

# Chapter 1: Khun Phlengphin

## In the United States

I opened the familiar bedroom door with a heavy heart, filled with anxiety. As I entered, I saw the owner of the room sitting on the sofa with her back turned to me. I walked closer from behind and found that she was reading a book.

A Braille book...

Since I hadn't controlled the sound of my footsteps from the start, she stopped running her fingers over the raised dots of the book and greeted me.

"Nara?"

"Yes," I responded before walking around to stand in front of her, even though it wasn't necessary—she wouldn't be able to see me anyway.

"Is something wrong?" She smiled faintly. Even though her eyelids were open, her sight was completely nonexistent. That was the reality for Khun Phleng.

Phlengphin, a Thai businesswoman and millionaire residing in Washington State, USA, had inherited her wealth from her parents, who had passed away long ago. She still had a team of loyal servants who took care of her. Unlike other wealthy women, Phleng was completely blind. And even though she should require special care, she didn't. She could move around as if she had sight, was highly knowledgeable, and possessed a kind and generous nature. She was so good-hearted that even someone as selfish as me felt ashamed every time she showed me kindness.

And because she was such a kind-hearted person, many men—of all types and backgrounds—wanted to take advantage of her.

That was why I had to be here with her.

"Can we get a divorce, Khun Phleng?"

"..."

I said it! I finally said it!

I had spoken the words I had been holding in for so long. But Phleng didn't react at all. Her expression remained unreadable, and I hated that.

"If we're being precise... we should just burn the marriage certificate and call it done."

"What do you mean!?"

"Our marriage isn't real," Phleng said, chuckling dryly.

I blinked in confusion, completely lost at her words.

"The marriage certificate we publicized—it's fake."

"What!?" I gasped in shock. Phleng put her book down on the small wooden table in front of her before standing up.

"We were never truly married. So, there's no need for a divorce."

"..."

"Where are you planning to go, Nara?"

The sadness and concern in her voice made my heart ache. And when I saw her face, now tinged with loneliness after I voiced my intentions, the guilt hit me even harder. But what else could I do? I wanted to live my own life —not hide under the protection of Khun Phleng forever. It was time to return to Thailand and start anew.

"I'm going back to Thailand, Khun Phleng."

"You don't want to stay with me anymore?" she asked, half-jokingly, forcing out a dry laugh. It was the expression of someone who wasn't used to confrontation but was still trying to persuade me. She probably knew it would be difficult to change the mind of someone as stubborn as me.

"I want to go home, Khun Phleng."

"What about your father? Aren't you afraid he'll come after you?"

"Oh, after getting all that money, I doubt he'll bother me anymore."

After I spoke, I looked at Phleng, expecting a response—only to remember that she couldn't see me. So I took a deep breath and waited for her answer. Her gaze, always unfocused and wandering, made it difficult to guess what she was thinking.

"If you go back to Thailand, you'll be happy, right?"

"Yes. I really want to go home," I confirmed firmly. Phleng nodded.

"Alright. I'll have Jared book your flight."

I let out a huge breath, feeling as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I had finally gotten what I wanted. Phleng must have heard my deep sigh, as she smiled faintly before reaching out toward me. I quickly took her hand, and she grasped my arm, gently stroking it. "So, tonight will be the last time I get to sleep next to you."

Damn it... I'm really about to cry.

...

**Five Months Earlier**

"Money! Money! Money!"

I sat and watched my father chant this word excitedly, filled with dreams of wealth, for a full ten minutes after seeing something in the newspaper.

We were Thai immigrants in a foreign country, and our lives were far from glamorous. My father worked for an underground gang in Washington. His job was to deliver drugs, collect bribes, handle transactions with customers, and deal with smugglers. My mother had abandoned us when I was born, leaving me to grow up constantly being dragged around gang hideouts.

The fact that I made it to adulthood without being assaulted by one of those criminals was a miracle in itself.

At one point, my father had a fleeting idea to send me to school, but that plan quickly fell apart because he was too obsessed with making money— by any means necessary.

Because I was a tough girl who refused to participate in his illegal activities, my father found me annoying. I had tried to escape once, hoping the Thai embassy would help me. But my father and his gang caught me before I could reach safety. They feared that if the police worked with the embassy, they would expose the gang's operations. In the end, all I could do was take on small jobs to earn my own money and manage the house. Sometimes, I even had to look after the children of the gang members, men who never thought to use protection or birth control.

And then, one day, we saw a small advertisement in the newspaper.

'Looking for a housekeeper. High salary. Immediate first payment of $80,000. Thai speakers preferred.'

For my father, it was an opportunity to make a fortune.

But for me, it was...

The Opportunity... to Leave This Place

"Money! Money! Money!" After seeing that ad, my father paced back and forth in our small, box-like home, shouting the word over and over.

Meanwhile, I packed a few belongings into my backpack, preparing to offer myself to the person who had written that column.

"Where are you going?"

I sighed at the man who saw money as everything—above education, experience, and wit—so much so that he couldn't even tell where I was headed.

"I'm going to the place that advertised for a housemaid. If you keep standing here shouting 'money, money, money' like this, someone else will apply first."

I rolled my eyes at my father in frustration. He was probably too busy dreaming about the eighty thousand dollars to consider that others would be just as interested in that money.

"You're right! Let's go!"

With that, he grabbed his motorcycle keys and rushed out of the room ahead of me. I stood for a moment, looking around my tiny home one last time. If I got chosen, I wouldn't have to return to this little hellhole. But if I didn't, I'd be back again.

The two of us rode straight to the address listed in the newspaper column, eventually stopping in front of a townhouse. It looked quite fancy. I doublechecked the address in the newspaper clipping before stepping forward to knock on the door, but my father quickly pushed me behind him.

"Wait, I'll knock," he said.

"Why?" I asked, confused.

"The first impression is important. I have to act like a warm, caring father looking after his daughter. I'll knock, then gently guide you inside with love."

I scrunched my face at his reasoning. With how scruffy and rough we both looked—more like underground thugs than anything else—was he seriously thinking about acting warm and loving now? If he really wanted to put on an act, he should've planned it better instead of coming up with it on the spot at the front door.

"Hello," a voice greeted.

As the door opened, we were met by a middle-aged butler, around forty years old, dressed neatly in a deep blue suit. He looked at us with a friendly expression.

"Uh... I'm... I'm here with my daughter to apply for the job in the newspaper column," my father stammered, jabbing his finger at the clipping he'd just snatched from my hand.

"Oh, please come in," the butler responded.

After he understood our purpose, he welcomed us inside. The interior of the townhouse was decorated like a proper home. My father and I followed him in, too distracted by the cleanliness and luxury of the place to watch where we were going.

"My name is Jared," the butler introduced himself. "I'm the housekeeper for Miss Phlengphin. Just to confirm, are you both Thai?"

"Yes," my father and I answered in Thai at the same time. Jared gave a small smile before leading us further inside, where we found about six or seven other candidates already waiting. They all turned in unison to look at us, the newcomers.

So, my potential employer's name is Phlengphin? What a beautiful name.

Everyone here was dressed neatly and professionally. Some even looked like they were applying for a flight attendant position rather than a housemaid job. And then there was me... old leather jacket, ripped jeans, worn-out sneakers. Yeah, no way I'd get this job.

"Why didn't you change into something better before coming here?" my father whispered.

"When have you ever given me money to buy new clothes?" I shot back without looking at him. He let out a frustrated sigh. Well, if he'd taken better care of me from the start, he wouldn't be so annoyed now.

"May I ask your name, miss?" Jared approached and asked me.

"My name is Nara," I answered.

"I just informed Miss Phlengphin that we have another applicant. She would like to meet you first."

With that, I was led down a hallway, my father cheering loudly from behind —only making my embarrassment worse.

Jared brought me to a room twice the size of the one I lived in with my father. Inside, bookshelves lined the walls, their wood intricately carved. At the center sat a young woman, waiting. The closer I walked, the clearer her face became. She was beautiful...

No, not just beautiful—stunning, like a leading actress on television.

So, this is Phlengphin...

Jared motioned for me to step inside alone before leaving. I stood awkwardly before her. Though her face was turned toward me, her eyes seemed distant. I couldn't tell what she was looking at.

"Hello," I greeted, testing the waters. It would be rude not to say anything. As soon as I spoke, she smiled and responded.

"Sorry, I didn't realize someone was standing in front of me. You didn't say anything, so I didn't greet you."

I didn't quite understand what she meant but replied anyway. "Okay."

"At first, I thought it was Jared standing there. What's your name?"

"Nara."

Before I could say more, the door behind me opened again. Jared entered and handed Phlengphin a sheet of paper. Peeking at it, I saw that it was blank except for small, raised dots all over it.

It looked like a type of writing I'd seen before...

Braille.

Was she blind?

"This is the list of today's applicants," Jared informed her. "I've already marked the ones you don't want."

He whispered a little more before leaving again, closing the door behind him. Once more, it was just the two of us.

"Are you visually impaired?" I asked, wondering if it was rude to say it so bluntly. But she didn't seem offended. Instead, she smiled sweetly.

"Yes. Surprised?"

"A little," I admitted with an awkward chuckle.

"Sorry, how old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"Three years younger than me, huh? So you're my little sister," she teased lightly. She seemed far more easygoing than I had expected. "Tell me why you're here, Nara."

"Uh..."

"I want the truth," she said, her voice firming slightly. "Almost everyone this morning fed me these over-the-top, formal answers. It was excessive. I didn't like it."

I took a deep breath before confirming, "You want the absolute truth?" "Yes, the most honest truth."

"I don't want to live with my father."

"..."

"I want a better life. Right now, I live surrounded by drugs, money laundering, scams, and street crime. I hate it, and no one can help me. If I could, I'd go back to Thailand and start over. But for now, the one thing I want most is to stop living like a stray dog."

I finished speaking. She remained silent. The air between us grew tense.

"What if the job I'm offering isn't actually as a housemaid?"

"..."

"The newspaper ad was fake. I wanted to personally meet and choose someone, so I posted it as a maid position to attract more applicants."

"As long as it has nothing to do with drugs, weapons, or illegal trade, I'm fine with it."

I answered without hesitation. Phlengphin smirked slightly. I wanted to believe that meant she liked me.

"You probably wouldn't have liked me much if you could see me," I added. "If you compared my outfit to the others, I wouldn't stand a chance. But when I do something, I take it seriously."

Because I was never taught how to sweet-talk my way into a job. I was never raised to speak politely or properly. All I knew was how to be blunt— even if it came out awkwardly.

"Taking care of a blind woman to make her life easier doesn't seem like such a bad job."

I should probably stop talking. Every sentence I said was a disaster.

"The actual work isn't that hard," Phlengphin chuckled before marking something on the Braille paper. If I had to guess, it was my name.

"I'll be in touch."

And because Khun Phlengphin said she would contact us, my father became extremely impatient, eager to get the money. He convinced himself that she would announce the results immediately and that I would be the chosen one.

"You have to be selected! I want that money!"

He had repeated this sentence to me at least a hundred times over the past three days since the interview. It was disheartening. I was his own child, yet he didn't want me at all.

But honestly, I had never been wanted since the day I was born. So why should I be upset about it now?

"Oh, and if you end up living with that rich woman, I hope you won't go snitching to the cops about my illegal business."

"Then stop doing illegal stuff, so we can end this."

"No."

His blunt response made me sigh in exasperation.

Knock, knock, knock.

The sound of knocking at the door echoed through the small room. I didn't think much of it, guessing it was probably Gloria or Nikki dropping off their kid for me to babysit while they went out to help their tenth husband roll some weed for sale.

"Shit, Nara! We have to run!" my father blurted out after peering through the peephole.

"What? Who is it?" I shoved him aside and took a look myself. Outside stood two massive Black men, whom I vaguely recognized.

"That's Tom and Mike. Why are you panicking? They're my friends." I reached to open the door, but my father stopped me.

"I stole money from them."

What!?

"Stop talking and open the window—we need to get out!"

BAM BAM BAM!

"I know you're in there, Mark! Open the damn door!"

Tom's angry voice boomed from the other side. Judging by his tone, he had already figured out that my father had stolen from him. Meanwhile, my father hurriedly shoved his backpack through the metal grating outside the window.

"MARK!"

This time, it was Mike's voice, followed by a loud bang on the door. Mike was usually known for his easygoing nature and goofy sense of humor. But this time, he was furious. He cursed my father's name like a man possessed. That meant they weren't here for a friendly visit.

"Give me back my money, you bastard!"

"So this is why you were so desperate to get money from Khun Phleng, huh?" I snapped at my father while helping him climb out the window.

"Stop talking and follow me!"

CRASH!

It was too late. The door burst open, and the two towering figures stormed in, their anger practically tangible.

"Trying to run, huh?"

Mike's strong hand yanked me back into the room just as I was about to follow my father out the window. I landed hard on the floor, pain shooting up my tailbone. I groaned and looked outside, but my father was already gone. I quickly got to my feet and peered out, secretly hoping he'd come back for me. Meanwhile, Tom and Mike were still swearing up a storm.

"Where did your father go, Nara?"

"I don't know. I just found out he stole from you!"

I tried to keep my voice steady, to reason with them. But it was useless. Tom and Mike advanced on me, forcing me back against the wall.

"Don't lie to us, Nara," Mike growled through gritted teeth.

"Don't—lie—to us!" Tom was less patient. His hand shot out, wrapping around my throat with brutal force. I choked, clawing at his hand, struggling to breathe.

"I—I don't... know..." I gasped, my hands frantically scratching and hitting him, trying to make him let go.

"We didn't want to hurt you, Nara."

Mike sighed, shaking his head with an almost regretful smile. Normally, I loved his smile when he was telling dumb American jokes. But this time, it was different.

"Your father will come back for you eventually."

"Yeah," Tom agreed, loosening his grip just slightly. "And we need to leave him a little message—so he knows not to mess with us again."

"No..." I trembled as Tom pulled out a small knife.

"Oh, sweetheart, I'm not gonna kill you."

SMACK!

The force of Mike's slap sent me sprawling onto the floor. My left cheek burned, a sharp, stinging pain radiating through my face. I struggled to gather my senses and looked up, hoping to plead for mercy.

"This is your warning." Mike pursed his lips and nodded at Tom, who still held the knife.

"Stop!"

A familiar voice rang out from the doorway.

I forced my blurry eyes to focus and saw Jared standing there, a small gun aimed at the two men.

Tom lowered his knife slightly and glanced at Mike.

"Who the hell is this scrawny old man?"

"Drop the knife and leave," Jared commanded, his voice unwavering. "Don't make me shoot."

"Oh, look at this. Mr. Skinny over here wants to play hero."

Before I could react, Tom lunged at Jared. The butler staggered backward, and Mike rushed in to join the fight. The three men grappled violently, but Jared was surprisingly skilled. He rammed his elbow into Mike's chest with enough force to send him crashing to the floor.

I knew I had to do something. I grabbed the small wooden table in front of the sofa and heaved it up before slamming it down on Tom with all my strength.

No matter how big and strong you are, getting hit with a thick slab of wood still hurts. Tom collapsed instantly. That just left Mike, who was still conscious but groaning in pain on the floor.

"Let him go, Jared," I said, grabbing his arm before he could hit Mike again. "He's my friend."

Mike looked up at me, his expression unreadable.

"I don't know where my father ran off to," I continued. "I hope you find him. But as for me and him? We're done."

"..."

"Goodbye, Mike. You were a good friend to me."

I turned to Jared, who led me out of the room. Outside, his car was parked by the curb. As we drove away, the sound of police sirens filled the air. A convoy of police cars sped past us toward my old apartment building. Someone must have called them.

"Would you like to go to the hospital first, Miss Nara?"

"Just some ice and bruise cream will do. Thanks."

I waved him off, feeling sore but otherwise fine—aside from my aching tailbone and burning cheek.

"I came to pick you up on behalf of Khun Phlengphin," Jared said, smiling. "Congratulations. You got the job."

"Thank heaven."

I exhaled deeply, resting my forehead against the cool glass of the car window.

One problem down—my father.

Now, onto the next mystery...

What exactly is this job Khun Phlengphin wants me to do?

"Married!?"

I had never thought I would scream in such a ridiculous way in my life. But this job that I had to do for Miss Phlengphin was utterly insane.

"Yes."

Mr. Jared answered on behalf of the lady of the house, who sat silently on the sofa beside him.

"Wait, wait—I'm completely lost."

I held my head in both hands, pacing in a small circle before trying to piece together the reason behind this marriage once again.

"You don't want any men bothering you because of your wealth and privacy. So, you need to find someone to enter into a fake marriage with you to keep those people away. Did I get that right?"

"Yes."

Miss Phlengphin answered briefly, not bothering to explain further, unlike me, who desperately needed more details.

"This makes no sense! You could just hire security guards to keep them away, or... move to a state where fewer people would bother you."

I tried to suggest alternatives, but Miss Phlengphin and Jared only smiled.

"We've thought of that," Jared said. "But I believe just hiring security or moving to another state would be pointless. More importantly, Miss Phlengphin has a hotel empire inherited from her father to manage. It wouldn't be practical for her to live far away."

"But I'm a woman, and you're a woman. Isn't this a bit too strange?"

"Nara, you just answered your own question," Miss Phlengphin said with an amused smile.

I was confused. "What do you mean!?"

"Strange."

"..."

"Even though the world is becoming more accepting of same-sex marriage, many people still find it strange. Loving someone of the same gender is considered disgusting and undesirable to associate with. And that is exactly what we want."

Hearing this, I couldn't help but frown. She seemed like a woman who secluded herself from the outside world, completely withdrawn. And with her blindness, I believed that even more. Yet, she was surprisingly aware of the world and its happenings.

"The stranger it seems, the less people want to come near." She shrugged. "Over the years, many people have tried to approach me. They were liars, deceivers, always pretending to be sincere. They claimed they could bring color into my dark world, but all I ever wanted was peace and quiet."

"..."

"I don't want anyone offering themselves to me anymore. It's annoying." Her voice carried a hint of frustration, though she remained calm and composed.

"What do I have to do?" I asked, finally deciding to agree and inquiring about the next steps.

"Just register the marriage with us. That's all."

"That's all!?"

"A marriage certificate is proof enough. Unless... you'd like a church wedding too? That would make quite the headlines."

"No—no, that's unnecessary."

"Then it's settled. Good girl."

Before I could react, Miss Phlengphin walked up to me and pinched my cheek in amusement.

How did she know where I was standing?

"Is there anything else I need to do, Miss Phlengphin?"

"Take care of us."

"..."

"We're married. We should take care of each other."

"Uh..."

Hearing those words, I suddenly felt my cheeks heating up.

Wait—she's a woman! Why am I blushing over a woman!?

"Don't worry. We won't make you uncomfortable."

With that, she pulled out her cane and extended it to the floor. I watched curiously, never having observed how a blind person navigated before.

"Would you like to walk us to the reading room?"

"Uh..."

"If someone guides us, we wouldn't need the cane."

It sounded like a subtle request. Realizing that my duties had already begun, I stepped closer to Miss Phlengphin and reached for her arm, hesitating on how to assist her properly.

"Uh... like this," Jared, who had been silent for a while, stepped in to help.

"No need, Jared," Miss Phlengphin interrupted him. "I'll teach Nara myself. Go make some hot cocoa—for both of us."

"Understood."

With that, Jared left the room, and Miss Phlengphin reached out, searching for where I was. Once she found my arm, she looped hers around mine.

"Hold onto our arm like this and walk together with us."

I nodded in understanding, then realized she couldn't see me. Scratching my head awkwardly, I spoke instead.

"Got it."

Walking side by side with Miss Phlengphin felt unfamiliar at first, but I was glad to be doing something in return for the woman who was giving me a new life.

For so long, I had walked alone. But from that moment on, I became like a

walking cane for Miss Phlengphin. I helped her navigate, guided her to the bathroom, and ensured her safety wherever she went. Sometimes, I even cooked simple meals for her, though Jared always supervised and dictated her preferred flavors.

As for the eighty thousand dollars, Miss Phlengphin kept her word. She had Jared track down my father, who had gone into hiding, and personally delivered the money to him—on the condition that he sign an agreement never to interfere in my life again.

And then, of course, there was the marriage certificate. She had me sign it to officially register our marriage before handing it over to Jared to have it published in a small column in the newspaper—just enough for the public to take notice.

Miss Phlengphin admitted it was a bit ostentatious, but she was utterly fed up with men trying to prey on a blind woman like her.

"Nara."

"Yes?" I responded to Phleng while walking out of the bathroom, freshly showered and ready for bed.

"Are you dressed properly?" Her tone carried a slight scolding, making my shoulders slump in frustration.

I liked sleeping in just a bra or sometimes a thin tank top because it was comfortable. But in Phleng's opinion, dressing like that would make me catch a cold, so she wouldn't let me wear anything like that anymore. Though, sometimes I still stubbornly disobeyed her.

"Phleng, I don't like wearing thick clothes to sleep."

"At least wear a T-shirt," she said, her face slightly tensing upon realizing I'd gone against her orders.

Believe it or not, Phleng and I shared the same room.

It was such a bizarre arrangement that I had to ask her once, "Aren't you

afraid I might steal your money or valuables?" Her response was annoyingly smug.

"Go ahead and try stealing something and running away. I'm rich—police would catch you in no time. Ha!"

Who would've thought that a blind, wealthy 26-year-old woman could be this sarcastic?

"Just sleep in the same room. It's cozy."

"Fine, whatever."

Not like I had any bad intentions anyway.

"If you're looking at me, turn around. I'm going to change into my pajamas. Too lazy to go to the bathroom again."

Phleng told me as she prepared to change. Earlier, she'd had to switch into casual wear to meet a guest suddenly, so now she had to change back into sleepwear.

"Okay, okay," I quickly turned my back to her.

Sometimes, being the one who could see was actually harder. But... I couldn't help it—I wanted to sneak a peek.

When I glanced back, I saw her toned abdomen, the faint outline of her muscles casting soft shadows. She was wearing a solid black bra and was in the middle of pulling a T-shirt over her head. As she raised her arms high, the motion made her body even more visible.

"You're not peeking, are you?"

Somehow, she seemed to sense my eyes on her. She stopped in the middle of pulling her shirt down, standing frozen.

"Nope! Not at all!" I quickly covered up with a nervous laugh.

Phleng sat at the edge of the bed, falling into a short silence as if she had just realized something. Then, with a frustrated sigh, she looked adorably annoyed. "Nara."

"Yes?"

"I think I need to go to the bathroom again."

"Huh?"

"I forgot to brush my teeth."

And so, I had to climb out of bed again to walk her to the bathroom, linking my arm with hers like always.

"Cover yourself with the blanket."

After I turned off the lights, a cool hand reached out, fumbling for the blanket and pulling it up over me gently.

No one had ever done something like this for me before.

It felt so unfamiliar.

Honestly, Phleng didn't have to take care of me at all, but she always paid attention to the little things.

I often found myself watching her face as she slept—she always fell asleep before me.

Tonight was no different.

"Why are you staring at me?"

"You have really sharp senses, Phleng."

I couldn't help but laugh because, for the past few nights, she always noticed when I lay on my side, quietly watching her.

"I may be blind, but I'm not stupid."

"I never said you were."

"I know." She reached out, searching for my cheek and giving it a light pinch.

"You're this rich, Phleng. Why don't you get surgery to fix your eyes? That way, you could see."

"I don't know. Maybe because I have you. Seeing or not seeing doesn't seem to matter anymore."

Hearing that made me feel like an angel.

That was just like Phleng.

She always had a way of making me feel good about myself. She always made me laugh, despite having the kind of personality that didn't seem suited for it.

"Don't you want to see my face, Phleng?" I joked, chuckling dryly.

"Of course, I do. Why wouldn't I?"

As she spoke, she reached out and gently brushed the hair away from my forehead.

Why was my face getting warm?

Why was I feeling shy?

My eyes widened in shock at my own reaction.

What the hell was happening to me?!

# Chapter 2: Lermarn

Back in the present moment, I was still standing there, holding hands with Khun Phleng. Her expression grew sadder as she realized my intentions.

I wanted a divorce... to return to Thailand.

"Um... Nara wants a divorce, but that doesn't mean I'm leaving for Thailand tomorrow," I said.

"I thought you wanted to leave as soon as possible."

"It's not like that!" I quickly denied. "Actually, if you don't allow it, I can't go anywhere."

"..."

"You spent eighty thousand, and I've only been with you for about five months. Honestly, it would be disgraceful if—"

"Money is money," Khun Phleng interrupted. "If you want to leave me, I won't force you to stay and feel uncomfortable."

"Oh, Khun Phleng..."

Hearing that made me feel even more despicable, as if I were an ungrateful person who didn't appreciate kindness.

"Why do you want to go back to Thailand? What's better there than here?"

"It's home," I answered simply. Khun Phleng fell silent for a moment before nodding in acceptance.

"No, no... Let's cancel it. It's too cruel."

I waved my hands back and forth, unable to bring myself to leave her. But then, suddenly, the lady of the house pulled me into a hug as if she could see me. After a brief moment, she slowly released me and reached behind herself to find a chair before sitting down.

"Go."

"And what about the marriage certificate? You said it was fake—what does that mean?"

"We intended for it to be fake from the beginning," Khun Phleng smiled at the corner of her lips. "For both of our futures."

"I don't understand."

"If one day you meet someone good and want to marry them, this marriage certificate won't stain your record, showing that you've been married before."

"Oh."

"Because it's fake," she continued. "And as I told you before, it's fake so that if we ever want to end this ridiculous marriage, we can just burn it. And if I find the one I truly love in the future, I'll have proof to show them that this marriage was a lie."

I was astonished by her plan...

"But if I had told you from the start that it was fake, you might not have taken the plan seriously, and it could have failed. Or worse, if it were someone else, they might have exploited the fact that it was fake for something bad. Don't you think?"

"That's true."

"See?"

We fell into another moment of silence.

"So, does this mean you're allowing me to go home?" I gazed into her eyes, never quite knowing where exactly she was looking.

Khun Phleng smiled at me as she always did.

"Yes, I allow it."

Even though I had received permission to return to Thailand, I couldn't bring myself to leave her just yet. The bond between us was too deep for me to simply ask for a divorce and flee home. So, I asked Jared, who was arranging my ticket, to book one for the following week instead. Khun Phleng had no objections.

That day, I was scrolling through my phone, watching her type on her Braille typewriter in her study.

"Nara."

"Yes!?"

"Let's go watch a movie."

"A movie!?" I exclaimed.

How could a blind person watch a movie?

"How will you watch a movie? You..."

"I can just listen to the sound. Didn't you say a couple of days ago that you wanted to see a certain film?"

Besides memorizing every business detail, she also remembered what I had casually complained about.

"I can just go alone. If you're coming, we should do something we can enjoy together."

"I said we're watching a movie, so we're watching a movie. I'm going to change now. Take the coffee cup from the table, wash it, and then come upstairs."

With that, she grabbed her cane and walked past me. I stood there watching her back, confused about what she was thinking.

We took a taxi to the nearest cinema. I walked beside her so she could hold onto my arm. Many passersby glanced at us, curious about the blind woman beside me—especially since we were at a movie theater, making her presence even more peculiar.

"How many tickets?" The cashier hesitated upon seeing us. It wasn't surprising; he must have been unsure how many tickets to issue since one of us couldn't see. "Two, please."

"Are you sure?"

"Two means two!"

I didn't like how he questioned her disability, so I raised my voice. He quickly handed over the tickets.

I led her to our seats, guiding her carefully as usual. As soon as we sat down, she reached for my hand and held it.

"Are you okay?" I asked, worried she might be feeling uneasy. It was a Friday, and the theater was crowded.

"No, I just want to hold your hand."

She traced her fingers over mine, playing with them. I smiled at her cute gesture.

"Has it started?"

"Yes."

I kept glancing at her, feeling sorry for her. I could see everything and fully enjoy the film, while she could only listen to the sounds and voices.

As the movie reached its climax, I was so absorbed that I momentarily forgot she was there. Suddenly, a cool hand touched my face.

"Huh?" I gasped, startled. It was her hand, moving over my face.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm imagining your face."

"..."

"In two days, we won't be together anymore. Boohoo~"

She shrugged her shoulders dramatically and fake-cried. The light from the screen allowed me to see that she was just joking. But for some reason, I felt genuinely sad.

...

After the movie, we held hands just as we had for the past two hours. The movie was amazing—I had wanted to watch it for so long but had been too busy helping Khun Phleng and Jared.

"Did you like it?" she asked as we waited for Jared's car.

"It was great."

I accidentally smiled at her again but quickly stopped, realizing she couldn't see it.

"It would have been even better if you could see it, too."

"Just listening was enough. I could tell it was fun."

She nodded along with me, but I didn't feel happy at all. The movie was great, but if the person beside me had enjoyed it fully, it would have been even better.

"Before you leave, I wanted to do something fun together. So I took you to see a movie." "Khun Phleng..."

...

Then, the day finally came. I packed only the essentials. Some things that she had bought for me, I tried to return, but she insisted I take them back to Thailand.

When I entered her room, she had just walked out of the bathroom, looking groggy. I rushed over to steady her.

"Bathroom trip?"

"I just washed my face and brushed my teeth. I knew you'd come to say goodbye."

I smiled at how well she knew me and helped her sit on the edge of the bed.

"I wish you could take me to the airport," I murmured, but she had been sick with a cold the night before, so we had to scrap that plan.

"Don't go getting mixed up with bad crowds in Thailand." She touched my face gently.

"I won't."

In the car, we chatted casually until Jared came to get me.

"I already burned that fake marriage certificate," she reminded me, ensuring I had peace of mind.

"Thank you for everything. I will never forget this kindness for the rest of my life."

"Just be happy with your life. Now that you're free, fly as far as you can, okay?" She reached up to find my position and pulled me into a tight hug.

"Goodbye, Nara." "Goodbye, Khun Phleng."

...

**Five Years Later**

"Le!"

"Le!"

"Le, where are you?!"

My legs were practically tangled as I rushed around while the entire film crew kept calling for me frantically through the walkie-talkies. Why did P'Vee have to get sick at a time like this?

"The coffee for the actors is ready!" I handed the tray of expensive coffee cups to the talent management team before hurrying off to the next department that was calling for me.

"Le... How's everything going?"

Then, the owner of the voice appeared at the slightly ajar door of the production van. P'Vee, the beautiful thirty-something producer and my boss, peeked her head out. Last night, she had a severe bout of vertigo, throwing up multiple times. But being the strong-willed boss she was, she refused to take a sick day and insisted on coming to oversee the shoot—even if it meant just lying in the van watching from afar. Since she was too unwell to manage the production as usual, the responsibility fell on me, her assistant.

"P'Vee, you should wash your face and take some medicine," I scolded her helplessly. "Or if you really can't take it anymore, I can call a taxi to take you to the hospital."

"I'm fine, Le... Oh—"

P'Vee tried to act tough at first, but she ended up collapsing onto the van's seat again, looking completely drained. Luckily, today's shoot was a smallscale production, so I managed to keep everything under control, consulting with P'Vee when needed.

...

After returning to Thailand from the U.S., I struggled through multiple companies, gaining experience while also putting myself through university. It was exhausting to the point of tears. The money I had brought from abroad helped me get by, but it wasn't enough. I had to work part-time jobs constantly. I started as a water server on set because I was interested in media and advertising. Slowly, I built connections, moving up from set welfare staff to an intern at a television network, and eventually landing a full-time job as an assistant producer. I finally had a stable salary, but the work came with an unpredictable schedule—long nights and early mornings were the norm.

I changed my name and surname to avoid being tracked down by my father or any dangerous people from my past. From "Nara," I became "Lermarn Phutthiwat," or simply "Le."

I rented a condo in Bangkok. With my salary and occasional freelance gigs, I was no longer struggling to survive like I did under my father's control. I had enough to live comfortably without relying on anyone. I was also looking for opportunities to pursue a master's degree in communication. It wasn't the most glamorous life, but it was mine. I had left my past behind and started fresh.

The only thing I still held onto was my memories of my former boss—the beautiful Khun Phlengphin.

I had tried to find out about her, but as expected, she was private and stayed out of the public eye. The last news I managed to dig up was that her hotel business in the U.S. was shutting down. It didn't seem to be due to financial troubles or economic issues—it was her decision. Beyond that, there was no further information.

"Wrap for today!"

As soon as the assistant director made the announcement, the crew erupted in cheers. Meanwhile, P'Vee, who had somewhat recovered, and I began distributing wages and settling payments with various teams.

"Tomorrow at nine, we have a meeting with a client about a new ad campaign, P'Vee," I reminded her while helping the set crew pack up.

"It's already 4:30 AM... By the time we get home... Ugh, another night with barely any sleep," P'Vee groaned. "Maybe we should give the office a break tomorrow."

"How about just letting everyone leave early instead?" I suggested while helping Auntie, the welfare staff, load the water containers into the truck.

"That sounds good. And you—go home, clean up, and wear something nice. You're coming to the client meeting with me tomorrow."

"Got it, P'Vee."

...

After we wrapped everything up at the office, I finally went home to rest. By the time I got to my condo, it was exactly 6 AM. Thankfully, my place wasn't far from the BTS station—just like my workplace—so I managed to get an hour of sleep before getting up to shower.

When it was time, I quickly freshened up and picked a decent outfit: a cream-brown shirt paired with navy straight-leg pants. I downed a strong cup of coffee with some toast before heading out to battle the Bangkok morning crowd.

"Here, I got this for you as a thank-you," P'Vee handed me a large iced chocolate from a famous café as we walked to the elevator.

"Aw, I'll buy you a drink in return, P'Vee."

"No need. You helped me a lot yesterday. Did you even get any sleep?" She grabbed my arm and shook it lightly in concern.

"An hour, exactly."

"Better than nothing. I'll tell the boss to bump up your bonus this month."

"Sounds good! Saint-Michel is having a 50% sale at the end of the month," I muttered, thinking of the clothing brand's upcoming discount event.

When we arrived at the office, we greeted the rest of the team as usual.

"The client today is from a hotel brand, right, Vi?" asked P'Jay, our tanskinned, sharp-featured director.

"Yeah, P'Jay. We should head to the meeting room soon. The client is almost here."

"Okay."

"Le, can you go down to the parking lot and greet them? I'll take the documents to the meeting room."

"Got it."

I handed the folder to P'Vee and headed to the elevator. After waiting downstairs for a bit, a sleek black luxury car pulled up in front of me. I could sense instinctively that this was our client, so I quickly stepped forward to greet them.

The windows were tinted so dark that I could barely make out the figure inside. But I could tell the client was a woman. When she opened the door and stepped out, I instinctively took a step back to make way for her.

I hadn't seen her face yet, only her outfit—a fitted navy-blue suit with delicate light-gray lace details underneath. She looked expensive and powerful.

"Good morning," I greeted politely as she lifted her face to meet my eyes.

At that moment, my heart pounded violently. My breath caught in my throat. My hands trembled the instant I saw that stunning face again.

And for the first time, I realized—she was looking directly at me.

Khun Phlengphin!

# Chapter 3: Didn't Mean to Get Close

**"Khun Phlengphin."**

I accidentally murmured the name of the person in front of me, and before I could even finish my sentence, she turned to look at me—clearly surprised.

"Why do you look so startled?"

"Uh... uh..."

Was I going to keep opening and closing my mouth like a fish?

"You're Phlengphin, the one here to discuss the PP Palace hotel advertisement, right?"

I tried to collect myself and keep my voice from shaking—though my whole body was trembling.

"That's right." Phleng nodded. I was about to lead her to the VIP elevator, but she reached out and held me back.

"Are you feeling unwell? Why are you shaking so much?"

"N-no! It's just... the weather is kind of chilly."

