standing here today, they no longer needed to shake hands just for the cameras.

This time, they held hands as true partners, with a special bond. The very people who had once pushed them to compete were now standing nearby, ready to congratulate them as allies.

The benefit offers were revealed one by one, without ranking them in order.

The first company announced was *Charmelo*, which had submitted an offer of 15 billion.

The second company, *Great & Grow*, had proposed 26 billion.

"They really adjusted their bid to be just slightly higher than Superior's old figure,"

Mevika muttered. She now fully believed Aiwarin's information-*Great & Grow* had indeed obtained details on *Superior's* bid and adjusted theirs accordingly.

"I need to investigate this properly and find out who leaked the numbers," She added, making sure her father, who stood nearby, could hear.

"For now, let's just hope that *Great & Grow's* bid won't be considered, no matter how high it is," Aiwarin said.

"The next company-*Oriana Hotels & Resorts*," The announcer called. The room fell silent.

"They have submitted an offer of 27 billion."

"Oriana's bid is higher than Superior's old number," Mevika noted. "I didn't cheat,"

Aiwarin said immediately.

"That was the number I originally set-I never changed it."

"I believe you. You must have calculated it carefully," Mevika replied.

"Now, let's wait and see *Superior's* number."

"*Superior Holding Group Public Company* submitted a bid with a total amount of..."

The announcer paused briefly, causing a quiet stir in the audience. Then, he raised his voice to announce the number.

"Thirty billion baht!"

A wave of murmurs spread across the event hall. This was the highest bid announced so far. Although the final decision still depended on other qualifications, many had already started speculating which company had the best chance of winning.

"Royce Trading Company...."

Everyone listened intently as they waited for the next number.

"Royce submitted a bid of twenty-six billion baht."

"Twenty-six billion!" Aiwarin exclaimed.

"That's lower than Superior."

"And lower than Orianna too,"

Mevika added excitedly. She glanced at her father, who was just as anxious.

The bidding phase was finally over, and it was time to announce the winner. The decision would be based ona percentage score assigned by the International Duty-Free Committee of Thailand.

After a short break, the announcement began, with many media representatives ready to report.

"We will first announce the company with the highest bid score, followed by the second-place company. According to the bidding conditions, if the second-highest score is within ten percent of the top score, two companies will be awarded the concession to manage Greater Duty-Free together."

Excited murmurs filled the room again before the announcer continued with additional information about a recent controversy.

"Initially, two companies tied for second place. However, due to certain **inappropriate incidents** reported in the news three days ago, the qualifications of one company had to be reconsidered. There were also rumors of corruption and favoritism. We would like to clarify that this bidding process..."

"The committee was carefully selected. However, one of the members was found to have accepted money in exchange for favoring a bidder. We have investigated the matter, removed that committee member, and ensured that only bidders who meet our rules and qualifications are considered."

Applause erupted across the room upon hearing this transparent announcement. Everyone hoped the winners would truly be the most deserving and that there would be no monopoly in the outcome.

**"The winner of the Greater Duty-Free concession, with the highest score, is..."**

The room fell silent, and everyone held their breath. Then, the announcement rang loud and clear:

**"Superior Holding Group Public Company, with a score of 95.60 points!"**

As soon as the words were spoken, the crowd erupted in cheers and applauselouder than ever before.

But no one was more shocked than Mevika, who stood frozen in disbelief. Meanwhile, the person beside her jumped up in excitement as if they had won themselves.

"Maple, you did it! You won! Superior won the bid!"

Aiwarin grabbed Mevika's hands as she stood there, still in shock. Finally, Mevika snapped out of it and threw her arms around Aiwarin in a tight hug. "You're amazing! You did it! You were incredible!"

Aiwarin praised her with excitement.

Mevika's eyes glistened as if she were about to cry.

"Thank you... Thank you so much."

"Looks like we're going to have a huge celebration. Congratulations!" Athiwit laughed. He extended ahand to Nuttakorn.

