

# Chapter 01: Future Husband

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***...squeeeeeeeeeeeek***

As the vehicle transporting me home brakes against the rail, the lower section emits a long, high-pitched metal-on-metal sound. The station name is announced before the train door opens.

I look over to two strong-built Caucasian females sitting a few seats away from me. Opposite me, a man with a dark complexion is reading a palmsized book with a dark cover, while three to four teenagers sit a few seats further away from him.

Sitting at the end of the car is an Asian man. No one moves as the train resumes its journey, which makes me feel relieved.

The watch on my wrist shows that we are now 43 minutes into a new day in New York. This is why there are so few passengers on this train. I've been praying that my fellow passengers will not abandon me along the way and leave me alone on this train with that large Asian guy. Only one more station, and I will arrive at my destination.

New York has it all, from fashion to entertainment, food, and nature. It also has a thriving art scene. Museums, art fairs, galleries, shows, and street statues can all be found throughout the city. Not to mention the numerous business transactions involving the arts.

This is one of the reasons why I chose to continue my design studies here.

The other reason was that I did something extremely grave to my sister in Thailand. There was no way to solve the problem, and I couldn't bear the agony in her eyes.

I decided to flee to a new environment, one filled with the sights and sounds of a bustling metropolis,

However, in some ways, New York resembles my home country's capital. The civilized side isn't the only one it has. The city is full of skyscrapers and civilization, but it is also chaotic, dangerous, and filthy. It attracts people from all over the world.

People of New York origin coexist with those who moved here, immigrants, and tourists. It is home to both good and bad people. That includes scammers and a wide range of lawbreakers.

Living here for more than two years required me to learn daily survival skills in addition to earning my master's degree. I had to learn when not to go somewhere or which areas | should avoid at all costs... as well as the types of people to stay away from.

As soon as that thought crosses my mind, my gaze unconsciously returns to the car's end. The Asian guy with a buzzcut has tattoos from the end of his short sleeves to his rough hands, and the artistic drawing also runs from his collar to his Adam's apple.

My gaze remains fixed on him until I notice a mocking grin in his eyes as he returns my stare. I quickly look away, just as the name of my station is announced.

I step off the train as soon as the door opens. The Asian guy does the same. As I make my way to the exit, he watches me and slowly follows behind. I keep going, ignoring the stench of the New York Subway and the bright advertisements on the walls.

The fresh summer air soothes me as soon as I emerge from the damp underground subway station. Nonetheless, I pick up my pace because the Queens side of town is quieter and less lively after dark than Manhattan.

Most of the shops on the streets are closed. There are few people on the street, which makes it feel unsafe unless you pass a 24-hour supermarket or street food cart or if you hear a hip-hop song from a passing pickup truck, as I just did.

Those lights and signs of life make me feel less like I'm being pursued through a deserted city in a horror film.

I look back as I walk. That Asian guy did not follow me, as I was afraid he would. I'd like to believe I was just overly concerned, but my instincts tell me otherwise... Something is off.

When I first moved to New York, I rented a place in Brooklyn. But I wasn't happy with my roommate's hygiene, so Phi Golf, my senior friend from college, introduced me to Phi Pay.

**Phi Pay**, a 40-year-old man, relocated to New York as a young man. He married an American and became a US citizen before their divorce, almost ten years ago. He and his friend, Oam, run Let's Eat Thai, a small restaurant in Brooklyn. He makes extra money by renting out a part of his house to students.

It took me a while to decide to move into this three-bedroom share house in Queens with Phi Pay.

There is a big bedroom that the owner uses and two smaller bedrooms. When I moved in, there was already one Thai lady staying there, but she returned home after graduation.

So only Phi Pay and I are left at the place now, and the owner has been missing for over a week, despite the fact that all of his belongings, except his wallet and passport, are still there.

Phi Oam called me three to four days after Phi Pay disappeared. He told me that three male foreigners walked authoritatively into Let's Eat Thai and asked for my housemate. When no one at the restaurant could tell them where he was, the strangers became violent and wrecked the place.

Phi Oam threatened to call the police, but they showed no signs of fear. However, they eventually left grudgingly because there was a police car parked near the restaurant.

The Asian man I saw on the train showed up only one day after that phone call. It was across the street from the building where I applied for a job that I initially noticed him.

I saw him again the following morning while jogging in Central Park. Then, as I was leaving the museum with my Korean friend, Jeong-ah, I spotted him again in a black sedan... Isn't it too much of a coincidence that he was with me on the train home tonight?

***Thud!***

My pitiful foot kicked some trash that had been scattered on the sidewalk as I looked back to ensure no one was following me before turning left at the corner onto the street where my place is located.

If I mentioned earlier that the streets I was walking on were rather empty, I'd like to emphasize how much more so this street is because it's lined with only residential properties and empty cars.

This street is darker than others because there are no shops. All of the houses are locked, and the lights are turned off. Everyone is soundly sleeping in their warm beds.

***Thump...***

***Thump...***

***Thump...***

***Thump...***

In the dead of night, my two stilettos alternately scrape against the sidewalk. Having to listen to my own footsteps in this environment makes me want to flee as fast as possible if Chunky, the ghost-face toy, appears in front of me with a butcher's knife. Or perhaps I will fight back by stabbing its head with my stiletto if it attempts to cut my Achilles tendon.

Why not look for a place to stay on the Manhattan side? It's because one month's rent on that side of town can be used as a down payment on a car. And I hadn't been afraid of the silence of the night in Queens in the previous two years until I met the Asian man on the train tonight.

As my thoughts turn to this, I silently curse myself for declining Jeong-ah's offer to drop me off after the party to celebrate my first-place finish in a design portfolio competition.

If I have not used up my work experience training quota, I will be able to work in the United States for one year after graduation. However, if I am unable to find work within three months, I must leave the country.

And without experience and connections, no one would want to hire me, even if they were interested in my qualifications. This is why I had to submit my portfolio for the competition.

I'm hoping that my first-place finish will lead to opportunities to advance my career in the design industry here.

When I see the compact, cream-colored house not far away, I instinctively search my purse for the key... This is good news for the night because I will eventually make it home with my Achilles tendons intact and no knife stuck in my back.

A black European car hums in the silence as it comes to a halt on the opposite side of the street as I make my way to the backdoor along the side of the house.

I quickly insert the key into the keyhole on the oak-colored door, push myself inside with my buttocks, and securely lock the door... as securely as I can-on the door of a house in Queens.

I lay down all of my belongings and take a thorough survey of the area. A paper-framed picture of a sassy middle-aged woman with a stunning jawline and dimples hangs on the refrigerator. She looks at me as if mocking me for falling for her son's deception.

Actually, she's been smiling like this for the past two years, every time I open the refrigerator door to look for food.

Everything in this house has remained unchanged. Every item is in the same place it was before Phi Pay vanished. The only difference is that he no longer comes home. He also doesn't go to work, and no one can reach him.

When he didn't show up the second day, I considered filing a police report because I was concerned he had been kidnapped, was in an accident, or had witnessed some horrific events. But then I got a short message from him saying he wouldn't be returning home for a while, with no further explanation. I have not heard from him since.

I was initially perplexed because I couldn't connect the dots. But soon after, I became enraged and vengeful because we had planned to get our marriage certificate from the church two days from today.

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'***Phi Pay! What a bastard!'***

***Hwan-jeab****, my best friend, curses all the way from Thailand to New York when I tell her what happened over the phone.*

*'I don't want to say I told you so, but I have to, Pun. I told you not to be overly trusting. He did not just vanish; he also took your money. What were you thinking when you gave him a million baht?'*

'*He said that he needed money to take care of something for the restaurant.*

*I lived in the same shared house with him for years,* ***Jeab****. He's not a bad guy by any means. He owns a stable business. He didn't seem broke. I didn't expect him to disappear like this.'*

'*Was he the one who came up with the idea of getting married?'*

'*Yes. I was stressed about getting a job when he unexpectedly proposed to me.'*

*'Is your sister aware that you're getting married?'*

*'Keep your mouth shut, Jeab. I have already caused her enough problems. Also, I do not want more people to point out how stupid I am. Worse, the money was a graduation gift from Prang.'*

*'I didn't say anything about you being stupid, Pun.'*

*'The sound of your voice says everything.'*

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I am now broke because I didn't want to ask for more support from my family than was necessary. I haven't found a decent job, my future husband has disappeared, and the deadline for my stay in New York is approaching.

At this point, I am losing patience because I am also concerned about my own safety.

I'm not sure why those people are looking for Phi Pay, but I am determined to find out today!

I open the door to the bedroom on the second floor, which I have never gone into in all the years I've lived here. A guitar sits on a stand near the wall.

There is a beige shelf piled with books, file organizer boxes full of documents, and male collectibles such as Avengers and Saint Seiya figures. The first thing I grab is the notebook that's on top of the dark-colored bedsheet on the mattress.

As soon as the 14-inch screen turns on and is ready to use, I scroll through the history of the websites Phi Pay visited, his social media networks that he did not log out of, and his emails, which he also left logged in.

There are some unread emails in the inbox. The only one that was read was the one I sent when he first went missing.

I quickly scan through his emails, pausing at a flight confirmation email with all of the flight details, to discover that the passenger's name on the ticket is **Paytai Metakit**, also known as **Phi Pay**. who is missing.

The departure date was nearly two weeks ago, on the same night he went missing. The destination is 8,668 miles from New York.

You can't figure out where that is? I will reveal it to you then... It's Bangkok; where else could it be?

Following that discovery, I search the notebook and documents in his room for additional clues. I notice a suspicious black box resting peacefully under his bed.

I really hope that whatever is inside the mysterious box holds the key to why Phi Pay went missing and that there are dangerous men looking for him. So I reach under the bed and pull me box out.

I open the black lid. There are several old CDs in envelopes scattered throughout the box. The covers depict Asian women...

"Oh, Sola Aoi!!!"

When I realize the mysterious black box contains more than ten Japanese AV movies, I quickly get up, throw the lid back on the box, and kick it back under the bed before leaving the room.

So, aside from the plane ticket and Aoi with friends, I couldn't find anything else.

Perhaps I was overthinking things when I saw the Asian guy on the train.

But what about the men who went looking for Phi Pay at his restaurant? Might they have been the reason he ran away to Thailand?

If not, what was the reason? I couldn't think of anything else but the fact that he wanted to scam the money I gave him.

All of these thoughts occupy my mind until I turn off the lights and retire for the night.

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***....Don't go to Bangkok, I'm telling you.***

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***Don't go to Bangkok; the city will ruin you.***

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In my sleep, a song from my childhood plays over and over in my head until my alarm goes off.

The weather is gloomy outside my window today. It reminds me of Hurricane Irene, which hit New York last year it was not as bad as the media made it seem.

New Yorkers stacked up on food and braced themselves for the worst, but they only got heavy rain for a few days.

I get up and dress myself. Before leaving the house, I debate whether or not I should bring my umbrella. The debate continues even as I unlock the door, walk out of the house, stand on the sidewalk, look over at my neighbor's red Toyota parked by the gate, and take long strides across the street, passing the black European car from last night with 2-3 men inside, to get to the other side of the street.

After checking my watch to make sure I have plenty of time to get to my job interview, I stop at the corner store for coffee and a hot dog for breakfast. First of all, it is convenient. Second, it's cheap... I just got scammed. I'm broke. Damn. Even the cockroaches in the subway know this.

The female newscaster on the shop's wall-mounted TV is covering a shooting that happened in the Bronx two weeks ago. I don't get to see it until the end because the staff gives me my order first.

At this point, I give up arguing with myself and decide to believe the weather forecast on my phone's app. It says it's going to rain soon, and I don't want to get wet or walk around Manhattan with dripping foundation on my face, so I make my way back to my residence.

I walk through the same environment I just did earlier for 5 minutes before arriving at my house. I still see the black European car parked where it was, but it only has one person inside now, while my neighbor's red Toyota is no longer visible.

Drizzle begins to fall. I thank my luck for returning home to get the umbrella in time before it started raining heavily. As I take the key from my purse, I reflect on how strange it is that people here prefer to use the back door rather than the front and how, after some time here, I am doing the same.

When I get to the door, I discover that it is not locked... Damn! I have never been so stressed that I forgot to lock the door before. I'm so angry with myself!

I silently curse myself as I enter the house mindlessly. I reach for the black umbrella that | returned for, but maybe I walked too quickly because I'm now thirsty.

So I pour water from a clear bottle and take a big gulp. I place the empty glass in the sink, intending to wash it when I get home tonight.

But, three steps from the door, I have to look back because I mindlessly left the coffee I bought on the table when I grabbed the umbrella.

As I grab my coffee and rush to the exit, I notice something out of place. My instinct tells me to turn back and take another look.

My keen eyes notice that the first-floor bedroom door, which hasn't been used in years, is slightly open. I'm certain I didn't open it last night.

Everything is quiet and still. Only the drizzle of rain can be heard. However, the weight of the air compels me to reach for my phone in my purse. My brain is beginning to put the pieces together.

*Last night, a black European car pulled up and parked on the other side of the street.*

*The black European car with the engine running is currently parked in front of my house.*

*The back door wasn't locked.*

*Two men are missing from the car.*

My eyes widened. My senses are heightened. My vivid imagination envisions two men hiding somewhere inside this house.

My shoes make a soft sound against the wooden floor as I take a cautious look around. I slowly make my way back to the door, and as soon as I get outside, I dial 911.

'Police department.'

"I....th-" !!!!!!

My phone was pulled from my hand before I could finish my sentence. When I turn around and look, my heart skips a beat.

The Mexican guy who was sitting in the European car is now standing behind me. He has a gun in his hand and is holding it at his waist with the gleaming silver barrel pointed at me.

"Shhh."

With a menacing expression on his face, the man slowly shakes his head as he notices how firmly I grasp my umbrella. He presses the disconnect button on the phone he took from me before slipping it into his shirt pocket.

"Go back inside the house."

At this point, the rain starts pouring. I find it difficult to breathe as I consider my options and how I might escape. Going back inside the house is the last option on my list.

When the man notices that I am still not moving, he orders me again in a more threatening tone.

"I told you to get inside the house."

"No."

When I say no, the gun's silver barrel presses up against my waist.

"I'm not kidding around here."

He takes the coffee cup and umbrella from me and throws them away before nudging me back to the door with the gun's barrel. As soon as we get to the door, he shoves me inside.

The two uninvited guests emerge from hiding. They look at me and the newcomer, surprised. One of the men smiles at me, as if we are well acquainted.

"Hello, young lady."

My eyes widen. I immediately realize that I am in danger. My heart races as I recognize him as the Asian man I saw on the train last night.

The rugged-looking Mexican man with a mustache and beard yells at his friend,

"What the fuck is going on, man? Why did you bring her here?"

"This bitch just dialed 911."

The man pushing me to the center of the house responds.

"How did you let her catch you in here? You're as dumb as Boss said."

"Now what?"

The guy with the beard asks. Three intimidating-looking men are now surrounding me.

"I have some money. And you are free to take whatever you want from here."

I sweep my gaze around, looking for a way out. The heavy raindrops against the roof serve as a background sound.

"You think we're here to rob you?"

The Asian man laughs, as if what I said was incredibly funny. As he speaks, he brings his face up to mine.

"We want to know where your boyfriend is."

"I have no idea who you're talking about." I believe I know who the "*boyfriend*" is.

One of the men takes a picture from his pocket and shows it to me. It's a photo of Phi Pay and me when we went to Portland together.

"He owes us a great deal of money. He also took something from us. Tell us where he is hiding."

"I do not know. And he is not my boyfriend."

"This is a complete waste of time. Stop questioning her and just take care of it. I'm heading back to the car."

The Mexican says this as he losses my phone to the Asian and walks out the back door.

"It's pouring really hard, damn it!"

He then slams the door shut, disappearing from view as he utters his last curse.

"Sit down."

The Asian guy with graffiti-like tattoos commands me as he throws my smartphone on the table.

"Where is Pay?"

"I don't know."

When a nasty smile appears on his face, he squints so hard that his eyes are nearly closed. He slaps his right hand against my face, forcefully and unexpectedly. The pain hasn't yet hit me, but the daze has.

"Do you realize how much he owes us? If he does not return, you will have to pay us back."

I smell blood in my mouth as the scumbag backs away.

"I will ask you again."

He straightens himself up.

"Where is Pay?"

I expel a deep breath from my lungs. Tears well up in my eyes due to the excruciating pain that has spread across my left cheekbone.

"His room is on the right side of the top floor. Why don't you take a look?" "I'll go."

The man with the mustache exclaims loudly before dashing upstairs. The Asian man turns back to face me.

"You know what? That bastard was a handful. I knew he could not be trusted. I have never liked him. I wanted to shoot him the moment I laid eyes on him."

He looks down at me before slipping his hand into my hair and jerking my head back to meet his gaze. The rugged face leans in so close that I have to turn away from the unpleasant smell emanating from his mouth.

"Perhaps I could teach him a lesson through his woman. What do you think?"

In that instant, I gritted my teeth and fought. With one hand, I forcefully press my two fingers into his narrowed eye, while the other punches his balls hard.

*Kick them right in the balls... My sister taught me that.*

"Fuckkkkkkkkkk!!!"

The Asian man under attack twists his face and takes a step back, clutching his balls. I dash for the back door, but he recovers and grabs me just in time.

My body is thrown through the air. It flies and crashes into the refrigerator before landing on the floor. A powerful punch is delivered to my ribs. The bastard grabs my hair from behind, causing my head to jerk back yet again.

I'm so beaten up that I can barely stand. But I refuse to give in. When he drags me back to the center of the house, I try to stay on my feet. With my two hands, I sweep the area aimlessly until I finally get my hands on a kitchen knife. And right away...

"Arghhhhhhhhhhh!!! Bitch!!!!!"

When I stab the sharp blade into the thug's thigh and press it all the way in, a shrill echo echoes through the house. The hand on my hair loosens as it shifts to press on the wound.

"Fuck you!!"

I yell in his face as I make my way back into the living room. However, the one who refuses to fall simply pulls the knife from his thigh and stumbles over to me.

More than ten of Phi Pay's beloved ceramic dolls are being thrown at the Asian man. The sound of an entire set of dolls breaking is louder than the rain falling outside, prompting the Mexican man to rush down from the second floor. He only throws one punch at my head, but the damage is significant.

*.....Why is everything blurry?*

As soon as the punch lands, my entire skull vibrates like an earthquake. Everything goes into slow motion, and my limbs weaken. I lose all my strength and fall like a stone.

I blink rapidly and aimlessly as my vision dwindles, and then the world goes black.

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# Chapter 02: Miss Ambrosial

**The woman with the enchanting scent.**

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**The vivid memory of the agonizing pain in my cheekbone jolts me out of the darkness. My eyelids flutter, waiting for my pupils to adjust to the morning light. I take a deep breath, filling my lungs with the soft, appealing fragrance.**

...Oh?

Did I describe it as a soft, appealing fragrance?

Actually, I believe it is more akin to the soft, delicate, yet alluring scent of a beautiful flower that fades as you get closer to it. It only leaves traces that entice you to seek it out.

I stretch comfortably as I close my eyes and snuggle my face into a white pillow, smiling at the corners of my mouth.

*...But! Whose room is this!?*

I startle awake and sit up straight. My heart is racing. Upon realizing that I am completely naked save for my earrings and bracelet, I quickly wrap myself in the fresh-smelling blanket.

"Argh."

My mouth lets out a long moan, laced with rude curses in English. My head is pounding. I wrap the blanket around myself and stand up, swaying side to side. My feet move across the cold marble floor as I tiptoe and search quietly for my clothes.

...If my sister finds out that I'm back to my old ways as soon as I return, I'll be too ashamed to face her.

What crazy sh\*t happened last night? When I think back to last night, I want to scream at Hwan-jeab. My best friend promised that she would take good care of me.

So, how did I wind up in somebody's room? Where are my phone, wallet, and other personal belongings? Have I been robbed?

As my imagination runs wild, my heart begins to sink because I believe I may have been raped if this is not one of my friends' rooms. I start taking in my surroundings.

The view outside the window, which extends from the floor to the ceiling, indicates that I am not on ground level but rather in a suite in a high-rise building, which offers a broad skyline as well as the city's countless buildings and endless traffic.

The room's decor is extremely feminine. It exudes luxury and maturity. It's elegant but simple. Most importantly, the place exudes a very pleasant aroma.

And because I believe this is a women's room, I feel a little more at ease. I would freak out if I awoke to find myself in a more dangerous situation than this.

I'm alone in this room. Of course, I am not prepared to face the unknown owner of this room in this condition. Accordingly, simply lying in bed and waiting for that person to enter this bedroom is clearly not a good idea. I need to choose which of the three doors in front of me to open.

...I should find something to put on first.

The sliding door is my first choice. When the door is slid, the light comes on. What's inside makes my eyes pop wide open. I walk inside the room in a daze, admiring the items with fascination.

This room is almost double the size of the bedroom. The numerous built-in shelves are filled with women's clothing and accessories, such as belts, watches, and purses. Every item is elegantly displayed, as if in a shop.

The most impressive shelf is the white one with all of the shoes. The shelf is neatly organized. According to my quick assessment, each pair is one of a kind and expensive.

There are sandals, sneakers, high heels, flats, wedges, chunky shoes, scarpins, d'orsays, slingbacks, stilettos, and more that I can't list because it would take up too many pages and turn this into a thesis about what shoes women should own.

What I can tell from this room is that the owner spent her money on style rather than luxury items.

While I survey the space, I take my time to look around. And when I happen to see myself in the mirror, I am horrified by my horrific appearance.

Someone has completely removed all of the colors I painted on my face for my nighttime exploration, and my unkempt hair is pointing in all directions. It's not a pleasant sight.

While combing my hair with my hand, I happen to notice a pair of shoes. My two legs instinctively lead me to a well-known brand's high heel, which is so stunning it could kill. I can't stop myself from reaching out to touch it or try it on.

"Good choice. That is my all-time favorite."

When I hear a voice as seductive as the fragrance on the bed from behind me, I startle and immediately withdraw my hand.

The sharp eyes combined with a sweet smile, as well as the dimpies on the cheeks when the lips are smiling teasingly, are the first things that captivate me when I turn to look. A woman stands at the door, her arms crossed, her hair voluminous, thick, and wavy, falling to her shoulder.

The face is familiar, but my brain is too numb to identify her.

"I..."

I stutter as if I had been caught red-handed, despite the fact that I have done nothing wrong.

"I was looking for the bathroom."

The woman tilts her head a little, playfully.

"It's behind another door."

I move awkwardly because I'm holding a large blanket to cover my naked body. I smell something on the skin of the owner of this suite as I walk past her. It's an enticing scent that differs from the one on the bed. This one is gentle yet sophisticated. It is seductive and alluring. It draws you in.

"I... I don't know where my clothes are."

She smiles slightly, walks out of the room, and then returns with my clothes in her left hand. Her right hand holds chic and polite-colored clothes, but not mine.

"I already cleaned your clothes for you, but I do not think they are appropriate for a taxi or Skytrain ride home. If you're okay with it, I can lend you some comfortable clothes."

The left hand first hands me a scanty piece of clothing, a scanty bra, and scanty underwear.

Though the room's owner makes a genuine suggestion, it causes the listener, like me, to feel so embarrassed that I find it difficult to keep my face on my shoulder.

"Thank you."

When I reflect on my scanty outfit from last night, I want to run to the bathroom and hide. But everyone needs to keep up their image. So, I keep my cool and smile sweetly at her, trying to channel my sister's (**Prang**, an A-list Thai leading actress) demeanor of serene beauty.

"Yours appears to be better suited for a taxi ride back to my place."

I take from her the clothes that are more appropriate and fitting for the morning commute home.

"And."

She pauses and inspects me from head to toe.

"I would appreciate it if you didn't drag my blanket into the bathroom with you."

I trip over the thick, soft white blanket as soon as she finishes her request. I've never felt more embarrassed in my life. However, I can still project my sister's beautiful, leading lady aura on my face...

It was fortunate that I grew up alongside my sister. It makes it easy for me to imitate her poise.

"I am sure you are aware that I am naked. I promise to return your blanket to your bed if you give me some privacy."

The killer dimples appear as soon as the listener cracks a humorous smile. She doesn't hide her satisfaction with my response.

She turns and walks toward the door, but I am so clumsy that the blanket knocks a large, white box off the short shelf and onto the floor as I make my way to the bed Several items from the box are now spread across the floor

Those sharp, sweet eyes express panic, but her overall expression quickly shifts to one of humor as she tries to hide her smile when she notices that I now have the facial expression of someone under some strange spell from the book Harry Potter.

I'm speechless. I'm not sure what to do. I keep looking back and forth between her and the items on the floor.

The owner of the room suddenly bursts out laughing. She appears to be unable to contain her laughter

"Ah..."

"Go take a bath, I'll tidy up."

The woman approaches and bends down in front of me while saying this. She grabs the chain, whip, cufflink, and vibrating item from Japan with both hands and places them back in the box. Ah... I excluded several torturing items.

"I... I apologize."

She continues to giggle uncontrollably.

"It's okay. I didn't expect any guests, so I didn't properly put the box away."

"You..."

I don't dare to ask the question, despite the fact that I've wanted to know since I first saw her.

"I'm curious."

The items scattered on the floor are quickly placed in the box before being taken to the dressing room. The box's new home is a closet with closed doors. Inquiringly, the woman walks back to me and raises her eyebrows.

I swallow hard and pause before deciding to simply ask the question.

"I don't remember whether last night... we... *XXX* or not."

The person in front of me appears unable to conceal her smile once more.

"Please rest assured that the marks on your body didn't come from those items."

What exactly does that mean? Did we, or didn't we?

I stand motionless, stunned, blinking blankly, as if my brain has lost touch with my body.

"I will go outside and give you some private time to use the bathroom freely. Just in case il helps you remember things."

As soon as she finishes speaking, she moves her buttocks and tall, slender, yet full-figured body out of the room, along with those dimples.

"Hey! Wait!"

I massage my temples with both hands... I'm not sure if we did it, but one thing is certain: The woman saw all of me. Sob.

After two minutes of whining to myself, I remove the blanket from my body, lay it on the bed, and enter the bathroom naked.

I can see my reflection in the big mirror behind the sink. I thoroughly inspect myself to ensure that there are no potential marks from last night's XXX activity with her.

I can only see the marks on my left cheekbone and eye, which are faded and barely visible. However, the bruise on my body is still dark green. Also, the glass cuts on my arms and legs have not completely healed.

I may not remember what happened last night with that alluring woman, but I do remember what happened two weeks ago.

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I was lying facedown in the living room. My left cheekbone throbbed on the wood floor. After receiving a crooked Mexican punch to the face, I went completely blank in my head.

I slowly opened my eyes before closing them again, pretending to be unconscious, when I noticed the person who punched me nearby.

*'Tie her up with a rope or get rid of her.'*

*"No! This batch was a pain in the ass. I'll wait for her to regain consciousness before giving her a lesson.'*

*'Get rid of her!'*

The Mexican emphasized this as he approached the Asian man authoritatively.

*'Butt off! You do not want to fight me.'*

But the Asian man yelled back. The two stared each other down, and the Mexican eventually backed away.

*'I'll go look upstairs. Protect the area. Don't do anything stupid that will get you hurt again.'*

I remained motionless on the floor, pretending to be unconscious, even as I heard one of them walk up to the second floor. However, a strong jerk lifted my face, and a hard squeeze on my cheek jolted me out of my unconsciousness.

My eyes immediately opened. The man and I locked eyes for a split second before...

*'Arghhhhh, bitch!!!!!!*

I first punched the wound on his thigh, then aimed my second punch at his

Adam's apple. He collapsed to the floor. I dashed to the door. However, the guy keeping watch, stationed inside the parked car outside, swung open the back door.

I didn't think twice when I dashed back into the living room, grabbed the phone those insane men had left on the table, and fled for my life to the room no one had slept in for years. I locked myself on the opposite side of the door.

Before making a call, I quickly moved the table, shelf, bed, and anything else I could get my hands on to block the door.

*'Police station.'*

There are three uninvited men in my house, and they are attempting to kill me! I spoke quickly into the smartphone.

*'What are they doing?*

*'They're trying to break down the bedroom door so that they can come in to kill me!'*

I yelled back at the person on the other end of the line as I exhaled heavily. My whole body is shaking.

*'Where are you right now?"*

I paced nervously while giving the police my address. Outside, those men are trying to break down the door.

*"What is your name?"*

***'Pun.'***

*'Okay, Pun. We'll rush over. But I want you to stay on the line the entire time. Okay?'*

*'Arghhhhhhhhh!!!!!'*

I screamed into the phone as the men outside shot the doorknob. It fell off.

They continued slamming into the door. Even though I'd moved everything I could find to block the door, I doubt they would be able to keep those guys out for long.

*'Please hurry and send someone over.'*

I became panicked when I realized I was in danger. I did not wait for the police officer to respond. I attempted to find my own way out.

The dark curtain was pulled to the side. I tried pushing the window open with my hands, but it was stuck. I looked around anxiously and came across a clock on the wall. I threw the clock through the window to break it.

I then jumped out of the house while wrapped in a blanket. It was around the same time that the door broke down. As I fell to the ground, the shattered glasses cut my hands and calves, causing me to scream at the top of my voice.

Nonetheless, I sucked it up and limped to the middle of the street, barefoot, through the rain.

Two of those men dashed out the door and chased me, while the one with the injured leg stood there, staring at me vengefully.

When the three men saw me run to cut off a bronze SUV to ask for help and noticed that the people in the area were paying attention, they got into their European car and drove away.

The police car arrived shortly after the incident was resolved. I was transported to the hospital and interrogated. Phi Oam arrived after learning of the incident and took over from there.

*'So, who were they? Were they the ones who came to my restaurant, Pun?' 'I think so.'*

*'What did they want?'*

Phi Oam started pacing around, which made me dizzy.

*'They wanted your friend.'*

*'What did that idiot Paytal do?'*

*'They claimed Phi Pay owes them money. Have you ever seen Phi Pay borrow money, gamble, or do anything illegal? They aren't ordinary people like us. They did not hesitate to end someone's life.'*

Everything that had happened four hours before was still fresh in my mind.

*'You lived in the same house with him, Pun. Have you ever seen something like that?'*

I wasn't sure. I don't think he's a drug addict. However, he did not come home every night!

Following that event, Jeong-ah and my friends volunteered to go pick up my belongings from that house for me. I didn't dare return to the house because it gave me a panic attack.

*'Stay with me for the time being. Your place is a mess. I'll ask someone I know to repair the door and window for you. However, the police have yet to apprehend those men. I do not want you to go back there. I'm afraid they'll come looking for you.'*

The party girl, who is also my best friend from my master's degree studies, suggested that I move in with her for a while, despite the fact that her face is as pale as a sheet of paper due to fear.

*'Thank you, Jeong-ah. But I cannot stay with you. I do not want to cause you any problems.'*

I recalled the Asian man's vengeful eyes when I successfully ran over to ask for help from the people nearby. Before the European car drove away, he opened the window, smiled from the corner of his mouth, and said something I could clearly read from his lips:

*'We will return.'*

My visa was going to expire soon. I haven't found a job, and the man who started it all has returned to Thailand with my money, leaving me to deal with his shit.

'*Jeong-ah.'*

I had nothing else to do there.

*'I will go back to Thailand.'*

.

. .

After that, I immediately planned my return to my home country and have been staying with Hwan-jeab for the past week.

"Why don't you go back home, Pun?"

The woman who stood in front of me, looking stressed, sells clothing online. Her name is Hwan-jeab.

We went to the same university, but Jeab told me,

*'I think I'll be richer faster selling clothes'.*

So she decided to change her career path and launch her own small brand. Her business is so successful that her most recent collection was sold out in less than a day.

However, I've never asked her if her business is successful or if she simply produces a small amount per collection.

*'Jeab, have you noticed the marks on my face?'*

I asked this with a vacant and flat tone.

*'If my father sees this, I will be interrogated about how I obtained these marks. And if I tell my father that the mafia slapped me, he'll ask how I came to be associated with them. I'll have to explain until I admit that I was about to marry a man whom my father has never heard of. If that happens, you'd better be ready to pick up my corpse.'*

*'Do you think it is truly over? Those men intended to kill you. Your father is a high-ranking police officer. Why not tell him?'*

*'The police over there just let them walk around town freely. What can a Thai police officer like my father do? Furthermore, I don't think they will come all the way here for me. I'm not the one who owes them money. And if they do show up, I can tell my father about it then.'*

*'You should at least tell Phi Prang.'*

*'No. No one needs to know this. The only thing I want is to find Phi Pay.'*

So Hwan-jeab and my friends are the only ones who know about my problems. Hwan-jeab was the one who dressed me up in scanty outfits and took me to Phi Nob's Night Club. Phi Pay has always boasted about his best friend, Phi Nob, who owns a night entertainment business in Bangkok.

*'Think about it, Pun. You're in trouble, correct? And you won't go home. Instead, you came straight to me. So, who do you think that bastard Pay would turn to if not his best friend? He must pay a visit to his friend sooner or later. Since you are unfamiliar with his family, it would be wise to start with his closest friend.'*

*'You are brilliant, Jeab.'*

*'But. Pun.'*

Hwan-jeab held out a small, lightweight piece of clothing to me.

*'I designed this collection for fun-loving, sassy party girls. Wear it, please.*

*Since we're going out, I'll take some pictures and use them to promote my products.'*

I poked my finger at the leftover pieces of clothing that Hwan-jeab referred to as a new collection with fear.

*'You call this clothing, Jeab? Will I look too provocative in them? If my father sees me in it, he will kill me.'*

*'First and foremost, my clothes are not provocative; they are sexy. Second, don't worry about your father. I'll make certain that your face is not visible in the photos. Third, you are just as attractive as your sister. If we're in this together, where will the money go?'*

*'I am beautiful because I am beautiful, my friend.'*

*'Fine. You're beautiful-really beautiful. You're the most beautiful person on this street. So. please wear these. I will pay you. You're jobless, no? Easy work here. Just wear these so I can photograph you.'*

Because of the hypothesis and agreement that day, our party gang from university days-Hwan-jeab, Best, Chakrit, and I-met at Phi Nop's nightclub to look for clues about Phi Pay.

*'He forced you to flee to Thailand because thugs were threatening you. He also scammed you and fled the marriage. If it were me, I would not have it. I'll have my man help slap him to the ground get all worked up just talking about it.'*

**Best**, our faculty's beauty queen, said this as she bottomed up her glass. She also decided not to pursue a design career after graduating. She became a full-time product presenter.

*'If you are so enraged on behalf of your friend, why don't you slap him yourself, Best? Why are you asking your man to do it?'*

The young model, who is not yet well-known, teased his friend amusingly. It brought back memories of our university days together.

*'I just got a boob job.'*

*'So you're worried that your boob will burst and your man will be frustrated because he has to pay to have it fixed?"*

*'I will have my man slap you first, Chakrit. What a mouth!'*

The product presenter pointed her finger at her male friend, who was dancing to the music and mocking her.

*'Stop arguing with each other. Can't you see how stressed out Pun is?'*

I looked at Hwan-jeab's expensive makeup, which contrasted with her outfit. She pushed her vintage eyeglasses up as she attempted to stop her friend from talking nonsense.

*'YOU ALL!'*

Best screamed through the music.

*'Let's have a drink. I can't take it anymore. We've been here for a week and haven't seen Phi Pay of his shadow. We don't get together like this very often. Let's party today. Yeah... What would you like to drink? I'll head to the bar. They also serve cocktails. Pun, do you want some?'*

I shook my head, but Hwan-jeab spoke on my behalf.

*'Just order for us. You know who likes what.'*

When she got her answer, Best smiled and dragged our male friend away by the arm, disappearing among the crowd.

*'I'll be back. I need to use the restroom.'*

In retrospect, Best was correct. We hadn't seen either Phi Nob or Phi Pay. We couldn't even get their phone numbers from the staff. And we were concerned that Phi Pay would flee if he smelled something. So we could only snoop around in secr-!

I hadn't finished grumbling to myself after leaving the restroom when I noticed a man walking through the crowd toward the VIP area. He looked around as if he were searching for someone or trying to hide from someone.

He appeared familiar. He was strikingly similar to the man I was looking for. However, the lighting was extremely dim, and the crowd was too chaotic for me to be certain.

I paused to take a good look before sprinting after him.

"Oops!"

My haste caused me to collide with someone. My nose was buried in her soft hair for a brief moment before we backed away from each other.

... smells wonderful.

Despite the darkness, the reflections on her stunning facial features revealed that the woman who grabbed my arms and kept me from falling was so beautiful that I became paralyzed. Three seconds later, I realized I couldn't keep looking into those eyes.

Two dimples appeared on her cheeks as she smiled slightly.

*'Are you OK?'*

I did not reply. I just backed away from her rudely and looked past her to her back because I remembered I was chasing a man.

.....Shit, he's gone!

I frowned and said, 'I'm sorry', before walking back to the table where Hwan-jeab was waiting for me, frustrated that I had lost sight of my target.

*'Best hasn't returned?'*

*'No. But, Pun, I think this is good. Let's have some fun today and fulfill*

*Best's wish. After that, I'll help you gather information and the address of*

*Phi Nob. If we can find him, we might be able to track down Phi Pay.'*

After a week at the nightclub, I realized that we are drunks with very poor spying and missing person-finding skills. It would be best to hire a detective, yet I do not have the money to do so.

*'Fulfills Best's or your own craving, Jeab?'*

The woman with the eyeglasses giggled.

*'The entire gang's craving.'*

*'You are well aware that I no longer drink.'*

.

*'Geez, Pun. Even though you hide behind your nun's front, the evil spirits within you remain. Look at what you are wearing.'*

Best placed several beverages on the table.

*'Come on. Keep the nun locked inside and bring out the little succubus.*

*We'll take good care of the devil. We will not let her go play with anyone.'*

Besty hugged me around the neck and rubbed her breast against my arm, rousing me.

*'Have fun, you guys. I will not drink... And please take the silicone off of my arms, Best.'*

*'How is the sensation? Please give me a review.'*

Best giggled as she continued to snuggle her 350-cc breast against my arm.

*'Be careful. If you rub too hard, Best, it might shift to the wrong position'*

A tall, triangular glass filled with a clear beverage and an olive was placed in front of me. The male model then persuaded me with his sweet smile.

*'This is for you, Miss Pun. Come on. This is a reunion to unleash Best's evil spirit."*

*'A lovely, full-figured, sexy succubus, Chakrit.'*

The person in the conversation abruptly interrupted.

*'Come on, Pun. If you're a nun, consider this a release of the evil spirits within us. That is a good thing. Hwan-jeab will look after us, right, Jeab?'*

The male model kept trying to convince me through the loud music and background noise.

*'I shall not drink.'*

I was unwavering in my determination.

*'Come on, Pun. Simply have fun for the day. You've been hibernating for years. I will take care of you tonight. As a member of our gang, I give you my word.'*

Hwan-jeab raised two fingers in the air.

*'Just like in the old days.'*

My responses were consistently 'no' until Hwan-jeab slipped two onehundred baht bills under the martini glass. It's as if if I drink it, I get to keep the bills.

.

I regained consciousness on the bed of that seductive-smelling woman.

....I think I remember who she is now.

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# Chapter 03: Last night

Though I feel a little more refreshed after a bath, I'm still disoriented as I exit the bedroom dressed in the mysterious woman's casual attire.

I cast my gaze around the room, looking for the owner, but all I see is emptiness. My two feet move cautiously as I look around, but I can't see a soul in this room.

In light of this, I go over to the living room and settle down on the big sofa. Under a glass of beverage on the living room coffee table, there is a note.

*'This drink is for the person who is still hungover.'*

I look around, and I'm the only one suspected of being '*the person who is still hungover'*.

Consequently, I take the glass and sip its contents. The sweet and sour taste of lime and honey combined with warm water travels down my throat.

... I want to ask you about last night, but where are you?

Since I finished the beverage, the smallest needle on the clock that moves the fastest has advanced five times past the number 12.

As I sit here for what feels like an eternity with nothing to do, anxiety starts to boil over. So I get up and begin my morning exercise by inspecting the ambrosial woman's room.

This high-ceilinged common area is illuminated by a chandelier. The area is large enough to accommodate two large sedans. The color scheme and decor are modern but cozy, making you feel right at home.

There is an eight-person dining table in the back. The wall behind the table is decorated with portrait art of a stunning woman.

"Ta Dah Da TaDah DaDaaDah..."

As I take a moment to appreciate the portrait, I can't help but hum a tune that has been playing in my head ever since I woke up. The colors that frame the face and bring out the dimples on the cheeks and the expression in those eyes...absolutely breathtaking. It cannot, however, match the vibrancy and allure of the woman I saw when I awoke.

The kitchen is to the right. A dark-colored marble island table dominates the center and acts as a zoning device. Every detail of this kitchen is meticulously designed and decorated. It includes a complete set of cooking equipment, indicating that this kitchen is more than just a decoration for the suite.

A writing table can be found near the window. A nearly 2-meter-high shelf serves as a barrier It accommodates books, documents, and accessories. However, one shelf is dedicated to photo frames.

I scan the photos, starting with a young girl with dimples and a cheerful smile. Continuing with the photos, I see a woman holding her bachelor's degree alongside another beautiful woman (who, if I recall correctly, is a wealthy woman I often see in the newspaper).

Next to that picture is another with the same woman and the Eiffel Tower in the backdrop. Then there's a photograph of... Prang?

**Ploy Pitcha**, a well-known actress, is the woman with the enchanting scent. She appeared in a series alongside Prang. How stupid of me not to recognize her right away!

Before continuing, I pause and take a close look at the photograph of my sister. The final frame is facing down. I would have lifted it to have a look if I didn't notice a book first.

I take the book with the yellow and red spine, English title, and author, Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist, and turn it over in my hands... Does she read this book as well?

I open the red cover to learn more about the book's contents and why it's on everyone's shelf. However, seeing the familiar handwriting in ink makes me feel numbed.

*'I want you to read this instead of repeatedly calling me to preach.'*

*.*

In addition, there is a signature....

*Rumble... Rumbleee.....*

Damn! When you snoop around too much, you get hungry. I don't want to open the refrigerator or search enclosed areas without permission.

So all I can do is put the book back on the shelf and return to the large sofa beneath the extravagant chandelier. I'll wait for the owner of this suite to return so that I can say goodbye and ask a question before leaving.

I take this opportunity to reflect. Despite the fact that I'm still hungover, my brain is working overtime. It is overflowing with memories and muddles.

"Ta Dah Da Tabah DaDaaDah...."

This tune is still playing in my head. I can't remember where I heard it, but I can't stop humming it until...

"Every time you are near..."

The lyrics are gradually revealed.

"Close to you...."

My eyes widen as I recall something from last night. It's as if a cassette tape is being rewound.

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*Amidst the darkness.... and flashing lights, the music plays in the background.*

*My arms and hands are clinging to her body.*

*My nose nesties into her soft skin.*

*.... her scent*

*.... alluring*

*Those sensations are vivid in my mind.*

.

Though it's faded and concerning, it's so arousing that I unconsciously place my hand on my chest, hoping to alleviate the electrical shock in my stomach.

*However, it was completely useless.*

I spring up. A new note is carefully handwritten.

.

***'I couldn't find you, so I'm leaving without saying goodbye. Please contact me at 091-234-5678. I'll return your clothes.***

***PS. Thank you for not letting me sleep with makeup on my face.***

*.*

***From the person who still has a hangover.'***

.

The note is left on the table before I dash out of there. I don't think I can face the woman with the enchanting scent because I can't recall what I did or how far we went last night.

Even if I assumed Prang's personality, I would have no idea how to react. I need to retreat for the time being to collect my thoughts.

I go down to the lobby and realize I don't have any money. So I approach a staff member and borrow a phone to call my best friend.

**"Jeab."**

I send a cranky voice down the phone line.

**[Is that you, Pun?! Are you safe? Where are you right now? I'm worried sick about you. Where did you go? We drove around all night looking for you.]**

**"Stop, Jeab! You were supposed to take care of me. How could you have lost sight of me?"**

**[I didn't lose you, Pun. You went missing.]**

**"Let's talk later. Hurry up and pick me up!"**

**[Where are you?]**

.

I search for the condo's name and am once again surprised.

**"Phi Prang's condo."**

**[Oh? Are you with Phi Prang? We shouldn't have stayed up all night looking for you. We should have gone home right after we left the police station.]**

**"What were you doing at the police station? Do not tell me that you filed a police report."**

Hwan-jeab has not responded as I continue on furiously.

**"I'm not with my sister!"**

**[So who are you with?]**

**"Listen to me, Jeab. Bring all of my clothes and personal belongings from your place, and we'll talk here. I'm using someone else's phone, so now isn't the best time to talk. Ah! Please thank your parents for providing me with a place to stay while I was in hiding. I'll go thank them properly with gifts later."**

**[You're so angry that you'll pack up and go live with your sister?]**

**"Yes! Hurry up!"**

**[Fine!]**

**"Bring food. I'm hungry!"**

.

I wait for Hwan-jeab in a quiet corner of the lobby. I intend to call my sister once I have my luggage and belongings. I'll tell her I just got back from New York and ask to stay with her. There is no need to provide any further explanation.

As I plan this in my head, I look up and notice an unfamiliar man smiling at me from a nearby table. I smile back, as I always do, so he gets up and walks over.

"Do you live here?"

"Something like that."

"I live here too."

I give him a sparkling, inviting smile but don't say anything back.

"I'm Shane."

He has a good appearance.

"I'm Pun."

"I'm waiting for a friend, but they have not arrived yet. If you don't mind, may I sit with you?"

He sits down after I nod. We exchange smiles

"I'm also waiting for my friend."

"Why haven't I seen you around before?"

"Do you see everyone who lives here?"

He shakes his head, laughing at my response.

"I do not have much time today. But if the opportunity arises, I'd like to invite you to coffee or a nice breakfast..."

Before I can respond, Hwan-jeab arrives with a paper bag containing fast food that I despise. My good friend runs up to me, and I expect her first words to be,

*"What happened last night?"*

But I'm wrong.

"Go help me with the luggage. You have three, not including the small bags that hold your daily essentials. I can't carry them all."

I turn to face Shane, who looks surprised, and smile sweetly at him.

"My friend is here. I have to go. If the opportunity arises, we will meet again."

He gets up but refuses to give up.

"If you don't mind, I can assist with your belongings, ladies."

Of course, I welcome a helping hand. So we all go get my belongings and return to the lobby just as Shane's friend arrives. "Can I get your contact information?"

"Maybe next time, if we should meet again."

He leaves with a smile. He does not push it like some annoying men do. I turn to look at Hwan-jeab.

"You were flirting big time. Pun, when will you stop flirting and dumping men?"

I scrunch my face as I look at the burger and fries in the paper bag.

"Couldn't you buy something more creative than this, Jeab?"

"If you want me to get here quickly, this is it. It is also on my way... So, Pun, what happened last night? Where were you, and how did you end up here?"

"You go first. I need to eat this dry burger to calm my stomach first."

"Where should I start?"

"Begin from when I got drunk."

Quickly chewing, I look at the woman with a thin face and bangs and examine the dark circles under her eyes. She is not shortsighted, but she wears glasses to look like a cute nerd. Today, she's dressed in shorts and a masculine t-shirt.

It's very casual, which is unusual for her. I believe she just woke up.

"Okay. So this was what happened."

Jeab pushes her glasses up.

"After you got drunk, Queen Punnakorn took over. You stood up and went to the dance floor to showcase your seductive dance. Pun, you twirled and shook your Zimzalabim routine in front of the DJ. Chakrit and I walked over to keep an eye on you. But Chakrit was also a little inebriated, so he just kept shouting, *'I'm a good guy. I am a good guy'.* What good guy yells that at everyone?"

I nod in agreement.

"I went to study abroad for a while, and he still does this?"

"Yeah. It's that exact sentence he's been saying while drunk since his first year of college... So, after performing your seductive dance for a while, a man approached you and danced with you. Chakrit attempted to separate the two of you, but that dull face refused to back down. He insisted on getting your phone number and Line ID, while you just continued to shake your bottom seductively with no concern. You also gave out your phone number. That dull-faced dude's hands were like octopus arms. They wrapped around you and grabbed you here and there. Chakrit was enraged, and Best wasn't having it. So she cursed at him."

"What did she say?"

"Son of a bitch. Did your parents abandon you?!"

"What a queen!"

I nod, licking the corner of my mouth to remove the sauce. I intently wait for Hwan-jeab to continue.

"You seem to enjoy the food."

"Do you want some?"

I look at her and ask hesitantly, pushing the fries toward her. Hwan-jeab gladly accepts my offer. She picks up the golden fries and dips them in cheese sauce before popping them into her mouth.

"Continue."

"Okay. We were no longer having fun after the fight started. So we were getting ready to leave. But that dull-faced guy went and gathered a group of friends to surround us. We were asked to apologize. Best would never apologize. She insisted that he apologize. You could barely stand up straight while this was going on. You just screamed that you wanted to puke and looked like you were about to."

"I did not puke, did I? Those who can handle alcohol do not puke."

"I am about to tell you about the part where you puked... Chakrit told me to take you somewhere to puke and that he and Best would handle the situation. But the restroom was a long way away, and the area was extremely crowded. I figured since we were about to leave, I'd take you to the parking lot and let you puke outside."

"Is the climax soon?"

"Yes, I was waiting for you to puke, but you wouldn't. Best called and said that those thugs were beating up Chakrit. This made her very angry, so she called her man for help. When Best is with her man, damn, she transforms into the goddess of war. Best cursed and spit at those thugs. And Chakrit and her man paid for it."

The person who is telling the story pauses for effect.

"Best called me as everyone was getting into it. She asked me to go in to help. She didn't dare try to separate them because she was afraid of being hit and having her breasts displaced."

"Can that really happen, Jeab?"

"Do not interrupt... When Best called, I wasn't sure what to do because I was worried about both of you. And you wouldn't simply puke. You appeared to be going to, but you didn't. So I told you to sit down and puke while I went back into the nightclub. Then I bolted back into the nightclub. It was absolute chaos. The guards and guests were getting into it. And, as is customary in these situations, the police respond quickly. The fight had just started, and the cops arrived moments later. It was a little chaotic, and when I went back outside, you were gone. We all freaked out."

"Where's my purse and phone?"

"They were with me then, but now they're in your luggage. And I paid for the burger you're eating with the money in your wallet."

"Okay... what happened next?"

"The cops apprehended us all. I had to call my mother. It was a mess. We drove around all night after leaving the police station, looking for you."

"Where are Chakrit and Best now?"

"They were with me when you called, but after knowing that you were safe, Chakrit took a quick shower and left. He said that he has a modeling job for the brand Greyhound this evening."

"What about his face? Didn't he get punched in the face?"

"It isn't so bad. He can conceal it with makeup."

"And Best?"

I gather the paper wrap and trash to dispose of once I'm finished eating.

"She is sleeping in my room. So, what about you? How did you end up here?"

"Somebody brought me here."

I respond flatly.

"Who?"

"A woman with dimples."

I press my index fingers into my cheeks to show where the dimples are.

"I woke up in her room."

"Shit! Is she a criminal?"

The woman with bangs appears to be imagining numerous bad scenarios.

"But proChapter :ly not, since she lives in such a pricey condo. What was your condition when you awoke? Did she do anything to you?"

"She didn't."

She didn't do anything?... The images that came to mind while the song "Close to You" played in the background made me question what I had just told my friend.

"What does she look like?"

"Do you know Ploy Pitcha Pariyakorn?"

"Ploy Pitcha, the renowned actress who plays a villain? She is on TV five days a week. In the most recent one, she was in the same series as your sister."

"I was in her room last night."

"Shit!! Really?! is she attractive in person?"

"Stunning... but..."

She has a sophisticated beauty, but she exudes an aloof air. She has soft skin, an alluring body scent, a seductive scent on her hair, and an enticing fragrance on her neck... her neck?!

"But what? Why do you look shocked?"

"She's too attractive for the average person. She has an alluring aura about her. She also has a photograph of herself with Prang in her room. They seem close, Jeab."

"They're in the same series. But if they're lovers, it would be a fantastic climax."

"The real climax is that I saw a book in her room."

Hwan-jeab immediately turns to look at me. Because we are best friends, our eyes can communicate. They are saying,

*'You are thinking the same thing I'm thinking, right?'*

"A pornography?"

"No!"

I roll my eyes and say it dejectedly.

"The book is The Alchemist."

My friend's expression is full of question marks.

"Phi Pay also has this book. So, when I saw the same book in her room, I picked it up to look through it. At first, I didn't think much about it. I just wanted to take a look. But I noticed a message inside, with the signature

'*Paytai*' at the bottom... I recognize his handwriting. It's definitely the same Paytai."

"What does this mean, Pun?"

"I have no idea. But, aside from Phi Nop, the woman is the only other ingredient I have in my search for the man who ran away from marrying me and wasted my time and money."

"What will you do if they actually know each other? Can you just ask her about it openly?"

"Do you think she'd tell me the truth if I asked her directly?"

"I don't know. We're not even sure how they're related. We proChapter :ly need to find out more."

We sit and talk a little longer before Hwan-jeab excuses herself and returns to her room to sleep. As for myself, I'm calling my sister. I wait a while before Prang answers the phone.

**[Hello.]**

**"Hi, Prang. This is Pun. Can you talk? Are you available?"**

**[Uh-huh.]**

**"Where are you?"**

**[At my condo.]**

**"I'm back, Prang. I'm in the lobby of your condo."**

**[Are you waiting in the lobby?]**

**"Uh-huh."**

**[When did you get back?]**

**"Last night."**

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I pause before saying something that makes me uncomfortable because I don't want to bother my sister.

**"Can I stay with you, Prang?"**

Prang responds without hesitation.

**[Okay.]**

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Prang exits the elevator shortly after. Another climax of the day is seeing the person who walks alongside her.

The woman's distinct features and brown hair give her an air of international charisma.

**Jay Jeerapat** is a well-known female actress who always looks irritated. To be completely honest and fair.... Phi Jay is well-known throughout Asia, not just locally.

It was rumored that Phi Jay and Prang did not get along well and hated each other. However, there have been numerous sweet moments between the two in the media recently.

I assumed it was because they were in the same series. Prior to seeing them together with my own eyes, I never believed what I saw in the media.

Why didn't I believe what the media was reporting? It's because Phi Jay is the reason I quit drinking and fled to New York. Prang and I grew up together. I've never seen Prang so angry. Prang has not been whole since that event many years ago. She was completely broken. And I couldn't bear to see it

I, therefore, never expected to see the lead actress's perfect figure and elegant demeanor walking in my direction. She is taller than my sister, but her slender legs beneath those shorts move at the same pace as the person beside her.

"Phi Jay."

I greet her nervously as I notice her eyes examining me.

If I said she always appears irritated, let me elaborate. Her irritated expression vanishes when the chic woman smiles. Her smile is pure, sweet, and radiant. It also comes with sparkling eyes that make you want to stare into them for eternity. "You two are back together?"

She nods to confirm.

"Let's talk upstairs. Is this all you have?"

The two women take me up to Prang's room. We talk about our past conflicts. What they tell me lifts the burden I've been carrying. I am bursting with joy. I'm happy for both myself and them. The Prang that I see today is the most vibrant I've seen in years.

They both look perfect. They complete one another.

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***Knock... Knock... Knock....***

A knock on the door interrupts our conversation. One of us opens the door, and a new pair of slender legs enters the room.

The soft, distinct voice makes me look up. When I realize the woman with lovely dimples is the owner of the slender legs that have just entered the room, I am overcome with awkwardness. She is also the woman who has a vibrator and a strange collection of toys in her bedroom.

I'm caught off guard. I want to hide, but she already saw me!

"Is this our new friend?"

Her thick, soft, wavy hair moves as she looks over at me, teasingly smiling.

"This is Pun, Prang's sister. Pun, this is Phi Ploy."

Phi Jay introduces me to the person who has just joined us.

Damn. They know each other and are close enough to visit each other's rooms. I begin to worry about what happened last night.

I am afraid *Phi Ploy,* whom Phi Jay has just introduced me to, will tell Prang about it, especially the bruises and wounds she noticed when she saw me naked.

Yet...

"Nice to meet you, Nong Pun."

She acts as if we've never met.

"Hi."

"She seems to be in a daze."

The person speaking furrows her brows slightly. She says this to Phi Jay with a surprised tone in her voice. But people who speak the same language as her and I understand what she's saying.

Those honey-sweet eyes are well aware of the situation and communicate with me in codes.

"Were you drinking last night or something? I have hangover remedies."

I can only stand there and blink blankly because I don't know how to respond. It's proChapter :ly a good thing Prang interrupts us by telling me to go take a bath.

But, come to think of it, leaving the area may not be a good idea because I'm afraid Phi Ploy will tell Prang about what happened last night.

I go to the bathroom unwillingly. But I have already planned to speak with Phi Ploy. We have to talk, and we have a lot to talk about.

I think I should get to know this actress who plays a villain better...

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# Chapter 04: Close to you

***.... 13 hours ago***

It was already late when I returned from the restroom to the table that had been reserved for me. The table was in the VIP zone, which was private yet provided a clear view of everything going on in the establishment.

I was not in the mood for a night out in such crowded surroundings, but he asked me to come meet him. If he was going to be late, he should have called instead of making me sit there for hours listening to the ear-piercing

EDM.

Doesn't someone who has lived abroad for many years learn to be punctual like the people there?

"He's not here yet?"

I nodded dejectedly. Had it not been for some entertainment from the nearby table, I would have taken my wealthy best friend out of here within the first half hour of our arrival instead of listening to her complain about how terrible she'd look from sleeping late every ten minutes.

"So, are you interested? I've noticed you looking at her for a while now."

The person who asked me that was peering at a group of friends sitting at a nearby table.

"Which one, Ploy? Who's the one? The one with glasses, the one with a cup C breast, or the naughty one with long hair?"

I merely sipped my cocktail, smiling slightly.

When the person who was sitting in front of me did not receive a response or any words from me, she became irritated and began to annoy me to get me to say something, as she usually does.

"I'd guess the one with glasses, but the one with long hair is more interesting."

Min paused when she noticed that I was not paying attention to the woman with big breasts as she walked away from the table with her male friend for the umpteenth time last night.

"She looks like your ex."

I cracked an amused smile.

"No, Min. She does not. My ex has piercing eyes, which makes her fun to tease, but this one..."

I sipped my cocktail again while staring at that woman, then returned to talking with my friend and said,

"... still young."

I kept the term 'call for cute aggression' to myself and used a more appropriate phrase.

I was not sure why, but I thought she resembled a mischievous tiger cub that is elegant, has fangs, yet is not at all dangerous. On the other hand, she is so adorable that I wanted to hug her rather than be afraid of her. Her appearance and beauty appeared to be too expensive for the clothes she was wearing.

She moved confidently and without awkwardness. Her arms and hips moved fluidly in sync with the music, demonstrating that she was not new to this environment but was quite a handful. She finished her drinks one after the other, despite having not touched any of them previously.

When she bumped into me when I returned from the restroom, she gave me a grumpy look, but her eyes were gentle and naughty. She was riddled with inconsistencies.

"Don't lose control and force yourself on her."

My rich friend laughed annoyingly as she returned her gaze to my cub.

"But from some angles, she looks a lot like your ex, Ploy."

Similar... the term "similar" was more appropriate.

"Do you want to go tease her a little?"

Min won't stop bugging me, especially after she noticed my cub leave her table, swaying from side to side, to dance in front of the DJ.

I shook my head in response to her playful question.

"Would you like to order anything else? If he doesn't show up soon, we should leave. I'm tired of you teasing me."

"At first, I wanted to go home; now, I would much prefer to see a documentary on a tigress hunting her prey... The cub is cute. Are you not interested at all?"

Instead of playing along with her, I kept my cool. My gaze remained fixed on the person we were talking about. There was some movement among that group of friends after a man approached to play with my cub.

And if she was indeed my cub, I would undoubtedly spank her in the bum for dancing seductively to attract men without regard for the purple, red, and green lights that whirl in this establishment.

"A quarrel is inevitable. Let's get moving, Ploy."

The naughty, long-haired woman was dragged out of the place by the one wearing eyeglasses just as the fight was about to break out, so I nodded in agreement with Min. I didn't want any news in the media, so we immediately left the scene.

Our destination was the parking lot. However, when we arrived at our car, a car was blocking our exit. We had to spend some time clearing the car's path before driving away.

As we approached the exit, we came across a black sedan. If I hadn't noticed something. I would have kept driving. That something was a woman's smooth, white back, which caught the light as she lay face down on a car hood.

I have to thank her for wearing the clothes she was wearing because they allowed me to recognize her immediately.

"Let's go, Ploy."

My best friend told me this as I slowed down. I had already driven past her, but when I looked in the rearview mirror, I noticed two men approaching her.

My foot gently pressed on the brakes. The gear shifted from D to R, and the wheels transported me back to the black sedan.

"Come down and help, Min."

I opened the door. The two men paused and watched me get out of the car.

"Is this your friend?"

"Yes... Tim. Why are you sleeping here? Get up! Go home!"

Min raised an eyebrow in confusion when she heard me call a fake name and shook the unconscious woman sleeping on the car's hood. I frowned at my friend, signaling for her to come over and help me get the drunk woman into our car.

I helped the person who was unable to support her own weight to her feet. She was completely unconscious. Her arms dangled, her neck drooped, and her face was nestled against my shoulder.

"Help me, Min."

My best friend stood there, wide-eyed, for a second before she hurried over to prop up Tim's (an alias) spineless body and wrestled with her to get her into our car.

Once Tim (an alias) was comfortably seated in the back seat, her dangling arms wrapped around my neck and refused to let go. I heard her murmur something intangible.

"Now what?" Min asked.

"Take her home," I replied.

"Who was shaking her head and saying she wasn't interested?"

My rich friend smiled triumphantly.

"You drive. I'll sit in the back."

The woman with clingy hands clung to me and refused to let go. I had no choice but to join her in the backseat.

"I thought you were no longer bringing strangers home."

"Get into the car, Min. Can't you hear the siren?"

"Hmm. How much were the shoes stolen by your sleeping partner the last time?"

"Please, Min. If one is wealthy, they can afford to lose as many shoes as they like. Please drive before the police arrive; otherwise, we will be unable to go anywhere."

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***Why do birds suddenly appear,***

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***Close to you.***

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In the middle of the night, the four wheels of a BMW vehicle quietly spun through the streets, cars, buildings, and people who had yet to sleep. The lights from outside seeped into the car, casting glittering shadows.

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***Why do stars fall down from the sky***

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***Close to you.***

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There was music playing in the background. The air conditioning was cool. I was in the backseat, and I wished the journey home was a little longer because there was a soft, warm body leaning against mine, and there were warm breaths with an alcohol scent on my neck.

The stranger's nose tip and soft lips touched my skin. Her eyes were closed. Her arms were wrapped around my body.

*...Close to you.*

The 25-minute ride back to my condo was satisfying; I won't deny it. "Miss... Miss."

I tried to wake the woman up by shaking her. If she regained consciousness, she might be able to support herself.

Her heavy eyelids opened slightly. Her cheeks were flushed, like those of children who have been outside in the cold. Her lips parted to reveal a smile. Her naughty nose began to snuggle against my neck once more. Geez.

Min helped support her to the elevator. I told my best friend to go back to her place because the stranger appeared to be able to support herself on her wobbling legs.

As we ascended, her two arms wrapped around me tightly. Her face never separated from my skin, not even for a split second. When I called her or asked her to support herself, her soft lips smiled, and her heavy eyelids lifted slightly.

"You're extremely drunk. And you stink of alcohol."

I complained to myself as I helped her into my bed... But the kid was very good at asking for tenderness. She made me want to hug her and squeeze her tight.

"@&#$#&#&"

Again, she opened her heavy eyelids and smiled at my complaint while muttering something I couldn't make out. She didn't seem at all bothered by what I just said.

"What?" I asked adoringly, amused.

"You smell wonderful, Miss Ambrosial."

She responded in a drunken tone. It made me laugh. Suddenly... she opened her eyes and puked... on me..

The young woman was on the verge of falling to the ground because I was so taken aback that I let go of her slim waist. I instinctively wrapped my arm around her again.

This time... she puked on both of us and ended with a heartfelt thank you.

"Thank you, bitch."

My sense of humor faded as frustration and dejection took over. I set her down on the floor and dashed to the restroom. I didn't waste time mourning my condition or the subsequent cleanup job.

Stupid kid! I smell wonderful? So you puked on me, making me smell bad? Never before had a woman puked on me and said.

'*Thank you, bitch.'*

I thought to myself as I washed and changed into new clothes before returning to take care of the drunken kid's clothes. Small pieces of clothing were removed.

The curvy body and smooth white skin gradually became visible. But the smell of the mess she had just made kept me from thinking about anything else but quickly removing her clothes, washing her body, and dragging her soft, naked body back to bed.

If I did not do that, the odor would linger until the morning.

However, the bruises on the side of her body startled me. Her arms and legs also had visible cut wounds... What happened to her?

I put a blanket over her naked body and quit trying to pry into her affairs. I paused to admire her lovely, delicate face. Her youthful skin was so bouncy that I envied her. She looks very similar to my ex, as Min has mentioned.

Her long eyelashes, which resemble those of Western women, are most likely responsible for her eyes appearing gentle yet sweet.

"Argh."

I sighed and reached for some makeup remover to help remove the makeup from her face.

Damn. The child was inebriated; however, she was in such a good mood that I felt inclined to strike her. She was smiling adorably, her eyes still closed. I paused to see if those heavy eyelids would reopen.

And I didn't have to wait long for those thick eyelashes to move. Her clear brown eyes looked at me like a puppy, and she raised her hands to pull me into a hug.

"Miss Ambrosial."

"HAHA... crazy kid."

It was a chaotic night. I shook my head and pushed her away before turning around and going into the bathroom.

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I was having a challenging morning. I was unable to leave my room because my overnight guest had not awoken. I couldn't contact any of her friends because there was nothing on her.

So all I could do was sit and sip my coffee while thinking about my friends who also reside in this condo. I planned to go to my ex's new lover's suite and tell my ex that I met someone who looks a lot like her after I finish my errands today.

My guest awoke around noon. She wiped down the box containing toys from Japan. They were scattered all over the floor. The kid appeared visibly shocked.

In her eyes, I proChapter :ly appeared to be someone who enjoys playing with those toys.

Those were Min's strange jokes. My wealthy friend enjoys purchasing those items for me whenever she travels to Japan. She suggested that I use them with my sleeping partners. To be completely honest, I have never used any of them with anyone.

After our awkward moment, I let my guest continue her personal business in the bathroom. During that time, Min had someone return my car, which she had driven home the night before.

I was debating whether I should go down to get the car because a model once stole my shoes after I let her sleep over.

After I took care of the car and returned to my room, the kid had vanished. She didn't say goodbye or anything. I didn't have a chance to ask for her name.

I was worried, so I went straight to my dressing room... It was fortunate that all of my favorite shoes were in their proper place.

I kept a note with her phone number with me before leaving my room to go play in my ex's new lover's room. But no one was there. So I switched my destination to my ex's room.

And the moment the door opened, I knew I had a new friend to play with. "Nice to meet you, Nong Pun."

