

# Chapter 01: 07:37 AM

**The Prophecy...**

People love to seek answers about the future through tarot cards, fortune sticks, or even palm readings. But to me, those things are nonsense if the prediction is right, people cheer and say it's incredibly accurate.

But if it's wrong, they forget about it and look for a new prediction, as if waiting for an answer that pleases them or something that will actually happen in the future.

Many times, I think those people are fooling themselves. They are impatient folks who want uncertain answers to comfort themselves, or sometimes it might even make them feel worse. I think putting such feelings into predictions is unreasonable.

So, I'd never believe in them!

*But then again... being human means nothing is certain.*

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**2008**

**"Students who have arrived at school, please don't crowd around the school gate."**

The loudspeaker's voice echoed all the way to the roadside. People who had been standing in front of the gate started to move inside, knowing that the announcement was more of an order than a request.

I was hiding behind a streetlight pole, checking my watch for the hundredth time. Why was time moving so slowly? And so many people had already gone inside. Ugh... It was my first day at school, and I didn't have any friends. It was really sad, but what could I do? This was my first time entering middle school.

*Who goes to middle school twice anyway?*

I rolled my eyes at myself once before getting anxious again. Who would've thought that transferring to a school in an unfamiliar province would be so nerve-wracking? I was so worried that I even agreed to a fortune- telling session the day before school started.

Yes... you heard right. Even though I didn't believe in predictions, a few days ago, I was walking around the market near my condo and saw lady dressed in rags sitting and waiting for someone. She looked lonely and had an A paper with a marker-written sign saying, *'Fortune-telling for 99 baht. Come on in'.*

At that moment, the old lady called me over. I couldn't ignore her, so I agreed to let her read my fortune. And what I asked wasn't about love, money, or work. Of course not... I was only thirteen. Why would I care about those things? The only thing I was concerned about was whether I could fit into a new school with thousands of students.

**'You must step into the school with your right foot at 7:37 AM. If you do that, you'll only encounter good things.**

The words, which seemed like a casual remark, made me feel that... it wouldn't hurt to try believing in it. "It's 7:37, hurry up Meow!"

"What are you talking about?"

"What kind of creature meows?"

"A cat."

"And what's your name?"

"Cat."

"Exactly. New school, new name."

"Just call me Cat in the original way, please."

The voices of two students talking came from afar. Hearing that, I quickly walked through the school gate, cutting in front of them. I checked my watch to see how many seconds had passed. I spent 99 baht; if I didn't try, I wouldn't know if it was worth it. Alright! Right foot, right foot. The voice in my head echoed before I confidently stepped in with my right foot.

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***Thud....***

**"Ahhh!"**

Damn it! That thud wasn't the sound of walking, but...

The hand holding my bag let it drop to the ground as my body tried to steady itself. But when I put weight on my foot, a sharp pain shot through, throwing off my balance. I stumbled backward, hitting the iron gate with a loud bang, drawing the attention of dozens of students. Realizing how loud the gate was, I quickly leaned forward, only to end up slamming my knee into the ground intentionally. At first, there were gasps from many people, but soon those sounds turned into... laughter.

Oh no... What the heck! Didn't they say if I stepped in with my right foot at 7:37 AM, only good things would happen!

"Oh dear, why didn't you walk carefully?"

A teacher standing far away hurried over to help, but there was still a smile on her face.

Even though I was so embarrassed I wanted to disappear, my twisted ankle hurt too much to get up and run away. My knee stung as if it was injured too. Damn fortune-teller! If I see her at the market again, I'll demand my money back and compensation!

**"Are you okay?"**

As I looked at the teacher walking over with a smile, a sweet, melodious voice called out. A fair hand reached out in front of me, catching my attention immediately.

"Can you get up?"

She asked again, and what I saw was...

Oh my gosh! What a beautiful girl. Long hair, beautiful eyes, small lips but a high nose, petite, and her skin was so fair it seemed to glow. Can high school girls be this pretty...

I was dumfounded, my mouth agape, not immediately accepting her help. Her fair hand started to tense up. She looked around before stepping back to pick up my bag and hand it to me. But I still sat there, unmoving. She decided to sling my backpack over one arm and extended her hand to me again.

And of course, I hesitated... but I still reached out to take her hand. The clock's second hand showed it was,

**'7:37 AM and 55 seconds'**

And... her hand was very soft.

I used my other hand to push myself up, and when I stood at my full height, the person who helped me seemed much smaller. But I didn't care much. I quickly limped over to a nearby marble bench. The angelic girl, seeing that I was safely seated, placed my bag beside me before crouching down and lifting my skirt.

*Wha... why is she lifting my skirt!*

"What are you doing?"

"Sorry, I just lifted it a little. No one saw. Ah... your knee is scraped. Does it hurt?"

She asked with a concerned look, but I didn't respond.

"Teacher, I think her ankle is twisted. Someone needs to help her to the nurse's office."

She spoke without the amusement others had. My eyes quickly scanned her collar and saw three pink stars embroidered there. If mine had one triangle, those stars meant she was a senior in her final year of high school.

"Thank you,"

I said, raising my hands in a wai, feeling like a clumsy tall kid. But the kind senior waved it off.

"It's okay. Just walk carefully next time."

I nodded awkwardly in response.

After that, the teacher sent the students to their lines, leaving me alone. But before the senior disappeared, I swiftly read the name embroidered on her chest, curious about the girl who was so beautiful, had soft hands, and even had a cute name given by her parents.

**Seenam...**

I thought to myself, maybe I don't need to get my 99 baht back from the fortune-teller. Even though the first day of school was a disaster, meeting someone so nice made me feel that the school environment might be really good.

Yes, today had to be a good day!

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**"Hey, Meow, isn't that the girl who twisted her ankle at the school gate?"**

No way, someone saw me fall at the school gate and was in the same class. My life was really a mess.

"Oh, come on, Man. If you're going to ask that loudly, why don't you ask her yourself?"

"Yeah, right."

Without another word, the boy and girl hurried over to me, sitting in the middle of the room.

"Hey, did you fall at the school gate this morning?"

"Geez! Asking like that will just embarrass her."

"Oh, really?"

"By the way, are you the one who fell at the school gate and bent over like a dolphin, hitting your knee on the ground?"

As soon as the girl finished speaking, the two friends laughed together as if it was an unavoidable joke.

"Uh,"

I responded with just a sound, not knowing what to say.

"No."

"But you have gauze on your knee. It must be you."

The flamboyant boy replied, stroking his chin as if he had a beard to stroke.

Then why did you even ask?!

"Yeah, it was me. Did you see my underwear or something, so you came to ask? Or are you here to laugh at me again?"

My growing irritation made me snap, and that made both of them go silent, looking at each other as if telepathically communicating that they'd slap me in three seconds.

"Alright, Man. We can't leave someone like this alone."

When the girl finished speaking, she looked me up and down before narrowing her eyes.

*Looks like my first day at school might end up in the principal's office. But whatever, I don't mind going twice.*

**"Welcome to the Daring Pretty Girls Club."**

"Huh?"

And so, the morning class ended in confusion. I didn't really learn anything. The teacher just gave us an orientation, introduced us, and explained the rules, asking us to share our real names and nicknames with the class.

And I... who was sitting in the middle of the room, had to move to the back and realized that I was now part of the Daring Pretty Girls Club. What a ridiculous name. Who came up with that? And calling it a club when it only had those two and me, who just joined. It was hilarious. I was ready to show my slapping skills, but now I have to sit and laugh at their jokes instead.

"So, Pao, how long have you been in Chonburi?"

"Not long. I just moved here during the break."

"And where were you before?"

Cat asked, as if interrogating me. All I could do was answer.

"North."

"Are you a Stark?"

"No, I'm a Targaryen."

"Oh, You're so fluffy that I thought you were a direwolf."

As soon as Cat finished speaking, the two friends laughed loudly, then shook hands as if preparing for a comedy contest.

"You guys are funny."

"Of course. They say beautiful people often miss out, but funny people always get it. So we'll be beautiful and funny because we won't miss out and we'll get everything. And by everything, I mean everything, honey. Top and bottom, all the way."

"Ten points for you, Man!"

And the two of them laughed and joked again. What the heck! I haven't even started learning, and I'm already getting a headache!

Even though I thought that on the first day, as time went by, I became more like those two. Silly jokes started to pop into my head, just like people say, if you stay close to someone long enough, their traits will rub off on you.

Before I knew it, our group, calling ourselves the Daring Pretty Girls Club, became known as the Three Stooges among our friends. Well, it wasn't surprising. Others calling us that was quite accurate.

"The Daring Pretty Girls here!"

Man's voice echoed after the morning assembly. Not only was his highpitched voice loud, but there were also several table slaps to grab attention. A magazine was slammed onto the table with excitement, as if he couldn't wait any longer.

"The new magazine issue is here!"

"Wow, Man, you got it so fast. Open it up, bestie. Don't waste time."

Then both of them crowded around my desk. Oh, let me explain our seating arrangement first. We sat in the last row of the classroom, so the desks at the back were arranged in a middle row of three. Cat sat on the left, I sat in the middle, and Man sat on the right. Initially, I told them to sit next to each other, but they insisted that I sit in the middle.

They'd been close friends since elementary school and wanted me to become close with them quickly. At first, I was touched, but over time, I realized they did it for a reason: to make copying my homework easier. How about that? This group of daring girls had to be truly daring.

It wasn't just them who were bold, but me who had to resist the urge to start a three-way fight someday.

"What's my zodiac sign?"

Cat's voice rang out loudly as she quickly scanned the room, exclaiming, "Here it is!"

And then the fortune-telling resumed as if it were a normal occurrence.

"Come on, Pao, I'll read your fortune."

"Alright, go ahead."

Even though I didn't really like it, listening made me feel more involved with my friends, so it wasn't all bad.

"Your fortune is quite chaotic. You need to adapt to many things You're like a gecko clinging to the bathroom wall."

"What kind of prediction is that?"

I said, frowning.

"Just listen,"

Cat said, and my frown turned into a straight line. I nodded reluctantly and continued to listen.

"You adapt well to situations, so change isn't too difficult for you.

Financially, you're pretty balanced. You spend as much as you earn."

Of course, after school, they always invited me to eat or buy things. It was a wonder my allowance wasn't gone already.

"As for love..."

The boy and girl stopped what they were doing and made funny faces, as they always did when the reading reached the love section.

"For those in a relationship, love is smooth. For singles, someone will make your heart flutter. So, for singles wanting to find love, you need to showcase your special talents and let the world know how attractive you are!"

"Wow/Wow,"

They exclaimed in unison, turning to look at me again.

"Wow, what? What special talents? Do I have to fan my tail like an argus to attract a mate?"

I said, waving my hands, causing my friends to widen their eyes at me.

"What's an argus?" Man asked.

"Look it up on Google in computer class."

"And why attract a mate?"

Cat's question made them look at each other.

"Did I just say mate?"

"Yes."

"I just said it because male arguses fan their tails to attract females. I was just following the story I knew."

"Oh."

And that topic ended as homeroom began after our fortune-telling session.

I thought middle school life wouldn't involve much more fortune- telling until suddenly, a rumor about a super accurate palm reader spread through the school. After school, many students lined up to get their fortunes read by the fortune-teller who set up shop behind the market near the school. And, of course, both Man and Cat dragged me along.

Honestly, it was a waste of money. At first, I didn't mind, but as time went on, they took me so often it became annoying. They considered it accurate if it was right 20% of the time. Confusing, right? I was the only one confused. I realized it when the bomb dropped on our group.

"I'm not going anymore! It's not accurate. I could give a more accurate reading!"

And believe me, saying that was like tying a noose around my own neck. The fortune-telling turned into a small bet among us first-year students.

"Alright, if your prediction isn't accurate, you have to treat us to lunch for a week. But if it is, Meow and I will treat you to lunch and dessert every day for a month!"

Man's voice rang out, and other classmates started to gather around us, interested.

"Man! Does your family print money or something? Treating Pao for a whole month?"

Cat started to complain, and Man elbowed her lightly.

"Don't you think we'll get free food? Pao's predictions won't be accurate."

"True."

Hearing such a challenge, I, who couldn't back down, rolled up my already short sleeves a bit. Hmph, predicting these two's future shouldn't be hard! "Alright."

"But you can't predict for me or Meow. Predict for three other classmates instead."

Darn... Did they read my mind?

And so, my bad luck began. I probably needed to prepare money to treat my friends for a week. Sigh, why didn't I think before speaking?

Even though I thought that, when class ended, three classmates lined up for me to read their fortunes, as if to say the bet couldn't be ignored.

"So, how will you do it?"

Cat asked, arms crossed, with Man nodding beside her. Seriously... were these two really my friends or just using me for free food and homework copying?

"Uh, palm reading will do."

As soon as I said that, the first friend's hands were on the table, ready.

"Go ahead, Pao,"

The owner of the hands said excitedly. I understood they liked fortunetelling, but this felt like they were just here for random guesses. Why get excited over our group's bet? I didn't get it.

"Hmm..."

I squinted slightly, moving my hands and flipping them over to look at the back.

"What kind of palm reader looks at the back of the hand?"

Man said, leaning in to look before pulling back.

He was right. I didn't know what I was doing! I decided to just say something. Gathering my thoughts, I considered my friend's appearance. She was quite pretty, with a neat look. Hmm...

"Soon, an upperclassman will like you, but don't accept his love. He's a player, dangerous. Wait for the second upperclassman who approaches you; it'll be smoother. Next person."

As soon as I finished, the next person was ready, hands on the table.

This one was smart but seemed disappointed if they didn't get perfect scores. Very intelligent, not interested in romance.

"Your studies are fine. Don't pressure yourself. The more pressure, the worse it gets. Stay calm. Smile when you don't get the score you want, and next time, your score will improve. Next person."

This one was a sassy girl, always carrying a mirror and comb. Her friends seemed just as bold. She was annoying. What should I guess?

"Don't trust your friends too much. The close friend you have now will cause problems over something you love, leading to a big fight."

When the last person was done, I turned to my two friends, who were busy writing something down.

"What are you doing?"

"Writing down your predictions. If they're wrong, get ready to pay for our meals,"

Cat said.

Why weren't they this serious about studying? Oh well, better bring extra money just in case.

"When will we know if these predictions come true?"

The first friend asked. I looked up at the classroom ceiling, as if the answer would appear if I found a gecko. Hmm... How long would it take for these to come true? A hundred years?

"How long do fortune-tellers usually take?"

"They have daily, weekly, and monthly readings."

Everyone fell silent. If it happened within a day, it wouldn't be possible. So, a month would give me time to prepare for their laughter.

"One month,"

I said, marking the date in Cat's notebook where she wrote my predictions.

"Okay, sign. If anyone breaks the promise and can't pay for meals, they have to be the other's servant for the number of days they missed,"

Man said, signing first, followed by Cat and me.

"Alright, let's see in a month!"

That month passed quickly, as time often does. But what wasn't normal was...

"Are you going to sit there with your mouths open?"

I said as my two friends stared at their lunch plates in the cafeteria.

In that month, a lot happened. The smart friend told me they didn't get a perfect score but followed my advice to smile at their score. After that, they got perfect scores every time.

Honestly, the fact that the prediction came true wasn't as surprising as smiling at a test paper. Who in their right mind would do that?

The sassy friend had a fight with her close friend three days ago over the last ice cream bar. Ridiculous. They probably already had issues, but the ice cream was just an excuse to fight. The pretty friend had a flirty upperclassman approach her, but she turned him down because she believed my prediction.

Not only were Man and Meow shocked, but I was too.

"Come on, Man. At least there isn't a second upperclassman hitting on Prae,"

Cat said, mentioning our pretty friend's name, trying to comfort each other. I nodded along, even though I was the one who would lose money.

"Right, Cat. There's no way a second upperclassman will hit on Prae..."

**"Prae, I like you!"**

An upperclassman's voice echoed through the cafeteria, drawing everyone's attention. My two friends widened their eyes and shook their heads.

"Man, tell me it's not our Prae."

At the same time, we all turned to look.

**And there she was... Prae from our class!**

"Hahaha,"

I laughed loudly, while my two friends looked like they had swallowed something bitter.

"Since I already paid for lunch, let's just have dessert after school today."

"How did she get it right?"

Man whispered to Cat, confused.

"Yeah, the predictions were impossible, but they all came true,"

They said, looking at each other before turning to me.

"Pao, seriously."

"What?"

"We don't have any money today. Can we borrow some?"

"Borrow?"

"To treat you to dessert." "Borrow my money to treat me?"

They nodded eagerly.

"Come on, Pao, lend us some. We'll pay you back."

"Seriously, are you two thieves disguised as friends?"

"Yes,"

Man replied quickly, and I lifted my foot, ready to kick them both over.

"You ungrateful brats!"

"Ahh!"

They screamed dramatically, and other friends joined in.

"Pao, read my palm too!"

And so, the kicking was forgotten. Before I knew it, I had become a school celebrity, with everyone calling me **'Queen Pao'.**

Weird, right? Suddenly, I was the school's sacred figure. Just walking through the cafeteria, snacks would pile up in front of me. Thankfully, it was snacks now because it used to be red drinks. If I hadn't asked for something else, I might've gotten diabetes from drinking red syrup every day. Not only students but even the cafeteria ladies asked for readings, giving me free or extra food. I had more privileges than the school's star students.

At this moment, my reputation had soared to the point where I got to talk to someone again.

A girl who arrived precisely at 7:37 AM.

"**Miss Pao, could you please read my fortune?"**

The lovely voice of a beautiful senior echoed, making my heart race the moment my eyes landed on her chest-uh, I mean, the name embroidered above it.

**P' Seenam...**

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# Chapter 02: Divine Intervention

Three days before school starts...

I'd moved to Chonburi for about a month now. Before this, I lived in Chiang Mai. Well, saying "lived" mightn't be entirely accurate because it seemed like there was a chance I might have to move back to Chiang Mai someday. This was because my parents were currently expanding their popular scented candle business, which was loved by both locals and foreigners. For this expansion, they both came down to oversee the work themselves and brought me, their only daughter, to Chonburi as well. It sounded like a happy family, but the truth was, my parents rarely had time for me, including today.

I took a motorcycle taxi from the condo to stroll around the nearby market to see what food was available. After getting my hands full of snacks, I stood waiting for a ride behind the market. That's when I encountered an old woman who was staring at me.

"Hey, you!" The old lady waved at me as if she wanted to say something "Me?" I pointed at myself, confused, and the old lady nodded slightly.

I walked closer to her. She was dressed in a shabby manner, almost like a shaman, and her face didn't look very trustworthy. But despite that, I agreed to sit on the small chair opposite her after being invited to chat

"Just moved here, huh?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"I know because I'm a fortune teller"

1 blinked, still confused by everything happening. "So, why did you call me over?"

"No customers today. Thought I'd do a good deed and give you a reading. Tell me what you want to know."

I hesitated but, having already sat down, felt it was unavoidable. Even though I was puzzled by the free reading offer, I decided to go along with it to get it over with.

"Will I fit in at my new school?"

"Give me your hand."

I extended my hand to the fortune teller, still bewildered. In less than a minute, she began to speak in a serious tone

"You must step into the school with your right foot at exactly 7:37 AM. If you do that, only good things will happen."

"That's it?"

"That's it."

"Uh, okay. Thank you." I forced a smile and respectfully thanked her But just as I was about to get up, she spoke again.

"Wait, young lady." "Yes?"

"Ninety-nine baht."

"What?"

We locked eyes, and the fortune teller extended her hand, her face expressionless, indicating that I needed to pay for the reading

"Didn't you say you were doing this as a good deed?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you charging me?"

"I said I'd do a good deed by giving an accurate reading. I never said it was free."

Great, I've been tricked

"Didn't you see the sign? It's as big as a house," she said, glancing at the sign, while 1 sighed heavily

Whatever, I'll just pay and get it over with, I thought, feeling exhausted. I reluctantly pulled out the money and handed it to her.

"You're a good person," she said.

"Yeah, thanks," I replied, not wanting to engage further, as I took the onebaht change. I was ready to walk away, but the old lady continued to talk.

"Since you're my first customer, tell me one of your wishes."

"Oh, no thanks. I need to get going," I said, turning to leave, but she grabbed my arm.

Whoa! Her hand was as cold as a corpse!

"Tell me. You don't get opportunities like this often."

The atmosphere around me turned chilly. I looked around and realized there was no one else here. What kind of market was this, with no one around? This old lady was starting to creep me out

"Uh, I just want to get through my first year of middle school smoothly. Whatever I say, let it come true." I rubbed my arm where she'd grabbed me, looking around again.

"Just the first year? One year?"

"Yes, that's enough."

As I was looking for help, I heard the sound of a motorcycle approaching from a distance. I saw it was a motorcycle taxi without a passenger, heading my way. Thank goodness! I stepped back a bit and forced a smile.

"My ride's here. I have to go now," I said, and this time, I ran as fast as I could, but the old lady's voice still followed me.

"Think before you speak! Sometimes, those things might come true even after a year!"

Whatever, lady. I don't care anymore. I'm out of here!

I quickly jumped on the motorcycle, my bags of snacks hitting the driver's helmet hard.

"Sorry, I was in a hurry," I apologized.

"Where to?"

"Condo, Soi 7."

As soon as I told him the destination, the motorcycle took off. I let out a big sigh and started chatting with the driver like someone who'd been holding it in.

"I just escaped from a creepy fortune teller. Her hands were so cold. Did you see her smile at me? Gave me chills!"

The driver didn't respond, just shook his head slightly. I couldn't tell if he was saying he didn't see her or if he was annoyed that I'd accidentally hit him with my bags.

This was the story before the first day of school. Despite meeting a weird fortune teller and strange friends, the strangest thing right now was me.

After my first day of school, where I fell and was helped by a beautiful senior, I started acting weird for no reason. I should've been grateful and greeted her every time I saw her or smiled to say hello. But instead, the usually fearless me found myself avoiding her like I was scared.

"Have you had breakfast?"

"No/No," Cat and I answered in unison, as if we'd rehearsed it.

"Good. I'm having boiled chicken rice with liver. Who wants some?"

"No thanks, I'll have porridge."

"How's that going to fill you up, Cat? In the morning, you need Auntie Jum's chicken rice."

"Hey, it's my mouth and my money. Why do you care?"

"Why are you being so sassy?"

"What's with the 'sassy'? Are you from the South or something?"

"You say 'sassy' too, Pao!" Both friends said in unison, making me laugh.

Just when it should've been a fun time, my eyes caught sight of someone pale walking our way.

Oh no! It's that beautiful senior

"But chicken rice sounds good. I'll have that too," I said.

"Great, so both Man and Cat are having chicken rice. What about you, Pao?"

"Hey, where's Pao?"

Their voices weren't far away. Oh, don't wonder. As soon as I saw that beautiful senior walking over, I ran to hide behind a tree by the road.

"Pao, what are you doing sitting on chicken poop?"

"Chicken poop?!" I jumped up immediately, only to realize I'd been tricked.

"Are you crazy? Our school doesn't have chickens," Man laughed loudly, standing next to me with Cat.

"What are you hiding from?"

Yeah, what am I hiding from?

Realizing that, I quickly looked for the senior. And believe me, the word "chicken poop" I'd just shouted was loud enough to make everyone around look, including that beautiful senior...

1 locked eyes with her for a second and a half, not even having time to smile or do anything to ease the awkwardness. My legs knew what to do and immediately turned to run away

"Pao! Where are you running to?" Man shouted, and both friends ran after me.

"Why are you shouting? Aren't you afraid people will look?"

"Oh, come on! You're worried about people looking? As if running a hundred meters through two buildings didn't make you a target!"

"People are looking because you two are chasing me!"

"Alright, alright. But Pao, stop running! Man and I can't keep up," Cat said, panting, making me stop immediately. I took a moment to gather myself and looked back to make sure we were out of sight of the beautiful senior

"Why did you follow me?" I asked, equally out of breath, standing in front of my two friends:

"I don't know. Saw you running, so I ran too," Man said, sitting down on the grass by the school pond.

"What were you running from? If it wasn't daytime, I'd think you were running from a ghost," Cat said, sitting next to Man

"Nothing, just wanted to exercise."

"Liar," Cat said

I rolled my eyes and sat down. Our heavy breathing filled the air for a while before I sighed.

"I was avoiding a senior"

"A senior? Which one? And why?" Man asked, hugging his knees, staring at me like he was interrogating a criminal.

"A senior from grade 12. She helped me when I fell in front of the school"

"So why are you avoiding her?" Cat asked, looking confused, with Man nodding in agreement

"Well"

I told them everything, including the embarrassing skirt incident. Because of that, I felt so asharned. And that senior was the only one who saw the whole embarrassing scene clearly.

"Cat and I saw it too. Why didn't you run from us?"

"Remember, when you two mentioned the fall, I almost started a fight," I said.

"Yeah, so why didn't you challenge the senior?"

"She helped me. Why would I challenge someone who helped me?"

"But you ran instead?"

We all fell silent. I scratched my head, not knowing what kind of face I was making. "Yeah, it's kind of embarrassing."

As soon as I finished speaking, Cat lifted my skirt a bit, and I looked at her, ready to kick

"What are you doing?"

Cat looked around, and I followed her gaze. What was she doing, lifting my skirt and making a weird face?

"Huh?"

"Huh, what?" Man looked at Cat, confused, and I had the same expression.

"There are a lot of people around here. Aren't you embarrassed?"

"No, why?" As soon as I finished speaking, Cat tried to lift my skirt again. "Hey, why are you being annoying?"

"You said you were embarrassed. So, who lifted your skirt higher, me or the senior?"

"You, probably,"

"So why aren't you embarrassed?"

"Because you're my friend."

"But there are a lot of people around. Why aren't you running away?"

As soon as Cat finished speaking, Man put his legs down. "Maybe you're not embarrassed about falling or the skirt incident. Maybe you like that senior, so you're avoiding her."

As soon as Man finished speaking, I laughed loudly. "Crazy, why would I like that senior?"

"'True, but wait..."

"Wait, what?"

"Isn't that the senior you were running from?"

As soon as I heard that, I got up to

"This is the face of someone who has a crush on a senior, Pao!"

The face of someone who has a crush on a senior? Um... does such a face even exist in this world?E

I froze, along with...

Ding dong, ding dong

"The bell rang..."

"What about our breakfast?"

"We couldn't have that anymore, ugh, it's all your fault, Pao!"

The angry faces of my two friends made me feel exasperated because, in the end, they blamed me and demanded I make it up to them by pointing out who the senior was.

And so... their nosiness radiated so intensely that I had no choice but to take them.

My two friends and I stood hiding beside the building where the senior would walk by on her way to class. As soon as I pointed out who she was, both of them exclaimed simultaneously.

"She's gorgeous/She's stunning!"

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"Well, seeing someone that beautiful come to your rescue, it's natural to feel something. So, are you a tomboy?" Man asked, looking at me as if we were in the same boat.

"What tomboy? I still fangirl over guys with you."

"That doesn't matter. We have the right to fangirl over anyone and like anyone we want."

"Calm down, Man. Stop insisting that I like the senior. Let's go back to class before Somorn gets there and yells at us."

"Oh right, Somorn is in charge of homeroom today." Man and I quickly left our hiding spot and stopped talking about liking the senior.

"You two are so casual about calling teachers by their first names."

"Hey, Pao! You started it!"

And this was another strange event in my life before I discovered I had the power to predict the future accurately. Even though I was starting to gain some fame, I still avoided the beautiful senior. My two mischievous friends loved to tease me about it, sometimes even shouting loudly that I liked the beautiful senior whenever she was nearby, forcing me to run away every time.

But, as time went on, I found myself genuinely liking her. After telling my friends everything, I began to notice her more. Whether she was talking, smiling, or even just walking, everything about her seemed fascinating. Or maybe these feelings developed after running away so often, mistaking my racing heart from exhaustion for genuine affection.

Then came the day I couldn't run away...

"Pao, can you read my fortune?"

The senior's voice came from outside the classroom as my friends and I were the only ones left, everyone else had already gone home

"Well, Pao, you've become so famous that the senior you've been avoiding is now asking you to read her fortune," Man whispered in my ear, with Cat nodding in agreement

"Are you in a hurry to go home? If you are, I can come back another time." While I stood there looking dumbfounded, my two friends quickly approached the beautiful senior with smiles, more enthusiastic than insurance salespeople.

"Sure, come on in and have a seat," Cat said, leading the senior into the now-empty classroom before I could even refuse.

"Cat already brought her in. How am I supposed to read her fortune? Just standing close to her made me so nervous," I whispered to Man, feeling anxious, but my friend just grinned. "So, you admit you like her, right?"

"Is this really the time to ask that?"

"Answer!"

"Well you guys kept pushing me until I really started to like her!" I stammered, feeling embarrassed and letting out a big sigh.

"Wow, adding some color to your life Why don't you take this chance to ask her out? We've tested it before; when you really focus on saying something, it comes true. So why not wish for yourself to be happy? Being the girlfriend of a beautiful senior would be awesome, right?"

"You want me to ask her out just to look cool?"

"Why not? Chasing after her would be cooler than running away. Maybe this time, your courage will stop you from running away every time you see her."

Come to think of it, I was getting tired of running away. Even though I still ran or hid behind trees every time I saw her.

"Do you think it's a good idea?"

"Of course! She seems really nice. Even if you don't succeed, she'll still think you're cute."日

A breeze blew through the corridor, making my hair fall over my face In that moment, I felt a bit more confident, quickly fixing my hair.

"If I get my heart broken, you have to take responsibility"

"Sure, we'll go get some cold milk."

"Good"

"But you're paying."

"Ugh! You always want free food, you lousy friend!" I said, glaring at Man, who just laughed.

"Just try it. Maybe it'll be so sweet you won't need the milk."

"Seriously, you're really good at convincing people."

"It's just natural for someone as beautiful as me." I rolled my eyes in exasperation

"Whatever, my life has been weird since I started at this school Predicting that the senior will be mine won't be any different!"

# Chapter 03: White or Brown

The chatter that used to fill every corner of the school gradually faded away, leaving only the occasional shouts of other students below or the sound of the wind, making the classroom feel not hot at all.

"What are you here to see?"

I asked, while the beautiful senior just blinked at me.

Oh my god, what's happening? I'm so excited!

"What do people usually ask about?"

Her sweet voice made my heart flutter even more.

"Uh, mostly about studies, friends, but if it's popular, then love stuff, I guess."

"Hmm, let me think."

She extended both hands in front of me, looking like she hadn't even intended to get her fortune told.

Then, my eyes caught sight of two friends sitting behind the beautiful senior.

'Talk to her, you idiot!"

'If you can crack a joke, do it! Don't waste time!'

The notebook I used for class notes had now become a sheet of paper with large, bold letters, courtesy of those two...

"Uh, before we start, can I ask your name?"

"My name? Sure, I'm Pa, but some people call me Watercolor."

"Pa?"

"Yes"

"Your parents named you '*father*'?"

Everything fell silent. The beautiful senior looked confused, while my two friends looked exasperated, as if to say my joke was terrible.

"Uh, it was a joke, like your name is Pa, so do you like a fatherly uh, motherly kind of person? I didn't mean to confuse you."

As soon as I explained, her puzzled face slowly turned into a smile.

"Oh, not that kind of Pa. My full name is Paper."

"Oh, Paper. Well, let's start the fortune-telling. What do you want to know, Watercolor?"

"Oh, I thought you'd call me Pa after asking my name."

"I'm used to calling you P' Seenam now."

"Used to it? Do you know me?"

Oh no!

"Oh, I usually call people by their real names. Sometimes I call those two friends Yotpol and Marisa."

I gave a weak smile, not knowing what else to say.

"Bullshit,"

Cat whispered, but loud enough for me to hear, making me glare at her as if to say she'd get it later.

"I see."

"So, P' Seenam, what do you want to know? Have you decided?"

"Yes, I've decided. Fortune-teller Pao, help me choose between white or brown."

I was silent, confused by her request.

"Choose a color?"

"Yes."

She moved her hands closer for me to see, and I blinked, unable to think of anything, so I just said,

"White"

"Why white?"

"Because your hands are white."

And in a split second, I realized I'd said something weird.

"Uh, I mean..."

"Okay, then I'll take brown."

Before I could explain, a brown teddy bear keychain was placed in front of me, and the beautiful senior smiled at me kindly.

"I just wanted to know which keychain color to use."

"That's all?"

"Yes, usually you have to pay for fortune-telling. Can I give you this keychain as payment?"

"Uh, sure"

"Great."

The beautiful senior smiled happily before continuing.

"And I'm sorry for lifting your skirt on the first day of school. I don't know if you've been avoiding me, but if you have, please accept my apology. I don't want you to feel bad."

As soon as she finished speaking, she took a white teddy bear keychain from her bag and attached it to her pencil case zipper, as if she'd decided which color to use.

"Huh?"

"Thanks for the fortune-telling. Maybe using this keychain will bring me luck, right?"

At that moment, I didn't know what to say. My mind was blank, unable to process anything. Should I agree or just smile back? In the end, I just stared at the beautiful senior, not responding, not smiling, not showing any reaction. I took the cute keychain and watched her stand up.

"If we pass each other, smile at me so I know you're not mad anymore, Fortune-teller Pao."

The beautiful senior gave me a small smile. She didn't wait for an answer about why I had been avoiding her. She chose to walk away, leaving me there.

"Oh my, Miss Pao's soul has left her body,"

Man said, looking at the keychain in my hand.

"It's cute."

"Pao, wake up," Cat said this time.

I snapped out of my daze for a moment, squeezing the little teddy bear tightly. I stood up from my chair and rushed out of the room, not caring what my two friends were saying. My body was running outside, calling out someone's name as loud as I could.

"P' Seenam!"

The beautiful senior stopped and turned to me, looking surprised and without a smile.

"Next time we meet!"

"...."

"I'll smile at you!"

Honestly, I knew my face probably looked dazed and excited, but the person who heard me just smiled back, not caring about my awkward expression.

She waved goodbye before walking down the stairs and disappearing from my sight.

"Wow, this is like a scene from a high school romance movie."

I said, turning to look at my two friends standing beside me. When the senior was gone, my true self seemed to return.

"Was I dreaming?"

As soon as I asked, my friends raised their hands and smacked my back.

"You violent people, just answer me!" "We were afraid you wouldn't believe us,"

Cat said, lowering her hand.

"P" Seenam is a bit sneaky, you know,"

Man added.

"Sneaky how?"

I quickly asked Man, who was picking at his nails. Honestly, I wanted to smack him so hard it would hurt his brain.

"How sneaky? She asked for a fortune-telling, then asked you to choose a keychain color. When you picked a color, she gave you another one as payment, like she was pretending. It's like she was saying the fortune-telling was just an excuse, she really wanted to give you something."

After Man finished speaking, there was no doubt my gentle heart was floating far away. Even though I hadn't smiled at the beautiful senior earlier, her smile after she left stayed on my face almost the whole time.

"No way, she wouldn't think like that. She probably gave it as a real payment."

"Playing the innocent girl now, huh? Don't stand too close to her, Man. Pao looks like she's ready to die, not caring about anything anymore."

"You're xaggerating"

Cat linked arms with Man and walked away, leaving my bag to fall to the ground.

"Hey, why are you two walking away from me?"

"'Cause you're annoying,"

Man replied.

"Annoying? Man, you're the one who encouraged me!"

"Encouraging is one thing, but I didn't say I wouldn't be annoyed. Let's run,

Cat. Let her chase us like we chased her earlier."

As soon as my flamboyant friend finished speaking, they both ran away as fast as they could. Except....

"Whoever walks back with me, I'll treat you to unlimited bowls of boat noodles."

"Man, how can you walk away from your dear friend Pao? That's not right!"

Cat quickly walked back to me, her mischievous smile showing how great my offer was.

"Cat! You traitor!"

"It's normal. Hot people are always a bit mean Come on, Pao, let's go before the noodles run out."

"Sure, Cat. Let's leave Man to walk home alone."

"Come bere, I'll smack both of you!"

As soon as Man shouted, Cat and I screamed and ran away as fast as we could. But soon, we were all talking about what had happened and ended up eating several bowls of noodles before going home.

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***Creak***

The condo door opened, and I walked into the luxurious suite. I threw my backpack onto the sofa and walked straight to the fridge, pouting a nearly full glass of water and gulping it down.

"That noodle shop must use a ton of MSG."

I wiped the water from my mouth with the back of my hand. My phone buzzed loudly, startling me. I quickly reached into my skirt pocket to grab it.

"Hello?"

[Are you home, Pao?]

"Yes, I'm home"

[Have you eaten?]

"Yes, I had noodles with my friends. How about you, Mom? Have you eäten?"

[I Not yet. Your dad is still in a meeting, I don't know how late it'll be.]

"If it's late, you can stay in Bangkok. I'll be fine."

[I'll let you know. Once you're in your room, take a shower and change your clothes.]

"Got it."

[Was school okay today?]

"Yes, everything was fine. I'm doing great."

[Good. We'll talk later. I have to join the meeting now.]

"Okay. Don't overwork yourself. If you're tired, come back so I can hug you."

[Alright]

The call ended. I lowered the glass and placed it on the kitchen counter, then sat on the sofa and grabbed the TV remote to find something to watch.

"I'm so bored."

If I were in Chiang Mai, I'd probably be talking about scented candles with Grandma Toey or giving Grandma Mali a massage. It was inevitable that being away from home made me miss the people who raised me. At school, I might be brazen, but at home, I was a different person-a well-behaved child, sometimes even seeming older than my age.

I came from a very good family We had plenty of wealth, land, and successful businesses, ensuring a secure future. I was the only granddaughter, so I was very cherished, especially by my grandmothers.

My parents didn't have much time, as I'd mentioned, but I still received all the love they can give. Have you ever seen a drama where the heroine is born rich? That's me, except in elementary school, I barely interacted with anyone I didn't even have close friends. Despite being wealthy and having new toys, I pushed everyone away because I felt more fun being with my grandmothers.

But Grandma always told me that humans are social animals. No matter how much we can live alone, in the end, we need our own community, whether it's big or small. Honestly, when Grandma said we are social animals, I secretly laughed inside. But when it came down to it, I understood that being alone could affect my studies. For example, when the teacher asked us to form groups, I always ended up with the leftover boys because everyone else already had their groups.

After I accidentally told Grandma about school, she advised me to try making friends at the new school because she wouldn't be there to play with me anymore. Hearing that, I promised her I would try to find close friends in my new environment.

And that's when I realized that having friends was really fun.

***Ding***

The sound of an MSN message popped up, and I immediately got up to sit in front of my thin laptop.

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**Man jub:**

Are you home yet?

**Cat\_Za:**

Yeah, got yelled at for coming home late.

**Man jub:**

Serves you right for being so greedy.

**Cat\_Za:**

Excuse me, like you never eat.

**Man jub:** Hahaha

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Before I could reply, my phone buzzed with a message from Mom, displayed clearly on my expensive flip phone.

[Looks like I have to stay in Bangkok tonight. Not sure if I'll be back Sunday or Monday. I'll call Aunt Parn to stay with you tonight.]

[It's okay, Mom. Aunt Parn can come tomorrow.]

[Are you sure? Can you stay alone?]

[Absolutely, Mom. I've already eaten, so I won't go out. Don't worry.]

I replied calmly. This wasn't my first time sleeping alone. Since moving to Chonburi, I often spent the first night alone. If my parents didn't come back the next day, Aunt Parn, our trusted housekeeper, would occasionally stay over.

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**Paopanna:**

I'm home, but feeling a bit down.

**Man jub:**

How can you be down when you're so happy?

**Cat\_Za:** True.

**Paopanna:**

It's not about P' Seenam

As soon as I typed "P' Seenam," the smile that had disappeared since I entered the room reappeared.

**Cat\_Za:**

I bet Pao is smiling.

**Man jub:**

I bet too.

**Paopanna:**

Know-it-alls!

**Man jub:**

So why are you down?

**Cat\_Za:**

o x < (know-it-all face)

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I laughed softly at Cat's weird emoji and began to understand the concept of humans being social animals a bit more.

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**Paopanna:**

Alone at home again.

**Man jub:**

Oh Pao, if I had your house, I'd love it. No way I'd complain about being alone.

**Cat Za:**

True. Even though I've never been there, everyone in the province knows it's the most expensive condo. So jealous, I want to live there too.

**Paopanna:**

Then come over.

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And as soon as I invited them, my Saturday morning became less boring. Even though I had known Man and Cat for quite some time, bringing friends over and revealing my true self to my parents made me a bit nervous. So inviting them over when my parents weren't home seemed like the perfect plan.

And the night I had to sleep alone passed....

I got out of bed at nine in the morning, quickly tidied up my blanket, and went to shower and brush my teeth. After almost half an hour, I came out of my room wearing a white T-shirt and black shorts.

"Good morning, Pao,"

Aunt Parn greeted me with a smile, and I immediately smiled back.

"Good morning, Aunt. We meet again,"

I replied with the friendliest smile.

"I made fried eggs and toast for you. But if you don't want that, I can make fried rice. Do you want fried rice?"

"No, thank you. Just the toast and eggs are fine."

"Do you want anything special for lunch? I can go out and get it for you."

She hadn't even finished serving breakfast, but our caring housekeeper was already asking about lunch. I should compliment her to Mom more often so Aunt Parn might get a little raise.

"My friends are coming over around noon. We'll probably order something to eat."

Auntie Parn just nodded with a smile and placed two fried eggs and two slices of toast in front of me.

"Have you eaten yet, Aunt Parn? Join me."

"I've already eaten. You go ahead, Pao. Oh, there's also a salad. Your mom insisted you eat more vegetables."

I just nodded, then stacked the toast and eggs, added a lot of sauce, and put the green, juicy vegetables in the middle. I walked over to sit in front of my laptop and took a bite of the sandwich.

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**Paopanna:**

11 o'clock, right?

I sent the message on MSN and waited for about five minutes before someone replied.

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**Cat Za:**

Getting dressed.

**Paopanna:**

It's not even ten yet. Why the rush?

**Cat\_Za:**

Yeah, bringing a swimsuit too.

**Paopanna:** What for?

**Cat\_Za:**

To swim in your condo pool, duh.

**Paopanna:**

If you're going, go with Man. I'm not joining.

**Cat\_Za:**

Why not?

**Paopanna:**

Too crowded. It's Saturday, kids will be swarming like worms.

**Man jub:**

Don't they have separate pools?

**Paopanna:**

They do, but they're close together. Still noisy. Just woke up, Man?

**Man jub:**

Yeah, your messages woke me up.

**Cat\_Za:**

Go shower and get dressed, Man. Last one there buys pizza.

**Man jub:**

You'll be buying, Cat!

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The conversation ended, and I knew those two would really race. But trust me, even though they said the last one buys, when they both arrived.....

"We arrived together, so the host buys."

Ah, my wonderful friends. Whers, else could I find friends like these?

"Not surprising."

I shrugged slightly and led my two friends to the almost top floor of the condo. The keycard beeped, and the door opened.

"I knew it was fancy, but this is too much,"

Man said, amazed by the suite. "How rich is your family, Pao?"

Cat was equally astonished.

"I don't know, maybe they could buy the whole sea in Chonburi."

"You're getting cocky."

I laughed softly and led them to the living room, which had a view of the city and the distant sea.

"You can see the sea too. So extravagant,"

They said, sitting on the sofa with a big TV in front of them.

"If it were me, I wouldn't complain about being alone if home was here,"

Man said, eyes sparkling.

"Want to watch a movie? I'll let you choose,"

I said, grabbing a box full of CDs for them to pick from.

"This one,"

They chose a Doraemon cartoon as soon as I set the CDs down.

"Good choice."

"There are only cartoons, and almost half of them are Doraemon. What else could we pick?"

I just laughed softly at my friend's exasperation.

"I'll fry some nuggets and fries,"

Aunt Parn said, placing drinks in front of my friends.

"Hello,"

Cat and Man greeted, startled, quickly bowing to Aunt Parn, not expecting anyone else to be there.

"Pao's aunt is so pretty,"

Man complimented sweetly, trying to make a good impression.

"Oh, you're so sweet, young man. But I'm just the housekeeper, not Pao's aunt,"

Aunt Parn said with a smile, touching her face before disappearing into the kitchen.

"Wow, you have a housekeeper too."

Man and Cat looked at each other, then sat close together on one side of the sofa, looking tense, making me scratch my head.

"I didn't fart."

"Smells like rich people."

"True,"

Man added. I just raised an eyebrow while putting the CD in the player.

"So what, are you going to stop being friends because I'm rich?"

As soon as I said that, they looked at each other again, then relaxed, sitting comfortably with their legs crossed, looking at me mischievously.

"No way, how could we stop being friends with someone who can treat us for life?"

"Evil!"

I shouted, then sat between my two best friends.

"Hungry? Should we order pizza?"

"Calm down, I just ate. Cat, did you eat?"

"Yeah, let's order later."

I just nodded, understanding, and started watching the cartoon, even though it was probably my hundredth time.

Soon, fries and nuggets were placed in front of us, and Aunt Parn said she was going out to buy snacks for us. I gave her a list of what I wanted and continued watching the cartoon until halfway through.

"Hey, by the way,"

Cat said, turning to me.

"I think P' Seenam is acting strange."

I made a confused face. What we were watching a cartoon, and now we're talking about the pretty senior?

"Strange how?"

I asked, pretending to take a sip of water.

"Well, yesterday, it seemed like she knew you liked her."

My eyes widened immediately.

"Honestly, if I were P' Seenam, I'd know Pao likes me too. Always avoiding her, and your face when you look at her is far from hate,"

Man added, moving closer to look at me. Now I was the one feeling squeezed between them.

"No way, how could she know? Besides, yesterday I didn't show any signs except for running away when I saw her."

"Oh Pao, even a three-month-old baby could tell."

"You're exaggerating."

"True, I agree with Man. And if she knows you like him, that's even stranger,"

Cat said, taking a sip of water, as if trying to tease me until I burst with curiosity

"Out of water, Pao. Go get some for your guests,"

Cat said, and I quickly moved closer to her, pinching her cheek.

"Do you want to die? Spill it! No stalling!"

As soon as I acted like that, Man laughed loudly, enjoying my clear reaction But honestly, I was quite precocious.

Cat shook her head free from my grip, opening and closing her mouth a few times.

"If P' Seenam knows you like her but still gives you things subtly like that."

"Then maybe she likes you too."

"....."

"Not surprising, Pao is quite the catch," Man teased.

"Yeah, running away from her all the time, she must think it's weird,"

I laughed awkwardly, trying to brush it off, but Cat shook her head, raising a finger to stop me.

**"Interested means...."**

**"....."**

**"She likes you too."**

***Eh...?***

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# Chapter 04: Bad Habits

It was now twenty-two thirty-two hours.

And I was still sitting in the same spot even though my two friends had left hours ago, leaving me alone with a bombshell to ponder.

"Pao! I'm back!"

My mom's voice rang out as her still-beautiful middle-aged figure hurried over to hug me.

"Yay, you're back! Were you tired?"

I quickly shook off my earlier thoughts, seamlessly slipping into the role of the good child who only thought about her parents who hadn't returned yet.

"Very. Have you eaten yet, dear?"

"Not yet, I was waiting for you."

"And what about me? Are you only waiting for Mom?"

My dad's playful voice chimed in, making me smile.

"Should I wait for him too..."

"So mean."

I just laughed softly at the conversation that didn't seem to be genuinely hurtful.

Our happy family chatted a bit while my parents sweetly prepared dinner together. Meanwhile, I imagined myself cooking like this with P' Seenam.

*But wait. Oh, come on! I'm really losing it.*

Realizing that, I shook my head a few times before acting normal again.

After a night of tossing and turning, thinking about P' Seenam, the morning found me walking around like a zombie, ready to collapse in five minutes.

"What's wrong, Pao? You look tired,"

Dad said, ruffling my hair a bit as we walked around the mall near our condo.

"I didn't sleep well last night."

"Why didn't you come sleep in our room then?"

"Who does that? I'm thirteen now."

"But you act like you're three."

"Dad!"

On Sunday mornings, it was inevitable that my parents would try to make up for leaving me home alone often by taking me shopping for clothes. Even though the situation seemed pleasant, everything felt off when I saw someone in the clothing store we were in.

P' Seenam... and another senior guy

My hand froze on a pretty T-shirt as I secretly watched the senior girl laughing with the handsome senior guy. If I remembered correctly, that guy was in the same class as P' Seenam. Even though I'd promised to smile if we met, I couldn't keep that promise in this situation. My heart was a bit annoyed.

And it seemed my secret glances were too powerful. Suddenly, the beautiful senior girl turned to look right where I was standing. We locked eyes through the clothes racks. She seemed a bit surprised to see me, but what I did was...

"Mom, let's go to another store."

"What about the clothes you picked? You can go ahead, I'll pay for these first."

"Okay."

This was the first time I hurried out of a store without waiting for my parents like I usually did.

"Sigh..."

I sighed softly as I stood in another clothing store next to the old one.

"Why do I always act so weird?"

I kept mumbling to myself, trying to acknowledge how annoying my recent behavior was.

"Oh well, it's done."

I tried to stop thinking about it and started browsing through the clothes. It seemed I grabbed the same shirt as the person next to me.

"Sorry,"

I quickly apologized, turning to make eye contact to show it wasn't intentional, but...

"Hey... Pao, buying clothes?"

I was stunned, standing stiff like I was covered in cement. It took several seconds to regain my composure.

"Oh, P' Seenam!"

I pretended to be excited, calling her name a bit louder than usual.

"Are you buying clothes?"

"No, I'm here to buy mackerel for my mom. But when I asked the staff, they told me to go to the market."

Buying mackerel? I just stood there with a dry smile, looking around in confusion. Soon after, P' Seenam's soft laughter filled the air.

"I was joking. No need to look so exasperated."

P' Seenam covered her mouth slightly, trying to suppress her smile.

"Oh, a joke... Mackerel in a clothing store, right."

Then I laughed loudly, startling her with my overly enthusiastic reaction.

*Oh my gosh, why did I laugh so exaggeratedly!*

"So, what kind of shirt are you looking for, Pao?"

The beautiful senior quickly changed the subject, seemingly unable to handle my awkwardness anymore.

"Nothing specific, just looking for something I like."

"Want me to pick one for you?"

Without waiting for an answer, she started browsing through the clothes with a smile. I watched her with excitement, forgetting my earlier annoyance at seeing her with another guy.

*Another guy! What am I saying! It's not like we're anything to each other.*

*But the senior in front of me... she's so cute.*

"How about this one? It's cute."

P' Seenam pulled out a white tank top with the word SMILE written in an artsy font.

Honestly, it seemed like she was telling me to smile. "Sure, this one works."

I reached out to take the shirt, but she pulled it back.

"I was joking. The shirt is plain and overpriced."

The beautiful senior smiled at me before quickly pulling out her phone as if someone was calling.

"Hello? Yeah, I'm coming down. Is the food ready? Okay, okay."

I watched her put her phone back in her bag quickly. She seemed relaxed.

"I have to go now. See you at school."

"Okay."

She waved slightly before walking out of the store without looking back. I was the only one watching her beautiful figure disappear from sight.

And this was probably the first time I felt strangely sad. Even though I'd walked out of one store to avoid seeing her, when she followed me and we talked, I regretted that we were no longer in each other's sight.

Wait, did she follow me?

"Did you get a shirt, dear?"

Hearing my mother's voice, my thoughts were abruptly interrupted, and I could barely adjust my emotions in time.

"Are you hungry? Let's find something to eat,"

Mom said, browsing through the clothes a bit.

"Sure, but..."

I held up the tank top the beautiful senior had just picked for me.

"I want this one too."

"Are you going to wear a tank top? The sun here is strong. How about looking for something else?"

This time, Mom didn't agree. I quickly scanned the area and grabbed a denim shirt from a nearby rack.

"I'll wear it with this shirt. Please it's pretty."

"Will it match?"

"Last Friday night, I was so lonely. I had to stay alone. My heart hurt so much it almost shattered... I almost cried."

"Alright, alright, enough. We'll buy it. No need for the drama."

Dad said, taking both shirts and heading to the cashier.

"You're something else. If you're going to wear that tank top, you must always wear a cover-up. Otherwise, I'll throw it away."

"Got it. Let's wait for Dad to pay and then find something to eat. I'm hungry."

I quickly linked arms with Mom, forgetting the sadness of parting with the beautiful senior easily.

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And so, the happy Sunday ended, leading to a Monday morning where I wasn't sure what I was feeling.

"Good morning, Lady Pao,"

Man said, bowing slightly, with Cat following suit.

"Today's breakfast is chicken rice with dipping sauce, chicken bone soup, and garnished cucumbers. Oh, and cilantro too."

"Additionally, we have Pepsi, orange juice, green soda, red soda, and unlimited salt to sprinkle on them if you wish, Lady Pao. Even if it means ruining your kidneys, Man and I will serve it immediately."

If I had to compare the straightness of the white lines on the road, it'd match my eyes right now.

"What are you guys doing?"

I looked at my friends with exasperation before laying my head on the cafeteria table.

"Oh no, Lady Pao, you can't let your expensive face touch this dirty table! Lift your head up."

Man said louder than usual. Both of them were seriously playing the servant-master role, which felt over the top. I wasn't in the mood to play along at all.

"Enough, I'm not in the mood."

As soon as I said that, my friends sat across from me, eager to know what was wrong.

"What's wrong? You look like a dog whose owner won't play with it,"

Cat said, poking my head like she was nudging dog poop with a stick

"Sigh..."

"It's serious,"

Man said, resting his chin on his hand and leaning in to look at me.

"Is it about P' Seenam?"

"Man, go buy a lottery ticket. You're more accurate than my fortunetelling,"

I said, lifting my head from the table and sitting up straight to talk to my two best friends.

"I ran into P' Seenam at the mall yesterday."

"Oh my, was it a coincidence or are you a stalker?"

"It was a coincidence. I was shopping with my family and happened to see her with a senior from our school. They were together... a senior guy."

"Ah, I see,"

Cat said, looking at me seriously.

"It must be Nat. They seem to stick together a lot."

"Nat? Which Nat?"

"Over there."

As soon as Cat said that, Man and I quickly turned to look where she was pointing.

What we saw was P' Seenam walking with a group of four or five friends, and one of them was the senior guy I saw yesterday. They were talking loudly, not worried about any other seniors because they were the top seniors now.

I gathered my courage. Even though I couldn't figure out my feelings, I still wanted to keep my promise to smile when we met.

But it seemed nothing was going my way. Even though I stared at her, trying to do what she'd asked, she didn't look at me at all. I wasn't in her line of sight, or maybe... someone else was more visible.

I decided to stop looking at the senior group, while my two friends looked at me with pity.

"That's enough. I think I need to give up on the idea of liking or pursuing her."

"Why?"

Cat asked, confused, her eyebrows furrowed as if regretting she wouldn't get to tease me about the beautiful senior anymore.

"No reason. We're in different grades, and I'm a girl. Judging by her style, she probably likes guys. Besides, I don't even understand my own feelings right now. Honestly, it's a bit frustrating"

"Ah,"

Man and Cat nodded as if they understood.

"Well, if you say so, that's good. Also, when you do your fortune- telling, you should hint that she should like you. Maybe things will get better."

"Usually, special powers don't work on their owners, right?"

"How would you know if you haven't tried?"

Man said, looking like he had an idea.

"How about this? Before giving up, why don't you use your special powers to make her like you? Since you're going to stop liking her anyway."

"What's the point?"

"No point. Just try it. Because for sure, you'll be confused about your feelings for a while."

"Even if you tell me to get my fortune read, how am I supposed to do that? Just walk up and say, 'Hey, P' Seenam, can you read my fortune? That's weird."

"Well, you never know. Maybe she'll come up to you and start a conversation or give you something."

"Huh?"

I looked confused, and at that moment, Man had a mischievous smile on his face, while Cat was grinning widely, looking in another direction instead of at me.

"Honestly, Pao,"

Cat said hesitantly, "you can't just give up."

What a lousy friend, saying something like that out of nowhere.

**"Fortune Teller Pao..."**

Before I could start lashing out at my friends for their annoying comments, my attention was drawn to the owner of the voice instead

"I brought you a drink. Your friends said you needed something colorful, so I was worried the keychain I gave you wouldn't be enough."

*Oh, how could I ever get over this adorable girl!*

"Thank you, but you really didn't have to. People just make things up," I replied, feeling excited but secretly happy at the same time.

"Oh, really? But I already bought it. Do you like green drinks, Pao?"

"No, I don't,"

I answered, trying to hide my smile, knowing that the veins in my neck were probably bulging.

"Oh, really..."

"But I love you for it."

"...."

The beautiful senior's disappointed face turned into a slight smile. She stifled a laugh at my awkward playfulness, and yes, why did I say that!

"You scared me. I thought you really didn't like it."

"P' Seenam, would you like Pao to read your fortune about love? I saw you with your boyfriend earlier. Let Pao predict it for you,"

Man said casually, but I knew immediately that this was his way of giving me a chance to use my special powers or maybe to find out if the senior and her friend were really dating.

"Boyfriend? What boyfriend? I don't have a boyfriend."

P' Seenam said with a smile, and although I was secretly smiling with joy, that smile quickly faded.

"I mean, not yet uh, never mind."

The beautiful senior just gave a slight smile. I couldn't tell if it was a shy smile she was trying to hide or a smile of uncertainty.

""Then let Pao read your fortune,"

Cat chimed in again.

This time, I felt a strange sensation. From feeling hopeless earlier, I suddenly sprang up, grabbed the beautiful senior's hand without asking for permission, and used my other hand to touch her smooth, white palm, pretending to read her palm lines. But my eyes weren't looking at her hand at all. I stared directly into her eyes. She seemed startled, not used to my sudden boldness.

"Someone has a crush on you, P' Seenam."

"And that person is very close to you right now. So... if you open your heart to love, it'll be a love beyond your expectations."

"Close to me right now? You mean..."

Her initial shock slowly turned into a gentle smile. She didn't pull her hand away from the strange junior but instead held my hand in return. We were in a rather odd position, and she started speaking again.

"Like... can you give me a hint? Is that person younger or the same age? Or are they a girl or a boy?"

"Huh?"

This time, it felt like I was the one under a spell. Why would a senior who seemed to like boys ask if it was a girl or a boy? Or was she suspecting that I was hinting at myself?

Did she figure out that U liked her, or was she just teasing? My earlier courage vanished, but I still let her hold my hand. Should I run away or laugh it off and say I didn't know? But this relaxed atmosphere seemed perfect for a confession.

What if I just told her I liked her...

"P' Seenam, I...I...."

"Hey, what are you doing?"

Before I could say anything, a guy walked up from behind. He had a smile that showed he was enjoying his school life, and my plan to confess was put on hold.

The beautiful senior smiled at the guy like she did when she was with her friends. Her hand slowly let go of mine naturally, and at that moment, I understood something. I wasn't sure if I understood it correctly, though.

The smile she gave the guy was a friendly one, full of fun, unlike the affectionate smile she gave me. And maybe just maybe, P' Seenam might like girls too.

"I brought a drink for Fortune Teller Pao, and she offered to read my fortune in return. Even though the prediction was a bit confusing"

"I didn't know you liked fortune-telling,"

The guy said, looking surprised.

"Not really."

"Where's the drink?"

"Oh, I forgot I came to buy a drink. When I saw Fortune Teller Pao sitting here, I stopped to chat. Did you get the food?"

"Yeah, I did. The food's so cold it's attracting flies,"

The guy said, and P' Seenam laughed, turning to me again.

"Were you going to say something earlier, Pao?"

"Huh? Oh, no, I just wanted to thank you for the green drink."

"No problem. Thanks for the fortune-telling too,"

She said, and with that, the beautiful senior I almost confessed to walked back into the cafeteria. I slumped back into my chair, feeling drained.

"Do Man and I still have a role in this?"

Cat asked, looking exasperated.

"What were you going to say to P' Seenam before P' Nat interrupted?"

"I was going to confess."

"What?!"

"Yeah, I almost blurted it out. The moment just felt right. I even forgot you two were sitting here."

"Good thing P' Nat walked in,"

Cat said, grabbing the green drink P' Seenam bought for me, but I snatched it back before she could take a sip. "Pao, don't be so stingy."

"I'm not stingy. It's mine."

"Stingy."

"You! Anyway, how was P' Nat interrupting a good thing?"

"Well, if you confessed and she didn't feel the same, wouldn't it be awkward?"

"Cat's right. I told you to make her like you, not to confess outright."

"Yeah, I know. But at that moment, it felt like the world stopped. I don't think I can stop liking her. How can someone be so cute?"

"Great. If you've decided, then go for it. We know she doesn't have a boyfriend. I'll have Cat deliver the message to P' Seenam."

"Deliver the message?"

"What message?"

Cat looked confused, suddenly being given a task.

"Tell her that Fortune Teller Pao will read her fortune every week until the end of the term!"

"Why?"

I asked, not understanding and not feeling excited at all.

"Can you at least pretend to be excited for me? You're not being a good friend."

"Wow, amazing, magnificent!"

Cat clapped loudly, drawing the attention of other students passing by.

"Good, but that's too much. Sit down!"

Man pulled Cat back to her seat and continued with his plan.

"If what you said doesn't work, just make up a prediction and then follow through with it."

"How?"

"Like, if you predict that P' Seenam will get a treat today, just buy her a heart-shaped chocolate or something. That way, you can flirt with her subtly, and we'll help you come up with ideas. Plus, you'll get closer to her. She said she saw you sitting here and came to talk, which means there's already some senior-junior bond."

"...."

"If you invite her for a fortune reading, she won't refuse. You're famous at school and generous with your friends. So... can I have a sip of that drink? I'm thirsty."

"Don't drink the one P' Seenam bought for me..."

"Stingy!"

"But what Man said makes sense. He must read a lot of novels,"

Cat added after listening quietly for a while.

"Well, good novels are often based on real-life situations."

I sat there, listening to them argue, unable to decide. Man's plan sounded good, but I wasn't sure if it'd work.

While I was lost in thought, the beautiful senior walked out of the cafeteria with two female friends. They were chatting happily, too far away for me to hear what they were saying, but I could clearly see the bright smile on her face, captivating me.

"Alright,"

I said, feeling more determined after seeing her smile.

"..../..."

"Cat, go tell P' Seenam. If she agrees, we'll figure out the next steps. Honestly, I feel like I'm bringing out a bad habit of mine, even though I promised myself I wouldn't"

"What do you mean?"

Cat asked, puzzled. I could only smile slyly. imagining myself as a villain in a soap opera.

**"The bad habit of a rich person. Wanting something and having to get it."**

# Chapter 05: The Smile

The chatter among friends in the classroom grew louder as soon as the Thai language teacher left. Technically, we were supposed to prepare for another subject in this last period, but since the teacher didn't show up, it turned into a free period by default.

With the free period, Man and Cat started setting up their little fortunetelling booth, with me just waiting for people to line up. This had become a routine. Whenever I had free time, I'd give random fortune readings to anyone in the room or anyone passing by. My two friends managed the queue and the snacks we received each day.

Even though I read fortunes for everyone who asked, I had a small rule:

each person could only get their fortune read once a month, or maybe twice, but the two readings couldn't be about the same thing.

This way, I didn't have to deal with the same people obsessed with fortunetelling every day. Despite this rule, we still received plenty of snacks daily.

"Anyone else want their fortune read?"

"Everyone who wanted a reading has had theirs. Now it's time for the great fortune-teller to take a snack break,"

Cat said in a playful tone, still caught up in the Thai language class vibe. I couldn't let her joke go unanswered.

"Who gave you permission to call me the great fortune-teller?"

I retorted.

"Then what should I call you, oh great one?"

"Call me beautiful,"

I said, lifting my leg onto the chair and striking a pose like an ancient ruler.

"Just kill me now if I have to call you that,"

Cat said, grabbing some snacks and putting them into the bag we'd prepared to take home after school.

"Since you asked for it... Man, get ready for the execution,"

I said, and Man immediately started mimicking a traditional dance, as if preparing to behead Cat for real.

"How should I execute her, oh great one?"

"Take her to the dog-headed guillotine!"

"But I've already started dancing. Why not let me behead her?"

"That's right. Since you're the dog, if you behead her, you become the dogheaded guillotine," I explained.

"Hey, Pao, why are you calling me a dog out of nowhere?"

Man protested.

"Do you have a problem with the great one?"

"Cat, you're the judge. I'm going to dance and slap Pao,"

Man said, starting to dance again, and I joined in. "How dare you call me Pao, you insolent servant!"

"Eat it all yourself, then," Cat replied.

And so, the three of us continued our mock dance without actually hitting each other, until...

"Um..."

A polite voice came from behind, and I turned to look, still in my strange pose.

Who would've thought that the person making that sound was someone I didn't want to see me like this?

"Oh, hi, P' Seenam. Are you here for a fortune reading?"

Man's voice rang out, sounding pleased to see me frozen in place,

"Am I interrupting? You all seemed to be having fun,"

Seenam said.

"No, not at all,"

I replied stiffly, changing my dance pose into a stretching one.

"We had a lot of people come for readings earlier, and my back was hurting, so I had to stretch. Oh, my back just cracked."

"Liar,"

Cat muttered, and I glared at her "So, are you here for a reading?"

I asked.

"Yes, Cat mentioned that there was more to the reading about someone nearby I'm interested. Oh, and I brought snacks this time,"

Seenam said, holding up a bag of snacks.

"Oh, more to the reading?"

I glanced at Cat, who was pretending not to know anything.

Who told my crazy friend to say there was more to the reading? It sounded like some sequel to a Harry Potter story.

*Ugh, I'm just rambling now.*

"You brought a lot. Next time, just a little is fine,"

I said, sitting down properly in my chair, while Seenam sat across from me.

"It's not too much. I can share with my friends,"

Seenam said, placing the snack bag down and extending her hand.

"Shall we start? School's almost over."

"Oh, right," I replied.

I took her hand and pretended to study her palm intently, but I was actually stressing about what to say. I'd already hinted at a potential love interest, so I needed to find a place where we might "accidentally" meet.

"The shaved ice shop," I said.

"Hmm?"

Seenam looked confused, so I had to elaborate to make it sound more convincing.

"Go to the shaved ice shop this evening. It's at the corner of the street behind our school. The person I mentioned in the reading will be nearby. I can't say who it is, but they'll be someone in that shop."

"Really? That's strange,"

Seenam said, looking genuinely surprised.

"It's true. Man and Cat can vouch for me. Pao's readings are spot on,"

My two friends chimed in, making Seenam smile at how well we worked together

"I'm not doubting the reading. I just wanted to add some excitement,"

Seenam said.

"Oh...."

"But I do have a question,"

Seenam added.

"What is it?"

I asked, unable to contain my curiosity. I slowly withdrew my hand from hers.

"Why is the great fortune-teller so nice to me?"

"Huh?"

This wasn't a question I was prepared to answer. Was Seenam suspecting something?

"My friends who came for readings said you keep track of who gets a reading each month. But why do I get a reading every week?"

She looked at me casually, her smile not matching the curiosity in her question. I should've felt uneasy or worried that she might sense my feelings, but as I looked at her, my anxiety faded. This wasn't a situation to feel uncomfortable about, it was a chance to speak my mind.

"Well, you're nice to me too, aren't you?"

"Me?"

"Yes," I nodded.

"Do you believe in first impressions? Honestly, on my first day here, I was really nervous and even fell in front of the school."

"...."

"It was a terrible and embarrassing experience But when I think back, I remember a senior who offered me a hand. She didn't laugh like everyone else. She even helped check my injuries before I realized I had them."

Despite the embarrassing story, I smiled, feeling that the good outweighed the bad.

"It was shocking. Who would laugh at that?"

"But everyone else did," I replied.

"Really?"

Seenam laughed, and I nodded, smiling back.

"If you don't mind my readings, you can come every week," I offered.

"Sure, I don't mind. I'll come again,"

Seenam said.

I smiled at her, my heart racing. This was probably the most comfortable conversation I'd ever had.

"Hey! Are you done with the reading?"

A girl's voice interrupted. She arrived with a few other girls, and Seenam and I turned to look.

"Yes, we're done,"

Seenam said just as the school bell rang, signaling the end of the day.

"I'll head out now."

"Okay, take care," I said.

"Bye, Seenam,"

Man and Cat chimed in, waving as Seenam waved back and left.

Our classmates started leaving the room, and I just smiled at my two friends, who nodded approvingly.

"Pao,"

Seenam's voice called out again, even though she'd already left.

"Yes?"

I turned to the door, where Seenam peeked her head in.

"I was surprised when you mentioned the shaved ice shop because I'd already planned to go there with friends."

"....."

"So, do you want to join us? Maybe the person from the reading will be there, and you can give me a signal," Seenam suggested.

"Uh, I can't really tell who it is..."

I stammered, frustrated at my sudden nervousness.

"I'm just kidding. But come with us. The shop is really good. Man and Cat, do you want to come too?"

"Sure,"

Man said, and Cat quickly grabbed her bag, indicating she was coming too.

"Okay, I'll head to the shop first. See you there," Seenam said.

"Got it,"

Man replied, and Seenam smiled at us before leaving.

"Oh my gosh,"

Cat exclaimed, walking over to tease me.

"A girl invited you to get shaved ice."

"Does P' Seenam like you, Pao?"

Man added, both of them standing excitedly beside me.

"Am I dreaming?"

I asked, but quickly raised my hand to stop them, knowing they were about to slap my back.

"You're not dreaming. Hurry up and pack, or you'll miss sitting next to Seenam,"

Man said, grabbing my backpack from the chair.

*Sitting next to P' Seenam at the shaved ice shop.*

"Ahh!"

I suddenly screamed, making my friends jump and move closer together.

"What's wrong? Are you possessed?"

"Seenam invited me to get shaved ice! Seenam invited me to get shaved ice!!!"

I shouted.

"Slow on the uptake, aren't you?"

Cat said, holding her head while 1 ignored everything else and continued to scream for almost a minute.

"Once I was 13 years old, my daddy told me, *'Go get yourself a wife, or you'll be lonely*'."

I sang.

"It's supposed to be eleven,"

Cat corrected, walking beside me.

"I'm thirteen, so why would I sing eleven?"

"Once I was 13 years old, I became a friend who has to put up with a boycrazy-oops, girl-crazy friend."

Cat sang back.

"What's your problem?"

I glared at Man, who quickly responded in a high-pitched voice.

"Nothing! How could I have a problem? You're always ready to fight over the smallest things."

"It's my style," I said.

The three of us walked out the back gate of the school, just a few steps away from the shaved ice shop. The chatter outside indicated that many students were already there, enjoying their treats.

"Ready, my dear friends?"

Man asked, and I nodded determinedly.

"Let's go make my prediction come true," I said.

We walked straight to the long table where the beautiful senior was sitting. The chatter grew louder as we approached, and as we got closer, I started to notice more details. I wasn't just looking at Seenam anymore, I was scanning the whole table. It seemed like the senior named Nat was also there.

Annoyance crept in when I saw Nat sitting next to Seenam, but then I noticed three empty chairs next to them, as if Seenam had saved them for us.

And one of those chairs was right next to Seenam.

"I'm going to sit next to Seenam,"

I said with determination, my voice barely above a whisper. My two friends sighed in unison

"Who's going to fight you for it?"

"Oh, you're here! Come sit here,"

Seenam quickly waved us over to sit next to her, drawing the attention of everyone at the table.

"Oh, it's Pao the Fortune Teller,"

Another senior girl called out to me. What was her name again? I couldn't remember, but I did recall she was one of the first to ask me for a reading.

"Move over, Kung I want Pao to sit next to me. Pao, come sit here."

"Hey, you're kicking me out just like that?"

"Yeah, move it."

"Ugh!"

Kung grumbled but smiled at me, signaling that it was okay to take her spot.

I stood there, frozen. Why did that senior have to call me over? I wanted to sit next to Seenam! Even though I was screaming internally, my outward demeanor was hesitant. If I sat next to that senior, I wouldn't be able to sit next to Seenam and would be separated from my two friends.

I sighed softly and looked at my two friends, who seemed to be urging me to go ahead. My legs carried me to the chair opposite Seenam. The senior smiled at me and asked the person at the head of the table to pass the menu to me and my friends. But I wasn't interested in the menu at all, my eyes were fixed on Cat with envy. Why did Cat get to sit next to Seenam instead of me?

"Good fortune but terrible luck," I muttered under my breath.

"Pao Pao! Are you listening?"

The senior next to me snapped me out of my thoughts.

"Yes?"

"Why do you give readings to Pa more often than others? Didn't you say you could only do it once a month?"

Her question made my irritation rise. Not only was she a roadblock in my love life, but now she was whining about something trivial.

"If you want a reading, I can do it, but I can't guarantee its accuracy,"

I replied.

"So Pa got an inaccurate reading?"

She asked, and I immediately glanced at Seenam.

Seenam smiled at me, seemingly unconcerned about whether the senior's statement was true or not. She didn't seem to care, which puzzled me. Why did she agree to a reading so easily.

"P' Seenam's readings are different from others. I can't explain how, but maybe it's because I want to read for her. She never asks too many questions and doesn't live her life based on others' words. Oh, and she's not superstitious either,"

I said with a smiles, noticing my two friends looking bewildered.

'Pao!" they mouthed.

"Don't pick a fight with the senior!"

Cat and Man mouthed, looking like they were about to cry. I realized I'd unintentionally provoked the senior. Well, maybe it was intentional Even though I was excited to be with Seenam and her friends, it didn't mean I had to be overly polite to someone making unreasonable demands.

"That's spot on,"

The senior next to me said, resting her chin on her hand and looking at me as if she wanted to say something.

"I thought you would be scared of me."

"Scared? Why would I be scared?"

"Most juniors are scared of me. Even some of my peers are. Do I not seem scary?"

She asked, looking both unsure and pleased.

"Not really. Just because you speak loudly doesn't mean you're scary,"

I replied.

"Really?"

She raised an eyebrow, sat up straight, and pushed a dessert towards me.

"Eat up. It's on me. You two can order whatever you want, I'll pay."

"Thank you!"

My friends chorused, their faces lighting up instantly. Free food could change their mood that quickly?

"Why are you suddenly being nice to the juniors? Did you take the wrong medicine, Pang?"

A male senior's voice chimed in.

"It's rare to find a junior who's not scared of me. It's interesting,"

She replied.

"Take it easy, freshman," he said.

"Why? Do I look like I'm going to eat her?"

"Maybe," he teased

"Don't be a jerk,"

Pang retorted, her voice sharp. I blinked, still confused by everything that was happening.

"Th-thank you,"

I stammered, looking at Pang with a clueless expression. She smiled back at me.

When she smiled, she looked pretty, even if it was a bit of a wicked kind of pretty.

"Go ahead, eat," she urged.

"....."

"I'll be right back; I need to use the restroom,"

She said, addressing the whole table before getting up and walking into the restaurant.

*Darn it! How could I forget I was sitting with P' Seenam?!*

Realizing this, I quickly turned to look at Seenam, who seemed to have been watching me all along.

"...."

We locked eyes amidst the chatter of the others at the table. Cat and Man didn't seem to care anymore. I didn't ask Seenam if something was wrong, and she didn't say anything either, though her gaze seemed concerned.

I was starting to feel tense...

I decided to smile at Seenam before looking down to scoop up a bite of the dessert. But...