"It's thirty-one degrees today. You really think it's cold?"

"Heh... heh..." I had no argument left, so I just laughed awkwardly and gestured for the VIP guest to proceed toward the elevator.

"You're kind of funny, aren't you?"

Hearing that made my face turn red instantly. What the heck was happening?!

I pressed the elevator button for Phleng and her two companions. While waiting, I had no idea what to say. If it were anyone else, I'd probably make small talk, but this was someone I hadn't seen in almost five years— standing right in front of me. And those clear, striking green eyes... I didn't know how to act.

When the elevator doors opened, I gestured for Phleng and her team to enter first. But just as I was stepping inside, the doors suddenly closed on me.

"Whoa!" One of the three people in the elevator exclaimed before someone quickly pressed the button to reopen the doors. I was then pulled into someone's embrace.

"Are you hurt?"

Before I even realized it, Phleng had let go of me. Her eyes were filled with concern, but I probably just looked like a bumbling fool. Get a grip, Lermarn! Stay focused!

"Hey."

"Y-yes?!" I immediately turned toward Phleng when I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder.

"Why are you so jumpy? You really don't look well."

"Uhm... maybe I really am a bit off today." I tried to compose myself, regaining some confidence after making a mess of myself already.

"I didn't ask your name yet. What's your name?"

"Lermarn. I'm the assistant to producer Weerada." I introduced myself and mentioned my senior's name as well.

"Oh, you're Weerada's assistant? That's a lovely name."

She smiled so sweetly that I almost melted into a puddle right there in the elevator. Five years of not seeing her, and now I was feeling overwhelmed by her smile again. But what unsettled me even more was the way she looked at me so intently. Five years ago, I was the one who always looked at her like that.

When we reached the meeting room floor, I led Phleng to the designated room. Inside, Weerada and Jay were already there, introducing themselves and setting the stage for the meeting.

"Your PP Palace hotels have five branches, right? We'd like to understand which key aspects you'd like us to highlight for each one..."

During the meeting, I kept stealing glances at Phleng. This must have been fate playing tricks on me. It was pure coincidence that Weerada was in charge of this meeting instead of me. My only role was to keep track of the schedules and appointments, not research clients like I usually did.

Since our production house had a steady stream of clients, Weerada and I often switched responsibilities.

So the rumors about Phleng closing her hotel business in the U.S. must be true. And now she's shifted her focus to the Thai market instead.

"I'd like Weerada and Jay to highlight the unique features of each hotel in a way that's easy to remember, but not overly detailed."

Phleng still spoke with the same clarity as before, her deep and smooth voice captivating to listen to. But she looked even more beautiful now—far more confident than she had been five years ago.

"In our next meeting, we'll present the concept and designs to you, Phlengphin," Jay summarized at the end of the meeting. He and Phleng continued discussing details, while Weerada shifted her chair to talk to me about our next steps in the project. "Want to have lunch together?"

We both paused when Phleng's voice suddenly interrupted us.

"Our hotel is offering an international buffet today. I'd like to invite the team to try it out."

"Uh..." I had no idea how to respond, so I turned to Weerada—who was already grinning ear to ear.

"Well, if Phleng is inviting us so graciously, how could we say no?"

And with that, Phleng instructed her assistant to book a VIP table for us at the hotel and set a time for dinner.

I personally escorted her to the parking lot.

"See you later, Khun Ying Lermarn."

"Uh... just Lermarn is fine." I chuckled nervously.

"Do you have a nickname?"

Phleng was about to close the car door but paused, waiting for my answer.

"You can call me 'Le.'"

"Okay, see you later then, Le."

She winked at me before closing the car door, and then her vehicle pulled away from the building's parking lot.

I stood there watching her car disappear, feeling nostalgic. I couldn't believe we were meeting again. But this time, it seemed even harder to get close to her—unless I told her the truth.

That I was Nara, from five years ago.

But would it be a good idea to tell her...?

I'd think about it later.

"Phlengphin is quite gorgeous, isn't she?"

Back at the office, I overheard Jay and Weerada gossiping with the rest of the team.

"Really? Any pictures?"

"I wonder if she has a boyfriend, heh." Jay chuckled mischievously.

"Watch out, Jay. Your wife might smack you."

"I can't help it! She's rich and beautiful! But people like her are usually already taken, for sure. Sigh."

"She's a dark horse, though. Came out of nowhere, and suddenly, PP Palace is one of Thailand's top hotels."

Everyone in the office was busy gathering information about Phlengphin, except for me. I stayed quiet at my desk, pretending to work—but secretly searching for information about PP Palace.

After a while, I found out that the hotel was founded three years ago, with Phleng listed as the owner the entire time. However, she only moved back to Thailand to fully manage it about a year ago.

PP Palace was famous among both backpackers and business travelers, offering everything from capsule rooms to luxurious suites.

"Hah! You were quiet, but turns out you were searching for info too!" I jumped when Weerada suddenly appeared behind my chair.

"I was just curious, that's all. Wanted to understand the background of the hotel so I could help you with the script."

I made an excuse, and she believed me completely before returning to her desk.

But the truth was... I was searching for something else entirely.

...

In the evening, we all rode with P'Jay to have dinner at Khun Phleng's hotel. Upon arrival, we mentioned Khun Phleng Phin's name and our reservation time, and the staff promptly escorted us to the VIP dining room, a private space arranged specifically for us.

As for Khun Phleng, once the staff informed her of our arrival, she personally came to welcome us and invited us to help ourselves to the buffet or order directly from the staff as we preferred.

"This roast duck is insanely delicious! Oh my god, if you eat this outside, just one piece costs hundreds. I love it!"

While P'Vee was passionately describing the food to P'Jay, I was the only one eating simple dishes, not taking anything special. My mind was too preoccupied with thoughts of Khun Phleng.

Also, having Khun Phleng sitting at the same table made me so nervous that I didn't know what to do.

"Is the food not good?"

And there it was—Khun Phleng finally spoke to me. Of course, my demeanor didn't resemble someone enjoying a delicious meal in the slightest. I probably looked more like a sick person forced to wake up and eat porridge.

"You can criticize it if you want. That way, I can let the chef know how to adjust the flavors."

She seemed genuinely curious about my reaction. But the truth was, I had no problem with the food. It was delicious—far beyond what an average salaried worker like me could afford.

"No, it's very delicious," I reassured her with a smile, hoping she wouldn't overthink it. Maybe making conversation would help ease my nervousness.

"I just feel kind of lightheaded."

To be honest, I wasn't lying. I had only slept for an hour, then worked all day. Realistically, instead of eating at a buffet right now, I should be sleeping and giving my body proper rest.

"I knew it! You don't look well." Khun Phleng leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms and giving me a slightly scolding look.

"That's just life working on a film set. We're always sleep-deprived. Haha."

"Don't drink too much coffee, okay? And sleep whenever you have the time. Sigh... working in the media industry is tough too. Oh, thanks."

As she talked to me, a staff member arrived with a special dish she had ordered.

"So... have you been back in Thailand long, Khun Phleng?"

"How did you know I lived in the U.S.?"

"..."

I totally let that slip.

"Oh, I saw it in an online news column. It mentioned that you used to live in the U.S."

"Oh, I've been back for almost a year. But I didn't make a big deal out of it with the press."

"Must've been hard to adjust after being abroad for so long." I kept the conversation going to avoid any awkward silences.

"Not really. Honestly, the U.S. is even hotter than Thailand."

"That's true! I've been there for a trip, and the sun was brutal."

Suddenly, P'Jay chimed in out of nowhere. I just noticed that he had several empty plates stacked next to him—at least four or five.

"Yes, but the harder part was the loneliness." Khun Phleng responded to P'Jay before sighing softly, as if she were speaking more to herself than to us.

"Oh, so you don't have many friends in Thailand?"

I pretended to ask, but I already knew that she had grown up in the U.S. since birth. She didn't have any Thai friends—only a few acquaintances through family connections.

"Yeah, a big house with only one real occupant isn't as comfortable as it seems."

She shrugged lightly, idly stirring the food on her plate. Seeing that she was getting too somber, I decided to lighten the mood.

"Wowww!"

"..."

"This salmon is AMAZING."

I dramatically lifted my spoonful of salmon drenched in spicy sauce and took a big bite, savoring it enthusiastically.

"Oh my god, this is heaven for spicy food lovers!"

And it worked better than I expected—Khun Phleng actually laughed a little. That made me feel relieved, at least knowing she was in a better mood.

As we continued eating, P'Vee's phone suddenly rang.

"What's up, Ball?" The moment I heard the name, I knew it was Nong Ball, our office's video editor, who couldn't join us because he was drowning in editing work after taking sick leave.

"It's broken? Are you sure you checked it properly?" P'Vee's voice turned sharp.

"What's broken? What happened!?"

P'Jay immediately panicked the moment he heard the word "broken."

P'Vee was about to continue the call, but noticing that Khun Phleng—our client—was nearby, she decided to step outside. When she returned, her face was filled with concern, as if she had just encountered a disaster.

"We need to get back to the office."

"What happened?"

"Ball's editing computer is having issues. Not sure if it's because of the power outage the other day. I think I should go back and help."

"Oh, okay."

I nodded, preparing to leave with her, but then P'Vee pressed me back into my chair.

"You don't need to come."

"...Huh?"

"I already told you that you could leave early today. And you helped me out all day yesterday on set. If you hadn't been there, I'd have been in trouble. Just stay and enjoy the buffet."

"Uh... okay."

Since she didn't insist on me coming along, I didn't argue. P'Vee and P'Jay quickly said their goodbyes to Khun Phleng and rushed off, leaving me alone with the hotel CEO.

"Want some ice cream? I can have the staff bring a whole combo for you."

Seeing that I had only been eating spicy food, Khun Phleng leaned on the table, watching me eat with interest.

"Aren't you going back to work? Really, you don't have to stay—I can eat alone."

"How could I leave a special guest alone?"

Hearing the word "special" made my face heat up. No, she was referring to P'Jay and P'Vee too. And why am I blushing!? Damn it!

"How are you getting home?"

"Oh, I usually take the BTS, but I might have to take a motorcycle taxi first."

As dinner ended, Khun Phleng offered to have the hotel's car drop me off at home. I felt too guilty accepting such a favor, so I insisted on going home by myself. But luck wasn't on my side. The moment I stepped outside, the rain started pouring down.

"Seriously!? Right now!?"

I shouted at the sky in frustration. No umbrella. No choice but to walk and find a taxi. But none of them stopped. Checking my GPS, I saw that the BTS station wasn't far—no reason for taxis to refuse.

Just then, a taxi with its vacant sign lit up approached. I stepped forward to hail it, but I didn't see the motorcycle coming from the other side.

It hit me—hard.

I crashed onto the wet, dirty ground, and the rider sped off without even looking back.

"Ow!" Looking down at my knee, I saw a fresh wound. My hands were scraped too, throbbing from the impact.

"Are you okay?" Passersby rushed to help me up.

"I knew it. I knew this would happen."

I recognized the voice instantly.

It was Khun Phleng.

# Chapter 4: Massage

After leaving the hospital, Khun Phleng drove me back to my condo herself. The atmosphere in the car was silent. I had nothing to talk about because I couldn't think of anything. I was in pain from my wound, and it still felt strange to sit in a car driven by someone who used to be blind. Khun Phleng, on the other hand, was fully focused on driving, not saying a word. Only the soft music from the radio kept the silence from becoming too suffocating.

"Are you living alone now, Khun Phleng?"

"..."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to be intrusive."

I quickly lowered my head, afraid she would think I was being rude.

"Yes, I live alone."

"And your family in America didn't come with you? Or maybe someone close to you?"

I asked because I was curious about Jared—was he not here? I still remembered how he had always been by Khun Phleng's side. If she had returned to Thailand, he should have been with her. But I hadn't seen a trace of him. Even the people accompanying her at the meeting today were new faces.

"They all left me," she said, her expression turning sorrowful.

Jared left Khun Phleng all alone?

"Today was fun. I got to see a lot of sides of you," she said as the car hit a red light, playfully knocking her fist against my head.

"Then why did you close your business in America? You could have made more profit there than in Thailand, right?"

"I wanted to come back to Thailand."

"Is it really better here?"

I accidentally blurted that out and immediately covered my mouth, realizing how rude it sounded. Seeing this, Khun Phleng chuckled softly.

"Honestly, my business is more profitable here than in America. Believe it or not, being in my home country is better, so I decided to move back."

"..."

"Besides, I was lonely there. Maybe if I stay here, I'll make some friends.

Or even find a partner."

After saying that, she turned back to focus on driving.

"Having a partner would be nice. You wouldn't be lonely anymore," I mumbled absentmindedly, only to realize that Khun Phleng was glancing at me.

I knew she was someone who got lonely easily, yet at the same time, she disliked people interfering too much in her life. I just hoped someone would come along to take care of her.

It took us an hour to get through the traffic. By the time we reached my condo, it was already 9 PM.

"Are you sure you can make it up to your room?"

"I can manage," I replied while dragging my exhausted body toward the condo lobby.

The truth was, my wound still stung, but I gritted my teeth and said I was fine because I didn't want to trouble my important client any further.

"Wait."

"Huh—what?"

"Give me your number."

She walked over just as I was about to disappear into the elevator hall and handed me her phone.

I stood there for a moment, staring at it, until she pursed her lips and gestured toward the phone as if to say, *'Hurry up and type it in.'*

"Alright."

"I'm not trying to flirt. Why are you taking so long to think?"

My eyes widened for a brief moment, and my face heated up instantly. She stood there, arms crossed, watching as I typed my number before handing the phone back to her.

"That's it. I'm off."

"Goodnight," I said before half-walking, half-running toward the elevator without waiting to see her return to her car. I just wanted to get to my room and rest. Today had been exhausting.

.

. .

Once inside my apartment, I kicked off my pants and threw them into the laundry basket, leaving only my underwear on. Then, I collapsed onto the sofa, grabbing a small pillow to rest my head and shutting my eyes.

But before I could even relax, my phone rang.

The screen showed an unfamiliar number, making me nervous. Could it be Khun Phleng? If so, I had to answer immediately.

"Uh... hello?"

"Are you in the elevator yet?" It *was* Khun Phleng.

"I'm already in my room."

"Come downstairs for a moment."

"Huh?!"

"Please, hurry! Right now!"

Her voice sounded urgent. I had no choice but to grab the pair of shorts draped over the sofa and rush to press the elevator button, heading back down once more.

"Hah... What is it?" I panted, running out to find Khun Phleng standing at the entrance of the condo lobby with a worried look on her face.

"A cat..."

"Hm!?"

"Come here."

The tall woman took my hand and led me to her car, which had the passenger-side door slightly ajar. Khun Phleng turned on the car's interior light, revealing a small bundle wrapped in a towel on the seat. When I unwrapped it, I saw a tiny kitten crying non-stop.

"A kitten?"

I couldn't help but smile in adoration. The little cream-colored kitten had brown "socks" on its paws—definitely a Siamese mix. But as I looked closer, I noticed traces of blood on the towel.

"I don't know how it got injured. It was meowing so loudly earlier. I followed the sound and found it lying under that tree." Khun Phleng pointed at the cluster of decorative plants near the entrance.

"What should we do now...?"

"We have to take it to the vet! And you have to come with me, too."

"Me!?" I pointed at myself in confusion. "I don't know any vet clinics around here."

"I don't either! Do you think I do!?"

She looked flustered, her eyes widening at me in frustration. I couldn't help but laugh before quickly composing myself. "Just get in the car. Hold the little one on your lap."

She called the kitten *Nong*—so cute.

I had no choice but to go with her. And so, we drove off into the night, searching for an animal clinic to save this tiny life.

Finding a vet turned out to be harder than expected, especially since it was getting late. We drove around for half an hour before finally finding a clinic in time for the little sock-pawed one to get medical attention.

The vet concluded that the kitten had been hit by a car, suffering a serious injury to its left hind leg. They would need to keep it for observation. Just as I was processing this information, Khun Phleng, who had gone to park the car properly, walked into the clinic hesitantly.

"This place is scary."

The clinic was filled with injured or sick stray animals, creating a somber atmosphere. The sight must have unsettled her because she suddenly clutched my shoulder.

"Are you scared, Khun Phleng?"

"I've never been this close to animals before."

She glanced around nervously before asking about the kitten.

"How is *Nong* doing?"

"She got hit by a car. The vet will keep her here tonight." I gestured toward the restricted area where the vet had disappeared with the kitten.

"Alright, then."

"Khun Phleng..."

"Hm?"

"You'll have to cover the vet bill first... I didn't bring my wallet."

I put on my best guilty expression.

"Why are you looking like that? I was always going to pay."

Without another word, she walked past me to settle the bill.

After making sure the kitten would be taken care of, we left the clinic feeling exhausted.

"I really need a shower."

"Me too. I smell like a vet clinic," she complained, brushing dog fur off her shirt with a look of distaste. "Ugh, where did this even come from? I feel gross."

I watched her grip the steering wheel and sigh. And then she said something that nearly made me stop breathing.

"Can I stay over at your place tonight?"

"Stay... over!?"

"It'll take me another hour to drive back to my hotel. I'm exhausted. I hope I'm not imposing."

"Uh... well..."

I stammered, completely caught off guard. She misread my hesitation and quickly became serious.

"Is it inconvenient?"

*No! Not at all!*

"It's fine!"

"Okay."

With that, she started the car and drove back to my condo.

How could I refuse? After everything she had done for me tonight, letting her crash at my place for one night was the least I could do. But still... why was I getting so flustered over this!?

. .

As soon as we stepped into my room, a wave of nervousness hit me. My place was always tidy, but having *her* here made me feel strangely selfconscious.

"Your place is so neat."

She smiled at me before casually pulling her shirt out from where it was tucked into her pants, getting more comfortable.

"Can I use your bathroom?"

"Of course."

As soon as she disappeared inside, I hurried to tidy up even more— grabbing my jeans from the laundry basket edge and hiding a certain *undergarment* I had carelessly tossed aside.

Wasn't this happening *too* fast!? I just met her this morning, and now she was staying the night? Sharing my space? This was insane—I didn't know how to handle it!

"What's wrong?"

A cool hand suddenly landed on my forehead, and I turned to see her peeking at me from behind.

"Nothing... I just never had anyone over like this before."

"Wow, so I'm the first?"

"Yes."

"Can I borrow a shirt and some shorts? I'll wash and return them later."

"No need, I can wash them." I went to my room and grabbed an oversized T-shirt and a pair of shorts for her.

"Do you want to shower first? I don't mind waiting."

"You go ahead. You've been running around all day—take a shower and relax."

While waiting for her, my mind spiraled with questions. Should I just tell her everything? Or should I keep holding back? So much had changed, but

Khun Phleng was still the same—someone who made me nervous, flustered, and utterly weak. If I just told the truth, maybe I wouldn't have to feel so lost anymore.

After she finished showering, I took my turn. I washed my hair twice, making sure I was as clean and fresh as possible before stepping out. Just as I was about to check my phone for updates from work, she spoke up.

"You're not going to dry your hair?"

"Huh!?"

She tapped my head lightly with a hairdryer before gently pushing me down into a chair. I sat there, stunned, as she dried my hair until it was completely dry.

"Thank you..."

"You live alone. You should take care of yourself. If you get sick, it'll be tough."

"You worry about me a lot, huh?"

I couldn't help but say it because I could *feel* how much she was looking out for me.

"I don't have many friends. If taking care of someone means I get to have a friend, then I don't mind."

I watched as she unplugged the hairdryer and put it away. And I couldn't help but blame myself—five years ago, I had left her when she needed me the most.

"You can be my friend, Khun Phleng."

"Hm?"

"You don't have to go out of your way to make me feel good. But if you ever need a friend, I'm here."

I blurted it out without knowing how she truly felt. But I wanted her to know that I was still here, still willing to be by her side.

Fate had somehow brought us back together. If she needed someone, I would be that person.

"Such a strict rule... So, where do you want me to sleep?"

It must have looked funny—the way I tried to put on a serious face to show my sincerity. Khun Phleng smiled slightly before pointing to the area near my bed.

"I can lay a mat on the floor or sleep on the sofa outside instead."

"No way! The bed is a double bed. We should sleep together."

I quickly stopped Khun Phleng when she walked over and pointed at the floor beside the bed.

"Alright, do you want me to sleep on the inner side or the outer side?"

"Where do you usually sleep?"

"I prefer sleeping alone."

"..."

"I'm just kidding."

Khun Phleng reached out and pinched my cheek, just like she used to do five years ago.

"I'll sleep on the inner side so that if you need to get up to use the bathroom, it'll be easier for you."

"Alright."

After saying that, Khun Phleng climbed onto the bed. I turned on the bedside lamp before following suit, intending to check my phone for any emails or messages from P'Vee about work.

"Not sleeping yet?"

"Uh, just a sec."

I turned to reply to Khun Phleng before quickly scrolling through my notifications on LINE to check if there was anything important. Seeing that P'Vee hadn't sent anything urgent, I set an alarm on my phone, turned off the light, and lay down.

Since it had been years since I had a friend—or anyone, really—sleep in the same room or next to me like this, I found myself wide awake. I couldn't sleep at all. I didn't even dare to toss and turn too much, afraid that it would annoy Khun Phleng.

"Can't sleep?"

"Yeah."

"Me neither."

"I'm not used to it. I haven't had anyone sleep next to me for a long time."

"Same here. The last time I had someone sleep next to me was five years ago."

"..." Her words hit me hard.

The bed wasn't particularly big, so our bodies occasionally brushed against each other as she shifted positions. It made my heart race so much that I had to swallow hard.

"Five years ago... was the person sleeping next to you your mother? Or... someone else?"

I asked, pretending to be clueless, even though I knew the answer.

"No, just someone I was close to. They should still be in Thailand now."

"A friend?"

"Maybe more than a friend. We were close, but only for a short while—just five months. Then they went back to Thailand."

"Did you ever try to find out where they were? You could go see them."

"I didn't want to disturb them. I figured they'd want to live their own life." "..."

Hearing that, I couldn't find anything else to say, so I just let the silence settle between us.

"You don't have any parents, Lermarn? That's why you live alone like this?"

"No. My dad might still be alive, but I have no idea where he is."

"Oh."

It seemed like Khun Phleng realized her question might have hit a sore spot because she didn't continue the topic. A moment later, she turned onto her side, facing me. Our faces were now only inches apart.

She really had gotten even more beautiful. Seeing her up close like this, I could tell she must have started taking better care of herself—nurturing her skin, her hair. But honestly, even if she didn't do anything, she would still be stunning.

As I was lost in thought, suddenly, her cold hands slipped under the blanket and cupped the sides of my head, massaging my temples gently for a moment before disappearing back under the covers.

"What are you doing?"

"Giving you warmth."

"Huh?"

"Like this."

Then Khun Phleng sat up and placed her palms on my temples, pressing and massaging them lightly as a demonstration. The light coming in from outside allowed me to see her face just a little.

The massage actually felt nice, so I didn't resist—just found it a bit strange.

"No one's ever done this for me before," I chuckled.

"It helps you relax. And... makes you feel close."

"..."

"This is my own way of giving warmth," she said, pointing at herself smugly before flopping back down beside me, leaving me with my mouth slightly open and blinking in disbelief.

...Cute.

Oh god, why is Ms. Phleng this cute?!

# Chapter 5: Khun Kwang

The alarm clock woke me up groggily. My hand fumbled for my phone, snoozing the alarm for another ten minutes because I really couldn't get up. I burrowed back under the blanket, stretching my leg out to hug my bolster —only to realize I had draped it over Khun Phleng instead.

I quickly pulled my leg back, completely forgetting that I hadn't slept alone last night.

Khun Phleng must have felt it too because after I accidentally pressed my leg against her waist, her sharp yet delicate face turned toward me. She looked drowsy, barely able to keep her eyes open.

"Just ten more minutes..." she mumbled sleepily before burying her face back into the pillow. I wasn't any better—having snoozed my alarm, I snuggled into my pillow again, both of us remaining in that lazy, groggy state together.

"I made some toast for you," I said, handing her a plate of two slices of bread while she sat brushing her hair.

She turned to look at the slightly burnt toast I had made and smiled.

"I know it's burnt," I admitted before she could say anything. "I forgot to adjust the temperature, so it got a bit crispy."

I preemptively defended myself, knowing full well she was probably amused that I had managed to mess up something as simple as toasting bread.

"It's nothing," she said. "Someone used to make burnt toast for me all the time too."

With that, she casually took a piece and bit into it, holding it between her lips as she walked over to return my hairbrush to the vanity.

"Well, back then, you couldn't se—"

"..."

Realizing I was about to blurt out something I shouldn't, I clamped my mouth shut and internally scolded myself. I quickly turned away, jabbing a straw into a milk carton and taking a long sip, trying to play it off.

"Oh, right. Lermarn never knew, huh?" she said suddenly.

"Knew what?"

"That I used to be blind."

I froze. "You were?"

"Yeah. Five years ago, before I came back to Thailand, I was completely blind."

Khun Phleng arched an eyebrow as if it were some kind of challenge.

"Really?"

"Yeah. Every morning, someone would make me toast. I couldn't see how burnt it was, but I could sure taste it. It was so bitter that I knew it was completely charred."

"..."

That "someone" was me, wasn't it?

"You've really..." I hesitated before finishing, "been through a lot, huh?"

"You could say that."

I knew that learning about someone's past blindness should have sparked a stronger reaction—shock, curiosity, a flood of questions about their past. But what could I do? I wasn't good at pretending. I could only offer a brief comment and let the moment pass.

After all, I already knew everything about Khun Phleng.

"Alright, let's get to work before we're late."

. .

Khun Kwang still insisted on helping me wash the pajamas she wore last night. She drove me to the entrance of the BTS station before saying goodbye and parting ways. Then, she drove off while I took the train to work as usual.

Thinking back, my heart still couldn't stop racing. I slept with Khun Kwang last night!

"Hey, so did Khun Kwang discuss the project details any further yesterday?" P'Vee nudged me while I was sitting at my desk, working on the filming budget.

"No, we just had dinner and then went home."

"Oh really? By the way, the hotel food was delicious, huh? I should take my boyfriend there sometime."

P'Vee chuckled before returning to her desk. Normally, in the morning before work, I'd review my to-do list with her, so I picked up my notebook, ready to go over things. But before I could, my phone suddenly started buzzing with five consecutive messages.

**Peepee:** *[Sticker]*

**Peepee:** *[Sticker]*

**Peepee:** *[Sticker]*

**Peepee:** *[Sticker]*

**Peepee:** *[Sticker]*

"..."

All stickers. From someone I didn't recognize. But when I opened the chat and saw the display picture—a candid shot of Khun Kwang leaning on a beautiful balcony somewhere, wearing sunglasses and looking effortlessly cool—I was so startled that I dropped my phone. I almost blocked the contact right then and there.

"Hey, careful there, Le!" P'Vee turned around after hearing the sound.

"Sorry..."

And the Line display name... *Peepee...*

That's ridiculous.

**LERMARN:** *Don't you have work to do?*

I replied shortly before glancing at the clock. Seeing that it was already noon, I grabbed my wallet, ready to go for lunch. But as soon as I stepped out of the office and took five steps forward, I bumped into someone tall.

"Oof—"

"Khun Kwang?"

I blurted out his name in surprise.

Khun Kwang was a handsome 30-year-old man with sharp features, a high nose, and a towering height of 185 cm. He had that classic *oppa* charm that made all the ladies in the office swoon. On top of that, he was the son of the executive who owned the building we worked in.

Being good-looking, rich, and at the perfect age to settle down, Khun

Kwang was essentially a walking fantasy for many women in the office— including P'Vee, who already had a boyfriend but still found him irresistible.

I used to be a fan of his, too. But just a *fan*—because, sure, he was cute, but I never thought much beyond that. To me, he was just some eye candy to admire from afar.

That is, until he started trying to *court me*.

"I just got back from Boston. Brought something for you," he said, holding up a shopping bag that looked expensive.

"Thank you, Khun Kwang."

"Heading to lunch?" Instead of handing me the bag, he continued the conversation.

As he mentioned, he had been away in Boston for about two weeks. It had been a blissful two weeks, free from his relentless flirting and constant presence. Khun Kwang was quite skilled at wooing, but for someone like me, who prioritized work above all else, his advances felt more like an obstacle than anything else. And, to be frank, I just wasn't interested.

"Yes, it's already noon," I said, glancing at my watch to subtly hint at my schedule.

"Then I'll join you."

Without waiting for my response, he casually fell into step beside me, heading toward the elevators.

"Which restaurant?"

"The one right across from our office."

"Alright."

"You like eating there too, Khun Kwang?"

"I can eat anywhere... as long as it's with you."

"Oh, come on, that's a bit much," I said, rolling my eyes.

I chose a simple street food restaurant right across from the office. Initially, the place was lively with the chatter of other employees on their lunch break. But as soon as Khun Kwang stepped in, the atmosphere shifted— now filled with hushed whispers from the women eyeing him.

"I'll have what she's having," he told the vendor smoothly before turning to flash me his signature charming smile.

"Does it bother you that I'm pursuing you like this?"

"A little," I answered honestly.

He seemed taken aback, eyes widening slightly. Maybe he wasn't expecting such a blunt answer. But instead of being discouraged, he chuckled softly.

"Then just say yes and be my girlfriend already."

"It's easy to *say* that," I shot back.

"I'm not giving up that easily."

I might have debated him further if the food hadn't arrived just then. As we ate, he kept the conversation going while I responded passively.

"How about dinner tonight?" he asked.

"I'm too tired. Work has been hectic today. I just want to go home and rest."

Since he had been trying to court me for a while now—long enough that I could call it *persistent*—I felt comfortable being straightforward with him. More so than most women in the office, who wouldn't dare to reject him outright.

"Just one night. Come on?"

"How about the weekend instead?"

"I can't. I have to spend the weekend with my grandma."

"Then let's wait until you're free and I'm not with your grandma. That way, we can go when it's convenient for both of us. Sounds good?" I suggested with a polite smile, hoping to steer the conversation away.

I checked my phone again and saw that Khun Phee had replied on Line.

**Peepee:** *I'm working. Trying to figure out how to use Line.*

**LERMARN:** *Line has been around for years. Where have you been? 55555* **Peepee:** *Well, I couldn't use it before, remember?*

I froze at that response. Guilt instantly crept up my spine—I hadn't thought before typing.

"Who are you chatting with?"

Suddenly, Khun Kwang leaned in *way* too close, peering at my screen. Startled, I yelped and accidentally dropped my phone into my soup.

"Shit!"

"Here, let me—"

Khun Kwang quickly fished my phone out of the bowl and wiped the screen with tissues. Luckily, it had only been submerged for a second and was still working.

"Khun Kwang!" I snapped, irritated.

He looked sheepish, knowing he was at fault. But at least he made up for it by diligently drying my phone until the screen was spotless.

"Sorry, I didn't think you'd get startled *that* badly."

I let out a frustrated sigh before finishing my meal in silence. At least he had the sense to keep quiet this time.

After lunch, I bumped into P'Jay, who was coming out of 7-Eleven. Seizing the opportunity, I quickly ran over to chat with him—leaving Khun Kwang behind.

. .

"You seem really serious about courting Le, Khun Kwang."

"Please don't bring him up, P'Vee. I'm annoyed with him."

I told P'Vee without looking up as we sat working together in the office.

"Oh wow, if you two actually end up together, could you ask him to tell the accounting department to process our salaries faster?"

P'Jay's comment made me laugh and eased my stress a little. Then, I picked up my phone to check if Khun Phleng had replied yet. I had sent her a message apologizing earlier, but she had only read it without responding.

If she was actually mad, how was I supposed to face her the next time we met? Ton was the only one who knew she had been blind before.

And after Khun Kwang accidentally sent my phone for a swim in a bowl of soup, he hadn't dared to push any further about dragging me to dinner.

When the clock hit 7 PM—our office's closing time—I shut my laptop, packed my things, and got ready to head back to my condo.

"I'm heading home now, P'Vee."

"Alright, take care, Le."

"Goodbye, everyone."

I bowed slightly to the other colleagues in the room before grabbing my backpack and walking out. As I slid open the office door into the hallway, I immediately bumped into Khun Kwang again.

I didn't even need to look up—I could recognize the color of the shirt he was wearing today.

"Khun Kwang."

"I'm sorry."

The tall man mumbled and blocked my way.

"*Sigh* You again, Khun Kwang?" I pouted, but not too seriously. Every time I wanted to go home and rest, something always came up to delay me. "Excuse me, I'm heading home now."

"Please don't be mad at me, Le. I really didn't mean to."

"If this is about the phone, I'm not upset about that." I brushed it off as I made my way toward the elevator hall. Upon reaching it, I pressed the button to go down.

"Then let me take you home."

"I'm stopping by to shop first."

"I'll go with you."

"I take a long time shopping."

"I can wait."

I turned to look at the handsome man in front of me, surprised by his patience. Seeing the determined look in his eyes made me feel like I was losing this battle.

"...Fine, if you really want to tag along, then come."

"Okay!"

The handsome man immediately beamed with joy and stepped into the elevator with me.

Now, I had to actually go shopping just to keep up the lie I had told Khun Kwang.

The truth was—I just wanted to go home and sleep!

. .

I pressed my finger against the scanner and walked out of the building with Khun Kwang, feeling awkward. He looked way too happy about going to the mall with me, while I just felt exhausted—both physically and mentally.

We strolled through the parking lot toward the main road. Right at the front of the alley stood a large shopping mall. I decided I'd buy something small just to make it seem like I hadn't lied.

"Lermarn."

A familiar voice made both me and Khun Kwang turn around at the same time. That's when I saw Khun Phleng leaning against an orange Porsche behind us.

"K-Khun Phleng?"

Without thinking, I found myself stepping toward the tall woman. But instead of looking at me, she glanced past my head to greet the man following behind.

"Oh, you must be Khun Kawinphop?"

"Yes, that's me. And you are...?"

Khun Kwang responded, frowning slightly in confusion as he tried to place her face.

"I'm a client of your father's. My name is Phlengphin."

"Oh! Khun Phlengphin, CEO of PP Palace Hotels..."

Khun Kwang repeated her name and then turned to look at me with surprise.

"I didn't know you knew Lermarn."

"Well, we're—"

"We're friends," Khun Phleng interjected before I could answer. Then, she casually rested her arm on my head as if using me as a leaning post.

Just because she was tall, did she think she could do anything she wanted?

"I actually came to discuss some changes to the ad campaign with Lermarn. But it looks like you two are heading out. Am I interrupting?"

"Oh, not at all," Khun Kwang replied. "We were just going shopping for a bit. But since you made the effort to come all the way here for work, please go ahead."

With that, he gestured for me to talk to Khun Phleng alone. Then, looking somewhat dejected, he turned back toward the office building.

"I'll take you shopping another time."

"Alright, see you later."

I waved him goodbye so he wouldn't feel too embarrassed before turning to Khun Phleng with gratitude.

"Thank you, Khun Phleng."

"You figured out I was helping you, huh?"

She glanced at Khun Kwang's back as he disappeared into the building.

"You've got quite the charm—big shots are after you. Why don't you seem interested in him at all?"

"How do you know I'm not?"

"I've been sitting in my car the whole time. Since before you even came out of the building. Because you weren't answering my calls."

"Oh..."

I quickly pulled out my phone and, sure enough, I had missed several calls from her.

"When I saw you walk out, I could tell right away you were being pursued."

"Wow, your timing is just too perfect."

"Here."

She handed me a small, semi-transparent white bag.

"Pajamas."

"You came all the way here just for this? You could've returned them during our next meeting."

"If I returned them then, people would wonder why I had your clothes in the first place."