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# Chapter 05: Phi Jay's room

I am not sure where I can get more information on Phi Pay right now. I don't know anything about his personal life other than his real name. Hwanjeab asked someone to locate Phi Nop, the nightclub's owner.

When we questioned him, he said he knew nothing. I don't believe he told us the truth, but we seem to have hit a dead end there. As a result, we must abandon that strategy in favor of focusing on Phi Ploy.

I find Ploy Pitcha Pariyakorn to be an intriguing individual...

...whether it's her background, interests, clips, previous work, news articles, or posts on her social media (according to my research, she only uses Instagram, not Facebook or Twitter).

I've been scrolling through her Instagram feed for days. I've been doing so much research on her that I'm starting to dream about her gentle voice and lovely dimples almost every night.

I got information on her birthday, zodiac sign, height, previous work, and education, She received an MBA from a prestigious university. Her parents have separated. She began working in the entertainment industry at the age of 19 after being scouted by her best friend's mother's best friend.

She started her career as a model for a lesser-known publication. Later, she appeared in a music video. She eventually rose to fame for her roles as villains She cofounded a clothing line with her high-society friend.

She also appeared in a series alongside my sister. Last month, on her 32nd birthday, she reportedly made donations to assist orphans. She has an impeccable image and has never been the subject of negative rumors.

She is also one of the most coveted women by men in high society. Yet she never dated anyone seriously. What piques my interest, however, is a photograph taken three years ago of her with a model in a Korean lesbian nightclub.

She confirmed in an interview that she was the one in the photo. Curious, she went to check out the place while out with a friend.

Some media sources, however, leaked rumors suggesting she might favor beautiful women over attractive men in the industry. Nonetheless, there has been no compelling evidence or definitive conclusion until now.

There are only photos of her hanging out with numerous models at various hangouts.

*She likes women? Could that really be the case?*

I've been sitting in front of the computer for so long that I'm about to throw up. I spent the entire day obsessed with news clips, variety shows, and every matter involving the woman named Ploy.

I finished three of her series and am moving on to the fourth in less than a week.

I have to admit that this woman is pleasing to the eyes and pleasant to the heart.

I decided that it's time to take a break and get some food. Yet, the refrigerator in Prang's room... which from now on I will shamelessly refer to as my room because Prang has permanently moved into Phi Jay's room... or so I hope; I hope they don't fight like they did and Prang has to return to this room.

The lengthy explanation above is just to establish that I, the person who asked for a place to stay, am now the sole owner of this room.

Now back to the empty refrigerator in my room. It's empty to the extent of only containing plain water, milk, rotten vegetables, and half a kilogram of frozen pork that has turned into a fossil after years in the freezer.

My refrigerator's sad and lonely drought brings to mind Phi Jay's room.

That room is abundant. Rice covers the field, and fish swim in the water. The terrain is incredibly lush.

And Prang happens to be in the room right now. I think I will go fill my stomach in that room. You can call it socializing with the neighbors.

I laugh to myself as I ring the doorbell to my sister-in-law's room.

"Pun."

"Hello! How are you, Phi Jay?"

"I'm fine. Thank you. Come in. I was about to call you and invite you to my room."

"What's the occasion?"

"I just wanted to invite you to join us for dinner. We have a lot of food. Prang is learning a new recipe each day."

"Phi Prang cooks?"

The woman with an international look winks in response to my shocked face and twisted mouth.

"Is it edible, Phi Jay?"

My sister can't cook. If she does, it will be so bad that the street dogs flee in fear.

"Is it edible, Jay?"

Prang's piercing stare and icy voice are directed at me from inside the room.

"She has excellent hearing."

I whisper to Phi Jay, who walks over to Prang with a big smile on her face.

Wow... Prior to this, I had only been inside my sister-in-law's room a few times. Never in all those times have I seen my sister standing there, hovering over the stove.

She has her hair in a bun, one hand clutching a pan and the other whirling a spatula. However, it was not my sister's actions that caused me to silently go *wow* earlier, it was the sight of the other woman standing next to Prang.

She stands with her back to me, instructing the inexperienced cook, Prang, to add the ingredients one at a time. She turns to face me after she's finished.

"Hello, Phi Ploy."

Although the corner of her mouth was only slightly raised in greeting, those sweet, mysterious eyes smiled broadly at me before she returned her attention to Prang's cooking.

I can sense that she was genuinely smiling. The smile was not an act of good manners. It was a dazzling, sweet smile that somehow found its way into my heart.

"Your hair is very long, but your shorts come up to your buttocks."

My sister-in-law's comment interrupts my thoughts.

"Is this the current trend in New York?"

"Phi Jay, the cost of a haircut in New York is insane."

Phi Jay's comment prompts me to sweep the hair that reaches my buttocks to one side. However, the shorts remain as short as before because I am not a good girl. I proudly accept that.

I am not sure if I am imagining things, but I believe Phi Ploy raised the corner of her mouth again after I said that. Perhaps she was simply smiling at the food that my sister had just finished cooking.

"Can I be of any help?"

"Come and join me over there. Let the student and teacher carry out their tasks."

Phi Jay wraps her arms around mine and leads me into the living room.

While chatting with Phi Jay, I find myself constantly looking over at the kitchen. The gentle gestures, the suppressed smiles, and the knowing looks they give each other tell me that those two are rather close and know each other very well.

They seem so close that if Prang isn't already Phi Jay's, I'd consider hooking them up.

"Phi Jay."

I grab the remote and turn up the TV volume, getting ready to gossip.

"Why is she wearing shoes in your room?"

The leading lady rolls her eyes as she looks at the only person in the room wearing brand new high heels.

I read in a news article that Phi Ploy is obsessed with shoes, but I didn't expect her to wear them in the room.

"The only person I allow to do that is her, because even if I didn't, I wouldn't be able to do anything."

"You allowed her to do that?"

I furrow my brow in surprise.

"Are you close to Phi Ploy?"

"I'm not sure; we haven't discussed our relationship."

"Do you know whether she has brothers or sisters? Where exactly does she live? Does she have a romantic partner?"

The person being questioned squints and leans back on the sofa. She raises her arms and crosses them.

"Why are you asking all these questions?"

"Well... Aren't you jealous when someone gets that close to your lover?"

"Not if it's her."

"Then who and when?"

Phi Jay squints while contemplating.

"When Prang gives more attention to someone else than to me. Also, when she is in intimate contact with another person."

"Right now, Phi Prang is preoccupied with someone else."

Under the pretense of secrecy, I lean in and rest my head on hers,

"Do you see how they look at each other?"

Phi Jay looks into the kitchen as if she agrees, leaning her head against mine.

Something in their eyes reveals their connection. Despite the fact that they were not physically touching each other, their smiles and gestures... I don't know. I can't explain it. But they have this peculiar chemistry

"You agree with me, right, Phi Jay?"

My sister-in-law and I lock eyes and communicate through them. Damn. Looking at Phi Jay in this close proximity, I still cannot see any pores.

"Pun."

The flawless face is showing stress.

"Party girl, I believe you're attempting to sow discord between your sister and me."

We immediately back away from each other... Phi Jay thinks I'm being ridiculous.

"Phi Prang and I grew up together. I can tell that there's something special between Phi Prang and Phi Ploy."

"Not this woman."

The beautiful woman with an international appearance leans back against the sofa backrest.

"So, are you currently in a relationship? Have you met anyone interesting while in New York?"

Thinking about Phi Pay, I shake my head and try not to seem suspicious. I then steer the conversation back to our previous topic.

"How did you come to know Phi Ploy?"

"To answer like a celebrity... both of us participated in the same series.

Regarding those two, they already knew each other before the series began. I was the one who later came into the picture."

With her lips pursed, Phi Jay puts on an act of being pitiful.

"If you want a more direct answer, I flirted with Phi Ploy, but she didn't play along. As for those two, they were a couple when Prang broke up with me."

Phi Jay giggles when she sees my shocked expression as I become speechless... Is Phi Ploy Prang's ex? Is Phi Jay trying to mess with my head?

"Are you kidding me?"

"No. That's the truth."

Amused, the woman with international appeal sweeps her soft, shiny hair off her shoulder.

"And what is the relationship between the three of you?"

How many sisters-in-law do I have?

My imagination has transported me to Phi Ploy's bedroom. I'm opening the box filled with toys from Japan. I'm not sure what kind of expression is on my face right now, but I see Phi Jay laughing until her tall and slender body sways from side to side.

"Come on. Let's go eat."

Phi Jay didn't answer my question. She simply extends her long legs and stands up. She looks at Prang as sweetly as honey and beams at her while the chef and master chef are arranging the plates on the table.

"Phi Jay."

The person known by that name turns to face me. When she sees my pitiful expression, she bends down and whispers something to me.

"Have you come to terms with liking women?"

My heart thumps as she whispers that into my ear.

"I wish your first is someone easier to handle than Phi Ploy." "I don't..."

My answer is more like a mutter.

Phi Jay lets out a soft laugh.

"I know... Phi Ploy is like a flower that attracts all the bugs and bees. With a single sweet glance, all of the models flock to her. If you've already dug a hole too deep to climb out of, be careful with your heart. My girlfriend will surely be moody if you're heartbroken."

She steps back with a broad smile on her face.

"But I'm on your side. I would love to see someone as cunning as her fall in love."

Phi Jay winks naughtily. Her eyes are gleaming. She then turns around, drawn to the aroma of the food on the table.

As for myself... I'm still *stunned*!

I remain quiet as I help Phi Jay serve rice and water to everyone. We all sit down at the dining table. The three sit down in their chairs without hesitation. It's as if they eat together as part of their normal routine.

Phi Jay sits next to Prang, whereas Phi Ploy sits on the opposite side. Sitting down on the vacant seat next to Phi Ploy, I find myself the sole individual uncertain of my seating arrangement.

The individual sitting next to me never called me, even though I gave her my number. The clothes she loaned me are neatly folded and waiting to be returned to their owner in my room.

"Let me know how the food tastes after you take a bite."

My sister looks around with sparkling eyes, expecting compliments. And her lover is the first person to take a bite. I wonder how and when Prang got into cooking.

"Oh. I think this is better than last time."

After hearing Phi Jay's compliment, I take a bite and discover that the food on the table is not only edible but also delicious.

"Prang, did you really cook this yourself?"

"How is it?"

The smile hasn't left my sister's face since we sat at the table.

"It's good... Was I away for my degree too long? Why do I feel as if everything has changed?"

Phi Jay used to almost cry while she ate if my sister suddenly decided she wanted to cook.

She liked to say that she didn't want my sister to have to labor, so it was better to buy food. However, both she and I knew that the food Prang prepared in the kitchen didn't qualify as food.

"Try this."

The person sitting next to me places a serving spoonful of crab in yellow soup on my plate. As soon as those sharp, sweet eyes look at me expectantly, I start to feel awkward.

"This is delicious, too; even better."

"I cooked this."

Dimples appear on those smooth cheeks.

"What's it called?"

"Crab and betel leaf yellow curry."

"How can you compare the food I cook to the one Phi Ploy prepares? Different menus make them different, but both are delicious."

My sister complains, seemingly annoyed, while Phi Jay looks on merrily.

"Phi Ploy, you're stealing my thunder."

"I didn't do anything. I just had Pun try the yellow curry. Pun said the rest on her own."

Phi Ploy says that as she smiles teasingly. She casts me a sideways glance before returning her attention to her plate.

The conversation flows, and the food slowly disappears. Once everyone has finished eating, Phi Jay and I take on the task of washing the dishes.

"*JieJie.* Prang has me do the dishes again."

I have known Phi Jay for many years. She has continued to work under the same manager since I first met her. She also still calls him every time she wants to complain about mundane stuff.

"That's true. But the dishwashing liquid makes my hands rough. What if, when the camera zooms in on my hands, they look dry and wrinkled? What? Just wear gloves... How can you tell me to just get it done? Why are you always siding with Prang?"

Though she's complaining nonstop, she's also smiling pleasantly.

"I'm not talking to you anymore. I have to go clean the dishes."

"I'll do the cleaning part. Phi Jay, you can do the rinsing so that your hands do not become dry and wrinkled."

I tell Phi Jay this as I clean the plate with a sponge soaked in dishwashing liquid.

"It's okay. I can do it. I just wanted to irritate JieJie Ang."

"Will your hands be okay?"

"Phi Ploy gave me gloves and hand cream."

Phi Jay gives me a wink as she says that.

I sense a warmer connection between my sister and Phi Jay. We rarely spent time together, not to mention cooking and having a proper meal. Phi Jay's schedule was packed back then. Most of the time, she would show up exhausted.

She would show up to date, just meet, or sometimes sleep. I recall a time when she took a flight from China to spend 6 hours with Prang, after which she had to return there to work.

"Phi Jay... are you sure Phi Prang and Phi Ploy have broken up?"

"If they haven't broken up, then what am I? A mistress?"

"Maybe we are the mistress without realizing it."

I say it with a chuckle.

"And maybe we like someone without realizing it... don't you think?"

Phi Jay says it with a mysterious smile. My laugh slowly dies out. And why do my naughty eyes turn to look at the woman with wavy hair sitting on the sofa?

"I don't like women. Does Phi Ploy have any brothers or male relatives? If so, I will hit on him."

I slip in a question concerning the information I want.

"I've never asked her. But, seriously. If you like her, just say so. There's no need to beat around the bush and talk about her relatives."

In the end, I don't get the information I'm after.

. .

When we reconvene in the living room, Phi Jay goes straight to the ambrosial woman to talk makeup. Rather than continue watching YouTube, my sister decides to go take a bath in her room.

She then comes back out, wearing a football jersey and soft shorts that barely cover her buttocks. Her face is painted with the flag of her favorite team.

This brings back memories of when Prang and I used to watch sports with our father and his friends. The men cheered as if there was no tomorrow. Come to think of it, I should proChapter :ly go home and see my parents now that the bruises on my face have faded

"Will anyone be staying up to watch football with me tonight?"

The person asking settles down next to her lover.

"Phi Ploy?"

"I'll need to excuse myself. I don't enjoy watching men run around fighting for a ball."

The oldest among us gets up.

"You used to watch it with me."

"When I want to bed someone, I can do anything."

Following that response, Prang tosses the pillow in Phi Ploy's direction. The person in high heels simply leans slightly sideways and chuckles wickedly.

"Are you two really going to talk about your lovely romance from the past while I'm sitting here?"

Phi Jay asks, nearly screaming. She lets out a sheesh sigh, just like the women in Korean series do when they stare at their adversary.

Phi Ploy's expression suggests that she is unbothered.

"I'll be leaving then, It's already 9 p.m. It should be family time."

Once she finishes saying that, her toned legs bring her tall, slender, but hourglass frame right to the door.

"Pun?"

Prang turns to ask me, hopeful.

"I have work to do tonight. Next time, Prang."

I also immediately stand up when the opportunity to speak with Phi Ploy alone presents itself.

"So there are just the two of us left."

The football fan's voice reveals her disappointment as she turns to tell her lover this.

"Should we call and invite Ken over?"

"He has an early schedule tomorrow. I don't think he'll join us... Let's just watch it together."

"But you always fall asleep, Jay. You only wake up, confused, when someone scores."

As I walk out the door, I can still hear the argument between the leading ladies who hooked up.

"How about this? I'll put on a football jersey just like yours. I'll also paint a flag on my cheek And if you don't want me to fall asleep, you just have to let me-"

At this point, I can hear my sister laughing. However, the door has now closed, preventing me from hearing the rest of the conversation. I find myself standing alone in the hallway with Phi Ploy.

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Now that I'm alone with her, as planned, and all of the disruptions have subsided, only unfamiliarity and awkwardness remain. I suddenly don't know where to put my hands.

Why my usual confidence has dropped into a faint shadow is beyond me. If it isn't due to Phi Ploy's exceptional staring ability, it must be because of what happened that night.

"Phi Ploy."

The owner of that name turns to face me as she's about to reach the elevator.

"Can you please wait here for a few minutes? I want to return your clothes to you."

When the person to whom I made the request nods, I quickly spin around and go into my room. I grab the earrings I wore that night and slip them into my pants pocket before grabbing Phi Ploy's clothes.

"Here it is."

The clothes that have been laundered and ironed are presented to Phi Ploy. She smiles and prepares to leave after she has taken them, but then...

"Phi Ploy."

"Yes?"

I think I need to get rid of my awkwardness around her once and for all, so I take a deep breath and ask what's been on my mind.

"That night, we didn't... did we?"

"No, we didn't."

*Ohhh, I made it out intact*. I close my eyes and scream silently in relief.

"But my clothes..."

"You got alcohol on me."

I raise my eyebrows and request a more detailed explanation. The older woman is beaming as she recounts how she picked me up and took me to her room.

"Argh. I'm so embarrassed."

I cover my head with my hands, silently screaming even louder than before. I slept on the car hood, vomited on her, and said, '*Thank you, bitch!'* A queen doesn't do that.

"Phi Ploy, I am deeply sorry. I don't know how I could ever make it up to you."

"It's okay. You don't need to do anything."

This woman is incredibly charming. When she looks at me with those adoring eyes, I'm drawn to her.

"Did you tell Phi Prang about this?"

The woman with the egg-shaped face and distinct features slowly shakes her head, indicating that she did not.

"You also didn't tell Prang about the marks on my body, did you?"

"I don't like meddling in other people's businesses."

"I have one more question. That night, I lost one of my earrings. I must have dropped it somewhere. Have you seen it in your room?"

As she mulls over my question, her exquisite eyes drop down and then return to mine.

"I haven't. That night, I only removed your clothes. I did not touch any of your accessories."

Upon hearing her words, I nearly choked on my own saliva. But I kept my cool.

"Would you mind if I asked for permission to look for the earrings I lost in your room? Perhaps It's hidden away in a corner."

"That would be fine. I happen to be free at the moment."

That was all it took for me to follow the alluring scent of the tall and slender woman to the elevator. We are now in a cramped square compartment on its way to the 42nd floor.

The person next to me has perfect waves of natural brown, shiny hair, and I'm curious if it ever gets messy. How can someone maintain a flawless appearance all the time?

As I reflect on it, I try not to smile. Surely there are times when her waves aren't ideal. Perhaps it is when she engages in strenuous activities. Or maybe when someone... *pulls it hard.*

Ohhh... Before my brilliant imagination could go any further, I quickly cut it off with scissors. The alluring, misty scent in this closed area, however, is stirring me up and drawing me closer to her.

*Why do birds suddenly appear*

...every time you are near?

Argh... I silently shake my head, realizing that I'm growing to dislike this song. I glance at the person next to me but do not think of initiating a conversation.

Every time I get a whiff of this scent, the visuals and music play back in full HD. Eventually, the elevator doors open, allowing me to breathe more freely.

The spacious room on the 42nd floor is exactly as it was the last time I visited. I am referring to the room's cleanliness and neatness. As I walk into the room, there isn't a single dust particle on my feet.

The only difference is the atmosphere; there was no ambrosial woman standing in the middle of the room to awe me that day.

"Where do you think you might have dropped it?"

"That day, I walked around this area."

My first stop is in the living room.

"I was standing right there."

I point to the area beneath the portrait of the room's owner.

"Also the bedroom."

"You can look for it in this area, Pun. I'll look around the bedroom."

"Okay."

I wait until Phi Ploy moves her inviting buttocks into the bedroom before removing one of the earrings from my pants pocket and hiding it under the sofa cushion. I make sure the shiny part is visible. Now, I just need to wait...

"I looked everywhere, both inside the bedroom and the bathroom, but I couldn't find it."

Phi Ploy says this with a frown as she exits the bedroom.

"What about the dressing room? I unintentionally wandered into that room." "It's not there either"

"No?"

Out of my repertoire of flirtatious cards, I chose the Puppy Eyes card and wore an expression of disappointment. I notice that the person looking at me sighs.

"Have you searched every corner of this room?"

"Maybe I did not drop it here."

***Rrrrrrrr***

***Rrrrrrr***

The owner of the ringing smartphone looks at the name of the person calling, but the screen only shows a set of numbers. She takes the call and gestures with her hand for me to wait.

"Hello... I don't have time to talk right now... Phi, you didn't show up that day."

Phi Ploy looks in my direction as she walks away to talk in private, I admit that I was listening to her phone conversation.

"Is this the same topic we discussed previously? If so, I believe we have nothing more to discuss... I'll think about whether I can find time to meet with you."

Phi Ploy frowns as she hangs up. She returns and asks for more details.

"Where precisely were you that day? I'll help you search again."

When I point to a location, she walks there, sweeps her eyes around, and stoops to investigate every corner. Despite this, she doesn't notice one of the earrings I purposefully hid under the cushion of the sofa.

While pretending to look around the bookshelf with picture frames on it, I let her twist, turn, and scan the space, I'm looking for an opportunity to pick up the book '*The Alchemist*' so I can ask her how she got it.

"You seem to be very close to Phi Prang."

The person on her knees in front of the sofa, searching for my earrings, looks up at me.

"We took that picture a long time ago, proChapter :ly about two years ago."

I put the photo of Prang and her back on the bookshelf. I pretend to look at other pictures with interest for a while. The picture that was facing down that day is now properly displayed.

It's a picture of a cute little girl in the arms of a woman, who is smiling lovingly at her. Even though she appears to be younger. I remember her face well. It's her!

During my nearly two years in New York, I've seen the woman with gorgeous eyes and attractive dimples every single day. It's the woman in the picture on the fridge... **it's Phi Pay's mother.**

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# Chapter 06: Defeated

"Is this a photo of you when you were younger?"

I ask innocently, trying to conceal my excitement. I'm eager to know if the answer is as expected.

"Does it look anything like me?"

I hear Phi Ploy's sweet voice from behind before she moves over to stand beside me.

"Here."

I press my finger against the dimple on her cheek as I look at her with sparkling eyes.

"This right here is exactly the same."

The astute woman's brilliant gaze meets and locks with mine. I openly flirted, but she did not respond. I'm beginning to feel embarrassed. So I clear the air by returning our attention to the woman in the photograph...

I am beginning to contemplate the possibility of my success. If she did not respond to Phi Jay's flirting, wouldn't I have to withdraw, looking foolish?

"You got your mother's eyes and dimples."

"I'm not sure about that. Everyone tells me I look like my father. She says this with an amused smile on her face. Her eyes, though, are not at all cheerful.

"Is this what we were looking for?"

The presentation of the diamond earring, which I pretended to lose, changes the topic.

"Yes, it is. Where did you find it?"

"On the sofa... It was in an obscure corner."

She mesmerizes me with her eyes. Her face is etched with a smile I can't interpret. Am I overthinking this, or is she a different woman than when we first met?

.

***Rrrrrrr***

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**"Hello."**

**[What are you doing? Can we talk?]**

**"Is it urgent?"**

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I whisper into the phone, looking over at Phi Ploy, who is now sitting on the sofa to give me some privacy.

**[I have some news regarding Phi Pay.]**

**"Okay. Stay on the line. Give me a minute."**

**[Okay.]**

**"Phi Ploy, I've got to get going. I have a pressing matter."**

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When I hear the name of the person I'm looking for, I suddenly feel a sense of urgency. My two legs sprint out of the room, not waiting for the owner of the room to send me off.

As soon as the door separates me from Phi Ploy's room, I immediately resume my conversation with my friend from where we left off.

**"What do you have, Jeab?"**

**[Did you know that Phi Golf has returned to Thailand? Do you want to go talk to him? Didn't he introduce you to Phi Pay?]**

**"He's back? I haven't checked my messages in weeks. Recently, he has been pushing for a status between us. It makes me really uncomfortable, so I don't want to speak with him."**

**[Ah, he's your number one fling. The person on the phone laughs. 'Did you know that your number two to number five flings are also aware that you've returned?]**

**"Wasn't it because you asked me to promote your latest collection? My messages have been flying through the roof. I don't even want to open my chat."**

**[Pun, why don't you just choose one to date seriously?]**

**"What are you saying? They are just friends that I hang out with."**

[**You're heartless. And what about the marriage license with Phi Pay?]**

**"I will arrange to meet with everyone and sort things out, okay? I'm starting to get tired of it all, too."**

**[Wow. You completed your degree studies overseas. I thought you would have changed.]**

**"I said I'll take care of it just now."**

**[Are you planning to meet up with Phi Golf as well? I think you should, Maybe you can get some information out of him.]**

I ponder as I round the corner and come to a halt in front of the elevator. I don't want to go in yet because I'm afraid there will be no signal inside.

**"I'll think about it later. I want to tell you something first."**

**[What is it?]**

**"It's about the woman who picked me up from the nightclub."**

**[Ploy Pitcha, who appears in the series 'Fatal Trickery,' which is currently airing on Channel 13. The rating is quite high. Phi Jay is very sassy. My mother enjoys watching it, but she constantly criticizes Phi Jay. HAHA. Could you ask Phi Prang about the ending?]**

**"Hwan-Jeab, focus. What I'm about to tell you is..."**

I pause for effect.

[**What? Spill it!?]**

**"Do you think I'm attractive?"**

**[Geez!... Yes.]**

**"Am I attractive enough to woo an older woman?"**

[**What are you up to, Pun?]**

**"I want a girlfriend."**

**[What!!]**

**"I want this woman, Jeab."**

[**Geez! Have you lost your mind because you were dumped? You cannot flirt with every person you meet!]**

**"Listen to me, Hwan-Jeab... Phi Ploy and Phi Pay have the same mother... They're siblings!"**

**[Crazy. How did you know that!!!!!!! Wait, is Phi Pay's last name 'Pariyakorn'?]**

**"No. But I'm confident they have the same mother. And Phi Ploy was just on the phone with someone she referred to as 'Phi.' They're planning a meeting."**

**[And what are you planning to do?]**

**"I just want to ask her something. But she's extremely reserved. She chooses her words carefully. She is not very chatty. I can tell she is not going to open up about her personal life easily. I'd like to get intimate. If she has feelings for me, she may say more. I don't want to be impatient and get nothing from her, like I did with Phi Nop."**

**[I don't believe that's it. Pun, you simply cannot change your habit of flirting with everyone. What if she genuinely likes you?]**

**"What if Phi Ploy genuinely likes me?.... That is something I haven't considered. I doubt it will go that far, either. I just want to get closer to her a little. Once I get my answer, it's over. I'm not hitting on her for real or anything."**

[**Pun, don't play with other people's feelings. It's not okay to trust someone only to discover later that everything was a lie.]**

**[You watched too many series, Jeab. Don't be so dramatic. According to what I know about her, she is not naive. She wouldn't fall for someone easily. She appears to be quite a player in her own right.]**

**[Even so. She is, however, too attractive to be drawn to a jobless kid like you. She should be dating a handsome trillionaire from high society.]**

**"Jeab... Do you know why people spend their money on something?" [Because they want it.]**

**"Absolutely. It is all about emotions. If we want something badly enough, our brains will find a reason to buy it, even if it has no practical use in our lives."**

**[Don't get all academic on me. Just get to your point.]**

**"I may not be better than all the others in her life, but if she feels more for me, I have a chance. At the very least, I know she likes women."**

[**I don't know or care about her taste, Pun. But I'm not with you on this. Find other options. Or we could hire a detective. I'll lend you money. You could also ask your father to ask for help from his police team.]**

**"Can you please get me Phi Pay's address? It shouldn't be too difficult if he has the same mother as a famous person. I will accept responsibility for how things with Phi Ploy play out. And as for Phi Golf, I'll meet with him when I have time."**

**[Pun. I hope you fall as deeply as you made Phi Ploy fall for you. I curse you as a friend who does not want you to continue doing this.]**

**"I have to go. I'm entering the elevator."**

. .

I have never had to take the initiative before. Others approached me throughout my life, and I simply enjoyed myself and went along because of my adolescent hormones.

I'm open to talking with anyone who can broaden my horizons. However, I have never imagined myself hitting on a woman before.

As the elevator door opens, my mind races with a million different ideas.

Then I realized I was so rushed to leave Phi Ploy's room and chat with Hwan-Jeab that I forgot to bring the earring I was looking for from Phi Ploy's room with me. I thus make my way back to Phi Ploy's room.

"Did you forget something?"

When I ring the doorbell and see my target standing beaming on the other side of the door, the fire inside me burns brightly.

I gave the sweetest smile I could muster, tilting my head ever so slightly to let my hair cascade down. As I admit my clumsiness and enter her room, I make an exaggerated, embarrassed gesture.

We're looking each other in the eye. The owner of the room walks over to get my lovely accessory and hands it to me. If she places it on my palm, everything will go according to plan tonight.

I'll put the earrings in my pants pocket and ask if I could treat her to dinner as a thank you. It would guarantee that I would see her again. I'll take my time walking to the door and part with a dreamy smile that will linger.

Yet...

Instead of placing my earring on my palm, Phi Ploy moves intimately close to me in a manner that catches me... off guard.

The instant our toes collide and that breathtaking face tilts to meet my gaze, I am paralyzed. Those glittering eyes look at me as if I'm a lavish meal or a mouth-watering appetizer.

Everything else fades into silence. All I can hear is the steady 'beating' of my heartbeat close to my temples.

When her slender hand reaches out as if to touch my face, I swallow hard and freeze like a robot. However, she simply sweeps my hair behind my ear, leaving my neck exposed to the naked eye.

Her nose moves in so close that the feel of her breath on my skin gives me goosebumps all over. Her distinct, alluring scent is so seductive that I unconsciously close my eyes when her cold fingers caress my ear.

"Don't lose it again."

Her voice has the power of a spell. It disperses the enchanted mist that was once here. After Phi Ploy takes a step back, I can breathe again. She stands still and looks at me with a slight smile on her face.

"Ah... okay."

I flutter my eyelids as I gather myself.

I feel like a dumb character in a play or novel who stutters when she can't hide her feelings.

*'Ah... okay?'*

That is so stupid! I meant to flirt with her, but I was knocked out. It was so horrific that I won't tell even my closest friends about it.

To be honest, aside from that badass senior who taught me a life lesson when I was a freshman in college, my heart has never raced so fast for anyone else. I think I've met the real deal.

I can still hear the pounding near my temples. It's louder on my left side right now because that's where I'm carrying the accessory Phi Ploy has put on me as I return to my room, defeated.

Life is a book with a story inside, and I believe this story will be more than just about my bad days... My game plan will have to be more rigorous the next time around!

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# Chapter 06.1 : Ploy's Diary

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Prang's sister asked to come to my room tonight to look for her missing earrings. She claimed she lost it the night I brought her here because she was dead drunk.

The earring was tucked away on the sofa in a discreet location. But what the owner of the earring is unaware of is that I recently cleaned my room a few days ago.

Yes. There were no accessories on the sofa.

Are you trying to lure me in... Nong Pun?

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# Chapter 07: 6 slices of pizza

**"Quarter-Life Crisis."**

"What quarter-life crisis are you talking about? I'm not twenty-five yet."

"It's like a pre-quarter-life crisis, Pun. Your birthday is just a few months away. Think about it. After taking your money, Phi Pay fled from the marriage registration. The mafia beat you up. You were jobless and had to return to Thailand. You got dead drunk and woke up in a stranger's room. And it turned out that the stranger is your sister's friend... Your luck couldn't be any worse."

We're sitting in an air-conditioned cafe decorated in a European style, flowers all around us, basking in the sunshine that filters through the glass roof. Five minutes after the scones we ordered were brought out, a dashing male server is dusting matcha powder over a bed of pure white mousse.

"Best, what in the world happened to your lips? Did it take a blow? Why is it swollen?"

I gather my friends to ask for assistance, but I doubt I'll get much from them if Chakrit and Best continue to bicker.

"The procedure was not cheap, Krit. Please respect Mother Jolie's lips and shut your mouth."

The mirror-grade lips, which are nearly as full as Angelina Jolie's, quickly retaliate. These two never cease to fight like cats and dogs. It's as if the world isn't chaotic enough.

It was drizzling this morning. I had to take the Skytrain to a salon along the

Skytrain route with damp hair. There was only one available seat, and my destination was quite a distance away.

Normally, someone as attractive as me would be able to sit comfortably. Unfortunately, the guy in the next seat sat with his legs wide apart, allowing the wind to caress his body.

This means that he was occupying half of the vacant seat... Krahang *(a well-known male spirit of the Thai folklore who flies in the night riding on a long wooden pestie*).

I read a blog on Pantip that analyzed and referred to this type of behavior as someone we should sympathize with because he must clench his legs on a pestle for an extended period of time, resulting in a burning sensation in his balls that necessitates cooling.

"The owner of the clinic offered her a 50% discount on all of their services in exchange for reviews on her Instagram."

Even Hwan-Jeab, my most reliable friend, laughs and joins in the bickering.

"That is why she intends to undergo a complete makeover."

"How many more procedures are there? Have you undergone the hymenoplasty to restore your virginity?"

"Krit! Don't be rude. With this mouth, you will not be able to find a wife."

"Guys... Aside from my bad luck and Best's makeover, can we discuss Phi Pay's whereabouts?"

I find that taking a spoonful of the sweet and creamy matcha mousse and allowing my taste buds to fully appreciate all of its flavors helps soothe me.

"Of course we can, Miss Pun. This is D'Best you're talking to. Finding someone's address is a piece of cake."

Mother Jolie shows us the location of Phi Pay's house, supported by Google Maps street view photos.

"This house."

I take a brief look at the information presented by my friend before deciding to come clean.

"Best. I'm not used to your new body part. I'm having a panic attack because you seem to be pouting at me all the time"

"Did you inject 3 cc rather than 1?"

"Krit! Don't exaggerate! I performed the procedure yesterday. It's still bloated."

The person giving the explanation purses her lips and kisses my cheek.

"How does it feel, love? Please give your feedback."

"Did you leave a lipstick mark on my cheek, Best?"

My stern tone has no effect on the cheeky friend. She's even giggling.

"Wipe it off me."

"Your new hairstyle and ash brown hair color make me want to jump you. If I don't already have Phi Boy, my husband, I will make you my wife."

"I don't like women. And I don't want to be your wife."

"How can you be sure if you don't try?"

Best's silicone breasts are ruthlessly crushing my arm.

She proceeds to lean into me as if she's seducing me.

"Don't you feel anything when I do this, Pun? Ahhh..... Umm..... Oh....."

I laugh at Jolie's phony moans and shift my body away from her.

"Best, you're becoming scarier by the minute."

"Are you sure you're not interested, love? Ummm. Ahhh.........."

Best takes my hand and tucks it underneath her blouse. She then puts my hand on her breast and forces me to squeeze it.

"Is it as soft as the real thing?"

"Stop, Best."

Hwan-Jeab claps her hands twice to catch everyone's attention.

"Go back home and seduce Phi Boy, your husband. I'll do a quick rundown of where we are... To start, Phi Boy has sent someone to follow Phi Nop, but Phi Pay is nowhere to be found. Because we are short on resources, I am debating whether we should withdraw our man or continue with this mission."

"Let's move him to go check out Phi Pay's mother's house, Hwan-Jeab."

"Okay. Next, are you certain you want to move forward with your plan regarding Phi Ploy?" I nod.

"Then you should take a seduction and flirtation course with Best."

"I can't handle what she just did."

"You both need to agree on the degree... Finally, you should arrange a meeting with Phi Golf. Maybe you'll get some useful information from him."

"Okay."

"What's my role, Miss Hwan-Jeab? I feel as though my contribution here is minimal."

The male model interrupts us in the middle of our conversation.

"You can accompany Best to the clinic when she needs her body parts repaired, Krit."

"Isn't there a better role than this, Jeab?"

"Once you become a famous model, you can negotiate for better roles."

In annoyance, Hwan-deab waves her hand to dismiss Chakrit. She then turns to me and says,

"You seem to be enjoying your dessert."

That was all she needed to say in order for me to push the chocolate cake and pistachio ice cream in front of my dear friend.

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I devote the following morning to gathering details about Phi Ploy, including her work schedule, lifestyle, and daily routine. I look through everything I can find online, through her fan club, and In Phi Jay's room.

According to my assessment, she is mature. As such, stability is more important to her than sweet talk and outward appearances... I guess. Given her extensive experience in the industry, it's safe to assume that she has dealt with all that fluffy stuff.

But what does she truly desire? I'm clueless. I think I just need to find a way to get closer to her for the time being.

I begin by visiting the shopping malls she often frequents or attends events at. I try to make it appear as if we meet by chance. Nevertheless, she's difficult to approach. There is never a good time to spend more time getting to know one another better.

That, however, does not deter me. I continue to follow her social media activities. Finally, there's some interesting movement. The alluring woman shares an image from her childhood on Instagram. Her caption suggests that she is meeting up with someone.

My full-fledged stalking mission has begun. Before D-Day, I go back home to pay my respects and borrow my parents' car. I have previously investigated the make, color, license plate, and parking space of Phi Ploy's vehicle.

On D-Day, the effort I put in to stake out a spot where I can clearly see her car pays off around noon. Phi Ploy steps gracefully out of the elevator and gets into her car. I follow closely behind her, surveying each stop she makes.

But nothing even comes close to what I had envisioned. Her last stop is a dinner date with a woman. To find out who the woman is, I secretly photograph them and send it to my friends' group chat.

*"Her name is Min; she is a member of the elite."*

...in sum, I made no progress

My next plan is to spend my late afternoon and evening at the condominium's swimming pool.

My informant (Phi Jay) gossiped that Phi Ploy and Prang enjoy swimming in their free time. The only problem is that they changed their routine to make cooking lessons a priority over exercise.

As a result, meeting her at the swimming pool by chance is extremely unpredictable. There are times when I remain in the pool until my skin wrinkles, and I still can't see even the shadow of the attractive woman.

Taking the direct approach and going to my sister-in-law's room is also inconvenient because, there, I will have both my sister's and sister-in-law's eyes on me. In conclusion, it is difficult to move our relationship along.

"Everybody seems to be in my room all the time lately, why is that? Don't you all have work to do?"

The woman with an international appearance whines as she exits the bedroom, her face scrunched up.

"Your room is fun."

Phi Ploy is the first to respond.

"Agree. I find Phi Jay's room to be fun."

I smile at Phi Ploy, indicating that I agree with her while flirting a little.

"I also agree with Phi Ploy; this room is fun." Phi Ken concurs.

Tonight, I'm surrounded by celebrities. If Hwan-Jeab and Best find out that Phi Ken, the male leading star who was shipped with Phi Jay, is rolling around in this room, they will scream from the rooftops.

"Ken, don't you have an early schedule tomorrow? Are you not going home to read your script? If you act without expressing your true emotions, the director will criticize you again... What time will this gathering come to an end? I have an early morning flight tomorrow."

I glance down at my watch. It's only 9 p.m. The nightclubs aren't even open yet. The prime-time series has only aired a few commercial breaks. What's Phi Jay's rush?

"Jay, why don't you go rest? What are you doing in the living room? Were we being too loud?"

Phi Jay's manager, the well-groomed gay Jie Ang *(sumalin)*, looks puzzled as he asks.

"I want Prang. Return Prang to me. After that, you can stay until morning, for all I care. You can't keep doing this every night."

To hide her smile, Phi Ploy presses her lips together firmly.

"I'm afraid I can't go with you right now."

"Yes. We can't let Prang go now."

The manager screams

Phi Jay breezes past us and takes a seat beside my sister. She rests her head on Prang's shoulder, snuggles her neck, and asks for tenderness.

"When will you come to bed?"

"Just a moment, Jay I will join you in the bedroom shortly."

Though she smiles at Phi Jay, her hands do not let go of the objects she is holding. Phi Jay seems to be running out of patience. She whips out her phone and snaps a group shot of us. She then dials 911.

"I'm not bluffing. If you all do not leave, I will call the police."

"You can call Prang's father. He's a cop. I have his phone number. Do you want it?"

Phi Ploy teases Phi Jay in a playful whisper.

"However, this will make front-page news. A well-known leading actress sets up a gambling ring in her room for her co-stars, including the daughter of a police officer... Oh, Pok 9. Plus 2x."

"Prang."

"Hang on, Jay."

My sister puts an end to all arguments by placing her two cards down with a big smile on her face.

"Pok 8: The dealer takes all."

"Arghhhhh, the dealer got Pok 8 again? I got JQK cards. I thought I would get 3x and go home rich."

Jie Ang whines.

"Did Prang rig the cards, Jie Ang? Why is she winning all the time? I only got 6. If things continue as they are, I'll be reading my script at home earlier than I had planned. Jie Ang, please cut the card next time."

"How's your hand, Pun?"

"I only got 4."

I respond with a hint of melancholy while Prang and Phi Ploy happily count their money. I'm starting to believe I'm going through a pre-quarter-life crisis.

"The dealer has a hot hand today: I think we should make Pun the dealer.

HAHA."

Jie Ang suggests.

"No! Everyone will get their hands on my money... Prang..."

I slowly and smoothly extend my hand towards my sister's stack of cash.

"You're extremely wealthy. Can I get 100 baht for an additional investment?"

"No!"

Prang strikes my hand before I can touch her money.

"You bring bad fortune. Don't touch my money."

"I'm with you, Prang. Don't touch me, Pun."

After Jie Ang says that, everyone backs away from me.

"Phi Ploy, you too?"

I can't believe my eyes when I see Phi Ploy grab her money and distance herself from me. It's as if everyone witnessed me eating bat soup.

"I am not infected with a zoonotic infectious disease or coronavirus"

"I'm having a good run right now. I cannot allow anyone or anything to touch me."

The dimples on Phi Ploy's cheeks are clearly visible as she speaks.

I lunge at Phi Ploy, trying to seize her hand in an effort to vent my frustration. However, she read me and screamed as she yanked her arm out of my grasp, leaving me defeated and resentful.

"Don't take it personally, Nong Pun."

To tease me, the ambrosial woman swoops her hair. Everyone else is laughing heartily, apart from one person who watches on with a sour face....

"I'll be away for three days, are you sure you won't go to bed with me, Prang?"

Prang turns and whispers to the cranky woman.

"Just hang on a bit, Jay. Can't you see that I'm earning money to support our family?"

"When I return, I'll invite the monks to perform a ceremony."

Phi Jay says this as she stands up while her manager continues to laugh.

"Would you like to have a blessing ceremony for your room?"

"I want the monks to use sacred water to expel gambling demons!"

Phi Jay widens her eyes, threatening everyone, before spinning her buttocks and walking sulkily into her bedroom. She shuts the door in response to our loud laughter.

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...In addition to my ongoing efforts to strengthen my relationship with Phi Ploy, which have made little progress, I have another mission to complete.

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**Number 1**

"Let's watch a movie after we eat, Pun."

"I'm heading straight home after this, Ball."

The guy on the other side of the table appears dissatisfied with my response, but he maintains a smile.

"I thought we'd be able to spend more time together now that you're back."

One pizza slice is missing from the tray. The Italian dish on the plate of the guy I used to hang out with is nearly gone. I look at my watch.

It's 5:13 p.m. I have about 15 minutes to resolve things with the person in front of me.

"Who?... Who's your new guy?"

He stops eating as well as hiding his feelings.

"There's no one, Ball. I'm simply more mature. I'd like to focus on my career and other aspects of my life. I don't want to just let time go by like I used to."

"You can work while we continue to hang out."

"Ball. I'm not ready to allocate my time to a relationship. For a while, why don't we just keep our distance?"

"So you asked to meet today to break up with me."

"I just want to set things straight between us."

So you can stop sending me love messages and move on.

"Why did you give me hope? Why did you tell me to wait for you?"

I shake my head slowly,

"I never asked you to wait for me."

He was the one who tried to stay in touch while I was away for my degree.

"Sometimes we just need to leave our adolescent ways behind and move forward."

Perhaps I'm too cold-blooded. The guy I have been hanging out with since my senior year of college gets up and marches out of the restaurant. He didn't look back or leave a 500 baht bill for his share of the food.

I look at my watch again... I have a 10-minute break.

The waitress comes over as soon as I wave.

"Could you please clear these plates?"

The woman in a uniform nods and clears Ball's plate, leaving behind the smoked salmon pizza with one piece missing.

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**Number 2**

'I'm here' (5:35 p.m.)

'I'm already inside.' (Read)

I look up from responding to my chat message to see a handsome man, whom I haven't seen since I went to New York, enter through the glass door. His striking eyes scan the restaurant for a brief moment before he beams a bright smile at me.

"Have you been waiting long? I thought I'd arrived early. You've also already placed an order."

He looks at the pizza tray, which has 7 pieces left.

"I ordered it while I was waiting for you. Do you want to order something.

Phi Mix?"

"Please order for me."

I don't reply verbally. I simply put the menu in front of him so he can make his own decision As he waits for his food, the second guy I arranged to meet eats the second piece of pizza from the tray as an appetizer.

"Did you change your hair color?"

I nod.

"I went to see you at your house, but your father said you weren't there... Why didn't you tell me that you were back? You've been back for a while, right? I was afraid we'd never meet again."

"Please eat first. Let's talk later."

I don't like men who come to my house looking for me. That is why I need to clear things up with him.

The conversation is not going well. Phi Mix's eyes no longer sparkle like they did when he arrived. Once he's finished eating, I get right to the point.

"Phi Mix, I want to clear things up."

Twenty minutes later, a man named Mix walks out of the restaurant, furious and disappointed I ask the waitress to clear the plates once more, excluding the pizza. There are 6 slices of pizza remaining.

I'm glad I set aside so much time before my next appointment. Phi Mix's meeting cut into my next appointment by ten minutes. I was fortunate that the next person did not arrive on time, and thus they did not meet.

I proceed to meet the third, fourth, and fifth person as the remaining slices of pizza are consumed.

It's almost 9 p.m., and I'm at Number 6... I have a lot to discuss with this guy. That's why he's the last one on the list. I do not wish to be concerned with the time.

"Phi Golf... I'm here."

Phi Golf is the only guy I've allowed to get closer to me than anyone else. He's a spender. His family is extremely wealthy. He enjoys flaunting money and wasting it.

He is very easygoing and will go wherever I invite him. He's a fun person to be around. Most importantly, he always covers my expenses... But that's okay. Today, I will treat everyone to a meal.

"This is for the beautiful lady."

With a broad smile, he hands me a large bouquet. He parted his thick black hair down the middle, resembling a Korean actor.

"How long have you been here? There are just two slices of pizza left... Actually, you've recently returned from the United States. I assumed you would grow tired of western food."

I had intended to eat Korean shabu, but Hwan-Jeab stopped me.

*'You run the risk of suffering serious burns and possibly losing your attractiveness if they get so angry that they splash hot soup on your face.'*

This is why I chose to end my relationships with a cold tray of pizza at a trendy Italian restaurant in the central business district. Actually, if the fourth guy didn't eat two slices, there should still be three left.

"What do you want to eat, Phi Golf? Let's order."

He's like the other five guys I met today. He's just someone I chatted with or hung out with when I was lonely. We flirted. We held hands. We exchanged gifts. We also dated. But I wasn't that into him.

I dislike his occasional attempts to touch me too intimately or his assertion of ownership over me. All I wanted was to have fun and enjoy being pampered. I was simply taking advantage of my attractive looks.

"Did you change your hair color?"

He asks the same questions as the other guys.

"Yes."

"Your outfit today is really cute. I like how sweet you look. He extends his arm over the table to sweep my hair behind my ear. But I lean back and unconsciously brush his hand away. He pauses and scowls for a moment before smiling again,

"Has it been too long since we last met?"

"How's Germany?"

I deliberately changed the subject.

"I don't want to talk about Germany right now. I want to talk about us."

The same waitress, who has been clearing the plates on my table and observing the situation since I arrived, slowly places Phi Golf's order on the table. It appears as though she is viewing the same film for the sixth time.

"What do you want to talk about?"

"Are you still looking for work? My friend, who owns a business, is looking for a graphic designer. I can put you in touch with him. Are you interested?"

"I'm currently preoccupied with other matters. I'm not actively looking for work just yet."

"So, what exactly are you doing?"

"Ah... I was wondering if you'd touched base with Phi Pay I've been unable to contact him since I got back."

"Why do you want to contact him?"

"I need his assistance with something."

Phi Golf extends his hand to grab mine, but I pull my hand away.

"Why are you being so cold to me today?"

"Can we focus on Phi Pay first?"

"Is it true that you and Phi Pay were dating?"

He chuckles, as if he's reached a conclusion.

"So you wanted to meet with me today to ask about Phi Pay? Will you break up with me like you did with the others after that?"

Anyone who has ever had their plan uncovered and then left feeling numb can relate to how I feel right now.

"What are you talking about?"

Even though he is laughing, his eyes are hard.

"We proChapter :ly really didn't meet for too long. Is that why you forgot that I always arrive early for an appointment? Six slices of pizza are missing. I'll ask you directly, 'How many guys are you breaking up with today?"

"Which one did you see?"

I signal the waitress to bring me the bill, even though Phi Golf is still eating.

"How can you do this? How many guys did you hang out with while you were with me?"

Phi Golf is starting to raise his voice.

"Keep your voice down, Phi Golf.

Aren't you embarrassed?"

"You do not appear to be embarrassed about what you did. Why are you so embarrassed now?"

"You knew from the beginning that we were never in a serious relationship. However, you insisted on making us a couple. Because you were sure you could outspend everyone else, you showered me with cash. I simply let it be. I don't believe you were unaware that I was hanging out with someone else. They came before I met you."

The person listening falls silent. It's not like he didn't know. He's simply upset that he's not more important than others.

"And, yes. I wanted to meet with you today to sort things out."

I place the money for the food on the table and leave my final words.

"Today, I'm treating you. If you are not yet full, you are welcome to stay and finish the meal."

I exit the restaurant and proceed to a dark gray sedan in the parking lot. But before I can open the door and get inside the car, someone grabs my arm so forcefully that I lose my balance. I am dragged to another vehicle

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"Get in!"

"Let me go, Phi Golf!"

"If you want to know where Phi Pay is, get in!"

I look at him hesitantly. But before I can make up my mind, he opens his car door and shoves me inside. His rage has driven him insane. Feeling unsafe, I kick his shin and struggle to get out of the car.

However, Phi Golf blocks my path and shuts the door. Everyone simply stands by and observes. They are too scared to step in and help because they think it's a marital dispute.

I jump at the chance to open the door and dash away as soon as Phi Golf circles the car to get in the driver's seat. Phi Golf chases me down and grabs my arm again.

Once again, I lose my balance, this time twisting my ankle. I almost fall to the ground, but the enraged person lifts me and places me back in the front passenger seat.

"Don't make me use force on you!"

Phi Golf clenches his jaw and threatens me while speaking through his teeth. The burning pain in my cheekbone and ribs from the mafia punch is still fresh in my mind.

That, combined with the intense pain in my ankle, causes me to remain motionless. By the time I realize that going with him could lead to worse consequences, the car is already turning out of the parking lot.

I immediately dial my father's number, but the man reaches over and takes my phone from me.

***Crash!!!***

There is an abrupt collision. The owner of the brand-new car must be crushed to hear the sound of the car's front parts breaking because Phi Golf, enraged, bolts from the vehicle.

The black BMW's headlights are still on when the breathtakingly beautiful driver steps out of the car in her high heels to inspect the damage from the head-on collision with Phi Golf's brand-new car.

"Is anyone injured?"

The woman inquires in a sweet and steady tone that does not quite fit the situation. While her brows furrow slightly, her eyes smile as if she is unaware of the gravity of the situation...

...*Phi Ploy.*

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# Chapter 08 : Player one

"Do you know how to drive? Do women simply drive, oblivious to their surroundings?"

When Phi Golf notices that his right headlight is shattered into pieces, he becomes visibly agitated. In addition, his front bumper has come off and is hanging loose.

"Didn't you see me turn out of the parking lot?"

The woman in high heels observes the frustrated demeanor of the person she is conversing with. However, she maintains a soft and emotionless tone of voice.

"I was driving straight down my lane. You should have seen me if your side mirror was working properly or was not hazy... unless some guy was oblivious to his surroundings."

When the initial shock wears off, I leap out of the car, as if it's my opportunity to flee or I can't wait to be by Phi Ploy's side.

"Get back in the car!"

The lunatic keeps assuming control as if I care. I stagger forward until I reach Phi Ploy's side without uttering a word. Phi Ploy scans me from head to toe.

"Go wait inside my car."

Seeing her here was completely unexpected. It caught me by surprise. However, my life has been so full of unexpected events that the unexpected is to be expected.

"Get back in the car, Pun!"

"Let go of me, Phi Golf!"

"I said, Get back in the car!"

Phi Golf firmly grasps my arm and clamps down on it. He stares at me threateningly as he tries to drag me back and confine me inside his car.

"Hey."

Phi Ploy casually interrupts the argument between Phi Golf and me. We turn to face the person who is standing with her arms crossed over her chest.

"Do you have any connections to high-ranking officials in the system?"

The only man present pauses, puzzled. He then abruptly raises his index finger, as if recognizing something.

"I know you're a celebrity. But you should not have asked that question."

His eyes are filled with arrogance.

"Do you want to be in the news?"

The celebrity among us smiles amusingly, as if she's conversing with an adolescent rascal.

"How many years for the charges?"

"What are you saying?"

Now that he knows he's being threatened, Phi Golf seems even more agitated than before. Moreover, he doesn't quite grasp what Phi Ploy is trying to convey.

"How many years will you serve for assault and battery, kidnapping, and the other offenses that you intend to commit against her?... I don't want to get involved in other people's affairs, but she doesn't appear to want to go with you."

"I think you should make better use of your time by taking a driving lesson."

"I also think that, at your age, it is better to live life than to pick up soaps and form close bonds with prison inmates. You're not going to have much fun after this unless you have connections with someone high up in the system. Her father is a reputable and high-ranking police officer. If he discovers that you are attempting to force her into your car, or if anything happens to her after this, he will not allow you to live in peace. No pardon will be extended, and further charges may be levied against your case. He has extensive personal relationships with everyone working in the legal system. By the time you leave prison with a criminal record, you will have ruined your future prospects. A hasty choice can have far-reaching consequences for your life."

The amount of happiness radiating from Phi Ploy's dimples is beyond what I've ever witnessed.

"I would seek out a woman who is willing to accompany me if I were in your shoes... that's way cooler."

Phi Golf frees my arm from his grip. In his wrath, his normally pale face flushes red. His nostrils are widened as a result of his heavy breathing. His appearance stands in stark contrast to the cheerful woman's.

I haven't seen Phi Ploy make a call, but the insurance agent who represents her shows up in less than 20 minutes. According to what I see, Phi Golf's insurance will have to cover the cost of repairing Phi Ploy's vehicle.

Phi Golf retreats after the insurance companies complete their procedures in his bumperless car with smashed headlights and a bad driving record. His insurance premiums will almost certainly Increase next year.

Meanwhile, Phi Ploy's black BMW is spotless, save for a small ding on the left side of her front bumper. As for myself, I want to extend my apologies to everyone involved. I am guilty of all charges, from the past to the present, including this incident.

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"Did Phi Ploy crash her car into Phi Golf last night?"

"She crashed into Phi Golf's car as he was leaving the parking lot."

"You were extremely fortunate to have escaped from him last night. I don't want to say you deserved it, but you did bring it on yourself."

"I'm aware of that, Jeab."

"You got involved with him. His actions were a reaction to the pain you inflicted upon him. I understand where he was coming from, but he took the wrong approach. As for you, you're too heartless... If I didn't know your background or weren't your friend, I'd describe you as flirtatious and eager to get involved with anyone."

"What exactly do you mean by getting involved? I have not given anyone the status of 'boyfriend'."

"You led them on. You hung out with them. You didn't give them a status, but you also didn't cut them loose. You flirted around with everyone. You acted as if they were your boyfriends, but you refused to let them kiss you, engage in intimate activities, take you home, or claim ownership of you."

"I'm just friendly."

"Still arguing..."

Hwan-jeab places her elbow on the table, rests her chin on her hand, and shoots me an icy stare.

"Jeab, I am free to socialize with anyone because I am not committed to anyone and do not have a boyfriend. I may not be as pretty as others, but I care about everyone equally."

"Pun, you haven't learned your lesson."

I scrunch my face and brush my hair to the back.

"Okay, I am fully aware that what I did was wrong."

"Pun. I don't understand what happened when you kissed Phi B in your freshman year and why it turned you into someone who enjoys breaking people's hearts. The fact that you do not engage in sexual intimacy with them is, in my opinion, your sole redeeming quality."

Yes. Phi B gets extremely intimate. Her exquisite figure is a public treasure that no one can truly own. And except for me, many beautiful women at the university have been touched by those public hands.

"You've changed since that night, Pun. For some reason, you feel the need to tell everyone that you don't like women. And look at you now. You became this person. You toy with other people's emotions. Did Phi B unleash the devil centipede on you and make you her heir?"

"I think you watch too many soap operas, Jeab."

Phi B didn't unleash any centipedes on me. She just taught me not to get too emotionally Invested in anything. Even if we had a passionate kiss that night, she might have woken up to find herself naked in someone else's bed...

You will not be hurt if you do not become emotionally involved. That is why, with the exception of joyful feelings, I choose to set aside my emotions when I spend time with someone.

"Gosh. I don't want to talk to you anymore... What about Phi Ploy? What happened last night?"

"Phi Ploy..."

Unknowingly, I attempt to hide a smile.

"We returned to the condominium together in her car."

"What about your car?"

"I left it in the restaurant's parking lot. I just took a taxi to go get it this morning."

My best friend stares at me, as if she's waiting for an explanation.

"I told her I didn't have a ride home and asked to go back with her. She concurred with my request. When we got back to the condo, I invited her to a meal as a thank you for her help. She said she was available today. We decided to have breakfast at 6 a.m. because she wanted to give alms to the monk first."

"So you have gotten a little closer to her."

"Closer, my ass! I woke up late. Why else would I have ended up here with you? I called her, but she didn't answer. She is proChapter :ly working."

"You also got her number."

"I've got everything I need... I have to get this woman, Jeab."

"The dust from your old cases hasn't settled, and you're starting a new one."

There are moments when I wish my best friend's manner manual included instructions on how to hide her contempt for me.

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Ultimately, I didn't meet the woman I had my sights set on that day. During the day, when I'm not *hunting down* Phi Ploy, I dedicate my free time to seeking employment.

If I am unable to return to the United States, I should find a steady job, as money is essential for daily living. Meanwhile, my hobby will be tracking down Phi Pay.

My friends in the States, including Jeong-ah, occasionally contact me.

*'Pay hasn't contacted me'.*

That continues to be Phi Oam's response whenever I inquire.

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After the day of the accident, Phi Golf disappeared. There has been no sighting of Phi Ploy all week as well. She didn't show up in Phi Jay's room, the condo's swimming pool, or anywhere else.

Until one evening.

***Rrrrrrr!***

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**"Hello, Prang."**

**[What are your plans for tomorrow morning?]**

**"Why are you asking?"**

**[I would like to invite you to go give alms at the temple.]**

**"What time?"**

**[Let's meet at 6 a.m. in front of our rooms.]**

**"Geez, 6 a.m... I'm not available,"**

**[What will you be doing?]**

**That is not a question. Prang is scolding me because she knows I lied.**

**"Sleep."**

**[Pun, you need to do some good every now and then. Let's go instill some positive thoughts in your mind.]**

**"I don't want to go. It's too early."**

**[Don't be late, Pun. Phi Ploy will join us. I don't want to be rude.]**

Phi Ploy will join us. How can I pass up this opportunity?

**"Okay, 6 a.m."**

I realized how difficult it would be to see her again after ditching her the last time. I've already missed one opportunity; I won't miss another.

If a sin scanner is present at the entrance, I will undoubtedly be unable to enter the temple, as my motivation for almsgiving is not pure.

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The next morning, at 6 a.m., I dress all in white and stand in front of Phi Jay's room, looking cute.

The four of us load the food and items intended for the monk's alms into the car. I admit that I am not starting the day impressively. During our ride to the temple, I fall asleep and lean against Phi Ploy.

Then, while the monk is praying, Prang has to pinch my waist to wake me up. I only become fully awake when we release the fish back into the river. "I am convinced that karma binds people together. Good deeds done by one another will bring us together again as allies, guiding each other along the road to righteousness. However, if we treat each other badly, we will inevitably cross paths again and continue to inflict harm on one another through our thoughts, words, or actions. What we do to one another now will have repercussions when we cross paths again." "Is this why you like to give alms to monks?"

"I'm not very knowledgeable about religious teachings."

Phi Ploy giggles.

"I don't do it to seek wealth or anything like that. I simply believe that it gives us a concrete way to exercise our minds while also supporting our religion. But, in fact, I believe that we can exercise our minds at any time, beginning with our family, friends, and pets. Being generous and doing good deeds for others are excellent places to begin, We can make an effort to think and speak positively at all times. Even if it doesn't benefit others, it does benefit us by purifying our thoughts. If we repeatedly practice something until it becomes our instinct, we will train our brain to think good things. It will shape our attitude. Our optimism or pessimism is influenced by what we consume and practice. Morality, mindfulness, intelligence, and consequences-all of this strikes me as very scientific."

"What about the next life?"

"I don't know. We will have to wait until I pass away before I can provide you with an answer to that."

"I need a statistical answer, so please provide me with three numbers." Phi Ploy gives me an adoring look.

"Even without karma or sin, do good deeds with or for one another, such as..."

Phi Ploy's umbrella is opened, and my arm is pulled so that I stand beneath it.

"Sharing an umbrella with a sleepy kid who is unprepared for the day could turn her bad intention into a good one... Cause and effect are linked."

Phi Ploy's straightforward words struck a chord deep inside of me, making me feel like a cow with a wound on its back (a metaphor for someone who has done wrong and is carrying guilt).

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I doodle my feelings in the notebook, where I scribble down design concepts. Sitting in my condo by the floor-to-ceiling window, I allow my thoughts to wander.

My memories are being transferred onto the white papers. My graphic design skills transform my doodle into a sketch. I manipulate my pencils with different weights and incorporate shadows to add dimensions to my drawing.

The sketch is taking shape as a facial frame and striking eyes of the person... who is constantly occupying my thoughts.

I'm not sure how long I have been sitting in the same position. All I know is that I thoroughly enjoy and am delighted to examine that face in my mind.

The combination of her silky locks, perceptive eyes, dimples, facial features, and skeletal movements gives her an irresistible sweetness-not an empty sugar rush, but an intense, refined sweetness that words fail to capture.

My expertise is in communicating with images rather than the words of an author. As a result, the image on the paper that's making me smile expresses my emotions far better than any word could.

This afternoon, the company where I went for an interview extended an offer to me. This means I won't have as much time to plan how to find Phi Pay in the coming days. Maybe I need to shift gears.

The sky is turning dark. Leaving the couch vacant, I get up and reach for my smartphone resting on the table. I pace around, my gaze fixed on the chat application on my phone. I am uncertain about whether to initiate contact with her.

*Hello, Phi Ploy.*

That's too formal... I delete the message I didn't send and begin typing a new one.

*Hello. This is Pun.*

She obviously knows that this ID belongs to me. What's the point of introducing myself? I delete yet another unsent message.

*Are you available, Phi Ploy? How about we go out tonight?*

I spend twenty minutes repeatedly typing a new message and erasing the old one. Eventually. I decide to call Best.

"Best."

"Yes, love. Have you changed your mind and decided to be my wife?"

"I'd like to flirt with Phi Ploy through messages, but I'm not sure what to send."

"Here in Thailand, we're living in the 5G era. How about you simply go to her room?"

"What excuse could I possibly have for doing that? We're not that close."

"Get close to her today."

"How?"

"Are you sick or something, Pun? You were an expert at flirting with men. Just do what you usually do when you flirt."

"It's not the same, Best."

"How is it not the same?"

"Men usually approach me. And I don't feel this awkward when I flirt with men. I really don't know what to do. I don't know what the limits are. I'm afraid that she would think poorly of me."

"Pun. Why are you so concerned? You're NOT acting normal."

The person on the other end of the line emphasizes her point.

"You're wasting my time, Best. Stop trying to read my mind and get to the point. How should I go about approaching Phi Ploy?"

"Apply makeup in a makeup-no-makeup style. But go for a bold lip color and a pair of shorts that will turn heads. Show off your greatest asset, whatever it may be. Adopt a sweet yet slightly edgy style. Then go to her room. Invite her to a play, a Thai traditional dance, or whatever. But don't just ask her directly. Ask her with an enticing smile. Keep the conversation going and find a way into her room. Use the gifts your mother gave you when she gave birth to your full potential. When you talk to her, pretend to unknowingly reveal what you have here and there. Also tries to get intimate with her. Gently brush against her. If she responds, seize the opportunity to kiss, caress, and grab her. You're both women, so there's nothing to worry about. You're not serious about this relationship anyway... are you?"

"Do you have any less hardcore strategies? This could be too scary."

"This IS the less scary strategy. I was more hardcore with Phi Boy."

I put my hands over my head.

"Thank you, Best. I've got to go."

"Why are you in such a hurry... You don't actually like Phi Ploy, or do you, Pun?"

"No, I don't like her."

"It's game over if you fall in love with your target, Pun."

"I have high tolerance, Best. Okay?"

"Would you like to test your strategy with me to ensure you don't fall for her?"

"There's no need for that! I've got to go."

.

After hanging up, I can't help but laugh at my friend's cheekiness. I then called Hwan-jeab to seek advice from another friend.

"I am not sure where your confidence and flirtatious skills have gone. But if you want to win quickly in this game, get them back. Be yourself. Consider Phi Ploy one of your hangout friends. She is no more special than anyone else. Use this attitude."

Hwan-jeab's words sparked my cold-blooded cell to action. Once again, I turn to the chat application.

.

**PUN:**

**The trip to the temple today to give alms was enjoyable. I feel wonderful.**

.

I eventually sent a message to Phi Ploy. I recline on the couch, set the phone back on the table, and stare at it. I'm suddenly addicted to my phone and social media, as if I suffer from nomophobia.

Do you think she has seen my message yet? The notification must already have appeared on her screen... I can't take the suspense any longer, so I grab my phone and check the status.

It's been ten minutes, and she still hasn't read my message.

It was a simple message. Why do I feel so nervous? I didn't care when my friend didn't respond to my chat message for over ten days. When I realized this, I put down the phone.

I pick up the novel Doctor Sleep and resume where I left off. However, I have to put down the novel after reading five lines because I am unable to concentrate.

I'm becoming increasingly frustrated, so I go to the bathroom to distract myself. I fill the bathtub with water and soak in it naked.

"You can read today or answer tomorrow for all I care."

After I have vented to myself, I close my eyes and try to let go of everything. But then I hear a ding, and I jump out of the tub, still drenched, and run to my phone in the bedroom.

.

**THE BEST:**

**Have you reached the endgame, love? ^3^**

**THE BEST:**

**If you can't do what I've taught you, you can come to my room for a trial run**

.

It's a mix of disappointment and frustration that my friend caused me to stand naked in my bedroom, wetting the floor with the water dripping from my body. Why did you have to send me a message now, Best!

As I'm about to return to the bathroom, I hear another ding. Despite my racing heart, my defense mechanism quickly warns me that it's proChapter :ly another message from Best' to spare me another disappointment.

I slowly lean in to look at the phone. I'm excitedly anticipating what I'll see before screaming out loud when I see what's on my phone's lock screen.

.

**PLOY:**

**Uh-huh.**

.

Phi Ploy answered me AT LAST!

With a broad grin on my face, I return to the restroom, leaving my phone behind.