"Sorry, but I have to go,"

Seenam's voice broke the silence. She stood up, grabbing her purse from under the table, clearly ready to leave.

"What? Why are you leaving so soon? I thought you were staying longer today,"

A female senior asked, and I put my spoon down, watching Seenam give a sheepish smile to her friends.

"I forgot I have something to do. I'll make it up to you another time."

"Alright, take care," they replied,

"I'll leave with Pa then,"

Nat said, causing a chorus of teasing from the group. I felt a bit strange and looked at Seenam, who seemed unfazed by the teasing. Why did they have to tease? Even though I had questions, I knew they weren't just regular friends. Seenam had said she didn't have a boyfriend, but still....

This wasn't fun anymore. Maybe I should go home too.

I sighed softly, ready to grab my bag and suggest to my friends that we leave.

But then...

"It's okay, I'll go with the juniors,"

Seenam said, looking at Cat and Man, who seemed confused.

"Huh? You're coming with us?"

Man asked, clearly reluctant.

"We're not in a hurry to leave, right, Pao?"

Almost everyone turned to look at me.

"Pao, you need to leave, right? You told me before we left school,"

Seenam said.

My brain processed quickly. I didn't know what Seenam was thinking, but I had to seize this opportunity

"Yes, I need to leave," I said.

"What?"

My friends looked puzzled, but I wasn't going to let this chance slip away.

"You guys stay. I'll leave first. Eat for me,"

I said. They exchanged glances, piecing things together, and within seconds, they were excitedly urging me and Seenam to go together. "Take care of Pao," they said

"Sure,"

Seenam replied immediately, turning to Nat.

"Take care of these two. Don't let them get into trouble."

As soon as Seenam finished speaking, the other seniors playfully protested, knowing she meant no harm.

"Shall we go, Pao?"

"Yes,"

I replied quickly, walking out with her, leaving my friends watching us proudly.

Those two are so dramatic.

As we walked away from the dessert shop, the tense atmosphere made me look around for something to do. Seenam didn't say anything either.

*Maybe I should start a conversation...*

"Do you need to hurry home? / Is something wrong?"

We both said at the same time.

"Huh? / Oh." We both laughed.

"What did you say?" I asked. "I asked if you needed to hurry home,"

Seenam replied.

"No,"

I answered immediately, and she smiled, pleased that I played along smoothly.

"Great, let's go for a walk,"

She said, flagging down a passing songthaew.

"Pao, hurry up!"

She called, waving me over. I was still confused, but her growing smile made me run and jump onto the vehicle with her. I didn't care about the looks we got from the other passengers.

All I knew was... I was smiling just as much as she was.

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# Chapter 06: Like

Before I knew it, we were already standing by the beach. What kind of situation was this?

"The breeze feels just right,"

Seenam said, taking a deep breath, while I watched her actions, feeling a bit out of place.

"Is something wrong, Seenam? You seem like you want to invite the Pao group out," I asked.

"No, actually, I just wanted to invite Pao out," she replied.

*Just me...*

My steady steps came to a halt, and I stood frozen as if facing an iceberg instead of the Chonburi sea.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Sorry for what?" I asked.

"Sorry about Pang,"

She said, starting to walk along the beach, and I walked beside her. "It seems like my friend made you uncomfortable. You looked annoyed."

"So you invited me out?" I asked.

"Yes," she nodded.

"Oh, I see... But I wasn't really upset. It was just a spur-of-the- moment reaction. Teen emotions, you know. But overall, it was just a fleeting feeling,"

"Then I made the right call inviting you out. Or do you want to get some shaved ice?"

"No, walking along the beach like this is better."

"Alright," she said.

We both fell into a comfortable silence. I forgot about my earlier tension, and Seenam seemed to be fully enjoying the natural surroundings.

Since everything felt right, I decided to start a conversation. "Did you see Cat and Man's faces when I responded to Pang?"

"No, why?" she asked.

"When I responded, they looked like they'd seen a ghost. They were mouthing words, trying to stop me. They probably thought I was going to start a fight with Pang,"

I said, laughing softly. Seenam smiled at me in that affectionate way she always did.

"Too bad I didn't see it."

"The shaved ice must have been delicious, right?" I asked.

Seenam nodded enthusiastically, then started moving her arms as if trying to catch more of the breeze.

"There's a drink stand over there. Want something? My treat," she offered.

"No, thanks. I'm not hungry," I replied.

"If you get hungry, just let me know. Today, I'm ready to treat you," she said.

"Wow... like a saint,"

I said, clapping my hands. Seenam immediately smiled brightly.

""Then call me 'Saint Pa," she said

"How much do you have to treat me for me to call you that?" "How much should it be?" she pondered.

We both laughed softly, leaving the question unanswered.

We continued walking on the sand, which felt surprisingly fun. The atmosphere seemed perfect, making this one of the best moments I'd ever experienced. The weather was pleasant, with no sun at all. I should have been soaking in the surroundings, but Seenan was more captivating.

She stopped walking and took off her school shoes, followed by her clean white socks. She suggested I do the same, and I had no reason to refuse. I followed her lead, thinking how cute our actions were.

"How tall are you, Pao?" she asked.

I looked up from the sand.

"About 167 cm."

"That's tall,"

She said, pouting a bit. She used her free hand to measure my height.

"With shoes on, I can manage, but without them, I feel short."

"How tall are you, P' Seenam?" I asked.

"About 160 cm, I think," she replied.

"That's not short at all. You're exaggerating,"

"Or maybe 159 cm. Or 158 cm,"

She said playfully, making me smile easily.

"So, how tall are you exactly?"

I laughed softly, and she smiled a bit.

"158 cm. Short, right? And I think I've stopped growing. But you, Pao, you still have time to grow. How tall will you get?" she wondered.

"320 cm," I joked.

"That's not human,"

Seenam replied instantly, making me laugh at the perfect timing.

"Do you like tall people?" I asked.

"Are you flirting?"

I held my breath for a moment, but everything returned to normal quickly

"No, how could I be flirting?" I said.

"Do you like tall people, Pao?"

"Yes, anyone over 10 cm taller," I replied.

"So, you like everyone in the world?"

She teased.

I laughed softly and said I never thought about height. Seenam replied that I was still young and would figure out my preferences as I grew older.

Hearing that, I wanted to shout that I liked someone like Seenam, but I kept it to myself.

"What time do you need to be home, Pao?" "Anytime, really. I'll be alone at home anyway."

"What about dinner?" she asked.

"I'll eat alone," I said.

"You said 'eat' so cutely," she laughed.

"How about we go to a restaurant? I know a place with a million-dollar view for a few bucks."

"Wow, let's go," I said.

"Aren't you going to think about it?"

"No, I want to see what a million-dollar view for a few bucks looks like," I replied.

"Good, curiosity is good for a kid. Let's go, run!"

"Wait,"

I started to protest, but Seenam took off running. At the same time, two kids ran in front of her.

"Watch out!" I shouted.

I instinctively grabbed her hand and pulled her back. She stumbled towards me like a scene from a romantic movie, but...

Her school shoes landed squarely on my face, with the sandy side sticking to me.

"I'm sorry, are you okay?" she asked.

"Phew,"

I blew the sand off my mouth, grimacing as some grains got into my eyes.

"Wow, it got into my eyes."

I blinked rapidly, trying to get the sand out. It stung like crazy!

Meanwhile, Seenam gently pulled away from my grip. My eyes watered from the irritation, but soon she turned my face towards her and started wiping the sand off with a tissue. Her small hands worked quickly, and she spoke softly as she helped me.

"Sorry, your face is covered in sand. Let me clean it," she said.

At first, she seemed concerned, but once my face was clean, she couldn't stop laughing. She crouched down, hiding her face in her knees.

I was confused.

"Why are you laughing so much?" I asked.

"Your face was funny. No, everything was funny,"

She said, trying to hold back her laughter. Her beautiful face looked up, smiling with tears in her eyes.

"Sorry, I can't stop laughing." "Was it that funny?" I asked.

"Yes. Are you mad?" she asked.

I could only look at her smiling face, feeling how adorable she was. Even though I didn't laugh, my smile showed I wasn't mad at all.

"Did it hurt when I pulled you? I might have pulled too hard."

"No, it didn't hurt,"

She waved her hand dismissively and stood up, holding her shoes again.

"It was kind of cool."

"...."

"It would've been cooler if the shoes hadn't landed on your face."

"Is that a compliment?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Oh..."

I squinted, pretending to be suspicious, making her laugh again.

"What? Do I look like I'm lying?"

"No, I didn't say anything," I replied.

"Your eyes say it all."

"How?"

I asked, widening my eyes challengingly.

"Never mind... Let's go. I'll treat you to dinner as an apology," she said.

This time, Seenam turned towards the direction of the restaurant. I nodded even though she wasn't looking. I focused on her back, admiring her relaxed demeanor. She turned to signal me to walk beside her. I quickened my pace to match hers, then slowed down so we could walk together.

We walked along the beach for almost ten minutes until we reached a place that was part restaurant, part bar. Even though we were in school uniforms, the staff welcomed us warmly and led us to a corner table by a bamboo wall, with a clear view of the sea and the setting sun.

"I'll have grilled beef with spicy dipping sauce and a honey lemon soda, less sweet. What about you, Pao?"

"I'll have the same," I replied.

The waiter took our order quickly. We sat on the same side of the table to enjoy the view. There were a few other customers, but it was quiet enough to keep the atmosphere intact. The only downside was not being able to see Seenam's face, but having her next to me was nice.

"Isn't the view great?" she asked.

"Yes, I didn't know a place like this existed."

"Don't you go out much?"

"I do, but mostly to the mall or the market near my condo. I have to wait for my parents to take me out, but they're always busy,"

I explained.

"Don't you get lonely?" she asked.

"I have Man and Cat to chat with on MSN, so it helps. Oh, and I play Audition. Do you play games, P'Seenam?"

"I don't like games," she replied.

"What do you usually do?" I asked.

"If I'm bored, I read or watch movies. Sometimes I just sleep."

"I like that too," I said.

"You like reading?"

"Yes, comic books," I replied.

"That counts,"

Seenam nodded seriously, making me laugh softly.

"Do you need to call home?"

"Oh, I forgot,"

I said, pulling my flip phone from my skirt pocket and dialing my mom.

[Hello, dear. Are you home yet?]

"Not yet, Mom. I'm having dinner with a senior. Just calling to let you know in case you don't see your beautiful daughter at home."

[A senior? Is it a girl or a boy?)

"A girl, of course," I replied.

[Let me talk to her, then.]

"Uh..."

I hesitated, feeling awkward. But there was no avoiding it.

"Um, my mom wants to talk to you."

"Oh..."

She picked up my flip phone and held it, then greeted the person on the other end with a polite tone,

"Hello."

"Yes, my name is Pa, but Pao calls me P' Seenam... Yes... I just invited her out to get something to eat together... Yes, we aren't going anywhere else...

Okay, once we finish eating, I'll have Pao call you... The restaurant is called Rim Lay Helan... Yes... Okay, goodbye."

Then my phone was handed back to me, and the call had already ended. "Did my mom say anything?"

"No, she just asked my name and said that once we're done, You should call her. Your mom will come pick you up at the restaurant."

"Oh... wait, she's coming to pick me up?"

"Yeah, why?"

*This... this is like introducing a daughter-in-law to my mother!*

Just the thought of it made my blood rush like a heroine in a soap opera who blushes so hard that the hero notices, even though no one can actually see a character's face turn that red on screen.

The meal between me and P' Seenam started to feel tense I barely said anything. When the beautiful senior noticed I was giving short answers, she started to fall I silent too. We just looked ou out at the sea as the sun was setting.

As the sky gradually darkened, some clouds turned a pinkish-orange My smile grew wider at the beauty of it all. The tension eased, and I turned to the beautiful senior to say,

"The sky is so beautiful, isn't it?"

And in that moment, when P' Seenam turned to look at me, the orange light from the sky hit her fair face, making her eyes look even more beautiful than the sea. I was instantly mesmerized, my heart beating faster as my smile slowly faded. The way I looked at her must have seemed pretty bold, but what could I do? She was just that beautiful.

"Yeah, you like it, right?"

"Yes, I do... but not just the view right now."

"...."

**"I like you too, P'Seenam."**

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# Chapter 07: Because I'm Your Soulmate

We locked eyes... and **I just came to my senses!**

Damn it! What did I just say?

"Uh, I mean..."

**"Pao"**

Suddenly, a familiar voice broke the awkward silence just in time.

But wait... isn't this going to make things even more awkward?

"Oh... why are you here so early? I haven't even called you yet,"

I said, my voice trailing off. The beautiful senior who'd been deep in thought slowly smiled. She turned to greet my parents with a respectful bow, seemingly forgetting the earlier tension.

"Hello," she said

"Is this the senior you were talking to on the phone earlier?"

"Yes,"

The beautiful senior replied, standing up as if ready to leave immediately.

"The food's all gone. Are you leaving now?"

"Well... are you leaving now, Senior?"

"Yes, I think I'll head back now," she said.

"Mom, do you want to eat something first, or should we just take me home?"

I tried to sound as natural as possible, even though I was really nervous.

"Let's go home Dad said he'd order something to eat,"

My mom replied.

"Then I'll head home now,"

The senior said hurriedly, making me even more anxious. Was she in a rush because she was being polite to my parents or because she wanted to escape the earlier conversation?

"Wait, where do you live? It's already dark. Come with us, and I'll drop you off,"

My mom offered.

I quickly turned to my mom. What should I say?

"That's right, Senior. Come with us. It's dangerous..."

I quickly added, hoping we could go home together. The beautiful senior looked visibly tense, but because my mom insisted, she reluctantly agreed to come with us.

And this was... **incredibly lucky!**

After that, Dad quickly paid for the meal, even though the beautiful senior seemed quite embarrassed.

We both sat in the back seat together, not talking like before. The only sounds were my parents chatting and the senior occasionally giving directions.

*What should I talk about?*

Even though my mind was racing, my eyes stared out the car window, pretending not to notice her. I felt awkward and didn't know what to say. What if I said something that made my parents suspicious? Worries flooded my mind.

Before I could think of anything, a piece of paper was handed to me in the silence. I looked down and realized it was from the beautiful senior sitting next to me.

"What is it?"

I asked softly, but she didn't answer. She just nodded for me to read it.

I opened the paper and saw neatly written words.

*'I didn't get to treat you to a meal, and now you're dropping me off at home. I'm sorry.'*

The message quickly registered in my mind. Even though the car was quite dark, the streetlights allowed me to read it. I looked around before grabbing a pen from my bag on the car floor. I pulled out a notebook to use as a surface and started writing a reply. But my handwriting was nowhere near as neat as hers.

I handed the paper back to the beautiful senior, who took it and read it. Her smile grew, even in the dim light. Soon, the paper was handed back to me.

*'There's nothing to apologize for. I had a great time.'*

*'Really? Then I should say... thank you :)'*

The same piece of paper continued to work its magic. My smile grew bit by bit. The situation no longer felt tense or awkward. Instead, I felt excited and a bit strange, unable to pinpoint my feelings. I quickly folded the paper and put it in my bag, but the beautiful senior took it back again.

I didn't protest. I just watched her write something on the paper. She seemed focused, reviewing her message before handing it back to me.

***'Here's my email. When you get home, you can let me know you arrived safely.'***

My heart pounded as if it'd burst out of my chest.

Before my excitement could fade, she announced that we'd arrived. I realized her home was a pharmacy near my condo.

"Thanks for the ride,"

The beautiful senior said, bowing with a smile. She turned to me and waved warmly.

"See you at school, Pao."

I watched her get out of the car with longing, forgetting my parents were there...

"You have a good senior. She's polite and sweet," My mom said as the car started moving again.

"It's the senior who has a good junior," I replied.

"So full of yourself,"

My mom said, laughing, showing how happy she was.

It seemed... my mom liked the beautiful senior too.

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When I got back to the condo, I quickly sent a message introducing myself and letting her know I got home safely. But it seemed the beautiful senior had other things to do because she didn't reply.

I wondered why I even bothered, but my thoughts were interrupted by messages from my two close friends waiting for my reply.

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**Cat\_Za:**

Don't forget to update us on how sweet it was.

**Man Jub:**

Cat doesn't care; she just wants to be nosy

**Cat\_Za:**

Oh, Man, aren't you waiting to be nosy too?

**Man Jub:** Waiting!

**Cat\_Za:**

Pfft!!!

**Paopanna:**

Dear lovely friends, today I, Pao Pannakorn, walked along the beach with Senior Paper, or P' Seenam. Due to some circumstances, a romantic accident happened, leaving a footprint on my face for a while. But despite that, I smiled because the senior wiped off all the sand. After the romantic accident, Senior Pa took me to dinner to watch the sunset, calling it a 'million-dollar view for a ten-dollar price. I decided that the million- dollar view wasn't the scenery but the person sitting next to me.

In the end, I was confused because my parents came to pick me up and dropped the senior off at her house. She gave me her email so I could let her know I got home safely.

*And... I now have P' Seenam's MSN. Thank you. Love (Love that means love, you know what I mean, hehe). End of report.*

*. .*

I sent my long message after reviewing it more than ten times. Both friends seemed to be online because they replied with squeals almost immediately.

And it was no surprise what they said.

'She likes you!'

'Wedding bells!"

Something like that. And I was the one smiling like I'd never been happier in my life.

I waited for the beautiful senior's reply until almost 10 PM. When she didn't respond, I turned everything off and went to sleep without thinking much. That night, my dreams were filled with the recent events, making my sleep longer than usual. I dreamt of the beach again, but this time we talked a lot, even though I couldn't remember any of it when I woke up.

The next day and many days after, I continued my usual routine. Nothing changed except for checking my horoscope, studying, and occasionally waiting for a message from someone. And that someone was none other than P' Seenam. After I sent her the first message, she replied with an okay, but I was already asleep.

Once the initial awkwardness passed, my boldness grew. Every day, I found new things to say to her. Sometimes we talked a lot, and sometimes she only answered one question and then disappeared. Despite that, I called this time my harvest period. It might seem ordinary to others, but for someone starting to fall in love, it was incredibly special.

Every week, I continued to predict things for the beautiful senior. No matter what I predicted, I always ended up being the one involved. For example:

*'That person always has jokes to share'*

*And of course, I often joked with her*

*'When you meet, that person will always smile and show concern.'*

I said this on a day when the senior had allergies and kept blowing her nose. I pretended to buy her three rolls of tissue and smiled encouragingly all day whenever we bumped into each other.

*'Today, you'll get food from someone who likes you'*

After predicting this, I pretended to share snacks, saying I had too many. In reality, I'd specifically chosen and bought those cookies for her.

Before I knew it, almost a year had passed...

I still had fun with my friends, occasionally chatted with P' Seenam, and everything seemed to fall into place. Then came the day everyone was excited about.

**Valentine's Day....**

**'The right person will bring chocolate and confess their love to P' Seenam.'**

This was the last prediction I left for the beautiful senior before confessing my love.

"Hey, Miss Love Guru, are you ready?"

Man's voice was determined, unlike me, who sat slumped with worry, making my friend sigh.

"What's wrong now? You've liked her for months. She graduates in two months. Are you going to confess or not?"

"Is this the right time?"

I asked, unsure, even though I held the expensive chocolate tightly.

"Of course! Are you going to give it to her on Halloween?"

I bared my teeth at my friend, but they looked more exasperated than scared.

"Come on, you chat often, and you have a great friendship. You've had moments together. She might already know before you confess."

"But what if something goes wrong?"

"Like what?"

Cat asked, puzzled, pulling a chair to sit in front of me.

"Like... I'm about to confess, but someone else does first, and she agrees. What would I do with the chocolate then?"

We fell silent, and then Man slapped my arm hard

"Pao!"

"What! That hurt!"

"Don't jinx it! Remember, what you say can come true."

I quickly covered my mouth, my heart sinking with fear that my words might come true. I slapped my mouth three times and threw the imaginary bad luck out the classroom window. I didn't know if it worked, but better safe than sorry.

"I threw it away quickly. It should be fine,"

I said, letting out a big sigh

My heart swelled with anticipation. Over the past months, I'd often made predictions to benefit myself or create opportunities to flirt with her.

*But you know what...*

*Sometimes, playing with fate or forcing yourself to gain too much can lead to changes you're not prepared for.*

I stood at the stairs leading up to the senior class, and what I saw was...

Nat, a senior, was handing a rose to Seenam amidst the cheers of many friends. I stood still, my vision starting to blur, overwhelmed by emotions as I witnessed something I'd just talked about with my friends. The two friends standing behind me quickly grabbed my arm and whispered softly,

"Pao, let's go."

"Don't look."

Their voices were more serious than ever, probably because my face showed a significant amount of shock.

And yes, I was too late... My legs moved with the pull of my friends, but after a few steps, I had to stop.

**"Pao the Fortune Teller."**

My heart started to tremble again, thinking that maybe my own prediction could come true. Seenam might see me and not accept the love from that guy.

"What are you doing here?"

With that thought, a smile slowly appeared on my face. I turned my body towards her, but disappointment greeted me again because she wasn't who I thought she was.

"P' Pang..."

"Uh-huh."

She didn't just speak, she quickly walked towards me, her height slightly taller than mine, her eyes fixed on what was in my hand before her smile became more pronounced.

"Are you here to confess to a guy with chocolates? Who do you like? I'll take you there, but it looks pretty tasty."

I looked at the chocolate in my hand with a blank expression. I wanted to throw it far away, but I felt a bit regretful because I'd spent a long time choosing it.

Finally, I handed the chocolate to the senior I didn't intend to give it to. She looked surprised but didn't say anything.

"Do you want it? Pao is giving it to you."

"For me?"

Pang looked incredulous but reached out to take the chocolate. Even though I'd let go, she still held her hand out as if I might take it back.

"Really giving it to me?"

"Yes."

"Not giving it to a guy? I'm a girl, you know."

"No, P' Pang, you can have it."

"Well... I won't hold back then."

This was the first time I saw a happy smile from the girl known as the scariest in school. She didn't say anything else, just looked at the chocolate in her hand and then at me.

"Well... I'll go now."

I didn't wait for her response. I immediately walked down the stairs, away from the couple I didn't want to see.

I ran ahead of my two friends to the back of the school. There was no one there except for many unused tables and chairs stored there. I stared at those chairs before tears started to fill my eyes.

What did I do wrong...

Soon, my body, which had been standing tall, sat down on the ground without worrying about my skirt getting dirty. Even though I didn't cry out loud like in the movies, tears kept flowing. My mind was too numb and confused to think of anything.

"Here you are."

"You ran so fast, we almost couldn't keep up."

Cat and Man's voices echoed, filled with clear concern.

"I'm heartbroken."

"..../...."

They didn't say anything, just sat down beside me, hugging their knees, as if afraid I'd run away again.

"It's okay. You've done well so far."

"We'll meet many more people in life. There will definitely be someone new you'll like."

"Seenam is cute, but I think you'll find someone even cuter."

"True. Look at you, you're thirteen and already this pretty. Imagine how beautiful you'll be at thirty. You're smart and come from a wealthy family." My mind stopped to think, and more tears started to flow.

"Do I have to wait until I'm thirty? That's seventeen years away. Will I dry up and die before then?"

My voice was filled with sadness, but I could see my friends biting their lips, trying not to laugh.

"Are you guys laughing at me? I can see it!"

"Who's laughing? No one!"

"Your high-pitched voice means you are! You traitors! I'm heartbroken here!"

And suddenly, I burst into tears, making my friends look shocked and start pacing around, not knowing what to do with me.

"Pao! Stop crying!"

"Stop it! If you cry, I'll cry too. Stop crying!"

"I can't stop, sob."

As soon as I said that, I let out a full cry, knowing that I had people to comfort me and could cry as much as I wanted.

"You idiot, now I'm crying too!"

"Me too!"

And the three of us sat there crying and hugging each other, with no one stopping anyone. During that time, a thought popped into my head.

"I don't want to stay here anymore! I don't want to live near Seenam's house. I don't want to see her pharmacy. I don't want to see Nat again. I don't want them to be together. I want to go back and hug my grandma."

"You! You'll really go back if you keep saying that!"

"Hug us first, sob."

And that's how it ended. I learned what it was like to like someone for the first time, to have close friends for the first time, and to be heartbroken for the first time. Everything happened so quickly in almost a year. Most importantly, Seenam decided to date Nat, and that made Cat and Man tell the beautiful senior that she didn't need to come to me for fortune-telling anymore. Even though the senior asked if that person was Nat, my friends replied that they couldn't say because Seenam had already decided to date someone.

And yes... my friends were also mad at her for making me sad, even though Seenam didn't know anything about it.

I started avoiding the beautiful senior again. At first, she tried to talk to me, but my two friends always blocked her. Eventually, she stopped approaching me directly, except for the occasional smile when we ran into each other, which I returned out of politeness.

I avoided her so well that she didn't get a chance to smile at me again. Sometimes she messaged me, but I only gave short replies until she stopped messaging altogether.

By the time I realized it, the final exams were over, and the semester ended with more distressing news.

My grandma Mali was seriously ill, and I had to move back to Chiang Mai to be with her and my grieving grandma Toey. I had only one day to say goodbye to my two friends. But even that farewell was interrupted by the search for the source of my so-called "special gift," which had caused so many bad things to happen.

**"Fortune teller grandma? Our market never had a fortune teller."**

I stood there with goosebumps, my two friends beside me. I couldn't find the grandma, and no one had ever seen her before.

"How is that possible?"

I said as we sat in a beachside café, which was more crowded than usual. My friends sipped their drinks with sad faces, not saying anything.

"Hey, aren't you going to say anything?"

"I don't know what to say,"

Man replied, blinking rapidly as if trying to hold back tears.

"We've only known each other for a year, and Chiang Mai is so far. How can I follow you there?"

Cat added, as if the creepy fortune teller story wasn't as heartbreaking as me moving back to my hometown.

"Cat, don't bring that up now. There are a lot of people here. I'll cry," I said.

"When should I bring it up? Pao is moving back tomorrow!"

As soon as Cat finished speaking, the three of us started tearing up, ready to cry.

"Let's go."

"Where?"

Man asked, wiping his tears with the back of his hand.

"Let's walk on the beach..."

And our last memory as a strong-hearted girl gang ended with us sitting and crying by the sea. My friends comforted me about my grandma, but then hugged each other when it came to me not staying to study here.

We sat by the sea until sunset, crying until it was dark. My parents came to pick me up at the beach, meeting my two close friends for the first time. The worry I had about my parents accepting me as a different person with my friends disappeared.

Sadly, this first meeting was also our last. We said our goodbyes in the car. Luckily, with the internet, we could still talk no matter how far apart we were.

*But still even though we could talk easily, it didn't mean it wasn't sad.*

That night, I chatted with my friends longer than usual, packing my things as I replied to messages. By the time I realized it, it was morning. My parents didn't even know I hadn't slept, thinking my tired look was from having to move schools.

In the late morning, a car came to take us to the airport. I sat in the back seat in silence, not responding to my parents' occasional chatter. It wasn't that I was angry about moving schools, I was just increasingly worried about Grandma Mali and didn't know what to say.

Except...

"Is that your senior?"

My mom's voice broke the silence. My heart sank. Everything seemed muffled by my many thoughts, and in a split second, the last thing I wanted to do before leaving became clear. I had nothing to lose...

"Can we stop the car for a moment?"

As soon as the car stopped, I quickly opened the door and got out. Seenam was sweeping the front of the pharmacy, looking annoyingly cheerful.

"P' Seenam!"

My voice echoed loudly. She flinched a bit before turning to look at me.

"Oh, Pao, what are you doing here? Are you buying medicine?"

I didn't answer because I only wanted to say what I had in mind.

"The person in my prediction. it's not P' Nat."

"...."

"It's me."

Her stunned expression told me I should finish speaking while she was still speechless.

"No matter how many people come into your life, they won't be the right one. It'll always end in sadness or discomfort."

"....."

**"So, the only person who can bring you true happiness is me."**

**"...."**

**"Because I'm your soulmate."**

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# Chapter 08: Judgment Spells8 & The Devil

**Whoosh...**

White smoke drifted aimlessly into the air. I watched it dissipate completely before taking another drag and exhaling again. People hurried through their lives, oblivious to the beauty of the morning sky. The orange light reflected off the buildings, making the cigarette taste even better.

But even so... a smile didn't cross my face, despite thinking it was beautiful. I remained focused on the sky's light, then gradually lowered my gaze to the bustling traffic below. Unlike me, everyone seemed to be in a rush.

*What time is it now?*

I glanced at my phone. it wasn't even seven in the morning yet, early enough to go back to bed. I stretched lazily, taking one last drag from the cigarette before stubbing it out in the ashtray.

I walked back into the room unhurriedly. The air conditioning was still cool, almost cold. I took off the white shirt I had on and slipped under the thick blanket, seeking warmth.

"You're up early... what time is it?"

A sleepy voice beside me asked.

"Almost seven," I replied.

"Really?"

I didn't respond, choosing instead to close my eyes, hoping to sleep a bit more.

"Wake me up at seven-thirty, okay?"

"Okay."

"Or maybe don't wake me up at all."

Her hesitant voice came again. She moved out from under the blanket, the cold air from the AC hitting us both, making sleep impossible.

"Are you getting up now?"

I asked, curious. I wondered what time I should wake up if she didn't need me to wake her.

"Yeah, I think I'll get up."

With that, she straddled me without any shyness. Our naked bodies were exposed to each other, but the familiar exploration ended when her lips met mine in a kiss that felt like we'd been apart for years.

"I'll do it myself," she said.

"You don't want me to do it?" I asked.

"No, it's fine if I do it. I have to leave the room before nine anyway."

"We have plenty of time. I think we have enough time for both of us."

"No... just do as I say,"

She ordered, a tone I was used to, so it didn't bother me. Her touch was always perfect, hitting all the right spots. For some, this might take a while, but with her, it only took a few minutes to reach satisfaction multiple times. And it never seemed to end easily.

**"Ah... P' Pang**," I moaned.

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**14 Years Ago**

I moved back to Chiang Mai because my beloved grandmother was gravely ill. It was the right decision because less than a month after I returned, Grandma Mali passed away peacefully amidst a somber atmosphere. Grandma Toey was quite saddened by her sister's passing, but she didn't cry like everyone else.

"When the time comes, we all have to part ways, no matter the reason. Humans are not long-lived creatures. We must always remind ourselves that everything can leave us, whether we want it or not. So cry today as much as you need to, but try to cry less in the days to come. Think only of the good things. Even if we lose someone, we must continue to live."

I was supposed to comfort Grandma Toey, but in the end, she was the one comforting me.

My life changed a lot then. I lost my beloved grandmother, had to part from close friends, moved to a new school, and finally, said hurtful things to a senior I had a crush on before we parted ways and lost contact.

Many times, I wanted to message P' Seenam, but I never had the courage to start a conversation. Time passed, and eventually, I met someone unexpected.

Pang, a senior who used to be in the same group as P' Seenam, came to intern at our resort during her fourth year of college. We became close. I'd grown up a lot, and my playful nature from childhood was tucked away, missing my two close friends who used to complete me.

Although we still messaged each other, it was only during the first few months. After the first semester, I got busy with school and adjusted to the new environment. By the time I realized it, we'd drifted apart. But I grew very close to Pang, beyond just a senior-junior relationship.

We had a secret relationship that my parents didn't know about, even though she was interning at my family's resort.

But Grandma knew and often hinted at it.

"Love is a good thing, but are you sure you truly love that girl?"

At that time, I was warned because she could see that I had no real feelings for Pang. Maybe it was because my heart still held onto another senior, even though we hadn't seen or spoken to each other in almost four years.

Hearing that made me question my feelings and start paying more attention to Pang. The change was significant enough that eventually, my eyes were only for Pang. During that time, we loved each other deeply, spending almost all our time together. She stayed at a condo near the resort during her internship.

When her internship ended, Pang continued to work there. When I turned eighteen, my other grandmother passed away. I was so devastated that I couldn't stay in Chiang Mai any longer. As soon as the ceremonies were over, I asked my parents to let me study in Bangkok, and Pang moved with me. Of course, my parents didn't know about Pang living with me.

I moved to a condo in central Bangkok, still carrying a lot of sadness. But Pang was there to support me. It took over a year to come to terms with my grandmother's death. During that time, Pang and I started living together fully. We loved each other enough to call ourselves life partners.

Except... when I turned twenty-five, things started to go downhill. Pang, who used to be attentive, gradually disappeared. I began to feel neglected and upset often. Whether it was her coming home late, not coming home at all, or small things like not telling me where she was going, she made me anxious.

During that time, I also started my own scented candle shop, and she didn't make me feel any better. Instead, she stressed me out so much that I couldn't work.

The worst was when she got drunk and called out another woman's name. I lost it and asked her directly who that person was, but I got no answer. We broke up, but even though we said we were done, it was more of a change in status. We still ended up sleeping together often over the past two years.

I was twenty-seven, single, but still physically involved with her.

"Can you just end it already? End it for real, not this 'we're done but still sleeping together' nonsense,"

My friend Man said, frustrated. This wasn't the first time he'd told me this.

Oh, I forgot to mention, my friends and I reconnected when we started college. The bond of our strong-hearted girl gang was unbreakable. Not only did we end up studying in Bangkok together, but we also went to the same university. So, the word 'goodbye' never came up again.

"I'm trying to end it," I said.

"Trying my ass. You've been saying that for two years, Pao,"

Cat added, twirling spaghetti into her mouth, equally annoyed.

"Seriously, if you were just hooking up with her with no feelings involved, that'd be one thing. But you still have strong feelings for her and never say no to anything she asks," Man said.

"This isn't just being stuck; it's like a dog waiting for its owner to show love. Even if she beats you to death, one pat on the head and you forget all the pain," Cat added.

"Can you stop complaining? It's not like I'm happy with this. I want to end it, but I can't yet," I said.

"Is she that good in bed?" Man asked.

"I'll slap you,"

I said, raising my spoon, ready to actually slap him.

"Pao, no matter how good she is, it doesn't mean others aren't. You've closed yourself off from finding better sex, stuck with the same old routine and convincing yourself it's the best,"

Cat said, making me so angry I couldn't control my emotions

"It's not just routine; she's really good," I said.

"There, you admitted it," Cat said.

"Fine, I admit it. Happy now?"

I said, grabbing my expensive handbag and getting ready to leave. Whenever it came to Pang, I couldn't stand listening

"You're leaving?"

Man asked, grabbing my arm.

"Yeah, it's almost noon. I need to get to the shop," I said.

"You're the owner. Why rush? Stay another hour. It's not like Cat and I have time to eat together often,"

Man said, looking sad, a stark contrast to when they were ganging up on me.

"We eat together every week," I said.

"Yeah, but still, stay," Man insisted.

"No, I'm not in the mood. Oh, and you guys are paying for this meal," I said.

"You're really leaving?" Man asked.

"Yes!" I said.

"Fine,"

Man said, letting me go. But Cat couldn't resist shouting after me, not caring about the other diners.

"Are you coming out for drinks tonight?" she asked.

"Maybe," I said.

"Let us know. Same place," she said.

I nodded and walked out quickly. My legs moved automatically, knowing the mall's layout well.

. .

After graduating, I took over the family business, opening my own scented candle shop in this mall. The rent was high, and after expenses, the profit was minimal. But I didn't want to go back to managing the resort in Chiang Mai, so I held on as long as I could.

And yes, my parents weren't happy about it. The main reason I stayed was Pang. If I went back, everything related to her would end.

Like my friends said, I was just a dog that couldn't live without her.

I walked into my candle shop, visibly upset, and the staff noticed. They all greeted me respectfully, even those older than me. But in my bad mood, I ignored their politeness and headed straight to the counter, checking stock and accounts I'd already reviewed.

For two hours, I sat there, not moving, not talking, not even looking at customers. My mind was filled with thoughts of Pang and my friends' words.

"Hello,"

A voice directed at me broke my concentration. I looked up from my work to see who it was.

"Hello," she greeted.

"I was hoping you could recommend some scented candles," she said.

"Oh, sure. Just a moment, I'll have someone assist you,"

I replied, standing up from my chair. I scanned the room to see if anyone was available to help, but the store was busier than usual today. She seemed so earnest in her request that I didn't want to keep her waiting

"Is there a specific scent you're looking for?"

I asked again, noticing the height difference between us as I approached her.

"I'd like something with peppermint,"

She responded.

As soon as she mentioned her preference, a smile that had been absent all day began to form on my face. I offered her a friendly smile, and even though she was wearing a mask, I could tell she was smiling back.

"Actually, our store has a signature line of scented candles and essential oils,"

I said, leading her to the front corner of the store where we displayed our beautifully packaged candles. I picked up a sleek white box and handed it to her to inspect.

She took the candle calmly, and I handed her a test strip to sample the scent

"This candle is one of our signatures. It contains peppermint, cedarwood, and lavender," I explained.

"....."

"The cedarwood gives a warm, earthy aroma, while the lavender helps with relaxation and sleep. Combined with the coolness of peppermint, it creates a soothing scent perfect for unwinding after a long day. Imagine lighting this on a stressful day; doesn't it make you feel more relaxed?"

"Yes..."

She replied through her mask, prompting me to continue.

"People often interpret scents differently based on their feelings. So..."

"What do you think of this scent?"

She asked unexpectedly.

"Huh?"

I blinked in surprise before smiling.

"To me, it feels like a rainy day."

"A rainy day?"

"Yes, it's perfect for reading a book or letting your thoughts wander. Maybe it's because this is my favorite scent, and I created it myself. It became a bestseller, so whenever I smell it, I feel incredibly relaxed."

"Oh, you're the owner? You look so young!"

She exclaimed, making me blush slightly. She then examined the candle's name, written in elegant script.

"What does the name mean? It doesn't seem related to the scent."

"Judgement Spells8?"

I asked, and she nodded, looking more like a curious intern than a customer.

"The name doesn't relate to the candle's ingredients," I laughed softly, feeling my earlier frustration fade. "Have you ever had your fortune told?"

"Huh? Well, a long time ago," she replied.

"The name "Judgement' comes from a tarot card, 'Spells' from spells, and '8' represents the eight wands of first love. Together, it symbolizes a love that can't be replaced, like a first love that remains unique despite finding better or more appealing things. In business terms, it's like trying it once and always coming back for more, even after liking other scents."

"Oh, that's deep," she said.

"But it all depends on personal preference," I added.

"What about the one next to it?"

She asked, pointing to another package behind it.

"That's the same scent as this one,"

I explained.

"Why is it called "The Devil'? Is it another tarot card?"

"Exactly,"

I said, smiling as I picked up the black package with red accents, giving it a bold look.

"This signature line is meant as gifts. 'Judgement Spells8' is for someone who feels like a first love, deep and unforgettable. 'The Devil' is for complicated relationships,"

I said, thinking of my friend Pang and biting my lip slightly.

"Does it have a similar meaning?" she asked.

"Yes, 'The Devil' is a deep card. People often think it's scary because of the name, but it also represents a love that remains connected, unable to part, even if it's not ideal. It's like a pact with a devil, a card of not moving on."

"....."

"This package is often bought as a joke gift for friends, saying, 'I don't want to be friends with you, but I have no choice, like a devil binding us together,"

I laughed softly before continuing.

"Some people even give it to exes they still have deep connections with," I added.

*And that person was me...*

"But anyway, it depends on how you use it. This candle has peppermint, just like you wanted,"

I concluded the sale smoothly.

She nodded, seemingly impressed by my effort, and...

"I'll take four boxes of this candle and two bottles of the matching essential oil," she said.

"Sure," I replied

My smile grew even wider as I carefully packed her items. Then she spoke again.

"Could I get two boxes of each package?" she asked.

"Of course," I said.

After packing everything, I had an employee ring up her purchase and gave her a discount for buying so much. It made my lengthy explanation feel worthwhile.

"Here's a 10% discount for your next purchase over 1,000 baht," I said. "Thank you," she replied.

"Thank you as well," I said.

"Can I ask one more thing?" she inquired

"Sure,"

I said, pausing my bookkeeping for the third time.

"Do you offer fortune-telling services here?" she asked.

"Huh?"

"Like, buy 5,000 baht worth and get a free reading?" she joked.

I blinked and looked at the cashier, who seemed just as confused.

"What?"

Just kidding. Thanks,"

She said, leaving quickly and leaving us puzzled.

"No one promoted a 5,000 baht purchase with a free reading, right?"

"No, Pao," the cashier confirmed.

"Weird," I said.

I watched her leave, but she was already gone...

After showcasing my sales skills, my earlier frustration faded. I chatted with the staff as usual, but soon a woman in a clean white outfit approached the counter, handing me a piece of paper.

"Hello, I'm from the clinic across the street,"

She said, pointing to the newly opened dental clinic.

"Oh, okay," I replied, taking the paper.

"We're offering a 10% discount on dental services to celebrate our opening. Feel free to visit," she said.

"Sure,"

I said, looking at the paper and realizing I hadn't had a cleaning in a while.

Has it been six months? But there are no customers now...

"Wait,"

I called out to the woman as she was leaving.

"Is there an available slot now?" I asked.

And so, I ended up getting a cleaning today. It'd been over seven months since my last one, and my usual clinic was in Chiang Mai. Trying this new place might be convenient.

After giving instructions, I walked to the new clinic, which felt clean and familiar.

*This smells like The Devil...*

*Oh, I forgot to mention I prefer The Devil over judgement Spells8, and you can guess why..*

"Hello, please wait a moment. The doctor is finishing with the last patient,"

The receptionist said.

"Okay," I replied.

"Please fill out this form," she said.

I filled out the form quickly, noticing a section for a nickname meant for children. I wanted to cross it out but decided to leave it.

After finishing, I sat on a clean white sofa, feeling at home with the familiar scent of The Devil, just like in my bedroom.

But my comfort was interrupted when I saw the board listing the dentists' names, one of which was familiar:

**'Dr. Seenam, Pediatric Dentist (Dr. Paper)'**

***Wait, what?!***

It couldn't be a coincidence. That name...

Memories from the past began to resurface, and...

I gathered the courage to tell the nurse I needed to reschedule, but before I could, a small woman in a lab coat walked out with a child.

"You did great today. See, the dentist isn't scary," she said kindly.

"Not scary at all," the child replied.

"Good job. Have a safe trip home,"

She said with a smile I recognized immediately as the customer who bought our signature candles earlier.

I froze, unable to move.

"Is the next patient here?"

She asked the nurse, who handed her my file. She removed her mask, revealing her unchanged beauty.

"Hello, Pannakorn,"

She greeted warmly.

"Here for a cleaning?"

"Uh, yes," I stammered.

"Follow me," she said.

"Actually, I have an urgent matter, so I can't stay today,"

I tried to excuse myself.

"Once you're in the clinic, even crying children have to get their teeth done,"

She said firmly.

"...."

**"You wouldn't run away like before, would you, Pannakorn?"**

**She smiled at me with a kind demeanor, but I... could sense an energy that indicated...**

**...there was no escape...**

# Chapter 09: Excuse Me, I'll take My Leave

**This is so uncomfortable...**

While the discomfort was overwhelming, the doctor seemed completely at ease, her face adorned with a smile that suggested she was oblivious to my current feelings.

"Have you not had a dental cleaning in a while?"

"It's been about seven months."

"Just on time then."

She spoke as she neatly tucked her hair into a green cap and put her mask back on. I watched her actions from the dental chair, my tense demeanor catching the attention of the assistant, who tried to comfort me, seemingly used to patients like me.

But the nervousness wasn't because of the dental procedure. "Please rinse your mouth on the left and then lie down on the chair,"

The assistant said kindly, but I remained tense.

*This is terrible... Meeting P' Seenam again after ten years, and now I have to open my mouth for her to see.*

*Terrible, yes... very terrible.*

I let out a big sigh after rinsing my mouth, adjusting myself to sit back against the chair where the doctor and assistant were behind me, and then.....

**"Are you scared?"**

Suddenly, the doctor's white hand touched my shoulder, making me jump in surprise. I glanced at her hand, but what I saw was her face, very close to mine.

"Uh... no, not that scared."

"Are you cold? If you are, I can ask the assistant to get a blanket."

"No, I'm fine."

"Okay, just relax. "

She said, gently patting my shoulder.

"I'm going to adjust the chair now."

***Gasp!***

As soon as the chair reclined, I jumped again, causing it to shake. The assistant immediately reassured me not to be afraid, while the doctor paused her actions. I heard a soft laugh, and the angle of the chair allowed me to see her face more clearly.

*Oh my god... she's really laughing at me.*

"Okay, I'm going to adjust it a bit more so you can lie comfortably,"

She said, finishing the adjustment while I alternated my gaze between her and the assistant.

What am I doing here...

"Would you like a cover for your face? If not, the water might splash a bit,"

The assistant asked again, and this time I felt like I was losing my mind.

"Uh..."

"But if you want to see the doctor's face while she's cleaning your teeth, we don't have to cover it,"

She said, her expression serious as she examined my face, making me even more tense.

"I... I think it's better to cover it."

"Alright, I'll cover your face then,"

The assistant said, and my eyes were soon covered by a dark purple cloth. At least now I didn't have to make eye contact.

"Open your mouth, please. A bit wider... okay, hold it like that. The doctor will start now."

The sound of the scaler and water began, splashing all over my mouth. I tried to stay calm and let the doctor work on each tooth thoroughly.

"Suction, please,"

She said periodically, her tone serious as she spoke to the assistant, unlike the casual conversation earlier.

"You take good care of your teeth. There's hardly any tartar,"

She commented.

"Thank you," I mumbled.

"Don't talk yet, or the tools might hit your tongue," she warned.

*Then why did you start a conversation then, Doctor?!*

I wanted to ask, but I felt too miserable to care. After nearly half an hour, the procedure ended. I quickly rinsed my mouth one last time and prepared to get up, but then...

"We have a promotion for free fluoride treatment after a cleaning," she said. "What?"

"If you're done rinsing, please sit back like before," she instructed.

"Wait... do I have to get the fluoride treatment?"

"Yes," she confirmed.

"Can I skip it?"

"You can, but you'll miss out on the promotion. It's better to get it done..." Oh my god! I can't escape this!!!

"You can put the tools away now. I'll handle the fluoride treatment myself," the doctor said.

"Okay, doctor," the assistant replied.

They spoke casually, but I was so tense I could feel my hands shaking.

If I was this tense with the assistant here, how much worse would it be alone with her? Oh no.. what do I do? I want to go home.

"Are you done rinsing?" "Y... yes," I stammered.

"Okay, lean back," she said.

I followed her instructions, leaning back against the chair, unable to resist. As soon as I was in a comfortable position, the chair reclined slightly, and a dental tray was placed in my mouth.

"Bite down for four minutes. If you have saliva, let me know," she said.

I didn't respond, just sat there quietly with my mouth closed. The doctor was writing my records seriously and didn't say anything.

*Please let four minutes pass quickly!*

I stared at the clock on the wall, feeling like I could devour it. But time seemed to crawl. The hands showed only two minutes had passed, but it felt like two years.

*Okay... that's an exaggeration.*

Before I could finish scolding myself, the doctor moved her chair closer, putting on gloves again. She leaned in to check if any saliva was leaking from my mouth. Seeing I was fine, she removed one glove and picked up my records to read aloud.

"Pannakorn, age twenty-seven, nickname Pao..."

"....."

**"Do you recognize me, Pannakorn?"**

Here it comes! The direct question! Oh my god, P' Seenam! Can you pretend we don't know each other!!!

"Actually, I felt like I recognized you at the candle shop. I wanted to say hi but wasn't sure, so I had the clinic staff give you the promotion flyer, hoping you'd come in and I could confirm."

**Was this all part of her plan...**

I swallowed my saliva unknowingly, and the doctor immediately scolded me.

"Don't swallow. I told you to let me know if you have saliva..."

She lifted the suction tool, ready to help, but I just stared at her without opening my mouth.

"Open your mouth, or how can I suction the saliva?"

I opened my mouth reluctantly, letting her suction the saliva. Now that she knew it was me, she started scolding me. Oh my god, she never scolded me like this when we were kids.

"Bite down for another minute, and I'll take it out," she said. "..."

I remained silent, no longer paying attention to the clock on the wall.

Well... from her question, it was clear she wouldn't let me leave without talking.

What should I say to her...

"By the way, did you know the nickname field is for pediatric patients? But it's cute that you filled it out," she said.

"What?"

The dental tray fell onto the cloth on my chest, but the fluoride splattered onto my pants.

**Oh crap! Why do I always mess up around her!**

"Let me clean that for you," she said.

She switched from calling herself "doctor" to "P' Seenam," looking quite flustered as she quickly grabbed tissues to clean the fluoride off my pants.

Everything happened so fast, and she didn't realize where she was wiping.

Yes... the fluoride had landed right on my crotch.

"P' Seenam! I can clean it myself,"

I said, grabbing the tissue from her. She seemed to realize where she'd been wiping.

"Sorry," she said.

"It's okay, I'm clumsy," I replied.

"When you called me P' Seenam, I knew it was you, Pao..."

I looked at her and gave a weak smile, still wiping the stain.

"It's funny,"

She said, laughing softly, catching my attention.

"What's funny?" I asked.

"Us. The first time we met, you tripped and scraped your knee, and I lifted your skirt to check the wound. Now, meeting again, you're still clumsy, and I'm helping you in a spot below the navel again," she said.

Memories from childhood became clearer, her cute smile overlapping with the face of the older version of her. I couldn't take my eyes off her smile, feeling something familiar and gaining a bit more courage.

"It's been a long time, P' Seenam. How have you been?" I asked.

"I've been good. How about you, Pao?"

"I'm good too," I replied.

"You've grown taller, haven't you?" she asked. "Not much taller, but you're still the same height."

"That's a memorable greeting," she said.

We both laughed, as if the long time apart hadn't mattered. Earlier, I felt so uncomfortable, worried about the things I said as a child, but since she didn't bring it up, my worries faded away.

"Since we're here, can I have your number? I have a lot to talk about, but..."

She paused, looking at the clock showing almost 7 PM.

"I have another patient."

"Sure, I need to get back to the shop too," I said.

We exchanged numbers quickly, and a message popped up immediately.

"Are you free tonight around 8:30 PM?" she asked.

"I should be. Why?"

"Great, let's have dinner. I know a good place, and we can talk more."

"Uh..."

"No refusing. We rarely get to meet," she insisted.

**Everything seemed so fast... yes, too fast.**

But even though it felt too fast since we just met again, I felt more excited than uncomfortable. Since I couldn't refuse her, the only thing to do was to tell my friend I'd be late.

"I'll be late to the shop tonight, probably around 11 PM. Please tell Cat," I said.

[I'm already at the shop, but okay, as long as you're coming...] "Okay," I replied.

[Where are you going? Not going back to sleep and missing the appointment like last time, right?]

"No, I have something to do," I said.

[What is it?]

"None of your business!"

[Fine, I was just asking. Hurry up.]

"Okay, I'll tell you when I get there. Bye,"

I said, ending the call.

As soon as I hung up, a message from someone else popped up.

'I'll come over tonight,' it read.

The message from P' Pang made me sigh. She must be stressed again to come over even though she just left this morning.

'I have plans tonight. I'll be back late,' I replied.

"So, you can't make it today?"

"I can come, Pao. I'm just not in my room right now."

She read the message but didn't reply. I stared at the screen for a minute before a woman walked into the store.

"Hello,"

The staff greeted in unison, prompting me to quickly put my phone away.

"Please take care of the store. Make sure everything is in order before closing."

"Got it, Pao. Don't worry,"

The manager replied, looking visibly relieved. Well, if I stayed, she wouldn't seem like a manager at all.

"Right on time,"

I said, glancing at my watch, which made the petite woman smile warmly.

"You changed quickly, Pao. This outfit looks great on you."

I looked down at my tight dress, one of the few I kept at the store for occasions when my close friends would drag me out for drinks, leaving no time to go home and change.

"I keep some outfits here at the store. It only takes a moment to change..."

"Oh, I see."

"Shall we go?"

"Sure. Are we riding together or driving separately?"

"I didn't drive today."

"Okay, then let's take my car."

Soon, I found myself in the luxurious car of my beautiful senior, whom I hadn't seen in a while. Although it was exciting, arriving at the restaurant she chose made my heart race even more.

. .

"Look who's here! Pang, do you remember Pao?"

Pang and I locked eyes, both unprepared for this encounter. Pang slowly sipped her wine, glancing between the two of us.

"How did you two come together?"

Pang asked, just as our mutual friend took a seat on the other side of the table.

"We opened a new clinic in the same mall as Pao's store, right across from each other. We ran into each other today, so I invited her along. I thought it'd be a nice surprise for you, Pang. You used to love getting your fortune read by Pao."

"Oh..."

"You remember her, right?"

"Yeah, I remember."

I forced a weak smile. It'd be bad if she didn't remember, considering we'd just talked this morning.

"Sorry for not telling you I had plans with Pang. I just got to Bangkok recently. I ran into Pao today but had also planned to meet Pang. Missing either of you would have been a shame."

"Is anyone else coming?" Pang shook her head.

"No, it's just the three of us."

"Oh, okay."

"Come sit here. Order whatever you like; it's on me."

I gave a weak smile to our mutual friend before sitting down, but...

"Pao, aren't you supposed to sit next to me?"

Pang's authoritative tone made me uncomfortable. It wasn't that I was afraid of our mutual friend, but I didn't like how Pang was acting in front of others.

"Pang, you're going to scare her."

"Scare? Has Pao ever been scared of me?"

She turned to me, making my feelings clear. I was okay with her being authoritative when we were alone, but not now.

"Excuse me, I need to use the restroom."

I avoided all questions, feeling exhausted. The excitement of seeing my first love vanished. I walked briskly, not even knowing where the restroom was, until someone grabbed my arm.

""The restroom is this way."

Pang quickly dragged me to the restroom, looking very displeased. I tried to pull my arm away, but she used all her strength to pull me into a stall.

"What are you doing?"

"Is your business here to go on a date with her?"

"A date? It's not like that."

"Then why did you come with her?"

"Like she said, we just ran into each other, and she invited me to dinner."

"Just like that?"

"Yes, there's no reason to refuse."

I answered, trying to leave the restroom, but she blocked my way, locking the door and starting to kiss the back of my neck, her fingers slipping under my dress.

"P' Pang, not here."

"Why not? It's fine."

***"This isn't just being stuck; it's like a dog waiting for its owner to show love."***

***"Even if she beats you to death, one pat on the head and you forget all the pain."***

***.***

My best friend's words echoed in my head. Even though the sex was good, her actions now were not okay. She acted like she could do anything to me.

"No,"

I pushed her away. Once free, I quickly left the restroom, feeling a mix of emotions.

"Don't walk away! You know I hate that!" "P" Pang, can you stop treating me like this?"

I turned to her, my anger rising.

"I've always given in to you, but this is too much. I don't like it either."

"What's wrong? It was good before."

"Good? For who? For us or just for you? I feel like I'm just an outlet for your emotions."

Tears started to flow.

"If you don't plan to come back, let me go. Don't make me feel like I'm just something you can do anything to. And we shouldn't be doing this here."

"Why? Because she's outside?"

"It's not about her."

"Then what?"

"P' Pang, this is a restroom. And... just stop."

"It doesn't matter where. Or are you still into her and feel guilty about being with me here?"

"Can you stop making random connections?"

I looked at my ex with mixed feelings. I wasn't exactly angry or sad. She just wanted to win, thinking my attention was shifting to someone else. Having been with Pang for years, I could guess what she was thinking

"I think you're drunk, Pang. Let's talk another time."

"Let's talk now. Stop worrying about the person waiting outside."

"But I came because she invited me."

"But what about me... You should prioritize me."

"Prioritize someone who never really saw me as important?"

Pang's unreasonable anger made me lose control. I'd never given her a reason to worry about other women. And yes, my anger made me say things I never intended to.

"How many times have you left me? Have you ever counted? Every time you come back, it's the same. I'm stupid enough to wait, hoping one day we'd end up together without any issues. But look at you, always unreasonable. You spend your time freely with anyone, but I can't?"

"So you're admitting you still like Pa?"

"Yes! I still like Pa. I'm happy to see her today. I'd rather sleep with her than be with you again!"

"...."

"Are you satisfied now?"

As soon as I let out my emotions, tears flowed uncontrollably. I quickly walked away, unable to handle the situation anymore.

But then...

"Uh..."

The voice belonged to the person we were talking about. I didn't even know how long she'd been standing there. Seeing her listening made my mind go blank.

I wiped my tears hastily, trying to find words to explain, but all I could say was...

**"I'm sorry, P' Seenam, but I need to leave now."**

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# Chapter 10: Change clothes

**What a mess! My life is the worst!**

I rushed out of the restaurant-bar, tears streaming down my face. My legs carried me to the sidewalk, my temples throbbing so badly I wanted to collapse right there. The best I could do was open Maps to see how far the bar where my two friends were waiting was.

It was frustrating to see it'd take twenty minutes to walk there. Still, I chose to keep walking, afraid that if I stopped to wait for a cab while crying, I'd draw too much attention from passersby.

The sidewalks in Bangkok were terrible, just like my life at that moment. I nearly tripped and fell three times on the way. On top of that, I hadn't prepared myself for the argument with Pang, and I had no idea how much the person who'd just returned today had seen.

*What kind of day is this?!*

It took me almost twenty minutes to reach the bar where I'd arranged to meet my friends. When I arrived, I hurried up the dimly lit stairs, only to trip on the last step and fall, drawing the attention of everyone on the upper floor.

I ended up falling after all...

"Hey, Pao!"

Cat's voice competed with the live music blaring from the speakers. The pain made me cry even more.

"Damn it! Ugh..."

I cried out. My body didn't get up as it should have, prompting Man, who'd been watching, to rush over and help me up.

"Why are you making such a fuss over a fall? Wait... are you crying?"

When my friends saw my tears, their initial amusement turned to concern. Not only did my two friends come to help, but a staff member also rushed over. Once I was safely seated, the same staff member quickly brought a first aid kit to tend to my wounds.

My knee was scraped, and blood slowly trickled down, indicating the pain was quite significant.

"Pao! You're bleeding. It must hurt a lot, right?"

Hearing that, I burst into tears, making my friends even more anxious, not knowing why I was crying.

"Pao, let's go to the hospital."

"No!"

"But it looks really bad. We should go to the hospital. Cat, pack up."

"The hospital won't help!"

"What..."

"I had a fight with P' Pang."

As soon as I said that, my friends exchanged glances before deciding to take me to Man's condo, which took a thirty-minute drive. I cried the entire way, and even after arriving at my friend's place, the tears didn't stop.

"So, what happened?"

"What did she do to you?"

My friends looked at me with serious expressions. A variety of wine bottles and beer cans were lined up in front of us, as if they knew how much I needed them right now.

"Today, I saw... P' Pang... with... ugh, P' Nam."

"Yeah, and then what? Wait a minute... who?"

"P' Seenam..."

"P' Seenam? Which Seenam?"

Man asked Cat, who looked thoughtful before her face showed a look of realization.

"P' Seenam, P' Pang's high school friend?"

"Your first love?"

I nodded and began to recount the whole story, still sobbing. My friends listened intently, alternating between shock and concern. When I got to the part where I tripped and fell, I started crying loudly again.

"What a terrible day! Why do I have to go through this?"

"Calm down, take a deep breath,"

Cat said, rubbing my back soothingly.

"But this time, P' Pang went too far. I get that she acts like this when she's drunk, but trying to hook up with you in the bathroom while a friend is waiting outside... that's just wrong."

"And the worst part... is me,"

I sobbed, my voice competing with my tears.

"I told her... I wanted to sleep with... P' Seenam... more than with her.... and she heard it."

Tears flowed uncontrollably. Realizing how awful I was, I grabbed a beer can and chugged it, prompting my friends to try to stop me.

"Pao! Drink slowly. Are you trying to finish it in one go?"

"Yeah! I can't take it anymore!"

With that, my friends stopped trying to stop me, knowing that when I said I couldn't take it, I really meant it.

By the time I realized it, a lot of time had passed. My friends had fallen asleep on the couch where we'd been drinking. In the silence, I lit a familiar cigarette, alternating between puffs and sips of beer.

My eyes wandered to the balcony view of the empty street below. The only sound breaking the quiet was my sniffles, a reminder of how much I'd cried.

I pulled my phone out of my bag, staring at the screen filled with missed call notifications. I didn't need to check to know who they were from, except for one unfamiliar number.

*'P' Seenam 1 missed call'*

I stared at the screen, feeling a deep sense of guilt. Every time, I ran away without telling her anything. Even though I knew it was wrong, I never found a better way to handle these situations than to run.

I took another drag from my cigarette and tossed my phone back into my bag. Tears started flowing again, and this time, my legs gave out. I collapsed to the floor, the pain in my knee flaring up as I lost control.

*I'm so exhausted... that I can't think anymore.*

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**11 Years Ago**

**"Pao"**

**"P' Pang"**

I called out my senior's name from my old school in surprise, but she looked delighted to see me.

"What are you doing here? Are you on vacation?"

She asked, glancing around as she saw me sitting alone, looking at the mountain view.

"You could say that."

"Are you staying here? Great... I just started my internship at this resort today. If you need anything, just let me know. I'll take good care of you."

"You haven't changed a bit... still so kind," I said, smiling.

"But actually, I'm not staying here. I just snuck in."

"Oh no... will I get fired?"

She said, looking around again like someone who'd done something wrong.

"If we get caught, don't say you know me. I don't want to get in trouble on my first day."

I laughed at her cute reaction and moved over to make room for her to sit.

"Come sit with me."

"Is that okay? Even if you're staying here..."

She hesitated but eventually sat down next to me.

"If we get in trouble, just say I was trying to convince you to leave."

"Sure,"

I agreed immediately, not feeling anything even though we'd just met again.

"So, who are you here with? Why are you in your school uniform?"

"I'm not here on vacation. I moved back here."

"Oh, I thought you were in Chonburi.

"No, I live in Chiang Mai. But I had to move to Chonburi for middle school because my parents had to work there."

"Oh, what do your parents do that they had to move? That's cool."

"They run various businesses, collect rent, and sometimes partner with others. I don't really know much about their work."

"You seem wealthy, fitting for your looks,"

She said, nodding as if she'd figured something out.

"Don't flatter me. What if I start showing off?"

"Go ahead. I'm not the jealous type."

I raised an eyebrow, the natural conversation making me laugh a little. I turned to look at the cluster of houses separated from the resort, offering the best mountain view.

"See those three houses over there?"

"Oh, the owner's houses? Why? Are you saying one of them is yours?"

She laughed softly before sitting up straight and continuing,

"If one of those is yours, I'll devote myself to you. I'll propose and live a comfortable life without working."

"Is it that serious? You might have to work a lot because the owner seems to have many businesses."

"So, they're locals? Have you met the owner? Are they nice?"

"I've met them often. They're very nice. Oh, the resort owner is very hardworking, selling goods, collecting rent, and partnering in many businesses."

"Are you trying to say it's your parents? That's too obvious. Show off something I can't figure out."

P' Pang's challenging look made my smile even brighter.

"Can I show off my last name?"

"Go ahead."

She said, resting her chin on her hand, looking playful and kinder than three years ago, making me laugh a little "My last name is Kiatpiyadewa."

"Hmm, that sounds rich... but wait."

She didn't just say it, she looked a bit shocked.

"No way."

She pulled out a phone with a keyboard-like keypad, typing my last name into Google. Soon, a family photo from a business magazine last year appeared.

"Are you the resort owner's daughter?"

"Can I show off now?"

"I don't know how to act now."

"Why..."

"Well... how should I put it?"

"...."

"Never mind... but you're not going to act like in the dramas where you boss me around out of spite, right?"

"Do I seem spiteful to you?"

"Not really. But back in school, you didn't seem to like me much. Plus, your first prediction made me worry so much I couldn't sleep."

"The first prediction?"

"Yeah, remember?"

"I don't remember. I predicted for so many people that I don't know what I said."

Oh, except for the last prediction I gave to P' Seenam.

"You predicted that a great love was waiting for me, but it'd take some time. That person would help me through my problems. But once I overcame those problems, I'd hurt them, even though I knew they loved me a lot."

"Wow, did I really say that?"

"That's not all."

"...."

**"You also said that I had to hurt them because if I didn't, they wouldn't find their true love. And I'd find my true love after cutting ties with them."**

I was shocked by what she said. Was the person she had to hurt me?

Wait... was it me?

My eyes slowly opened as my senses returned. The sunlight streaming onto the balcony interrupted my dream.

What was that... a past memory turned into a dream.

As I tried to stand, the scene spun, indicating a hangover from the countless drinks. The pain in my knee intensified as I tried to stand up straight. I shook my head a few times, realizing I'd fallen asleep on the balcony since last night. My two friends were still asleep in the same spot.

"Hey, aren't you guys going to work?"

"Work!"

Cat's voice rang out loudly. Her small frame shot up before she froze.

"It's Sunday... I'm going back to sleep."

I stared at her quick movements before calling out to someone else who was still lying down.

"Man... Man."

"...."

"Man!"

I slowly raised my hand to my temple as the throbbing pain increased, feeling like my head was about to explode.

"What?"

A groggy voice responded irritably, making it inevitable for me to walk over and shake my best friend.

"Do you have any hangover medicine?"

"In the top drawer."

"Which drawer?"

"Next to the bed."

I walked to the spot she mentioned, and as soon as I got the medicine, I quickly swallowed it before grabbing my bag from the balcony floor.

"I'm heading out."

No one responded. I tried to make my way to the elevator and down to the front of the condo. This morning, there were fewer cars than usual. No taxis were passing by, and my phone battery had died at some point.

I exhaled slowly, feeling drained. I stood there waiting for a car, feeling like I had no other options.

But suddenly, a car pulled up in front of me. The window rolled down, revealing a face I couldn't quite make out.

"Pao, get in the car..."

"Who are you?"

I squinted, trying to see the owner of the voice. The hangover was still strong despite the medicine.

"Get in quickly, I'm blocking other cars."

"Who are you? Wait, how did you get here?"

I looked around, trying to make sure I wasn't hallucinating.

Before I could figure anything out, the driver's door opened. She hurried over to me and took my bag from my hand.

"You're still in the same clothes, and you reek of alcohol. Get in, I'll take you home.

"P' Seenam, how did you get here?"

"Didn't you call me to come pick you up?"

"What?"

*How drunk exactly was I...?*

In the end, I had to get into the car with the beautiful senior. No, I got into the car with the doctor. Or should I call her P' Seenam? Ugh, stop thinking. My head hurts so much.

"Did you drink a lot?"

The voice beside me asked. She kept her eyes on the road, not looking at me.

"I don't remember how much I drank." "It must've been a lot. The smell is strong."

I sniffed, feeling a wave of guilt wash over me.

"Um... you can drop me off here. I don't want to be a bother."

"It's fine. I was just asking, not trying to make you get out of the car... So, where should I drop you off?"

The image of Pang waiting in the room flashed in my mind. I quickly grabbed my phone but sighed when the screen showed nothing.

"Can I charge my phone?"

"Sure."

I placed my phone on the car's wireless charger, staring at it. After a while, the fruit icon appeared, indicating the phone was almost ready to use.

"So, where should I drop you off?"

"You can drop me off at a hotel nearby."

"A hotel?"

"Yes."

"Why a hotel?"

She asked, stopping the car. Her curious eyes turned to me, seeking an answer.

"Well..."

I hesitated, not knowing how to explain that I was afraid of running into someone at the room. Why didn't I think about this before leaving my friend's place?

"It's not a good time to go back to the room."

"Why not?"

"...."

"Sorry, I asked too much."

"It's okay. I wasn't overthinking it."

I gave a faint smile, my temple throbbing again, making me want to do nothing but take another nap.

"How about this?"

Her determined voice broke the silence. She thought for a moment before continuing.

**"Stay at my place for now. At least I have clothes you can change into."**

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# Chapter 11: The Part to take Responsibility For

P' Seenam led the way up to a condo, which happened to be right across from mine. What a coincidence. As soon as we entered the room, the scent of The Devil essential oil filled the air, making me close my eyes to savor the familiar aroma. Once I'd absorbed it enough, I started to look around to see if I could spot my own room from here. It seemed like we could see each other's rooms, even though the two buildings were quite far apart. But then again, if we did look, we'd probably just see each other as tiny as ants.

"My room is around here too," I said.

"Really?"

She replied, walking to the fridge to pour some water into a glass for me. She gave me a small smile before leading me to sit on the white sofa in the middle of the room.

"Thank you,"

I said, accepting the glass of water, afraid that if I left it untouched, it'd seem ungrateful to someone who'd welcomed me so warmly.

"Do you want to take a shower now? I'll grab some clothes for you," she offered.

"Sure," I replied.

"Do you want to pick them yourself?"

"You can choose for me, P' Seenam. I won't be staying long," I said.

"Okay, wait a moment,"

She said, disappearing into the bedroom.

"My head hurts so much," I muttered.

My eyes slowly closed as the cool air from the air conditioner started to work its magic. The exhaustion seemed to melt away. The sofa in her room was so soft. Or maybe it was because I'd accidentally fallen asleep on my balcony last night, making this sofa feel even more comfortable.

I didn't want to go back and face P' Pang. Just thinking about her made the tears that had dried up start to flow again. I quickly wiped them away, afraid someone might see.

Even though we'd fought many times before, this time was the worst. I didn't want it to be like this. Why did everything have to end with me losing my mind? I wanted to go out and smoke to relieve the stress, but this room didn't have a balcony. Besides, smoking in someone else's room wouldn't be polite. So, the best I could do was hold back my tears and keep my eyes closed,

I had no idea how much time had passed. My mind was filled with random images, like someone dreaming. Yet, I felt inexplicably comfortable. Warmth and coolness alternated against my body, making me slowly open my eyes.

"You're awake"

A voice greeted me. When I focused, I realized it was the voice of the senior I'd asked to stay with for a while.

"Did I fall asleep?" I asked.

"Yes, you've been asleep for several hours. You looked so tired, so I didn't wake you,"

She said, placing a small towel in a white basin.

I blinked, taking in everything. I touched my face, feeling the warmth from the dampness. A soft blanket covered my body, making me realize that someone had been taking care of me while I slept.

"Sorry for wiping you down without asking. I was worried you'd get sick sleeping like that. Oh, I only wiped your arms and face, nothing weird."

"....."

"But I avoided your knee because of the wound. You got hurt again, didn't you? I cleaned it and put a waterproof bandage on it so it won't hurt when you shower. It must hurt a lot, right? If it gets worse, see a doctor."

"....."

"Also, I bought a toothbrush and some food for you. If you're hungry, take a shower and then come eat. I'll warm the food while you shower," she said.

I kept staring at her as she spoke. My headache was gone, but tears started to fill my eyes again. I didn't want to cry in front of her, but everything she did was something I'd never received from someone I loved. No matter how many times I was sick or unwell, I'd never been cared for like this.

"P-Pao," she called.

"Yes"

"Do you feel uncomfortable because I wiped you down? I didn't mean to make you feel bad, I just..."

"No, it's not that," I interrupted.

"But you're crying..."

"It's a good thing..."

I bit my lip, trying to hold back my tears.

"It's because it's good that I'm crying."

"..…."

"Why doesn't this kind of care happen with the people we love? Why are the people who are good to me the ones I've wronged?"

*How weak am I right now...*

"What did you do that was so wrong?" she asked.

"I said things I shouldn't have, acted like a child, even though I knew the chances of it happening were high. I did it for my own benefit,"

I confessed.

"...."

"Even though I don't know if P' Seenam found happiness, I can't help but wonder what if she didn't. What would that be like?"

I couldn't see her face clearly through my tears. I was frustrated that I'd let out everything I'd planned to keep to myself.

"You still remember that? It's been over ten years," she said.

"Do you remember?" I asked.

"Of course," she replied.

"....."

"But it wasn't a bad thing,"

She said, putting down what she was holding and sitting next to me with a gentle smile.

"And.. have you been happy?" I asked.

"Yes. Happiness doesn't always have to come from love."

"Are you mad at me?" I asked

"Yes," she replied.

"...."

"I was mad that you disappeared. I never got an answer as to why you said those things. During my teenage years, when love never worked out, I wanted to find you and ask if there was a way to fix it. But no matter how hard I looked, I never found you. Then I got busy with school, work, and social life. Everything changed from when I was a kid wanting a boyfriend or someone. When I stopped hoping, I met someone who could give me answers. But still I wouldn't be so heartless as to ask about my own issues when you're sitting here crying," she said.

"....."

**"Pao, your love life hasn't been great either, right? So don't worry about my past. Just take care of yourself,"** she said softly.

Her gentle voice made my heart ache. The tears that were already flowing came out even more. My hands started to shake, and I clenched them tightly. I let my feelings take over, covering my face with my hands and crying hard.

"I'm... sorry," I sobbed.

"It's okay... it's okay. I'm not mad anymore," she said.

Her hand gently rubbed my back. She didn't say anything else, just sat beside me, comforting me with her touch. I felt like I could finally let my feelings out without worrying. I'd never shown my emotions to anyone except Cat and Man. But now, there was someone else who made me feel like I could be myself.

"Don't be so kind to me," I said.

"But I'm a kind person," she replied.

Her smile was still gentle and comforting. The only thing happening now was her small hand rubbing my back. When my crying subsided, she got up to prepare the food, telling me to wash my face to feel refreshed.

I did as she said, still feeling the remnants of my sobs. Even though I'd stopped crying, the feeling lingered.

At-shirt and long pants were hung up for me in the bathroom. A toothbrush was set up with toothpaste already squeezed on it. I was always moved by these small gestures because I'd never received them from someone I loved. But then, a question popped into my mind. Was I feeling moved because I was sad?

Thinking that, I quickly turned on the shower, letting the water flow from my head down. As the warmth of the water seeped in, the heaviness seemed to lighten. I didn't like myself in moments like this because whenever I was sad, overthinking would take over, making it hard to escape.

I spent almost an hour in the bathroom, not really showering but sitting in the bathtub, letting the water flow over me. When I realized I was using someone else's water too freely, I decided to end my time in the bathroom.

I put on the clothes P' Seenam had given me. They fit well around the torso and hips, but the pants were noticeably short. I quickly walked out of the bathroom to find her preparing the food. This time, she hadn't set the food on the table in front of the sofa as I'd expected. Instead, she'd set it up on a rug by the window, which seemed like a cozy sitting area. The large glass window offered a view of the park between our condos. I walked over to her and sat down on the well-laid rug.

"The pants are really short, aren't they? Do they fit?" she asked.

"They fit fine," I replied.

"Good," she said.

"Won't we get the rug dirty with food?" I asked.

"Just don't spill," she joked.

"...."

I'm kidding. I put a cloth down. But if it gets dirty, we can wash it together Deal?"

Her smile made me feel inexplicably at ease. I gave her a small smile in return before answering.

"Deal," I said.

"No second thoughts?" she asked

"I'm a responsible person, you know."

"I believe you. From the way you run your shop and your attention to detail, you seem very responsible."

I didn't respond, just looked at the food in front of me. Grilled beef rice bowl, salmon salad, and... what was that drink? I picked up the glass and took a sip, recognizing the taste of my favorite drink, honey lemon soda with a hint of sweetness.

"Honey lemon soda. Refreshing, right?" She asked, taking a sip from her own glass.