"But bringing them here like this will make people wonder too." I laughed, glancing around at the office workers moving in and out of the building.

"Good point... That was careless of me."

"Khun Phleng?"

"Hmm?"

"I'm really sorry... about what I said in Line."

"Oh, don't worry about it," she said, waving her hand dismissively.

"But you didn't reply, so I thought you were mad."

"Not replying means I was mad!?"

She looked genuinely shocked.

"...Yes?"

"I had meetings all day, so I didn't reply. I didn't think it was a big deal. Does not replying really mean I'm mad?"

"Not exactly, but it makes people overthink."

Were we seriously having this conversation right now?

"I have so much to learn."

"You've really never used Line much before? Even in business, people use it a lot nowadays."

"I've only ever used email. And I've never had casual chats with anyone before."

"...?"

"So I never knew how people felt about it."

I looked at her face—she really wasn't bothered at all.

She was already thirty, yet there were still so many things she didn't know.

"Honestly... It's not that big of a deal. You don't have to be so mindful of me."

"But if you hadn't told me, I might have done the same to someone else." She made such a reasonable point that I didn't know how to respond.

While I was searching for an answer, Khun Phleng glanced at her watch.

"I should get going. I have a meeting with an elder tonight."

"Drive safe."

"See you later."

She said her farewell briefly before hopping into her car and driving off.

I watched until her car disappeared down the road.

. .

I stopped for dinner and bought some groceries to stock up in the fridge. When I got to my room, I quickly took a shower to relax my body from work stress. The day after tomorrow, I'd have an outdoor shoot again—plus, it's a night shoot. That meant I'd definitely be sleep-deprived. Maybe I should go buy some vitamins tomorrow to keep myself healthy.

Time passed, and by 10 PM, I had a quick chat with P'Vee on LINE about work before excusing myself to get some rest. As I walked to my bed, I suddenly remembered that I had forgotten to fold my blanket earlier. However, when I looked at my bed now, it was perfectly neat—my blanket was folded so precisely that I could tell whoever folded it took their time to make sure it was perfectly aligned at the foot of the bed. My pillows were also arranged neatly, side by side.

So neat that I didn't even dare mess it up. Seriously, Khun Phleng...

Just as that thought crossed my mind, my phone rang. The ringtone was from the LINE app. When I checked the screen, I saw that it was Khun Phleng calling.

"Why is she video calling me at this hour?"

As if I wasn't already weak to her presence...

"Are you asleep yet?"

As soon as I answered, the familiar beautiful face filled my phone screen. Khun Phleng was lying on her stomach on a white bed. From what I could see on the screen, she was wearing a navy blue pajama set.

Why was I even noticing these details...

"Not yet."

"How do you buy LINE stickers?"

"Do you want to buy some?" I couldn't help but chuckle at her question.

"Tonight, I had dinner with some executives, and we exchanged LINE contacts. One of them messaged me using a cute sticker. When I checked, I saw that it costs money."

"What kind of sticker set do you want?"

"Why? Are you going to buy it for me?"

She then flashed a dazzlingly sweet smile at me through the screen.

"You're blushing. Do you have a fever?"

"No!"

I quickly tried to cover up my reaction.

"So how do I buy them?"

"Well..."

I proceeded to explain the entire process to the CEO, who clearly wasn't very tech-savvy. Meanwhile, she listened intently, paying full attention to my explanation. I noticed she had a gray laptop placed beside her on the bed—she was probably working while lying down.

"Do you understand now?" I asked once I finished explaining.

"If I didn't have you, I'd be doomed."

"Don't your employees or subordinates ever help you with things like this?"

"No. I don't really like asking my subordinates for things."

"And asking me is better?"

I changed my position, lying on my stomach while propping my phone against a pillow.

"I don't know. Talking to you feels like talking to a friend." "..."

Saying things like that will just make me even more flustered!

"Last night, you said we were friends already. That means I can ask you things, right?"

"Yes."

"Then that's all. I have to get back to work now. Sweet dreams."

"Good night, Khun Phleng."

She ended the call immediately. The last thing I saw before the screen went dark was her expression shifting into something serious and focused as she turned back to her laptop.

I couldn't help but feel a bit worried. Managing such a massive business empire all on her own must be exhausting.

Even though she had already ended the call, she had basically left a bomb behind. I had been trying my best not to think about her, not to let my mind wander to her beautiful face. But how was I supposed to do that when she kept hovering around me like this?

# Chapter 6: A Bad Day

Today was the casting day for a commercial shoot for PP Palace Hotel. Since the hotel belonged to Khun Phleng and was an extremely important client for the company, not only were P'Vee and the production team present, but Khun Kwang had also been assigned by her father to oversee the process and act as an advisor to Khun Phleng.

In reality, casting wasn't such a big deal. Our side could've handled it just fine, but Khun Phleng still wanted to personally oversee the selection process. That meant there were more people in the meeting room today than usual.

"Le, come here," P'Vee nudged me as I stood outside the glass-walled room, watching the casting team manage the actors who had arrived earlier.

"Huh?"

"Beam is coming for the audition. You'll have to go downstairs to pick him up. He should be arriving in about ten minutes."

"Beam? Don't tell me you mean Beam Nadol?" My face immediately scrunched up in dismay. P'Vee didn't look too thrilled either.

"Yeah, that Beam."

"I hate him. You know that, P'Vee."

"I hate him too, but what can we do? His face is really popular in service industry ads. Just hang in there, okay?"

I let out a deep sigh.

Who is Beam Nadol? Not anyone important, really. He's just another prettyfaced Thai actor who's currently at the peak of his career. On the surface, he's a gentleman—charming, polite, always smiling, and the ideal man for many girls. But behind the scenes, this guy is an arrogant, foul-mouthed diva who enjoys belittling and looking down on the crew he works with. Many production companies are fed up with him, but since he brings in massive profits for producers and media outlets, they have no choice but to put up with him.

P'Vee and I happen to be among the unfortunate souls who have witnessed his true nature firsthand. That's why every time we hear his name, we automatically cringe.

While waiting for Beam's manager to call and let me know he'd arrived, I watched the auditions of the other male actors. But despite the initial estimate of ten minutes, the man was still nowhere to be seen an hour later.

As for Khun Phleng, we hadn't spoken at all today. She had gone straight into the meeting room to discuss business with Khun Kwang and P'Jay as soon as she arrived. Meanwhile, I was busy organizing schedules with P'Vee and the rest of the casting team. The only interaction we had was a brief exchange of eye contact and my polite greeting at the start of the casting session.

"P'Vee, it's been an hour. You said ten minutes," I whispered in irritation. Besides being a jerk, he was also incredibly unpunctual.

Before P'Vee could respond, her phone rang. She glanced at the screen, looking alarmed, and quickly answered.

"Yes, yes. Oh—okay, got it. I'll send someone down right away."

She hung up and nodded at me. That meant only one thing—Beam was finally here.

"Oh, Lord, have mercy on me," I muttered, pressing my hands together in mock prayer before slipping out of the meeting room quietly.

"Hello, P'Ae. Hello, Beam," I greeted as I approached the black van parked outside.

P'Ae, Beam's manager, stepped out first and greeted me warmly, while the diva himself remained seated, posing like a damn celebrity. Not even a nod in response.

"I remember you," he suddenly said, pointing a finger at me.

"..."

"The assistant producer I yelled at on that short film set, right?"

His voice dripped with mockery as he lazily climbed out of the van.

"Still not fired, huh?" he sneered before walking past me, deliberately bumping my shoulder on the way to the building entrance.

I inhaled deeply and gave P'Ae a small nod to assure her that I was fine.

I led Beam to the waiting area, a glass-walled room where the actors were being held before their auditions. Unfortunately, at that moment, no one else was inside.

"Why are you still standing here? Get out," Beam waved me off dismissively as soon as he sat down. "You're just an assistant. Stop sticking your nose where it doesn't belong."

I clenched my fists but forced myself to walk away and return to the meeting room instead of wasting another second with that arrogant bastard.

"How was it?"

"Still the same asshole," I answered P'Vee in a whisper as I took my seat. Khun Phleng and Khun Kwang were still watching the auditions with serious expressions. P'Vee gave my hand a small squeeze of encouragement.

"Let's take a short break," Khun Kwang suggested after the current audition ended. The team dispersed—some heading for the restroom, including Khun Phleng. I stayed behind to organize the application forms submitted by the actors.

As I stepped out of the meeting room, I spotted Beam chatting animatedly with Khun Kwang and Khun Phleng. His usual cocky attitude had been replaced with charm.

"If I become the presenter, can I get a free night's stay at your hotel?" he asked smoothly.

Classic. The moment he saw a beautiful woman, he turned on the charm.

"If you do get selected, I'll consider offering you something even better," Khun Phleng replied with a polite smile.

"Damn, then I'll give it my all!" Beam laughed.

I didn't want to watch this any longer, so I excused myself and went upstairs to grab some documents from the office. On my way back down, I saw Khun Phleng heading toward the restroom.

I was about to call out to her when Khun Kwang beat me to it, pulling her into a conversation before she disappeared into the ladies' room.

"Where's the smoking area?"

Out of nowhere, Beam appeared behind me, looking agitated. His hands were twitching slightly—probably desperate for a cigarette.

"There's none on this floor. You'll have to go downstairs," I replied.

"Take me down there, then."

"Can you wait until after the audition? Your turn is coming up soon."

"I said take me down!" he snapped.

His sudden outburst startled me, and I accidentally dropped all the papers I was holding. They scattered across the floor.

"Serves you right," he scoffed before storming off back into the waiting room.

I clenched my jaw so hard that I could taste blood. But I forced myself to kneel and start gathering the documents.

"Le," a familiar voice called softly.

I looked up to see Khun Phleng standing in front of me, nearly stepping on the scattered papers.

"Why are these all over the place?" she asked, bending down to help pick them up.

"It's nothing," I quickly reassured her. "I just dropped them myself."

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I put on a sweet smile to cover up what I had just experienced and excused myself, walking ahead, trying to appear busy. Seeing that, Khun Phleng simply walked into the meeting room without saying anything further to me. The reason I acted busy was that I was afraid I might show my frustration toward the person in front of me—who, after all, was a client. As for Beam's behavior, I couldn't tell Khun Phleng anything about it because it was behind-the-scenes stuff. If he performed well in the commercial, there was no reason for me to badmouth him and tarnish his credibility. Besides, Khun Phleng didn't need to know what kind of person Beam really was.

Once Khun Phleng entered the meeting room, it turned out that as soon as the key figure of the event disappeared, Beam took out his vape and started puffing away in the lounge as if he didn't care about anyone.

"You can't do that here," I immediately stepped in to stop him. "If the smoke detector goes off, it'll cause a huge problem."

"It's just one hit. Stop making a big deal out of it."

With that, the arrogant actor shoved his vape back into his bag, which was right next to P' Ae, who remained silent and didn't even try to stop his agency's actor. Instead, he just sat there timidly, letting me and Beam exchange words.

"You can insult me all you want. You can say whatever you like. But if you continue this kind of behavior in this building, I'll call security!" I raised my voice, which prompted Beam to step in closer, towering over me in an attempt to intimidate me.

"And what are you gonna do about it? Go ahead, try me."

He was smart enough to hold back. If we were outside, he probably would've pushed me or even gotten physical. But since we were in my territory, surrounded by my colleagues, and he was about to take on an important job, he merely glared at me for a moment before retreating back into his seat.

"Khun Beam, you're up in five minutes,"

P' Vee stepped into the room to inform us before returning to the meeting room. Seeing that I had to escort Beam into the casting room, I took a deep breath to swallow my anger. Beam, realizing it was almost time, picked up the script and started reviewing his lines. The room fell into an awkward, tense silence once more.

I waited for the famous actor to finish going through his script, then checked the time and finally spoke up.

"It's time."

Hearing my voice, he glanced at me briefly before getting up with the script in hand, ready to leave the lounge.

Everything seemed like it would wrap up smoothly—I did my job, he did his. We had our own responsibilities. But then Beam deliberately bumped his muscular arm into me, sending me crashing onto the floor.

The impact wasn't as painful as my arm slamming against the glass wall and then collapsing onto the ground.

"Beam, don't," P' Ae finally spoke up for the first time today, but it didn't do anything to stop the brute.

"You were in the way," Beam muttered before turning to open the heavy, dark brown wooden door of the lounge—only to find someone tall standing right outside, intentionally hiding from view.

"Khun Phleng."

I barely managed to utter her name as I struggled to get up. She stood there with a cold expression, her gaze locked on Beam.

"What did you just do to her?" She pointed at me, her voice sharp.

"Nothing. I didn't do anything," the actor feigned innocence, shrugging nonchalantly.

"You pushed her to the ground. I saw it with my own eyes!"

"Khun Phleng, you must be mistaken. Beam didn't do anything," P' Ae jumped in to defend him, but she wasn't having any of it.

"Still lying, huh?!"

Her voice rang loud and clear across the lounge. Within moments, P' Vee and Khun Kwang stepped out of the adjacent meeting room, likely drawn by the commotion.

"What's going on?" Khun Kwang asked.

"Call in the next actor. I don't want this one," Khun Phleng turned to tell P' Vee, leaving my boss completely stunned.

"Why, Khun Phleng?"

"I just saw him deliberately knock Lermarn to the ground. I don't work with men who lack basic decency and have no integrity."

"I didn't do anything! Don't accuse me falsely," Beam quickly defended himself, but his confidence wavered at the sight of Khun Phleng's unwavering stance.

"You think I don't know who scattered Lermarn's papers all over the floor outside the restroom?"

"..."

"And let's not forget that rude, loud voice of yours. Do you not know how to speak to people properly?"

"I... uh..."

"I saw everything."

"..."

"Every single one of your barbaric actions."

Her words silenced Beam completely. Once she was done putting him in his place, she turned back to Khun Kwang and P' Vee.

"Take his name off the list. I don't want him."

And with that, the CEO walked away from the tense scene. Beam shot me a death glare, while P' Ae looked utterly lost.

In the end, Beam Nadol lost the commercial deal. At first, Khun Kwang tried to persuade Khun Phleng to at least let him audition, but she tore into him instead, accusing him of failing to protect his own team. That team being me, of course.

"I said no, yet you're still trying to negotiate? Do you have some personal gain in this, Khun Kawinphop?"

"No, I just—"

"He bullied someone under your management. Instead of protecting your employee, you're siding with the wrong person?"

...That was just part of the scolding Khun Kwang received.

"I'm already being generous by not calling the cops for assault."

After finishing her tirade, she turned to glance at me, her eyes filled with something unreadable...

In the end, we chose another actor from the auditions to be the commercial's presenter. P' Jay assured Khun Phleng that the ad didn't need a big-name celebrity to make an impact, and she trusted his directing skills. P' Vee escorted her out of the building while I excused myself to find some ointment for my bruises after being shoved to the ground.

"Does it hurt a lot?"

Khun Kwang, looking a little irritated, came to check on me as I sat in the employee lounge, trying to relax.

"I'm fine," I replied.

He loosened his deep red tie slightly and sat beside me.

"I'm sorry I let him treat you that way. I never meant to take his side, no matter what Khun Phleng said."

He looked frustrated—very unlike his usual cheerful self. But I understood. Today had been a rough day for all of us.

"I get it," I said. Though deep down, I was still upset that he tried to keep Beam in the casting even after what happened. He had the authority to kick him out, yet he didn't.

"I had to let him audition because I was worried about our company's interests."

"..."

"Beam is signed with a major agency, and if he badmouths us to them, we might lose credibility and future opportunities. I just wanted to keep things smooth, but I ended up making it worse."

He laughed at himself bitterly, and suddenly, I felt sorry for him. His top priority was the company's best interests, but this was a difficult situation.

"But really, can one bad actor ruin everything?" he mused.

"We can always find someone else," I reassured him, patting his shoulder. "He's just one guy, but we have a whole team."

"True." He chuckled, then stood up, adjusting his tie.

"Still, I never thought Khun Phleng would be that fierce."

"As an apology, let me treat you to dinner."

"Oh god," I groaned in exhaustion, making him laugh.

"I'm joking. I don't have the energy for a meal either."

"Good, because I'd rather go see a massage therapist after today."

"I'll ask my dad to give you a bonus instead."

Hearing that, my eyes lit up instantly, and he smiled, as if to confirm his promise.

The pain I felt? It suddenly didn't seem so bad anymore.

After wrapping up work, I finally returned to my apartment. On the way back, I stopped to buy some ointment for my sore muscles. Just the other day, I got hit by a car. Today, I got shoved to the floor by a man twice my size. What a fantastic life.

The phone in my apartment rang. It was the same front desk staff as usual.

"Someone's here to see you, Khun Lermarn."

"Who?" Please, don't let it be Khun Kwang—I had nothing left to say to him.

"It's a woman. She says her name is Khun Phlengphin."

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I dragged my battered body down to meet Khun Phleng at the elevator. She was no longer in the outfit from this morning's meeting but instead wore a casual brown T-shirt and straight-leg jeans.

"Why are you here?" I asked, rather rudely.

Thinking about how she stood up for me, I should have felt grateful. But instead, I was oddly angry that she had stirred up such chaos in my company. If I had just met her, I probably wouldn't have dared to be upset. But what could I do? I'd known her for five years already. So I was quite comfortable expressing exactly how I felt. I knew I shouldn't, but I couldn't help it.

"Well, obviously, I came to check on you," she replied.

"I'm fine, all thirty-two parts still intact," I muttered, looking away.

"Are you mad? What for? Because I went off on that Nadol guy?"

Her face showed a mix of frustration and curiosity. So I answered honestly. "I don't know if our company's reputation will take a hit because he lost that job."

"But he bullied you. Why should you be scared?"

"That's true, but I'm just a low-level employee. You could've just ignored it, Phleng. There was no need to make such a big scene." I knew she meant well, but I couldn't stop myself from saying it.

"Why don't you stand up for your own dignity?"

Her voice rose slightly, drawing the attention of a few condo residents passing by. But as soon as the tall woman shot them a glare, they quickly scurried away.

"Dignity doesn't put food on the table. But money can," I shot back.

"You little fool."

I looked up at her, surprised by her reaction to my words.

"If you're waiting for me to apologize, I won't. I came here just to check on you. Honestly, you should be thanking me. If I hadn't stepped in and that guy got the job, wouldn't it be worse if he caused even more trouble on set?"

"I know."

"If someone comes at you with a knife next time, will you still protect the company's interests, or will you protect yourself?"

"I... I'd protect myself, of course. But I can't help overthinking things!"

I snapped, my patience wearing thin. Why was everyone lecturing me today? I wasn't saying I was completely right, but did they have to yell at me like this?

Even if it was Phleng...

I gave in to Beam earlier because I was just doing my job. I didn't want Phleng to get into trouble with him because it would cause problems for my company. I had deliberately held my tongue earlier because she was a client. But when she came all the way to my place and asked me about it, I simply answered truthfully. Was that so wrong?

I was on the verge of crying now. I was exhausted. Trying to protect people, trying to protect the company—only to end up getting scolded like this.

"Are you crying?"

She stepped closer when she saw me lower my head and wipe my tears away.

"I'm just tired. Excuse me."

"..."

"Thank you for helping me today, Phleng. I know I'm being unreasonable. I'm sorry."

I waited for her to say something, but she didn't. So I gave her a wai and quietly walked away.

Tomorrow's Saturday, right?

I'm going to sleep in as much as I want!

Might as well, since God clearly has no mercy on me at all!

# Chapter 7: Pad Thai and the Rogue Doctor

As I mentioned, it was Saturday—my favorite day of the week. Last night, after a brief but intense argument with Khun Phleng, I turned off my phone, shut myself down, and raided the fridge. Whatever I found, I ate. Then, I put on my favorite movie, replaying the best scenes over and over until I was satisfied. After that, I wrapped myself in my blanket and went to sleep —no alarms, no schedules. If I missed breakfast, so what? If I didn't make it to lunch, who cares!

When I finally opened my eyes, it was already 1:30 PM. A pretty late start to the day. I hesitantly checked my phone, half-expecting to see a barrage of messages from P'Vee for not replying. But thankfully, that wasn't the case. On weekends, we usually respected each other's personal time—though, in the world of film production, anything could happen.

There were a few messages from P'Vee about work, but nothing urgent. He ended by saying he was taking a quick day trip to the beach with his husband. That meant I was free from work today. Nice.

I scrolled through my messages, and my eyes landed on Khun Phleng's chat. She hadn't sent me anything, but just seeing it reminded me of our fight last night.

I had been exhausted. Honestly, she had done everything right. If it weren't for her, Beam would've walked all over me on set.

Should I call to apologize?

"H-Hello."

I finally gathered my courage and dialed her number, taking a deep breath.

Surely, if I called to apologize, she wouldn't be too harsh, right?

"What?"

Her voice was sharp, so sharp that my heart dropped to my stomach.

"Khun Phleng..."

"Speak."

"What are you doing?"

"..."

Why the hell did I ask that? Just apologize already, idiot!

"Um... I called to say sorry."

"Oh? And what exactly are you sorry for?"

She obviously knew why I was calling. She was just messing with me. Her tone was full of amusement.

"Well... I wasn't very nice to you yesterday."

"Uh-huh."

"..."

I could tell she was enjoying this.

"Do you forgive me?"

"I don't know. You acted like a child, you know that?"

"I know... I'll be more careful with my words and actions from now on."

"Hmm. But I'm actually thinking about withdrawing from the ad campaign with Khun Kwang's company."

"What!?" I nearly shrieked. "You're pulling out? Because of me?"

Panic rushed through me as her voice remained cold and indifferent.

"I don't like unprofessionalism. I just... don't feel good about it anymore after yesterday. Maybe it's best to switch companies..."

"You can't do that! If it's because of me, then I'm sorry! I really didn't mean it. You can scold me, yell at me, whatever you want—but please, don't pull out! I'm begging you."

"..."

And then... I started crying. Hard. My sobs echoed through the phone.

"...Are you crying?"

"N-No." I lied, despite my tear-streaked face.

"We were just joking, and you started crying?"

"..."

"You called to apologize, so we're not mad anymore. But seriously, don't let people walk all over you so much. And by the way—"

Click!

I hung up. Then, I threw my phone onto my bed.

What, just because she's rich, she thinks she can toy with my feelings like this? She's even worse than before!

And just like that, my phone started ringing non-stop. Khun Phleng kept calling. Sometimes I declined the call, sometimes I let it ring until it cut off.

As I sat there sipping a cold Coke, feeling quite pleased with myself, she called again. This time, I answered.

"You finally picked up. Listen, I just wanted to say—"

Click!

Was I out of Coke yet? What about snacks? Last night, I finished all the jelly candies in front of the TV.

I tore open a fresh bag of cookies. And—surprise, surprise—my phone rang again.

"Hey, I didn't mean to—"

Click!

I hadn't cried like that in a long time. I always put on a tough act, always held my ground, always powered through everything. But just because she thought I was important, did she think she could keep making me cry?

Dream on, Khun Phleng!

I ignored my phone and continued watching my series on my computer. I hadn't even showered yet, but who cares? Today was my free time.

An hour passed, and then the landline phone rang. When I picked up, the voice on the other end made my eyes widen like goose eggs. The cookie bag in my hand slipped to the floor instantly.

"Come down and get me. Right now."

"..."

"If you don't, I'll call your handsome boss and tell him I'm pulling out of the advertisement deal."

"..."

"Come down."

When I didn't respond, the tone softened a bit. I could tell right away that the other person was just pretending to be tough. In reality, she was as soft as they come. Oh, dear Phleng.

But still, in the end, I hurried to change clothes and went downstairs to meet her.

"You haven't showered yet?"

"Nope."

"It's already 3 PM."

"It's Saturday. If you're that disgusted, then just go back."

I pouted and turned away in mock annoyance. Of course, she wasn't going anywhere.

Once we got back to my apartment, I let Phleng wait on the sofa while I took a quick shower. When I came back out, she was still sitting in the same cross-legged position on my couch. "Why did you come to see me?"

"Well... you cried, didn't you?"

"I stopped a long time ago. Crying is exhausting."

"I'm sorry..."

"Hm?"

"I'm sorry." She lowered her head slightly and blurted out an apology again. Then, she lifted her gaze to look at me, pursing her lips a little. "I was just teasing. I wasn't really going to pull out of the deal."

Because of how childlike she looked in that moment, I couldn't stay mad at her anymore.

I wanted to be angry longer, but I just couldn't. So frustrating!

"Why are you pouting?"

I stopped arguing with myself when she pointed it out. She must've seen me making weird faces on my own.

"It's nothing. I'm not mad anymore." I sat down at the farthest end of the couch. "Honestly, I should be the one apologizing. Everything happened because I was being immature."

"You're sitting so far away. Come sit closer."

"I don't think that's necessary. I'm fine here."

"Come here."

She didn't take no for an answer and pulled me by the waist, dragging me closer to her.

"Let's go out."

"Huh!?"

"Let's go out."

"Aren't you a CEO of a luxury hotel? Don't you have work to do?" I asked, surprised. In my head, she should be busy all the time—not wandering around malls.

"It's Saturday."

She threw my own words from earlier right back at me, making me smile despite myself.

"I'll even buy you a movie ticket, as an apology for making you cry."

"But I made you mad too."

"Then buy me dinner."

"I can't afford to take you to some fancy restaurant."

"I don't want anything fancy."

She tilted her head and shook it slightly, looking determined—like a kid eager to go play on a new playground. There was no way I could refuse now.

"Alright... let me change first."

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And that's how I ended up standing with Phleng at the train station near my condo.

At first, I asked her why we weren't taking her car. That way, we wouldn't have to come back here to pick it up later. But she said she wanted to try taking the train. Since returning to Thailand, she hadn't taken the BTS once. So, she left her car at my place, and we walked out to catch the train.

Because the tall woman standing behind me was stunning, people kept stealing glances at her when she stepped onto the platform. But she had no clue. She was too busy looking around in awe, like a kid who just discovered a brand-new playground.

"Uh... what do you want to do first? Shopping? Eating? Or should we watch a movie first and then eat after?"

I wasn't sure what to do first. Usually, when I came to the mall, I had a set goal of what to buy. Once I was done, I'd leave. I wasn't the type to stroll around aimlessly. But now, I had to figure out a plan while also entertaining this overly tall woman.

"Are you hungry? If you are, let's eat first."

"The place I want to take you isn't inside the mall. We have to walk a bit." "Oh."

"The best food isn't in malls. The real gems are the street stalls."

"That's not unhygienic?"

Her words made me a little self-conscious, but I couldn't blame her. She was raised in a completely different world than me—one where every meal had to be elegant and high-end, not grabbed from a street vendor like mine.

"But I can eat that." She suddenly said, cutting off my worries. "If you want to take me, I'll go."

"Are you sure? You might have to wait in line. This place is always packed."

"If you want me to eat there, I'll wait as long as it takes."

"..."

"Why's your face turning red?"

I turned away because her words made me flustered. But it seemed like she didn't even realize it herself. I had to fan myself to cool down.

"You're blushing. Admit it—I'm beautiful."

"..."

Okay. I'm not blushing anymore.

I'm annoyed instead.

"Let's watch the movie first, then. The restaurant's open until midnight. We can eat after."

"Sounds good."

She nodded in agreement.

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"The sweet seat, two in the middle," the tall woman reached past me as I was selecting regular seats and pointed at the most expensive seats in the theater without even asking first.

"Khun Phleng, those seats are really expensive. The regular ones should be fine."

"I can afford it. Why squeeze in with other people?"

With that, the tall woman pulled out her credit card from her wallet and handed it to the cashier without hesitation, leaving me standing there, speechless.

"I'll take the biggest size."

As we stood near the popcorn counter, Khun Phleng didn't wait for me to decide. She just walked up and ordered on her own, then returned with a giant tub of popcorn and an oversized drink.

"Aren't you afraid you'll be too full? We're supposed to go eat after this."

"I've never had popcorn in a movie theater before."

The tall woman handed me the popcorn tub while she sipped her drink and led me toward the theater entrance. But suddenly, she stopped, making me bump right into her back, causing some popcorn to spill onto my own face.

"I just realized—are you okay sharing a drink with me, or does that gross you out?"

"Uh..."

"You probably don't want to, huh? I'll go buy you another one."

She turned as if to head back to the counter, but I quickly blocked her path. "I can drink from the same cup! Let's just go inside."

It felt like I was taking a little kid to the movies. She was wandering around, fascinated by everything.

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We entered the theater together—me carrying the giant tub of popcorn and her holding the drink. The tall woman walked ahead of me, looking around excitedly. Understandable, given that she hadn't been able to see for most of her life. There were probably so many things she still hadn't done.

"Walk straight ahead, Khun Phleng. It's a narrow walkway—watch your step."

"..."

Instead of continuing, she froze in place and turned to look at me, as if something I said had completely stunned her. But once she regained her composure, she kept walking and sat down on the large sofa seats we had reserved.

"Are you okay? You suddenly stopped back there..." I asked, noticing that her expression wasn't as bright as before.

Had I said something wrong?

"That sounded just like her."

"Huh?!"

"What you just said."

"Who... who did I sound like?" I asked, sensing something significant.

"Five years ago, I went to a movie theater with someone. Back then, I was still completely blind, so they had to help me find my way. They said the exact same thing you just did."

"..."

"It made me think of them out of nowhere."

Khun Phleng wasn't looking at me anymore. Instead, she picked up one of the pillows the theater had provided and hugged it, gazing at the dark movie screen where only commercials were playing. Meanwhile, I sat there, completely stunned.

She remembered what I said. A line I didn't even recall saying myself. But she remembered it perfectly.

"Who was that person?" I couldn't stop myself from asking. I wanted to know how she felt about my past self.

"It's a long story. Honestly, it's kind of crazy," she laughed lightly. There wasn't a trace of sadness in her voice, which reassured me that my past self hadn't caused her pain.

"I used to be married to a woman, you know."

"A woman?!"

"Back when I was still blind, my parents had already passed away, and I was surrounded by men trying to get close to me—just after my inheritance, of course. So, I came up with a plan to get rid of them by finding someone to marry me—fake marriage, obviously. That way, they'd stop bothering me. And that's when I met her."

"Oh..."

"Her name was Nara. She was Thai, just like you. She applied for the position when I was hiring someone to be my fake spouse. After her interview, I liked her immediately. She wasn't fake, didn't try to impress me with fancy words, and answered my questions honestly instead of reciting rehearsed lines like the other applicants. So, I chose Nara as my temporary wife."

"And... how was she?" I asked, feeling a strange anticipation.

"I liked her a lot!"

Her voice was filled with excitement when she talked about my past self.

"My house was always quiet and empty. But after Nara came, it had more life in it. Not much, but enough to keep me from feeling lonely."

"That sounds nice."

"But she only stayed for five months before she asked to go back to Thailand. I didn't stop her. Five months was more than enough to convince people I was married. I even burned our marriage certificate. If anyone still thought I was taken, that was fine—it kept them away. After that, I never saw Nara again."

"..."

I didn't say anything. I just sat there, listening to her as she reminisced about the past with so much energy.

"But things actually got sad after that, because—"

She didn't get to finish. The movie trailers started playing, and she fell silent. So, I stopped thinking about my past self and turned my attention to the screen instead.

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**"Vengeful Wrath: The Rogue Doctor's Revenge"**

The poster looks stylish, giving off a raw, action-packed vibe. But why is the Thai title so awful? The movie revolves around an underground network of rogue doctors in a city who have gained influence over multiple hospitals. Eventually, they cause the main characters to lose their unborn child, which sets off a relentless quest for revenge.

Honestly, we could have watched a lighthearted romance instead, but we just couldn't decide. There wasn't really any movie we were dying to see. So, in the end, Phleng used the "random pick" method, and we ended up watching this one.

"Holy sh—!" I gasped in horror at the gruesome scene on screen—one I never expected in this movie. If I had watched the trailer beforehand, maybe I'd have been prepared. But meanwhile, the tall person sitting next to me watched the film with wide, unflinching eyes, completely unfazed.

"Ughh."

Did they just decapitate someone like it was nothing?! I do not like this kind of movie. I pulled my knees up and turned my face away from the gory scenes every so often.

After a while, a long hand suddenly covered my eyes. I jumped in my seat —the sound in the theater was already intense, and the movie was relentless with its brutal visuals. So when a hand unexpectedly appeared in front of me, it startled me even more.

I turned to see Phleng, the owner of the hand, watching me. When she noticed me looking at her, she scooted a little closer.

"Scared?"

"..."

"I've been noticing you squirm for a while now. Do you want to keep watching?"

"I'm fine. I can keep watching."

Since she seemed to be enjoying the movie a lot, and we had gone through the trouble of taking the train and paying for tickets, it would be a shame to leave it unfinished.

"I really don't mind," I repeated when she didn't turn back to the screen right away. Finally, Phleng returned her attention to the movie, while I had to endure yet another grotesque scene—a gang member's head cracked open, brain matter spilling everywhere.

Then—grab!

I looked down to find Phleng's hand firmly holding mine. I shifted slightly, trying to pull away, but she wouldn't let go. And without a care in the world, she kept watching the movie while keeping my hand in hers. Sometimes, whenever an extra disturbing scene appeared, she'd squeeze my hand even tighter.

At this point, I wasn't even scared of the movie anymore. I was too busy being flustered by the person next to me.

"That was such a great movie!"

I glanced at Phleng, who was swinging her arms happily as we walked out of the theater, feeling a pang of jealousy.

So this is the kind of movie she likes...

"But there were a few too many bloody scenes, huh?"

Just a few?!

"Let's go eat! Come on!" she said, wrapping an arm around my shoulder to guide me forward.

I was a little concerned about how long Phleng would be willing to wait in line for the famous Pad Thai restaurant I had planned to take her to. The wait time varied—sometimes it was quick, sometimes it took forever. We had already been in line for ten minutes, and there was still no sign of us getting in.

"How much longer?"

The question I had been dreading finally came from behind me—from the person who was currently resting both arms on my shoulders, practically draping herself over me. If we got any closer than this, maybe I should try asking her to carry me on her back next time.

"I'm not sure, Phleng. Can you wait? Should we just eat at the mall?"

"Just asking. I can wait," she replied with a shrug, which reassured me for now.

"You're sure this place is really good?"

"Absolutely! You'll love it," I said enthusiastically. Phleng gave me a look of anticipation in return, clearly teasing me.

After nearly half an hour, we finally made it inside. Now came the next challenge—the taste. I personally loved the food, as did half of Bangkok, but whether Phleng would like it was a different matter.

Turns out, the result exceeded expectations. While I was still working through my first plate, Phleng had already devoured two and was about to order a third. A bottomless stomach, truly.

"You put in a lot of chili," Phleng commented as she watched me sprinkle more onto my Pad Thai.

"I like spicy food," I replied.

"Really?"

She then gathered the remaining bits of food in her dish into one bite and finished it off.

How does she eat so much and stay that fit?

"Maybe I should take some to-go for lunch tomorrow," she mused.

"You can always come back, Phleng. The restaurant isn't going anywhere," I chuckled.

"Guess I'll have to hit the gym this week. Ugh, this was all carbs," she groaned, covering her mouth as she let out a small burp while I paid the bill.

She may be an adult, but she still acts like a kid sometimes.

"It's already 9 PM. Should we head back?"

"Is there anything else good to eat?"

"You can't still be hungry!"

"I am!"

. .

By the time we were finally heading back to my condo, it was already 10:30 PM. After Pad Thai, I had taken Phleng on a food tour, stuffing her with desserts, drinks, and every snack her stomach could handle. If I gathered all the food she ate tonight, I could stretch it into three full meals for two days.

A true bottomless pit.

"I'm so sleepy," she mumbled, leaning against my shoulder on the train. Since it was late, there weren't many passengers—just the two of us and a handful of others.