I'm not going to respond just yet. I'm going to make her wait. Having her response on my lock screen makes me feel much better than sending her a message and waiting for her reply.

Despite my intentions, I don't spend nearly as much time in the bathtub as I had planned. My phone currently has too much pull.

I wrap up my personal business, clean up the wet floor, and walk back to smile at my phone. However, the screen still only shows one 'uh-huh' message.

*What is this? I'm flirting with you!*

Is she not at all interested in me? How dare she just give me one quick response and then disappear? I will not allow this woman to undermine my confidence in my appearance and breasts. But I'm not going to lower my own self-esteem by pestering her.

That night, I go to Phi Jay's room for dinner with a broad smile on my face... a broad smile to conceal my annoyance.

I then return to my room and use my computer to research shoes and fashion trends. You need a good conversation starter to approach a woman, right?

.

. .

Late evening the following day, as I'm coming up with various ways to get closer to Phi Ploy, my phone alerts me to a message notification. I was expecting it to be from one of my friends, but it wasn't.

.

**PLOY:**

**Would you like to go again?**

**.**

Before reading and responding. I allowed some time for my heart to dance. Despite knowing what she meant, I feign curiosity....

.

**PUN:**

**Go where? (read)**

**PLOY:**

**Go to give aims to the monk.**

**PUN:**

**Will you be joining me? (read)**

**PLOY.**

**Will you oversleep and ditch me again?**

**Can I reply to that question with my action? (read)**

**PLOY:**

**You can respond to me at 6 a.m. on the next Buddhist holy day.**

.

This time, Phi Ploy reads and replies to my messages right away. My blood circulation is so strong that my face flushes, prompting me to cover it with a blanket and snuggle up to my pillow.

What is it with her? Yesterday, her response was so brief that I became frustrated, but today she has asked me out.

.

**PUN:**

**May I respond before the next Buddhist holy day? (read)**

**PLOY: ?**

**PUN:**

**I came across a chic restaurant on the internet. I would like to invite you to join me. (read)**

**PUN: I would like to express my gratitude for your assistance the other day. (read)**

**PLOY: Can you send me some pictures first?**

.

Shit! I don't have any pictures to send. I made it all up. When I asked her out, no trendy restaurant sprang to mind. I plan to find one after she accepts my invitation

**Will you accompany me if the location is kept secret for the time being? (read)**

**PLOY:**

**Should I?**

**PUN:**

**I really hope you will come. (read)**

.

One minute... three minutes... eight minutes... The message has been read for eight minutes without receiving a response. I'm tired of waiting and guessing her answer. And after nine minutes,

**PLOY:**

**Where are you right now?**

**PUN:**

**I'm at the condo. (read)**

**PLOY:**

**I'm available tonight. I will meet you in front of your room in thirty minutes, if that's alright with you.**

.

Even though I had no idea where to take her, I immediately said, '*Okay*'. Also, there is a stupid pimple on my chin. However, if I don't seize this opportunity now, I fear that the chance to grow closer to her may not present itself easily, just like the last time I ditched her.

As a result, Phi Ploy's chat is quickly closed, and my friend group chat is immediately opened.

.

**SOS!!! (read)**

**PUN:**

**Who's reading this? I urgently need help!!! (read)**

**THE BEST:**

**What is the level of urgency? If it's not too urgent, I'll come back after my private time with Phi Boy.**

**PUN:**

**Code Blue!**

**CKrit:**

**What's Code Blue?**

**Can't be sweeter than this:**

**It's a medical term for when the patient goes into cardiac or respiratory arrest. Have you not watched Grey's Anatomy?**

**THE BEST:**

**Are you extremely hungry?**

**Can't be sweeter than this:**

**@THE BEST people must move on. Let the dead be. We, the living, should keep watching the series.**

**PUN:**

**Phi Ploy likes Thai food. It could be Thai fusion. The place should have a pleasant, relaxing atmosphere. I also want a place that isn't too crowded so we can spend some quality time together. It should be a suitable setting for dating a classy woman. I give you twenty minutes. Whoever sends me a location that I end up choosing will be treated to scones.**

**Can't be sweeter than this:**

**Oh.**

**THE BEST: Wow**

**CKrit:**

**Okay.**

.

After sending a message to the PKJB (Pun, Krit, Jeab, Best) group, I quickly run over to get dressed, put on makeup, and spritz some perfume all over my body and hair.

I feel like I'm back in the days of dressing up to flirt with men in nightclubs. The only difference is that my feeling is one of excitement rather than enjoyment. My stomach is knotted up.

Photos from a wide variety of eateries have been flooding the group chat. Chakrit will be the one who gets to eat the free scones.

Can't be sweeter than this:

I paused my live product sales to assist you. Why is Krit getting the free scone?

**CKrit:**

**Do not be envious.**

**PUN:**

**Don't fight. I'll treat everyone.**

.

***Ding...***

I stop responding to my friends' messages and take one last look at myself in the mirror before reaching for my purse. I walk confidently up to the door and open it. My date and I are standing face-to-face.

I give her the most endearing look I can muster, letting it linger. I gently parted my lips to offer the exquisite woman a bright, delicate smile.

Welcome. I am pleased to invite you all to my hunting hours.

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# Chapter 09: Butterfly

The silky hair is swept behind the ear to highlight the striking facial features and glowing skin on the neck. The makeup is soft to highlight her dewy skin, which is a departure from her usual sexy and intriguing look.

She is dressed in a flowy white shirt with sheer fabric. Despite her simple outfit, she elevates the look with a stunning pair of high heels and a low-cut shirt. That plunging shirt shows off some very sexy skin.

If Best catches a glimpse of what I'm seeing, she will stop wanting me as her wife and instead moan Phi Ploy's name.

However, what drew my attention and held it was her seductive smile and sparkling eyes when she asked,

"How's it going?"

I slowly wipe the smile off my face, close the door, and approach her.

"This way, my lady."

The dimples on Phi Ploy's cheeks make an appearance when I greet her and sweep my hand towards the hallway. "Don't you have to work today?"

"I have been working since yesterday."

When the ambrosial woman notices my confused expression, she proceeds to provide further explanation.

"After we went to the temple, I had to leave town for work. I've just returned from my trip and arrived at my room."

Was this the reason her response was so brief yesterday?

"Am I interfering with your downtime?"

Phi Ploy shakes her head. We stroll alongside each other until we arrive at my car.

"I'll drive. Would you like to give me the route or tell me where we're going?"

Phi Ploy extends her hand to me, requesting the car key. With selfpermission, I instead offer her my hand. I lead her to the passenger's side, open the door, and adjust the seat to its most comfortable position.

"I want to drive for you."

I recently discovered and talked to Hwan-jeab about the softness of Phi Ploy's hand. She has the lovely nails and fingers of someone who takes excellent care of herself. How I could possibly fit into this person's life is beyond me.

I must admit that I frequently glance over at my companion while driving. I like Phi Ploy in this look better than I anticipated. It's a sweet and innocent look.

It's a look that exudes confidence while remaining delicate enough to make you want to give her the best care possible.

It didn't take long to get to our destination. I park my car in the parking lot of a Thai-Japanese restaurant. The restaurant is primarily decorated with plants and features warm lighting.

To create a sense of space, the structure is designed to look like a glass house.

*I believe I should get 8 or 8.5 out of 10 for choosing this restaurant.*

After we sit down, I examine the expression on the person I invited to assess my rating. The dimples on her cheeks indicate her level of satisfaction with my selection on a scale from one to ten.

To me, a score of 8.5 is not bad.

"Have you been here before?"

"Does this visit count?"

Phi Ploy responds with a question. I simply smile and look down at the menu, not answering her question to my question.

I wait for her to place her order before ordering dishes that feature fish and seafood as main ingredients, such as grilled scallops with garlic, Southernstyle sour curry with sablefish, and grilled squid with chili and ginger... The villain actress loves seafood. I did my homework well.

I was a bit worried about our chemistry before we came here. I've never made an advance on anyone before. She's older than me. It may be challenging for two people who don't know much about each other or their preferences to spend hours dining together and keep the conversation flowing.

However, if you wish to venture into the bear's enclosure, you will need to don a bear costume. If I ever want to be a part of Phi Ploy's life, I must first get to know her and learn about her preferences, lifestyle, and interests.

As a result, our conversation ranges from shoe brands to fashion color trends, cosmetics, and the food she enjoys cooking when she comes across an interesting menu. The topic even ventures into...

"So you were the one who taught Phi Prang to cook?"

"Prang forced me to."

She narrows her eyes and whispers to me.

"Don't you want to open a restaurant? Your passion for cooking is evident to me. Phi Ploy's eyes light up when she talks about her passions.

"From my brother's business, I've seen how hectic things can be... I prefer to cook for my close friends."

"I just realized that you have a brother."

I cast a brief glance at her before returning my attention to my plate of food, attempting to conceal my interest in her *brother*.

"I have one brother. He opens a restaurant in New York."

As Phi Ploy puts the shared spoon back where it belongs, the sound of metal striking ceramic echoes. It makes me question whether I'm maintaining an appropriate poker face.

"I just returned from New York. What is the name of the place? Perhaps I know it."

"Let's eat Thai. It's in the Brooklyn neighborhood. Have you heard of it?"

"New York has many Thai restaurants. I'm not sure if I've been there... Have you ever paid your brother a visit?"

"I haven't visited him for a long time."

"Are you close to your brother?"

"I'm close to everyone who's cute."

Does that mean she's close to him or not?

"Try this. I think you will like it."

The most delicious part of a sablefish is placed on Phi Ploy's plate. The woman with the striking features smiles back at me in gratitude.

"Who's better at cooking?"

"Hmm?"

"Who is a better cook, you or your brother? Have you ever competed?"

"We are both good, but in different ways."

Phi Ploy blinks slowly and looks deep into my eyes as if she's dead serious. However, she appears to be teasing me as well.

"It depends on the person's eating preferences."

"When I was in New York, I wanted to open a Thai restaurant, but I had no experience in that field. I thought it would be helpful if I knew someone who owned a restaurant in New York so I could ask for advice on hiring and obtaining permits... Does your brother come home on occasion? I'd love to see you two in the kitchen."

"He just came back."

The woman with dimples wipes the corner of her mouth with a piece of tissue. She maintains the brightness in her eyes as she places her fork and spoon together to indicate that she is finished with her meal.

"If I want-"

I lose my voice as Phi Ploy leans over and looks me in the eye.

"You have exhausted your quota for asking me questions tonight. Could I ask you some questions instead?"

*Damn!* I was about to get the information I needed.

"Sure."

"Do you like women?"

She is overly skilled at staring and expressing her emotions through her eyes. She rests her chin on her palm, places her elbow on the table, and concentrates her entire attention on me. I can once again see those dimples on her cheeks.

"Whether or not I like women depends on who is asking the question."

"I'm the one posing the question to you."

"You're looking at me as if I'm a little kid."

"I have no idea that I'm looking at you in such a manner. But if we were to compare ages, I am older than you."

***Click!***

I grab my phone from the table and take a picture of her.

"Here."

I turn the screen to the person staring at me with adoration.

"This is how you look at me. You look at me as if I'm an immature kid."

Phi Ploy squints at the phone without paying much attention to it. She then tilts her head away from the phone and fixes her eyes on me once again.

"You're not answering my question."

"Well..."

When I stutter, Phi Ploy returns to her upright position.

"What was your question? I believe I have answered all of them."

"I asked... if you like women."

*Direct and to the point.*

When those eyes meet mine, time seems to stand still. My mind races as I quickly search through my lifelong memories for the most appropriate response. Do I like women?

How should I respond to *this question*? I'm not even sure if I've ever truly liked anyone. I never yearned for anyone. Phi Bi may have had some influence on me as a freshman in college. That's it.

*No*.

I respond to everyone with that answer without giving it any thought. However, in front of this woman, that word refuses to leave my mouth. The gravity of my words is too significant for me to speak hastily.

What alarms me is that, deep down, I'm aware that my hesitation isn't a result of wanting to approach her in order to find Phi Pay.

"Is my question too difficult for you to answer?"

Phi Ploy sets her gaze on me. Her expressionless eyes and smile reveal nothing. Despite this, I have the impression that she can read me like an open book.

"No, the question is not hard to answer. But I'd rather respond to that question with my actions... Meeting more frequently will help you get the answer."

The person who got her response remains silent. She simply looks at me adoringly, her dimples reappearing before she sips her water.

I'm so embarrassed. I am embarrassed by how I flirted with her just now. My entire body is flushing, and I'm feeling unusually anxious.

We spend more time discussing broad subjects. There's no uneasiness or dead air. We're both in a good mood and have a lively discussion. I begin to appreciate Phi Ploy's response of asking a question that prompts me to think deeper.

I like how she looks at me. In her sparkling eyes, it's as if she finds joy in my every move. Or perhaps this is her charm... It's so alluring. She makes everyone around her feel good.

I requested the bill, and it is now in front of me.

*We ordered only a few items from the menu... yet this meal costs nearly two thousand baht...*

This price already includes a 30% discount for cash payments!

I expected the place to be expensive, but I did not expect to find only one 500 Baht bill, three 100 Baht bills, and a few green (20 Baht) bills in my wallet when I opened it.

*No matter how many times I add it up, it's less than one thousand.*

The stares from Phi Ploy and the waitress put me under pressure.

"Ah... I think I'll buy something back for Phi Prang and Phi Jay... Can I have the menu again?"

I direct my request to the waitress. She acknowledges my request and proceeds to fetch the menu for me.

Having placed one last takeout order, I excuse myself to the restroom. Stealthily making my way to the register, I approach a male employee and discreetly inquire.

"Excuse me. Can I use a cash transfer (Prompt Pay) here?"

My question is out of desperation. According to the reply I got, my credit card limit is going to take a serious beating.

"I apologize, Miss. We don't currently support that."

Okay. The response I received means that I will have to return to the table with a smile on my face, hand the waitress my credit card, and pay the full amount of the bill without any discounts.

"Don't we get a 30% discount if we pay with cash?"

When the beautiful woman sees me handing the credit card to the waitress, she interrupts us.

"Yes, Miss."

That was not me. The woman in the restaurant's uniform answers to Phi Ploy on my behalf. She's about to walk up to the cashier and transfer my asset to the restaurant in exchange for this meal.

I offer a dry smile to the woman with waves in her hair as she gazes at me.

"I was in such a hurry that I didn't grab any money when I left my room."

R.I.P. to my dignity and confidence in my appearance and breasts for today.

I dressed up as stylishly as I could and utilized all of my flirtatious skills to ask her out, saying that I wanted to treat her to a meal to show my gratitude.

I wanted to impress her by paying for the meal. However, it was Phi Ploy who eventually handed the waitress three gray bills, each worth 1000 baht, for this meal.

"Phi Ploy, I can pay with my credit card. You don't need to pay for this meal."

"The discount is worth several hundred Bahts. I'd rather it be in our pockets rather than the restaurant owner's."

I failed! Let me declare my failure right now! That's why I keep a grumpy expression the entire way back to the condo.

"Are you angry with me?"

The question Phi Ploy asks as we approach her door is more akin to playful banter. We are standing on the 42nd floor because I insisted on escorting her to her room.

"I'm angry at myself."

"And as a result, you're upset with me?"

"I wanted to treat you, but you wouldn't let me repay you."

"I'm free next week."

"Huh?"

"I will make a list of what you have to buy me in exchange for our meal today and send it to your chat. If you're okay, I will go to your room at 7:30 p.m. next Sunday."

"Huh?"

Does she mean we're making plans to meet again? Or does she simply want me to buy her something in exchange for the money I owe her?

The older woman leans against the wall, arms crossed over her chest. Her lips curve into a gentle giggle as she shuts her eyes. It's as if seeing me confused puts her in a good mood. "Does this mean you're fine with the plan?"

"Yes." I blink blankly.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone you just couldn't win? Have you ever met someone who consistently has the upper hand and leaves you in the dark?

"Ah... Good night then."

"Good night."

The smile we shared before parting stays with me, even when I'm back in my room screaming. Arghhhhhhhhhhhhh. Phi Ploy arranged our next meeting.

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My probation period with the Thai company is going well. The work is okay. The co-workers are nice. My boss complains a little too much, but that is fine. Even more than the weekends, it has been tonight's meeting with the ambrosial woman that I have been eagerly anticipating.

Though we haven't met in person all week, we text once or twice daily. I received the list of ingredients I needed to buy in my chat on Saturday. And at precisely 7:30 p.m. on Sunday, my doorbell rings.

"How's it going?"

We greet each other as soon as we meet. Phi Ploy is standing in the hallway. Her sparkling eyes are as bright as ever. Seeing her standing before me has made me realize how long this week has been and how thrilled I am to see her.

"Please come in."

I step aside to make way for her.

"Did you manage to get everything on the list?"

"Yes. And it still doesn't cost as much as our meal that day."

"Okay. Let's gather everything and head to my room. Let us prepare something for dinner in my kitchen."

Phi Ploy gathers the ingredients I've prepared and is about to move her buttocks out of my room.

"Should we invite Jay and Prang as well?"

I Immediately come to a halt and remain silent. Phi Ploy must have sensed something because she turns to face me.

"If you want others to join us tonight, please invite them."

"Does that mean you want me to invite them or not?"

"A big group could be fun."

I evade her gaze to conceal my dissatisfaction.

Phi Ploy tilts her head and gives a nod. With that, she walks over to the door. I wanted to grab her wrist, but I didn't. I wanted to tell her not to invite anyone else, but I kept quiet even though the words were right in my throat.

Eventually, I let the situation lead us to Phi Jay's door and wait for it to open after Phi Ploy rings the doorbell. However, not a single soul answers.

Phi Ploy complains that Phi Jay is about to go into lockdown because she wants to keep Prang all to herself, citing the gambling demon as an excuse.

Nevertheless, her amusement is evident as she vents her frustrations. As for me, I'm moody because the woman on the 42nd floor wanted to invite other people to our dinner... It makes me want to win.

"I'll cook the rice. I guarantee that the rice will be perfectly and evenly cooked. While my cooking skills are lacking, I am a master at rice cooking."

"Do you know how?"

"I am confident you will ask for a refill."

It is in the ambrosial woman's kitchen that we progress in our courtship. I refrain from acting irrationally or theatrically toward the woman in order to express my frustration (as I am not entitled to do so).

Instead, my face is painted with a broad smile as I take on the role of sous chef. I assist, care for her, and become her safe zone. She clearly appreciates it when I make honest comments about the food she prepared. "Orange was not on my list."

Phi Ploy looks at the freshly squeezed orange juice in the glass I just placed on the table before taking a sip.

"Do you like it?"

Who doesn't like orange juice, especially someone who's as healthy as Phi Ploy?

"There's more in the refrigerator. I keep it on hand for you."

She will think of me every time she drinks it.

Phi Ploy does not have any flaws. She is breathtakingly beautiful, wealthy, intelligent, and capable of taking care of herself. If I am unable to compensate for her flaws, I will strive to enhance her strengths... Let it be known that I will win this game.

Our conversation appears to expand as we get to know each other better. Thanks to the time we spent together and the chat messages we exchanged, we're able to connect and engage more naturally than before.

"Did you cook when you lived in NYC?"

"Sometimes... But my roommate always brings back food or cooks for me when he cooks. My only responsibility was to cook rice."

"You and your roommate seem very close."

I smile when I think about Phi Pay.

"Yes, we were."

We were so close that I almost signed a marriage certificate with him.

Phi Ploy poses more questions than she answers. In our conversations, she often asks me broad questions about my job and my thoughts on various topics. She will listen attentively without making any comments.

It gives me the impression that I speak far too much. I'm on a roll and feel compelled to share everything with her. I wish she would reveal something about herself as well.

So I start asking more questions and becoming more observant in order to avoid being the only person in this conversation who reveals too much.

"Have you read the book?"

We're discussing Doctor Sleep, a horror story that has been turned into a film and will be released in theaters soon. I discovered new information about Phi Ploy, which is that she has a passion for reading.

The wooden shelves are lined with best-selling English novels. More importantly, Phi Pay's signature with a date appears not only on the inside cover of The Alchemist but also in a number of other novels.

"More intriguing matters have arisen recently."

She shakes her head slowly. We're sitting on her balcony, taking in the breeze.

"It is difficult for me to find time to read."

"What are you currently interested in?"

From this vantage point, the lights from the residences and vehicles appear as tiny dots, decorating the night. An almost whisper-soft wind is caressing us. I long to tuck Phi Ploy's stray locks behind her ear as they cascade onto her cheek.

"ProChapter :ly food, work, and..."

She pauses to look at me before continuing.

"...someone."

*No. Pun. Don't smile. Don't you dare smile. You cannot let her flirt back.*

*Keep your cool. Be cool!*

"Ah."

I meet her gaze. But soon after, I avert my eyes to the night sky because I can no longer look into those eyes.

"Shall we go watch it together?"

"Huh?"

"If you don't have time to read, then let's go watch the movie togetherDoctor Sleep, I mean."

"You're inviting me to see a horror movie?"

Phi Ploy laughs... I just realized how much I adore the dimples on her cheeks when they're paired with those dazzling eyes... The longer I stare at her, the harder it becomes to tear my eyes away.

"Will you join me?"

"Will you buy me popcorn?"

"I will lend you my hand if you're scared."

Phi Ploy giggles and stands up while my ears burn with embarrassment. "It's time for you to return to your room."

Her response astounds me. Although there was an air of romance, she is now evicting me, and the romantic ambiance we had been cultivating is dwindling as we make our way to the exit.

"It's Monday tomorrow. You have to work, right?"

I just realize it is already 11 p.m. when she says that. But is it really necessary to kick me out now? Like, right now?

"Can you walk back to your room by yourself?"

"Yes," I reply as we reach the door.

"So, when does Doctor Sleep open in theaters?"

"Huh?"

"Let's catch the 9 p.m. show so we can have dinner first."

"What?"

By the time I've processed what she said, the ambrosial woman's door has closed, leaving me standing among the glowing night butterflies[] gently flapping their wings in the hallway... in the elevator... and throughout the night.

*When does Doctor Sleep open in theaters... Can it be tomorrow?*

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# Chapter 10: Player two

"The staff at my restaurant called to tell me about the incident. Did you really go to the extent of crashing your car into his? Too bad I wasn't there to witness it with my own eyes."

As we enjoy afternoon tea in an English-themed cafe, I smile and brush aside my wealthy friend's perceptive gaze.

"She's special, isn't she?"

We've been friends for a long time and know each other inside and out. Min gets especially excited when I become interested in someone.

"I was simply helping an ex's sister."

Being in the news for a car accident is far preferable to being in the news for fighting with a man over a woman.

"I've been wanting to get a paint job on my Bumper without a bad driving record since I crashed it into the sidewalk a few months ago."

I had no idea what that man was like. For all I know, he may have been carrying weapons. I couldn't just walk up to him and punch him in the face like I was some movie hero.

Crashing my car into his while pretending to know nothing was far better than getting in his way and being shot.

I cross my legs and place my fragrant cup of tea on the table.

"You're only making excuses. Crashing your car is a costly endeavor. What sets this kid apart from the others?"

The perceptive eyes, which resemble those of a housewife addicted to television series, continue to inspect me.

I chuckle and shake my head gently. I find myself thinking about the tender eyes of the kid Min is referring to.

"She's proChapter :ly special because she ended relationships with six men in a matter of hours."

"Please don't use her to replace Prang. Ploy."

"They couldn't be more different."

Min's vibrant eyes fix on me. She's dead serious.

"When I called to tell you about it that day. you didn't appear to care. I thought you weren't going."

"I had just finished work at the time, so I decided to drive by and take a look."

The owner of the Italian restaurant where Pun broke up with six men over a single tray of pizza the other day is known as Min. She remembered Pun and reached out to me immediately after Pun's fight with the first man.

Min was dissatisfied with my lack of concern. She didn't stay until the sixth guy arrived, but she had asked her employee, Oa, to keep an eye on Pun. She also kept calling and urging me to go to the restaurant.

Coincidentally, I arrived at the scene just as my ex's sister was having a heated argument with a man in the parking lot. I had no idea what they were arguing about, but I was certain that the spunky kid did not want to get in the car with her male friend.

That was why I immediately contacted the insurance company, fastened my seat belt, and accelerated toward the car that was exiting the parking lot. As a result, I got a dent in my front bumper and had to contact my secretary to handle the insurance paperwork.

"Oa was grinning from ear to ear, saying you tipped her one thousand Baht."

"In fact, I should treat the wealthy restaurant owner to a meal for having her employee keep me informed about the situation."

Min gives a wink and grin.

"You can treat me to tea because we're having it right now."

"First, let us discuss our investment. Our clothing brand is gaining popularity I would like to expand our product line to include shoes. Are you interested in co-investing in this venture?"

"My father intends to expand our restaurant business. We plan to open two or three branches in major cities. I am not sure if I will have time to assist you with the expansion. However, if you offer me free afternoon tea... or reveal a few secrets... I might succumb to your persuasion."

Attempting to persuade me to grant her request, Min sips her tea while rolling her eyes. I know it's just an act.

Nevertheless, I let out a deep sigh.

"I'll have to invest in it on my own then."

"Geez. It's just an afternoon tea."

My friend's whining and sarcastic remarks make us laugh. Of course, all of the money in her wallet remains intact today.

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# Chapter 11 : Romantic Horror Movie

**[So? Do you have anything yet?]**

**"Not yet."**

**[You went to her room and shared a meal together. Why didn't you talk to her and get it over with so we could locate Phi Pay?]**

Hwan-jeab is acting like a reminder application. She calls me on a regular basis to check on my progress. But the frequency has shifted to every other day, and I'm beginning to suspect that it was her money that was duped.

**"I don't want to delve too deeply into her personal life if she doesn't initiate it herself, Jeab. It appears desperate and intrusive. I don't want to scare the chicken away."**

**[Make her want to talk so that you can finish the job.]**

**"I am waiting for the right time to do so."**

**[Also, we got nothing from sending our man to stakeout Phi Nop's nightclub. There's no sign of Phi Pay there. As for his mother's house, Best said that Phi Boy went to considerable measures to pose as a messenger, delivering a document and informing his mother that Phi Pay's signature was needed. His mother insisted that Phi Pay was still in the United States and asked to sign off on his behalf.]**

**"Did Phi Boy give her the document?"**

**[How could he? It was fake. He refused to give her the document without Phi Pay's signature and left... You're our only hope now. Just ask Phi Ploy and get it done.]**

**"Do you find this strange?"**

**[What do you mean?]**

**"Phi Pay left New York and returned to Thailand, but he went missing. He didn't even go home. Is he trying to avoid paying his debt, or was he kidnapped?"**

**[You also didn't go home, Pun. You chose to stay at your sister's condo. You can bet that Phi Pay has somewhere to stay. Didn't you say you heard Phi Ploy talking on the phone with him? I believe Phi Ploy is aware of his current whereabouts.]**

**"What if she doesn't know, Jeab?"**

**[Then it's a dead end. We can move forward with a new strategy, and you no longer need to bother with her.]**

Yes. It will be the end... It's as simple as that.

**[But you have to be certain that she doesn't know, Pun.]**

. .

Doctor Sleep Movie Day has finally arrived. I took the Skytrain to work this morning to give myself an excuse to ask Phi Ploy for a ride back to the condo. We agreed to meet at a restaurant in the evening because we wanted to eat before relaxing and watching the movie.

When she's in a good mood, I intend to steer the conversation to her family. But how can I bring up her brother without making someone as intelligent as she aware that I am attempting to elicit information from her...?

I am beginning to genuinely care about Phi Ploy's opinion of me. I am also unable to take my gaze away from her at the moment.

Phi Ploy is dressed in a bodycon dress with long sleeves. As we are purchasing movie tickets, she is flaunting her lean legs and stylish sneakers to everyone around. Though it's a basic look, it's very hot!

Her figure, expression, demeanor, eyes, hair, and alluring scent make her hot without revealing or doing too much. She effortlessly exudes a sensual aura simply by breathing. Phi Jay was right. Phi Ploy is like a flower. The longer you stare at her, the stronger your attraction to her grows.

How could a tiny butterfly like me resist her draw?

"Are you planning to pay for everything?"

She's a pure-blooded spender. I have not spent a dime since we met and had dinner and until now.

"I'm older than you."

Here comes that merry smile, which calls for cute aggression once more.

"You're always using the age card. If you're going to pay for everything like this, let's do Omakase next time."

"In that case, you'll need to call me *Daddy*."

I stand still, stunned, for two seconds before throwing my hat back into the ring.

"I'm not a mistress. I am capable of caring for others, despite the fact that I am younger than you. At least allow me to pay for the popcorn."

"Okay."

Phi Ploy's smile is as sweet as honey.

"It would be greatly appreciated if I could also get a bottle of water. Could you please buy me some water, Nong Pun... Make it mineral water. Daddy doesn't drink plain water."

As soon as she finishes speaking, Phi Ploy walks away and sits with one leg over the other, delegating the task of purchasing and carrying the large bucket of popcorn and water to me. Geez. Despite being older than me, she has a childish, mischievous streak.

The theaters in Thailand are incredibly elaborate. This stands in stark contrast to those in New York, where theaters are simply places to watch movies.

"Do you ever feel uneasy with so many eyes on you all the time?"

To be honest, I'm beginning to feel uneasy as people continue to stare at us. Though they're not looking directly at us, I can feel their gaze lingering on the individual next to me. At times, they also shift their gaze towards me.

"If I were a celebrity and no one paid attention to me, I would be even more stressed. So, where are our seats?"

"I'm not telling you. I'd like to have a senior walk after me."

"The tickets shouldn't be in the hand of this kid."

"If you're afraid of getting lost, I can lend you my hand."

Instead of taking my hand, Phi Ploy squints at me, pretending to be annoyed. She follows me to our seats, and we settle into the largest and most comfortable seats available.

. .

"The theater's air conditioning can be chilly, so I thought you might like this."

I offer Phi Ploy a small blanket I brought. She thanks me softly, and we both fall silent.

Twenty minutes into the movie, I realize that Doctor Sleep is a horror movie that is so *bdry6e8hetgrdyhftyr5...*

Do you get the sense? If I hadn't read the novel, I wouldn't be able to catch up because I can't focus on the curved screen once the light dims, and I have my privacy with Phi Ploy.

My gaze keeps drifting to the person next to me. I keep wanting to move closer to her... It's cold, and I need some warmth.

Phi Ploy, on the other hand, pays no attention to me. She concentrates on the movie as if there will be an exam afterward. In contrast to my wandering eyes, hers remain firmly glued to the screen.

The woman briefly rests her hand on her side. Honestly, I don't care how the lead male deals with the ghost because the voice in my head keeps saying...

*Take her hand. Move closer to her, Pun. Be bold.*

...The voice keeps repeating the same words until my hand slips from its resting place and casually inches towards Phi Ploy's. Our pinkies are on the verge of touching when Phi Ploy crosses her arms over her chest.

*....damn!*

Even though there wasn't a funny scene, I thought I saw a smile on the face of the person who was sitting very still for an instant. But the light and shadow on the screen may have tricked my eyes. I can't be sure.

Another movement occurs in the middle of the film when Phi Ploy sips her water. I see another opportunity to make physical contact with her.

But she quickly returns to crossing her arms over her chest. I'm becoming irritated, convinced that the theater environment only affects my mood.

.

*Phi Ploy is not paying attention to you, Pun.*

*She's never shown any interest in you.*

*But there were moments when she appeared to be flirting with you, weren't there?*

*No, there weren't. She has never expressed any interest in you. You're the one making advances on her. She likely agreed to come today because she was bored, and it just so happened that you invited her.*

*To her, you're just a kid. Pun, what were you hoping for? Many individuals with more impressive profiles are pursuing her... blah, blah, blah.*

.

My mind races with doubts. Many questions are running through my head. I'm wondering if the smile and look in her eyes she gave me were meant for everyone.

Except for my sister and parents, I've never been so let down by anyone else.

"Pun."

Out of nowhere, the person who's annoying me moves closer to me. Her arms are no longer crossed, and her hand is resting by her side.

"I'm scared."

... A night butterfly materializes amidst the darkness, spirits, and demons depicted on the screen. The luminous wings flutter softly as it swoops down and lands on my arm. My heart echoes the words I once told her.

*'I will lend you my hand if you're scared.'*

My doubts make me turn to the woman who still has her gaze fixed on the movie screen. A swarm of glowing butterflies appears here and there, one after the other, complementing the sparkles in her stunning eyes.

Two, three, four, five, six... They gently flap their wings around us as I reach out and grab Phi Ploy's hand. Her long, slender fingers are soft and cold. For my part, my whole body is flushing. "It took halfway through the movie to scare you."

The person listening bursts out laughing.

"You don't appear scared at all."

"I was scared since they turned off the lights."

I whisper under my breath as Phi Ploy tightens her grip.

From that moment on, Doctor Sleep becomes increasingly more bsdfgbrsys65va3.....

Yep. After that, nothing enters my mind.

If someone asks me what genre the movie was, I would confidently say that the first half was horror and the second half was romantic-horror.

Damn. I'm trying to hide my smile as I watch a horror movie, feeling warm in my heart, until the lights come back on. We continue to hold hands as the credits roll, only letting go when the others have left the theater.

Due to the late hour, there are significantly fewer people outside the theater than when we entered. Phi Ploy and I use the restroom and walk to the elevator together without saying anything.

When we're standing side by side in the elevator, arms touching, I can't resist doing something. My index finger seems to have a will of its own. It inches slowly to Phi Ploy's pinky and wraps itself around it.

Phi Ploy only casts me a sideways glance. She simply keeps her hand in place.

"Are you still scared?"

"I'm not scared. I'm simply holding onto your finger in case you still are."

The person listening shakes her head and smiles so big that her teeth are visible. The elevator doors open, and she leads the way to her car while our fingers remain locked together. The tiny night butterfly accompanies us as we drive home in Phi Ploy's car

I completely forgot that the purpose of this movie date is to extract information about Phi Ploy's brother. I only remember asking her to wait at the door after Phi Ploy walked me to my room so that I could get and hand her the orange juice I squeezed and stored in a bottle for her.

*Let your heart be mine. Let your soul be mine. Let your heart's desire be solely mine. Let your heart long for and love only me.*

I am giggling as I cast a spell in my head. Why didn't I cast the spell while preparing this?

"Why are you in such a good mood?"

"I'm not telling you... Sweet dreams."

As I stand motionless, refusing to enter my room, I decide to draw nearer to her and plant a quick peck kiss on the dimple on her delicate cheek. I quickly step back and close the door.

For two minutes... I stand behind that door, hand on my heart.

. .

"You seem to be radiating lately, Pun. What did you do? Do you know of any fascinating treatments? Share them with your friends right away." "I merely think and do good deeds, Best. I also pray before going to bed."

Hwan-jeab laughs at my response.

"What's going on, Pun? It must be something good."

"Please stop staring at me. I beg you."

I push Best on the shoulder because I am afraid of touching my friend's face.

"You look suspicious. You look... happy. Your eyes are sparkling too brightly. Come on. Why aren't you telling your friends if you've found a good treatment?"

It took very little mouth movement on the part of Best to convey her keen observation.

"I told you, I did nothing special. I do like your new chin, however. After you corrected it, your face appears more naturally slim." I try to change the topic.

"Pun, look at me. Focus. Now, compliment my chin again." I tighten my lips as I look at my friend's swollen chin.

"I can tell that once it's not swollen, it will look good on you."

"She seems suspicious, Jeab... Are you in love, Pun? This is the look of someone who is in love. I'm certain of it."

Best's eyes widen as she looks at me.

"Who? Tell us, A guy from work?"

At this point, Hwan-jeab is also examining me.

"Stop staring at me. There's nothing going on."

I wave my hands at my curious friends.

"It's just that I've been seeing a lot of butterflies lately."

Best and Hwan-jeab exchange a bewildered look.

"What butterflies?"

"Night butterflies." I smile slyly.

"They flap their luminous, lovely wings all around me."

Best gives Hwan-jeab a heavy dose of winks and grins, as if she has found her answer. I'm concerned that the thread on her chin will snap.

"She's got a guy at work." Hwan-jeab agrees with a nod.

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After a prolonged downward spiral, my life has finally turned around for the better. I'm having fun. I'm happy. Every single song makes me smile. The vibrancy of each flower and blade of grass brightens my day.

Phi Jay's room has turned into our den. Phi Jay, Prang, Phi Ken, Jie Ang, and Phi Ploy will all gather there at least once a week. On occasion, all they do is eat. Sometimes they spend the night out. All of them show up at times.

And at times, some are unable to join. We've become a close-knit group. Thanks to this, I can see Phi Ploy from a different perspective. What's even better is that there are more and more details about Phi Ploy's life that only we share.

The only aspect of her life that I haven't had the opportunity to ask about is her family. Every time I'm about to delve into that subject, something comes up or the topic abruptly changes.

I once overheard Phi Ploy talking on the phone with someone she called "Phi." Their mother and the impending anniversary of a certain Pailin were among the subjects they were discussing. This is why I must go ahead with my plan.

"Phi Ploy, would you be interested in joining me for dinner and stargazing at a rooftop restaurant? Two artists will also be performing mini concerts. The event takes place at AEIOU."

"I wish I could join you, but I have an appointment that day."

Those deadly dimples appear when my face turns sad.

I wonder if we've come to the end of the line. I feel like all of the sins I've committed against my previous hangout buddies are catching up with me. Phi Ploy and I go on dates, talk on a regular basis, and look deeply into each other's eyes.

Our chemistry is as dazzling as the wings of those night butterflies. Despite our growing closeness, though, we never crossed the boundary that Phi Ploy has established between us.

It's as though I'm important and her favorite person. However, I can't help but feel like she's torturing me by confining me in my own doubts and concerns.

However, that evening, Prang calls to tell me that she has reserved a table at AEIOU and invites me to go with her.

'[Are you free that day?]

"I am."

[I told Phi Ploy that I was certain you were available, but she insisted that I invite you now.]

"Is Phi Ploy also going?"

[Of course. I booked the tickets two weeks ago. Jay and Phi Ploy have already cleared their schedules. You're the only person I haven't invited yet.]

So Phi Ploy's appointment is the mini concert that Prang has just invited me to. She didn't tell me earlier because she wanted to mess with my head. She has also disappeared since rejecting me.

My mood is sour the entire rooftop dinner and mini-concert day. I really miss Phi Ploy. My normally jovial mood has suddenly turned unusually sensitive. I couldn't get any work done that day.

Something is burning inside of me, and it's about to burst, while Phi Ploy remains graceful and shares her dimples with everyone. Today, Phi Ploy is accompanied by a beautiful high-society woman whom I saw while stalking her.

"Who's that, Phi Jay?"

She's the woman depicted in numerous photographs in Phi Ploy's room. I really want to know why they are so close.

"That's Min. I saw her in the high society circles, but I've never spoken to her... Prang, is this Phi Ploy's new girlfriend?"

Phi Jay speaks with a smile on her face. My face, on the other hand, is extremely sour. The three of us arrived in the same car. Phi Ploy joins us later.

"Stop gossiping, you two. Here they come."

"Prang."

Phi Ploy's companion's crystalline voice is accompanied by a radiant smile. She's as cute as a doll. She embraces Prang before taking a seat at the head of the table next to my sister.

"How are you? We haven't met as a full group in a long time. I miss the good old days."

"You refused to join us."

"I came here today because I wanted to meet Jay in person."

Phi Ploy smiles and looks at Prang. She then proceeds to join me on the same sofa.

"Hello, Jay."

Phi Min does not hide her admiration for Phi Jay.

"You are breathtakingly beautiful in real life. Can I get your autograph for my niece after dinner? She's eight years old and a big fan of yours."

"Of course."

Phi Jay smiles as sweetly as honey at Phi Min, just as she does with the media.

"Invite your niece to a meal with us someday."

"Great idea. Let's set that up."

The affluent woman smiles as she turns to face me.

"Hello."

I raise my hands to pay respect to the older woman.

"Pun, is it? Ploy is always talking about you."

"Min."

The person in the conversation, Phi Ploy, gives Phi Min a cold stare as a warning. Phi Min, on the other hand, giggles as if she's having fun.

The conversation at the table moves at a leisurely pace, much like the cool breeze that surrounds us. As far as I can tell, Phi Min and Prang are quite close. The view from here is stunning

The food tastes good. The artists are talented. The music is fantastic. The atmosphere is lively, and the night is filled with laughter. Everyone arrives in pairs and gets along well, except me.

I am very comfortable socializing. However, I am not in the mood to make new friends tonight, so I do not engage in conversation with Phi Min after I greet her.

I sent a message to Phi Ploy the other day, but she did not respond, despite the fact that we hadn't met in a week. As a result, I did not reply to her message two days later. And Phi Ploy is Phi Ploy. She didn't bug me or show any signs of frustration.

As a result, our chatroom is currently haunted by ghosts. She doesn't seem to care about me. As far as she is concerned, we can talk, better yet, meet, or simply drift apart. I'm growing weary of constantly having to initiate contact.

I'm sick of running on the treadmill, where no matter how quickly I shuffle my legs, the distance between us remains the same. She has always been like this. I don't know what I was hoping for.

This is why I'd rather not speak with Phi Ploy today. I politely smile at her and then ignore her. I get engrossed in the live music and fiddle with my phone. I engage in conversation with everyone at the table, but I only give the woman sitting next to me brief responses to her questions.

"Let me excuse myself to use the restroom."

I excuse myself as Phi Jay starts a video call with Phi Min's niece.

"Do you want me to accompany you?" Prang asks.

I shake my head.

"It's okay. I can go by myself."

When I leave the table, the conversation continues uninterrupted. The restroom is not far from our table. It's luxurious, clean, and nearly empty.

However, when I finish my business, I find someone waiting for me with her arms crossed and her back leaning against the sink countertop.

I ignore the person. However, while I am washing my hands, she asks me a question.

"Are you mad at me?"

"Why should I be? What did you do?"

Phi Ploy tilts her head, puzzled.

"Yeah. What did I do?"

"You didn't do anything." I shake my head.

"You did nothing."

Her icy fingers seize my wrist as I make my way to the door.

"If you say there's nothing going on, should I just let you go back to the table?"

"Yes."

She does exactly that; she lets me go. She does not try to stop me or bother me. Her inquiries end there. How about me? I walk mindlessly back to the table. Phi Jay whispers to see if I'm okay, as I appear to be down. I simply tell her that I'm stressed about my job.

Shortly after, the source of my bleak mood emerges from the restroom and takes a seat next to me. Everything goes on as usual except for Phi Ploy's left arm.

While everyone is enjoying the music and Phi Ploy is focusing on the singer on stage... she sweeps her hair to one side and, seemingly unintentionally, places her left arm back on the table, brushing my right arm.

I move my right arm away, despite my confusion about what is going on. However, despite Phi Ploy's continued focus on the singer performing on stage, that bothersome arm presses against my right arm again.

This time, I draw my arm away and cross it over my chest. I lean against the backrest, adopting the posture of someone who is relaxing and absorbing music. Let's see what she will do next.

I believe Phi Ploy has grown tired of teasing me. She does not move or lean against the sofa's backrest. That is, until I feel something cold on my shin, prompting me to look beneath the table.

The woman with dimples' right leg, which is crossed over her left, brushes against my shin before resting there. When I move my shin away, the possessed leg follows and lands on my shin once more.

While everyone else is enjoying the music, I'm sighing with frustration. I place my hands on the sofa and force myself to sit straight up. I also draw my leg away from her.

However, Phi Ploy's left hand has moved from resting on the table to resting on the back of my right hand..

Her sweet, striking eyes look into mine. Her soft, delicate fingers are teasing my fingers. Her cold palm is providing warmth, reviving the weary, luminescent night butterflies that are drawing their last breaths in my chest...

I despise myself for forgetting everything that bothers me just because she does this. I despise the singer for singing a song that is appropriate for the occasion.

And I despise the backstabbing butterflies that flit about flirtatiously in my merry heart without even attempting to save my face.

I return to my condo feeling flushed as my blood circulation has accelerated. I'm too exhilarated to keep still. I am unable to sleep. I eventually pick up the phone and quickly type something.

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**PUN:**

**Phi Ploy.**

**PUN:**

**Are you still awake?**

My messages are read promptly.

**PLOY:**

**It's nearly 1 a.m. Why are you still awake? (00.43)**

**PUN:**

**I can't sleep. (read)**

**PUN:**

**What are you doing? Why are you still awake? (read)**

**PLOY:**

**I tried to sleep but couldn't. HAHA (00.44)**

**PUN:**

**Could we perhaps video call? (read)**

My phone shows an incoming call. Phi Ploy's face appears on the call as soon as I answer. My mind is at a loss for words.

**[So, how's it going for the one who can't sleep?]**

Phi Ploy is lying in her bed. She has no makeup on. I have never seen her look more natural. Her wavy hair remains perfectly styled... She must have spent a significant amount of money on that wavy hair.

**"You, Phi Ploy, are also one who can't sleep."**

"......"

I say nothing more. I simply look at her.

**[You requested a video call, but you are not saying anything to me.]**

**"I don't know what to say. I just want to look at you."**

She smiles... It appears to be a shy smile... No, it doesn't appear to be one; she's shy!

*Phi Ploy is shy!*

**[Why were you mad at me today?]**

**"I like how you're smiling."**

I point toward the camera.

**[You're not answering my question.]**

**"I wasn't mad at you. I was just..."**

I sigh.

**"I know how to play the guitar. Do you want to listen?"**

**[Should I?]**

**"I don't care. I want to play it for you."**

The adoring gaze of the older woman with dimples fills my heart.

**"Wait a moment."**

.

I set down my phone and go get my guitar. I then return to my phone and sit motionless in front of it.

"....."

"......"

**[Did you say you were going to play the guitar or simply hold it and smile at the camera?]**

**"Hold on, Phi Ploy. I'm shy."**

The woman on my phone is smiling widely and showing her teeth once more. I'm beginning to wonder if seeing her will help me fall asleep faster or not.

I take a deep breath to build up my courage I look into her eyes through the camera on my phone. My left hand plays a series of chords while my right hand strums a melody on the guitar.

***"Look. I've been looking at you for so long. I'm too shy. That's why I avoid looking into your eyes."***

The music pauses. I freeze because the line was cut. Phi Ploy has disappeared from my phone's screen. Except for the soft humming of the air conditioning, everything becomes quiet.

*Phi Ploy hung up*

I strum the guitar again, my voice quivering. My initial shock was replaced by the realization that Phi Ploy hung up while I was singing to court her.

***"The hidden secret within your heart, is it me... Phi Ploy?"***

***.***

# Chapter 12: Enchanted

For about ten minutes, I sit still and allow my emotions and thoughts to work on me.

*Ding-dong...*

*Ding-dong...*

It takes two rings on my doorbell before I get up and head to the door. The part of me that wants to complain about who could be ringing my doorbell right now is at odds with the part of me that wishes it were the person I wish it was.

I'm still angry with her, so I don't want to dwell on it or raise my hopes any further. I'm afraid I'll fall apart. Yet, I unlock the door the second I peer through the peephole to see who rang the bell.

In her pajamas and slippers, Phi Ploy stands outside my door... Once more, those night. Butterflies are ecstatically dancing within me. However, on the outside, I remain calm.

We stand staring at each other, and Phi Ploy seems to know why my face is angry and my eyes are empty.

"Can I go in?"

"It's late. I no longer entertain guests."

I try to shut the door, but Phi Ploy is savage. I didn't realize Phi Ploy had placed her slippers in the way to prevent me from closing the door in her face. In response, I kick the slippers out of the way and attempt to shut the door once more. Yet....

"Ouchhhhh!!!"

The person outside my room screams. I panic, thinking I might have slammed the door into her fingers. As a result, I let the door swing open.

Phi Ploy immediately walks into my room, her hands and feet looking fine. There is no evidence of injury to reflect her scream.

"You tricked me into opening the door?" I look at her, stunned.

"You were screaming really loudly."

"I'm an actress."

The dimples appear with no hint of regret. In a fit of cute aggression, I am frantically tempted to pinch and tug her cheeks.

"Talking to a kid requires me to be tricky."

"I am not a kid."

"Besides being a child, you also have a vivid imagination. You imagine things and then sulk all by yourself."

I give her a look of contempt. I would prefer not to engage in conversation with her. She upset me, but instead of attempting to reconcile with me, she said I'm behaving like a child.

"It's late. Please excuse me. I don't want to talk to anybody right now."

"I'm here to listen to your song."

Phi Ploy remains calm and composed. Her soothing voice makes my eyes well up.

"You hung up on me."

"I didn't. The line disconnected because someone called me."

"Someone called you at 1 a.m.?"

I let my head drop and my tears flow. The wall I put up to suppress my emotions crumbled under the weight of my own emotions.

"Yes. Someone called me at 1 a.m."

That's the only explanation Phi Ploy gives me. Then I catch a whiff of Phi Ploy's alluring aroma as she approaches and swiftly plants a kiss on my nose. The touch is warm and gentle. And it makes me cry even harder.

"I don't want to sing anymore tonight."

"You're really not going to sing?... I came all the way from the 42nd floor, you know?"

I nod. However, I cannot stop myself from stomping over to hug her and burying my face in her shoulder. The heat of her body fills my lungs as I inhale deeply I wrap my arms around her neck, not allowing her to return to her room like I said I would.

"Why are you crying?" She strokes my hair.

We remain in that position for a little longer before I release her and bid her goodnight. I do, however, call out to her before she takes a step.

"Phi Ploy."

The person who goes by that name waits patiently to hear what I have to say. But no words come out of my mouth. I'm overcome with emotions. I go up to her and kiss her out of the blue. Phi Ploy's lips feel warm and moist. They are not at all cold, unlike her hand.

"Do you open your eyes while kissing?"

I need to lock my target...! When Phi Ploy is in close proximity, I tend to behave clumsily, and my entire body starts to flush. Now, I feel even more awkward when she asks me that question. So I lean back and glare at her.

"Didn't you open your eyes to see that I hadn't closed mine?"

"I was in shock."

She giggles and looks down as if considering something. She then sighs and looks me squarely in the eyes.

"Only high school students who are just starting a relationship give that kind of kiss."

*High school students who are just starting a relationship!? She's insulting me excessively!*

"Just because I opened my eyes?"

"No. I am referring to the way you simply pressed your lips against mine, as you just did."

....*simply pressed my lips! My anger is through the roof!*

"Let me try again."

The person listening to my request tries to hide her smile. She crosses her arms over her chest and allows me to press my lips against hers once again. This time, I did more than just press my lips. I move my lips, and she responds.

*...She's feeling it. I got the hang of it.*

I lean back, smiling, waiting for her to compliment me.

"So?"

"I'm impressed.."

It's only after I grin that she goes on.

"I mean, I am impressed that that is all you can manage."

"Savage!" My temples are throbbing.

"Now."

The woman who just insulted my kiss tilts her head.

"Let me show you."

She sweeps her wavy hair behind her right ear.

"I will show you how adults... kiss."

With those words, the slender figure approaches me. She moves with a delicate yet swift grace. Gradually, Phi Ploy backs me up against the wall. Her silky skin brushes against the inside of my thigh as she slides her bare knees beneath her shorts between my legs.

The same brilliant sparkles that fill Phi Ploy's eyes when she talks about her passion are now present in her eyes, which are full of depth. For a fleeting moment, I yearn to be the recipient of that gaze forever.

As this woman draws her face closer to mine, I yearn to become one of her passions. Our proximity is such that I can detect her aroma....

"Phi Ploy..."

There's no response. Her icy hand slips beneath my hair and grips the nape of my neck. Her head tilts as she leans into me. Her warm lips firmly press against mine. The initial touch is delicate Then it heats up. The sensual, seductive touch skillfully floored me.

She didn't wait for me to get ready. She didn't test the waters. She's not teasing. She is going all out!

My entire circulatory system suddenly revs up. I clutch the pajamas that encircle her abs. My knees are losing strength. I'm burning on the inside and having trouble standing on my feet. If Phi Ploy doesn't stop, I fear for my life.

Nonetheless, she draws me in by the waist until our bodies meet. She also locks me in place and uses the wall to support my body weight. Leaning her head back slightly, she intensifies my desire for her, and then she presses her lips against mine once more.

It's soft. It's smooth. It's seductive. It's proof of our desire for each other.

Despite the fact that this is merely a kiss, I feel as though Phi Ploy is gradually stripping me of my clothing with each movement. She flipped a switch inside of me.

....*Argh, shit! I genuinely* ***have feelings*** *for Phi Ploy.*

"Pun."

"....."

In comparison to her red Ferrari kiss, my kiss appears to be a jiggling piece of metal.

"I will do more than just kiss you if you keep groping my breast."

Blinking blankly, I stare at her face, my right hand still squeezing. It's smooth. It's firm. It feels really good. I swear on Best's 350-cc silicon breasts.

"But you groped mine first."

"I didn't do that. My hand simply brushed by it."

"If you touched it, I consider it groping."

"Does this imply that you will or will not stop caressing my breast?"

Phi Ploy is mocking me with her smile.

"If you refuse to stop, we should continue on the bed in case your knees weaken again."

One day... one of these days, I will not be insulted in this way.

The look in Phi Ploy's eyes makes me feel hot inside. I'm not content to just caress her breasts anymore. I want to hold her hand, kiss her neck, and feel her skin. I wish to get closer to her. I want to feel the deepest level of intimacy possible.

Unfortunately, all I can do is hug my hands and study the creases on Phi Ploy's long-sleeve satin shirt.

"Allow me to walk you to your room."

"I'm an adult."

"I want to take care of an adult."

At some point after 1 a.m., I take Phi Ploy's hand and lead her out of my room while she holds an orange juice bottle in her other hand. Even though we're alone in the hall, I restrain myself from grinning too broadly.

"Phi Ploy."

I dare not meet her gaze, so I cast my gaze to the floor.

"Is it possible for us to eat together more frequently?"

"You want to meet up with me more frequently, but you won't even look at me."

"We're walking. I should keep an eye on where we are going."

As soon as I finish speaking, Phi Ploy stops walking. Since I am still holding her hand, I must also come to a stop. Her expression remains composed as I turn to meet her gaze.

"I would like to eat with you more frequently."

I plead softly, both with my voice and my eyes.

Phi Ploy examines me, seemingly searching for something. She then sighs, just as she did before we kissed, and continues to lead me by the hand to her room.

"Please ask me more politely. Maybe try calling me Daddy."

"What?"

I couldn't believe what I had just heard.

"I spoke clearly."

Phi Ploy laughs with an air of villainy.

"Why should I address you that way? I'm not requesting that you treat me."

"Daddy. That's a simple word to say."

She shrugs as she opens the door with her keycard.

"If it's that easy,"

I lean into her and look her directly in the eyes, hoping to make her blush.

"Call me Daddy."

But in response, the villain brings her beautiful face closer to mine and focuses her honey-sweet eyes on me. I can't help lowering my gaze to gaze longingly at her soft, dewy lips as they begin to move

"When you get to your room... please let me know."

...I lose. Staring into her eyes has left me feeling defeated. I return to my room along a deserted hallway, her broad smile lingering in my mind.

I hum the final verse of the song... "Close to You" all the way back to my room.

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What time did I go to sleep?

All I can say is that I'm glad it was a Saturday night and that I didn't have to get up early for work the next day. Otherwise, I could be a case study for the campaign,

*"Don't drive when you're sleepy; don't stand when you're asleep."*

What? Do you want me to go into more detail?

Well... Someone told me to let her know when I got to my room. Therefore, I decided to inform her via video call, reassuring her with both my voice and my face.

More? Would you like more information?

Geez... Okay. After calling Hwan-Jeab, who did not answer, I called Phi Ploy and informed her that I had already returned to my room. I was unable to cut the line once I saw her face. So I asked what she had planned for Sunday.

She told me that she was going to a spa and rehearsing for an event on her channel. The allure of her voice prompted me to inquire further, which in turn sparked additional discussion.

Suddenly, Phi Ploy brought up the topic of shoes, expressing her desire to expand her clothing brand into an area she is passionate about. She told me how proud she was to have built the brand from scratch.

Phi Ploy has never revealed anything personal to me. She would normally ask questions and listen to me. She will only delve into broad subjects at most.

She then proceeded to make excuses for wearing shoes in Phi Jay's room, causing Phi Jay to frown. I lay in bed and listened to all of this, feeling as though the outside gate had been opened.

In the end, the one who tried to make up weak excuses just laughed and admitted that she's simply obsessed with her shoes and wants to irritate Phi Jay, even though she knows Phi Jay isn't actually angry with her.

My only role for the night was to listen and observe the dimples on those cheeks until we entered a yawning competition. Our bodies succumbed to fatigue.

At 4 a.m., our conversations ceased, and we found ourselves lying on our sides, gazing at each other through our communication devices.

*'You're enchanted.'*

That's what Hwan-jeab would say if she were aware of my actions. And, yes. I'm enchanted, and I can't break free....

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[Hello.]

"Hello."

[You called me at 1 a.m.? What happened? I didn't hear your call because I was asleep.]

"Jeab... I think the prey has stepped into my trap."

[I would appreciate it if you could elaborate. The person on the other end of the line inquires, although I believe she understands what I mean.]

"I believe Phi Ploy is developing feelings for me."

I fill a bottle with freshly squeezed orange juice, ready to store it in the refrigerator.

"Soon, I will know directly from Phi Ploy's mouth... where Paytai Metakit is hiding."

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# Chapter 12.1 : Ploy's Diary

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I wasn't going to. But I eventually crossed the line.

How could an innocent kiss make my heart pound like that? ...

Pun is adorable.

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# Chapter 13: Balanced

'*I have an older brother and a younger sister."*

*'But that was never in the news.'*

*"We all have different fathers, so we use different surnames. Only those close to me know about this. I don't share this much personal information with the media.'*

*.*

My plan was to get information on Phi Pay from Phi Ploy. However, as we get closer and she shares more information with me, I become less interested.

There is a part of me that wants to track down Phi Pay, but another part of me doesn't want to hear all of this directly from her because of how close we are.

I would prefer not to ask or have her divulge this information to me... That's the only aspect of Phi Ploy about which I have no interest in learning more.

"Tell me about your relationship with Phi Min."

"She's a friend from my undergrad studies."

The person answering sits with her chin resting on her palm and her elbow on the table. She looks at me smilingly. "I want to know about your first kiss."

A bowl with fish eyes is placed in front of me.

"I was a freshman, and we were in a car."

I smile and push the bowl back where it was.

"Was it with a man or a woman?"

"You only get one question each round. You will have to wait until I ask you a question before you can ask me that."

"It's within the scope of my question. You did not provide a detailed answer."

"You're cheating... It was with a female."

There are ten small, white bowls between us. In each, you'll find hideous edibles. We are engaged in a game where we exchange questions with each other during each round.

If we choose to respond, we will continue on to the next round. If we refuse to respond, we have to eat whatever's in the bowl the person asking the question chooses.

"I also want to know about your first kiss."

Phi Ploy twists her face as she looks at the contents of the bowl I just picked up and placed in front of her, which is a large fried scorpion.

"I was a high school junior, and it happened in the science lab."

"Naughty kid."

"I just grew up fast... My turn."

She brushes her hair back, flashes a slight smile, crosses her arms across her chest, and looks at me.

"Have you ever sneaked a peek at my breast?"

"......!!!!!!"

What kind of question is that?! I am stumped and unable to speak as Phi Ploy watches me with her sparkling eyes, waiting for my response.

"What are you asking?"

"You just have to answer truthfully whether you've sneaked a peek at my breasts."

What should I do: eat dog food or answer Phi Ploy's question? "... I have."

I mutter in response to that question, my gaze drawn downward.

"What did you say? Your response was so soft that I couldn't hear it."

"Argh."

I exhale deeply and let the air out of my lungs before responding in the most normal voice I can. However, I cannot hide my embarrassment. "You sometimes dressed to flaunt them. Would anyone not look?"

"What were the thoughts running through your mind when you peeked at my breast?"

The woman who poses the question straightens up and undoes the buttons on her shirt to reveal her cleavage.

I attempt to fix my gaze on Phi Ploy's stunning facial features as she stares at me.

"You're asking more than one question. It's my turn... I'd like to know about your relationship with Phi Prang."

"She's my ex. We're no longer together, and there's no rekindling the flame.

There is absolutely no smoke."

With a mischievous grin, Phi Ploy sets a bowl of fermented fish sauce before me.

"How did you feel when we shared a kiss that night?"

*Geez. She's savage!*

Without saying anything else, I squeeze my nose and down the fermented fish sauce in one gulp. I can hear the savage laughter of Phi Ploy as I sprint to the restroom to gargle.

I then head to Phi Ploy's fridge in search of something potent to soothe the overwhelming tingling in my throat and mouth.

"Okay. My turn."

As I speak, I move the bowl containing sliced onions toward Phi Ploy.

"Which of your ex-partners took your virginity?"

"How do you know that I'm not a virgin?"

I shake my head and flash her a savage smile as I play with the bowl in my hand with my fingertips.

"Will you answer or eat these onions?"

Phi Ploy maintains her gaze on me without blinking. She then pops a piece of onion into her mouth and follows it with beer. The white vegetable has made its way down her throat... damn. She didn't even chew it.

Phi Ploy despises onions to the bone, but the tough one continues to the second slice, followed by a sip of beer. As she tries to swallow the fourth slice, I see tears forming in her eyes.

"Okay. That's enough. You do not have to finish the entire bowl. I'm not that ruthless."

"I want to brush my teeth. I'll be back."

Phi Ploy quickly gets up and rushes to the restroom. I can hear her vomiting. Nonetheless, she swiftly makes her way back, clearly not feeling well

"I don't want to play anymore. Let's go get something to eat."

"But I still have a question."

"Okay. You can ask a question to end the game. I have nothing more to ask you."

I simply don't want to see her suffer anymore.

"Okay. Last question."

A mischievous grin spreads across her face as Phi Ploy pushes the bowl containing two yucky fish eyes back toward me once more.

"When you were at the top of your game, how many guys were you seeing simultaneously?"

I bite my lips as I stare at Phi Ploy, contemplating what I will have to eat if I don't respond. I can only muster a bitter smile.

"Are you merely teasing me, or are you actually interested in the answer?"

"I'm interested in your response to this question."

Phi Ploy pretends to furrow her brow and looks down, whereas I am actually feeling down.

"There... there... Is my question too difficult?"

She gently cradles my face in her two cold hands, as if comforting her daughter.

"You don't have to eat them both. I'm not that ruthless."

She's not being considerate. She's mocking me.

No way am I going to put those fish eyes in my mouth!

"I've never dated more than one person at a time."

I reply. However, Phi Ploy immediately narrows her eyes at me. Her gaze is razor-sharp, piercing through my lies.

"...."

It becomes too much for me to bear.

"...Two."

I respond with a lack of confidence.

"I dated two people at the same time."

"Two?"

She asks, clearly skeptical. Her calm eyes pierce right through me. Guilt immediately consumes me.

"Not two, but... I don't want to answer."

"I'm not forcing you to answer me... just don't lie to me."

Phi Ploy smiles pleasantly. However, it sends a shiver up my spine.

"Let's go eat."

"...Six." I answer in a whisper.

"What?"

"I was dating six people at the same time."

My confidence has completely evaporated as I look her in the eye.

The 32-year-old woman leans over to close the distance between us. She encircles me with her hands on both sides of my lap. Her face is only one palm's length away from mine.

"Six?"

...Breathtakingly beautiful. Her Chapter :y skin is flawless and youthful, with no visible signs of aging. The only signs of her age are the wise look in her eyes and the brain convolutions in her perfect skull.

"Now that I told you the truth... does your perception of me change?"

"Do I have to eat the fish eyes if I don't answer you?"

I lean closer to her as a challenge.

"Or you can eat the scorpion. I have no problem with that."

"Pun..."

Our faces are so close that even a slight movement will cause our noses to touch.

"I can smell fermented fish coming from you."

"I can also smell onions."

With that, our laughter erupts, and we go our separate ways.

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Looking back on our relationship, I used to feel like I was walking on a treadmill without seeing the finish line. But ever since that night when we shared our first kiss, I feel like I'm strolling through a gentle meadow with the destination clearly in sight.

Our relationship progressed faster than I had anticipated. We spend more time together than ever before. We eat together rather regularly. We sometimes talk on the phone until we fall asleep without hanging up.

I'd like to believe that if I ask about Phi Pay right now, Phi Ploy will give me a straight answer. However, I'd forgotten all about Phi Pay. The here and now telis me that sitting next to Phi Ploy while she looks at me affectionately is wonderful.

I love seeing those dimples nearly every day. I care about her, and... I'm scared.

People are afraid of the dark because it obscures their vision... When you can't see, you're unaware of what lurks in the shadows.

I'm scared of my feelings for Phi Ploy right now. I'm scared because I've never felt such intense feelings for anyone. I'm scared that if I dive in too far, she'll have the upper hand. I'm terrified of committing to a relationship. I don't want to fall for her. Yet I want to be with her.

The condominium's fitness center becomes my place to unwind. I'm hoping that exercising or doing other activities will help to distract me from constantly thinking about Phi Ploy.

Does anybody remember Shane? Shane, the guy I mentioned as being quite attractive, was the one who made a pass at me in the lobby. He is the person who is currently approaching me, swinging a white towel around his neck in an effort to appear cool.

"Do you also come to, work out here, Pun?"

"I figured I should make the most of the facilities since I paid the common fee." I smile casually.

"Is there a particular exercise you enjoy doing?"

"I like to jog. Actually, I'd like to try out those exercise machines as well."

I gesture toward the bizarre fitness equipment that appears to be designed to inflict physical harm on humans.

"I am happy to instruct you."

He leads me to each piece of equipment, explains how to use it, and its intended purpose. On top of that, he trains me like a pro by showing and instructing me how to use each one correctly. As a result, we engage in a lengthy conversation.

This is all possible because I did not inform him that my family owns a fitness equipment company and a boxing camp. Obviously, I know my way around any piece of fitness equipment there is.

In fact, I am also familiar with their prices and where to buy them. However, if I disclosed this information to him, he wouldn't be able to care for me.

Shane is several years older than me. He's also older than Phi Ploy. Nevertheless, he's incredibly active and in great shape.

He comes across as youthful in his conversational style and forwardthinking outlook. He worked as a senior engineer before leaving his job to start his own business.

"So I will have to call you 'Phi'."

"I'm fine as long as you don't call me 'Uncle'."

He seems friendly. As for me, I still believe in the principle that I may not be as pretty as others, but I care about everyone equally.

For the purpose of getting to know him better, I purposefully spend time with each piece of equipment. My favorite workout, however, is on the table tennis table in the room adjacent to the fitness facility.

I have some athletic ability because my older sister, younger brother, and I have been active from a young age.

We had a table tennis table in the middle of our house. On occasion, all three of us-Prang. Pun, and Poon-will pass the time at that green, rectangular table. However, upon opening the fitness center and boxing camp, our parents relocated the table.

"I wish I could stay longer, but I really have to leave."

Shane looks at his watch after I laugh at one of his stories,

"I was wondering if I could have your phone number."

"....."

"You mentioned giving me your contact information when we meet again. Remember?"

"Did I say that?"

He laughs.

"That's how I interpreted it."

"What if I claim that I do not recall saying that?" I test him.