"Yes, it's my favorite," I replied.

"I like it too," she said.

"Isn't this the same menu we had by the sea?" I asked.

"Bingo. You remember?" she said

"Yes, the sea was so beautiful then,"

I said, the faint memory of telling her I didn't just like the sea becoming clearer. I quickly looked away and took another sip of my drink.

"I remember because it's my favorite menu. Grilled beef rice bowl with spicy dipping sauce and honey lemon soda. When I thought about what to order, I decided to go for a nostalgic choice. But I ordered the salad because I wanted it. Can you eat it?"

"Yes, I can," I replied.

"Then let's eat. I'm getting hungry," she said.

I nodded in agreement, starting to eat. The taste exploded in my mouth, making my eyes squint and a sound escape my lips.

"Hmm."

I touched my cheek, surprised. She laughed softly and handed me some water, knowing I needed it.

"Thank you," I said

"Is it good?" she asked.

"Yes, it's delicious,"

I replied, taking a few more sips of water before setting the glass down.

"You must have been hungry. Oh, I charged your phone. You didn't bring it down from the car. I was going to give it to you but forgot. I was too excited to bring you here, wondering if I'd cleaned the room well. It would've been embarrassing if you walked into a messy room," she said.

"You're always so considerate," I said

"But you've changed," she said.

"Changed?" I asked.

"Hmm, you used to be more cheerful."

"Back then, I was only thirteen. I hadn't seen the outside world yet."

"That's how it is. The older you get, the smaller the world feels. Sometimes it can be suffocating. But your bedroom becomes a huge place because you can feel completely at ease or completely miserable there."

"That's true. It's quite contradictory."

I agreed while slowly starting to eat the food in front of me. The sky outside was turning a mix of orange and pink. Even though my condo blocked some of the view, there was still enough space to see the sky clearly. If I remembered correctly, her room was on the thirtieth floor, just a few floors above mine.

"The view from higher floors is really beautiful. Maybe I should move to a higher floor too."

"Yeah, I chose this room because of the view. By the way, where exactly is your place around here?"

"Well."

I blinked a few times before smiling.

"The condo right in front of you, the blue one."

"Really? What a coincidence,"

She said, looking a bit surprised.

"Which floor are you on?"

"The nineteenth floor. Um right there,"

I said, pointing forward.

"The nineteenth floor?"

She started counting the floors carefully, but after finishing, she paused for a moment.

"Which one is your room? Is it on this side?"

"It's on this side, but it's hard to point out the exact room from here. My balcony has four or five cactus plants. It's hard to see from here."

"Oh, I see."

"But your room is beautifully decorated,"

I said, noticing she seemed a bit lost in thought.

"Oh, I decorated it for when I opened a branch in Bangkok. I didn't stay here much before, but now I think I'll be moving here permanently."

"I see. Do you like white? The room looks very clean with all the white."

"White makes it look nice and it's a lucky color too."

"Lucky?"

"Yeah, hold on..."

She quickly got up and walked into the bedroom. I tried to peek in but she was gone for a while, so I turned back to my food.

After almost five minutes, she came back with an old, faded pencil case.

"Do you remember this?"

I looked at the pencil case carefully, but what she wanted me to see was the white teddy bear keychain that had turned yellow with age.

"I remember. You still kept it?"

"Yeah, I kept things from when I graduated high school. When I moved here, I accidentally brought the box with me. It has friendship notes and school uniforms. I keep forgetting to take it back to Chonburi."

"That's nice."

"What about the brown teddy bear keychain I gave you?"

"Well..."

I hesitated, not wanting to admit that I threw it away when I was heartbroken.

"It it got lost."

"Yeah, it's been a long time."

She smiled understandingly and sat down next to me again. She started eating while we chatted a bit more.

"I'll wash the dishes," I offered.

"No need. I'm the host, I should take care of it,"

She said, getting up to stack the plates and glasses. I quickly grabbed them from her.

"Let me carry them then."

"Alright."

I watched her as I placed the dishes down. She kept smiling, and it made me realize that while we were talking, I'd forgotten all the things that made me sad. I picked up my phone for the first time since entering the room and saw many missed calls from Pang.

I sighed softly without realizing it and turned my attention to the chat messages.

[Pao, where are you? I went to your room and didn't find you, only Pang. Then Pang started grilling us about where you went.]

[I didn't say anything because I didn't know, but Cat almost slapped Pang. She was scared though.]

"You're all crazy"

I muttered with a smile that hadn't appeared in a while.

[Who's scared? It's called not wanting any trouble, Cat immediately protested.

[Cat and I are still together. If you need a ride, let us know. Go somewhere to clear your mind and come back when you're ready. Take care of yourself.]

[But please, don't go to Cambodia alone. Who goes to see a massacre site to relieve stress? I'm worried something might follow you back.]

[If you're free, call us back. We're worried.]

[Yeah, we're really worried. We ate a whole pizza each out of sadness, but at least the pizza was good.]

This time, I laughed softly I started typing to let my friends know I was okay.

[Still in Bangkok. I was super hungover this morning but feeling better now. Had some food, so don't worry I'll head back to my room soon. Not sure if Pang is still there. Hope she's gone by now.)

My friends replied immediately, as if they'd been waiting for my message all day.

[Good to hear. I think Pang left. We knocked on your door a few times, five minutes apart.]

[Cat's idea. She said if we knock often, Pang will get annoyed and leave your room.]

I read the message and could picture Pang's face. She probably understood my friends' real intentions. Every time we fought and something like this happened, Cat and Man would always mess with her. [Thanks. I'll let you know when I get back.]

[Okay. If it's not too late, Man and I will come over.)

[Sure, I'll let you know.]

I put my phone down and turned my attention back to the sky, feeling more at ease.

"Pao, let me know when you want to go back,"

She said, placing a glass of water in front of me.

"Or if you want to smoke, there's a small balcony in my bedroom. You can smoke there."

"Uh how did you know I smoke?"

"Oh, the smell clings to your clothes. I noticed it in the car. Also,"

She said, glancing at my bag, "when I carried your bag, I saw it. At first, I wasn't sure if it was yours, but after getting in the car, I figured it was."

"Oh"

"Dentists usually scold you about it. It's bad for your teeth and your health."

"...."

"But if life isn't easy, we need an outlet. I smoke sometimes too, but only when I'm stressed or drinking."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"So, can I smoke?"

"Of course."

I smiled more brightly and quickly took out a pack of cigarettes that wasn't sold in Thailand. I hesitated for å moment.

"Want to join me?"

"Huh?"

"It feels better to smoke with someone."

"Really? How about some beer too?" "Do you have some? Then yes, please!"

She raised an eyebrow and smiled.

"Okay do you want to drink from the can or should I pour it into a glass?"

"From the can is fine."

She nodded slightly and went to get a can of beer from the fridge. She led me to the bedroom, which was as clean and white as the other rooms.

I stood on the small balcony, just big enough to hang a single clothes rack. Luckily, there was nothing there except empty space. Seeing no clothes to ask permission to move, I lit a cigarette and took a deep drag, filling my lungs before slowly exhaling.

"Feeling better after smoking?"

"Yes, I haven't smoked all day. It tastes much better now"

"Really?"

"Want some?"

I offered her the cigarette, but she shook her head.

"No, thanks. I don't have anything to be stressed about right now, and I'm not drunk yet."

"Oh..."

"Does it taste good?"

"If it tasted good, it'd be candy."

"True..."

I smiled a little and took another drag. The view in front of me was getting darker, except for the lights from the park and the streetlights below.

"You can ask me anything you want to know now. I feel much better,"

"You mean..."

"About when we were kids."

"Oh... I used to want to ask why you cursed me like that,"

She said with a small laugh.

"But now I don't care. You probably did it because of teenage emotions.

"I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I told you it's in the past. I'm happy now." "Aren't you curious about last night why I fought with Pang?" I asked, taking a sip of alcohol.

"I am, but I figured you and Pang were dating. Is that right?"

"And... how much did you hear?"

"That's a secret,"

She said, taking a sip of her drink.

"Well we used to date. We broke up two years ago."

"Really? Then why do you fight like you're still together?"

"We still have a complicated relationship. It's hard to explain."

"Just tell me as much as you want. No need to feel uncomfortable."

I looked at her, and she seemed sincere. But you know what? When she didn't push for answers, I felt more comfortable sharing everything with her. My eyes wandered to the city view. "We still sleep together. Is that too blunt?"

I laughed a little before continuing.

"I never thought I'd do something like that, but when it's someone you love deeply, you'll do anything to keep them from leaving"

"...."

"Have you ever heard the saying, 'You lose yourself countless times just to keep them'? That's me. I do everything because I cherish what I once had it's a way to deceive myself and prolong the pain."

"So you're not sad?"

Her gentle eyes made my tears well up again.

"Quite the opposite. I'm very sad, like I'm dying..."

"....."

"But this time, I think I really need to stop. I don't like being this way. How do I put it I don't want to lose myself anymore because things between Pang and me will never get better."

"I haven't been in love for a long time, so I don't know what advice to give."

"It's okay. I'm fine... at least I have Cat and Man as friends."

"You have me too."

"Huh?"

I looked confused, noticing her face was getting red from the alcohol. She put her beer can down and grabbed a new one.

"We've met now. We work close to each other, and our homes are nearby. If you feel lonely, come see me. Or..."

"...."

"To forget someone faster, you need someone new. I think this method works well."

I looked at her, my heart starting to race unexpectedly,

"Really?"

"Yeah. But if you don't want more friends, maybe I can be something else."

"Something else? Like what?"

"Try making that prophecy come true. Make me truly happy for once, free from everything I've been through. Think of it as making up for cursing me. Pao, you can redeem yourself for what you said, divert attention to someone else, and I can benefit from something you once predicted."

"....."

"I didn't believe in what you said before, Pao. But now, I think I might believe that you can create happiness. Because if you weren't really good,

Pang would've left you without a second thought."

"....."

**"Try making me happy like you said, Pao. I'm also someone you need to take responsibility for."**

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# Chapter 12: Irritated

**The part I.... have to take responsibility for....**

Suddenly, the senior girl collapsed to the floor, her face flushed red.

"Are you okay? And what do you mean, P' Seenam?"

"I'm drunk."

"What?"

"I'm drunk. You can go home by yourself, right, Pao?"

"Uh... yeah, I can."

"Are you leaving now?"

"Well... if you're going to rest, I'll head home now."

"Okay... you can go. I'll sit here for a bit. My room locks automatically, don't worry."

*Wow... just kicking me out like that.*

"Are you sure you don't want to lie down properly first?"

"No, I'll get up in a bit."

".…."

I paused, looking at the exhausted senior who was no longer making eye contact. My mind weighed everything, but in the end, I grabbed my bag and the dress she'd neatly packed in a paper bag.

"I'll head home now, P' Seenam."

"Take care"

"Okay..."

The situation was still confusing, but I chose to walk out of her bedroom. As I stepped out the door, I felt likę leaving like this was wrong.

Should I leave her like that...

The door was about to close, and I rushed back into the room, more determined. I saw her looking up at me.

"Did you forget something?"

"I forgot what I should do."

"What you should do?"

I didn't answer but dropped my bag and walked over to her. I bent down and scooped her up.

"Whoa..."

"Sorry for carrying you like this, but if I don't take you to bed properly, I'll feel guilty."

She's so light...

My well-trained arms did their job as I walked steadily, carrying her to the bed not far from where we'd been drinking.

"Am I... not heavy?"

"Honestly..."

"...."

"You are, but it's manageable."

"You're strong...."

Then she rested her head on my chest. I stopped, looking down to see her asleep.

She must really be a lightweight.

I gently laid her on the bed. She shifted slightly but kept her eyes closed. My heart raced as I looked at her and then at the clock on the wall. I decided to repay her kindness before leaving.

"Excuse me,"

I said, wringing out a small cloth. Warm water ran through my fingers as I gently wiped her beautiful face. She shifted a bit but didn't wake up. I continued until she seemed more comfortable, then pulled a thick blanket over her and nodded to myself, satisfied.

"I'll head home now. Thanks for today."

After saying goodbye to the sleeping girl, I left the room and called my two friends to let them know I was heading back. On the way, I stopped to buy a beer at a convenience store before heading to my nearby condo.

. .

When I reached my room, I found my two friends sitting there, looking bored.

"Wow, you guys are fast."

"Finally, my butt's numb from waiting."

"I just said I was coming back. Why are you here so soon?"

"We were eating nearby, so we dropped by."

"Oh, come on in."

"Did you drink? I can smell it a bit."

"Just one can. Are you a bloodhound?"

"Hey, watch it."

The three of us walked into the empty room. Even though I knew P' Pang wouldn't be there, I still felt a bit down. But I was also relieved not to have to explain everything to her. "So, where were you?"

"I was at P' Seenam's place."

"What?"

"Yeah."

I smiled awkwardly, opening my beer and walking to the balcony.

"I don't even remember telling her to pick me up, but she was waiting at your condo this morning."

"Seriously?"

Man looked shocked, and Cat wasn't any different.

"Why would you tell someone you just met again to pick you up?"

"I said I don't know! I don't remember!"

"Playing the drunk card, huh?"

"Yeah...."

"But was it nice being with her, or was it stressful?"

Cat asked, sitting on the couch. I had to listen from the balcony.

"It was nice. She took good care of me."

"Like?"

I listed the ways P' Seenam had taken care of me. My friends nodded, surprised and excited. I couldn't help but smile at her small gestures.

"In the end, she said she's part of what I have to take responsibility for."

"Well, she's right,"

Man said, raising his beer. I quickly joined them on the couch.

"What do you mean? She might have been drunk. And even if I still feel good about her, it doesn't mean I like her like I did when I was a kid."

"Have you ever thought about it from her perspective? If you were P Seenam and felt cursed in love because of a junior's careless words, wouldn't you want to break that curse? You even said you're the only one who can make her happy. It's not strange for her to ask for responsibility."

"Or she might've been really drunk," Cat added.

"Drunk or not, you'll find out. But from what I heard, I agree."

"....."

"Focusing on P' Seenam isn't a bad idea. There's nothing to lose."

I stayed silent, drinking my beer, deep in thought.

"I don't know!!!"

The confusing night passed. I woke up the next morning and worked out intensely, making up for the days I missed after the incident with P' Pang.

I spent almost two hours at the gym in a nearby mall. Feeling refreshed, I returned to my condo, showered, and got ready for work as usual.

But then...

When I arrived at the shop, I saw the beautiful senior browsing scented candles. My confident steps slowed. I watched her from a corner, debating whether to greet her or run away. I decided to text my friends who'd just left that morning.

[Emergency! P' Seenam is at my shop]

But no one read the message.

"Why aren't they reading it!"

I muttered, looking up to see her leaving the shop.

*She's gone!!!*

I was about to run, but her voice stopped me.

"Pao."

I froze, closing my eyes before trying to act normal.

"Oh, P' Seenam, are you here to buy scented candles?"

"No."

"...."

"I came to see you."

"You came to see me?"

"Yes, let's talk somewhere else."

She grabbed my arm, preventing me from running. She gently pulled me along, and soon we were at a restaurant.

"Do you want to order something?"

She asked, looking at the menu. Her expression gave nothing away.

"Uh... what are you ordering?"

"How about some dishes? The sour curry with acacia omelet and mackerel chili paste here are delicious."

"Sure."

She quickly ordered, and silence filled the air. I checked my phone, but no one had read my message.

"I'll get straight to the point."

"Okay?"

I looked up at her, putting my phone on the table. Her eyes showed hesitation but also determination. I could barely breathe.

"Yesterday, I was a bit drunk when I said that."

I blinked, feeling a mix of disappointment and relief. At least I wouldn't have to be confused about her proposal.

"Oh, I see I understand. You wouldn't say something like that."

I laughed awkwardly, trying to hide my strange feelings, but she didn't smile or laugh.

"But I wasn't completely drunk"

"Huh..."

My heart started racing again. Oh my God! My heart's going to explode!

"How should I put this?"

She thought for a moment, biting her lip.

"The alcohol made me impulsive, but it wasn't far from what I was thinking."

"...."

**"To be honest, Pao, will you date me?"**

"What!"

I shouted, quickly covering my mouth.

"Keep it down. People are staring."

"What did you say, P' Seenam?"

"I asked if you'd date me. No, pretend to date me."

I looked at her, confused. My mind went blank, and I leaned back in my chair, stunned.

"I might've been too brief. There's someone pursuing me, and I don't like him. But we have to see each other often because we work together. I have to play along because we don't have enough doctors at the clinic. I can't reject him outright, but I can't keep pretending forever. So, I want you to...."

"Wait a minute, P' Seenam."

I raised my hand to stop her. I took a deep breath.

"You want me to pretend to date you so he won't pursue you?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Why me?"

"Isn't it because of your prediction that I haven't found anyone I like?"

"It mightn't be related"

"But it might be."

"....."

"Like I said, I've never been happy with anyone I loved. And the ones who seemed to love me, I never liked them. It might be because of your prediction. And you're trying to get over Pang, right? This benefits both of us."

".…."

"Oh, and I still believe you have to take responsibility. You knew the prediction had a high chance of coming true, but you said it anyway."

"Uh..."

I was still stunned. The feeling that she liked me turned into something else. My mind was blank, and my phone buzzed with a message.

.

*[Go back to P' Seenam, dear friend. She takes good care of you. Who knows, the sex might be great too.]*

.

It felt like my friend's words filled the uncertainty in my heart, bringing back old memories.

"Won't you have any problems with Pang, P' Seenam?"

"Didn't Pao break up with Pang already?"

"Yes, but Pang is still your friend."

"That's a separate issue. I think Pang can distinguish between the two."

"But Pang mightn't let me go that easily."

"Trust me, I can handle it. Who knows, Pang might have to let go because the person Pao is with is me."

"What?"

"But in any case, I'll let you decide. Even though I might sound a bit forceful, if you really isn't okay with it, we can just drop it. I understand, these things aren't easy."

While she spoke so casually, I couldn't keep up with her at all. So, was this forcing or not forcing? I looked at her face intently, and at that moment, her smile became more pronounced.

"You look so serious."

Why is it that every time I see her smile, I feel so much more at ease.

But even so, my focus on the beautiful face in front of me had to stop because the food started to be served. I didn't say anything more, even though my mind was still unsettled. We ate in silence, so quiet that we finished the food in front of us.

"I'll head back to the shop first. Don't stress about the answer, just take it easy."

Taking it easy is the hard part....

I thought to myself as I watched the beautiful senior walk back into the clinic. My mind was still heavy, but that didn't affect my work efficiency today. Before I knew it, time had passed, and it was almost closing time. I was still sitting there checking the accounts, feeling like I'd forgotten to do something.

Has she left yet...

My body stretched lazily as I looked over at the dental clinic in front of me. The lights were still on, so she hadn't left yet. Hmm.. should I go say hi?

Before I could answer that thought, the lights in the clinic across the way turned off, and a few assistants walked out, followed by the senior I was thinking about. The smile that hadn't appeared earlier slowly became more visible.

I quickly packed my things into my bag, pretending to finish work at the same time. The lights in my shop turned off, leaving the account book open. My legs hurried to lock the shop door to catch up with the senior, but it seemed like she was walking back with someone.

"Want to grab something to eat?"

The voice of the person next to P' Seenam rang out. She was a tall, slender woman, almost as tall as me. Her hair was cut short, making it unclear if she was a tomboy or just a masculine woman, as I could only see her from behind. But her outfit and confident walk made it easy to guess.

"I'm still full and really tired."

"But Mai wants to have dinner with you. Can't you come with me? I've been waiting for so long."

"I told you to go ahead. My patient came late today."

"Come on, just this once. Then I'll focus on work."

Their conversation was crystal clear to me, probably because the mall was so quiet at this hour, with no other sounds but their voices.

"Using work as an excuse again."

"Just to get you to come with me."

Could she be the one P' Seenam mentioned was pursuing.

"Alright, but just for a bit. I'm really tired."

"Okay! Let's take my car then."

"Sure."

My heart skipped a beat, and an unexpected irritation crept in. From just following them, I started to speed up. They continued their annoying. sweet conversation, and...

"Are you done with work, P' Seenam?"

My voice rose a notch as I quickly stood in front of them. P' Seenam looked surprised.

"Oh, Pao, I thought you'd already left."

"How could I leave when I was waiting for you?"

"Waiting for me?"

P' Seenam looked shocked, making me turn to the tomboyish girl standing next to her.

"P' Seenam can't have dinner with you today."

"Who is this, Pa?"

She turned to ask P' Seenam with curiosity, while the senior looked hesitant, unsure of how to respond.

"Oh.. a junior."

"My name is Pao,"

I interrupted the beautiful senior, giving a mischievous smile.

**"I'm P' Seenam's girlfriend."**

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# Chapter 13: Can't Stop Now

**I... I said it!**

Even though my face was full of determination, believe me, inside I was screaming.

*Oh my God! What am I doing!!!*

"Does Pao really your girlfriend?"

'Tom' (tomboy), the new girl, asked curiously, making me turn to the beautiful doctor with bated breath.

"Well..."

P' Seenam's face still showed surprise, but soon a small laugh escaped her lips.

"Sorry, Mai. I can't go with you anymore."

"...."

**"My girlfriend is picking me up."**

***Kyaaa! Why am I blushing?!***

My hands, which had been hanging by my sides, started to cover my mouth slightly, as if I couldn't contain my embarrassment. But then, the small girl reached out and grabbed my hand. We held hands in front of the tomboy girl who was still standing there, stunned.

"Shall we go, Pao?"

"Y-Yes, let's go..."

And with that, we walked away hand in hand. At that moment, I didn't care what Mai's reaction was anymore.

We walked to the elevator next to the mall in silence, but our hands remained clasped together.

"Um... she probably can't see us anymore. Should we... let go?"

"Let's hold on a bit longer. It helps break the ice."

She smiled sweetly, showing just how beautiful her smile was.

"Your smile it's so beautiful."

"Hmm?"

"Oh! I mean, Mai's smile is beautiful."

"Beautiful? People usually say she's handsome."

"Oh, right. Handsome. I misspoke."

I let out a big sigh.

"That was a loud sigh."

"I was worried it wouldn't seem natural."

"It seemed natural. I was surprised too."

"I was surprised too."

"So... what do we do next?"

The doctor asked, looking at me intently Just then, the elevator doors opened.

"Let's talk on the phone tonight. I should go back to my room first."

I hurriedly walked away, but my hand was still held tightly by the person next to me.

"We're together now. Why not talk face to face?"

"Huh?"

"Let's go to a bar."

And just like that, I was quickly dragged into a car. Despite her small frame, she had the strength to pull me along. Realizing I couldn't resist her, going to a bar seemed inevitable. But the bar I had in mind wasn't like this.

After nearly half an hour of driving, we stood in front of a dark stall with a few burly men sitting around. Confusion filled my chest as I turned to ask the beautiful senior if she'd come to the wrong place.

"P' Seenam, are we at the wrong place?"

"No, this is the right place"

"But this is a herbal liquor shop. I was still in shock, while she kept smiling. "Excuse me,"

The doctor called out to the shop owner sitting behind the stall.

"What can I get for you, beautiful?"

"Two 'Falling Girl' drinks, please."

"Sure, have a seat."

The middle-aged woman quickly led us to a wooden table on the side.

"Have you ever tried herbal liquor, Pao?"

"Uh... no, I haven't."

"You should try it. It's good. The 'Falling Girl' has great benefits."

I gave a weak smile and looked around the shop, feeling out of place.

"What are the benefits?"

"Hold on,"

She said with a smile, quickly typing on her phone.

"The benefits of 'Falling Girl' include relieving body aches, muscle pain, tendon pain, waist pain, back pain, numbness, and it boosts energy. It's a great tonic."

I pretended to be impressed and clapped awkwardly.

"Wow, that's amazing."

"Right? But if you can't handle it, you don't have to drink it. But you'll have to carry me back"

"Huh?"

"If I went with Mai and got drunk... she would've taken me back to my room. Would you leave me here?"

She looked around the shop as if feeling unsafe, even though she'd chosen the place.

"Who would leave you?

The beautiful senior laughed softly, resting her chin on her hand and gently stroking my hair.

"Cute."

Oh my God... P' Seenam, you can't be this gentle in a herbal liquor shop. It doesn't fit!

Then two small glasses of dark liquid were placed in front of us. The senior girl downed hers in one go, letting out a satisfied "Ah..."

"How is it?"

"Try it."

I sniffed the liquid in the glass. The strong smell of herbs mixed with the strong scent of alcohol hit my nose, making the senior girl across from me laugh immediately.

"I thought you'd be braver than this."

Her challenge made me determined not to lose face. I downed my glass in one go, and my face contorted in a way that words couldn't describe.

"Huh, oh wow."

The senior girl couldn't stop laughing. She covered her face with her hands, her body shaking as if she couldn't stop laughing.

"What's so funny?"

"You, Pao. your face is hilarious."

"The taste is..."

I tried to think of how to describe it, but it seemed the senior girl wasn't interested in my words anymore.

"Excuse me, four 'Elephant Strength' drinks, please."

"What! Four?"

"Come on, just a bit more."

And so the night seemed far from over. I tried a couple more glasses. To call it tasting would be an understatemerit. The liquor was stronger than I expected, but the doctor, who seemed so gentle and weak, kept drinking without stopping.

"Pao..."

"Yes?"

I responded, and the woman in front of me, her face flushed, looked at me. She downed her last glass in one go before saying one word.

"I'm drunk..."

***Thud!***

And then her beautiful face collapsed onto the table. I called for the bill and struggled to carry her to the car, with cheers from the men and the shop owner clapping in amazement at my strength.

"The herbal liquor here is amazing. Look at her, carrying her friend so easily."

"I told you, good liquor gives you great strength."

Well... all my years of working out were credited to a few glasses of herbal liquor.

But I didn't argue. I just paid and drove her to the condo. It seemed she was completely out of it. I hesitated about what to do with her in this state, and finally decided to take her to my room instead.

I carried her small frame to the condo elevator, but eventually had to let her sit on a chair in front of the elevator, panting heavily from exhaustion.

"P' Seenam, my arms are so tired."

"....."

"P' Seenam."

*Oh no, why isn't she waking up!*

I had to carry her, alternating with laying her down on the floor several times before reaching the bedroom. As soon as her small body was thrown onto the bed-yes, thrown, because my arms had no strength left to lay her down gently-I collapsed beside her. My breathing was heavy, and my vision blurred from exhaustion.

At that moment, I turned to look at the woman beside me. The smell of alcohol lingered, but her beauty was just as overwhelming.

Before I knew it... our lips were almost touching.

*What am I doing! Oh my God... the herbal liquor got to me!!!*

"Where... am I?"

Suddenly, the senior girl's voice broke through, sounding groggy. I quickly pulled away.

That was close... too close

"This is Pao's room."

"Which Pao?"

"Oh.."

"Pao, my girlfriend?"

She turned to look at me, blinking with a heart that felt like it was dropping.

"You could say that"

"Oh..."

Then she suddenly sat up. I was surprised at how quickly she seemed to regain her senses.

"I don't feel well."

"Do you want to take a shower? I washed your clothes, so you can wear them after."

"But I can't get up."

"Huh?"

Then she lay back down.

"How about a sponge bath?"

"I want a shower."

"But you can't get up."

"...."

And then she fell asleep again. I looked at her in confusion. As my exhaustion started to fade, I decided to let her sleep. I grabbed my clothes and headed to the bathroom. My head was spinning, but the discomfort was stronger.

The shower water felt soothing as it hit my body. I closed my eyes, still confused by everything that had happened. Since meeting P' Seenam, nothing had been normal.

Who would've thought she'd take me to a herbal liquor shop... a herbal liquor shop?

Thinking about it made me laugh softly, remembering her stroking my hair. The initial laughter turned into a clear smile.

*P' Seenam... you're so cute.*

But before I could finish reminiscing, someone else walked into the bathroom. She slowly undressed piece by piece. I was stunned, frozen in place. By the time I regained my senses, she was completely naked.

***So white... Wait, no!!!***

"P' Seenam!"

I quickly grabbed a towel to cover her, while I only managed to put on a large T-shirt.

"You're drunk."

"Pao?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Why are you naked?"

"I was taking a shower!"

"Why are you showering in my room?"

"This is my room."

"My room..."

"Oh, P' Seenam please be more aware. Look around. This isn't your room. And it's not the time to argue about the bathroom. You can't just undress like this!"

I sounded like I was about to cry, but no tears came out.

"Why not? This is my room."

"P' Seenam! Look at me."

"I am looking..."

Her sweet eyes stared at me, her face still flushed. My heart raced, but I had to shake off all thoughts.

"Be aware."

"Pao..."

She said, gently stroking my cheek.

"You've grown up so beautifully."

"Huh?"

I was still stunned, and it seemed she was seriously examining my face.

"You've grown up so beautifully. You're tall. Look at me... still small as ever."

Then she dropped the towel. I screamed and quickly covered her with it again.

"You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"It's indecent... I'll die."

The last sentence was whispered, but she heard it clearly.

Her legs froze in place. She didn't seem drunk at all like before. The look she gave her seemed to convey something. Seeing her calmer than expected, my heart pounded as if it'd explode.

"Let's not go to the herbal liquor shop again,"

I quickly changed the subject, trying to divert my gaze elsewhere.

But then...

**"I'm your girlfriend, Pao. My body... is yours too."**

As soon as those words left her mouth, I scooped her up in my arms The fatigue from earlier vanished completely. I quickly strode to the bed and laid her down. I pulled off my only T-shirt and tossed it beside the bed.

I leaned down to kiss the person beneath me swiftly. The smell of alcohol still lingered, mixing with the intoxication. Her small arms began to wrap around my neck. Our lips pressed together tightly, neither of us willing to back down. My arms lifted her to the center of the bed while my lips continued their work.

**"Mmm..."**

Her voice broke the silence, snapping me back to reality, making me realize I was doing something wrong.

I quickly pulled away, eyes wide, breathing heavily as if I were suffocating.

"....."

*What have I done?*

I scrambled off her, sitting beside her, quickly grabbing my discarded shirt and putting it back on. My heart still pounded with guilt washing over me

"Pao..."

I didn't respond. She began to sit up too. At that moment, I couldn't even look at her face.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have...."

"....."

"I'll go sleep on the couch."

I stood up quickly, ready to leave the room, but she grabbed my hand. The small woman pulled me back down onto the bed. This time, she moved swiftly to sit on my lap, her face flushed, het eyes serious, making me unable to say anything.

"Why?"

"...."

"Why shouldn't you?"

"Because... you're drunk, and Pao shouldn't take advantage of that."

"If you say it's taking advantage, that means it's something good for Pao, right?"

"....."

**"If I started it, then it's not a problem, right?"**

With those words, she leaned in to kiss me again, her tongue slipping in with intent. My heart raced, and my mind buzzed. At that moment, my body couldn't resist or respond. I sat still, letting her do as she pleased.

In my life, I 'd never done anything like this with anyone except Pang. Everything seemed to happen so fast that I couldn't keep up. We'd only reunited a few days ago, and so much had happened that I couldn't process it all. Now, we were crossing a line beyond what people pretending to be lovers would do.

Before I knew it, her small body was rubbing against my leg. Her breathing grew heavy. Her naked form invited my gaze more than before when I felt shy I couldn't look away, watching her move like that. The wetness on my leg told me how much she wanted it. At that moment, my sense of right and wrong was torn away.

"Mmm"

Her sweet voice came out softly, making me press my lips together tightly, exhaling in frustration.

I shouldn't... let her be like this.

With that thought, our lips met again. I began to kiss back, my hands supporting her still-moving body. All my thoughts were stolen away. From letting her do as she pleased, it became me wanting to follow my own desires.

"Pao... mmm..."

Her breathy voice called my name as if she wanted something, making me flip her small body down and quickly climb on top of her.

"I can't stop now.."

"....."

**"I can't stop anymore, P' Seenam."**

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# Chapter 14: Unstoppable

Our lips were still pressed together, as if we'd been longing for each other for a long time. My heart pounded, and my breath came in short gasps. I began to explore her flushed face. She looked so exhausted that her chest heaved up and down. Her breath came out in puffs.

I stared at her beautiful face before I couldn't help but lower my head to kiss her white neck. Her scent made my mind go blank. Before I knew it, my lips had trailed down to her white chest. Her small hand tugged at my hair slightly, but when I moved my face away, that hand pulled me back, as if telling me to continue.

"Are you okay?"

"Mmm..."

Her sweet eyes looked at me, dazed. My body moved up to kiss her again, but my hands continued their work. My fingertips began to touch her sensitive spot. She flinched slightly, which only made the excitement grow. She kissed back, as if wanting to release her pent-up emotions. Her breath came faster. I could feel her desire. My fingertips pressed deeper into her small body. She moaned softly, mixed with her restless hands.

"I'm going to start now."

"Ah!"

The sound of the person beneath me alternated with my own heavy breathing. My previously tired body suddenly had more energy, which was surprising. I explored her body thoroughly. We continued our lovemaking, as if nothing could stop us.

And no matter how many times... it never seemed to be enough.

"Pao..."

"I can't take it anymore,"

She said weakly, but her body still responded well to every movement. I looked up at the clock and realized it was almost morning.

"One last time okay?"

"Mmm.... Ah!"

She wrapped her arms tightly around my neck, and soon her small body shuddered, signaling that the last time I mentioned had ended.

Her heavy breathing continued. The arms that had been holding me fell to her sides. At that moment, the sunlight began to filter into the room. Her beautiful face, covered in sweat, caught the light, revealing just how stunning she was.

My heart trembled as I looked at her sleeping face. I leaned down to kiss her again. I got off the bed to close the curtains, preventing the light from coming in. I pulled the thick blanket over us. The exhaustion slowly took over, and my eyes closed.

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***Веер Веер Веер***

The alarm clock rang for the hundredth time. I tried to reach for it, but my hand touched something else. My eyes slowly opened, and I saw the face of someone sleeping just inches away.

*P' Seenam....*

The memories of last night became clearer. My eyes widened, and I quickly sat up.

*Oh no! Last night... last night we...*

My heart pounded so hard that my mind went blank. I looked at the person sleeping next to me again, but this time she was awake.

"You're awake"

She said sweetly, smiling softly.

My face burned, and my body trembled. As my senses returned, I quickly got off the bed to put on my shirt. She sat up too, pulling the blanket over herself, as if just realizing our inappropriate state.

"P' Seenam, I...."

"....

"I mean...."

I stammered, frustrated. I started pacing, biting my thumb.

"I mean, last night...."

I had to say something!

Suddenly, I knelt beside the bed. She looked shocked, reaching out to help, but when she saw I knelt on purpose, she froze.

"I'm sorry!"

"…."

"About last night..."

I closed my eyes tightly, trying to think of what to say. But it seemed there was nothing more appropriate than...

**"I'll take responsibility for you, P' Seenam!"**

I looked at her beautiful face seriously. At first, she seemed surprised, but then a smile slowly spread, turning into a laugh...

"Hehe..."

*Laughter?*

"Uh..."

"Did it take a lot of courage? You even knelt,"

She said, wiping away tears of laughter with the back of her hand.

"Well..."

I was confused. Did I say something wrong?

But then my confusion faded. Her small hand reached out to stroke my hair. She wasn't laughing anymore, but smiling softly.

"You're so cute.

"Uh, cute?"

"Yes, very cute. Acting like you did something wrong."

"Well don't you think it was wrong?"

"I don't seem angry, do I? So how could it be wrong?"

She spoke gently, her hand slowly lifting away. Her smile grew, and she rested her chin on her hand, studying my face. I held my breath, unable to guess what she was thinking.

"Since you spoke so seriously, then..."

"....."

**"From now on... please take responsibility for me."**

And that's about how it went. Even though I said I'd take responsibility for her, we didn't exactly talk about dating. It was because what happened last night was so unexpected and hard to talk about directly. How should I put it... she seemed to want to talk, but I couldn't look her in the eye. It's not that what happened was bad.

It was so good that I didn't dare think about it...

It was now 2:30 PM. I was at the shop as usual. We'd parted ways around 1 PM. She said she needed to go back to her room to change clothes, and I had to apologize because she had patients at 3 PM. Well... I almost made her late for work.

I sat in the shop, my mind not focused on anything around me. And even though I said I wasn't paying attention, there was someone who made my feelings even more chaotic

"Pao,"

A stern voice called, snapping me out of my thoughts.

"P' Pang. what are you doing here?"

"I came to see you, of course. Do you have time to talk?"

*Oh no...*

We sat in a coffee shop. P' Pang ordered a drink for me, knowing exactly what to get. Soon, an Americano was in front of me, and my ex sat there, sipping her drink silently.

"What do you want, P' Pang?"

"We never cleared things up that day."

"I thought we cleared things up two years ago."

"I mean our current relationship."

"....."

"I'm sorry about that day. I shouldn't have done that."

I looked at her with mixed feelings. I didn't even know if I was happy to hear her apology or just uncomfortable.

"It's okay. It's in the past."

"So, does that mean we can go back to how we were?"

I sighed softly. She looked at me, searching for an answer in my expression. It seemed the discomfort outweighed the happiness.

"What do you mean by 'how we were,' P' Pang?"

"Well... like before."

"Go back to being lovers or just sleeping together?"

I asked directly, lifting my coffee cup with a sense of resentment. Whatever the answer, it wouldn't be about getting back together. Suddenly, P' Seenam's face popped into my head. I bit my lip. My feelings were all over the place.

"Which one would you be okay with?"

"Maybe none of them."

"...."

"Let's end this, P' Pang. It's too late for us now."

I prepared to leave, but she grabbed my hand.

"End it? You want to end it just like that?"

"P' Pang, it hasn't been easy for me, even if it was for you."

"....."

"For two years, I lied to myself that what we had was good. But good things shouldn't make me cry all the time, right?"

"Do you think you were the only one crying?"

"I wouldn't know because you never told me anything I barely knew anything about your life. I only knew what I could see. But the sad thing is, even the things I could see, you didn't care about."

"Do you not love me anymore?"

Suddenly, that question brought tears to my eyes. I looked at her with so many emotions. Why did she only value me when she was about to lose me?

"It doesn't matter anymore, P' Pang."

"But it matters to me. Can you answer me?"

And this time, I saw her tears. She'd always been angry, never showing this side. My heart softened. Memories of our time together became clearer. I hesitated with my answer, but then I saw someone standing behind the glass window of the coffee shop.

She looked at me with a blank expression. My breath caught. Guilt washed over me, knowing this situation shouldn't have happened. But then she walked away, heading towards the clinic. And I knew what my heart wanted more.

"I can't say I don't love you anymore, but what I can say is that we shouldn't see each other again."

"....."

"Please let me go."

As soon as I finished speaking, her hand released mine. She didn't make a scene like at the restaurant. Even though I was curious, I chose to follow the doctor. I couldn't find her, so I started running. I ran until I almost reached her clinic, and then I saw her about to enter.

"P" Seenam!"

My shout was loud enough to stop her. She froze at the door without turning around. I ran until I reached her.

"Have you been at the shop long? I just got here,"

She said cheerfully. I tried to gauge if she'd seen me earlier.

"Did you see me earlier?"

"No, I saw you when you called out."

"You didn't see me at the coffee shop?"

".…."

"You did see me..."

I sighed softly, unsure of what to say.

"I mean..."

"Have you eaten? I made a sandwich for you."

She handed me a brown paper bag, changing the subject immediately. Her smile remained.

"Did you make it yourself?"

"Yes, I usually make sandwiches almost every morning. Even though it's afternoon now, it can still be breakfast."

She laughed softly, and I felt she was pretending.

"..…."

"If you're free this evening, let's have dinner together. Block my schedule in case Mai asks me out again."

I took the paper bag, and she walked into the clinic.

It shouldn't end like this... but in the end, I let her walk away.

I sat back down at the café, my mind more muddled than before. I picked up the sandwich he made for me and started eating. It was delicious. As the minutes passed, I found myself not thinking about P' Pang at all Instead, the image of P' Seenam lingered in my mind.

I finished the sandwich and sat there, feeling aimless. Hours went by, and my eyes were fixed on the clinic across the street, not paying attention to the customers like I usually did.

. .

Finally, my hesitation ended. I followed her into the clinic, even though several hours had passed.

"Is Dr. Pa available?"

"The doctor is with a patient right now. Would you like to make an appointment?"

"I'm not here for dental work. I just need to talk to the doctor. Can I wait here?"

I chose to wait in the clinic rather than go back to the café. After about twenty minutes, the doctor came out with a male patient.

She looked a bit surprised to see me waiting, but she quickly spoke to the nurse at the counter and then led me into the dental room. She started taking off her lab coat, and memories of last night became clearer.

She's so small... How does she have the energy to keep working?

"Is something wrong? You look stressed."

"Oh, I just wanted to say the sandwich was really good"

"Really? That's good to hear... I'll make you another one sometime."

"Thank you."

We both fell into silence. She looked at me as if trying to figure out if there was something more.

"Is that all?"

"Well...."

I hesitated, gathering my courage before speaking.

"Okay... I'll get to the point."

"Sure."

"Did you see me with P' Pang?"

She paused, the smile that was always on her face slowly fading. She walked over to a chair and sat down, letting out a soft sigh.

"You saw that? I thought I was being discreet."

"Yes, when I saw you, I left immediately..."

"Oh... But don't worry about it. We haven't really talked seriously. Everything happened so fast. I understand that you need some time to sort things out. Think of this as a trial period. We can take things slowly and learn as we go. If you still want to see Pang, that's okay. I'm just a part of what you have to deal with."

"..…"

"Not a part that you feel good about."

My heart sank. Was that a complaint? I looked at her with a certain feeling, and that made me say something.

"What if I feel good about it?"

"...."

"When talking to P' Pang, I couldn't deny my feelings... But when I saw you nearby, all my doubts seemed to fade. I was happy that I had the courage to tell P' Pang that we should end things and not see each other again. And the thought of P' Pang left my mind easily, something that had never happened before. For the past two years, I could never get over her. But when you came into the picture, it's you that I keep worrying about. I can't figure out what your smiles mean."

"It means I understand."

"Why do you understand, P' Seenam? We did something last night that goes beyond responsibility. Or were you just drunk, or... did you mean what you said to me?"

"Mean what I said? What do you mean?"

"Pretending to date... Are we just pretending to date? I don't want that kind of relationship anymore because it wouldn't be any different from when I was with P' Pang."

"...."

"If we're going to end up like I did before, then we shouldn't start. I'm sorry that what I said this morning contradicts what I'm saying now."

"It's different, Pao..."

".….."

She spoke seriously, walking over to me and kissing me. Her small hand rested on my shoulder. We kissed, and my mind couldn't keep up with what was happening. Her beautiful eyes closed, as if saying that this was better than talking.

"Do you smell alcohol on me? If not, then I wasn't drunk,"

She said, our faces inches apart.

"And besides... every time we've met, I've shown interest in you, haven't I? So, I don't want a casual relationship either."

"What?"

"But to put your mind at ease about whether I was just drunk... Do you want to test it?"

"You mean..."

**"Right now, if we were to do that, I wouldn't mind."**

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# Chapter 15: Kisses Taste of Salmon

*Not serious, huh...?*

*My brain processed quickly. So, that means we are actually dating, right?*

With that thought, I moved to claim her lips again. My hands quickly pulled her waist closer. She kissed back, and I was getting carried away...

"But...."

She pulled back, a pleased smile spreading across her face.

"I have another patient. What should we do?"

"Huh?"

"Pao, you have to go now. My patient will be here soon."

"You want me to leave now?"

"Yes, we'll talk later."

*Oh, come on! This is just teasing!!!*

I walked back to my shop, feeling frustrated and dazed, like someone who hadn't fully escaped the trance she'd put me in.

"Ms. Pao, the promotion for next month has been sent to your email.

"Okay."

"Would you like to check it now in case there's anything you want to change?"

"Just go with it."

"Huh?"

Ever since I opened the shop, I've been very serious about promotions because they determine the sales for that month. The staff responsible for this always got stressed because I never approved anything without at least three revisions.

*But right now, who could think straight?!*

"Just go with it. I hope it's good enough."

"Oh, okay..."

I maintained my usual composed demeanor, walking over to sit on a soft chair, my eyes still fixed on the clinic across the street, wanting to go back in but knowing she was working. How could I interrupt?

"Ouch!"

Two nearby employees jumped, startled, and I eventually let them manage the shop on their own. I sluggishly walked to a nearby mall to work out, taking an intense class to vent my emotions. By the time I realized it, it was almost 8:30 PM.

[How about a party tonight?]

A message from my friends popped up. These two always planned to drink, even if tomorrow was a workday.

[Party at my place.]

I replied, and they grumbled, preferring to go out and watch people and listen to music. But I stood my ground, and they reluctantly agreed.

Why couldn't P' Seenam be as accommodating as my friends? Ugh, working out didn't help at all.

I walked back to my room, arms full of alcohol. My arms were so tired I wanted to just sleep, but I knew I wouldn't be able to. She hadn't even texted. Couldn't she spare a moment to send a message?

An hour passed. I showered, got dressed, opened a beer, and waited for my friends. I smoked three or four cigarettes, my stomach growling since I hadn't eaten anything since the sandwich she gave me. I started browsing the food delivery app for something interesting.

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***Knock, knock.***

The sound of knocking made me rush to the door.

"Why are you so late! If you're going to be this late, don't come next time!!!"

"Am I late?"

I froze. The person standing there wasn't who I expected.

"Oh, it's you, P' Seenam."

My voice softened to that of a thirteen- year-old.

"Yes, did you have plans? Maybe I should go."

She turned to leave, but I grabbed her arm.

"I did, but not anymore."

I led her into the room filled with alcohol. She raised an eyebrow at the amount. I laughed awkwardly, not wanting her to know how much I drank.

Then I did what I had to...

[Sorry, let's go out another time. I'm exhausted. Bye.]

I put my phone down, not planning to touch it again. Seenam looked around the room before turning to me.

"Have you eaten?"

"Not yet."

"But you've been drinking?"

She frowned slightly, putting the drinks back in the fridge, signaling that I needed to eat first.

"Just a little, waiting for Cat and Man."

"So, no one's coming now?"

"No, they'll be really late. I told them to reschedule."

"So, it's just us."

My heart raced, unsure of her intentions but hoping she was thinking what I was. Am I obsessed?

"Have you eaten?"

"Not yet, but I brought something." She lifted a bag.

"Salmon."

I stared at the tray of salmon. She said she ordered a kilo, planning to grill the leftovers for breakfast sandwiches. We split the salmon and started eating, chatting intermittently.

"When was your last relationship?"

"Me? Hmm... about five years ago."

"Wow, that's a long time. What was she like?"

"She was a dentist too. We used to co-own a clinic in Chonburi. After we broke up, I left and opened a clinic with friends."

"Oh did she treat you well?"

"I don't know. We were more like friends who ate, traveled, and slept together. She had a fiancé."

"What?"

"Surprised?"

She laughed softly.

"It was the wrong place, wrong time She wasn't into women. I pushed myself into her life. Terrible, right?" "Everyone has their reasons."

"My reasons mightn't make sense."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a secret."

She smiled, picking up a piece of salmon.

"What did you like about Pang?"

Her unexpected question made me think I sighed.

"I don't know Maybe it was the attachment. I don't like change. Starting over is scary."

"So, you stayed in that relationship?"

"Yes."

"I get it."

I nodded, wrapping a big piece of salmon in lettuce and eating it.

"This place has fresh fish."

"It's my go-to. If you like it, we can order again."

I gave a thumbs up, lifting my beer.

"Want a drink?"

She shook her head, wrinkling her nose.

"I have to work"

"You seem fine today. You drank a lot yesterday."

"Everyone needs a break. Not everyone drinks daily like you."

"How do you know I drink daily?"

I teased, and she laughed.

"From the stockpile, it looks like you could drink for weeks."

"I could finish it in a day."

"Really?"

"Just kidding."

Though, honestly, I could.

"How did you get here? Did you drive?"

"I walked, in case someone was lonely."

"I'm not lonely."

"Then I should go."

She started to get up, but I stopped her.

"Wait, if you leave, I'll be lonely"

"Really? Then I'll stay a bit longer."

"Good, we need to finish the salmon."

I said, dipping a piece in soy sauce. The salmon was so tender that a drop of soy sauce clung to the corner of my mouth.

"You've got a spot..."

She handed me a tissue. I reached for it, but she pulled it back, leaned in, and licked the soy sauce off my mouth

"This soy sauce is good, isn't it?"

*Wha...!*

My heart pounded. I stared at her playful smile, and an impulse surged through me. I leaned in and kissed her. She seemed surprised but didn't pull away. We kissed slowly, savoring the moment. The taste of salmon and soy sauce mingled. I wondered if kissing a dentist with a dirty mouth was okay. and I pulled back.

We locked eyes, neither of us speaking. She didn't seem disgusted, and my face felt hot.

**"A salmon and soy sauce kiss..."**

She said, licking her lips, making me....

"P' Seenam! Why did you say that?"

"Why not? It's unique."

"I wasn't going to mention it."

"So, you thought the same?"

I nodded, covering my face with both hands, embarrassed. Not because of the kiss's taste, but because it was my first sober kiss.

She laughed, and I joined in. We held hands and went to brush our teeth, laughing. Luckily, I always had extra toothbrushes. We had a moment brushing our teeth together Seenam showed me the best way to brush, and I followed like a three-year-old. When we finished, she patted my head.

"Great job. You did everything right. Should the doctor give you a reward?"

"What's the reward?"

**"Maybe... the doctor will stay over."**

**"Oh."**

Our lovemaking began, and began, and began again. Her small body moved up and down on my lap. Sweet sounds filled the air, our breaths heavy. I led our love game, but she was more passionate than last night.

"Can I take the lead. Are you okay with being on the receiving end?"

"Are you good at it?"

I smiled, and she cupped my face, kissing me gently. I closed my eyes, my heart racing. Our breaths were uneven, and soon she pushed me down.

"Let's find out."

"....."

"Do you have a favorite spot?" Her breathy voice was sexy. "My stomach."

She didn't say anything else. She climbed on top, kissing me again. I loved our slow, deliberate kisses. When she was satisfied, she moved to my neck, chest, and finally my stomach. I watched her, nervous, trying to breathe steadily. She looked up at me before kissing my stomach as I'd asked.

"Mmm..."

I moaned, my mind blank, tugging her hair slightly.

She pressed kisses all over my stomach. When she saw that I was restless, her small face slowly moved down to kiss my lower abdomen. My body twisted in response, and moans began to escape my lips. At that moment, her fingertips gently touched my sensitive spot.

My head tilted back, overwhelmed by the flood of sensations. I couldn't think straight, feeling completely under her control. Her hands continued their work, while her delicate lips kept kissing my lower abdomen.

Not long after, my voice grew louder, my body tensed, and my breathing became rapid and shallow.

"How are you feeling?"

She asked sweetly, like a child. Her small frame moved up until we were face to face.

"Is this... really you, P' Seenam? Why... so amazing?"

My voice was broken, making her laugh. She leaned down to kiss my forehead lightly, then gently stroked my hair.

"Why use the word 'amazing' at a time like this? I can't stop laughing..."

She buried her face in my neck, her body still moving as if she couldn't stop.

I lifted my arms to hug her small frame, trying to steady my breathing.

"I can't... think... of anything..."

"Just breathe first..."

She said, continuing to stroke my hair, her face still nestled in my neck.

I took a moment to steady my voice. The first thing I said was a compliment, telling her she was worth trying. Seenam laughed again and said this was just the beginning. After that, she continued as if she never got tired. I understood that I exercised a lot, but where did she get all this energy from? And she was so good at it too.

By the time this round ended, a lot of time had passed. I lay on the bed with my eyes closed, her body still on top of mine, not moving.

"Am I heavy?"

"No. Do you like lying on people like this?"

"I just wanted to try lying on a six-pack. Do you exercise a lot?"

"Quite a bit, yes."

"Every time I try to exercise, I get discouraged. I can never stick with it.

"You should exercise with Pao. Having someone cute nearby will give you more motivation."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, it is."

"Are you sleepy yet?"

"I'm asleep right now, sleep-talking."

"Silly..."

She said softly, then sat up.

"Want to take a shower?"

"I'm too sleepy. Can we just sleep?"

"No way."

'*Snore...'*

I pretended to snore, making her laugh again.

"What if we shower together?"

"Wow, where does all this energy come from?"

I quickly sat up, realizing my voice and body were completely out of sync.

"Are you a pervert?"

"I'm your pervert."

"You're getting better at talking."

I put on a smug face, and we walked to the shower together. Believe me, our shower took longer because we kept fooling around instead of actually showering.

During that time, one thought became clear along with the feeling that....

***I think I've really fallen for P' Seenam again.***

# Chapter 16: Not Cute

***What time is it...?***

The voice in my head echoed as the dream ended. My body shifted slightly, feeling the presence of someone still lying beside me. My smile grew wider, just like every other morning. I kissed her pale cheek before getting up to dress, following my daily routine.

It'd been over a month since I started dating Nam, but we kept it to ourselves. I hadn't told my close friends that I'd finally gotten together with the senior I had a crush on since childhood.

But calling her my childhood crush didn't quite capture it, because now my feelings for her were much deeper. We spent our days working, grabbing meals together, waiting for each other to come home, and spending almost all our free time together.

"Up early again..."

Nam's voice broke the silence. She stood beside me, holding a toothbrush I'd already prepared with toothpaste.

"I'm heading to the gym," I replied.

"So diligent," she said.

"If I lose my six-pack, someone might disappear too," I teased.

She raised an eyebrow and laughed softly, pinching my cheek playfully.

"I won't disappear."

"Just being cautious," I said.

"Is this... flirting?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"You say it so seriously," she noted.

"Well, I'm flirting. Is it working?"

I asked.

"I don't know. What do you think, Pao?" she replied.

"Well..."

I pretended to think, nodding my head.

"I don't want to seem full of myself." "A little self-love never hurt anyone," she said.

"Are you saying you love me?" I asked.

"That's so cheesy," she laughed.

I couldn't help but laugh too, wiping my face with a small towel.

"I'm off now," I said.

"I'll prepare breakfast. Anything special you want?"

"I want... you, Doctor."

"Are you full of energy because you're young?" "Do you mean young in age or young as in your girl?"

I asked, and she playfully slapped my arm.

"Go exercise. I'll figure out what to make."

"Okay! I'll be back soon,"

I said, giving her a quick kiss on the cheek.

The morning was as bright as ever. The sky was clear, and my heart felt light. For the past month, I'd been exercising with an abundance of motivation, knowing that someone was eagerly waiting for me to return. Life wasn't particularly exciting, but it was incredibly happy.

After my workout, I returned to the room, expelting Nam to clap and give me a thumbs up as usual. But, as always, expectations often lead to disappointment.

*Where did she go...?*

[Where did you go?]

I quickly typed and sent the message, but she didn't read it.

I took a quick shower and sat at the dining table. She'd never appeared like this before. No note, no reply to my message. My patience was wearing thin, but then...

"Why isn't she answering..."

I muttered, my eyebrows furrowing. This wasn't like her at all.

Before my mind could spiral, the door opened. Nam walked in, carrying several shopping bags. I quickly went to help her.

"Did you go shopping? You should've waited for me," I said.

"I wanted to, but I was worried our guest might get hungry," she replied.

"Guest?" I asked, confused.

I looked puzzled, and soon enough, familiar faces walked in. Cat and Man stood there, arms crossed, glaring at me. I gave them a sheepish smile and looked at Nam, who was grinning mischievously.

"I introduced you already,"

Nam whispered in my ear, laughing softly before heading to the kitchen.

"You Highness, you kept messaging us when you were stressed, but now that you're happy, you disappear,"

Man said, wrapping an arm around my neck.

"I was going to tell you! But there was never a good time," I defended.

"But you had time for other things,"

Cat added, locking my other arm.

"What things!" I exclaimed.

"Don't get defensive! To the balcony, now!" they ordered.

They dragged me to the balcony, and I quickly shot an apologetic look at Nam, who just smiled warmly as always.

"Spill it!" they demanded.

"There's nothing to spill," I said.

"How long have you been dating?"

"About a month," I admitted

"A month! So you haven't seen us because you've been all lovey- dovey?"

"Yes," I said cheerfully.

"You're so cheerful!"

Cat smacked my arm.

"We didn't bother you because you said you wanted to be alone. We thought you were too stressed to see anyone. If you were happy, you should've told us so we wouldn't worry!"

"Can I apologize?" I asked.

"That's not an apology,"

Man said, glaring at me.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know how to tell you. It all happened so fast, and I wanted to be sure before saying anything," I explained.

"But Nam seemed pretty sure about telling us," Cat noted.

"Really?"

I asked, surprised, feeling a mix of excitement and embarrassment.

"Nam looks even more beautiful now. I remember she was already stunning when we were kids. Is she in her prime now at thirty?"

Cat said, looking at Nam, who was cooking in a clean white apron. I stared at her, captivated, until my friends waved their hands in front of my face.

"Pay attention to us," they said.

"I am, I insisted.

"Liar,"

Cat said, rolling her eyes and pulling out a cigarette.

"Are you going to smoke in front of her?"

"Why not?" I asked

"What if she doesn't like it?"

"Nam said it's okay. She sometimes smokes when she drinks," I replied.

"Really? She doesn't seem like a smoker. And she smokes with you?"

"No, actually, I've never seen her smoke," I admitted.

"Maybe she lied to make you feel comfortable," Man suggested.

"Hmm..."

I pondered, watching Nam cook with a smile, seemingly oblivious to us.

"If that's true, she's really sweet," Cat said.

We all stared at Nam, and she eventually turned to us, looking confused before beckoning me over.

"Your wife is calling," Cat teased.

"Shut up,"

I said, walking over to Nam.

"Yes?"

"Open your mouth,"

She said, holding a spoonful of soup.

"Wait a second."

She blew on the soup to cool it down. I watched her with a smile.

"I can blow on it myself," I said.

"Can't I do it for you?" she asked.

"Of course you can," I replied.

"Taste it and tell me if it's good. I don't want to embarrass myself in front of your friends."

I tasted the soup.

"It's delicious," I said.

"I'm making clear soup,"

She said, giving me a stern look. I grinned and hugged her.

"Just kidding. Why the serious face?"

"You called my clear soup curry. Not cute."

"But the person who made it is so cute it hurts. I'm going to die,"

I said dramatically.

"You're ridiculous,"

She laughed, her smile growing.

"Go talk to your friends. I'll finish cooking."

"Okay,"

I said, walking back to my friends, who were grinning.

"What?"

"So sweet. We're practically invisible," Cat said.

"It's not that bad. Don't exaggerate,"

I said, trying to hide the fact that I'd momentarily forgotten about them.

"You seem much happier now, even more than when you were with Pang," Man observed.

"Really..."

I thought for a moment before smiling.

"I guess so. Everything just feels right with Nam."

"Then we don't have to worry anymore," Cat said.

"Yeah, and sorry for not telling you. Like I said, it all happened so fast," I apologized.

"It's fine. But make time to hang out with us. Don't disappear for a whole month," Man said.

"Got it,"

I replied, inviting them to join us for breakfast. They joked that they were only here for the free meal, and the sentimental mood vanished.

The four of us had a leisurely breakfast. Nam was bombarded with questions, and I tried to intervene, but she assured me it was fine. Her kindness, unchanged since childhood, won my friends over. After a satisfying chat, they finally left. I started washing the dishes, with Nam drying them meticulously.

"Were you uncomfortable? Cat and Man asked a lot," I said.

"Not at all. It was fun. I didn't expect your group to stay close for so long."

"No one is as fun to be around as Cat and Man," I said.

"Not even me?"

She asked, feigning disappointment.

"They're fun as friends. Do you want me to feel that way about you too?" I teased.

"As friends? If it makes you happy," she said.

"But we can't be together then," I said.

"You're naughty... Did you think I'd panic and say no? Actually, I could," she teased back.

"No, because I can't," I said.

"There it is, the cheeky kid,"

She laughed, drying the last dish and wiping my hands. Once our hands were dry, she hung the towel back and checked that everything was in order. Satisfied, she prepared to leave the kitchen.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. I might have to go out of town once a week." "Why?" I asked.

"The clinic in Chonburi needs a doctor. I'll have to cover until they find someone," she explained.

"So we won't see each other," I pouted. She turned back to me.

"It's just one day," she said.

"But if it's every week, that's a million days we won't see each other," I exaggerated.

"Do you think I won't find a replacement? And how long do you plan to live?"

She asked, smiling warmly.

"Just being dramatic," I said.

"To keep me from going? How about you study to be a dentist? Then you can replace me, and I'll stay with you," she suggested.

"But if I replace you, we'll still be apart," I pointed out.

""True," she admitted.

"So what's the difference?"

I asked, sitting on the couch. She joined me

"Will you be lonely if I go?"

"I might cry myself to sleep."

"That bad?"

She laughed, stroking my hair.

"What should I do with this clingy kid?"

Then her lips moved forward and gave her a quick peck. The small figure froze, seemingly caught off guard.

"Won't you be lonely, P' Seenam? Without a kid to kiss you like this?"

"How about I commute back and forth every day? It's only an hour and a half drive, about the same as being stuck in Bangkok traffic. That way, I'll still have a kid to kiss,"

She said with a smile, her hands cupping my cheeks. We locked eyes.

"Won't you be tired?"

"Not really. I was planning to go early and come back late anyway. I'll just make sure my last case ends by 5 PM, so I won't get back too late. How does that sound?"

"Or how about this... do you need a driver?"

"Hmm... no need. I can drive just fine."

"No, I mean Pao."

"...."

"Let Pao be your driver. That way, we can be together."

"What about Pao's shop?"

"Taking one day off a week shouldn't be a problem. Pao has taken days off before. I don't think it will be an issue."

"But isn't it better if you stay at the shop?"

"Are you saying you don't want Pao to go with you? Fine, Pao won't go..."

I pulled my hand away from hers. Initially, I wasn't upset or anything because she was going to work anyway. But her words felt like a rejection, and it made me feel a bit hurt.

"I didn't say that."

"But driving to work alone might actually be less tiring. I understand. I'll go take a nap now,"

I said, getting up from the sofa to head back to bed as I'd mentioned.

"Pao."

"Yes?"

I stopped in my tracks, trying hard not to let my smile show. She was definitely going to ask me to go with her. Yay!

"If you're going to nap, brush your teeth first. You just ate, right?"

*Oh...*

I looked at her, no longer needing to force my smile. I sighed softly.

"Okay."

I walked to the bathroom to brush my teeth, feeling a bit down. Was I too attached to her? Maybe I should use that one day a week to hang out with friends. That might be a good idea... At least i need to find something to do to keep my mind occupied.

.

After that, we didn't talk anymore. I went back to sleep, feeling a bit hurt. I didn't know when she left. The next thing I knew, it was almost noon, and she was already gone. I changed clothes to head to the shop as usual. By the time I finished everything, it was past noon.

My phone was empty of messages, no notifications from the person constantly on my mind. I sighed, my face showing my frustration.

"Hello, I'm here to buy The Devil scented essential oil. Where is it?"

A sweet voice called out. I looked up to see the owner of the voice, a stunning woman who drew the attention of everyone in the shop.

"It's over here,"

I said, getting up from my chair and leading the woman, who was about my height, to the spot. My mind tried to recall who she was. She seemed older but looked like she was in her late twenties. She was definitely an actress I hadn't seen on TV in a while.

"Is there a promotion right now? I usually order from the website, and there's no promotion there."

"Yes, we have a buy four, get one free promotion. Do you buy it often?"

"Yes, it's my favorite scent."

My smile grew wider, happy that someone liked it, which started to ease my frustration.

"Here it is. If you buy the promotion, you can mix and match scents from the entire shop, but they must be the same price. If you choose a more expensive one, you'll need to pay extra."

"I'll take five bottles of The Devil scent."

"Sure,"

I said, smiling, thinking she must really like it.

"Ms. Ploylin, can I take a picture with you?"

Suddenly, two customers approached her excitedly. The name made everything click for me.

Yes, she was Ploylin, a former famous actress in Thailand. She didn't act in movies much anymore but hosted a travel show that aired on holidays. I handed the items to the cashier while watching her charming smile. She was so approachable, but I wasn't the type to ask for a photo with a celebrity.

After taking pictures and chatting with her fans, she didn't forget to recommend The Devil scented candles she'd just bought. I smiled, feeling proud. Soon, she walked over and handed me her credit card.

"Thank you for recommending this scent to your fans. Can I give you an extra bottle of essential oil?"

"But it's already a freebie. Won't the owner get mad?"

I laughed a little. She was such a charming adult.

"The owner is giving it herself. I don't think she'll get mad."

"Are you... Pao?"

I blinked, confused about how she knew me.

"Yes, do you know me?"

"You probably don't remember me."

"I do. You're Ploylin, the actress."

As soon as I said that, her beautiful smile became more prominent.

"We met a long time ago when I was still acting. We didn't meet often, but I was close to your parents and once filmed a drama at your resort. Do you remember?"

My mind went back, and I vaguely remembered a film crew at the resort. But at that time, I was so involved with P' Pang that I didn't pay attention to anyone else. It must've been then.

"Oh, I see."

"Back then, I told your parents that you would grow up to be very beautiful, and I was right."

I handed her the paper bag with all the items and her credit card, feeling a shy smile forming without realizing it.

"Thank you. I'm embarrassed."

"No need to be. Send my regards to your parents. I'll visit again when I have time."

"Sure, I'll let them know."

"I'll be going now."

She smiled and waved goodbye as I respectfully bowed. I realized she was gone when I saw her legendary beauty walk away.

"Do you know celebrities, Pao? Ploylin is stunning in person."

"Why do they call her Ploylin?"

I asked one of the employees who'd come to chat.

"It's probably a shortened version of her real name. There are many people named Ploy in the industry, so they likely chose something easy to remember."

I nodded, understanding. My shy smile grew again. Being complimented by such a beautiful actress was something to be embarrassed about. I should've asked for a photo. Maybe I am a fan of celebrities after all.

Darn it! Why didn't I ask for a photo?

While my mind was racing, my phone suddenly notified me of a message.

[Is it right to leave you alone in the room one day a week, Pao?]

I stared at the message from P' Seenam, which made my emotions fluctuate. I was about to type a reply when she sent another message.

[The way you looked at that woman was very annoying. And you kept talking non-stop.]

I looked up from my phone and saw her sitting on the sofa inside the glass door of the shop, her calm eyes watching me as if she'd seen everything.

*Oh no! How long had she been sitting there watching?*

Before I could type a reply, she sent another message.

**[Not cute at all]**

# Chapter 17: Outing

[It's not like that. I was looking because she's a celebrity. And we talked because we met before, and she remembered Pao.J

[You met before?]

I looked at her message, feeling even more anxious.

[We met when we were kids. It's been over ten years. It's not like that. She's a celebrity. You must know her, right?)

[Oh, a first love? Haven't seen each other in over ten years and then meet again. Sounds romantic.]

*Heaven... Pao's first love is supposed to be you!*

Then the doctor got up and walked away into the dental room. I tried calling her, but she didn't pick up. She didn't read my messages explaining it wasn't like that either.

*If it's like this, there's nothing I can do except.*

I hurried down to the lower floor of the mall to buy three or four boxes of donuts. I gave two boxes to the staff at the store and then walked to the clinic, pretending to bring snacks and sneakily asking to see the doctor who'd disappeared.

"Dr. Pa, Ms. Pannakorn brought some snacks for you,"

The assistant's voice led me into the dental room. P' Seenam's face remained calm, almost stern. The assistant looked confused but let me see the doctor and then walked out.

"What are you doing here, Ms. Pannakorn?"

"I brought donuts for you,"

I pretended not to care about the distant tone, even though my heart ached.

"I've already eaten, and I'm planning to skip sweets today. You should give the snacks to the customer who was here earlier. They seemed to enjoy it a lot."

"Oh, P' Seenam, it's not like that."

I made a face like I was about to cry, walking towards the person sitting in the dental chair, but then...

"Sit in that chair. If you have something to say, say it from there. No need to come closer."

Honestly, P' Seenam's demeanor was something I'd never seen before. It was almost scary. She used some kind of pressure that made me feel even more guilty Suddenly, emotions overwhelmed me, and tears started to fall.

"Why won't you listen to me?"

"Pao.."

Her voice softened. I wiped my tears with the back of my hand, and she got up and walked towards me.

"Why are you crying?"

"Because you... won't listen to me. I haven't done anything. Why are you mad?"

"I'm not mad."

"You didn't read my messages, didn't pick up my calls, and wouldn't let Pao come closer. Isn't that being mad?"

"I'm not mad. Don't cry."

She reached out to wipe my tears, her gentle touch making me cry even more.

"I told you not to cry. Why are you crying more?"

"Because I'm sad."

"Why are you sad, Pao?"

"Because you ignored me."

"Is this ignoring? I'm standing here wiping your tears."

"Are you going to leave me, P' Seenam?"

"Who said that? I never said that."

"...."

"Are you really this much of a crybaby?"

"It's because of you, P' Seenam."

I complained, but thinking about her stern face made me cry even more.

"Hmph... Pao is going back to the store."

I tried to walk away, but she grabbed my arm.

"How can you leave like this? Everyone outside will know you've been crying."

"Let them know."

"What about me? How can I let you walk back crying?" She opened her arms, her face showing clear regret. "Come here, let me hug you. Maybe the crybaby will stop crying."

I stood still, not rushing to hug her like usual. This time, she walked over and hugged me instead.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you cry. How about I eat all the donuts to make it up to you?"

"...."

"No answer means no. So, what should I do?"

"You don't have to do anything. Just let me cry like this."

"You're really upset. Okay, okay. I was just jealous. Can I be jealous of you, Pao?"

She stepped back, looking at me as if she wanted an answer. My heart, which had been sulking, started to beat faster.

"Is that jealousy? Not anger?"

"Yes, even if I'm angry, it's because I'm jealous."

"So you were really angry..."

My lips quivered, ready to cry again. This time, she smiled, looking amused.

"Why focus on that one sentence?"

"You said I wasn't cute."

"I just typed that. How many people come to apologize and cry with a runny nose like this? If it's not cute, I don't know what is."

"Really?"

"Yes, stop crying now."

"Hug me."

My tearful, pleading face made her soften. She hugged me again, her hand gently rubbing my back, telling me to stop crying.

"You're not mad at me, right?"

"Who could be mad at you when you cry like this?"

"Are you still jealous?"

"That hasn't gone away. You're really something, with those flirty eyes."

"You don't like it?"

"No."

"What if I look at you like that, P' Seenam?"

"That's the look I always get. It's annoying when you do it to others."

"Should I get punished?"

I stepped back, looking at her, knowing the purpose of my question.

"No, you'll cry."

"Cry?"

"Cry in another way.."

We looked at each other, then laughed, understanding each other's words perfectly.

"P' Seenam, you're such a tease."

"I didn't say anything, Pao."

"I can tell by looking at your eyes. You're such a flirt."

She laughed uncontrollably, lightly hitting my arm.

"Can we not use that word? It sounds weird."

"It's literal. What's weird about it?"

"That's what's weird... So, what should we do with you? Your eyes are all puffy."

"I'll just keep my head down and go back to the store. No one will see."

"Or you could help me work."

"How?"

"Be my assistant until your eyes go back to normal. A patient will be here soon. It's just a cleaning, not hard."

"Pao gets to try suctioning saliva?"

"Yes, want to try? If you're not grossed out."

"Sounds interesting. I've never done it. What do I have to do?"

As soon as I said that, she rang the bell for the assistant to come in. She said I'd be helping, so they should prepare a gown, cap, and mask for me. Everything was set up, and she arranged everything herself. I was excited, and so was she.

"Pao, you should fit into my gown."

"We share clothes every day anyway." I said, watching her button up every button.

She looked so adorable right now...

"Is the collar too tight? But button it all up so water doesn't splash."

"Okay."

"Turn around. I'll tie your hair."

I followed her instructions. She gently tied my hair. Everything felt slow and sweet, making my heart race as if this was a moment I'd never forget.

Soon, I was fully dressed in dental attire. She inspected me thoroughly, complimenting me non-stop.

"You look more like a dentist than me."

"Really? Then lie down, P' Seenam. The dentist will start working on your teeth. Oops, I mean, cleaning your teeth."

She lightly hit my arm.

"You little tease."

"I misspoke. You're the one thinking too far."

"All the way to the room."

I smiled shyly under the mask. Gosh, why does she have to work? I just want to drag her back to the room.

"What should I do when the patient arrives?"

"Just suction the water in time. I'll go slowly. Or do you want to practice first?"

"Sure."

As soon as I agreed, she had me lie down on the chair. After adjusting it, she picked up the water spray tool. She told me to open my mouth and hold a large mirror. I looked at myself and at her as she sprayed water.

"When I start scraping, water will flow out like this."

"Ah ( Okay)."

"Now, Pao, use the suction to remove the water from the cheek. When I say 'suction,' do it like this..."

She demonstrated, using the suction tool.

"Don't suction near the throat, or the patient will choke. Gently suction the cheek. The water will flow there. Be careful not to press too hard, or the patient will feel pain. Just lightly touch... like this. Does it hurt?"

"Ah (No)."

"When I finish scraping the inside, I'll move to the front. When I do, Pao will need to open the lower lip for me. Otherwise, the scraper will hit the patient's lip, causing pain..."

At first, I listened intently to her instructions. But soon, I found myself staring at her beautiful face. My heart raced unexpectedly. In work mode, she seemed like a different person. Suddenly, her thumb moved to my lower lip, gently opening it to reveal my lower teeth and gums. Everything felt serious, but I felt a strange flutter in my heart.

"See? If you open it like this, I can see clearly, and the patient's lip won't get hurt. If you can't see well while sitting, you can stand. It's easier but a bit tiring."

She spoke, looking into my eyes. But what she saw was my adoring gaze.

"Did you hear what I said? Why are you staring at me like that?"

She stopped everything. I sat up and rinsed my mouth, feeling my face heat up.

"I... I was listening."

"Really?"

She looked at me suspiciously. I just smiled a little.

"The teacher is so beautiful. The student needs extra concentration. My eyes keep wanting to look at you."

"Exaggerating."

The learning session ended. I experienced being a dental assistant for the first time. At first, it seemed easy, just suctioning saliva. But in practice, I was so nervous I tensed up. When the patient lay down, I didn't cover their face. The doctor had to do it. Everything felt awkward, but P' Seenam kept smiling, looking more amused than annoyed.

"Assistant, please open the lower lip for the doctor."

"O-Okay."

I responded nervously, opening the patient's lower lip as instructed. Afraid of hurting the patient, I didn't open it wide enough. The doctor gently placed her hand on mine, guiding me to open it more.

"Open it like this."

"Okay."

She finished opening the part I couldn't reach. Her fingers lightly touched mine. I looked at her, and she smiled. Even though we've done many things together, in this situation, I felt shy and wanted to run away. But she was too cute to leave. We touched hands throughout the case, and finally, the patient left.

During that time, I remained silent. An assistant came to collect the items and then left. The doctor told me to take off my gloves. She showed me how to do it and then led me to wash my hands at a nearby sink. I sat waiting while she scribbled on some papers. It wasn't long before she walked out and then came back to me.

"How are you feeling?"