"That's what happens when you eat too much," I teased, scrolling through my phone while she dozed off against me. We stayed like that until we reached our stop.

I walked her to the parking lot before heading up to my apartment. She seemed half-asleep, but still managed to follow me to her bright orange Porsche.

"Oh, thanks, Le. I had so much fun today," she said, smiling sleepily.

"..."

"I'll get going now. See you."

"Goodnight," I replied, walking back inside the condo. I heard her car start as I got a few steps away—but oddly, it didn't drive off right away. It was as if she wasn't quite ready to leave yet.

It was late. If she was too tired and ended up dozing off behind the wheel, that would be bad...

"Phleng?" I walked back and tapped on her car window. She was scratching her head, looking a bit dazed. When she saw me, she rolled the window down.

"Yeah?"

"Do you... want to stay over?"

# Chapter 8: Happy Birthday

"Hmm, our staff did the right thing."

In the end, Khun Phleng agreed to stay the night with me without hesitation. Right now, she's wearing my navy blue pajamas, with a pair of comfortable shorts underneath.

Khun Phleng is taller than me by about five to six centimeters, so anything of mine that she wears tends to look a little shorter on her than it does on me.

Sexy...

Wait, wait—what am I even thinking?!

"I'll tell the repairman to install a new glass panel. Also, let the staff on duty at that time know that they did a great job."

The taller woman paced around the room while talking on the phone for a while before hanging up and dropping herself onto the sofa.

"Is there something wrong, Khun Phleng?"

"A guest went on a rampage at the hotel. They slammed their hand on the counter glass and broke it."

"Oh no, that's terrible. How is the situation now?"

"We reported it to the police and had the branch manager handle it. During the entire incident, our side remained calm and didn't retaliate at all."

Khun Phleng closed her eyes and stretched her legs out, seemingly trying to relieve the stress in her mind.

"Why are you sleeping there? You should sleep on the bed instead."

Suddenly, the tall woman got up and moved to curl up like a little worm on my bed.

"Should I turn off the lights now?" I walked over to the side of the bed and asked the CEO, who seemed ready to meet the sandman.

"Up to you, but I'm going to sleep now."

Her drowsy voice and vague response made me shake my head. Since she already seemed half-asleep, I went to clean my face in the bathroom. When I came back, I lay down beside her, unsure if she had already drifted off.

The faint scent from her made my heart race. In the end, I decided to turn away, afraid that if I kept staring at her back, I wouldn't be able to fall asleep. But just as I turned, she spoke.

"Are you asleep?"

"Not yet."

"Tomorrow is Sunday. What are you doing?"

"Just staying in, doing laundry, and maybe working a bit," I answered casually.

She hummed softly in response, pulled the blanket over half of her face, and went quiet.

"Khun Phleng?"

"Hmm?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

I took a deep breath, preparing to ask the question that had been on my mind. It wasn't a serious question, just something I was curious about. But I could only hope the answer wouldn't end up hurting me.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

At my question, the tall woman turned her face towards me and chuckled warmly, her sharp features illuminated in the dim room.

"Why do you ask?"

"I just want to know," I admitted, suddenly feeling shy and avoiding her gaze. "If you don't want to answer, it's okay. I'm sorry for asking."

"It's fine. I haven't even refused to answer yet." She smirked. "A boyfriend, huh? Yeah, I had one."

My heart instantly clenched. A wave of heat rushed to my face, and my chest felt oddly tight.

But it's not surprising. She's beautiful—of course, she would have a boyfriend. And these days, not everyone feels the need to announce their relationships publicly. Maybe she just kept it private.

"But we broke up."

"Oh."

My train of thought came to a sudden halt. I blinked, looking up at her, who raised an eyebrow knowingly, as if she could see right through me.

"What's wrong?"

"N-Nothing."

"It only lasted a month. That was when I had just moved back to Thailand." She turned onto her back, resting one arm under her head.

"Back then, I was busy establishing connections, meeting people. And he pursued me aggressively. I had no one to talk to, so I thought, 'Why not? It might keep me from feeling lonely.'"

"And?"

"It didn't work out. Ha!" She laughed, showing no signs of regret. "We were too different. I didn't feel comfortable, and he had too many expectations. So we broke up."

"Didn't you feel sorry about it?"

"Nope. I didn't love him, so I have nothing to regret."

Her nonchalant response reassured me that her ex had no hold over her heart.

"Why are you smiling? Are you happy that I don't have a boyfriend?"

I hadn't even realized I was smiling until she pointed it out. I quickly tried to hide my reaction.

"N-No, not at all."

"Sometimes, it feels like you're my girlfriend, you know?"

She reached out and pinched my cheek, making me turn to face her properly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I text you when I have something on my mind. I can video call you anytime. On weekends, we eat and watch movies together. Isn't that what couples do?"

"But we only just went out together yesterday," I pointed out.

I said that because it was only yesterday that we actually spent time together outside of work. Before that, all our meetings were strictly business. I didn't want to assume too much.

But judging by the way she pouted at my words, she didn't seem to like my response.

"You should find yourself a real girlfriend, Khun Phleng. You're thirty already—maybe it's time to start thinking about it."

"I don't think it's that easy for me to find one."

"Why not?"

"Because... I don't think I only like men."

I fell silent at her words, and she hesitated, seemingly nervous about my reaction.

"Do you... hate me for saying that?"

"No, not at all. I was just surprised," I quickly reassured her, making sure my expression remained relaxed so she wouldn't worry. Seeing that I wasn't disgusted, she continued.

"Sometimes, I find women really beautiful. They have emotions and sensitivity that men don't. There are things about them that are so charming. But it's not like men are bad. Some are strong, protective, and have this sharp, dashing look—like Khun Kwang."

...The moment she mentioned Khun Kwang, jealousy surged within me. I felt my expression harden. I wasn't jealous of Khun Kwang—I was jealous of the person lying next to me.

"Are you jealous of Khun Kwang?"

"No! I don't like him," I quickly denied and shifted the conversation back.

"So, what were you saying?"

"That's why I think it'll be hard for me to find someone. When I meet handsome men, I admire them, but I don't feel the urge to chase after them. But with women, sometimes..."

"Sometimes what?" I pressed, eager to know.

She quickly turned away.

"Never mind. Forget it."

I shook her wrapped-up form like a giant cinnamon roll, but she remained silent. I gave up—for now. If she stopped being embarrassed, she might bring it up again later.

"But if..."

I was about to drift off when she spoke again.

"Yes?"

"If I had someone, would I be happier?"

"..."

"I've never known. Tell me."

"You'd have someone to take care of you, to make you smile and laugh more."

"So I'd be happier?"

"If they're the right person for you, yes."

"I see. Okay."

And with that, she shifted slightly and went still.

She must have fallen asleep.

I turned to look at the woman next to me and realized something undeniable.

I love Khun Phleng.

I've fallen for her completely.

. .

Time passed, and life returned to its usual routine. In the past few days, I had barely spoken to Phleng at all. We exchanged a few messages on LINE, where she told me that she had to travel out of town and wasn't sure when she would be back. From at least having her in Bangkok to keep me somewhat comforted, now she was even farther away.

**Phee Phee:** "There are so many Italian tourists coming in lately. They're all so handsome!"

**LERMARN:** "You must be enjoying that, huh? Italian men are all goodlooking, after all."

My message might have seemed excited, but in reality, I wasn't at all.

**Phee Phee:** "One of them even asked for my number. He invited me for a drink at night, but I turned him down."

**LERMARN:** "Be careful, okay?"

Even though I only typed that much, the moment I found out that someone was hitting on her, I clenched my teeth so hard that I accidentally slammed my desk with a loud *thud.*

"Le... what's wrong?" P'Vee rushed over and grabbed my shoulders, pulling me back to reality.

"Nothing. I just saw something annoying. Sorry, P'Vee."

I put my phone down and tried to refocus on my work, but my concentration was completely shot. And tomorrow, we had our first shoot for the hotel advertisement—without Phleng around to oversee it since she was still busy with her out-of-town responsibilities.

"Le, come to the small meeting room with me for a moment. Let's go over tomorrow's schedule. P'Jay, you too."

"Got it."

Everyone in the office busied themselves preparing for the big shoot tomorrow. I forced myself to shake off Phleng's beautiful face from my mind and concentrate on my work instead.

**"Lermarn!"**

**"Le!"**

**"Le!"**

And just like that, every time we had a shoot, I, who was usually just a quiet little office worker sitting behind a glass window, suddenly became the most popular person around. I had no idea why. It wasn't like P'Vee and I hadn't hired enough people for each department.

"Why is the sky so cloudy today?"

"I'm getting a bad feeling about this, P'Vee," I murmured as the two of us stood on the sidelines, staring at the overcast sky with growing concern. We had checked the weather forecast yesterday, and it had promised clear skies and sunshine. So why did it look like a storm was about to hit?

Today's shoot was outdoors, which meant...

If it rained, we were *screwed.*

"Let's not worry about something that hasn't happened yet," P'Vee tried to reassure me.

"Yeah... you're right."

We both tried our best to comfort each other. We were basically the moms of this production. More than half the budget and planning came from the two of us, and that also meant that if things went south, we'd be the first ones scrambling to fix everything.

"Oh, here, take this," P'Vee suddenly handed me something. When I opened it, I found two 1,000-baht bills inside. I looked up at her in confusion, while she, on the other hand, seemed amused.

"You really don't remember, huh?"

"Remember what?"

"Happy birthday."

"...?"

I froze before quickly checking today's date.

It was my birthday.

I could remember work deadlines, shooting schedules, editing timelines, double-header release dates, client meetings, and proposal deadlines. I remembered everything—except my own birthday. *Fantastic.*

"I didn't have time to buy you anything, so just take this and treat yourself, okay?"

"Thank you, P'Vee."

"Stick around with me for a long time, will you? Finding someone as tough as you is rare these days."

She patted my shoulder in encouragement.

.

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But of course, life wasn't done giving me lessons. What should have been a smooth shoot, after all the careful planning we had done, started going downhill fast.

"IT'S RAINING!"

One of the crew members shouted. Right after that, tiny raindrops began to sprinkle down on me as I stood discussing things with the team.

"*Shit!*"

I sprinted toward P'Vee, who was standing by the monitors, to ask what we should do. If we couldn't finish this set because of the rain, that would mean reshoots. And reshoots meant more costs. *Fuck.*

"Move to the next location! We've already got a few good takes. We'll pick the best ones later. Move, move, move!"

P'Vee's announcement sent the entire crew scattering like ants, each person quickly packing up their equipment and loading it onto the cars. Our next location was an indoor set, but it was nearly half an hour's drive away.

"Actors, come this way!" I grabbed an umbrella and rushed to escort the cast to the waiting van.

After making sure that everyone had gotten into their vehicles and confirming with the drivers over the radio, I finally turned to head toward my own ride. The rain was getting heavier by the second.

And then...

Where the *hell* was my car?

I looked around once more, hoping that I was just mistaken. But no, all the production vehicles had left.

I had been left behind.

In the middle of a downpour.

.

. .

I called P'Vee, who was on the van, and she immediately started cursing herself over the phone. She told me to find shelter first, and she would turn back to pick me up. But since traffic during the rain was terrible, and there was no place nearby to take cover, I was stuck. Walking to a store or a house was out of the question—it was a straight main road with nothing but trees on either side. The only reason we had been able to stay there comfortably before, without sun or rain bothering us, was because of the welfare department's tent, which had driven off long ago.

I tried waving for a taxi, but none were available. So, I decided to run and find shelter on my own. But just as I started moving, a brown pickup truck suddenly swerved to a stop in front of me on the sidewalk.

Four men I had never seen before stepped out of the truck and approached me with an intimidating stance. Each of them was holding an umbrella, shielding themselves from the rain. Meanwhile, I was standing there completely soaked, looking like a drenched little puppy.

"You there!"

"Huh?"

"You're with the film crew from earlier, right?"

"Yes," I nodded, confused and wondering why they were yelling at me. Who were these guys, anyway?

The rain was pouring harder and harder. I was wearing a cap, but that hardly did anything to keep me dry.

"This land belongs to the state. Did you get permission before filming here?"

"We arranged everything with the municipal officers. They already gave us approval."

"I don't know anything about that!"

"Well, that's something I wouldn't know either. How about I call the person I dealt with, and you can talk to him directly? Sound good?"

I reached for my phone, but the man in front of me smacked my hand away.

"I don't need to talk to anyone."

"Then how are we supposed to clear this up?!" I snapped, getting increasingly irritated. My eyes flicked to the huge umbrella being held by a younger man behind him. Geez, would it kill them to share a little with the girl getting drenched in front of them? And honestly, these guys were starting to look really shady.

"Hand over the money."

"What!?"

"The location fee. Pay up."

"Wait, wait—this is extortion!"

I stumbled back in shock, scanning the surroundings for help. But since this was just a sidewalk by a highway, with nothing but a metal fence and trees behind me, there was no one around. The drivers in their cars were too preoccupied with traffic to notice anything.

"If you don't have it, we're taking you to the station. Let's go!"

With that, two of the men grabbed me by the arms, trying to drag me toward the parked pickup truck. It had a sticker on the side that read, *"Police Station—For the People."*

"Help! Somebody help me!" I shouted, struggling as they tried to force me into the truck like I was some kind of criminal.

"Hey, you! Where the hell are you taking my little sister?!"

P'Vee's voice rang out behind me, shrill with rage. I turned and saw my boss charging toward us, face contorted in fury like an avenging demon.

"Let go of my girl right now! Who the hell do you think you are?!"

. .

And that's how I ended up sitting miserably at our second filming location, with P'Vee beside me, trying to comfort me while looking guilty as hell.

I wasn't mad at her, really. If anything, I was just frustrated with my own rotten luck.

Those men were probably scammers or corrupt cops who had been watching our crew for a while. When they saw me stranded alone after the film crew left, they took their chance to intimidate and extort me. But the moment they got a taste of P'Vee's wrath, they scurried off in their truck like rats fleeing a fire.

At first, she had wanted to report them at the nearest police station. But with so much work left to do, we had no choice but to let it go and head straight to our next location.

"I'm so sorry, Le. I really am," P'Vee kept repeating.

She had no excuse—things had been hectic, the rain was coming down hard, and in all the rush, she had forgotten to do a headcount before leaving. And because I had been busy making sure everything was packed up properly, I ended up being the one left behind.

"It's okay, P'Vee. You can stop apologizing now."

Honestly, if it weren't for my boss, I'd probably be sitting in a shady police station right now, getting my pockets emptied by those crooks.

. .

The filming wrapped up at exactly 9:30 PM.

The production van took us all back to the office, where the editing team took over the next phase of work. P'Vee gave everyone permission to come in late tomorrow, so after packing up my things, I finally headed back to my apartment.

Today was a disaster.

And today was also my birthday.

No one was here to celebrate with me, but whatever.

I could celebrate on my own.

# Chapter 9: Birthday Gift

I went back to my room to change clothes, switching from my practical outfit to a white tank top layered with a denim jacket and matching denim shorts. Earlier, I had tried texting some old friends from university, but unsurprisingly, no one was available. Well, of course—who would be free to meet up when I only invited them an hour before heading out?

I grabbed my phone, browsed the internet for a cool bar to hang out at, and finally found a place that seemed worth checking out.

"Tonight, Lermarn is hitting the town!"

When I arrived at the club, I headed straight to the bar and ordered something strong to down immediately. The atmosphere was relatively quiet, probably because it was just a regular weekday. It wasn't as lively as a Friday or Saturday night.

As the alcohol hit, everything started feeling hot. I took off my denim jacket, leaving just the tank top I had underneath. I noticed a guy sitting at a nearby table sneaking glances at me from time to time.

"What are you looking at?" I snapped at him with a glare. I knew exactly what was going through his mind—probably undressing me with his eyes.

After nearly finishing my drink, my phone rang. The caller ID showed 'Khun Kwang.'

"What's up, Khun Kwang?"

"Happy birthday! Am I late?"

"Late or not, whatever."

"Are you out somewhere? You're not at home, are you?"

His voice sounded worried. Of course, he liked me. Seeing the woman he adored in a noisy place like this must have made him anxious.

"Take a guess, Khun Kwang. Go on, guess!"

"Are you drinking?"

"Nope. How did you know?"

"I'm coming to get you."

"No need. I can take care of myself."

"No way! You're alone in a place like that—you call that taking care of yourself? Don't lie to me. And another thing—"

And then he just kept ranting non-stop until my ears practically went numb. While he kept talking, I took another sip of my drink. At some point, I couldn't tell whether he was actually coming to pick me up or just wanted to lecture me. So, I simply hung up and turned to the bartender, who was wiping a glass behind the counter.

"Excuse me, is there a hotel nearby where a drunk person could crash for the night?"

"Oh, yes. There's one right next door. Just walk up a little, and you'll see it. It's called—"

Before the bartender could finish, a sudden force grabbed my arm, making me turn around in surprise.

"What a coincidence."

"Beam?!"

I blurted out his name in disbelief. Nadol, dressed in an all-white ensemble, looked dashing enough that I could tell he was definitely out hunting for a girl to take home tonight.

"Check, please. How much for the drinks?"

"Hey, hey, where are you going? Let me buy you a drink first," Beam blocked me from paying the bartender. I shot him an annoyed look.

"What do you want from me? Trying to get me drunk or what?!"

"Please. I have no interest in someone like you."

Still as arrogant as ever, huh?

"Move. I don't want to see your face."

"So rude. You weren't like this back in the office."

"That was work."

I dragged out my words, emphasizing them again. I was too drunk to bother crafting polite sentences for this jerk.

"Let me buy you just one drink—as an apology for how I treated you that day. After that, you can go wherever you want. Deal?"

Beam narrowed his eyes at me with interest. I didn't trust him one bit.

But thanks to the alcohol, I agreed without hesitation.

. .

Mr. Pum ordered drinks for both me and himself. I had no idea when he had joined my table, but I didn't bother to chase him away since he didn't seem like he was here to start a war. Besides, the alcohol was already messing with my decision-making.

"Got yourself a target for tonight yet?"

"If I did, would I be sitting here with you?"

"Why aren't you out with your celeb friends or whatever?" I teased, genuinely curious. Usually, actors and celebrities liked to hang out in groups. So why was he drinking alone like this?

"Too lazy to deal with people. I don't always enjoy being around crowds, you know."

"Oh, really?"

"And what about you? Why are you sitting here drinking alone? It's kind of weird."

As he finished speaking, Beam gave me a look like I was some kind of strange, disgusting creature. Was drinking alone really that big of a deal?

"It's my birthday."

"Oh." The handsome man raised his eyebrows before flashing me a grin. "Happy birthday."

"Thanks, but it's a shitty birthday, so I figured I'd drown it in booze for a bit."

Beam didn't respond—he just watched as I took another sip from my glass. I stared back at him until he excused himself to go to the bathroom. I didn't stop him, just shrugged and let him go. That was when my phone started buzzing non-stop.

The caller ID said *Khun Phleng*.

"Halloooo~"

"...What's wrong with you? Why do you sound like that?"

"Le's drinkin' right nowww~"

"..."

"Khun Phleng, come join meee~"

"Why are you out drinking? I was calling to discuss today's shoot with you. I just finished handling some business and texted you, but you never replied."

"The shoot went fineee~ Le almost got scammed for money, y'know? Didja hear?"

I dragged out my words, my voice completely slurred. The more I spoke, the more my brain felt like it was short-circuiting. Talking properly while drunk was seriously hard.

"What happened? Where are you right now, Le?"

Khun Phleng's voice grew more urgent. That made me feel a little pleased —because it meant she was worried about me.

"Not tellin'! Heehee~"

"Le, get a grip. Who are you with?"

Her voice was getting more insistent, pressing me for an answer. Just then, Beam returned from the bathroom, so I quickly tried to wrap up the call.

"I'll call you back later, Khun Phleng. Bye-bye!"

Then, I hung up and turned my attention back to my generous drink sponsor.

"I'll buy you another drink, in honor of your birthday."

"Suit yourself."

I let the actor do as he pleased. No point in arguing. Free booze was free booze.

We spent some time talking and throwing jabs at each other before I decided to call it a night. If I drank any more, I'd have a hard time getting back to my apartment. Drinking alone was already reckless enough—no need to make things worse.

"I'm heading to another place. Wanna come meet my friends?"

"No, thanks. I'm going home."

I took the bill from the bartender and swatted Beam's hand off my shoulder.

"Come on, just for a bit."

Beam grabbed my wrist and tried to drag me toward the back exit that led to the parking lot. I immediately yanked my hand free.

"I said no. I'm tired."

"You can sleep in my car first."

"Not happening."

I focused as hard as I could to speak clearly. Beam's expression darkened as he glared at me, muttering curses under his breath. If he made a scene here, it wouldn't end well for either of us. Someone could take a video, and that would be bad news. Even though the bar was quiet tonight, with barely any customers, it was still a public place.

I walked away, checking over my shoulder every now and then to make sure no one was following me. Thankfully, I saw no sign of him. That bastard was definitely planning to get me into trouble, but too bad for him —I wasn't playing along.

As I strolled along the sidewalk, the sound of passing cars grew fainter. It was getting late, and the people still wandering around were clearly here to enjoy the nightlife, just like I had been.

That was when I spotted a warm, glowing orange light in the distance. It stood out from the flashy neon signs of the clubs and bars I had just walked past. The sight of it made me feel oddly safe.

I moved closer and slumped down onto a raised concrete ledge nearby.

"Miss, you can't sit here. You're blocking the path for our guests."

A man's voice called out, and I felt a firm hand on my arm. Annoyed, I swatted it away and squinted up at the older man in uniform. He was probably the security guard for this place.

"At this hour? What guests? Are you crazy?"

"This is private property. You can't just sit wherever you want."

"Wait, what? This is a *hotel*?"

I wobbled to my feet, my vision swimming. Everything was a blur, and I couldn't focus on anything properly.

"Your breath reeks of alcohol. Go somewhere else. You're ruining the view."

The security guard gave me a light shove on the shoulder. That made drunk me snap and get defensive.

"How dare you push a woman? I should call the police on you!"

"Go ahead. Let's see who they'll side with—an on-duty security officer or a drunk like you."

His words shut me up immediately.

"...I'm sorry, sir. I'll leave now."

"Yeah, yeah."

I raised my hands in a respectful apology to the older man and staggered away from the warmly lit building, searching for a taxi to take me back to my condo to rest. But then, a cold hand grabbed me from behind, turning me around, and I collided with a tall figure, feeling warm breath against my face.

"Where are you going?"

"You, Phleng?"

I called out the name of the person in front of me, who was holding me to keep me from collapsing onto the ground.

"What a coincidence to run into you like this..."

The tall person murmured something, but I couldn't quite catch it because my mind was completely foggy. Phleng pulled me towards the warm orange lights.

"What is this orange thing, Phleng?"

"This is our hotel, obviously. That 'orange thing' is just the lights from the hotel," the tall person answered me, sounding oddly irritated. I squinted my half-lidded eyes at the sign in front of me and saw elegant lettering that read *PP Palace.*

"Where are you taking me, Phleng?"

"You're this drunk, and you still want to go back to your room? Just sleep here. You can go home tomorrow."

The tall person dragged me into the hotel with an arm firmly wrapped around my waist to keep me upright. Without their support, I would have fallen over long ago.

"Sit here first." Phleng pressed my shoulders down, making me sit on a soft chair, then placed a warm glass of water in my hands.

"Drink this warm water."

Of course, I downed it in less than five seconds.

"Should I prepare a special reception room for you, Miss Phleng?"

A stranger's voice sounded nearby, but I was too tired to open my eyes and look, so I just leaned back against the comfortable chair.

"No need. I'll take her to my room. Please help me out for a moment."

Then, someone else—who wasn't Phleng—helped me up and led me forward. I could tell it was a male employee from the way he supported me.

Since some time had passed since my last drink, my vision had started to clear up a bit, though I still couldn't walk properly.

I was now inside an elegant hotel elevator, flanked by two staff members. In front of me stood Phleng, arms crossed, waiting for the elevator to reach our floor.

I want to hug her... I want to bite her shoulder...

I just wanted to do *something.*

"Thanks, Noi, A, Moss. Go get some rest now," Phleng thanked the staff who had escorted me to the room before closing the door.

I lay sprawled on a large, long sofa, staring at the simple yet elegant ceiling. Just by looking at the ceiling, I could tell this room was incredibly expensive and luxurious.

"Le,"

The sofa dipped slightly, signaling that someone had sat at my feet. A cold hand gently stroked my leg, a touch so light and familiar that I knew immediately who it was.

"Phleng," I propped myself up to sit. My beautiful Phleng was dressed in a simple white t-shirt and navy-blue slacks—casual but still professional.

"Why did you drink so much? That's dangerous."

"I know, but I *wanted* to!"

I whined and flopped back onto the sofa, turning my back to the person sitting at my feet.

"What if the one who found you wasn't me but that bastard instead? Have you thought about how dangerous that would be?" Phleng scolded me sharply, grabbing my arm to make me sit up and listen properly.

"You need to *think* before you act! Why are you so reckless? You're an adult now!"

"..."

"One day, you'll regret acting like this. Just think ahead a little, will you?"

Phleng's face was serious, not amused at all. She looked at me with clear disappointment. Since it was Phleng—someone very important to me—her words made me sober up a little more. I swallowed hard, feeling ashamed.

"I understand... I won't do it again."

"Good. Now, how was the shoot today? Can you still tell me?"

Phleng changed the topic, but this new question was precisely why I was such a mess tonight.

"The shoot... went well... The first location, at the park, we managed to shoot several scenes in one go without needing to move the camera around as much as we originally planned in the storyboard, so we saved a lot of time. But in the afternoon, the sky got cloudy. At first, Vee and I thought it would rain, but it just stayed overcast, so we had the lighting team adjust the setup instead. No issues there.

"But for the second location, just when we were about to wrap up, the rain suddenly poured down. Luckily, we had already gotten plenty of footage, so I think we'll have enough to work with in post-production. As for the third and final location, the shoot itself was fine, but we had some issues setting up the scene because the elevated platform there wasn't very sturdy. Overall, though, it went smoothly—no major problems."

When I finished speaking, I took a deep breath—I had been talking nonstop without pausing for air. Even though I was still tipsy, I had managed to report on the shoot's progress to my client.

"Good job," Phleng chuckled and clapped for my lengthy, uninterrupted explanation. "And what about the drinking?"

"Huh?"

"Why did you go out drinking alone? Can you tell me?"

Phleng crossed her arms, waiting for an answer. I pressed my lips together, knowing that if I answered, I would definitely cry. But what choice did I have? She was asking.

"The shoot... went well... That's supposed to be a good thing."

I started trembling, my lips quivering, before Khun Phleng, who had noticed, approached me and sat down. Being questioned about today felt like unlocking all the bottled-up emotions I had been keeping inside. I started crying even harder.

"But it turned into a disaster for Le. P'Vee left me stranded on the street, and do you know, Khun Phleng? Some random guy came and grabbed me, saying our film crew was trespassing on his land. He threatened to take me to the police station if I didn't have money for him. I was so scared. There was no one around—just me, all alone."

"..."

"It was my birthday, yet nothing good happened at all. I went drinking, then ran into that jerk Beam. Why, Khun Phleng? Why does my life keep running into the wrong people? Why? Why!"

I threw the question back at the tall woman sitting silently, listening to me. Tears and snot ran all over my face, and I could only wipe them away again and again. But once I let it all out, I started to feel a little better, though I still couldn't stop my sobs.

"I know I could laugh this off, make it a joke. It's kind of funny, isn't it? Shooting a film and suddenly being dragged away. But I just can't. Not today, Khun Phleng."

I preempted any response and lowered my head, too ashamed to meet her gaze. I knew full well that I'd acted recklessly, but I just couldn't control myself. The shifting weight on the couch told me that she was moving closer.

A slender hand lifted my face, making me look into her eyes. Her delicate features, her brows slightly furrowed, carried an expression that seemed like pity or compassion—if I guessed correctly.

"You poor thing, haha."

"Again..."

"It's okay."

She turned away briefly before returning with a tissue. Khun Phleng wiped my face until no trace of tears or snot remained, then walked over to the kitchen. She came back holding a green bottle and handed it to me.

"Drink this. Green tea—it'll help sober you up."

"Thank you."

I took the bottle and drank two big gulps before placing it beside me.

"Can I have a hug?"

As soon as I spoke, I was pulled into her loose embrace. She held me closer against her frame and gently rocked me as if to soothe me.

"Happy birthday."

"..."

"A little late, but at least I said it in time."

"..."

Since I was feeling drowsy, I let myself lean completely into her, forcing her to hold me up like a child. She looked down at me and asked softly:

"Do you want anything?"

"...Can you really give me what I ask for, Khun Phleng?"

From this angle... she looked even more beautiful than before. The strands of dark brown hair falling around her face made me stare at her, utterly mesmerized.

"Well... depends on what it is."

She chuckled slightly, but I wasn't paying attention to that.

It was my birthday, after all. Just this once, I wanted something I truly desired.

"In that case, I want..." I let my voice trail off teasingly, watching for her reaction. As expected, she leaned in unconsciously, eager to hear my answer.

"A kiss."

"Huh!?"

"A kiss from you, Khun Phleng."

Before she could react, I used my free hand to pull her face toward me and pressed my lips against hers, swift and firm. My other arm wrapped around the back of her head, preventing her from pulling away.

She was clearly startled, struggling to break free, twisting to escape from my grip.

But I wasn't stopping there. That was just a teaser.

Before she could put any distance between us, I climbed onto her lap, cupped her delicate face in my hands, and kissed her deeply. She resisted, trying her best to push me away, but I knew it wouldn't be easy.

My hands wandered over her upper body, my tongue delving and swirling in her mouth despite her protests.

I wrapped my arms around her slim waist, pulling her flush against me, and deepened the kiss. Then, using both hands, I tilted her face to the perfect angle for me.

"Mmh..."

She was still resisting, trying to push me off, but I could feel her strength waning. That was a sign, wasn't it? A sign that she was beginning to surrender to me.

I teased her, coaxing her to respond. Finally, she let out a soft moan in her throat. That was it—I had her now.

Cool, slender arms hesitantly wrapped around me, pulling me closer until there was no space left between us.

"Haah... Khun Phleng."

I barely pulled back, our lips still brushing. My gaze locked onto hers, filled with all the emotions I wished she could see—just how much I adored, how much I craved her.

That desire made me impatient. I didn't wait to see what she would do next —I pushed her down onto the couch.

She followed my lead so easily. And when our eyes met again, all I saw in hers was shock, surprise, and disbelief, wrapped in her usual warmth.

"Le, what are you doing?"

"Nothing, really."

I whispered softly, lying through my teeth. I straddled her lap again, but this time, I leaned down, grazing my lips along her jaw before claiming her lips once more.

Alcohol really did make people reckless.

I held her wrists down, keeping her from pushing me away, while my tongue invaded her mouth, claiming and teasing until her lips turned a deep shade of red.

"I'm sorry, Khun Phleng," I murmured against her lips, knowing full well that a simple apology couldn't make up for what I'd just done.

My hands roamed her body, sending shivers through her despite the layers of fabric between us.

"Enough."

Before I could react, she flipped me onto my back in one swift motion. I should have known—she was stronger than me. But now that she was on top, I still had the advantage.

I pulled her face down again, repeating the same game—moaning, kissing fiercely, tilting my head to keep things interesting.

"Hnn..."

A small moan escaped her, and when she finally responded, kissing me back, my mind went blank. I wrapped my arms around her neck, pulling her even closer, while she hesitated, barely brushing her fingers against my face.

As the tension built between us, exhaustion began to creep in. My arms, which had been clinging to her tightly, started to weaken.

She stopped as soon as I did, as if waiting for me to take the lead.

When I didn't, we just stared at each other, saying nothing.

"Le? Are you okay?"

"...Sleepy."

"Huh?"

"..."

I couldn't say anything more.

Then, darkness swallowed everything.

# Chapter 10: Again

Pain... my head is throbbing. It hurts so much.

As I open my eyes, I'm immediately greeted by a massive hangover. A pounding sound echoes in both temples, relentless and unforgiving.

What the hell did I do last night...?

I glance around the room and realize that I'm in a bedroom—one that is as big as my entire rented apartment. The decor is a blend of gray and brown tones. Lifting the blanket, I check my condition and find that I'm still in the same outfit I wore to go out last night.

I don't remember anything...

The only thing I vaguely recall is that I ran into Phleng. That's it.

"Ugh..."

I take the liberty of walking into the en-suite bathroom to splash some water on my face, hoping to shake off the drowsiness. Then, with a mix of courage and apprehension, I open the bedroom door and step outside.

Did I do something bad last night? I have this nagging feeling, but I just can't remember.

Looking around the living space, I try to find the owner of the room. At first, I don't see anyone, but then my eyes land on a familiar face—Phleng, sitting at the kitchen counter with a laptop, looking right at me.

"Um..." Phleng looks like she's about to say something but stops herself, quickly turning her attention back to the screen, pretending to be focused. "Phleng, do you have something to say to me?"

I walk toward her, only to find that she seems even more flustered than before. Her eyes dart around nervously, avoiding mine entirely. That only makes me more suspicious.

"N-no. Nothing. Do you... want some hot milk?"

"...Thanks."

She moves to prepare a cup of hot milk, while I sit down on the chair opposite her, unsure of what to do with myself.

While she makes something simple for me to eat, she keeps sneaking glances at me. That's when I realize—she hasn't showered yet. She's still in her sleepwear, a simple t-shirt and shorts.

"Here." She sets down two slices of toast and a small cup of hot milk in front of me.

"Phleng?"

"Y-yes? What is it?"

"Why are you so jumpy?" I can't help but ask. Every time I move or speak, she seems to be on high alert. "Can I bother you for some painkillers? I... have a hangover."

"Take the jelly-type one. It dissolves faster, so the pain will go away quicker."

Muttering under her breath, she disappears into the bedroom for a moment before returning with a pack of painkillers—one I've never seen before.

"Thanks." I quietly eat my toast, while Phleng types away at something on her laptop right in front of me. But for some reason, the atmosphere between us feels unbearably awkward.

"Phleng?"

"Hmm?"

"Did I... do something bad last night?"

**Clink.**

The moment I ask, it's like I trigger something in her. She accidentally knocks over a cup of hot water beside her, spilling everything.

"Ah, let me clean it up!" I rush to help, but she's quicker, grabbing a cloth from the kitchen and wiping the mess away in record time.

"You... really don't remember anything?"

As she hangs the cloth back, she turns to look at me—but the moment I meet her gaze, she quickly looks away.

Oh god. I really did something bad, didn't I?

"If you're saying that, then I must've done something awful."

"You... you did."

She finishes her sentence, then sits back down, absentmindedly twisting a strand of her hair with her finger. Her gaze remains fixed downward, as if deliberately avoiding my eyes. I wait for her to say more, but she stays silent for what feels like an eternity.

"Phleng," I finally call her out, unable to take the suspense any longer. "Just say it already. Yell at me if you have to, but don't just sit there like this."

She hesitates for a moment, but then finally sighs in defeat.

"Alright. If you want to know, I'll tell you."

"Yes."

"Last night... you kissed me."

"..."

I inhale sharply, eyes widening. Meanwhile, Phleng, after dropping that bombshell, turns bright red and looks at me with an expression that's halfaccusing, half-sulking.

What... what the hell does that mean!?

"And it was a deep kiss..." "A... A k-kiss... A kiss? A kiss!?"

My tongue is tripping over itself.

"Yes. We kissed. A lot. For a long time."

"...!" My hands tremble as I reach for my cup of hot milk, desperately trying to drink away my embarrassment. Not that it helps at all.