"Then, I can only hope that my smiles today are sufficiently endearing that you inadvertently provide me with your number or line ID so that I may get to know you better."

With his cheerful smile comes playful teasing, and I can't help but laugh.

"Hand over your phone."

He does as instructed willingly.

*Pun, when will you stop flirting and dumping men....*

Hwan-jeab's imaginary voice screams in my head as I enter my phone number into the phone of one of my condomates.

"You find my smile attractive, don't you?"

My laughter erupts once more.

"I really need to leave. I hope to see you again without having to search the entire condo like I do now." "You were looking for me?"

He gives a nod and smiles.

"Please tell me that you're available."

Once more, I find myself laughing at his playful teasing.

"Maybe next time we meet, I'll let you know."

Shane is nice. However, my true desire is to find someone who can distract me from my intense fascination with Phi Ploy and keep me balanced. I don't want to fall so deep that I can't get back up from the hole I dig myself into.

I accept Shane's invitation to a cup of coffee that week. He's mature, friendly, fun to talk to, and successful in his field. We communicate more frequently through our communication devices.

In the meantime, I'm making steady progress in my relationship with Phi Ploy, though I'm at a loss for where I want to take it. My interest in obtaining Phi Pay's whereabouts from Phi Ploy has waned.

I also do not want to fall deeper for her. But I would give anything to be closer to her.

"Jeab, please hire someone to track down Phi Pay. I have some money now."

"What about Phi Ploy? You're close to getting something from her, aren't you?"

"It's not that easy. She rarely talks about her family. I want it to be over with."

"So all of the effort you've put into forging a relationship with Phi Ploy is in vain?"

"Uh-huh."

"Okay. I'll start looking for someone for the job. Okay?"

"Yes. Please help me with that."

It's a relief to no longer have a hidden agenda. I feel less guilty when I spend time with Phi Ploy.

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"Prang. Why do you love Phi Jay?"

While we're seated in her room one day, I pose that question to Prang. Prang gives it some thought before shaking her head,

"I don't know."

Prang's meticulously drawn eyebrows furrow in response to the disappointed look in my eyes.

"You really want to know?"

"Uh-huh."

Before responding, my older sister takes a moment to reflect.

"Have you ever been in love with someone-someone who brings you joy simply by existing and breathing? I don't know... I don't need many reasons to love someone. My lover does not need to show up on a white horse clad in shining armor to rescue me whenever I need her to, nor does she need to be like those on TV. Some people may be nice, but you know they aren't the right ones for you. Some are talented and perfect, but they cannot make you feel at ease around them... Jay and I may not be the most balanced couple. We fight. We experience both joy and sorrow."

A calm smile escapes Prang's lips.

"Nonetheless, coming home to Jay fills my heart with warmth. When Jay is by my side, I feel balanced... We understand each other... We have the same ideals and share similar attitudes, aspirations, and ways of life. All that matters is that we don't drag each other down or hurt each other, that we care for each other, hold each other's hands when the world falls apart, and smile at each other when the weather is nice. When it comes to love, sometimes there is no reason. I'm happy and content where I am. Jay is the vitality that enhances the livability of my world."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid of what?"

"I don't know. Aren't you afraid of disappointment or whatever comes with the relationship?"

"I sometimes am. Love is similar to stock and everything else. Even if you believe you've done enough research and selected the best, you can still make a mistake. There may be a global recession or pandemic. The stock market could crash. Who knows... But I only have one life. If I let fear stop me, I might not have anything positive in my life today. I might not have

Jay by my side. You have to be willing to take a chance every now and then, Pun... Choose wisely. Love, but be mindful of your actions. Try your hardest every day. Most importantly, love yourself deeply so that you always have yourself to love, even when you realize your choices weren't the best."

"What can guarantee that we chose wisely?"

"There is no guarantee. The only constant in life is change."

"Huh?"

"The present will tell us. Just give it your all. A bright future awaits you if you excel in the here and now."

"I don't understand. Why should you put yourself at risk for something so uncertain? What if your lover is a bad person? What happens if your lover harms or betrays you? If your love wanes, what then? And what if your lover doesn't love you as much as you love her, or if you have to end things someday? Shouldn't we just enjoy ourselves without making any commitments?"

I think I understand what Prang said to some extent. However, my doubts far outweigh my understanding.

"Geez. Why are you overthinking this... Let me put it this way: if you want something, go for it. You gain nothing by wasting time thinking or allowing your fear to confine you to your small world.bDespite your fears, press on. Do your absolute best. Love more if you fear that your love will wane.vHaving said that, if your love does end, you should simply let go... Don't let your fear control you, and you'll be liberated from everything that's holding you back."

"Can I ask you why you broke up with Phi Ploy?"

"Because three years wasn't long enough for me to forget Jay."

"So you dumped Phi Ploy?"

"It was far more complicated than that, Pun."

"Do you still love Phi Ploy?"

"I do. However, it is not the same as my love for Jay."

"How so?"

"Our love is the type that always has each other's best interests at heart. I love her as if she were my family."

"Will you be okay if Phi Ploy starts a relationship with someone new?"

"If Phi Ploy finds love, it will make me very happy."

"Arghh... Phi Jay's answer was nothing like this."

"What did she say?"

"Phi Jay said that she loves anyone who lets her grab her boobs," 😂

"Did Jay say that?"

My sister is smiling as if she is about to murder someone.

"Ah.... *cough cough*."

I have faith in Phi Jay's abilities to make it out of this alive.

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I'm still struggling to keep my emotions in check. It keeps me up at night and drives me crazy in the afternoon. The easiest way for me to break from this is to take a break from Phi Ploy.

As a result, we talk on the phone less frequently. I try to avoid meeting her and expressing my desire as openly as I used to. Instead, I use those times to meet up with Shane.

However, luck never favors the sinner....

On a Thursday night, when the weather is nice, I am having dinner at an Italian restaurant. Leaning against my arms, I listen to Shane describe the bonsais he grows at his condo.

Yes! It is the same restaurant where I broke up with all of my hangout buddies.

"You named your bonsais?"

"I named each and every one of them. I take good care of them, and seeing them grow brings joy to my heart."

Just as Shane is beaming as he tells me his story, a beautiful woman with perfect wavy hair and charming dimples walks into the restaurant. Face-toface and eye-to-eye, Phi Ploy and I meet.

It would be too awkward to get up and leave at this moment, though Phi Ploy's piercing gaze scares me more than the time my mother discovered I spent over ten thousand baht on an online purchase when I was a kid.

My mind races with the thought of Phi Ploy's reaction, wondering if she will be furious with me.

However, she simply sends a sweet smile to the waitress as she walks in my direction.

Walking casually past my table, her once-sweet eyes have turned fierce as she looks at me from a distance and leaves an alluring scent that draws me to look at her back as she walks to her table.

A tall, slim woman with a sassy attitude walks into the restaurant less than ten minutes after that. A quick scan of the area elicits a smile from her before she turns to greet the individual she sought. She then heads over to Phi Ploy's table.

I sit motionless while the two women exchange greetings. However, I can't make out what they're saying When I can no longer control myself, my eyes wander to Phi Ploy's table.

The person who has a strong influence on my emotions is wearing her usual expression. She pays no attention to me. She keeps her attention on the brat with the model body and the menu.

No outrage. No anger. No attention. No greeting. No care at all.

"Do you know her, Pun?"

I return my attention to my tablemate, completely forgetting about the miniature trees we were talking about.

"She's an actress. Do you not know her?"

"I mean, do you know her personally? I see you stare at her until your head turns."

"Oh?"

"She was also looking at you."

"Who?"

I make an effort to suppress my enthusiasm.

"Ploy, Pitcha. The one who's facing us." I can't stop myself from smiling slightly.

*...You can't ignore me, can you?*

"She resides in our condominium."

"She's friends with Prang Punnaputch. They were regulars at our condominium pool."

Something seems to have just clicked for the man who raises bonsais. He draws nearer and examines me from every angle.

"Come to think of it, you look like an actress... Yes. Looking more closely, you resemble Prang Punnaputch. Have you met her in person?"

I laugh dryly because I think Shane is funny. But, because Phi Ploy is sitting behind me and I am nervous, my laughter appears forced. "She's looking at us again."

This time, I decide to turn around and refocus my gaze on Phi Ploy. She's not looking at me, as Shane claimed. She's looking at her tablemate with that look the look *I'm possessive of.*

"I think we should get the bill. I have work to finish."

"Do you need to work after this? Should report to the Ministry of Labor? My network is extensive, you know?"

My usual reaction to his serious-faced teasing would be to laugh. But my frustration is getting the best of me right now.

Ugh... I couldn't sleep last night. With my arms wrapped around my pillow, I allowed my heart to drift to the 42nd floor. I was frustrated just thinking about the look Phi Ploy gave that woman.

I did nothing wrong. We are not romantically involved. Both of us are free to get to know anyone. So, why do I care?

. .

I awoke late this morning after lying awake all night with my arm resting on my forehead, deep in thought. As a result, I have to rush through my normal routines because I have a meeting in the morning.

My hair is still damp as I hug my belongings and enter the condo elevator.

Life frequently throws you curveballs, such as meeting someone you're not prepared to meet in your most distressing state.

The beautiful woman on the 42nd floor steps into the elevator. She greets me with her usual smile, but I get the impression she is looking at me distantly. I don't know how to respond, so I just stand still and silent, fully aware of my own guilt.

"Where are you going, Phi Ploy?"

She has her travel luggage with her.

"I'm fleeing to heal my heart."

She teases with a sarcastic smile.

I hate this. Although things appear to be normal, they are not.

"Will you return to your room tonight? Should we get together for dinner?"

"I have to go to work in Rayong."

"You did not tell me you had work out of town."

"Did you ask me about it?"

Her silky hair falls down her shoulder as she tilts her head in response to my question. Her emotionless face makes it impossible for me to read her thoughts and feelings.

"When are you planning to return?"

On the inside, I am fuming and on the verge of losing it. However, I try to suppress my emotions and calmly ask her another question.

"Shall I pick you up?"

"I'll be back tomorrow, but I already have someone driving me."

Phi Ploy smiles, but only out of politeness.

When the elevator reaches its destination, it comes to a stop. I follow Phi Ploy into the parking lot. I had planned to take the Skytrain to avoid being late for my meeting, but I no longer care about the time I arrive at my office.

"Phi Ploy."

I slip my fingers into hers to stop her from walking as I softly call her.

"Are you upset with me?"

"What did you do? What makes you think I would be upset with you?"

"You didn't say hello when we met at the restaurant yesterday."

"You were with a friend. And today we're conversing as usual, aren't we?"

Phi Ploy looks at her watch.

"I believe you'll be late for work if you don't leave now."

She's aloof. I feel like I'm back on the treadmill.

"Phi Ploy. Please don't do this."

I hold on to the older woman's hand as I hang my head and let my tears fall.

"I had dinner with a friend. His name is Shane. He currently resides in our condominium. I met him at the fitness facility. He owns his own business and works as an engineer. He raises five bonsais and gives each one a name"

The older woman bursts into laughter the moment I confess everything. The adoring expression in her eyes returns. There and then, I lose it. The corners of my mouth are itching to form a pout.

Finally, I place my head on her shoulder and cry.

"I stayed up all night thinking about yesterday, so I got up late. Since I have a meeting first thing in the morning, I didn't even have time to style my hair and draw my eyeliner. And because I'm still here, I won't be able to make it to the office on time. My phone will ring any moment now, and my boss will scold me. I will have to go to work with swollen eyes. Most importantly, you went out to dinner with someone else yesterday. *Sob*."

***Rrrrrrrr!***

The timing is spot on, as if we're in a sitcom. My phone rings just as I finish my long speech, causing me to bury my face deeper into Phi Ploy's shoulder and cry even harder. As a result, Phi Ploy takes the call on my behalf.

"Hello."

I am unable to hear the other person on the line. Phi Ploy simply listens quietly with a smile at the corner of her mouth. She looks at me adoringly every now and then, and then she speaks

"Give me a moment to speak, and you will realize that I am not Pun. My name is Ploy. Pun is feeling sick today. She may be about ten minutes late, but she is well prepared for the meeting. I guarantee that she won't be a liability to the company. And if you have nothing constructive to say other than venting your frustration, I will hang up because I need to drop off your employee before the meeting ends."

Phi Ploy ends her lengthy speech by simply hanging up.

"How could you say that to my boss?!"

The slender shoulders are shrugged casually.

"He's not my boss"

"Phi Ploy!"

I drop my jaw and am left speechless. I can't imagine what I'll face 35 minutes from now when I arrive at the office.

"Get in the car. I will drop you off."

Phi Ploy takes my hand. However, I stand motionless.

"Are you not coming?"

"After dropping me off, you'll head to Rayong. How will I get home after work?"

"The Skytrain is only 100 meters from our condo. This information was clearly stated in the presale brochure... And I don't want to make matters worse, but your eyebrows are uneven."

Leaning back, I peer at my brows through the car window of Phi Ploy and pout at her with puffy eyes. And at the sight of the stain on Phi Ploy's shirt, my eyes well up once more.

"*Sobbbbbbbb*... It seems like my powder got all over your shirt."

I proChapter :ly buried my face too deep.

Phi Ploy laughs at my reaction before moving closer, wiping my tears, and styling my hair.

"I have a spare shirt in my car... How about we have dinner when I get back?"

"Phi Ploy"

I take a moment to gather my courage.

"When Shane asked me out to dinner, he asked if I was available."

Phi Ploy's eyebrows twitch as she listens to me.

"And what did you say?"

"I wasn't sure what to say... Because we haven't discussed it yet."

I'm not sure how Phi Ploy feels about our relationship. I don't know if she wants to claim me as her own.

*Because... all she does is kiss me.*

.

# Chapter 14 : How to...

**I am not usually a whiner... I think.**

I'm not clingy to my friends or lover. I don't act childishly. However, my yearnings for Phi Ploy only grow stronger in response to my efforts to rein them in. The more I try not to think about her... the more I miss her.

"Can I go see you this evening?"

[I already told you that I'm in Rayong for work today.]

"But you said it was just for a day."

[And I told you that my work finishes very late at night, so I will spend the night here. I'm going back tomorrow.]

"I can go pick you up tonight. Rayong isn't far from Bangkok."

[What's going on with you?]

"I want to see your face."

[Just Google my name. There's no need for you to travel all the way here. A simple Google search will return a large number of my photographs.]

I can imagine her lovely dimples hearing that teasing voice of hers.

"I'd rather not argue with you. Are you back at your accommodation yet?"

[I'm heading back there now.]

"Have you had any dinner?"

[Yes.]

"Who are you with?"

[My secretary.]

"Do you miss me?"

"......"

There is only silence.

"Are you smiling right now?"

"....I've been smiling since I saw your name on my phone when you called."

That is all it takes to alleviate my longing for her. That should be enough to calm my anxieties until I meet her.

I reach Rayong at 1 a.m. I'm trying to calm myself in front of room 9013 of a hotel in the heart of Rayong, waiting for someone to open the door for me after knocking twice.

Despite her silence, I could feel the scolding in her eyes, brows, lips, and facial muscles for driving alone to Rayong at night.

"If you're going to scold me, do it now."

As soon as I see her face, the first night butterfly flies out of my chest. Its luminous wings are flapping joyously as it delicately descends onto Phi Ploy's silky cleavage.

"You're an adult. You should be able to think for yourself. Why should I scold you?"

Dressed in a bathrobe, the woman brushes her wavy hair off her face before inviting me to take a seat in her room. Even the hotel room where Phi Ploy stays for just one night exudes an enticing aroma. A Phi Ploy vibe permeates the entire space.

"So you're not going to scold me?"

Phi Ploy's lovely eyes narrow as she clearly becomes irritated by my lack of guilt. As a result, I hang my head and droop my face in an attempt to appear adorable, yet...

"That expression doesn't work on me, Pun."

"Aren't you happy to see me here?"

I want to hug and cuddle her so badly. I want to bury my face into her soft body.

"Is that how I look?"

"You would not let me hug you. I desperately need a hug."

"Did I stop you from doing that?"

I express my displeasure by burying my scrunched face into her neck and grunting. Loosely wrapping my arms around her, I press the tip of my nose against her luminous, fair skin, just above her earlobe.

"Does it imply that you're happy to see me?"

"You're an adult. You should be able to think for yourself. Do I need to tell you that?"

Phi Ploy's voice is brimming with happiness. I lean back and meet her eyes.

"I am unable to think right now."

Her eyes shine with adoration as the light catches her cheerful face. I can't help it... The urge to press my lips against hers is too strong for me to resist.

"What a terrible kiss."

The touch is delicate, yet the words are vicious. I press my lips down once more, hoping for a better response. However, she shakes her head.

"That isn't any better."

"If you're going to be this savage, I will no longer allow you to speak."

I wrap my arms around her neck and pull her in for another kiss.

"I'm not a device to track your kissing skill development, Pun."

I look into the eyes of the person in front of me and decide to go for it. I am going to give this relationship my all, and if it fails, I will accept all responsibility

"What do I have to do... to receive a full score from you?"

My question is as quiet as a whisper. Phi Ploy grabs my collar and pulls me closer. She leans her gorgeous features in delicately. The sparkle in her honey-sweet eyes as she pauses to look into mine renders me speechless.

So seductive... Phi Ploy has a remarkable talent for flirting.

"Do you realize what you've just asked me?"

She speaks in a sweeter tone than usual. Her fingers tenderly trace a delicate outline around my face as she raises my chin.

"I'm fully aware of everything that's happening."

I cannot decipher the deep thoughts that are visible in her dark eyes. She shakes her head slowly, as though I didn't respond to her query. She then presses those dewy lips against mine, as if she has made up her mind.

It is not as passionate as our initial kiss in the condominium; however, it is so warm that it melts my heart.

Her fragrance is intoxicating. I ensnare her silky hair in my fingers and give a little tug. And when Phi Ploy leans in and tilts her head at the perfect angle, I let out a soft moan.

My stomach flutters with butterflies... I've never been so infatuated by someone.

My hand finds its way through the opening in her collar and brushes against her silky cleavage. An erotic scene would have ensued if Phi Ploy hadn't seized my hand as I was slipping it into her bra, on the verge of touching more than just her cleavage.

Although our lips have not yet parted, she is smiling at me with an expression that is both adoring and content.

"Are you attempting to outdo your teacher?"

"What constitutes outdoing a teacher? I only know doing a teacher."

With an emotionless expression on my face, I say this as I longingly peer through the opening of her collar... Just a little bit more. Why did she have to stop me?

"Crazy kid."

Phi Ploy gets up and straightens her clothes while laughing merrily.

For the first time in my conscious state, we are sharing a bed. With only a few pieces of clothing on, our exposed skin brushes against each other. Her skin is cool and moist, beckoning me to cuddle her.

I wish I could spend the entire night with my face buried in her cleavage and neck. There are moments when I do nothing more than lie fully still. On occasion, I snuggle and kiss. It is difficult for me to resist the urge to run my fingers over her silky skin.

She gives me free rein to do whatever I want until she begins to breathe deeply and steadily. The day's exertion caused Phi Play to nod off first.

In the darkness, I look at Phi Ploy and recall our video calls until we fall asleep. During those moments, I wished I could lie next to her in bed and kiss her eyelids as they closed. I wanted to know what she had dreamed about.

I wanted to embrace her and keep her warm, despite the fact that she is older and more resilient than I am in life. I wanted to safeguard the vulnerabilities I could sense she was concealing deep within her strong heart. I still can't put my finger on what it is about her.

And yet, despite the fact that we've only just met, she has my complete affection and confidence. When I'm with her, I get a warm, fuzzy feeling in my chest.

"Pun."

The person I thought was sleeping calls out to me in a slow, sleepy tone.

"I didn't want to say this because we're sleeping in an unfamiliar place. But every time I'm about to nod off, your constant fiddling keeps me awake. I feel as though an ethereal being is keeping me from getting any rest... Stop kissing me and lie still."

"It is easy for you to say. You've never been in my position."

The person listening frowns in confusion. I am unable to suppress a soft giggle as I maintain my face buried in her warm breasts.

"What's so funny?"

"You smell too good."

I pull away from her and touch the part of her cheek where a dimple usually appears with my finger.

"Have you ever seen yourself smile? There's light there."

I press my lips against her eyelid.

"If you haven't seen that, please don't ask me to stop kissing you."

It appears that the sleepy person is now awake. Without warning, she pushes me and turns me over so that I'm lying on my back. She then places her slender frame on top of me, stretches my arms out, and presses my wrists above my head.

"If I do this..."

She brings her breathtaking features close to my face.

"... Can you keep still?"

Her soft hair falls on my shoulders. Even in the dark, her intense desire shines through her ferocious eyes.

A passionate kiss from Phi Ploy lands firmly on my neck. Her lips are soft as they caress my shoulders and cleavage, despite the intoxicating sensation of her sharp fangs. Through the sheer fabric, her hands delicately touch my two breasts.

As her fingers trace across my delicate areas, I tremble and raise my face. I can clearly smell the seductive aroma of the ambrosial woman... That scent sends the butterflies in my chest into a completely disorienting frenzy, and they begin flying around aimlessly.

This level of intimacy is unprecedented for me. However, I made no effort to fight off Phi Ploy's pressure as she pressed my wrists against the bed. I simply shut my eyes and allowed my face to flush.

I'm breathing heavily and with difficulty. Wherever that lovely face wants to go, I make way for it.

I thought we were about to cross the line when the swift aggressor lifted the hem of my shirt and sucked my exposed skin. My stomach churns. I feel Phi Ploy's nails sliding up my thigh and onto my hip.

"If I do not get enough sleep, I will become extremely irritated."

Everything stops dead in its tracks, and I am taken aback.

Phi Ploy pushes herself up, returns my clothes to their proper places, kisses me on the forehead, and then lies down next to me as if she hadn't just aroused me.

Damn. I turn to look at her, my eyes wide open in disbelief. The savage and seductive eagle is grinning at me. Without a second thought, she hoisted me into the air and then carelessly let me fall to the concrete below.

"Can you now imagine yourself in someone else's position and experience the sensation of an ethereal being waking them up while they're asleep?"

"Did you have to go that far? I did not go near your breasts, but you caressed them and.... Argh."

I'm fully awake and aroused.

"Caress, and what?"

Phi Ploy asks, as if she doesn't understand what I meant. But the fact that she was laughing while she asked me shows how thorough and accurate her understanding of my words was.

"I had no intention of getting even with you. But you're just so adorable."

Can I really believe what she just said? She claims I'm adorable, but she just left me to plummet from the sky.

"My mother has always raised me to be a lady."

There are giggles coming from the shadows

"And?"

"You touched my breasts."

"Yes. I admit, I touched them... In fact, I planned to do more."

The fact that the lights are off is a blessing. I am able to hide my awkwardness in the room's darkness. If the lights were on, I wouldn't know where to bury my flushed face.

"I find myself at a disadvantage."

"Do you want me to compensate you? However, you didn't appear to be a victim. You seemed to enjoy..."

"Phi Ploy!"

I sigh loudly, but she simply laughs and draws me in for a hug.

"I'll treat you to omakase when we return to Bangkok, okay?"

Once again, my nose and mouth gravitate towards her radiant neck.

"Omakase in exchange for allowing you to touch my boobs?"

"Is it a good deal?"

"I feel like I'm selling my body."

"It's a good price. I only touched your breasts. An omakase course typically costs at least a few thousand."

"That isn't a good price. You get to touch the bosom of a gorgeous woman who is an angel, has a degree from the United States, and comes from a loving family. That's a bargain."

"But all the models usually allow me to touch their boobs for free."

I break free of her embrace as an internal wave of annoyance washes over me. But I shift my game plan from complaining to doing something else the second I catch a glimpse of the sparkle in her eyes.

"But then, why would you even consider treating me to omakase?"

I playfully wiggle my toes up her leg.

"Am I... special?"

"I will tell you everything if you let me touch it again."

She may be threatening me verbally, but I seriously doubt she will follow through with her threats. Consequently, I take hold of her soft hand and rest it on my breast. And when Phi Ploy tries to withdraw her hand, I grip it firmly.

"Explain in detail why you're willing to pay to touch my breasts."

"......"

Phi Ploy pauses when I launch an attack. It seems like my unexpected tactic has caught her off guard.

"Or... is this not enough?"

Phi Ploy's eyebrows arch as I thread her hand down to my shirt hem and slide it underneath.

Feelings of naked flesh meet. I am warming her icy fingers as I bring them closer to my breast. The moment her hand touches my breast, I let it go free.

As Phi Ploy's fingers start to caress the spot where I released her hand, my pulse quickens and my abdominal muscles tense. Even though I can sense that she is also aroused, she remains rooted to that spot and refuses to claim any other area.

"Where is the woman who was raised to be a lady by her mother?"

The person who says those words draws her hand back and wraps her arm around her chest. I exhale in frustration as I find myself once again left hanging.

"I'm going to sleep now."

I turn away from her, frustrated, though I am not sure why. I pull the blanket up to my neck and hide under it. Nevertheless, I'm totally outclassed. I turn back to Phi Ploy after closing my eyes for less than a minute.

..Those sweet, profound eyes are still fixed on me.

We lock eyes for a moment before I kiss her soft lips and close my eyes after cuddling her, even though I'm still sulking.

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Our relationship advances slowly. In other words, while it may appear slow, it actually progresses quickly. On the other hand, despite appearing swift, it moves at a frustratingly slow pace.

My hormones have gone haywire. I constantly yearn and long to be close to her.

We become an integral part of each other's lives. We spend our nighttime together. We discuss personal matters. I pay her discreet visits at work. We are aware of each other's daily schedules.

I am aware that she drives at a high speed and that she requires at least eight hours of sleep every night to maintain her attractiveness and prevent easily becoming irritated.

I even know she prefers when I openly express my desires for her. She likes it when I take the initiative and make the first move. The only problem is that she won't do anything to me. I sometimes get the impression that she is holding back.

She appears to be testing the waters but refusing to dive in. Once we're completely aroused and ready to cross the line, she'll abruptly end the teasing.

I've recently been trying to seduce her more and more because I want to break down the wall she's built between us. I pay closer attention to her and note what she likes and dislikes, as well as her body language with different people.

My biggest worry is that she hasn't moved on from her feelings for Prang. There's something between them that I can't compete with.

"What are you watching... What's with your recent taste in obscure music?"

"What is so peculiar about oldies songs?"

"It wouldn't be odd if you don't normally listen to Coldplay or go crazy for The Script."

"I never said anything about you changing your preferences in men every six months."

"Pun, oldies music isn't your thing."

"Well, Best... I want to listen to some oldies right now. By the way, I would like a Phi Ploy cardboard cutout standee. Could you tell me where I can get one made?"

"For what reason do you want it?"

"She'll be competing in her channel's sporting event. I'm going to go cheer her on."

"OMG. A cardboard cutout standee? isn't that a bit much? Have you thought about using the stadium's LED lights instead?"

"Good idea."

"I was being sarcastic... Didn't you already hire a detective to locate Phi Pay? Why are you still spending time with Phi Ploy?"

Best is arching her brows and twisting her mouth-which are almost normal in comparison to the last time I met her-as she looks at me skeptically.

"We hang out with the same people. It's only natural for me to go support her."

"Will Phi Prang, Phi Ken, and Phi Jay also be there?"

"Of course. They are the channel's leading actors and actresses."

"Why aren't you making cardboard cutout standees for them? Why are you only getting one for Phi Ploy?"

"They have a lot of fans who can do those things for them."

"And Phi Ploy doesn't?"

"Phi Ploy portrays a villain while they are the leads. Obviously, they have more fans."

"Look at my beautiful face, Pun... Do I look stupid?"

"Yes."

"Do you like Phi Ploy?"

"Best. I have VIP passes."

"Okay. I'll play dumb. I won't ask you any more questions. What does Miss Pun want D'Best to do for you?"

The sarcastic friend rubs her breasts against my back in an attempt to please me.

"Good girl. Do not challenge the authority of the state... I'm looking for a reliable shop for standees and LED lights."

"At your service."

"Following this event, Phi Jay will begin working in Pattaya... Phi Prang will accompany her. Their gang is planning a trip. Would you guys like to come along? The lodging is free, and it has a swimming pool."

"Is Phi Ken in the gang?"

"Uh-huh."

"Ohhhhhhhh. Absolutely, my darling. D'Best will also be there if Phi Ken is. However, even if Phi Ken does not go, I will still make the trip... because it's free. HAHAHA."

Best is so giddy that you would never guess that her husband is home waiting for her.

"Okay. Please check if Jeab and Chakrit are available. I will send the date and details in our group chat."

"Krit will definitely go. He enjoys rubbing shoulders with celebrities."

"Uh-huh. One last thing."

"Yes?"

"When you and Phi Boy got to know each other, when did you confess your love?"

"Is it necessary for us to confess our love? Isn't sleeping together enough?"

"Argh..."

I did not get the information I wanted.

"Has Phi Boy ever simply stopped when you wanted to be intimate or were about to do so?"

"My, my, my. You're so hardcore today. Don't tell me you have a guy."

My best friend is pointing her index finger at me, winking and twisting her face, as if she has discovered my secret. "To whom are you giving your virginity?"

I brush Best's finger away.

"Stop your 'my oh my' and answer me. Make sure it's something useful." "Geez... Okay. When we're tired or stressed, we may not feel like doing it. But we rarely stop while doing it. Who would stop unless there was an emergency?"

"Ah."

"What is it? Why do you seem to be in distress?"

"Nothing. The LED from this shop doesn't appeal to me; it lacks vibrancy."

Best takes the phone out of my hand and looks at it.

"That's a lame excuse. The LEDs are exceptionally bright."

Best moves her 350-cc breasts away to grab the cheesecake from the refrigerator, leaving the cardboard cutout standee images frozen on my phone's screen, along with my thoughts.

Am I not beautiful enough? Do I need to have a model figure to persuade Phi Ploy to cross the line?

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# Chapter 14.1 : Ploy's diary

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I cannot do that. I must stop myself. It's Prang's younger sister.

Remember that, Ploy.

Always keep this in mind. You must never forget.

# Chapter 15: Paytai

***Rrrrrrr!***

***Rrrrrrr!***

"Hello."

[Did you get a chance to read the email I sent you?]

"I'm driving. I will read it shortly. You've got something?"

[Although I have not yet located him, I believe the details I have just sent you may be of interest to you.]

"Okay I'll contact you if I need any additional information after I read it."

The sky is dark, and the streets are jam-packed with cars. I got off work later than usual today, I'm dying of hunger. The only reason I didn't stop for dinner anywhere was because I wanted to dine with the villain star at our condo.

However, the email I just read after parking my car in the condo parking lot derailed my plans.

I quickly scan the email before closing it and gathering my belongings. I make my way to my room and dial the number of the person I'm missing.

"What are you doing?"

[I'm on my way back to my room.]

"Phi Ploy. I have to work today. Our dinner-"

[Are you canceling on me?]

"I don't want to, but I really need to work... Perhaps you should have a bite to eat before you come back. I don't want you to eat alone in your room."

[I can take care of myself.]

I almost see her smile through the line.

[Where are you? Are you already at the condo?]

"No."

I lie. Right now, my hand is hovering over the door handle of my room.

"I'm still outside."

[Will you be back late? Would you like to eat anything? I can get you something on the wa.]

I sorely miss the person on the other end of the line. But today, I need some alone time.

"I don't want anything. I just want to see your face."

My voice fades as my emotions intensify. The person on the other end of the line teases back with a soft, joyful tone.

[Google my name.]

I laugh. "Phi Ploy."

'Yes?'

"I made a playlist for you. Please listen to it and refrain from driving too fast. And please let me know once you reach your room."

[You too. Inform me once you get to your room.]

.

I hang up with a merry heart and put my belongings on the table. As soon as my buttocks touch the sofa, the email I received from Ruj, the private detective I hired to locate Phi Pay, appears on my iPad.

I read about Phi Pay's early life in great detail, including the names of his parents, his birthplace, and his siblings, all of which I had previously scanned in the parking lot.

Paytai Metakit is Mrs. Pojjamarn's eldest son. Mrs. Pojjamarn married Mr. Pichit Melakit and became pregnant with Phi Pay at the age of 18. She divorced shortly after Phi Pay's birth and began dating Mr. Korn, a wealthy businessman.

They were together until Ms. Pojjamarn became pregnant with a daughter. However, Mr. Korn was involved with multiple women, and he started having affairs when Ms. Pojjamarn was four months pregnant.

They argued and ultimately decided to part ways without marrying. Mr. Korn did not support Mrs. Pojjamarn in raising his own daughter, Ploy Pitcha Pariyakom, who later became a well-known celebrity.

A few years after her breakup with Mr. Korn, Ms. Pojjamarn married Mr. Chainarong Pariyakorn and had a daughter named Pailin.

Unfortunately, Ms. Pojjamarn's youngest daughter passed away at a young age-before she turned 18-after spending two years in a coma as a result of a car accident.

Mrs. Pojjamarn is still married to her third husband, Mr. Chainarong.

Regarding her previous husbands, her second husband, Mr. Korn, died of cancer, while her first husband, Mr. Pichit Metakit, still runs his own business in Chiangrai.

Ruj, the private detective I hired, goes into detail about Phi Pay's upbringing. According to his report, Phi Pay and his two younger sisters were raised by their mother. In his adull years, Phi Pay relocated to New York and married a US citizen.

Phi Pay obtained American citizenship after five to six years of marriage. However, they later divorced. Following the divorce, Phi Pay started a restaurant business with his friend and began renting out rooms in his house to college students. Not long ago, he vanished with my money.

Since my investigator was unsuccessful in locating Phi Pay, he turned to individuals who knew him well in an effort to piece together his whereabouts. These included his sister, mother, stepfather, and closest friends.

The report includes a photo of Phi Ploy and Phi Pay in what appears to be Phi Nop's nightclub. This demonstrates that Phi Pay is in Thailand and within my social circle.

I reach out to Ruj over the phone to discuss further details. He said that Phi Pay had met with his sister once since I hired him.

That night, the siblings argued quietly. Ruj was unable to obtain additional information because the environment made eavesdropping impossible. The sister-an actress-walked out of the nightclub in a fit of rage that night.

Ruj followed Phi Pay after he split from his sister to find out where he lives.

[He was very cautious, but I was able to follow him to an old building in the suburbs.]

The report also includes a photograph of Phi Pay entering an old, run-down building at night.

[I silently trailed him until he arrived at his room. He opened the door, then abruptly paused and dashed down the stairs. Two men bolted out of the room and pursued him. I chased them down the stairs, but I lost them as they ran into the narrow alleys. In the event that he does not return to his room, I thought it would be prudent to return to his room and collect additional information. I came across loan agreements.]

"Did you bring any back?"

'No, but I did take photos of them. They can be found in the emails.'

All of the loan agreements are in English. Add the accrued interest to the sum he borrowed, and it comes to nearly $200,000 USD... His debt is substantial.

[I traced the trail to the loan's issuer. He operates a nightclub in New York. As I dug deeper, I found out that he is associated with QQ, a Thai import/export firm. The company is embroiled in a US lawsuit, as anyone who follows the news can tell you.]

"A lawsuit?"

[Yes. According to my contacts, the company serves as a cover for illicit activities. The company owns stakes in several nightclubs in the Bronx, many of which allegedly belong to US citizens. They partake in prostitution, illegal lending, gambling, drug dealing, and a variety of other illegal activities. Did you happen to catch CNN's news coverage from a couple of months ago?]

"What news?"

[The shooting incident that took place in the Bronx. It happened in broad daylight. The incident occurred in a convenience store involving a boy and three Mexicans.]

"Ah, yes."

I was in New York when it happened. A young boy's death at the hands of gangsters during an attack on African Americans garnered widespread media attention.

However, I am uncertain about the apprehending of the shooters, as I did not follow the news closely.

[Someone provided the authorities with evidence that allowed them to apprehend the shooters. The shooters' confessions indicated that the owner of SS Nightclub was involved in the incident, which centered around disputes related to illicit businesses. Several people were killed in order to conceal evidence. However, when the charges became unavoidable, the owner of SS Nightclub implicated the owner of QQ in the case. The US police investigated further and discovered evidence that could link QQ to illicit activities such as drug trafficking, prostitution, and others. Oh. They were also involved in the murder of a Thai woman and the subsequent disposal of her body near the railway in the Bronx. From what I've heard, the police are currently collecting evidence with the intention of apprehending QQ's owner.]

"Does Paytai simply owe them money, or is he also involved in these illicit activities?"

[I don't have any information about that at the moment. I was only asked to locate him. These extra details are provided free of charge because they were required to track him down. My current focus is on locating him through his sister, the actress.]

"Are you trailing her?"

[You can say that. I think they're in touch. I will soon find out where Paytal is hiding.]

"I'd like you to send me everything you have, including this information, documents, photos, and so on. I will transfer the remaining fee to you."

[My work is not done. I have yet to locate my target. Why are you transferring the remainder of my fee now?]

"This is sufficient. I believe I have everything I need. I would like to end our agreement and contract at this time."

I no longer want the detective to track down Phi Pay because I don't want him to involve Phi Ploy in this. I don't want anyone to intrude on her privacy.

The information I just received is weighing heavily on me. I can't stop thinking about it as I go about my personal business and lie in bed.

I keep thinking about it until my longing for the person named Pitcha eventually overtakes me. Looking at the time, I take a long moment to reflect before picking up my phone.

I scroll past Shane's message from the evening, not thinking about responding right now.

These days, I've been trying to put some space between us and give him signals that we should be friends. Shane appears to understand and has continued to extend his friendship to me.

**PUN:**

**Are you asleep, Phi Ploy? (22.51)**

**PUN:**

**I made fresh orange juice for you. I want to bring it to you, but I can't go down to your floor without a keycard. (22.51) (read)**

**PLOY:**

**I will go get it from you tomorrow. (22.53)**

**PUN:**

**But it tastes best when it's fresh. (22.53) (read)**

**PLOY:**

**Thank you. But it's 11 p.m. It's proChapter :ly best if I drink it tomorrow. (22.54)**

**PUN:**

**Okay. (22.56) (read)**

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All I can do is sigh and let time pass. However, I soon receive another chat notification on my phone.

**PLOY:**

**Tomorrow is not Saturday. Why are you up at such a late hour making orange juice? Is everything alright? (23.03)**

**PUN:**

**I'm fine. Gd night ^^ (23.05) (read)**

**PLOY:**

**Gd night (23.05)**

But I can't sleep!

**PUN:**

**I also have some warm milk. Drinking warm milk is said to improve your sleep quality. (23.15) (read)**

A photograph of warm milk freshly poured into a bottle is sent to our chat room.

**PLOY:**

**Pun. Simply say what you want. (23.17)**

**PUN:**

**I want you to sleep soundly. (read) PLOY: Tell me what you really want. (23.17)**

**PUN:**

**Nothing. (23.18) (read)**

**PUN:**

**You will say I'm acting like a child. (23.20) (read)**

**PLOY:**

**I'm waiting. (23.21)**

I take a moment to reflect before typing everything I'm thinking into our chat.

**PUN:**

**I miss you. (23.23) (read)**

**PUN:**

**I didn't get to see you today because I got back late.**

**PUN:**

**I have been missing you all day, and I'm burning inside. I tried but couldn't sleep.**

**PUN:**

**I would like to hear your voice close to my ear.**

**PUN:**

**I want to know if you're feeling tired today.**

**PUN:**

**Just seeing the door of your room is enough for me. HAHA.**

**PUN:**

**But I don't want to bother you. I don't want to be whiny or overly attached. I don't want you to think I'm acting childishly.**

My messages were not read until about 6-7 minutes later, when the word (read) appeared on the screen. I am eagerly anticipating the response from the woman who read those messages.

**PLOY:**

**Is that all you have to say? (23.32)**

**PUN:**

**Yes. (23.32) (read)** She's incredibly cold.

**PLOY:**

**If you're finished typing, please open the door for me. I am standing in front of your room right now. (23.33)**

Can I scream? Will that cause people to panic? Will they think the building is on fire or something?

"How's it going?"

The same greeting and smile come from my favorite person standing outside my door.

"Why did you come up here?"

"This was not what you said you would say in our chat room.

I pull the woman with perfect wavy hair in for a tight embrace.

"I am hugging you, but I still miss you. Have you enchanted me in some way?"

"There were spells in the food I made for you."

I wrap my arms around her neck and pull her closer, then close my eyes and press my cheek against hers.

"I beg you, lessen the spell. The organ in my chest is overworking."

"Should I take you to see the doctor?"

"Can the doctor also help me get over my fear?"

"What is the nature of your fear?"

"Fear of change. Fear of everything."

My voice is so soft that the listener leans back to look for the seriousness in my eyes and face.

"....."

"Have you ever felt so deeply for someone or something that it consumed you with fear?"

In the eyes of the ambrosial woman, I see vulnerability. Nonetheless, she remains silent and listens.

"You don't feel as deeply as I do, so you proChapter :ly don't understand."

"Pun... What is an adult female's typical heart rate?"

"ProChapter :ly 70 to 80 BPM?"

Phi Ploy's slender brows furrow as she takes my hand and places it against her chest.

"Is my heart rate currently within the normal range, in your opinion?"

I detect an accelerated beat in Phi Ploy's chest. Her face, however, is expressionless. The only emotion I can detect is adoration in her eyes, which are fixed on me.

My hand remains on her soft breasts, and I try to suppress a smile while nestling my joyous face into her ear.

"I was taken aback when you pulled my hand, thinking you wanted me to grope your breasts."

"Naughty."

The older woman spanks my butt and bursts into laughter.

"Please spend the night here."

....... Phi Ploy falls silent, but I can feel her heart pounding. This boosts my confidence. Thus, I proceed to lay a passionate kiss on her alluring neck. To get her to comply with my request, I'm appealing to her tenderness.

"Please."

"......"

"Please, Phi Ploy."

My nose is pressed against her ear. I breathe out a warm breath.

"I have to-"

"Say nothing if you are going to reject me."

I bite her neck before she can finish her sentence.

"Someone told me to come get orange juice, so I left the lights and the air conditioning in my room on."

I nod understandingly. However, I'm not happy that she's come up here solely for the orange juice. Does she not realize I was implying something?

Does she not care how badly I want to see her? Okay... if orange juice is her only purpose in coming here, then I will get it for her.

I turn around sulkily and grab the orange juice and warm milk. I then hand them over to the person who is playing hard to get.

"Enjoy your drinks."

She lets out a heavy breath because of the reactions I inadvertently displayed to her... I get the impression that she sees me as a whiny child who makes her uncomfortable with my demands.

But I'm not like this with everyone! Plus, I'm not interested in anything she gives me if it feels forced.

"Why are you just standing there, sulking? Please turn off the lights and air conditioning so that we can go to sleep in my room."

"Huh?"

"And, here."

Phi Ploy thrusts the milk bottle into my hand.

"Help me with this."

Geeeeeeeeez. I really hate her (not). I'm extremely annoyed. She's driving me insane. She makes me a whiny little girl. She always teases and then consoles me.

After she gets me all pumped up, she simply stands there and grins at me, her shiny, silky hair glowing. I really want to make a bird's nest out of her soft, smooth, and flowing hair.

"Pun. Don't bite me!"

The woman with dimples laughs as she separates my face away from her shoulder.

"Ouch! Why did you spank me, Pun?!"

I do not respond to her. I simply switch off the lights and air conditioning in my room, grab her wrist, and lead her down to the 42nd floor.

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# Chapter 15.1 : Ploy's diary

**Date xx/xx/XXXX**

Pun often sulks.

She cries easily. And she likes to bite.

# Chapter 16 : The event at the channel

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It's beyond me how Phi Ploy manages to maintain such a pleasant scent all over her body.

"Pun. You're getting in the way."

But I do know that she spends 5 to 10 minutes each day spinning in front of the mirror, matching her favorite shoes to different outfits.

Occasionally, she pulls out her phone and snaps a photo of herself wearing her shiny new heels in the mirror. For a subtle but effective way to promote her own brand, she often posts photos of herself going about her day while dressed in stunning pieces of clothing.

"How can you not feel sleepy getting up this early in the morning?"

I wrap my arms around her waist and cling to her. I continue to nestle my face against her shoulder and rest my entire body weight on her. I feel like a little girl who is still half asleep.

"Pun. Step back. I don't want to spill this. It's hot."

The person who is issuing me a warning leans away from me and sets down the pot in her hand. Nonetheless, I refuse to let go. I maintain my position, clinging on to her from behind. As a result, when she moves, our arms and legs tangle.

"If you're still feeling sleepy, go back to bed."

"I'm sleeping here."

Phi Ploy proChapter :ly doesn't realize this, but I enjoy watching her try to suppress her emotions or persevere. I like it when she bites her lips, then the knot on her brows (formed because of the weight in her hand) loosens, and a bright smile spreads across her face as she looks me in the eye.

Her moist skin is frequently coated with sweat. She tends to wear a hair tie to secure her wavy hair, leaving only her hairline on her neck exposed.

Every Tuesday and Friday night, amidst all the exercise equipment, I like to watch her look like that.

"Let me go. Go freshen up so that we can eat together."

"It's the weekend. And I showered last night."

She always twists her face at me in this way when we spend the night together and I refuse to shower the next morning... Is it necessary? I didn't jog or exert myself to the point of sweating the night before.

"Where are you going today? Why are you all dressed up?"

I press my nose against her diamond-adorned ear.

"I thought you weren't working today."

"I'm meeting up with Min today."

If I didn't know that Phi Min was Phi Ploy's best friend, I would have felt possessive. They meet about as frequently as Phi Ploy and Prang do. "Will you celebrate my birthday with me tomorrow?"

"I had no idea your birthday is tomorrow."

"Because you don't care."

"Because you never told me."

"You never told me about your birthday, but I do know. I also know that you get stomach pain when you eat spicy food. I know your favorite lipstick color and the expression you give when you're upset. I know your clothes size, shoe size... and breast size."

"Did you Google all that?"

The person who is preempting me giggles.

"It's called caring. However, I measure your breast size with my hands."

"I'm older than you. You should be respectful when speaking with me."

This expression... I can tell she's not agitated like she appears to be.

"How am I disrespecting you?"

"Are you turning 25 this year? Where do you intend to celebrate?"

"I'm not throwing a birthday party or anything. Phi Prang and Phi Jay are not around. If I throw a party, I'll be the one to foot the bill."

"What do you want for your birthday?"

I pretend to think about it.

"I want to eat clear soup loaded with egg tofu and minced pork. Can you cook that for me? I will cook the rice."

"Don't you want something more special than that?"

I also like this, When she's not teasing me, I really like her expression of genuine surprise. The more time we spend together, the more I see her genuine self.

"Your clear soup with egg tofu and minced pork is special."

I lean in close to her after the person who has dressed and is ready to leave the house turns off the stove and turns around to look at me. No matter how much I attempt to seduce, intimate, or taunt Phi Ploy, she is rarely shy around me.

"You know how good you are at sweet talking?"

Nevertheless, the sweetness in Phi Ploy's eyes surpasses that of my words.

"I came close to kissing you... Unfortunately, you still haven't brushed your teeth."

The slim figure ducks to one side and makes a beeline for the dinner table,

"But I already gargled!"

"Assist me with that bowl, please."

"Phi Ploy. I said, I already washed my mouth!"

The ambrosial woman maintains the dimples on her face, unaffected by my explanation. She then proceeds to pull out the chair, sit down, and enjoy her breakfast.

"Are you joining me at the table? I got up early. I'm starving."

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I intended to rush back to the condo after visiting my parents the following morning so that I could have a meal alone with Phi Ploy. I planned to checkmate once my stomach was full.

My plan, however, unraveled when I opened the door on the 42nd floor and discovered balloons floating everywhere.

Standing inside the room, Hwan-jeab, Best, and Chakrit were merrily singing me Happy Birthday... Why would Phi Ploy invite them to our private party?

All the gifts from my colleagues, best friends, Phi Jay, and Phi Prang didn't make me as happy as the silver butterfly earrings set with diamonds from Phi Ploy did.

"Why butterfly?"

"I saw that you drew them frequently."

It dawned on me that she had been paying attention to me all along. It made me realize that she was even more adorable than I had previously thought.

She was so cute that I wanted to be her wife. She refused, however, to cross the line. That night, I attempted to intoxicate her, seduce her with my dancing ability, and cuddle up to her.

I found it astounding how she maintained her composure.

Unfortunately, I found myself the only one unable to maintain an upright position due to intoxication

Following the birthday party, Best, Chakrit, and Hwan-jeab relentlessly interrogate me about my relationship with Phi Ploy. They are skeptical because the way I flirted with her was different from how I usually flirt.

"How close do two people have to be to buy diamonds for each other, Chakrit? Though it isn't particularly large, I can tell it's worth more than twenty thousand."

"And when one of them slipped the earrings on the other, it was as if they were in their own world. Pun's smile was so wide that her face was the size of a satellite. Who would have thought, Jeab, that they were just hanging out? Why would Pun claim that she doesn't like women?"

"I want Phi Ploy to be my husband. She's so hot in real life. She's also incredibly gentle. Her breasts are exquisite. Are they real, Pun? I would like to request permission to touch them."

That rambling was from the one and only D'Best.

"Chakrit, did you see when Pun was drunk? She was practically perched on Phi Ploy's lap... A drunk Punnakorn is even more naughty than a slut."

"And when Pun danced... Did anyone notice the way Pun stood behind Phi Ploy, her arms encircling her until they reached her breasts? I will report all this to your parents, Pun."

"Just like I said before, it's nothing. Why are you all overthinking?"

"We can telll/Can telll/Can telll."

My three friends speak in harmony immediately after my response.

What I did that night is still somewhat hazy in my memory. What stayed with me, however, was the look in the eyes of the person lying on the bed next to me when I awoke the next morning.

"Has anyone ever told you that you smile before opening your eyes in the morning?"

"Don't you think it could be due to the alluring fragrance emanating from your body?"

"If you were lying where I am lying right now, you would be acutely aware of the overpowering aroma of alcohol emanating from your body"

She's something. Don't you think?

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I have to get up and go to work every morning just to survive in this society where the tax money isn't used for the benefit of the citizens, people routinely ignore traffic signals or drive on the shoulder of the road, highvoltage cables are all tangled, sidewalks are pothole-ridden, motorcycle taxi drivers chase after delivery men, public hospitals need donations to treat patients, citizens have to fight for themselves in the case of a pandemic, money can buy justice, and democracy advocates can't even accept free speech.

However, certain elements and individuals make this world bearable... such as Phi Ploy.

I don't care what the others are doing here. The person on the vibrantly colored float in the parade has my undivided attention. Wearing a vibrant pink dress that accentuates her stunning breasts.

Phi Ploy gracefully waves her hand. Her silky hair is adorned with a blue flower. She is dressed in a long, flower-inspired dress with layers of pleats and sheer fabric.

It's strangely beautiful, and it fits the country-style concept perfectly. In any case, she looks totally cute to me.

**"Phi Ploy! Phi Ploy! Phi Ploy! Phi Ploy!"**

We're cheering her on among the fans in this stadium while other fan clubs chant over us.

However, I can see her gleaming eyes and a smile directed at us four-three are holding LED signs, and one is frantically waving her cardboard cutout standee at a channel (13) sporting event.

That's all I want. I just want her to know that she has our full support here.

"Pun, why aren't you waving the standee?"

Best shouts over the music and MC to ask me this as she sets down Phi Ploy's cardboard cutout standee.

"I only have LED signs for Phi Prang and Phi Jay. They will attack me if I hold the standee."

"Is your sister in the dark about your relationship?"

"I made it clear before that it's nothing."

Angelina Jolie's lips on Best's face curve into a playful taunt. And despite my best efforts to conceal my smile by drinking water, it remains unmasked.

The parade continues to march, showcasing all of the channel's celebrities. Prang, Phi Jay. and Phi Ken are all on the same float. They smile and wave to the crowd as they exit the float and get onto the stage. **"Phi Prang! Phi Jay! Phi Ken! Phi Prang! Phi Jay! Phi Ken!"**

We continue to cheer, waving the LED signs.

The entertainment during the opening ceremony proceeds smoothly. But when Phi Ploy steps onto the stage to sing with four other stars from her new series, my 350-cc friend starts elbowing me.

"Pun... Pun... Does that Annie woman's dancing seem odd to you?"

"Yeah, I've noticed."

The lead actress, Annie, is singing and dancing alongside Phi Ploy. She's swinging her arm and body in an unusual fashion. She looks like a giant inflatable mascot outside a petrol station.

She nearly hit my woman in the face with her hand while twirling. It was fortunate that Phi Ploy was quick enough to avoid the mishap.

"What do you want to do, Pun?"

Hwan-jeab looks at me and asks.

"Do you want me to throw rotten eggs at her? I'd like to have a role here."

Chakrit is bending over and whispering to me.

"Do you happen to be carrying them?"

"Krit. Record this. Make sure you get everything. If something goes wrong, we will let the society judge Annie."

Best turns to me and smiles after she says that. We continue to wave our LED signs and shout, **"Phi Ploy! Phi Ploy! Phi Ploy!"** in a joyful rhythm until the show concludes beautifully and the audience erupts in cheers.

However....

***"Greeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeed!!!!!!"***

As the celebrities descend the stage, nearly every single person in the stadium lets out a terrified scream. I am not sure what happened. But when I see that the leading actor could only grab air while attempting to grab Phi Ploy's arm before she fell off the nearly 200-meter-high stage, the beating organ in my chest drops to my feet.

The staff and medic rush in. The stadium echoes with murmurs and gasps. The woman with glowing breasts is cursing at my ear.

"Bitch! Annie deliberately stepped on Phi Ploy's dress! Pun! Where are you going!! Wait!!!"

"Pun!"

Chakrit grabs and locks me in place. "Calm down. Get a hold of yourself."

He then lets me go.

I move through the crowd. Some are sitting. Some stands. Some are recording clips with their phones. With Prang's VIP tag around my neck, my seat is very close to the stage, and I have access to all areas except behind the steel fence, which requires guard permission to pass.

Some individuals, however, have been granted VVVIP access. A refined woman hurried over to Phi Ploy the moment she heard a scream. She was clearly enraged when she dashed in to support Phi Ploy.

Her concerns as she embraces the injured woman during first aid make me pause, but I continue to run to see if Phi Ploy is all right.

"Those without access, please move away. Please allow space for the first aid team."

I have to stand to the side, even though Phi Ploy is right in front of me.

As I gaze out into the grassy field, I see Phi Ploy's silky, wavy hair, which I adore, spread across the ground, her body bending, her left hand resting on her right elbow, and an expression that... I never want to witness.

A sensation pierces straight through my chest. It's a strange sensation that I don't fully understand just yet... but it hurts. Anxiety has completely consumed me, and it's overwhelming.

I rush into the thick of things without considering the consequences.

"You go, Pun!"

Best, my best friend, is cheering me on as she runs up behind me. She pushes Annie to the ground before the guard takes her away.

I... didn't reach for Phi Ploy's hand. I didn't get to ask her how much pain she's in. I simply stand motionless and follow the white-shirted male nurse as he transports her to the ambulance.

I want to shout, "I'm going with her!" However, that woman boards the ambulance and sits next to Phi Ploy, leaving me as a bystander. I can't help but feel like Phi Ploy is so far away. I don't have any access to her.

I cannot assist her in any way. But another sensation is raging through me, and it hurts even more than the others.

*My worries... are eating me from the inside... I just realized it as I watched the ambulance pull away.*

The incident swiftly resolves, and the ceremony proceeds. However, my friends and I are sprinting to our car.

"Which hospital?" Best asks.

"Hospital SSS. It was on the ambulance." Jeab replies.

"Start the engine. I am familiar with the route. Chakrit says.

As for me... I'm on the verge of tears.

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# Chapter 17 : The entertainment business

"It isn't so serious. You do not have to come."

The woman in the patient uniform glances over at me as I enter the room. She is lying calmly in the patient bed. Her left hand is pressing her phone against her ear.

"Yes, I was admitted... I'm a little sore... Just a little... You should stay at the event, Prang... I have to hang up now. Let's talk later."

Phi Ploy flashes me her adorable dimples with a slight smile as I approach. She then lets out a sigh as her phone rings again.

"Hello."

Her beautiful face is still adorned with the makeup she wore to the event. Her right arm is almost completely bandaged to the shoulder.

"Has the news been released yet?"

We exchange glances as Phi Ploy speaks on the phone.

"It's not a major injury. Yes, the one I had issues with."

I lean in to kiss her on the temple and place my cheek against hers as we embrace.

"I will share the details with you later... I have to go, Min... You do not need to come... Okay... I'll let you decide"

I take Phi Ploy's icy, soft hand.

"Where does it hurt?"

"Why is the one who is visiting me crying?"

I haven't answered her when someone walks through the door, causing me to quickly wipe away my tears. That brings out another sigh from Phi Ploy.

"You're here, Nong Pun? Weren't you still on your way when you called to inquire about the room number?"

The question comes from Phi Ploy's secretary: as Phi Ploy and I grew closer, we had brief encounters, usually when she brought me something or helped me with some matters.

But most of the time, I only heard Phi Ploy speak with her on the phone.

"Yes. My friend took the wrong bridge and had to go a long distance to make a U-turn. Due to road closures, the traffic is extremely heavy, so I got out of the car and made my way over here first. If I hadn't done that, I wouldn't be able to get here anytime soon."

"You got here, actually, pretty quickly. Except for Miss Dream and me, you are the only one who has already arrived."

"Phi Ji, I would like to rest. Are there any pressing matters?"

Phi Ploy abruptly interrupts us Her frustration is clearly growing.

"I wanted to let you know that I've already taken care of everything. I'll go get your clothing and personal belongings for you. Would you like me to help you with anything else?"

"Min will visit in the evening. You can leave my belongings with her so that you do not have to travel all the way here."

"There's one more thing. Miss Dream has asked me to inform you that she will come and stay with you once she has finished her work. Should I reschedule anything?"

"It's okay. I'll take care of the rest. You can go back to your work. If I need help with anything else, I'll call you."

"Okay. Then I'll get going."

Phi Ploy acknowledges with a nod, then turns to face me when we are alone once more.

"What did the doctor say?"

"My right knee, hip, and shoulder are bruised."

I remove the bandage from her right knee and take a peek to examine the bruise.

"Do you have to be admitted for this?"

"I informed the doctor that I also had a headache, so they wanted to keep me under observation overnight."

"Did your head also sustain an impact?"

I ask softly, as if I'm afraid that if I ask too loudly, the memory of what happened an hour ago will return.

"No."

A mischievous grin appears on Phi Ploy's face as she shakes her head.

"But I'm aching all over."

"How did you fall?"

"I stumbled onto a stump."

Phi Ploy's sparkling eyes are trying to hide a smile.

"Could you please look up the news for me? What are people saying on social media?"

Although I don't understand Phi Ploy's reaction, I follow her instruction and pull a chair up to the bed and do what she says.

Word quickly spread on the internet. People have uploaded several videos of the incident, including the exact moment Phi Ploy fell from the stage.

"One says, *'She looks good even as she falls off the stage'*."

A small smile forms on the face of the person featured in the news article.

"Also, *'The gossips that the leading lady and the villain actress have a rocky relationship are likely valid...'* Do you have an issue with Annie?

When you were on stage with her, I could tell that something wasn't right. The media is going with that."

Someone noticed in the clips that Annie stepped on Phi Ploy's dress as she was getting off the stage. The comment section is going wild.

"I didn't do anything. However, Annie doesn't like me."

"You got hurt... I don't like it."

I feel my mood dipping.

"She took it too far. Will you take legal action?"

"In all likelihood, Annie will issue a public apology, claiming that the incident was accidental. She will face some criticism as a result of the videos and comments on social media, but it will pass."

"Will you just let it go? This does not sit well with me. What she did was serious. Consider the possibility that your injury was severe."

We are interrupted in the middle of our argument by the entrance of a middle-aged man and a stunning middle-aged woman with short, chocolatecolored hair.

She possesses a striking combination of height, slimness, and intense sass. Her cheeks are marked with dimples, and her features are sharp. As she locks eyes with the patient, she seems distressed... It's my first time seeing her in person.

"Try not to be emotional."

The man grasps the woman's arm.

"Do I have to learn about your life and death matters from the news?"

"The fact that you read about me in the news is impressive."

On my end, the patient in bed keeps a nonchalant smile on her face while remaining expressionless. What this does is make her mother even more furious.

"How are you? We came as soon as we heard the news."

"I simply have some bruises on my body. I am still able to argue with my mother. You have nothing to be concerned about, Dad."

"Why didn't you let me know you were in the hospital?"

When Phi Ploy continues to remain silent, her mother lets out an exasperated sigh.

"Was it true that that woman shoved you off the stage?"

"What did they report in the news?"

I decide to make my way to the door because I believe the family members should speak in privacy. However, Phi Ploy squeezes my hand, signaling that I should stay.

"Ploy, I asked you a question. Is it true that that woman bullied you?"

"Can you please be yourself, Mom... You never cared. Just stay that way. I have always dealt with my problems on my own. My current situation does not necessitate your assistance."

"Are you feeling arrogant now that you're a celebrity?! Do I have to reach you through your secretary these days?"

Phi Ploy doesn't even make eye contact with her mother. She slowly shuts her tired eyes and turns her face away from her.

"I need to get some rest."

"Ploy!"

I immediately intervene.

"Please allow Phi Ploy to rest. She sustained an injury. I believe we should discuss this later."

Phi Ploy's mother maintains her fixed gaze on her daughter.

"Please."

The door closes after Phi Ploy's parents agree to leave, leaving only me and Phi Ploy in the room.

Phi Ploy resembles her mother in many ways, including her dimples, eyes, and figure. Their personalities and temperaments, however, are vastly different.

Her mother causes anxiety in those around her, whereas Phi Ploy is fragile, alluring, steady, and subtly self-assured. However, when Phi Ploy decides to be icy, she turns into a block of ice.

She closes off and becomes impossible to approach. I worry that she might one day turn her icy exterior against me.

"Should I refuse to have visitors?"

As her eyelids reopen, the glimmer in her eyes returns.

"Everyone is worried about you."

"But I want to be alone with you."

Abruptly, the patient sits up and hangs her legs by the bedside. Her exhausted eyes meet mine. She then speaks in a gentle voice that causes my heart to flutter.

"Please give me a hug."

She is vulnerable, delicate, and naked in a way that I have never seen before.

Phi Ploy leans her head against my breasts as I embrace her. Our bodies become one. She seeks warmth in a way that makes me want to shield her from the outside world.

"I'm right here with you."

There is no response. She simply wraps her arms around my waist and draws me closer.

We use our bodies to communicate. When we trade energies, they penetrate deeply, healing both the big and little holes in our souls.

The forces are radiant, and they can mend our broken hearts so that we can face the world with renewed strength.

I finally understand what Prang was trying to convey to me about "love." Someone's presence alone can refuel us. It goes beyond simple feelings for her or love.

It's the sum of all that makes Phi Ploy unique. It's the ideal balance. It inspires me to go about living my life. It adds vibrancy to my life... I care about how she feels.

"Ouch! Why did you just stop walking? I nearly collided with you. Walk, Krit."

"Ah... Umm... Well..."

A voice from the door interrupts the force exchange between Phi Ploy and me, I turn to see Chakrit standing at the door, looking awkward.

He can't back away from the door, but he's not sure if he should come in. So he simply stands there, blocking the path of my two other female friends.

"Come in, Chakrit."

I tell my male friend before whispering to the person who has just let go of me.

"I believe it is best if you do not allow any visitors."

I walk over to sit on the sofas for the guests.

My friends can't stop talking about what happened. All of them, especially Best, are determined to teach Annie a lesson. After getting to know Phi Ploy better at my birthday party, Best declared,

*"I will be Phi Ploy's biggest fan if I can't be her wife."* As a result, her level of anger is higher than everyone else's.

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Phi Ploy fell asleep exhausted after my friends and I talked nonstop for a while. After a nurse arrives to check on Phi Ploy, I go out to eat with my three chaotic friends.

I also call Prang and ask her to bring my clothes to me so I can spend the night at the hospital caring for Phi Ploy. (No way am I going to leave Phi Ploy in anyone else's care.)

My sister didn't push the matter, even though she appeared surprised by my request.

"Guys."

I can't get one thing off my mind. I can't let it go, but I'm not sure who to ask.

"This is delicious. Staying in the hospital to care for Phi Ploy isn't too bad if there's good food nearby, right, Pun?"

"Jeab. Stop focusing on food. I'm still frustrated with Annie. I say we attack her on social media, Krit. Drama spread like wildfire on the internet."

Even though she is not Phi Ploy's wife, Best is enraged. Think about how furious I, who came so close to becoming Phi Ploy's wife, am.

"Don't merely speak. We should make new accounts the moment we get back to our houses. Perhaps we could also use Instagram to post vague messages. I guarantee all online detectives will solve the mystery in one night."

They are a wonderful duo.

"Chakrit, did you learn about cyberbullying from all of the government's IOs (Information Operations)?"

"Guys. Bear with me for a moment."

My sigh immediately draws the attention of my three friends.

"What? You don't like the food?"

I let out another sigh in response to Hwan-jeab's ridiculous question.

"Did you see the woman who got into the ambulance with Phi Ploy?"

"Yes. Her name is Dream."

"Do you know who she is, Best?"

"Hey, Pun, how about you check out the latest entertainment news? Could it be that you don't have internet at home?"

"Can I skip the mocking and get right to the useful part?"

"I just want to have some fun... Okay. Dream is the daughter of a producer named Duang-dao. Whenever her mother needs assistance on set, she is there to help. I heard she'll be producing the next series herself. I believe she and Phi Ploy are the same age."

Hwan-jeab hands me her smartphone

"Here."

Dream's information is on the screen.

"Duang-dao is the producer of the series in which Phi Ploy currently appears. Dream likely boarded the ambulance to care for one of her stars."

Is she only looking after her employee?

"Why? Are you jealous?"

"What exactly is jealousy? The concept of jealousy is foreign to someone like Pun."

"Geeeeeeeeeeeeeeeez. Pun is unfamiliar with the meaning of jealousy. When Phi Ploy stumbled off the stage, you sprinted until your hair resembled Einstein's. It's obvious that you care about Phi Ploy. If not, please hand her over to me."

"You already have a husband, Best. Cut out the naughtiness."

"Best is like this with everyone, Pun. You've never had an issue with that. Why are you angry with her when it involves Phi Ploy?"

I hate this Best-Chakrit duo. If they don't mock one another, they'll band together to mock others.

"I am troubled by her behavior toward everyone, as it makes me feel sorry for Phi Boy."

"You appear to be very concerned about my husband."

Everyone laughs, including me.

After a while, my friends leave, and I return to Phi Ploy's room. But what I see stops me cold.

*... Just caring for one of her stars, eh?*

The woman with wavy hair fixes her gaze on me as I open the door and walk inside. It causes the other woman with long hair to stop what she is doing and look my way.

.....*Remove the makeup and then put on some moisturizer... Uh-huh... Providing basic support to her employee.*

The woman merely gives me a smile before returning to tending to Phi Ploy's face.

"Is she a friend of yours, Ploy?"

There is no response from Phi Ploy. Keeping her eyes on me the whole time, she casually poses a question to Phi Dream.

"Are you almost done, Dream? I'm tired. I would like to rest."

"I'm done. Do you want to use the restroom first?"