"If you're planning a party, consider using Orianna's services. I'll give you a special price."

"Thank you!"

Nuttakorn shook his hand firmly, still overwhelmed with emotion. Right now, all he wanted to do was praise his daughter, but there would be plenty of time for that later. For now, they still had to hear the announcement for the second-place winner.

"Congratulations to Superior! Now, we will announce the company that ranked second. According to the bidding conditions, Superior will take the lead in management, but the second-place company will also be granted comanagement rights to ensure there is no single-company monopoly."

"We are happy to accept this condition, and no matter who takes second place, we hope we can work well together. Now, I will announce the runnerup of the Greater Duty-Free concession."

Silence filled the entire hall. Only one company would get the chance to partner with Superior, so everyone was on edge. If they missed this opportunity, it would be gone for good.

Some whispered the names Royce and Orianna, but many had expected Royce to win from the start due to its previous monopoly. However, the committee had proven that things wouldn't go as expected, making this moment even more suspenseful.

"The second-place winner originally tied with another company. However, due to issues regarding its qualifications and a committee member who gave an unfairly high score, we have adjusted the evaluation. After recalculating all scores fairly, only one company secured second place. With outstanding qualifications, undeniable expertise in service, and years of business experience, they have achieved a score of 91.80 percent. The winner is..."

Aiwarin took a deep breath. She had told herself not to hope, but at this moment, she couldn't help it. She heard whispers of Royce, and then she heard Orianna-not from a hushed conversation, but from the speakers. **"Orianna Hotel & Resort Company is the second-place winner!"**

For a moment, Aiwarin's ears rang. She thought she had misheard. She had always been confident in her business skills and had won before, but recent events had shaken her. Yet now, fairness had prevailed. She had defeated both Great & Grow and Royce.

"Ai!"

Mevika's voice rang beside her, snapping her out of her daze.

"You got second place! You won! We won together!"

This time, Mevika was even happier than when she had won herself. Just moments ago, Aiwarin had celebrated for her-and now, they would be comanaging Greater Duty-Free together.

An announcement followed, detailing additional conditions regarding the distribution of shared benefits. This meant that Superior's initial bid of thirty billion baht could now be pooled together with Orianna's, allowing the total to remain at thirty billion.

Aiwarin had already considered and calculated this carefully. She knew that Superior's adjusted bid was quite high, perhaps even excessive.

However, she had anticipated that once a second company joined in the management, Superior's financial burden would be reduced, and Orianna would step in as an equal partner.

This made her twice as happy-not only because they had won the bid together, but also because of their personal relationship.

From now on, the media would likely have a field day covering their partnership-both in business and in life. But Aiwarin didn't mind at all, and neither did Mevika.

"I'm so happy! We're really going to manage Greater Duty-Free together?" Mevika beamed, unable to stop smiling at the news. "I told you-we were never real competitors. Never." Aiwarin smiled back.

"We're meant to bring each other good fortune, not compete."

"The best good luck charm ever,"

Nuttakorn chimed in, laughing as he overheard his daughter and her girlfriend talking.

"Congratulations to Orianna. In the end, we really did end up working together! Looks like we'll be merging not just businesses, but families too." He turned to Athiwit with a smile.

"Happy to be working together. Both our daughters are incredibly talented. Looks like Orianna should just shut down the hotel and throw a massive celebration with Superior!"

Athiwit replied. He laughed heartily, and Nuttakorn joined in.

Seeing the two fathers shake hands in genuine goodwill brought tears to Mevika and Aiwarin's eyes. Then, they both burst into laughter, joining in the joy of the moment.

Not far from them, a massive building framework stood tall, waiting for glass panels to be installed. It dominated the skyline, promising to become a landmark. Compared to a shopping mall, its service area alone spanned seven.

The new Greater Duty-Free building stood taller than the nearby Greater Office Tower, yet it was far more spacious. It would house luxury brand stores, a large supermarket, and various service areas.