"Right there."

She points at the long couch in the middle of the room. Against my will, my eyes follow her finger—only for me to whip my head back almost instantly, feeling my face heat up even more.

"I think... I should go take a shower now."

Phleng quickly gets up and vanishes into the bedroom, leaving me frozen in place, mourning over my past self and whatever reckless stunt I pulled last night.

Am I happy? Maybe. Am I upset? Possibly.

I don't know if Phleng was okay with it or not.

There are just too many emotions. I can't process all of this at once—damn it!

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When Phleng finished showering, she ordered me to take a shower too, saying it would make me feel more refreshed. She also said she'd walk me to the hotel lobby afterward. While she spoke, she avoided looking directly at me—just a few stolen glances here and there, but nothing like before. I wasn't brave enough to look at her either. I could only nod and quickly head into the bathroom.

When I came out, I saw that Phleng had already dressed and was getting ready to leave for work. I hurried to fix my hair and clothes, grateful that I hadn't woken up too late—I still had time to return to my condo and change.

"Lermarn."

She called my full name. Was she about to scold me about last night? I turned to face her hesitantly.

"Why do you look so scared?"

"I'm scared."

"Scared of what?"

"Scared that you're going to yell at me."

"Why would I yell at you?"

Phleng scoffed and walked closer to me, while I instinctively tried to keep my distance.

"I did a lot of wrong things to you last night." "..."

"I don't know if just apologizing is enough because what I did... that kiss... You probably wanted to share that with someone you actually like. I don't know how to make up for it, and..."

"I never said it was wrong."

"What!?"

I looked up at her in confusion. The tall woman gave me a faint smile.

"Yesterday was your birthday, right?"

"Yes."

"Then let's just say what you did last night was your birthday present."

"Uh..."

I had no idea how to respond. Was I happy? Yes. Was I guilty? Also, yes. I had no clue if Phleng was okay with it or not. Before I could say anything, she suddenly stepped even closer, leaving only an inch between us.

She leaned in, her delicate yet striking face drawing near. My heartbeat went wild. It pounded so hard that I was sure she could hear it.

"Judging from what you did last night, I'd say you enjoyed it too, didn't you?"

"..."

I can't take this. My legs are about to give out.

"That birthday present from me."

"I... um..."

I was so stunned by what she said that I opened and closed my mouth without managing to say anything coherent.

"You're really not mad at me?" I finally asked.

"Do you want me to be mad? I can be mad, you know. It's no problem." The moment she said that, her expression turned stone cold, as if she was truly angry. I panicked and waved my hands frantically.

"No! No! Thank you for not being mad at me!"

"I've never kissed anyone before."

After saying that, she raised her hand to touch her lips absentmindedly, looking lost in thought. It was such a simple gesture, yet it was unbearably sexy to me.

So sexy that I wanted to pull her in and kiss her all over again.

"Have you kissed anyone before?" she suddenly asked.

"Why?"

It was the kind of question that made me want to disappear off the face of the earth.

"Because you were really good at it."

"..."

"You bit my lip, held me down, and even..."

"Phleng, can we change the subject?"

I grabbed her arm in desperation, looking up at her with pleading eyes. She laughed, clearly amused.

"You're embarrassed, huh?"

"Of course, I am!"

"I have to admit, when you walked out of my room, I couldn't even look you in the eye." "I noticed."

"But now that we're talking, I feel a little less flustered."

She led me out of the room and pressed the elevator button. That was when I realized her hotel room was on the top floor—there was only one door on this entire level, aside from the emergency exit and the elevator. It must be a private suite just for her.

As we rode the elevator down, Phleng pulled out her phone and started scrolling. I couldn't help but glance at her lips as she absentmindedly licked them.

The lips that I had so recklessly invaded last night.

"You know, I probably should be mad."

"What?!"

She spoke suddenly, catching me off guard.

"For kissing me."

"Well, yeah! That's why I kept asking if you were really not mad at me. Anyone else would've slapped me by now."

I sighed, regretting my reckless actions. From now on, if I wanted to drink, I'd just buy some and drink alone at home. I'd gone out drinking with friends before, but I'd never been this much of a disaster.

"Yeah... Why am I not mad? I don't get myself."

She continued to ponder the question as we exited the elevator. She walked me to the lobby while the hotel staff greeted her with synchronized "Good morning, CEO." I could feel their eyes on me, silently questioning how some random woman ended up stepping out of the CEO's private elevator.

"This is as far as I can take you. I have a meeting."

She stopped at the entrance and turned to face me. I glanced outside, figuring out how to get back to my condo.

"Thanks for walking me out."

I gave her a respectful bow, still feeling guilty about last night. She waved goodbye casually. I was about to walk away when I hesitated and turned back.

"What you said in the elevator..."

"Hm?"

"If you want to forget about last night, you can. Or if you actually want to be mad at me, I wouldn't blame you."

"What do you mean?" She frowned in confusion.

"I mean... Kissing someone you don't even like... Who would actually feel good about that?"

I tried to keep my tone light, dragging out my words playfully, afraid she'd get angry. But I still wanted to clear things up before leaving. I didn't want her to think I was celebrating that kiss. I was in the wrong—so, so wrong.

She stared at me with an unreadable expression as I gave her one final bow and walked away.

Before stepping outside, I glanced back one last time.

She was still watching me.

Then she turned and walked back into the hotel.

It was supposed to be a meaningless kiss.

A mistake that should never have happened.

That was the right way to see it.

...Right?

# Chapter 11: Bruce & Robert

Since that day, I haven't seen Khun Phleng at all. On the day we reviewed the first draft of the edited footage, I was hoping to see that beautiful face again after so many days. But instead, Khun Phleng sent her close assistant in her place. When Phi Vee asked about her, the response was that she was too busy to attend at the moment.

The longer it went on, the more my heart sank. I missed her, but I didn't dare message her on LINE because I was afraid I'd be bothering someone who held a much higher position and had far more responsibilities than me.

**PeePee:** Hello, test.

But then, out of the blue, Khun Phleng messaged me first, and I nearly dropped my phone.

**PeePee:** You didn't even say hi to me at all.

**LERMARN:** I've just been busy.

Busy, huh? But as soon as she texted me, I replied within a minute. What a terrible liar, Lermarn.

**PeePee:** How have you been?

**LERMARN:** Just the usual.

Yeah, right. Usual my ass. I miss her so much I could die. Should I just go to the hotel to see her?

**PeePee:** You're so cold.

Oh wow, it turned into this instead.

I was about to type a response, but she beat me to it.

**PeePee:** I'm sulking now. I went out of my way to text you, you know?

Oh no, I didn't mean to upset her!

Sensing danger, I quickly spammed her with stickers and sent an apology.

**LERMARN:** Please don't be mad at me, Khun Phleng! I'm sorry!

What exactly are we doing here...?

**PeePee:** Keep apologizing a lot, okay? I like it.

"..."

And just like that, I was so caught up texting back and forth with Khun Phleng that I didn't even realize Phi Vee had been standing behind me, watching for a while.

"Who's that, PeePee?"

"Shit!" I yelped and quickly flipped my phone face down to hide it from Phi Vee.

"Ohhh, are you cheating on Khun Kwang, Lermarn?"

Phi Vee narrowed her eyes and stretched out her words, clearly prying for details.

"No! Just a friend."

"The way you two are texting? That's not 'just friends.'" Phi Vee said as she walked back to her desk.

"What? It doesn't look like a normal friendship?"

"Nope. It looks more like a couple."

"..."

Phi Vee's offhand comment made me flip my phone back over and scroll through our chat history, comparing it with what she had just said.

*"More like a couple."*

Are we really acting like people in a relationship?

**LERMARN:** Why is your LINE name "PeePee"?

On my way back to my condo on the train, I kept texting Khun Phleng nonstop. She only paused for a while when she had to discuss work and go inspect a construction site.

Oh, I forgot to mention—Khun Phleng isn't even in Thailand right now. She's overseeing a hotel renovation project abroad, which, as both CEO and owner, she has to personally supervise.

Thinking about it, her LINE name felt strange and totally uncharacteristic of her.

**PeePee:** I don't know. I couldn't think of anything, so I just used "PeePee." **LERMARN:** Let's give each other nicknames on LINE!

I suddenly thought of something fun. Since Phi Vee already said we seemed like a couple, I figured I might as well take this chance to do something sweet. She probably wouldn't even notice.

**PeePee:** We can do that? I had no idea.

**LERMARN:** Of course! What name should we use?

**PeePee:** I can't think of one, but I want them to match.

**PeePee:** Help me choose.

I set my phone down for a moment to think, but then it vibrated again with a new message.

**PeePee:** How about the names of the characters from the movie we watched together?

"..."

**PeePee:** Since it was the first movie we saw together.

I had assumed the hotel CEO wouldn't be into something so silly, but somehow, she seemed more into it than me.

I furrowed my brows, trying to recall the names of the main characters from that blood-soaked horror film we saw.

**LERMARN:** Do you mean the villain and the protagonist, or the protagonist and his wife?

**PeePee:** The villain and the protagonist.

**LERMARN:** Why?

**PeePee:** Because you stole a kiss from me. You're a bad person. And I'm a bad person too, because I kissed you back.

**PeePee:** And in the movie, the protagonist was just as bad as the villain since he went on a revenge spree. So, we're both bad people—just like them.

What kind of bizarre reasoning is that...?

**LERMARN:** Dr. Bruce? And Robert?

I typed out the names of the characters we were talking about.

Such macho names. Would they really suit us as LINE names?

Khun Phleng read my message but didn't reply right away. Instead, after a moment, I saw her display name change to *Robert.*

**Robert:** I changed mine. Now you change yours.

Seeing her so happy about this, I had no choice but to follow along. I went into my settings and changed my name to *Bruce.*

Once I was done, I scrolled up through our conversation to see how our names looked now.

...It totally looked like a chat between a gay couple.

**Bruce: Changed it.**

**Robert: Yay!**

I was so caught up in changing names with Phleng that I almost missed my station. When I finally reached the lobby of my condo, I accidentally spotted someone sitting there.

"Khun Kwang?"

"Le," Kwang turned to me with a smile and walked over. But more than anything, I was surprised—what was he doing here?

"How did you get here, Khun Kwang?"

"I came to ask for an answer."

"Uh..." I let out a small noise, caught off guard.

I had been so busy chatting with Phleng—thinking about her whenever I had a free moment—that I had completely forgotten about Kwang.

"Well? Do you have an answer for me yet?"

"Can we talk somewhere else?"

I whispered. Kwang seemed to realize the situation and allowed me to lead him to the parking lot at the back, where fewer people passed by.

"So, Le? I've been waiting for a long time now."

The handsome man looked at me with an expectant gaze. It had indeed been quite a while since he had been waiting for my answer. It wasn't surprising that he had come to ask me directly.

"I don't think I can be with you, Khun Kwang."

I answered truthfully, though my heart pounded with nerves, unsure of how he would react. He immediately fell silent.

"Why?"

"You're a good person—"

"Don't flatter me, Le," he cut me off, his voice now edged with irritation. "I just want to know why you won't be with me."

"Because... I don't like you that way."

"Then who do you like!?"

"Please don't be angry, Khun Kwang. Feelings aren't something we can control."

I tried to reason with him, hoping to calm him down. To be honest, I was a little scared. He was much taller and stronger than me—if anything happened, how would I even defend myself?

"I saw you chatting with someone."

"That's just a friend, Khun Kwang."

"What kind of 'friend'? You were smiling at your phone the whole time."

Was I? I hadn't even realized it myself.

"You shouldn't interfere with my personal life, Khun Kwang. What I'm trying to say is—I can't be in a relationship with you because I don't have those feelings for you."

"..."

Hearing me say it again, Kwang stepped back and put his hands on his hips, visibly frustrated.

"We can still be friends. I truly appreciate that you've always been there for me, but I just don't see you that way."

"I understand."

His voice had lost some of its edge, but I still couldn't relax. I was terrified that rejecting him would somehow affect my work.

"We can still be friends, right?"

I repeated. Kwang lifted his gaze from the ground and met mine. His eyes held a trace of resentment, but I held my ground, showing him that I wasn't running away—I simply didn't love him.

We stared at each other in silence until, suddenly, Kwang lunged forward and kissed me.

I was completely caught off guard. The moment I realized what was happening, I started struggling. His lips had barely brushed against mine before I managed to push him away.

"Disgusting!"

I blurted out in anger, raising a trembling hand to my lips, which stung from the force of his kiss.

"I'm sorry," Kwang stepped toward me again, but I instinctively backed away and raised my hand to ward him off.

This was the first time in my life that something like this had happened to me, and my mind was spinning. I was filled with nothing but fear. Even though it was Kwang...

"Stay away from me! Or I'll call security!"

"..."

Kwang froze, seeing how furious I was.

I could feel my tears running down my face, my legs shaking, my skin burning—not from embarrassment, but from sheer rage.

"Is something wrong?"

Right then, a security guard approached us, glancing between Kwang and me.

"I'm really sorry, Le. I don't know what to say. I'm sorry."

With that, Kwang finally backed off and left. I turned to the security guard, thanking him and assuring him that nothing had happened before making my way to the elevator.

As soon as I got inside my apartment, I locked the door and checked it over and over again to make sure it was secure. Then, I rushed into the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and scrubbed my lips with my hands repeatedly until they stung.

I felt so many things at once—anger, disappointment, sadness.

I didn't even know how to put it into words.

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After sitting in shock from everything I had just experienced, I eventually fell asleep. The next thing I knew, I was waking up at 11 PM to the sound of my phone vibrating nonstop. I quickly grabbed it, fearing it was something work-related, but it turned out to be messages from Phleng.

**Robert:** Why did you disappear?

**Robert:** Did you fall asleep?

**Robert:** (Sent a sticker)

**Robert:** (Sent a sticker)

**Robert:** (Sent a sticker)

**Robert:** (Sent a sticker)

**Robert:** (Sent a sticker)

**Robert:** Did you get to your room yet?

What P'Vee said about us talking like a couple... maybe it was true.

**Bruce:** I just woke up. I went to sleep.

I sent my reply, but Phleng didn't read it right away, so I just lay there, rolling around on my bed. My mind kept wandering back to Kwang— would someone be dragging me out of the building with my stuff tomorrow?

**Robert:** Tired? Was work tough today?

**Bruce:** A little.

**Bruce:** (Sent a sticker)

**Robert:** Hang in there! I'm cheering for you.

That last message made me smile uncontrollably. Just moments ago, my emotions had been all over the place, but now, after reading those words, it felt like—at least amidst all the bad things—there was still something good.

**Bruce:** Phleng, something happened today. **Robert:** What happened?

It seemed like Phleng really wanted to know because before I could even start typing out the story, she immediately replied.

**Bruce:** I never told you this before, but on the day you drove over and kissed me at the condo... that same day, Kwang asked me to be his girlfriend.

I hit send and was about to continue when I noticed that the previous message had been read—but there was no response.

**Bruce:** But I didn't say yes. So today, Kwang came to ask me for an answer.

**Bruce:** I rejected him.

**Bruce:** And then... Kwang kissed me.

Why did it feel like I was the only one sending messages? Phleng had suddenly gone completely silent.

All my messages had been marked as read, yet there was still no reply.

**Bruce:** It was a kiss without consent. I didn't want it at all.

I quickly typed that out to prevent any misunderstanding.

But still—nothing.

I waited for a response until almost 2 AM, way past the time I should've been asleep. But I kept waiting. And waiting. And nothing.

When I woke up in the morning, showered, and got dressed, it was still the same. No messages.

An uneasy feeling started creeping in. I kept staring at my phone, hoping to see a notification pop up. Even just a sticker would be fine.

But there was nothing.

What's wrong with Phleng!?

# Chapter 12: Jealousy

Ever since I told Phleng about Khwang, she hasn't responded or messaged me at all. I tried texting her, but there was no reply. All I could do was wait —wait and wait, hoping she would eventually reply. I didn't want to pressure her or bombard her with messages morning, noon, and night because we both had work to do.

As for Khwang, the day after he kissed me, I went to work feeling uneasy, but surprisingly, he vanished. He didn't bother me or lurk around anymore.

"I haven't seen Khwang around lately."

I flinched when P'Vee suddenly brought up the person I had been trying to avoid while we were all having lunch at our usual restaurant.

"Le, do you know where he went?" P'Jay was just as curious.

"I have no idea. I haven't talked to him at all," I replied.

"So, are you two dating yet?"

Suddenly, I became the center of attention at the lunch table. P'Vee set her chopsticks down and looked at me expectantly, waiting for an explanation about my relationship status.

"We're not. We're just friends," I clarified.

"But Khwang has made it obvious that he likes you. Do you not like him back?"

"I only see him as a friend, nothing more."

I spoke in a firm tone. There were too many things weighing on my mind, making me uneasy—especially Phleng's sudden disappearance from my life. I knew my colleagues were trying to push me toward Khwang, but I just couldn't force my feelings.

"Oh, right! Phleng is coming tomorrow to review the second draft of the video editing."

"..."

I was about to take a bite when my hand froze midair. I turned to P'Vee, who had just casually dropped that bombshell.

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. Phleng called me before we came down for lunch. She said she and her assistant would be coming to review the second draft tomorrow."

P'Vee said it so nonchalantly while slurping her noodles, but I was anything but calm.

So, Phleng was still going about her business as usual—she just deliberately chose not to respond to me. Normally, I wouldn't be surprised that P'Vee was more informed about client meetings than I was, but in Phleng's case, it felt intentional, like she purposely bypassed me. Or maybe I was just overthinking.

Sometimes, Phleng was really hard to read.

Well, all I could do now was prepare myself.

For her arrival tomorrow.

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The dreaded tomorrow finally arrived.

I woke up earlier than usual after a sleepless night, my nerves eating away at me. My legs felt weak as I walked to the train station, like I had just finished an intense workout.

When I arrived at the office, P'Vee, P'Jay, and the editing team were already setting up the files to be displayed on the large TV screen in the conference room.

"Have you eaten yet, Le? You can go grab breakfast first. Phleng won't be here for another hour or so," P'Vee suggested.

"I already ate. I'll just wait here for her."

I declined and stood watching as the team finalized the setup.

I was anxious—not about work, but about *her*.

Then, Phleng and her assistant finally arrived. P'Vee volunteered to go down and greet them at the parking lot while I waited in the conference room with everyone else.

The moment the tall woman walked in, our eyes met.

I looked at her, silently asking what was going on.

But all I received was a cold, indifferent stare before she quickly averted her gaze, refusing to look at me again.

"Let's start. I want to see it."

She flashed a sweet yet terrifying smile at P'Vee before one of our team members pressed play.

As the video played, I quickly ran to turn off the lights for better visibility. Everyone's focus was on the screen, except mine—I kept glancing at Phleng's stiff expression.

She looked tense, unusually serious. Her dark brown eyebrows were slightly furrowed in a way I wasn't used to seeing. When she sensed my gaze, she turned toward me, so I quickly pretended to be engrossed in the video instead.

When the clip ended, I turned the lights back on. Everyone shifted their attention from the screen to the conference table, all eyes on Phleng.

"What do you think, P'Vee? Is it good?"

Instead of giving feedback herself, she passed the responsibility to P'Vee.

"Uh..." P'Vee hesitated, unsure. Normally, clients were the ones to provide feedback, not the other way around.

"I think it looks good, aside from the sequencing. If there are any specific changes you'd like, we can adjust accordingly," P'Vee answered.

Phleng nodded before turning to me.

"What about you, Lermarn?"

I blinked at her, confused. Her formal tone and icy gaze were so unlike the Phleng I knew.

"I'd say the same as P'Vee. If there's anything specific you'd like adjusted— like color grading or graphics—you can let us know."

I answered professionally, and she simply raised an eyebrow before looking away.

"Fix everything."

"Huh!?"

Everyone in the room, except me, gasped in unison.

"Everything Lermarn just mentioned—fix it all."

She stood up, her serious tone silencing the entire room. No one dared to speak. A chilling aura radiated from her.

"The graphics, the fade transitions, the color grading—you all did well, but it's not good enough. I want to see new versions next week."

"..."

"Make multiple versions so I have options."

"Uh... Phleng, if you'd like changes, we need more specifics. Otherwise, we won't know exactly what you're looking for," P'Vee reasoned, trying to mediate the situation.

Phleng smirked before her eyes landed on me.

"You can ask Lermarn. She might know what I like."

Suddenly, all eyes were on me. I glanced around in confusion, shaking my head quickly to indicate I had no clue. P'Vee looked just as baffled.

When I turned back to Phleng, her expression had shifted. She was now rubbing her temples, looking conflicted.

"...I'm sorry," she finally muttered, directing her apology at P'Vee. "You all did well. Just revise the sequence of the hotel room showcase."

P'Vee immediately jotted down notes. The tension in the room eased as Phleng continued listing specific changes.

After finalizing the details, she prepared to leave.

"I apologize for being difficult earlier," she told P'Vee before heading out.

"Oh, it's fine. You seemed stressed. Is everything okay?"

"Not exactly. More like a headache."

"Because of work? I heard you're opening a new hotel branch."

"Work is part of it... but *people* are another issue."

She subtly glanced at me before walking away.

What did I do!?

"I'll walk her to the car," P'Vee offered.

"I'll do it," I quickly interjected.

P'Vee didn't object, so I followed Phleng downstairs.

"I need to use the restroom. You guys go ahead," she told her assistant when we reached the ground floor.

I didn't hesitate to follow her in.

Inside, she stood at the sink, arms resting on the counter, her expression unreadable.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"..."

"Why didn't you reply to my messages?"

"..."

"Phleng!"

I raised my voice, making her flinch.

"If this is about that kiss—"

"Not now," she cut me off, brushing my hand off her arm. "I don't want to talk about it."

"Why not? I want to explain—"

"I *said* not now. I'm pissed off."

"And how is avoiding me going to help!?"

We glared at each other.

Phleng turned on the faucet, washing her hands. When she moved to leave, I grabbed her wrist, but she shook me off.

"I didn't *want* that kiss!"

I shouted after her.

If I had no choice in the matter, why was she still mad at me?

Why wouldn't she listen?

So cruel.

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It was another emotionally draining day. After Khun Phleng walked out, I went into the bathroom and cried for almost an hour. When I finally returned to work, everyone bombarded me with questions about what kind of work Khun Phleng actually liked. They were afraid that if they made revisions again, there would be more problems. I ended up snapping at them, shouting that I didn't know either.

By the time work ended, I packed up my bag, ready to head back to my condo while wondering what to have for dinner. I'd just reheat some leftovers.

"Le," I was walking toward the elevator lobby along with a few other colleagues when someone grabbed my arm. I turned around to see Khun Kwang standing behind me. I didn't say anything to him, just glared with hostility.

"Are you heading home?"

"Yes."

"Do you want me to give you a ride?"

"No."

I gave him a short answer and walked away to the elevator, but the handsome man wasn't giving up so easily. He followed behind me.

"I heard about what happened in the meeting today."

"..."

I hesitated for a moment and turned to look at Khun Kwang, who was now standing beside me.

"Did Khun Phleng lash out at you?"

"She lashed out at the entire meeting room," I replied dismissively, feeling exhausted. Crying at work had already drained me enough. Now, I had to put on a normal face so that no one in the office would suspect anything.

"You look really tired, Le."

"..."

"Your face looks awful."

Khun Kwang's words hit the nail on the head. My face must have looked like an emotionless robot by now.

"Let me give you a ride."

I turned to look at him with my robotic expression. He raised an eyebrow as if to ask me again. We stared at each other for a moment, and before I even realized it, I was sitting in his car.

"I want to apologize again for that day," he said.

"Just forget it. I don't want to remember it anymore." I leaned my head against the car window, staring outside with frustration. Khun Kwang had apologized to me at least ten times since we got in the car.

"So, we can still be friends, right?"

"Of course. I'd love to be friends with someone as handsome as you," I said absentmindedly, but for some reason, he found it amusing and laughed.

"If you ever have any problems or worries, you can tell me."

"Sure, if something comes up, I'll let you know," I said, just to get him to stop making conversation.

We drove in silence for a while. Suddenly, it started to rain—a light drizzle, not too heavy. Khun Kwang had classical music playing softly in the car. The atmosphere was oddly relaxing, and for some reason, it made me feel drowsy. I had woken up earlier than usual this morning, and I barely got any sleep last night...

"Le."

Khun Kwang's voice startled me awake. I looked around and saw that the car had already parked under my condo. Did I fall asleep?

"We're here."

"Oh... Thanks for the ride, Khun Kwang." I rubbed my eyes, trying to shake off my drowsiness. I could go upstairs and sleep properly now.

"See? I dropped you off safely. I didn't take you anywhere else."

"Yeah, yeah."

"So, the reason you can't date me is because you already have someone you like, right?"

Out of nowhere, he brought up the one topic I didn't want to discuss. His handsome face looked troubled as he asked, as if he knew he shouldn't be asking but couldn't help himself.

"Yes, I already have someone I love."

I felt cruel switching from the word "like" to "love," but I wanted him to truly give up on me. Someone as good as him deserved to open his heart to someone else, not waste his time trying to win me over.

"Wow... I can't believe I got rejected," Khun Kwang slumped against the car seat, laughing to himself before turning to look at me again. "You look really sleepy. Do you even realize how tired you look?"

"Yeah, I didn't sleep well last night."

"Then go rest. I'll head home too."

"Alright. Drive safe, Khun Kwang."

I said goodbye and got out of the car.

After parting ways with him, I went up to my room, tossed my bag and everything I brought from the office onto the couch, and then went straight into my bedroom, collapsing onto my bed in exhaustion. All the fatigue I had been holding in finally poured out in the form of my body sinking into the mattress.

Good. Let it swallow me whole. I didn't even need to eat dinner anymore. I buried my face in the pillow and rolled around a bit to make myself comfortable before I drifted off to sleep.

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**"Lermarn..."**

Phleng, in her oversized yet incredibly sexy nightwear, was teasingly running her lips along my thigh.

Her expression was utterly seductive, and both hands were eagerly tugging at the clasp of my pants, trying to pry them apart.

**"W-what are you doing, Phleng!?"**

"Doing what lovers like to do," she replied.

**"I—I don't know how to do this! Wait!"**

Before I could say anything more, the taller woman effortlessly slid my long pants off and climbed up, her nose nuzzling along my face.

"I'll take care of it," she whispered huskily in my ear, her fingers expertly unfastening the buttons of my shirt, one by one.

And why wasn't I resisting?

I couldn't seem to control my arms or hands at all.

Was I paralyzed or just completely helpless? Oh god, what was happening!?

"All you have to do is..."

Her warm tongue slipped into my mouth, twining and sucking the heat right out of me. I tried to fight back, but my body refused to obey.

What was this!?

"Just stay still."

Her cold hands parted my shirt after unbuttoning it completely, while her beautiful face lowered to breathe softly against my chest—my most sensitive spot.

**Riiing... Riiing... Riiing...**

**"Huh—huh!?"**

I jolted awake, sitting up with wide eyes as the ringing of my room's phone echoed non-stop.

**"It was a dream?"**

I clutched my chest, feeling the heat rush to my face.

I dreamed about almost... with Phleng.

It felt... good.

Wait—what the hell was I thinking!?

I was still trying to gather my thoughts, lost in the lingering sensations of my dream, when the phone finally stopped ringing. I quickly got up from bed and called back.

"Yes?" I mumbled sleepily after hearing some shuffling on the other end.

"Come downstairs and get me."

**"..."**

I just dreamt about her, and now the real thing was right here?

"I'm not coming down," I huffed, still annoyed and unwilling to face her. I immediately hung up and marched back to my bed.

Forget dinner—sleep was the priority.

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**Riiing... Riiing... Riiing...**

**"Ugh!"**

I could ignore it... but somehow, I just couldn't.

"Miss Lermarn, please come down to get your guest," the condo's receptionist, Miss Niti, sounded practically on the verge of tears. "If you don't, I'll be in big trouble."

**"..."**

I froze.

What had Phleng done to poor Miss Niti!?

And that was how I ended up trudging downstairs, dragging my body along while clutching a bolster pillow. If she was going to disturb my night, I wanted her to see how much of a bother this was.

"Did you really bring a pillow down just to get me?"

Phleng's sharp eyes scanned my disheveled appearance—puffy face, mismatched work shirt with pajama pants, and, of course, the bolster in my grip.

"It's late. Normal people go to bed after a long day of work," I grumbled, shooting a sweet (but exhausted) smile at Miss Niti, who was sweating bullets.

I had no idea what Phleng said to her, but it must have been bad.

Deciding that standing here wasn't productive, I walked ahead to the elevator, Phleng following close behind.

"What did you say to Miss Niti that scared her so much?"

"Nothing much. Just mentioned that the service elevator in this condo has been left wide open multiple times without any security checks. If a thief got in and robbed the residents, what would they do? Oh, and I also have the contact number of the building owner. If I called and told them the security here was negligent, someone might lose their job."

I turned to gape at her.

She merely shrugged, unfazed.

Once inside my apartment, I cut straight to the point.

"What do you want? I'm tired."

As soon as I spoke, her face twisted in annoyance.

"Put the pillow down first."

"No."

"Seriously?"

She frowned at me, displeased.

We stared at each other in silence.

The longer I looked at her, the more I remembered today's events—her coldness, the way she ignored my texts, and the outright hostility she had shown in the meeting.

"Why did you do that?" I finally asked.

"Do what?"

"The moment I told you about Kwang kissing me, you ignored my texts, stopped reaching out, and then, at work today, you were cold and even picked a fight with me in the meeting!"

She said nothing.

"What did I do wrong? If this is about Kwang kissing me, I didn't want that! He did it on his own!"

Frustration boiled over as I slammed my bolster onto the couch.

"You were so cruel, Phleng."

Still, she said nothing.

"I was crying in the bathroom for ages after you left, wondering what I did wrong to deserve that treatment!"

I felt tears prick my eyes. Ashamed, I wiped them away with the back of my hand.

"I was jealous."

**"Huh!?"**

"I was jealous! And angry!"

I stared at her in shock.

"I didn't know what to do. When I found out Kwang kissed you, I couldn't think straight. I didn't know what to say, didn't know how to drive over to see you—I was completely lost! And you! Why weren't you more careful!? Why did you let some guy just kiss you like that!?"

She was now kneeling in front of me, leveling our gazes.

"I'm sorry for disappearing. I just... I didn't know how to handle how I felt. I've never liked anyone before. Never been kissed. Never felt this way about someone. But when I found out that someone else kissed you after I did..."

She clenched her jaw.

"I hated it!"

We fell into silence.

Then, she met my eyes again.

"I loved kissing you that day."

My heart stopped.

"So I hated seeing someone else kiss you after me."

**"**Phleng**..."**

She leaned closer.

"Whose kiss do you like more—Kwang's or mine?"

My heartbeat was thunderous.

She was getting too close.

"Yours," I whispered.

The moment I answered, her lips crashed into mine, hungry and demanding. Her arms wrapped around my waist, pulling me flush against her, while her hand parted my thighs so she could press even closer.

Her lips moved against mine insistently, feverishly, stealing every breath I had.

"Do you like it?" she murmured huskily when we parted briefly.

I could barely form words.

"Y-yeah."

She didn't give me a chance to say anything more—her lips were on mine again, hotter and more urgent. I melted in her arms, clutching onto her shoulders.

"What if I want more than just kissing?"

Before I could react, her lips trailed down to my neck, sending shivers through my entire body.

Her hands began roaming.

"W-where did you learn this!?"

"TV."

"You said you don't watch movies!"

"TV and cinema are not the same thing."

She smirked before leaning back in.

"Let's not stop, yeah?"

# Chapter 13: Sweet

After we had been tangled up for quite a while, I, still unprepared for too much progress, had to quickly put the brakes on Khun Phleng before things escalated further.

Khun Phleng seemed to crave my kisses—a lot. In fact, it wasn't just kisses anymore. But when I asked to stop, she gave me a sweet smile and complied without hesitation. She was passionate, but when she wanted to, she could be surprisingly obedient.

Now, I was sitting like a little puppy, waiting for my dinner from its owner, while Khun Phleng was chopping vegetables and preparing eggs that I had stored in the fridge to make a simple meal.

"Here, stuffed omelet," she said, handing me the plate of food.

"Thank you," I replied, nodding in appreciation before picking up the fork and digging in hungrily. I wouldn't have been this hungry if Khun Phleng hadn't drained all my energy earlier.

After finishing her task, she pulled up a chair and sat down, watching me eat with an intense gaze—one that was different from before. It was like a wolf eyeing its prey.

"Would you like to lie down on the bed?" I asked.

"No."

"Then how about watching TV?"

"No."

"Why are you staring at me like that?"

"I want to kiss you."

She answered in such short, clipped sentences that I ran out of ways to distract her from that sharp gaze.

After a while, I finally found something to talk about, especially when I recalled her kissing skills and how her hands had wandered all over me just moments ago.

"Did you secretly watch adult movies?" I teased.

"What?! No way!"

Khun Phleng had such an obvious guilty look on her face. "You look suspicious," I grinned.

"I didn't! Movies in general have love scenes, don't they?"

"Oh, sure. But don't you think you learned a bit too fast? Just now... you almost took off all my clothes."

As I said that, my face suddenly turned bright red.

"I'm sorry, I got carried away," she admitted easily, looking like the usual Khun Phleng I knew—not the fierce, intense version from earlier in the day.

"Are you still mad at me about this afternoon?"

"Ah..." I hadn't even finished chewing my food.

"I'm really sorry. I know I didn't act right."

She apologized again, looking genuinely remorseful. Honestly, I wasn't mad at her anymore. The fact that she had cooked for me and that we had just shared such a fiery kiss had completely wiped away all my irritation.

Khun Phleng continued watching me until I finished my meal. When I got up to wash my dishes, she was still staring at me, making me ask,

"When are you going back?"

"Are you kicking me out?"

"Well, you've just been sitting there staring at me this whole time. Aren't you going back to your hotel? It's late."

"I want to stay here." She pouted, looking like a kitten begging for tuna.

"Then stay."

"But I have work in the morning."

"Then go sleep at your hotel."

"But I still want to be here."

I sighed, too tired to argue. "Do whatever you want." I decided to grab my pajamas and take a shower.

I walked into the bedroom to pick out something to wear. As I bent down to grab my nightwear, I turned around—only to bump straight into Khun Phleng, who had been standing right behind me. I lost my balance and fell against her.

"You scared me!"

"Who told you to stand so close behind me?"

I yelped as I got back up. But then she moved behind me again, wrapping an arm around my waist and following my steps, resting her beautiful face on my shoulder.

"So... does this mean we like each other?"

"Uh..."

That's a good question. We had just kissed so passionately, yet neither of us had said anything about our feelings.

As the realization hit me, my face grew hot. What should I do? How should I tell her I like her?

"Can I take a shower first?" I asked.

"Do you need to shower before confessing?" She laughed, probably because I looked so awkward right now.

"I'm not talking to you anymore," I huffed, escaping into the bathroom.

"Le, thank you, Phleng."

I repeated this phrase for what felt like the millionth time under the running water of the shower. The shampoo I had lathered onto my scalp had long since rinsed away, flowing down to the drain.

"Or maybe... Le loves Phleng?"

'Nara loves Phleng.'

At that moment, I suddenly recalled my past self. Should I just tell Phleng tonight that I am actually Nara?

But before anything else... I should at least confess properly first.

I took longer than usual in the shower, my heart pounding as I hesitated to face Phleng. But in the end, I had to come out eventually—I couldn't exactly live in the bathroom forever, could I?

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As I pushed open the bathroom door, I saw the tall figure sprawled out lazily on the sofa, a small pillow covering their face as if they were trying to nap.