When asked, Phi Ploy nods. Consequently, that Dream woman assists Phi

Ploy in getting out of bed and using the restroom. She is so closely assisting Phi Ploy that the only thing she isn't doing is practically carrying her to the bathroom.

It appears that Phi Ploy's right side is sore to the point that she can't even put her weight on it. She's so delicate. However, her fragility doesn't resemble the way it was when we were alone together earlier.

Something is off, particularly her right arm, which was wrapped around my waist when she embraced me. Now, she is no longer able to use it in any way, including brushing her hair off her face.

So, who does it for her? Obviously, it's Dream, the producer's daughter... *I'm insanely jealous!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

I walk over to the sofa and sit quietly until Phi Ploy returns to her patient bed.

"Pun, this is Dream, a friend of mine... Dream-this is Pun. She's Prang's younger sister."

"Hello, Phi Dream."

"Hello... She's Prang Punnaputch's sister?"

Phi Ploy nods. Phi Dream and I exchange pleasantries for a while.

"Would you like to become an actress? You have a beautiful face. I can make you a star.

"No, thank you." I reply with candor.

"Have your buddies left?"

"Yes. Prang and Phi Jay are likely to visit in the late evening. Is there anything you want? get them for you."

Phi Ploy keeps her gaze fixed on me.

"You already know what I want."

My concerns regarding the relationship between Phi Dream and Phi Ploy persist. However, my jealousy has subsided as she communicates with me through her eyes about a topic that only we both understand.

*Scrapeeeeeeeeeee...*

Interrupting our two-meter-long, silent eye contact conversation, the producer's daughter pulls a chair over and places it between the patient's bed and the sofa I'm occupying. With that, she takes a seat in the chair, obstructing my view of Phi Ploy.

"Did Phi Ji tell you that I'll be staying with you tonight?"

Phi Dream says this while cradling Phi Ploy's face in her hand. Phi Ploy makes no effort to move her face away from the touch.

"Are you aware of the reason I am currently lying in the hospital, Dream?"

A gentle, whiny voice is employed by Phi Ploy. She's never used this tone with me before.

"I will take care of it for you."

Phi Ploy shakes her head.

"Dream, you can solve the problem at its root."

Right now. Dream is the one who's shaking her head.

"Ploy..."

"I am considering withdrawing from the series... She is becoming more aggressive by the day... You know that I love myself, Dream. You know I would never get involved in something like this. Do not drag me into it. Could you please sort out this mess you created? Could you please deal with your person? I only want to work peacefully"

"Ploy..."

I can't see Phi Ploy's expression. However, her whiny tone, as if they were sulking lovers, makes me uneasy about being here. I just realized how little I know about Phi Ploy's social circle.

I am beginning to question my place in her life. Fear grips me as I contemplate their relationship. Staying here and listening to them is becoming more intolerable by the minute.

"Please go home and let me rest. I already have someone to take care of me tonight."

The person who had been listening quietly pauses and lets out a sigh.

"Please don't pull out of the series. Please do not do anything or remove anyone from your life just yet....Give me some time. I only ask for a week, and I will show you that I can handle everything."

Phi Dream stands up and leans down to kiss Phi Ploy on the forehead... Kiss??? A producer's daughter takes such excellent care of their stars.

The person receiving the kiss now looks directly at me. She remains motionless, as do I, while Phi Dream smiles and says goodbye.

"I'll be leaving then."

She detonates a bomb, then gathers her belongings and flees.

But... I am the wife of the 2020 generation. I will keep my cool, even if I want to strangle someone right now.

Phi Ploy pushes herself to sit up the moment I stand up. Her gaze remains fixed on me. Her vulnerable demeanor vanishes. She seems like a completely different person.

"Where are you going, Pun?"

I don't answer her question. Stomping over to the cosmetics container on the table, I retrieve a cotton swab, soak it in cleansing water, and then dab it onto the glowing woman's forehead resting on the bed.

Before planting multiple kisses on Phi Ploy's forehead, I made sure to clean the area where that woman's lips had come into contact with Phi Ploy's body.

Phi Ploy says nothing. Her dimples, however, are visible, as are the sparkles in her eyes.

"Are you upset with me?"

"Do I have the right to be?"

Tears well up in my eyes as I survey her. I'm feeling vulnerable and insecure. And Phi Ploy remains true to herself. She retains her composure. Nothing comes out of her mouth.

She just wraps her right hand around my neck and pulls me in. But I refuse to let her kiss me. So we simply lock eyes in silence. The only sounds we hear are our own breathing and the hum of the air conditioning.

"Please get some rest. You're still aching. I don't want to fight you right now."

"You are upset, but you want me to rest?"

"Yes, I'm pissed off. I'd rather not talk to you. But for the time being, I'm not going to make a big deal out of your actions."

"Please come closer to me."

I remain motionless. So Phi Ploy jumps out of bed and approaches me. She is so close that her nose is pressing against my ear as she wraps her arms around my neck.

"Isn't your leg hurt?!"

"Yes."

"Then, why... She had to support you so that you could stand a moment ago." I wiggle to escape her grasp.

"Can you please stand still?"

"Let me go." I reject her touch.

"You just instructed me to rest."

"Go rest on the bed."

Phi Ploy nestles her face against my neck with her arms wrapped around it. Because of her delicate aroma and the myriad of feelings she evokes, I long to return her embrace.

"Compared to lying on the bed, this position provides me with better rest."

I am completely soft on her. I am experiencing love, anger, and cute aggression all at once.

This is the first time I've felt compelled to inquire about my status. I want to know who that woman is, I'd like to know my rights, and I want to hold her tight. But, no... no way.

"I am still at a loss regarding the injury you sustained to your leg."

"Are you familiar with the entertainment business?"

Phi Ploy whispers merrily into my ear.

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# Chapter 18 : Have you ever... even for once?

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Phi Min visits in the evening with food in both hands. The majority are my personal favorites.

"Ploy asked me to buy them."

That's what Phi Min says.

Prang, Phi Jay, Phi Ken, and Jie Ang arrive around 9 p.m. Phi Ploy falls asleep after only a brief conversation. Her body is exhausted and aching.

However, unlike the photo she posted on social media, she does not require a wheelchair, and her injury is not as serious as the news suggests or as some have misinterpreted.

The doctor discharges her the following morning. Phi Ji is the one who picks her up and drives her home.

I continue to pay her frequent visits. I assist in applying the medicine to her bruises, and we fesume our normal activities. When she's feeling sick like this, I let her ask for tenderness as I see fit... Physical intimacy is something she enjoys.

An interesting development happens when Phi Ploy excuses herself from filming her series due to aching muscles in her arms and legs. On a daily basis, she gets a bouquet and a card signed by DREAM.

The owner of those flowers is unaware that every day. Phi Ploy takes a leisurely stroll to play in Phi Jay's room, visits the gym, and requests my tender care at night...

Her arm, so bruised that it hinders her from filming the series, performs flawlessly when she lifts weights at the gym.

[Did you hear the news?]

"What news, Best?"

Best, Hwan-jeab, and Chakrit all call me one evening. They all ask the same question and discuss the same news.

[Annie was abruptly removed from her series. Please read through the group chat from time to time. I have already sent you a link to the news article.]

"Give me a rundown in two minutes. I'm working."

[Rumor has it that the senior is upset with Annie for pushing Phi Ploy off the stage. Do you think that's Dream's doing?]

"I don't know. Is there anything else?"

[It doesn't look promising for Annie. Many people have turned against her, primarily because Phi Ploy's image is portrayed as clean and perfect. However, the channel claims that Annie's busy schedule prompted the decision to change the lead, as the series had only just begun filming and the damage is manageable. But everyone knows the true reason for her withdrawal. Karma works like lightning, doesn't it?]

It's not karma that works like lightning. I believe Phi Ploy is responsible for Annie's lightning strike flight to Mars from Earth.

"Who's the new lead?"

[Jay, Jirapat.]

"By the way, for the trip to Pattaya this Saturday, you guys come to my condo in the morning. and we'll all go in Phi Jay's van, okay? Get the word out to Jeab and Chakrit."

[Okay.]

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When Saturday morning rolls around, my friends and I are in a terrible state from our wild night out the night before. We returned to our condo at three in the morning. This is something that Phi Ploy is completely unaware of and will never find out.

Even if she does, it won't matter much. Every day, she accepted bouquets of flowers from others. She also let Phi Dream kiss her forehead. The mere thought of it causes my brain to boil.

How could she have done that in front of me...? How... couldn't she see... my tears when she was with others? How could she possibly do that.

Stop!!!! I believe I still have a hangover.

We all ride in one van. Phi Ken will meet us later because he is traveling with two other male friends. I'm relieved I won't be sitting next to Phi Ploy, otherwise, she'll know I had a few too many drinks the night before.

"I sent the new packaging design to you via email yesterday. Did you check your inbox? The booth design was sent to you this morning. It's in a separate email. Is that clear?"

The wheels are turning, transporting us to Pattaya. A senior colleague at work roused me from my slumber with an annoying phone call. I was asked if I had finished revising the design for the clients because one requested a larger font and another preferred a darker black color.

I had made three revisions before this. I've already increased the font size to the point where it obscures all other elements. But who cares? Artistry is not necessary. Whoever is footing the bill for the design services is solely concerned with advertising messages.

And my company's only concern is pleasing the person who pays us. The client had already conducted research on the industry, current news, investments, and market competition to develop guidelines for the best design that would communicate and captivate their target audience.

Never mind... Let's talk about another email I just discovered I received yesterday. It's written in English. Following a quick scan, I discovered that it is from an esteemed design firm in New York.

My portfolio, which includes the winning piece from a New York design portfolio competition, has piqued their interest. They are hoping to interview me at my earliest convenience.

Would it work for my schedule? Of course. Working in New York has always been my dream.

There's a problem, though. Since meeting Phi Ploy, the thought of returning to New York has never crossed my mind. I need more time to mull this over.

When we arrive at the port, the blistering heat of the sun stings our skin. Phi Jay rented a yacht to take us on a tour of Pattaya. However, she is unable to join us due to her work commitments.

I just realized that we are not the only ones on this trip. Phi Jay's and my families are also present... this feels like a family reunion.

The yacht is absolutely luxurious. There are bathrooms, bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. Phi Jay also hired a captain, two assistants, and a massage therapist.

My first order of business upon boarding is to have the massage therapist give me a good squeeze in a private room. At this point, I'm not particularly interested in the picturesque sea because I'm extremely sleepy.

Out in the back cabin, the parent gang is having a good time chatting and eating. I am sure they will be there for a while. Phi Ken, Prang, and Phi Ploy are proChapter :ly having fun by jumping into the water or partying on the roof deck, while my friends are taking photos on the front deck.

I have no idea how long the massage lasted. I dozed off and did not awaken until someone woke me up. It looks like that person is flaunting her legs in shorts. On the upper half, she is dressed in an all-white swimsuit with a plunging V-neck.

Additionally, the swimsuit features a plunging back cut that reaches her waist. This is not the outfit she was wearing earlier.

"Why are you so sleepy? What time did you get back yesterday?"

I sit up and kiss the soft skin on Phi Ploy's back.

"I am not letting you leave this room wearing this."

"I rode a jet ski while you were sleeping and have just returned."

"Did you apply sunscreen before doing that?"

I kiss her silky shoulder as she nods.

"Argh... I am possessive of you, but I do not want you to be any less beautiful. I want you to shine for your own good, as you are."

"You talk a lot... They have decided to anchor near an island. I woke you up just in case you wanted to go out and have fun with your friends."

"Why don't we do something else on the boat together while they disembark?"

My finger strokes her cleavage. I sigh again.

"Who designed this swimsuit? Do you want to change into a different one? Every single guy who sees this will have bad thoughts... even I do."

Those adorable dimples adorn Phi Ploy's cheeks as I speak. Whether it stems from shyness or cute aggression toward me is unknown to me.

"I can't control everyone else's thoughts. Please take responsibility for your own thoughts... Are you going to go out like this or change into something else?"

"Of course, I will change. What you're wearing will look too conservative in comparison to what I'll be wearing."

I only become conscious of the fact that I'm hungry when I'm completely awake. I ended up changing into scantily clad clothes just to eat and enjoy the view from the back deck.

I take sexy photos of my luxurious lifestyle and post them on Instagram before enjoying the sunset on the front deck with Phi Ploy while she sunbathes. I do not partake in any water activities like others.

"Get into the water, Pun."

Looking down at my friends, I shake my head. Hwan-jeab is waving her hand to invite me to join her on the yellow floating rubber duck. Do none of my friends have hangovers? How could they jump into the water like that?

Once the yacht docks, the celebration continues at the house that Phi Jay rented. The parent gang, as well as Phi Ken and his friends, has left. Accordingly, the party is graced with the presence of just my gang, Phi Ploy, Prang, Phi Jay, Jie Ang, and one uninvited guest who arrives with Phi Jay.

"We were discussing the series. Phi Dream is nearby, and since she is a friend of Phi Ploy, I invited her to our party."

The person speaking smiles at Prang, paying no attention to my sour expression.

"Does the fact that she is nearby indicate that she sped straight from Bangkok?"

Hwan-jeab speaks to me in a whisper

"Yeah. She went to the extent of bringing her suitcase."

The friend with the glowing breasts puts her arm around my shoulder and caresses my back with her breasts as she says this.

We are sitting by the pool, enjoying some fine dining food and drink ordered to the house in a low-light setting adorned with shimmering lights and music. Sounds of laughter and conversation fill the air.

"Pok 9, again. How did Phi Ploy become a dealer?"

Phi Jay whines.

"Since the time we were students, Ploy has enjoyed nothing but good fortune. She's also extremely good at bluffing when it comes to playing Pok

9. Don't you miss the good old days, Ploy?"

The fact that Phi Dream and Phi Ploy are sitting next to each other bothers me. I'm also not fond of Phi Dream's sparkling eyes as she gazes at Phi Ploy and her caressing of the dimpled woman's exposed flesh-the latter is still wearing her shorts and a long-sleeve shirt with a plunging v-neck that exposes her cleavage.

I particularly dislike how the woman talks about their past and the closeness they shared. Who wants to hear her story?

"Really? Was Phi Ploy considered a nerd in her high school years? I want to see Phi Ploy with a pair of spectacles and a neatly pressed school uniform."

I sigh as Best becomes enthralled by the story Phi Dream tells.

"She used to be beautiful but plain, as opposed to now."

"I was too innocent back then. I was too trusting. Don't you agree, Dream?" Phi Ploy stands up, wearing a chilly smile.

"I need to use the restroom. I'll nominate Prang to play dealer."

Phi Dream watches as Phi Ploy walks away, then excuses herself.

"Excuse me. I also need to use the restroom."

In this scenario, how does a legal wife deal with a mistress?

Phi Jay suddenly hands me money as my face twists.

"If you need a lifeline extended, I can donate 100 baht to you. You appear to be in despair after suffering so much loss."

I'm not stressing over the card game, Phi Jay!!!! "Does the industry have a large gay population, Jie Ang?"

I turn to ask the person next to me.

"A significant number. The media seldom covers their hookups because most of them happen privately. Women who are attracted to other women are hard to identify, making it hard for the media to distinguish between friends and friends with benefits unless they disclose their sexuality. However, I can usually tell who is genuinely gay and who is merely pretending to be so for the sake of fame."

"How could you tell?"

"Ask Jay." My sister interrupts.

"She's hooked up with the majority of the gay ones in the industry."

"What are you saying, Prang!"

Phi Jay immediately gives Jie Ang a sidelong glance. She's being very suspicious. Everyone at the card table looks up, their eyes gleaming due to the intriguing topic.

"I've never been with anyone."

"Ken told us everything."

Prang casually puts a dark-colored grape in her mouth.

"Ken?" Phi Jay's face turns pale.

"You should not believe hearsay without hearing from me first. I'm surrounded by those who envy me."

"What about Kimmy from Channel One?"

"Oh... You believed that? Ken was simply teasing. They're just friendly with each other.

"HAHAHA."

Phi Jay's manager interjects in a high-pitched voice, hands waving. It's not just the hands; the eyes are also moving around. Even I can tell that Jie Ang is nervous.

"That happened a long time ago, when we broke up. Phi Jay's voice is visibly shaking.

"Now my reputation is spotless. Not even the slinging of mud can mar my spotless reputation these days, Prang."

"Remember how you said our breakup left you so devastated that you couldn't move on? Yet you managed to hook up with half of the people in the industry?"

"My distress led me to choose the wrong path."

My sister keeps putting grapes into her mouth while maintaining an expressionless face. Phi Jay reciprocates by placing Prang's hand on her forehead.

"I have spent the entire day in the sun. I don't feel well. Am I running a temperature, Prang?"

I've seen Phi Jay's act thousands of times before, If my sister maintains her expressionless demeanor, Phi Jay will intensify her plea for tenderness by resting her forehead against Prang's cheek, as she is now doing.

"I also have a headache."

Prang sighs and casts us a bored look.

"Your body temperature is a little high. I will put Jay to bed first, you all. Find a new dealer."

When my sister and sister-in-law walk away, I realize that the other two women have not returned from the restroom. So I decide to go and find them.

My heart races as I follow their path, terrified that I will soon find myself in a scene where *the lawful wife* *captures the adulterous lovers... red-handed.*

In fact, perhaps that is not the case. Perhaps I'm the mistress.

"...Wasn't Ploy waiting for Dream all along? Isn't that why you're still not in a committed relationship?"

I can't see their expressions because I've stopped and hid behind a wall. I admit that I'm eavesdropping. Their whispers fan the flames in my heart. "You just choose to believe whatever you want to believe, Dream."

"Stop denying it, Ploy. Why are you making things so difficult? What's the problem? I'll fix it. I had already cleared things up with Annie. She will not bother us anymore."

I hear Phi Ploy sigh.

"I want you to address the root cause, which means you should stop attempting to become involved with me rather than end your relationship with Annie. I don't want to talk about this anymore, Dream."

"You still love me."

The sound of XOXO fills my mind with endless possibilities. My heart aches, and I'm frustrated.

"You flirted with me on set. Did you think I wasn't aware of that? Leave the past behind and stop denying your feelings for me. Why are you being so cold?"

Everything quiets down. I'm terrified that the people in the restroom are doing exactly what I imagine them to be doing.

I want to burst through the door, go inside, separate them, slap the mistress to the floor, and kiss the cold, heartless woman passionately. However, I don't; I simply kick the door, creating a loud noise, and then sprint back to the card table.

I sit alongside everyone, but my imagination runs wild. If they like each other, I'll lose even if I split them up. I'll let Phi Ploy decide who she wants to be with.

Phi Ploy and Phi Dream rejoin us shortly after my return. I attempt to be my cheerful self.

Perhaps I overdo it. I up the ante by changing the music to something more energetic, drinking some booze from the bottle, and pulling my three friends up to dance with me.

We jump into the pool, make a lot of noise, and laugh. Unfortunately, I am not enjoying myself at all. My inner bitterness needs to be buried, and I just want to do something crazy to distract myself.

Phi Ploy frequently looks over at me, as I do her. We make eye contact but do not speak. One person seems more intoxicated than me: Phi Dream. She begins to whine at Phi Ploy, pleading for tenderness with her eyes.

Finally, Phi Ploy requests that Chakrit assist Phi Dream in getting to her bedroom before the two of them disappear together.

After the party, Chakrit split up to sleep with Jie Ang, while Hwan-jeab, Best, and I shared a bedroom.

I can't sleep. It isn't because Hwan-jeab, who is sleeping to my left, is constantly moving. It is also not due to the fact that Best, who is currently sleeping on my right, is inebriated and mutters in her dream.

It's because I find myself constantly imagining what the two women in the other room are doing to the point of anxiety. They are sleeping together in the same room. Are they going to do anything? Will Phi Ploy say no?

I have no idea how late it is when I step out of the bedroom. It's dark outside because there aren't many lights on. With an anxious heart, I leave the room and decide to lie down on the sofa in the dimly lit living room.

Looking through the floor-to-ceiling window, I see a dark sky full of sparkling stars, a floating rubber white pony in the pool, and some movement.

I open the sliding door and step outside to take a look. Shortly after swimming to the pool's edge, a woman with honey-sweet facial features rises from the water. Her damp, wavy hair clings to her nape.

The white swimsuit that she has been donning all afternoon clings all too firmly to her body, reawakening my imagination.

I stroll over to the pool's edge, take a seat, and dip my legs into the water.

"What gives with you swimming at this hour of the night?"

"And why are you going for a stroll this late at night?"

As Phi Ploy swims closer, I gaze skyward, sway my legs in the water, and decline to respond to her.

I'm glad... that Phi Ploy is not sleeping or engaging in any other pleasant activity with the woman she shares her bedroom with.

The person who just asked me a question is unaware that she was the reason I couldn't sleep for several nights.

"I returned to my room at three a.m. last night. I was a little tipsy, so I gave out my LINE contact to a few people who asked for it."

Silently, I meet her gaze.

"They keep sending me messages, but I have not responded to any of them."

I presented those conversations to Phi Ploy.

Phi Ploy is still standing in the swimming pool. Quietly, her damp face looks up at me. She's waiting to hear everything I have to say.

"Have you ever felt possessive of me when I talk to other people?"

"Why did you give them your contact information if you don't plan on answering them?"

"I don't know. That is just the way I am... You did not respond to my question."

A kaleidoscope of lights reflects the pool's crashing waves. As the person in the pool draws nearer to me and extends her hand as an invitation, the water sways in a shimmery pattern. "Would you like to swim with me?"

I shake my head.

The older woman, however, continues to approach me.

"You don't want to swim?"

She keeps her gaze fixed on me.

Thankfully, I have the good sense to set my phone down before Phi Ploy snatches my waist and yanks me into the pool while I'm still in my sleepwear.

The water is cold. I am completely wet. My t-shirt clings to my body, revealing my black bra.

"Phi Ploy!"

I push her shoulders. I'm upset about both the Phi Dream situation and being dragged into the pool. Nonetheless, the older woman simply gives me a sweet smile and moves seductively closer to me.

"What was your question again?"

She brings her face closer. Our lips are on the verge of contact. Phi Ploy wraps an arm around my waist and presses my back against the pool. I don't know how to escape, nor do I want to.

I long for her to embrace me more tightly and kiss me more passionately than before. What I really want is for her to show me that she wants me as well.

"Have you ever been possessive of me?... Even for once?"

I never get a verbal response from her. Phi Ploy is gripping my hair from behind. Our abs come together. She kisses me passionately, grinding her lips into mine.

She slips her other hand under my t-shirt and sweeps her thumb over my nipple while my bra remains on, sending butterflies through my stomach.

I am also stroking her nipple through the swimsuit that clings tightly to her body.

Despite the water submerging more than half of our bodies, a burning sensation permeates my entire body.

Now that we've gone further than ever before, I can't help but make an embarrassing noise as Phi Ploy lifts my legs to wrap them around her waist and grind her hips against mine. Her two hands slide under my bra and caress my exposed flesh.

Then...

Then everything comes to an end. She steps away from me, as she usually does. This time, though, I see panic in her eyes.

"It's late. We should proChapter :ly get out of the pool."

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# Chapter 19 : The Island Table

*It's late. We should proChapter :ly get out of the pool.*

Those words lingered in my head all the way to breakfast the following day.

We once again had food delivered to our rented house. Two sets of breakfast were served.

One set of breakfasts was served to the older group outside, while another set was served to us four-me, Best, Krit, and Jeab-inside.

"I have some gossip to share."

When Best uses the voice tone we all know is for talking about someone who isn't present, she grabs everyone's attention.

"I woke up in the middle of the night, and Pun was not there. Where were you, Pun?"

"That's your gossip?"

I grab my phone and check my email. I believe I have decided how I will Tespond to the New York firm's job interview.

"Geez. Fine. I'll skip that portion and go straight to the part where I came downstairs for water."

Best alters her tone of voice once more. We three instinctively tilt our heads toward Best. My friends are oblivious to my anxiety about what Best might say next.

"You know, it was really late. I got thirsty and came down to the kitchen for some water. However, the floor leading to the kitchen was splattered with water."

"A ghost?"

"Right? I was petrified. I mean, it was dark, too. I was on the verge of dashing back to the bedroom. But I was more intrigued. So I made my way to the kitchen. The thing is, when I listened closely, there were sounds like something was moving behind the island table."

Best points her head to the kitchen island table.

"I calmly made my way to the table when all of a sudden..."

The island table... Biting my lip, I listen intently to the story and imagine what was behind the island table.

"All of a sudden what? Stop teasing!"

Chakrit is eager to hear the rest of the story.

"All of a sudden, Phi Ploy emerges from behind the island table in her swimsuit. How fit must she be to go swimming in the middle of the night?"

"Ugh. I got so excited. Is that all?"

We all lean back as Hwan-jeab asks that.

"Wasn't it strange? Who gets up in the middle of the night to swim? And what was she doing to make those sounds in the dark kitchen? She was unbelievably beautiful, by the way. Her smile was incredibly sweet. Her hair was wet and messy, and her face was flushed when she emerged from behind the table. If she were a vampire, I would happily let her suck me."

"Suck what?"

Chakrit assists in setting up the joke.

"Suck my blood. Ouch... Ohhhhh. Oooooooh."

I slap Best's shoulder because I find her expression, sound, and movements annoying. I don't mind her doing that when discussing anyone else, but not Phi Ploy.

"Stop being so slutty... She was proChapter :ly thirsty, just like you."

Though Krit seems to be criticizing Best, he's chuckling.

"Do you want to know what she was doing down here last night, Best?"

Hwan-jeab asks, pointing her head in my direction.

"Ask her. She's making her way over."

When I turn around, I see the woman who was the subject of our conversation approaching with a sweet smile on her face. She sits next to me, appearing to be in a good mood. Her eyes light up as she looks at us.

"What are you talking about? The head huddle suggests that it must be interesting."

"Best was telling us that Pun had disappeared from the bedroom last night. Also, she met you down here when she came down to get some water from the kitchen."

Chakrit once more sets the stage.

"Yes. I was surprised to see Best down here so late at night."

"And..."

I place my elbow on the table and rest my face on my palm as I swing one leg over the other. I also tilt my head while staring intently at Phi Ploy.

"What were you doing in the kitchen?"

Under the table, I am moving my foot... sensually against the smooth leg of the person seated next to me as I ask.

Looking down, Phi Ploy attempts to suppress a smile. She then raises her head, her eyes smiling.

"And where were you last night? Why did your friend have to search everywhere for you?"

Where was I? **I was behind that island table!**

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Yes. Phi Ploy did indeed put on her bathrobe and lead us out of the pool last night.

However, the moment the sliding door to the house opened, I snatched the person who wanted to get out of the pool by the ribs and dragged her inside, pressing my weight against her body.

I rose to my toes and kissed her passionately. It was a steamy and yearning kiss. I cut off all of her words as I nudged and hugged her all the way to the sofa.

"Pun."

"Shhh..."

The sofa sank while I pushed and pleaded with Phi Ploy to sit down. Like a shadow, I crouched down and took a seat on her lap when she complied. With my full weight on her, I pressed in until her back sank into the backrest.

Although she displayed some resistance with her hands until I had to push them down, her delicate lips battled mine willingly.

Both of us were wet. However, I could clearly feel her breath trembling, her skin burning, and our emotions flushing from within.

"Pun, stop."

Phi Ploy freed her mouth to voice her objection. Her body, however, clearly conveyed a different message. I could tell she shared my sentiments. All of those intense feelings originated somewhere.

My stomach and ghest tingled with electricity. It was tender, warm, quivering, and yearning.

"Pun."

I reclined slightly, but not significantly.

"That is all I allow you to say."

I whispered through my lips. I nestled my nose against the dimpies on her alluring cheeks. My hands were moving towards her firm breasts.

"You can only say my name, Pun... Do not say anything else."

"If you do not stop, I will no longer try to stop myself."

The person who disregarded instructions and uttered numerous forbidden words immediately received a bite to the chin. Phi Ploy breathed laboriously, seemingly struggling to control her emotions. It boosted my confidence.

"Do not say anything other than my name."

Her neck's radiant skin called for cuddling. I didn't know how to get things rolling. I had no idea where to start. One thing I did know was that I wanted to be very close to her.

I wanted to bury my face in her alluring neck and hair. I wished to inhale her alluring scent as much as my heart desired.

The more we bare ourselves naked and share body heat, the more I desire her all to myself. Apart from myself, I didn't want her to allow anyone to touch her in this manner. I did not want her to look at anyone with these eyes and expressions.

She could not allow anyone to be more special than me. No one else should make her happier than I do. The butterflies in my chest were fuming.

"Don't bite, Pun."

That voice jolted me out of my dark mood. My eyes begged for forgiveness.

"Did it hurt?"

She shook her head.

"You can't leave a mark there."

The bathrobe was opened, revealing the faded red marks I left on her soft breasts and shoulders.

"But you allowed her to make a mark here."

Frustrated, I scrutinize the bruised mark on her neck, left by someone else's lips.

"Are you upset with me?"

So sweet... The person beneath me had such dewy, sweet eyes that it melted my heart.

"I am."

My face snuggled into her warm breasts once more as I placed her left hand on my stomach, hoping to relieve the strange sensation I was experiencing.

However, it was completely ineffective. Everything in my body had become even more jumbled. I did, however, enjoy how close we were.

"Can you get off me first?"

"No."

"I will make it up to you."

"Do it in this position."

My finger caressed her breasts. My nose and lips refused to separate from her skin, and I continued to caress her face.

"Pun. Look at me."

Who would... If I looked into her eyes, I would do whatever she asked.

"Pun."

My arms encircled hers in a tight embrace. I ignored her beckoning until my hair was touched. It was the warm lips of the person I'm falling deeper and deeper for. I'm constantly thinking about her. I care about her enormously. I'm extremely possessive of her.

I want to see her smile. My heart won't rest until I see her face.

Nonetheless, whenever I see her, my heart flutters, and my mind races with bad thoughts. I long to kiss her here and touch her there, I want to be able to call her mine. I inevitably succumb to greed and indulge in sin.

"Phi Ploy... I feel it here."

I brought the gentle touch from my stomach to my chest.

"Whenever I'm with you."

Silence and a warm, sweet, alluring atmosphere surrounded us.

"And when you're with someone else, I also feel it here."

I pressed her hand against my chest.

"I did not do anything inappropriate with her. And you should return to your room right now."

Those unpleasant words compelled me to do the opposite. I gnawed on her neck with my lips.

"I'm not going back to my room."

I slipped both hands into her bathrobe and caressed her tender breasts.

The target of the attack gasped for air. She did not use her arms to defend herself. She showed no resistance. Only unpersuasive words of denial came out of her mouth.

"If you let your heart lead the way tonight..."

I stopped her from finishing the sentence with my mouth.

"I already stated that all you could say was my name."

After that, our lips locked in a heated embrace. We progressed to more passionate touches.

No longer were Phi Ploy's two hands idle. They were all over me, both on my clothes and on my naked skin.

"Get up!"

I shook my head, rejecting the command Phi Ploy gave as soon as our lips parted.

'We will change location. I don't want anyone to walk in on us."

The house has four bedrooms, all of which were occupied. As a result, the dark area behind the island table served as our personal retreat. It became the area... I will cherish for the rest of my life.

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"Right. Where were you last night, Pun?"

"You moved around while sleeping, Jeab. And you talked in your sleep, Best. So I came downstairs to sleep on the sofa."

"Were you comfortable?"

"It was better than sleeping on the floor."

When you just stepped out of the pool with a low body temperature, the tile floor behind the island table was not particularly cold. Additionally, the tiles did not feel particularly harsh on your skin.

However, the floor was a little too uncomfortable to lie on while someone was repeatedly pressing down on you.

"You were on the sofa last night? Why didn't I see you when I came down?" Best frowns as she tries to remember what happened.

"Perhaps it was dark, and you were a little tipsy."

Jeab makes an assumption.

"Why didn't you say anything to me, Pun?"

"Pun was proChapter :ly either busy or asleep."

Phi Ploy smiles elegantly as she shifts her body.

Only I know that her hand has shifted to rest on my thigh, below the table.

"Were you sleeping, Pun, or were you sedated with Conan's anesthetic?... Didn't you hear anything coming from the kitchen? I could hear it walking down the stairs."

"That's because you like to eavesdrop, Best."

The duo is at it again. The oldest and most attractive woman here laughs.

"The cabinet door was flimsy."

The soft, icy hand on my thigh moves up dangerously high.

However, Phi Ploy's expression is so carefree and joyful that it appears as though nothing is happening beneath the table.

"It made a noise when there was a slight impact because it wouldn't shut all the way. I examined it and poked at it because I was slightly irritated."

*Indeed... the quality of the door on the bottom cabinet is subpar. This was why it made a noise every time my leg jerked and hit it.*

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"Do not cry out loud."

"I'm not a little kid to be crying in this situation."

Under her breath, Phi Ploy's face caressed my flesh and giggled softly. She effortlessly pulled my bra and t-shirt up to my neck without even wasting time to unhook my bra. Her warm tongue caressed my bare skin from stomach to breasts. She relentlessly assaulted the tips until they quavered.

She didn't give me a chance to think or feel embarrassed before my naked buttocks touched the kitchen's shiny, icy floor.

It was as if Phi Ploy were painting on a canvas with each touch. No limits or regulations were in place. She wasn't teasing or taking her time as she normally does. The touches were overflowing with passion but also very gentle.

I felt like I was melting in the cramped quarter between the kitchen island and the counter. Phi Ploy's body, fingers, and tongue were all over me, expressing a rainbow of emotions.

She pinned me down, lifted my knees, and spread my legs. She proceeded to the sensitive, off-limits region, causing me to shudder involuntarily.

I twisted and turned. As a new sensation rushed through my body, I let out an uncontrollable moan. It was as if I had experienced something previously unknown to me...

Yes, I've never been physically intimate with anyone before. But I will never tell her so that she can insult me like she did about my kiss.

"I told you not to cry out loud."

Phi Ploy whispered, a satisfied smile on her face. She had forbidden me from making loud noises, but she clearly enjoyed it... Just then, I finally grasped her meaning of "crying out loud."

She let go of my legs and rose up to passionately kiss my neck, ear, and face. Her red lips were scorching. Her wavy hair was disheveled due to my tugging. So as not to disrupt my feelings, her fingers kept moving fluidly below.

"Can I take this off?"

I made the request, pleading with her with my eyes.

With that request, the magnificent figure rose. She let the straps of her bikini fall from her rounded shoulders down to her hourglass waist. Her seductively exposed 11-line abs and silky breasts were beckoning.

Her beauty intoxicated me. An overwhelming desire to touch her consumed my thoughts.

I reached for those velvety breasts. I imitated every action that was done to me, from kissing the neck to moist kisses on the sensitive peaks of the breasts. The delicate nipples were aroused.

Sweet, suppressed moans echoed in her throat. The woman with wavy hair closed her eyes and pushed me back onto the floor. Her slender fingers pulled the small piece of clothing between her legs to one side...

"Do not cry out." She whispered.

My hair splayed across the kitchen floor. I raised my arms above my head, pressing against the cabinet to keep myself from slipping on the floor, while Phi Ploy pressed her hips against mine.

Despite the cool air conditioning, my body was covered in sweat. I held back my trembling moan as my sensitive area quivered. Aroused, I twisted my body and tensed my muscles. However, the person who was attempting to silence her sweet, heavy breathing refused to let me go.

Phi Ploy was blooming beautifully right on top of me. Her lips were parted. With half her eyes closed, her eyes were so sultry that the mere sight of them could kill you. She brushed her hair away from her breasts before sliding her hand down her body, swaying her waist to a hot beat.

...That sight really could kill me.

"Phi Ploy... I... Ahhh."

Her grinding was gentle when I screamed in a whisper.

"Not yet."

Following her stall, she then accelerated her grinding speed.

She was torturing me. She refused to let me off the high ride. She propelled me nearly to the horizon before pulling me back down. However, every time she thrust me back up, my emotions skyrocketed.

"Shhh..."

As my toes dug into the floor, ready for another round, her hips suddenly slowed to turtle speed. The slender body leaned in closer. She used her right hand to cover my mouth.

"Someone's coming down."

As the other person tilted her head to try to hear every movement, my eyes went wide open in panic.

...Did we cease our actions?

...No.

Phi Ploy was merely listening intently to make sure that there were movements that weren't ours. After that, she said... '***Do not cry out loud***.'

It was at that moment that the door to the cabinet began to squeak.

Okay... My legs twitched!

I needed an outlet, otherwise, I could have died from the rising temperature, which had not been alleviated earlier and was then rising even higher.

While I lay there gasping for breath, Phi Ploy dressed herself and stood up. As she did, she swiftly swept my pants behind the island table where we were hiding with one leg.

"Best. What are you doing down here?"

The woman is very skilled at bluffing and regulating her emotions. She was all tense on top of me just a second ago. However, by taking one deep breath to calm her racing heart and starting a conversation, she managed to stop Best from coming over that very moment.

"Ah... I was thirsty."

As I walked down the stairs, I noticed some noises coming from the kitchen and decided to investigate. The woman in the swimsuit responded with a dry laugh.

"What are you doing in the kitchen, Phi Ploy?"

"Are you thirsty?"

I wondered if Phi Ploy ever responds to anyone's question.

"Here it is."

Phi Ploy handed a bottle filled with clear liquid to Best. I assumed that my friend had walked away, puzzled.

I remained seated on the kitchen floor, fully clothed. Her scent permeated every part of my body. We exchanged quiet looks. The silence was broken by me...

"I want to do it again."

The person who was listening right away chuckled.

I was aware that I was quite forthright. But what was that? Phi Ploy was so sweet, yet devilish. Both the feeling of her touch and the sight of her lifted me to great heights.

It was intensely juicy. It felt immensely delicate. I had completely lost all of my strength. My entire body was all tense. It was incredibly exhilarating.

I had no idea my body was capable of feeling such emotions, I felt as if I were Tenshinhan when his eyes were opened. My heart was still racing... I liked it. I wanted to repeat the recent experience with Phi Ploy,

"Can we do it again?"

Phi Ploy smiled once more.

"Not tonight."

She reached out her hand and pulled me up.

"You really should return to your room right now. You're all wet. I don't want you to get sick."

"Can you not sleep with her?"

She knew exactly who I was talking about.

We ended up going up to our rooms to shower before returning to sleep on the sofas in the living room. I was aware that I would be unable to refrain from kissing her naked skin if we were in close proximity, so we opted to sleep on separate sofas.

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That was why I sent a rejection email to the New York-based company this morning. I squandered an opportunity for career advancement and my dream to work in New York.

I don't know if I made the wrong decision, but I don't want to go anywhere right now.

The reason isn't simply because we've already engaged in intimate activities. It's because I sense a deeper connection between Phi Ploy and myself, as well as a sense of belonging-a special place for my essence and spirit.

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# Chapter 20: The Media

**Can't be sweeter than this:**

**What has Pun been up to lately? Why has she been unusually quiet?**

**THE BEST:**

**Yeah. Pun, where have you been? Is work piling up for you?**

**CKrit:**

**Right. You rarely answered our chat messages.**

**PUN:**

**Yeahasdh I'm busy, lakdfnv93ajgals**

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"Replying to your chat messages at this time is very disrespectful."

The woman lying on her side directly behind me moves her mouth from the tip of my breast to the back of my neck. She nibbles my ears and reaches deeper into my underwear. It goes so deep that it reaches...

"Ahhhhhh..."

The depth of it causes my eyelids to close and my breath to tremble. I allow her fingers to work their enchanting magic.

"Does it hurt?"

I shake my head... Hurt? No. It feels pleasurable.

"Have you come up with any ideas for your work yet?"

Her nose is caressing the nape of my neck. Her body is snuggled against mine. Her wrap envelops me. Her lips savor me. Last but not least, her hands never stop moving.

"I can open your eyes to more new possibilities."

"Phi Ploy..."

"Yes???" She smiles.

Phi Ploy changed forever after our night together on the kitchen floor. Her patience has worn thin. When we are in public together, she always uses her eyes to strip me down. Further, whenever we're alone, she paints every inch of my body.

"Did Phi Jay really buy you a new car?"

I ask as I suck the chocolate from a renowned shop off my finger.

With teary eyes and a smile that goes from cheek to cheek, the person who just got a brand-new car nods.

"You know I took good care of you, Jay?"

"No."

The person known as Jay responds, still clutching a piece of chocolate in her hand.

"I don't want to sit in your beat-up vehicle when you pick me up... Both the car and the driver are ancient."

"Ugh, you rebellious kid. Come here!"

While everyone is focused on Phi Jay and Jie Ang, who are wrestling with smiles on their faces, the person next to me whispers.

"Try this one. I think it's good."

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I made a poor decision that day. Not everyone was watching Jie Ang wrap his massive arms around Phi Jay's body.

There was a woman who enjoyed meddling in other people's affairs and keeping a close eye on everything that happened. She took note of every detail and shared it with her friends.

"Is it true, Jeab?"

While raising her spectacles with her index finger, the saleswoman gives a nod.

"Yes."

"Geeeeeez. Pun. You couldn't be any naughtier."

Best now looks stunning after undergoing plastic surgery on her chin, neck, nose, and lips, and she has completely recovered from the ordeal. The pain she went through during her makeover was worthwhile.

"Please provide some evidence that what you said about me was true. I have the legal right to sue you, Jeab, for spreading false information."

"They proChapter :ly won't be able to find any trace of your DNA on Phi Ploy's finger from the event a few days ago."

"Wow, Jeab, that's really dramatic."

"Pun, did you really suck Phi Ploy's finger?"

Best won't stop bugging me. She stares at me with her large, round eyes, forcing me to respond.

"Are you insane? I didn't suck her finger!"

"Half of her finger was in your mouth."

Best's jaw drops when Hwan-jeab immediately interrupts me.

"Talking to all of you is pointless. I already told you there is nothing going on between us. She simply extended an invitation for me to try her chocolate and handed it to me. All I did was accept the Invitation. You were only observing from a certain angle when you saw me touch her finger with my mouth. Do you understand, Jeab? It's merely the angle."

"Geeeeeez. Touched her finger... Are you considering getting into politics? White powder is essentially flour, right?"

"Shit! Pun. You are now a full woman. I'm proud of you. I wish Krit were here to join us in congratulating you."

"Best! I did not suck Phi Ploy's finger!"

"Okay. You did not suck Phi Ploy's finger."

Best says this while laughing and pushing me on the shoulder with teasing eyes.

"You're a woman now, Pun."

Gosh. Nobody believes a word I say. I might as well quit arguing with them. What they believe is irrelevant, so they are free to make whatever assumptions they want... I did not suck Phi Ploy's finger, as they claim.

Perhaps the finger went too deep into my mouth. I'm not even sure if it was half the finger. I only recall licking it as I released it....

Okay. I admit it... Only recently have I realized that my favorite pastime is reaching up and slipping my hand into the placket of the 42nd-floor resident's clothing.

I'm a sex addict. Or perhaps I'm addicted to Phi Ploy. I'm addicted to her smell, skin, and touch. I'm so obsessed with her that I don't ever want to take my face away from her breasts.

My condition is so severe that I also watch R-rated movies during work hours to research and experiment with the woman with dimples... My professional background is in design.

That is why I enjoy experimenting with new ideas.

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"Lick me!"

I'm quite embarrassed for screaming that phrase without regard for Phi Ploy's portrait on the wall above the dining table, which is staring right at me now. My long hair is loosely tousled, and my legs are dangling. My entire body is exposed, but I am clad in high heels.

The Phi Ploy in real life is licking the area between my legs while holding my butt on the edge of the table, causing my back to curve into a half-circle.

"Bitch!"

The gorgeous face pauses her activity to give me a startled look.

"What... did you just say?"

Her fingers continue to stroke my nipples.

"Bitch."

"Tell me what you've been watching and reading recently in the media." With a brief twitch of her eyebrows, her dewy lips pose the question. She then screams, "You slut!" and spanks my butt with her slim hand. Ploy Pitcha, a pornography star, is born.

"....."

"....."

Wow... I did not expect my lovely woman to grasp the concept so quickly.

Upon making eye contact, there is a brief hush. Then we both break out laughing.

"Phi Ploy... I think... Let's try conversing with each other again in a more polite way."

"I agree that doing it the usual way is preferable."

With a smile on her face, the older woman climbs on the table and gets on top of me.

"How much does this table cost, Phi Ploy? If we were to slam down on it repeatedly, would it be able to support our combined weight?"

"Should I get off the table?"

"Please don't." I whisper.

"Phi Ploy..."

My-eyes beckon her as I call her name, pleading for tenderness.

"Yes?"

"Do you prefer that I address you with respect and tenderness?"

Phi Ploy responds with a smile, a warm kiss, and a playful act, making me forget all about the R-rated clips I watched.

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I don't really think my sexual obsession is that bad, to be honest. Making love with Phi Ploy stimulates my mind and fills it with ideas.

After spending time with the ambrosial woman, I always end up with a notebook full of sketches the following morning.

"Ouch!"

As soon as I whip the person I'm seated on, a red stripe appears on her body.

"Does it hurt?"

Phi Ploy fixes her intense gaze on the red stripe that serves as evidence on her body.

"Where did you get the whip?!"

"I took it from the white box in your dressing room... But I'm curious whether you're just acting or not. According to what I read online, it's not painful at all."

Out of curiosity, I whip her once more, this time around her chest.

"Ouch!!!"

The whip victim startles and looks up at me with a glare of ferocity. In response, she snatches the whip from my fingers and whips my chest.

"Does it hurt?"

"Yes."

"It hurts, doesn't it?"

Her piercing eyes express.

"What did you watch this time?"

"......"

I'm too embarrassed to reply.

"Please do not tell me that it is Mr. Grey."

The person below rajses an eyebrow. She then laughs when I puff my cheeks. And now our moods are back to normal. We bite, nibble, scratch, and giggle after tossing the whip carelessly to the side of the bed.

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Let's face it: my parents make a steady living, and my sister is wealthy. In my entire life, I have never been short when it comes to love and money.

That is, until I began working and stopped asking for money from my parents, I've realized that, aside from my beauty, I'm just a regular employee. I struggle to make ends meet, leaving little money for other needs.

So, I recently began taking on freelance jobs. It provides me with more financial flexibility. On the other hand, it's extremely stressful and takes up most of my time.

Taking on side jobs, such as modeling for small clothing brands, is a better way to earn quick money.

"Why don't you leave your freelance job and become a model for my clothing company? You want to make some additional money, don't you? I'll also give you some, bonuses."

"I dislike appearing in front of the camera."

The sole issue is my aversion to public recognition. A net idol, celebrity, or any such thing isn't something I aspire to be. As a result, I am reluctant to take on such jobs.

However, if the person I like wants to be in the public eye, I am fine with that. In no way do I intend to obstruct her professional advancement.

"Are you still reading that?"

I place a glass of orange juice and a plate of fruits on the table.

Phi Ploy has been lying in the same position for over two hours. Donning a pair of vintage eyeglasses, Phi Ploy loses herself in a thick stack of paperthe script for her upcoming series.

She rarely responds to my inquiries. She has a propensity to let her focus consume her completely.

"How long before you pay attention to me again?"

Asking for tenderness in a soft voice does not work with her Snuggling her, on the other hand, produces some results.

"What kind of role are you playing this time?"

"Hmm?"

There is a reaction. But she hasn't let go of the script.

"You really are a nerd, aren't you?"

My fingertip caresses the bridge of her nose as I playfully play with her glasses before I take it off her face. Her stunning features and sweet eyes now focus on me.

"I like it when you frown like this."

I lift myself up to kiss her eyes.

"I also like your dimples."

I continue by kissing her cheeks.

"Please give me another half an hour. I'm almost done."

"When you were a college student, were you still a bit of a nerd?"

In the space between her placket, I press my lips to the delicate flesh. The sheer, flowy dress she is wearing allows me to get up close to her body.

"I held the title of 'campus queen' within the business administration faculty."

"Were you really unattached when we first met? Just how did it happen that you weren't in a committed relationship?"

"As we get older, we tend to use our brains more."

"What is your ideal type?"

I now slip my hand between her dress placket and stroke her inner thigh while I wait for an answer.

"I wasn't particularly close to my mother."

Phi Ploy puts the script on the table. Prior to this, she had rarely discussed her family. The serious tone in her voice causes me to slowly pull my hand away from her thigh. However, her soft, icy hand grabs my hand and places it back where it was.

"My mom was in a relationship with three different people throughout her life. My father was her second life partner. They did not have a happy relationship. My mother harbors a deep hatred for my father, and this hatred extends to his daughter."

Because Phi Ploy is vulnerable on the inside, she has to put on such a tough exterior. Every living being possesses at least one weapon for self-defense.

That is the basic survival rule.

Those calm eyes show no emotion. Her expressionless eyes suggest that she is unconcerned with the words she is speaking. Still, I've witnessed her true vulnerability beyond her facade.

"I was previously involved in a relationship. People, however, are constantly changing. Human nature is characterized by lies, doubts, and selfishness. Before I knew it... I'd become an old soul."

I'm not sure what kind of social circle she was in or what her previous life experiences were.

But seeing how self-sufficient and solitary she is hurts my heart. Because I was not a fire that could have kept her warm in the snowstorms she endured, it pains me.

I take my hand off her thigh, grab her hand, and kiss it. I press my lips against her knuckles and draw her in for an embrace.

"And why did you date so many people at once?"

"I didn't do that."

I make excuses while whining.

"I'd never been in a relationship... I simply hung out with them."

"Just hung out?"

"Yes. We do not have ownership over each other. We were just hanging out, eating, talking. and enjoying ourselves."

"Were they simply having fun, like you were?"

"Many were merely enjoying themselves."

My voice is muffled as I snuggle the neck of the woman who knows me too well.

"I am afraid of making commitments. I dread being in a committed relationship when the sparks start to die. I fear that my emotions will distort my perception of reality and twist everything. The thought of being the one who loves more and then gets dumped terrifies me. That is why I refrained from going beyond the act of enjoyment. Perhaps it was because I had no strong feelings for anyone."

"Are you saying that you've never experienced genuine feelings for another person?"

"...I have."

"Was reality as twisted as you had feared it to be?"

"Yes."

I've just foregone my ideal future in New York City in favor of spending the moment cuddling with her here.

"Were you the one who let that happen?"

"I didn't intend it, but it happened, and I had no control over it."

"Do you really like this person?"

"I have never liked anyone so much."

"....."

When our gazes meet, I detect a hint of possessiveness in her eyes.

"I've never liked anyone as much as I do you, Phi Ploy."

The possessiveness transformed into something I'm unable to decipher. Something fickle in those sweet eyes. She appears to be extremely calm from the outside. Looking into her eyes, though, reveals a tornado's worth of mayhem.

I don't wait for the tornado, storm, or whatever it is that's raging inside her to subside. I get up and kiss her right away. I take my time savoring her soft lips. I slip my tongue in to give it a little taste here and there. I kiss her repeatedly to convey my feelings.

"I give you nine out of ten."

Our breaths are trembling. Our emotions are transpiring.

"What for?"

"For your kiss just now."

"Only nine? I'll give you another chance to say it."

I lower my body and rest my face on her breasts. My hand goes back through her placket. This time, I also pull her dress up. My hand crawls up her smooth thigh, all the way up to her panty,

"It's a nine. Today, I only want to give you nine."

Phi Ploy beams a seductive smile as she whispers to me. She's lying on her side, allowing me to do whatever I want to her body.

"So it's a locked result... Your reaction suggested that I should get a score higher than nine... Could you please reconsider the score?"

With her sweet, dewy eyes, the older woman invites me in, and my fingers playfully graze her panty for a brief moment before they dart inside.

Phi Ploy places her head on the backrest, bites her lips, and takes a deep breath.

"If you refuse to raise my score tonight, I will have to make you my wife."

With the appearance of her dimples, Phi Ploy laughs with adoration.

"What have you been watching lately?"

With her eyes closed and her chin raised, she poses the question. Her legs start to spread. Her hips raise, inviting me to investigate.

"I've been watching Thai dramas."

She whispers to me in a low, trembling voice,

"Don't go so far as to strangle me."

"If we are discussing strangling, I believe we are referring to different series."

I grate my teeth on her thigh as I lick it. My fingers move slowly as I wait for her to become more ready. Phi Ploy is very clear about what she wants. She will take action when she wants something, and that includes sex.

I simply need to rouse her until she's ready, and then I will witness the authentic Phi Ploy: the one who doesn't merely stand there and smile, leaving me to speculate about her thoughts.

The real Phi Ploy will express her desires to me through her body language, temperature, expression, and every passionate action she performs on my body.

***Rrrrrrrr***

The phone interruption is ignored, or at least we try to ignore it until the third time. I eventually get up, press the reject button, and throw the phone back to its original location.

At that moment, the older woman rises to her feet. She pushes me down onto the carpeted floor, removes my panty, and pulls my skirt up to my radiant hips.

She then gets on her knees, straddling me, and lowers her body so that her sensitive spot can control my finger.

It's tight, slippery, and warm.

The lips parted as if to make a sound, but only heavy breaths emerged. The eyes are half closed. The buttocks are grinding. And the hands are unbuttoning the dress to reveal her breasts.

"You're this aroused?"

"Stop talking... Kiss me."

Her voice and entire being radiate sweetness. I follow her every order. I drape her dress over her delicate shoulders and plant moist kisses from her chin down to her neck.

"Lower."

I obey her every command, bringing my lips to her breasts as my hand gently tugs on her bra....

***Rrrrrr!***

Her nipple is in my mouth. I lick it until I hear her intoxicated moans. The tug on my hair Indicates her satisfaction with my actions.

"Ahhhhh..."

The more she makes those sounds, the more I arouse her... The more I arouse her, the more she massages my breasts.

***Rrrrrr!***

The person on the other end appears hell-bent on keeping going. The sound of the phone's ring is so sharp that it reaches our very brains.

Phi Ploy clenches her thigh muscle, grinds her hips violently, and moves her lower body more aggressively as she lets out a frustrated sigh and digs her nails into my shoulder.

"Ahhh..." ***Rrrrrr!*** "Argh!/Ugh!"

The constant ringing of the phone has finally worn us down to the point where we scream in exasperation.

"Pick it up."

When Phi Ploy moves her hips away with a frown, I regain full control of my fingers once more. She hands me a tissue to wipe the fluid off my hand.

She is now leaning on the sofa, arms crossed over her chest, scowling at me. The piercing eyes are fixed on me, as if to say, Deal with the phone call quickly. I'm left hanging here!

My phone shows the name "Hwan-jeab"prominently.

"Hello."

I pick up the phone, clearly frustrated. However, before I can say anything else, the person on the other end of the line issues a series of threats.

[Why didn't you answer the phone sooner? I've called you over ten times.

Come to me right away! I have already sent you the location.]

"Now? What's going on?"

The person on the sofa is now hugging me from behind. She is cuddling with me, tickling me with her nose, and licking my earlobe.

[I saw Phi Pay.]

"Where?!"

[Just come to the location I sent you. I will call you if there is any movement. Best and Chakrit are also on their way. We will help you put pressure on Phi Pay.]

"Right now?"

I look over at Phi Ploy with a heavy heart.

[Immediately, or he may disappear again. I'm making every effort to monitor him closely.]

"Uh-huh."

[Hurry.]

When the smartphone goes quiet, the entire room goes silent. I turn to face the person hugging me from behind. Given the way Phi Ploy is looking at me, I am afraid to say anything.

"Phi Ploy....I... have to go."

"......"

The person listening does not respond. She says nothing. That makes me feel even more nervous. My friends are rushing me, while Phi Ploy is giving me the silent treatment. I'm incredibly stressed right now.

I lean over to kiss the older woman's cheek and neck. To pamper her, I take a tissue and wipe the stain from her thigh.

"Let's meet tomorrow."

I buttoned all the buttons on her dress.

"Do you have to leave right now?"

"Yes."

I look at her as I stand up. She holds onto my hand.

"It's almost 11 p.m."

"I really have to go."

"Can you not leave right now... Can you spend the night with me?"

I bend over and stroke her hair. I then passionately kiss her. But I have made up my mind.

"I will hurry back."

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# Chapter 21 : Why? What could poossibly be the reason?

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I have not been out much recently, either for a night out or to simply socialize. The primary reason is that the existence of Phi Ploy dulls everything else. Another reason is the pandemic, pollution, and PM 2.5 that have engulfed the capital and are slowly killing us.

Our government can only advise us to rely on ourselves and wear masks, which they sell at exorbitant prices. I wonder if they will wait until the city resembles a smokehouse before devising a long-term sustainable strategy to address the problems.

Do you want me to elaborate on the disparity? Let me simply state that fresh, clean air comes at a cost.

I sigh and inhale the potentially PM2.5-contaminated air inside my airconditioned vehicle.

Even at 11 p.m., some parts of the city are still bustling. There are a lot of cars on the streets. However, the street I just entered, which follows Hwanjeab's route, has only a few people walking on the sidewalk.

Restaurants and nightclubs, on the other hand, are bustling with people from all walks of life.

Pulling into the parking spot across from old buildings, my Benzene engine finally goes quiet. I enter a small, dark alley between a watch shop and a tailor shop, following Hwan-jeab's directions from our phone conversation.

It's very desolate. I feel like I'm in a Chinese ghost film.

I make quick, long strides until I reach a black door on a cement wall. The sign on the door with the opening hours and a handle indicates that I've arrived at the right place.

You'd never guess there was a bar here. It appears to be just another resident.

Just as I open the door, a man wearing a black shirt and a motorcycle helmet dashes out. He mounts an emerald-green Vespa parked outside the entrance and rides it onto the street from the alley.

I return my focus to the narrow passageway behind the door. The dim light and atmosphere from the alley outside give me goosebumps.

However, the live music coming from the ceiling compels me to walk to the door at the top of the stairwell. One door has a sign that reads restroom, while the other says entrance.

The smell, music, and warm, orange, dim lighting stand in stark contrast to the outside environment. It's livelier and busier than I had anticipated. I make my way through the crowd and tables, looking for Hwan-jeab.

My friends seem to be waiting for me. Upon seeing me, the saleswoman quickly raises her hand.

"Where is he?"

I carefully survey the area. A bartender behind a counter is mixing cocktails for customers. Behind him is a bare brick wall and shelves stocked with various types of liquor. As I look around further, I notice a section with a live band.

We are on the second level of the bar. From here, I can see down to the first floor, which is more quiet and private. However, due to the dim lighting, I am unable to see clearly.

"He stepped out to use the restroom just now... I have Chakrit monitor him while we wait for you."

"The restroom outside?"

Hwan-jeab nods as Best looks down to the first floor from time to time.

"He came here to meet with that woman,"

Hwan-jeab says, pointing her head towards a table Best is looking at.

"That woman approached him and handed him something. They had a brief conversation before he walked out. I told Chakrit to follow him and monitor him while we waited for you, as well as keep an eye on the woman."

"Okay. I'll head to the restroom then."

"I'll go with you. Keep a close eye on the woman, Best."

After Best makes the "okay" hand gesture, Hwan-jeab and I head to the restroom.

The door I walked past on my way up the stairs is now pushed open. Someone we know is sprawled out on the floor, eyes closed, and a gushing stream of blood oozing from his temple.

"Chakrit!!!!!!"

Hwan-jeab and I both scream out in panic. While we check around to make sure no one else or danger is nearby, we hastily go to Chakrit and attempt to bring him back to consciousness.

"Chakrit. Chakrit!!! Wake up!!!"

"Is he breathing, Pun?"

"Arghhhhh. Ouch."

Slowly, the eyelids of the individual lying on the floor open. Raising his hand, Chakirt touches the wound on his temple. A raspy, low moan slithers out of him.

"What happened?!"

Hwan-jeab inquires in a hurry.

The person being questioned's gaze continues to drift aimlessly. It appears that Chakirt is still out of it. Yet, as he remembers what transpired, his eyes rapidly enlarge.

"I'm sorry... He caught me following him... He landed a blow on my head."

All the stalls are empty. There's nobody else in the restroom. Phi Pay has once again escaped.

"Are you okay, Krit?"

Chakirt's condition is quite concerning. I want to make sure he doesn't suffer any major head or brain injuries.

"Let's get you to the hospital. We'll deal with Phi Pay later."

"I'm okay. I'm just a little dizzy."

Chakrit sits up, still a little disoriented. He then exhales frustratedly as his memories begin to resurface.

"Damn. I'm so furious right now. He pretended not to notice me, but as soon as I let down my guard, he struck me in the head with his motorcycle helmet."

"You shouldn't trust someone who walks into a bar with a motorcycle helmet... Can you get to your feet? A visit to that woman is in order."

Hwan-jeab assists Chakrit in getting up. However, he waves his hand, indicating that he can stand on his own. We all exit the restroom and return to the bar.

"I think Jeab should take you to the doctor. I'll cover the bill. Best and I can handle that woman."

"I'm okay, Pun. I'll let you know if I'm not."

I nod to that. Once we get that out of the way, we proceed to the table Best is occupying. However, when the other half of the duo sees Chakrit, she immediately gets up and walks over.

"Hey! What happened?"

In her enraged state, she looks at us as though she has the answer before she asks.

"What did he do to you, Chakrit?"

"He was struck with a motorcycle helmet," I reply.

"He got away?... Gosh. Krit."

Best leans in to examine the wound on Chakrit's head.

"I am the only one who can strike your head. Why weren't you more careful?"

"When I arrived, I saw a man walk out. He was wearing a motorcycle helmet. He dashed out. got on his motorcycle, and took off."

"What was the color of his shirt?"

"Black." "Was it a Vespa?" I nod.

"Son of a bitch."

Hwan-jeab curses vehemently.

"I drove after him from the late-night boiled rice restaurant. I'm so fucking furious that he managed to escape. Not only that, but he struck Chakrit in the head while fleeing."

"Jeab. The woman is on the move!!!!!"

When Best shouts, we all turn our focus to the table on the first level... She's gone.

Two of us dash to the first level as two others bolt out of the bar to check outside. But none of us can see the target. We lost both Phi Pay and the woman he had met... Damn!

We leave the bar empty-handed. Our next destination is the hospital. We should have Chakrit examined to ensure that his brain cells are still intact.

I call Phi Ploy on our way to the hospital to ensure she doesn't worry about me or overthink things.

"I'm back in my room already. Are you still up?"

The person on the other end of the line remains silent for three seconds before responding.

"Have you returned to your room?"

"Yes. I'm in my room."

Determining whether or not to lie can be difficult at times. All I know is that my intention is pure this time. Nonetheless, I feel uneasy every time I don't tell the truth to Phi Ploy.

"Uh-huh."

Her reply was brief. It appears she is still upset that I left her hanging.

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Phi Ploy is the only person who can make me feel anxious just by saying, "Uh-huh," in a flat tone. So, in preparation for our date this evening, I went ahead and ordered a white bouquet with a pinch of red.

She, however, calls to cancel our date in the evening because she doesn't know when she will finish her shoot.

Guess what. Despite the fact that my relationship with Phi Ploy has progressed significantly, it is still not easy for us to meet up. I can't contact her unless we make an appointment or if she doesn't tell me where she is or who she's with.

Furthermore, I am unable to visit her on the 42nd floor, whereas she is free to visit my floor whenever she pleases. There is quite a bit of inequality.

This is why my Japanese-made car's original intended destination has shifted from my condo to a new location. I stop to buy Phi Ploy's favorite snack before continuing on my merry way.

While I have paid Phi Ploy a visit on her set in the past, it is not something I do very frequently. And, while it isn't the first time, I don't usually buy her flowers. Yet...

"Miss Ploy Pitcha has finished her shoot for the day. Just the main characters are here now, shooting... But hold on for a second. I'll doublecheck just to be sure."

The individual who informed me of that went to inquire with the crew on set before coming back to me.

"Miss Ploy left in the afternoon. She drove off as soon as she finished her work."

This is the first time my flowers and sweets did not reach their intended recipient.

My confusion and the sky's darkness persist as I make my way back to my car. I make a phone call shortly after getting into my car... It took a while for the receiver to answer my call.

"Hello. Where are you, Phi Ploy?"

"I'm still on set."

"Where are you filming today?"

Her response is exactly where I am right now... Why must she lie?

"What time will you finish? I'll pick you up."

My voice is more reserved than usual. Despite my hurt feelings, I try not to make a scene. I'm certain she has a reason for lying. However, I feel compelled to push the issue a little further.

"It's okay. I can return on my own. I have no idea when I'll be done."

"I can wait until you finish."

"I'll feel uneasy if I know you're waiting for me."

"Okay. I won't go then. But could you please let me know when you return to your room?"

"Okay."

I just lied to her last night about being in my room. Everything has turned around, and I am overwhelmed with feelings of disappointment and anxiety. I'd like to understand why she's lying. My mind races over *why and what could possibly be the reason.*

Phi Ploy did not contact me that night, nor did she contact me the next day or the next. She has become very quiet. Except when I call her, we never speak. Even though we don't usually meet daily, something is making me nervous.

"Prang, what do you know about Miss Dream?"

One day, while we're eating spicy salad near the condo, Phi Jay asks Prang the question.

"What, specifically?"

"Regarding her and Phi Ploy."

Famous for her charisma on a global scale, the leading lady looks at Prang with an arched eyebrow. With a fork in one hand, she fiddles with the salted egg yolk resting on the tabletop plate.

"From what I can tell, they have a lot of subtle, nonverbal communication going on on the set. They don't speak, but I feel like something is going on. It's similar to when Phi Ploy mentioned that she sensed something between us during our series shoot when I first met her."

"They were each other's first loves, but the relationship did not end well. They can, however, maintain their friendship."

So they are each other's first loves...

"Friends? At least one of them does not want to be just friends."

Prang removes the pork crackling from Phi Jay's plate as soon as Phi Jay pours some from the bag.

"What do you mean when you say that one does not want to be just friends?"

I am unable to resist asking.

"I believe Miss Dream is attempting to reignite the old romance. However, I can't read Phi Ploy. What she's thinking is a mystery to me. She can be aloof at times, but she occasionally goes out with Miss Dream."

Phi Jay adds more pork cracklings to her plate and drizzles them with spicy salad sauce. With a spoonful of juicy pork crackling in her hand, she continues.

"It was the same way Phi Ploy acted when I hit on her. She appeared to be open to talking, but she did not respond to my advances."

As she says this, Phi Jay glances at Prang and quickly explains herself.

"That was in the past. Please do not be upset with me right now, Prang."

Prang does not reply. She merely removes the spoon containing the crackling pork from Phi Jay's hand and discards its contents. Substituting juicy salmon for the crackling pork, she returns the spoon to her lover's plate while maintaining an emotionless expression.

"Pun, your sister is being secretive with me lately."

Phi Jay looks at Prang cross-eyed when my sister remains silent.

"Whenever Phi Ploy is in the picture, she always remains silent."

"It's not our concern. Their relationship is none of anyone's business, regardless of her feelings for Miss Dream or whether they reconcile or stay friends. Can't we just enjoy the food in front of us?"

"You know, but you say nothing. I'm the only outsider in the equation."

The salmon and other seafood that Prang placed on the plate in place of the pork crackling are being spooned into Phi Jay's mouth one by one.

"If you have any questions about me, I will answer all of them. Regarding matters pertaining to other people, if we are unable to assist, then let us refrain from discussing them."