Now that Superior and Orianna had won the bid, they would take full responsibility for managing the entire facility.

As the car doors shut, they stepped out, stopping in front of the towering structure-a shared dream brought to life.

Hand in hand, they walked closer, stopping at a vantage point where they could admire the entire scene. They stood in silence for a moment, imagining what it would look like next year when it was complete and ready to welcome tourists and customers.

"I never thought we'd actually manage this place together," Aiwarin said.

"Well, we each have our strengths. Superior is great at sales, and Orianna is strong in hospitality. Together, we'll make this place thrive."

"True."

Aiwarin nodded. This was exactly what they had always talked about-even when they were competitors.

"A seven-year, six-month contract sounds just right. If we hadn't won this bid, we'd probably be waiting for the next concession opportunity."

"It's a fair agreement. Some contracts last ten, fifteen years, or even longer. That kind of exclusivity isn't ideal. This setup is the fairest."

"If we manage this well, who knows? We might win the next bid too." Aiwarin smiled.

"Or, if things go as, you and the Institute for Business Development and the Small Retailers Association proposed, the next government might restructure the system. Instead of a 'Master Concession,' we could have 'Concession by Category.' That way, multiple companies could operate duty-free sections by product type-cosmetics, fashion, alcohol, tobacco. It would boost the country's economy significantly."

"So you care about the country's economy more than your own profit, huh? Guess I'm not the only one who thinks that way." Mevika teased, admiring her girlfriend.

"Well, if I'm not a good person, my girlfriend might stop loving me. And my girlfriend happens to be a very good person." Aiwarin grinned.

"Really? Or is it because you were already such a good person that you managed to flirt your way into having a girlfriend?" Mevika teased as she slipped her arm through Aiwarin's.

"No one is perfect, but to me, you're a great girlfriend-clever, sharp, but never dishonest. The only thing you ever cheated at was stealing my heart. You're such a flirt, too. I never stood a chance." Aiwarin lifted her chin slightly, smirking.

"Cheating at stealing your heart, huh?" She nodded slowly, playfully smug.

"But I think you're just as much of a flirt. Even if you didn't try, you still got me. And when you did flirt, I walked right into your trap-completely defenseless."

"It's not a trap-it's a love pit,"

Mevika leaned in, grinning as she delivered her corny joke.

Aiwarin chuckled.

"Sure,"

She said, accepting it with an affectionate smile. Tightening her hold on

Mevika's arm, she gazed at her girlfriend with pride. Winning the Greater Duty-Free bid was an achievement, but nothing compared to winning Mevika's heart.

Even if they never managed another major business deal together in the future, as long as she had Mevika by her side, doing the work she loved, that would be enough.

"I'm already imagining the day we get to walk through the finished Greater Duty-Free,"

Mevika looked up at the towering structure.

"It'll be amazing, especially since we get to work on it together. Superior and Orianna are already putting together dedicated teams for it, and we'll have a joint management team, too."

"We have plenty of time to plan everything. Greater Duty-Free won't open until next year, so we'll get to spend lots of time together before then. Want to take a trip somewhere?"

"To the beach-Phuket, Samui, Krabi. Or maybe Chiang Mai, Khao Yai. Where else? Or should we go abroad?" Aiwarin laughed.

"Why are you planning so fast?" "I've been thinking about it for a while," Mevika admitted.

"You once said that traveling together and spending more time with each other helps us understand things better. And you were right. When we went to Pattaya, it really worked. I loved that trip, so now I want to go even more places with you."

"You get to have a nice dinner at a good restaurant, or even just go shopping and watch a movie. That's happiness too. Besides work, I also have you." "I also have you."

She smiled at those words, wanting to say the same-that she also had her.

"Alright then, let's go. Pick a place, anywhere you want. Oh, and next month,

I have to go take care of the resort down south. You can come with me then."