"Asleep?" I mumbled as I stepped closer to check.

"HACHOO!"

Before I could react, Phleng suddenly sprang up, grabbing me and pulling me onto their lap.

"Phleng!" I scolded in annoyance, while they merely chuckled, amused at my startled reaction.

"If you're not staying over, maybe you should head back now. I'm about to turn off the lights and sleep."

"What about what we talked about before you went in to shower?"

At their question, I fell silent, and so did Phleng, waiting expectantly.

"Why do I have to tell you first?"

"So that's how it is, huh?"

Hearing my deflective response, Phleng let out a small sigh, not seeming too surprised.

"You want me to say it first?"

"If possible, yes."

I knew I was being unfair. They had come all the way here to see me, even cooked for me, and yet I couldn't even do this one thing they asked.

Or... maybe I should just say it first?

"I li—"

"I like you, Phleng."

Before Phleng could finish their sentence, I blurted it out first. That instantly made them freeze, their lips still parted from the words they had been about to say.

"Fuuu... ah!"

I let out a small breath, but before I could process what happened, Phleng had already pulled me into a tight embrace. Their sharp, handsome features pressed against my cheek, kissing me over and over.

It would have been just a normal affectionate moment if not for the fact that they were slowly easing me down onto the sofa.

"Phleng, what are you doing?"

"I want to kiss you again."

"But I already said it first! You haven't even told me how you feel yet!" I stammered, feeling nervous as they continued nuzzling close.

"I like you."

"Hm...?"

"I like you, Lermarn."

"...!"

I swallowed hard, feeling my entire face heat up. Hearing them say my full name made their words feel even more real. My hands, which had been gripping their shoulders, slowly moved to wrap around their back.

"Ever since that night when you were drunk and kissed me, I knew I couldn't see you the same way anymore."

"So that night, when I went drinking alone, was actually a good thing, huh?"

"But if you try to go drinking alone again, I won't allow it. It's dangerous."

Phleng frowned, making me quickly nod in agreement. I reached up and scratched their chin lightly.

"I won't go, okay, babe?"

I deliberately changed how I addressed them, and to my delight, Phleng immediately turned their face away, their cheeks noticeably pinker.

"Are you blushing? That's so cute!" I laughed, grabbing their face to turn it back toward me before gently pinching their cheeks. But as soon as I did, Phleng's gaze flickered past me toward the clock on the wall.

"It's almost eleven. I should head back."

"You have work early tomorrow, right?" I asked, even though I already knew the answer.

"Yeah. If I wake up late and have to drive through rush hour, I'll definitely be late for my meeting."

"Maybe we should meet outside next time? I feel bad making you drive all the way here every time."

I suggested, not wanting them to always have to make the late-night drive.

"We can talk about that later. It's late now—get some rest."

With that, Phleng leaned in and pressed a long kiss to my cheek. One hand slipped around my waist, pulling me easily into their arms, as if they just wanted to keep me close for a little longer.

"Drive safe, okay? Don't speed."

"That'll be hard. I need to make good time so I can sleep properly."

"Come on, bear with it. Losing a little sleep is better than ending up sleeping forever in a coffin."

"So you want me to drive slower?"

"Yes—"

"Then kiss me first."

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I woke up and went to work feeling lighthearted, unable to stop myself from smiling at my reflection in the mirror. So this is what being in love feels like—energized, motivated to do things with a renewed sense of purpose.

Last night, after you asked me to kiss you, how could I possibly refuse? I quickly stood on my tiptoes, cupped your beautiful face, and kissed you with all the skill I had. When I pulled away, I was nervous you might say I was terrible at it. But instead, you smiled so wide that I could see all of your teeth.

Seeing that smile often wouldn't be so bad, especially yours—I could never get tired of it.

"Why are you smiling to yourself so much today? What did you do?" Vee started the conversation as we sat down for lunch at our usual spot under the office building.

"Did you notice, P'Vee?"

"I'm your boss, you know."

After saying that, P'Vee just focused on eating his soup and didn't say anything else. I did the same. We ate in silence until my phone suddenly rang—it was an unknown number.

"Hello, this is Le speaking."

"..."

"Hello? Who is this?"

"..."

"..."

Since the caller stayed silent, I hung up without thinking too much about it. This kind of thing happened quite often—unknown numbers were usually clients, talent managers, or modeling agencies I had worked with but hadn't saved in my contacts.

"By the way, tomorrow at ten in the morning, we've scheduled a review of the third draft with Khun Phleng."

"Ah, got it."

Hearing my CEO's name immediately made me smile again.

"Hopefully, you won't lash out at us like last time. That was terrifying."

P'Vee rubbed his temples as he spoke. If this were before, I might have been nervous. But now? Not at all.

Go ahead and try to lash out—I just won't kiss you again.

"I won't, P'Vee."

Seeing my dear boss so stressed, I reached out and held his hand. "Everything will be fine tomorrow, I promise."

"You say that now, but don't forget how she threw shade at you last time."

"Haha," I laughed, remembering the bizarre way Khun Phleng had acted jealous during that meeting. She really had the weirdest way of showing it.

I stayed in the editing room with the team until around 9 PM before calling it a day. Since we were reviewing the video in a dimly lit room, I had turned off my phone's notifications to avoid distracting anyone. I only checked my phone after packing up, and that's when I saw a flood of messages from Robert.

Robert: Why aren't you answering my calls?

Robert: Have you left work yet?

Robert: Where are you? Why won't you pick up?

Robert: Are you in your room yet?

Robert: Babe

Robert: You're really not answering me...

Seeing all that, I quickly called her back, imagining she was probably sulking in his office by now.

"Why did it take you so long to pick up? I called so many times."

"I was in the editing room, watching the video for Khun Phleng," I replied as I climbed the stairs to the train station.

"Where are you now?"

"At the train station."

"Which one?"

"I haven't boarded yet."

"How long until you get home?"

I smiled to myself at how many questions she was asking. If it were anyone else, I might have been annoyed, but since it was her, I didn't mind at all.

"Why don't you come pick me up if you're so worried?" I teased.

"Can't, I have too much work tonight."

Her dejected tone made me feel soft.

"Hang in there. I'll be home soon, so don't worry about me."

"Of course I have to worry—we're dating now, aren't we?"

"..."

My face was burning again. Not just my face—my whole body felt hot!

"Or... are we not dating?" she asked when I didn't respond.

"I... we are, okay? We're dating!" I stammered, beyond flustered.

It was a good thing we were talking over the phone—if she had asked me this in person, I might have actually melted into a puddle on the floor.

"Then I'll see you tomorrow. P'Vee told you already, right? I'll be there at ten."

"Yes."

"Why do you sound down?"

"It's just... sometimes I can't help but feel a little disappointed. You could have told me directly instead of going through P'Vee every time."

"..."

"As your girlfriend, I want to hear things from you first."

I knew I was being unreasonable, but I wanted to be honest about how I felt.

"Are you jealous of P'Vee?" ...Oh, come on.

"Never mind. I'll hang up now."

"I don't tell you first because P'Vee is your boss. Sometimes it's not right to go over the head of someone higher up. It's not that I forgot about you." ...Did she just call me beautiful?

So smooth.

Honestly, I wasn't seriously upset about it. It's just that when you have a partner, someone you can act a little spoiled with, you start caring about things you wouldn't have before.

"You understand now, right? I didn't realize you thought about stuff like this."

"I was just being silly. I'll text you when I get home, okay?"

"Okay."

. .

Everything seems so easy, doesn't it? But in reality, it's not that simple— pretending like we're nothing more than colleagues, hiding the truth behind composed expressions. Still, no matter how much we try to act indifferent, I can't help but glance at Khun Phleng whenever I get the chance. And sometimes, the way she feigns indifference makes me chuckle. Likewise, whenever I have to speak or move, she secretly watches me and smiles to herself.

It's like we're two crazy people in the middle of a room full of professionals focused on their work.

"So, in conclusion, these are the only changes needed. I'll send the final file to you via email, Khun Phleng," P'Vee said after we wrapped up the discussion about the last round of edits on the clip.

"Alright. If possible, just add the credits and the necessary elements on your end now. I think there shouldn't be anything left to fix," Khun Phleng replied, leaning back comfortably in her chair—such a stark contrast to our previous meetings.

"Then let's move on to discussing the second video," P'Vee continued before turning to me. "Put up the slides, Le."

"Got it."

I got up and moved to the laptop, which was near where Khun Phleng was sitting. I closed the video player and opened the presentation file instead.

"The computer froze," P'Jay's voice cut in.

I sighed, already feeling frustrated. Even though the laptop we were using wasn't that old, we'd pushed it to its limits. Lately, it had been freezing more often.

"Let me take a look."

Before I could react, the tall figure beside me stood up and leaned over, practically hovering over me. She used her slender fingers to swipe the trackpad, taking over where my hand had been. I swallowed hard as the faint, pleasant scent of her perfume filled my senses. And to make it worse, she let out a soft chuckle right next to my ear.

But since my body was blocking everything, no one else in the room could see what she was doing.

"I'll check it out," Ball, one of the editors, quickly got up to help. I took the chance to step back to my seat, while the mischievous CEO returned to her 'throne' with a satisfied look, gazing at me with amusement.

Would this count as workplace harassment?

The meeting continued, with P'Jay leading most of the discussion, supported by P'Vee. Khun Phleng listened attentively this time, keeping her eyes on them instead of sneaking glances at me—probably because both presenters were standing right in front of her.

"That's all. Khun Phleng, do you have any additional comments?"

"No issues. Just keep an eye on the weather conditions—I heard it caused quite a bit of trouble on set."

Khun Phleng offered a brief reminder.

"Understood. And regarding the design, do you have any concerns?"

"Not really, but I'd like to hear some opinions from others."

She turned to look at the rest of the team, including me. That prompted those with input to speak up, offering suggestions for improvements.

"What about you, Le? What do you think?"

Once everyone else had spoken, it was my turn. The CEO flashed me the sweetest smile before asking.

"I helped P'Jay with the slides, so I don't have any comments for now. I think we'll have to wait until production to see how it really comes together. But overall, I like it."

"Oh? You like it?"

I gaped at her. That should have been the end of the conversation. But no, she had to press on, her expression teasing and full of meaning.

"Yes, I like it a lot."

"Really? Why do you like it?"

I nearly rolled my eyes. I knew exactly what she was doing.

"The project is great—very well done. It looks high-end, sophisticated, and it perfectly aligns with the client's expectations. This kind of quality and attention to detail is hard to find elsewhere. You have to experience it firsthand to understand just how good it is."

I answered sarcastically, hoping she'd be satisfied and stop messing with me. Meanwhile, P'Vee and P'Jay exchanged confused glances, as if questioning why I was responding to a client in such an odd way.

Not that they'd understand—I wasn't talking about the project at all.

As for Khun Phleng, she just chuckled to herself, clearly enjoying her little game.

Ugh, I'm going to lose my mind!

# Chapter 14: The Return

After that ridiculous meeting ended, Khun Phleng went back to work at the hotel. It was P'Vee who walked her out, not me—which was honestly a good thing. She came alone today too. If I had walked her out myself, she definitely would've teased me to no end. Trust me on that.

**Robert:** *"I'm coming over to sleep tonight. I'll bring some snacks and dinner from the hotel. Wait and eat with me, okay?"*

A few hours passed, and then she texted me that. My heart skipped a beat, and I instantly felt so much better.

I get to cuddle with my girlfriend tonight—so happy!

"Ahem... smiling to yourself again, huh, Nong Ler?"

P'Jay, who came to return the flash drive he borrowed from me, teased as he walked by. I quickly dropped my phone into my lap before anyone could see who I was chatting with.

But with a name like that, no one would guess it's Khun Phleng anyway.

"Hey Ler, I think you should go talk to him."

P'Vee came to stand right in front of me like he did it on purpose, then subtly gestured behind him with his lips. I looked past P'Vee's shoulder and saw Khun Kwang standing outside the office window, blurred behind the glass.

I saved the file I was working on and walked outside to face the handsome guy. I already cleared things up with him, didn't I? What else does he want?

"Hello."

"Do you need something, Khun Kwang?"

"I miss you, Ler."

There it is. I sighed again, annoyed. So in the end, he really hasn't moved on from me.

"I mean, I *really* miss you."

"...."

If this were the old Kwang, he probably would've flirted with me more, maybe tried some cheesy pickup lines. But now, his expression was serious. Different.

"I just want to ask... do you really have a boyfriend now?"

"What made you ask that again?"

I wasn't trying to be sarcastic—I really wanted to know where he got that idea, or what made him suddenly bring it up again.

"I saw you smiling to yourself."

"Come on, Kwang, I was just—"

"Ah, ah, ah, no."

The handsome guy cut me off before I could dodge the question. "That's not normal behavior. I've seen you on your phone a lot lately. During lunch breaks, you usually never even look at your phone because you love chatting with the team, but now you're checking it like, every minute."

"..."

"I just want to make sure."

He adjusted his shirt like he was trying to mentally prepare himself for something.

"That you really do have someone you love now."

I looked at Khun Kwang, who stared at me with such sadness in his eyes, and I couldn't help but feel bad. It must have taken so much courage for him to ask me this directly—not hearing it from others or assuming things on his own, but wanting to know the truth from me.

"Well, I..."

I was about to answer when I accidentally dropped my phone. Kwang bent down to pick it up, and just then the screen lit up. My heart skipped a beat, and I wanted to snatch it from him—but I was too slow. He looked at the screen, then smiled.

"I didn't mean to read it, but the message just popped up." He handed the phone back to me, smiling slightly.

On the screen was a message from Khun Phleng.

**Robert:** *"Do you want anything special to eat? I'll have the chef make it hot before I come see you."*

"Didn't know you liked European, blonde-haired, blue-eyed types."

"Uh..."

How the heck was I supposed to explain this?

"Introduce me to him sometime. His name's Robert, right?"

"..."

"Why do you look so uncomfortable? Or are you not ready to go public yet?"

Seeing me speechless, Kwang kept guessing.

He looked so innocent, completely unaware or suspicious about who the person on my phone really was.

"Alright then, I'll get back to work. You look pretty uncomfortable, so... see you around."

Just as I was trying to think of what to say, Kwang turned and walked away —just like that.

Should I go after him and tell him?

Tell him who this so-called Robert really is?

...

In the end, I didn't go after to explain things to Khun Kwang anyway.

Besides, I'm still not ready to reveal that I'm in a relationship with Khun Phleng to anyone. We'll just wait for the right time and find a way together later. As for my tall beloved, once she arrived at my condo, she stuffed my fridge with all sorts of snacks and sweets. Of course, I didn't object. It's actually great—when I get hungry, I won't have to go down to the shop under the condo. Saves money too.

Today, Khun Phleng brought smoked salmon for me, the good kind, along with two or three other savory dishes I didn't even ask for. Of course, I couldn't finish all of it. I had to drag my beloved to join me at the dining table.

"Really? And that guy didn't ask anything else, right?" Khun Phleng asked while dipping salmon into sauce and feeding me as we sat together in front of the TV.

"No, he didn't ask anything."

"Good. So we don't have to depend on anyone else, right?" The pretty-faced person turned to ask me again. I nodded repeatedly with puffed cheeks because I was still chewing my food.

After we were full, Khun Phleng volunteered to clean up for me and told me to go take a shower and freshen up.

When I stepped out of the bathroom, I saw her still standing at the kitchen corner, drying the dishes. That tall back of hers... I couldn't help myself—

*Grab!*

"Hm?" The tall one hummed softly when I walked up to hug her, pressing my face against her back.

"So warm... I like it," I said, rubbing my face against her back, craving her warmth. Then she turned around and hugged me, making me now bury my face in the crook of her long neck.

We stood hugging like that for a while, adjusting our arms and hands from time to time. Then Khun Phleng slowly lifted my face to kiss me.

It started off as a gentle kiss for just a few seconds before she made it into the most passionate kiss. Her warm tongue moved inside my mouth with such intensity. It began slowly before she sped up, catching me off guard, making me wrap my arms around her long neck for support.

Everything started heating up. Khun Phleng kept taking more from my mouth without stopping. Our kiss grew deeper and more consuming. It was like water that had reached boiling point but could still get hotter. My hands, which had only wrapped around her neck, started to roam across her back. Just like her hands, which pulled me closer.

"Khun Phleng..." I finally moaned her name when she moved from my lips to my neck.

"What is it?"

"I... can't stand anymore..."

I confessed in defeat. Her warm breath was wreaking havoc on my body, and my legs, which had some strength left, now felt completely drained.

"Then don't stand," she said, before lifting me and placing me on the edge of the sink.

Wait—are we doing *this* position?

Her perfectly beautiful face stayed close to mine. I cupped her face and kissed her back after letting her take the lead for so long.

"How far are we going to go?"

Khun Phleng asked, kissing me again, softly this time. Her long arms wrapped around my waist so I wouldn't fall from the edge of the sink.

"H-How far do you want to go, Khun Phleng?"

I asked in return, because honestly, I didn't know my own limits. If it were to go further, I'd be willing. But whether I'd be good at it... that's another story.

"I don't know either."

"Should we wait a bit, then?" I suggested. While we kept sharing sweet kisses, gently and lovingly, we were also trying to figure out the answer.

"We just started, right?" The beautiful-faced person moaned softly, then nodded slightly. "Okay, let's wait then."

"Okay." I looked into her eyes before stopping everything, even though it felt strange.

It felt like... if we didn't wait, maybe we'd feel more comfortable?

Why does it feel incomplete? Half-done? Like something's stuck?

"I'll go brush my teeth and take a shower then."

She gently lowered me from the sink edge. Her movements were awkward, just like mine. I guess that's what it's like when you're freshly dating someone. Maybe it'll get better soon.

"I'll go get the bed ready, then."

"Okay," Khun Phleng replied and disappeared into the bathroom, while I went to turn on the bedroom light and make the bed. The strange feeling still lingered. But since we both agreed to stop, I tried brushing away all the crazy thoughts I had about tonight.

Just sleep next to each other... Just sleep...

*Just sleep next to each other, damn it!*

Once Khun Phleng finished her shower, we found ourselves awkwardly standing around the bed as if unsure whether just lying down would be enough for our first night together as an official couple.

"I'll sleep on my usual side," she said, pointing to the inner side of the bed where she usually sleeps. I nodded. When she saw that I was fine with it, she climbed into bed. I turned off the main light, left the bedside lamp on, and followed her in.

"Get under the blanket, okay?" I rolled my eyes at her words and actions. As soon as I lay down, Khun Phleng pulled the blanket from the foot of the bed and wrapped it around me up to my neck. She even made sure it covered me well.

Exactly like five years ago... Even the words were the same.

As I was lost in thoughts of five years ago, the tall person next to me suddenly nuzzled into my neck and kissed my cheek with a big *mwah*.

"Can I kiss my girlfriend before bed?"

"You already did! Why ask?"

And then suddenly, my phone rang. I propped myself up and checked the number—it was an unknown number again. It's so late—what does this person want from me?

"Who is it?"

"I don't know. Let's sleep," I replied, dismissing it and cutting the call, then turned off the bedside lamp and rolled over to face the tall one.

Khun Phleng saw me turn and pulled me close, tucking me into her neck. Her long arms wrapped around me like chains to keep me from escaping. "Normally, no one's ever cuddled me like this before."

"Now you have me."

"Oh wow, that's sweet."

"But honestly, I want to do more than this."

"Hm?" I looked up at her in the darkness, only to receive more than a stare —she lifted my face and kissed me again. This time, the kiss was gentle. Not hot and wild like in the kitchen. She kissed me multiple times, and our tongues barely touched. It wasn't desperate or hungry.

"Why do I want to do this so badly? We've only been dating two days."

"Because Khun Phleng really likes me?" I answered, totally flattering myself, and it made her laugh helplessly. I guess it's normal. It's human nature, isn't it? When you finally have someone you can do these things with... maybe you just want to?

"I don't know..." Khun Phleng lifted her head a little to think, then shook her head in defeat. "Let's sleep. It's late."

After that, she pulled the blanket up and hugged me tightly. I buried my face in her neck. Her heartbeat reassured me that this wasn't a dream.

I'm really in love with Khun Phleng.

*Beep... beep... beep...*

The phone's ringtone startled me awake. I reached for it.

Through the small gap in the curtains, I guessed it was around 5:30 or 6

AM.

...An unknown number again.

And the same number.

I slowly moved Khun Phleng's arm that was hugging my waist and set it on the bed before grabbing my phone and walking out of the bedroom. Seeing her sleep so soundly, I didn't want to wake her.

"Hello?"

"..."

"You've called my phone several times now. What do you want?"

I asked irritably, annoyed that every time I answered, the caller stayed silent.

"Nara..."

"..." I froze. The person on the line called my old name. The voice sounded so familiar. I knew exactly who it was.

It's you, isn't it?

"Who are you?" I still didn't admit anything. I had already let go of my past identity five years ago. And if he was really that person, this was bad news.

I had changed my phone number. How did he find me!?

"I asked if you're Nara, aren't you?!"

The voice yelled at me just like he always used to when we lived together. I held firm and didn't give in.

"I don't know any Nara. Who's that? Are you crazy or something?" I lied and hung up right away, then quickly turned off my phone. I leaned against the bathroom sink, shaken and afraid.

That voice on the line... If my memory wasn't mistaken or my ears weren't failing me—

That person was my father.

And there's no way he's coming with good intentions.

I stood still for a moment, trying hard to keep myself calm and not to look too panicked. Then I walked back into the bedroom. Khun Phleng was still sound asleep, unaware of anything. I stood looking at the person I love for a long while to calm myself down before slipping back into bed. The tall figure lying next to me seemed to sense my movement and pulled me into a loose hug.

We still had an hour to sleep, but it turned out I couldn't even close my eyes again.

"Why are you up so early?" And since I couldn't get back to sleep, after lying still for almost an hour, I got up to find something to eat from the fridge and planned to take a shower afterward. When Khun Phleng woke up after me, I wouldn't have to rush. But it seemed she noticed before then and slid the bedroom door open to greet me.

"I just happened to wake up early. You can sleep a bit more, Khun Phleng. I'll come wake you up later."

"Okay." The tall woman nodded lazily, still groggy, and went back to curl up in bed again.

Ever since I realized the person on the mysterious call wasn't coming with good intentions, I became more cautious than before. On the way to and from work, I started to feel paranoid, always looking around to see if anyone was following me. I double-checked the doors and windows in the room before going to bed and leaving for work—even though my unit was high up and no one could possibly climb through the windows to hurt me.

But the strange occurrences didn't stop there. In the beginning, when I was still paranoid about my father's call, that weird number didn't call me again at all. Over a week passed, and there was still no sign of any threatening or aggressive calls like before. I wasn't ready to relax just yet, but I was starting to wonder—what exactly did the other side want? Since there had been no further contact, I took the opportunity to secretly file a daily report with the police and switched to a new phone number. I didn't want to tell Khun Phleng just yet because I was worried about safety. My father had seen and known her face before, unlike her, who had been blind at the time and had never seen my father's face. There could be danger to the one I love.

Now it was just a matter of waiting to see if that person could contact me again. As for the reason for changing numbers, if anyone asked, I'd just say it was for good luck or auspicious numerology. No one would question it further.

As for my relationship with Khun Phleng—what should I call it? Sweet day and night, maybe. My wardrobe was starting to have some of her clothes hanging in it, so she wouldn't have to bring them every time she stayed over. The toothbrush that used to be mine alone now had hers beside it. On free days, she'd pick me up from the office, and we'd go eat or walk around together. It was like a dream relationship that even now I still couldn't believe was real.

"Hello, Khun Lerman."

Khun Jean, Khun Phleng's secretary, greeted me when she saw me coming out of the elevator at the hotel office. Today, I had planned to come and keep Khun Phleng company in her office because she had to wait for a Skype call with an overseas architect during this evening shift.

"Hello. Is Khun Phleng working?" I pointed toward the closed door of her office, where she works and receives important VIP guests.

Khun Jean only knew me as Khun Phleng's close friend. I was sure she had her doubts—just a "close friend," yet Khun Phleng had taken me to register my fingerprints to access all areas of the office. You couldn't say she wasn't doting on her partner, right?

"Yes, but you can go right in. Khun Phleng told me if you arrived, you could go in and see her."

"Oh, thank you." I nodded at Khun Jean and lightly knocked on the door before slowly pushing it open.

When I walked in, I saw the love of my life pacing back and forth talking on the phone. Today, she looked so beautiful.

She was wearing a white shirt under a semi-formal jacket with dark highwaisted jeans.

When she saw me waving at her from the doorway, she smiled sweetly and beckoned me in. When I got close, she used her free arm to wrap loosely around my waist.

"Important client," she whispered to me, and I nodded, then pointed at the brown sofa in the corner of the room to indicate I'd wait there while she finished her call.

"You're right on time. Want something to drink?" After she finished her business, Khun Phleng came to sit beside me.

"No, thanks. What time is the call?"

"In about two hours." As she spoke, she rubbed the back of her neck. "So sore. Move over a bit."

She nudged me to sit at the edge of the sofa before she lay down with her head resting in my lap and closed her eyes.

"Tired. Let me rest my eyes a bit."

"Tough day?" I brushed her hair behind her ear. The tall woman didn't answer, just nodded and reached for my hand, placing it on her cheek.

"So soft. Whose hand is this?"

"It's your girlfriend's hand, of course," I praised myself a bit, which worked —Khun Phleng smiled contentedly at the answer. She rested in my lap only briefly before sitting up again.

"Come see this view. Ever seen it before?" She took my hand and led me to the window of her office, opened the curtains, and I saw a night view of Bangkok I'd never seen before.

Since the hotel was truly in the heart of the city, the colorful lights of the view were much more vibrant than those around my condo, which was quite far out. The tall woman stood behind me, wrapped her arms around my waist, rested her chin on my shoulder, and nestled her head into the crook of my neck.

"Feeling cuddly, huh? Must really be tired," I turned to speak to the one behind me. Khun Phleng cleared her throat a little before replying.

"Yeah, I'm really tired."

"Khun Phleng, feedback on the dinner menu has arrived—oops, sorry!"

Khun Jean, who suddenly opened the door, stopped when she saw us standing with Khun Phleng hugging me. She quickly covered her face with the documents she'd brought in and backed out of the room.

"Oh no, she must be suspicious now."

"So what? Let her be. We don't care."

"But we're both women. Isn't that... odd?"

"Why? We're in love."

I wanted to continue that conversation, but the way she acted so nonchalant made me hesitate to say more.

"There are tons of same-sex couples out there. What's wrong with that? Are you worried about something, Lerman?"

After saying that, Khun Phleng looked into my eyes, asking silently.

"Nothing really. Never mind."

I smiled and answered truthfully. She then called Jean back in to bring the documents again.

When her secretary came back in, she lowered her eyes as she handed over the papers and walked back out. As she passed me, I noticed her smile faintly. I didn't know what that meant exactly, but at least she didn't seem disgusted if I was truly in a relationship with Khun Phleng.

"Hey," once we were alone again, Khun Phleng suddenly hugged me. Her gaze was different this time.

"What is it?"

"Should we try fooling around in the office?"

# Chapter 15: Confrontation

As soon as she finished speaking, the tall woman buried his face in the crook of my neck and blew her breath softly at specific spots, as if she intended to stir up my body—which worked. My legs turned weak all over.

"Someone might see us. Don't do that," I moaned softly, trying to push her face away even though I was absolutely enamored with Phleng's face more than anything in the world. But this was too risky.

"I can lock the door."

"No! Phleng, come on!" When she backed me into a corner in front of the desk, I tried to push her chest away, but it didn't seem to work at all. Phleng just stood there grinning at me.

"Why do you keep harassing me like this? You weren't like this before."

Seeing how flustered I got, Phleng finally pulled away—but not completely. She still hovered around me, taking my hand and pulling me to sit on her lap while she continued working on her desktop computer.

"Well, we weren't together before, were we? But now we are. Or did you secretly want me to harass you all along?" Taking the opportunity, the tall woman teased me relentlessly. I gave her a light punch out of annoyance.

"No way. Don't flatter yourself."

I said it like that, but really, just being near Phleng a little... anyone would fall for her.

"It's really late. Aren't you sleepy?" I looked at the clock on the wall and couldn't help but worry about Phleng, since it was quite late. But she still kept working non-stop.

"I already had coffee," she replied without looking at me, clicking through various work files on the computer, while her other arm wrapped around my waist.

When it was time for her appointment, Phleng put on headphones and began a serious video call with an architect, spreading out plans and papers with drawings on the desk. I went to sit on the sofa where she had laid on my lap earlier. Since it was late, Phleng had told Jean to bring a blanket and pillow for me, in case I wanted to nap while waiting.

I sat watching Phleng work in the role of a serious and competent hotel CEO, and I couldn't help but smile admiringly. When the tall woman glanced over and saw me watching, she gave a shy smile and quickly turned back to the video call to hide her embarrassment. I laughed at that adorably awkward behavior just before my phone rang.

Because I was so focused on Phleng, I answered the call without checking the number.

"If you hang up on me, you're dead."

My smile disappeared instantly. The pillow I had been hugging fell to the floor.

I slowly moved, cautiously, afraid that Phleng might notice I was panicking. But she seemed deeply engaged in her call and didn't turn to look at me.

"Aren't you going to praise me? I found your new number, Nara."

"I'm not Nara."

I kept lying, but the caller seemed too smart for that.

"Don't lie. You think you can get away from me?"

"I'm back. Your father is back, Nara. And you will work for me."

"I won't," I refused firmly, even though I knew I was at a disadvantage.

"Getting confident now, huh? I heard you've got money, a job and everything now." His mocking tone, from someone who was supposedly my father, made me so angry I wanted to hang up immediately.

"What do you want now?"

"Come meet me. We haven't seen each other in almost five years. Don't you miss me?"

"You left Nara," I said, my voice shaking with the pain of being abandoned by my own family. I still remembered clearly the image of my father escaping through the window from Mike and Dom, leaving me behind.

"That was the past. I don't care, and you should forget it too. Come meet me at the road..."

He gave the address and told me to come meet him immediately, giving me one hour to get there. At first, I refused. But a cruel person like my father would never let anything get in the way of what he wanted.

"If you don't come meet me, the people around you—the ones you love— will suffer badly."

Those words made me glance toward Phleng. After I ended the call with my father, I walked closer to the tall woman sitting at the desk. She looked at me with mild curiosity, as if silently asking what was wrong. I picked up a small note paper from the desk and wrote:

*P'Vee has urgent work. I have to go back and handle things at the office until morning.*

*Can't stay any longer. See you later.*

Of course, Phleng pouted at me, clearly disappointed, but she walked over and let me kiss her softly in apology. Since it was about work, she didn't try to stop me. After saying goodbye, I grabbed my bag, folded the blanket I had over my legs earlier, and walked out of Phleng's office.

. .

I hailed a taxi in front of the hotel and it took me around forty minutes to reach the place where my father had arranged to meet. The scene before me was a neighborhood filled with low, dilapidated buildings—completely different from the area around my office or Khun Phleng's hotel. Both sides of the street were lined with shophouses and narrow alleys leading to slums. The nighttime atmosphere only made me more afraid as I looked for the name of the building my father had mentioned.

Once I found the building, I cautiously stepped inside. The people inside didn't look trustworthy—junkies, criminals, all speaking rudely and harshly. They stared at me as though they could see right through my clothes, but I pretended not to notice and turned down the hallway just as my father had instructed.

"Who are you here to see?" A fat man with a scruffy beard blocked my way. His body odor nearly made me faint.

"C-come to see Mr. Mark," I tried to keep my voice as steady as possible. The fat man glanced at another guy smoking nearby before turning back to me.

"You're Nara, right?"

"Yes."

"Wahaha! Guys, this is Brother Mark's daughter!" he roared with laughter and waddled closer to me.

Get away from me. I'm disgusted by you.

Suddenly, a group of scary, sketchy-looking men began to take an interest in me as the fat man led me further into the building.

"Didn't think she'd be this pretty."

"Got a boyfriend, girl? Wanna come have a drink with me?"

"What do you do for a living? Are you a celeb?"

I kept my head down and ignored them until we stopped at an old glass room. The light was on inside, and there were two or three people walking around and sitting inside.

When I stepped in, my expression turned as if I'd seen a ghost—because my father was really sitting right there.

He looked much older, but his attitude was still cocky and defiant. He looked at me with a strange gaze before waving the fat guy away.

"Well, well, you little troublemaker. Come here."

Of course, I had to follow his order and walked closer to him, standing right in front of him. The two other men in the room stared at me with stone-cold expressions, shamelessly.

"You've gotten prettier." I didn't feel pleased by that compliment at all and went straight to the point.

"I'm here. What do you want?"

"I just found out you changed your name and surname. What was it again? Lermarn? What the hell does that mean?" I sighed and answered reluctantly.

"It means a precious and noble spirit."

"Pretentious."

My face went numb when he spat that vulgar insult at me again.

"What job do you do?"

I looked at him and tried to come up with a vague but acceptable answer— not completely true. "Office work."

"What's your position!?"

"I help manage this and that."

"Good money?"

"Average."

"From now on, you need to give me half of your salary."

"What did you say!?" My calm face immediately turned furious. But my father looked completely unbothered, laughing at my outrage.

"Why should I give you money? You haven't contributed anything to my life. I've worked for everything myself. Why the hell do I have to give you money!?"

"Because I'm your father!" He suddenly shouted at me when I spoke too much. I flinched from his harsh tone. "I have the right to that money. Don't argue or I'll have someone kill you right here!"

The word "kill" sent chills down my spine, and I didn't dare say another word. At the very least, I needed to protect my life first.

"I didn't ask for much today. Just wanted you to see where I work."

"What do you do?" I asked with a mocking tone. I was sure it wasn't anything good.

"I'm a distributor—of drugs—to customers all across Thailand."

When I heard that, my knees nearly buckled. My back went cold with disappointment and fear. In the end, my father had gone back to his old life.

Why couldn't he change? I looked at him and saw how proud he was of his job.

"I'll have work for you soon. I'll be in touch."

"What kind of work!?"

"Related to my business, of course."

"I'm not doing it."

"..." I laid it out flatly, even though I knew full well it could get me killed right here in this dirty building. My father stared at me expressionlessly before stepping closer and doing exactly what I knew was coming.

*SLAP!*

My head snapped violently to the side, almost turning all the way around. I collapsed to the floor, cheek burning with pain on the left side.

"I wasn't asking. I was ordering."

Again...

"When I tell you to do something, you do it. I'm not the underground flunky I used to be. I'm a big shot now—and I'll get even bigger. You'll follow my orders."

The more I listened, the worse it got. It was clear—my father was beyond saving.

The sound of footsteps receding told me he had walked back to his large chair. I slowly lifted myself off the floor.

"That blind chick is in Thailand too."

"..."

The word "blind" made my heart pound wildly with fear and worry. I hoped the person he was talking about wasn't...

"That Khun Phleng Phin or whatever."

"How do you know!?"

"I just know she's back in Thailand. Pretty impressive she's still alive, and with her vision too." He sneered, then looked back down to write in what looked like an accounting book.

"What do you mean—she *survived*? You did something to her years ago, didn't you!?" I lunged toward him without thinking, slamming both hands on the table, glaring at him unafraid. If he wanted to slap me again, fine— but I needed to know what he did to her.

"I didn't do anything. It was Zell—my old boss. He did it. It was payback because one of her people helped get Kom and Mike arrested."

"Tell me everything. Now." I clenched my jaw, speaking slowly and clearly.

My father looked surprised at how interested I was in Khun Phleng.

"Why would I do anything to her? She actually kept her word really well.