"If it were truly a matter of other people's business, you would tell me. But when it comes to Phi Ploy, you keep quiet."

Prang simply stares at the fresh batch of pork crackling Phi Jay pours onto her plate.

"Waitress."

My sister summons the staff.

"Can you please remove these from my table?"

The waitress takes away all of the pork cracklings. Prang interrupts Phi Jay just as she is about to whine.

"You've reached your quota for pork crackling. Eating them excessively is unhealthy."

The person being scolded makes no arguments. Phi Jay may appear to be someone who likes to lash out at others, but she treats her lover with great respect.

When Phi Jay and Prang fight, if Prang is overly emotional, Phi Jay will transform into a cat and try to cuddle as closely as possible. She skillfully avoids Prang's threat and instead requests tenderness.

I didn't trust her at first because she seemed like a player. I was concerned that Prang would not be able to handle her. However, as I've seen them together more frequently, the way she looks at Prang and cares for her has made me accept her as my sister-in-law.

. .

I couldn't keep my cool after hearing what Phi Jay had said about Phi Ploy and Phi Dream that day.

"Hello, Phi Ploy. Are you working at the moment?"

[I can talk.]

"A senior at my office asked me to fix his computer again. I am a graphic designer, not an IT professional."

I complain about my daily life while pretending that everything is fine between us.

[Did you fix it for him?]

"I gave him the phone number of someone who can... What time will you be finished with your work? Could we have dinner together today?"

[I'll proChapter :ly return to my room around 8 p.m. Because she's willing to meet up with me today, I'm feeling less anxious.]

"What would you like to eat? I'll buy them on my way home."

[Can I make any requests?]

"Anything goes as long as you rush over to see me."

I can hear a smile on the other end of the line.

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That night, Phi Ploy knocks on my door as she usually does. My first action is to pull her into my room and seal her mouth with mine before I even say hello. She smells as wonderful as ever.

Her lips are still incredibly soft. Even if she has changed, it doesn't matter to me... I miss her. That's the only word I want to say between our kisses.

"Are you tired today? What did you do?"

"I just dress up prettily and go to an event. I also have something on my mind that I need to sort through."

"What is bothering my Phi Ploy's mind?"

The older woman takes my hand and leads me to the table. She sits down, takes in the inviting aroma of the food I prepared for her, and smiles sweetly at me. Her eyes, however, are ebviously tired.

"My brother has gotten himself into a mess."

Her reply sends my heart racing. I try to control my desire to ask her more questions. However, given that he escaped just the night before, I can't resist asking her for more information.

"Did you meet up with him?"

"......"

The person who was asked that question leans back in her chair without responding.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"My brother had previously requested my assistance, but I refused. I didn't think that doing so would make things worse. He still hasn't returned home yet. So far, my mother has no idea that he is back in Thailand." "Why doesn't he return home? So, where is he currently staying?" I... couldn't stop myself.

"He moves around."

Phi Ploy is staring intently at me.

"However, if I request to meet him, he will come."

I have no clue how things will turn out at this point. Will Phi Ploy hate me if I confess that I've been looking for Phi Pay all along or ask her to set up a meeting with him? I... don't dare to take any action.

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# Chapter 22: Our Deal

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That night, everything seemed normal. Contrary to my initial fears, nothing has changed. However, because of our busy schedules and limited free time, our meetings became even less frequent after that.

"Phi Jay, I was wondering why Phi Ploy hasn't been dropping by your room to play recently. Is the shooting schedule for the new series very tight?" The lead actress pauses for a moment before responding.

"Ah. Why hasn't Phi Ploy stopped by our room lately, Prang? The filming for the new series is not particularly tough. Is she preoccupied with something?"

"Personal time for Phi Ploy is important to her, and she never lets work get in the way of it... Could it be that she is playing in someone else's room?"

"Might it be the beautiful model with small breasts but jaw-dropping features?"

"Who are you talking about, Jay? Phi Ploy has a large supply of that type of model."

"The one Phi Ploy used to hang out with at AAA. What's her name? It's on the tip of my tongue."

"That isn't the most recent one. She has already moved on."

Prang says this with a straight face.

"Is Phi Ploy a player, Prang?"

I ask with a piercing pain in my heart.

"Not exactly. It's more like she's never committed to anyone. If the word

'love' does not come from her mouth, it is best not to make assumptions."

"And are all those models okay with that?"

"I believe the majority of the people she hung out with understand how much Phi Ploy can give them. Phi Ploy refused to let anyone get too close. If the other party becomes too involved, she will immediately distance herself."

"But Phi Ploy and Prang were an item."

My sister looks up from the YouTube video she's been watching to look at Phi Jay and me. Instead of responding, she asks us a question.

"And? Why are you two staring at me?"

Ultimately, I devise a plan to drive to the set where Phi Ploy is filming the following day. I tell Phi Jay I have to pass through that area, so I will bring her some snacks.

"Is Phi Ploy also on the set, Phi Jay? I also bought some snacks for her."

Phi Ploy is becoming increasingly difficult to reach. I have to contact her through other people. Is Phi Ploy putting distance between us, just as she did with the others?

"She is."

Phi Jay takes a box of snacks from me.

"Do you want me to give it to her for you?"

"I'll hand it to her myself."

I smile and say goodbye to Phi Jay so she can prepare for her next scene.

As I walk, I notice that some people are working while others are resting. Some of the celebrities are munching snacks, chatting, and laughing with their peers.

I ask a staff member where Phi Ploy is and then head in that direction. I eventually locate my target. Phi Ploy is sitting with Phi Dream. They are leaning into each other in front of the monitor. Their heads are so close, they almost touch.

At all times, Phi Ploy wears a subtle smile. She's talking to Phi Dream when she notices me.

"I brought snacks for Phi Jay, so I got some for you, too."

Awkwardness is setting in. In the past, I had no trouble paying her a visit on set. However, I need to find an excuse to be here today so she doesn't think I'm bothering her at work.

Phi Ploy stands up and walks towards me. She accepts the snacks and the bottle of orange juice I brought her.

"Thank you."

"Do you have a minute? Can I speak with you for a moment?"

The person from whom I requested her time smiles slightly, turns to face Phi Dream, and directs me to a quiet area.

"Is your workload too strenuous? You don't appear to be very lively today" She's as beautiful as ever. Her eyes, on the other hand, are thoroughly exhausted.

"I have to film every day, so I'm proChapter :ly not getting enough sleep."

*She's lying. Phi Jay told me she only needs to be on the set two days a week.*

I raise my hand to stroke her cheek and run my fingers over her dimple. I miss her.

"Do you want me to pick you up?"

"I will finish late. You have to get up early for work. I don't want you to have to stay up waiting for me."

If she says she's exhausted, I can come and wait for her to finish before driving her home every day.

If she would merely call me and request that I pick her up-whether it be because she is too worn out to drive herself, because she misses me, or for some other reason-l would gladly fulfill her request and care for her.

"Then... please take good care of yourself."

Because Phi Ploy told me that she has to work until late every night, I have to return to the condo every day to eat or find something to do by myself. Sometimes she answers the phone when I call, and other times she doesn't.

Her schedule is likely packed with work. We no longer get to say "sweet dreams" every night as we once did. Her orange juice remains in my refrigerator. Eventually, I have to drink them all by myself to keep them from spoiling.

It reaches a point where I'm consumed by overthinking and experiencing intense loneliness. I don't want to accept that we are drifting apart. I am not sure when it started, I only know that they are working together, Phi Ploy and Phi Dream, that is.

. .

One night, the doorbell rings in the middle of the night, startling me out of my solitude. The rhythm of the bell tells me who is at my door.

On the 16th day since we last met, Phi Ploy stands in front of my door, her honey-sweet smile on her lips. She has unusually dewy and sweet eyes.

"Are you intoxicated?"

Her breath smells like alcohol, Though the scent is faint, she is so intoxicated that she immediately places her entire weight on me as soon as I open the door.

"Does my appearance suggest that I have been drinking?"

Suddenly, I find myself laughing. My pulse quickens as Phi Ploy snuggles me. This particular version of Phi Ploy is completely new to me. She isn't so inebriated that she's completely out of control. She simply lacks her usual composure, which is endearing.

"You do look like you're drunk."

"Do I really appear drunk?"

I close the door and lead the older woman into my room, her shoes still on.

"How did you make it back to the condo?"

"Min dropped me off."

I'd pinch her waist if she said she drove herself back in this condition.

"Please sit here. I'll help you remove your shoes."

I push the intoxicated woman down onto the sofa.

"Why are you removing my shoes? Isn't it beautiful?"

A new fit of laughter escapes me. For the past few days, I've been experiencing depression due to the disappearance of Phi Ploy. She had me terrified and overthinking.

But all of a sudden, she arrives at my door, intoxicated. She is both cute and elicits cute aggression.

"Your shoes are beautiful, but you must remove them."

"Will you also remove my clothes?"

"Let's deal with the shoes for now."

While I sit on the floor and assist in removing her stunning shoes, the person whose breath smells like alcohol leans against the backrest of the sofa. A long, silent stare comes from the honey-sweet eyes that are heavy with exhaustion.

Her two hands, now noticeably warmer than normal from the alcohol, eventually cup my cheeks. As if pleading for care, Phi Ploys leans down and whispers to me.

"I miss you, Pun."

I suddenly feel a lump in my throat. Tears welled up and threatened to spill down my cheeks.

"Can you say that again?"

"I miss you, Pun."

To hear one simple sentence upon reuniting with someone can sometimes be worth enduring many days, months, or even years.

"If you miss me, why didn't you come and see me?"

"Can you give me a hug?"

She is once again revealing her vulnerabilities to me. What caused her to act this way? What made her get so drunk?

I shift my position to sit next to her. As she leans in closer, I embrace her and stroke her silky hair to comfort her. I bury my nose in her warm skin behind her earlobe. We cuddle briefly before moving on to something that raises our body temperature to a scorching high.

So that I can inhale her enchanting aroma more deeply, I trace my lips over her radiant skin. However, something prompts me to halt abruptly and recline back to regain my senses. I then press my nose back against her neck and clothes.

*...an unfamiliar scent.*

It's neither the familiar scent of Phi Ploy nor alcohol. Another aroma clings to Phi Ploy's skin.

"Where were you earlier?"

Phi Ploy shakes her head, not making eye contact with me. Phi Ploy always makes eye contact with me when she is fully conscious. So I start looking at her more closely. And eventually I find...

"Who did this?"

I find a faded red mark on the right side of her neck. It's in the exact same spot where I previously saw a similar mark on her, indicating that someone is attempting to claim ownership of the woman in front of me.

If the mark is in an area that clothes cannot cover, it is definitely not my doing, as I am well aware that Phi Ploy dislikes having visible marks on her otherwise healthy body. However, she allowed someone else to do it.

"Was it Phi Dream?"

"....."

"Answer me, Phi Ploy."

"....."

"Are there any other marks?"

"No."

"Phi Ploy." I speak with an angry tone.

"This is the only one."

Even though this is the only mark, it enrages me beyond words. Under the influence of alcohol, Phi Ploy becomes more compliant. She readily allows me to remove her clothes and examine her entire body.

I then drag her delicate body into the bathroom, thoroughly clean every inch of her, and pull her to my bed.

*Phi Ploy dislikes marks that her clothes cannot cover.*

First, I make a dark mark on her right neck to replace the faded one I dislike because it was not my creation. My second mark is on Phi Ploy's left side of the neck.

As I make the mark, Phi Ploy, who is extremely particular about the placement of the marks on her body, lifts her face to make room for me and lets out a quavering moan.

Along her flawless body, from the nape of her neck to the breasts and belly, numerous more marks are inscribed.

When Phi Ploy is intoxicated, she becomes defenseless. Her honey-dewy eyes are filled with passion and desire. Her mouth keeps urging me to kiss her harder.

Our sexual interaction is awkwardly heavy. It's both bitter and sweet. My heart flutters with pleasure despite the agony. Until my arms give out, I hold Phi Ploy close. I couldn't care less about her reaction when she wakes up the following day and sees all the marks I made.

. .

I was mistaken. The individual, whose body is covered in marks, does not say anything. I only see a slight frown on her face before she gets up and dressed, ready to leave my room.

"Do you remember what happened last night?"

The person I asked rolis her eyes as if she's trying to remember.

"I recall being raped... violently."

That's partially true. If she sweeps her hair behind her back, she will also see dark marks on both sides of her radiant neck. However, the term "violently" is a bit of an exaggeration.

"I'm not going to ask why you allowed someone to make that mark on you. However, I'll admit that I don't like seeing marks on your body that are not mine. I don't like it when you allow others to kiss you. And if you're indifferent to my feelings, I ask that you refrain from visiting me while intoxicated."

"Did you ever consider my feelings when you went out with other people?"

"Are you mad at me?"

That was quite a while ago. However, I only learned this now. She never said anything.

"How long have you been upset with me?"

"I'm late, I have to go to the shooting location."

I grab Phi Ploy's wrist and dial Phi Ji's number on my phone.

"Phi Ji, what is Phi Ploy's schedule for today?"

[There's only a party at night.]

"Does Phi Ploy have any filming scheduled today?"

I give Phi Ploy a stern stare while waiting for Phi Ji, Phi Ploy's secretary, to respond. [No.]

"Thank you."

"Now that you know, can you let go of me?"

"Why are you even going there today if you don't have a shoot scheduled?"

"I never pushed the issue or forced you to tell me where you were when you said you were in your room."

How could I have possibly thought Phi Ploy wouldn't know? How could I be so completely ignorant?

"...I'm sorry. I won't do that again."

Whether or not she finds out, I will not repeat that action.

"As for going out with someone else, I haven't done it in quite some time. I also have no intention of doing it again... Is this the reason we don't get together as often as we used to? Is it because you're upset with me? Can't you simply tell me how you're feeling? If you are upset, express it. Express your frustration in the same way that I am right now."

My insides are on fire..

"I'm not upset... I'm just disappointed."

Like a little child, I wipe the tears from my cheeks and press my whole weight against her.

"I thought you had someone else."

"Is it better for me to be disappointed than for me to have someone else?"

"If you are disappointed, you still care. But if you have someone else, it means you don't care about me anymore."

"So this means that, for you, it's better that I'm disappointed."

"It means that I will not apologize for all of the marks on your body."

"You're not going to apologize despite the fact that I've already told you that I dislike it?"

"Last night, you liked it."

I grab her waist and pull her in.

"And I was not violent, as you claimed."

"Please let me go. I want to take a bath."

I let her go as she asked. But I'm also taking her clothes off.

"Pun."

This time, it's Phi Ploy who applies the stem voice.

I arch an eyebrow.

"Don't you need to take off your clothes to bathe? I'm just assisting you so that you can bathe sooner."

With hers, the older woman stops my hands.

"You liked how I helped you take a bath last night. Do you not remember?"

"......"

Phi Ploy remains motionless and finally lets out a sigh. So I pull my hands away from hers and continue to assist her in undressing until she is completely naked.

"I'll help you with your bath... Then I'll help you cover up the marks on your neck with makeup... Don't let anyone make any marks on you again, or I'll make sure there's no space on your skin for anyone to leave a mark."

I walk Phi Ploy to the bathtub by hand. I fill the tub and scrub her back while she leans comfortably against my body.

"I'll do everything for you."

Phi Ploy abruptly turns to face me and hugs me tightly. She buries her face against me, allowing me to stroke her hair and back.

"I am capable of taking care of myself."

"I am aware of that."

I wrap my arms around her and kiss her temple.

"You're making me get too comfortable with this."

"I want to care for you."

"...Would you be interested in joining me during the upcoming long holidays to witness the sky in Hong Kong?"

"Yes. Anywhere you want me to go, I will accompany you."

. .

Alright... After that, things were nearly as good as before. Phi Ploy has returned to her merry and seductive self. I am no longer the only one who initiates our phone conversations. We spend time together during the week.

We stroll through the street market or eat dinner together. However, Phi

Dream refuses to give up. When Phi Ploy needs to go to the shooting location, Phi Dream occasionally comes to pick her up. Sometimes, she will also send gifts to Phi Ploy.

"You can work with her while still remaining her friend. You can also join her for meals on occasion. However, it is completely unacceptable to allow her to touch you."

"Where do I draw the line between what I can and cannot do?"

As Phi Ploy remembers how scrunched my face was when I visited her on set and discovered Phi Dream clinging to her, a smile appears on her face.

I will not even begin to address the issue of those models who frequently contact Phi Ploy and extend dinner invitations.

"You're an adult. You should be able to think for yourself."

"Wow, you've gotten really good at talking back... You've forbidden me from doing this and that. What can you offer in exchange?"

"I've stopped talking to everyone else. I will also never lie to you again."

"In a relationship, that is the proper thing to do."

"Well, what do you want?"

Turning to admire her stunning features, I press the floor button as we enter the elevator with our luggage.

"I don't like it when you're completely drunk and out of control. Your tendency to wear revealing clothing, such as shorts or dresses that hardly cover your butt, shirts made of sheer fabric that anyone can see through, and front-cut designs that expose your belly button, worries me. There are certain precautions you should take before venturing out at night. I hate it when you go out in clothes that are either too tight or too exposed."

"Am I not beautiful?"

"It's too revealing. You should reveal your body parts appropriately and in accordance with the circumstances."

"Is it appropriate to wear a dress with a slit that reaches up to your hips or a neckline that plunges down to your cleavage without wearing a bra?"

"I wear them to events... At the very least, my dress covers my ankles and does not reveal my buttocks."

Is she kidding me? Her ankle-length dresses have slits that go all the way to her hip. Despite not revealing her buttocks, her ankle-length dresses elicit a gasp from onlookers with each step she takes.

"When you wear those dresses to events, the whole country sees it. Only the people on our street see my buttocks-revealing outfits."

"Even if it's just the people on our streets, I can't help but feel possessive of you. Do you want to expose your buttocks to the motorcycle taxi drivers?"

"I also feel possessive of you."

Phi Ploy unwraps her arms around her chest and gently runs her fingers down my placket. She looks at me, amused, and tilts her head slightly.

"Are we making a deal or just arguing to win?"

"I'll drink responsibly and wear shorts that are two inches longer than my current ones. Deal?" "Three inches."

"Okay. Three inches."

Phi Ploy only smiles when I comply with her request. She makes no mention of changing her outfit. "What about your dresses?"

Phi Ji, who has been waiting for us in the lobby, rushes to assist with our luggage as we exit the elevator.

"You asked me not to let Dream touch me in exchange for not getting drunk or dressing too provocatively. What does my attire have to do with anything?"

"Ugh... I had forgotten this is how you are. Feel free to wear anything revealing if you're indifferent to my feelings. I can't do anything about it." I'm really sulking. But all she does is smile pleasantly.

"So here's the deal: you won't put yourself in a position where you can get a mark on your neck again, and I'll be more careful with what I wear. Deal?"

"I already told you that I did not let her do it. Will we argue about this all the way to the airport?"

"We'll argue about it until we arrive in Hong Kong."

"How about I let you help me choose the dresses I wear to events in exchange for not bringing up the mark on my neck every time we argue?"

"I do not bring up the mark someone else left on your neck every time we argue."

"You're bringing it up again."

"I don't--"

"Deal or no deal?" "Deal." I respond softly.

.

***Rrrrrrr!***

...Whose number is this?

"Hello."

[Hello. Is this Pun speaking?]

Phi Ploy lets me answer the phone while she prepares the things for Phi Ji to load into the car for our trip to the airport.

"Yes. Whom am I speaking to?"

**[Is your soon-to-be husband's voice no longer recognizable to you?]**

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# Chapter 23 : Urgent matter

"Phi Ploy... I have an urgent matter."

The person to whom I just relayed this information has a surprised expression on her face in response to my brief statement. Or, at least, that is what I believe her exquisite eyes convey.

There's no hint of anger, disappointment, or any other emotion present. In her eyes, I see only a reflection of myself.

"Can we meet at the airport? Let Phi Ji take you to the airport first. I will take care of my urgent matter right away and then follow you to the airport."

"We can ride to the airport together after I accompany you to where you need to go."

"You'll be more comfortable waiting for me in the airport lounge. I'll be there shortly."

Phi Ploy fhods in agreement, a beautiful smile playing on her lips.

I stand and wait for Phi Ploy to get into the car. But just as the wheels are about to turn, I act like a little kid and rap on the window. Quickly. I lean in to kiss Phi Ploy as she lowers the window.

"Pun. Phi Ji is here right now."

"I was merely bidding farewell in a traditional Western manner. It's nothing out of place... I will be there right away."

The person I just kissed reminds me of the boarding time before the car drives away and disappears from view. I look at my phone again. Phi Pay sent me the meeting location five minutes ago.

A cab is the mode of transportation I choose to get to a cafe tucked away in a hidden alley right in the heart of town.

Unexpectedly, there's a chic cafe lurking behind an old cement wall, an antique glass door, and verdant vines. From the counter to the vases and bowls, the cafe is decorated with antiques. How does someone who has lived abroad learn about this location?

I walk deeper into the cafe, looking for Phi Pay, until I reach the bench by the river. However, I do not see anyone resembling him. So I grab my phone and call him after ordering a drink out of courtesy so I can sit and wait for him.

Because I had been looking for him for so long, I agreed to meet him on the way to the airport with Phi Ploy simply because he requested it.

*Would you be able to meet me right now? I'm not sure when we can meet, if not now*

However, now that I'm here, I'm unable to reach him. He does not answer the phone or respond to my messages. I wait for nearly an hour. I eventually run out of time because another person is waiting for me at the airport.

I pay for my drink and snack and walk out of the cafe, frustrated. I proceed to hail a pink cab However, after less than ten minutes in the foul-smelling passenger seat, I receive a message.

.

**PT:**

**Pun, I'm currently unable to meet up with you.**

**PT:**

**Is it possible to meet tonight?**

**PUN:**

**Phi Pay, take my call**

I call him right away. However, he refuses to take my call.

**PUN:**

**Phi Pay, answer the phone now.**

**PT:**

**Let's meet at 11 p.m.**

**PT:**

**At HHH bar, where we nearly collided at the entrance. I'm sure you remember the place.**

**PUN:**

**Answer the phone.**

**PUN:**

**I will not be able to meet you tonight, Phi Pay.**

**PUN:**

**Phi Pay, answer my call.**

**PT:**

**Come get your money.**

**PT:**

**I'm only able to meet tonight.**

**PUN:**

**Phi Pay, take my call!**

I send a few more messages and make several attempts to call Phi Pay. However, the line continues to ring until it disconnects. He vanishes once again.

I can't decide what to do. The cab arrives at the airport earlier than | anticipated as a result. I only have two hours to go in, meet Phi Ploy, and board the plane.

However, I don't know when I will get the chance to see Phi Pay again if I go to Hong Kong tonight. I want my money back. I also want to settle everything with him once and for all.

"Miss. We are at the airport."

The tan-skinned taxi driver repeats this to me for the second time as he comes to a stop at the airport.

"I'm not getting off here anymore. Please drop me off at XXX."

As I grab my phone and call Phi Ploy, the four-wheeled vehicle heads for my condo.

[Hello. Have you arrived, Pun?]

"Phi Ploy."

Because I use a serious tone, the other end of the line goes silent.

[I'm listening.]

"I'm still dealing with my urgent situation. Could we perhaps fly to Hong Kong tomorrow instead?"

[I have already paid for the hotel and everything. If I have to rearrange everything, could you please explain why we have to reschedule our trip?]

"It's work-related. My client wants me to redesign the entire layout. I must go to the site and work on it all night. But I promise that I will accompany you to Hong Kong tomorrow. I will cover all costs associated with the rescheduling."

I don't dare tell Phi Ploy the true reason I can't make the flight tonight.

"Phi Ploy... Please don't be quiet."

[What would you like me to say, Pun?]

"Say whatever you're thinking."

[Go do your work. We can go to Hong Kong whenever we want.]

"Are you mad at me?"

[.....]

"Phi Ploy?"

[Let's talk in person when we meet.']

"Will you return to your room right away? Let's eat dinner together. I'll book a new flight right away."

[Let's talk later.]

Phi Ploy ended the call. I'm feeling immensely uneasy.

It would not surprise me in the least if Phi Ploy was furious with me. If I were Phi Ploy, I would feel the same way. I will make every effort to reconcile with her tonight. I take full responsibility for abandoning her in such a hasty manner.

I will assume responsibility, take care of everything, and pamper her to the best of my ability.

*However, before we leave on our trip tomorrow, I have to settle my outstanding matter.*

.

I hide in my room until evening because I'm supposed to be at the office doing urgent work. I call Phi Ploy again late in the evening.

However, I can't get in touch with her. She's also not responding to my chat messages. It's making me very nervous.

"Phi Ji. I am unable to contact Phi Ploy. Are you aware of her whereabouts?"

'Miss Ploy went to Hong Kong with you, didn't she?'

"You didn't drive her back to the condo this morning?"

'No. After I helped her with her luggage at the airport, she told me I could leave right away.'

Shit. I reach out to Prang and everyone I know, but no one is able to reach Phi Ploy. Finally, I decide to check her social media.

I see a picture of a woman with dimples standing on the beach with her hair blowing in the wind while wearing a blouse that exposes her shoulders. The ocean, mountains, and buildings are visible in the background.

This picture was taken at Repulse Bay in Hong Kong, where Phi Ploy has checked in. The caption reads "ALONE." Phi Ploy posted this image on Instagram three hours ago.

Phi Ploy didn't return to the condominium. She flew to Hong Kong on the original flight we reserved. Didn't she say we would talk in person?

...Ugh. Phi Ploy made no promises about returning to the condo. I assumed she would return to the condo even though she hadn't confirmed it.

I send her multiple messages. Phi Ploy, on the other hand, does not appear to be reading them. Without releasing this pent-up energy, my chest is going to burst. So I dial my best friend's phone number.

"Jeab."

[Yes?]

"Ugh..."

[You called just to sigh at me?]

"Jeab. I am losing my mind."

[What's the matter?]

"I just finished watching a television series."

[And?]

"The main characters had planned a vacation to Hong Kong together. However, the male lead had some urgent work to complete just before their flight, so he called to request that the female lead reschedule the flight for the next day. The female lead simply went silent. When the male lead asked if she was upset, she simply responded, 'Go do your work. We can go to Hong Kong whenever we want."

[And?]

"The male lead assumed that the female lead would return home and wait so they could travel to Hong Kong together the next day. However, he later discovered that the female lead did not return home. She took the original flight to Hong Kong on her own. How upset do you think the female lead is? How will the male lead mend their relationship with her?"

[The female lead is understandably upset. He ditched her at the last minute. Was it true that he had urgent work?]

"Yes."

[Then they will eventually reconcile. Do you want to eat some BBQ tonight? I'm hungry.]

"Argh... I have to meet Phi Pay tonight... Could you help me with the character analysis first, though?"

[You're meeting Phi Pay?]

Hwan-jeab's voice on the line indicates that she is surprised to hear that. "Yes. This morning, I received a call from an unfamiliar number. It was Phi Pay on the other end of the phone call. He invited me to meet with him. He said he wanted to talk and return my money. When I went to see him, he had rescheduled our meeting for tonight. I intended to invite all of you to join me."

[We searched everywhere for him. Why did he call so suddenly?]

"I just hope everything works out tonight."

[What time is the meeting? I will call Best and Chakrit to inform them.]

"11 p.m. at the same bar where we found him the last time."

[Okay.]

"So... Jeab, I'm really stressed. The female lead must be extremely upset."

[She'll get over it.]

"I no longer want to go see Phi Pay. I want the male lead to book a plane ticket and pursue the female lead."

[Go see Phi Pay first. We're talking about a million baht here. You can use that money to sign up and watch the entire series at once. Next time, save yourself the trouble of calling your friends to vent by waiting until the series is over before you start watching.]

"......"

[Pun.]

"....."

[Pun... Pun... Why have you gone silent? Can you hear me?]

"Jeab."

My tears are suddenly welling up.

"I have a bad feeling about this."

[Hey. Are you alright? Why is your voice cracking? What is it? What's giving you a bad feeling?]

"What do you think... can cause a person to give up on their relationship?"

[I don't know. I guess it depends on how strong the relationship is in the first place.]

...I'm in tears.

I have no idea how strong my relationship with Phi Ploy is.

Phi Ploy rarely gets upset about minor issues. But when she gets angry, I feel a hole in my chest. I fear she will despise me. I'm afraid she won't look at me in the same way she used to.

"I'll pick you up at 10 p.m."

'You don't have to. You don't appear to be yourself. I'll pick you up."

Until 10 p.m., when Hwan-jeab and my friends get to my condo, my anxious heart keeps racing with thoughts of the person in Hong Kong. We arrive at the meeting location ahead of schedule.

My friends send me in alone to survey the place. I don't see Phi Pay anywhere, so I sit at a table in the corner and wait for him. Hwan-jeab, Best, and Chakrit enter the premises later, but they observe the situation from a nearby table.

It's now 11:50 p.m. I've been waiting far too long...

I get up, ready to leave the venue. I've had enough. I've been messaging the person I'm supposed to meet for over an hour, and I'm getting frustrated because he hasn't responded to my messages despite the fact that it's well past our meeting time.

How did I come to the decision to forgo the trip with Phi Ploy in order to meet this guy?

As I curse Phi Pay and walk away, a man in a black shirt approaches me in this dimly lit bar, no more than three steps from the table. He quickly takes long, swift strides toward me in his dark jeans, snatches my arms, and yanks me back down onto my chair before settling down across from me.

"Why are you leaving so quickly?"

I had wanted to get angry and slap, punch, or smack him if I ever saw him again. However, I'm too distressed to even curse at him right now. I simply sit, grumpy, and quietly examine his shabby appearance.

"You're late."

He shakes his head and smiles from the corners of his mouth.

"I just wanted to make sure there was no one else besides your three friends at that table."

Though his eyes have deepened, his face has lost all the fat until his cheekbones are clearly visible, his beard and mustache are unkempt, and his once neatly styled hair from New York is now long and unruly, he's still the Phi Pay I recognize at first glance.

"Geez... I knew you'd recognize them."

I examine him for resemblances to Phi Ploy. The only resemblance I can see is the dimples and coyness.

"Where's the money you took from me? Give it to me so I can leave."

With his tongue, he playfully makes a sound.

"I think we should have a conversation first."

"I have no idea what you have been up to. But did you know that I was assaulted? The people you became involved with arrived at your house to confront you. They showed me a photo of us together and claimed *that my boyfriend had taken their money*. It was a crazy situation. I'm not even your lover. Why did you give them our photo and put me in that situation? I almost got killed. As a result, I was forced to flee to Thailand. Ah..."

Angry, I let out a frustrated breath.

"If you hadn't stolen my money and fled our marriage, I could be in New York right now, maybe even with a green card. I'm not even talking about the incident in which you struck my friend on the head using your helmet."

The more I talk about what he did, the more agitated I get. My voice is more enraged than I had anticipated.

He brushes his unkempt hair away from his face and leans closer to me.

"Calm down, young lady. I apologize for what happened to your friend. He was following me around. I wasn't sure who sent him. Regarding the money, I had no intention of ripping you off. It was an emergency situation. If I hadn't fled then, I might be a corpse discarded near a railway or at the bottom of a river now. In that scenario, you would not get your citizenship or money back."

"Why didn't you warn me!"

"I didn't want to involve anyone in my mess. I didn't expect them to find my house."

"They came after me because of the photo you gave them."

"I didn't give them the photo. But I admit that I was too careless when I showed them the photo to persuade them. I only intended to use the photo as an excuse to delay repaying the money I owed them, but they took it from me."

I punch him on the shoulder.

"You're such a bastard, Phi Pay. It was fortunate that they did not follow us to Thailand."

"If they did not follow us back to Thailand... why do you think I am hiding?"

"Are you telling me that..."

My eyes widen in terror as I look into his dark, serious eyes.

"I assumed you were fleeing debtors or something else in Thailand."

Phi Pay shakes his head.

"Do you have time to hear my story?"

.

# Chapter 24: Kiss Mark

***'.... Would you like to go back to New York with me?'***

. .

The fresh ginger scent in the lobby almost puts me to sleep as I sit thinking about the event from the night before.

*'I lost money while gambling.*

*'Not even my best friends in New York knew that I was a gambler.'*

*'At first, it was just an activity to relieve stress, I didn't immerse myself to the extent of getting into trouble or anything like that. The experience of winning and losing was enjoyable.'*

*'I went there so often that I knew everyone and remembered all of the employees, including those women who worked there.'*

*'The chaos began when I won $50,000 USD in a single night. I became overconfident as I won round after round. The belief that luck was on my side that night caused me to consistently put up higher bids. However, I lost everything three days later.*

*'After that, my focus shifted to trying to beat my luck. I kept telling myself that luck would eventually come my way. Even so, the dealer will never actually let you win. I became increasingly entangled in the situation, ultimately losing all my money. My lack of rational thought led me to sign a loan with ridiculously high interest rates. Ultimately, my earnings were insufficient to repay my debt. The person who had previously offered help refused to assist me. I was threatened and physically assaulted. However, they only touched my body, not my face.'*

*'I wanted to get out of the mess. I collected nearly enough money to pay them off. I only required a minor additional sum. I remembered you wanted to stay in New York, so I offered to help you stay legally and permanently in exchange for one million baht. Who could make you a better offer, right?'*

*'However, the situation was more complicated than simply repaying my debts. I bought a plane ticket because I did not trust those people. If anything went wrong, I wanted to be able to leave right away. If nothing happened, I would simply take advantage of the opportunity to visit home. They did, however, play dirty.'*

*'I made the decision to leave on the day I was about to pay off all of my debts. My debt rose from 156,000 to 200,000, despite the fact that I did not borrow any more money from them. They claimed that the hike was due to interest and a penalty for my late payment.'*

*'But I knew they were upset because I had stopped gambling."*

*'I made a big deal about how they were dishonest and that I was not going to pay them anything more. So they beat me up, dragged me into their car, and were about to drive me somewhere. I was fortunate that they met their enemies along the way.'*

'*Have you heard about the Bronx shooting, which claimed the life of a child? It was them. I was actually there.'*

I suspected he was involved in the shooting, but Phi Pay denied it.

*'No. They had me wait in the car with one of their guys. I fled once the shooting began. They continued to shoot at each other until they entered the convenience store.'*

*'I fled to Thailand because I was afraid the security camera would catch me at that incident. I had to flee before the police discovered that there was a Thai male present.'*

*'However, the situation did not end simply because I fled to Thailand. They were involved in a wide range of criminal activities, including prostitution, drug dealing, and illegal transactions. Most importantly, they have a Thai partner who supplies them with women. If their illicit dealings in New York were to surface, the Thai firm would also face serious repercussions.'*

*'They pursued me not only for the money I owe them but also because I had taken documents, photographs, and videos that could be used as evidence. That was the reason I had to go into hiding. I didn't want my family or anyone else to get into trouble.'*

Anger over being the target of beatings, cheating, and insults due to his Asian heritage led Phi Pay to attempt to bring them down, he said. He was forced to flee for the rest of his life.

He couldn't return to New York and had to go into hiding, even in Thailand. He claimed those people were too evil to lead comfortable lives.

*'While I was still gambling, I ran into a courageous Thai woman. The owner of the nightclub there favors her. According to what she told me, some of the women went there voluntarily, while others were deceived into becoming prostitutes. Earnings were minimal. They were threatened, and their passports were confiscated. If they resisted, they would face beatings, some of which could lead to death. The bodies were tossed into the river. They also administered drugs to the women through forced injections, rendering them incoherent and preventing them from escaping.'*

*'The woman asked me to help her get away. I was, however, unable to do much. All I could do was get her a counterfeit passport. She made multiple attempts to escape but ultimately failed.'*

*"We only contacted each other as needed. She and her friends were trying to return to Thailand, and I offered to help them in return for information that they could turn over to the authorities."*

*'Prior to this, the authorities had been investigating the nightclub for quite some time. However, they lack strong evidence that would lead them to the key players. They tried going undercover but were unsuccessful. The setback prevented them from taking any action. However, once I provided them with information from an insider, the investigation quickly gained momentum, enabling them to eliminate each individual like a domino effect. There are only a handful of major players remaining after the others dispersed. Shortly after the nightclub shut down, that Thai woman managed to escape to Thailand. I just met up with her... It's like catching up with old friends, you know? We fought alongside each other and all.'*

*'If the police can apprehend them all, I'll be able to return to New York.'*

*'Do you still want to be a US citizen? This time, I will sign a marriage certificate for you free of charge. I won't take your million. It's my apologies for involving you in my mess.'*

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By now, the sky outside is most likely completely dark. Yawning, I glance at the clock and see that it's been three hours since I arrived here straight from Hong Kong International Airport.

The sound of my stomach growling suggests that the enzyme is breaking down my stomach rather than food, and I'm really hungry for some bread or something similar. But the individual I came to meet with hasn't shown up just yet.

For fear of missing her, I've decided to stake out the lobby in this manner.

Phi Ploy flat-out ignored all of my messages. I couldn't contact her. I can only see her movements through her Instagram. I am relieved that, according to the photos she posted, she has not yet returned to the hotel.

That is why I am still here, waiting to speak with her. Despite everything that has happened, I am fortunate in that I know exactly where Phi Ploy is staying every night because I am the one who booked the hotel (using her credit card to pay for it).

My seemingly endless wait comes to an end at 10:57 p.m. The woman with lovely dimples walks in through the lobby's entrance. She smiles slightly as the person next to her engages her in a conversation. However, as soon as she notices me approaching her, her face becomes emotionless.

"Pun. Are you also sightseeing here? What a coincidence!"

The first person to greet me is the woman who entered the hotel lobby with Phi Ploy.

"Yes. What a coincidence. I didn't expect to see you here with Phi Ploy."

I smile. However, I am shaking on the inside. The person I came here to see remains silent.

"Is this your accommodation..... Phi Dream?"

"Yes. We're both staying here... Is that your luggage? You just arrived?"

The person who just asked me this turns to look at my luggage on the nearby sofa.

"I arrived a while ago, but I can't reach the person I came here to meet. So I've been sitting and waiting here aimlessly for six hours now."

"Do you have a place to stay yet? It's getting late now. You should look for a place to stay first, then contact your friend tomorrow."

"If my friend is this insensitive... I don't think I should make that call."

"You haven't been anywhere since your arrival in Hong Kong?"

I shake my head as I answer Phi Dream. My gaze, however, is fixed on Phi Ploy, who remains emotionless.

"I just waited here because I was worried I would miss her when she returned."

"Will you be staying here? Should I assist you in booking a room?"

"Thank you, Phi Dream. But I think I can handle it."

"Okay. Please let me know if there are any issues. My line is always available."

"Thank you."

"Please excuse us, then. Ploy has been complaining about being exhausted since our return trip."

They are on the verge of leaving when I grab Phi Ploy's wrist and gaze at her sorrowfully, attempting to keep my tears from falling.

"I have not eaten yet."

The beautiful eyelashes flutter as Phi Ploy's hushed demeanor gradually unravels.

"Dream... Maybe you should head up first. I will take Pun out to eat."

"I will accompany you."

"You should go up first."

"But..."

Phi Dream becomes quiet because Phi Ploy does so.

"Okay. I'll see you later."

Upon Phi Dream's departure, my tears start to fall.

"You don't read any of my messages... How did she get here?"

Phi Ploy is still gorgeous and radiant. Her hair cascades with an air of elegance, glistening and voluminous. Her eyes, on the other hand, are completely empty. She responds with silence.

Without a word, she steps away, seizes my bags, and has the concierge put them in storage.

"Let's get some food. There are still some open shops nearby."

We do not exchange words. Phi Ploy's expressionless face and my irritated, tear-filled expression are the sole means of communication between us as we exit the hotel.

Even at this hour of the night, the stores tucked away in the narrow passages between buildings are bustling with customers seated on simple plastic chairs and folding tables.

The air is thick with the sound of people talking and the aroma of stir-fried foods.

I expected to be eating with tears in my eyes, but the food Phi Ploy ordered made me feel physically better. And it has a positive impact on my emotions as well. My tears begin to dry as the warm, delicious food enters my stomach.

We both remain silent until I swallow the last spoonful of food.

"Is she staying in the same room as you?"

Phi Ploy is true to herself. She remains silent. She simply requests the bill from the shop owner

"This is our trip."

My tears are welling up again. The Chinese male who came to take our money looks at me, unsure what to do.

"I know that I was wrong, but are you really not going to look at me?" "Let's talk somewhere else."

She immediately gets up. I grab her cold hand and hold it while we walk from the shop to the hotel. We ask the staff for my luggage back, and I'm back to standing in front of Phi Ploy, grumpy.

"Bring me up to your room."

"What if I tell you that Dream stays with me? Will you want to go up?"

"Then I'll book a new room and take you there."

Even though I don't think Phi Ploy would allow Phi Dream to stay in the room I reserved for us, I'm speaking with tears in my eyes.

"Do I need to book another room?"

There's no response from the older woman. She simply guides me to the elevator. I pay no attention to the floor or room number that she directs me to.

My only memory is that no one is there when the door opens. As soon as I see no one else in the room, I wrap my arms around Phi Ploy's waist.

"I'm sorry. I apologize for bailing on you at the last moment. I apologize for getting here late. Could you please stop being upset with me?"

I press my nose to her neck and snuggle my cheek against her shoulder.

"You paid for my meal and brought me to your room... How can you speak to me without even looking at my face?"

"You're Prang's younger sister. I must take care of you."

This time, she looks me directly in the eye. Her words are unexpected and heartbreaking.

"What?"

My arms automatically release her warm waist, and my face moves away from her neck. I step back to put a distance between us. I'm not sure whether my head or my heart is more numb.

Does the fact that she is still upset with me explain her choice of words?

"Go take a shower so you can rest."

"I... would like to unpack first. Why don't you bathe first? You're also exhausted, right?"

Despite what I said, I had no intention of unpacking when she entered the bathroom. I sit on the bed and reflect on my emotions... The white bedsheet is thoroughly crumpled.

Phi Ploy does not like anyone entering her hotel room, including the cleaning staff. However, she has never allowed her bedsheet to become so crumpled before.

Her words, *"You're Prang's younger sister. I must take care of you"* lingers in my mind as I run my palm over the white cotton bedsheet. A void has opened up in my heart.

My gaze then falls on Phi Ploy's brown hair on the bed. I get up and unconsciously move away from the bed.

A piercing pain rips through my heart before my brain has time to process what I just saw. My insides are quivering violently as I try to catch and control my breath in order to regain my brain function.

I push the bathroom door open. The damp, slender figure turns to face me. The stunning eyes, which have always been difficult to decipher, look to me for an answer as I rush in to hug her under the rain shower. The downpour soaks my hair, face, clothes, and shoes to the very core.

*Enticing her,* I run my fingers over her entire body.

"Stop, Pun."

"You do not want me to touch you?"

I lean in close to her, holding her body as I examine her. The moment I turn her around, I see.

*Radiant red marks adorn the back of Phi Ploy's neck, shoulder blades, and waistline.*

*At that very moment, I start crying. As I step away from her, my tears combine with the water from the rain shower.*

"What are these marks? What happened on that bed before I arrived?"

"......"

My inquiries are not being answered. We lock eyes for a while before Phi Ploy turns off the rain shower. She exits the restroom after wrapping herself in the white bathrobe.

I follow her, water still dripping from my body, and stand in front of the TV, waiting for her response.

"Was it Phi Dream?... Do the black strands on the bed belong to her?"

Phi Ploy takes a quick glance at the bed and frowns.

"I didn't notice what color Dream's hair is these days."

"You didn't want me to touch you in the bathroom just now, but you slept with someone else on that bed last night!"

As I say this to her, tears stream down my cheeks, and my hands rest on my head. I'm still shocked by what I've just learned.

"Please tell me that what I'm thinking is not true. Please tell me that it's a misunderstanding... Please tell me you did not sleep with someone else, Phi Ploy. *Sobbbbbbb*."

"Pun..."

When she approaches, my legs automatically move backward. My action most likely brought her to a halt. The eyes that once looked adoringly at me are now cold and distant.

"I think I should sleep somewhere else."

I grab my luggage and dash for the door. However, Phi Ploy grabs my arm and prevents me from leaving.

"It's late. Sleep here."

I pull my arm away and turn to face her. To keep my emotions in check, I tighten my fists. I'm afraid to unlock my fingers for fear of them being used to slap Phi Ploy's face.

"Are you suggesting that I sleep in that bed?"

With disgust, I cast a sidelong glance at the bed.

"You want me to sleep in the bed... you slept with another woman?"

I look for something in Phi Ploy's eyes, but there is nothing there. As a result, I make another attempt at the door. This time, she uses her words to stop me.

"I'll accompany you to reserve a new room. I need assurance that you are safe, at the very least."

"Stop pretending to care!"

I immediately vent at her. I'm distressed, upset, and depressed. My tears are flowing, and my legs are weakening.

"Don't take care of me because I'm your ex's younger sister... I have never asked you before, but could you please tell me once and for all... how you feel about me? Have you ever felt anything remotely similar to the way you treat me?" "Pun..."

Phi Ploy shakes her head and sighs. Her eyes shine, but they are cold.

"Your presence brings me joy. We share laughter and good times. Is that not enough? We don't need to limit ourselves to just one friend. We are both still free. I will not stop you from being where you are happy. We can still meet whenever we like. And I will always wish you the best."

"What's wishing me the best?"

Even I am surprised at how weak my voice is.

"...I hate you."

This time, Phi Ploy doesn't stand in my way. She simply directs her gaze elsewhere as I walk out the door... farther and farther away from her.

I despise both the brother and the sister The older brother almost got me killed, while the younger sister tore my heart apart with her own hands.

No moment in my life has been more miserable than this night in Hong Kong. Just tripping over the sidewalk makes me cry uncontrollably. I lost my heart. I have never felt such pain and heaviness in my chest before.

I'm experiencing the same pain and heaviness that the men I used to hang out with felt when I gave them hope and then abandoned them. The pain may vary in intensity, but what remains the same is the loss of love.

"Miss, are you all right?"

The staff at the hotel on the other corner of the street looks at me from head to toe with concern. My clothes and hair are wet. My eyes are puffy and red. My voice cracks when I speak to him...

"Do you have a room available?"

"Yes, Miss. Which room type would you prefer?"

I'd like to apologize for never caring about those men's feelings and treating them like toys. My indifference to the possibility that I may have irrevocably altered their lives or caused them emotional distress is something I deeply regret.

***Rrrrrrr!***

When my phone rings, I don't even want to see who is calling. I realize I'm putting too much hope into the possibility that it's Phi Ploy. I'm hoping she'll run after me and tell me I'm being silly and overly imaginative.

I want her to assure me that I am overthinking and misinterpreting her. I wish she'd tell me she said those words because she was upset with me.

However, another woman's hair, the red marks on her body, and the eyes that once looked at me with adoration revealed everything to me.

Eventually, I reach for my smartphone in my pocket. The four letters on the screen make me cry so hard that the receptionist pauses as he prepares to tell me my room number.

[Pun, hello.]

"Best. *Sobbbbbbb*"

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# Chapter 25 : Six Degrees of Separation

Dark clouds obscure the sun's rays. A shower of shimmering, transparent flakes lands on the mound of fluffy powder outside the window. This town's roofs, balconies, and trees are covered in a blanket of white and icy cold.

A thin layer of snow covers this familiar house. I wipe the foggy, cool window to see what's happening outside.

My face lights up with joy as soon as the doorbell rings. With a flurry of excitement, I dash for the door.

She stands in front of the door... stunning, seductive, and smiling brightly, with those lovely dimples I adore. I don't even bother to wait for her signature *"How's it going?"* as I welcome her slim figure into the comfort of my home.

My two hands sweep the icy flakes from her body before cradling her face as I lean in to kiss her delicately and yearningly. I inhale deeply, savoring the aroma of her skin and hair.

"Phi Ploy."

I whisper into her neck before my heart sinks and tears well up in my eyes as I notice something on her radiant skin.

**"The mark on your neck... Where exactly is it from?"**

My feet are shivering with cold as I snap out of my deep slumber. I'm working hard to fill my lungs with oxygen. The harsh reality is pulling back my sunk heart.

The snow outside is thicker than it was the night before. However, I am warm under my blanket because I have a naked body beside me. Her loving eyes are still filled with adoration as she lies on the same pillow with me... Thank goodness it was just a dream.

"Has anyone ever told you that you smile before opening your eyes in the morning?"

"Did I smile just now?"

"Yes."

"But I had a nightmare."

"Tell me about your nightmare. I will comfort you."

"I dreamt about you..."

I raise my hand and stroke her wavy hair, sweeping it aside to reveal her skin. The woman, who is resting her chin against her palm, has a dark red mark on her neck that contrasts sharply with her glowing skin.

"Having... a mark on your neck."

"What mark?"

The woman with marks on her body leans closer to me, causing the blanket to slip off her. Her delicate smile contradicts the image that pierces my heart, causing me to scream and move away from her.

**"These marks?"**

*Her entire body is covered with kiss marks... from another woman.*

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My whole body jolts awake. I'm drenched with sweat. Once again, my heart is aching intensely... I had another nightmare?

... I am alone on the bed. It was another night filled with tears. How long has it been since that night in Hong Kong?

Best calling me that night helped a lot. I wept as I expressed my grief to her. The only thing I withheld from her was the fact that Phi Ploy had slept with another woman. I fell asleep from exhaustion and flew back to Thailand the next morning.

Best told me that I am not the only person in the world who has experienced heartbreak.

From every corner of the world, people have felt the pain of heartbreak. Recovery will take time. At first, it will hurt, but eventually, I will feel better. Within three months, I'll be completely healed and ready to find my next love.

However, things do not go as smoothly as Best had promised. Each of the steps is difficult Without Phi Ploy, a single day can feel like a month or a year. Phi Ploy never realized how much I needed her.

Every day's activities remind me of us. I'm going crazy because I miss her so much. Every morning I go to work miserable, and every night I cry myself to sleep on my pillow. My heart breaks over and over when I imagine her with someone else.

What I thought I had turned out to be emptiness-it had always been emptiness.

My mind continues to process the same thoughts as if I were in the eye of a storm. Every day, I think about how I would feel if Phi Ploy returned to my life. I often imagine and wish that she would ring my doorbell.

However, my broken heart always tears down my hopes and forces me to confront reality. Her sleeping with another woman shattered our trust and much more. I'm not sure how to rebuild them.

I often wonder how all the heartbroken individuals around the world manage to get through this difficult time. For me, I begin by deleting all of our chat conversations in tears.

The butterfly earrings Phi Ploy gave me are tucked away in the deepest corner of my stash box. Nonetheless, I pull them out whenever I'm depressed and think of us.

Our pictures, though, are something I still can't bring myself to remove... The once-sweet recollections have become a poisonous bitterness,

After that night in Hong Kong, I stopped going to Phi Jay's room. I no longer hang out or party with that celebrity group. However, I revert back to my party girl persona, who is always smiling.

I spend nearly every night out with my friends. If we don't venture out, we host our parties in our condos. I'm Punnakorn, the succubus, in front of everyone. I'm all right. I'm perfectly fine. I'm doing better. However, in reality, loneliness is killing me.

Best seems to know me better than anyone else.

"You are allowed to drink as much as you want in your room. But please delete her phone number and chat so you don't call her when you're drunk."

Gosh... If I could get drunk, it would be as simple as skipping the dramatic parts of a book and reading the happy ending. The thing is that I never get drunk. Every time alcohol enters my mouth. I feel guilty.

*'I don't like it when you're completely drunk and out of control. It causes me to worry about you.'*

Being fully conscious while drinking means that I must delve into the details of all the pain in my heart. I am acutely aware of every pain. Her voice and loving eyes infiltrate every cell in my body.

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I can't stop wondering how Phi Ploy feels. Is she at all sad? Does she want us back? Or is she perfectly content? Has she thought about me at all? However, Best always tells me....

"Don't think about her, regardless of what you're thinking, even if you miss her. Don't care or imagine what she's thinking. Remove her from your life completely."

Best recommends that I go on dates and acquire fresh experiences. To distract myself, she suggests that I make new friends or participate in new activities. So I went on dates.

"Pun. Jack said that you declined his invitation to eat out."

"I've already gone on a date with him. He's not my type. I will not continue my relationship with him... Best, I think I've always liked women. I've just never met someone who truly clicked with me. before."

Having been close to Phi Ploy has made me realize the difference between sunlight and candlelight. The appeal to her was unlike any other.

"Okay. If you do not like men, how about Jee, the Chinese girl with ample breasts? She is both beautiful and sexy."

"I find her gum unattractive."

Actually, the issue isn't with anyone's gum. It's my heart.

"Look someplace else, idiot. Her other body parts are attractive... Or perhaps you prefer someone older. How about Phi Jeen?"

"I'll try chatting with her."

In the end, none of my dates work out. Phi Ploy's smile and the way she looks at me remain etched in my memory. I can't stop thinking about her thoughtful expressions as I tell her about my day. I miss the days of doing ordinary things with her.

My heart longs for her laughter and the delicious meals she prepares. I recall the times we ate and cleaned our rooms together. I miss Phi Ploy's genuine nature, which brings out the best in me. We grew closer because of our differences, which allowed us to share new experiences.

Personally, I am not good at looking out for other people. Early mornings and workouts were two of my least favorite things to do. However, Phi Ploy taught me to think about others and inspired me to wake up and enjoy what the world has to offer.

My mind is swimming with our memories. When she fights with her mother, I wonder who she'll hug. The more I think, the more hurt i feel. I wish to never be replaced. I am completely aware that I have no desire for any other woman. I want Phi Ploy and Phi Ploy only.

I once burst into tears in front of all my friends during a meal simply because Hwan-jeab ordered orange juice for Best. All the bait I laid to entice Phi Ploy has ensnared me. I can smell her enticing scent every time I hear the song "Close to You."

I remember her touch even in my dream. Worst of all, I awoke in the last two months to the realization that Phi Ploy would no longer ring my doorbell.

Those charming dimples, sultry smile, and *"How's it going?"* greeting that were waiting for me on the other side of the door will no longer exist.

I'm feeling increasingly depressed. I'm starting to show signs of extreme stress. My heart is racing despite the fact that I'm not exhausted or exercising. I can feel the heavy pounding in my chest.

During the night, the condo's fitness center and swimming pool have served as distractions and sources of relaxation. But, in the end, I decided that returning home to change my environment would help me get through this difficult period better.

I do not want to love anymore. I want the torture to stop. However, if it means losing all of the good memories I had with Phi Ploy, I am willing to bear the pain until it fades.

I will persevere until my heart accepts that those days are in the past-the past from my perspective, because I was the only one who felt anything between us. Phi Ploy was merely enjoying the moment. She slept with other people, and I must accept that fact.

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Saturday mornings used to be a peaceful time for me. At the condo, I can at least sit alone and be depressed.

However, as I sip my soy milk and listen to the female newscaster announce that the Thai representative placed first runner-up in Miss International Queen 20XX in my parents' living room, my neighbor, an elderly woman, has disrupted my peaceful moment.

"He never stops asking how you're doing and when you'll return from abroad... Were you in the US?"

"Yes."

I fake a polite smile, which takes up a lot of my energy.

"So you're already working after graduating? What about a romantic partner? Do you have one?"

"No."

"Same as my son."

The guy sitting politely and quietly beside Mrs. Sri is Phi Sorn. When I was younger, he was my next-door playmate. He's around Prang's age. He hit on me when I was a freshman in university.

However, I never hung out with him. I wanted to avoid any issues because he is my neighbor.

"He works for a bank. A number of women approached him. Some even stopped by our house. He never set eyes on any of them, though. All he thinks about is his career. But he kept asking when you were coming back from abroad. These days, women are something. They dress very provocatively. They're not very ladylike. They also flirt with everybody and drink more alcohol than water. Pun, I appreciate a lady like you who is kind and courteous. I have known you since you were a young girl. I'd like you to become my daughter."

"Uh-huh."

I give a dry smile. My eyes dart around in search of help. Not once did my mom lend me a hand.

'*Just be agreeable. She is completely harmless'*, my mother said over and over again.

A mother does not understand that annoyance can cause harm.

"You've lived abroad for so long. You must be missing Thailand. Sorn, why don't you show Pun around? Are you not planning to attend a music festival with your friends soon?"

"I've already invited Pun, Mom. She's not available."

"Yes. My calendar is packed with work."

"Why don't you invite her when she's available?"

"My schedule is very full."

"When will your schedule open up... But staying at home during this period may be a wise decision. Diseases are on the rise right now. It's quite scary. The news also reports numerous stressful events, ranging from entertainment to politics to crime. Many strange people roam the streets these days."

"Yes."

"Speaking of illnesses makes me think of your good health. Do you have any health insurance yet, Pun?"

The person who acts like she's my aunt but isn't moves closer to me.

"Come closer. I will offer you some advice. Som currently works in this department. There are many excellent programs available. You won't lose any money and will earn interest. I'll ask him to explain it to you... Sorn, please come here. Come closer to Pun."

"Yes, Mom."

Ugh. I can't take it anymore. She is selling both her son and insurance at the same time.

"Ah..."

I'm about to leap up. However, a short-haired female newscaster on TV kept me sealed.

The news reported that Thai police had made an arrest after discovering evidence that could potentially lead to the management of the company QQ being put on trial. They also apprehended all those involved in illicit activities.

This case is a continuation of an ongoing investigation into human trafficking in the United States.

So everyone's been arrested?

"...I have to use the restroom, Please continue the discussion with my mother first. I'll be back."

"Ah. Why didn't you tell me you needed to use the restroom? That explains why you were so silent and why your temperature was slightly higher than normal... Hurry back."

My neighbor shouts behind me as I tiptoe up the stairs to my room to make a phone call.

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**"Phi Pay. I saw the news. Did law enforcement actually manage to apprehend everyone involved in your case?"**

**[The authorities are rounding them up.]**

**"What will you do next?"**

**[I intend to stay in Thailand for a little while longer before returning to New York. I have already left the restaurant with Oam to manage alone for too long... What about yourself? Are you still interested in working in New York? You like it there, don't you? It is a city known for its creativity.]**

**"I need a little more time to think about it."**

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I end the call with Phi Pay and continue to reflect on the situation... Do I still want to go back to New York?

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"You told them you were going to use the restroom and then ditched them?"

"Uh-huh."

"Oh."

The person who is exclaiming walks over to sit with me.

"Don't look so down. It's been two months now. Prepare yourself for a new love... If you stop looking so depressed, I'll let you touch my boobs."

"HAHA... Crazy."

"This is premium-grade silicone."

My friend cups her breasts in front of me before checking her phone for messages.

"I'm doing better."

My sorrow is sealed with a smile.

"I spotted Phi B."

Suddenly, the friend who's caressing her breasts tells me

"Phi B... That Phi B?"

"Yes. That legendary Phi B. She looks absolutely stunning these days."

"Where did you meet her?"

"Ah... You're interested. Do you want to meet her? I'll take you there."

When I refuse to respond, Angelina Jolie's lips curve up.

"Oh... you're contemplating. Do you still have feelings for her?... Here's my opinion. You dated Gift, Cherry, Wine, Ann, Un, Bo, Hun, Fun, and May, but none of them worked out. However, you had a reaction when I mentioned Phi B. So, perhaps Phi B is a good candidate to help you forget Phi Ploy."

"First and foremost, you are recommending that I use a new credit card to pay off the debt from my previous credit card. Phi B is also a player. It'll be like jumping from a frying pan into a fire... Second, I did not date all of those people you mentioned."

"Geez. I'll start with your second point. I was only making a comparison. You've already dated quite a few people. Please stick to the main point I'm trying to make instead of looking for flaws. Regarding your first point, I simply want you to go out and have some fun. You should meet new people to lessen your sadness. I didn't suggest you flirt or fall in love with her."

"I have already stopped hanging out with people for fun. And I never intended to fall in love with Phi Ploy..."

It was never in my plans to fall this deeply in love with her.

"...Stop!...Pun!... Don't cry!"

I dry my tears.

"I'm not crying. I just have some dust in my eyes... Where are you going?"

"I will get you something sweet to eat."

"I prefer savory foods... I want to eat some beefsteak. *Sobbbbb*."

"Hey! Don't cry, please... Pun. I beg you. I don't know how to console anybody... Don't force me to call Jeab and Krit."

"I don't want to cry, but tears are falling on their own."

"So, are you going to check out the new credit card? For the time being, let's just focus on clearing your old debt. Just go out and have some fun with an old friend."

I'm still pouting.

"Fine."

"Excellent!"

My friend leans down and stares at me. She then cradles my face and wipes away my tears.

"You may have lost Phi Ploy, but you must continue to care for yourself. Don't lose yourself, Pun. Find a way out of your grief and continue living your life... Live a good life, even if you still miss her."

Best presses her lips against my forehead and remains motionless as our gazes meet.

"Does it feel soft? You haven't given me an honest assessment of my lips until now."

"It's bouncy... Kindly remove the lipstick from my forehead."

"I won't. HAHAHA."

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I find myself once again in a nightclub that is filled with dazzling lights and vices. I can't pinpoint the exact moment when I grew weary of this kind of establishment.

"You met her here?"

"Yes."

The woman next to me has been searching the area for someone since we arrived.

"I met her here all week. That's her usual seat."

As she says this, Best gestures toward a stool at the bar.

"She sits there looking stunning, drinking alone all night."

"Do you not see any other ladies accompanying her?.... That's unusual."

My memory of Phi B is that she always had a different woman by her side, even the morning after she kissed me and made my heart flutter. The image of a naked woman lying beside Phi B as a senior in university stuck with me.

It made me lose both my balance and my confidence. As a result, I denied kissing her and denied that her behavior had offended me because I was never interested in women in the first place.

"The bartender said she always comes alone and will return later in the night. If she's drunk, a friend will pick her up... There she is."

She has long, voluminous hair. Her outward appearance exudes warmth and kindness. She's a talented pianist who is also a charming stage performer. Her smile never fades, but her eyes are cold. Most importantly, she sleeps with everybody.

She's not intriguing or seductive like Phi Ploy. There's more sass and fury in her. That is evident in her short dress, which has a slit up to her hip. It's not particularly revealing, but it's very inviting when the slender figure shifts her hips onto the stool and the slit splits almost to the top. She orders her drink, her face devoid of emotions.

"Wow, Pun. Are these the eyes of a lesbian who has evolved into a xenomorph? What exactly did Phi Ploy teach you? I've never seen you exude such strong lesbian confidence."

"Best, you've been watching too many alien movies."

That's all I say before I approach my target. I keep my gaze fixed on Phi B until she turns to face me. I ignore the odor of alcohol. The music and people have faded into the background.

Phi B's emotionless eyes squint before returning her gaze to the rocks glass on the mahogany bar, which the bartender had just served. As soon as the drink passed down her throat, she pressed her lips tightly together.

Phi B orders the same beverage again and nudges one of the two glasses toward me.

"Sit down."

"You don't seem to be very happy. Are you in the process of repaying your sins?"

As I down the complimentary beverage, I shut my eyes in response to the cool but burning sensation.

I hear an "ugh" coming from Phi B's throat, as if she is mocking me.

"You appear to still hold a grudge against me... Did you have feelings for me back then?"

I shake my head as I gaze at the liquid coating the ice cube in the rocks glass.

"I thought I liked you. But when I met someone I really liked, I realized that my feelings at the time were far from liking someone."

"So why did you come over and greet me in such a nasty manner?"

Phi B tilts her head as she poses her question. Her finger playfully caresses the edge of the rocks glass. She's testing the water. She did not move back when I leaned in so close that I could feel her breath after finishing my drink.

"I'm bored... I'm looking for something to keep myself entertained."

I'm not sure what crazy urge drives me to press my lips against hers as soon as I finish speaking. I clutch her chin with my hand. I savor the soft lips with my tongue, tinged with burning alcohol.

A burning sensation immediately spreads through me, as if we were two perfect chemical mixtures. "This is a public space."

Phi B has changed significantly. She seems to take everything seriously, including a simple kiss.

"You've changed, Pun."

"Typically, you don't give this kind of thing much consideration."

"You're drunk."

"I'm not drunk."

My fingers are playing with her earlobe. I am imitating what Phi Ploy used to do with me.

"Do you want to..."

I whisper into her ear as I press my cheek against hers.

"...go to the restroom with me?"

"I haven't finished my drink... Are you in a hurry?"

"There isn't anything interesting here."

I finish her drink in one gulp and slam the rocks glass against the bar. I ignore the reverberating voice in my head:

*'I don't like it when you're completely drunk and out of control. It causes me to worry about you.'*

We walk away hand in hand as Best stands and watches with her eyes wide open.

Why is my friend so stunned? Wasn't she the one who suggested I come out and have some fun?

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# Chapter 26 : Don't want to know another kiss

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Phi B's hands do not feel as cold as Phi Ploy's when they caress my thigh. Her hair smells distinctively different. Her skin is warm and smooth, but the scent is unfamiliar.

She gropes my breasts with greater force. Phi Ploy will only tease me with light touches to arouse me before attacking me in my weakest spot to sap my strength.

"Phi B..."

"*Phi Ploy" is the word that woman most enjoyed hearing from my mouth.*

The person who just kissed my breasts lets out a low moan as she snuggles against my body. She only needs to shift her weight slightly to push me against the cramped restroom wall. She lifts my left leg and wraps it around her waist. Her stomach is pressed against mine.

"Do not touch my hair!"

We cease our activities when I brush off the individual's hand that is kissing me.

"I'm sorry. I just... Let's continue."

*Before, I could only let that woman's hands and fingers caress my hair and face... Now, someone else's hands have invaded my hair, which that woman used to brush and style with care.*

*Her lips always curled into a slight smile. She never tried to conceal the satisfaction in her eyes when I moaned.*

"Phi B... Sob."

As Phi B slides her hand up my thigh and into my skirt, I encircle her neck with my arms. We can faintly hear the live band's music while going about our business in the restroom.

*The piercing, perceptive eyes of Phi Ploy often gazed at me with adoration. But when she was intoxicated or asked for my tenderness, her eyes would become honey-sweet.*

*She enjoys Adele's music, whereas I prefer The Script's sound. But something has brought us together. On one occasion, Phi Ploy was feeling particularly amorous and hummed a tune as we began to make out. She enjoyed teasing me and laughing.*

*No one's compliment has ever made me as shy as Phi Ploy's assertion that I was beautiful.*

*Phi Ploy does not say much, but she enjoys teasing. She has a sweet smile that makes me want to hug her tightly.*

*No matter the hour, Phi Ploy would see to my needs and make sure I had food whenever I got hungry.*

*Phi Ploy's skin is moist but cool, while her kiss is steamy and juicy.*

*Phi Ploy enjoys driving at high speeds. She will, however, drive slower if the music makes her feel better.*

*Phi Ploy... frequently woke me up for breakfast with classical music from her Bluetooth speaker in her bedroom.*

*Phi Ploy...*

*Phi Ploy...*

"Phi B..." I tried.

"...Sobbbbbb."

Without Phi B's support, my knees would have gone weak. My heavy breathing gives way to sobs. My tears are flowing.

"Sobbbb.."

The hand that is about to reach deeper into my skirt pauses at my thigh before shifting to stroke my back. Phi B consoles me as I lean my face against her shoulder.

"Shhh... Everything will be okay."