"Excited,"

I said, slowly lowering my mask. She walked over and took off my cap. The small-framed doctor stood at a different height, reaching up to unbutton my coat one button at a time. The image of her looking so adorable flashed in my mind again.

"But you did really well."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I was thinking about taking you to another branch as my personal assistant. That way, I can keep an eye on you and you won't be giving sweet looks to anyone else."

"Oh, it's not like that at all... When do I start at the other branch?"

"The day after tomorrow."

"That's so soon."

"Since we're at it, how about we go on a trip?"

"A trip?"

"Yeah, let's go tonight. We can spend tomorrow having fun before starting work. Consider it my way of making up for making you cry earlier. How does that sound?"

I reached out to hold her hand, my eyes sparkling, making her laugh a little.

"I want to eat grilled shrimp."

"Sure."

"And big oysters too."

"Okay."

"And I want you, doctor."

"I'll bring my lab coat."

"Really?"

"You're making a naughty face."

She said, squinting her eyes. I laughed a little. Initially, I wanted to tease her, but she turned the joke back on me. Even though she seemed to be joking, I wouldn't let it be just a joke! I had to try something playful with that lab coat! I slowly let go of her hand and then cupped her cheeks.

"Consider this a down payment,"

I said, leaning in to kiss her immediately. She kissed back without worrying if anyone would walk in and see us.

"Just a small down payment, okay? I have to see patients next."

"Do you need my help?"

"No, but you can drive instead. Can you drive me?"

"Of course. I'll go pack my things now."

"You're going to pack right away?"

"Yes, whenever you're done, come over. While I'm packing, I'll find a place for us to stay. Our first trip has to be grand."

"That much, huh? Okay, let me know the cost. No budget limit."

"You're so generous, but you know what?"

"What?"

"I'm rich."

"Are you bragging?"

"Just kidding,"

I said, and she lightly tapped my arm.

After that, I went back to the shop to give instructions and let them know I'd be away for a few days. Everyone understood. With nothing else to do, I walked back to my room. I packed four or five outfits into my suitcase, including a white and red bikini.

Once I was done, I looked for a place to stay. It took a while to decide, but I booked it without much thought. Then I waited for the doctor to come back. I didn't realize how excited I was until I fell asleep and woke up around 11

PM.

"It's so late!"

I shouted, grabbing my phone. I saw missed calls from the doctor.

I called her back, but she didn't answer. I started to panic, thinking she might have come back and found me asleep. Would she think I didn't care about our first trip? When she didn't answer, I read her message instead.

[I came back and saw you sleeping, so I didn't want to wake you. I'll go check on the branch in Chonburi tonight. I don't want our trip to be interrupted by a clinic visit. Rest tonight, and I'll come pick you up tomorrow.]

*Oh...*

I felt abandoned and confused. I'd already booked the place for tonight. I tried calling her again, but she didn't answer. I hoped she wasn't mad. I sighed and grabbed a cigarette, heading to the balcony. I was so excited about our trip, but now it seemed like it wouldn't happen.

[I'm sorry. I fell asleep, and you had to drive alone. You should have woken me up, or we could have gone together tomorrow. Drive safely. Let me know when you arrive.]

The message wasn't read. All I could do was smoke and sigh. Then, a message popped up on my phone.

[I'm the one who should apologize.]

[Why didn't you answer my call?]

[I was driving. Just got to the room. Stopped by the clinic.]

[Oh.]

[I'm going to shower and sleep. You should sleep too. I'll pick you up early tomorrow.] [Okay.]

[Goodnight.]

[Goodnight.]

And just like that, everything ended abruptly. I didn't know if I was upset, sad, or disappointed. Nothing went as planned. I wanted to ask her more, but she seemed exhausted. Maybe waiting for tomorrow's fun was better. Thinking that way made me smile, but soon tears followed.

I felt so hurt! And we wouldn't even sleep together tonight!

I cried on the balcony for a while before going back inside. I sat down with puffy eyes, feeling like someone heartbroken. When I was with Pang, 1 only cried when we fought. But with her, I cried so easily. My chest felt strange when I didn't get the attention I got during the day.

I tried to distract myself by watching Doraemon on the big TV. I kept checking my phone, hoping for a message or call from her. But she seemed to be asleep. It was almost 2 AM, and I couldn't sleep. I wanted to grab a beer, but I was afraid I wouldn't stop and wouldn't be able to drive. So, I just sat there watching cartoons until I fell asleep.

But then... the door opened.

"Oh..."

I said, seeing someone walk in.

"You're still up? I told you to sleep early,"

She said, walking over. I sat there, unable to process what was happening.

"You said you'd pick me up in the morning. Why did you drive back so late?"

I rushed to her, feeling happy but also worried and a bit angry.

"Aren't you happy I came? I'm hurt, you know."

"I am, but why did you drive back so late? You worked all day and drove back and forth. Why didn't you..."

She suddenly cupped my face, her big eyes examining me closely. Soon, she looked guilty.

"Crying again?"

"...."

"Was I right to come back?"

"You came back because..."

"Yeah... I was worried you'd be upset being left alone. After finishing everything, I wondered how you'd be. Would you sleep like I told you, or cry like earlier?"

"....."

"I couldn't sleep, so I drove back to see if my worries were true. And they were. A little crybaby sitting alone,"

She said with a smile. But I didn't feel her playfulness. I felt...

**She was so gentle... Why was she so gentle?**

Tears welled up. Earlier, I wondered why I cried so easily with her. Now I knew. She was gentle and caring, without me asking. Unlike my ex, who never gave me what I needed, no matter how much I asked.

"Why are you still crying? I came back,"

She said, moving closer.

"I'm so glad you're here."

I hugged her gently. Her scent calmed my mind. My heart raced every time I smelled it. I kissed her neck softly.

"I'm so happy. Thank you for coming back."

"Yeah, I'm back..."

Her voice was softer. She hugged me back.

We hugged for a long time. Finally, I pulled back, looking at her beautiful face, seeing tears in her eyes.

"Why do you look like you're about to cry?"

"I'm yawning,"

She smiled. I nodded, understanding, and took her hand, leading her to the bed.

"Let's sleep. We need to leave early tomorrow."

"Sleep?"

"Aren't you going to sleep? It's late, and you're tired from driving."

"True, it's late and I'm tired. But you slept and aren't tired."

"What?"

"Let's go tonight."

"....."

**"Let's go on our trip... right now."**

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# Chapter 18: Polaroid Picture

**02:37 AM**

Music played from the car speakers. A smile lingered on my face, refusing to fade. My heartbeat was calm, almost relaxed. Even though it was late, I didn't feel sleepy at all. The person beside me, who'd earlier complained about being tired, didn't seem tired at all.

"Pao likes this song,"

I said as a new song started playing.

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Hmm?"

"Listen to it," I suggested.

She nodded in understanding, and the volume was turned up.

'*Sometimes I miss you too much, it makes my heart ache.'*

*'Sometimes I dream too much, it makes my heart wander.'*

*'The wind that touches my heart makes me feel warm inside.'*

*'I want to hold you close, keep you by my side, and hold your hand.'*

*(Beautiful Moment - Blackbeans)*

*.*

As the song reached this part, we stopped at a red light. I grabbed her hand, glancing at her while singing along with the song. My smile grew wider.

"Place it on my heart, so you won't be lonely. Embrace each other on the sand, with the stars as witnesses."

When the next part came, I turned to her, my eyes conveying that the lyrics were meant for her.

"You look so beautiful, girl, perfect right now. You look so beautiful, girl, perfect right now."

"...."

**"How do you know I love you so..."**

Her hand was on my chest, and my heart raced as if confessing my love. I'd never told her I loved her before. Even though I wanted to say it now, my heart was too scared. I was the type who couldn't say "I love you" easily, even if I felt it. Especially since it was the first time, I wasn't sure if I could say it after just a month. So, the best I could do was convey it through a song that seemed made for us at that moment.

"My heart is racing," she said, looking at her hand.

"So is mine,"

I said, pressing my finger lightly on her wrist, feeling her pulse.

"Our hearts are racing together."

"Well..."

She bit her lip and looked away.

"Focus on driving"

"Changing the subject, huh?"

"Not really. The light will turn green in ten seconds,"

She said, pulling her hand back. I missed holding her soft hand, but my clever mind thought of something.

"Your hands are so small."

"Are they?"

She raised her hand to look at it.

"Yes. Compare them with mine."

I extended my hand to her, and she placed hers against mine without hesitation. As soon as our hands touched, I slowly intertwined my fingers with hers, achieving my goal.

"Gotcha!"

"Hmm?"

She looked confused, but then her cute smile appeared.

"Sneaky."

"You have to be clever to woo someone older," I said.

"Are you wooing me?"

"Yes. Are you falling for it?"

"Am I?"

Her adorable expression made me laugh softly.

We held hands the entire way. I drove while she let me hold her hand. She played *Beautiful Moment-Blackbeans* on repeat. We drove in silence, but our hearts raced with the music. By the time we reached our hotel, it was past 3 AM. Luckily, the hotel had 24-hour check-in, so we could stay at the place I'd spent almost an hour finding.

I stretched a bit and started exploring the room. It was quite large, with a balcony offering a clear view of the sea. I stood there, breathing in the sea air and the constant breeze. Soon, she joined me, looking just as relaxed. I glanced at her and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

"Do you like tying your hair? You always have it tied up. Doesn't it give you a headache?"

"No."

"I can't tie mine well. I always tie it too tight and get a headache."

"Maybe because I have to keep my hair neat for work, so I'm used to it."

"Oh."

"Do you prefer tied or loose hair?"

She asked unexpectedly. I looked at her and tucked another strand behind her ear.

"I like both."

"If you had to choose?"

Her curious expression made me move my hand to the back of her head. I gently removed her hair tie, letting her hair fall freely. Her face looked different, more beautiful.

I cupped her cheek and leaned in to steal a kiss. We both closed our eyes, wanting the same thing. It wasn't a deep kiss, but it felt more meaningful than any before.

"I can't choose,"

I said, still gazing into her eyes before kissing her again, and again, and again.

"Then it'll be hard for me to decide whether to tie my hair or leave it loose when I'm with you."

"How about this?"

"What?"

"When you tie your hair, I'll untie it if it doesn't need to be neat. And if it's loose and gets in your face, I'll tie it for you."

"So, you don't like either tied or loose hair?"

She looked like she was catching me in a lie, but I smiled.

"Wrong. I like both. As long as it's you in front of me, I like it all." "So sweet. Did you practice those lines from a high school romance novel?"

She teased, but her face showed she was pleased.

"Are you sleepy? Let's go to bed."

"Are we really going to sleep or just pretend?"

"What do you want to do?"

I asked, holding her hand and leading her into the room. She followed without resistance.

"I want to sleep for real. It's almost 4 AM. We'll wake up late tomorrow."

"We've stayed up all night before. What's 4 AM?"

I tried to persuade her, but she gently pinched my nose.

"Save your energy for tomorrow. We don't have to part ways anytime soon." "True."

I agreed, but we still needed to shower before bed. She insisted on showering and brushing our teeth, even though we'd showered in the evening So, we showered together, and for the first time, it wasn't intimate. We were both tired. After showering, we fell asleep in each other's arms.

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. .

The sound of waves and the breeze from the balcony made my smile grow. It was almost noon, but she was still asleep, unaware that I'd been standing on the balcony for a while. I ordered black coffee and sandwiches to be delivered. When breakfast arrived, it was time to wake her up to enjoy the good energy, which was me.

"P' Seenam," I called softly.

"....."

"P' Seenam."

I said, gently stroking her cheek. It seemed to make her sleep even more comfortably.

"If you don't wake up, I'll have to kiss you,"

I whispered with a mischievous smile. But when I moved back, I saw her beautiful face looking at me. "Would you dare?"

"W-when did you wake up?"

I quickly moved away, but she pulled me back down beside her.

"I've been awake for a while. I just didn't want to get up."

"Are you hungry? I ordered coffee and sandwiches."

"Sandwiches again? Aren't you tired of them?"

"I like eating the same things," I said.

"Oh, I see... like an old favorite dish,"

She said, narrowing her eyes a bit, but I laughed.

"Do you want me to go back to an old favorite?"

Her playful look turned serious, and the sweet atmosphere became tense, making me sit up.

"Just kidding. I won't go back. Go brush your teeth so we can eat together"

"If you want to go back, I won't stop you."

"Please stop me."

"....."

"I'm yours, right?"

Her serious face softened into a tender smile. She stretched a bit and said she'd brush her teeth. Soon, we had breakfast, almost at noon. Then it was time to get ready for a walk on the beach, as I'd suggested earlier.

When we went downstairs, we saw bicycles available for free. I offered to ride while she sat on the back. She agreed cheerfully. I hung my Polaroid camera around her neck, and she took some pictures. We stopped at a quiet part of the beach.

"Want to take a picture?"

She asked, raising the camera. We smiled at the camera, and soon we had two pictures. We each took one, and I couldn't stop smiling at mine.

"Why are you staring at the picture?"

"It's cute. I've never taken a picture like this with anyone."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Let's take a lot more then."

"Yes! Let's take more pictures."

I grabbed her hand, and we walked on the sand. She took pictures of our hands, the sea with me in the background, and me carrying her. She stretched her arm out as far as she could to capture both of us.

Normally, I wouldn't do this in front of others, but with her, I didn't care. It felt like no one else was there, just the beautiful woman in my arms.

"We're done. Put me down. It's embarrassing," she said.

"I didn't bring my phone. Did you?"

"No. Why?"

"Great. Let's go in the water."

"Huh?"

"Let's go swimming!"

I quickly ran into the sea. She laughed and followed, but soon she was splashing water at me with a mischievous smile.

"You're in trouble!"

"Try to catch me!"

I teased, splashing water at her without caring about the people watching us.

"You're going down!"

She swam towards me, trying to lift me, but we both fell into the water.

"P' Seenam, cough! Oh, water in my nose. It stings,"

I said. She quickly came over, wiping my face with a guilty look.

"Does it sting a lot? I didn't mean to."

"Not much."

"Huh?"

"Gotcha!"

As soon as I said it, a sly smile spread across my face. I scooped her up and stared at her, now glaring back at me.

"You never stop teasing me, do you?"

"Why do you make yourself so cute and tease-worthy then?"

"Stop it already."

"How can someone look so beautiful even when they're soaking wet? Don't steal Pao's heart, okay? Because right now, you're so beautiful it hurts."

"Don't exaggerate,"

She said, scrunching her nose before pinching my cheek.

"Shall we take a picture?"

"Huh?"

"Oh no."

As soon as we locked eyes, we both looked down at the Polaroid camera, now drenched in seawater, with the film compartment wide open. She quickly got down from my arms and started shaking the water out, opening and closing the camera repeatedly.

"It looks like... the camera won't turn on anymore."

*Oh my God, no wet phone, but a broken camera...*

The perfect trip, etched in memory. On the first day, I managed to take the camera, which I'd never used before, for a swim. Now, our excitement seemed to have dwindled.

"What should we do..."

The doctor looked guilty, while I, still in shock, could only smile.

"It's okay. We got plenty of pictures already. It's worth it."

"But the camera still looks new."

"Did you have fun when Pao threw you into the water?"

"That's a strange question,"

She said, looking puzzled at my sudden change of topic.

"Of course, it was fun."

"Then it's even more worth it, right? Even without the camera, we can..."

I paused, then opened my arms to hug her.

"Keep the good memories in our hearts."

"....."

"I'm very happy."

"Me too, Pao."

From the image of two women splashing in the water, it gradually turned into the steady sound of waves. My smile mirrored hers. At that moment, I forgot everything else. I didn't care about the camera, the shop i left behind, or anything around us.

Her warm embrace replaced the cold touch of the seawater. Everything seemed to conspire to make us stop and hold each other. In my mind and heart, there was only one thought...

***It's so wonderful that we're together right now.***

After we had our fill of playing in the water, she suggested we take a walk along the beach. We held hands and walked, not caring about the time. We only realized how late it was when our stomachs started growling, signaling that we were too hungry to continue.

We decided to bike back to our place, but the doctor, now in relaxation mode, insisted on pedaling while I rode on the back.

"Are you sure you can handle it?"

"You never know until you try, right?"

I nodded in agreement because, for us, everything had to be tried first.

I let her pedal, but the ride turned out to be so wobbly that I had to hold onto her waist tightly. The beautiful bike swayed on the nearly empty road, and eventually, she stopped abruptly, causing me to bump into her back.

"I think you need to get off first."

"Huh?"

I looked confused but got off the bike without protest. As soon as she saw me standing safely on the road, she pedaled away quickly.

"Hey... you forgot me!"

"I didn't forget!"

She shouted back, and I ran after her.

"I haven't even sat down yet, P' Seenam! Come back!"

"This is your punishment!"

"Huh?"

"For throwing me into the sea, now you have to run after me!"

*Oh, come on!*

"Wait for me!"

I shouted, running as fast as I could, but how could my bare legs compete with a bike?

By the time I reached our place, I was out of breath. I hadn't warmed up before running, so sprinting full force left me exhausted, wanting to collapse on the ground.

"Great job running,"

The doctor praised with a smile that almost turned into laughter.

"You're so mean, doing that to me."

"I like to get even. Everything has to be fair, right?"

"Don't 'right' me,"

I said, pretending to be seriously annoyed, walking ahead without waiting for her. But then I quickly reached into my shorts pocket for something.

"Huh?"

"What's wrong?"

"Did I leave the Polaroid pictures with you?"

"I only have these,"

She said, showing me the pictures, but none of them were the ones I'd chosen.

"I must've dropped them. Maybe when I was running."

"Which pictures?"

"The ones we took when I was holding you. We took two."

"I still have one. If you like this one, keep it. I'll choose another one to keep."

"But it's not a couple's picture. And we don't have the camera to take new ones."

"It's okay. Keep this one. We'll have plenty more pictures." She smiled, handing me the picture of me holding her, then walked to the room. I stood there, feeling a bit regretful.

"Pao."

"Yes?"

"Go take a shower. You don't want to get sick. Then we can go out to eat."

She spoke casually, and I followed her to the room, feeling a bit down. When we got there, she let me shower first while she made a call to the clinic she'd visit tomorrow. I understood and went to shower without any objections. I soaked in the tub for almost an hour until she finally joined me.

"You were on the phone for a long time."

"Yeah, I had some things to take care of. I'm so tired," she said, undressing. The shower washed away the day's grime, and she lathered herself with soap before rinsing off and joining me in the tub.

"Do you want me to give you a massage?"

"Sure,"

She said, turning her back to me. I gently applied pressure to her shoulders.

"A bit harder."

"Is this too hard?"

"It's perfect. Move to my back a bit."

I started massaging her back, but she still wasn't satisfied.

"Lower."

"Here?"

"Yeah, a bit to the side." My hands moved to her sides.

"Here?"

"To the front now."

I swallowed hard without realizing it as my hands stopped at her chest. She leaned back against me, her eyes soft and inviting.

"Gently rub to help me relax."

My fingers moved gently as she requested. Her chest responded to my touch, and soon, our lips met in a deep kiss. Our bodies moved naturally, my fingers sliding lower until they reached her most sensitive spot.

She opened her eyes, saying nothing, but everything about her told me I could do as I pleased. With that thought, my fingers began to tease her, eliciting soft moans as our lips stayed locked. As time passed, her need for me grew stronger than ever.

My fingers pressed deeper, and her body tensed. She grabbed my arm, but I continued to caress her chest, making sure everything was in sync. My fingers moved faster, and soon, her arms wrapped around my neck, pulling me closer.

The water in the tub rippled with our movements, creating a mesmerizing scene. Eventually, she reached her peak, her breathing heavy as she collapsed against my chest, completely spent.

"Feeling more relaxed?"

I whispered. She kept her eyes closed, still catching her breath.

"Yeah... much more relaxed."

"Do you want me to wash you?"

"Let me stay like this a bit longer."

I didn't say anything, letting her lean against me with her eyes closed. Time passed, and eventually, she stood up, allowing me to wash her. But even then, she leaned against me, not helping at all.

"Are you really that tired?"

"Yeah..."

"Are you hungry?"

"I just want to sleep."

"How about we sleep for an hour or two, then go out to eat?"

She nodded, and we left the bathroom in our robes. She went straight to bed, letting me dry her hair. Once her hair was dry, she immediately lay down, motioning for me to join her.

"Think about what you want to eat, okay?"

"Can I eat you?"

"If you do it while I'm asleep.."

She mumbled, snuggling closer.

"You're so kind."

"Yeah..."

"Are you really going to sleep?"

"..."

She didn't respond.

"Hey, are you really going to sleep?"

"...."

"Hey, are you really going to sleep?"

"Yeah."

"Oh, okay. Sorry for bothering you."

She nodded in understanding, then snuggled closer again. But after a few seconds, she loosened her grip.

"I forgot to tell you."

"Tell me what?"

I asked, puzzled. She got up wearily, walked to the vanity, and picked up something

"I found it."

I stared at the Polaroid picture I'd lost, shocked. I quickly grabbed it, and underneath was another picture of us together. She smiled softly, patting my head affectionately.

"Now it's a couple's picture. Keep it safe and don't lose it again."

"When did you find it?"

"While you were showering. That's why I'm so tired now..."

She said, then lay back down on the bed. I looked at the pictures in my hand, overwhelmed with emotion.

Even though she was tired from yesterday, she still went out to find it for me...

She looked at me with eyes ready to fall asleep within three seconds. I placed the pictures on the nightstand and hugged her tightly, feeling grateful. Her heartbeat echoed with a feeling I'd never experienced before, a care I never had to ask for.

"I'm going to sleep now."

"Okay."

"Pao, you sleep too."

"I'll sleep too."

"If I wake up and don't see you... I'll throw the pictures into the sea."

I chuckled softly, finding her endearing in a way I hadn't known before. I kissed her forehead gently, feeling a sense of peace I'd never felt before.

**"You'll never get the chance to throw these pictures away, P Seenam."**

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# Chapter 19: Unexpected Trouble

By the time I realized it, it was almost dark. The person who'd been beside me was gone. I got up from the bed and walked around looking for her, but there was no sign of the one who'd threatened that we'd meet as soon as I woke up.

*So why wasn't she here when I woke up?*

In the end, all I could do was wash my face and brush my teeth. After taking care of myself, I noticed that it was raining heavily outside. I anxiously tried calling the doctor who'd disappeared from the room, but it took several attempts before she finally answered.

[You're awake?]

Her voice asked when the call finally connected.

"Where did you go again? Why don't you tell me when you go somewhere these days?"

[You sound so stern.]

"P' Seenam..." I said seriously.

[I went out to get dinner. I was going to wait for you to wake up so we could go out together, but it looked like it was going to rain, so I decided to get something and bring it back to the room.]

"Why didn't you wait for me? You could have woken me up."

[You were drooling in your sleep. How could I wake you up?]

"I wasn't drooling!"

I quickly defended myself, wiping the corner of my mouth even though I'd already washed my face and brushed my teeth.

"Where are you now? Did you go far? It's raining"

[I'm almost there. Come down and help me carry the stuff.]

I quickly got up from the sofa and went downstairs to wait for the doctor who was driving in. As soon as the luxury car pulled up in front, I opened the umbrella to shield her small frame.

"Are the things in the back seat?" "Yes, I'll help you." She replied.

"It's okay. You hold the umbrella."

I handed her the umbrella. She took it, looking a bit awkward as she tried to help carry the bags, but I took all the bags myself and led the way back to the room.

"Let me carry some." She said.

"You're small. Just focus on getting yourself up to the room."

I replied.

"Listen to you." She said.

"I'm still mad that you left without telling me."

I glanced at her, but she didn't seem bothered at all.

She raised an eyebrow and gave me a look that made me want to drop everything and pinch her cheek.

We both walked to our room. The many bags were placed on the table by the balcony door, and I could see the coconut trees swaying in the wind, indicating that the weather was getting worse.

"What did you buy?" I asked.

"A lot of things. I didn't know what you wanted to eat, so I bought everything that looked good."

"This is why you should have taken me with you. If you had, you wouldn't have bought so much."

"....."

"If we can't finish it, I'm not helping. We'll just throw it away."

I said as I grabbed four or five plates and set them down. The doctor, who was sitting with her legs crossed, looked at me mischievously. She reached for a paper bag and...

"But I think there's something you'll like "

I turned to look, and she pulled out a lab coat from the paper bag, smiling slyly as she put it back.

"But it looks like vou're still mad at me. Even if I wear this, it won't make you feel it looks like you're still mad at me. Even if I wear this, it won't make you feel better. What a shame. I went all the way to the clinic to get it. If you don't like it, I'll put it back in the car."

I quickly moved towards her, trying not to smile.

"Since you brought it, don't let it go to waste."

"Are you sure? I picked it out without consulting you..."

I stared at her, biting my lip.

"Why are you such a tease?"

"Why are you so easily upset?"

Oh, come on. Can't you just give in a little?

"Fine."

I raised my hand in surrender, making her smile immediately.

"Do you always have to win?"

"Well, winning is better than losing, isn't it?"

"Alright, you win. I'll lose." I said.

"You give in so easily." She said.

"When you tempt me with a lab coat, I have to give in."

I sighed a little, but she smiled widely before reaching out to stroke my hair and calling me cute.

After that, the food was neatly arranged on the plates: grilled shrimp, oysters as big as my palm, grilled squid, spicy shrimp soup, fried fish with garlic, sweet and sour fish, and the highlight was the doctor herself, making my mouth water.

"How are we going to finish all this?"

I asked.

"I know, right? I bought it without thinking. I should have taken you with me."

"From now on, you have to tell me before you go anywhere, okay?"

"Okay, I'll try." She said.

"Why do you have to try?"

"Sometimes I want to surprise you, like going back to get the lab coat. If you came with me, it wouldn't be exciting."

She gave me a mischievous look, making me laugh a little.

"You're so sneaky..."

"Do you like it?"

She rested her chin on her hand, looking at me. The food didn't seem as appetizing as she did.

"I'm going crazy." I said.

"Really?"

She reached out to stroke my hair. Her gaze showed her feelings even without words. But then she stopped and looked at the food in front of us.

"Let's eat."

"Okay."

I said, reaching out to unbutton her shirt quickly.

She looked at me, confused, while I tried to hold back a smile, my neck veins bulging.

"You said to take care of what's in front of us."

"The food." She said.

"That's right."

Then she pinched my cheek playfully.

"We have to eat the savory food first..."

She smiled and leaned in to whisper in my ear.

**"Dessert comes later."**

Oh my... The rain outside was heavy, the air conditioning was cold, but my face was burning!

"P' Seenam, I'm going to die." I sighed.

"Die again?"

She laughed uncontrollably. No matter how many times, she always got the better of me.

In the end, I gave in again and started eating the food in front of us with her. We ate and talked while the rain continued to pour outside. By the time we finished cleaning up, the rain had stopped.

"Do you want to go for a walk on the beach?"

Seenam asked, extending her hand towards the balcony.

"The rain has stopped."

"Sure." I replied.

We walked hand in hand along the beach. There were hardly any people, probably because the rain had just stopped, and the weather was cool, almost cold. I glanced at her to see how she was doing, and she looked cold. I let go of her hand and took off my jacket to put it on her.

"What movie hero are you, putting a jacket on me?"

She asked.

"Fifty Shades." I replied.

"Huh?"

She looked surprised, then smiled.

"Then just a lab coat won't be enough."

"There's still the bathrobe belt from the hotel." I said.

"You're quick. Were you really thinking about it?"

She asked.

"If the heroine doesn't mind, the hero is ready." I replied.

"Then take your jacket back."

She said, trying to take it off, but I stopped her.

"Just kidding." I said.

"I'm giving it back because I want the belt instead."

She said.

"What?..."

I could never control or predict anything about her, and this time was no different...

From walking hand in hand on the beach, we suddenly found ourselves back at our room. The doctor disappeared into the bathroom for a while, leaving me in a bathrobe, sitting awkwardly on the bed, staring at the closed door with a racing heart.

No matter how many times, we always let our emotions take over. But planning something like this felt a bit strange and made me nervous.

Not long after, she walked out of the bathroom, her long hair loose, wearing the lab coat with nothing underneath. I sat up straight, trying to smooth the bedspread, looking for something to do other than stare at her tempting figure.

"I took the belt from the bathrobe. The fabric is soft, so it shouldn't hurt." She said.

"R-really?" I stammered.

"Yes." She replied.

"Good... I promise I won't tie it too tight. Just loose enough."

I bit my lip, trying to steady my breathing, but she looked disapproving and said,

"Pao, who said I'd be the one tied up?"

"...."

**"It's you."**

She walked towards me, slowly unbuttoning her shirt to reveal her chest. I moved back a little, but she grabbed my arm.

"You started this, so you have to finish it."

"N-not like this..."

She didn't wait for me to respond. Her beautiful face leaned in to kiss me. My heart fluttered like the first time we were together. Even as our lips moved against each other, she pushed me down, lifting my arms above my head.

She straddled me, her beautiful face pulling back to look at me with complete control. Soon, the white belt was loosely tied around my wrists. I lifted my arms to look, but she pressed them back down above my head.

"P' Seenam..." I said.

"Breathe slowly." She said.

"...."

**"Because I'm about to start."**

With those words, she began. Our lips met again, her small hand pulling the belt from my bathrobe Her hands expertly explored my bare body, making me feel weak, surrendering completely.

No matter what she did to my body, I was hers. Our lips parted, and she moved down to kiss my neck, making my skin tingle. But then she moved back up to look into my eyes again.

"Don't close your eyes." She said.

"P' Seenam, right now I...."

**"You have to watch everything I'm going to do to you. That's the right thing, isn't it?"**

Her voice was commanding. I stared at her beautiful face, my heart pounding, biting my lip harder before taking a deep breath and looking at her clearly again.

**Come to think of it... Seenam is really amazing right now, isn't she?**

That night, the doctor made love to me with the utmost seriousness. She didn't let me touch her at first, saying I was a delicious dessert she didn't want to stop enjoying for even a second.

Hearing that, I let her enjoy me as much as she wanted. But when she seemed tired, it was my turn to enjoy the dessert in front of me. And let me tell you, her strength was no match for mine.

The belt that had been on my wrists was now on hers. I looked at her while catching my breath. Finally, it was my time.

**The time for an all-you-can-eat dessert buffet...**

By the time the more delicious course than the main dish ended, hours had passed. We were too exhausted to shower, but in the morning, we had to quickly pack up and head to her clinic, both of us still tired.

"Are you sure you can work?" I asked.

"What choice do I have You, on the other hand, I told you just a little taste was enough."

She said, sipping the coffee we'd just bought on the way I laughed a little and reached out to stroke her thigh.

"Why did you have to be so delicious?" I asked.

"Listen to you. Take your hand off."

She said, placing my hand back on the steering wheel.

"Is Pao a sweet person?"

I turned to her slightly, then looked back at the road ahead.

"Not sweet at all."

"Oh..."

"More like spicy. Makes it hard to breathe."

"Nice answer. I guess I'll have to give you spicy food more often."

I couldn't help but laugh, my hand reaching out to hold hers. This time, she didn't resist.

"Next time, we should stop doing that when I have to work far away. I mightn't be able to handle it."

"Okay."

"Aren't you going to argue, saying you can't stop?"

"Do you want me to argue?"

"Do you want to argue?"

"I want to please you."

She raised an eyebrow before offering me her coffee.

"Suddenly, you're being cute."

"Is that good?"

"Of course..."

She said with a smile, lifting my hand to kiss the back of it.

"But be a little less cute, or I won't be able to concentrate on work."

"Okay, I'll be less cute."

"Good."

"To be less cute, I might have to do something bad."

"Something bad? Like what?"

"Like taking you to a hotel right now instead of the clinic."

She squinted at me, then gave me a stern look out of nowhere.

"Take me, and you won't get to come with me again."

"So strict, but I like it."

She sighed a little, seeming to give in. I smiled, feeling the thrill of victory for the first time. This must be how she feels when she gets the upper hand on me...

We arrived at the clinic after about half an hour. As soon as we walked in, her demeanor changed. She seemed kinder, but still had the air of a dedicated professional. She spoke seriously with the staff before leading me to the doctor's lounge.

The room had a large TV, a sofa, a table for relaxing, a small fridge, and the air conditioning was already on.

"Won't you get bored waiting for me?"

"If I do, I'll just go for a walk at the nearby mall. I know this area well."

"That's right, you used to live around here."

"Yes."

"If I don't have any patients later, I'll come hang out with you."

"Hang out how?"

"Not like that."

I smiled immediately at her words, but we didn't continue the conversation because an assistant in full uniform came to inform her that the first patient had arrived.

I relaxed on the sofa, playing on my phone, not worried about waiting. Suddenly, my mom's number popped up on the screen.

[Pao, where are you? Aren't you at the shop?]

My relaxed demeanor turned tense. I hadn't even greeted her yet, and her question made it clear she was in Bangkok.

"I'm out of town on business. Are you at the shop?"

[Yes, I haven't seen you in a while, so I came to visit. When are you coming back? The staff said you'd be gone for a few days.]

"I'll be back this evening."

[Great, I'll wait at your place then.]

"What!"

Oh no, did I clean my room? I definitely have her lab coat and clothes in the closet, our toothbrushes together in the cup, and cigarette butts on the balcony! I'm doomed!

"Don't go to my room, it's a mess. I haven't cleaned it yet."

[I'll clean it for you. You're an adult, why don't you keep your room clean?]

"Don't you have somewhere else to go?"

[I do have plans with friends, but I'll clean your room first. The spare key is at the shop, right? Where is it?]

"Since you're in Bangkok, you should spend time with your friends. I'll clean the room when I get back. It's just a bit messy. Come over in the evening when I've tidied up. It won't be fun without me there."

[You're not hiding a man in your room, are you?]

*Heaven... typical mom. But no, I'm hiding a woman.*

"What do you think of me? There's no man. I just don't want you to get tired. Let's meet in the evening and go out for dinner."

[Alright, let me know when I can come over. I'm thinking of staying the night.]

"You're staying with me?"

My voice rose a level, making her immediately ask in suspicion.

[Why not? Is there a problem?]

"No, I'll come pick you up. Full service for mom."

I tried to sound cheerful, even though I felt a bit sad inside.

"Oh, I'm in Chonburi. Do you want anything?"

[Really? Then get me some sticky rice from Nong Mon.]

"Sure, see you later. Love you, mom."

I quickly ended the call, sighing in relief. That was close. Almost got caught hiding a girl. Thinking about it made my head throb. I've never talked about my relationships with mom.

She didn't know about my ex, Pang, and I'm not getting any younger. Should I tell her about Seenam? What if she doesn't accept it? Just thinking about it gives me a headache.

I lay down on the sofa, stretching my legs over the armrest. The comfort of the air conditioning eased my headache. My eyes closed, and soon I fell asleep.

When I woke up, some time had passed. I saw a woman walking around, putting food on a plate. I had a blanket over me, but I didn't know when it got there.

"No more patients?"

I asked groggily, making her turn to look at me.

"Just finished another case. Did you sleep well? Did the assistant give you the blanket?"

"Huh? Wasn't it you who covered me?"

"...."

"By the way, you should change the sofa. It's not very comfortable."

I looked at my legs hanging off the edge.

"The struggle of being tall"

She handed me a new toothbrush.

"Go wash up so we can eat together."

I nodded and went to wash up as she said. But when I came out, she was seeing another patient. She texted me that an unscheduled patient had come in for dental work, so I should wait in the lounge.

I stared at the plate of food for almost forty minutes before the door opened. Seenam walked in, looking apologetic

"Sorry, you could have eaten without me."

"It's okay, I can wait."

I smiled at her, and she just looked at me without saying anything. Instead of sitting next to me, she sat on my lap, wrapping her arms around my neck and resting her head on my shoulder. Her scent filled my lungs, and her unusual behavior made me ask.

"Are you tired?"

"Yes."

"...."

"Very tired."

She mumbled, pressing her face closer to my neck.

"After this case, you can sleep in the car. I'll recline the seat and cover you with a blanket, just like you did for me. I'll hold your hand the whole way. How does that sound? Will that help you feel better?"

For the first time, I stroked her hair, and she let me without any objection.

"That sounds nice, being pampered."

"....."

"Can I kiss you?"

"What?"

I asked, confused. Why did she suddenly ask that? Before I could think further, she lifted her head, her tired eyes looking at me. I smiled and leaned in to give her a quick kiss.

"Is that enough?"

"Not enough, more."

I kissed her again, and again, and again.

"Is that enough?"

"Enough. Now it's my turn."

She leaned in for a deeper kiss, her tongue moving slowly, making my mind race. I tried to control myself, not wanting to go further. My hands cupped her face, the kiss growing more intense despite my resolve.

We pulled away, and I saw tears in her eyes. I held her face, making sure I wasn't imagining it.

"Why do you look like you're about to cry?"

"Because..."

She tried to hold back her tears.

"I'm happy."

"...."

"Your prediction must be true. I've never felt this happy before."

Hearing that made my heart race with joy. I smiled softly, gently wiping her tears away.

"I've never been this happy either. Don't cry, that's my role."

I pulled her into a hug, rubbing her back to comfort her, silently promising to always be there for her.

"You won't leave, right? Even if I do something you don't like?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"I'm just scared. Whenever I'm happy, I end up getting hurt."

Her words brought back the prediction I'd made. I hugged her tighter, feeling overwhelmed.

"That won't happen anymore. I'm here now."

"Promise me you won't be like the others."

"I promise. I'll never let you go."

"Me neither..."

Her words were sealed with another kiss, deeper and more passionate. We stayed close for several minutes before finally pulling away to eat. Seenam wiped her tears and smiled again.

After the last patient, we drove back to Bangkok, stopping to buy sticky rice for my mom. I told Seenam that my mom might stay over, so we'd have to sleep separately. She understood and said she'd come by to pick up some of her things.

I felt guilty for not being open with my family, but I couldn't handle their full disapproval. I needed to prepare first.

We got back to my place around 7 PM. The exhaustion made me want to hug her more, but I couldn't. We had to sleep apart tonight. Why didn't mom tell me she was coming? I grumbled internally, my face showing my disappointment, making Seenam ask.

"Tired?"

"No, just sad we can't be together."

"It's just one night. Being with your mom is good." "Call her mom. When I'm ready, I'll introduce you properly." I felt more lively, but she suddenly went quiet.

"I should drive you to your place. I can pack my stuff myself." "If we live together, we should help each other clean up," she said.

"But you look tired, Seenam," I replied.

"I'm not tired at all. I reclined the seat and slept the whole way back. It was very comfortable,"

She reassured me.

"Babe... if Mom stays for several days, will you feel lonely?" I asked.

"Maybe a little, but it's okay. You can stand on the balcony and wave to me," she suggested.

"That sounds nice and romantic."

I said, stepping out of the elevator with a smile slowly returning to my face.

"So, while Mom isn't here yet, should we quickly put things away and cuddle for five minutes?"

"Are you that attached to me?" she teased.

"Yes... is that a problem?"

I asked playfully.

"Not at all,"

She said with a sweet smile.

But then I suddenly remembered that I hadn't taken the sticky rice out of the car.

"P' Seenam, you go inside first. I forgot to grab the sticky rice. I'll be right back," I said.

"Okay, I'll go inside and start putting things away,"

She said, handing me the car keys.

I nodded in understanding and quickly ran back to the elevator. In no time, I had three or four tubes of sticky rice in my hands. I switched from running to walking briskly.

I wondered if Mom would eat it all or if I should take some to my sister at the shop...

Even though my mind was wandering, when I opened the door, I found someone else in the room. My heart raced, and shock flashed across my face. My mind went blank with the thought... trouble.

**"M-Mom, why are you here already?!"** I stammered.

# Chapter 20: Gypsy

I asked in shock, my mind racing to figure out the best way to react. Should I run up and hug her like I missed her dearly, or pretend to be annoyed that she was in my room without telling me first? But it seemed like that decision was no longer necessary.

"My friend had some business to attend to, so we parted ways early. I didn't know where to go, so I came to your room instead... By the way."

Mom paused, furning to look at the doctor standing awkwardly,

"You didn't tell me you weren't alone in your room."

"....."

**"And who is this young lady?"**

The room fell silent. No one answered the question. It felt like everyone was carefully considering what to say next. But the longer the silence dragged on, the more suspicious I seemed. My clever brain tried to process everything quickly, but in the end, a stupid response slipped out.

"I've been short on money lately, so I got a roommate to help out."

"Short on money?"

Mom looked incredulous. Of course, she'd be. Normally, if I was really short on money, I'd call her. Plus, I always claimed to love solitude and didn't want to live with anyone. So, my excuse was obviously a lie.

"Uh... Actually, I have enough. It's just..."

My voice trailed off, sounding unsure of what to say next. But then...

"I asked to stay with Pao while my condo is still being renovated. Pao let me stay and in return, I cook for her."

As soon as she said this, Mom's suspicious look started to fade.

Of course, she was a doctor. She came up with a much better answer than I did.

I looked at the beautiful doctor with admiration, but she acted as if nothing had happened. She was so smooth, it was impressive.

"And where is this friend of yours from, Pao? University?"

"I'm her senior from high school. Um..."

"It's P' Seenam, Mom. Remember? She used to take me out to eat when I was little. Oh, and you and Dad drove me to her house once, near the pharmacy by our old condo."

I quickly explained, trying to jog Mom's memory. She sat on the sofa, thinking for a moment, then smiled.

"Oh, you're Pao's senior from back then?"

"Yes..."

Seenam replied, looking at me as if to say,

*"Say something more."*

"By the way, how did you get in here, Mom?"

"I got the key from the shop. It wasn't hard to find where you hid it."

"Oh..."

I smiled awkwardly, then quickly walked over to Mom and handed her the sticky rice in bamboo.

"Here's the sticky rice you ordered. Do you want to eat it now? You must be tired today. Let me feed you."

I tried to act like my usual self, but Mom's face turned serious again.

"Wait..."

She reached for a small plastic bag and held it up.

"What's this?"

The bag was full of cigarette butts. I immediately knew my fate.

"Didn't I tell you to quit smoking? You promised you would. And now you have a friend staying with you. Don't you think it's bad for her health too? Why did you start smoking again?"

"Well..."

I tried to come up with an excuse, but all I could say was,

"I'm sorry I was stressed and ended up smoking."

"You can't use stress as an excuse. You need to be firm. I give you all the freedom, but not to harm yourself like this. How can I trust you to live alone?"

"....."

"I'm sorry, dear. It must be unpleasant for you."

"It's okay. I'm fine,"

Seenam said, walking over to take the bag of cigarette butts to throw away, but Mom stopped her.

"It's alright, dear. Let Pao handle it."

She handed the bag to me.

"I'll take it outside then."

After throwing away the trash, I knew what was coming. Mom scolded me thoroughly. Seenam packed her things into her bag, saying she'd go sleep at a friend's place to give us some privacy. But I knew she was just going back to her own room.

"You should stay. I'll leave soon,"

Mom said.

"Oh, you're not staying the night, Mom?"

I asked, unable to hide my joy.

"I was going to, but I'd rather sleep at my own condo."

Mom said, picking up two bear-shaped cups, one white and one brown.

"These cups are cute. Where did you get them?"

"Oh, I got them from the mall where I opened my shop. If you like them, we can go buy some tomorrow."

I tried to keep my face neutral, but Mom shook her head.

"They're too cute. More suitable for young couples."

*Ouch...*

"You look youthful, ma'am,"

Seenam suddenly said, her clinic demeanor showing. I was a bit surprised but played along.

"Really?"

Mom laughed softly, putting the cups down.

"By the way, what do you do for work? Are you still in touch with Pao? She only studied in Chonburi for a year."

Mom sat on the sofa, motioning for Seenam to join her.

"We lost touch for a while, but we ran into each other when I opened a new branch. My place is right across from Pao's shop."

"A new branch? What do you sell?"

"Oh, I opened a dental clinic."

"That must be the one. I was planning to get some dental work done. Can I come to your clinic?"

"What do you need done, ma'am?"

"I need a filling. I had one done before, but it seems to have come out."

"Sure, just let me know when you're free."

"Great. Can I have your clinic's number? I have some errands to run tomorrow and I'm not sure what time I'll be free. I'll call to check if you have an opening."

"You can have my number. Just let me know when you're free."

Mom handed her phone to Seenam to enter her number, while I watched the whole scene like an outsider.

"Have you eaten yet?"

"Pao and I haven't. What about you, Mom?"

"You said we'd go out to eat together, remember?"

"Oh, right..."

I smiled awkwardly, checking my phone to see which restaurant we should go to.

"By the way, Seenam, you cook, right? Why don't you show off your skills and cook a meal for us?"

Seenam and I exchanged surprised looks. Mom seemed very interested in her. Even though it was a good thing, I couldn't help but feel uneasy.

"If you don't mind, Mom... Sure."

Seenam smiled slightly, getting up to check the fridge for ingredients.

"Is there anything special you'd like to eat?"

"Hmm... Something with noodles. Can you do that?"

"Sure. How about fettuccine with truffle mushroom sauce?"

"Sounds good."

"I'll go buy some mushrooms and onions. It won't take long."

Seenam grabbed her bag. I quickly got up to go with her.

"Pao, stay with your mom. I'll be right back."

"Oh... Okay."

I said, feeling a bit disappointed, but Mom got up instead.

"I'll go with you. Pao, stay here."

"Oh..."

"Let's go."

"Uh... Okay."

Seenam replied, walking out of the room, leaving me standing there alone.

***What kind of situation is this?!***

. .

After they left, I paced around the room anxiously. I wanted to text Seenam to ask what was going on, but I didn't dare. Was Mom grilling her? Saying weird things? What if our actions made Mom suspicious? The more I thought about it, the more I couldn't think straight.

After nearly an hour, they returned with more groceries than Seenam had mentioned. What surprised me even more was how well Mom and Seenam got along. It was like I wasn't even there.

"What can I help with?"

"You can chop the mushrooms and garlic, Mom. I'll boil the noodles."

"Alright."

At that moment, Seenam seemed more like Mom's daughter than I did. I was just a bystander, unsure of what to do.

"Pao..."

"Yes, Mom?"

"Go set the table and get some water. Do you usually just sit around and do nothing?"

"What?"

I was even more confused. Why was Mom scolding me now?

"Does Pao always just sit around, Seenam? You should ask her to help."

"Pao usually helps."

"Oh, good. I thought she just waited around and did nothing."

After Mom's comment, they continued cooking together, leaving me to handle the small tasks. Once everything was ready, we sat down to eat. And, of course, they kept talking, ignoring me.

"Tell me more about that assistant,"

Mom said, looking at Seenam as she took a bite.

"I think I've told you everything. But one funny thing was when she first started, she'd run out of the room whenever I asked for something, even though it was right in front of her. So, I had to prepare the tools myself at first."

Mom laughed, saying she wanted that assistant to help when she went for her dental work. Seenam agreed, saying the assistant was much better now and knew exactly what to do without being told.

"What are you talking about?"

I finally asked, but Mom waved her hand dismissively. "Nothing important. Just chatting. Seenam is fun to talk to."

The doctor smiled sweetly at Mom.

"By the way, did you go to Chonburi for a trip?"

"Oh, I went to check on my branch there. The regular dentist quit, and I haven't found a replacement yet. I didn't want to leave the clinic without a dentist for too long, so I decided to go once a week until I find someone."

"Oh..."

"The clinic is close to the beach, so I invited Pao to come along."

"That's nice. You haven't mentioned going out of town lately. How many times have you gone without telling me?"

Suddenly, I was part of their conversation, but it was just to get scolded.

"This is the first time. Why are you always picking on me?"

"Because you're acting suspicious."

I pouted and continued eating. But come to think of it, I did tell Mom every time I went out of town before. But it wasn't really a vacation. Every time I went, it was to clear my head after fighting with P' Pang. We fought often, at least every two to three weeks. So, not going anywhere for a month made Mom suspicious.

"I thought you were hiding a boyfriend."

***Clang!***

Seenam's fork and knife clattered onto her plate, making a loud noise. I looked at her, wide-eyed, as she seemed flustered.

"Sorry. I've been tired all day, so my hands are a bit weak,"

Seenam said, picking up her fork and wiping it before smiling at Mom as if nothing had happened.

"That's true. You must be exhausted, and then Mom asked you to cook for us. I'm sorry."

"It's no problem at all. I love cooking. Cooking is like a form of relaxation for me."

"You're so sweet. How about you take a break now? I'm full anyway."

Mom got up from the chair without any rush. The two of us quickly stood up to walk her to the condo entrance, where a car was already waiting. "I'll call you tomorrow to let you know what time I'll go to the dentist."

"Okay,"

Seenam replied quickly, raising her hands in a respectful gesture to say goodbye.

"Are you coming to see Pao at the shop tomorrow?"

"If I go to the dentist, I'll drop by. Your dad asked me to check the shop's accounts too. I actually looked at them yesterday, but I want to go over them with you to see if there's a way to solve the issues and what to do next."

I nodded in understanding, not feeling too pressured by her words. Soon, the car drove off, leaving us standing there until it disappeared from sight. Seenam and I walked back to the room, and I immediately collapsed onto the sofa.

"Ah... the smell of freedom,"

I said, closing my eyes with a smile.

"What did your mom mean by solving the issues?"

"Oh..."

I opened my eyes to look at the small figure standing in front of me.

"It's kind of embarrassing to talk about."

"There's nothing to be embarrassed about. But if you really don't want to talk about it, that's okay. It just seemed serious, so I asked in case I could help."

The small figure spoke while sitting down next to me, prompting me to shift from lying down to resting my head on her lap instead.

"Actually, the shop's sales haven't been great. It's different from a few years ago."

"Are you losing money?"

"No, not losing money, just making much less profit compared to other branches. Even though this location should be the most profitable, after deducting everything, the profit is less than forty thousand some months."

"What does your family say about it?"

"They want to close this branch and have me go back to manage the one in Chiang Mai instead."

"So, we won't be together anymore?"

Seenam said, gently stroking my cheek, her eyes showing a hint of reluctance at the thought of us being apart.

"I'm not going back. I still love my freedom. If I go back to Chiang Mai, I won't just have to manage the shop but also the resort. Just thinking about it makes me tired."

"But someday, you'll have to go back, right?"

"Maybe, but not anytime soon. Mom has talked to me about it several times, but this time she seemed more serious because the lease is about to expire. She's trying to convince me not to renew it."

I said, holding her hand and kissing it gently before closing my eyes, not wanting to think about it anymore.

"Should I open a new branch in Chiang Mai?"

"Wait until I move back, then you can open one."

"Sure, let me save up some money first."

"Let me be your partner. My family is okay with investing."

"It's like I'm talking to a sugar daddy."

"Call me Pao's sugar daddy."

"You're too much."

"Too little wouldn't be satisfying."

I said, and she playfully slapped my arm.

"You cheeky kid."

After Mom left, the sweetness between us was just about right...

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The next day, I had to face Mom again about keeping the branch open. She seemed to know she wouldn't convince me, but surprisingly, she didn't seem to mind much this time. When I said I wanted to stay a bit longer, she just said,

"Do as you wish,"

And walked off to the dentist with Seenam, who was waiting.

**Mom seemed to be in a good mood this time...**

I didn't follow or stay with her, trying to show her how dedicated I was to the shop. It worked. After her dental appointment, she stopped by to say I seemed to be working hard and that the economy might just be bad, affecting sales.

Then she left easily, as if she hadn't come to see me directly but to meet a friend she had plans with.

"How was it today with my mom?"

I asked as we started walking back to the room together.

"It was good. She lay still, didn't move her tongue, seemed like a pleasant patient."

"Are there patients who aren't pleasant?"

"Yes, like those who are tense at first but then try to flirt with the dentist."

"Who does that?"

I laughed softly and reached out to hold her hand as we walked together.

And so, peace returned. I lived my daily life with my loved one. Ah... I could call her my loved one, but I'd never actually told her I loved her.

That was the beginning of feeling that our relationship should be more defined. After our trip to Chonburi, two weeks had passed, and two weeks after that was my birthday.

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**"Happy birthday to youuu!"**

My two friends sang in unison at a restaurant. It was just past ten in the morning, and there were only a few tables occupied.

"Wishing you happiness, my dear friend. May your life be filled with good things, escaping the depths of hell to find the light of heaven. Oh wait, you've already escaped!"

Man said, handing me a gift box. I took it with a smile. "Thanks for including the word 'hell' in your birthday wish,"

I said sarcastically, still smiling.

"This one's from me. Same wish as Man's. Too lazy to think of a new one."

"The epitome of a close friend,"

I said, accepting the smaller gift box from Cat.

"Actually, Cat and I planned to make a cake out of your favorite brand of cigarettes, but Cat said if we lit it and blew it out in the restaurant, the staff would probably kick us out."

"Good thinking. Besides, I quit smoking."

"What!"

They both exclaimed in shock, but I smiled proudly.

"Yeah, P' Seenam told me to cut down, and I was worried about her health too, so I quit for good. It was tough, but I found other ways to use my mouth."

"Is this conversation rated 18 or what?"

Man said, looking at me with mock annoyance, but I just smiled smugly.

"Know-it-all!"

"Stop fighting and open your gifts,"

Cat said, clearly excited about what she'd bought for me.

Without delay, I started unwrapping the smaller gift. Soon, I had to squint to read what it was.

"What is this... lube?"

I quickly closed the gift box with a loud snap.

"You jerks! Giving me this in a restaurant!"

"Oh, Pao, who'd know? They only know because you yelled it out."

"Seriously, you gave me this as a gift?"

"Yes."

"I didn't expect anything fancy, but this is just..."

I paused, sighed, and continued,

"What did I give you for your birthday?"

"A luxury brand bag worth tens of thousands, which I sold."

"Seriously! You jerk!"

I was about to throw the lube at him, but Man quickly raised his hands to stop me.

"Open mine first. It's not as cheap as Cat's."

"Oh, Man... yours isn't much more expensive than mine," Cat said.

"It's much more expensive. I bought it from abroad."

Hearing that, I placed my hand on my chest, feeling unexpectedly touched.

"Man, my dear friend, thank you. At least you understand that people want nice gifts for their 28th birthday,"

I said, carefully unwrapping the gift. The box looked elegant, just as Man had boasted. The front of the box was plain but classy, making me feel pleased. As soon as I opened it, I saw...

A strap-on with, um, three different sizes to choose from.

And yes... I was shocked for a split second before slamming the box shut with a loud snap!

"W-what did you buy!"

"Hey, it's good stuff. Not cheap. It's even double-ended,"

Man said, stretching his neck proudly, while Cat pushed her gift box towards me again.

"Use them together. See, I didn't give it thoughtlessly. It might be awkward at first, but you'll enjoy it later."

"Enough, I'm going to faint,"

I said, feeling genuinely dizzy, prompting my friends to support me.

"Don't be dramatic. Couples need to try new things sometimes, so P' Seenam won't get bored."

"Stop trying to convince me. Please take both gifts back,"

I said, placing the boxes back in their hands, feeling exasperated. They both looked disappointed.

"See, Man, I told you Pao wouldn't take them."

"Wasted money, but it's okay. The gifts weren't expensive, just the boxes."

"You said it was good stuff, not cheap,"

I said, my tone making them back off.

"Well, the prank gifts weren't cheap. Here, this is the real gift. Cat and I chipped in,"

Man said, handing me a small gift box. My initial plan to run to Seenam for comfort turned into a small glimmer of hope.

"If I open this and it's something inappropriate, I'll use this steak knife on you both,"

I warned.

"What kind of person do you think I am? Just open it,"

Cat urged. I opened the box cautiously, revealing a cute bracelet inside.

"It's adorable..."

I said, my tone softening. I fully opened the box, relieved to see a safe gift.

"Do you like it? We spent a long time choosing it," Man said.

"I love it. But wait, Cat, did you really sell the bag I gave you?"

"Are you crazy? The bag you gave me is the one I brought today. See!"

"Oh... right. You scared me. But the bracelet is so cute. Thank you."

"Glad you like it. Want to wear it now?"

Man asked, coming closer to put it on me, while Cat touched his arm.

"Cat, what are you doing?"

Man asked, and Cat quickly looked away

"I just wanted to be part of it."

"Sure," Man said.

I laughed softly, admiring the bracelet on my wrist.

"It's so cute."

"Why did you schedule breakfast so early? Even if you had plans with P' Seenam, you could've met us in the afternoon. I barely made it,"

Man complained, sitting back down, looking annoyed.

"I'm getting my hair done next. It will take hours, so I wanted to see you guys first."

"What kind of hair takes hours? Are you getting a beehive for dinner with your girlfriend?"

"Yes, so my hair will block the view, and P' Seenam will only see me."

"Good one," Man said.

"No, I'm getting my hair colored."

"What color?"

"White."

"Why white? Practicing for old age? But with a mouth like yours, you mightn't live to see gray hair."

"Why are you insulting me, Man?"

"Yeah, why insult her? Maybe Pao wants to tell P' Seenam it's practice for growing old together."

"Calm down, if you keep comparing like that, I might have to propose to you."

"Why white?"

"It's a secret."

"Permission to be disgusted by people in love."

I shrugged indifferently before continuing to eat the food in front of me. We only spent a little over two hours celebrating my birthday because I had an appointment with the hairdresser at half-past noon.

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After we parted ways, it was time for a makeover. Seenam kept texting me, asking where I was and why I hadn't come to the shop. I just told her I had some errands to run and that we'd meet in the evening.

[It's your birthday, aren't you going out to eat?]

[Do you want to go out, Seenam?]

[Not really, I just thought you might want something more special than usual.]

[It's already special just being with you.]

I smiled at my own message. Seenam replied with a single word:

"crazy....."

Well, she was probably embarrassed. After all, I flirted with her every day.

Five hours flew by like a dream. I walked out of the hair salon, catching the eyes of passersby. I didn't want to brag, but I thought I looked stunning with white hair, enough to make people turn their heads. With that thought, I held my head a little higher, thinking that this beauty was for Seenam alone to admire!

Even though it was my birthday, it seemed like there were many things to do.

I stood in a flower shop that had many good reviews. As soon as 1 walked in, a bouquet of gypsophila was handed to me. I stared at its beauty, impressed by how cute the arrangement was.

Do you know the meaning of gypsophila? It symbolizes pure love or sincerity. The reason I chose this flower was because of its meaning related to 'love at first sight.' I didn't think any other flower could be more fitting.

With the bouquet in hand, I took the train back to my condo and arranged everything myself when I got to my room. I cooked what I could, placed the flowers on the Japanese table, and lit the scented candles I'd made. Even though it was my birthday, it didn't mean I always had to be the one receiving. My life now was meant to be shared with her.

**The person I intended to say "I love you" to today...**

Almost two hours later, Seenam came back to the room. The lights were completely off. It was strange, it was my birthday, but I felt more excited to surprise her than to be surprised myself.

"Pao... are you not in the room?"

"I'm here."

"Why are the lights off?"

"Did you buy a cake?"

"Of course, how could I forget?"

"Then can you light the candles in the dark and surprise me here?"

I said, hiding in the darkness. If she saw my hair color, she'd be shocked for sure.

"Would that really be a surprise?"

"Just having you here is already a big surprise."

"Crazy..."

Even though it was a scolding, she turned on her phone's flashlight and did as I asked. The lighter that came with the small cake was lit, and soon a few cute candles were burning. Seenam walked in carefully, afraid she might accidentally kick something.

"Here we go..."

Even though it was just the small light from the candles, I could clearly see her excited smile.

"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday, happy birthday... happy birthday to you."

I slowly blew out the candles, and as soon as they were out, the room lights came back on.

"W-why does you look like an old hag?"

Her small hand reached out to touch my hair lightly.

"Huh? Oh, don't you like it?"

"What did you do to your hair? Did you cook and spill flour on it? Why don't you take a shower first? Why are you standing like this?"

"D-do you really think that, P' Seenam?"

"No."

"Oh..."

"Did you spend the whole day getting your hair done? Is this your birthday gift to yourself?"

Then she suddenly smiled and laughed.

"Are you teasing me?"

I smiled too, moving closer to her. Our faces were just a breath apart, our noses touching with my intention clear

"It's a gift for you, P' Seenam."

"For me? How?"

"Didn't you say when you were a kid that choosing white might bring good luck? So..."

"...."

"I'll be the one to bring you good luck, P' Seenam."

Her smile grew even brighter. I stepped back a little and handed her the bouquet.

"Do you know the meaning of gypsophila?"

"..."

She shook her head, her eyes looking deeply into mine with curiosity

"It means pure love and also signifies first love."

"And you, P' Seenam, are my first love."

I said, moving even closer to her, handing her the bouquet as if trying to pull her out of some trance. When she saw me getting closer, her small hand reached out to hold the bouquet. As soon as she looked down at the flowers, I leaned in to whisper in her ear.

"I've always shown it, but I've never said it clearly. So.."

**A word kept hidden for over ten years, fading over time, but finally spoken aloud.**

**"I love you, P' Seenam."**

.

# Chapter 21: The Truth

The word "love" slipped out as our eyes met. At that moment, I didn't need anything else. She seemed taken aback by my straightforward confession, but soon enough, her demeanor softened. She reached out to gently caress my cheek, her lips moving slowly before we kissed without saying a word.

My heart raced, the sweet touch coursing through my body. Inside, I felt an overwhelming happiness mixed with my love for her, swirling constantly.

"Is it your birthday today or mine?"

She asked with a smile that remained as radiant as ever.

"It's my birthday, but my life is this good because of you, P' Seenam,"

I replied.

"Thank you..."

"Thank you for what?"

"Thank you for being the good thing in my life,"

I said, moving to hug her. Our hearts raced together, but then the sound of my stomach growling interrupted the romantic moment.

"Someone's hungry..."

"Terrible timing,"

I quickly said, rubbing my stomach.

"It might have interrupted the moment, but I did make something to eat."

"A lot, actually. Ta-da!"

I said, gesturing to the Japanese table where everything was already set up.

"Chicken basil with boiled eggs, is that a lot?"

"It's healthy! That's plenty,"

I said, scrunching my nose in defense. The simple dish in front of me was incredibly difficult for me to make.

"It's basil chicken without oil or sugar."

"Wow."

"Is it really wow? This is all I could manage,"

I said, my pride fading quickly. My head dropped, and she immediately hugged me.

"Wow because it looks delicious. The first meal Pao made for me must be tasty."

"Really?"

"Really."

"This is just the side dish. There's a main course too."

"Main course?"

I pulled out a sprig of gypsophila and tucked the beautiful flower behind my ear.

"This is the main course."

She laughed, nodding in amusement.

"Not surprising."

"Let's eat,"

I said, kissing her hand and guiding her to the prepared spot. But she looked a bit surprised, as if she'd forgotten something.

"I haven't given you your gift yet,"

She said, getting up to fetch a beautifully wrapped gift box with a white ribbon.

"Can I open it now?"

"Of course."

Seenam sat beside me, watching excitedly to see if I'd like the gift.

As soon as I opened the gift, a Leica Polaroid camera appeared. I quickly took it out to examine it. "A Polaroid camera..."

"Yes, do you like it?"

"I love it,"

I replied. At that moment, the food I'd painstakingly prepared seemed unimportant. I quickly loaded the film and fiddled with the camera until she spoke up.

"Eat first, then play."

"You eat first, P' Seenam. I'll just finish setting this up," I said.

"Why? Aren't you hungry?"

"To be honest?"

"Yes."

"While cooking, I tasted it about three times. It wasn't good, so I had to call my mom for help,"

I said, and Seenam laughed, gently stroking my hair.

"You're amazing... I'll handle it. You play with your camera," she said.

"Okay!"

I quickly finished setting up the camera. As soon as it was ready, I took a picture of her, causing her to look up.

"Sneaking a photo?"

"Yes!"

I smiled, watching the Polaroid picture slowly emerge.

"Cute..."

"Let me see,"

She said, but when I handed her the photo, she scrunched her nose in displeasure.

"It's not pretty."

"It's beautiful! How is it not?"

We argued for a while about whether the picture was pretty or not. But in the end, we looked through dozens of photos, some of which I didn't like, but others where we both looked adorable.

After the meal, we sat and talked, surrounded by the scent of aromatic candles that made the atmosphere even more romantic. Seenam kept looking at me with an unreadable expression.

"How did you know you could read fortunes when you were a kid?"

She asked.

"Hmm..."

I thought for a moment before answering.

"I once mocked a fortune teller near my school for being inaccurate. I told Cat and Man that I could do better. We ended up making a bet, and I had to make up predictions. But everything I said came true, and I became popular.

People came to me for readings, and I became known as Fortune Teller Pao."

"Really? I thought you studied it or had a family business."

"A family business?"

I laughed softly, thinking.

"I wondered why everything I said came true. I concluded it must've been a blessing from a grandma at the market."

"A grandma?"

"Yes. I was shopping for something and met an old lady who invited me for a reading. I didn't believe in such things, but for some reason, I agreed. I asked for help to get through a year at a new school. She told me to step into the school with my right foot at seven... seven something, I can't remember."

"Seven thirty-seven?"

"Yes!"

I said excitedly, but then my excitement turned to curiosity.

"How did you know?"

"Strange..."

"What?"

"Before the school term started, I went to the market too and met an old lady who told me to step in with my right foot at seven thirty-seven, just like you said..."

"Maybe she told everyone to do that,"

I laughed softly, but Seenam looked serious.

"But we met for the first time at that exact time, didn't we?"

As soon as she said that, I stopped laughing and thought about it. Our eyes met.

*That's right... we met for the first time at that exact time.*

"So maybe."

I said, thinking hard.

"Maybe it wasn't a coincidence."

"That's creepy," she said.

"Me too," I replied.

"So you can't read fortunes anymore?"

"No, I can't. In middle school, everything I said came true. But after I cursed you, nothing I said ever came true again. It's a shame. I should've wished for good things for you."

"If I only had good things happen, we mightn't have met again. I might have married someone else by now,"

She said.

As soon as she said that, my heart sank, and I felt like crying. Just imagining her with someone else was unbearable.

"How about this..."

She said sweetly, placing her hand on my arm. She rested her chin on her hand, looking at me with her usual affectionate smile.

"Try saying it again. Maybe this time, it'll come true."

I looked at her, puzzled, trying to understand what she meant.

"Okay..."

I focused on her small hand. After a moment, I spoke.

"You're going to have great luck soon."

"Luck?"

"Yes," I replied, smiling widely at her.

"How?"

"Well..."

I pointed playfully at myself.

**"From now on, I'll be your good luck."**

Her gentle eyes continued to look at me, and I smiled sincerely, wanting her to know that from now on, I would make her the luckiest woman. Even though I'd always felt lucky to have her.

"Actually, it's been a while,"

She said, reaching for my hand.

"A while? What do you mean?"

"Since I felt lucky. I'm so glad to have you, Pao,"

She said, lifting my hand to her cheek. She closed her eyes with a smile, and I gently stroked her cheek with my thumb.

"Stay with me for a long time," I said.

"You stay with me for a long time too," she replied.

"Forever," I said.

As soon as'i finished speaking, her beautiful eyes opened. She moved closer, and our lips met in a clear, shared touch.

**And at that moment... my heart kept shouting how much I loved her.**

.

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**A week had passed since my birthday.**

It seemed like we were living our usual lives, but something had changed. I'd become braver in expressing my love for her, showing it more openly wherever we were. Over the past few days, the staff at the shop would smile knowingly whenever they saw us together. Well, my life now revolved around showing my love for her.

Today was another day I drove to Chonburi to be with Seenam. But because there were fewer patients, she got off work earlier than usual. And after today, we wouldn't have to come here every week anymore because a new doctor would be stationed here.

So, we decided to go back to our place, relax, and watch movies as a way to celebrate not having to drive far for work anymore.

I ordered popcorn from the cinema, while she sat picking out a movie.

"How about Doraemon?"

"Haven't we seen every episode already?"

"Do you know that people can watch the same movie multiple times?"

"Are you teasing me?"

She laughed, looking like she wanted to playfully bite me. But then her phone buzzed with a message, and she quickly got up to check if it was the popcorn delivery.

**[Happy belated birthday, Pao. I hope you've found what you've been looking for.]**

Suddenly, I felt a chill. Who would've thought the message was from an exlover?

.

*[Even though we've had our share of pain, I just realized how much I miss you.]*

*[I'm sorry for suddenly messaging you like this. I've been thinking for days whether I should text or visit you. In the end, I could only send a message. Even though I might be a bad memory in your life, I'm grateful for everything. It's sad we didn't celebrate together this year, but that's fate. If you have time, let's meet one last time. I just want to give you a gift I prepared. I promise this time I'll disappear from your life for good.]*

*.*

The message seeped into me. Even though I felt more annoyed than anything, a part of me felt a sudden sadness.

My hands trembled as I stared at the message, unable to respond.

"Pao... are you okay?"

The voice next to me broke the silence. I handed her my phone, and in just a split second, the gentle and kind face beside me turned expressionless, making it impossible to guess what she was thinking.

"I should block P' Pang. I'm sorry for showing you the message. I just don't want us to have any secrets between us."

"And how do you feel now, Pao?"

"What?..."

I thought for a moment, and then a sigh escaped.

"Pang's message made me irritated."

"If you talk to Pang, will it really end?"

"I'm sorry to say this, but if we want to make sure Pang doesn't interfere with us anymore, I think you should go see her."

"I'm not going. I'm just irritated right now. I'm sorry for making you feel bad."

"Are you irritated because you still have feelings for her?"

"Well..."

I hesitated before reaching out to hold her hand.

"Even if I still have feelings, they're definitely not good ones."

"Then I don't need to worry, right?"

"Yes, you don't need to worry at all."

"But what if I want you to go see Pang?"

"....."

"Honestly, I've been worried about Pang for a while, but I didn't know what to do."

"Why? I haven't contacted Pang at all. Why are you worried?"

She was silent before handing my phone back and looking away, avoiding eye contact.

"I don't know. I just want everything to really end."

"P' Seenam..."

"..."

"Look at me, P' Seenam. Don't look away."

I cupped her cheek, and as soon as our eyes met, tears started to well up in her eyes.

"P' Seenam..."

"I want you to go, Pao. Go and come back quickly. Go clear things up with Pang and end it"

"...."

**"And come back to me."**

I quickly pulled her into a hug. Anger surged through my chest, and tears started to flow, feeling the pain for the person in my arms who'd been so worried.

"P' Seenam, will you come with me? Let's clear everything up together."

"It's better if you go alone. Ever since we got back together, it's like I took you away from Pang. So..."

"At that time, Pang and I were already over."

"But you still hadn't completely cut ties. I came between you two even though you still loved her."

"But now I love you, P' Seenam. That's the reality now."

I spoke clearly, but she still insisted that I go clear things up and come back quickly.

"Come back soon."

"I'll come back as soon as possible. I promise."

With that promise, I quickly texted Pang, telling her I was on my way to see her.

I drove out of my condo, heading straight to Pang's place. It took less than half an hour, maybe because I was driving faster than usual, fueled by the anger burning inside me.

I stood in front of my ex's door, feeling a mix of emotions. I knocked a few times, and soon the door opened.

"You're here."

She smiled... How could she smile when she was hurting me?

I quickly pushed her inside. Pang looked quite shocked by my uncharacteristic behavior. Once the door closed, my voice, filled with anger, broke out.

"Why did you send that message?"

"....."

**"Why are you doing this to me? Why can't you just let go?"**

"Did you come here just to say this?"

"Yes... Did you think I came to thank you for your fake message?"

"...."

"I'm with P' Seenam now, and I've been so happy. I've been happy until now, until you made me miserable again. And the cause of my misery is you..."

"...."

"Why can't you just let me go? What do you want from me? Haven't you hurt me enough?"

"I don't want anything from you anymore."

"Really? It doesn't seem that way. I don't know what you're thinking, but I hope it's not because you want my prophecy to come true. The prophecy that you have to hurt someone good to find true love. Let me tell you, hurting others to find something good doesn't exist. How can you find true love when you don't even know how to love?"

My voice softened, but the words were sharp. I could see the pain in her eyes.

"How do you know I don't know how to love? And... you still remember that prophecy?"

"I didn't want to remember."

"I understand."

"If you understand, then stop bothering me. Let's not see each other again."

As soon as I finished speaking, I turned to leave, but she grabbed my hand. I shook her off and turned to say something.

But... her beautiful face was crying

"Are you really leaving, Pao? Is this all you came for?"

My heart skipped a beat. She'd never cried like this before. I didn't know if it was an act or genuine regret. Despite the questions in my head, her tears turned my anger into guilt.

"Have I hurt you a lot, Pao?"

Her sobs filled the room. She stood there, looking at me, her mind seemingly blank.

"I'm... sorry."

"Keep it to yourself. I don't want to hear it, and I don't want to see you again. I've found someone good who loves me a lot now."

"...."

"So, even if we run into each other..."

I looked her in the eyes, feeling guilty but knowing it wasn't as strong as the worry of leaving someone I love waiting.

**"Pretend we're dead to each other."**

After saying that, my chaotic heart wanted to rush back to hug the person waiting for me. But then...

"How do you know Pa is really good? You don't even know her."

The one who'd been crying now turned defiant, like the old Pang who used to dominate me and never backed down.

"Why wouldn't I know? I've been with P' Seenam all the time. So I know everything"

"Really?"

"...."

**"Do you know that while you were with Pa, I was with her too!"**

I stared at her, confused, my brows furrowing as I tried to understand what she meant.

"What are you talking about?"

"You keep saying Pa is so great and you know everything. I'm just proving if you really know."

"Enough. I'm leaving"

**"Do you know that Pa and I have been together since college? And the last person I was with was her..."**

I felt a chill run through me. My mind went blank, and my heart ached suddenly, even though I knew she was probably lying to hurt me more.

"Stop hurting me. I don't believe your lies."

"Then listen a bit more to see if it's really a lie."

"No. Stop talking."

"I can't. I need to say this because I want you to know."

Her eyes were serious, not mocking. I didn't understand what she was doing. We should've ended this.

"Listen to a few more things. Maybe you'll understand."

"....."

"Did you know that the day she brought you to the restaurant and I got mad at you, it was all staged by Pa?"

*Staged?*

"Did you know that asking for responsibility for the prophecy you made as a kid was just an excuse to date you?"

*Asking for responsibility for a childhood prophecy... How did P'Pang know?*

"And did you know that the 'new' person Pa said she was pursuing was actually a friend from the same faculty?"

I-held my breath. Even this, she knew?

My heart trembled, and I clenched my fists. I wanted to walk away, but something told me to stay and listen. My curiosity seemed to encourage her, and she spoke with even more anger.

**"Did you know Pa mocked me about being with you for the first time, even though I told her you were mine?"**

**"...."**

**"And did you know that the day I asked you to meet at the coffee shop was because Pa kept saying I'd never get you back, and I'd never hear you say 'I love you' again? And that day, you didn't say it. Did you know that? Did you see my tears that day?"**

"S...stop."

**"And the night Pa said she drove to Chonburi alone, it wasn't true. Why? Because she was sleeping with me!"**

"...."

**"Even when you were sleeping in the doctor's room in Chon, and someone covered you with a blanket, that was me... And after I covered you, I went to the dental room with Pa..."**

**"....."**

**"Can you imagine what we could do in that time?"**

.

Everything felt like a nightmare I didn't want to be real. My mind slowed down, unable to process anything. My body froze, and tears started to flow as she stopped talking. My heart ached more than ever.