That eighty thousand dollars for your release five years ago? That Khun Phleng girl tracked me down and handed over a bag of cash."

"But I guess her people pissed off Khess somehow, and that guy didn't let it go. Someone ended up dead. I don't know how she survived that home invasion. Next thing I knew, I saw her face on the front page of a newspaper —all big-eyed and innocent—plus owning billion-baht businesses."

After that, he turned to me and frowned. "But why didn't you keep working for that Khun Phleng girl? Eighty thousand dollars isn't a small amount. If it were me, I'd have stayed with her for life."

I didn't care about Dad's question at all. The word "pulling someone's whiskers" made me pause and think — what exactly did it mean? Khun Phleng definitely wasn't someone who would start trouble with anyone.

Especially with thuggish gangs like that — why would she even get involved?

Or was it when Dom and Mike came to capture my dad, and Jared interfered?

Then there was the home invasion... Does that mean after I stopped living with Khun Phleng, some terrible events happened and someone *died*!?

"Then who was the person who died?"

"I don't know. Don't forget I was on the run from those people. The less I know, the better sometimes," Dad waved me off, trying to push me away after I had been standing there, demanding all kinds of answers.

"You're not involved with Khun Phleng anymore, right?" I couldn't help but ask weakly. Honestly, I didn't want to ask at all because it felt like I was showing too much concern for someone — more than I should. I might get watched too closely. But right now, I barely had enough presence of mind to hide my nervousness from Dad.

"She's loaded, and she's got bodyguards all over that hotel of hers. I wouldn't mess with her. But why are you so worried about that woman?"

"No reason. Just asking." I shook my head, hoping to drop the topic. But Dad didn't let it go. He narrowed his eyes at me suspiciously.

"Or are you still in contact with her?"

"There's no contact at all. I left that life five years ago. Khun Phleng Phin or whatever — that's all in the past."

"Really? Hope you're not lying to me. But good." Dad leaned back against the chair's backrest after hearing my answer. I quietly let out a sigh of relief after he stopped scrutinizing me so intensely. But it didn't end there.

"Because if you don't follow my orders, maybe I'll have to drop by and leave a painful *landmark* on Khun Phleng."

...I tried so hard not to show any reaction. Dad, after throwing out that threatening line to test me, sat and observed my response for a long moment.

"I don't care what you do to Khun Phleng. She has nothing to do with my life."

"Really?" Dad raised an eyebrow mockingly. If he weren't my father and I weren't in the middle of a den of thugs, I would've lunged at him right then and there. "Well, now I think you understand how you should behave."

"..."

"Follow my orders."

"I got it." I nodded and avoided looking at him. I couldn't even tell how much sadness and fear I was holding in anymore. "You can go now. That's all I called you for today."

Great.

"I'll be in touch. And I hope you're not thinking of changing your number to get away from me again, Nara."

...

After getting permission from Dad, I quickly fled from that dreadful, godforsaken building. As soon as I stepped out, I received a message from Khun Phleng asking how far along I was with my work.

So I had to lie and say it was done, and I was heading back to my room to rest. At first, the tall woman whined and tried to get me to come back to the hotel again, but I told her I had a bit of a headache and needed to go home to sleep. So she finally gave in.

Who would've known that in reality, as soon as I got back to my room, I sat there hugging my knees and crying by myself — out of self-pity. The person I tried so hard to leave behind to start a new life was now coming back to hurt me, even though that part of me should've already faded away by now. And then there was Khun Phleng, who I could never tell that I was Nara again — because that would mean putting the person I love the most in danger.

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"Lermarn, go be a background extra for me, will you?"

"Huh!?"

I looked confused at P'Jay. Right now, we were on set at an open area in a public park. This was a small shoot — nothing grand or extravagant with a million-dollar budget like Khun Phleng's hotel productions. So we only hired a few extras to walk around in the background, but it didn't seem to be enough for what P'Jay needed.

It wasn't the first time this had happened. Sometimes the crew members who weren't busy during the shoot would get called in to pretend to be people walking around in the background too — a way to save budget.

"Ready, action!" Once the director gave the cue, I and P'Vee — who also got called in to be an extra — walked around the open space together, pretending to be just passersby.

"Le, you don't look so well," P'Vee said as we walked side-by-side. I didn't even realize I looked sick, so I turned to him and asked for confirmation.

"Really, P'Vee?"

"Mhm. Earlier when we got to the set, I saw you sitting there spacing out at the back of the welfare truck for ages. Didn't you realize?"

"N-not at all."

Did I know? Yes — I knew I was sitting there lost in thought about Dad and Khun Phleng. It was when I was supposed to help unload stuff from the truck. But I didn't think I'd been sitting there long enough for people to notice.

"Your face looks pale too. You realize that?"

P'Vee casually reached out and put a hand on my forehead to check my temperature. I must've looked terrible — ever since Dad came back, I'd barely slept and barely eaten because of all the stress. My body couldn't keep up and finally started to give out — just as expected.

"If there's anything bothering you, you can tell me, okay?" P'Vee looked seriously concerned. I just gave a soft laugh under my breath. Even if I wanted to tell him, I couldn't. It would only cause trouble.

"Thanks, P'Vee." So the two of us continued working as usual until the shoot wrapped in the evening.

I messaged with Khun Phleng while we were on the ride back to the office. My beloved was staying overnight in another province to check on the new branch of the hotel, which had just opened and partnered with a major department store chain.

Come to think of it, I had an idea...

"P'Vee?"

"Hm?"

"Can I take a day off?"

"Where are you going?"

"I think I might have the flu. I want to see a doctor and maybe get vaccinated too."

"Oh, of course. You can take two days if you want. You really don't look well. Rest up as much as you can."

P'Vee gave me a kind pat on the head as he spoke.

*'Who said I was going to stay in my room and rest? I'm going to surprise my love, actually.'*

After I sneakily asked Khun Pleng where the hotel she was staying at and working from was, and which province, I went back to my room to pack my things, threw them in a backpack, and headed to the transport terminal to find a bus to that province that very night.

By the time I arrived, it was already around 1 AM. I had secretly called Khun Jean earlier to ask her to help me get to my girlfriend more easily. She was a bit confused about why I wanted to do it, but it seemed like she had already figured out my relationship with Khun Pleng, so she agreed to help and came down to pick me up and sneak me into the room where Khun Pleng was staying.

Tonight, Khun Pleng had to stay up late because she had to go check on the construction site at night and only came back to sleep afterwards. Perfect for me.

"We have to sleep in a bunk bed this week because there are lots of guests staying, so we need to prioritize their comfort," Jean said as she cracked the door to Khun Pleng's room open. I saw a black bunk bed placed at the edge of the room, with Khun Pleng's luggage sitting on the chair at the dressing table. Jean stayed outside, not wanting to intrude on her boss's private space.

"Thank you, Khun Jean."

"So, are Khun Pleng and Khun Lermarn a couple?" Jean asked, glancing down timidly, like she was unsure if she should be asking.

"You could say that. Do you mind that I'm Ler?" I asked sincerely, wanting her to feel at ease whenever we needed to interact. "Not at all. Actually, my partner is a woman too."

"Oh."

"I only asked because I was curious. I didn't mean to pry or anything," she said quickly, waving her hand nervously as if worried I'd take it the wrong way.

So the two of us ended up having a brief heart-to-heart about our partners. That's when I found out Jean had been with her girlfriend for a long time, which is probably how she figured out the connection between Khun Pleng and me so easily. After that, she excused herself to go wait for Khun Pleng in the lobby, while I went to hide in the room.

I hid right by the door and waited for quite a while—almost half an hour— before I heard the sound of keys jingling and footsteps outside the door.

My love has arrived.

As soon as the door opened, I squeezed myself into the tightest spot behind the door. When I saw that familiar back pass through the doorway, I ran up and jumped to hug the tall woman immediately.

"Ah!" Khun Pleng gasped and quickly turned around.

"Surprise!" I threw my arms wide. She stood there stunned for a moment before her face slowly lit up with a wide smile showing every tooth.

"How did you even get here? I never expected this." She took my hand and led me to sit on the bed, her whole face glowing with happiness. It made all the sadness and dark thoughts that had been weighing on me for days finally ease a little.

"I missed you, so I came." I scooted close to her deliberately. "Can I sleep with you tonight?"

"Did you think I'd let my girlfriend sleep in another room or something?" she said as she pinched my cheek playfully, before turning to place a large rolled-up blueprint she had brought back on the table by the mirror.

"You mean I'm supposed to sleep on the top bunk while you take the bottom?"

"..."

"Just kidding."

I burst out laughing because I knew very well how much she loved to cuddle me. Like she'd ever let me sleep separately.

But it seemed she was a bit more mischievous than I expected. Just as I got a good laugh in, she suddenly grabbed me and kissed me fiercely.

Her tall frame pressed me back against the vanity table as her hot lips moved against mine, licking and exploring my mouth non-stop. She kissed me so intensely I could hardly breathe. Then, she grabbed her clothes from the bag and went into the bathroom to shower, in a suspiciously good mood. What kind of person acts so nonchalant? I nearly died just now! *pant pant*

While she was in the shower, I sat there trying to figure out how to ask her about what happened years ago. Saying I'm Nara would be too risky. But I needed to know what had really happened.

As I lay waiting for her to finish, I suddenly remembered that before we got together, she had gone back to the U.S. That was when Khun Kwang stole a kiss from me and she got super grumpy about it.

Maybe I could start by asking about that trip to gather some information.

"You should shower too, so you'll feel refreshed."

Khun Pleng came out of the bathroom in a plain black t-shirt and shorts, drying her hair as she spoke. I quickly went in to shower, eager to get back and dig for more info from her directly.

"It's so nice that my girlfriend came. Sleeping alone is so lonely," she said as I snuggled up beside her on the bottom bunk. She wrapped her arms and legs around me tightly, even nuzzling her face into my chest like a little bear.

She looked really happy about my surprise visit tonight. I just noticed that her under-eye circles were darker than before. Her face looked a little more worn out—just a bit, but I could tell.

"Do you stay up this late every night, Khun Pleng?" I thought back to how we often talked or spent time together past midnight. She must be working herself hard.

"I have to work, you know. But not every night." She tried to brush it off. I could tell she knew she was overworking herself, so I didn't push.

"Khun Pleng?"

"Hmm?"

"When you went to America earlier... were you working this hard over there too?"

I slipped the question in naturally, blending it with our current conversation to make it sound casual.

"There's a time difference too, right? So it's kind of like working 24 hours a day, isn't it?"

"Not really. I had personal matters to deal with too. I wasn't working the whole time." She answered while playing around, making a "crawling crab" motion with her hand on my body.

"What kind of personal matters? Can you tell me?"

"Why are you suddenly curious?"

"Well, I've never been abroad before. I'm just asking to learn something new. And I want to know what you were up to there." I said in a slightly sulky tone to make it seem like I felt bad for asking. "But it's okay if you don't want to tell me."

"I'll tell you," she smiled softly at me, clearly touched, and finally opened up.

"I went to check out the old hotel we're going to take over. And I met up with some old doctors I used to know, old friends of my parents. And I visited a grave."

"A grave?" Now *that* was the detail that piqued my interest.

"Yeah. The grave of a butler who was close to me. I always go to pay respects and clean his grave every six months. He was really important to me. If it weren't for him, I might've died."

I suddenly had a bad feeling and asked quickly to make sure. Was the grave that of someone my father's old enemies had come after?

"What was the butler's name?"

Khun Pleng looked at me a little strangely, like I was asking something offtopic, but she answered anyway.

"His name was Jared."

# Chapter 16: Doing

I lay there staring at Khun Phleng's face with feelings of both fear and shock at what I had just come to realize. The tall woman looked slightly sorrowful when she had to talk about her benefactor.

"Lermarn... do you remember the woman who used to live with us? The one I told you about before?"

"Yes, I remember."

"It happened after Nara returned to Thailand. A gang broke into our house, destroyed our belongings, and came after me and Jared. When they caught us, I asked them what was going on, why they came all the way to our house to hurt us. They said Jared had interfered with their attempt to capture a traitorous subordinate who had stolen their money. Worse, two of their men who went after that traitor got caught by the police."

I struggled to breathe properly as I listened to the story. Khun Phleng paused to take a breath before continuing.

"The traitor they mentioned... was Nara's father. I begged them not to hurt the two of us. At the time, all the other servants were tied up. The police never came. At first, I think they were going to kill us—I'm not sure. Everything was chaotic and terrifying. And I could only hear things because I was still blind. But Jared said he was the reason everything had happened. He told them to punish only him. So..."

Khun Phleng let out a big sigh and looked down. It was good she wasn't looking at me, because if she did, she'd see that my eyes were red and I was on the verge of tears.

"So they killed Jared and ran away."

"W-What about the police!? Didn't the police catch them!?"

"They did. But the gang had bribed many of the officers. All we could do was let the matter go. Otherwise, they would've come after us again. I was already in terrible shape, covered in wounds. My right-hand man was dead. I had no other option."

"But... something good did come out of it. When I was in the hospital recovering, a doctor took interest in my case and offered to help restore my eyesight. That's why I have these eyes to look at you now, Le... oh."

When Khun Phleng turned to her side and faced me, she saw I was secretly crying under the blanket. The tall woman quickly pulled me into a tight embrace.

"Why are you crying?"

"N-No reason, really," I lied outright. Khun Phleng didn't press further. She just held me and rocked gently as if to soothe me into stopping my tears.

I could never tell her that I was Nara.

If I did... Khun Phleng would try to help me.

And then my father would come after her. Worse, he might bring those scumbags from America to kill her...

I have to end this myself. Quietly. Alone.

Jared already died because of me.

I can't let another person die because of me.

"Aren't you angry at that woman!?" I lifted my face from her embrace and asked the question I feared the most. "She was involved in your butler's death."

I was scared—if Khun Phleng said she was angry, my future would be even more uncertain. I might have to break up with her and disappear forever.

"If I were to be angry, I should be angry at her father instead." "..."

"If her father hadn't embezzled from his own gang, they wouldn't have sent people to hunt him down. And if they hadn't sent those people, Jared wouldn't have had to interfere. If Jared didn't interfere, none of this would've happened," she explained, voice calm and eyes serene, without the rage or vengeance I had feared.

"I shouldn't have told you all this, Le. Bedtime talk should be fairy tales or lovey-dovey stories, shouldn't it?" The tall woman paused, then changed the subject playfully, pinching my nose gently.

"Do you want me to tell you a bedtime story?"

"Nooo, I don't want a bedtime story."

"See? I knew it. We're too old for that stuff now."

I got up, wiped my face with tissues, drank some water from the fridge, and came back to lie beside her again. I got chills as Khun Phleng stared at me non-stop. The only light in the room was from the bedside lamp. It was dim... and kinda sexy, actually.

"I want to do something else more."

"..."

Was sleeping on the bottom bunk a mistake...?

"Do what?" I played dumb, even though her mischievous gaze said it all.

"Ghost under the blanket."

As soon as she said that, she slowly wrapped her long arm around my waist and laid her tall body on top of mine. Her gaze was deeper and more mysterious than ever.

"Uhm... ghost under the blanket?"

I knew what it meant.

But like... tonight?

"Can I?" she said, rubbing her nose playfully against my cheek—such a tease, and it worked too well because my skin tingled all over.

"But... it's really late already, you know?" I tried.

"Aww, knew it," she said with a sigh and flopped back down beside me, clearly disappointed. "I had a feeling you'd say that."

"Let's sleep then. We've got more fieldwork tomorrow," she said as she pulled the blanket up to cover me, just like she did every night, then reached out to turn off the lamp.

The atmosphere between the two of us fell into silence. Khun Phleng turned away, no longer facing me. But judging by her demeanor, she wasn't angry. She probably figured that if she asked to "do something like that" tonight, I'd surely refuse—because the building is tall (?), and come to think of it, the tall girl seems to have some unusual desires. Before this...

Did she secretly do something with someone else? Now that she has me as a girlfriend, all she does is try to pounce on me.

I lay on my side quietly, staring at Khun Phleng's back.

The oversized t-shirt she wore revealed her smooth shoulder. Or maybe... maybe I should just give in tonight. We've come all the way here already. Even if we don't do it tonight, one day we'll end up doing it anyway.

There's no way I could love anyone else anymore—not besides the person currently lying here with her back to me.

"Khun Phleng..."

"Hm?" She turned toward me at the sound of my voice, and at that moment, I lowered my head and kissed her right away.

"Mmph..."

The tall girl furrowed her brows, looking confused and surprised. I held her face and shyly slipped my tongue in. I was too embarrassed to say anything much with words. This action would have to do.

I kicked off the blanket and crawled on top of her. I didn't know whether I should stay on all fours or just lie down because I had never done this before. But in the end, Khun Phleng pressed on my hips, guiding me to lie on her.

We kissed as if we had been separated for an eternity and just found each other again. It was hotter than ever, more intimate than any time before.

"You really want to do it?" she whispered in a hoarse voice.

"I... I guess," I stuttered. "But I've never done it before..."

"Neither have I."

"..."

"..."

"Then..."

"We can take it slow," she said, then flipped us over so she was on top and pulled my t-shirt up. Then she ducked her head underneath it. Her hair and cool face brushed against my upper body all of a sudden.

It was both scary and exciting. I couldn't do anything but writhe in hesitation. Meanwhile, the tall girl hiding under my shirt let out warm breaths that teased my skin. "You sleep wearing a bra?"

"W-Well, we're sleeping outside the house, so I just wore it."

"I'm taking it off, okay?"

Upon hearing that, I arched my back a little to help her unhook my bra. Once it came off, she tossed it to the floor. The air from the A/C that sneaked in under my shirt sent chills through me, especially with her kisses all over my upper body.

Then she bit something, and I let out a suppressed cry.

She swirled her tongue around and nibbled on both sides before slowly pulling her head out from under my shirt.

Thonk!

"Ouch!" The cry from in front of me broke the mood immediately.

Khun Phleng, who was about to get back on top, was now sitting and holding her head between my legs.

"What's wrong, Khun Phleng?" I quickly sat up to check.

"My head hit the bed frame," she said, pointing to the steel beam of the bunk bed. I looked at it warily too. Since we're both tall, it seemed like there'd be more *thunks* tonight.

"Should we move to the floor?"

"No, it's cold. Let's continue."

With that, she kissed me again, lifting my shirt all the way up to my neck and showered kisses on my stomach before moving upward and nibbling again like before.

"Ah... ahh..."

"Are we doing good?" she asked, sounding curious.

Because neither of us had experience, we didn't know if this was *good*, or *good enough but could be better*.

"I... I don't know," I said, hiding my face with my hands. I bit my wrist lightly, afraid I'd make noise. Meanwhile, she was slowly moving her mouth lower, past my hips, and my pajama pants were sliding down more and more.

"I've only seen it in movies. I don't know how it's done in real life," she whispered worriedly.

That made my heart sink. It seemed like she was doing all the work, so I signaled back by moving my leg and then crawled onto her lap.

Thonk!

"Ow!"

I held my head when I accidentally bumped it on the bed beam while straddling her.

"Are you okay?" she gently rubbed my head, but I swatted her hand away and wrapped my arms around her neck, pulling her into a bold kiss. I also guided her cold hands under my shirt.

"Let's explore this together," I whispered softly. Of course, she responded right away.

She buried her face into my neck, nibbling at it. The pain came and went as she pulled back. I decided to take off my shirt. We hadn't turned the lights on—I was still shy. But if we stayed stuck in this half-and-half state, we wouldn't get anywhere.

"You're beautiful."

Her raspy voice complimented me as she lowered her head and sought out pleasure from my body. Her cold hands hovered near my pajama waistband.

I didn't want her to have the upper hand, so I tried to pull her shirt up too.

It was like she could read my mind—she guided my hand down and took off her own shirt, tossing it to the floor. Her soft, honey-colored skin was now in full view.

We rushed into each other's arms, both desperate to taste sweetness and new experiences. From sitting and hugging, we ended up lying down again. She nipped all over my body before sliding her hand into my pants. Her big round eyes looked at me with joy, and I couldn't bear the sensation—I pulled her in for another kiss.

After that, it was like a raging storm over and over. We took turns exploring and teaching each other. The tall girl eventually lifted me onto her lap again. Though the air conditioner was on, we were both drenched in sweat.

"K-Khun Phleng... ah..." I moaned as she curled her finger inside me, clumsily but sweetly. It was painful and good all at once—too hard to describe. I dug my nails into her back. Her biting her lower lip only sent my emotions soaring even higher.

Everything went on for hours until we both collapsed around six in the morning. I passed out as soon as I hit the mattress. My body ached everywhere.

When I woke up again, it was already 9 a.m. I turned to my side and saw that Khun Phleng was still asleep. Her shoulder and back were covered in scratches and love bites.

"Oww..." I groaned, forcing myself to get up. Our clothes were scattered all over the floor. Since she was still turned away, I took the chance to slip out of the blanket and quickly gather my clothes to get dressed.

"It hurts..." Showering was hard. I was sore and aching all over. When I came out, I saw Khun Phleng lying on her stomach, only wearing a pajama top. She must've woken up while I was in the bathroom.

Like I said, we were both totally spent. Neither of us had any energy left.

But I had to be the one to get up first because she had work today—and we couldn't miss the hotel breakfast either. As much as I wanted to lie down again, I dragged myself over and nudged her.

"Mmmgh..." The tall girl turned her face toward me but didn't move otherwise.

"Wake up, Khun Phleng. It's already past nine."

"We... we have no strength left... still sleepy..." she mumbled, rubbing her face into the pillow. But eventually, she got up.

I started walking to the mirror to comb my hair, but then she pulled me into a hug from behind.

Her nose rubbed against my neck.

"Was it good last night?"

"Why would you ask something like that? Go shower now."

"Answer me first."

Then her hand slipped under my shirt, caressing my stomach.

"Khun Phleng, stop teasing me!"

"Was it really good?"

"R-Really good..."

"How good?"

"So, so good... Khun Phleng! Stop!" I pulled myself out of her arms when she teasingly let her hand drift lower. She grinned at my pout, clearly enjoying my reaction. Then she grabbed her clothes from the suitcase and walked into the bathroom.

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Once we were all dressed, Khun Phleng held my hand and walked me out of the room before we went to find some breakfast. But we had to let go of each other's hands once we reached the dining room because we would be seeing staff members who had followed Khun Phleng from Bangkok. Holding hands all the time would've looked a little inappropriate.

Before we left the room, we both had to apply foundation on each other generously. That was the result of last night's "war," where we left quite a few landmarks on each other around the neck and collarbone. I was feeling shy, but Khun Phleng seemed to have a lot of fun dabbing foundation all over me.

"After breakfast, wait for me in the room. I'll be back around 1 p.m."

"Yes."

"By the way, did you take time off work? Didn't Khun Vee say anything? Hanging out with me in the countryside like this."

"I took time off, no need to worry," I said and then poked a piece of French omelette to feed Khun Phleng. I noticed some of the staff were sneaking glances at me, so I tried to ease my embarrassment by brushing my hair with my hand. Khun Phleng noticed and called one of the staff nearby to give a short order. The staff member nodded and walked off.

"What was that about?"

"I told them to bring some bruise cream."

"Um... If it's about the marks from last night, I don't think we need it."

"Are you sure? I meant for our heads," Khun Phleng pointed at her head, then mine. "I remember both of us bumped into the bed frame multiple times."

Oh, right.

We kept switching between being the one in charge and the one being led all night without stopping. When I touched my head, I realized I had a bump, and so did the CEO. When she touched her own head, she winced in pain.

"Next time we go on a trip, I'll try not to book a bunk bed room."

"Why not?"

"In case you surprise me again, if we do stuff, we won't get hurt."

"Khun Phleng, honestly!"

# Chapter 17: The Truth and the Pain

I stopped by the bank before going into the office to transfer part of my savings to my father, bitterly. But there was nothing I could do except comply. My father had many connections, so I didn't want to resist and end up getting hurt for nothing. Last night, he contacted me and said he already knew where I lived, and he was thinking about making me move to another place because the security system at my condo made it difficult for him to reach me. Well, yeah—if it wasn't safe, I wouldn't be renting there in the first place.

After work, I went to meet Khun Phleng at the mall where we once saw a movie together. Khun Phleng had to attend some kind of gala—I couldn't remember the name—but didn't have a proper dress for the event yet. So she asked me to come along and help her shop, turning it into a post-work date as well.

Life looks good, doesn't it? Even though in reality, there are probably a hundred gangsters secretly watching me.

"This dress... isn't it too revealing?" Khun Phleng kept muttering about the dress already bagged and paid for.

"Do you want to return it then?"

"But you picked it for me. I'm fine with it."

"Don't be afraid of showing a little skin. Be afraid of stealing everyone's attention at the event—that's more like it," I grumbled, a little exasperated.

Back when we were trying on dresses, her beauty shone even brighter than usual. The store staff couldn't take their eyes off her. Even guys walking past the storefront caught glimpses of her and started peeking inside. I was starting to get just a little jealous.

"What are they staring at? I'm not *that* pretty," she said casually while holding my hand and walking us out of the shop, looking clueless.

Only beautiful people can say something that confidently, you know.

"So, what do we do next?"

"Let's get dessert. Today, the chef had me taste-test new savory menu items —ten dishes! My palate's all messed up now." She looked around hungrily for a dessert shop. I watched her, amused, acting so childishly despite being thirty, then led her upstairs to the dining floor.

"You eat so much, Khun Phleng."

"Do I?" I watched her dig into a giant bowl of shaved ice with so much joy. The speed and amount she ate far outpaced me. She must've been really sick of savory food. But even when we queued up for pad thai, she ate several plates all by herself.

"You eat more too, don't just let me do all the eating."

"Yes, darling," I shook my head at how gluttonous my girlfriend was. But before I could say more, my phone started to vibrate. I pulled it out of my pocket out of habit. I thought it might be P'Vee calling...

But it was my father's number instead.

"Let me take this call real quick."

"Why don't you just answer it here?" Khun Phleng frowned in confusion. Normally, I'd answer any incoming call right in front of her, so I wasn't surprised she asked.

"It's noisy in here. I can't hear the client properly."

"Okay," she shrugged and returned her full attention to her dessert. I walked away toward the fire escape entrance—an area with few passersby—to take the call.

"What is it, Dad?"

"Where are you?"

"Running errands for my boss at the mall."

"Tonight, go meet my guys near the BTS station."

I nearly collapsed from shock when I heard what he wanted me to do.

He wanted me to follow his men and gang up on a debtor who refused to pay for drugs. I asked why I even needed to be there—I wouldn't be able to help anyway. But he said he wanted me to *see* how things work in his business firsthand. Just listening made me want to vomit.

According to the time he set, I still had two more hours—I could still spend time with Khun Phleng.

But I was starting to feel like I couldn't take this anymore. Was I really supposed to stand and watch a group of thugs beat someone up over this disgusting drug business? Just hearing someone cry out for help—I probably wouldn't be able to stand it. And now he wanted me to watch someone get hurt without lifting a finger?

Maybe it was time I told Khun Phleng everything... before things got worse than this.

Not for me.

But because there are probably a lot of innocent people suffering out there right now.

.

.

After standing to decide for a while, I walked back to find Khun Phleng at the dessert shop. That giant shaved ice from before, which had been overflowing, now was reduced to just the bottom of the bowl. My real elephant-stomached girlfriend.

"You're back already?" Khun Phleng greeted me as I sat down opposite her like before, then placed her dessert spoon down on the tray and wiped her mouth with a tissue. Looks like she's full now.

"Um... Le has something she'd like to ask for your help with," I said, dragging my voice out awkwardly at first, then trying to quickly turn it into a complete sentence.

"Mmm? What is it?" The taller one looked at me with her big eyes, full of curiosity. Normally, I never asked her for anything.

"Khun Phleng, can you promise that if I tell you everything... you won't get mad at me?"

"You secretly seeing someone else?"

"No! It's not that, not at all." My voice jumped and I waved my hands around, which probably just made me look even more like a liar.

Khun Phleng placed the tissue she was playing with down on the table and narrowed her eyes at me suspiciously.

"Then what is it about?"

"Well..."

"What a coincidence," I was just about to speak when a voice from outside the shop, near the farthest seat where we were sitting, interrupted. Both I and Khun Phleng turned to look, recognizing it instantly.

"P'Vee..."

"Le..."

P'Vee looked between me and Khun Phleng with a shocked expression.

Another person who looked just as pale as if they'd seen a ghost was P'Jay. My mouth flapped silently, knowing exactly why they had that expression.

"Khun Phleng, hello."

"Hello." Khun Phleng also realized that she was giving these two a lot of questions, so she gave them a sheepish smile in return.

"You haven't gone home yet, Le? S-Sitting here eating desserts with Khun Phleng? Oh..." P'Vee seemed to struggle with finding words and tried very hard to keep her voice steady.

"I didn't know that... uh, you two were close," P'Jay added. His face was full of question marks.

"Yes, we like to go places together,"

Instead of denying it, Khun Phleng answered sweetly and smiled with squinty eyes at P'Jay, who laughed awkwardly in response, clearly not expecting her to say yes and not deny anything at all.

"And you two haven't gone home yet either?" I quickly changed the topic because I really didn't want to answer any more questions right now. I had enough stressful things waiting.

"We came to buy an external drive for Ball. Jay wanted to check it out too, so he came along."

"Oh."

"Well, we'll get going then." P'Vee probably had a million more questions, but she didn't dare ask them in front of Khun Phleng, so she quietly excused herself and left with P'Jay.

Tomorrow I'll definitely face a full interrogation. Ugh.

"So, what were you going to talk to me about?" Now that the obstacles were gone, I was just about to start speaking again when my phone rang once more.

"Damn it," I muttered in frustration and ran out of the shop without explaining anything to Khun Phleng. "Why are you calling again!"

"Oh, you dare raise your voice at me?"

"What do you want, Dad?" I asked wearily. By now, Khun Phleng must be seriously confused about why I looked so rushed and upset like this.

"I'm calling to tell you that I've changed the time. You need to meet my guys at the BTS station in half an hour. Hurry."

"I can't go. I'm not done with what I'm doing."

"Are you with someone?"

"No."

"You're lying."

"I'm not lying!"

"I'm your father. I can tell from your voice when you lie. Get moving, or I'll send someone to beat up whoever you're with right now."

"Why are you doing this to me?" I choked out, tears falling without me even realizing. People passing by were glancing at me, probably wondering why I was crying in the middle of the mall.

"Don't go against me. Move!"

And that was it. I had to give in to him—one more round. After hanging up, I ran back to Khun Phleng, who had just finished paying for dessert and was now looking at me in confusion.

"What's wrong? Why did you run out like that?"

"I need to go back to my room now. Urgent work from P'Vee."

"What urgent work? If it was really urgent, P'Vee would've said something when we just met earlier, no?"

"..."

Shouldn't have gotten a smart girlfriend...

"The person who called wasn't P'Vee, right?" Khun Phleng's voice was serious now. She was clearly looking for the truth.

"Yes... it wasn't P'Vee." I answered, taking a deep breath. Khun Phleng kept looking at me, waiting for a fuller answer. But I couldn't tell her yet. If I stayed longer, my father might really send someone to hurt her.

"Tonight, I'll call you and explain everything. Please pick up." I squeezed her hand tightly in fear. I wanted to hug her, bury my face in her shoulder and tell her everything, but I couldn't yet.

"I'll take you..."

"No need. I'll go back on my own. Talk to you soon, okay?"

"I love you, Khun Phleng," I said with a bit of a shaky voice before walking away with a heavy heart. But today, I had to do it. I've never had to leave my loved one like this before.

I took the BTS to the meeting point just in time. Two men stood smoking beside a black car with no license plate and glanced at me. One of them walked over.

"You're Le... what's your name again? Lerman, right?"

"Yes, that's me."

"Get in the car." He opened the door for me to get in.

"Boss's daughter is hot as hell, haha!"

"Yeah, seriously hot."

Then they tilted the rearview mirror to look at me sitting in the back seat.

"You got a boyfriend yet? Wanna go party with us sometime?"

"Shut up. If she tells the boss, he'll slap our mouths off, man."

I sat listening to the two of them flirt with delight before the car drove off.

The journey took quite a while. It seemed like my father's debtor lived in the outskirts, far from Bangkok. I secretly opened the GPS to see where we were heading. After almost an hour, we finally arrived at our destination.

It was a small housing estate with a half-broken security booth standing at the entrance. Inside, it was empty—no security guard on duty. Across the street was just an empty lot with overgrown grass. Everything looked terrifying. I quietly pinned my location to Khun Phleng in LINE just in case, then turned my phone to silent and switched off vibration.

"You stay here. We'll go drag them out ourselves."

"Are you going to use a gun...? No way..." I cried out in shock when one of the two pulled out a gun tucked into his pants.

"If you're collecting debts for a mafia, you gotta use a gun. Don't ask stupid questions."

I was about to wet myself.

I stood waiting for a while until I heard crashing sounds from inside, followed by a scream, interspersed with the two thugs yelling crude, vulgar words.

After a while, they dragged out a man—no, a *boy*—from inside the estate and threw him down on the ground.

"Please... give me more time... I really don't have any money."

"No money? Then why the hell did you buy drugs, huh kid?"

"I just wanted to get high... I'm addicted... ack... help me..."

The boy turned his face toward me. His face was bruised, clearly from having been beaten before. I didn't know what to do—just stood there frozen.

"Hey, look at us, not at her. Looking at that girl won't help you."

"She's one of us too."

When I heard that, I felt disgusted with myself right away.

Why would I ever be one of these scumbags who make a living from drugs? I looked at the boy who was being beaten—judging by his appearance and haircut, he couldn't be older than a high school senior. Still so young, yet already a victim of this drug hell. What should I do?

"Enough! Stop it already!" I couldn't take it anymore and rushed over to stop them from hurting the boy further.

"I heard the boss told you to just stand there and watch, didn't he?" One of the two pointed the tip of a knife at me threateningly. "Stay out of this if you know what's good for you."

"But he's already beaten up, and he doesn't have the money. We can come back to collect next time."

"Collect what?! He's three months behind!"

The two ignored me and kept assaulting the boy.

Then they started using heavier weapons, like a discarded exhaust pipe nearby. I kept shouting for them to stop until finally, I ran in and used my hands to grab the pipe from one of them before he could strike the boy with it.

"Don't mess with us, will you!"

"You bitch!" The other one behind me yanked me back and then...

*Smack!*

I hit the ground after being slapped so hard my face went numb. When I looked up, I saw the one who slapped me standing over me, panting with a murderous glare.

"Don't think just 'cause you're the boss's daughter you can just interfere! Stay out of it!"

Of course, I didn't dare move because that psycho had a gun pointed at my head. So basically, no matter if I'm the daughter of the boss or not, I'm just as much in danger?

"The boss sent me to tell you that if you don't have the money in three days, I'm gonna burn your house to the ground."

Then the other one grabbed the battered boy from the ground by his hair. I could only watch helplessly, full of pity. Meanwhile, the one who had the gun pointed at me shifted his target and walked back toward the boy again.

"F... fine..." the victim could only stammer through his bloodied mouth. But the guy with the gun pointed it at the boy's arm.

"But you've done wrong and must be punished. We gave you months to pay for last time's drugs, but you kept stalling."

"..." I heard footsteps behind me but didn't pay attention, still stunned by what was happening.

"Today I gotta leave a bullet in your body. Teach you a lesson."

"Don't hurt my son!"

"Screeeam!!" I yelled before someone yanked me upright and locked my neck in a powerful grip. The tip of something sharp pressed against my throat—I didn't even have to see it to feel it cutting into my skin.

"Shit, it's his mom!" The two thugs who were threatening the boy looked shocked at me and the person holding the knife to my neck. I turned my face slightly to look—just a glimpse of a messy mop of hair from my captor.