Because I am unable to control my sobbing, we remain in that position for some time. What was once a passionate scene has transformed into a scene of female friends comforting each other.

Phi B is warmer than the person I previously knew. Who she was before-a cold-hearted player who hit and ran-is long gone.

"Thank you for staying with me."

I wipe away my tears, step away from her, and exit the restroom stall to redo my makeup in front of the mirror. Phi B approaches with a serious expression on her face.

"If you're trying to forget about your ex by sleeping with someone, you're making things worse. And if you still startle and say her name when you do it, I believe... you can never fill that void. You may later come to regret your decision."

"What do I need to do... to forget?"

"I have no idea."

Her eyes are filled with sorrow as she responds.

"... Because I could never forget."

The first thing I notice when I exit the restroom with Phi B, arm in arm, is Best's sick expression, as though she's about to throw up. The image that follows is of a woman with wavy hair and intense, penetrating eyes... It's terrible enough to run into her by chance.

To exacerbate the situation, she is seated at a nearby table. In one swift motion, she examines me from head to toe. My chest nearly bursts when our eyes meet...

...for the first time since our separation in Hong Kong.

My heart trembles. I'm losing balance yet again. My eyes start to well up. However, when I see the attractive model sitting next to Phi Ploy, all of my emotions are swallowed.

"Phi B, do you want to sit with us? I will place an order for you."

The person whom Best invited to join us squints in surprise.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Best, Phi B... Best Benjamas, the star of our faculty, who possesses a fullfigured, sexy body."

Our senior frowns briefly before dropping her jaw. She closes her mouth quickly, as if recognizing something. I just sit down grumpily, frustrated.

I just cried my eyes out in the restroom because I miss Phi Ploy so much that I can't move on with anyone else, but she's here sipping her drink merrily with her model date.

Her eyes are emotionless, and she never returns her gaze to my table after we locked eyes just a moment ago.

"Oh. You were the leader of the group that came to curse me when I had a problem with Pun."

My friend smiles with her sweet Korean eyes (which were obtained through a surgical procedure).

"Yep, that's me."

"Your face has come a long way. I couldn't recognize you at first."

"I know I'm much more attractive these days." Phi B lets out a laugh.

"I won't join you. I should proChapter :ly leave."

I reach for her hand and beg her with my sweet eyes... I'm not asking for Phi B's tenderness. I'm just acting for someone else to see if she ever notices me.

"If no one is waiting for you at home, please come sit with me for a while."

From that point on, I keep a smile on my face the whole night. The eyes that are on the verge of tears create an artificial sense of joy. Leaning unnaturally against the hot and sexy woman next to me.

I ask for tenderness. I constantly engage Phi B in conversations. However, throughout my act, I continually glance over at another table to gauge Phi Ploy's reaction.

*She couldn't care less...*

*Regardless of how much I drink or lean against the woman next to me, she doesn't seem to care.*

*When I give Phi B a sweet smile and lean against her shoulder, she does not even look my way.*

*She doesn't give a damn... even as I become more intimate with Phi B.*

*No reaction... Nothing... Not a single flinch...*

In my fit of wrath, I quickly down my dry martini. Gritting my teeth, I then issue a command to Phi B.

"Kiss me."

The two other women at my table exchange glances. Best appears to be on the verge of vomiting once again while the person I just asked for her mouth service sighs.

"Phi B... I want you to kiss me right now."

"I thought we had reached an understanding when we talked in the..."

I did not make a request to be denied. Consequently, my mouth presses against Phi B's, taking her completely off guard. I lift her chin and close my eyes.

I grind my lips, savoring her soft lips and the bitterness of the alcohol on our tongues. As Phi B and I exchange touches, I tilt my head. I give it my all before slowly leaning back.

"OMG...!"

Angelina Jolie's lips are wide open. Best has her hand on her chest, and her eyes nearly pop out.

"I wasn't expecting to see this in full HD... Pun, you've changed."

"I feel used." Phi B states.

"Did she look at me?"

My nose continues to rub against Phi B's. My honey-sweet eyes are still fixed on the person who gave me the bourbon-flavored kiss a moment ago.

"Best, did Phi Ploy glance over?"

"Yes... She had her eyes fixed on you. But now she's turned away."

"Good!... Please follow us in ten minutes. Phi B and I will go out first. Let's meet at your car."

I stand up and walk out, hand in hand with Phi B. When I walked past Phi Ploy's table, I didn't give her a second glance. Our destination is a twoseater sports car.

While the air conditioning alleviates physical discomfort, it fails to ease my emotional distress as we patiently await Best's arrival in the parking lot.

"Ugh.... I've got a heart. I am not anyone's tool, you know. Are you trying to forget about that celebrity, or are you purposefully making her jealous? Do you want her back or not?"

"I don't know."

I kiss and leave with another woman, but Phi Ploy doesn't pursue me.

"You're crying again."

Phi B offers me a tissue.

"Am I... not attractive, Phi B?"

My vision is blurry due to tears in my eyes.

"Is that why you slept with someone else back then... Is that why she doesn't care about me at all? Am I not good enough?"

"Come here."

The senior who has a history with me pulls me in for an embrace.

"First and foremost, I slept with someone else because that was who I was. It had nothing to do with you not being good enough. Second, I strongly advise against doing anything simply to get back at someone. Finally, I am unaware of your history with her. I do not want to give you false hope.

However, when you dragged me out, I noticed the look in that celebrity's eyes... Though it was cold, it conveyed both concern and possessiveness." Concern and possessiveness?

"If she were both concerned and possessive, she would not have let me come out with you."

I move away from Phi B and frown. I see Best exiting the nightclub and walking to her car.

"Best is here, I've got to go."

"Pun. People think and express themselves in different ways... She is genuinely concerned about you... Her reaction is identical to mine throughout my life. I can see it from a mile away."

*Concerned? It's proChapter :ly because I'm her ex's younger sister.*

Though I argue silently and immediately, Phi B's words stay with me as I walk back and get into Best's car.

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The fact that the individual who broke my heart is famous is yet another awful aspect of my circumstances. Even though we don't communicate, I am still aware of what's going on in her life through the media, including her new acquaintances, hobbies, and smiles.

I eventually unfollowed her on Instagram, but she never unfollowed me. The person who has been hurt is the one who does not want to know anything about the other person. Isn't that always the case?

I give my whole concentration to my profession. I engage in more social activities. I change my lifestyle and try to lead a normal life. I post updates on social media and move back to my condo (because I couldn't stand my neighbor).

I start to believe I can get through this. I'm ready to move on. That is, until I noticed that the account PPLOYY viewed my Instagram story. At that moment, I realized I wasn't as strong as I thought I was.

I'm still both hurt and angry. I still love her, despite my desire not to. I don't want to go back, but I do want her to try to reconcile with me. Although I try to avoid feeling down, I am in a state of distress.

The shoes line... Phi Ploy's brand extension with Phi Min has started off nicely. The celebrity persona, known as Ploy Pitcha, is also gaining popularity.

That Phi Ploy is constantly hanging out with different women was something I heard from Phi Jay. However, I continue to hope that if we ever meet again, she will express her longing for me.

Unfortunately, this does not occur. Our paths never crossed.

"I believe Phi Ploy has distanced herself, Prang. Why hasn't she shown up to play with us?"

"You were always complaining when she visited our room. You are also complaining now that she has stopped coming."

"I was merely rambling... But she's become increasingly distant lately.

When I invite her over for a meal, she always says she is busy. I even asked

Ken to invite her, but she still said no. Is she upset with us about something? When was the last time you spoke with her?"

The person who was asked takes a moment to think.

"The last time was... proChapter :ly around a month ago."

My sister begins to show concern. She goes into the bedroom for a moment before coming back out.

"I will go check on Phi Ploy."

"Where?"

"In her room."

"How can you get down to her floor? Do you have a keycard to access that floor?"

"Uh-huh."

Prang shows Phi Jay the keycard.

"We exchanged keycards."

My sister's lover lowers her jaw. A sharp pain pierces my chest. Phi Ploy did not even consider giving me a keycard.

"So Phi Ploy was free to come to our floor whenever she wanted, not because she had friends on every floor?"

Prang shakes her head.

"How could you possibly have believed her?"

"Does Phi Ploy always have the keycard to your room? Is she free to enter your room whenever she wants?"

Prang gives a nod.

"Yes. But we had agreed that we would not enter each other's room without permission. Phi Ploy is like family to me... Are you upset with me, Jay?"

"I dislike it... but I'm not upset."

Phi Jay says this with a sigh.

"I understand you have a strong bond with her. I'm possessive, but I understand. In any case, I am your first wife."

"I'm glad you can understand... However, I must inform you that I will not be your first wife. I will be your only wife."

"Of course. You are my one and only wife... Wait a moment, Prang. Please give this to Phi Ploy."

The famous leading lady hands my sister her cherished milk tea.

"If Phi Ploy is upset with me over something, please tell her that I asked you to give her this... Tell her it's the last one left in the refrigerator."

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Since Prang left the room, time seems to be passing more slowly than usual. Pretending to be preoccupied with my phone, I find myself constantly checking the door and the clock.

At 11:20 p.m.... over half an hour after Prang left and has not returned, I admit that I am growing increasingly concerned. I want to know what's going on with that cruel woman.

"She's not looking well."

When Prang returns, her expression is clearly one of concern. She sits cross-legged next to Phi Jay. Her brows furrow as she ponders the situation.

"She looks normal, but she isn't. When I got to her room, she was alone, sitting quietly. She's been drinking... But even though she's drunk, she doesn't say a word."

"Drunk? Phi Ploy?"

"Uh-huh... Something is definitely wrong with her, but she refuses to discuss it."

I quietly listen to the conversation while glancing at Phi Ploy's keycard on the table. I get to my feet after a while.

"Perhaps it's time for me to go."

I leave my sister and my sister-in-law alone in their room. I have no desire to continue listening in on their conversation. I dash out of their room and down the quiet hallway sometime after 11 p.m.

There are still lights along the hallway in this luxurious condo. Despite the fact that I am alone in the elevator as I touch the keycard to the pad and press the floor button, I do not feel unsafe.

As the elevator begins to descend, the red digit showing the number 48 slowly decreases. In no time, I exit the elevator and stand in front of the room full of memories... located on the 42nd floor.

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# Chapter 27 : Have You Ever...?

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My desire to see Phi Ploy can sometimes be so great that I find ways to get past my act of disinterest. I distort the truth about how she slept with another woman. I numb the hurt of rejection from the person I want to be closest to.

By remembering only her smile, her warm embrace, and the adoring gaze she bestowed upon me, I allowed myself to believe that I was her favorite.

My illusion was strong enough to tempt me into stealing Phi Ploy's keycard from Prang, and now I find myself standing in front of her.

When she gives me that icy stare, completely devoid of the adoration she once had for me, I bear the agony and sting.

She lifts the head that used to snuggle me, gazes at me disinterestedly, and then leans back onto the sofa. Her red lips are slightly open. Her arms are resting on the sofa

"How did you get in?"

I mock her while showing her the keycard.

"Who dumped you? Is that why you look so miserable?"

I get in her face to the point where our legs touch, and the aroma of alcohol wafts into my nose. Her face is still glowing and beautiful, even though she's totally drunk.

"Pun, why are you here?"

"I didn't need a reason to be here before now."

"That was then. This is now."

"Right. The thing we had is gone."

I take a deep breath and exhale slowly but deeply. I laugh, this time mocking myself.

"There are seven billion people on this planet. Do you believe I'm here because I want you?"

...My eyes are burning, and my vision is becoming blurry.

The drunk woman raises her head to look directly at me once more.

"Then why are you here?"

I have no answer for her. I can only look at her sweet but frustrated eyes and feel disappointed. My longing for her causes my heart to tremble. I can't stop myself from reaching out to touch her face.

"Have you ever missed... us?"

She tuns away from me and refuses to look me in the eyes. The response, which I will not interpret, is her icy demeanor. The pain is so intense that it is tearing a hole in my heart.

"Have you ever missed me at all?"

I bare it all. I muster up all of my strength to ask her that question. Then the strength I pretended to have evaporates completely. I'm down on my knees, straddling her legs.

I rest my entire body weight on her and nestle my face against her shoulder. I wrap my arms around her neck and sob quietly to get her attention like a little child.

I cry without any dignity. I'm hoping she'll empathize and embrace me back to console me. However, her arms do not move. She does not move away from me, nor does she move her arms.

"If that is the keycard that I gave Prang, please return it to me."

"Is it so hard to hug me back? You used to enjoy doing so."

In the face of despair, I let out all of my emotions. I've been keeping them inside for so long, along with all of my questions.

Like a broken dam, all the longing, words, gaze, and solace I experienced in our presence poured out of me.

"How can you be so heartless?"

If she's completely drunk, I've sobbed until I've lost control while sitting and holding on to the dead love.

"You should go back to your room, Pun."

I shake my head and press my tear-filled face against her neck.

"I'm not going back to my room."

"Let me go take a bath."

I continue to shake my head and hug her even tighter.

"No. I will not let you go."

I want to be near her. I don't want to be apart from her. However, not long after refusing to let her go, I let go of my arm and stand.

For eight breaths, one sits still and the other stands motionless. We meet gazes, but I fail to decipher her innermost feelings and thoughts.

There are no concealed sentiments or words in that window to the soul.

Perhaps she's picked out a special kind of window that shows nothing but nothingness and reflections of her broken targets, such as me.

"Why don't you get up? Don't you want to get away from here?"

She is the first to look away, just like when our relationship ended. Her slender legs slowly rise. Despite the absence of high heels, her slender frame sways slightly as she walks barefoot to her bedroom.

I watch as her back disappears into the room. She shows no signs of hesitation, which contrasts with her demeanor in Hong Kong.

The sound of water splashing on the bathroom floor blends with my flowing thoughts.

My thoughts rewind and fast forward again, but this time with a different combination. I think back on our initial meeting.

Then I think about how we became close. Finally, I ponder how we came to an end. In the embrace we just shared, all of my questions were answered.

If you've ever hugged emptiness, you'll understand what I'm facing. Embracing someone who has no feelings for you is equivalent to embracing a log-a soulless being.

Phi Ploy emerges from the bathroom, still damp and dressed in a bathrobe. She ignores me and goes about her business as if I do not exist. She eventually collapses on her large bed.

I'm shameless enough to lie down beside her. Even though we are facing each other, the owner of this bed closes her eyes to avoid speaking with me. "Are you fleeing from me again?"

"I'm exhausted. I would like to rest."

"Do you really not want me?"

I am aware that I am coming across as foolish and unworthy. However, my heart is compelled to continue doing this. Tears well up in my swollen eyes once more.

"Were you really only playing with me?"

There is no movement on that emotionless face. Her thick eyelashes flutter just above her closed eyes, which she keeps closed to hide her heart, as she takes deep breaths.

"Am I no longer in there, Phi Ploy?"

Every time I ask her a question, my vulnerabilities are revealed.

"Do you think about me at all when you lie on this bed?"

"Could you please let me rest?"

"How about when you are with your new woman? Do you think of me-"

I couldn't finish my sentence due to a sudden sob. Finally, Phi Ploy opens her eyes.

"Why are you torturing yourself? Are my actions not clear enough? I slept with another woman... remember?"

Her voice is calm, yet it ripped my heart wide open.

"Your message was clear. It was so obvious that I would rather be foolish and not understand it."

"Grow up, Pun. If I taught you how to kiss, I will teach you how to be an adult today."

Her words are creating a gap between us. I feel as if I don't know Phi Ploy at all.

"Pun, listen to me. Love is just one of many emotions, including anger, hatred, sex, sadness, liking, and wanting. All of these are simply emotions. They will fade as time passes. Forever does not exist. The feelings we have today may not last until the next. You may be with someone right now, but you will switch partners in the future. Aside from dwelling on your emotions, a human being is responsible for a variety of other tasks and creative pursuits. What you were discussing was only a fleeting moment in time. I'm unable to determine whether feelings were involved at that moment... If my memory serves me correctly, you were also playing me, correct?"

The words she says break my heart. It prompts me to take a deep breath. I pretend to be strong, but my voice is weak.

"Your past experiences may have shaped a certain belief in you, but my own life experiences have shaped me to hold a different belief... I believe that you felt something. I believe that what you're doing at the moment serves as a shield, keeping you safe from something. What exactly are you hiding from?"

"Your belief is not absolute truth. This is who I was before meeting you. I was not looking for an emotional connection."

Those icy eyes reveal vulnerabilities.

"You taught me love through physical touch. May I teach you something? Can I demonstrate to you what love is to me?"

"I've seen your love, Pun."

The older woman appears broken as she says this. As a result, I get closer to her and snuggle her like a little kid.

"Phi Ploy."

I longingly plead with her, pressing my face against her alluring neck. I take in a deep breath of her warm skin.

"Whatever I did wrong, could you please explain it to me in the same way I'm attempting to save our love?"

When the hand of the person who has been lying still strokes my hair, it feels like my heart is being healed. It's soothing. A surge of warmth goes through my entire being.

"Phi Ploy..."

My yearning for her is so intense that tears flow once more. It has nothing to do with sex. I simply have a strong desire to be as close to her as is humanly possible.

My lips rest against her flesh. My nose brushes against her smooth, velvety skin, extending from her neck to her jawline.

Eventually, my lips meet her soft lips. It begins with a gentle touch. I then nibble, bite, and intensify the kiss after I slowly relish the touch.

"*Sobbbbb*..."

Sobbing uncontrollably until my body sways, I lay back down on the bed. I then sit up and turn to face her.

"I understand now."

According to one research study, emotional trauma has an equal impact on the brain as physical trauma.

I can't help but wonder how extensive and deep the piercing will be if I can physically convey the feelings coursing through my heart right now.

After coming to terms with the fact that Phi Ploy doesn't care about my sentiments or tears, I distance myself from her. Instead of staying and behaving foolishly in her room any longer, I should just leave.

In my room, I use both hands to dab at my eyes as I recall the painful kiss from earlier. I'm gathering my important papers.

She willingly allowed me to kiss her. Nevertheless, it was cold and unresponsive.

Even when I nibbled and bit softly and hardly, her lips remained idle... She did not respond at all.

There is nothing keeping me here anymore.

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....**I'm going to return to New York.**

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**'s Note:**

**This book (English version) was just released a few days ago... I won't make it complete because someone will sell it in second... so** **lets give the book author (SIIX) a chance to earn money. the rest chapters you can read on Lunarwrite.**

# Chapter 28: Lessons "people" imparted upon me

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My mother was the first person who taught me about *love*...

*'Mom. I don't like basil leaves. Can't you cook something else instead? Could you prepare a Thai omelet with minced pork?'*

The spiciness that caused my stomach pain was more of an issue than the basil leaves... But who cares?

*'Why don't you cook whatever you want to eat yourself? I have three children to take care of. I'm tired, is it really necessary for me to cook for you when I am already exhausted?!'*

....Exhausted.

That line of reasoning was only used on me. If it were Paytai or Pailin, her responses would be...

*"I've already prepared food for you."*

*'Do you like basil leaves, Pay? I will prepare that for you tomorrow.'*

*'Lin, if you want to eat red curry soup with chicken, I will buy some coconut milk.'*

When it came time to cook for Paytal, or whenever he got hungry, my mother was always ready. But if it were me... If I ever found myself hungry at an inconvenient time, I must help myself.

One day, I came to this realization and decided to stop asking her questions along those lines.

The most important person in my life would be with Paytai on any important occasion, whether it was Father's Day, Mother's Day, or Parent's Day. Care for Pailin was entrusted to her father.

And I was the one who had to answer the questions I'd never gotten used to...

*'Will your mother come, Ploy?'*

*'Ploy, will your mom be able to attend your stage performance today?'*

*'Where's your mother? Isn't she going to come?"*

My solution was to skip school on those special occasions. The following day, however, I had to deal with yet another set of words.

*'Ploy skipped school because her mom couldn't attend the event.'*

*'Her mother never shows up. She must always borrow someone else's mother'*

*'How come her mother never came? If it were me...!'*

They think for me, talk about me, and make assumptions about my situation. I used to attempt to provide them with explanations...

*'My mom is very busy. And she has to be with my older brother and younger*

*sister.'*

In this world, however, there are three different versions of truth. The truth in my head. The truth in their heads. And the absolute truth... The criticisms and questions were overwhelming and draining.

I didn't want to hold on to the expectations or good intentions of those who didn't have to deal with the consequences. So one day, I decided to stop caring I didn't care what other people thought of me anymore.

All I cared about was who I was, what I was doing, and my goal. That was all I needed to think about... I simply smiled without responding, as my explanations didn't significantly alter anything.

When I was in sixth grade, I sat under a tree at school with a broken body from the Girl Scout camping trip. I watched as other children in their green Girl Scout and brown Boy Scout uniforms entered their parents' cars one by one, each carrying a large backpack.

'*I have to go, Ploy. My dad is here.'*

My friend stood up and smiled at me before walking over to get into an old car.

Gray..... My mood that day was as gloomy as the gray clouds in the sky. It wasn't a big deal to take the bus home, but I still felt jealous of the kids whose parents picked them up. I envied them for having someone to embrace them when they were upset, tired, discouraged, or simply needed a hug.

I have to care for myself my entire life. If I fall, I have to get back up by myself. If I cry, I must dry my own tears. I have to get my own food. I am responsible for myself. If I have a problem... I have no one to confide in but myself.

*'You're incredibly capable, Ploy. You're so strong. You're capable of handling any situation.'*

Am I capable? I have gotten such compliments all my life. Everyone thinks I am strong and a survivor. But how many people realize that even the strongest person wants to be cared for?

*'Ploy is a good student. Ploy also always arrives at school immaculately dressed, her hair smelling wonderful.'*

*'Ploy takes excellent care of herself.'*

The sole response I had to those compliments was a smile that reached the corners of my mouth... Who would care for me if I didn't take care of myself?

For as long as I can remember, my family has consisted of my mom and my older brother, Paytai.

My first birthday present was a manga book that Paytai picked out in front of our school. He inculcated his love of reading in me by giving me books and manga as presents.

Paytai also had a tradition of walking me to my room on the first day of school every year until I graduated from high school. Even though he's not the most loving and supportive sibling, he certainly wasn't the kind to intentionally hurt me.

Concerning my father, throughout my life... I refer to *Pailin's father* as "*Father*."

My mother, Paytai, and I were the only ones in our house until my mother introduced us to a new man. She said he'd be our father. Our family grew from three to four and then to five after my mother gave birth to Pailin, my younger sister.

What about my real father?... I've never met him, and my mother would get upset if I asked about him. She only mentioned my father when she wanted to scold me through him, for example....

*'Is what your teacher told me true... Do you come home late because you enjoy sitting with a boy in the evening? Your father may enjoy sleeping around, but I believe I raised you to be a better person than that.'*

She only asked me to judge me. She showed no interest in my response. If she had paid any attention to me, she would have realized that my preference is for something more delicate than boys.

When I was younger, I didn't understand why my mother didn't smile, laugh, or play with me the way she did with Paytai and Pailin. I didn't understand why my words didn't hold weight.

I couldn't understand why I received scolding instead of consolation when I cried or why I had to defend myself against bullying. I failed to grasp why I didn't want to share things with my mother or why Paytai and Pailin got first dibs on all the good and delicious stuff.

I never understood why, in every disagreement I had with my siblings, my mother never stood by my side. My mother would only pay attention to me when she didn't have anyone else.

My mother despises my father.... I didn't fully grasp it until later in life.

My mother's first love was Paytai's father. They separated after having one child together. My mother then became involved with my father. My father, however, abandoned her when she was pregnant with me.

He had numerous affairs and neglected to provide for us. My mother was likely deeply hurt. My father's only inheritance for me was his facial features and the hatred he instilled in my mother, which she extended to me.

Outside of the house, many people admired me. However, I am subjected to neglect and worthlessness at home. My mother was the reason I didn't know love as a child. I was unfamiliar with the concept of warmth. My heart broke repeatedly until I had to create my own vaccine.

Everyone has the right to free thought and action. It is not my mother's fault that she does not love me. She is entitled to that. I, too, possess certain rights.

Because it is difficult to change others, I resolved to change myself... I used to love my mother above all else, but I gradually began to feel less affection for her. Even my subconscious has grown accustomed to her lack of affection for me.

My mother's feelings about not loving or liking me are entirely her own. It has absolutely nothing to do with me.

Should I be concerned about someone who has no regard for me? The answer was "no".

So, why was I there? Could they see my worth? The answer was "no."

As a result, I decided to live for myself. I decided to shine brightly regardless of how good or adverse my surroundings are.

If I am in pain, I will heal myself. If I'm happy, I'll celebrate by myself. It is only up to me to determine whether I am sad or happy. I've lost hope in others. I refuse to tie my feelings to anyone. In this world, we are all alone.

I will learn to love by loving and taking care of myself. I will experience love solely for myself. I am prepared to forgive for my own sake. And I'm glad I've matured into the Ploy Pitcha I am today.

My mother was the first person who taught me to *love myself.*

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Someone unexpectedly entered my life. Dream, the class president, was a junior classmate of mine in high school.

*'Have you finished Teacher Kanya's homework? Do you want to copy mine?'*

*'Are you guys playing cards in class again? I won't tell the teacher if Ploy stays after school to help me with extracurricular activities.'*

*'Ploy, why are you so funny?'*

*"Which one does Ploy want to eat? I'll let you pick first.'*

*'What were you saying? Would you mind repeating it? I am interested in hearing your story.'*

Dream wasn't particularly stunning. We grew close because we got along well. We were the best of friends. I felt important and cared for in ways I'd never felt before. She was interested in what i had to say.

She laughed at the stories I told. She wanted to know how I was doing and spent time with me. She said she missed me. Most importantly, she consistently prioritized me.

*'Did Teen borrow your phone again? Don't let him borrow it next time. Please use your credits to call me.'*

*'You read all day, every day. Do you want to come hang out with me?'*

Our friendship gradually evolved. She appeared more beautiful to me. I wished to be closer to her. We were in a covert relationship. We never gave it a status. We exchanged hugs and kisses. Jealousy set in. We knew how each other felt. At that moment, I was significant to someone.

Unfortunately, after our high school graduation, we had to part ways. At first, we called each other every day and sent each other love songs, even though we were both preoccupied with adjusting to a new university, new friends, new classes, and new environments.

But I sensed a shift in Dream's demeanor within the first two months of our university enrollment. She called me less often. Her frequency of calls decreased from daily to once per week. It was difficult to contact or meet up with her.

She no longer requested to see me, and I had become less important to her. She brought up a classmate every time we talked. There were numerous signs that I no longer held a place in her life. Then, one day, Dream called me, clearly distraught.

She confessed to me that she was secretly in love with her classmate.

Everything happened so abruptly. Our relationship status, which we had never officially acknowledged, was immediately reduced to that of friends.

I didn't demand her love or make a big deal about it. I did not say anything to anyone. But deep down, I was in excruciating pain. It was difficult for me to cut ties while still feeling so strongly.

Dream was another person who taught me that *love... could fade*.

Despite my deep hurt, it eventually faded, just like any other emotion. Emotions fade away.

Dream taught me that everyone loves, yearns, and feels... *to varying degrees*.

Another lesson Dream taught me that day was that... *people cannot be trusted.*

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I have little faith in people. That has become clearer since my university years. It was around that time that I became acquainted with Min. Min was the classmate who inspired me to become the faculty beauty queen.

Min was always pushing me to participate in activities both inside and outside of university. Min's genuine nature compelled me to fully open up to her.

Her mother is very wealthy from her business and well-known in high society. Min's mother is extremely fond of me. On one occasion, she invited me to a meal and introduced me to someone.

*'This is my daughter's friend, the one I mentioned earlier. Doesn't she look absolutely breathtaking? On top of that, she's the reigning beauty queen within her faculty. She possesses exceptional intelligence, works tirelessly, is self-controlled, and has a stunning profile. Could you help make her a star?'*

My foray into show business began with those endorsements from Min's mother. I had steady work and income. People respected and accommodated my needs. I'd made connections and attracted more attention from those around me.

Since then, many interesting people have crossed my path. But I was not looking for an emotional connection. I only made physical connections with everyone who came into my life, believing they didn't deserve my love.

However, my actions fueled their desire to possess me even further. As a result, they frequently leave marks on my body.

I used to like that. When I was younger, Dream used to leave kiss marks on my neck.

However, once I learned to not let anyone own me, it turned into something I despised.

Despite my family's criticism, I left home once I was able to provide for myself.

'*You never show your face now that you've made a name for yourself.'* That came from my mother.

*'It is dangerous to live alone. I believe it would be better if you stayed home.'*

This came from my father.

*'I'd like you to be home more often. I have so many stories to share with you.'*

Pailin made the request.

*'You should at least let me drop you off. On the first day of class, we had a tradition of me dropping you off at your room.'*

And this remark was from Paytai.

I've always felt like I was alone. Therefore, living life alone shouldn't be a problem. Paytai moved to New York after I left home.

He married an American woman in order to become a US citizen and settle permanently in the United States. The life I led was fulfilling. We all have our own paths. However, for Pailin...

*'Your sister fell while riding the scooter you bought for her. She slammed her head against the ground. Why didn't you think about her safety before buying her stuff? You should not have bought her whatever she asked for.'*

*'It was an accident.'*

My sister's father, who allowed me to use his surname, attempled to calm my mother.

The five hours I spent waiting outside the operating room that day were the worst of my life.

Paytai flew back to Thailand as soon as he received the news. My parents were both stressed and devastated. The thought of losing their daughter forever filled them with fear.

Every day, the four of us went to visit Pailin in the ICU. The sight of Pailin in a coma on the bed crushed our hearts. Her entire face and head were so swollen from the surgery that we could barely recognize her.

They had shaved off her hair and tightly wrapped her head. Her mouth and arms were full of tubes.

While the doctor had anticipated that Pailin would emerge from her coma after three days, that did not happen.

*'Because of her cerebral edema, she has experienced brain stem compression. Another surgical procedure is something you'll need to consider. If you choose not to, the chances of the patient surviving are low. However, if you choose to perform another surgery, she will remain in a coma for the remainder of her life.'*

Because our mother could not bear the agony of losing Pailin indefinitely, she decided to save Pailin's life...

She was determined to save Pailin's life, regardless of my sister's quality of life or the suffering she would experience following the surgery. My mom was prepared to take care of Pailin for as long as she was alive.

I disagreed with the decision because I didn't believe it was intended to save the patient. It was intended to save the parents.

*'Wait until your child is in this condition to understand how I feel.'*

*'Mom. You are grieving, and I understand that. But it was an accident. It was nobody's fault.'*

Paytai was the referee that day. My mother's words, however, have remained with me to this day. Am I not her child? If she had the option, she would most likely prefer that I be lying in that ICU room instead of Pailin.

*'You despised Uncle Korn. Nonetheless, Ploy is your daughter. She is not only my younger sister but also Pailin's older sister. She has absolutely no involvement in what Uncle Korn did. She has nothing to do with any of it. Stop venting your frustration on her.'*

*'Have you ever looked at your sister's face, Paytai? Her eyes, brows, nose, and lips are identical to those of her father. When I look at her, I see her father.'*

What hurt me more than those words was the fact that Pailin never looked at us the same way she did before the accident. Her eyes wandered aimlessly.

Her cheerful words gave way to silence and cerebral edema-induced brain damage. I had no idea whether the sister I knew was still inside that body. I wonder if she felt lonely, if she was dreaming, or if all she saw was darkness.

I assumed full responsibility for all expenses, including the surgery and Pailin's care until her death two years later.

If I expressed my relief that Pailin was finally free from her body, my mom would likely accuse me of being cold-hearted.

Pailin, my younger sister from a different father, taught me *the value of life, time, the present moment, uncertainty, and letting go.*

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# Chapter 29: Don't want to feel another touch

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Prang and I were in a relationship... We knew each other through work. We became close because we got along well. Prang is different from the others. At first, it was her beauty that made me want her. After that, it was her genuineness that made me want to own her.

Prang has no trick up her sleeve. She takes her personal relationships very seriously. The more I got to know her, the clearer it became that she radiates warmth to everyone around her.

She was the only woman I wanted to open my heart to and commit to a relationship with, despite my lack of faith in people.

In the midst of our blossoming relationship, she told me one day that we couldn't be together.

*'I'm in love with another woman.'*

*'Is there someone else you're seeing right now?"*

Prang shook her head.

*'It's someone from my past. I tried to move on, but she is still in here.'*

The sorrowful expression on Prang's face nearly brought tears to my eyes.

She dropped everything from her past, changed her environment, moved to a new condo, and did a variety of other things to escape the memories of her ex.

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*'Do you love me at all?'*

*'I do. But I don't think it's fair for us to be together when I have another person in my heart.'*

*'But I still want you in my life.'*

*'I fear I will never be able to forget her. If that's the case, continuing our relationship will only cause you pain.'*

*'Then we don't have to commit. Let us simply continue as is. I will continue to welcome other people into my life. It won't be two-timing. We're basically agreeing that we can both consider other women. When you're ready, we can reassess the best course of action for our relationship.'*

That was an outright lie... I never let anybody in. I only said that to keep Prang from feeling as if she was tying me down and wasting my time.

*'And if your ex-partner returns or our relationship fails, we can simply step back and remain friends.'*

Prang remained silent while she considered this before responding. She isn't coming back

*'Are you still waiting for her?'*

The person in question shook her head.

*'But she is like a star... Everywhere I go, I see her.'*

Following our agreement, everything went well... as far as our friendship and the ways we treat each other are concerned.

However, there was something weighing heavily on our hearts. We were unable to experience complete joy. Prang understood this just as well as I did.

*'Can you please be my family, Phi Ploy?'*

On the last day that we were uncommitted lovers, she cried in front of me, baring her soul.

*'I'm not sure how long it will take for me to move on. And I know what you've sacrificed for me... Let's put an end to this. My deepest wish is that you find someone who can truly commit to you.'*

At the time, I did not express my sorrow or tears. I simply continued on with my life. It wasn't so difficult. Perhaps it was because I had already prepared myself for that day.

We were less intimate with one another. Nonetheless, our friendship and best wishes remained.

Shortly after our breakup, I began working with Jay. No woman can arouse Prang's myriad emotions like Jay. What I witnessed were catfights and excessive hatred.

If you've been enjoying the same ice cream for years and the flavor suddenly shifts, even slightly, you would instantly recognize the addition of a new ingredient

*'Is Jay your ex?'*

*'I don't want to speak about my ex.'*

Regarding the subject, Prang remained silent. So what I did was observe their behavior. Although Jay made overt advances toward me, I deduced that the two ladies had intense feelings for one another.

*'Can I ask what's going on between you and Prang, Jay?"*

*'Can we not talk about others? Why don't you tell me something about yourself?'*

Jay also never spoke to me about it. To find out if their relationship was what I had suspected, I went back to Prang.

*'Would you like to get back together with me?'*

*'I'm sorry, Phi Ploy.'*

*'Then I will move on and date Jay. Is that okay?"*

*'It's your choice.'*

When I was with Prang, Jay always had a dejected expression. When I was with Jay, Prang appeared irritable. The crucial thing was that neither of them was possessive of me.

I was initially afraid that learning the truth would hurt me. But, surprisingly, I liked seeing them together. The more they fought, the more I saw their undeniable love.

They cared for and yearned for each other. But something was holding them back from reuniting,

I wanted Prang to be reunited with the person she deserves. As a result, I started teasing and stimulating them, hoping they'd eventually realize how they felt about each other.

Prang became aware of my actions and began to feel frustrated with me. However, I found the situation amusing and enjoyable.

Prang entered my room dressed in black one night, a few days after we finished filming our series. We had just parted ways after attending the same funeral. She entered with the keycard we exchanged. I never once requested that she return the keycard.

*'Jay is back in her room... Phi Ploy, I'm worried about her.'*

It's the most anxious Prang I've ever seen.

*'Then go be by her side.'*

*'I'm not sure if Jay wants me there. I don't want to get hurt.'*

I haven't seen her so confused since we first met.

'*Will you feel hurt if you stand here and watch her fall off the cliff without reaching out to her?'*

As the person who never backs down from anyone nodded, tears welled up in her eyes.

*'I want you to choose what you will not regret when you look back on today.'*

... I adore the bond that exists between Prang and me.

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After resolving my relationship with Prang, I resumed dating various models, as I had previously done.

Actually... I can't claim to have returned to my usual way of life. Paytai's return brought someone new into my life when he asked me to meet him at a nightclub to talk about something.

I had anticipated that the discussion would be about the same subject as before. Paytai has recently been struggling with gambling. I helped him before, and he promised to stop gambling... but he didn't. Therefore, on this occasion, I... didn't help him either.

*'Ploy. This time, I'm in over my head.'*

*'You always say this.'*

*'Did you forget who was the first person to buy you a book for your birthday?'*

*"I haven't... I also haven't forgotten that I bought you a house in New York and contributed to your restaurant business without asking for a share.'*

*'You're bringing that up? I'm your brother!'*

*'Being around people like you pushed me to do it.'*

'*Let's meet. I may go back to Thailand.'*

*'When you are willing to tell me everything and keep nothing from me, we can meet.'*

Following that, he actually returned to Thailand. But he didn't return home. Nonetheless, he communicated with me on a regular basis.

*'Will you attend Pailin's anniversary? Mother proChapter :ly prefers you there over me.'*

*'I will make it if I can... Ploy, just so you know, our mother loves us all. You're aware of this, right?*

*'Uh-huh.'*

I know that my mother loves me. But there is something she just can't get past. Our relationship is in shambles because of that.

*'One more thing... Why is a young lady from New York searching for you?'*

*'Who?'*

*'Her name is Pun... Does your big mess include her?'*

Pun... From my initial encounter with the kid, I found her to be adorable.

She was naughty and wild. Her eyes, though, were gentle.

I'll be honest with you: if you spend all day around flirtatious models and celebrities, as I do, you will know that the kid has no hold on me in terms of flirtatious abilities or seducing me into bed.

However, because she is Prang's sister, we do occasionally cross paths. And because she wanted to use me to get to Paytai, we grew closer.

Upset... Yes. I was quite upset because the kid tried to play with my heart without regard for the pain she might cause me... I decided to let her have her chance and play along. Let's see who will fall in love first.

For a brief period of time, I relished my role as the prey. I was having fun, keeping in mind that Pun is Prang's younger sister, so I shouldn't play too rough or inflict too much pain on her.

I only reacted to the kid's actions. I had no intention of falling in love, bonding, or becoming physically intimate.

But then something sneaked in. It all began when I developed feelings for her mediocre flirting abilities. Pun was very flirtatious with me, but her innocence in contrast to the other women I've been with was astonishing.

Her pace was excruciatingly slow. I'd proChapter :ly be quite old by the time we held hands. I was amused and curious about what she was going to do next. What was her next plan of action? Thus, I provided her with the chance to move forward.

I also left trails leading to Paytai by dropping small crumbs along the way. That was enough to pique Pun's interest and encourage her to pursue me further. She was an open book and too naïve to take this path.

In addition to the enjoyment, adoration, and amusement, I developed a special feeling for her.

Our chemistry was incredible. If she was genuine with me, we could be friends. However, knowing that she had an agenda, I had to refrain from becoming too involved. Nevertheless, possessiveness crept in before I knew it.

I was then enraged that she lied to me repeatedly. Finally, I experienced sadness. I found myself becoming softer than ever, breaking all of my rules just by witnessing her tears.

I allowed myself and my heart to enjoy the moment, ignoring her agenda. I had forgotten... the price I had to pay for our relationship.

I was *fortunate* to have my beauty as an asset from birth. With the exception of that good fortune, I worked my way up to everything I own.

If I want to be attractive... I take good care of myself. If I want to be affluent... I put in the effort. If I want something... I go for it. If I want to know anything... I research it. If I want to enhance my skills... I practice.

These qualities are what attract people to me. They believe that I am perfect. They do not realize, however, that perfection is unattainable. Everyone has scars and flaws in their lives.

On this occasion, I let myself fall like a fool. I willingly allowed things to deviate from course.

*'Is everything alright at home... Ploy, I need you to let me know if anything or anybody seems off.'*

Whenever Paytai called, he always asked me this question. I never pressed him to explain himself.

It wasn't until my relationship with Pun became so tumultuous that it began to weigh on my heart that I finally asked him, because I couldn't tell if she truly loved me or if she was just manipulating me.

*'It appears you have been caught.'*

*'Can't you just tell me things without me having to probe?'*

*'I do not know where you are. But, please, be aware that Pun is on her way to see you.'*

Yes. Pun went to Paytai after she removed her fingers from my body before we were finished. Despite my requests that she stay, she chose to go see Paytai over me.

I was once again hurt. I could not bear the pain any longer. I had to put an end to this game.

*'I think it's time for us to talk... what mess are you in?'*

Paytai told me everything about why he left New York, including...

*'I was about to sign a marriage certificate with Pun.'*

That was the first bomb... Is Pun my brother's love interest?

*'She paid me one million baht... She wanted to get US citizenship. However, unforeseen circumstances prevented us from proceeding. She is now pursuing me to get her money back.'*

My shameless brother said that casually.

*'Give her the money and end it.'*

*'Where am I going to get the money to return her? I already gave the mafia all of my money.'*

*'When I asked to borrow money from you, you declined. That was why I had to agree to sign the marriage certificate with that kid.'*

*'I'll give you the money.'*

*'What?... Are you kidding me? The last time I asked, you turned me down immediately. Why are you offering to help me now?"*

*'Do you want my money or not?'*

*'What's the catch?'*

'*You must use it to return the money to Pun and nothing else.'*

*'Is that it?'*

*'Just one more thing.'*

I told Paytai to call Pun the morning we were leaving for Hong Kong. He was given specific instructions to meet with her, and I told him to change the time so that she would miss our flight if she accepted. I was curious what she would say to me if she had to postpone the trip we had planned together.

....She chose to lie once again.

People cannot be trusted....

I could understand why Pun chose to go see Paytai. But I couldn't continue to love someone I couldn't trust. What other secrets has she been hiding from me? We had agreed that she would not lie to me again... Could I believe any of her actions, or even her love confession?

As soon as my plane left Thai airspace, I decided to call it quits for good... I was in excruciating pain, but I had been preparing for it.

Posting a photo of myself with a lonely caption on social media as soon as I landed in Hong Kong yielded instant results, although it wasn't exactly the outcome I was hoping for.

*"Who are you in Hong Kong with, Ploy? Are you really here by yourself? I am also currently in Hong Kong. Can we meet tonight?"*

That night, in the dead of night, a woman with jet-black hair and a slim figure capable of turning any guy's head knocked on my door.

My decision to end things with Pun and close the door on returning caused me to take the initiative as the aggressor, not allowing my fling to say anything.

We moved toward the bed, taking off our clothes as our bodies became more and more entangled. When we finally collapsed onto the bed, we had only a few pieces of clothing left on us.

*'Who are you angry with? Oh... I like it when you are at your most intense.'*

She liked how I did this. She liked the fact that I did that. She was feeling good. It was nice. It was pleasurable, It was exhilarating...

*'Why did you stop! What did I do to upset you?'*

I separated my lips from the radiant breast that arched, waiting to be touched... Emptiness... Sex with a previously compatible partner had lost its meaning and interest, in contrast to how it once was.

*'I'm... not in the mood.'*

*'I can help you with that.'*

The slim woman shifted her position to be on top of me. She quickly removed my clothes and flipped me over so that I lay face down on the bed. She proceeded to repeatedly kiss my back. She tried to arouse me with her lips and fingers... Yet...

*'I told you never to leave any marks... Please, stop. I really don't feel like doing this tonight.'*

I used my hands to push her away. She hesitated because she could see the gravity in my eyes.

'*I came all the way here to be with you. I am not going to lie in bed with you tonight without doing anything.'*

She tried to make me go soft by kissing me all over. She then sat up on top of me. She pressed her body down, moved to arouse herself, and made an effort to please me. She moved her hand gently down my body. However, I immediately grabbed her hand. It was a completely unexpected spontaneous reaction for me.

*'I'm not feeling well.'*

*'Then just lie still, I'll heal you.'*

*'Are you going to return to your room, or will you stop and spend the night here?'*

*'You really don't want to do it, huh?'*

Even though I thoroughly cleansed myself, the guilt lingered... Why did I feel so guilty? I have already decided to end things... Why did I care if someone found out?

That was the first time I had been in bed with a fling without going all the way. It was the first time I resented another woman's touch. However, I decided to remain calm the following day and waited for everything to fade.

The next morning, I received a text message.

**DREAMMY:**

**After seeing your post about being alone in Hong Kong, I decided to fly over and accompany you. Where are you staying? I'll be there shortly.**

I'd moved on, not dwelling on the past. I did not stop or wait because I believed my life was too valuable for that. Dream, on the other hand, was convinced that I remained in the same place.

Dream has been trying to reunite with me for the past five years, but I have consistently turned her down. However, it was not the case on that particular day.

'So, what's your plan for the day? Let's hang out.

*'I can't. I have to meet somebody.... You are welcome to stay in my room for a little longer, but please leave by the evening, or we will have a problem.'*

Despite her obvious displeasure, the older woman who had been in my room since the previous night did not argue.

Being in Dream's company wasn't all that terrible. We used to know each other well. Yet, regardless of what Dream and I were doing, I couldn't stop thinking about the kid who always smiles before opening her eyes in the morning.

I didn't want to walk with anyone except Pun. And that night, Pun did, in fact, accompany me on a walk.

What made her fly over to see me? Didn't she already get her money back?

She was still a cryChapter :y. But were those tears also part of her deception?

Were her whining words truthful or deceptive?

I loved her. And I knew Pun must have felt something as well. My distrust, however, ate away at my heart. It turned our love into a raging fire, and I didn't want any of it.

All I needed to do was wait for it to fade.

Despite my intense pain when Pun fell apart upon realizing that I had let another woman into my room... I remained calm. I just needed to wait for it to fade.

*'Best. Could you please contact Pun for me right now? Don't tell her I told you to call. But could you please call me back and reassure me that she is safe in her accommodation?'*

Best texted me not long after I called her.

I was unable to sleep that night. I awoke the next morning with a low fever. However, I went out with Dream as if nothing had happened and as if I wasn't deeply hurt inside... It will fade.

I wasn't sure how many times I told myself, "It will fade," each day during that time.

Best always kept me updated on Pun, even though I didn't ask her to.

*'Phi Ploy, Pun is in terrible shape. Do you truly have no feelings for her?'*

*'Too bad. I was rooting for you and my friend to hook up.'*

*'Pun said your name in her sleep again.'*

*'She's acting strange... She was sad, so she invited us to a party, but she doesn't drink any alcohol.'*

In the background, I can hear Best's gang singing karaoke to,

*"Go. You must go. Get as far away from me as you can. If we ever meet again, please do not greet me. I will let this love go from my heart. Get as far away from me as you can."*

'*Pun cried again today, Phi Ploy.*

*'Fine. I can see that you're doing perfectly fine and spending a lot of time with different women. Equally unaffected, your professional life is booming... I'm beginning to believe that you truly have no feelings for Pun.'*

*'Did Pun tell you about her first kiss when she was a freshman? It was a kiss that made her vulnerable and transformed her into someone who enjoys flirting but never commits. Pun is meeting her first kiss at DDD. I'm only telling you this in case you want to come despite your heartlessness.'*

*'Will you really not come? Just now, Pun pulled her first kiss into the restroom.'*

I did go... But not before Pun went into the restroom with that woman.

*'They had been in the restroom for five minutes before you arrived... And why are you here with another woman?"*

*'I'm only here to hang out. Pun is not the reason I came.'*

*'Do you want to go check out what's going on in the restroom?"*

*'Was your friend... drunk?'*

*'No.'*

*'Then she is fully aware of her actions. I won't interfere.'*

I didn't interfere, even when Pun used the lips she'd kissed me with and asked me to grade her for kissing someone else. I remained motionless as Pun and that woman exited the nightclub.

'If you can stay calm after seeing what you just saw, I'm giving up."

Those were Best's final words before leaving the nightclub. That was the last time I heard from her.

....It will fade.

I'm still alive. But I've lost my vitality. My brain is still functioning. Nonetheless, my heart remained frozen in the past.

...It will fade.

What could possibly relieve the pain in my heart? A person, a lifestyle, sex, money, activities, friends, expensive items, shoes, handbags, logic, or alcohol...

*"Have you ever missed... us?"*

Whenever I'm awake. In a conscious and unconscious way, every single day.

*'Sobbbbb... I understand now.'*

...It will fade.

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# Chapter 30: The First Snow

The lake in Central Park is starting to freeze as the weather drops, marking the change from fall to winter. The tree's branches are bare of leaves. String quartets-violins, cellos-are performing instrumental music from Bethesda Terrace. It's a group and tune I'm unfamiliar with.

The hot chocolate in my hand helps to keep me warm. As I lean against the backrest of a bench, my gaze wanders to the people and activities scattered throughout the park. My mind is racing. and my hand is scribbling new ideas onto my notebook.

I've been roaming the streets and alleys with wide sidewalks since returning to this city brimming with creativity, towering structures, and people from various cultures.

Despite having six lanes, the streets are still congested with traffic. As I strolled down the streets, I could hear the familiar distant rumble of sirens and honks.

The streets are now decorated with festive lights, signs, and window displays, as the shops have been preparing for Christmas since the end of November.

The museums, the antique flea market on 23rd Street, inspiring artists in the underground subways (who played the Thai national anthem when I walked by), galleries in Tribeca, creative and classy ideas in Soho, and the energy of the people walking down 5th Avenue... all of this stimulates my creativity. Now that I'm back where I belang, my heart is healing.

It's a place that generates more ideas than a lush field of wild mushrooms. It's a place that appreciates art and provides numerous opportunities for talented artists.

Upon returning to New York, I make the most of the chance to reconnect with old friends. In addition, I had a meal with my professor, Catherine, who has been an incredible advisor for me throughout my time as her student.

When I first began my studies here, I struggled with the language. Not only was I slow to communicate in English, but I also made numerous mistakes. As a result, I tend to remain quiet in class. Catherine asked to meet with me, and we worked together to solve the problem.

Since then, she has become my mentor. A few days after our meal, she called to let me know that someone from DS Company had reached out to her.

They were on the lookout for creative, youthful minds to work with on a project. She recommended me, an alumna, for the job. She advised me to contact them and send in my portfolio.

I have secured the job I've always wanted and am leading the life I've always desired. I am residing in an environment that fosters my personal development.

I tried new things, like attending a basketball game in Madison Square Garden with Angela, a new friend who Jeong-ah introduced me to.

*'Motherfucker!!!'*

When the other team scored, Angela tried to quell the celebration by booing and cursing. She turned to me, and we high-fived throughout the competition. Jeong-ah and she analyzed the game as if they were rappers. They are diehard American sports fans.

...These things not only healed my wound but also occasionally allowed me to pretend to forget or ignore the scar in my heart.

*'Angie has expressed interest in you.'*

*'Doesn't Angie know... that I'm married?"*

Within our inner circle of friends, word has spread about the marriage license that Phi Pay and I obtained.

*'Have you told Angie about it?'*

Jeong-ah made an effort to provide opportunities for Angela and me to get to know one another. However, I have always maintained a distance between us and conducted myself as a friend... Yes, I've completely changed.

I am no longer the flirtatious Pun in any situation.

Regarding Phi Pay, he hasn't gotten involved in gambling since returning to New York. He paid to repair the door so that it was stronger than before and worked diligently on his restaurant business.

*'The whole set?'*

*'I had to protect myself.'*

Upon seeing the remnants of his prized collection in the box that Phi Oam had kept it in, Phi Pay began to complain on the very first day we arrived in New York... It's the collection I shattered the day the mafia broke into the house.

*'So I need to earn money to pay off my debts and also recollect these?'*

*'Why purchase a new set? Simply apply glue to them.'*

He was sulking at me at first. However, he did not dare to make a scene because he was the root cause of everything that had occurred

Things are going well thus far. Though I still miss... whenever I see beautiful high heels in store windows. Attracted... to anyone with dimples.

Drawn... to wavy, flowing hair, just as I was four days ago when I was leaving a movie theater with Jeong-ah.

I was starting to question whether I was experiencing hallucinations, as I detected a faint, familiar scent in the living room upon my arrival home last night. And every time one of those things happens, my heart still races.

I find myself pausing all the rushing memories and old stories as the violin and cello play the final note of the melancholy melody... and start to play a new song.

*..... Canon in D.*

The pen and notebook lose their purpose as I close my eyes and become immersed in the music... A cool breeze brushes against my skin. Then I sense a gentle mist descending on my face.

*...The first snow of the year.*

Pristine white flakes fall from the sky. A chubby boy in a blue jacket raises his hands to catch the falling snowflakes. Everything about it-the joy on everyone's faces, the excitement in the air, and that child's infectious energy-warms my heart.

*'Make a wish... If you make a wish on the first snowfall, your wish will come true.'*

My Korean friend once told me.

My wish will come true?

I don't believe any of that. However, while running an errand on Wall Street this morning, surrounded by elegantly dressed individuals wearing expensive perfumes and shiny new shoes, I began to yearn for wealth. For that reason, I spent some time rubbing the bull's ball in front of the New York Stock Exchange.

*'Many hold the belief that rubbing this will bring them prosperity and good fortune.'*

My same Korean friend informed me.

I didn't believe her, but I took her advice.

I don't believe her, but I'm making a wish in this season's first snowfall...

*Can I please reclaim my heart?*

Rising quickly from the bench, I leave the verdant park and head out onto Fifth Avenue as the snow starts to fall and night falls. I take a yellow cab to my house.

...Damn. The aroma of curry and butter greets me the moment I open the door. Still, I get in the vehicle before I tell the driver where I'm going.

There are still a lot of cars on the road. I'm not sure why I chose a taxi over my usual subway ride today. Now I'm unable to escape the stench of food as I sit in a taxi that plays music I don't recognize while we wait in traffic.

Phi Pay called me earlier in the afternoon to see when I'd be home and if I'd be able to attend dinner today. He also asked if I wanted him to come pick me up... He's been treating me much better than before.

He signed the marriage certificate and handled my visa application and fee for free. He doesn't charge me rent. He also sometimes picks me up from work. In addition, he makes it a point to call and inquire about my expected home time each day.

We seem like a legitimate married couple. But no one knows that we are far from a romantic partner. I wondered if he was taking his role as husband too seriously. I was worried that he'd jump me.

Nonetheless, despite his excellent care of me, he never touches me in that way.

The aroma of curry has made me lightheaded by the time the cab stops directly behind a white BMW parked outside my house. I sneak a whiff of my jacket as I step out of the cab out of concern that the odor might cling to my clothing and skin.

The sky is now completely dark. The warmth of the house's brilliant lights embraces me as I stand in the chilly wind and snow mist. The melted snow has dampened the concrete ground.

If the snow falls throughout the night, there will undoubtedly be a white, snow-covered landscape tomorrow.

The smell of cooking fills the house as I enter, and my stomach starts to rumble. I remove my footwear and place it on the shoe rack...

*High-heeled boots... Who do they belong to?*

Without moving a muscle, I stare at the shoe rack until someone interrupts my train of thought.

"Pun. Come in. What are you doing standing there? Your timing couldn't have been more perfect. Dinner is being served. I was just about to call you... Does snow fall heavily in the city center?"

The house's owner is beaming brightly as he sits in the wooden chair at the dining table. In front of him are numerous plates of freshly prepared and appetizing food.

I step inside slowly and nervously. As I look around, I notice that someone is standing in the kitchen, removing the apron from her waist. My heart quivers when I see the woman with stunning features, familiar gestures, and a smile so bright that it lights up her eyes.

"Ah. I completely forgot to tell you."

When Phi Pay notices that I am frozen in place, he explains the situation.

"Today, we have an honorable chef joining us for dinner. Come sit down, Pun. Let's eat. I'm starving."

"I think I'll excuse myself. I had no idea you were hosting a guest today."

My gaze remains fixed on the woman.

"I don't understand what you're saying."

As Phi Pay, a towering figure, approaches, he firmly grasps my shoulders and leads me to a chair.

"Ploy is my younger sister. So, she's your sister-in-law, not a guest."

The woman with wavy hair immediately stops smiling and gives her brother a sideways glance.

"I believe you know each other based on your reaction."

"If you are referring to her as a sister-in-law, I have just met her."

I take a seat with a scowl on my face as the woman is on the verge of laughing at what I said.

"Freshly squeezed orange juice."

The cruel woman places a clear glass containing orange liquid in front of me.

"If you want more, there is more in the fridge."

"Why is there only one glass? Where's mine?" Phi Pay asks.

"I didn't prepare any for you."

"But you said there was more in the fridge."

"Like I said, I didn't prepare any for you. All is for Pun."

The woman who's chatting with her brother smiles sweetly at him, then turns to face me,

"I don't drink orange juice anymore."

I offer my glass to Phi Pay.

"You are welcome to have it all."

The only man in the house smiles slightly as he gives his sister a sideways glance before finishing the glass. His eyes light up with amusement.

The woman who made the orange juice for me twitches her brow. Looking at the empty glass her brother just set on the table, her honey-sweet eyes flicker with anger.

Nevertheless, her demeanor abruptly shifts to one that sports a subtle, mocking grin. Her expression shifts from annoyance to teasing as she leans across the table, rests her hands on top of it, and fixes her gaze on me, keeping her distance no greater than the width of a palm.

"It was extremely rude of you to hand it to someone else in my presence."

"Observe your conduct carefully. I'm married to your brother."

Without flinching, I stare at her ferociously. My anger at her is immense. Nonetheless, she keeps a slight smile on the corners of her lips the entire time.

"Do you... want me as your sister-in-law?"

I choose not to respond to her and instead turn to face the man sitting beside me.

"I won't be having dinner today, Phi Pay. Please excuse me."

Phi Ploy's cold hand grabs mine as I prepare to stand up.

"Sit. I'm leaving."

Her eyes no longer tease me. She stands up, turns around, grabs her bag, and walks to the door to put on her boots.

"Why are you leaving so soon? You said you were going to dinner with us."

"When I think about it, I think I should not interrupt your family time."

"But you haven't eaten... Ploy. Where are you going to have your meal? Also, you prepared a lot of food."

"I am capable of taking care of myself."

The red lips curve into a smile. She gives me one last meaningful glance before disappearing behind the front door.

My favorite menus are spread across the table. However, tonight... I don't enjoy my dinner at all.

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The next morning, I leave home for work at my usual time. My heart, however, is not beating in the usual rhythm. In the evening, I spot a white BMW parked in front of my office building.

Standing there, arms crossed over her chest, the stunning driver leans against the door. She looks at me with a warm smile... Several months ago, she was icy cold to me.

Today, she's as amiable as one can be. What exactly is she trying to accomplish? Have I not learned my lesson already?

"Please get in. What's your post-work plan? Let me drop you off."

"Thank you. But this city is civilized enough that I can easily get around by taking public transportation."

A mist appears to be rising from Phi Ploy's nostrils as she lets out a sigh. It's been snowing for hours. As anticipated, white snow blankets the town.

"Pun."

Phi Ploy grabs my arm. I'm making a concerted effort to stay calm and not show my weakness in front of the crowd.

"I know you're capable of getting around by yourself... However, I would like to offer you a ride."

"That's unnecessary."

I remove my arms from her grip and walk away.

However, when I get home, I see the white BMW parked in the same spot as the night before.

As soon as I open the door, I hear the two siblings' joyful chattering.

"Why are you home so late today? Please hurry in. We're waiting on you to join us for dinner."

The male owner of the house is playing on his phone while sitting at the dining table in the kitchen, which is laden with inviting food. The elegant woman glances at me as she positions a glass of orange juice at my usual spot on the table.

"I will not be joining you for dinner, Phi Pay. Also, there is no need for you to wait for me tomorrow or the following days. I need to go to a party, run an errand, or just grab a bite to eat on my way home."

"Have you eaten your dinner today?"

"I'm not hungry."

*Growl...!*

*Damn... I feel like I'm in a television sitcom. Why did my stomach have to growl just now?!*

The woman who asked the question is trying not to smile. Her amusement, though, is obvious.

"Please eat. I'm about to leave."

Phi Ploy does not wait for anyone to stop her as she walks out of the kitchen and puts on her shoes at the door.

"I won't stop you today, sis. I'm beginning to see a pattern here."

Phi Ploy turns around and smiles at her brother. Before vanishing behind the door-which keeps the house warm-she shoots me another meaningful look.

It's another night... that I'm not enjoying my dinner.

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The next morning, I made an effort to carry on with my life as normal. However, Phi Ploy kept me from accomplishing this.

Not only did she occupy my thoughts until I remained awake all night, but she also parked her car in front of the house, waiting for me even before the cock could crow (if there are any cocks in the area, that is).

"Would you like a chauffeur?"

From her smile to her hair to her face, she is stunning. She is posing as if... she believes she is so cool!

I disregard her and casually stroll right by her. All the same, she keeps chatting with me.

"There are seven billion people on this planet. Yet here I am, standing in the snow, having flown across the Pacific Ocean for no reason other than to request to drop you off at work... Please get in the car. You can just sit quietly. You don't have to say anything to me."

...I refuse to look back.

I struggle to concentrate throughout the day and can barely complete any work. Walking away from Phi Ploy this morning may have upset her enough to make her fly back to Thailand.

She has never made an effort to reconcile with me before. She will undoubtedly dismiss me this time... Good. Let us put an end to this once and for all.

*Damn. Why are tears welling up in my eyes?*

Having allowed my imagination to roam freely during my working hours, I find myself standing in front of my office building after work.

There's no one here waiting for me. There is no sign of the familiar white sports car. No beautiful woman is there, grinning at me with a radiant smile.

Geez. Phi Ploy is still Phi Ploy. She doesn't really care...

"Who are you looking for?"

It's a recognizable sound... I am frozen in place because I was caught redhanded.

"I'm looking for a cab."

When I finally gather myself to face her after wiping away my tears, she has already made her way over to me. The black umbrella in Phi Ploy's right hand shields us from the snow that has been falling all day. In her left hand, she holds a paper tray containing two hot chocolates

"Do you want to help me with the umbrella or the tray?"

"Why should I help you?"

I immediately walk away from her.

"If I slip, I'll at least have one hand to keep myself from falling."

Despite the presence of public workers to clear the snow from the sidewalk, the sidewalk is completely covered in fresh snow. In some areas, the snow has turned icy, making walking dangerously slippery.

"You will get into your car soon. I think you'll survive."

No matter how frustrated or distant | am, the person walking by my side is unaffected.

"I didn't bring my car today"

"What happened to your car?"

"You won't ride with me, so I'll walk with you instead... Please take a cup to free my hand."

She presents me the hot chocolate tray.

"As an added bonus, it will help keep you warm."

I have no choice but to accept a cup. The delicious beverage not only warmed my body but also my heart. However, the heaviness persists.

We stroll side by side towards the subway, sheltering under her umbrella. We simply sip our hot chocolates without saying anything to each other until we finish the drinks and discard the cups.

"I have a dinner date today... Why are you following me?"

"You are free to go wherever you want. I'm not going to complain."

I didn't have any plans today until Phi Ploy joined me on my walk. I decided to call Jeong-ah and Angela to set up a dinner at a local restaurant. The table now seats four women.

I assumed Phi Ploy would feel awkward sitting with me and my friends while I gave her the cold shoulder. However, I was wrong. She blends right in.

She immediately hit it off with Jeong-ah and Angela, participating in their conversations... It turns out that I am the one who is becoming annoyed.

Without my uttering a word to her, we walk home together after taking the subway. She then drives her white BMW, parked outside the house, back to her accommodation.

Phi Ploy follows me around for the entire week. She follows me wherever I go, even though I behave like a dead log around her. She also comes with me to a party on Friday night despite the fact that she doesn't know anyone.

As a celebrity, she has excellent social skills. She also speaks English fluently. She can converse with any guy who approaches her, freeing me up to spend time with my friends.

Nonetheless, she keeps an eye on me at all times, as if she were my guardian. She will interrupt the conversation whenever I appear uncomfortable with a guy.

And if I appear to be having fun with someone, the woman simply observes me from a distance, without attempting to approach me.

Winter brings darkness earlier than usual, and the gloomy weather sometimes makes me want to give in to my emotions.

As we walk home from the party under the streetlights, Phi Ploy grabs my hand... and refuses to let go, even when I give her a firm look.

"I fear that I will slip."

She's saying this while wearing high-quality winter boots.

A scream escapes her lips as I attempt to free my hand from her grasp.

"Oops!"

Phi Ploy's boots skid and slide. I instinctively wrap my arms around her waist. Phi Ploy, though, can't hide the grin on her face.

Geez...!"

I immediately let go of her waist, frustrated.

"Was that part of your celebrity talent?"

"Ugh... I've been caught. You can read me as easily as a book these days." Phi Ploy reaches for my hand again. She leads the way ahead of me, her eyes betraying her amusement.

"You know what? When a villain like me engages in such foolish behavior, the male leads in TV series consistently fall for it. They honestly and unquestioningly believe it... And I'm starting to dislike the cold weather because I have to exercise every mental muscle to figure out how to hold your hand without these silly gloves getting in the way."

"Regardless of how hard you try, you will not be holding my hand."

Once more, I remove my hand from her grasp. And once more, she screams. Yes, I instinctively grab her waist once again... Ugh. I hate this!

I step away from Phi Ploy as she laughs. We keep on silently making our way to the cream-painted house nearby, lit up by warm lights streaming in through the window.

"You don't have anyone yet, do you? Can I get in line?"

"Will you let me go if I tell you that I already have someone?"

"I will make certain that it is true."

As we keep walking, Phi Ploy puts her arms around my waist, and it feels warm.

"If you still harbor feelings for me, even if they are just 1%, I won't let you go."

My head and my heart are at war. My tears are the end result.

"Why are you doing this?"

Because my voice is shaking, Phi Ploy releases my waist, comes to a halt, and turns to face me.

"Do you realize how difficult it was for me to get through each day and reach this point? Do you have any idea how long it took me to heal?

Everything is starting to fall into place. I'm about to start over. Why did you come back...? If you're still playing with me, could you kindly end this game? I'm already deeply hurt. The last thing I want is to be confused again. Could you please... stop?"

With the exception of the faraway hum of engines and the gentle caress of the wind across the leafless trees, there is complete stillness around us.

The temperature drops below zero degrees, causing our bones to tingle. As we stand motionless on a sidewalk, gazing into each other's eyes, I am attempting to end our relationship.

"I miss you every single day."

Her voice is soft... almost like a whisper. Her tone is pleading for my tenderness.

"Stop. I beg you."

"I could not heal myself like you did."

"Please, Phi Ploy... *sob*... let me go."

She gently wipes the tears from my cheeks with both of her hands. She is so vulnerable and sad, and that breaks my heart. Her eyes are intensely red. Tears are streaming down those normally playful eyes of hers.

My strong person is in tears.

"In the coming week, I ask..."

As if quivering inside, she exhales a heavy breath.

"Could you please consider us? If you still have feelings for me, I will be waiting for you at FFF at 8 p.m. next Saturday.... If you don't arrive by 10 p.m., I promise that I won't bother you ever again."

Upon confirming that I am inside the house, she turns around to depart, her tears still plainly visible.

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# Chapter 31: Hold My Hand

With Saturday drawing near so rapidly, my anxiety level has soared. Phi Ploy did not return to see me after that night. She vanished so that I could reconsider our relationship.