"I'll go." She let go of the arm she was holding and wrapped her arms around her girlfriend's neck instead.

"I just want to follow my girlfriend to work because when she's working, she looks incredibly charming."

"You're so silly."

Mevika raised a hand to scratch her eyebrow lightly.

"Silly? You're the one blushing."

"Of course, I am! You're complimenting me. You called me beautiful the first time we met, and now you're saying I'm super charming."

"I'm just telling the truth. When I say something, I mean it. Not like *someone* who claims that 80% of their jokes are actually true."

"Wow, you have a good memory." Aiwarin laughed.

"But if I say I love you, I've never once said that as a joke."

"I know."

Mevika pinched her cheek a few times and looked into her eyes. Then she smiled and spoke from her heart.

"Because I've never said it as a joke to you either."

She wasn't sure if this was the right moment, but she was confident that no one else was around. Today was a special day off for the construction workers at Greater Duty-Free, which meant they had the place to themselves.

It might be the only chance they had to do this. Once Greater Duty-Free officially opened, crowds of people would flood in, and privacy would be hard to find. But that was exactly what they wanted. The customers who would come in the future were their goal.

But right now, in this moment, it was just the two of them-the ones who would build this place's future together, as business partners and as lovers of Greater Duty-Free.

Mevika leaned in, pressing a soft, testing kiss on Aiwarin's lips. But Aiwarin never let her get away with teasing like that. Once it started, she always took it further. This time was no different-she leaned in and kissed her girlfriend back, just as gently at first, and then...

Their kiss was deep and lingering, as if they wanted this place to witness the journey that had brought them here.

**The competition, the rivalry-this very beginning Had led them to find love.**

**--THE END--**

## Chapter bonus : Sweet Deals

Greater Duty-Free had become a massive tax-free shopping mall, conveniently located along the route to Suvarnabhumi Airport. It was a prime stop for tourists and guided tour groups, with multiple buses arriving each week. The location also made it easy to travel to Don Mueang Airport.

During the holiday season, the mall was especially crowded with tourists.

Right now, it was beautifully decorated for Christmas and the upcoming New Year, with sparkling lights, a grand Christmas tree, and festive decorations in every corner.

"The decorations downstairs look so pretty. I want to go for a walk," Mevika said.

She was in a small office on the seventh floor of Greater Duty-Free. Normally, the two of them had a special office in the main Greater Duty-Free office building, but they also needed a workspace inside the mall itself.

This smaller office was used for overseeing operations, solving any issues, and occasionally meeting with staff. Since they were both responsible for managing the mall, they shared this space when working on-site.

"Let's finish handing out the wedding invitations first, then I'll take you for a walk. We have so much to take care of before the wedding,"

Aiwarin replied with a smile as she reviewed the documents in her hand.

"You keep bringing up the wedding so casually,"

Mevika murmured, blushing as she hugged Aiwarin's arm and leaned in closer.

"Are we really about to get married? Am I really going to be your bride?"

"And I'll be yours too,"

Aiwarin said, resting her chin on her fiancée's head.

They had been together for nearly five years now. From the beginning, they had promised that if they reached their fifth anniversary, they would get married.

That moment had finally arrived - on a trip to Orionna's resort in Koh Samui, they had proposed to each other.

There was no grand surprise proposal - just a natural step forward in their relationship. They had talked about marriage since the early days of dating, and after four, almost five years together, it simply felt right.

Their last beach date had been the perfect moment for both of them to pop the question-at the same time.

"A wedding this big is definitely going to make headlines," Mevika said with a smile.

"We've been together for almost five years, and you're still not used to people talking about us?" Aiwarin laughed.

As a power couple in the business world, they had been in the spotlight ever since they publicly announced their relationship.

Their impressive backgrounds had drawn attention, and they became a wellloved same-sex couple, admired by many. Whenever there was an opportunity, they also supported LGBTQ+ events and campaigns.