I couldn't even argue that she was lying. If she was lying, how could she describe everything in such detail? I felt lost, unable to distinguish between truth and lies.

"There are so many things you don't know."

"....."

"The one who really knows is me because I was with both you and Pa."

As soon as she finished, I lunged at her, pushing her hard. Her face twisted in pain, and tears flowed uncontrollably. My hands, pressing on her shoulders, shook uncontrollably.

"W-why?"

"....."

**"Why do you keep hurting me?"**

My cries filled the room. My hands, once pressing on her shoulders, slowly released. The pain from my chest spread, making my head feel like it would explode. But instead of shouting, my voice softened to a whisper, barely audible even to myself.

"What did I do wrong?"

"...."

Now, my once strong arms felt weak, as if I had no strength left. I couldn't even lift them to wipe my tears.

"Why did you do this to me?"

I chose to step back, but she quickly pulled me into a hug. I didn't have the strength to push her away. All I could do was pray that this was a nightmare, not the reality it seemed to be.

"P-Pao."

"....."

"Why did it turn out like this?"

Her trembling voice broke the silence. Pang seerned to realize she'd done something terribly wrong. If she'd kept all the secrets, my heart wouldn't have been so shattered.

"I just wanted to see you to give you a gift. Why..."

"Couldn't you stand to see me happy?"

"...."

"Why do you keep hurting me over and over?"

"I didn't mean to. Today wasn't supposed to be like this... I'm sorry."

"Then why..."

"....."

"P' Seenam, who has always been so kind to me, would you hurt me too?"

"...."

"Who are you two really?"

"Pao..."

**"Who are you to hurt me this much!!!"**

I quickly pushed the person in front of me away. My hands pressed hard against my head to regain my composure. I hadn't even listened to P' Seenam yet, so maybe none of this was true.

"Can I choose the gift that you want to give, P' Pang?"

"...."

**"Please just disappear from my life forever."**

. .

I walked out of that room feeling numb, but tears still streamed down my face as if it was the only mechanism my body had to express all the emotions I was going through.

My legs kept moving aimlessly, forgetting every promise I'd made to the one I loved. I didn't know why I'd come here or where I should go next.

By the time I realized it, I was standing in front of my own room.

How long had I been standing here?

Even though my mind was searching for answers, the door opened. The person in front of me looked shocked to see me standing there in a worse state than ever before

"Pao.."

"......"

I walled into the room as if I didn't see her at all. When the door closed, her small hand grabbed mine.

"Pao, I want to explain. Can we talk first?"

Why did she want to talk first? Did she know everything already? She didn't ask me how things went with my ex, but instead, she wanted to explain. I stared at my hand being held by her small one.

The tears that were already flowing came out even more. Even though my heart hurt so much, her warm hand made it feel like everything was still the same.

But the truth was... nothing was the same anymore.

"I....can I go get some air on the balcony?"

I tried to pull my hand away from her warm touch, but she wouldn't let go.

"Pao..."

"Can't I even go to the balcony?"

"..…."

"Fine, I won't go. Has the popcorn arrived? Have you picked a movie yet?"

"..…."

"But I feel so tired. Maybe I should just take a shower and go to bed..."

I wiped my tears with my other hand. My heart ached even more when I saw that she was crying too.

Why was she crying? Why did she look so hurt when I was the one trying to avoid everything?

"Why are you crying?"

"....."

**"Shouldn't the one crying to death be me?"**

She let go of my hand. Her small hand covered her mouth. I collapsed to the floor. I'd been holding back my trembling for so long, but seeing her tears confirmed all my fears.

"All this time, P' Seenam... was there any truth in what you did for me?"

"....."

"Aren't you going to answer? I can't think of anything anymore."

I looked up at her, but my vision was blurry. I couldn't see her clearly, nor could I understand her feelings.

"There is. There has to be some truth. Pao, are you ready to hear everything? I'll tell you everything...."

She knelt in front of me, reaching out to touch my cheek like she always did when comforting me or showing warmth.

But this time... I turned away.

"Did I... did I ever predict this?"

All the emotions I'd been holding back intensified. I didn't care about her previous words anymore. I didn't care about the warm touch that lasted only a second.

My body shook like someone who had been in the rain for days. My heart felt so cold that if anyone touched it, it would shatter instantly

"Did I ever predict that you, P' Seenam..."

"..."

**"...would hurt me too."**

**.**

# Chapter 22: Dreams and Reality

**At this moment... my eyes that are looking at you. must be the eyes of someone in the deepest pain.**

. .

She kept crying, and I... I cried along with her, my sanity slipping away.

So many things were thrown to the floor without care. The scented candle I'd made, which she once said she liked, was thrown down, shattering the glass all over the room.

The bouquet of dried gypsophila, still standing in the corner, was pulled apart and tossed to the ground as if nothing mattered anymore. The Polaroid camera, once carefully preserved, was thrown down, breaking into pieces beyond repair.

I took a cutter from the drawer to cut up all the Polaroid pictures, but even then, I could still feel the happiness from those photos. My hands froze. The happiness I felt so clearly at that moment couldn't confirm if it meant anything to her.

I threw the pictures to the floor, not daring to cut them as I'd intended. My body collapsed to the ground again, even though I knew there were shards of glass scattered around.

**"Pao!"**

Her worried voice rang out. She rushed to me when she saw the red, thick liquid starting to pool on the floor.

"The glass cut you. You need to see a doctor..."

I stood up as if the wound didn't hurt at all, quickly moving to push her away so she wouldn't get cut too. She stumbled and fell to a clean spot on the floor, while I stood there, letting the red blood slowly drip down.

"Don't come any closer..."

"Pao, at least let me treat your wound."

**"No! This doesn't hurt at all."**

".…"

"Before you worry about my body, did you ever think about how my heart would feel knowing everything?"

"Of course I worried. Why would you think I didn't?"

"Then why did you do this to me?"

"......"

**"Is this what you call caring for me?"**

My body collapsed to the floor again, but unfortunately, there were no glass shards to hurt me more and snap me back to reality. I reached for the same cutter, staring at it, ready to destroy another thing that meant something to us.

No, maybe it only meant something to me.

The sharp blade was used to cut my long hair. At that moment, I didn't care how short it'd be. I just needed it gone. My white hair, which I once hoped would bring her some luck, was now being cut away.

"Pao, Pao.. that's enough."

She took the cutter from my hand, not sure if she was more concerned about the hair falling or afraid that my actions wouldn't stop at just cutting my hair.

"Are you going to leave, or should I?"

I spoke without even looking at her. The scattered hair and items on the floor demanded more attention than the person crying non-stop. When she didn't answer, I started packing my things, even though this was my room.

"Stop it, that's enough..."

Her sobbing voice tried to stop me. She hugged me from behind, and it... still felt warm.

"Let me go. I can't even look at you."

"......"

"And I...." **still longed for her warmth...**

I didn't say what I was thinking. Instead, I stood there, letting her hug me from behind.

"I'll leave."

"......."

"But before I go... can I ask for one thing?"

***Why do people who hurt me always act selfishly and ask for something when they have to leave?***

What she asked for before leaving wasn't an explanation, a kiss, or a final intimate moment. It was to treat my wound. Even though I knew her kindness meant nothing now, I let her clean the blood gently.

I allowed her to treat my wound without any resistance. Looking at her from this angle, it felt like we were so far apart that I couldn't reach out to touch her warmth like before.

We were so far apart... I wanted an explanation.

But now I was too tired to say anything. I didn't even have the strength to cry.

We stayed silent until her final request was done. When she finished treating my wound, I turned my back to her. I pulled the blanket over my head, feeling her presence as she packed her things.

After a while, I did what I'd always done: I ran away. I closed my eyes, trying to force myself to sleep. I took sleeping pills I hadn't used in a while, swallowing them dry. My mind grew heavy, barely aware of anything anymore.

But the last thing I felt was the bed shifting, signaling that she'd come close one last time.

***'If you could hate me, it'd be easier.***

Her body moved away, and the door closed, leaving me in silence.

Did I really hear those words? The words telling me to hate her...

. .

***At this moment, I couldn't stand to see her close by.***

***And it hurt just as much knowing I wouldn't see her again.***

***If everything were just a dream, it'd be nice. Tomorrow, I'd wake up and hug her.***

***Cry and let her comfort me, telling her how terrible my nightmare was.***

.

.

***Six months later***

*.*

Phew...

The sound of heavy breathing echoed continuously. Exercising again after six months was much harder than I'd anticipated. I could feel my body weakening. The abs I once took pride in were gone, leaving only a tall, slender frame fighting against the cold.

It was late January, and the northern weather was freezing this year. I ran around the resort for over a lap before needing to stop and catch my breath. I stood, looking at the darkness behind the resort, trying to steady my breathing.

The smile I used to have when seeing familiar faces had faded for months, but the warm smile of someone still lingered in my mind almost constantly. I'd been looking at my reflection in the mirror, seeing a blank face for over two months.

But it was better than the first four months when all I saw was sadness.

I was no longer the owner of the scented candle shop in the famous mall downtown. I sold the condo I'd lived in for years during the first month after everything happened. I moved back to Chiang Mai, settling in my grandmother's two-story log house, which had been empty for ten years since she passed away.

The warmth that had disappeared was replaced by the cozy atmosphere of a family that no longer breathed. The image of me reading stories to my grandmother was still vivid, even after all these years.

*Have you ever heard the story of the black demon?*

It's a tale about a demon that absorbs negative energy, turning a colorful village into black. Or maybe it means absorbing people's happiness.

I never really understood that story and still wonder why my grandmother loved it so much. It was a mysterious tale with no clear origin.

But some parts of the story resembled my life. Like the character telling the little friend to hate him because it'd be easier.

*Does hating someone who did bad things to you really make it easier to move on?*

Saying "hate me" doesn't make the listener feel better. It's more to comfort the person who caused the pain, like saying, "If you hate me, it'd be better," but in reality, they just don't want to carry too much guilt.

Even though I'd been back home for months, I didn't have a serious job. The scented candle shop was gone, and the lease with the mall would end this month. I'd distanced myself from everyone, including close friends like Cat and Man.

Normally, I'd share everything with them, but this time it was too heavy to talk about. If I'd dared to share a bit, it might've been less painful.

But now, the pain had lessened, and I was back to exercising. Or maybe... it was all just a bad dream?

The smell of black coffee slowly wafted up, making me inhale deeply. The air was still freezing as it wasn't even 5:30 AM yet.

"Pao."

"Yes, Mom?"

My voice lacked the brightness it once had, and Mom never asked me about it, which was good because I didn't have to run away like I used to.

"Did you go running today?"

"Yes, the weather is quite nice. You're up early today."

"We're going to Bangkok today, remember?"

Right, Mom was going to clear out my shop.

"Do you want to come? You might want to say goodbye to your employees."

Mom never asked about why I abandoned my scented candle shop, even though I'd once tried so hard to keep it. It seemed unimportant now.

Many times, Mom tried to find a moment to ask about everything, but when she saw my empty eyes, all her questions disappeared, as if she knew her only child had gone through something that made her give up so easily.

I stayed silent, not answering. I wanted to say goodbye to the people at the shop, but why go if I might see someone there? Or worse, old memories might come back and knock me down again.

"Um, Pao..."

"You're not going, right? It's okay. Dad and I can handle it. Meanwhile, can you look after the resort? The manager is there, but you might want something to do."

"Sure."

I spoke less now, enough to make my parents worry every day.

"Is there anything or anyone you want to see today?"

"No."

Mom's worried eyes showed even more concern, but she only said that and left the resort to catch her early flight. I showered and dressed, heading to the resort like a guest around six in the morning. I saw many familiar employees but didn't talk or get close to anyone.

"Excuse me, where is room 357?"

A cheerful voice suddenly asked.

"Room 357 is on the other side of the resort. Oh!"

"Hey."

"Are you here for a vacation?"

I greeted my close friends I hadn't spoken to in six months. Cat and Man stood there, smiling happily to see me. As for me... I was happy but not fully, and I didn't recognize my friend's voice right away.

"Yeah, we're here for a vacation."

"I missed you. It's been so long. Come to my house."

I quickly said, genuinely happy but not as much as I expressed.

We walked to my house, chatting like we used to.

"We've been so lonely. When will we be close again?"

Man said, sipping the coffee I made. They were now at my grandmother's house, which I'd taken over, and my rarely seen smile slowly appeared.

"Sorry, I feel more at peace here."

".…."

"You should've told me you were coming. I didn't know how to react after not seeing you for six months."

I quickly changed the subject, and my friends exchanged glances before continuing the conversation.

"Well, then it wouldn't be a surprise, would it?"

"Mom and Dad are in Bangkok right now. You missed them. How long are you staying?"

"We're leaving tomorrow. Cat and I have to get back to work."

"That's so soon."

"Do you want us to stay longer? Come live in Bangkok."

They both smiled invitingly, but my smile faded instantly.

"I sold my apartment. There's nowhere to go back to. This is all I have left."

"You have plenty of options. You're rich. You can live anywhere,"

Man said, moving closer to sit beside me.

"No, I'm fine here."

Suddenly, the atmosphere grew quiet. I took a sip from my second cup of coffee, focusing more on the view in front of me than the excitement of having my two close friends by my side.

"You still seem so quiet. I thought you'd be more talkative by now,"

Cat said, not even looking at me this time.

"Yeah, I've gotten used to being quiet. Sorry about that."

A faint smile appeared, almost as an apology for not being as cheerful as I used to be. My friends fell silent again for a minute before Cat spoke up.

"Hey, Man's having a terrible reaction to the weather here. The medicine isn't helping. Can you take him to see a doctor? There's a private hospital in town where Man has insurance, so it won't cost anything."

"Oh, is it serious?"

"Ah....ah-choo! Ouch, my nose,"

Man said, rubbing his nose until it turned red. I quickly handed him a tissue before downing the rest of my coffee in one gulp.

"Actually, there's a good clinic nearby. It's closer than the hospital. Want to go there? You guys get car sick easily, don't you?"

"Why waste money at a clinic? Let's go to town. Maybe we can find something good to eat too."

I nodded in understanding and led my two friends to the resort's van to head to the hospital we discussed. The ride was silent as usual. I could tell they felt awkward, but I was content with the quiet.

It took almost thirty minutes to reach the hospital. Cat and Man hurried to see the doctor while I followed at a more leisurely pace.

"Pao, can I borrow your phone? I forgot mine at your place."

"Sure..."

I handed over my phone without hesitation.

"Did you bring any money? Just in case we need to pay. Cat and I didn't bring any cash."

"Let me check."

I opened my bag to check the money, but my friend quickly grabbed it. I froze but didn't say anything.

"I'll just borrow the whole bag. If we need money, I'll pay you back. Oh, you can wait here. I'll take Man myself."

In the past, I would've insisted on going with them or complained about being left behind. But now, I wasn't like that anymore. Instead of sitting as they suggested, I chose to walk around outside.

The sky was so beautiful today...

I gazed up at the sky for a long time. Then, I saw the familiar van speeding out of the parking lot. I watched as my two friends stuck their heads out of the window, shouting loud enough for everyone around to hear.

**"Pao! We have some errands! We'll come back to get you!"**

I stood there, unable to process what had just happened. But I realized I'd been left behind. Those two must be up to their usual pranks. I quickly reached for my phone to call them, but...no phone. And no money either.

"....."

There was nothing I could do but...run.

I ran as fast as I could out of the hospital grounds. People around me turned to look, but their interest wasn't enough to stop me. My legs, still sore from a recent workout, began to tire. Everything was out of sync, and...

I didn't even scream. My knee hit the pavement, and the embarrassment was a hundred times worse.

No one came to help because I quickly got up before becoming more of a spectacle. But my knee was scraped and bleeding, with a noticeable red bruise. I looked down the empty road. The resort van was long gone.

I checked my watch. It was 7:30 AM. There was nothing to do but walk a bit further and find a way back to the resort.

I limped along, but suddenly a car slowed down beside me. The window rolled down.

**"Um...excuse me,"**

A sweet voice called out. I stopped, recognizing the voice even though I hadn't heard it in a long time.

"....."

**"Do you need a ride?"**

**It was Seenam...**

.

I stared at her through the car window. I didn't say anything, just looked at her. Finally, she got out of the car and walked over, looking nervous. Her beautiful eyes, which I used to love looking at, lowered as she saw the blood on my knee. Her nervousness turned into concern, just like before.

"You're hurt. Let me clean it up for you."

Was this kindness real? Was this even real?

These thoughts echoed in my head, but what I said was,

**"Are you bad luck?"**

"...."

"Every time I see you, I get hurt..."

My voice was softer I stopped looking at her and started limping away, but she grabbed my arm.

"Let me clean it up. Get in the car."

"....."

I pulled my arm back, but she grabbed it again.

"My last request was to clean your wound. Let me do it one more time, okay?"

She pulled me into the passenger seat.

Does she even have the right to say that...

But I got in the car, feeling like I had no choice.

"I'll take you somewhere to clean it up."

"The hospital is right behind us."

"It's okay. I have a first aid kit."

She pointed to the back seat, where there was indeed a first aid kit.

"Is this an ambulance?"

She smiled as she drove.

"You're still funny."

"Do I look like I'm joking?"

Everything fell silent again. She glanced at me, and I turned to look out the window.

"An ambulance would be nice...don't you think?"

I glanced at her, feeling a strange sensation. For the past six months, all I felt was sadness and emptiness. I had no other feelings.

**I hadn't seen her in so long, but why didn't I feel excited or angry?**

"Do you have any Tylenol? I have a headache."

She handed me a bottle of Tylenol. I looked at it and continued,

"Do you have Ponstan, cough syrup, antacids, allergy medicine, antibiotics, migraine medicine, sleeping pills?"

She handed me everything I asked for, like it was a real ambulance.

Unbelievable...how does she have everything?

"Do you need anything else?"

She asked sweetly. I glanced at her and then looked out the window again.

"No, I'm fine."

I heard her laugh softly, but soon everything went silent again. I usually enjoyed the quiet, but now it felt suffocating...

My heart started racing when I saw the time...7:37 AM.

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Soon after, she took me to clean my wound. The place she chose was an open-air coffee shop, not ideal for treating a wound. She offered to get me coffee, but I declined. I'd already had two cups this morning, and they were making me jittery.

"This might sting a bit..."

She said, looking a bit stressed. She soaked a cotton ball with saline and knelt down, not caring if her dress got dirty. She started cleaning the wound. I flinched from the pain and moved my leg away.

She looked up at me.

"Are you okay?"

"Just hurry up,"

I said, turning away, unable to watch.

She finished cleaning the wound and applied a clean white bandage. The tightness was annoying, so I decided to leave the coffee shop.

"Let me give you a ride. We're going the same way anyway.

"The same way?"

"I'm on vacation and booked a room at your resort."

Is this a family reunion or something?

.

I ended up riding with her. She sighed occasionally, and it seemed like she wanted to say something but chose to stay silent. The tension was so high that I closed my eyes, not wanting to deal with it.

I could feel her presence the whole way, but I wondered what kind of situation this was. We'd been through so much, but I didn't feel angry at her anymore. Instead, I felt like...

*Whatever.*

After pretending to sleep, her car pulled into the resort's parking lot. I quickly got out and saw my friends waiting. Anger started to rise, but instead of yelling, I walked past them as if they weren't there.

"Pao, sorry, but..."

"Forget it."

"Why are you limping?"

Cat asked. I sighed and waved my hand, not wanting to talk anymore.

After that, it felt like my time was completely gone. My two close friends stayed by my side no matter what I did. That wasn't unusual, but what was strange was someone else...

"How long are you staying, Nam?"

Man asked. The three of them chatted happily while I stayed silent, pretending not to care. "I'm not sure yet."

"Did you drive here?"

"Yeah."

"That must've been tiring."

"Not really I had to drive myself."

Suddenly, I stood up and walked out of the resort, heading home. My two friends ran after me, but Nam didn't follow.

"Pao!"

"What?"

"Stay and talk with us. Maybe you..."

"Listen,"

I said firmly, turning to face them.

"What are you guys doing?"

".../..."

"Did you plan this with her? What did she tell you to make you go along with this?"

"She didn't say anything. You just seemed...unhappy."

"So what? You want to push me back to her? When it was Pang, you guys kept telling me to break up. And now..."

I sighed and walked away, not wanting to say more.

"If she treats you badly, we'll be the first to stop her. But I don't know. All I know is she hasn't had a chance to explain anything to you."

"For what? So I can get hurt again?"

"....."

"I've come this far. Are you guys going to be cruel to me too?"

I looked at them with a pleading expression. This was the longest conversation I'd had in six months, and it seemed to work a bit. My two friends stood still, not following me anymore.

The exhaustion was overwhelming, forcing me to collapse onto my bed in my own room. The quiet began to lull my eyes shut, and as soon as I was alone, the voices in my head grew louder. I tried to understand my own feelings, questioning how I truly felt.

When I saw her, I wasn't as shocked as I should have been. I wasn't as angry as I should have been. And I couldn't deny that deep down, a certain feeling was becoming more prominent...

A clattering noise came from outside. Grogginess hit me as I was woken up from my afternoon nap. The stiffness in my knees became more apparent as I emerged from a dream I couldn't remember. When I looked down at my knees, I realized that meeting someone else wasn't just a dream.

I walked out of the house to see who was making the noise, and there I saw my two best friends arranging for the staff to set up a grill in front of my house.

"What are you guys doing?"

"See, I told you Pao was asleep,"

Cat said, handing me my phone and wallet.

"Your mom called and told me to fatten you up, so I borrowed a grill. And it just so happened that Seenam brought some sliced meat too."

"Brought it?"

I raised an eyebrow before sighing.

"You guys go ahead and eat. I'm going back to sleep."

**"Aren't you going to join us?"**

A sweet voice chimed in. A petite woman in casual clothes, covered with a pastel apron, was looking at me. She was holding a medium-sized foam box in her small hands, and I almost went to help her carry it, but stopped myself, realizing it wasn't my place to help.

"It's okay," I said.

"But your mom asked me to. Besides, I already promised to make something delicious for you," she replied.

My mom asked her? What is going on...

Even though she said that, I chose to walk back into the house. My hands quickly dialed my mom's number, and my heart pounded as I heard her answer.

[Yes, I told her. Didn't you say a few days ago that you wanted to eat grilled meat?]

"I meant with you and dad, not with other people."

[But those are all your friends.]

"But Mom..."

[Pao, I've never asked you anything because I thought if you wanted to tell me, you would. Can you just have some fun for your dad and me? Honey, say something to her.]

Then my mom's voice faded, replaced by my dad's, softer than ever.

[You know I'm really worried about you, right?]

"Yes..."

[No matter what you're going through, your friends came all this way. Can't you have some fun with them?]

"Did my friends come because of you and mom?"

The line went silent. I heard faint whispers that I couldn't make out. I sighed, realizing it was probably my parents who arranged everything.

But how did Seenam get here? I didn't think my parents invited her. Finally, the answer came from Man, whom I dragged inside to talk.

"So, here's the deal. I ran into her while shopping with Cat. I told her we were coming to see you, and she said she wanted to see you too, so she came along. Remember?..."

"Remember what?..."

"Nothing, nothing. Sorry for not telling you beforehand."

"....."

"Hey, you know Seenam still has feelings for you, right?"

"I don't care about that..."

"Pao... you still have feelings too."

"What are you talking about? Stop being ridiculous."

"If you didn't feel anything, it wouldn't be like this."

Suddenly, Man's eyes filled with tears. I froze, a certain feeling becoming clearer, as if I remembered something

Silence crept in. My hands started shaking, and I had to clench them tightly. I'd always masked my feelings with silence, but now, something was hitting me hard.

"I just want you to talk to her. Maybe it will unlock something in your heart, and the old Pao will come back. Then we can have fun again..."

Tears slowly streamed down my face. My head throbbed painfully, and my heart ached so much that I had to press my hand against my chest. ***"We miss you so much... you're not alone, you know."***

Man walked over and hugged me. The feeling of loneliness I'd been carrying was unlocked a bit. My eyes focused on the many pills on my bedside table.

***I've been treating my depression for six months.***

And sometimes... I couldn't tell the difference between reality and dreams.

My condition made me indifferent to everything, not caring or overthinking. There were many times I overreacted to dreams, thinking my life was full of happiness.

In the end, I chose to believe everything was a dream. So, whether I faced good or bad things, I usually didn't get upset because I thought none of it was real. Sometimes, I even forgot what happened in the past six months.

*The medication worked well enough to let me live, but it was just getting through each day.*

*My condition didn't improve, but it didn't get worse either.*

***The reason I didn't feel excited or angry when I saw P' Seenam was because she'd been with me for the past six months.***

***But sometimes, I forgot we were still together.***

***And sometimes, even if she wasn't with me, I believed she still was...***

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**Six months ago...**

Swoosh...

The sound of heavy rain poured down. The cold air around me seemed to mock my already aching heart, making it hurt even more. I still lay in bed, not getting up, not leaving the room, not eating anything, barely moving at all.

Someone once said that this world would eventually be destroyed by natural disasters. But in reality, it felt like the world was collapsing every day.

For some people, the end of the world wasn't just about everyone dying. It could mean a heart so broken that it didn't want to live anymore.

Today marked the third day since that incident. I still questioned everything that happened, repeatedly wondering if it was real or just a long dream. Even though I felt stuck, the dream felt more real than now.

I saw Seenam as usual, told her about my nightmares, and now... I was back in the nightmare again. The scattered belongings remained untouched, the phone lay unused, and my body grew weaker than I thought possible.

*Knock, knock...*

The sound of knocking on the door echoed, but I didn't get up to open it. I continued lying there, not caring who was knocking. Why should I care when I was just stuck in the same dream? I just needed to wake up and continue living with Seenam.

With that thought, my eyes closed, and grogginess set in along with the sound of someone entering the room.

"What the heck is this..."

A man's voice said. I tried to wake up from the dream, but only managed to open my eyes slightly.

"Is Pao in the room? Man, watch out for the broken glass..."

Soon, my best friends approached me as I struggled to wake up from this dream. I stared at them blankly, but their eyes were filled with more shock than ever.

"Pao! Why are you like this? You're burning up,"

Cat said, placing her hand on my forehead, making me smile.

"You guys are in this dream too? I'll make plans to hang out once I wake up."

"What are you talking about..."

Man looked confused, but I didn't respond. This dream felt so real. My head hurt like it was going to explode.

"Man, get a wet cloth. Why is her hair like this? Have you eaten anything? How long have you been like this?"

I remained silent, staring at Cat with tears in her eyes.

"Why are you crying?"

**"You're crying too, aren't you?"**

My weak hand wiped away my own tears. What... was I crying? Why was I crying?

"We should take her to the hospital. What happened? We came to ask for food and found her like this."

"Did you fight with Seenam? I called her, but she didn't say anything. I couldn't reach you either."

"What would've happened if we hadn't come in?"

"Let's take her to the hospital first."

They tried to help me sit up, but I pulled away.

"No, let me stay in this room. Every time I dream about this place, I feel uncomfortable."

"What are you talking about? What dream? Get a grip!"

"No! You guys should leave."

"....."

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In the end, I couldn't wake up from this strange dream. Cat and Man in this dream were taking care of me, bringing me porridge, and giving me fever medicine as if this were real life.

Dreams are based on what we experience, so it's not surprising. Eventually, I fell asleep in the dream, hoping to wake up to the real world. But when I woke up, everything was the same.

"What should we do with her?"

"I don't know. She won't go to the hospital. Should we call Seenam?"

"They must've fought."

"Let's not ask her anything yet. Let her recover first."

Their worried voices filled the room, making me laugh.

"I woke up to see you guys again."

"Why don't you sleep more? You just fell asleep,"

Cat said, concerned, while Man lightly hit her arm.

"I told you to talk on the balcony so Pao could sleep."

"I'm worried about her."

I watched them talk, and then a smile slowly formed.

"I had a weird dream just now."

"A dream?"

"Yeah, I dreamed I had a big fight with P' Seenam and stayed in my room until I got sick. Then you guys came to take care of me, wearing the same clothes. It was so strange..."

I laughed softly, but my head hurt so much I had to close my eyes to bear the pain.

"So, you didn't fight with her?"

"Why would we fight? P' Seenam is so sweet."

"....."

"Did P' Seenam go out to buy groceries to cook for you guys? She didn't wait for me. I'll have to pretend to be mad at her when she gets back."

I picked up my phone from the bedside table, the charger cord getting in the way, so I unplugged it.

"I just charged it. Don't unplug it yet. Why didn't you charge your phone?"

"I forgot, I guess."

[Did P' Seenam go shopping? Why didn't you wait for me?]

[I think I'm getting sick.]

[Cat and Man came at the wrong time. I want to cuddle with P' Seenan when I'm sick.]

[Buy the groceries and come back soon. I'm waiting.]

.

"Did you text Seenam?"

Man asked, and I handed my phone to them.

"Yes, look. Who fights and texts like this? But I'm going to sleep now. I really feel sick."

As soon as I finished speaking, I lay down, letting them read the messages.

Before I fell asleep, I heard their shocked voices.

**"Cat, I don't think this is right."**

**"What's not right?" "Pao texted herself..."**

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I sat in a clean, square room, my gaze drifting without any particular emotion about being there. My parents were talking to a middle-aged woman with serious expressions, but when they turned to look at me, their eyes softened.

At that moment, I fully aware of myself, was listening to the psychiatrist discuss all my symptoms. These were the symptoms of someone who couldn't distinguish between dreams and reality.

However, when it came to deep conversations, my parents were asked to wait outside, and I was questioned as if the person in front of me was a close friend who only had good intentions.

"How have you been lately? Still dreaming?"

"Yes."

"What do you dream about? Can you tell me?"

"The same dream. We still live together, see each other every day, and are happy..."

I said, without the tears that used to come before.

"And do you think this is a dream or reality?"

"Reality."

"So, your condition is improving this time. Is that person still around?"

"They visit often."

"Maybe because they visit often, you're starting to separate things better. Have there been any new symptoms?"

I began to describe my symptoms to the person in front of me. There were many times I got angry at P' Seenam, yelled at her, and told her to leave. Then, a few hours later, I'd call her back, forgetting I'd told her to go, even though it was the same day.

Sometimes, I couldn't see her and would just text her, even if she was right next to me. I couldn't let her touch me, not even a simple touch.

Just being touched would make me tremble, as if her presence triggered those terrible memories. So, we kept our distance. If it wasn't necessary, she wouldn't touch me at all, or I'd just hide and sleep.

All the symptoms I described got me a lot of medication. I started treating myself at home in Chiang Mai. Friends visited often, and P'Seenam came even more frequently.

Our story from that day wasn't shared, and no one pressured us to talk about it. P' Seenam didn't speak, and I stayed silent. Life felt confusing and repetitive, sometimes frustrating, and sometimes it felt good to be this way.

Before I knew it, I was being cared for by everyone, not just in real life but in my dreams too. My mind comforted itself better than ever before, allowing me to live normally on days when I tricked myself into thinking everything was fine.

But there were times when I realized it was all a fabrication, and those days were filled with so much sadness that I didn't want to see anyone.

Because of this, everyone around me had to be very patient, constantly gauging what kind of day I was having-whether I was my old self, someone who'd just gone through something terrible, or a version of me that had come to terms with everything, mixed together in different ways each day.

***My life right now is incredibly difficult. And for her, it's probably just as hard...***

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# Chapter 23: Pretty Cute

**2007**

**"I'm off to school, Dad."**

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I said goodbye to my father, who was busy arranging the pharmacy, with my usual cheerful demeanor. It was because I was about to see someone I'd been thinking about all weekend while school was out.

"Pa... over here,"

Pang's voice called out as soon as she saw me get out of my mom's car.

"Drive safely, Mom," I said.

My mom nodded with a smile. We waved goodbye as the car drove away. I quickly turned to face the tall girl who, as usual, had a blank expression.

"Have you eaten anything yet, Pang?"

"Not yet, I was waiting for you," she replied.

"Alright, let's go grab something to eat,"

I said, linking arms with my best friend as I always did.

**But who would know... that I never thought of Pang as just a friend.**

Everyone thought I was perfect-a role model in academics, personality, and even in the way I spoke, knowing exactly what to say to make people feel good and like me.

I was often praised by friends, seniors, juniors, and even teachers. But no one really knew who I truly was.

I was quite self-centered, but no one could tell because I could easily find the right words to make people agree with me. That's how I lived my life. But one thing I never had was the stern-faced girl who was always by my side.

Pang was different from me in every way, but something about her intrigued me. Even though we were friends, she was good at hiding her feelings.

"Did something bad happen today? You seem irritated," I asked.

"You can tell?" she said, sighing.

"I'm always like this, nothing special."

No, this irritation was more than usual.

"Are you free today? I bought the Full House DVD yesterday and planned to start watching it today. I don't want to watch it alone; I need someone to fangirl with," I said.

"Really? I've been wanting to watch it again. You always know what I want," she replied.

I smiled as if it was all a coincidence, but the truth was I'd overheard Pang telling another friend that she wanted to watch it again.

Finding the DVD wasn't hard, I just had to tell my parents I wanted to take a break from studying to watch a movie for an hour a day, and I'd get whatever I asked for immediately.

**This is the result of being a good student and behaving well. When you're good, people will love you...**

After school, Pang and I got ready to watch the movie together. Pang seemed excited, and I pretended to be excited too, even though I wasn't interested in the movie at all. Throughout the time we were in my room, I watched Pang more than the TV. Finally, the first episode ended.

"I want to watch more,"

She whined, lying down next to me. One thing I felt superior about was seeing this side of Pang that no one else had ever seen.

Even though Pang seened stern and unapproachable, she actually attracted a lot of attention. If it weren't for her overly irritable nature, I thought Pang would be more popular than me. But I liked her just the way she was.

"One episode a day is enough. If we finish it too quickly, we won't have anything to watch," I said.

"You're always like this, never indulging me," she pouted.

"Oh, come on. Stay for dinner with us, then go home," I suggested.

"No, you should spend time with your family," she replied.

"I usually don't eat with my parents anyway. You can have a full stomach before going home and avoid facing anyone," I said.

My best friend looked at me with a tired expression. It wasn't because of my stubbornness but because I mentioned her family. Even though Pang was good at hiding her feelings, she often told me about her family.

Pang's family was a traditional Chinese family that valued sons over daughters. Pang had almost no role in the family except for being forced to do housework as a woman.

"You're the only one who understands me. Having dinner together sounds good. Can we watch one more episode?" she asked.

"No," I replied.

"You're so mean. I'll tell everyone at school that you're not really a good person," she threatened.

"Go ahead. I never said I was a good person," I said.

Yes, I wasn't a good person. I was only good when I wanted something.

Even though I always behaved well and aimed for people's admiration until I graduated, the day I had to show my true self finally came.

School was almost over for the term, but what my best friend was worried about wasn't the final exams. She seemed to have something on her mind, and if I had to guess, it was probably the same family issues as always.

"Do you want to hang out at my place today? We just finished exams,"

I suggested.

"Not today. I'm tired," she replied.

"Did you have a fight with your family?"

I asked, putting down the book I was studying for the last exam.

"Yeah, I thought I'd go get my fortune told after school. Maybe there's a way to break the bad luck and stop being poor," she said.

"What are you talking about? Your family isn't poor," I said.

"We are. I got my allowance cut after arguing with my brother. It's so stupid. And when I complained, they said they wouldn't let me go to college. Honestly, Pe, I'm tired. I'm tired of everything. Even breathing is exhausting," she said.

I knew that the best thing I could do was sit quietly, not ask questions or try to solve her problems. That's what someone like Pang needed. Today, I didn't insist on her coming to my house to celebrate finishing exams.

Without Pang, the day felt unbearably dull. I went home feeling exhausted and deflated, knowing I wouldn't see Pang every day like before. But my parents misinterpreted my mood, thinking I was tired from studying and felt sorry for me.

I unexpectedly received a ten-thousand-baht bonus. I silently thanked Pang for making me look pitiful enough to get money without even asking. The day wasn't so bad after all.

I used the money to buy a nice shirt for Pang, planning to use it as an excuse to see her. But as I was leaving the mall, I saw Pang walking alone by the beach.

I quickly got off my motorcycle to greet her, but before I could, a large man approached her first.

"Hey, girl. How can you drink beer in a school uniform?" The man said softly, not showing any anger despite his words.

"None of your business," she replied.

"I'm just concerned,"

He said. Watching from a distance, I started to feel uneasy. Could it be...

"No need to worry. We don't know each other," she said.

"You seem stressed. Is it about money?" he asked.

"....."

"You can tell me. I can help," he offered.

**That bastard...**

My anger surged. That girl was mine. I was about to run over and pull Pang away, but her response shocked me.

**"How much will you give me?"**

Pang...

"How much do you want? A thousand or fifteen hundred?" he asked.

"I've never been with anyone before. Is that all you're offering?" she said.

"Hmm, I'll give you three thousand then. Deal?" he said.

"Can you make it four thousand? If you can, I'll go,"

She said nonchalantly.

I couldn't hold back any longer. I ran over to Pang, seeing the man's disgusting smile clearly. My heart pounded with anger as I shouted.

"Pang! Your dad is looking for you at the police station. He's about to finish his shift, so you should go now,"

I yelled.

As soon as I mentioned the police, the man looked startled and quickly walked away, leaving me alone with my best friend.

"Since when did I have a dad who's a cop?" she asked.

"We'll talk later. Come with me first..."

I said, pulling her arm to leave, but she tensed up and didn't move.

"Pe, why did you interfere?" she asked.

"I don't know if you did it because you were drunk or because of your problems, but it's not right," I said.

"So what if it's not right? I don't care. Someone like you, with a perfect family and perfect life, wouldn't understand. No one cares about me, no matter what I do or don't do," she said.

"And me standing here means I don't care about you?"

I shouted. She looked shocked, never having seen me like this before.

"Caring doesn't help..."

Pang said, turning to walk away, but I grabbed her arm.

"I have money. I can help you," I said.

"No, I don't want to take anyone's money for free," she replied.

"I didn't say I'd give it to you for free," I said.

"If it's for money... you'll do anything, right?" I asked.

I took Pang back to my house that evening. Luckily, my parents were out, so we avoided them seeing Pang in her drunken state.

"Here's some pajamas. Can you sleep in these?" I asked.

"Yeah, no one cares if I go home or not," she replied.

"You can shower in my room. I'll go downstairs to shower," I said.

After showering, I came back to my room and turned on my computer. My heart raced as I read a story about two women. The detailed description of their intimacy was shocking but also exciting.

As I was engrossed in the story, the bathroom door opened, and Pang walked out, smelling of the soap I used every day.

I quickly closed my computer and looked at her in my pajamas.

"A shower really clears the mind,"

Pang said, sitting on the bed and drinking the water I'd prepared.

"If you want to tell others about what you saw, go ahead," she said.

"Why do you think I'd tell anyone?" I asked.

"I just don't want to expect you to keep a secret. If you promise and then break it, I wouldn't be able to face you. So, I think it'd be better if you told others," she said.

I walked over to her, sitting on the bed. Our height difference was noticeable. My desire to have her grew stronger. I placed my hand on her shoulder and moved closer.

"If we have a secret together, no one can say anything, right?" I asked. "A secret together?" she asked.

"Yeah, that would be better. No one loses anything, and we both gain,"

I said.

"....."

"Don't worry about money. I have it for you. It's just whether you're okay with it," I said.

"What do I have to do?" she asked.

**"Be with me,**" I said.

"....."

**"That man offered you four thousand, but I'll give you eight thousand if you stay with me..."**

Her beautiful face changed. She stared at me, and I didn't smile or show any guilt. If I showed any emotion, it was the worry that she mightn't accept my offer.

"S... stop joking, Pa. I'm already ashamed of myself," she said.

"Do you think I'm joking? All this time, you really couldn't tell that I don't just see you as a friend? I don't think you're so clueless that you wouldn't notice anything. You must've had some suspicions about my actions, right?"

The person in front of me quickly averted their gaze. Now, the once- feared Pang couldn't even look me in the eye. My smile grew more pronounced. I leaned in closer to the person in front of me, persuading them with words they couldn't refuse.

"I think being with me is better than being with that guy. I give more money, I care more, and I'm confident..."

"...."

**"...that I can take better care of you."**

Everything went as I expected. Pang hesitated before looking up at me slightly.

"Eight thousand, right?"

A hesitant voice spoke up before looking away again.

"Yeah..."

"Have you ever been with a girl before?"

"No, but wouldn't it be nice to try with someone you like?"

As soon as I finished speaking, Pang looked up at me with a somewhat anxious expression.

"If it doesn't feel right while we're doing it, just tell me to stop. I wouldn't force someone I like."

"....."

"Take the eight thousand. I'll keep giving you money whether you agree or not. You just have to stay with me."

The person in front of me was silent for a while. I sighed, realizing that the usually bold Pang was more scared than I thought. If she was this scared with me, how would she be if that guy took her back? Finally, I stepped back, not worried about our friendship.

I wasn't one to dwell on things. If our friendship ended, it wasn't a problem I feared. I had plenty of friends and people always approached me. If Pang told others about this, I believed I could handle it because I held the upper hand.

"You can sleep here or go home. I have nine thousand in cash in my bag. Take as much as you want."

I said, walking towards the desk, but my hand was held back by the person on the bed.

"Pa..."

"...."

"Will you tell anyone?"

"Why would I tell anyone? If I did, I'd lose too."

"So... what do I have to do?"

My heart raced, and my breathing grew heavier as I realized the person in front of me was yielding to my desires. My smile grew wider as I reached out to caress her pale cheek.

**"You don't have to do anything. Just stay still and let me handle it..."**

And that was the first time I was with someone I liked, revealing my true self to someone. But the disappointing part was that Pang started to distance herself. Not that we ignored each other or stopped interacting, but she looked at me differently. She didn't act comfortably around me anymore, and I missed her playful demeanor.

Everything felt stiff, unlike when we were alone together. We tried and failed many times, and I could touch Pang as I wanted. Once she understood many things, she often did what she wanted.

We weren't really friends as others saw us, and we couldn't be more than that. Pang still seemed intimidating to others, but the person she feared the most was someone everyone thought was good-me.

. .

Before the school term started, I went for a walk at the market and met a fortune teller sitting alone. I wondered why Pang liked fortune-telling so much. With nowhere else to go, I decided to get my fortune told out of curiosity.

"On the first day of school, you must step into the school at exactly 7:37 AM," she said

"Why?" I asked.

"No particular reason, just following fate," she replied.

I raised an eyebrow. Is this what people liked about fortune-telling? 1 handed her ninety-nine baht. She took the money and held my hand.

"That child is already very unfortunate. Don't hurt her any more,"

She said.

"What?"

"Ask yourself if you really like her or if you just feel superior because she has a few things over you, even though you have many things over her. If you don't change your mindset, your life will become chaotic, and you won't be able to turn back. It will get more complicated."

I listened to her words with a strange feeling. Pang's face came to mind. Sometimes I wondered if I pursued Pang because I genuinely liked her or because she was someone everyone feared.

Being with someone who seemed less good made me look better. But having someone say something like they knew something about me made me feel irritated.

"Do you know that deception is a crime?"

I said, wanting to retaliate for her hitting a nerve, and then I left without caring about anything else.

But the strange thing was that on the first day of school, I walked into the school at exactly 7:37 AM without even checking the time. A junior tripped and scraped her knee.

I helped her, accidentally lifting her skirt to check the wound because I was used to showing concern when many people were around.

After that, every time I saw that junior, she'd run away. Although it was frustrating, it wasn't something to worry about. Except...

"Did you get your fortune told by the freshman? She's really accurate. I used to go every day, but now she only does it once a month."

Pang said while putting her clothes back on. This was the strangest conversation we ever had. Usually, when we did things like this, Pang wouldn't talk or act casually. Her interest in the junior made me feel uneasy.

"Really..."

"You should try it with the fortune teller Pao."

"Why should I? She's probably just saying things randomly."

"No, from what I've heard, she's really accurate. She gets a lot of treats."

"Really? What did she tell you? Was it accurate?"

"For small things, yes. But the thing I'm waiting for will take time, so I don't know if it's accurate yet."

"What is it?"

"It's a secret..."

At that moment, I saw a gentle smile I'd never seen before. The usually stern Pang could smile like that. My heart raced, and I grabbed her arm as she was about to leave.

"Are you leaving?"

"Yeah."

"Stay a bit longer before you go..."

I said, looking at her with eyes that conveyed my hidden intentions. Pang hesitated but sat back on the bed. Our lips met again, and the clothes she'd just put on were slowly removed. The excitement grew without me realizing it. What made me like this? Just seeing that gentle smile? Was that all?

Sometimes, I didn't understand my feelings for Pang at all.

A few days later, I started to wonder about fortune-telling. Was it really that good? My experience with the old lady at the market felt like a waste of money. But what bothered me now was seeing the freshman running away from me with two friends following.

"Did you do something to her? Why does she run away when she sees you?"

A friend in my group asked.

"I don't know. Maybe she hates me."

"Hates you? You, being hated?"

"On the first day of school, she fell in front of the school, and I helped her. But I accidentally lifted her skirt to check the wound. Maybe she hates me for being rude... I don't know."

"If she really hates you, that's a big deal. She seems to have something special."

"Something special?"

"Yeah, she must be a medium. Why don't you try talking to her? Build a good relationship. If you leave it like this, it might be bad for you."

Nonsense...

Even though I thought that, I agreed and smiled as if my friend's suggestion was the best idea.

The day I decided to confront that freshman finally came. I was quite bored because my friend kept pushing me to talk to her every day, which was annoying. So, I decided to meet her once and for all.

"Fortune teller Pao, can you read my fortune?"

I walked to her room, asking for something I didn't care about. But the three kids in front of me kept whispering like I was some kind of freak. Honestly, I didn't like this atmosphere at all.

"Are you in a hurry? If you are, I can come back later,"

I said, trying to be friendly, hoping they'd tell me to come back another day. But suddenly, they changed their attitude and quickly brought me into the room.

Waiting for the fortune teller to come into the room was frustrating. Why did I have to wait for a freshman to tell me some random predictions? Even though I thought that, I remained calm as if I wasn't thinking anything.

"What do you want to know?"

The kid asked seriously, but her nervous eyes were noticeable.

If you're getting your fortune told, you must have something you want to know... but I hadn't thought of anything.

"What do people usually ask about?"

I asked, still calm.

"Uh, school stuff, friends, but love is the most popular," she replied.

Nonsense.

"Hmm, let me think."

I extended my hand to her, even though I had no idea what to ask about.

"Uh, can I ask your name first?"

"My name? Sure, it's Pa, but some people call me Seenam."

"Pa?"

"Yeah."

"Are you a generous person?"

Even though I was thinking about what to ask, she asked a question that made me wary. Generous? Did she know about the money I gave Pang? No way... that's impossible.

My heart raced, ready to snap back like I did with the old lady at the market before school started. But then...

"Uh, I was joking. Like, your name is Pa, so do you like to pay? I didn't mean to confuse you," she said.

Then my smile grew wider. She meant "pay" like that, not about the money

I gave Pang. I let out a small laugh, almost showing an inappropriate reaction.

"Oh, not that kind of pay. My full name is Paper."

"Oh, Paper. So, what do you want to know, Seenam?"

"Oh, I thought you'd call me Pe after asking my name."

"I'm used to calling you Seenam."

"Used to? Do you know me?"

Then curiosity filled my chest. This kid knew me, and I wasn't imagining her avoiding me. But her attitude didn't seem like she hated me. So, maybe she was just embarrassed that I accidentally lifted her skirt. If that's the case, it wouldn't be hard to earn points as a good senior.

"Oh, I usually call people by their real names. Sometimes I call those two friends Yosapon and Marisa."

"Liar,"

A voice came from behind, making it clear that even though the person in front of me didn't hate me, there was something I didn't know.

"I see."

My smile grew wider as I saw the awkward face of the so- called fortune teller Pao, who didn't look like a fortune teller at all.

"Uh, what do you want to know, Seenam? Have you decided?"

"Yeah, I have. Fortune teller Pao, can you tell me if I should choose white or brown?"

And when my mind finally relaxed, a solution popped into my head. A few days ago, I bought two keychains because they were cute, but I couldn't decide which one to use. The girl in front of me seemed like a sweet junior, so I thought it'd be fitting to let her choose for me and give her the other one.

"You want me to pick a color?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"White," she said.

"Why white?" I asked.

"Because your hands are white."

Is this how people read fortunes?

"Uh, I mean..."

But I didn't really care what she was going to say next. I just took out both keychains and handed her the brown one, saying,

"Okay, I'll take the brown one."

I smiled at her, feeling a bit amused by her stiff demeanor. Strange...

"I just wanted to know which keychain I should use."

"That's all?" she asked.

"Yep. Usually, people charge for fortune-telling. Can I give you this keychain as payment?"

"I-I guess so..." she stammered.

"Great. And I'm sorry about lifting your skirt on the first day of school. I don't know if you've been avoiding me because of that, but if you have, please accept this apology from your senior. I don't want you to feel bad."

I attached the keychain to my pencil case. Normally, I wouldn't speak so directly, but for some reason, it was easy to say what I was thinking in front of this girl.

"Thanks for helping me decide. Maybe using this keychain will bring me good luck, right?"

She didn't respond, just sat there looking awkward. Eventually, I stood up and said, as if there was nothing left to do,

"If you see me around, give me a smile so I know you're not mad at me anymore."

I walked out of the room, not really caring if her fortune-telling was accurate or not. What mattered was that she didn't hate me like I thought. In fact, she might even have a crush on me, given her reaction.

Usually, it's the boys who like me, and the girls don't act like this. It was kind of funny to think about. Plus, she was really tall, like a model. I was a bit jealous...

**"Hey, P' Seenam!"**

I stopped in my tracks, startled by her sudden shout. I turned around, curious about what made her yell so loudly.

"Next time we meet!"

"....."

**"I'll smile at you!"**

Huh? She shouted just to say that?

And she only responded after I'd walked quite a distance away. Slow reaction, huh?

Thinking that, a smile slowly spread across my face. I looked at my junior and waved a little goodbye. In that moment, a voice in my head chimed in,

**She's pretty cute, too.**

**.**

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# Chapter 24: Clearing Doubts

**"So, was it accurate?"**

Pang's voice rang out as we were about to start doing something together.

"I don't know."

My lips began to press kisses on the pale neck in front of me, but she kept asking questions non-stop.

"Then why did you go ask about it? Oh, I forgot, they told you not to tell anyone, right?"

"....."

"Next time, we should go get our fortunes read together. That way, I can eavesdrop on what a perfect person like you asks about."

"...."

"Did that kid end up hating you like you thought?"

"Pang."

"Hmm?"

"Can you stop asking questions already? We're about to..."

I snapped, getting up from straddling the tall figure on the bed.

"What's the big deal? I was just asking. Why are you so mad?"

"You keep talking about nonsense. It's just a fortune-telling, why make such a big deal out of it, Pang? When you're with me, you should focus on me, not on someone else."

"Why are you talking like that?"

Pang's displeased look showed as she buttoned up her shirt, seemingly angry at what I'd just said.

"Isn't it true?"

"I don't want to be with someone who belittles other people's interests as nonsense."

"So what? You don't have that many choices, Pang."

"Now that you're showing your true colors, you don't even try to hide it a bit? You don't have to show your true self to me that much."

"Enough. I don't want to argue anymore. You can go home today if you want, but on Sunday, our friends are planning to go to the mall. You should come along. It'd be good if you come with me."

I said, and what started as a good conversation turned into a tense atmosphere like never before. She looked at me with displeasure, and I let my close friend go home without trying to make up or understand each other before parting. This time, she didn't take any money with her either.

I stared at the white bear keychain on the pencil box with frustration. I shouldn't have met that kid...

Then Sunday came, the day we planned with friends. I was waiting at a famous mall with another male friend, feeling irritated. Pang hadn't arrived yet, even though I told her to come with me. None of the other friends had arrived either.

"No one is here yet. Should we walk around and wait?"

Nat's voice asked, and I immediately knew that the reason no one had arrived was that our group had some plan. That plan was probably to pair me up with the person next to me to create shared memories.

How could I not know what the guy next to me was thinking after being in the same room for over two years?

He sometimes showed his feelings openly, and sometimes acted like nothing was wrong, trying not to make me uncomfortable, which only made me more irritated.

"Sounds good..."

I replied, walking into a clothing store.

But suddenly, the tall figure of someone caught my attention. Even though I'd previously thought I shouldn't have met that kid, at this moment, finding that junior seemed better than staying with a male friend who made me feel uncomfortable.

"Hey, Nat, why don't you go order some food? That way, we won't waste time waiting for me. I want to look at clothes a bit more."

"Are you hungry?"

"A little, but honestly, I'm quite hungry "

I quickly flashed a sweet smile because I knew that whenever I smiled like this, Nat would immediately do whatever I said.

"Okay, I'll go order food then. You hurry and follow, okay?"

I nodded before turning to look at another target not far away. It seemed that kid had seen me. She was peeking through the clothes racks, but..... sorry, you're too tall to hide behind the clothes racks.

It looked ridiculous and funny, making me laugh. I was about to walk over to greet her, but she quickly walked out of the store.

**Didn't you say you'd smile if we met?**

"Pa, Pa.."

"What did you say, Nat?"

"I asked what you wanted to eat so I could order correctly."

"Oh, just order what you're having. Pick something for me."

"Okay."

Then he walked away like a puppy, and I had to leave the clothing store to find someone else.

Where did that kid go...

I searched through two or three stores before finding the tall kid standing and holding a shirt in one store. Seeing that, I quickly walked over, even though Nat was no longer there to bother me.

Well, I just felt uncomfortable, but walking around with someone I chose to be with seemed better.

"Sigh..."

The sound of a sigh from the person next to me was loud. I'd been standing next to the junior for a while, but she still hadn't noticed me. Was I too small?

"Why do you always act so weird?"

Not only did the sigh come out, but the muttering I heard clearly also came out. A smile slowly formed, amused by the strange behavior of the person next to me.

"Oh well, it's done now."

After scolding herself, she comforted herself. This kid is funny...

She continued to pick out clothes in front of her, still not noticing that I was standing not far from her. Finally, her hand touched the shirt I was holding.

"Sorry."

The apology came out, and it was a good moment for me to greet her.

"Hey... Miss Pao, buying clothes?"

Suddenly, the person next to me froze. She stood still as if time had stopped. I blinked before moving my face closer to see if she was okay, but then...

**"Oh, it's you, P' Nam.** Are you buying clothes?"

Her voice calling my name was so loud that it drew attention from people around. A bit of embarrassment crept in, but since she seemed more nervous than I was, I could act casually.

"No, I'm here to buy mackerel for my mom. But when I asked the staff, they told me to go to the market."

Then the weirdest smile I'd ever seen appeared. She seemed to be trying to piece together what I said, but in the end, she still looked confused, and my laughter came out.

"I was joking. No need to look so annoyed."

I raised my hand to cover my mouth, trying to stifle my laughter so she wouldn't feel more embarrassed.

"Oh, a joke? Ah... mackerel in a clothing store."

Then she suddenly laughed loudly. I was startled, starting to wonder if it was a good or bad idea to kill time with this kid instead of staying with Nat.

"So, what kind of clothes are you looking for?"

I quickly changed the subject because I couldn't handle the loud laughter. "Nothing specific, just looking at what I like"

"Want me to pick for you?"

Then I did as I said, seriously picking out clothes in front of me, even though I wasn't really interested. Soon, I pulled out a white tank top. It wasn't that the shirt was pretty, but it had letters that I wanted to convey to the person next to me that she should smile at me as promised, not run away like she did earlier.

"How about this one? It's cute."

"Uh, this one is fine."

She reached out to take the shirt, but I pulled it back.

"I was joking. The shirt is plain, but it's overpriced."

I spoke the truth because the message I wanted to convey had probably reached the junior next to me.

Before I could say anything else, my phone vibrated, signaling that the time for killing time was over. Nat called to say that all the friends had arrived, and the food was starting to be served.

Pang had also arrived. I felt a bit annoyed that Pang didn't call me to meet first but chose to meet the others instead.

"I have to go now. See you at school."

"Okay."

I didn't pay attention to the junior anymore. All I did was quickly walk down to the restaurant where I'd planned to meet my friends My demeanor was unusually calm, and that made the other friends notice.

"Pa, you look so serious. Sorry we're late."

"It's okay. I got to look at clothes."

"Pa, come sit here."

Kung said, waving me over, and luckily, Pang was already sitting there.

I tried to adjust my expression so no one could tell what I was thinking. When the friends started to have fun, it was time to whisper my thoughts to the person next to me.

"After we finish eating, let's split from the others. I'll treat this meal, but Pang, you have to come with me."

Pang looked at me with a blank expression. She didn't respond, just continued eating as if she hadn't heard what I said. But when the time passed and everyone was full and about to go watch a movie, I quickly excused myself with Pang following.

Everyone booed as if they disagreed, but as soon as Pang turned to look, they fell silent because they knew her look meant no one had the right to hold me back. And that's what I liked about being with Pang.

"Why were you late? You know how Nat feels about me."

"Everyone in the group knows."

Pang said while walking calmly as usual. I stopped to wait for her to walk beside me before continuing.

"If you knew, you should have blocked him for me. Or are you still mad about that day?"

"...."

"You really are mad, huh?"

I said, looking at her as her face showed displeasure.

"Do you want to go somewhere?"

"Didn't you drag me out because you had somewhere to go?"

"No."

"Then why not stay with the others?"

"I just wanted to be with you, I guess."

I said, not with the sweet look it should have been, but Pang turned to look at me with a slightly less displeased expression.

"Is this supposed to be sweet?"

"Not really."

"I can't figure out what you're thinking."

"I can't figure you out either."

Pang looked tired as if I was the only one who could argue with her But in the end, her displeasure from our previous argument seemed to lessen. I stopped by a clothing store to buy Pang a shirt. She accepted it and said she'd repay me later, which didn't need to be said to know what that meant.

We walked around the mall for a long time before switching to walking along the beach. As soon as we switched to walking by the sea in the evening, Pang's demeanor changed. She seemed lonelier than ever.

Her eyes showed sadness that made me want to ask if something was wrong, but in the end... I was still me, keeping all the information to find a good moment to speak or ask. I wasn't one to act on impulse and always thought carefully before saying anything.

"Buy me dinner."

Pang's voice broke the silence after we'd been walking quietly for a while.

"Sure."

"Can I choose the restaurant?"

"Yeah"

As soon as I agreed, the tall figure led me along the beach until we reached a restaurant called Rim Lay Hey Lun. The name suggested it'd be noisy, but sitting at a table by the beach, the atmosphere was peaceful. Maybe because there were no customers yet.

I sat looking at the sky, which was turning a pinkish-orange. The sound of the waves crashing rhythmically made me feel more at ease, forgetting how sad Pang had looked earlier.

"Why did you say fortune-telling is nonsense?"

Suddenly, Pang's voice broke the silence. I turned to look at her, still seeing the sadness hidden in her beautiful eyes.

"Well... it's something that can't be proven, right? Even if it's accurate, how do we know it's because the prediction was right and not because we tried to make it happen?"

Pang paused to think before speaking with a calm expression.

"That's true."

I felt a bit surprised that she agreed so easily.

"So why are your so fixated on fortune-telling, Pang?"

"Maybe because reality is too hard for us."

"...."

"Even if the predictions are just fantasies, good or bad, at least there's something good to hope for Because right now, there's nothing good in our lives. Everywhere we look, it's just bad stuff. If we still want to live, we need something to hold on to."

"....."

"Others might see it as nonsense, and that's fine. But for us, it means something."

At that moment, my heart ached. I must be one of those bad things for her too. Thadn't seen it that way before, but what could I do? Things had gone too far now.

**"But at least we're lucky to have you supporting us, Pa."**

"Hmm?"

"Yeah, so we don't have to worry about money for a while. I don't want to say this, but until we go our separate ways for college, let's just stay like this. Without your financial help, we'd be in trouble."

I watched her through the setting sun. How much was she carrying? But I knew I wasn't in a position to ask. We were just having fun physically, and it'd always been an agreement.

Even if I wanted to hold her now, all I could do was wait for the time when we were alone and then hold her in a different way.

"I'm sorry..."

I said, not looking at her anymore.

"Sorry for what?"

"Everything... I don't know. I just feel like I've wronged you too. I'm sorry."

She looked at me, and soon a rare, faint smile appeared. "I can't deny that you did take advantage of me."

"....."

**"But you also gave me a chance, so you don't need to apologize."**

My heart trembled. Watching her smile felt different this time. I couldn't take my eyes off her, but I had to look away to hide my feelings.

"Is this the same Pang? You seem so calm."

"Do you want me to be hot-headed all the time? That's exhausting.... By the way, can I order a beer?"

"Will they sell it to you?"

"Of course. They don't know we're in high school."

She raised her hand to order two cans of beer, pretending to order one for me but ended up drinking both herself.

After we finished eating, Pang asked to stop by my house first because she was worried the smell of alcohol would give her away at home. I told her to take a shower and put on her old clothes.

She did as I said, and for some reason, she looked cuter than ever. She took a long shower while I read a book on my bed as usual. After a while, the bathroom door opened, and she came out wearing a new shirt I'd just bought for her.

"How do I look? Pretty?"

Pang asked. I turned to look at the white shirt with cool designs. My heart raced, and I had to bite my lip.

"Yeah, it suits you."

"I thought so too."

She looked down at the shirt on her body before sitting on the bed.

"Reading again?"

"You should read too, Pang. We're in our senior year."

I said, turning the page, but she closed the book.

"Pang... I was reading."

"You don't need to read."

I turned to look at her. She'd already taken the book and placed it on the corner of the headboard. Then she slowly unbuttoned her shirt, revealing her white chest. I stared without embarrassment, thinking her behavior was probably due to the alcohol.

"Am I being bad today?"

She asked sweetly.

"Probably And you're drunk. You're not even twenty yet."

"Pa, you should break the rules sometimes. Otherwise, you'll seem boring."

"Do I seem boring?"

I asked, reaching to hold her neck and leaning down to make her lie flat on the bed. She complied easily, her face showing a desire for something I could give.

"I don't know."

"....."

"Tonight I want to have fun."

I smiled and leaned down to kiss her, teasing her lips. My hand moved down her side, cupping her beautiful chest. As I felt her breathing get heavier, I pulled back, watching her frustrated expression as I controlled the game.

"I'm not in the mood tonight."

I got up, reached for my book, and started reading again. She lay there, stunned and unsure of what to do next.

"Pa..."

"Yes?"

"Is this for real? Ending it like this?"

She sat up, looking at me with confusion, her shirt still unbuttoned, reminding me of what I'd started.

"You said you wanted to have fun, right? You know, fun comes from controlling the game yourself."

"....."

**"Come sit on my lap instead of the book, and do everything yourself..."**

After that, the fun she asked for happened. I barely had to do anything but let her follow her own game, and it made us both realize what fun sex could be.

We spent the night together, and even though we slept together, I had to take her to change into her school uniform in the morning.

Everything made me think about how our actions were becoming more like those of lovers, and I started to feel more for her than ever before.

The next morning felt brighter. I went to school with Pang, parked my motorcycle, and waited for her to change. Everything seemed fine until someone made me feel uneasy.

The person who annoyed me was none other than Nat, a friend from our group who was always around, and a freshman who kept looking at me. But I chose to talk to other friends instead of being the good person I always was.

Eventually, I ended up in the cafeteria where my friends were waiting My eyes focused on Pang, happy to see her after being separated by friends a few minutes earlier.

"Have you seen Pao? I want to bring her a drink,"

Pang asked one of our friends, making me feel annoyed.

"I saw her sitting at the table near the cafeteria entrance,"

My friend replied. I wanted to show my displeasure but had to hold it in.

"Okay."

"Are you going to see her?" Lasked.

"Yeah."

"I was going to see her too, but Nat went to get food for me. Can you bring it back for me? I'll take the drink to her and get drinks for the others too."

"Are you going?"

"Yeah, just bring the food for me."

I grabbed the green drink from Pang's hand and walked to the freshman, feeling reluctant but knowing it was better than letting Pang go herself.

On a good day like this, Pang should focus on me, right?

"Pao... I brought you a drink. My friend said you need colorful drinks, so I thought the keychain I gave you mightn't be enough."

I didn't give Pang credit for buying the drink. I made it seem like I bought it myself.

"Thank you, but you didn't have to. People just make things up,"

She said, looking excited, making me play the good person again.

"Oh really? But I already bought it. Do you like green drinks, Pao?"

"No, I don't."

"Oh..."

I tried to hide my smile. The drink Pang bought was something she didn't like. It couldn't get any better.

**"But I love it."**

Hmm?

My smile grew, unsure how to react. I laughed lightly, even though it was the most fake laugh I'd ever made.

"You scared me. I thought you really didn't like it."

"Do you want me to read your love fortune, Pa? I saw you with your girlfriend earlier. Let me predict for you."

"Girlfriend? Which one? I don't have a girlfriend."

My genuine smile returned, thinking of the tall girl who came to mind.

"I mean, not yet... but never mind."

But earlier... I wasn't walking with Pang.

"Let me read your fortune then,"

Her friend said quickly. I raised my eyebrows, about to refuse, but then.

The tall freshman stood up to face me. She grabbed my hand, tracing the lines on my palm without even looking at it. Her big eyes met mine, as if she had something to sấy

"Someone likes you, Pa."

"...."

"And that person is very close to you right now. So if you open your heart to love, it will be better than you ever imagined"

"Close to me now? You mean..."

For the first time, I felt engaged in a random prediction.

"Is there a hint? Are they younger or the same age? **Or are they a girl or a boy?"**

"Huh?"

I looked at her with genuine curiosity. If the prediction was about Pang, that would be great. Everyone said she was accurate. If everything pointed to Pang, it'd be good. And if I followed what she said... I could follow my feelings, right?

**"Pa, what are you doing?"**

I tried to smile at Nat, who interrupted at the wrong moment, but also the right moment. I almost believed the random prediction.

"I brought a drink for Pao. She offered to read my fortune in return. Even if the prediction was confusing."

"I didn't know you liked fortune-telling."

"Not really."

"Where's the drink?"

"Oh, I forgot. I was going to order a drink but saw Pao and stopped to talk. Did you get the food?"

"Yeah, the food's cold now."

I pretended to laugh at the joke, even though I felt annoyed. Nat called me "Pa" today, probably realizing I was upset when we went to the mall with friends.

"Pao, were you going to say something?" I finally turned my attention back to her. "Huh? Oh, nothing. Just wanted to thank you for the green drink."

"No problem. Thanks for the fortune-telling too."

And just like that, everything ended. I didn't pay much attention to what that kid said, and I started distancing myself from Nut even more. Lately, Nut had been moving too fast, almost alarmingly so.

Maybe it was because we were about to graduate from high school, and everything seemed more rushed than ever. To be honest, I wasn't too comfortable with his behavior.

Plus, today I found myself more interested in Pang than usual. Perhaps it was because we had so much fun yesterday that I couldn't stop thinking about her.

.

Out of nowhere, a freshman who was friends with the fortune-teller Pao walked up to me. What she said only fueled my curiosity about the unfinished prophecy.

"Hello, P' Seenam. My name is Cat. You might remember me. I have a message to deliver." "A message?"

"Yes, just a moment."

She said as she pulled a small piece of paper from her skirt pocket, her serious demeanor evident.

"The prophecy about the person who secretly likes you has a continuation. Everything is definitely not a coincidence, and I think you should get your fortune read every week so that Pao can see your fate more clearly, week by week. And most importantly..."

"...."

***"I guarantee it'll clear up all your doubts."***

***Clear up all my doubts?***

***.*** .

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# Chapter 25: Feeling Strange

*Could the thing that clears up my doubts be related to the person I'm looking at right now?*

*.*

"Aren't you going to get your fortune told like she invited you? It's been days already."

Pang's voice broke the silence. She walked over and sat on the chair opposite me in the classroom, her face showing a hint of displeasure.

"Pang, you don't seem okay."

"Well... I'm a bit annoyed."

"About what?"

"About Pa."

"About us?"

"Being the favorite senior in the eyes of the juniors must feel like this, huh? Getting special treatment more than others,"

She said, laying her head on the desk.

"I want to ask her why she gives you more fortune readings than others. I have to wait for months."

"Is that what's bothering you right now?"

"Yeah."

"This is the first time I've seen you sulk,"

I said, resting my chin on my hand, looking at her like she was a rare sight.

"Everyone thinks someone as good as Pe wouldn't understand. They probably don't even need to sulk because everyone pampers them."

My smile grew wider. I leaned closer to her, noticing that no one around was paying attention to us. My lips moved closer to her ear, whispering softly so only she could hear.

"Pang, you know... I'm not that good of a person,"

I said with a hint of hidden meaning. She turned to look at me.

"Only we know."

I smiled. Pang's childlike demeanor made me want to cheer her up a bit. Anyway, I'd already planned to go out with friends after school.

If I could arrange for Pang, who loves fortune-telling, to meet the fortuneteller outside of school, it'd be great.

Finally, I walked to that kid's room, carrying a lot of snacks. I told Pang there would be a surprise after school and to wait at the ice cream shop with our friends. I felt excited even though it was a small gesture.

The feeling of giving something more than money seemed better than I thought. I walked into the room, scanning the area and seeing three kids playing around.

**"How dare you call me Pao, you filthy servant!"**

"Eat your filth alone!"

The kid everyone in the room kept talking about, saying she might be possessed because her fortune-telling was so accurate, was the same one I was looking at now. A wave of curiosity hit me. I sighed, trying to adjust my demeanor.

*What kind of spirit would possess a kid like this?*

"Uh..."

I made a sound, and it seemed to break their fun. The fortune- teller turned to me with a strange look.

"Oh, P' Seenam, here for a fortune reading?"

The only boy in the group spoke up. I just smiled at him.

"Am I interrupting? You all seemed to be having fun."

"No, we had a lot of people come for readings earlier. My back hurts so much I had to stretch. Oh, my back cracked,"

Said the person I came to see.

"Taw."

The kids chatted familiarly. If I said I'd been watching them dance for a while, it wouldn't be good. She'd covered it up so well, if I mentioned it, she'd be embarrassed.

"So, you're here for a reading, right?"

"Yeah, Cat said you had more to tell about the person I like being nearby, so I'm interested. Oh, and I brought snacks this time."

"Oh, more to tell?"

She paused for a moment before continuing,

"You brought a lot. Next time, just a little is fine."

When she walked over to sit on the chair properly, I followed and handed her the snacks, extending my hand for a reading, trying not to make it obvious that I wanted to invite her to meet someone at the ice cream shop.

"It's not much. You can share with your friends. Shall we start? School's almost over."

"Oh, right,"

She said, taking my hand. Her long fingers caught my attention. This was the first time I really noticed her.

This kid has beautiful hands...

"The ice cream shop," she said.

"Hmm?"

I paused. The ice cream shop? Why?

I didn't understand how she knew I planned to invite her to the ice cream shop. Could she know my plan? Why did she mention the ice cream shop at the perfect moment? My heart started to race. I tried to keep my face neutral, but...

"This evenirig, go to the ice cream shop at the corner behind our school. The person I predicted will be nearby. But I can't say who it is. They'll be someone in that shop."

"Really? That's strange,"

I replied, keeping my tone steady, trying not to show my surprise. There were many ice cream shops, but she mentioned the exact one I planned to go to. Was this a coincidence, or was she really that accurate? "It's true. Man and Cat can confirm that Pao is really accurate,"

The other two kids chimed in.

"I'm not doubting the prediction, just trying to make it a bit exciting."

I said, feeling more curious about the person in front of me. Even though I guessed she might like me, asking directly would avoid her noticing my unusual behavior.

"But I do have some questions."

"What is it?"

"Why is Pao so nice to me?"

"Huh?"

"My friends who come for readings with Pao say they have to write their names down to keep track of who's had a reading each month. But why do I get a reading every week?"

I smiled, trying to hide my surprise about the ice cream shop. I started to observe her face more closely She seemed uncomfortable, but then she suddenly looked at me with a calm expression, different from her usual bright eyes.

"Well, aren't you nice to Pao?"

"Me?"

"Yes," she nodded.

"Do you believe in first impressions? Honestly, on my first day here, I was really worried. I even fell in front of the school. It was a terrible and embarrassing experience. But when I think back, I remember a senior who offered me a hand. He didn't laugh like everyone else. He even helped check my injuries before I realized I was hurt."

Her words, though simple, didn't match the smile she gave. Sometimes, even cheerful people have other sides. I felt her sincerity from that smile and her words. I carefully observed her before responding.

"It was shocking. Who would laugh?"

"But everyone at school laughed."

"Really?"

I chuckled a bit. She'd just seemed strange, but now she was back to her quick-witted self.

"If you're not uncomfortable with Pao's readings, you can come every week."

"Sure, I'm not uncomfortable. I'll come again."

Everything fell silent. I agreed so quickly because I found her endearing. Maybe keeping her close would be a good thing. At least... her sincerity just now made me feel she wasn't harmful. "Pa! Are you done with your reading?"

My friend's voice called out.

"Yes, I'm done. I'll go now."

"Okay, take care."

I walked out with a few friends, but then I remembered I wanted to invite her to the ice cream shop. I quickly turned back to the first-grade room, peeking in and calling her name.

"Pao."

"Yes?"

"Actually, when you mentioned the ice cream shop, I was surprised because I'd already planned to go there with friends. So, do you want to join us? Maybe the person in the prediction will be nearby, and you can give me a signal."

"Uh, well, Pao mightn't be able to tell who that person is..."

"I'm just kidding. But come with us. The shop is good. Man and Cat, are you coming too?"

"Yes!"

If her friends agreed, they'd come along.

"Okay, I'll go to the shop first. See you there."

I walked out, heading to the ice cream shop where someone else was waiting.

Even though I should have felt good about bringing Pao to meet Pang, when they actually met, I felt a sudden irritation.

"Oh, Pao! Move over, Kung. I want Pao to sit next to me. Pao, come sit here,"

Pang said excitedly.

Pang's excitement made me feel strange. I kept watching them. Besides being annoyed by Pang's behavior, I was also irritated by the guy friend next to me. I'd planned to sit with Pang, but it seemed Nat had arranged the seats, leaving only this spot for me.

Finally, Pao sat next to Pang, but she didn't seem pleased. So, it meant she wasn't interested in Pang. She came because she was interested in me.

Thinking that, I smiled. I asked my friend at the head of the table to pass the menu to the three kids. But it seemed Pang, who finally met Pao, started asking her questions.

"Why do you give Pa more readings than others?"

The question wasn't answered. I kept watching their interactions.

"Pao... Pao! Did you hear me?"

"Yes?"

"Why do you give Pe more readings? You said only once a month."

I pretended to eat my ice cream, but I was listening to their conversation.

"If seniors want a reading, they can have one. But I can't guarantee its accuracy."

"So, Pa gets inaccurate predictions?"

When my name was mentioned, Pao turned to look at me. I smiled at her, pretending not to know anything, just like always.

"P' Seenam's predictions are different from others. I can't say how. Maybe it's because I want to read for P' Seenam. Whenever she comes, she never asks too many questions. She seems to live without being too attached to others' words. Oh, and she's not superstitious."

Oh... Wasn't that an insult to Pang?