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***...7:30 p.m.***

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The male and female couple at the table next to me just ordered dumplings. Their expressions and smiles indicate that they enjoy their food. Over at the inside corner table, another woman is snapping a picture of the freshly served food.

For all I know, she may intend to share the photo on social media, send it to a friend, or simply save it on her phone for future reference. The guy at the table next to the woman is laughing so hard that his friends tell him to quiet down.

***...8:00 p.m.***

I check my watch every 3 minutes. My hands are sweaty. I'm seated in a Thai restaurant, yet my heart feels like it's miles away. Phi Ploy is most likely already at the location where she said she would be waiting for me. She is never late.

***...8:30 p.m.***

Four days after that night, I made my decision. I told myself thousands of times throughout the week that I would not go to her appointment.

I decided there was no way I was going back to her. My heart, however, shatters as a result of the decision I made.

***...9:20 p.m.***

"Pun!"

The restaurant's male owner walks in and notices me at the inside corner table. He scowls as he checks his watch,

"Why are you still here? I thought you had an appointment tonight."

"I don't have any appointment."

I spent the entire evening at Phi Pay's restaurant. I told everyone, including myself, that I have more important things to do than go meet someone.

"Don't you have an appointment with... Ugh."

Phi Pay shakes his head.

"So why are you sitting here sighing and looking so stressed?"

"Did she mention the appointment to you?"

The person being questioned smiles slightly.

"We had a brief conversation about it."

"What do you know?"

"I know enough to guess what's going on. What about yourself? Do you think you know enough to still be sitting here?"

"Your sister was just playing with me. That was the reason we broke up. I was just one of her many female counterparts. Our relationship gave the impression that we were together, but in reality, she was also with other women. I don't know why she came back to me."

"Is there anything else you'd like to say?"

"......" I shake my head.

"Okay. Then allow me to share with you what I know... Are you aware that I am broke?"

"Of course. You didn't even have enough money to repay the Mafia. That was the reason you were forced to flee to Thailand."

Phi Pay laughs and turns his serious gaze toward me. He then pulls up a chair and sits down to talk to me. But he keeps drumming his fingers on the table without saying anything until I am compelled to strike his hand.

"Did you ever wonder where I got the money to repair the door of our house?"

"The money from your restaurant business."

He raises an eyebrow and smiles.

"And have you ever wondered... where I got the money to repay you? It's one million baht. I was fleeing the mafia at the time. Where could I possibly have gotten it?"

My eyes have become wide open.

"What exactly are you saying?"

"I believe my sister was upset because she was misled and lied to. Ploy was aware from the start that you were looking for me. She was the one who gave me the money and instructed me to return it to you. She provided me with the specific date and time for me to do it. Now, I would like you to reflect on what happened from both your and her perspectives. You lied to Ploy as well, correct? You also exploited her, did you not?...We all make mistakes from time to time. She slipped. You fell. If she's prepared to rectify the situation today, are you willing to forgive her?"

When Phi Pay reaches this point, he quickly checks his watch.

"And if you think she's playing with you, you couldn't be more mistaken. If you don't know Ploy well enough, I'll tell you she's a strong decision-maker. Her guard is high, and she isn't quick to let anyone in. She's always lived her life independently. And, in my entire life, I've never seen Ploy try to reconcile with any woman. Today, however, she is willingly following a young woman around town."

***9:40 p.m.***

I look at my watch. My heart is on fire.

"Why are you just telling me this now!"

"Wait."

Phi Pay grabs my hand before I can dash out of the restaurant.

"Ploy gave me the money to fix the door because she knew someone had broken into the house and caused you harm. She also gave me the instructions for picking you up, dropping you off, and ensuring your safety."

I quickly grab my purse and head towards the door, while Phi Pay continues to yell behind me.

"Also, the reason I don't charge you rent... is because my sister brought up how much I owe her. She forc-"

Who would want to stay and listen to an old man whine? Idiot. Why didn't he tell me all this sooner?

As I swing open a cab door and tell the driver my destination, I repeatedly wipe the tears from my cheeks.

I turn back the pages of my memory of us and begin all over again, I'm still confused about everything, but I'll make sure to get the answer straight from her mouth.

"If you can get there before 10 p.m., I will give you a generous tip."

I desperately urge the driver. He nods as he peers at me in the rearview mirror. After making a sharp turn, he slams on the accelerator...

***10:10 p.m.***

I decide to pay the cab fare and quickly exit the vehicle before we arrive. I can't stand to be in the car while the light is red and the road is still so congested.

***...10:26 p.m.***

The warm light streaming through the window of an Italian-style building is visible to me when I arrive. From outside, I can see that two tables remain occupied by customers.

I really hope that Phi Ploy is still holding out hope for me, even though I was late with her deadline.

I have to take a moment to collect my breath because a sharp pain is shooting through my chest. From my temples, I can make out the sound of a pounding heart.

Breathing heavily after my run, I fill my lungs with deep breaths of the cool air. Gradually, I advance to the dark green-framed door and look down at the "Closed" sign with a heart heavy with sadness.

...I didn't make it.

I'm no longer panting. My eyes, though, are beginning to well up. I feel a wave of disappointment washing over me. Then I notice someone walking out of the door.

Standing motionless and locking eyes in front of the restaurant, her sorrowful eyes immediately shine.

"The restaurant is now closed."

The crimson lips speak as softly as the snowflakes falling from the sky.

"Why are you still here?"

"I'm hoping... someone is running late."

My phone rings just as I'm about to collapse into her embrace.

"Hello. Phi Pay?"

"Pun, where are you?!"

The disorder I can hear in the background nearly drowns out Phi Pay's nervous voice.

"I'm with Phi Ploy."

"Pay close attention to my words. A bomb went off ten minutes ago in my restaurant. Leave there immediately and hurry-"

"Sh\*\*!!!"

When Phi Ploy shoves me to the side, my phone slips from my grasp. A "whizz" sound whizzes past my ear, and then I hear something shatter. Cracks and shards fly from the restaurant's window.

When I look in the same direction as Phi Ploy, my entire body goes numb.

***Them!!!***

The Asian man, whom I had knifed and left a scar on his thigh during his hunt for Phi Pay, is grinning at me from behind a car window. He is aiming a gun with a silencer at us.

Another bullet flies by my ear as the gun jerks up. People in the area scream and bend over to protect themselves. And yet, Phi Ploy snatches my arm and hauls me away.

When the Asian guy sees that we are darting around the car and onto a different street, he jumps out and chases after us.

"Where are we heading?!"

"We're going to my car."

We sprint as fast as we can, out of breath and heart racing. Nonetheless, we never let go of each other's hand.

"Is your car parked here?"

"No. We need to do a U-turn around the block."

"Why did you run this way then?!"

"Bullets were waiting for us in the other direction!"

She explodes right away.

We sprint through the crowd while the Asian guy pursues us. Fewer and fewer people appear as we run farther. Upon realizing that there is no place to duck ahead, I yank Phi Ploy into a bar and dash for the rear exit

"Hey! That door is off-limits to you!"

The bartender shouts after us.

The metal back door leads us into a dim, narrow alley. As we make our way to the street at the other end, we can smell the stench of garbage. More and more, we can make out the sound of our pursuer's heavy footfall.

"I regret my decision to wear high heels today."

Phi Ply appears irritated.

"Should we split up? They want me, not you."

"No!"

She's frustrated as well as frightened.

"Are you afraid?"

"Who isn't afraid of bullets?!"

She snaps back, yanking me in to duck behind a corner as our pursuer opens fire again.

"YOU PUNK-ASS MOTHERFUCKER!!"

This is the first time I've heard Phi Ploy curse. She screams and curses as she looks back at our pursuer.

"...GO TO FUCKING HELL!!"

We keep running for our lives until we get to the other street. No more than ten steps separate us from the white BMW parked on the sidewalk. However, their car has turned onto the street and is speeding toward us.

The Asian guy with a gun is pursuing us from another direction. Phi Ploy drags me into the car and immediately shuts the door.

As Phi Ploy slams on the accelerator, the tires make a loud squealing sound that draws attention from the people on the street. She aims directly at the Asian man who is pointing his gun at us... I'm confident that she's hitting the gas pedal with all her might.

"Get down!!!"

Shriekkkk!!!

The assailant smashes into the car's hood, rolls over its roof, and falls to the street behind us after three bullets shatter our car window.

The screaming of people on the street has no effect on the car's speed. Phi Ploy makes her way onto the main road. In a state of panic, she is breathing rapidly

"Do you think he's dead?"

I turn around to check the black car that is pursuing us and the body that is sprawled on the street.

"......"

Phi Ploy falls silent for a moment. Her left hand appears to be shaking. Then, having regained her voice, she speaks to me.

"Do not lie to me again."

"What?!"

"If we make it out of this, promise me that you will never lie to me again."

"You can't sleep with any other woman either."

"I have not slept with anybody else!"

"Where did you get those kiss marks if you didn't sleep with another woman? Do you realize how hurt I was? I had recurring nightmares about kiss marks on your body."

"I almost did. Only almost. However, I couldn't do it because all I could think about was you!"

"Almost is also forbidden!!"

I respond right away. We're passing cars one after the other, but the black car stays right behind us.

"You're not allowed to kiss or do anything with other women!! I'm jealous and possessive, and I don't want you to be near another woman!"

This is the first serious fight we have had. We are loud, angry, and emotional.

"If you hadn't lied to me that day, I wouldn't have given up on us and allowed someone else into our room!!"

"You should tell me what upset you so I can make things right, not go sleep with another woman."

"You should've never lied to me in the first place."

"Are we seriously going to fight over this now?"

"We must put this matter to rest now."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry about everything."

"I'm also sorry."

Phi Ploy's voice softens.

"...You can have only me."

"And you can only think of me."

We exchange glances for a moment before I draw her in and kiss her. The car swerves suddenly, prompting Phi Ploy to push me away and give me a stern look.

"Kiss me harder once we get through this."

Both of us are perspiring heavily, despite the chilly weather outside.

It wasn't until today that I started to appreciate Phi Ploy's lightning-fast driving style. Also, I've never been more frustrated by New York City traffic than I am right now.

After swerving left and right, we find ourselves stuck at a red light. I have to grasp the hand on the steering wheel since it is clearly shaking. Phi Ploy's face is unusually pale, and her breathing is abnormally heavy.

"Remember this. **My love... is you**."

That is what she says the second she sees the Mexican man emerge from the black car brandishing a pistol. After that, she turns the wheel and squeezes the white BMW through narrow openings, scraping the sides of the car as we go, all the way to the intersection.

She runs the red light and drives on the incorrect side of the road. This strategy is absolutely reckless. As we drive past car after car, I can hear honking and cursing.

"What are you doing?!!!"

The driver glances at me with a smile, her mouth quivering slightly. Her forehead is bedecked in perspiration.

"I want the cops to come after us."

Shortly thereafter, I hear sirens blaring from behind. The black car comes to a halt, but Phi Ploy keeps driving for a short distance before parking.

Only then did I realize that something was wrong. Phi Ploy's face is pale and drenched with sweat. She leans against the backrest, arms dangling by her sides. She shuts her eyes as she strains to breathe, her lips slightly parted... Her entire body is trembling.

"Phi Ploy...!!"

"....."

Her eyes are blood red as she struggles to open them and look at me. In a panic, I begin to examine her. She appears normal, but when I touch beneath her ribcage, I discover thick red liquid on my hand. Blood stains the BMW seat on her side.

"No... Phi Ploy... No, no, no, no... Don't do this."

As the police encircle our car, I am about to lose my mind.

"Please hold my hand."

Phi Ploy's voice is weak. Her icy hand is not only icier than usual, but it is also shaking.

"Phi Ploy. Sobbb. No... Do not sleep, Phi Ploy. Stay with me."

......Tears fall from her blood-red eyes. Her breaths are shallow.

"Phi Ploy...!"

"Don't let go of... my... hand..."

"Phi Ploy!... No, no, no... Phi Ploy. Wake up! Stay with me. Phi Ploy... please... Help!!"

... HELPPP!!!!!!"

.

# Chapter 32: Ploy's diary

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

.

Prang's sister asked to come to my room tonight to look for her missing earrings. She claimed she lost it the night I brought her here because she was dead drunk.

The earring was tucked away on the sofa in a discreet location. But what the owner of the earring is unaware of is that I recently cleaned my room a few days ago. Yes. There were no accessories on the sofa.

Are you trying to lure me in... Nong Pun?

I had no idea what the kid wanted until I followed her to return the earring, which she had forgotten to bring with her when she rushed out to talk on the phone.

What I heard in front of my room enraged me beyond measure. The spunky kid must think I'm a fool.

If you want to be a hunter, I will play your prey.

.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I bumped into Prang's sister again at my event. I'm starting to suspect that it's not a coincidence.

.

**Date xx/xx/XXXX**

I posted something on social media. I am now patiently waiting for the hunter to stumble into my trap.

.

.

**Date xx/xx/XXXX**

Min informed me that my bait had snagged the hunter. Prang's sister dropped by the restaurant.

A part of me wants to play with her. But the fact that she's my ex's sister is holding me back.

Her sister is the reason I let her go.

....I'd like to keep my good relationship with Prang.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

We were supposed to meet at 6 a.m., but the kid was nowhere to be found. It is about time that she realized that I am not a sure thing. If she doesn't appreciate our appointment, she won't have an easy time seeing me in the future.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

She did her homework well. But who invites a lady to a meal without bringing any money?

Even though I didn't plan on playing with her much, I enjoy being around her.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I knew Jay and Prang were not in their room. The only reason I went to knock on their door was to tease the kid. Her expression was so glum, and the foolish kid had no clue.

Prang's sister is incredibly inexperienced at flirting.

She is an excellent rice cook.

The way she attempted to show her cleavage while slicing the vegetables was more amusing than seductive. I must admit, I found it quite difficult to hold back my laughter.

The orange juice was delicious.

I wanted her to stay so that we could talk more. But when she said, "I will lend you my hand if you are scared," it was so cute I wanted to kiss her talkative lips.... My best course of action was to persuade her to return to her room.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I felt like I was back in high school. The kid wanted to hold my hand. Did she really think I didn't know that?

I will play with her.

She pecked a kiss on my cheek.... how adorable.

Every model I've been with has expressed a desire to sleep with me after our initial week of conversation. I would always give in to their request if they were attractive, of course.

.

**Date xx/xx/XXXX**

Every week, I spend time with Ken and the gang.

Yaowarat (Chinatown) was crowded today. There were a lot of cars. Pun looked at me every time we crossed the street.

She pulled me over and positioned herself so that if something happened, the car would hit her first. She's petite, but she was acting like a gentleman and protecting me.

Adorable.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I continue to get freshly squeezed orange juice from Pun. I didn't expect her to be this consistent.

.

**Date xx/xx/xXXX**

I want to pounce on her out of cute aggression.

Calm down. That's Prang's sister.

.

**Date xx/xx/XXXX**

The kid was trying to seduce me. I almost gave in. HA...

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I wasn't going to. But I eventually crossed the line.

How could an innocent kiss make my heart pound like that?

...Pun is adorable.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I appreciated Pun reminding the waiter that we prefer our food to be "nonspicy."

She's very observant.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Once again, we were out enjoying some street food. I fanned myself with my hand because it was hot outside.

I wasn't expecting the person walking next to me to immediately pull out a brochure and fan me.

Pun is both caring and observant. The kid gets cuter as I get to know her.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

She's seeing someone else... She continues to believe that I am stupid... She openly courts me, but she is also dating someone else.

Yes, I deliberately went to Min's restaurant so that she could see me.

It wouldn't be a problem if all I felt was anger.

The feeling of being hurt should not exist. I've tried to maintain my emotional distance.

I should not have let that kid in and influence my emotions. I really should stop playing this game.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

**.**

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

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.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Pun's eyes and naive cruelty are deadly. She confessed everything... The wall I built crumbled.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Pun followed me to Rayong.

How long has it been since my heart has raced like this?

Stop, Ploy. It's just a moment of infatuation. It will fade.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I'm a bit exhausted today, but seeing the kid lifted my spirits.

.

**Date xx/xx/XXXX**

Even though I know the kid is a handful, I still find her adorable.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

She's Prang's sister. Don't ever forget.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

It was hot again today. Ken chose an outdoor table for our meal.

As a reflex, I fanned myself with my hand. Pun suddenly requested that we sit indoors with air conditioning, as she was feeling unwell. I'm well aware that Pun was perfectly fine. <3

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

She's Prang's sister. Don't ever forget... Don't take things too far.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

She's Prang's sister. Keep that in mind.

.

**Date xx/xx/xXXX**

I cannot do that. I must stop myself. It's Prang's younger sister. Remember that, Ploy. Always keep this in mind. You must never forget.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Pun often sulks. She cries easily. And she likes to bite.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I think I'm in too deep. My feelings spread like a virus. I want to love, but I already know how it will end.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

If the kid is going to wave the standee with such enthusiasm, we won't be able to keep our relationship hidden from Prang for much longer... How savage.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Annie purposefully harassed me. She has already done it a number of times. I'm not going to tolerate it this time.

Pun cried at the hospital, despite the fact that I was the one injured.

...The hug was warm

While she was supposed to be caring for the patient, she dozed off right in front of me. **Date xx/xx/xxxx** Pun is adorable.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I tried to resist, but I couldn't... The island table ^^

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

The kid enjoys seducing me.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

The kid is addicted to sex.

Date xx/xx/xxxx

The kid whipped me. Can you believe it?!

**Date xx/xx/XXXX**

Pun likes to bury her nose in the nape of my neck while I'm cooking in front of the stove and say, "What are you cooking? It smells great."

...A shyness creeps up on me every time.

**Date xx/xx/XXXX**

I awoke one morning to a pungent nail polish odor. A radiant smile spread across the face of the young woman seated at the foot of the bed the moment she saw me open my eyes.

"Please lie still," the kid pleaded.

....Damn. The polish on my toenails was yellow.

The following week, it was blue, and the next it was the colors of traffic lights. T T

I'm embarrassed when I wear high heels that display my toenails... But I like it.

**Date xx/xx/xXXX**

My body is frequently used for entertainment purposes. Pun would touch and kiss me here and there. She would take hold of my hands and lead the way for me to embrace her. At times, she dresses me up like a doll.

"I felt this was tailor-made for you. I knew you would look absolutely stunning in it."

She never ceases to buy me stuff.

"You like eating this type of food, right? When I saw it, I immediately thought of you."

"I got off work early today, so I went to buy you this."

"My flowers are only for you."

"I know you don't like eating that, so I made sure they didn't put it in... Are you going to award me cookie points?"

I always hear, "Thought of you," or "I know you..." Pun is like that.

I can't pinpoint the exact moment it began, but I can't stop thinking about her these days.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Pun's actions consistently reinforce the fact that I am loved.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Pun pressed me face down on the dining table and insisted that we do it one rainy night....

Right there and then.

The closer we get, the more wild the kid becomes. My crazy kid <3

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I will not tell Pun that her kissing skills have improved so that we can continue practicing.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

The kid told me she likes me. Does this mean I can stop playing this game?

Her actions have been telling me this for a while now.

Does this imply that I won? I don't feel like a victor. I feel loved Pun's phone rang as we were making love. I listened in on her conversation while kissing her neck.

She went to see Paytai tonight.

I almost forgot that her goal was to get closer to me in order to find Paytai. I almost believed everything she said and did.

I requested that she stay with me.

I understand her decision, but it still hurts. She chose to go to Paytai instead of staying with me, as I had requested.

I couldn't sleep. My mind kept returning to Pun.

Later in the night, she phoned to let me know that she had returned to her room. Once again, I was on the verge of believing her. At least, that was, until I heard the distant honking.

I wasn't upset. I was disappointed. I don't want my emotions to cloud my judgment about her intentions in approaching me.

I need to control my emotions.

Did she lie when she told me she liked me?

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I scheduled a meeting with Paytai to learn the truth about everything.

Eventually, my brother came clean.

I transferred one million baht to him so that he can repay Pun.

I want to put an end to this game between Pun and me.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Pun is acting in line with her original intent. When I mentioned Paytai, she could not contain her excitement. She finally asked about him. I was waiting for Pun to say something to me.

I would be fine even if she asked me to arrange a meeting with him. However, she remained silent.

At this point, Pun, if you're honest with me and say you approached me to find Paytai, I'll hand him over to you. You don't need to pretend to be nice to me any longer.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Pun lied to me once again... You must put an end to this, Ploy.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I didn't expect it to hurt this much.

Date xx/xx/xxxx

It will fade.

**Date xx/xx/xXXX**

I miss Pun again... I can't take it any longer.

My feelings for Pun never faded, no matter how long I waited.

I decided to ask Prang how she managed to forgive Jay.

Prang told me that Jay had been Jay her whole life before they met. Prang is no different. No one can be changed overnight. You must allow the individual enough time and opportunities to adapt and grow.

Jay made a mistake. She did, however, ask for another chance and worked hard to make things right. Prang believed that she should put in as much effort as Jay to repair their relationship.

I told Prang that I love her sister... Prang gave me a hard slap for hurting Pun. She then hugged me.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Prang's words continue to occupy my thoughts.

Pun forgave me for my mistake. She fought hard for our relationship... If I love her, should I also break my own wall and forgive her?

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Location: JFK

I will win you back, Pun.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Pun has started a new life. She resides in a nurturing environment, has wonderful friends, and has her dream job. I secretly follow her around... I yearn to hug her.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Pun hasn't found anyone yet, I'm certain.

.

**Date xx/xx/xXXX**

She was distant... Perhaps she no longer loves me

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I envy anyone who receives a smile from Pun... I want to hug her.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

It hurts, but I will persevere.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

Love... I want to tell her that, but I am not sure if she wants to hear it.

.

**Date xx/xx/xxxx**

I'll be waiting until she arrives tomorrow.

.

# Chapter 33 : Begin Again ... First snow

The little white flakes that are falling are reminiscent of the winter I had two years ago. I remember sitting in Central Park, listening to a string quartet perform instrumental music, and thinking about her.

The main difference today is that I'm sitting by an expansive cafe window in the Brooklyn area and sipping my fragrant coffee while people-watching.

I often take time out of my hectic schedule to sit here alone and appreciate the tranquility.

Typically, I'll place an order for some pastries and a drink, then sit by the window and listen to music on my headphones. All those familiar songs take on a new meaning whenever the woman with dimples enters my thoughts.

Aside from the expansive window that lets my imagination wander... it would be a wonderful experience if she could be here with me.

Snow used to be more exciting when I lived in a city that didn't experience a cold winter, Although snow is beautiful and can lift your spirits, too much of it can create havoc.

When it melts, the sidewalks become wet. And if you've ever seen bloodsplattered snow, you'll never forget it.

I scoop up my bag and head out the door with my half-full coffee as soon as the music stops.

I meander leisurely through the well-known historic buildings and pathways.

As the seasons have changed over the last two years, there have been many other shifts as well. Phi Pay is in a relationship with a Thai woman. She's the new chef who has been working at his restaurant for quite some time now.

They announced their relationship three months ago, but I'm not sure when it started.

Me?... Living in New York has been wonderful for me. My career is fulfilling, and I've been promoted. I have already obtained a green card. My standard of living could not be better.

A lot of people have tried to flirt with me, but I have ignored them all. One good shield for me is my marriage certificate with Phi Pay. I've returned to Thailand four times since I moved back here.

kAfter my family learned that I had signed a marriage certificate with Phi Pay, they complained for weeks.

*'As parents, we never prevent you from leading the life you want. But you should have informed us about it.'*

*'I'm sorry. From now on, I will not withhold anything from you.'*

My family had no idea Phi Pay had borrowed money from me or about the mafia incident until Prang discovered Phi Ploy had been shot.

That was when the truth came out. I got a fair amount of scolding. Even Prang wasn't on my side. Phi Jay was the only one who comforted me by offering me a glass of boba milk tea.

.

***Rrrrrrr!***

**"Hello."**

**[Pun. I won't be going home today. I will spend the night with my girlfriend.]**

**"Does Phi Ann let you sleep over now?"**

I can hear loud, joyful laughter over the line.

**[Not yet. However, I'll ask for her permission to do so tonight... What time will you arrive home? Have you left the cemetery yet?]**

**"Yes, I did. I'll go for a quick walk before heading back."**

**[Did you cry in front of the grave again?]**

**"No, I didn't. I simply wanted to leave some flowers there."**

**[Okay. Please call me once you get home.]**

.

Soon after I hang up with the man with whom I signed a marriage license, I stop by the store to pick up a few more things before heading back to my house.

The house is a lonely, cold place when I'm by myself. The comforting atmosphere of the kitchen with that lovely woman bustling about is something I long for.

Dresses with plunging necklines and slits that expose her beautiful thighs are her favorite. The appealing aroma of the food, lovely dimples, and adoring eyes... I miss them with all my being. How long has it been since I touched that face?

It's only 6 p.m. There are still many hours until it's dark outside. Rather than spending my time here all by myself, I should have gone to Barnes & Noble, worked out at the gym where I pay an annual fee, or met up with Jeong-ah for some Korean BBQ before heading home...

My thoughts wander as I place the groceries in the cabinet, fixing my gaze on the photo of Phi Pay's mother displayed on the fridge.

While I whip up some basic meals, I catch up on social media news from Thailand and around the globe. Despite everything else changing, Thailand's entertainment industry remains unchanged.

It remains vibrant, glamorous, mudslinging, twisted, and business-driven.

As I quietly go about my business, I can't help but sigh at the latest gossip:

"Top actress secretly flies overseas to cure life-threatening disease..."

When I shift my attention from the book I'm reading to the clock on the wall, it's 11 p.m. The lights are still bright inside this house, and I'm still awake. I flip through the pages of the latest book I bought from the Strand Bookstore's outdoor section last week. After a while, my wait is over.

.

***Rrrrrrrr!***

As soon as my phone's screen comes on, I grab it without hesitation. As the other person on the line notices my sour face and my silence, a small smile appears on her face.

.

**[Did you visit the cemetery again today?]**

**"You know everything, huh?"**

**[Did you cry?]**

I shake my head.

**"Catherine proChapter :ly doesn't want me to mourn too long."**

**[I apologize for not being there... Your eyes are welling up with tears again.]**

In the middle of her lecture, Catherine suffered a heart attack. They were unable to save her life. Her unexpected passing shocked and saddened me.

The funeral took place last month.

Her entire family and circle of friends were present. I spent weeks calling and crying with Phi Ploy. Catherine's one-month anniversary is today, so I went to her grave to lay flowers.

**"I understand that you have responsibilities."**

**[Then why are you giving me that grumpy expression?]**

**[You didn't call me yesterday, and you went missing this morning. It's already late, and you've just called me.]**

The eleven-hour time difference and great distance between us are the biggest challenges to our relationship. I am in New York, while she is in Thailand. When I'm looking at the moon, she's looking at the sun.

Only in the wee hours of the morning or the dark of night can we see each other's faces via our various communication devices.

**[I worked until late last night. I was so exhausted that I dozed off.]** Her lovely dimples are something I truly long for.

**"I thought you didn't accept acting work? Why did you have to work so late?"**

**[I have a lot of business-related tasks at hand. It's a little hectic right now.]**

I don't know what Phi Ploy is occupied with. She used to call me every day without fail. She used to fly to New York on a monthly or bimonthly basis.

However, these days she sometimes forgets to call me or is too exhausted to do so. On this occasion, she has already spent five months in Thailand without paying me a visit.... But I don't want to whine.

**"How is everything over there? I saw you in the news today: Top actress secretly flies overseas to cure life-threatening disease on many occasions. She stops accepting acting roles after her recuperation and disappears from the spotlight."**

Suddenly, the woman on the other side of the world goes from smiling to looking quite serious.

**[Pun. We need to talk... I know we've been through a lot together, and we've done our best, but do you really believe that a long-distance relationship can work?]**

**"I'm working in my ideal career. As for you, you still have a life to lead over there. We have feelings for each other and see each other occasionally, though not often enough. Isn't that enough?"**

**[While you're there, are you missing me?]**

I nod.

**[Have you ever felt so lonely that you thought you were going crazy?]** I nod again.

**[Do people make advances on you? Does anyone deserving of your consideration attempt to come between us?]**

I cannot deny it, so I nod once more.

**[I'm not there for you when you're happy or sad, right?]**

"But..."

**[Do you think that because of our distance, we don't know what's going on in each other's lives and find it difficult to connect? I'm talking about one thing, and you're talking about another. We're not invested in each other's stories because we don't know anything about them and weren't present. You're progressing along your chosen route, while I'm charting a separate course for my life. We changed. We know less and less about each other.]**

**"I have no problem with any of this. Why are you..."**

**[Pun... This is too difficult. This type of relationship does not work for me.]**

Doesn't work... Saying that is effortless for her.

I recall the day we made this decision two years ago. When asked if she was okay with everything, she responded in the affirmative. She accepted all of my requests.....

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***Slap!!***

On that day two years ago, a middle-aged woman slapped her own son in a New York hospital. She was overcome with rage, agony, fear, and worry.

'I've been going crazy since I got on the plane. I can't bear the thought of losing another child.'

'I'm sorry.'

"Ultimately, you harm your sister. Didn't I tell you to stop your behavior? Your sister is currently bearing the brunt of the consequences.'

'I'm really sorry.'

'Sorry? Is her pain lessened by your apology? Your sister takes excellent care of her body. You scarred her!'

'Come on, Mom. The surgeons here are very skilled. The stitches will be delicate and tiny.'

The woman smacked her son's shoulder hard while he gave her a dry smile. 'Isn't it already a blessing that Ploy is safe, Mom? I'm also worried sick about her... Let's go see her.'

Phi Ploy's mother flew to New York as soon as she received the news. She paced in front of the operating room for the entire time that Phi Ploy was unconscious.

However, she refrained from paying a visit once her daughter was conscious. She kept weeping and hitting her son.

As for me, I almost lost my mind when my lover appeared to stop breathing. I've never been more scared in my life. I didn't think a heart could stop beating so easily. As the cops took Phi Ploy out of the car, the thick red liquid stained the snow.

My clothes were splattered with dried blood as I stood in front of the operating room. I refused to let go of her hand until the moment when I absolutely had to.

Phi Oam and Phi Pay dashed in, terrified. Phi Pay hurriedly inquired about his sister's condition.

'She's still in the operating room. According to the doctor, the bullet missed vital organs, but she did sustain significant blood loss.'

The explosion caused an injury to Phi Pay's right arm, which required wrapping. Phi Oam was safe and scratch-free. The restaurant was gone. Six people were injured, including employees and customers.

Phi Pay stated that the bomb detonated only ten minutes after my departure, It was complete chaos. There were a lot of cops there.

They immediately checked the security camera and discovered that the bomber had entered with a bag just as I was leaving. After the bomb went off, they followed me to the Italian restaurant and then pursued me and Phi Ploy.

'I thought the cops had already apprehended them all.'

"These two escaped, according to the police. They were still searching for them. The two proChapter :ly waited for the situation to calm down before exacting their revenge on us. I gave them quite a bit of trouble.'

The Asian man, whom Phi Ploy struck with her car, sustained serious injuries. The Mexican driver who had been chasing us was eventually apprehended by the police.

There were numerous dents and scratches on the BMW sports car that Phi Ploy rented. The damage to the body was irreparable. Fourteen additional vehicles sustained damage.

Fortunately, nobody was shot during the incident. Phi Ploy's exceptional driving skills, which she used to attract police attention, contributed to the firearm chase becoming headline news in the United States.

Phi Ploy stayed in the United States for nearly a month after her full recovery. It felt like our honeymoon period. Phi Pay stated that living in the same house with us made him feel....

'I don't like this.'

One day, the male owner of the house expressed his sentiment.

'What don't you like now?" Phi Ploy asked.

'I see a lot of similarities developing between the two of you.'

At first, I didn't give much thought to his words. But after observing us, I realized he was correct. I unconsciously adopted a few habits from Phi Ploy. In a similar vein, Phi Ploy displayed gestures that mirrored my own.

During Phi Ploy's recovery, we had the opportunity to discuss, fight, and resolve our differences. As a result of our mutual understanding, we began to reacquaint ourselves with one another.

Finally, the day had come when we were required to part ways with one another.

She inquired about how I envisioned our relationship progressing. She disliked the idea of being her brother's wife's lover. Nonetheless, I refused to divorce Phi Pay and return to Thailand.

'I decided to stay in Thailand and throw my life away because of you before. As a result, I had nothing left for myself after I lost you.'

Phi Ploy's calm expression conveyed nothing. However, I could see the anguish in her eyes.

I don't want to go back to Thailand. It is here that I flourish.

Phi Ploy nodded to acknowledge my decision.

"I recognize that wanting to stay here and also having you in my life is selfish. But could we give it a shot? Could we try a long-distance relationship?"

I have my own dreams, as does she. I love her, and I believe I am strong enough to handle it.

At the time, she agreed to every one of my requests.

...Yet, today,

***'..A long-distance relationship is too difficult. This type of relationship does not work for me anymore.'***

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# Chapter : Epilogue

"Here are all of the contract documents, Miss Ploy. The lawyer you hired over there has already handled everything."

"Thank you, Phi Ji. What about the chef? Was there any update from Phi Pay?"

"That has also been taken care of."

A long-distance relationship? That's complete nonsense.

Did Pun honestly believe I rejected all the presents, companionship, relationships, and sex in favor of eating and sleeping in my room alone?

*"How about phone sex? Do you enjoy that?"*

*"You mean... something like eating plain rice while looking at a picture of mackerel?"*

*"Why don't you try it first? Let me start."*

It was nice. However... our current setup is not working for me.

I don't get an embrace when I'm worn out and in need of a pick-me-up. I can only see my lover's face on a small screen and hear her voice through a communication device for a few minutes each day.

I miss her intensely, yet I am unable to physically touch her. Despite being surrounded by people, I am experiencing a profound sense of loneliness.

When I enjoy a good film, I long to engage in a discussion with Pun. Whenever I find a great restaurant, I can't wait to take her there for some tasty cuisine. We tell each other about our days to keep each other updated and reduce the gap between us.

Nevertheless, this type of relationship is fragile. The differences in location, environment, and social circles make it difficult to empathize with one another. To keep our conversation going, we listen to each other and try to engage.

Having said that, I am not familiar with the coworker or anyone else she was referring to. Every time I see the kid, she changes. Her surroundings push her to grow and thrive. She has become calmer and more mature.

Over the last two years, I've made frequent flights between Bangkok and New York. It has brought home to me how much joy being in her presence brings me and how much separation makes me long for her company.

My heart feels ripped apart, even though it wasn't. While it does not kill me, it does cause me to lose my balance. Despite having a full heart. I feel unfulfilled. I miss her gentle gaze.

I long for the feeling of her warm skin against mine as we cuddle up under the blanket on rainy nights, completely undressed. Life is fleeting, and I don't want to waste any precious moments.

So I decided to be straightforward with her.

*".... A long-distance relationship is too difficult. This type of relationship does not work for me anymore."*

Even when we fought, we used technology as our medium... When we wanted to stop talking, we simply turned off our screens.

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"Have you purchased the ticket for me, Phi Ji?"

With one request, I stand at JFK Airport in the evening five days later, just to see the grumpy expression on the person waiting for me as soon as I walk out of the gate. Pun has been harboring her displeasure with me because I've been calling her less frequently lately.

The fact that we were apart for longer than normal on my most recent trip to Bangkok has irritated her. Still, she holds on to her embrace. Despite our recent disagreement, she plants a passionate kiss on my lips as we stand at the airport.

"I don't understand why this doesn't work. The farther we are apart, the more we miss each other. Isn't that nice?"

Paytai places all my belongings in the trunk before Pun and I climb into the backseat, allowing him to act as our chauffeur.

Just like every time my brother picks me up from the airport, Pun reaches for the rearview mirror and turns it to face up, while I hand over the headphones to him. I make sure the music is turned up so loudly that he can't hear anything.

"Don't you think it's torture to go five months without kissing me?"

My wild kid puckers her lips, sensing she is in control. The backseat is roomy, but she still leans her delicate body against mine. She also intertwines her fingers with mine as our hands rest on my lap. She's clearly asking for tenderness.

"Did you suffer because you were unable to kiss me?"

Our lives are like lit candles. It is getting shorter by the day. It is not a matter of distance. What bothers me is that I miss the times when we could be happy and sad together.

"Not so much that I need to invite you to have sex over Skype."

My response brings piercing eyes and a resentful expression to her face. We did that several times, all initiated by Pun.

"Don't you like it?"

"....."

I maintain my composure and conceal my grin. For that reason, Pun removes my scarf and plants mischievous kisses on my neck.

"Do you miss me?"

She is grinding her lips on my neck more vigorously.

"My brother is sitting right in front of us."

"Answer me then... Do you miss me?"

Her voice is gentle, but her teeth are sharp as they scrape against my skin. Her hands refuse to remain still.

"Phi Ploy... Do you like my shoes?"

She tries to seduce me by dragging the tip of her shoe against my shin. Pun has become increasingly adept at this. She knows what arouses me and does it repeatedly.

She always makes her desires known by enveloping me in her arms and gently pressing her face against my flesh. Then she turns up the heat to the point where I lose control.

"Why do you think I flew across the oceans to be here?"

"I want a direct answer."

"You're an adult. You should be able to think for yourself. Also, we're currently in Phi Pay's car. You have to stop seducing me."

"I will not stop."

"The gossip about me kissing a woman at the airport during my last trip here has just subsided. Rumors about my terminal illness have recently spread. I don't wish to add another piece of gossip about me having an affair with my brother's wife in the backseat of his car to the list."

Pun gives up trying to seduce me and laughs. However, she persists in resting her body on me.

"I really miss you... Are you exhausted? Do you feel sleepy?"

"I'm hungry."

"Would you rather eat at your favorite restaurant or at home?"

"I'd like to try a new restaurant and walk around the town with you... Is there anything specific you're craving today?"

My kid straightens up in her seat and reaches over to remove Paytai's headphones. I can't help but smile as she gives him a command.

"Please drop us off in town, Mr. Chauffeur. I would like to go on a walk with my lover. You are free to return home immediately with Phi Ploy's belongings."

"The headphones and the rearview mirror are already offensive. Are you referring to me now as your chauffeur? How about some respect?"

"Please drop your sisters off in town. I will buy you some pastries. What are you craving. Phi Pay?"

"Too late."

After a brief discussion about our arrangement, the AirPods are reinserted into Phi Pay's ear, and our destination is changed to Manhattan. Phi Pay drops us off in Soho and advises us not to stay out too late before driving away.

"Where are we going?"

"We'll go eat rabbit together... an entire rabbit. Pun whispers excitedly to me as she drags me along.

But... I find the description of "an entire rabbit" alarming rather than exciting.

Fortunately, the menu is not as frightening as I had imagined. This is our first in-person meal in five months, with the same food, location, and Western ambiance.

I can't help but notice the sparkles in Pun's eyes as she speaks. Pun tells me stories with a tender voice and a smile on her face the entire time. When she laughs, her cheeks flush with happiness.

"Where do you want to go tomorrow? Should we go out to enjoy some street food? There is an abundance of delicious food available at reasonable prices. Or perhaps you prefer a more elegant setting... I've been exploring town and noting down many hidden gems. There are so many places I would like to visit with you..."

"I miss you, Pun."

Just hearing that simple phrase brings tears to the kid in front of me.

Prior to my flight here, we had a small argument. I knew Pun was disappointed that I hadn't flown over in a long time and that I'd been calling her less frequently.

Pun, on the other hand, only recently discovered that I had spent four months selling my shares in my shoe company, which I had co-founded with Min. I also stopped accepting acting roles that required me to spend extended periods of time in Thailand.

In addition, I worked with my team to devise a strategy for managing my apparel business remotely. Everything related to the business has been taken care of, but there are still unresolved issues with my lover.

"*I don't want you to abandon the life you lead there in order to be here with me. I know there are things you want to do there."*

"*I am going to open a restaurant there. I've already got everything set up. I've already formed a team. I want to have both my career and you."*

"*Please assure me that this is not a hasty decision, Phi Ploy"*

*"Did you think I did nothing in the last two years while visiting you? Did you think that I went out to eat, drink, and walk around town without researching or collecting data?"*

I gathered data and developed a strategic plan for the location, menu, flavor, and all aspects of the management process. After that, I told Paytai to look for a space that was ready to lease and hired a lawyer to take care of all the paperwork.

I've put together the core team, which includes the manager, executive chef, sous chef, and all the other important positions. I had some help getting everything set up from my best friend, who owns several Italian restaurants in Thailand.

I also benefited greatly from my brother's advice since he owns a restaurant in Brooklyn. Did Pun truly believe that I was in Thailand for 4-5 months, idly sitting around doing nothing? If I want something... I go for it.

"*I traded a good card for a better one... I have everything I need, Pun. The only thing missing from my life is having you by my side."*

*"I love you, Phi Ploy."*

*"Please say those words to me in person."*

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**"I love you, Phi Ploy."**

"How is telling me that in a cab romantic?"

The lengthy flight had left me too tired to stroll hand in hand around town after dinner as planned. Additionally, I'm a little inebriated from the alcohol I enjoyed.

We decided to use public transportation, specifically a yellow cab, to go straight home. But traffic is keeping us on the road.

"You said you wanted to enjoy the scenery on our way back."

I vaguely recall saying that in front of the restaurant. However, once I get in the warm car with a partition between the driver and passenger, I no longer want to do that.

Her skin is delicate. Her scent is familiar. The smell of her hair is intoxicating. My lover's voice is... much more captivating than anything else.

"You're intoxicated... Your eyes are as sweet as honey."

Intoxicated? I can still walk straight. The alcohol merely impairs my ability to control my emotions, especially when I am aroused...

"Phi Ploy..."

She lets me nestle my face against her body. However, when I slip my fingers under her shirt. she immediately grabs them with her hand.

"Phi Ploy... Wait."

"Huh?"

Even though I can hear her, my nose remains buried in her skin, and my hands continue to roam all over her body.

"Phi Ploy, listen to me."

Pun lifts my face from her body with both of her hands, allowing us to lock eyes.

"Please take a deep breath for me."

I take a deep breath as she says.

"Done."

I then bury my face in her breasts again.

"Phi Ploy. Focus on me first."

I voluntarily meet her request by looking up at her face.

"I also really miss you. However, we are currently in a taxi. You wouldn't want me to go all the way right in front of the driver, would you?"

"No."

Even though I respond to her right away, my lips and hands continue to move. Soon after, though, I come to my senses and stop myself. I pause to regain my composure, then whisper to her,

"How long will it be until we get home?"

"Your tone of voice can cause serious harm when aroused."

Pun bends over and kisses me, which sets everything in motion. I need to move away from her because I'm losing control of my breathing.

"Answer me... How long before we get home?"

"With the current traffic, it will take some time."

I shake my head in disapproval without a second's hesitation.

"That's too long for me."

"If you're going to be like this... I will be unable to control myself as well." Without thinking twice, I swipe my credit card to cover the cab fare. We run across the street, giggling, to a luxurious hotel. Pun pulls at my hand, trying to stop me.

"This place is expensive." "I'm very wealthy." I reply.

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We're in a luxurious, private, secluded suite.

Pun smothers me with kisses. Our longings are communicated through our body language.

"I'm in the market for a home. Once we have our own place, let's move out of Phi Pay's house."

"I'll help you pay for it. However, we won't be able to move out until I officially receive my citizenship... and divorce him."

I'm frustrated. However, Pun's soothing words and wet kisses help me forget about my frustrations.

"I miss you. I also love you. Unfortunately, you'll have to play the role of mistress for the time being."

"I would like to relocate my shoe collection from Thailand as well... However, I possess an excess of them. There isn't enough space at Phi Pay's house."

"We can gradually relocate them during our visits to Thailand."

"I've already sold more than half of my collection. I only kept the ones I absolutely couldn't part with."

I say that with almost a sob.

"I'll buy you a new pair tomorrow. We can go pick one up at the shop."

She kisses the back of my hand.

"I will also get you a shoe rack. Please call me 'Daddy'."

"Let's have a proper meal with my parents the next time we visit Thailand. Even though my relationship with my mother is strained, I still want her to know who you are."

"Who am I?"

Pun flips me over, leaving me flat on my back with my hair splattered across the pillow. My skin is flushed pink from her kisses.

"You're my wild kid. I'm your Daddy."

"Who is the Daddy today? I'm on top of you as we speak... Are you completely worn out? Your trip must have exhausted you. Let me do it for you today."

I tremble and moan, nearly out of breath. The sensation of her lips caressing my breast and her face pressing against my body has completely enchanted me, to the point where I can barely open my eyes.

"Do you like it?"

The small butterfly tattooed under my ribcage over the bullet scar is kissed repeatedly while Pun's hands give me pleasure all over my body.

"When did you get this tattoo? I like it."

"Kiss me harder."

"We should visit our respective families in Thailand the next time we return. I'd like to introduce my lover to my family as well."

...... Sensual touches. Overcome with emotions. Fused with love.

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**---------THE END-------**

# Chapter : Japanese Movie

Phi Ploy enjoys seeing me in shoes... What I mean is that she would rather I not wear anything but shoes. If it's a gorgeous pair of high heels, her eyes will light up.

She will then spread my legs and exhaust me with all of her resources, leaving me with just enough energy to utter the phrase "Phi Ploy."

Phi Ploy loves it when I call her name. If I do it in my sweetest tone of voice, I can make any request. I can dictate whether we proceed or pause

Phi Ploy does not like it when I bite her hard. Her preferences do not include any form of pain. However, she takes pleasure in having me nibble, scrape, and leave marks on her skin by sucking it hard.

There is just one condition. All of the marks must be in places she can conceal with her clothing.

Despite this, I continue to leave marks on her neck with my lips.

Whenever we visit Thailand, the sight of me rummaging through the white box in her dressing room always makes Phi Ploy uneasy.

On one occasion, she woke up with her wrists bound to the bedposts, and she was visibly anxious. She immediately clenched her legs and threatened to never speak to me again if I inserted the vibrator from Japan into her body.

"Pun, Please. Please don't give me that insane look while you hold that kind of device in your hand."

I was amused by how I could make her nervous, so much so that I dropped what I was holding. On the floor beside the bed, the toy was wriggling and making noises.

"I just want to try something new."

I retrieve the remarkable toy from the floor and climb onto her naked body, which is still bound at the wrists.

"Try it on yourself! Untie me. Now!"

The gorgeous woman made a full-scale threat toward me.

"But it's your toy."

"You can take the entire box. Take it to your room and play."

"I want to play with you."

I pretended to look at her with a tilt of my head, emotionally charged.

"Pun. Let me go."

She went from a nervous to a seductive tone. Her honey-sweet eyes met mine, and she ran her foot up my leg, arousing me.

"...Please."

I restrained her by locking her ankle, even though I approved of what she was doing. I spread her legs and slid between them.

"I will. But after this."

"Pun. Don't!"

The seduction had given way to anxiety and frustration.

"Shhh..."

Gently placing my finger on her wet lips, I crouched down and murmured softly into her ear.

"Dear Phi Ploy, please refrain from being too loud."

I flashed her a smile... before planting gentle kisses on her upper eyelid neck, abs and the inside of her thigh.

"Rest assured, I will only use it outside. If it isn't to your liking, I will stop."

I wasn't requesting her permission. I was promising her that I would prioritize her feelings over all else.

"Pun! At the very least, change it to a less scary one!!!"

Phi Ploy exclaimed and retreated from me, insisting that the luminous purple vibrator whirling wildly in my hand was strictly off limits.

"Well, since you're new to this, I'll change it. Please give me a few minutes."

I slipped into the dressing room for a brief moment, and I quickly emerged with a cute pink toy. I pressed the power button with a playful smile and gently pressed it against Phi Ploy's skin.

I then waited for her body to familiarize itself with the toy. Her brows tightened immediately.

"How is it? Is the vibration too intense?"

The person I questioned bit her lip and shook her head. After a brief moment, I noticed her become more relaxed.

"I'll increase the intensity, okay?"

My question was not answered. Phi Ploy responded by moving her body freely in accordance with her emotions. Her rapid breathing turned me on.

"Pun, move it up a little."

"Here?"

"A bit to the left."

She jerked and twisted immediately after I fulfilled her request.

"Is it good?"

"Ahhh..."

"Do you like it?"

"Ummm..."

I didn't receive any response from her.

"How do you feel?"

"Ohhh...."

Since I did not receive any reply from her, I decided to turn off the vibrator.

"Why did you stop!?"

The fact that she raised her head and gave me a demanding stare made me want to tease her more.

"You wouldn't answer me. How can I tell if you are kimochi (happy)?"

The person on the bed sighed and frowned.

"You watched a Japanese movie this time?"

"Yes."

I looked at her with sparkling eyes and a smile on my face.

"While you're at it, why not cosplay?"

"It's expensive... So, did you kimochi?"

Phi Ploy's expression was one of amusement mixed with sobs.

"I'll tell you if I don't like something."

"So, what did *Ahhh, Umm*, and *Ohhh* mean exactly?"

She spanked my buttocks with her leg, irritably.

I laughed, lifted her leg, and kissed it softly.

"I'll test the rhythmic pulse mode."

I explored every vibration mode available. I touched here, stimulated there, and observed her reaction. It was clear from her facial expression, voice, breathing, and tense muscles that the person who adamantly refused to engage with this sex toy... genuinely enjoyed it.

"Which mode was your favorite?"

The pink-flushed individual no longer responded to me. She is unaware of the extent to which I derive pleasure from listening to her speak as she lets out sweet moans. So, as I watched her inner thighs tighten, I took the vibrator off her.

"Pun!!"

She was nearly screaming at me.

Frustrated and gasping for air, she let out a scream. She glared at me and attempted to free her wrists from the bedposts. She was really frustrated at that point.

I believed that gentleness would help her feel less frustrated. Accordingly, I climbed up on top of her and kissed her all over. I firmly pressed my lips against the butterfly tattoo that lay beneath her ribcage. Cuddled up to her, I nibbled on her damp flesh. With tenderness, I asked her. "Did you enjoy it a lot? You were screaming at me."

"Stop asking questions."

She was fuming. I loved it.

"Use your mouth to engage me in another activity... **only your mouth**."

She emphasized.

"But I would like to use my hands as well."

I was gently running my fingers up her thigh. I softly stroked the wet, hot spot.

Phi Ploy sighed, trying to control her emotions. She appeared to be about to kill someone. At that point, she encircled my waist with her legs.

"Kiss me hard. And feel free to do as you please. Do not stop unless I instruct you to."

*...I found her....adorable.*

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# Chapter Special Big Family

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"Shhh."

"Hush..."

*Two... That would be my guess.*

The joyful murmurs of the unknown visitors are drawing nearer to me in the dark.

"You must kiss right here... for the sleeping beauty to awaken. Also, you must be extremely gentle."

I feel a gentle touch on my cheek as the material that supports my body shifts after that piece of advice.

*A delicate scent... reminiscent of milk.*

"The princess is not awake."

A small voice whispers to someone close to my ears. The words are not very clear.

"Put some heart into it, Nong Petch. Give it another shot. Let the princess know how much you love her."

Very instantly, I sense a soft touch and the weight of a light body resting on me. I detect a mild, sugary shampoo fragrance as well as a milk scent. And then, without ceasing, gentle caresses envelop my face.

*...I need peace.*

My brows tense, and my eyelids open.

The first thing I notice is crystal-clear eyes that are beaming at me with joy.

"The princess is awake, Auntie Pun. Giggle... HAHAHA."

The small body continues to wiggle and embrace me. Less than a palm's length separates my face from the two-year-old girl's.

"Auntie Ploy... Auntie Pun tied my hair for me,"

The girl tells me. She leans down to reveal the bun in the center of her head.

"That bun?...What are you two up to?"

I cast a drowsy glance at the woman standing on the side of the bed. I pull up the blanket to cover my naked body before stretching and wrapping my arms around the child. I then snuggle my nose against her cheeks to take deep breaths, which causes her to giggle even more.

The girl tries to push me away with both hands because she tickles.

"I've come to wake up the sleeping beauty, Auntie Ploy."

"Are you here to awaken the sleeping beauty?"

After my question, I resume wrestling with the little kid. Screams and laughter erupt simultaneously as the little girl tries to escape from my embrace.

"Is Phi Pay already here?"

"Everyone is downstairs."

The woman standing next to the bed responds with a smile.

"Phi Pay said that Nong Petch has been hounding him to take her to see you early this morning."

"Does she know I brought her toys?"

My lover responds with a smile.

I wrap the blanket around my body, letting my shoulder-length hair fall naturally, and carry the child in my arms.

"Did you miss me, Petch?"

"I miss you, Auntie Ploy."

She gives a clever response, despite the fact that she can't speak clearly yet.

"How much do you miss me?"

"This much..."

Petch drags her voice, arms outstretched as far as they will go, before rewrapping her arms around my neck and leaning her face against mine. Her plea for tenderness is so endearing that it makes me want to give her a tight hug.

"Auntie Pun told me you have a huge Elsa doll."

"So... Are you here because you want Elsa or because you miss me?"

"I'm here to see you... Daddy told me that you will return today."

Her short arms are encircling my neck. Her nose is resting against my cheeks.

"Auntie Ploy smells lovely."

"Kids love you."

The woman next to me observes as she turns to face me with knowing eyes.

We exit our room after I get dressed, with Petch clinging to my waist like a little monkey.

"Let's head downstairs to see what I've brought you... Anyone up for some Thai snacks? Raise your hands!"

"Yeah! I want to eat some Thai snacks, Auntie Ploy."

Paytai and Pun had to finalize their divorce earlier than anticipated two years ago due to Phi Ann's pregnancy and the impending birth of Petch. Pun's green card was enough to allow her to apply for US citizenship. The process just took longer.

Once we've reached the bottom of the stairs, I let my niece walk by herself. The room is filled with the joyful chatter of three guests.

I'm surprised to see Prang standing next to Paytai with a long knife in her hand. She is concentrating on slicing smoked salmon thinly.

Jirapat, the lead actress, is sitting on a couch. When she sees me, she stands up and shouts,

"Happy birthday, Phi Ploy!"

She shouts so loudly that everyone looks at me and follows suit. The little one likewise leaps up and down, extending her hands into the air and shouting,

"Happy Birthday, Auntie Ploy! I've got a birthday present for you."

Even though her words are a bit muddled, her message is flawless.

"Do you have a birthday present for me?"

I smile at my niece and wave my hands at the adults whose childish behavior elicits cute aggression.

"Stop clapping."

"Geez... We're just glad the sleeping beauty has woken up."

The leading actress, who is seated on the couch, says this amusingly while laughing. Because of this, everyone starts giving me teasing smiles.

I turn a blind eye to them all and walk to the refrigerator to pour myself a glass of orange juice before returning to the center of the room.

"Phi Ann is not here with you, Phì Pay?"

"The restaurant is packed, so she won't be able to join us. She has asked me to invite you to a meal later."

I acknowledge Phi Pay's response with a slight nod... We've been quite busy lately. My flagship restaurant has been doing well and generating satisfactory revenue since the first year.

Consequently, I extended an invitation to Paytai and Phi Oam, asking them to assist me in running the businesses. Being able to rely on a family member who is familiar with the industry is preferable to bringing in complete strangers.

Not only can we grow together, but I have complete trust in him. This has allowed me to spend more time enjoying life by traveling and hanging out. Currently, we own three branches.

However, we are still in the process of assembling a strong chef team for our newest location. which required Phi Ann to visit the restaurant to provide assistance.

"When did you arrive, Jay, Prang... I expected you to be here tomorrow.

Weren't you two in San Francisco when I was getting ready to leave Thailand?"

"We arrived this morning. Pun has already assisted us in settling down in our room while you were in a deep sleep."

"Don't tease her, Prang. She's a year older now. Crossing time zones has a significant impact on the body. She cannot recover as quickly as we do... How old are you this year, Phi Ploy?"

"Ah. Jay, thank you for defending me... Just allow me to say this. You won't remain at your current age for eternity."

I want to practice my debate techniques with the lead actress for a little longer, but...

"Auntie Ploy..."

A tiny hand is pulling on my pants.

"Right. All of your presents are in another room. Come on, let's go over there."

However, before I can move, the doorbell rings.

Pun walks over to greet our new guests. Screams come from outside, and then Pun's whole gang shows up.

Best, Chakrit, and Hwan-jeab walk in and greet everyone.

"Have you all eaten? I hope it's not too late. I'm starving."

"We haven't eaten yet, Jeab. The food is nearly ready. You're just in time."

"Hello, Phi Ploy. It's been a long time since we've met. You're just as stunning as ever. You have eternal beauty, as if you have consumed an entire young lady "

Following Best's greeting. laughter erupts in the background. Even my niece, who doesn't understand anything, laughs along.

"Whose face is constantly changing, like yours, Best?"

The male half of the duo is once again relishing in verbal sparring with his female counterpart.

"I had no idea you were all coming to New York."

"Pun invited us. She said, 'Free accommodation', so we quickly packed up and came."

Best laughs as she says that.

"Actually, we've been wanting to pay you a visit. When we received this offer and realized it was also your birthday, we decided it would be an excellent time to come."

"So, have you explored the city yet? Pun, treat your friend to a meal tomorrow at my restaurant."

"Not yet. We arrived last night, spent the night in town, and took a cab here first thing this morning."

The person saying that has looked at my breasts for the fourth time since we met today.

"Pun told me you wanted to touch my boobs, Best."

Best smiles as soon as I inquire. She then whispers with bright eyes.

"Can I?"

This kid is extremely entertaining. She is straightforward and assertive, the complete opposite of Pun.

"Yes, you can."

I can practically hear Best thinking, "EHEHEH,"

As she reaches for my breast with both hands. But...

"No!"

I feel something sliding under my armpits. From behind, Pun hugs me and uses her arms and hands to cover my breasts.

"Go touch your husband's boobs, Best. This is my lover."

"Arghhhhhh. Pun, why are you being so possessive? Phi Ploy gave me permission."

"Phi Ploy, do you want to show Nong Petch her gifts?"

Pun didn't ask, expecting an answer from me. Pun quickly shoves me aside and forces me to stand behind her.

"Listen to me, Best. Phi Ploy is merely using this body. I am the true owner of Phi Ploy's body. And I do not allow you to touch any part of my lover."

"I just want to test it out and see how it feels."

"Go test somewhere else..."

Bickering ensues between the two best friends. Teens' energy and enthusiasm have permeated the space. Everyone can't help but laugh at their antics and banter.

I step away from our guests, taking Petch's small hand in mine. We walk along in this four-bedroom suburban house, past a floor-to-ceiling window that overlooks the swimming pool and a wall decorated with various plants that we added along our fence after purchasing this house.

Every single one of our guests couldn't get over how serene and soothing this space is thanks to the plant wall.

It also provides us with privacy from passersby while not making us feel confined... During the process of purchasing our home, we agreed on the importance of warmth and privacy.

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*"I believe a five-bedroom house is excessively large. I prefer a cozy, warm environment. Given that there are just the two of us, a single bedroom will suffice. What are we going to do with the other four?"*

*"I prefer a spacious home. I want a work area with a complete set of furniture so you can have your own workspace in our room. This can be our room. I'll knock down the walls in the other two bedrooms and convert them into dressing rooms. You are free to use the other two as you see fit. Or perhaps we want to have children someday."*

*My conversant rolled her eyes in my direction... Yes, that's how far we've come.*

*"Phi Ploy. We can not make Chapter :ies, in addition, this house is extremely expensive."*

*We were arguing in Thai. Our American broker simply flashed a confused smile.*

*"But I really like the spacious master bedroom in this house. The bathroom is also very spacious... We can keep the other two rooms for guests. Plus, from this balcony, you can enjoy a beautiful view. As we make love, you can take in the scenery from behind me."*

*"But you like to close your eyes right before we finish. You wouldn't be able to enjoy the scenery... What about the other one we looked at earlier, the four-bedroom one? Both the master bedroom and the bathroom are quite spacious. I could tell you liked it based on the look on your face. The space isn't so large that it feels lonely. I wouldn't have to walk all over the house looking for you. There's also a swimming pool in the backyard. We can make love in the swimming pool."*

*"You like that one? But the fence is only shoulder-high. If we do it in the pool, our neighbors will be able to see us."*

*"We can raise the fence or plant trees to obscure the view. It feels cozy there."*

*'Then... I'll think about how to address the fence height issue."*

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Reminiscing about that day brings a small smile to my face as I guide my niece to the room where I left her presents last night. Pun has most likely already unpacked and organized my belongings, as all I see in the corner of the room are boxes containing Petch's gift from Thailand.

"Let's have a look and see which one you like."

After embracing my thigh, the little girl quickly runs to the boxes. While Petch is busy sorting through her presents, I settle into an armchair.

"I remember feeling the same extreme joy whenever I got gifts when I was a kid."

The person I was thinking of has come to join Petch and me.

As the girl eagerly grabs the items from the boxes and rushes over to show them to Pun and me, we can hear a chorus of "*Wow*," "*EHEH*," and "*Ohhhh*" floating around.

"Can I show this to Dad?"

"Let's take them all. They're all for you."

My niece is holding dolls and toys designed for girls in both of her arms.

"Can you carry all of them?"

"I can."

Petch replies cheerfully. After that, she dashes out the door with most of the gifts in one hand and a large doll dragged behind her in the other.

I hear laughter and giggles, followed by someone asking the little girl, "Why did you drag Phi Elsa like that?"

Then Pun stands up to shut the door and returns to sit next to me.

"Have you got a headache?"

"Just a bit."

I rest my head on Pun's shoulder as I respond.

Whenever i fly across continents to clear up some work in Thailand and then straight back to New York, I usually end up with jet lag for at least a day.

"Would you like to take some medication?"

"......" I shake my head.

"Nong Petch wanted to come see you since last night, but Phi Pay was concerned that you wouldn't get enough sleep, so he came today instead."

"What I remember is that I did not get any rest last night. Except Nong Petch wasn't to blame."

Pun is teasing me with her gentle eyes.

"It was due to the kid named Pun... three rounds.... That's why I awoke feeling exhausted."

"You, too, were savage."

Pun's soft lips lightly touch my temple as her hand strokes my thigh.

"After you finished, you fell asleep. You have left me hanging since last night."

"What are you doing? Our niece could walk in on us."

"Haven't you noticed I locked the door?"

The kid tilts her head as she asks me that question.

"No one is going to walk in on us."

The warm hand has slipped beneath my shirt, caressing my breasts.

Snuggling up against my neck is the nose. The lips are whispering softly against my skin.

"How about another round? I only need 5 minutes. I will jolt you awake."

"I am not a sex machine. Please give me some time to rest."

"Okay, not right now."

Pun laughs, as if she's content with simply being able to tease me. She withdraws her naughty hand from beneath my shirt and envelops her arm around my waist. She then leans her face against my shoulder, close to my ear.

"I miss you. You spent nearly a month in Thailand this time."

"Is that the reason you pounced on me all night?"

"I was welcoming you home... Did any women approach you while you were in Thailand? I never got the chance to ask because I was too busy kissing you all night."

"Seated next to me is the one and only Thai woman I let touch my body."

I have refrained from engaging in any kind of interaction with models ever since our reconciliation. Even the ex who had been trying to reconcile with me for years, like Dream, had learned her limits since I moved to the United States.

Yet, I would never have offered her hope, even if Dream persisted. Pun has nothing to worry about, as it takes two to tango.

"It's another birthday. Can you not get old? I want us to be together for a very long time... I love you."

The sound of a knock on the door interrupts our passionate kiss, Knock Knock. The knock is followed by a little voice calling,

"Auntie Ploy, Auntie Pun..."

"Let's continue tonight."

I whisper softly, my lips gently brushing Pun's cheek. I smile sweetly at her as I open the door for Petch to enter. Tiny hands pull Pun and me out of the room, each gripping one of us tightly.

"Dad asked me to come get you to go eat."

"Okay. Let's eat."

I let the little one lead me by the hand, continuing to argue with my lover as we walk.

"You're aware that I love you, Pun?"

"I am not. You've got to tell me."

"But you know I would never allow just any woman to use my credit card to buy cosmetics, right?"

"You are welcome to charge me the entire amount plus interest. I will repay you in full."

"You will repay me?"

"Yes... with my body."

She responds in a whisper and giggles before heading off to help Prang set up the dining table.

I grab two cans of cold beer from the refrigerator, then approach the lead actress and hand her a can before taking a seat on the sofa next to her.

"I recall you coming down from your bedroom barefaced. I don't remember you wearing lipstick."

As she sips her beer, the woman seated next to me steals a quick glance in my direction.

"But now you have lipstick on your lips-the exact same shade as my lover's sister."

I simply lean on the backrest and cross my legs.

"You have a keen sense of observation when it comes to others. Can't I just apply a quick touch-up?"

"You may have overdone the touch-up. You've gone overboard with your lip liner."

Jay points her finger to the area above her upper left lip.

"Here... My advice is to wipe it off before Prang notices it. I have heard that Prang nearly grounded you with a slap after you admitted to playing a bit too rough with my lover's sister."

I gently dab the lipstick stain from above my lip with the back of my finger.

"I would have found another way to confess if I had known that was going to happen."

In an effort to conceal my amused grin, I take a sip of my beer and then glance over at the person in the kitchen who is receiving cooking lessons from Paytai.

"My Botox almost moved."

"I understand... I've been there."

We both laugh simultaneously.

"You know what? Back then... when we were drinking beer and talking like this on the day Pun came back to Thailand, I had no idea that we would end up becoming one big family."

Jay's lips' corners raise. She returns my gaze with a friendly one. Without saying anything, her expression clearly indicates that she understands and knows what I mean.

Following that, I enjoy a meal with familiar faces in a warm and lively setting.

I open my birthday gifts, which include a large bouquet from Pun, a scarf from Chakrit, a strange-looking home decor doll from Hwan-jeab, a sexy nightgown from Best, cosmetics from Jay, a complete set of kitchen knives from Prang, and chocolate from my niece.

I taste, wear, and use them all right away. With Paytai, I didn't even need to speculate. He handed me a book like he always does.

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After some guests have left and the rest have slept, the night becomes quiet. Someone enters my bedroom, holding a brand new red box. She motions for me to sit down, then kneels on the floor, extracting an exquisite pair of high heels from the box and delicately placing them on me.

"Happy Birthday, Love... Do you like it?"

"I'd prefer that you get up, come over here, and allow me to kiss you."

Pun does not require me to repeat it twice. She quickly rises and sits on my lap.

"I don't think you should wear anything but high heels tonight."

I stand up, gripping Pun's thighs and lifting her up with me. Pun kisses me passionately before I even reach the bed.

She slides open the placket of my shirt as she kisses and tastes my sensitive skin until it's wet, all the while pulling the shirt down.

The thick mattress sways as I lay Pun down and crawl up on top of her. I patiently allow her to explore my body with her tender gaze. My lover's hot breath indicates that she is fully aroused.

I can feel her emotions building as I delicately trace my fingers from her breasts to her inner thighs, all while she remains fully clothed.

I whisper softly against her flesh as I gently kiss her.

"Did an angel descend from heaven last night?"

I gently caress her delicate earlobe with my tongue as I nibble her delicate flesh.

"Tonight... please allow me to return my angel to paradise."

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**---------THE END-------**

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