Over the years, the media buzz had settled down, except during major events. But they remained a beloved couple, seen as role models for many. And soon, their wedding news would likely spread far and wide again.

The wedding was set for Valentine's Day next year-just three months away.

There was no need to stress over the venue. Orionna Grand was ready to open all its halls for them, and they had chosen the most luxurious ballroom for their celebration.

They also planned to set up a cozy outdoor area with drinks and a photo corner on the small lawn beside the venue.

"I'm used to it,"

Mevika replied, reaching for a magazine that had just been delivered by a staff member. It was a fashion magazine featuring the two of them on the cover. They had already appeared on four business magazine covers, and this was their second major fashion magazine feature.

The cover had a striking black-and-white concept-sexy yet sweet. Aiwarin wore black, while Mevika wore white, creating a visually perfect balance.

Beyond magazine covers, they had also done over ten interviews for various media outlets and social platforms throughout the past five years. And with their wedding coming up, the spotlight on them was only going to shine brighter.

They always tried to focus on work-related questions-talking about their experiences, how they collaborated, and their journey as business partners.

Discussions about their relationship were kept as a secondary topic, though they sometimes shared their views on supporting same-sex love.

"I think after we announce our wedding, we might get asked to do a magazine cover in wedding dresses. One magazine even joked about it before,"

Mevika said.

"No time for that. We're way too busy,"

Aiwarin replied with a smile, placing the finished documents on her desk.

"Oh, really?"

Mevika looked at her as she walked closer.

"Alright, let's take a break. I want to see the Christmas tree," Aiwarin said, wrapping an arm around her girlfriend's waist.

"Yay!" Mevika cheered excitedly.

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***Ten minutes later...***

The two of them strolled through the grand central hall of Greater Duty-Free. The space was open, bright, and beautifully designed. Elegant escalators led up to different floors, while the walls were lined with massive glass panels decorated with festive ornaments.

Luxury brand stores were organized into different sections across each level, alongside spa and wellness services. On the ground floor, a massive supermarket catered to shoppers looking for premium goods. "It's beautiful,"

Mevika said, gazing up at the towering Christmas tree in front of them.

"Yeah, really beautiful,"

Aiwarin agreed, looking up at the tree's shining top before tilting her head back to admire the high ceiling adorned with twinkling lights.

It had been over five years since they first competed in the auction to win this project. After winning the bid, Greater Duty-Free was built from the ground up, and once completed, Superior and Orionna took over its management.

Their contract from that time had almost reached the five-year mark-only three years remained before the lease expired and a new bidding process would begin.

They had been attached to Greater Duty-Free since the very first day it opened. They both wanted to continue managing it, but the future was uncertain.

Would they still be here together when the next bid came around? Or would things change?

No, the real news was that the current government-reelected for a second term after the last election five years ago and the recent one that just passed was discussing a restructuring plan.

They were considering allowing multiple companies to take part in managing Greater Duty-Free in the next contract period. Many businesses were now paying close attention to this development.

Whether or not they would continue overseeing Greater Duty-Free together, one thing was certain: even if they no longer managed this place side by side, they would still hold hands and walk through life together.

To Aiwarin and Mevika, that was what truly mattered.

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The chandelier lights sparkled against the grand white ballroom of Orionna Grand Hotel. Elegant fabric draped beautifully across the ceiling, while round tables filled with guests surrounded the room.

Applause echoed through the hall as the two brides walked hand in hand down the red carpet, making their way to the stage. The formal ceremony began. Important figures from both families and many distinguished guests had gathered to witness this moment of love.

From the day they met-brought together by the right timing and the right circumstances-they had built their relationship step by step. This was fate.

Aiwarin and Mevika were getting married.

Looking back, they had been happy together, and their relationship had always been strong.

Nothing would change.

Nothing would be different.

The one thing that would always remain-tightly bound and unshaken was their love for each other.

**Two lucky young women, who fell in love each other.**

***May....Wo Ai Ni.***

**--THE END--**