I should have been angry that she spoke badly to Pang, but I found myself interested in her. It's rare to find a junior who isn't afraid of Pang. Even our friends are scared of her.

"That's so accurate,"

Pang said, surprisingly pleased. She rested her chin on her hand, looking at the junior next to her with a gaze I'd never seen before.

"I thought Pao would be scared of me."

"Scared? Why would I be scared?"

"Most juniors are scared of me. Even some of my peers are. Don't I seem scary?

"Not really. Just because you speak loudly doesn't mean you're scary." "Really? Eat up. It's on me. You two as well, order whatever you want. I'll pay"

Pang, who is usually very frugal, offering to pay...

I kept watching from across the table, observing the first-grade kid again. Many questions filled my mind, and I couldn't find answers. What if Pang was interested in her for more than just fortune-telling?

Suddenly, the person I was staring at turned to look at me. Our eyes met, and we stood there silently, not saying a word.

Since Pang went to the restroom, I shouldn't let her sit close to that kid again.

"Sorry, but we have to leave now," I said.

"What? Why are you leaving so soon? I thought you said you could stay late today," another friend in the group asked.

"I forgot I have some errands to run. I'll make it up to you another time," I replied.

"Then I'll go back with you,"

Nat said, and the others teased us.

"No, it's fine. I'll go back with the juniors,"

I said, looking at the two younger students beside me. But they didn't follow my plan at all.

"Huh? Go back with us? We're not in a hurry to leave, right, Pao?"

One of the juniors said.

I looked at the junior across from me, and it wasn't just me; everyone else seemed interested in this conversation too.

"Pao, you need to leave soon, right? You told me before we left school,"

I said, trying to cover my lie. If I didn't say something, she wouldn't catch on, and I'd be the only one leaving without any real reason.

"Yes, I need to leave soon,"

Pao confirmed.

"Oh..."

The two juniors exclaimed. I smiled, feeling satisfied with how things were going.

"But you guys stay. I'll leave first Eat for me too,"

Pao said to her two friends, and soon everything went according to my plan.

"Take care of Pao for me," she said.

"Sure,"

I replied, then turned to Nat to give her some instructions.

"Take care of these two juniors, Nat. Don't let anyone mess with them."

There were cheers, but I didn't pay attention. If I stayed any longer, Pang would come out of the restroom and see us together, ruining my plan to separate them.

"Shall we go, Pao?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied.

As we walked out of the dessert shop, the tension slowly crept in. Usually, people would approach me, and there would always be conversations to ease the atmosphere. But now, everything was quiet. I didn't speak, and neither did she. We stood by the roadside like that.

I should start a conversation.

"Do you need to hurry home, Pao? / Are you okay, P' Seenam?"

We both asked at the same time.

"Huh?/Oh,"

We both said, then stopped and looked at each other. She must have felt awkward too.

"What did you say, P' Seenam?" she asked.

"I asked if you need to hurry home, Pao," I repeated.

"No, I don't,"

She replied, smiling brightly. In one day, I'd seen so many sides of this kid. She was fun with friends, serious when expressing her feelings, and annoyed when snapping back at seniors everyone feared. Now, she showed she could keep up with me. If it were someone else, they mightn't have followed me out like this.

"Great, let's go for a walk," I said.

Without waiting for a response, I quickly flagged down a passing songthaew (a shared taxi). I climbed in swiftly and waved for her to join me.

"Come on, Pao! Hurry.."

I smiled at her.

At that moment, I realized this was a genuine smile, not one I had to force. Even though I used to dislike this kid, now I found her quite interesting.

The sound of the waves was constant as we walked along the beach. There weren't many people today, making the atmosphere even more relaxing. "The breeze feels nice," I said.

"Are you okay, P' Seenam? You seemed like you wanted to invite my group out," she asked.

I hesitated, trying to find a good excuse.

"No, I actually just wanted to invite you out,"

I said, but she seemed more surprised than I expected.

"Sorry."

"Sorry for what?" she asked.

"Sorry about Pang. It seemed like my friend was bothering you, and you looked annoyed," I explained.

"So you invited me out?" she asked.

"Yes," I nodded.

"Oh, I see... But I wasn't really bothered. It was just a moment of teenage emotions, so i responded like that. Overall, it was just a fleeting feeling," she said.

"Then I made the right choice inviting you out. Or do you want to go back for more dessert?" I asked.

"No, walking along the beach is better," she replied.

"Alright," I said.

She really was an interesting kid..

We continued talking, sometimes she initiated, sometimes I did. The conversation flowed naturally, and eventually, I took off my shoes, letting my bare feet sink into the sand. I told her to do the same, and she complied without hesitation. Even barefoot, she was still much taller than me.

I glanced at her and asked,

"How tall are you, Pao?"

"About 167 cm," she replied.

"You're so tall. Even in school shoes, you're tall, but without them, you seem shorter,"

I lamented about my own height "How tall are you, P' Seenam?" she asked

"Maybe 160 cm," I said.

"That's not short at all. You're exaggerating," she said.

"Or maybe 159 cm. Or 158 cm," I continued.

"So how tall are you exactly?"

She laughed, seeming more relaxed.

"158 cm. That's short, right? And I think I've stopped growing. But you, Pao, you still have time to grow. How tall will you get?" I wondered.

"320 cm," she joked.

"That's not human," I laughed.

"Do you like tall people?" she asked.

"Are you flirting with me?"

I asked playfully, but she tensed up again.

"No, I can't flirt with you," she said.

"Do you like tall people, Pao?" I asked.

"Yes, anyone over 10 cm taller," she replied.

"So you like almost everyone in the world,"

I laughed, and she joined in.

"But you're still young. When you grow up, you'll know what kind of person you like."

Suddenly, she fell silent. She didn't respond, so I changed the subject.

"By the way, what time do you need to be home, Pao?" I asked.

"Anytime. I'll be alone at home anyway," she said.

"What about dinner?" I asked.

"I'll eat alone," she said.

"You said 'eat' like a little kid,"

I teased, seeing her childish side.

"How about we go to a restaurant? I know a place with a million-dollar view for just a few bucks."

"Wow, let's go," she said excitedly.

"Wait, don't you want to think about it?" I asked.

"No, I want to see what a million-dollar view for a few bucks looks like," she said.

"Great, curiosity is good. Let's run."

"Huh?" she exclaimed.

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I started running ahead, wanting us to have fun in a way I never thought I would. But things didn't go as planned. Suddenly, two kids ran in front of me Panic surged through me, and I knew I couldn't avoid them. just as I braced myself to collide with them...

**"Watch out!"** she shouted.

She grabbed my arm quickly, and I felt her strength. I stumbled into her chest, my heart pounding, and our lips pressed together.

**What is this atmosphere?**

I slowly regained my balance and moved away slightly. When I checked everything, I realized my shoes had ended up on her face.

"I'm sorry. Are you okay?" I asked.

"Phew,"

She blew the sand off her face, and I quickly lowered my shoes.

"Wow, it got in my eyes."

Her irritated expression showed she wasn't lying. Tears welled up, and I quickly pulled out a tissue to wipe the sand from her eyes. Luckily, the sand was visible, so I could help her quickly.

"Sorry, your face is covered in sand. Let me clean it,"

I said. Once I was sure her eyes were clear, I gently wiped her face. When everything was back to normal, I collapsed, burying my face in my knees, trying not to laugh.

"Wh...why are you laughing so much?" she asked.

"Your face was funny. No, everything was funny,"

I said, looking up at her and wiping away my tears.

"Sorry, but I can't stop laughing."

"Was it that funny?" she asked.

"Yes. Are you mad at me?"

I asked, and she smiled, a gentle smile compared to my laughter.

"Did it hurt when I pulled you? I might have pulled too hard."

"No, it didn't hurt."

I waved my hand, then stood up and picked up my shoes.

"You were pretty cool just now."

"...."

"You'd be cooler if my shoes weren't on your face," I teased.

"Is that a compliment?" she asked

"Yes," I confirmed.

"Oh"

She squinted, trying to figure me out, but I just laughed again.

"What? Do I look like I'm lying?"

"No, I didn't say anything," she replied.

"Your eyes say it all."

"How?"

She asked, her mischievous expression making me feel playful. I'd discovered another side of her.

"I won't tell... Let's go. I'll treat you to dinner as an apology,"

I said, ending the conversation and leading the way to the restaurant we'd agreed on Even though everything seemed fine, my heart started pounding.

I placed my hand over my chest, trying to understand why my heart was racing. As everything slowed down, curiosity crept in.

***Why is my heart beating so fast?***

Even though I wanted an answer, when I looked at her, she gave me the same innocent look. Her smile grew brighter. I stopped walking to let her catch up and walk beside me. Even though I didn't say a word, she quickly came to my side, as if she could read my mind

The atmosphere remained calm, comfortable, and more relaxing than I'd expected.

***So why do I feel so strange?***

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# Chapter 26: Why

"I'll have the grilled beef rice bowl with spicy dipping sauce and a honey lemon soda, light on the sweetness. What about you, Pao?"

"I'll have the same, please."

We ordered our food right after sitting down at a table by the beach. The view in front of us was the ocean, with the sun about to set on the horizon. It was as beautiful as I'd always said: a million-dollar view for a few bucks.

Despite everything seeming perfect, my heart couldn't shake off a strange feeling. I couldn't find an answer for myself, but I continued to act normal so the person beside me wouldn't notice.

After that, our conversation grew louder. She asked some questions, and I asked some in return. Then I remembered that Pao was just a first-year high school student.

"Do you need to call home?"

"Oh, right, I forgot."

The person beside me seemed to remember as well and quickly called home. But before long, she handed her phone to me while I was gazing at the view.

"Um, my mom wants to talk to you."

"Oh... hello,"

I greeted politely, and I could hear the voice on the other end.

[Are you Pao's senior?)

"Yes, I am."

[And... what's your name?]

"My name is Pa, but Pao calls me P' Seenam."

My nervousness increased, and even though I didn't like this situation much, the questions kept coming.

I told her I'd invited Pao out for dinner, assured her I'd take care of her, and mentioned the name of the restaurant we were at. Shortly after, the call ended, and I sighed in relief

"Did your mom say anything?"

"No, she just asked my name and said to call her when we're done so she can pick me up."

"Oh... wait, she's picking you up?"

"Yeah, why?"

I looked puzzled, but the person beside me seemed excited. After that, she sat tensely, making it clear something was off. Maybe it was because I'd talked to her mom, but her mom seemed fine.

There was nothing to worry about. We sat quietly, watching the view, forgetting our doubts and focusing on the surrounding atmosphere.

It was nice coming here with Pao, but why did I feel so much more at ease with her?

"The sky is beautiful, isn't it?"

Out of nowhere, she asked. I turned to look at her, meeting her innocent gaze. The smile on her face slowly faded. She looked at me with an understanding that this wasn't normal.

My heart felt light, surprised that I felt this way about someone so much younger, but I couldn't help but feel fond of her.

"Yeah, do you like it?"

I asked, hoping she would say she loved this place. But instead...

"Yes, I like it... but not just the view. I like you too, P' Seenam."

Was she confessing her love?

I stared at her innocent face. The initial smile had disappeared. Normally, if someone came at me like this, I'd run away immediately. But for some reason, with this girl, my body couldn't move. I wasn't entirely surprised, but a different feeling took over.

"Um, Pao, do you mean..."

*What excuse should I use this time...*

**"Pao!"**

But then someone called out. I couldn't find the answer to what I wanted to know because Pao's parents had arrived to pick her up.

"Oh... why are you here so early? I haven't called yet,"

Pao said, and I quickly stood up to greet her parents.

"Hello," I greeted.

"Are you the senior who spoke on the phone earlier?"

"Yes, I am,"

I replied with a faint smile before standing up to grab my bag and leave.

"You've finished eating, right? Are you leaving now?"

"Well... are you leaving now, P' Seenam?"

Pao's mom turned to me. I'd intended to stay unnoticed, but now I had to show myself.

"Yeah, I think I'll head back now."

"Do you want to eat something first, or should we take Pao home now?"

"Let's go home. Dad said he'd order something to eat."

"In that case, I'll head home now,"

I quickly said, preparing to leave. But then...

"Wait, where do you live? It's dark now; come with us, and we'll drop you off."

"Yes, P' Seenam, come with us. It's dangerous..."

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Both mother and daughter insisted I go with them. Since I always tried to be a good person in others' eyes, I couldn't refuse. Eventually, I found myself sitting in the car with Pao's family. It turned out they were wealthier than I'd thought. Pao's dad even paid for our meal.

We sat in silence the whole way. Finally, I took out a piece of paper and wrote a message for Pao before handing it to her.

"What's this?"

I didn't answer, just gestured for her to read it.

After reading it, she quickly took out a pen from her bag and pulled out a notebook. She placed my paper on the notebook and started writing a reply.

'I didn't get to treat you to dinner, and now you're dropping me off at home. I'm sorry.'

"There's nothing to apologize for. I had a great time."

'Really? Then I should say... thank you.'

After reading her message, she started to fold the paper, but I took it back and wrote something I hadn't planned to.

'Here's my email. Let me know when you get home safely.'

I gave her my email out of concern. Even though she didn't seem like someone to worry about, I felt I should show some care in return for the kindness I received today.

Not long after, we arrived at my place. I thanked them and said goodbye to Pao, telling her we'd see each other at school.

Everything seemed to go well, except now someone was waiting for me.

"You're back late."

As soon as I stepped into the house, I saw Pang sitting with her arms crossed, looking at me. She had the same demeanor as at school, but I was more surprised that she was waiting for me, even though we hadn't planned to meet today.

"It's strange that you're here, Pang. Did we have plans?"

"No, I just have something to talk to you about."

"What is it?"

"Can we talk in your room?"

"Sure..."

I replied and led her upstairs. As soon as the door closed, Pang hurried over and started unbuttoning her shirt without warning.

"P....Pang."

**"I'll ask you directly. Are you interested in Pao?"**

"What do you mean?"

"I mean exactly what I said. Why did you go out with her alone? I know you well enough to know you don't go out with just anyone. And from her behavior, she seems interested in you. What should I think?"

"Are you asking because you're jealous of me or of her?"

"Shouldn't you answer my question first?"

"I'm not interested in her."

"Then why did you go out together? And come back so late? You didn't do anything, right?"

I quickly pushed Pang's arms away and buttoned my shirt back up. Frustration surged through me. I sighed and walked over to sit on the bed, crossing my legs and staring at her.

"Did you unbutton my shirt to check for marks? She's just a first-year student. And besides, you shouldn't be this angry. I haven't done anything wrong. I invited her out for dessert, and she agreed. That means I didn't do anything wrong."

"You said you weren't interested in her."

Her face showed displeasure, and I returned a cold stare.

"Yes, I'm not interested in Pao. But I'm interested in you. You should know that. And you're the one who's openly showing interest in her."

"...."

"And if I'm protective of what's mine, is that wrong? Don't forget, you're mine. You still are."

"Is that why you took her out? To keep me from talking to her? I'm not sure I want to keep following your conditions anymore."

"What do you mean?"

This time, it was my turn to feel even more frustrated, unable to control my emotions.

**"I don't want to sell myself to you anymore."**

"Don't say that."

"Why not? It's the truth. I've been selling myself to you. We've been doing this for money. That's selling myself. And I didn't know I had to be yours and couldn't be interested in anyone else. Oh, by the way, I'm interested in Pao."

"Stop saying things that will make us fight. I'm tired. I want to rest."

"I'm serious, Pa. I don't want to do this anymore."

"Because of Pao?"

She fell silent immediately, as if my question had hit the mark. I walked over to her, reached out to touch her cheek, and leaned in to speak softly.

"Don't be like this, Pang. It's not good. You're interested in her because she's good at reading fortunes, right? She's not as important as me, who's here with you now. Think carefully about what's more important."

After I finished speaking, she stepped back, looking confused. That made me regain my confidence, forgetting we'd just fought.

Even though I felt good about Pao today, she wasn't as interesting as the woman standing in front of me now.

"Keeping things the same is good, isn't it? And besides, she's still very young. I think you're looking for the wrong kind of support. Did something happen at home again?"

Suddenly, the conversation shifted. I didn't know if she was genuinely interested in Pao or just looking for an outlet for something I didn't know about. Because of my question, Pang looked at me with more vulnerability than ever.

"A little bit. I might be going crazy. My feelings are all over the place."

"Then... why not let go?"

"...."

"It'll be okay. Trust me..."

In the end, we ended up in the same place, going through the same cycle. Even though everything seemed the same, something had changed. Being with Pang this time wasn't as enjoyable as before.

For a split second, I saw Pao's innocent smile flash in my mind. But it was just a moment. Soon, everything was over. Pang fell asleep immediately after we finished. I turned on my computer and saw a message from an unknown sender.

'This is Pao. I got home safely. Thank you for taking me to that restaurant. It was beautiful.'

I stared at the message, sighed softly, and started typing a reply.

'Okay.'

Then I shut down the computer and went back to bed, where someone else was already sleeping. She was still sound asleep, and I knew there was nothing better than the person right in front of me.

Yes... today's feelings were just influenced by the atmosphere.

After that day, Pao started approaching me more often. But instead of feeling awkward, it was actually kind of endearing at times. I still went to get my fortune told regularly, making sure Pang didn't find out.

Each session was the same, I wasn't there to learn about my future but to hear what new things she'd say each week.

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*'That person always has jokes to share.'*

*'When you meet, that person will always smile and show concern almost all the time.'*

*'Today, you'll get lucky with food from someone who likes you.'*

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No matter what she predicted, she always made it happen herself I pretended to be excited, curious about who the person in the prediction was, but in reality, I just went along with Pao to feel more fond of her.

But things weren't as simple as I thought. One day, Pang saw Pao giving me snacks, and sometimes she overheard Cat and Man teasing their close friend when I was nearby. Everything was in Pang's sight, so she came back to confront me again.

"You said you weren't interested in Pao. If you told me not to care, I wouldn't. But you're the one hanging around her."

"Calm down, it's not like that."

"Stop lying to me, Pa. I can't figure out what you're thinking."

"You don't have to guess because I'm not thinking anything."

"Then why don't you just reject her?"

"Pang, you know I'm seen as a good senior by everyone. No matter what, I wouldn't do anything to hurt someone who means well for me."

**"But you'd rather give her false hope?"**

Was I... giving Pao false hope?

"Then what do you want me to do? Why do we always fight about this kid?"

"Just reject her, Pa. If you don't, we won't have to deal with this anymore."

"I still stand by what I said. I won't do it, but you still have to do everything the same."

I declared firmly, my eyes determined, and she didn't back down either

"Then why don't you try dating Nat? If you agree to date Nat, I think Pao will back off. If that happens, I'll stay with you as usual, just like before, until we go our separate ways for college."

I paused to think. Why bring up Nat now? But I couldn't refuse this option because we'd graduate in two months anyway. Besides, cutting ties with Pao now might be better because maybe I was giving her hope while just having fun myself.

On Valentine's Day, Nat asked me out in front of the classroom, with many friends cheering. I looked at Pang, who was watching from not far away. My smile remained bright even though I still remembered Pao's prediction clearly.

**'The right person will confess their love to you with chocolate, Nam.'** But Nut brought roses, which meant he wasn't the right person for me.

Even thinking that, I reached out to accept the roses. My smile widened, but it was a smile thinking of that junior, not the guy in front of me who looked so happy.

When everything went according to Pang's wishes, the tall figure walked away down the stairs as if there was nothing to worry about anymore. But the one who was worried was me.

Even if it was just a split second, I was sure the person talking to Pang was Pao. And even though I wanted to walk over to see more clearly, I felt strange.

Guilt crept into my chest, and the smile I'd earlier disappeared completely. I couldn't force a smile for the first time and chose to walk into the classroom, letting Nat follow me.

It's good... It's good that Pao saw it. Pang will come back to me as usual.

Because during this time, I should hold onto Pang as much as possible.

Even thinking that, when Pang came back into the room, I was more interested in the chocolate in her hand. Pang smiled happily and unwrapped the chocolate to take a bite, not knowing my hand was reaching out. I grabbed the chocolate, took a bite, and handed it back.

"I'm hungry. Thanks."

Sometimes, I didn't understand my own actions...

Even though everything seemed to end without any issues, I accidentally saw Pao and her two friends standing in front of the school's trash can. She threw away the brown bear keychain I'd given her without a second thought. At that moment, I felt something strange inside.

When the three of them walked away, I reached into the trash can to retrieve the keychain, not even knowing why I kept it. She threw away what I gave her, and I should have been angry or upset, but those feelings didn't come.

I regretted hurting that innocent smile of hers. Because everything felt different, Pang and I started arguing more often over trivial matters. Sometimes I picked fights with her, or she did with me. We didn't have anything between us, just sitting quietly in the room.

She didn't speak, I didn't speak, and everything felt wrorig. I didn't care about her like I used to, and she distanced herself even though I kept my end of the deal.

By the time I realized it, Pang had distanced herself, and I didn't hold her back even though our agreement wasn't fulfilled.

There was a time when I tried to talk to Pao again, but her friends always blocked me until we eventually drifted apart. That period made me realize I couldn't fix anything. Pang still talked to her freely, but I was avoided every time we met.

Because everything was wrong, I started getting angry at Pang for no reason. I didn't know if I was mad because she didn't keep her promise to stay with me until graduation or if I was angry about something else.

After the last exam, I broke up with Nut immediately, giving the reason that I never loved him. Everything became boring again. I didn't contact Pang or any friends and chose to delete my email to start a new life.

But one day before starting college, I met someone I didn't expect.

**"Nam!"**

A loud voice called from afar. If someone called me Nam, it could only be...

"Oh, Pao, how did you get here? Are you buying medicine?"

I tried to keep my face as normal as possible, even though I was happy to see her. I asked, but she didn't care about my question at all.

**"The person in your prediction... isn't P' Nat."**

Why bring up the prediction?

**"It was me."**

I was caught off guard. Everything stopped. I was stunned by the boldness of the girl who no longer had that innocent smile My brain was processing, but she didn't give me a chance to say anything.

"No matter how many people come into your life, they won't be the right one and will always end in sadness or discomfort."

"....."

**"So, the only person who can bring you true happiness is me because I'm your soulmate."**

That day, she predicted my fate for the last time, and no matter how I listened, it sounded more like a curse than a promise of happiness. She said only she could make me happy.

But when I asked her again on the first day of school, a classmate told me that Pao had moved back to Chiang Mai.

***Even though she said she could make me happy...***

***Why did she disappear like this?***

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# Chapter 27: No Escape

**Fourteen years had passed since that time.**

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Now, I'd graduated as a pediatric dentist, but I still treated adults occasionally when patients came in. Besides that, I was a partner in three dental clinics. Even though my life seemed perfect, I'd never found success in love. Or maybe... I'd never truly loved anyone.

No matter how many people came into my life, none could make me feel anything. The only clear feeling was the desire to possess.

I still hid a part of myself from everyone. The last person who saw that side of me was an ex-girlfriend from years ago. Even though I knew she was engaged, I still tried to win her over, hoping she'd choose me over her fiancé.

If you asked why I went to such lengths, I couldn't give a noble reason. It was simply because I wanted someone I was very interested in.

But all that was years ago, a past I no longer cared about. I hadn't had a fling with anyone for a while since I got busy with multiple clinics. I transformed myself into a beloved dentist, adored by both children and adults.

I was so busy with the dental branches that I finally told my partners I'd only work at one branch, the one opening in a major mall in the city center in a few weeks. This would be the fourth branch where I had the most shares.

But fate had a funny way of playing tricks. On the day I planned to celebrate not having to work so hard anymore, I ran into someone I hadn't seen in a long time.

That person was Pang, now thirty-two years old. At first, I didn't recognize her because we hadn't seen each other in over a decade, and the dim surroundings didn't help. It wasn't until we were in the bathroom, finishing what we started, that I realized she was the same Pang.

Our drunken state led things to go further than they should have. We continued at my place, and even though I knew she was my childhood friend, I couldn't stop what was happening.

Her touch still felt exciting, or maybe... it was just familiar.

We caught up the next day. To my surprise, I learned she'd been in a longterm relationship with that junior from middle school but had broken up two years ago. I didn't know why she mentioned they still saw each other occasionally.

Maybe it was to mock me, but I didn't care anymore. As we talked, I found out Pang worked behind the scenes in the entertainment industry, while Pao owned a candle shop in a mall. I told her I was a dentist and that she could come for a check-up anytime. That was probably the last conversation we had.

We exchanged numbers out of courtesy, but I didn't think we'd meet again. If there was anything I was curious about, it was whether Pao still had that innocent smile...

Just a few days after that thought crossed my mind, another coincidence happened. I ran into her unexpectedly.

I was staring at a beautiful face in front of a candle shop, trying to figure out if it was Pao. It seemed too coincidental to be true. And the new clinic I was opening was right across from her candle shop.

Not believing in such coincidences, I decided to enter the candle shop to see if it was really Pao.

"This scent is our best-seller and was created by our shop,"

Her voice rang out as I pretended to browse the candles. I wore a mask, thinking she wouldn't recognize me.

I lingered in the shop, pretending to browse more than buy. Then, someone walked in with an authoritative air, like they owned the place.

"Pao, let's go grab something to eat."

"Oh, Pang, you should have told me you were coming."

"Do I need to tell you first?"

"Well...no."

The girl I once adored for her innocent smile no longer had that smile. She was stunning, turning heads wherever she went, but she didn't seem happy. It made me think that Pang still being around Pao, even after their breakup, wasn't a good thing.

As I watched them, Pao turned to give orders to the staff, while Pang scanned the room and spotted me. We locked eyes but said nothing. Pang looked surprised, and I just smiled, even though my mask hid it.

"Shall we go?"

"...."

"Pang?"

"What did you say, Pao?"

"I asked if we should go."

"Oh, yes, let's go..."

They walked out, and even though Pang kept glancing back at me with a puzzled look, we didn't speak. I turned away and went to buy the essential oil the shop owner had recommended to the previous customer.

As I finished my purchase, a message popped up on my phone.

**[What were you doing at Pao's shop?]**

I stared at the message, intrigued. Wasn't Pang supposed to be over Pao? Why did she sound so jealous? I'd felt sorry for the girl who'd lost her innocent smile, but now I was more interested in Pang.

Not because I cared about her, but because I enjoyed watching people squirm, like Pang was now.

My personality had changed a bit... but sometimes my childhood traits resurfaced without me realizing it.

Who would've thought that Pang, who acted so authoritative at the candle shop, would come to see me at the clinic? Even though it wasn't the opening day of the new branch, she used a dental check-up as an excuse to meet in the afternoon. I watched her familiar figure with mixed feelings, but she looked at me with distrust and asked bluntly.

"Why are you looking at me like that? I haven't done anything."

"I've seen you do nothing, but it always seems to affect me somehow."

"Affect you? That's strange."

"Did you open your clinic here just to see Pao?"

I couldn't help but laugh.

"What did you say? You think I opened a clinic here just to see Pao? Why would I go to such lengths? It's just a coincidence."

"Then why didn't you approach Pao? Why were you just watching?"

"I wasn't sure if it was Pao. I was a bit shocked to see you and then Pao so soon after. I was just looking, nothing special."

"Really..."

"Why? Are you jealous? If you're still that jealous, why did you break up? From what I saw, it seems like Pao still has feelings for you."

"That's none of your business."

She stood up to leave, forgetting her excuse for a dental check-up.

So, she was really jealous...

**"But if you're broken up, it wouldn't be wrong for me to pursue Pao, right?"**

As soon as I said that, Pang turned with a fierce look and grabbed my arm.

"Someone like you shouldn't go after Pao."

"I think someone like you shouldn't be with Pao either."

"...."

"Is this why you made me date Nat back then? So you could end up with Pao and leave me hanging, even though we agreed to stay together until graduation? I gave you tens of thousands during that year and a half. You shouldn't have done that."

"I don't remember that. But if you're hung up on the money, I can pay you back. I've wanted to for a long time but couldn't find a way to contact you. Actually, I just didn't want to contact you."

"It's fine, keep it. If you want to pay me back, let's reminisce about that night... it was good, wasn't it?"

I moved closer, and she quickly backed away, showing the same worried look from our childhood. She turned to leave.

"Enough. That was already too much."

"I don't think it was too much. It was just right."

"Stop it. I'm not going back to you."

I raised an eyebrow, feeling a surge of irritation. Her arrogance sparked an idea for some fun, something I hadn't had in a long time.

"It's okay. I'll just wait for Pao."

Her beautiful face turned to me, no longer worried but angry.

"Do you think you can? Pao loves me. That won't happen."

"Then what are you afraid of?"

"...."

"Let's see if I can."

"No need. I don't need to see your weird plans."

"Then don't watch. What I do is my business."

"Why are you interfering? I won't let you mess with Pao."

"What right do you have to stop me? You're not her girlfriend. You treat Pao like an object. If you're not happy, make Pao so happy she won't care about me. But if she does, that's not my problem."

"...."

"But if you don't want me to have fun with Pao, make me more interested in you. Fulfill our old agreement, and I'll leave her alone." I smiled lightly, and Pang walked out without a word.

It might seem silly, but you know what? I hadn't felt this excited in years. So, trying something fun might be a good idea.

I spent the next month observing the candle shop owner across the street. Sometimes she sat behind the counter, other days she walked in cheerfully, and some days she was angry. I enjoyed watching her behavior, but I never saw that innocent smile from her childhood.

What a shame...

My routine was simple: watch her, work, and go home bored. I'd moved to a condo near the mall where the clinic was opening. Even though going home was dull, I had something to do. I watched a woman in the condo across from mine. She often smoked, a heavy smoker.

If possible, I'd invite her for a dental check-up. Oh, and if you ask how I saw her, it's because I had a telescope from years ago when I helped a friend at a clinic in Korat. I intended to use it for stargazing, but it ended up being a boredom buster.

How should I put this... It seems like watching the owner of the candle shop every day has led me to also watch the person across the street. Her room is at the perfect level for my camera to catch her.

My life right now is pretty much just this. So, the story of Pao and Pang has become something unavoidably interesting. Not long after, I finally got to face my junior properly. The essential oil I bought last time was almost gone, and today the candle shop seemed less busy than usual. So, it seemed like the perfect time to go in and talk.

I put on my mask and walked straight into the candle shop, hoping she'd recognize me.

"Hello,"

I greeted. The person who'd been looking down slowly raised her head to look at me.

"Hello,"

She replied softly. She didn't have the typical customer service smile, but her beautiful face was captivating no matter what expression she wore.

"I was hoping you could recommend some scented candles," I said.

"Oh, just a moment. I'll have someone help you,"

She said, standing up and looking at another employee. But suddenly, the shop, which had been quiet, became busier. She hesitated before coming over to help me herself.

"Is there a specific scent you're looking for?" she asked.

"I'd like something with peppermint."

As soon as I mentioned the scent from the old essential oil I'd bought, she slowly smiled. In that moment, she wasn't Pao, the candle shop owner, but the same Pao from middle school who used to follow me everywhere.

Pao's innocent smile... I saw it again.

My own smile grew a bit. I was relieved that she hadn't forgotten that smile. I wanted to reach out and pat her head, telling her she was doing great despite the challenges of life.

But I held back. In that moment, I realized that the affection I had for her hadn't diminished, even though we hadn't seen each other in over a decade. "Actually, our shop has a signature scented candle and essential oil,"

She said, leading me to a beautifully arranged display. She handed me a scent test paper, and the scent was the same as the one I'd bought last time.

"This candle is our signature. It contains peppermint, cedarwood, and lavender. The cedarwood gives a sweet, warm scent like the smell of earth, while the lavender helps you relax and sleep well. When these two scents mix with the coolness of peppermint, it creates a relaxing atmosphere, perfect for lighting on a day off or after a tiring day. Try smelling it and think of a tiring day. Doesn't it make you feel better?"

"Yes..."

I barely listened to what she was saying. Her innocent smile and the joy she showed while explaining her product were more captivating. "Many people interpret the scent differently based on their feelings,"

She continued.

"What do you think of this scent?"

I asked, curious about her thoughts on the candle she seemed so happy to explain.

"For me, it feels like a rainy day," she said.

"A rainy day?"

"Yes, it's perfect for reading a book or letting your thoughts wander Maybe because it's my favorite scent, and I created it myself, so it sells well. Whenever I smell it, I feel very relaxed."

"Oh, you're the owner? You look so young,"

I pretended to be surprised, though I was actually amazed that she'd created the scent I loved from the first time I used it.

"What does the name of this candle mean? It doesn't seem to match the ingredients."

"Judgement Spells8?"

I nodded, looking at her with interest again.

"The name doesn't relate to the candle's ingredients,"

She laughed a little. I tilted my head slightly, forgetting myself, then quickly acted normal so she wouldn't notice.

"Have you ever had your fortune told?"

She suddenly asked. I froze, memories flooding back.

"Uh, yes, a long time ago."

"The name Judgement comes from a tarot card, and Spells from spells. The number 8 represents the eight wands of first love. Overall, this scent symbolizes a love that can't be replaced. No matter how many better, more fragrant, or more knowledgeable things we encounter, the scent of first love is unique and irreplaceable. In business terms, it's like trying it once and always coming back to buy it again, even after trying other scents."

The scent of first love?

"Oh, that's deep,"

I said, pretending to agree out of politeness, but inside, I felt unexpectedly romantic. Had she grown this sensitive?

"But it depends on personal preference," she added.

"What about the one next to it?"

"That's the same scent as this one."

"Then why is it called The Devil? Is it also named after a tarot card?"

"Yes,"

She smiled brightly. I smiled under my mask as she picked up another candle named The Devil.

"...."

"This one is meant to be a gift. Judgement Spells8 is for someone who feels like your first love, deep and unforgettable. The Devil is for complicated relationships."

Did she create this for Pang?

"Does it have a similar meaning to the first one?"

"Yes, The Devil is a deep card. People often think it's scary because of the word 'devil, but it also represents a love that remains connected, unable to part, whether it's a desirable relationship or not. It's like making a pact with the devil, unable to escape. It's the card of not moving on."

So, it really is for Pang...

"Most people buy this package as a joke gift for friends, like saying, 'I don't want to be friends with you, but I have no choice, like a devil binding us together."

She laughed lightly, but I sensed sadness in her eyes.

"Some people give this candle to ex-lovers they still have deep connections with. But overall, this candle has peppermint, which you're looking for."

I nodded, admiring how she closed the sale beautifully. My smile grew more affectionate.

"I'll take four boxes of this candle and two bottles of the same essential oil."

"Sure,"

She said, her face lighting up with joy. Seeing her again, she still had many sides for me to see. Since entering the shop, how many expressions had I seen her make? But soon, my order was ready.

"Here's a 10% discount for your next purchase over 1,000 baht."

"Thank you."

"Thank you too."

"Can I ask you something else?"

"Sure,"

She paused, looking at me curiously.

"Do you offer fortune-telling services here?"

"What?"

"Like, spend 5,000 baht and get a free fortune-telling session?"

"What do you mean?"

She looked confused, but I had to stifle a laugh.

"Just kidding. Thanks."

I said, walking out of the shop immediately I headed back to my clinic and sat in a corner where I could see the shop across the street.

"Dr. Pa seems to like looking at the candle shop,"

One of my assistants said. I chuckled softly.

"It's an interesting shop. Don't you think?"

"It's just a regular candle shop, doctor."

"Not really,"

I smiled slightly, not saying anything more, just watching her behind the counter as usual.

"By the way, have we given the promotional flyers for our new branch to the candle shop yet?"

"I don't think so. Should I take them over now?"

"Yes, maybe they'll come for a dental check-up."

As soon as I said that, my clinic staff quickly followed my instructions. I watched the tall figure still looking confused. But my observation ended when a patient walked in. I returned to work, hoping to see the candle shop owner again soon.

Work continued as usual. I was almost done with a patient when my staff brought in a new patient's file

"Dr. Pa, there's a walk-in patient for a dental cleaning."

"Okay,"

I replied, focusing on the child patient in front of me. When I finished, I turned to the new patient's file.

**'Pannakorn Kiattipiyatewa, nickname Pao.'**

Don't tell me it's the same Pao...

My heart raced with excitement. Instead of just sending the patient to the treatment room, I decided to walk out with the child. But my focus wasn't on any patient, just the tall figure waiting.

"You did great today. See, visiting the dentist isn't scary, right?"

"Not scary at all."

"Good job. Have a safe trip home,"

I said to the child's mother.

At that moment, I saw her freeze, looking shocked. She must have seen the nameplate outside the clinic. So, she still remembered me after all these years.

"Is the next patient here?"

I asked my staff, lowering my mask so she could see my face clearly.

"Yes, doctor. This way,"

The staff gestured. I turned to look at her naturally, and she was still frozen.

"Hello, Pannakorn. Here for a dental cleaning?"

"Uh, yes.."

She was stuttering...

"Follow me, please,"

I said, leading the way. But she didn't follow. She hesitated before speaking.

"Uh, I have something to do, so I can't stay today.."

"Once you're in the clinic, even crying children have to get their teeth done."

She remembered me so there's no reason to hesitate.

"You wouldn't run away like before, would you, Pannakorn?"

I asked, sending a gentle smile, but my eyes conveyed that this time, no matter what happened, I wouldn't let her run away again.

***I won't let you escape again...***

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# Chapter 28: Something Terrible

The tall figure stood stiffly as before, even though we were now in the dental room. I pretended not to notice anything, asking straightforwardly if she hadn't had a dental check-up in a long time. She answered, and then it was the assistant's turn to prepare the patient to sit on the dental chair. She followed the assistant's instructions, and then I heard a loud sigh.

**"Are you scared?"**

I asked, raising my hand to touch the woman's shoulder in front of me.

She flinched, a clear smile appearing at her adorable reaction. The tall figure turned to look at me, bringing our faces very close together. My heart fluttered strangely, but I had to act as if I felt nothing.

"Uh... no, not that scared," she replied.

"Are you cold? If you are, I can ask the assistant to bring a blanket," I offered.

"No, it's okay," she said.

"Alright, just relax. I'm going to adjust the chair," I said, and she flinched again as the chair reclined.

***So cute...***

She looked at me when our eyes were at the same level. I couldn't hold back my laughter, but I had to control myself. No matter how adorable she was, she was still a customer.

"Okay, I'm going to adjust it a bit more so you can lie comfortably, Ms. Pannakorn,"

I said, adjusting the chair one last time. I saw her nervously looking back and forth between me and the assistant.

"Would you like to cover your face? If not, the water might splash a bit," I asked.

"Uh.."

"But if you want to see my face while I'm cleaning your teeth... we don't have to cover it,"

I teased her a bit more, not letting my smile show.

"C... cover it, please," she said.

Then the teeth cleaning began. Even though I was working, I couldn't help but glance at her beautiful lips, which were slightly open for me to work on.

She had beautiful lips and very clean teeth...

"You take good care of your teeth. There's hardly any tartar,"

I commented.

"Thank you," she mumbled.

"Don't talk yet, or the tools might hit your tongue," I warned.

At that moment, I knew she was probably cursing me in her mind. My smile grew under the mask. After finishing the cleaning, I mentioned a promotion, pretending it was something she should do, even though I just wanted to spend more time with her.

"Bite down for four minutes. If you have any saliva, let me know,"

I instructed.

Then everything was in place for me to ask a question. Deep down, I wondered if her personality had changed since she was a child. I moved the chair back and casually read her history, already knowing who she was.

"Ms. Pannakorn, do you recognize me?"

I asked. Her shocked expression was clear. I smiled slightly before continuing.

"Actually, I recognized you at the candle shop. I wanted to say hi but wasn't sure, so I had the clinic staff give you a promotion flyer, just in case you came in for a check- up."

She remained silent, swallowing despite my earlier warning not to.

"Don't swallow. I told you to let me know if you have saliva,"

I reminded, raising the suction tool to clean her mouth. But she stayed silent, not opening her mouth.

"Open your mouth, or how can I suction the saliva?"

When my words, which sounded like a command, came out, she obediently opened her mouth.

Then everything fell silent. I glanced at her, thinking about how to tease her. Finally, I remembered something unusual she had done.

"By the way, did you know the nickname section is for child patients?"

I asked, laughing internally because it was clearly marked for children.

"But it's not wrong to fill it out. It's cute."

**"Huh?"**

The compliment was genuine, but she opened her mouth in response, causing the impression tray to fall out. I quickly got up to grab a tissue to clean her, not thinking about anything else.

"Let me clean that for you..."

I said, gently wiping the mess, not realizing the position I was in.

**"P... P' Seenam! I can do it myself,"**

She said, grabbing the tissue from my hand, her voice startling me.

"Sorry," I apologized. "It's okay. I'm just clumsy,"

She replied.

"When you called me P' Seenam, I knew it was you, Pao..."

And so, our reunion began. I smiled at her, and she smiled back, though her smile was a bit tense.

"It's strange, isn't it?"

"What's strange?"

She asked, looking puzzled. I laughed softly before answering.

"It's us. The first time we met, you tripped and scraped your knee, and I lifted your skirt to check the wound. Now, meeting again, you're still clumsy, and I'm helping you in a position lower than your navel again."

Her tense demeanor softened. She smiled at me, a sense of comfort becoming more apparent. Finally, she said what I wanted to hear.

**"It's been a long time, P' Seenam. How have you been?"**

"I've been good. How about you, Pao?"

"I've been good too," she replied.

"Have you grown taller?"

"Not much taller, but you... you're still the same height,"

She said. Though I didn't want to hear that, I pretended not to be affected, even though I wanted to glare at her.

"It's a memorable greeting," I said.

I spoke, and soon soft laughter filled the air, reminiscent of our childhood. Even though I had seen her many times, actually talking to her was unexpected. A feeling crept in, and I couldn't identify what it was.

"Since we're here, can I have your number? I have a lot to talk about, but..."

I glanced at the clock, which showed it was almost 7 PM.

"I have another patient."

"Sure, I need to get back to the shop too," she said.

We exchanged numbers. At that moment, I forgot what I had told Pang. I only knew that our reunion was better than I had imagined.

"By the way, are you free tonight around 8:30?"

"I should be. Why?" she asked.

"Great, let's have dinner. I know a good place where we can talk,"

I suggested.

"Uh..."

"No refusals. We rarely get to meet,"

I insisted.

Finally, the plan was set. I continued with my last patient, feeling more cheerful than usual. But then something annoyed me. Pang texted me, and my earlier cheerfulness faded.

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**[Whatever you're planning, it won't work. Just give up.]**

.

I stared at the message, feeling angrier than ever. What right did she have to tell me what to do? My anger pushed me to type a challenging response.

.

[Meet me at the restaurant tonight. I have something to show you.]

[Why should I go?]

[It's up to you. I'm not forcing you.]

.

I left the restaurant's name where I planned to go with Pao, not caring what Pang would reply.

After finishing everything at the clinic, I headed to the candle shop where the tall figure was busy with something. The staff greeted me as I walked in, and soon she approached me, looking more cheerful than I had expected.

"Right on time," she said.

"You changed quickly. That dress looks great,"

I commented, noting how the tight dress demanded attention. But I pretended it was a casual compliment, even though I was more interested in the figure beneath the fabric.

"I keep a change of clothes at the shop. It only took a moment," she explained.

"Oh," I replied

"Shall we go?" she asked

"Sure. Are we driving together or separately?"

"I didn't drive," she said.

"Okay, let's take my car," I offered

I smiled at her, but then my phone buzzed with a message from Pang, saying she had arrived at the restaurant. My heart raced as I hurried to drive to our destination.

***What will Pang's face look like... when she sees Pao with me?***

When we arrived at the restaurant, I quickly walked in and saw Pang waiting.

**"Look who I brought. Do you remember Pao?"**

That was my first greeting, watching Pang's shocked face with satisfaction. But her shock soon turned into displeasure.

"How did you come together?" she asked.

"We opened a new clinic in the same mall as her shop, right across from each other. We met today, so I invited her. I thought it would surprise you. You used to love getting your fortune told by Pao," I explained.

"Oh..."

I looked at Pang with an innocent expression, as if I knew nothing. Pang kept her composure, though I knew she was processing everything.

"You remember her, right?" I asked.

"Yeah... I remember," she replied.

I waited to see if she would say more, if she would expose everything. But she said nothing, perhaps fearing that revealing her secret of sleeping with me would also come out.

"Sorry for not telling you. I just got to Bangkok recently. I met Pao today but had already planned to meet you. Missing either of you would be a shame,"

I said. Pang's stern look turned to me. I smiled slightly, feeling like I had won the first round.

"Is anyone else coming?" she asked.

"No, just the three of us," I replied.

Because if there were more... it wouldn't be fun.

"Oh okay," she said.

"Come sit here. Order whatever you like, it's on me,"

I said. She gave me a forced smile before sitting down as I invited her.

**"Pao... shouldn't you sit next to me?"**

Pang's authoritative voice rang out. I looked at her, not pleased, but pretended to laugh it off, acting clueless.

"Pang, you'll scare her," I said.

"Scare? Has Pao ever been scared of me?"

She asked, looking at the youngest one. Pao seemed more tense, but soon her tension turned into weariness.

I looked at her, feeling a bit sorry but that feeling lasted only a few seconds "Excuse me, I need to use the restroom," Pao said.

Pao walked away from the table. As soon as she was out of sight, Pang's stern gaze turned to me. My gentle senior act stopped.

"Is this what you wanted to show me?" she asked.

"Yeah," I replied

"Are you really happy doing this?"

"Well... I don't know. Maybe it's more like fun."

"...."

"I already told you, Pang. If you're upset that I'm hanging out with Pao, you just need to make me more interested in you. But honestly, I think I'm more interested in Pao now. She's grown up so well, hasn't she?"

The provocative words echoed, and the feeling of victory made the night seem even more eventful.

"I'm taking Pao back."

"Go ahead. I just invited you to see for yourself that when you said I'd never succeed."

"...."

**"I've already succeeded in one step."**

She stared at me with a challenging look, and I couldn't help but smile and continue speaking.

"Think about it, Pang. Even though it's the first time we've talked in years, she agreed to come with me so easily. Maybe Pao still has feelings for me. I don't need to remind you how she used to feel about me."

Finally, Pang stormed off from the table in anger, heading in the same direction as the youngest one who had left earlier. Sitting alone, I wondered if this was really fun or if I wanted something else.

I didn't like chaos, but if I could control it freely, it wouldn't be so bad. After pondering for a while, I realized they had been gone too long. I decided to follow and see if they were still in the restaurant.

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"**So, Pao, are you admitting you still like me?"**

**"Yes! I still like P' Seenam, and I'm so happy to see her today. I'd rather sleep with her than do anything with you! Are you satisfied now?"**

.

My legs froze. What did Pao just say? Still like me? Want to sleep with me?

Before I could react, Pao's beautiful face turned to me, tears streaming down, showing her pain. My heart ached for no reason, and I wanted to say something.

"....."

But in the end, I couldn't say anything.

"I'm sorry, P' Seenam. I have to go now,"

She said, walking away. I didn't dare to look after her. All I could do was turn to the other person nearby. Pang glared at me angrily before walking so close that we almost touched.

"Are you satisfied now?"

I didn't respond, and she walked away in another direction. The situation was worse than I had imagined, and the fun I had anticipated seemed to fade away. Was it because of the pained look on Pao's face as she walked away?

And so, the night I thought would be more interesting than any other ended. I didn't even touch the food I ordered. I walked to my car with my mind still racing.

But as I drove away, I saw the familiar figure of the person who had left earlier. She was wiping away tears as she walked. My heart trembled, and I drove slowly, even slower than her walking pace.

Eventually, a car behind me honked. I didn't dare call her to get in the car, so I just drove around, parking where I could to watch her until she walked out of sight. If I couldn't park, I sped up to circle back and check on her.

Finally, she walked into an entertainment venue. I parked to make sure she arrived safely before driving back to my condo.

It seemed like everything was over. I called the tall person once to pretend to ask if she got home safely, but I hung up after a few seconds. She didn't answer, but later that night, I got a call.

[P' Seenam, *sob.*.. I'm sorry...]

The sobbing voice on the other end made me squint at the phone number again.

"Pao?"

I asked uncertainly. The sobbing continued.

[Yes... It's Pao... I'm sorry...]

"Where are you? Are you okay?"

My heart felt conflicted. Wasn't I the one who made her like this? How could I ask if she was okay?

[I'm at Man's place...]

Man... the guy from our middle school group?

"Okay... that's good."

[I said something bad.]

"...."

**[Did you hear me when I said I wanted to sleep with you? *Sob*...]**

She cried loudly. I, half-asleep, immediately widened my eyes. At first, I was shocked by her intense crying, but then I started to laugh softly.

"Well, yeah, I heard."

[Do you hate me? I'm sorry...]

"It's okay. You don't need to apologize. You must have had a reason to say that. I don't know what you and Pang were talking about before I heard, but I'm not upset. Are you drunk?"

[Yes...]

"Then go to sleep. Don't feel guilty."

[I'm sleeping... on the balcony...]

"Huh?"

I frowned. Sleeping on the balcony? She'd catch a cold.

[P' Seenam, can you come get me?]

"Now?"

[Yes, Man's condo is at...]

She gave me the address and asked me to pick her up right away. When I looked at the time, it was almost 4 AM. I got up and dressed while she told me not to hang up, to stay on the line until I arrived, and she'd come down when I got there.

Normally, I wouldn't follow anyone's orders, but tonight was an exception. Her pitiful face was still vivid in my mind, and I felt responsible.

Not long after, I drove out of my condo towards the address she gave me.

But as I got close, the call dropped, and I couldn't reach her again.

"Did her battery die? Or did she turn off her phone?"

Confusion set in. I mumbled to myself, staring at the condo in front of me, unsure what to do. Finally, I parked in front of the condo and waited in the lobby until almost 5 AM. Who would have thought she'd come down around 7 AM?

I watched her walk out of the elevator with relief, feeling like my two or three-hour wait was over. I smiled at her, but she walked past me as if she didn't see me. I froze, confused about what was happening. Finally, I rushed to my car, parked by the road, and called out to her.

"Pao, get in the car..."

"Who are you?"

She squinted at me, and I felt a surge of anger.

***Does she not remember asking me to pick her up?***

"Get in the car quickly. I'm blocking traffic,"

I said, glancing at the cars behind me, honking impatiently.

"Who are you? Wait... How did you get here?"

She looked around, confused, making me sure she called me while drunk.

I quickly got out of the car, grabbed her bag, and the strong smell of alcohol hit me, confirming she had no idea I had been waiting for her for hours.

"You're still in the same clothes, and you reek of alcohol. Get in the car; I'll take you home."

"P' Seénam... How did you get here?"

"Didn't you call me to pick you up?"

"What?"

Why was she so surprised? If it weren't for me causing her to be in this state, I would have given her a sharp look

She finally agreed to get in the car, but she seemed dazed, still not fully sober.

"Did you drink a lot?"

"I don't remember how much I drank."

"It must have been a lot. You smell strong."

"Uh... You can drop me off here. I don't want to trouble you."

The smell wasn't as troubling as making me wait for hours, but whatever. I was the one who put her in this state.

"It's fine. I was just asking. I didn't mean for you to get out of the car.... So, where should I take you?"

She sighed, hesitated, and didn't answer my question.

"Can I charge my phone?"

"Sure."

Then everything fell silent again until I asked her once more.

"So, where should I take you?"

"You can drop me off at a hotel nearby."

"The hotel?"

"Yes."

Then her words about wanting to sleep with me popped into my head. Or was I overthinking it? She wouldn't ask to sleep with me now, would she?

What should I do... I'm not in the mood for that right now.

"Why do you want to go to a hotel?"

"Well... It's not a good time to go home."

"Why not?"

Was she afraid of running into Pang? Yeah, maybe that's it.

"Sorry, I asked too much."

"It's okay. I don't mind."

She gave me a faint smile, and I noticed how tired she looked. Guilt washed over me. If she couldn't go home, maybe she could stay at my place for now.

"How about this? Come stay at my place. At least I have clothes you can change into."

She agreed to stay at my place. As soon as we got there, I offered her a drink, as was polite when having a guest. I told her to take a shower to feel refreshed, but within minutes of me getting her some clothes, she had fallen asleep, too exhausted to shower.

"You must be really tired,"

I said, walking closer to her, examining her carefully. I noticed a wound on her knee.

"When did you get this?"

I decided to clean her up. I went to the supermarket downstairs to buy bandages, a toothbrush, and some other essentials. When I returned, she was still asleep.

I used a small towel to wipe her down and then cleaned her wound gently. Even though she was asleep, she moved occasionally when I cleaned the dried blood.

"Ugh..."

She groaned. I looked at her from above.

"Just a bit more, almost done."

I looked at her again, and it seemed she was just talking in her sleep. She didn't even know I had cleaned her up and treated her wound. How deeply was she sleeping? Once I finished, I covered her with a blanket and checked her over to make sure there was nothing else to do.

She slept for a long time, and my actions seemed to make her sleep even deeper. Seeing her asleep, I started tidying up my room, organizing some clutter.

A white bear keychain from my school days brought back memories. I smiled because it wasn't just the white bear keychain in the box, the brown bear keychain she had left over ten years ago was there too.

After finishing everything, I walked out of the room and ordered some food, thinking that the person who was asleep would be hungry when she woke up. My eyes focused on her beautiful face, her eyebrows furrowed together.

I used warm water to wipe her face again, but the intention to make her sleep comfortably was put aside. Her big round eyes slowly opened, and I greeted her with a cheerful voice.

"You're awake..."

"Did I fall asleep?" she asked.

"Yeah, you slept for several hours. You looked so tired, so I didn't wake you up," I replied.

She rubbed her face in confusion, and it reminded me of the time I accidentally lifted her skirt, causing her to run away for a long time. The memory came back vividly and unexpectedly.

"Sorry for taking the liberty of wiping you down. I saw you sleeping like that and was worried you might get sick. Oh, I only wiped your arms and face this time. I didn't go to any weird places, except for your knee where you got hurt. You got another wound this time,"

I said with a smile.

I smiled, but she just looked at me without saying anything. I quickly thought about what to say next to avoid making the atmosphere tense like in the past.

"So, I cleaned it up and put a waterproof bandage on it. That way, it won't hurt when you shower. It must hurt a lot, right? If it gets really painful or infected, you should see a doctor," I added.

She continued to look at me but didn't respond...

"Also, I went down to buy a toothbrush and some food for you. If you're hungry, you can take a shower and then come out to eat. I'll warm up the food while you shower,"

I said, trying to change the subject because I didn't know what else to say.

I decided to cut the conversation short and told her to take a shower because I was out of words. But the person in front of me had a change in expression. Tears slowly rolled down her cheeks. I felt a chill, my heart felt light, and I was confused, wondering if I had done something wrong.

"Pao..."

"Yes..."

"Do you feel bad because I wiped you down? I didn't mean to make you feel bad, I just..."

My excuse trailed off. I couldn't even think of what to say at that moment.

"No, it's not that," she replied

"But you're crying..."

**"It's a good thing..."**

She said, biting her lip, her sad eyes looking at me.

**"Because it's good, that's why I'm crying."**

Because it's good?

"Why doesn't this kind of care and attention happen with the people we love?" she asked.

"....."

**"Why is the person who is good to me someone I once did something terrible to?"**

Something terrible? Did she do something bad to me...

Why would someone so genuine and innocent think that way?

. .

At that moment, a sense of right and wrong was hitting me hard. I wasn't used to seeing anyone's tears, especially not from someone I remembered as a junior with a pure smile.

It made my insides feel all mixed up. Did she really do something bad to me?

**When the person who did something bad from the start... was actually me.**

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# Chapter 29: Inebriate

"What did you do that was so terrible?"

I asked, staring at her, curious about the answer to her recent statement.

"I said those things out of childish emotions, saying things that shouldn't have been said, even though I knew deep down that there was a high chance they'd come true. But I still did it for my own benefit."

*What does she mean by that?*

"Even though I didn't know if you, P' Seenam, found happiness, I couldn't help but think about what would happen if you really didn't find happiness."

She cried heavily, and from what she said, it wasn't hard to guess that she was referring to the prophecy she made when we were kids, which she left me with before disappearing.

"You still remember that? It's been over ten years."

"Do you remember, P' Seenam?"

"Of course I do, but it wasn't a bad thing."

I sighed before walking over to sit next to her as she cried.

"And... have you been happy, P' Seenam?"

"Yes, happiness doesn't always have to be about love."

"Are you mad at me?"

"Yes."

As soon as I said that, her beautiful face looked like she was about to cry even more. I smiled at her endearing expression before continuing,

"Mad that you disappeared."

I explained at length to ease her sadness. She listened quietly, still looking guilty, and it was necessary for me to say what I was thinking.

"Pao's love life hasn't been great either, right? So don't worry about my past. Just take care of yourself first."

Instead of stopping her tears, she cried even more.

"I'm... I'm sorry."

"It's okay it's okay I'm not mad anymore."

I lifted my hand to rub her back, comforting her with my words.

"Don't be so kind to me."

"But I'm a nice person."

***Even if I'm not a good person..***

Everything started to settle down. I got up to prepare some food when I saw that she had calmed down a bit. She went to take a shower as I suggested. She was gone for an hour before coming out of the bathroom wearing my clothes, which didn't quite fit her.

"These pants are really short. Can you wear them?"

"Yes, they're fine."

"Good then."

We sat down to eat, talking about various things, including the menu we ordered for this meal. I told her I had charged her phone, but the surprising part was her living situation.

After a short conversation, we concluded that she lived in the room I used to spy on with my telescope. Even though I hadn't invited the woman from that room to get her teeth done, it seemed she had already come to me for dental work and was now sitting here crying for comfort.

What a coincidence. As I pieced everything together, it turned out that I had been watching the same person all along, and the room she mentioned was definitely that room.

And if she was the owner of that room, did that mean she was a heavy smoker?

"But you decorated your room beautifully, P' Seenam."

"Oh, I decorated it for when I opened a branch in Bangkok. I didn't stay here much before, but now I think I'll be moving here permanently."

"I see. Do you like white? The room looks very clean, all white."

"White makes it look nice and it's a lucky color too."

I tried to steer the conversation back to her rather than the coincidence that had shocked me.

"Lucky?"

"Yes, wait a moment...."

The box I'd accidentally grabbed seemed useful now. I took out a white and brown teddy bear keychain. Should I show her that I had kept the bear keychain she threw in the trash back then?

But I decided to take out only the white bear keychain.

"Do you remember this?"

I asked, holding it up for her to see.

"Yes, you still kept it?"

"Yes, I kept things from when I graduated high school. When I moved here, I accidentally grabbed the box with me. It has friendship notes and school uniforms. I always forget to take it back to Chonburi."

"That's nice."

"What about the brown bear keychain I gave you?"

"Well...."

She looked uncomfortable, making me even more curious about her answer.

"I... I lost it."

"It's been a long time."

*Well... who would admit they threw it in the trash back then?*

We resumed eating, and everything seemed more relaxed. She was less tense, and I could focus on cleaning up without worry. She offered to wash the dishes, but I quickly declined and told her to rest until she was ready to go back to her room.

"Pao, let me know when you want to go back. Or if you want to smoke, there's a small balcony in my bedroom where you can smoke."

I casually mentioned, trying to confirm if she was the woman living in the condo across from mine.

"Uh.... how did you know Pao smokes?"

It seemed like she was the one.

"Oh, the smell stuck to your clothes. I smelled it in the car. Also, when I picked up your bag, I saw it. At first, I wasn't sure if it was yours, but when we got in the car, I thought it must be."

"Oh..."

"Actually, dentists should scold you. Smoking is bad for your teeth and your body. But if life isn't easy, we need an outlet. I smoke sometimes, but only when I'm stressed or drinking."

I lied because I didn't smoke and didn't like smokers much. But she was an exception. Maybe her life wasn't easy, so she needed something to relieve stress, as I had said.

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Can I smoke then?"

"Sure."

She looked cheerful. I didn't say anything more, but she asked another question.

"Will you smoke with me?"

"Huh?"

"It feels better with a smoking buddy."

I raised an eyebrow, wanting to please her, but since I didn't smoke, I suggested something else.

"How about some beer?"

"Do you have some? Let's have it!"

She was so cheerful. Had the little girl from back then turned into a drinker?

"Okay do you want to drink from the can or should I pour it into a glass?" "From the can is fine."

I nodded and prepared everything before joining her on the balcony.

The weather was nice. The sky outside was getting darker. We had been together for hours, but I hadn't noticed the time passing, maybe because she had slept most of the day.

"Do you feel better after smoking?"

"Yes, I hadn't smoked all day. It tastes better now."

"Really?"

"Do you want some?"

I quickly shook my head, pretending my life was perfect right now.

"No, I'm not stressed and not drunk yet."

"Oh..."

"Is it tasty?"

"If it were tasty, it would be candy."

"True"

She smiled at me before looking out, seemingly uninterested in me During that time, I studied her face closely. A feeling crept in, telling me how beautiful she was.

"You can ask me anything you want to know, Seenam. I feel much better now"

"You mean..."

"About when we were kids"

"Oh... I used to want to ask why you cursed me like that, but now ! don't care. You probably did it out of teenage emotions."

"I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I told you it's in the past. I'm happy now "

I brushed it off, not wanting to talk about it anymore, but she asked another question.

"Aren't you curious about last night... when Pao fought with Pang?"

She asked, taking a sip of alcohol.

"I am, but I gathered that you were dating Pang. Is that right?"

"And... when did you start hearing us?"

"That's a secret."

I smiled a little before taking a sip of alcohol.

"Actually, we used to date. We broke up two years ago."

"Oh, really? Then why did you fight like you were still together?"

"We still have a connection we can't break. Like... how should I say it?"

"Just tell me what you want to. You don't have to feel uncomfortable."

Because even if she didn't tell me, I had a good idea of what her relationship with the other woman was like.

"We still sleep together. Is that too blunt?"

She laughed, but I could tell it wasn't a genuine laugh.

"I never thought I'd do something like that, but when it's someone you love, you'll do anything to keep them from leaving. Have you ever heard of losing yourself just to keep someone? That's what Pao did, doing everything to hold on to what she once had, fooling herself to prolong the pain."

"So you're not sad?"

"On the contrary, I'm very sad. It feels like dying."

I looked at her again. Her face suddenly seemed older, but her words revealed the pain inside. Everything was confusing. I didn't enjoy the situation. On the contrary, I felt she shouldn't have to go through this.

The alcohol and the atmosphere made me confused. Would it be good if I could help her out of that relationship?

"To forget someone quickly, you need someone new. I think this method works well."

I started to persuade her. What began as fun turned into excitement I hadn't expected.

"I didn't believe what Pao said before, but I think I believe Pao can create happiness. If Pao wasn't good, Pang would have left without a trace."

And this was what I truly thought. If I could bring back her innocent smile, it might make up for the terrible events she went through last night.

And besides if she was with me, my boring life might become more interesting.

"Try to make me happy like you said, Pao. I'm part of what you need to take responsibility for."

We looked into each other's eyes. The surroundings were silent, but my heart started to beat faster. I'd never felt like this before, never spoken so directly when I wanted something. But this time, I said what I thought easily.

I collapsed to the floor, pretending to be drunk, even though I was just shocked by what I'd said.

***Strange... this isn't like me at all.***

"Are you okay? And... what did you mean, P' Seenam?"

"I'm drunk."

"Huh?"

"I'm drunk. You should rest. Can you get home by yourself?"

The words were clearly a polite way of telling her to leave. It wasn't that I couldn't handle the situation, but I needed some time to think things through.

"Uh yeah, I can get home."

"Are you leaving now?"

"Well. if you're going to rest, I'll head out."

"Okay you can go. I'll sit here for a bit. My room locks automatically, so don't worry."

"Are you sure you don't want to lie down properly?"

"Yeah, I'll get up in a bit."

Finally, she agreed to leave. I sighed deeply, staring at the dark clouds above. I bit my lip to regain my composure. What was wrong with me? Why did I say that to her?

Even though my mind was wandering, the tall figure of the junior who had just left came back. She looked at me with a serious expression, prompting me to ask,

"Did you forget something?"

"I forgot to do something important"

"Something important?"

She didn't answer but instead walked closer and quickly scooped me up in her arms.

"Whoa..."

I yelped, my heart racing. I was too shocked to even hold onto her. How could she lift me so easily?

"Sorry for carrying you like this, but if I don't take you to bed properly, I'll feel guilty."

"Aren't I heavy?"

"Honestly yes, but it's manageable."

In that moment, a strange feeling crept in. Not only was my body stiff, but my face felt numb. All I could do was praise her strength and try to suppress this odd sensation.

I didn't want her to see my face right now

Eventually, I leaned against her chest. The scent from her body made it even harder to think.

**She was both cool and adorable.**

She carried me to the bed. I pretended to fall asleep, but she didn't just leave me there. Instead, she started wiping me down, just like I had done for her before.

"Excuse me," she said softly

My heart pounded erratically. I prayed she would finish quickly and leave. But she was so gentle, as if afraid to wake me. Her touch was so tender, it reminded me of when she told Pang she wanted to sleep with me. Should I make a move now? Was she being so attentive because she wanted something?

**"I'm leaving now. Thanks for today."**

But my thoughts were interrupted. She didn't cross any boundaries. After wiping me down, the door closed, and I opened my eyes to an empty room.

I touched my face, still feeling the warmth of her touch.

**"No wonder Pang is so protective."**

I muttered to myself, a smile slowly forming. The childhood promise that she would make me happy seemed less important now. Because now I was more interested in that junior than I had ever imagined.

I grabbed my phone and dialed a number. I didn't need to call, but teasing someone who liked to be in control seemed like the right thing to do. She should be more worried after underestimating me so much.

[What do you want?]

"Just calling to chat as old friends. I didn't know who else to talk to."

[I don't consider you a friend. Don't call me again.]

"Sure, but I just wanted to say that Pao is really sweet. I don't understand how you could be so cruel to her."

[What did Pao tell you?]

"Nothing much. She just came to vent, talked in my room, and opened up about a few things."

The line went silent. I checked my phone to make sure she hadn't hung up. Her number was still on the screen.

[Pao was with you?]

"Yes. Oh, and I've decided to ask her out."

[What are you talking about? Pao would never date someone she just met again.]

"Who knows? Did I ever tell you that when we were kids, she predicted that only she could make me happy? It was like a love confession. Now I want to see if it's true. I told her she has to take responsibility for what she said. Besides, she seems to want to get away from you."

"...."

"And today, she really caught my interest. She showed how cool and adorable she is. You know me, when I want something, I get it. So, step aside for me."

"....."

**"I'm going to make her mine."**

The line went silent again. I waited for her to hang up, but then her voice came back.

"Do whatever you want. If you think messing with me will make you feel better... go ahead. But I'm telling you, Pao loves me a lot. Don't be so sure you can take her from me."

"You're so selfish. You're not even dating her anymore, but you can still say that with a straight face."

"**You're no better than me. Don't forget, I've seen your true colors."**

Then the line went dead. Her confident tone irritated me. Maybe I did want to mess with her, but wanting that junior for myself was more real. I set my phone down and stared at the ceiling, deep in thought.

After being underestimated like this, I had to continue this game....

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The next day, I waited for the tall girl at the candle shop. She arrived later than usual, but I saw her on her phone outside the shop, looking anxious. I walked over to her.

"Pao."

She froze, looking surprised before greeting me.

"Oh, hey, P' Seenam. Are you here to buy candles?"

"No, I'm here to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yeah, let's talk somewhere else."

I decided to move quickly. We ended up at a restaurant. She seemed very nervous, probably because of what I said last night. She kept looking at her phone, making me wonder who she was talking to.

Was she talking to Pang?

Even though Pang said I could do whatever I wanted, she was still holding back. She was acting just like I did as a kid. Or was this her way of getting back at me for teasing her last night?

**"Let's be honest, Pao. Will you date me?"**

I decided to lay it all out, to see if I should stop or keep going. She seemed shocked, her voice loud enough that I had to tell her to keep it down. But in that moment. I found her awkwardness endearing, like a scene from a childhood movie.

Confusion mixed with my thoughts. I wanted to know if she was ready to move on from Pang, but I was also afraid that if she still wanted to stay, my words would make her uncomfortable. So, I added a lie to ease the tension.

"What did you say, P' Seenam?"

"I said, will you date me? No, **pretend to date me."**

She looked confused. I closed my eyes for a moment to gather my thoughts before creating a story to lighten the mood.

"Maybe I didn't explain well. There's someone who's been trying to date me. I don't like him, but we work together, so I have to see him often. I can't reject him outright because we need more doctors at the clinic. But pretending to be interested is exhausting. So, I want you to..."

"Wait a minute, P' Seenam,"

She interrupted, raising her hand.

"You want me to pretend to date you so this other person won't pursue you?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Why me?"

"Isn't it because of your prediction? The one where you said only you could make me happy?"

I brought up the prediction again, even though it didn't really matter to me.

"Well... maybe it doesn't matter."

"But maybe it does. Like I said, I've never been happy with anyone I loved. And the ones who truly loved me, I never liked them. Maybe your prediction is why I'm like this. And besides, you're trying to move on from Pang, right? This benefits both of us."

"...."

"Oh, and I still think you should take responsibility. You knew there was a high chance your prediction could come true, but you said it anyway."

"Uh..."

She seemed stunned. Then she looked down at her phone, which had a notification. I couldn't see who it was from, but it might have been Pang.

If Pang was talking to Pao, it'd be over. I'd have to stop caring about them and go back to my boring life.

"Won't this cause problems with Pang?"

"You broke up with Pang, right?"

"Yes, but Pang is your friend."

"That's separate. I think Pang can handle it."

"But Pang mightn't let me go easily"

She was hesitant, which meant my persuasion was working.

"Trust me, I can handle it. Pang might have to let go because the person you want is me."

"Huh?"

"But it's up to you. Even though I'm pushing, if you're not okay with it, we can drop it. I understand. It's not easy."

The earlier confusion faded. I looked at her calmly. Everything seemed to be in my favor. If Pang was playing a game, Pao wouldn't be acting like this. Realizing that, I smiled.

"You look stressed,"

I said, my voice betraying no worry. In fact, I sounded more relaxed than during our entire conversation.

We finished our meal without any more questions or answers.

"I'm heading back to the clinic. Don't stress about your answer. Take it easy."

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I left her with that, walking back to the clinic like the good senior I always was. But everything had to be perfect. Luckily, an old friend was helping out at the clinic today I talked to her right after finishing with my patients

**"Chasing someone? I'm a bit hurt you used that term for someone else."**

I laughed softly, walking over to a friend I wasn't very close to but often relied on for work.

"Why? Do you still like me?"

"Not as much as in school, but I still do."

"We're going to tell Cha. Don't forget, Cha is our friend too."

As soon as I mentioned the name of the person's boyfriend in front of me, she sat up straight, blinking her eyes before baring her teeth at me.

"Don't try to threaten me. It's because of Pa that you didn't accept my love. Not only did you reject me, but you also introduced your friend to me."

"And what's wrong with Cha? If you don't like it, then just break up."

"I'm not breaking up!"

"See? I introduced someone suitable for you. Come on, consider it a favor for when I played matchmaker for you."

Mai looked thoughtful, staring at me as if she didn't really want to do it.

"Let me think about it first"

"Mai..."

"....."

"I thought I asked nicely."

My smile faded, and I looked deeply into the eyes of the short-haired woman in front of me with a calm expression. When she saw my demeanor, she quickly looked away.

"Fine, fine. You're like a villain in disguise, always radiating a menacing aura. What do I have to do?"

As soon as she finished speaking, my warm smile returned.

"I'll tell you later. Let's leave the clinic together."

After that, I secretly watched the person at the shop across the street. She often looked over at my clinic, making me think she might be waiting for me. So, this seemed like the perfect time for everything to make sense.

I told Mai to pretend to flirt with me, while I would act like I couldn't refuse to observe the behavior of the tall person who might come out to see me after work. I knew her schedule and thought my guess was pretty accurate.

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"Do you want to grab something to eat?"

Mai's voice rang out, her face teasing as if mocking the situation.

"I'm still full and really tired."

"But Mai wants to have dinner with Pa. Can't you come with me? I've been waiting for so long."

"I already told you to go ahead. My patient came late today"

"Come on, just this once, and I'll focus on work."

"Using work as an excuse again."

"I'm only using it to get you to come with me."

I smiled at my friend beside me, sending an appreciative look. She was acting better than a professional actress.

"Alright, but just for a bit. I'm really tired."

As soon as I said that, I started to sense someone following us. I looked straight ahead at the beauty clinic, and the shop's window reflected the tall woman walking behind us.

"Okay! Let's take Mai's car then."

I followed Mai, thinking about whether she would come in, help out, or if she would do nothing at all, I might just stop caring about her.

**"Is your shift over, P'Seenam?"**

Here she comes...

My smile grew wider, but I had to hide it before greeting her.

"Oh, Pao, I thought you had already left."

"How could I leave when I'm waiting for you?"

"Waiting for me?"

I feigned surprise, genuinely shocked that she admitted she was waiting for me.

"P'Seenam can't have dinner with you today."

Before I could say anything, she turned to talk to Mai, who looked like she was holding back a teasing comment.

"Who is this, Pa?"

Mai asked, pretending to be upset, making me want to give her an award for best actress.

"Oh... a classmate."

"My name is Pao. I'm **P'Seenam's girlfriend**."

I froze. Not only was I shocked, but Mai also looked equally surprised. She probably thought I was the one pursuing this woman, but from Pao's behavior, it seemed like she was the one pursuing me.

We were stunned for a moment. Mai, who'd been briefed well, quickly spoke up.

"Pa, you have a girlfriend?"

"Well..."

Finally, I let out a small laugh, unsure if I was amused, pleased, or happy. I gave Mai a grateful look before saying something we hadn't rehearsed.

**"Sorry, Mai. I can't go with you. My girlfriend is here to pick me up."**

Even though she started the conversation, I just followed along. But now, the tall woman looked so shy that she had to cover her mouth with her hand. That made me quickly grab her hand, my heart pounding without knowing why.

"Shall we go, Pao?"

"Y-yes, let's go."

I parted ways with Mai, giving her a smile of thanks once more. Mai raised her hand as if to wish me luck, and then it was time for me and the tall woman to be alone together.

"Um... I think she can't see us anymore. Should we... let go of hands?"

"Let's hold on a bit longer, to break the ice."

I said, liking the person beside me more without realizing it. But even though she was shy, she looked at me steadily, with a compliment slipping out.

"When you smile... you're really beautiful."

"Hmm?"

"Oh! I meant the person named Mai. She's really beautiful."

*Not convincing at all...*

"Beautiful? I've only heard people say she's handsome."

I played along, my smile growing even wider.

"Oh, right, right. Handsome. Pao misspoke."

Then she let out a sigh. I glanced at her a bit.

"You sighed so loudly."

"I was worried it wouldn't be convincing."

"It was convincing. I was surprised too."

"I was surprised too, P' Seenam."

"So what do we do next?"

I asked, sounding like I didn't have an answer myself. If I had her pretend to be my girlfriend, then what? Now, I needed the person beside me to share her thoughts.

"Let's talk on the phone tonight. Pao should go back to her room first."

And once again, she intended to escape. But since my hand was still holding hers, I tightened my grip.

We've come this far, I can't let her go so easily..

"We're right here together. Isn't it better to talk face to face?"

"Huh?"

"Let's go to a bar."

I looked at her beautiful figure, considering, and a smile broke out on my face.

***Should I get her drunk...?***

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# Chapter 30: Breaking Into Her Room

Even though I'd previously thought about getting her drunk, when it came down to it, that idea vanished from my mind. Seeing her show off her cool side earlier made it impossible for me to take my eyes off her beautiful face. But her grimace while trying the infused liquor made me feel even more fond of her.

"Huh, oh wow."

I quickly raised my hand to cover my face, trying to stifle my laughter It wouldn't be right to make her lose confidence.

"What's so funny?"

"It's just that, Pao... you made a funny face"

"It's the taste."

She made a face as if she couldn't put it into words, and that made me quickly order more of the same drink.

"Excuse me, can we get four more of the same, please?"

"Four? Really?"

"Come on, just a little more"

In the end, everything turned out this way I wasn't interested in the powder or getting her drunk, I was interested in the person in front of me who was opening up a new world for me. How should I put it?

The first time I came to an infused liquor bar, it was probably like this. And the person who brought me was a college friend who was eager to try new things. Once I tasted it, it wasn't so bad.

Tonight, I let myself go completely, drinking to my heart's content, feeling like the person in front of me could protect me even though the bar was full of men.

"Pao..."

"Yes?"

**"I'm drunk..."**

That statement wasn't an exaggeration. As soon as I told her how I felt, my heavy head slumped onto the table. If I were this drunk with other friends, I'd be bracing myself for the pain of being dragged back to my room. But because it was her... a tall, strong woman who seemed trustworthy, I didn't need to worry about anything.

She carried me to the car as if my body was as light as a single pillow My eyes closed, pretending to sleep even though I was still somewhat aware.

She smelled nice... which made me feel even more at ease.

But it seemed I had underestimated her strength. As she carried me for a while, she started to complain. She brought me to her room, and my excitement grew, but I continued to pretend to be asleep.

"P' Seenam, my arms are tired. P' Seenam..."

She called out when we stopped inside the condo. I continued to feign unconsciousness until she alternated between carrying and setting me down. At least she didn't drag me back like my college friends used to.

Soon, I found myself on the bed. The scent of my favorite essential oil filled my senses. The atmosphere felt like I was back in my own room. But this time, being laid on the bed wasn't as gentle as before, which was understandable since she must have been quite tired.

I could hear her breathing heavily nearby, but what intrigued me more was sensing her beautiful face moving closer. Her warm breath touched my face, confirming she was about to do something.

*Is she going to kiss me?*

I didn't open my eyes to look but chose to lie still, waiting to see if she would dare. My heart pounded erratically, my throat dry, and I swallowed slowly. Finally, I decided to break the silence.

"Where... am I?"

Her face quickly moved away when I spoke. The smile I wanted to show her had to be suppressed, making me feel tense.

"This is my room."

"Who?"

I pretended to ask, focusing more on her beautiful face.

"Oh.."

"My girlfriend's?"

As soon as I said that, her flustered expression made me feel even more fond of her.

"You could say that."

"Oh..."

I quickly sat up, not wanting to look at her any longer because I felt strange inside.

"I don't feel well."

The infused liquor was taking its toll on me...

"Do you want to take a shower? I've already washed your clothes, so you can wear them."

"But I can't get up."

"How about a sponge bath then?"

"I want to shower."

"But you can't get up."

She'd already confirmed being my girlfriend... so just helping me shower shouldn't be a big deal.

That must have been her thought at the moment. But instead, she left me there, not helping me shower or even giving me a sponge bath. She chose to shower alone.

As soon as she disappeared into the bathroom, I waited until I heard the sound of the shower. If she started showering and I went in then, what would happen?

I didn't let myself wonder for long. My body quickly moved into the bathroom with a heavy head, but I was still somewhat aware. Luckily, she didn't lock the door, probably used to being alone. So, this seemed like the perfect opportunity.

As soon as I stepped in, I slowly undressed. I pretended not to see her, but from the corner of my eye, I noticed her naked body watching me. I didn't look at her directly, but I could tell she had a great figure.

"P' Seenam!"

She hurriedly grabbed a towel to cover putting on a shirt herself. I felt a pang of disappointment, not having had the chance to fully appreciate her figure.

"You're drunk."

"Pao?"

I pretended to ask again, giving her an innocent look to make her believe I was out of it.

"Yes, it's me, Pao."

"Why are you naked?"

"I was showering!"

"How did you get to my bathroom?"

"This is my room."

"My room..."

"Oh, P' Seenam... please be more aware. Look around, this isn't your room. And it's not the time to claim the bathroom. You can't just strip like this!"

She exclaimed, looking like she was about to cry, unable to handle the situation. I wanted to laugh and pat her head, but I held back.

"Why not? This is my room."

"P' Seenam! Look at me."

"I am looking..."

I stared at her without blinking, sending a longing look that made her face gradually turn red.

"Be aware."

She should be the one aware... why is she so shy?

"Pao, it's you."

I pretended to recognize her, lifting my hand to gently touch her beautiful face. Her skin was smooth and warm.

"You've grown up so beautifully."

"Huh?"

"You've grown up so beautifully. You're tall. Look at me. I'm still small."

I let the towel drop, hoping she would do something about my body, but she kept covering me with the towel

"You can't do this!"

"Why not?"

"It's indecent... Pao might die."

"Why would Pao die?"

As soon as I said that, she started to look at my barely covered body. Her face turned red, and...

"Go back to bed. I'll take you."

She tried to push me out of the bathroom.

But because she was too innocent, my patience finally ran out.

**"I wouldn't mind if Pao did more than just look."**

This time, I wasn't pretending to be drunk. My gaze turned serious, and she stopped everything she was doing.

"Next time, let's not go to an infused liquor bar."

She turned her gaze away, so I needed to push her a bit more.

"I'm Pao's girlfriend. My body... is Pao's."

And it worked. She scooped me up like before, carrying me out of the bathroom quickly. She laid me on the bed, took off her only shirt, and my heart raced as I saw her body clearly.

She leaned down to kiss me immediately. It should have been familiar, not too exciting, but this time... my heart pounded so hard I couldn't think straight.

I wrapped my arms around her neck, not wanting her to pull away from our touch. She kissed well and was strong. I couldn't imagine what it would be like if she dominated me all night.

"Mmm..."

I moaned as I started to run out of breath. She was more intense than I expected.

But then she pulled away, and my heart sank. Confused and frustrated, I watched as she put her shirt back on. I stared at her in displeasure, not understanding why she stopped so suddenly.

"Pao."

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have I'll sleep on the couch."

I quickly grabbed her arm, causing her to sit back on the bed. When she was within reach, I moved to sit on her lap, my eyes conveying my desire.

"Why? Why shouldn't you?"

"Because you're drunk, and I shouldn't take advantage of you."

"If you say it's taking advantage, that means it's something good for Pao."

I always found the right words to persuade people. So, no matter what tonight,

She had to be mine

"If I start it, it's not a problem, right?"

I leaned down to kiss her, letting my skilled tongue explore. She didn't resist, which encouraged me. My body pressed against her thigh, my desire rising along with my racing heart.

And it seemed what I had been waiting for had arrived. She used her strength to push me down, her gaze filled with the same desire I felt. In that moment, my heart fluttered, and I felt weak, no longer in control.

"I can't stop now....**Pao can't stop now.**"

Everything fell into place. She touched me as she pleased, and I was ready to comply with her every wish. She continued to kiss me, her lips trailing all over my body. But she also showed me another side of her.

"Are you okay?"

**She was gentle**... and when I responded, her fingers began to press deeper. My heart trembled, and I swallowed hard, still not used to the new sensations. She did everything so well that I had to pull her in for a kiss.

"I'm going to start now..."

"Ah!"

My mind went blank, my body trembling with uncontrollable desire. I didn't know if she was already skilled or if the infused liquor had enhanced her abilities, but whatever it was, I was completely intoxicated by her touch.

She didn't stop touching me, and I hoped she would continue until the night was starless.

Even though I wished we could go on until morning, in reality, 1 couldn't keep up. Her strength never waned, while my body, tired from a full day's work, felt exhausted.

"Pao, I....can't take it anymore."

"One last time... okay?"

Her breathy voice said. I liked it, but I was also a bit scared.

**In my entire life... no one had ever made me reach the peak over and over like she did tonight.**

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Finally, our love game ended. My body felt heavy as if I had been running for hours. My vision blurred, and I had to close my eyes to keep my mind from spinning.

My breathing was loud and constant, and my arms lay limp at my sides, too weak to pull her in for a kiss as a reward for what she had just given me.

But then she leaned down and kissed me, as if she knew I wanted to kiss her too. Her tall frame wrapped the blanket around me carefully, and soon our bodies moved closer together.

I didn't have the strength to even turn and hug her, but she did everything I wanted to do. Her tall frame embraced me, and I drifted off to sleep, feeling completely drained.

If I exercised more... would I be able to keep up with her?

In the late morning, the alarm clock rang incessantly, but the person who set it showed no signs of waking up. I stared at her beautiful face, my mind filled with thoughts.

If I had to describe my gaze, it would be one of admiration that wouldn't stop. Last night's events were still vivid, every touch still lingering, and I was quite impressed with her.

I spent a long time studying her beautiful face, but then her eyelids slowly opened. I quickly closed my eyes, pretending to still be asleep. She got up suddenly, seemingly startled by the precarious situation.

I opened my eyes to see her tall frame now just sitting there. She seemed quite shocked, so I had no choice but to greet her.

"You're awake."

She didn't respond but quickly got up to put on the shirt she had discarded beside the bed. Her frantic movements made me sit up as well, but since I was still naked, I grabbed the blanket to cover myself a bit.

"P' Seenam, um... about last night..."

She seemed to lose her composure, biting her finger like someone extremely stressed. But I thought those fingers weren't meant to be bitten.

Even though I waited for her to say something, her tall frame collapsed to sit beside the bed. I was about to help her up, but then I realized she intended to kneel down herself.

**"I am sorry!"**

Sorry?

"About last night..."

She closed her eyes tightly, biting her lip before speaking louder than usual.

**"Pao will take responsibility for P' Seenam!"**

I was quite shocked. I stared at her, but within a split second, everything seemed to lighten. What did she say? Take responsibility for me? Even though I was the one who initiated everything last night. I laughed, feeling an unexpected surge of affection for her.

"Did you gather a lot of courage? You even knelt down."

I wiped away the small tears that had formed, trying to get a clear look at her beautiful face from a different angle.

"Well..."

She made a goofy face as usual, making everything seem adorable.

I reached out to stroke her hair, my heart beating faster but feeling inexplicably at ease.

"You're so cute."

"Uh, cute?"

"Yeah, you're cute. Acting like you did something wrong."

"Well... don't you think it was wrong?"

"I don't seem angry, do I? So how could it be wrong?"

I started to smile at her in a way that didn't feel forced, unlike many times before. I propped my chín on my hand, looking at her as if this was a comfort I shouldn't have. Because she's so cute, that's why Pang never let her go.

My mind started to fill with thoughts, but in the end, all I could say was,

"Since you spoke so seriously, from now on, please take responsibility for me."

Even though that conversation should have been longer, her tall frame seemed unaccustomed to it. She kept avoiding eye contact, so I gave up. She probably needed more time to think.

So we parted ways in the afternoon. I went back to shower and get ready for work as usual, but then a message from someone came in the morning, and I just saw it.

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**[Give up your intentions. Today, I'm going back to see Pao.]**

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I read the message with irritation. My good mood slowly changed, my heart pounding with anger before I started to reply.

[Sorry, but it's too late. We can't give up our intentions.]

As soon as I sent the message, a phone number appeared. I stared at it for a moment, hesitating whether to answer, but in the end, I did, even though I didn't want to talk to her at all.

"You actually called me. Pang, you always tell others what to do and then do everything yourself."

[Stop messing with Pao. Pao is mine.]

Her harsh voice came through, and I knew immediately she was angry But that wasn't my concern because the person I cared about was the woman in the condo across the street.

"How can I stop when she's caught my interest? And she seems interested in me too."

[What are you talking about? Pao would never be interested in you. Pao loves me.]

As soon as she mentioned love, my anger surged. My hand clenched tightly, not wanting to accept that she had received the same tenderness I had last night.

"But last night... we were together."

[What... what are you saying?]

"Exactly what I said. Don't be so sure she'll stay with you forever. You never took care of her heart. Now that I'm taking her, what's your problem? Are you suddenly possessive? I don't know what makes you so confident that Pao still loves you, but go talk to her. If she says she loves you, I'll give up."

[You seem very confident that she won't come back to me.]

"Well, everything fits. I'm interested in her, she's interested in me, and I even brought up that childhood prophecy. So I think she's responsible enough not to go back on her word. And from what I see, if I had to guess, Pang..."

[....]

"You'll never hear 'I love you' from Pao. You'll never get her back."

[.....]

**"Because I already have her."**

I ended the call in frustration, trying to focus only on what mattered. But things didn't go as I planned... because now Pao and Pang were talking at a coffee shop.

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Both of them looked serious, with no signs of the sweetness of old lovers reconciling. Even though I thought that, my heart trembled, unable to explain the feeling.

What was wrong with me... anger? Displeasure? Or something else....

But then Pao's eyes met mine outside the shop. My heart sank, and she looked at me with a guilty expression. Why did she look at me like that?

Was Pao going back to Pang? I pushed that thought aside and walked away. If she really went back to Pang, there was nothing I could do.

At this moment, my heart was trembling. There was no sense of humiliation as there should be, but rather an unfamiliar feeling. What was wrong with me?

If she went back to her ex, it shouldn't be a big deal. With my ex who decided to marry someone else, I felt indifferent, at most just humiliated.

But this time... why was it different?

**"P' Seenam!"**

Suddenly, a voice called out. That way of calling my name... was it her?

I was about to reach the clinic when I stopped in my tracks. My heart raced, knowing she saw me and chose to follow me instead of talking to the person in the coffee shop. Inside, I felt so happy that I turned to greet her as if I had no other thoughts before.

"Have you been at the shop long? I just got here."

"Did you see Pao just now?"

"No, I didn't see you until you called out."

I lied, not wanting to ruin the happy feeling with the strange thoughts.

"You didn't see me at the coffee shop?"

Why did she keep asking...

"You saw, didn't you well."

"Have you eaten? I made a sandwich for you."

I handed her the sandwich I brought, trying to change the subject. If she told me to stop everything, it would be hard to accept, even though I had prepared myself a bit.

"Did you make it yourself?"

"Yeah, I usually make my own sandwiches almost every morning.

Even though it's afternoon now, it can still be called breakfast."

She was silent, looking like she wanted to say something more.

If she really chose Pang, I would have time to come to terms with it while working. I didn't want to say this, but she was the only one I felt regretful about.

"So if you're free this evening, let's have dinner together. Block my schedule in case Mai asks me out again."

I mentioned Mai even though she wasn't coming to the clinic today. As soon as she took what I handed her, I walked away immediately.

I couldn't focus on work. Everything was chaotic, and I wanted to go back to bed. But then I put that thought away.

Hours later, she was waiting for me at the clinic. I was surprised but thought she must have something important to say, so I brought her into the dental room for privacy.

"Is something wrong? You look stressed."

"Oh, I just wanted to say the sandwich was delicious."

"Really? Good... I'll make more for you."

"Thank you."

Then everything fell silent. I looked at her, waiting for her to speak, but she didn't. So I asked,

"Is that all?"

"Well....Pao will get to the point."

It was time to stop everything

"Did you see Pao with Pang?"

"You saw too? I thought I was being discreet." "Yes, when I saw you, I came out immediately..."

Why did I feel anxious? I had hours to prepare myself.

"Oh... but don't worry. We haven't had a serious talk. Everything happened quickly, so I understand. Pao probably needs time to sort things out. Let's think of this as a trial period, learning everything slowly. If you still want to see Pang, I'm okay with it. After all, I'm just someone you have to take responsibility for... not someone you feel good about."

Feelings of inadequacy I had never felt before started to grow. At least now, I should say something to make myself feel better. She looked at me, and I looked at her, not knowing what expression I was showing.

**"What if Pao feels good about you?"**

My heart raced... I couldn't believe what I just heard. Did she say she felt good about me?

"When I talked to Pang, I couldn't deny my feelings... but when I saw you, all my doubts faded. I'm glad I had the courage to tell Pang to end things and not see each other again. And now, thoughts of Pang seem to slip away easily, unlike before. For the past two years, I never got over her. But when you came into my life, it's your thoughts that occupy my mind. I can't figure out what your smiles mean."

"It means I understand."

I tried to stay calm, even though my heart was racing with what she was explaining. Everything was different from what I had thought. If she said this, it meant she didn't agree to get back with Pang, right?

"Why do you understand? We did something beyond responsibility, Or were you just drunk last night, or... did you mean what you said to Pao?"

"Thinking like you said before? What do you mean?"

"Pretending to date... Are we just pretending to date? I don't want that kind of relationship anymore, because it wouldn't be any different from when I was with Pang. If we end up like I did before, I think we shouldn't even start. I'm sorry that what I said this morning and now seem completely opposite."

"It's different.."

My body moved on its own, as if my brain was no longer in control, but my heart was. I walked towards her, my lips pressing against hers with a whirlwind of emotions.

I closed my eyes, trying to suppress my feelings, searching for answers about who I was. But the clearest thing right now was the voice in my head telling me that kissing her, being close to her, and everything she said was making me lose myself

**I felt like I wasn't the same person anymore.**

"Can you smell alcohol on me? If not, it means I'm not drunk. And besides, ever since we met again, haven't I shown interest in you? So, I don't want a casual relationship either."

"What?..."

"But to ease your mind about whether I'm just drunk... Do you want to test it?"

"You mean..."

"Right now, if we were to do that, I wouldn't mind."

I said it as if it was what I wanted, but it seemed like she wanted it too. She moved quickly to kiss me, my heart racing and my thoughts running wild.

But then...

**"But... I have a patient next. What should I do?"**

I said, regretting that we couldn't be closer right now.

"What?"

"You have to go now. My patient will be here soon."

"You want me to leave now?"

"Yes, we'll talk later..."

I quickly stepped back, turning away from her as if I couldn't look at her beautiful face anymore. If I saw her any longer, I might have to ask my assistant to reschedule my patient and be with her in this room.

She looked confused but chose to leave without saying anything. When she was out of sight, my body felt weak, collapsing into the chair with a heavy sigh, trying to control my emotions.

"Doctor, your patient is arriving,"

One of the staff said. I picked up the patient's file, forcing a small smile to hide my strange behavior.

"Thank you."

"Are you feeling okay, Doctor? Your face is really red."

I touched my face lightly, blinking as I realized how numb it felt. My chest was pounding so hard it was uncomfortable.

"Just tired. When the patient arrives, send them in."

"Okay."

I changed the subject, ending everything with my heart still racing. No need to schedule a farewell dinner with Pao today... So maybe...

**Should I just go to her room?**

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**Chapter 31: Feeling Jealous...**

**It was almost ten o'clock now...**

I stared at my phone, which had no messages. Was she not planning to text me at all? And when did she disappear from the shop? I glared at my phone in frustration, but soon my patience ran out. I grabbed the salmon and found myself standing in front of the tall girl's room.

*Knock, knock*

The sound of knocking echoed, and soon the door opened to reveal someone with an annoyed expression.

"Why are you so late! If you're going to be this late, don't bother coming next time!!!"

The voice shouted as soon as the door opened. I flinched, blinking rapidly, unsure of what to do.

"Am I late..."

"Oh... it's you, P' Seenam."

The scary voice softened, and her demeanor changed. That made me ask.

"Yeah, did you have plans with someone? Maybe I should leave."

I didn't know who she had plans with, but I should probably go. Even though I thought that, my arm was held back by the tall girl.

"I did have plans, but not anymore."

A smile slowly appeared on her face, and her lips pursed cutely. She invited me into the room. The pleasant scent made me feel more relaxed, just like the first time I came here.

But my eyes were drawn to the many alcoholic drinks lined up. I raised an eyebrow, and the room's owner laughed awkwardly, as if she hadn't had time to clean up.

"Have you eaten?"

"Not yet."

"But you've been drinking?"

Her stern demeanor, which she rarely showed, became clear. It wasn't appropriate.

"Just a little. I was waiting for Cat and Man."

"So no one else is coming now?"

"No, they said they'd be very late, so Pao suggested we reschedule."

"Oh, so it's just the two of us then."

I tested the waters. She looked nervous immediately, making me smile secretly.

"Have you eaten anything, P' Seenam?"

She changed the subject.

"Not yet, but I brought something... salmon."

I said, showing her what I had in my hand.

After that, we sat down for a late-night meal together. I didn't make any moves like I'd planned. We just talked, asking each other questions, like we were getting to know each other better

"When was your last relationship, P' Seenam?"

"Me? Hmm... a long time ago, about five years:"

"Wow, that's a long time. What was that person like?"

"She was a dentist too. We used to co-own a clinic in Chonburi. After we broke up, I left and opened a clinic with a friend instead."

"Oh... did she take good care of you?"

"I don't know. We were more like friends who ate, traveled, and slept together. She had a fiancé."

"Huh."

This was the first time I dared to tell someone about this. Well... my story with my ex wasn't something to brag about.

"Surprised?"

I laughed softly before continuing.

"It happened at the wrong place and time. She didn't like women from the start. I was the one who pushed myself into her life. Pretty bad, right?"

"Well... everyone has their reasons."

"My reasons mightn't make sense."

"What do you mean?"

I just wanted her... the harder it was to get, the more I wanted her.

"It's a secret..."

I smiled before asking her, "What about you, Pao? What do you like about Pang?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's the bond. I don't like change. It feels like starting life over without knowing what to expect."

"So you stayed in your previous relationship?"

"Yes."

"I get it."

"This place has fresh fish."

"It's my regular spot. If you like it, we can order from here again."

She gave me a thumbs up before handing me a can of beer.

"Will you drink with me, P' Seenam?"

"I can't. I have work tomorrow."

"You look fine today. You drank a lot of herbal liquor yesterday."

"Everyone needs a break. Not everyone drinks every day like you, Pao."

"How do you know 1 drink every day?"

She started to tease me back. Quick learner...

"From the amount you stockpiled, it looks like you could drink for a week or two."

"I could finish it in a day."

"Seriously?"

I was shocked, but she laughed.

"Just kidding. How did you get here, P' Seenam? Did you drive?"

"I walked, in case someone was lonely."

"I'm not lonely."

"Then I should go."

I started to tease her. She quickly grabbed my arm, not wanting me to leave

"Wait, if you leave now, I'll be lonely."

"Really... then I'll stay a bit longer"

"Good, we need to finish the salmon first."

She said, taking a bite of salmon, but soy sauce stuck to the corner of her mouth like a child waiting for someone to clean it.

"You're messy..."

I handed her a tissue. She thanked me immediately, but I still wanted to tease her. I pulled the tissue back and leaned in.

I licked the soy sauce off the corner of her mouth. She froze, unprepared. My smile grew as I spoke.

"The soy sauce here is delicious, don't you think?"

She stared at me, seemingly dazed. I was about to laugh, but suddenly she moved closer and kissed me quickly. I was surprised, but the soft touch made everything feel lighter. I kissed back, even though I didn't expect her to do that.

She was more daring than I thought

My affection for her grew even more. Soon, she pulled away. We looked into each other's eyes, hearts racing, breathing softly, trying not to show excitement. So...

**"A kiss that tastes like salmon and soy sauce..."**

I started licking my lips. I didn't want to say something like that, but what could I do? If she saw i was nervous, she'd get foo confident.

"P' Seenam! Why did you say that?"

"Why not? It's unique."

"I tried not to say it."

"So you thought the same?"

She nodded, covering her face in embarrassment. I couldn't help but laugh at her cuteness. When she saw me laughing, she started laughing too. This moment was something I'd never experienced before.

This light, warm feeling was new to me.

Then I started teaching her how to brush her teeth. She followed my instructions perfectly, so I praised her with a hidden meaning.

"You're really good. You did everything right. Should the doctor give you a reward?"

"What's the reward?"

"Maybe... the doctor will stay over."

*Coming to her room was a great idea.*

Tonight, she was as passionate as ever. I lost count of how many times I lost my mind. No matter how many times we did it, it was never enough. Have you ever heard that finding someone with great sexual chemistry is like winning the lottery?

That's how I felt. My past partners weren't bad, but the person in front of me had a spell that made me fall for every move she made.

This time, I tried taking the lead. The tall, model-like girl looked cute under me. Her flat, toned stomach made me unable to look away. How much did she work out? That thought kept popping into my head while we were together.

"How was it..."

I asked, looking at her differently.

"**Is this really you, P' Seenam? Why are you so amazing..."**

**Seriously, her timing for saying things was always off.**

I laughed, kissing her forehead and running my hand through her slightly sweaty hair.

"Why use the word 'amazing' now? I can't stop laughing..."

I rested my head on her neck, and she wrapped her arms around me.

"I couldn't think of anything else..."

"Breathe first..."

I gave her time to catch her breath, and soon she couldn't stop praising me.

"Am I heavy..."

My voice was muffled. I was still lying on her even though our love game was over.

"No. Do you like lying on people like this?"

"I just wanted to try lying on a six-pack. Do you work out a lot?"

"Quite a bit"

"I get discouraged every time I work out. I can never go consistently."

"Work out with Pao. Having someone cute nearby will give you more energy."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Are you sleepy?"

"I'm asleep now, talking in my sleep."

"Silly..." So cute.

"Do you want to shower?"

"I'm too sleepy. Can we just sleep?"

"No."

"Snore."

Her playful but cute voice made me laugh again. How many times had I laughed since I met her?

"What if we shower together?"

"Wow, where did all this energy come from!"

She jumped up, and I couldn't help but laugh again.

"You're such a naughty kid."

"I'm your kid."

"You're getting better at talking."

**Yes, she was getting better at talking, and her teasing was increasing too...**

That night, we fell asleep in each other's arms again. Every time I woke up to see her, I felt good and smiled. Even though I used to think my life was boring, with her, that feeling faded away.

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One day, I was working hard with overlapping patients, leaving no time to eat from lunch until evening. I was exhausted and frustrated, but then a message from someone came through.

[There are so many patients today. Have you eaten yet?]

The candle shop owner texted me, as if she was watching the clinic all the time. That made my exhaustion seem to lessen.

[Not yet. I only have a ten-minute break. The patient is stuck in traffic but should be here soon.]

I sent the message back, but she just read it and didn't reply. I drank some water, feeling a bit hurt that she asked and then went silent. Where did she go? We hadn't talked all day.

My eyebrows furrowed, and suddenly there was a knock on the door.

What was this? I thought the patient would be late. Why were they here now? My tired face showed again as I put my mask back on.

**"Food delivery for the doctor."**

A familiar voice called out. I blinked rapidly, seeing the tall girl walk in with a smile.

"Oh."

"The patient hasn't arrived yet. You should eat quickly."

Without another word, she dragged a chair over to sit beside me. The lunch box was set in front of me. I was still dazed by the current events, and before I knew it, she was spooning rice and holding it up to my mouth.

"Open wide."

And so began the experience of being fed like a two-year-old. I was still in a daze, but the person feeding me couldn't stop smiling.

"Is it good?"

She asked, flashing another cute smile. My heart fluttered, and I nodded, unsure of what to say.

**This kind of thing had never happened to me before. I'd never been cared for like this, not even once.**

I didn't know when I started seeing her differently, but my gaze was now filled with admiration and joy. The prediction she once made, that she'd bring me happiness, didn't seem far-fetched at all...

It wasn't just the surprise meals she often brought me, but the little things she did that I'd never experienced before.

"Did you bring your car today?"

She asked one day after I'd just finished work.

"No, I didn't. Are you going somewhere?"

I asked, shaking my hand a bit to relieve some of the fatigue. If she drove me back to the condo, that would be great. Even though the condo was close to the mall, my body didn't feel like walking at all.

"No,"

She replied, and my excitement faded instantly.

"But I have this."

She extended her hand to me, her usual bright smile even more pronounced I looked at her beautiful, slender hand with a certain feeling, my smile growing wider as I reached out to hold it, thinking.

Maybe walking back wouldn't be so bad.

"If you can't walk, just let me know. Pao will carry you back to the room,"

She said, making me laugh when I shouldn't have been able to.

"Just holding hands gives me enough strength,"

I replied, tightening my grip.

"Wow, Pao must have magical powers. May the doctor's fatigue disappear, disappear, disappear," she chanted.

*Goodness... how can she be so adorable?*

"You really do have magical powers. Don't let go of my hand," I said.

"Of course. Whoever lets go first gets punished..."

Her eyes hinted at something, and I didn't need to ask to know what she meant.

We walked back to the room without letting go of each other's hands. Even when I went to the bathroom, I held onto her hand. Eventually, she gave in and became mine for the night.

**Isn't our story adorable right now?**

And if you think these little things are enough to make me happy, the tall girl always had more tricks up her sleeve to make me smile. Like one day, she waited for me until I finished with my patients.

"I have something to show you..."

She said, leading me to another floor of the mall, to the kitchen ware section.

"Ta-da..."

She held up two bear-shaped mugs, one white and one brown. I stared at the mugs, memories of a keychain from the past flooding back

"Is this what you wanted to show me?"

"Yes. Do you remember anything?"

"Hmm? Remember what? It doesn't ring a bell,"

I pretended not to understand. She immediately looked disappointed, ready to put the mugs back. But I couldn't hold back my smile and reached out to grab her arm, pulling her back.

"Where are you going?"

"To put them back,"

She said, still looking upset. I gently patted her head, feeling affectionate.

"They look like the keychain I gave you, right?"

Her disappointed expression changed, her eyes sparkling. She nodded eagerly and showed me the mugs again.

"Do they look the same? Do they?"

"Yes, they do. Let's buy them and use them at home. A pair of mugs."

"Yay! I almost got upset. I'll go pay now,"

She said, giving me a quick kiss on the cheek, not caring about the few people around. I touched my cheek, usually not one for public displays of affection.

But for some reason, I couldn't stop smiling, pleased with her actions...

Our relationship had been going strong for a month now. Everything was going well, and I was happy. But the stress from work increased when I received a call.

[I'm sorry, but I have to move back home. I can't work at the Chonburi branch anymore.]

"It's okay, I understand. But if you know anyone who wants to work, let me know. I'll cover for now."

[Thank you so much for everything.]

"Likewise."

I ended the call, realizing that the junior doctor at the Chonburi branch had resigned. With such short notice, it'd be hard to find a replacement, so I had to cover the branch for now.

In the morning, Pao went for her usual workout while I planned to buy groceries to cook for her return. But something unexpected happened. A high school friend stood at my door, and the three of us stared at each other, wide- eyed.

"Uh..."

I broke the silence, but they seemed lost in thought

"Is that... you, Seenam?"

"Oh, yes. Cat and Man, right?"

They nodded, and it was inevitable that they'd follow me to the supermarket. They seemed hesitant at first, but once that faded, the questions came nonstop.

"How's Pao? Why are you living together? What's your relationship?"

**"Oh, I'm dating Pao."**

And believe me, that answer left them both flustered and confused, and they didn't ask anything else. Eventually, we returned to the room where the tall girl was waiting.

"Did you buy groceries? You should have waited for me so we could go together,"

She pouted but quickly took the bags from me.

"I wanted to wait, but I was worried our guests might be hungry."

"Guests?"

She asked, confused, as Cat and Man walked in.

"I already introduced you,"

I said, laughing softly before heading to the kitchen, leaving her to talk with her friends.

She seemed to be getting scolded by her friends, but seeing her with others for a long time made me feel irritated. So I called her to taste the food, bringing her back to my side instead of with the outsiders. Soon, the meal I prepared was ready, and the four of us sat down to eat together.

"Is Pao hard to take care of?"

Man asked. I laughed at the odd question but didn't feel uncomfortable.

"Not at all. She's easy to take care of."

"Pao is a heavy drinker. She drinks and gets drunk all the time."

"Hey, why are you exposing me?"

The tall girl seemed different, more playful, but in a way that she only was with friends.

"I have to let her know, right?"

"Pao hasn't been drinking much lately. If she does, we drink together..."

This time, I answered, and her friends seened pleased with my response.

"Take care of Pao for us. She's not all there, but she's a good person."

I nodded, laughing softly, knowing that the three of them would start bickering and teasing each other soon.

**I didn't easily feel close to anyone, but with Pao's friends, it wasn't hard at all.**

"Are you uncomfortable? Cat and Man asked a lot of questions," she said.

"No, it was fun. I didn't think a group of fortune tellers would stay friends this long."

"No one is as fun to be with as Cat and Man."

"Not even with me? Oh..."

Her playful nature started to rub off on me.

"They're fun as friends. Or do you want Pao to feel that way about you too?"

"As friends? Sure, if it makes Pao happier."

If that happened, it'd be bad. Just being out on the balcony with her friends for a long time made me irritated.

"But you can't eat together."

"You're cheeky. Do you think saying that will make me anxious and say no? Actually, I can do it."

"No, because Pao can't."

"There you go, cheeky kid."

I laughed, everything going the way I wanted. The comfort and peace when Pao was with her friends, even if it was noisy, wasn't my style, but now it didn't bother me.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. I might have to go out of town once a week for a while."

"Why?"

"The clinic in Chonburi needs a doctor. I'll have to cover until we find a replacement"

"So we won't see each other?"

She started to pout, but it didn't bother me.

"Just one day."

"But if you go every week, that's one day a week we won't see each other for a million weeks."

"Do you think I won't find a replacement? And how long do you plan to live?"

"I'm just exaggerating."

"To keep me from going? How about you study to be a dentist? When you graduate, you can replace me, and I won't have to go. I can stay with you forever."

"But if I replace you, we'll still be apart."

"True."

"So what's the difference?"

She sat on the sofa, and I joined her

"Will you be lonely if I go?"

"Maybe I'll cry myself to sleep."

"Really? A kid pouting to keep me from working. What should I do?"

I said, stroking her hair. Stroking her hair had become a habit, but she leaned in and kissed me, still pouting.

"Won't you be lonely without a kid to kiss you like this?"

"How about I go in the morning and come back in the evening? It's only a 90-minute drive, like being stuck in Bangkok traffic. That way, I can still have a kid to kiss."

I cupped her cheek, but she didn't seem to be appeased.

"Won't you be tired?"

"No, I planned to go in the morning and come back at night. I'll clear my schedule to finish my last case by 5 PM, so I won't get back too late. Is that okay?"

"Or how about this... do you need a driver?"

"No, I can drive just fine."

"No, I mean Pao."

I didn't understand at first, but soon realized she meant she'd drive for me. If she drove, her candle shop would be left unattended one day a week.

"Let Pao be your driver. We can be together."

"What about your shop?"

"Closing one day a week won't be a problem. I've taken days off before. It should be fine."

"But isn't it better if you stay at the shop?"

"Are you saying you don't want me to go? Fine, I won't go..."

This was the first time she openly showed she was upset. I hesitated about taking her with me

"I didn't say that."

"But driving alone might be less tiring. I understand. I'll go take a nap."

She got up to go to the bedroom. I didn't quite understand her work routine, as she seemed relaxed about the shop, often napping after her morning workout instead of heading straight to the shop.

Should I invite her to come with me...

"Pao," I called out.

"What?"

No, it wouldn't be a good idea... If staying together affects our work, it definitely wouldn't be good.

"If you're going back to sleep, brush your teeth first. You just finished eating and haven't brushed yet, right?"

"Okay."

She looked disappointed but walked into the bathroom to brush her teeth as I'd told her. Even though she seemed unhappy, she still listened.

After that, she really did fall asleep. I walked over and kissed her cheek before heading to work. But then my worry grew when I saw a tall figure at the candle shop. And now, she was making sweet eyes at a beautiful woman.

I squinted to get a better look and realized that the person was an actress who was probably several years older than me. I'm not a celebrity fanatic, but she looked young. What was clear, though, was that my girl couldn't stop flirting.

[Is it right to leave you alone in the room one day a week, Pao?]

I finally decided to send a message to the person across the street. She picked up her phone immediately, but I didn't wait for her to reply. [The way you looked at that woman was very annoying. And you kept talking non-stop.]

This time, she quickly looked up towards the clinic to find me. We locked eyes through the large windows separating our shops.

[Not cute at all.]

**I stared at her, realizing instantly that I was... jealous.**

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# Chapter 32: Deep Feelings

[It's not like that. I was looking because she's a celebrity. And we talked because we met before, and she remembered Pao.]

[You met before?]

[We met when we were kids. It's been over ten years. It's not like that. She's a celebrity. You must know her, right?]

[Oh, a first love? Haven't seen each other in over ten years and then meet again. Sounds romantic.]

**I... couldn't control myself at all.**

Eventually, I chose to walk away from staring at the tall figure and the phone. When I walked back into the dental room, I didn't pick up my phone to read the messages again. But who would've known that the person I was just upset with would be so anxious that they had to come find me in the dental room.

"What are you doing here, Ms. Pannakorn?"

"I brought donuts for you."

"...."

I've already eaten, and I'm planning to skip sweets today. You should give the snacks to the customer who was here earlier. They seemed to enjoy it a lot"

"Oh, P' Seenam, it's not like that."

"Sit in that chair. If you have something to say, say it from there. No need to come closer."

**And this was the first time we had a serious argument.**

But even so, the jealousy faded away just by seeing her tears. My heart ached so much that I had to hug her. And in the end, the only thing that could make up for those tears was to keep her with me longer. She played the role of a dental assistant for the first time, and it was clumsy but very endearing.

I agreed to let her drive, but if we went somewhere with attractions and didn't go out, it'd be a waste. I suggested we take a trip out of town together. She agreed and went back to her room to prepare for our first trip with a happy demeanor.

I was excited... yes, very excited.

After finishing with the patients, I went back to find her in the room, only to see her tall figure sleeping. I moved slowly and bent down to kiss her cheek. Was she a child to sleep like this?

I smiled and thought of something fun, like going back to the room to get a revealing swimsuit to make her heart race. But when I reached the door, it was my heart that started racing.

"What are you doing here?"

"I forgot something. Can I go in and get it?"

Pang's voice echoed, and it made me quite displeased.

"What did you forget?"

"My headphones. They probably fell by the bed when we first met again."

She maintained her usual calm expression, and I was tired of asking more questions. I opened the door and walked in first.

"Find it quickly and leave. I have things to do.."

But it seemed like looking for something was just an excuse to do something else. Pang's tall figure quickly approached me. She kissed me immediately as if she didn't want me to escape. One hand held my neck while the other boldly slipped under my shirt.

"What are you doing!"

I turned my face away. Anger slowly seeped in as my body tried to resist.

"Doing what you like. I'll do it well... just come back to me."

Her serious eyes stared at me. She was determined to the point of being scary.

"Pang, it's too late"

"It's not too late."

She was stubborn, trying to slip her hand into my jeans. Her lips pressed kisses along my neck, making me shout at her.

"Pang... Pang! Stop this madness!!!"

"I won't stop!!!"

This time, she stood up straight and stared at me. Pang's pained eyes made me dizzy. She was crying, and even though I wasn't okay with what was happening, seeing the tears of someone I once liked slowed everything down.

Pity gnawed at my chest. Her tall body shook, and I couldn't think of what to say at that moment.

"Pa... I'm begging you, give Pao back to me."

"...."

"I'll do anything. I'll crawl like a dog right now if you want. Just give Pao back to me."

"....."

"I love Pao... I just realized how much I love her."

My mind was a mess, filled with shock, anger, and sympathy all mixed together. I couldn't think straight, and my silence seemed to make her assume I was accepting her offer.

Before I knew it, her fingers started to touch sensitive spots. She knew exactly where to control the situation, and I...

**....was just a terrible person.**

My sense of right and wrong was destroyed instantly. I let her do what she wanted because I felt like a winner. My habit of controlling everything in my life came back. Maybe saying I was defeated by tears wasn't far from the truth, but perhaps it was just an excuse to feel less guilty.

Her tongue continued to tease sensitive spots. She wouldn't let me move away, as if stopping would make me resist. My body stayed pressed against the wall, legs held in place.

Her beautiful face moved from my thigh back to the spot that made my mind go blank. I won in everything, but when I reached the end, I didn't feel that way at all.

**I didn't feel good at all...**

Emotions carried everything to the final moment, where guilt overwhelmed me, making it hard to breathe. No matter how many bad things I'd done before, this was the first time I felt this guilty.

And with that, I decided to call the person sleeping in the other room to tell the truth, feeling like I had no other way out.

But she didn't answer...

The screen showed an open chat with someone else. Messages were typed and deleted several times. What if I saw her cry like she did during the day? And if everything had to end while I was feeling more for her every day, what would I do?

At that moment, I felt like I understood Pang. I understood a saying I'd heard often.

***We only realize the value of what we have when we're about to lose it.***

[I came back to the room and saw Pao sleeping, so I didn't want to wake you. I'll go check the branch in Chonburi tonight. I'm afraid our trip won't be fun if we have to stop by the clinic first. So, rest tonight, and I'll drive back to pick you up tomorrow.]

In the end, the message I intended to tell the truth was saved. I wasn't ready to tell the truth yet...

But the tall figure in the same room read the message rudely. She stared at me, wanting an answer as to why I wouldn't end the relationship with the other person.

"Break up with Pao and let her come back to me."

"I never said I'd agree."

"But we had sex!"

"So what!"

I threw my phone to the floor with all my remaning strength.

"I never said I'd let Pao go. And besides..."

"...."

"Pang, your sex is terrible."

I didn't know what excuse to give her.

"I don't even know if it's terrible because you've lost your touch or because I don't care about you anymore."

One hand pressed against my temple, trying to find a reasonable answer. She stared at me, looking like she wanted to hit me to ease her anger, but in the end, it was the silence that made us reflect on something

"Why did you come and confuse me when everything was going well?"

"But in the end, you agreed. You can't say that."

I looked at her with many feelings. I couldn't explain how I felt. I just knew I didn't feel good about what happened. Just a split second. just a split second of my old habits coming back, and it seemed to make things worse

"Pang, let me ask you... if I let Pao go, would she be happy?"

"That's not something you should ask."

"And if I don't let her go..."

"...."

"How much would what just happened between us hurt Pao?"

Suddenly, a thought I never thought I'd have came out. I was confused, but I knew what happened was something I shouldn't have let her do.

"Why have I always put myself first?"

"Don't pretend to be good now. You've always gotten what you wanted. All those words about wanting both of us were yours. Don't pretend to be good now. It's annoying."

"Yes, someone who always gets what they want like me shouldn't feel anything about what happened."

"...."

"Then why... why am I not happy with it now?"

"....."

**"I should be having fun. I should be celebrating the victory that you went to such lengths. And Pao seems to love me a lot. Then why... am I scared?"**

When I finished speaking, my tears flowed. All the pent-up feelings were squeezing someone who'd never cried before, making me feel pain for the first time. I'd never been hurt by anything this much.

And when I truly felt it, what happened became a big issue that I couldn't figure out how to handle. How could I face Pao directly?

"Pao. shouldn't know about this. I don't want to see her cry."

"It's because of you! You're the one who made everything worse!!!"

This time, she seemed to lose her mind. Her tall figure looked at me with intense anger.

"Then why didn't you keep her! Why did you let Pao have a chance to open her heart to me?"

"...."

"And why did we both... have to hurt Pao like this?"

When those words ended, Pang's body lunged at me. She grabbed my arm tightly. Her face showed she just realized that what she did had no good outcome for anyone. I brushed her arm away and walked into the bathroom to calm myself down.

And when I was alone, the tears that flowed seemed uncontrollable. I cried hard to ease this guilt, but no matter how much I cried, the feelings didn't lessen. Everything felt wrong, and I couldn't see a way out if she found out.

How would our story end?

I spent two hours in the bathroom, trying to deal with my dirty body and twisted feelings. But when I walked out, I still saw Pang waiting.

"No matter what you won't let Pao go, will you?"

I didn't answer. I chose to get a drink of water, not knowing what the right answer was.

Someone who doesn't care about right and wrong like me... kept thinking about what would happen over and over.

"Pa..."

"I don't know. Right now... I don't know anything."

My body collapsed onto the bed, eyes staring blankly like someone in a daze.

"But one thing I do know."

"...."

**"Pang, you came too late. My interest doesn't include you anymore."**

Pang quickly stood up, grabbed my neck with one hand, and prepared to slap me with the other. But I looked up, not flinching or protesting as I should have. That made her stop all actions.

Her eyes stared deeply, searching for answers. But soon, she let go and chose to walk past me to grab her bag.

"Are you trying to act like a good person now? Isn't it too disgusting?"

She said, preparing to walk away as if she didn't want an answer to her question.

"I'm sorry,"

I said, looking at her with a weariness I'd never felt before.

**"Just play the good girl role when you're with others. Whether you feel so guilty you want to die or you're just doing it to be seen as good, either way, you're just a despicable woman."**

She said that and then walked out. I remained seated, staring at everything with blurred vision, my mind heavy. I leaned back on the pillow at the head of the wide bed, tears streaming down my face again, showing that even when no one was around, my tears weren't for anyone's pity.

Then my phone on the floor lit up. It wasn't cracked from being thrown earlier, and I could clearly see the message that had come through. I stared at the screen, barely able to stand.

[I'm sorry, P' Seenam. Because I fell asleep, you had to drive alone. You should've woken me up or we could've gone together tomorrow. But it's okay. Drive safely. You sent this message three hours ago. Let me know when you arrive.]

**She... apologized again.**

I didn't open the message, just stared at the notification. My hands trembled, unable to do anything. Finally, I chose to take out the telescope I'd folded away and set it up to look at the building across the street.

I couldn't tell if she meant what she wrote or if she was holding back some emotions.

Even though I couldn't see clearly, I could tell she was smoking.

[I'm the one who should apologize.]

Finally, I sent a message back. At that moment, I couldn't type anything other than "sorry".

[Why didn't you answer my call?]

[I was driving, Just got to my room. I stopped by the clinic.]

[Oh.]

[I'll probably go to bed after I shower. You should sleep early too. I'll pick you up in the morning]

[Okay]

[Goodnight.]

[Goodnight.]

I continued to lie to maintain this relationship. But my body went numb when I realized that the person a block away was wiping away tears. Even though she said goodnight, it seemed she wouldn't sleep anymore.

My heart ached as I watched, and the more I looked, the clearer my feelings became. I should have folded the telescope and disappeared, but instead, I embraced the pain as punishment for what I'd done.

***What should I do now?***

At that moment, countless thoughts made me reflect on everything. But no matter how much I thought, there was only one thing I wanted to do... and that was to hold her.

I took a long time to compose myself until my face and tear stains dried. I applied a bit of makeup so that the person I was going back to wouldn't know how much I'd cried.

"Oh..."

I went back to the room, my heart trembling as I looked at her. Just hearing her voice... it felt like my heart was being comforted.

"You're not asleep yet? Didn't I tell you to sleep early?"

"You said you'd pick me up in the morning. Why did you drive here so late?"

She got up and came to me, her worried face making my heart ache even more. She was so kind, always so kind.

"Aren't you happy I came? I'm hurt, you know."

"I am happy, but why did you drive back so late? You've been working all day, driving back and forth. Why didn't you..."

But at that moment, I didn't want to hear anything more. I raised both hands to touch her pale cheeks, looking at her closely again to see if what I saw earlier matched what I thought.

"Crying again... was I right to come back?"

Yes, I was right. I'd never felt like I was doing the right thing before, even though I'd just done something unforgivable.

"You came to see me now, not because..."

"I was afraid this kid here would feel abandoned. After finishing everything, I thought about how the person waiting in the room would be. Would they sleep as I told them to, or would they cry secretly like during the day?"

I pretended to forget what had happened earlier and started saying things to make the person in front of me feel better.

"After thinking about it, I couldn't sleep. So I drove back to see if my worries were true. And I was right. There's a little crybaby sitting alone, not sleeping."

I smiled, trying to hide my pain as deeply as possible.

But then... she started crying.

"I came back, so why are you still crying?"

"It's so good to have you here."

*Is it really that good?*

Then she hugged me tightly, tighter than ever before, and that made my feelings shatter along with the growing shame. My hands behind her clenched tightly, my neatly trimmed nails digging into my own hands to stop the tears. She gently kissed my neck before speaking sweetly.

"I'm so happy right now. Thank you for coming back."

"Yes, I came back for you..."

That was the only thing I could say. Tears welled up, my heart trembling so much I could barely stand. But even so, I wanted to hold her for as long as possible. As long as we were together like this, the fears I had would lessen.

"Why do you look like you're about to cry?"

She asked as she pulled away from the hug I longed for.

"I'm yawning,"

I said, finding an excuse for a question I couldn't answer right now. But she understood and took my hand, leading me to the bedroom.

"Let's sleep. We have to leave early tomorrow."

"Sleep?"

"Aren't you going to sleep? It's late, and you've been driving tired."

"That's true. It's late and I'm tired, but Pao has already slept and isn't tired."

"Huh?"

"Let's go out tonight. Let's go on a trip... right now."

If I ran away with her, would all the problems end?

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When we agreed to go on the trip as planned, she seemed more excited than ever. Her enthusiasm made me feel a bit calmer, just seeing her innocent smile.

Music played from the car speakers. She kept smiling the whole time. I glanced at her often during our journey, listening intently to the song she said was for me.

***'Beautiful Moment - Blackbeans'***

*The wind that touches my heart makes me feel warm inside.*

*I want to pull you close, hold your hand...*

"Place it on my heart, so you won't be alone. Embrace each other on the sand, with the stars as witnesses."

Her warm hand held mine, her smile never fading. Even though I should have smiled and been happy with everything she was doing, I couldn't help but feel pain.

"You look so beautiful girl, perfect right now. You look so beautiful girl, Perfect right now. How do you know I love you so..."

She placed my hand on her chest, her heartbeat so strong it showed how happy she was.

"Your heart is beating so fast,"

I said, not daring to look at her face.

"Yours is too... beating just as fast."

"Well..."

Silence replaced my answer for a moment before I changed the subject.

"Focus on driving."

"Changing the subject, huh?"

"Not at all. The light will turn green in ten seconds."

I pulled my hand back, unable to look at the good things she was doing for me right now.

"Your hands are so small."

She pretended to measure my hand, but when I complied, she smiled in that adorable way I loved to see.

"Successfully tricked you into holding hands."

"Huh?..."

My foggy mind tried to understand what she meant, but soon I got it.

"Sneaky."

"You have to be clever to woo someone older."

"Are you wooing me?"

"Yes, Have I succeeded?"

"Have you?"

And for the first time, I laughed, even though I'd done such terrible things.

She didn't let go of my hand, driving like that while playing the same song on repeat, as if she wanted me to feel the song she'd just given me.

**And at that moment... everything made me feel a happiness I didn't deserve.**

When we arrived at our destination, she excitedly explored the place. I watched her the whole time. When everything seemed settled, she went out to the balcony to breathe in the fresh air. I hesitated whether to join her, but eventually, I did without saying anything.

The sea breeze grew stronger, my eyes still fixed on the dark ocean. But she gently tucked my wind-blown hair behind my ear.

"Do you like tying your hair? I always see you with it tied. Doesn't it hurt your head?"

"No."

"I can't tie mine well. I always tie it too tight and get a headache."

"Maybe because I have to keep my hair neat for work, so I'm used to it."

"Oh."

We were silent for a moment, and I started a conversation.

"Do you like it tied or loose?"

"I like both."

"If you had to choose?"

I turned my attention to her.

She didn't answer but chose to untie my hair. Was that her answer?

The voice in my head asked. Then she leaned in and kissed me. My heart raced at the unexpected touch, but I closed my eyes and accepted it.

"I can't choose."

We looked into each other's eyes, and my gaze must have been a plea for her to kiss me again. No matter how much time passed, she was still the same, reading my mind. She kissed me again, repeatedly.

"So it's hard for me to decide whether to tie my hair when I'm with you or leave it loose."

"How about this?"

"What?"

"When you tie your hair, I'll untie it if it doesn't need to be neat. Or if it's loose and gets in your face, I'll tie it for you."

"So you don't like either tied or loose hair?"

"Wrong. I like both. As long as it's you in front of me, I like it all." If she knew everything... would she still like me?

"So sweet. Did you practice those lines from a high school book?" I pretended not to worry, showing a playful demeanor, and that made her smile again.

"Are you sleepy? Let's go to bed."

"Sleep for real or pretend?"

"Do you want to sleep for real or pretend?"

She asked, leading me into the room to escape the growing cold sea breeze.

"I want to sleep for real. It's almost 4 AM. We'll definitely wake up late tomorrow."

"We've stayed up all night before. What's 4 AM?"

I pinched her nose playfully.

"Save some energy for tomorrow's trip. We're not parting ways anytime soon."

"True."

In truth, I wanted to touch her more than anything, but that wasn't the right thing to do now.

We held hands as we walked to the shower, but my anxiety was overwhelming What if there were still traces on my body that she could notice? My heart pounded so hard that I couldn't touch her the way I usually did.

Fear surged through my chest, and the regret gnawed at me relentlessly, as if it wanted me to feel even more guilty.

That night, I didn't even dare to turn and hug her. I just stared at her beautiful face in the darkness. She simply wished me goodnight and closed her eyes.

My heart ached, feeling that we were distant now. Even though everything seemed like we were close, it didn't help at all.

Tears slowly welled up, and I clenched my fists tightly because I couldn't bring myself to hug the person beside me. But as the coldness gnawed at me from within, she turned towards me.

Her beautiful eyes remained closed, but her arms pulled me into an embrace. Her gentle actions made me cover my face, pretending to be asleep, but in reality... the tears wouldn't stop flowing.

I didn't know when I fell asleep, but by morning, the events of the previous night became clearer, making it impossible to act normal. That's why I remained lying there

"P' Seenam," she called out.

But my pretense of sleep had to end when she called me, as if wanting us to wake up and enjoy the fresh air together, something we didn't do often.

"P' Seenam,"

Her hand gently stroked my cheek. My heart fluttered, wanting to pull her into a hug and tell her everything, but I didn't have the courage.

"If you don't get up, I'll have to tickle you."

But my worries slowly faded, replaced by another feeling.

**She was still playful... and that's what I loved about her.**

"Oh, really?"

I finally ended my pretense of sleep.

"W-when did you wake up?"

She prepared to flee, but I held onto her arm, pulling her back down beside me.

"I've been awake for a while, just too comfortable to get up."

"Are you hungry? Pao ordered coffee and sandwiches."

"Sandwiches again? Aren't you tired of them?"

"I like eating the same things," she replied.

"Oh, I see... like an old favorite dish,"

I teased, but it made me feel guilty because that comment should have been directed at me.

"Do you want me to go back to an old favorite?"

My heart sank, and the image of Pang flashed in my mind, making everything tense.

"Just kidding, I won't go back. P' Seenam, go brush your teeth so we can eat together,"

She quickly corrected herself. I stared at her beautiful face before speaking my mind.

"If Pao wants to go back, I won't stop you."

Yes... if she said she wanted to go back now, I wouldn't hold her back.

But then...

"Don't be silly,"

Her playful expression turned serious. I couldn't say anything until she finally spoke.

**"I belong to you.... right, P' Seenam?"**

In that moment, my heart ached. She was so kind, so kind that she shouldn't have to face any pain. In the end, all I could do was pretend to stretch and yawn.

The tears that were about to spill were hidden just in time before I walked away to release my emotions in the bathroom.

My distorted face reflected in the mirror. I raised my hands to cover my face, trying to hold back the tears.

**If that hadn't happened... would I have had the courage to answer her?**

**That I wanted her to be mine without any fear.**

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# Chapter 33: The Love I Dare Not Speak

It took me a long time to pull myself together in the bathroom. When I finally came out, I saw her, and she greeted me with a smile that overflowed with happiness.

I stared at her beautiful face, my heart pounding. Since everything was still the same, I decided to make the most of this moment and be as happy as I could.

After we finished breakfast, we went for a walk along the beach. She offered to ride the bike while I sat on the back. I took out my Polaroid camera and started snapping pictures of the scenery, and of her back as she pedaled.

Her back was something I wanted to lean against, and as I thought that, 1 rested my head on her back, letting the sea breeze carry us away.

As we walked along the beach, I forgot all my sadness, as if nothing had ever happened. We took pictures and talked with smiles that I loved. If I could freeze time, this would be one of the moments I'd want to keep forever.

**"Even without a camera, we can still keep good memories in our minds."**

After having so much fun that we forgot about the camera, I felt guilty for breaking it, even though she was partly to blame. But her words made my heart flutter. She hugged me tightly, not caring about the many people playing in the water around us.

**"I'm so happy."**

*Being together like this... it makes us happy, right?*

My mind was in a whirl, but we continued to hug each other quietly, surrounded by the perfect atmosphere.

When we had enough fun, I offered to ride the bike back to our place But who would've thought that I'd become so weak? Because I was so happy, I pretended to ride away from her so she wouldn't see my tears. I tried to hold them back until we got back, and in the end, I succeeded.

"Pao, do you want to leave the Polaroid pictures with me?"

"This is all I have."

"I must've dropped them, maybe when we were running."

"Which picture?"

"The one we took when you were carrying me, Pao, the one we took two of day."

"Here, I still have one. If you like this picture, keep it. I'll choose another one to keep."

"But it's not a couple's picture. And we don't have the camera to take another one."

"It's okay, keep this one. We'll have plenty of pictures together."

I said to stop her from looking so sad, but then she didn't follow me.

"Pao."

"Yes?"

"Go take a shower. You don't want to get sick, and then we can go out to eat."

But Pao, who was usually so carefree, seemed more stressed than usual. She reluctantly went to shower, and I didn't follow her.

I made a quick phone call to the clinic staff before deciding to leave the room. I took the same bike and rode around, carefully looking for the picture she said she lost.

I rode around twice, feeling discouraged, but just as I was about to head back, I found the picture near a drain. It was about to fall in. I smiled brightly and walked the bike back instead of riding it.

Exhausted from everything, I hurried back to the room to see her. My legs felt weak as I walked into the bathroom to wash up before joining her in the tub.

"Do you want me to give you a massage, P' Seenam?"

"Sure."

She started massaging me.

"A little harder"

"Is this too hard?"

"It's perfect. Move to my back a bit, lower."

"Here?"

"Yes, a little to the side."

"Here?"

"To the side and then to the front.

At that moment, I needed her more than ever. The thought that I could cleanse myself of my past sins became clearer. At least for now, I wanted to be hers and not dwell on last night.

For the first time, our lovemaking took on a different form. But when it was over, my feelings became even clearer. Even though I reached the same heights as I did with Pang, with Pao... the happiness was more intense.

I leaned back against her, my heart aching. I held back my tears so she wouldn't know how strange I felt.

"Feeling more relaxed?"

She whispered. I tried to close my eyes tightly to hold back the tears that were about to fall.

"Yes... I'm relaxed."

"Do you want me to help you shower?"

"Let me stay like this a little longer."

Her warmth made me feel both good and hurt at the same time. If everything could stay the same, I promised myself I'd become a new person, someone I'd never been before. And if that happened... our story could continue as it was, right?

"Are you very tired?"

"Yes.."

"Are you hungry?"

"I want to sleep more."

"Then let's sleep for an hour or two and then go out to eat."

This time, she took care of me better than ever. When we came out of the bathroom, she gently dried my hair. I wanted to hug her and cry about everything I was hiding, but that seemed impossible. All I could do was lie down.

"Pao, think about what you want to eat."

"Can I eat you?"

"If you sneak up on me while I'm asleep..."

I said, moving to hug her as she lay down beside me.

"You're so kind."

"Yes"

"Are you really going to sleep... P' Seenam?"

"...."

"P' Seenam."

"Yes?"

My voice responded. The exhaustion from everything made my mind fade, and it seemed my words pleased the person in my arms.

"Why are you calling me that? Someone might die from it" she teased.

In the end, instead of closing my eyes to sleep, I had to open them to look at her beautiful face that wouldn't stop talking. "Are you not going to let me sleep, Pao?"

"Yes, sleep. I won't bother you anymore."

I nodded and snuggled into her again. But as I closed my eyes, I remembered something I needed to give her.

"I forgot to tell you."

"Tell me what?"

She asked, looking curious as I got up to get the picture I'd spent so long looking for.

"I found it."

She quickly took the couple's picture and held it close, looking so happy that I had to reach out and stroke her hair.

"Now it's a couple's picture. Keep it safe, don't lose it again."

"When did you find it?"

"While you were showering. That's why I'm so tired now."

Finally, I walked back to bed. She looked at me with adoration. I knew what she wanted to do, but she let me fall asleep in her arms, holding back her desires.

"I'm going to sleep now."

"Okay."

"Pao, you sleep too."

"I'll sleep too."

"If I wake up and don't see you... I'll throw the picture into the sea."

Instead of being scared, she laughed. Her soft lips kissed my forehead gently, making me feel that escaping into dreams wouldn't bring the nightmares I wanted to avoid.

"P' Seenam, you'd never throw this picture away."

I hoped she'd keep that picture forever too.

The exhaustion made everything feel heavy, but it was comforting to be in Pao's arms. Pao, who was mine...

By the time I woke up, it was already evening. Even though we'd slept for quite a while, she was still holding me. My heart fluttered as I hugged her tighter and kissed her cheek.

Finally, I gently released her. The wind outside indicated that it was going to rain. I wanted to wake her up to go eat together, but I decided to go alone and bring food back instead.

I bought a lot of food and stopped by the clinic since it was close to the restaurant. The patient schedule for tomorrow was manageable, so I brought my lab coat back to the room, hoping she'd appreciate our first trip together.

Once everything was ready, including the food, I drove back to the room, missing her terribly. But who would've thought that my daydreaming would make me miss several of her calls?

"Are you awake?"

[Where did you go again? Why don't you tell Pao when you go out anymore?]

"Why so stern?"

I replied, amused, but she sounded serious.

[P' Seenam]

I never knew she could be so intimidating when serious.

"I went out to get dinner. I was going to wait for you, but it looked like it was going to rain, so I decided to buy food and bring it back."

[Why didn't you wait for Pao? You could have woken me up.]

"You were drooling in your sleep. How could I wake you?"

[I wasn't drooling. Where are you now? Did you go far? It's raining.]

"I'm almost there. Come down and help me with the bags."

She seemed very upset, even after we were back in the room. She kept making sarcastic comments until I took out what I'd prepared.

"But I have something I think you'll like. But it looks like you're mad at me, so even if I wear this, it won't make you happy. It's a shame. I went to the clinic to get this. If you don't like it, I'll put it back in the car."

I said, pretending to put the lab coat away, but she quickly stopped me.

"Don't waste it."

"Are you sure? I chose it without asking you..."

"Why are you such a tease?"

"Why are you so sulky?"

"I give up."

I smiled without realizing it, but then she said something that reminded me of my old self. Maybe that part of me was still there.

**"Do you like to win?"**

"Well, winning is better than losing, right?"

"Okay, then keep winning. Pao will lose."

She said, giving in easily

"You're giving up so easily."

"You lured me with the lab coat. I have to give in."

She looked tired, but I found it endearing and stroked her hair

I wished everything could stay like this forever...

After we finished eating, we went for a walk on the beach, feeling relaxed. But then something exciting happened that I hadn't planned for.

"I took the belt from the bathrobe. The fabric is soft, so it shouldn't hurt."

I said when we got back to the room. I was wearing the lab coat, holding the bathrobe belt.

"I won't tie it too tight. I promise. Just loose enough."

"Who said I'd be the one tied up? **You'll be, Pao."**

I'd planned to be hers, but now... I wanted her to be mine.

I quickly walked over to her and started unbuttoning her shirt, but she moved away. I pulled her back.

"You started this, so you have to finish it."

"N-no, that's not..."

I didn't even listen to what she was saying because what I intended to do next was far more interesting.

Tonight, I was in complete control of the game. I forgot all the things that made me sad, leaving only the desire to make the person in front of me so happy that she couldn't escape from me.

We were lost in our love for hours. She seemed happy, and I was unforgivably happy too. But even so, I could fall asleep in her arms, and during that time, I forgot all the things that made me sad.

The next day, we left our place early to go to work at the clinic. When it was time to see patients, I didn't have any time to be with her. It wasn't until lunch break that I could see her again.

She was sleeping comfortably in the doctor's lounge with a blanket I'd never seen before. Did someone at the clinic cover her up?

"No more patients?"

"Yeah, just finished another case. Did you sleep well? Did the assistant give you the blanket?"

"Huh? Oh, wasn't it you who covered me up? By the way, we should change the sofa, it's not very comfortable to sleep on."

Then the curiosity was put aside. I didn't care or want to go out and ask the staff if they'd taken the liberty to cover my person.

What I did was tell the tall figure to go wash her face and brush her teeth.

Not long after she left, a young staff member walked in, as polite as always.

"Doctor, there's a patient who needs help with their teeth. They said they know you." "They know me?"

*Who could it be...*

"Yes, they said they have something to discuss. They're waiting in the other dental room now."

"Oh, okay."

I replied simply, putting my mask back on. But when I walked into the room the assistant mentioned, I found someone I hadn't intended to see waiting there.

**"Scared enough to bring her along?"**

"What are you doing here?"

My voice was more serious than usual, but it seemed like Pang didn't care about my displeased tone at all.

"Just came to see if it's what I thought."

"...."

"I actually went to see her at the shop, but the staff said she was out of town. When I stopped by the clinic, they said you were at the Chonburi branch, so I followed. And here you are, together."

"What's so strange about us being together when we're dating?"

I spoke, sending a displeased look, and it seemed like the person sitting there was also unhappy.

"Bold words, considering we just did that a few days ago. And another thing... she was cold in the room, so I had to get a blanket from my car to cover her. You couldn't even take care of something that simple, yet you act so possessive."

My heart froze, angry at the actions of the person in front of me who seemed to be crossing the line unnecessarily.

"But I'm confident I can take care of her better than you, Pang. Go back. I don't want to talk to you."

I said, preparing to walk away, but then Pang's tall figure grabbed my arm forcefully, causing me to fall onto the sofa in the dental room. She pinned me down before kissing me hard.

"P... Pang!"

I turned my face away, starting to use my arms to push her off.

"Why? If we stay like this and she walks in, she'll leave you, and I'll get her back."

My heart started pounding, fear overwhelming me until I had to clench my teeth. My arms kept pushing her away, but it seemed like my strength was no match for hers.

"Pang! Stop!... Get out!"

"How about this, Pa... I have a proposal."

"...."

"Let's take a gamble. If you agree to sleep with me in this room, I'll leave her alone. I won't interfere anymore. But even so..."

She smiled.

**"You'll have to risk whether she walks in or not."**

"...."

"If you're willing to risk everything for her, I'll back off."

When those words ended, my resisting hands weakened. My mind started thinking about everything that was about to happen.

"And what will you get, Pang? Just my body? No matter how you look at it, that's not what you want."

**"Your dignity, Pa. That's what I'll get..."**

"...."

"Would someone like you do anything for her? Would you let yourself be controlled when you've always controlled others? Honestly, I've always wondered what was so fun about what you did, but now I'm starting to understand."

"...."

"Oh, and another thing, while we're doing it, we won't lock the door, and you'll have to follow all my orders. Even if I tell you to strip and crawl on all fours... you'll have to do it."

"Is this what you want?"

"Not yet. Actually, it's not just her who might walk in. If a staff member comes in, I can't help it. If you agree, I'll back off."

Pang spoke casually, sending a disgusting smile. I knew those words were meant to scare me.

"You're taking too long to think. But I understand that someone like you wouldn't dare let yourself be humiliated. So from now on, be prepared. I'll take her back..."

The tall figure stepped back, staring seriously, but even though I was free, I grabbed her hand and placed it on my chest.

"If I agree, will you let us go?"

My voice was softer than usual. I bit my lip hard until it hurt, then used my strength to press Pang's hand harder. The pain from my chest made my eyebrows knit together.

The person in front of me looked confused, and soon I started undressing. She stood there, seemingly stunned by what she saw. Soon, my naked body was on display, proving to her that I was willing to give up everything.

"What do I have to do? Should I crawl now, or do that first? As hard as you want. Whatever you want, Pang. And after that."

"...."

"You have to let us go."

I stared at her with a pounding heart. Fear was eating away at me, making my body tremble like never before. If someone walked in, we'd have to close this branch, or I might have to quit dentistry altogether.

Even though it seemed like a small matter, the dental community was so small that everyone knew each other. Someone could do something bad in the south, and people in the north would know through word of mouth.

"So... let's start with crawling."

I stared at my body, still bearing marks from last night, and I thought Pang saw them too.

**Fear... that was the only thought that came out.**

I started kneeling on the floor, tears welling up in my eyes. I slowly crawled towards the tall figure not far away. My heart trembled with increasing fear, showing no sign of subsiding. Pang just watched without saying anything, seemingly shocked by what I was doing.

"W... what are you doing, Pa!"

Her voice yelled, and luckily the room was soundproof.

"I'm doing everything you want. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it."

And this time, I didn't even look up at her. I kept my eyes on the floor, tears slowly falling.

"Are you crazy, Pa?"

"...."

"Are you out of your mind!"

She yelled again, picking up the clothes I'd taken off and throwing them at me. The tall figure walked to the sofa, rubbing her face as if she couldn't believe what she was seeing.

"P' Pang, you have to tell me what to do! And end this already."

I said, my body trembling more, but the person watching me said nothing. "Tell me, right now..."

"....."

"I'm really scared."

Then the shaky voice came out. She stared at me with an unreadable expression, but finally, the tall figure stood up, not even looking at me.

"I'm done.."

"....."

"Why would you go this far?"

She looked down at me, her eyes cold and scary.

"Why does it have to be her?"

I was silent... staring at her while putting my clothes back on, knowing that what I was doing was no longer what she wanted.

"Tell me why you'd go this far."

She kept asking, staring as if she really wanted an answer.

"My answer won't be anything fancy."

"...."

**"I just love her."**

The word "love," which I never thought I'd give to anyone, was spoken to the ex-girlfriend of the person I loved.

"I'm sorry for saying something so selfish, but I don't know any answer more correct than this."

"...."

"If you don't want to do that anymore, if you need anything else, just tell me. Just one thing."

"...."

**"Let us go. I'm tired."**

My tears started flowing again. Pang just looked at me before walking out of the room without saying anything.

I wanted to go back and hug the person waiting for me, but in the end, I could only sit there crying. It took a while to stop crying. I went back to the doctor's lounge, feeling guilty for making the tall figure wait, even though I felt more guilty about other things.

"Sorry, you could've eaten first."

"It's okay, I can wait."

She smiled at me, and my heart ached so much that I couldn't smile back. Finally, I went to sit on her lap, wrapping my arms around her with so many feelings. I rested my head on her shoulder. At this moment, I couldn't say anything. All I could do was hold back my tears.

"Are you tired?"

"Yeah, very tired."

"Just one more case, and then we can go home. You can sleep in the car. I'll recline the seat and cover you with a blanket, just like you did for me. I'll hold your hand the whole way. How does that sound? Will that help you feel better?"

Her gentle voice and touch almost made my tears overflow. My hands clenched tightly, my nails digging into my palms.

"That sounds nice. Can I have a kiss?"

"Huh?"

I didn't wait for her to ask anything else. I moved my face away from her shoulder, giving her a look that showed what I wanted.

She let me kiss her, but it was just a light touch of our lips.

"Is that enough?"

"No, I want more."

She indulged me with several more kisses before asking again.

"Is that enough?"

"Yes, now it's my turn."

Our lips met again, this time more deeply than before. My heart started to flutter, and the warmth filled my exhaustion. She kissed me back as usual, and that made the tears I was holding back impossible to contain.

"Why do you look like you're about to cry?"

"Well..."

When asked, I tried to hold back my tears.

"I'm just happy."

She looked like she wanted to ask more, but I had something else I wanted to say.

**"Your prediction must be true because I've never felt this happy before."**

This wasn't just flattery for her prediction. It was a way of saying that I....

**Love her.**

Then her fingertips started wiping my tears away. Her gentle gaze made my heart ache. My mind went blank as I listened to what she was about to say.

"I've never been this happy either. Don't cry. Being the crybaby is my role."

Her playful words were full of care. She hugged me, gently stroking my hair, knowing how exhausted I was.

"Pao, you won't disappear, right? Even if one day I do something that makes you upset?"

Everything felt so fragile at that moment. I asked her, wanting to share everything with her, but in the end, it seemed too difficult to reveal everything right now.

"Why do you ask that?"

"I'm just scared. Whenever I'm happy, I always end up getting hurt."

"That won't happen anymore. I'm here now."

"Can you promise me that you won't be like the others who came and went?"

"I promise. I will never leave you."

"Me too.."

Our lips met in a kiss. The person in front of me probably understood my feelings clearly, but I... I couldn't accept her feelings without feeling ashamed.

After work ended that day, I told her to wait in the car because I had a few things to discuss with the clinic staff. She understood and went to start the car.

"Do we have any patients scheduled for next week?"

"Yes, but not many yet."

"Okay, I'll head out then."

"Goodbye, doctor."

"Bye."

I responded, but then remembered something important.

"Oh, the blanket in the doctor's lounge..."

"...."

"Please throw it away for me."

I walked out of the clinic feeling a bit gloomy, but I still acted normally. Pao stopped to buy some things for her room and mentioned that her mother would be staying over tonight.

My heart felt tender, I wanted to ask her to stay with me tonight, but her worried expression stopped me from asking for more.

. .

"You're not mad, right? That I have to send you back to your room?"

"Why would I be mad? Your mom's visiting, you should spend time with her."

"I don't want to be apart..."

She pouted while driving, and I thought to myself that I didn't want to be apart from her either.

**"We'll be together for a long time. Don't act like I'm going to disappear."**

When I said that, she seemed to calm down a bit. When we got back to her place around 7 PM, she realized she'd left the sticky rice she bought for her mom in the car. We parted ways as I walked into the room first, but it wasn't the familiar room I expected. Someone was sitting there, waiting.

"...."

I stared at the older woman, and in a split second, my sharp mind realized she was Pao's mother. I quickly greeted her with a polite gesture and tried to look as normal as possible.

"Hello."

"Hello." She responded.

That was the only greeting we exchanged. After that, I wondered what I should say next, but it seemed like she had more to say.

"Where's Pao?"

"Oh, she forgot the sticky rice in the car. You're Pao's mom, right?"

"Yes."

"Pao told me you were coming tonight. Let me get you some water."

I quickly changed the subject, but her curious expression didn't fade.

"Told you? It sounds like you live with Pao. Do you sleep here too?"

I felt numb. The events of the past few days had been mentally exhausting, and I couldn't think of a response.

"Uh... well."

**"M-Mom, why are you here already?"**

Suddenly, Pao's voice broke the tension, and I felt relieved not to face this awkward situation alone.

"My friend had an errand, so we parted ways early. I didn't know where to go, so I came here... By the way,"

We both looked at the older woman,

"You didn't tell me Pao wasn't living alone. Who is this?"

The room was quieter than usual. I glanced at Pao, signaling her to say something.

"I've been short on money lately, so I got a roommate."

"Short on money?"

"Oh, actually, it's enough. Just..."

Pao's voice was hesitant, and as I had time to think, I spoke up.

"I asked to stay with Pao while my condo is being renovated. Pao let me stay and I cook for her in return."

I wasn't sure if it was believable, but it seemed to ease her curiosity a bit.

"And where did you meet Pao? College?"

"I'm her high school senior. Uh..."

"Mom, remember? She's the one who used to take me out to eat when I was little. You and Dad even drove her home once, near the pharmacy by our old condo."

"Oh, you're Pao's senior from back then?"

"Yes..."

I replied, looking at Pao to signal her to change the subject.

"How did you get in, Mom?"

"I got the key from the shop. It wasn't hard to find where you hid it."

"Oh... Here's the sticky rice you wanted. Do you want to eat now? You must be tired. Let me feed you."

"Wait... what's this?"

Suddenly, the conversation shifted to something that made Pao's face turn pale. A bag full of cigarette butts was in her hand, and her mother's face showed extreme displeasure.

"Didn't I tell you to quit smoking? You promised you'd stop. And now, with your friend staying over, don't you think it's bad for her health too? Why did you start again?"

At that moment, I felt like I didn't exist, and that was the best thing.

"I'm sorry. I was stressed and slipped up."

"You can't just say you slipped up. You need to be firm. I give you all the freedom, but not to harm yourself like this. How can I trust you to live alone?"

Even though it was a mother-daughter conversation, I ended up being part of it.

"I'm sorry if it bothered you."

Her mother said to me.

"It's okay. I'm fine."

I quickly grabbed the bag of cigarette butts, but her mother stopped me.

"It's alright, dear. Let Pao handle it."

"I'll take it out."

Pao said as she walked out to dispose of the trash. I started packing my things, saying I'd stay with another friend, but her mother stopped me.

"Stay. I'll be leaving soon."

"Oh, you're not staying over?"

Pao's voice sounded, showing how happy she was.

I was just as happy.

"I was going to, but I'd rather sleep at my own place."

Pao's mom replied, looking around the room as if it was a routine check.

"These cups are cute. Where did you get them?"

"Oh, I got them from the mall where Pao's shop is. If you like them, we can buy more tomorrow."

"They're too cute, more suited for young couples."

I felt numb again and knew I had to say something.

"You look youthful too."

"Really? So, what do you do? Are you still in touch with Pao? She only studied in Chonburi for a year."

Finally, the serious questions began. I sat and talked with Pao's mom, discussing her dental needs, which I gladly offered to help with. Our conversation ended with her asking me to cook dinner.

"If you don't mind, sure."

I said, trying to be charming. I checked what ingredients were missing and excused myself to go to the nearby supermarket.

"I'll go with you. Pao, stay here."

Her mom said.

Who would've thought I'd be shopping with my girlfriend's mom?

The short drive felt longer than it should have. We didn't talk at all, and the atmosphere was tense.

"Is it okay living with Pao?"

"What?"

"Sharing a room with Pao. I hope she doesn't make a mess and tire you out."

"Oh, no. Pao is quite tidy."

"Really?"

"Yes."

That was our first and only conversation in the car. But once we started shopping, things got better. Pao's mom pointed out ingredients and brands she liked, and I responded like someone who knew a lot about food.

Soon, I seemed to win her over without realizing it.

As the atmosphere relaxed, our conversation became more natural, including sharing funny work stories. Pao's mom enjoyed the jokes, and I kept finding more to tell her.

"What can I help with?"

"You can chop the mushrooms and garlic. I'll boil the noodles."

"Sure."

When we got back, we stuck together, and Pao looked confused, trying to piece together what was happening. I forgot about my sadness and the tough times. Cooking felt relaxing, and Pao's mom's positive energy was contagious.

Pao's mom left after dinner, but she confirmed her dental appointment, meaning I'd see her again tomorrow.

"What did your mon mean by 'solving the problem?"

I asked Pao when we were alone.

"Oh... it's embarrassing."

"There's nothing to be embarrassed about. But if you don't want to tell me, that's okay. It just seemed serious, so I asked in case I could help."

I said, as she lay on the couch, resting her head on my lap. I let her, looking at her thoughtful face.

"Actually, the shop's sales aren't great. It's different from a few years ago."

"Are you losing money?"

"No, not losing, just making less profit than other branches. Even though the location should be the most profitable, some months we barely make $1,200."

"What does your family think?"

"They want to close this branch and have me manage the one in Chiang Mai instead."

"So, we won't be together?"

I said, stroking her hair protectively.

"I'm not going back. I love my freedom. If I go back to Chiang Mai, I'd have to manage the shop and the resort. Just thinking about it is exhausting."

"But someday, you'll have to go back, right?"

"Maybe, but not anytime soon. Mom's been trying to convince me not to renew the lease because it's expiring soon."

She confirmed her stance, kissing my hand.

"Should I open a branch in Chiang Mai?"

"Wait until I move back, then you can open one."

"Okay, I'll save up first."

"Let me be your partner. My family is okay with investing."

"Feels like I'm talking to a sugar daddy"

"Call me Pao's sugar daddy."

"You're too much."

"Too little won't satisfy me."

"You cheeky girl."

We remained the same... and I hoped that everything would stay the same no matter what happened after this.

. .

That night, we both slept in each other's arms as planned. I started to feel less worried about what had happened, and that might have been because of the warmth from the tall figure who was always by my side.

The next morning, I went to work as usual, with Pao tagging along. Today, she arrived earlier than usual, explaining that if her mom came to check on her early, she'd see how dedicated she was to her job. I found it endearing and began to admire her a little, hoping the day would go smoothly.

As the afternoon rolled around, Pao's mom came in for a dental appointment. I cleared everyone else's schedule and welcomed her more warmly than anyone else who came in that day.

"The place looks nice, clean, and elegant," she said.

"Thank you,"

I replied, starting the dental work on Pao's mom. But when I finished, I heard something I never expected.

**"Can I leave Pao in your care from now on?"**

"Leave Pao with me?"

"Yes. It seems like Pao is happier this time around, maybe because she has a friend. If you don't mind having her around, please continue to stay with her. If Pao stays like this, I'd feel at ease."

"Was she not like this before?"

"Last time I saw her, she seemed much more troubled. I was surprised to see her looking like her old self again."

She laughed a little before taking my hand.

"Can I trust you with Pao?"

I looked at her kind smile, feeling a strange mix of emotions. Even though I felt good, I also felt like I shouldn't be happy. But I couldn't avoid giving her a reassuring answer.

**"Yes, I'll stay with her and take good care of her."**

"Thank you."

"...."

"Oh, one more thing. Could you help me get Pao to quit smoking?"

"Are you very worried about that?"

"Yes, it's not good for her health in the long run. I've spoiled Pao a lot.

Yesterday, I felt bad after scolding her, but I couldn't just say nothing."

Her previously smiling face turned worried, and I tried to reassure her with a smile.

"Okay, I'll talk to her about it."

"Thank you. So, can I go pay now?"

"No need, it's on the house."

"No, you run a business, you should expect a return. I can't just take without giving back"

In the end, I couldn't argue. Pao's mom paid three times the actual cost, saying the extra was for snacks for the clinic staff. I thanked her and saw her off at the clinic entrance before returning to my patients.

Everything seemed to be falling into place, and I found myself growing more interested in the tall figure.

After that, whenever I saw Pao smoking, I'd stand with her and ask if she was stressed. She always said she wasn't, that it was just a habit. I didn't tell her to quit immediately but encouraged her to smoke less. In less than two weeks, I didn't see her smoking anymore.

At least I'd accomplished one thing.

Time passed, and it was the birthday of the person I loved. She seemed excited about the day and said she'd handle everything herself as long as I was there.

Today, she looked different. The tall figure had dyed her hair a soft white. I stared at her, feeling a bit uneasy. Not because I didn't like it, but because I liked it so much that I was afraid others would too.

"W-why do you look like an old person?"

I reached out to touch her hair lightly.

"Huh? Oh, is it not pretty?"

"What did you do to your hair? Did you spill flour on it while cooking?

Why don't you take a shower first? Why are you standing here like this?"

"D-do you really think that?"

"No."

"Oh..."

"Did you spend the whole day getting your hair done? Is this your birthday gift to yourself?"

"Are you teasing me?"

She smiled and moved closer.

"It's a gift for you."

"For me? How?"

**"When we were kids, you said choosing white might bring good luck. So..."**

"...."

**"I'll be the one to bring you good luck."**

At that moment, I stopped breathing for a second. My heart raced as I looked at the tall figure who stepped back and handed me a bouquet of flowers.

"Do you know the meaning of gypsophila?"

I shook my head, looking at the beautiful bouquet she held out.

"It means pure love and also first love..."

"....."

**"And you... are my first love."**

I was spellbound by everything at that moment. My heart trembled, and I didn't know what to do.

She moved closer, offering the bouquet again, and this time I took it. I looked at her gentle eyes, her beautiful face moving closer, and her voice sweeter than ever.

"I've always shown it, but I've never said it clearly. So..."

"....."

**"I love you."**

The word "love" was spoken, but every time I felt overwhelming happiness, my mind would think of things that made me sad.

I'd done such bad things before, and even though I wanted to respond...

.

***But can I really say the word "love" now?***

***.***

# Chapter 34: The Deserved Pain

If there was anything I could respond with, it'd be to hold the cheeks of the person in front of me. My lips moved to kiss without saying a word, absorbing every feeling through our bodies pressed together.

My heart trembled, wishing this moment would stop spinning so that it'd be just her and me together.

"Pao, Is today your birthday or mine?"

"It's my birthday, but my life is this good because I have you, P' Seenam."

*Having me... is that what truly makes you happy?*

"Thank you..."

"Thank you for what?"

"Thank you for being the good thing in my life."

This time, she opened her arms to hug me. As our chests pressed together, our hearts beat strongly. I tried to suppress my sadness, but then my stomach growled.

"Someone's hungry..."

"Not the right timing,"

I said, before changing the subject.

"Even though it interrupted a bit, I made something for us to eat"

"A lot, tada!"

"Is chicken basil with boiled eggs a lot?"

"It's healthy. That's a lot already. Basil chicken without oil or sugar."

"Wow."

"Is it really wow? This is all I can make,"

She said, looking a bit disappointed, which made me quickly move to hug her.

"Wow because it looks delicious. The first meal you made for me must be tasty."

"Really?"

"Really."

"This is just a side dish. There's a main course too."

"Main course?"

At that moment, she took a flower I'd given her and placed it behind her ear, saying something I guessed would be suggestive.

"This is the main course."

"Not surprising."

Then the worries ended. I started eating what she'd made, while she began playing with the camera I bought her. We took several photos together, and soon a simple conversation about childhood astrology began. But who would've thought that it'd reveal something I never knew before.

"Back then, I went shopping for something, can't remember what, and met an old lady who invited me to get my fortune told. I didn't really believe in that stuff, but for some reason, I agreed that day. I asked to get through the year after transferring schools. Oh, and she told me to step into the school with my right foot at seven... what time was it? Can't remember."

"Seven thirty-seven?"

"Yes! How did you know, Seenam?"

"Strange..."

"What?"

"Before the school term started, I also went to the market and met an old lady who invited me to get my fortune told. She told me to step in with my right foot at seven thirty-seven, just like you said."

"So, she must have told everyone to step in at that time."

"But we met for the first time exactly at the time she said, didn't we?"

"So maybe... it wasn't a coincidence."

"Gives me chills."

Who would've thought that the old lady's words at the market would lead to this? Even though I didn't believe in predictions, everything fell into place too perfectly to be a coincidence.

There were many doubts, but that wasn't the main point. Because no matter who that old lady was, the only thing I cared about now was Pao.

After Pao's birthday, she started saying "I love you" more often. At first, she was shy, but later she said it so often that I wondered if I should respond. But every time I wanted to reply, my courage seemed to fade because I wasn't brave enough.

Today, Pao drove to Chonburi to wait for me as usual. She fell asleep before the first patient even arrived. Maybe it was because we had a rough night. Even though I couldn't say "I love you," what I could do was touch her gently and passionately at the same time.

I let her sleep, kissed her cheek, and walked to the clinic. But then the first patient arrived. The sound of the door chime made me look up and see someone I didn't expect.

"Pa, can we talk?"

It was another time that Pang came to see me. Maybe she'd moved back home, but that wasn't my concern. What I needed to do now was take her to the front of the clinic and find a good spot to talk privately.

"Pang... enough already. Didn't you say it was over?"

I asked, frowning.

"It is, but you said if I needed anything, I should tell you."

"So what do you need?"

"To see Pao."

She didn't wait long to reveal her intention. My heart raced. It shouldn't be now. Everything was going well. Nothing should ruin our day.

"I want to see Pao."

"Why? Do you want to make everything worse or what?"

"Honestly, if I wanted to make you and Pao fight, I could do it right now."

"...."

"I could walk in and cause a scene, but I won't. What I want now isn't that. I just want to say goodbye to Pao one last time and give her a gift I prepared."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. We've celebrated her birthday for ten years. At least this time, let me give Pao a gift before I disappear. I'll go back to my life without coming back to this relationship. Honestly, I'm tired..."

And this time, Pang's face looked genuinely exhausted. She seemed out of options, which made my anxiety lessen

"Actually, you shouldn't be asking me. You should ask Pao. If Pao wants to see you, I can't stop her."

"If I ask Pao to meet me, you won't stop her?"

"If this is your last request, I'll let her go."

"Then I'll call Pao now. "

As she spoke, she took out her phone, but I raised my hand to stop her.

"Pao is sleeping now. Find a better time and arrange it yourself, but not now," I said.

I walked away from our private spot. She didn't follow, making me feel that Pang was really done with this.

When I got back to the clinic, I started rescheduling the evening patients, saying I had something to do. But that something was going back to the room to spend more time with my lover. Even though Pang said she was done with everything, I couldn't help but wonder if this messy relationship would really end that easily.

After rescheduling the patients, today's work felt harder than usual. My feelings were all over the place, worrying about everything. Throughout the day, I kept checking on my sleeping lover almost every hour.

Finally, the last dental case was done. I didn't wait to be lazy as usual. Today, she suggested we watch a movie together to celebrate finishing early. I agreed, pretending to relax even though I was the one who rescheduled the evening patients

Even though i told Pang to find a better time to meet Pao, she sent a message while we hadn't even started the movie.

"Pao probably blocked Pang. Sorry for showing you the message. Pao just doesn't want us to have secrets."

I read the long message from my childhood friend sent to my lover. My heart trembled, and my anxiety grew. But what I said was to ask how my lover felt.

"How do you feel now, Pao?"

"Huh? Pang's message made me annoyed," She said, looking genuinely annoyed.

"If you go talk to Pang, will it really end?"

I asked, needing an answer that no one knew, with a look that couldn't be described. It made me realize I was about to break a promise to someone else. If I held Pao back, Pang mightn't disappear.

"Sorry to say this, but if it means no more Pang in our lives, I want you to go see her."

"I won't go. I'm just annoyed now. Sorry for making you feel bad."

"Are you annoyed because you still have feelings?"

"Well... even if I still have feelings, they're not good ones."

"So I don't need to worry?"

"Yes, no need to worry."

"But if I want you to see Pang, honestly, I've been worried about her. I just didn't know what to do."

Memories flooded my mind, my hand clenched tightly, trying to control my emotions.

"Why? I haven't contacted Pang at all. Why are you worried?"

Because it concerns me, I didn't say. **"I don't know. I just want it all to end."**

**Yes... it should end.**

"P' Seenam,"

She called, her voice sterner than usual. But I couldn't look directly because tears of sadness were flowing.

"Look at me, don't look away... P' Seenam."

She looked surprised, not knowing what to do seeing me cry.

"I want you to go, Pao. Go clear things with Pang... **and come back to me.**"

With that, she hugged me tightly. Her pained expression showed she was also sad. Just seeing me cry made her show that face. Why is she so good?

"Do you want me to go with you, Pao? To clear everything together?"

She asked, stepping back, revealing she was also crying.

"It's better if you go alone."

I couldn't bear to see her with someone else. Besides... if I went, it wouldn't end.

"Because ever since we met again, it's like I took you from Pang. So.."

"But Pao and Pang weren't together then."

"But you weren't completely over. I came between you when you still loved Pang."

"But now I love you, Seenam. That's what matters now."

She said "love" again, and once again, I couldn't respond. All I could say was,

**"Come back soon."**

"I'll be back soon. I promise."

If she promised, it meant she'd really come back to me.

Then she walked out of the room. My eyes became vacant. Even though she wasn't there, her scent and feelings were still clear. I didn't watch a movie or do anything to forget my worries. All I could do was lie on the bed, inhaling her lingering scent.

Time passed, but I couldn't tell how long. I hadn't moved from the bedroom at all. Then my phone rang. I quickly got up, hoping it was her calling to say she was coming back.

But the number wasn't Pao's. It was Pang's.

I answered the call without greeting as I should. The person on the other end was silent, which was frustrating.

[Pa...]

"Where is Pao? Has Pao come out of your room yet?"

That was the first question I asked, but the other end of the line went silent for a moment until I had to ask again.

"Where is Pao, Pang?"

**[I'm sorry, Pa. I shouldn't have done that.]**

Her words made my heart race. What did she do? What did she do to Pao, and why was she apologizing?

"I don't understand."

**[I accidentally told Pao everything.]**

My heart felt like it stopped. My mind went blank, and the hand holding my phone gradually lost its strength. I let it drop without caring.

My legs quickly moved out of the room to find someone else, but when I opened the door, I found someone already standing there.

"Pao."

I called out, staring at her with a heart pounding with regret and guilt. She didn't even look at me but walked into the room, making me grab her hand quickly.

"Pao, I want to explain. Can we talk first?"

At that moment, I, who used to be smart and could find a way out of any situation, was at a loss. I wasn't pretending to be ignorant anymore but was pleading for her to listen to me first.

"I... can I go get some air on the balcony?"

She said, pretending not to know anything. I squeezed her hand tightly.

"Pao..."

"Can't I even go to the balcony?"

She looked at me with indifferent eyes, but her beautiful eyes began to fill with tears.

"Fine, I won't go. Did the popcorn arrive? Have you picked a movie yet? But I feel so tired. Maybe I should just take a shower and go to bed..."

She wiped her tears, and that made me unable to hold back my feelings any longer.

Tears streamed down my face. My heart trembled as if it'd stop beating if it beat any harder.

"Why are you crying?"

"...."

**"Shouldn't the one crying to death be me?"**

I... couldn't hold her hand anymore. The hand that once held hers was released immediately, but then she collapsed as if she'd lost all strength. She cried heavily but still voiced her doubts.

**"All this time, P' Seenam... was there any truth in what you did for**

**me?"**

She didn't even look at me, just kept crying. I didn't know what to do or how to respond.

"Aren't you going to answer? I can't think of anything anymore."

This time, she looked up at me, her cheeks stained with tears. I wanted to hug her, but I didn't even know if I could.

"There is. There has to be some truth. Pao, are you ready to hear everything? I'll tell you everything."

Then I knelt in front of her, reaching out to wipe her tears, but Pao, who used to be gentle, turned away as if she didn't want to be touched anymore. "Did I... did I ever predict this? Did I ever predict that you, P' Seenam..."

"...."

**"...would hurt me too!!!"**

**Everything now was terrible... too terrible for me to bear.**

Tears continued to flow, showing the person in front of me that I was also heartbroken. But how could my sorrow compare to hers? The tall figure of the person I loved was becoming someone I didn't recognize.

She destroyed everything that held our memories, and that might be the answer that she didn't want those memories anymore. Or maybe... she didn't even want me.

I didn't stop her from doing anything, but then she picked up a cutter. If she'd stabbed me, it would've been deserved, but she picked up our photo instead, pretending to cut it before throwing it to the ground along with her collapsing body. The glass shards from the scented candle started to cut her, and I saw red blood flowing out.

**"Pao!"**

I rushed to pull her away from there.

"The glass cut you. We need to see a doctor."

But she got up as if the wound didn't hurt at all. The painful thing was that she pushed me away, even now... she was still worried that I might get hurt.

"Don't come closer"

"Pao, at least let me treat your wound."

"No! This doesn't hurt at all. Before you worry about my body, did you ever think about how my heart would feel knowing everything?"

"Of course I worried. Why do you think I wouldn't?"

**"Then why did you do this to Pao? Is this how you show you care?"**

With that, she collapsed to the floor again, reaching for the same cutter and cutting her hair as if it wasn't something to cherish anymore. My mind went blank, not knowing what to do for a moment.

When I came to my senses, I rushed to stop her from doing anything more.

"Pao, Pao... that's enough,"

My voice trembled, afraid she'd do something worse.

**"Are you going to leave, or should I leave instead?"**

Then the question that seemed like an answer was spoken. She didn't even listen to my explanation, but that was understandable because if it were me, I wouldn't be ready to listen either.

The only thing I could do now was to hold onto her as she packed her things, along with one last request.

"Pao, at least let me treat your wound."

And that seemed to be the only request she could grant me.

She didn't cry anymore, and I tried to hold back my tears. Treating her wound seemed to take longer than necessary, probably to buy as much time as possible. When it was done, she moved to lie on the bed and didn't look at me again.

All the while packing, I had to hold back my tears. I wanted to hug her one last time, but the only thing I could do was say something selfish. **"I don't want to say this, but if you could hate me, it'd be easier."**

That was probably the last thing I said about us.

I returned to my room with the same suitcase. Everything was placed in one corner of the room. I didn't even glance at or organize my things as someone meticulous like me should.

All I did was collapse onto the wide bed, and when everything was quiet, one thing happened tears flowed endlessly.

I couldn't sleep all night, but the next thing I had to do was go to work as usual.

My condition was so bad that people at the clinic noticed, but it was good that no one asked. All day, I didn't talk to anyone, which was very unusual for me.

The only thing I did was explain dental procedures to patients, and even that was difficult, even though it was something I did every day.

. .

Today, Pao didn't seem to come to the shop. I kept looking out for her, hoping that seeing her face would somehow ease my feelings.

But who would've thought that for the past three days, Pao hadn't come to the shop at all? I kept looking at my phone, wanting to call her, but every time I just looked and gave up. Finally, the phone rang.

[Hello, Pa. Are you with Pao?]

The voice of Pao's close friend came through. My heart trembled, and I clenched my hand tightly, choosing not to say anything that would reveal our problems to outsiders

"No, I'm not."

[Oh, we've been trying to call Pao for a day or two, but she hasn't answered. The last time, her phone was off. Is she at her place?]

"I don't know. Try checking her place,"

I said before abruptly ending the call.

Tears flowed again, making it impossible to work. I decided to have the staff at the clinic post a notice for a substitute dentist because it seemed that forcing myself to work for the past three days was beyond my limit.

Finally, the workday ended. I had the staff reschedule the patients and went back to rest at my place. But as soon as I lay down, my phone rang again.

**[Pa, what did you do to Pao? She's acting crazy now!!!]**

The voice didn't have any preamble because what was said was clearly an accusation. I didn't wait for things to linger. I quickly got up from the bed to go to Pao's place, and luckily, our rooms were close to each other.

When I reached her door, I quickly entered the password as someone familiar with it. The first thing I saw was Pao's two close friends cleaning the room. Why was everything still scattered? Where was Pao?

"Where's Pao? Is she in the room?"

I asked quickly before walking into the room, but Man grabbed my arm forcefully.

"What did you do to Pao? What did you fight about?"

Man asked harshly. Even though his face looked angry, I wasn't scared at all.

"Let me see Pao, Man."

"No! You have to answer what you did to Pao first."

My arm was squeezed tightly, and that made Cat, who was standing behind Man, quickly intervene.

"Man, stop. You're squeezing her arm too hard."

"So what? Didn't you see Pao's condition? When she was with Pang, she wasn't like this. And now what? How can I let this person near Pao?"

"Let me see Pao,"

I tried to pull my arm away, but Man's strength was much greater.

"What did you do to Pao?"

"**That's between me and Pao!"**

This time, my patience ran out. My concern for Pao was so great that I didn't care about anything else. Tears slowly flowed, showing that I was also deeply hurt. When both of them saw this, their shocked expressions were clear.

I didn't know if they were shocked by my tears or by my shouting. The arm that had been squeezed was released, and I didn't even thank them.

The first thing I saw was Pao sitting against the headboard, typing on her phone as if messaging someone. She smiled and laughed, but tears still flowed. My hands trembled as I slowly walked closer, hoping she'd say something, but this time, it was as if she didn't see me.

"Pao."

I called out. She looked up at me, then made a blank face and continued typing on her phone.

"Pao has been like this since we came into the room. That's why Man was so angry at you,"

Cat's voice came, making me turn to look at her.

"Who is Pao talking to?"

I asked, not out of jealousy but out of curiosity, about who she was talking to that caused such varied reactions.

**"She's talking to you."**

"..."

**"But the number she's texting is her own."**

I grabbed Cat's arm, not understanding what she just said.

"W-what do you mean?"

"She's lost her mind..."

Cat looked troubled, just as confused.

"But I called Pao's parents. They're on their way."

Now, everything was silent. I still sat in one corner of the bedroom, watching Pao type continuously. She kept smiling and crying at the same time. I cried too, not understanding.

My mind was in a fog, not knowing what to do. I wasn't worried about her parents arriving, but I was deeply concerned about why she was like this.

**Was it because of that night? Was it because of me?**

**Even though it seemed like a question trying to avoid blame, the truth was I was just trying to avoid the pain.**

After about two hours, both parents arrived. I stood up from the corner where I'd been sitting, raised my hands in a respectful gesture, feeling like a body without a soul. Only Pao's father acknowledged my greeting.

"What happened?"

Pao's mother asked, but she didn't wait for an answer. She went straight to her daughter, who was still sitting in the same spot.

"Oh, Mom, Dad, how did you get here?" Pao asked the two adults.

Why could she see everyone except me...

"Pao, what's wrong? Why are you in this state?"

As soon as the question was asked, the tall figure looked confused, but tears streamed down her face.

"I'm fine, Mom. Did you meet Cat and Man? My friends from Chonburi. Oh, but right now, Seenam isn't here. She probably went out to buy groceries to cook for us."

At that moment, everything fell silent. A numbness spread throughout my body. Everyone turned to look at me except for the tall figure who'd just said I went out to buy groceries.

The hand that had been holding mine squeezed so tightly that nails dug into my palm. I didn't understand, and it seemed like no one else did either. "What are you talking about, dear? Seenam is right here,"

Pao's mother asked again, turning to look at her daughter, who seemed confused.

"P' Seenam went out. Have you eaten yet? I'll tell her to buy more food since the room is full of people."

She then looked down and started pressing her phone again, but this time her mother began to look at her daughter's screen instead.

"P...Pao, that's."

Shock showed on her face for a moment, and then the small figure rushed towards me quickly. Amid the shocked faces of everyone, I remained expressionless.

My body was pulled forcefully, my arm gripped tightly by Pao's mother's nails as if she'd lost control. I stood there without responding or stepping back even a single step.

**"What did you do? What did you do to my daughter!!!"**

The term "mother" that she used before seemed to fade away. The adult in front of me had tears that showed her sorrow. She started pulling me as if she wanted an answer to her question, but I couldn't say anything. I just stood there feeling guilty until everyone in the room rushed to stop her, fearing that things might get worse. "I...I had a fight with Pao."

"What kind of fight led to this?"

I looked at everyone in the room but didn't answer, letting my tears flow instead.

"I'm sorry..."

That was the only thing I could say. As soon as I said it, the oldest man in the room walked towards me, his face showing clear tension.

"Are you dating Pao?"

The question I didn't expect to be asked came up. My heart trembled with fear, but there was nothing to worry about anymore.

"Yes."

But who would've thought that my answer wouldn't surprise anyone? It seemed like both of them already knew we were dating, which only made me feel worse about what I'd done.

"We trusted you so much. Why did you fight until Pao ended up like this?"

Then Pao's mother started crying.

They knew all along...

"I'm...sorry."

And it seemed like my apology only ended the patience of the adult in front of me. She lunged at me and slapped me hard. When the slap landed on my cheek, I stumbled to the floor.

Everyone in the room rushed to stop the violent act, except for Pao, who remained sitting in the same spot.

I sat there, unable to do anything but let my tears flow the pain.

"Let go! Can't you see the state of our daughter? Why are you stopping me?!"

"Enough. This child's condition is no different from our daughter's. Look at her."

Even though I received sympathy, it wasn't something I wanted. If there was more violence, it might have been more appropriate. I didn't think of telling anyone the whole story because the only person who needed to know was Pao. The others didn't matter to me.

"You should leave for now. Staying together like this will only make things worse,"

Pao's father said calmly. I slowly got up from the floor, feeling exhausted. But before I could stand up, the person who'd just hit me was ready to lunge at me again.

But then...

**"Mom, what are you doing?!!"**

Suddenly, the figure sitting on the bed, unaware of anything, rushed to hug me. She cried out in anger, glaring at everyone in the room as if they were villains hurting the person she loved. Even though it was actually me who'd caused her pain.

**"Why did you hurt P' Seenam?!"**

"...."

**"This is my room! Everyone, get out! Get out!!!"**

The tall figure continued to hug me, her body shaking, while I was at a loss, feeling like I'd lost my mind.

"Pao..."

I couldn't ask anything, just looked at her beautiful face with a trembling heart, beating fast with both joy and sorrow.

"P' Seenam, are you hurt?"

Her voice showed concern, and at that moment, I couldn't hold back my feelings anymore.

I burst into tears, feeling utterly heartbroken. My body trembled as I hugged my lover, burying my face in her chest. Her scent, her touch, still warm and something I'd always longed for.

"Why did you have to be so harsh with her? Is it because she's dating me?"

"Pao, it's not like that, dear."

"I don't know why you slapped her, Mom, but one thing's for sure, no one has the right to hurt P' Seenam. We're dating."

"...."

**"And I love her very much. Even if it's you, Mom, I won't allow it."**

Everything fell silent. Hearing everything clearly, I thought this couldn't be real. The only sound breaking the silence was my crying. Everyone looked shocked I hugged her tightly, not wanting this embrace to disappear.

I hoped that what she'd just said was truly what she felt and that everything would return to normal once she heard my selfish explanation.

After everyone fell silent, I calmed my crying. The tall figure kept saying she wanted to sleep, so I had to take her to bed as she requested. When I walked out of the room, everyone was still sitting outside, looking at me as if waiting for some answer. With time to think, I decided to speak my mind.

"Honestly, I don't know what to say right now. I can only say that we had a serious fight. I intended to disappear from Pao's life, but..."

"Then why didn't you leave?"

Pao's mother's voice interrupted, and I held my breath.

"I still intend to do that. If Pao doesn't want to see or talk to me, I'll disappear."

"....."

"But if Pao calls for me, can I stay with her? Just when she calls, that's all I ask."

Even though it was a question, my demeanor made it clear that it was more of a statement than a request. No one said anything after that, as if Pao's feelings were more important than keeping me away from her.

It seemed like everything would end with me taking care of Pao or being kept away from her.

But that wasn'the case. In the end, I had to deal with many unexpected things.

Since the day Pao told her family she was dating me, I hadn't seen her again. That was because she couldn't see me anymore. My heart ached, and I chose to step back from the tall figure's sight.

Everything got worse. I didn't contact anyone, but one day, her number called me, something that had never happened before.

[P' Seenam, where are you? Why aren't you in the room?]

And that was the first time she called for me. I went to her immediately, dropping everything I was doing. When I got to her room, everything seemed the same, except her parents were always there.

She showed clear affection, and even though I felt good, I had to hold back my tears as much as possible and act like everything was normal. She talked as if the terrible events of that time weren't in her memory If that was the case, I just went along with it and cried alone later.

The next day, I went back to Pao's room, but this time she was the Pao who remembered everything. She looked at me with anger, but she didn't scold or physically harm me.

She just avoided me and disappeared into her room, making me return to my condo without saying anything.

That same day, she called me again, asking when the patients would be gone because she wanted to hug me. Just hearing that, I rushed to her before anything could change.

For weeks, I kept visiting her whenever she called, and then I'd quietly cry alone. Eventually, Pao's parents seemed to soften their anger, seeing my miserable face all the time.

The conversations between me and the two adults became gentler, but they never thanked me for taking care of their daughter.

As time passed, Pao's parents said they'd take her back to Chiang Mai and sell the room. Even though I had no say in the matter, I asked why they were selling it since the location seemed good for renting.

The answer I got was that Pao wanted to sell it. At that moment, my heart trembled with sadness, and I ended up selling some of my dental clinic shares to buy the room instead.

Pao went back to Chiang Mai with her family and started treatment at a hospital there. Over the past few months, I've been busy with everything, including my clinic shares and my own clinic where I'm a major shareholder.

Despite being very busy, I still found time to fly to see Pao often. Many times, by the time I reached her, she'd already pushed me away. My efforts started to pay off. Not only did Pau's parents feel sorry for me, but her close friends did too.

All four of them began to talk to me more naturally. Although there were no playful conversations, there was no awkwardness like before.

Now, six months have passed, and it's the right time for me to take care of the tall figure fully. I didn't have to be stationed at any branch because I'd found replacements.

As for accommodation, I talked to Pao's parents and asked to rent a room at their resort. If she didn't call for me, I'd hide in that room and not go anywhere. But whenever she called, I'd be able to reach her quickly.

However, taking care of Pao wasn't easy. I couldn't predict our appointments. Many times, I prepared everything, only for it to fall apart because she suddenly didn't want to see me.

She once said she wanted to go camping at a resort in a nearby province. I prepared everything and flew back to get my car for convenience. But on the day we planned, she remembered everything, and it was decided that I didn't need to hide in the room anymore.

I should meet Pao when she remembered everything. But her memories were only bad ones. The six months I'd spent visiting her whenever she called weren't in her memory at all. Cat and Man tricked Pao into going to a hospital in Chiang Mai, leaving us alone to meet.

At that moment, Pao seemed completely uninterested in me, showing no signs of regret, as if she'd resigned herself to life. She'd fallen while chasing after the hotel van. I offered to treat her wound, even though she seemed reluctant.

That day, our camping trip was canceled, and we ended up cooking the meat I'd prepared at Pao's family resort.

But that was just for one day when she was truly herself again. The next day, she was back to calling out to me as usual. However, over the past six months, one thing had changed: the embrace we could share.

If the embrace wasn't something she wanted, I was forbidden from touching her, even now when she'd forgotten the terrible events. Even when we expressed our love, I couldn't hug her.

Whenever I hugged her out of my own desire, she'd push me away, only to turn and smile at me a few seconds later, as if forgetting she'd hurt me. It was likely a mental mechanism to protect her from trauma or recalling those bad memories.

I never complained. All I did was take care of her as best as I could.

Whenever I felt exhausted and wanted to disappear, my mind kept telling me that this was what I deserved.

**Even if I had to die with a broken heart,**

**I was ready to accept it and embrace all the pain alone.**

.

*It'd been ten months since the horrible events occurred.*

*.*

I continued to care for her closely, while Pao seemed to call out to me less frequently. Although it seemed good that she was regaining her vitality, I had to accept that she might never accept me again.

I still longed for the rare embraces she gave me and missed her bright smile, even though her eyes were often filled with sadness. Normally, she'd call out to me every other day at the latest, but now it'd been five days since I had to hide in the resort, feeling lifeless.

Whenever she went for a morning run, I'd sit and watch her pass by my room without her seeing me. It was the only thing that kept me going.

As the intervals between her calls grew longer, it meant they'd become less frequent. From every five days, it changed to once a week, and for the past month, she hadn't called out to me at all.

*It'd been a year and two months since the incident.*

When she hadn't called out to me for a month, I decided to step outside the resort for some fresh air. But everything told me I no longer needed to be there. Even though I wanted to stay, if it wasn't what she wanted, I had no right to linger for my own happiness.

That night, I packed my things to return to Bangkok. Once everything was ready, my heart told me there was something I needed to do: see her one last time before we parted. I sneaked into Pao's log cabin, which was luxuriously furnished inside.

I used the key she'd given me for the last time. In her bedroom, a dim bedside lamp was on, and music played softly from a record player. Even though we were still apart, seeing her up close after a month made my heart race with a mix of joy and sorrow.

I walked slowly towards her, inhaling the familiar scent. The room I used to stay in had been sold, leaving me to restore our room as best as I could. Would Pao's room still smell the same? Would returning tomorrow ease my longing?

Before I knew it, I was sitting silently on her bed, staring at her beautiful face without saying a word. Her hair had grown back to its original length, and the dyed white hair had been cut off. My fingers gently brushed through her hair, and I leaned down to kiss it lightly.

A smile appeared briefly, but soon tears flowed uncontrollably. My heart ached, feeling like I couldn't stay any longer, fearing I might wake her with my sobs. But my heart wouldn't let me move away from her, not even an inch.

*Have I learned my lesson yet?*

*And should I continue living now that I no longer have to take care of her?*

At that moment, a thought crossed my mind: if returning to our room didn't ease my longing, I might end my life there.

I wiped my tears hastily and forced a final smile at her sleeping form. I stared at her for a while, my hand moving to touch her pale cheek without fear of waking her. If she woke up and told me to leave, I'd go immediately. But for now, I just wanted to say goodbye.

My tears were replaced by the saddest smile. I looked at her with longing, hoping her life would improve after this. As for mine, it didn't matter. "Pao... I'm sorry,"

I whispered, my heart aching more than ever, feeling like it might stop beating.

"We probably won't see each other again. I'll miss you so much."

She remained still, likely in a deep sleep from her regular medication. But that was good, it allowed me to say everything I needed to. I carefully studied her beautiful face, planting a gentle kiss on her cheek.

As I did, my body trembled, unable to bear the emotions of the moment.

My hand slowly moved away from her cheek.

**"I love you, Pao."**

**"......"**

**"So much."**

After saying what I needed to, my tears flowed again, dripping onto her beautiful face. I quickly wiped them away, my body shaking with pain Realizing I'd overstayed, I slowly moved to leave. But then....

**"P' Seenam."**

My heart seemed to stop. I didn't dare look at her. I wiped my tears hastily and turned to her with a smile.

"Hey..."

My voice trembled, and tears threatened to fall again.

"...."

"I'm sorry for sneaking in like this. I was visiting Chiang Mai and thought I'd drop by. I'll leave now."

I didn't know which version of Pao she was, but she hadn't called out to me for a month, meaning she remembered everything.

I moved quickly, and as I turned away, tears flowed uncontrollably At least she'd called my name. At least we'd made eye contact again. That was the best gift I could have received. But suddenly, my arm was grabbed by the room's owner, her body trembling with emotion.

"I... I was just leaving. I'm sorry."

"How many times have you apologized?"

She asked in a calm voice, but it felt so gentle that I wanted to turn and hug her.

"....."

"All this time..."

Her voice suddenly trembled.

**"Has it been very hard?"**

This time, her voice was so gentle that I couldn't turn away. I slowly turned to face her, tears still streaming down my face. When our eyes met, I realized she was crying too.

"Pao..."

My hand moved closer, wanting to wipe her tears, but I lowered it, knowing it wasn't the right thing to do.

"Are you leaving?"

"...."

**"If you're not in a hurry, P' Seenam,"**

**I stared at her, unable to believe what she was saying.**

**"Can we talk? I'm ready to listen to everything now."**

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# Chapter 35: Willing to Do Anything

***Because I thought I was the one who was hurt the most...***

***That's why I couldn't escape from here...***

*. .*

The sound of many voices echoed like a dream. The images of people played out like a film reel. I sat alone in the pitch dark, watching myself do this and that. I'd been hugging my knees for so long that I couldn't remember how much time had passed.

The deepest part of me was hidden away, and even though I rarely ventured into the real world, I could see everything clearly. Whether it was myself crying hysterically, smiling brightly, or being silent and serious, everything seemed like different versions of me that I showed each day.

But one thing I saw often... was that small woman.

She should've been just a cruel woman who ruined my life. So why did she try so hard?

That question echoed in my head all the time while I hid in this dark corner, hiding within a fragment of myself that didn't live life as it should. I knew every action of mine and those of others too.

But even so, it didn't feel like it could unlock what was inside. I still hid, as if the pain that seemed to lessen would intensify if I accepted the truth one day.

**"Child..."**

"...."

"Child..."

An unfamiliar voice echoed in my head. I'd been here alone for so long. How could there be a voice calling me?

"Of course, there is. I'm talking to you right now."

I turned to look behind me and saw an old woman walking towards me. This time, she wasn't dressed in the ragged clothes I'd seen her in the first time. I didn't know why I still remembered this fortune teller even though so much time had passed.

"It's very painful, isn't it?"

She asked before sitting down next to me

"How did you get here? And... it's always been just me here."

"Of course, it's in your head. But think of it as a dream."

I looked confused, not understanding anything that was happening. But then the old woman beside me spoke again.

"Even though I told you to think before you speak, things got messy like this."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean everything. Your life since you started speaking things into existence. If you predicted someone else's life without much involvement, it mightn't be a problem. But your last prediction was for your own benefit, wasn't it?"

I stayed silent. Childhood memories were clear as if they'd just happened. **"The punishment for changing someone else's destiny for your own benefit is severe and shouldn't be done. You'll face great suffering."**

Everything fell silent again. I kept my eyes on the old woman beside me. She looked at me with a mix of weariness and pity.

"But you never said not to talk about myself."

"Did you stop to listen? You ran off without hearing anything. And when you hesitated about predicting your own life, that was me trying to tell you not to do it. But you chose to follow your own will, and everything spiraled out of control. But I'm also at fault, so I came to you before it's too late." *Before it's too late? What does that mean?*

I was still puzzled, but the old woman turned away, looking into the vast darkness.

"Do you think you've faced great suffering?"

"Me, now?"

She nodded, and I looked at the same spot she was looking at, searching for answers in the darkness. But the clearest thought was,

"I don't know. I don't feel anything here. It's safe."

"And the you that lives each day?"

"...."

"Does she think the same?"

*The me that lives each day?*

"You can continue like this, and no one will say anything. Everyone around you is helping you with everything. But it's a shame."

"....."

**"You keep running away because you're afraid of pain. Just a little more, and you'll find happiness. If you don't do anything, you might regret it later and never find true happiness, even if you return to a normal life."**

"Happiness?"

I asked, not paying attention to her last words. My mind was thinking back to the first prediction she made.

"When you told me to step into school at 7:37 AM, nothing good happened. The person I thought was in the prediction turned out to be the one who hurt me. How can I believe what you say?"

My question had a hint of anger, but she just shook her head.

"Why did you think the good thing was meeting someone you love?"

"...."

"At that time, there was nothing about love in your mind."

"Then what was the good thing?"

"Can't you see? She was on time."

This time, my mind started processing. Memories of the past came back, and at that time there were others. I met them before I met P' Seenam.

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***Cat and Man..***

"If you hadn't rushed into school and fallen, those two friends wouldn't have greeted you. And you wouldn't have greeted anyone first. In the end... **your close friends who are with you now would've just been ordinary classmates, nothing special**."

I stared at the person beside me. All this time, I thought that person was P' Seenam...

"And... what about P' Seenam?"

"What do you mean?"

"If I hadn't said that her soulmate was me, what would've happened to her?"

"To be honest, playing with someone else's destiny makes everything go wrong. That woman's original fate was to live alone, not caring about anyone, living life her way. But because you made her feel uncertain, it wasn't enough to change her destiny. Unless you said something that couldn't be undone. So, the end that was written started to go wrong. As the lines of destiny tried to align with what you said, it got messy."

"...."

"And the mess means both you and that woman will face pain until everything can be straightened out. Changing someone's destiny is forbidden. It'll be accepted only when the price is paid."

"So, does that mean... no matter what happens, P' Seenam and I will be soulmates forever?"

The old woman beside me stared at me for a long time. A soft sigh escaped her lips.

**"Destiny will change again when one of you dies."**

"....."

**"At first, it was you who was going to change this destiny. But now... everything is about to change."**

"What do you mean?"

"I can only tell you this much. The rest is up to you to decide which path to take. But for sure... the woman you love, will you let her be like this forever?"

"...."

**"Forever doesn't exist. And if you don't do anything, hiding like this, the one who won't be truly happy... might be you."**

She stood up and started walking away. I was still dazed and confused, unable to do anything.

"Wait, don't go..."

I ran after the old woman who walked slowly, but no matter how much I ran, I couldn't catch up to her.

**"Grandma! Wait for me!"**

My voice echoed out. I reached out to stop her from walking away, but the scene in front of me turned into the familiar ceiling of my room. I'd been living here for almost a year.

*Was it a dream?*

*. .*

That was my first thought. But then someone's movement made me turn. I wasn't lying on the bed alone. There was a small woman lying beside me

She held my hand tightly even though she was asleep. Pain surged in my chest as memories from the past year came flooding back. When this part of me returned to face the real world, everything felt heavy.

Fear and regret overwhelmed me. I quickly got up, pulling my hand away from her grasp, which woke her up immediately.

"Pao... I'm sorry,"

She said, her voice more panicked than sleepy.

The room was dimly lit. Even though it was familiar, it didn't feel comfortable. I felt like a stranger in a familiar place. But what shocked me was her face. She was still beautiful, but there was a sadness and a much darker look than before.

I didn't respond to her call. I just stared at her, my eyebrows furrowing. She didn't ask what was wrong, but instead, she said something.

"I'm sorry for sneaking in like this. I came to visit Chiang Mai and stopped by. I'll leave now."

With that, she quietly left the room as if she'd never been there. This wasn't the first time I heard her excuses or saw her actions like this. It seemed like every time 1 returned to Chiang Mai, I encountered this situation often.

All night, I tried to close my eyes to forget all the painful memories. But when I paid attention, the pain seemed to lessen. I felt like a new person, constantly reflecting on myself.

Even so, I was aware of every action of the small woman over the past year. I felt like myself with all my memories back.

But if asked about discussing what happened, the answer was always that I wasn't ready to hear her explanations.

In the morning, I went for a run around the resort as usual, searching for answers from the dream I just had. When I was satisfied with my run, I stopped at the back view of the resort, thinking again as if it was necessary.

But what was surprising was that the pain I felt when I first woke up seemed to fade away.

Suddenly, I felt guilty, thinking that maybe I was the one who caused all the terrible things to happen.

In the past few days, I became quiet again, but this time to observe everything. I hadn't seen P' Seenam again. At first, I thought she'd left, but when I ran around the resort, I accidentally saw her car parked beside the resort.

The car stayed in the same spot, not moving. I kept an eye on it for days. But what was more surprising was that one room in the resort had been booked for months.

I don't know what made me think she must be in that room. I waited for a moment when her car wasn't there and sneaked up to check. As soon as I opened the door, the scent of the essential oil I'd created filled the room.

The smell of the shower gel she liked was mixed in. Many things looked familiar, and what caught my eye the most was the Polaroid photo of us. The photo I intended to throw away the day everything happened but couldn't.

When I didn't call for her...did she just stay in this room?

Thinking that, I returned home with a whirlwind of emotions, staring at my phone with messages sent to her over the past days. Even though it wasn't the first time I saw those messages, this time they felt different.

"Where are you?"

I tried sending her a message, and within seconds, it was read.

[I went out to get coffee. I'm on my way back.]

I stared at the message in surprise. She responded as if everything was normal. Even though I was surprised, it also felt familiar.

Both my hands held my temples as if I couldn't think straight. I was sure I'd sent the message less than ten minutes ago, but she rushed into the room, panting.

"Pao, I'm back," she said, breathless

I looked at her joyful smile. Was she smiling so much because I hadn't called for her in days?

"Where's the coffee?"

I asked, looking for the coffee she said she went out to buy but didn't bring back.

"I drank it all,"

She replied casually, not surprised by my question.

Was it because of me... that she had to lie about everything when we met, so much so that it became a habit and she wasn't surprised by my questions?

I wasn't angry at her lies. Instead, I felt that all this time she must have been quite exhausted.

"Pao, do you want to eat something? I'll make it for you,"

She said, glancing at the clock that showed it was almost two in the afternoon. I just stared at her smile, not knowing how to respond.

"I'm not hungry," I replied.

"Then do you want to go for a drive?"

This time, I agreed to go out with her, being myself. The petite woman didn't realize that I was different from usual, or maybe I'd changed so much that she couldn't keep up.

"Do you want to go anywhere, Pao?" she asked.

"No," I replied.

"Then let's just drive around.."

Her smile remained, but her eyes clearly showed sadness.

"Are you tired?"

I suddenly asked what I had been thinking.

"How could I be tired? You know I don't have to work at any branch now. I can stay with you for a long time," she said.

"That's it... staying with me, is it tiring?"

Her smile faded for a moment but quickly returned, as always.

"How could I be tired?"

"..."

**"Because you are my happiness, Pao."**

My heart skipped a beat. Even though it wasn't the first time she said that, it felt like the first time I truly heard it.

She glanced at me and smiled as usual. That was the last conversation we had. For the next several minutes, only the sound of music filled the car.

She didn't ask why I was silent, but thinking back, she never asked me anything. All she did every day was take care of me.

We returned to the resort later. No matter where I went, she followed me everywhere. During that time, I saw myself talking to her, laughing together, and sometimes we even had staring contests to see who would lose first.

"P" Seenam," I called her.

"Yes?"

Since when did she start speaking so politely to me?

"Shall we have a staring contest?"

I asked, turning to look at her still smiling face.

"Sure, let's go to our usual spot,"

She quickly said, leading the way to our usual seating area. I stood still, making her walk back to me.

"Aren't you coming? Why are you still standing?"

"Well.."

I hesitated, looking at my hands that had refused her touch days ago. Should I try holding her hand now?

"Pao, is something wrong?"

She asked, her face no longer smiling, showing immediate concern at my hesitation.

"I don't want to play anymore, I said.

"...."

"I'll go inside," I said.

"Okay, let's go inside," she replied

"No, I want to be alone,"

I said, walking back to my house. When I turned to look at her, she stood still, not moving What was more surprising was the smile she gave me, a smile filled with sadness.

Facing her seemed too soon. After that, I kept my distance for a week When I messaged her, she appeared almost immediately, her joyful face unchanged. But I felt sadder, my anger and sorrow replaced by her sad eyes.

Many times, I saw her on the verge of tears, but when she noticed me nearby, she'd quickly change her demeanor to her usual kind self, sending me a bright but unnatural smile.

After that, I stopped messaging her to meet. She often sneaked into my room, sitting quietly beside me before leaving. I opened my eyes every time the door closed softly. Even though the pain wasn't as intense, I couldn't understand why I never listened to her explanations.

Two weeks passed, and I called for her again. She came with the same demeanor. I started looking at her more, brushing hands when passing by. The Initial pain of being myself had lessened to almost nothing If any feelings remained, it was that I didn't love her any less.

That night, 1 let her sleep with me. She kept her distance, waiting for me to fall asleep before moving closer. The image of me pushing her away was still clear, as it was my true feeling at the time

But that wasn't the case anymore...

I pretended to sleep so she'd move closer. She called my name softly to see if I was really asleep. When I didn't respond, she moved closer, holding my hand and whispering,

**"I miss you, Pao..."**

She gently placed my hand on her cheek. Seeing that I didn't react, she rested her face on my hand. The warmth from her made my heart flutter. I let her rest on my hand until I felt warm tears on the back of my hand. I opened my eyes to see her asleep, crying in her sleep.

"Pao..."

She called my name with tears streaming down. I watched everything through the dim light and reached to turn it off, feeling guilty even though ! had no reason to.

I moved closer to her and whispered,

"I'm here, Pao. Sleep now."

As soon as I spoke, her sleep-talking stopped. She moved away, pulling the blanket up to her shoulders. Once everything was settled, I just watched her in the dark

***Why... couldn't I listen to her explanation?***

After seeing her cry that night, I didn't dare call her again. I waited until I was ready to hear her explanations before meeting her again.

But who would've thought that giving myself a month to think would hurt her so much? P' Seenam barely left her room. Her car stayed in the same spot, gathering dust and leaves.

I tried to retreat into my own darkness, hoping my brighter self would come out to meet her. But it seemed those parts of me'd merged into one, with the fearful part taking the lead.

I let time pass, feeling lost. If I knew the reasons behind her actions, it'd be easier to decide the direction of our relationship. But it never seemed like the right time to listen.

Until... she sneaked in one night while I pretended to sleep.

She sat on my bed, kissed my hair, and my heart raced at her scent, confirming how close we were.

Then, she touched my cheek. She'd never done this before, never risking waking me. But tonight, she did. My heart pounded with fear. Should I open my eyes and look at her? Then, her familiar voice broke the silence.

**"Pao... I'm sorry."**

Her voice was soft and trembling.

"We won't see each other again. I'll miss you so much."

Not see each other again? Where was she going?

I prepared myself to face her, but then her lips touched my cheek. Her hand trembled, and I felt it. Should I open my eyes and ask where she was going? Despite her smiles, her sad eyes never faded. If I asked her to stay a little longer, would it be okay?

**"I love you, Pao."**

All my thoughts froze.

Did she just say she loved me?

My thoughts spiraled. Had she ever said she loved me before? It seemed like this was the first time. My heart fluttered, and all my worries and fears of the past two months were replaced by one feeling.

I was happy... to hear those words.

"P' Seenam," I called her.

She stopped immediately but didn't turn around.

"Yes..."

Her voice was shakier than usual. She wiped her tears quickly and turned to me with a smile.

"Sorry for sneaking in like this. I was visiting Chiang Mai and thought I'd drop by. I'll leave now."

That line again...

After she finished speaking, she turned away again, determined to leave as always.

"I... I'm leaving now. Sorry," she said.

"How many times have you said sorry?" I asked.

"All this time..."

She still had her back to me, her body trembling, clearly crying. My feelings became clearer, and tears streamed down my face.

**"Has it been hard?"**

With that question, she slowly turned around. We could feel each other's pain. I didn't know why she did what she did, but she'd always taken care of me. If it were anyone else, even Pang, they wouldn't have had the patience to care for a sick person like P' Seenam did.

"Pao..."

She looked at me, shocked. Her small hand reached to wipe my tears but hesitated and lowered.

"Are you leaving?" I asked.

"....."

"If you're not in a hurry, can we talk? I want to hear everything," I said.

She stared at me, her beautiful eyes filled with fear but also a hint of joy. She raised her hand to cover her mouth before bursting into uncontrollable sobs.

Her small frame collapsed to the floor, and I quickly grabbed her to keep her from falling.

"Pao... Do you remember everything?"

She asked, her voice breaking with sobs, making it almost impossible to understand her.

"Yes, Pao remembers," I replied.

"Then why... why don't you hate me?"

I didn't know how to answer her question. All I could do was sit beside her, watching her small frame cry uncontrollably.

"Right now, Pao doesn't have an answer. Let Pao hear the whole story first, and then maybe I can tell you,"

I said.

She nodded, but it seemed like the explanation I was bracing myself to hear wasn't going to come out immediately. We continued to sit in silence.

I wasn't crying like before, but the person beside me couldn't stop. "It all started when I was in high school, a year before Pao came to study..."

Her sweet voice, interspersed with sobs, began to recount the entire story. As I listened, I didn't say anything, just pieced together everything she was telling me. In her childhood, it seemed like she didn't remember everything in detail, but she understood that she'd liked P' Pang before.

She'd helped the person she liked by giving money in exchange for being intimate. When I heard this, I asked her to stop for a moment. The pain inside me started to resurface, but it wasn't enough to stop me from listening.

She continued, saying everything went wrong when I came into the picture. She said that if liking someone felt like how she felt about me, then she didn't really like P' Pang back then. She just wanted something to focus on because she was someone who always had people interested in her.

She mentioned that P' Pang often talked about me and seemed to like me from back then. P' Seenam and P' Pang often fought, mostly because of me. Eventually, P' Seenam started dating P'Nat to make me back off from liking her.

At this point, I asked her to stop again. I took a moment to compose myself before listening further. She said that after graduation, she lost contact with everyone she'd studied with. Over ten years passed before P' Seenam and P' Pang met again, and I realized that the woman in front of me wasn't the good person I'd imagined.

She had partners but never felt love for anyone. This statement brought back the words my grandmother had said in my dream, that she was destined to be alone, but I'd changed that fate myself.

P' Seenam said that at first, she approached me because she was bored, and P' Pang and I happened to meet her at that time. Initially, she just wanted to provoke P' Pang and win. But as she spent time with me, her old feelings resurfaced.

She loved me without realizing it. By the time she realized it, it was when P' Pang came to see her the night we planned to go to the beach together. She left me to get her swimsuit from her room but found P' Pang waiting there. It seemed like P' Pang started it, not P' Seenam. She wasn't the one who initiated it.

P' Pang was jealous and wanted me back, even willing to be intimate if P' Seenam would let me go. But she admitted that at one point, her old habits returned. However, after everything was over, she realized she wasn't happy or having fun as she thought she would.

She was just worried about what would happen if I found out because at that moment. it seemed she realized she loved me.

As she recounted this part, her small frame cried heavily, as if it was a lifelong burden. I was confused and disoriented. Even though I wanted to be angry about what she'd told me, a thought popped into my head: was she really that wrong?

Could the years she spent caring for and worrying about me make up for what happened? But in the end, I still didn't have an answer.

It took her about ten minutes to finish crying and continue her story. Throughout her crying, she kept apologizing to me.

She continued, saying that night she wanted to hug me but didn't dare. Once she realized she loved me, everything changed. Except two days later, P' Pang followed her to the clinic in Chonburi and told P' Seenam to be intimate with her in the dental room without locking the door.

When I heard this, I knew immediately that P' Pang didn't intend to do it in the dental room. She just wanted to get back at P' Seenam. I listened patiently, feeling like a blind person who couldn't bring myself to be angry at the person in front of me.

"So, P' Seenam... did you really have something with P' Pang in the dental room while Pao was asleep in the doctor's room?" I asked.

"If it meant we could stay together, I'd do whatever Pang asked," she replied.

"...."

"At that time, I knew that when Pang told me to strip and crawl on all fours, it was a sarcastic remark. But I had no choice but to do whatever it took to get Pang out of our lives,"

She explained.

"What?"

I repeated, raising my hand to my temple as if I didn't understand anything. Was that why she asked me for a kiss when she came back from the dental appointment?

"So, in the end, did P' Pang do that with P' Seenam?"

She shook her head.

"When Pang saw that I was willing to do anything, she backed off, and we didn't do anything."

Thinking back, P' Pang never explicitly said she did anything with P' Seenam that day. She just let me assume what they did in the dental room.

She continued, saying that after that, P' Pang disappeared for real but came back to see P' Seenam again after my birthday. P' Pang asked to see me again to give me a gift. P' Seenam said she let her talk to me herself.

That was why P' Seenam tried to get me to meet P' Pang, hoping everything would end and she could be with me without any worries.

The reason she never said "I love you" wasn't because she didn't love me, but because she felt too ashamed of what she'd done to say those words.

P' Seenam continued, saying that after I went to see P' Pang, P' Pang called to apologize and said she'd told me everything. At that moment, P' Seenam was scared and was about to come after me but found me standing at the door unexpectedly. So, she could only say she wanted to explain everything to me.

As she recounted this part, silence began to seep in. I started to think repeatedly, but no matter how much I thought about it, all three of us seemed to be at fault. If I disregarded what the fortune teller had said, it meant that I was the one who caused the rift between P' Seenam and P' Pang, leading them to play mind games again as adults.

P' Pang did many things out of jealousy and didn't want to let me go. P' Seenam was just being herself, like in her childhood, but she genuinely fell in love with me, making everything more complicated

"Now that you know everything... do you hate me?"

She asked softly, not daring to look at me.

"Why did P' Seenam endure everything? Why did you accept all that pain alone?" I asked.

"Why wouldn't I? Pao has been in pain all this time too, hasn't she?"

"....."

"Besides, the meaning of the gypsophila flower also represents my feelings,"

She said, looking up to meet my eyes. Her beautiful face still had tears, but a faint smile began to appear.

**"It's not just that I was your first love, Pao. You're also my first love.**

**So..."**

Her sweet voice stopped there. She closed her eyes as if trying to hold back her tears. When she was ready to speak again, her beautiful eyes opened, looking more hopeful.

She reached out to touch my cheek, gently stroking it as if happy that she could touch me this time

"**I'll do anything if you just let me... love you, Pao."**

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# Chapter 36: Her Prophecy... Is Me [END]

At this moment, I didn't feel any lingering attachment. Maybe it was because the events had happened so long ago, or perhaps because I'd come to understand everything, including the past.

Our story overlapped in many ways. We had very little happiness compared to the amount of suffering we endured.

*But if what Grandma said was true... does that mean the worst is over?*

I questioned myself silently, still staring at the person in front of me without looking away. Even though P' Seenam still looked tired, she seemed more lively than she'd been in the past year.

I slowly moved closer. Her hand still held my cheek as before. The person in front of me looked nervous and startled, while I found it incredibly difficult to muster the courage. She didn't dare move closer either, perhaps because she was used to being rejected. I couldn't help but feel sorry for her, thinking about how much she had to adjust.

"Pao..."

Her sweet voice broke the silence. She looked at me, our noses almost touching.

"Don't force yourself. If you're touching me out of guilt, it's not necessary. Just being able to touch you is enough for me."

*Was she really the person I once hated?*

"I'm sorry, P' Seenam."

"..."

**"But I'm not satisfied..."**

Then my lips moved quickly, seizing the touch I'd longed for. Her eyes widened, confused by the sudden contact. At first, we only pressed our lips together, but as I pressed harder, she yielded easily. Our hearts beat erratically, and I believed she felt the same.

We kissed deeply, neither of us pulling away. Finally, I used my arms, strengthened from exercise, to lift her onto my lap. She still held my cheek, not wanting our lips to part even for a second.

My mind started to wander, overwhelmed by the sensation I'd craved. I didn't wait for her to ask for anything. My fingers moved down to her flat stomach. She was already small, but now she seemed even smaller than a year ago.

The guilt of letting her stress and take care of me without taking care of herself pained me, but I couldn't stop my actions.

My fingers moved lower, past the edge of her satin pants. She flinched in surprise, her lips pressing harder against mine. But after a few seconds, she pulled away, her face flushed, breathing heavily Her small hand grabbed my arm, her eyes pleading for me to stop. She seemed not ready for more.

"Pao wait."

"Why?"

"I...."

She hesitated, pushing my hand away from her small body on my lap, but I held my arm in place.

"P' Seenam."

"If we do this, and tomorrow."

"...."

**"What if you don't remember everything tomorrow? What if you push me away? What will I do? Let me stay as I am. I'll come only when you call."**

This time, her beautiful eyes filled with tears. I looked at her with pity, holding her hand on my cheek.

"Then I'll call you every day, P' Seenam. I'll call you whenever you're not in my sight. And besides..."

"...."

"I've been myself for two months now."

"Two months?"

She looked thoughtful, then her sorrowful face turned to surprise.

"So when we went for a drive, it was you, the real you?"

"Yes, I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I just needed time to prepare myself."

She looked at me with increasing love. It was my fault for letting things drag on for so long. As her hand hesitated, not holding my arm, my fingers pressed deeper, making her flinch again.

"Can I do this?"

I asked, sending a look of desire. When she nodded, giving permission, my fingers moved up and down outside to help her relax. But it seemed to make her tense. She made a sound from her throat, pressing harder. My fingers went deeper, and she leaned forward to hug me, moaning softly.

"Are you okay? Why are you shaking?"

I asked, kissing her white neck. But no matter where I touched, she seemed unable to handle it.

"It's been over a year..."

She said, breathing heavily.

"Over a year."

"And you didn't um..."

I hesitated, wondering if I should ask.

**"I didn't pleasure myself... that's why it's been over a year."**

My heart raced, pleased that she'd waited for me. I didn't think I could hold back any longer.

"If you can't handle it, tell me. I'll try to control myself"

"It's okay."

Her hoarse voice replied, just as I pressed my fingers deeper.

**"Ah... do... whatever you want."**

"No take-backs."

I said firmly, but she stopped me.

"Wait."

"...."

"Can I move myself? Just this time."

Her sleepy eyes looked adorable. I smiled and nodded, watching her small body move slowly.

She took a deep breath, pressing her hands on my shoulders. She looked at my hand, which could bring her pleasure. She moved up waiting several seconds before lowering her hips. Her sweet voice came from her throat. I watched every move, my breathing getting heavier.

She was so beautiful, I couldn't look away. Her body moved up and down, sweat forming, her face arousing me. I almost pushed her down, but she'd asked me to let her move. So I watched, my heart racing.

It felt like our first time together.

Soon, she increased her pace. She leaned down to kiss me, as if seeking an outlet before our lovemaking ended. As her body tensed, I moved my fingers to help her reach climax faster. She moaned, then collapsed on my shoulder, her heavy breathing arousing me more I slowly unbuttoned her shirt, but she seemed not ready.

"Pao can we rest?"

"That was just once."

"Just rest..."

She kept breathing heavily. Her heartbeat was strong under my hand on her chest.

"Are you very tired?"

"No... just need to adjust... a bit."

I laughed softly. When I did, she lifted her head to look at me.

"Are you laughing?"

"Yes."

"That's good."

She smiled, making me lose all restraint.

I wrapped my arms around her waist, pushing her down on the bed.

"You can't smile like that"

"...."

"Because I can't control myself."

I felt like a repressed person who, once freed, became overly energetic P' Seenam kept smiling, even though I warned her. She said she couldn't stop because she was happy to see me laugh.

No doubt what happened next. I touched her continuously for hours. She called for me to stop, asked for a break, even wanted to start herself, but I didn't let her. Not because I was power-hungry, but because her inviting look made me lose control.

Now our breathing was steady again. She lay beside me, eyes closed. I watched her beautiful face with pity. She looked exhausted, but I didn't stop, making her so weak. I thought I should sleep too, but as my eyes closed, I felt her move. I opened my eyes to see her getting up, even though she looked so tired.

P' Seenam was quietly putting on her clothes, thinking I was asleep. She moved carefully, trying not to make noise. I watched until she was about to leave the room.

"Where are you going?"

She flinched at my sudden question, turning to see which Pao I was.

"I..."

I didn't wait for her to answer. I got up and walked to her confused figure.

"Where are you going? It's not morning yet."

"I was just going back to my room."

"Why?"

She stopped, her sweet eyes turning sad. Was she so afraid I'd push her away? Even after I said I wouldn't go back to how I was, she still kept her distance, not fully believing everything that happened.

"I'm scared."

She started shaking, avoiding my eyes.

"If you go back to how you were, I want to keep the good memories as long as possible."

"I told you I wouldn't go back to that. And besides everything you explained unlocked my doubts. So you don't need to go anywhere. Just stay with me."

"Can I stay?"

"Of course. How could I let you disappear?"

I hugged her tightly. She said nothing, just trembled and cried, relieved and happy.

"You'll really let me stay?"

"Yes. Tomorrow, we'll get your things and bring them here."

"Can I bring my pictures?"

"Bring everything. I've seen your room, it's full of things that used to be in my room."

She pulled away, her tear-streaked face looking curious. She blinked, then leaned back into my embrace.

"What else do you know from these two months?"

"I know someone was watching me while I exercised."

"How did you know? I thought I hid well."

"The feeling of being watched was strong, like at the candle shop."

"Then it must be true."

"Are you a stalker? No more sneaking around."

"...."

"If you want to look, call me so I can look at you too."

She laughed, hugging me tighter. We stood like that before returning to bed. When I told her to sleep with me, she fell asleep immediately.

I stared at her beautiful face as she slept all night, and when she woke up, I kept looking at her the same way.

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This morning was different from usual. The first thing I did wasn't going for a run around the resort but taking P' Seenam to see my parents at their other house.

Neither of them seemed surprised because it was a familiar sight sometimes. But when I told them that my multiple personality disorder had been gone for two months, they were very happy.

I knew they wanted to ask how it all happened, but I ended the conversation by saying that the small person helped me recover. The fact that she was the cause was sealed away.

I didn't want to talk about it because it wouldn't benefit anyone. If we brought it up again, the one who'd be hurt the most might be her.

So, I made it clear that no one should ask any more questions. Everyone should just know that we'd come to an understanding, and that included Cat and Man. I called to thank both friends and invited P' Seenam to see the doctor with me.

I explained all my symptoms and mentioned that I'd secretly stopped taking my medication for two months, but there were no abnormal symptoms. At that moment, the doctor who'd been taking care of me seemed to disagree, but I firmly stated that I wouldn't see the doctor anymore.

When I said that, the doctor's initial resistance turned into a happy expression. She looked at both of us as if piecing everything together, but I didn't say anything more.

Once everything was resolved, P' Seenam and I started living together as usual.

After overcoming the bad times, everyone seemed to agree with me on everything. I discussed with P' Seenam about opening a clinic in Chiang Mai, offering to be her business partner Initially, P' Seenam didn't want me to invest in her because her monthly income was enough for us to live on.

But I feared that the small person would get bored if she had nothing to do. That was the starting point for talking to my parents about wanting to be a partner in a dental clinic, with me as the major shareholder. I also asked them to increase dental benefits for resort employees to thirty thousand baht per year.

When I said I'd be the major partner, my parents seemed more okay with it than I thought. However, they offered me a deal to come back and help manage the resort fully, rather than just overseeing the Tien Hom branch.

The deal included all the funding for building the dental clinic, and once everything was complete, P' Seenam and I would handle the partnership percentages ourselves.

When everything started to fall into place, P' Seenam and I began looking for a convenient location for people to come for dental services. My mom gave us a piece of land in the city center, which was initially reserved for expanding the Tien Hom branch.

But due to declining revenue and fewer tourists compared to previous years, that project was shelved, leaving the land for us to build the clinic instead.

We spent the whole year preparing everything. I was responsible for the construction, while P' Seenam handled finding suppliers for the equipment.

Despite being busy, we still found time to be together. I didn't want to be away from her, and she seemed to be more attached to me than I was to her. No matter how many things P' Seenam had to handle in Bangkok, she'd always fly back to see me the next evening.

When the dental clinic officially opened, we had more clients than expected. P' Seenam was quite exhausted from work, but whenever she had an hour or two free, she'd drive back to the resort to have a meal with me, watch me work, or just come to give me a kiss before heading back to work.

When everything settled down, P' Seenam seemed like a new person I didn't know. She was gentler, sweeter, and managed her time so well that I wondered if she ever got tired. She was friendly with people, looked bright, and my parents seemed to love her more each day, probably because of her consistent kindness.

And it wasn't just P' Seenam who became a new person, I did too. After going through so much, I didn't go back to being as cheerful as before. I was quieter and sometimes so serious about work that even the elders watching me work felt tense.

But I could still be my cheerful self when I was with her alone.

Every day, I fell in love with the small person over and over again, including today.

"Pao, do you want to eat now?"

She asked after we got home. Instead of letting her rest, it seemed like the person in front of me still had her perfectionist habits. She'd do everything perfectly as usual, and no matter how much I told her to rest, she never listened.

"I have to go out for a bit. If you're hungry, go ahead and eat first,"

I replied.

"Where are you going?"

She asked, putting her things down and sitting next to me as I looked at resort documents without glancing at her.

"Just some errands,"

I said, and she looked a bit hurt but didn't press further. She was still the smart woman she always was, just not very good at hiding her feelings.

"Okay, I'll go take a shower then,"

She said and went upstairs to shower as she said she would.

Once she was out of sight, I put down all the documents, grabbed my car keys, and drove into the city. It was early evening, and the traffic was quite heavy, but I managed to pick up what I'd ordered on time.

A large bouquet of gypsophila was placed on the passenger seat. I drove a bit further to my final destination.

I had an appointment at a famous hair salon, and as soon as I walked into the elegantly decorated shop, the staff greeted me warmly. I was getting my hair dved white again, and it took almost five hours.

After finishing my hair, I quickly drove back to the resort. I parked in front of my house and saw that all the lights were off, except for the pathway lights. The temperature was probably below twenty degrees Celsius, and I couldn't help but worry about how upset she might be that I'd been gone so long.

She didn't call or text, probably because I'd been so distant today.

But the distance was just a plan to surprise her for her birthday. I looked at my watch, it was almost midnight. I opened the bedroom door, and the dim light shone out. I saw her small figure lying under the covers not far away. I placed the large bouquet on the bed and walked over to see if she was asleep.

"Sniff..."

**But she was crying...**

My heart sank. I quickly pulled the blanket away to see if she was really crying.

"P' Seenam."

"...."

Her sobs were immediately stifled. It took her several seconds to respond.

"Y.... you're back. Go shower and come to bed."

She said only that before pulling the blanket back over herself I stood there, unsure of what to do, but finally pulled the blanket down again. This time, she held onto it.

"P" Seenam, why are you crying?"

"I'm not. I'm not crying."

She mumbled, which made me pull harder until her beautiful face was exposed.

Her pillow was soaked with tears. She raised her small hand to cover her face, and I sat down next to the bed, gently pulling her hand away so I could see the face I loved to look at.

"You are crying, aren't you?"

She didn't answer but turned her face away. When she turned, she sat up and noticed the large bouquet I'd bought.

"What's this, Pao?"

She asked, her voice still muffled.

"Do you only see the flowers? Don't you see anything else?"

I asked, and she wiped her tears quickly, looking at me as if she just noticed the change from earlier in the evening.

"What did you do to your hair?"

This time, she didn't joke but moved closer, gently touching my hair as if trying to understand its significance.

"Do you like it?"

I asked, and it seemed like she was about to cry even more.

"Do you like it, Pao?"

"Of course, I do. That's why I did it,"

I said, sitting next to her. I reached over to turn up the bedside lamp, and when she saw my face clearly, she kept touching my cheeks and hair. "It's beautiful."

"...."

"Were you gone so long because you were getting your hair done?"

"Yes, I was getting my hair done. And were you crying because I was gone?"

She nodded, her beautiful face starting to pout as if she was about to cry again.

"Why didn't you tell me? I thought you.... **were bored of me**."

*How adorable.*

"How could I be bored of someone as lovely as you, P' Seenam? I just wanted to surprise you,"

I said, glancing at the clock that was almost midnight.

"It's almost your birthday."

"...."

"This time, I got the surprise right. I'm not surprising you on my own birthday anymore."

"That's right, tomorrow is my birthday,"

She said, as if just realizing it. I felt a bit sad that she'd been so busy doing everything for others that she forgot her own special day.

"I thought you might have some idea that I was planning a surprise When I came back and saw you crying, did you really not know?"

"I had no idea. If I knew, I would've dressed up nicely instead of sitting here crying with puffy eyes,"

She said, pouting I laughed at her cute behavior and reached for the bouquet.

I watched the clock as it approached midnight, and when the minute hand hit twelve, my smile widened.

**"Happy birthday, P' Seenam."**

I handed her the bouquet, and she took it immediately, trying to hold back her tears.

"Thank you for remembering," she said.

"I have a gift for you too,"

I said, and she looked around to see what it was.

I gently took her hand, turning it palm up so I could see the lines clearly.

"Let me read your palm. This will be the last time," I said.

She looked at me, and I smiled before kissing her palm. I kissed her hand for a long time before looking up at her again.

"You have a destiny with white things. You'll meet a very good lover with white hair and beauty,"

She laughed softly but waited for me to continue.

"But there's one more very clear prediction."

"What could be better than meeting a good lover with white hair and beauty?"

She asked, her face still adorned with a warm smile

"There is,"

I said, smiling sweetly, moving closer until we were almost touching But before I could kiss her, I spoke the final prediction I'd planned.

**"P' Seenam, let me remind you again, I'm the one who will make you happy."**

**"....."**

**"And your soulmate... is only me."**

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**------THE END-----**