My legs were shaking... Khun Phleng, please help me.

"Let my son go, you bastard!" The voice was shaky and strange, making me feel suspicious. The two men looked at each other before blurting out a guess at the woman holding me hostage.

"You high right now or what?"

"If I wasn't high, how would I be brave enough to come fight you?!" she screamed so loud it hurt my ears. So turns out both mother and son were druggies. The mom didn't come help earlier because she was busy getting high so she could come rescue her son who was purple and swollen. Must've felt like the Hulk or something. "Let... let go of my son or I'll slit this girl's throat!"

I couldn't take it anymore... I really couldn't...

If I was going to get hurt, so be it—but I wasn't going to die like this.

I threw myself to the ground to escape her grip. The sharp blade nicked my neck but it was okay—didn't seem too serious. I could take it. But I had to run!

I pushed myself to run with everything I had, not daring to look back, even though I could still hear angry shouting behind me.

I had to get back... I had to get back to Khun Phleng...

I couldn't die here.

"Stop, you crazy girl! Where do you think you're going?!" One of my father's men yelled after me. At first, he sounded close—he was probably chasing after me—but then his voice faded. Maybe they had to go back to deal with the drugged-up mother and son first.

I kept running like mad, not knowing what lay ahead, but I had to escape. Then suddenly, I heard a police siren blaring behind me. I froze in my tracks.

Police? Then that means...

I slowly walked back, hoping to get help. But instead—

*Grab!*

"Got another suspect."

"No! I didn't do anything! I was forced!" I flailed as the cop cuffed me instead of helping. I shouted, but he didn't care.

When we got back to the scene, my father's men and the mother and son were already on the police truck.

"Take her to the station. She's injured too—get the first aid kit," one officer said when he saw the blood on my neck, looking concerned.

But I wasn't even hurt that bad... So why the hell was I being arrested?

In the end, I was taken to sleep in a detention room, feeling exhausted beyond words. As for those two guys who were detained in a separate cell, they glared at me with vengeful looks for running away earlier. I didn't care. I didn't want to do something wrong. The police let me contact a relative, but I didn't call my father.

I called Khun Phleng...

Looking at the clock, I saw it was already midnight. My body was nearly at its limit, and Khun Phleng still hadn't arrived. Eventually, I dozed off without realizing it.

I regained consciousness when the police walked in and took me out of the holding cell. Two men who looked kind and calm were waiting for me. I stared at them in confusion since I had never seen them before.

"You've been released. You can relax now," one of them said.

"W-Who are you?" I asked.

"We're the heads of Khun Phleng's security team. She sent us to pick you up, Khun Lerman."

I glanced nervously at my father's two henchmen. They were sneakily watching me and the two men with curious eyes. I was so afraid they would tell my father that Khun Phleng was the one who came to help me.

"We've arranged with the police not to disclose who posted your bail. Don't worry," one of the men whispered to me when he saw how worried I looked.

"They'll never know it was Khun Phleng who helped you."

"O-Okay."

"Let's go. It's very late."

"Okay... Where's Khun Phleng?"

"She's waiting at the hotel. We'll take you to see her."

The two of them took me to a car parked outside. Their warm voices and friendly demeanor lifted a weight off my chest. As the car started, the man in the passenger seat turned to me and handed me a blanket.

"Khun Phleng said you get cold easily, so she told us to bring a blanket for you."

"Thank you," I said, taking the blanket and wrapping it around myself with relief.

Khun Phleng really understands me all the time.

"You can sleep for a bit if you'd like, Khun Lerman. We'll reach the hotel in about an hour," one of them said.

"No one's going to follow us, right?" I asked nervously as the air conditioning touched my skin and the pleasant scent inside the car made me feel drowsy.

"Let them try. They don't know us well enough," the driver said jokingly as he started the car. After a while, I unknowingly fell asleep.

When I woke up again, I found myself lying on a soft bed in a room. Looking around, I realized it was Khun Phleng's bedroom—the one I had stayed in before. The lights were dimmed, lit only near the headboard. A blanket was pulled up to my neck. I looked around but didn't see her, so I opened the door and stepped out.

Then I saw the person I loved sitting in the kitchen, a laptop in front of her. She was staring at the screen with a tense expression. When she saw me walking closer, she closed the laptop and walked toward me, looking extremely angry about something.

The tall woman grabbed my arm and pulled me close before asking in a harsh tone, "Le... are you Nara?"

"..." My eyes widened. I guessed the laptop must have had my personal information on it. Khun Phleng was still waiting for my answer, her face still full of fury.

"Yes... Lermarn is Nara."

# Chapter 18: Alone

"When were you planning to tell me?" the taller woman asked me with a hurt tone. "Or did you just see me as a joke? Like, since I was already blind before, I didn't need to know anything, is that it?!"

Phleng had never raised her voice at me before, but this time she did. As for me—I couldn't help but cry.

I guessed that Phleng must've suspected my behavior and the events of today, so she must have had her people investigate the whole thing to get to the bottom of it.

"I... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to."

"You had time. So many chances to tell me. Why didn't you? What were you afraid of?!"

"If it was before, then yes, it was my fault not to tell you," I tried to explain. "But after my dad came back into my life, I had to keep my former identity a secret... otherwise, you would've been in danger."

I tried to explain, but Phleng's expression didn't get any better—still full of anger. Her slender hand gripped my arm tighter until I could feel the pain.

"But when I told you at the mall that I had something important to tell you —that was when I had changed my mind. I decided I would finally come clean, tell you everything I've been hiding. Because now... things are starting to spiral out of control."

"So if it hadn't gotten this bad, you still wouldn't have told me, right?!"

... I couldn't say anything. I knew I was entirely in the wrong. "I'm sorry."

But since I had already started talking, I asked another question.

"How much do you know now?"

"I know you're Nara—the person I once hired for a fake marriage. And I know what happened tonight."

"You don't know about my father's work right now, do you?"

"That—I know too."

"..."

"So what? Now that I know, what can I even do?"

Phleng walked away and sat on the other side of the sofa, burying her face in her hands. I didn't know what to do either, so I sat on a chair in the kitchen corner, trying to keep some distance—because I didn't know if, in her current state, she saw me as an eyesore.

"I used to suspect..."

Suddenly, Phleng spoke again after we had sat in silence for a long time.

"I used to wonder if you were the same person I once knew."

"..."

"The tone of your voice, the way you spoke, and some of your actions— they reminded me of someone."

"..."

Her voice was hoarse and full of disappointment, to the point I wanted to hang myself with a rope.

"But I'm not a superhero. I wasn't sure if what I thought was true. Back then, I was blind. And we only spent five months together. I couldn't recall exactly who you reminded me of."

After saying that, the taller woman raised her eyes and looked at me—pain evident in her gaze.

"At one point, I even thought of hiring someone to find out where Nara was because I missed her. But I gave up on that idea."

"..."

"Because I fell in love with you."

"Phleng..."

"Since I had fallen for you... I didn't need Nara anymore. But I never thought that..."

She didn't finish the sentence and buried her face in one hand again. Her shoulders shook rhythmically, indicating she was crying. I stood up and walked to my lover, kneeling before her.

"Phleng..."

"..."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry I didn't tell you earlier who I really was. If I could turn back time..."

"There's no need to say anything," she cut me off and raised a hand to stop me, leaving me at a loss for what to do next. Phleng turned away from me with tears in her eyes and then spoke words that tore my heart into pieces.

"At first, I really wondered if falling in love with a woman was actually right for me. I'm famous, and I'm a businesswoman."

"..."

"There were so many men who tried to court me, but I didn't accept any of them. And yet I fell for a woman who was drunk out of her mind and stole a kiss from me. When I think about it, it's pretty pathetic. And on top of that, I was deceived like a fool for so long."

My legs shook. Tears streamed down my face like a broken dam when I heard her words.

"So what—you just wanted me to help you escape your father?" Phleng looked at me and said in a flat tone as if she felt nothing anymore, then let out a cold laugh. "Too bad. I can't help you."

She shook her head slowly. Her big round eyes, still wet with tears, looked at me with an unprecedented coldness. I slowly stood up. I couldn't bear kneeling like a fool any longer. The way she responded was far beyond what I had imagined. I felt like I couldn't handle it anymore.

"If I help, I don't know how much damage it'll cause to my business or the people around me. Your father's mafia influence is way more powerful now —just from the little we've looked into."

"You... you won't help me?" My voice trembled—not from crying, but from fear. Because the one last person I thought I could rely on clearly wanted nothing to do with me anymore.

"Five years ago, I paid eighty thousand dollars. I could've skipped out on paying you back then, but I didn't. I thought once you got the money, you'd find something better to do. But in the end, you're still just as rotten." Phleng smiled coldly. It was a cruel smile, and it hurt more than it scared me. No, it wasn't just her father...

I stepped back as she stood and slowly walked toward me. Phleng leaned in close and used her words to cut me again.

"Like father, like daughter."

I figured I'd better head back to my room. I couldn't take any more of this.

I'd find a way out later. I'd have to get the police involved somehow. Once I could form a rough plan, I turned to leave and grab my bag from the bedroom. But Phleng called out to me first.

"Hey, by the way..."

"Yes?"

"That eighty grand... thinking back, it wasn't really worth it for just five months."

"..."

"I paid quite a lot, didn't I? And now you're begging for help..."

Phleng rolled her eyes, pretending to think about something. Her nonchalant demeanor made it clear—she was treating me like a joke.

Can anger really turn someone into a completely different person like this?

"Sleep with me. Give me your absolute best performance—and then I'll consider it."

....

I walked away from Khun Phleng out of the room immediately after she used such cruel words to hurt me so deeply. As I grabbed my bag and halfran out, I saw her sitting back on the sofa. Her eyes didn't even glance at me as I walked past her.

I went downstairs to hail a taxi back to my condo. On the way, I couldn't stop crying, to the point the driver asked if something was wrong. But I denied it. When I got out of the car and arrived at my condo, I looked left and right to check if anyone was waiting to ambush me. Once inside, I

locked the doors and windows properly for safety.

Looking at the clock, I saw it was already six in the morning. I must've slept about two hours at Khun Phleng's place, since I still felt exhausted. Today was a weekday, which meant... I had to go to work.

A shower and shampoo might help me feel refreshed...

Stop crying already, Lermarn. You deserve this.

I walked out of the condo to catch the skytrain, but then the rain suddenly poured down hard. I didn't have an umbrella in my room, and all the ones provided by the condo had already been taken. I had no choice but to brave the storm to get to work. I checked the weather forecast on my phone—it said there would be a storm all day. When I got off the train and walked into the office, the storm still showed no signs of stopping. I had dressed up nicely after a shower, but now I looked like a drowned dog next to a trash can.

"Oh, you're soaked..." Khun Kwang, the handsome guy, greeted me as I snuck off to wipe my face in the bathroom and returned. "Careful, or you'll catch a cold, Le."

"Yes," I replied shortly, intending to walk away, but Khun Kwang held me back.

"Why's your voice like that? Sounds like someone who's been crying."

"It's nothing," I said, gently shaking his hand off and walking away to do my work. Today, if possible, I just wanted to stay quiet and talk to as few people as possible.

"Achoo!"

But from trying to stay quiet, I ended up sneezing the loudest in the office. Phi Vee had to dig through her bag and donate some medicine to the sick one—me—before I could spread the germs even further.

"Did you go out last night with Khun Phleng or something? Why are you this sick, all cutesy and stuff?" Phi Jay teased me, but I shot her a cold stare and the driest smile I could muster. Eventually, she went back to her desk quietly.

"You already took two days off. Why are you even sicker now, Le?" "Probably because of the storm this morning, Phi Vee."

I replied to Phi Vee and grabbed a tissue to plug my nose. I felt dizzy somehow, but there was still so much work to do. I had to push through.

"So are you and Khun Phleng a thing?" Phi Vee still wasn't done and nudged me to turn and answer her question. I just sighed and looked at her face to gauge how I should respond.

Better not say anything...

"No, we're just friends."

"No wayyy," as soon as I said that, Phi Jay, who stood up and joined our chat, disagreed dramatically, causing Ball—who was editing work with his headphones on—to pull them off and look over at us.

"There's no way that's just friends."

"Yeah! What kind of friends sit all lovey-dovey eating shaved ice together like that? Just tell us the truth," Phi Jay seemed eager to know. When I turned to look at Phi Vee, she wore a similar expression.

"If I tell you, will you guys be disgusted with me for dating a woman?"

"What?! What's going on? I'm confused," Ball, who just caught up to our topic, widened his eyes and leaned in toward me with interest.

"I've dated a tom before too, y'know—those boyish girls," Phi Vee said. "Just tell us already. When did you start dating? How long were you secretly talking? Spill it!"

"Alright," I sniffled once and began to explain. "I'm actually dating Khun Phleng."

"Knew it! / Whoa!" Once I confirmed it, everyone in the room slapped their knees and looked at me like I was the villain in a drama.

Seemed like they wanted to hear a cute and romantic story. I'll try to lay out the events the way they want to hear them.

"We started contacting each other since the day she came here for a meeting."

As I spoke, I recalled the events in my mind.

The day Khun Phleng stepped out of the car and met my eyes again after so many years... she pulled me into her arms after I got caught in the elevator door.

"That day she took me to the hospital because I got hit by a motorcycle. After that, a bunch of things happened, and she ended up spending the night at my place."

That day, Khun Phleng handed me a bag of medicine with gentle, warm eyes... that night was the first night I got to sleep beside her...

"We chatted on LINE sometimes. We went out for some delicious pad thai together."

...Why does telling this story hurt so much?

"We watched that movie Vengeful Quack Doctor together."

I still remember her warm hand holding mine in the theater... her long arm always resting on my head whenever we stood together for too long... the three plates of pad thai Khun Phleng devoured...

"I'm sorry, everyone."

I couldn't keep telling the story and walked out of the room immediately. No one followed me. I figured they were still confused as to why I ran out like that. I went into the bathroom and cried for a long time. The moments we spent together—when we were happy, smiling—kept playing in my head, not going anywhere.

That first night we became one... every touch Khun Phleng gave me... her arm wrapped around me as we lay side by side...

Including the cruel words she said last night, too.

...

"Just pay up nicely, ma'am. Don't make me use force."

"Dear, if I had the money, I would've given it all already. But this is really all I have. Please have mercy."

"But you've delayed for two weeks now, ma'am. It should be full by now."

"Oh dear, why are you being so cruel to an old woman like me?"

"Stop talking and just hand over the money already!"

One of Dad's henchmen standing behind me shouted out as I was being guilt-tripped by the food vendor lady. I raised my hand to signal them to stay calm.

"I'll go dig through the back of the shop myself. You guys wait here."

"Okay."

"Ma'am, come with me."

I had to pull the old lady by the arm to make her walk into the back room. Then I grabbed some stuff and made loud noises, pretending to be rummaging through things.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. How much money do you really have?"

"Uh... you asked for ten thousand. I only have seven thousand. That's all I've got, really."

The old vendor looked puzzled why my face changed from harsh to gentle so suddenly, but I didn't have time to explain.

"Okay, just give me that much. I'll take care of the rest myself." I held out my hand for the money, and she pulled it from the pocket of her apron and handed it to me.

"When we walk back out front, you have to pretend to be annoyed with me, like I messed up your back room. You get it, right?"

"O-okay."

"Keep quiet about the missing three thousand. If anyone asks you later, just say you paid me in full, alright?"

"Got it." The poor old woman looked visibly relieved, so I walked back out with the cash in my hand and showed it to the henchmen.

"Exactly ten thousand."

"Nice!" The dumb guys looked at me with admiration, impressed that I collected the full amount.

"I'll count it again just in case. You guys go get the car and pick me up."

"Alright."

They walked off to get the car. One of them stayed behind to wait with me. I pretended to count the cash again and mumbled:

"Yup, exactly ten thousand."

"Ah, there's a cart selling snacks over there. I'm gonna grab something real quick."

"Go ahead."

I pretended to walk off to buy snacks, but really, I needed to create a situation where my dad would believe that the missing three thousand was lost while I went to get snacks.

One advantage I had over the other henchmen was that I was the gang leader's daughter. So they didn't dare say much to me. At first, they had guts —like those two jerks who beat up the high school druggie the other night and slapped me so hard my cheek went numb. I think my dad had them beaten up badly—first, for being careless enough to get caught by the cops, and second, for daring to lay a hand on me.

I used a little charm to make peace with my dad and told him everything those guys did to me to make sure they were properly punished. It was my way of getting back at them. My cheek still stings from that night until now.

As for how I ended up collecting stall fees for my dad? After being cut off by Khun Phleng that day, I went to the police for help. Turns out, no one helped me. They even said I was delusional. So I had no choice but to go back and do whatever my dad said. But I'm not as evil as he is. Every time I was assigned to follow his men on some shady mission, I always found a way to avoid being the one to hurt the victims. Today was my first task collecting stall fees. Of course, I had to collect as much as they could give, but if they couldn't pay, or it meant starving later, I'd secretly help them quietly. It's tough, yeah—but I just don't want to be a bad person.

On the outside, it looks like I've adjusted to this new life, but believe me, I've never slept peacefully since. I have nightmares more often, and sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night for no reason. I cry myself to sleep almost every night.

It's been almost two weeks since I was denied help. Khun Phleng has completely disappeared from my life—no LINE, no calls. I have no choice but to find my own way out of this hellhole my dad dragged me into.

At first, Dad wanted me to move out of my condo and live near his inner circle. But I refused and negotiated with him. I might obey him in most things, but when it comes to my personal space, I won't let anyone interfere. At the very least, I need one peaceful place to sit and think. He saw I was firm about it, so he gave in.

As for what happened last night—getting picked up by the cops and locked up with his men—I told Dad I panicked. Said I'd never seen someone get beaten up before, that's why I ran. That was enough for him not to punish me.

"Very good, my dear. See? Dad's job isn't so hard, right?"

Not hard? But it wrecks innocent people's lives!

"Why is there only seven thousand?" Dad furrowed his brows when he double-checked the cash and noticed the gray bills didn't add up. I kept a straight face and said:

"Count again. I counted it twice in front of your men when I got it from the vendor."

My firm tone kept Dad from suspecting anything. Back when I worked for him in America, I never once skimmed or stole. So he trusts me enough to believe I didn't keep anything for myself. Not enough money just means... not enough.

"Fine, whatever. You're progressing quickly. The night after tomorrow, go deliver some 'Lac' for me."

I thought I was done for the day, but as soon as he mentioned a new job, I felt like collapsing right there.

"L-Lac!?"

Lac is a drug my dad's gang invented. It causes severe hallucinations and lets users imagine things far beyond normal. And once someone tries it once, they get addicted fast.

"Yeah. Just you. One of my guys just said you did a decent job today."

"I won't do it! That's too much!" I yelled at Dad, finally losing it. That made the old man glare up at me with fury from his pile of bills.

"Just collecting stall fees from innocent people already feels bad enough! And now you want me to deliver drugs—uh... ack!"

I didn't even get to finish when a man's hand suddenly came from behind and grabbed my neck tightly. He must've been hiding behind me all along. Dad must've signaled him to shut me up when I started talking too much.

"Why do you talk so damn much?" Dad walked around his desk toward me, voice cold as ice. He didn't care I was struggling to breathe, or that I could choke to death in a few minutes.

"When I tell you to do something, Nara, you do it! Why do you always go against me!?" He leaned in and shouted in my face. The strong smell of tobacco from him made me even more sick, and I started to really lose air because the thug behind me was squeezing harder now.

"Let her go."

At Dad's command, my feet touched the ground again. Just a moment ago, I'd been lifted slightly off the floor by the brute choking me.

"Take this address. Go to the meeting point at 8 PM sharp. One of our agents will hand over the drugs. Then you deliver them to the second location."

I unwillingly accepted the small piece of paper. Dad gave me a threatening look before growling:

"Now go to bed. I'm sick of your face. So damn stubborn."

...

I went back to my room to take a shower and wash away the terrible things

I had encountered. Standing and looking at my own reflection in the mirror, I couldn't help but feel pathetic. I had just weighed myself and realized I'd lost nearly three kilograms. No surprise—I hadn't been able to eat much lately.

That night, I cried on my bed until 2 AM before dragging myself to sulk on the sofa outside. There was no work during the day tomorrow because we had a shoot scheduled for 6 PM, running until the afternoon of the day after tomorrow. That means once the shoot's over, I'll have to rush out to deliver the drugs...

With the stress piling up and my body lacking proper nutrition for several days now, I eventually came down with a fever. I tried taking medicine, but it only helped a little. By 4 PM the next day, I got dressed and headed to work as scheduled.

"Ready! Action!"

The shoot went on as usual. I was sweating like crazy from the fever but secretly brought a handkerchief to wipe myself while standing in as a body double for the actors during camera blocking with the cinematographer.

"Turn a little to the right," the cameraman stepped away from the monitor to tell me.

"Okay," I replied.

I did as he said and took the chance to drink as much water as I could to try to flush the heat out of my body. Once the actor arrived, I stepped away from the set to wait somewhere else.

"How's the shoot going?" Khun Kwang came over to greet me.

"All good. But this scene might take many takes since the client wants it really polished," I reported to the executive's son. Khun Kwang didn't say anything further and instead quietly watched the shoot beside me.

"I heard you're dating Khun Phleng?"

His question nearly made me spit out the water I had just gulped. Instead, I choked and coughed hard.

"Where did you hear that from, Khun Kwang?" I asked in a meek voice, avoiding eye contact with him.

"Khun Vee told me."

"..."

"Don't be mad at her. I was the one who pressured her to tell me," Khun Kwang quickly added when he saw I went silent.

"Do you despise me, Khun Kwang?"

"To be honest, I was shocked," he said tensely. That made me even more nervous and disheartened. "I didn't expect that person to be such a major client, and I definitely didn't expect it to be Khun Phleng."

"I'm sorry."

"Why are you apologizing? If you're happy, then I'm happy for you," Khun Kwang said with forced optimism, but I could tell from his tone that he was faking it.

"If you're disgusted that I'm dating a woman, just say so."

I walked away from him to sit with Khun Vee at the monitor. Maybe I really don't have anyone left after all.

In the end, even a genuinely nice guy like Khun Kwang was repulsed by someone like me. And who knows, maybe Vee, Jay, or the boss might be talking behind my back too.

"Wrap for the day!"

It was exactly 2:55 PM. As soon as the assistant director shouted the announcement, everyone on the set scattered—lighting crew, the ones constantly walking around, all retreated to get drinks and snacks to recover. Some disappeared for a smoke. As for me and Khun Vee, we stayed put to help with closing up costs and discuss some things with Khun Jay.

"We need to make sure we've captured all the actor shots at this location."

"All done. I followed the storyboard schedule exactly."

"Okay, then..."

The four of us—me, Vee, Jay, and the assistant director—stood discussing things seriously for a while before breaking off to finish our respective tasks. I handled the supporting actors resting in a corner, then returned to help the welfare crew pack up.

"Le, can I talk to you for a bit?"

Khun Kwang quietly approached me, but I was in the middle of working, so I brushed him off. "Can we not talk right now, Khun Kwang?"

I could barely carry any more emotional weight. I didn't know what he was going to say to further break me down. I walked away while carrying plastic chairs used on set to stack them.

"I wasn't going to talk about Khun Phleng. The other day, I saw... Hey!"

Khun Kwang shouted as I suddenly fainted. My surroundings were spinning wildly before everything collapsed. I had never felt this weak and powerless before.

All I saw was several people, including Khun Vee, running toward me with deeply worried faces. Then I felt Khun Kwang's arms catching me and lifting me up, letting me see his handsome face—

And then everything went black.

# Chapter 19: The Embrace

I woke up with a throbbing headache. As I propped myself up and looked around, I found myself in a hospital room. I couldn't remember anything before that, only that the last thing I felt was my body no longer able to take it — and then I collapsed, my head hitting the floor.

I pressed the nurse call button and learned that I had been rushed to the hospital after fainting. My condition was the result of severe accumulated stress and a very high fever, which caused me to pass out. The man who brought me here — presumably Khun Kwang — had already left, leaving a message with the nurse that he would visit me again later.

Looking at the clock, I realized it was 10 PM the same day. I had a task — I had to deliver that medicine. If I didn't go, my father would probably send someone to beat me up.

"Can I leave now? I have something important to take care of."

"You can't, Miss. Your body is very weak right now. You have to stay overnight at the hospital," the nurse I had called quickly stopped me and pressed me gently back onto the bed.

"Can I leave tomorrow?"

"You'll have to wait until the doctor checks on you first," the nurse didn't give me a clear answer and tucked the blanket around me before leaving. I glared at the IV line in frustration.

I reached for my phone on the side table and found that I had nearly ten missed calls from my father. I immediately called him back.

"You're in the hospital?"

"How did you know?"

"I called earlier. Some guy answered your phone — I lied and said I was your relative. He told me you passed out."

It must have been Khun Kwang.

"Good thing I didn't curse at you right when he picked up! Ha ha ha."

"Whatever. Just so you know, I won't be able to deliver the meds this time."

"Says who? I already rescheduled the appointment for you."

"..."

So I really have to do that damn job, huh...

After hanging up, I was assigned to deliver the goods three mornings from now at the same address, with the added bonus that my father would secretly tail me to watch the operation. I tucked myself under the blanket and lay awake for a long time. Eventually, a nurse came in to check my blood pressure. I asked for some sleeping pills to finally get a long rest.

...

"You worthless girl. You filthy spawn of hell."

A terrifying woman from who-knows-where shook my frail body roughly.

Her face was ghostly white and covered in blood. I turned away in disgust.

"Help me! Someone help!"

"You're cornered now, crazy girl! Ha ha ha!" A group of over ten men — my father's goons — swarmed in and grabbed at me, rough hands reaching in every direction. I curled into myself, hugging my knees, trying to fend off their filthy hands.

"Go away! What do you want from me? What do you want!"

"Le!"

A sweet voice pulled me out of the nightmare. I opened my eyes to find long arms shaking me gently. When I came to, those hands stopped — and there she was.

The one person I hadn't seen in nearly two weeks, and the last person I expected to be standing in my hospital room:

Khun Phleng!

...

[Special Talk: Phlengphin]

As soon as I entered Lermarn's hospital room, I saw her tiny frame tossing and turning, tense and drenched in sweat.

"Go away! What do you want from me!"

Her screams made it clear she was having a nightmare, so I shook her hard until she finally came to and looked at me.

"Khun Phleng..." The small girl looked utterly shocked by my appearance. Understandably so — I had disappeared for two full weeks.

Lermarn was panting as if she had just run a marathon. She wiped the sweat off her face, so I picked up the tissue box beside the bed, gently took her hand, and dabbed her face for her.

She stared at me without blinking, her large eyes fixed on me, barely moving. After wiping her face, I walked into the bathroom to wet a small towel, then returned to dab her face again to refresh her.

Her eyes were dark and sunken, lips dry and cracked. Her hands were still trembling. I reached out and held them firmly.

"Was it a nightmare?"

"Yes, but... I'm okay."

"..."

She's lying... Lermarn is trying to make me think she's fine when she clearly isn't.

"Why did you lie to me?"

She looked up at me, confused. No need to ask — that dream must have been terrifying; otherwise, she wouldn't have screamed like that.

"I'm sorry."

I said nothing more. I just looked at her fragile form with pain in my heart, wishing I could rip myself apart to make up for what I'd done.

The past two weeks, I spent reflecting and digging into Lermarn's past — from her return to Thailand, her life in university, to the time she changed her name and began working at Khun Kwang's company. I obsessed over the details the entire time, including her infamous father. That man doesn't have much true power — he just acts tough and puts on a scary face to seem larger than life.

As for Lermarn's identity, she really was Nara from five years ago. I felt like an idiot for not realizing it sooner. But hey — I'd only lived with her for five months and then she vanished for five years. It's hard to remember someone clearly after all that time, especially since I was blind back then.

Nara had meant so much to me during that time. She was a friend, someone who brought color into my dull life. All these years, every memory of the time we shared remained vivid. But my longing and worry for her had been slowly eaten away by time — five years is a long time — and running several hotel branches alone had left me with more to worry about than a single woman from my past.

...

As for Lermarn, she hadn't contacted me again since that day. And I didn't have any reason to contact her either, because I was still angry at her about being Nara. I admit that I used a lot of harsh words to hurt Lermarn. It was because I was angry, hurt, and felt like a fool. Maybe it was because no one had ever made me feel this way before, so I ended up hurting her. But she hurt me too. Even though I felt bad for speaking harshly to her, I was still angry all the same.

It sounds crazy that I fell in love with a girl who doesn't know how to control her emotions—so sarcastic, moody for no reason, sometimes straightforward, and sometimes full of secrets. But love often happens when we least expect it. That night when Lermarn got drunk and kissed me—after she fell asleep, I immediately realized my heart was beating abnormally. And I never looked at her the same way again. I had intended to bury my feelings and suppress that crazy desire for a sweet kiss. But I couldn't. So I drove to see Lermarn that evening to find a way out for myself. And when I saw the bouquet Mr. Kwang gave her for her birthday, I realized I could no longer stay still and ignore everything I felt.

The truth is, I already wanted to help Lermarn with her father. But I couldn't think of a good plan or a proper escape route. And with her not contacting me, and many things I still didn't know, I couldn't act recklessly. In the end, we didn't really talk again until this evening, when Mr. Kwang called me.

"Lermarn was admitted to the hospital."

"What happened to her?!"

"The doctor said she's severely stressed and has high usage levels. Her body is also suffering from serious malnutrition."

"Where is she now?"

Mr. Kwang told me the name of the hospital. As soon as I knew the location, I left my work with Khun Jean and rushed out immediately.

When I got to the front of the patient room, I saw Mr. Kwang waiting there.

Looking inside, I saw Lermarn lying unconscious on the hospital bed with a nurse watching over her nearby.

My heart tightened and ached deeply when I saw her small figure lying there, pale and unconscious.

"I need to talk to you," Mr. Kwang nudged me to face him and pointed his lips toward the relative seating area outside the room.

"I know about you and Lermarn."

He started talking as soon as we sat down. His face was calm, hard to read.

"But that's not the main issue. A few days ago, I was out doing errands with my mother and saw Lermarn standing with a group of scary-looking men— five or six of them—pressuring market vendors for money."

"..."

"I didn't know if you were aware of this, but I stood at a distance and saw everything. Lermarn went into the back of the shop alone to collect money from a vendor. When she came out, she told the men to go get the car and stood counting money on the side of the road. At first, I didn't think someone with her professional background would be doing something so shady. But her expression didn't look good. She said something to one of the men and went to hide somewhere else, looking tense, as if she was planning something."

Mr. Kwang described everything he witnessed to me.

So in the end, after Lermarn was rejected by me, she really had to join her father's gang, huh?

"And when she was still unconscious earlier, someone called her. A man— sounded pretty pissed. But probably because I answered the call instead of Lermarn, the guy didn't say much. Once he found out she was in the hospital, he hung up."

That bastard's been tracking Lermarn every single step, hasn't he? If he weren't a drug dealer using his daughter as a tool to make money, I'd say he was a pretty devoted dad—attached to his daughter like that.

"Do you know anything about this?" Mr. Kwang asked me seriously. "Like, if someone's threatening her to work like this?"

I glanced around to make sure we could speak freely here.

"I just recently found out everything, actually."

After that, I told him Lermarn's story—how she used to be Nara, how she lived with me when I was still blind, and how she's now being threatened by her father, a former gang member in the U.S., to do his bidding. Of course, I also told him the disgusting things I did to her two weeks ago.

After listening, Mr. Kwang exhaled heavily and leaned back in the sofa, visibly shocked by everything.

"Damn it, Lermarn." He looked toward the patient room with a look of sympathy. "You must be pretty angry at her. I can understand."

"Yes, I was very angry. And from now on, I'm determined to atone for the things I said to her."

I admitted it to Mr. Kwang openly. He's someone who has had feelings for Lermarn for a long time. If he were really possessive, he wouldn't have called me to come. He would've stayed quietly and taken care of her himself.

"So what will you do now?" he asked. I shook my head—no concrete plan yet to take down Lermarn's wretched father.

We'll have to wait until she wakes up and then figure it out together.

"Yeah, probably. But I don't think she should go back to stay at her current condo..."

"Oh, don't worry. I'll take care of that myself," I assured him confidently. He nodded in trust. After all, we both have some influence and people who answer to us.

"But if she's not at her usual place, her father might get suspicious."

"Lermarn will be safe. Don't worry, Khun Kwang."

"Then her workplace might be the next target," he said, sitting up as an idea hit him.

If they find out Lermarn's gone missing, they might go search for her at work. I think you should be extra careful about people entering and leaving the building.

"I'll take care of the office. You just focus on Lermarn."

We both nodded, understanding each other well.

"It might be best if she rests here for another day or two," Mr. Kwang added, seeing how I kept glancing into the patient room.

"Probably, yes."

"We were filming overnight today. If Lermarn hadn't fainted, I'd say she was beyond human."

"She's always been beyond normal," I said with a half-laugh.

We chatted a bit more before he excused himself. As for me, I left Lermarn with the nurse temporarily and went down to buy something sweet she liked to have ready for when she woke up.

When I came back, I spoke seriously with the nurse about Lermarn's condition before making a certain request.

"We're going back to the room. Tonight."

I said to Lermarn while watching the little one sucking on the sweet jelly I bought from the convenience store downstairs, sitting on the bed. If a nurse saw this, I'd probably get scolded—how could I point at something and let a patient eat it? But what else could I do? I wanted to see Lermarn smile as soon as possible. Maybe eating something sweet might help her feel better faster.

"Oh, you mean back to my room, right? We can't go yet. We'll have to wait until tomorrow to see what the doctor says," Lermarn's shoulders slumped as she spoke to me in a downhearted tone.

"No, I mean our room," I pointed at myself, and that made Lermarn look at me in confusion.

"Why would I go there? If my dad finds out, he might..."

"Stop talking about him," I lightly touched her lips with my finger as a sign to hush. "Let's not think about scary things like that for now."

"Uh..."

"Aren't you scared? Didn't you say you didn't want to do this?"

"..."

"I'm here now," I reached out and squeezed Lermarn's hand. "And you don't have to be afraid that I'll disappear again."

"..."

"Finish your jelly, then we'll go already."

In the end, I pulled Lermarn out of the hospital room with me. Earlier, I had spoken with the nurses and arranged for the hospital to prepare medications and all the necessary items for Lermarn to take back to my place. I still had some connections with doctors at other hospitals—I'd have one of them come to look after her at my place instead. Right now, I just wanted to get this little one out of the hospital. It wasn't very safe here.

"How many cars did we bring?" Lermarn, who had been pushed into the car with me, looked left and right nervously. I told the driver and one of my bodyguards to turn on the air conditioning just enough, then I grabbed the blanket I had prepared and wrapped it around Lermarn.

"Two cars. One will follow us. Why?"

"Wait... what if someone's following us? We might be in danger."

Lermarn's shaky voice made me want to go grab a gun and shoot her dad dead right now.

Lermarn didn't seem like herself at all—her whole body was trembling.

What did those people do to her!?

"There's no one. Trust me," I pulled Lermarn into a hug and gently patted her head. Her small frame turned to look at me, searching for reassurance. Of course, I returned a warm smile.

"You can lay your head on my lap if you want. Come on." I gently nudged her to lie on my lap. She obeyed without resistance, resting her face against my arm draped over her shoulder, then quickly fell asleep from exhaustion. "I'm sorry, Ler. I'm really sorry."

...

I sat watching Lermarn sleep on my bed for nearly an hour. When we first arrived at the apartment—one of my close aides carried her up—Lermarn kept glancing behind her to see if anyone was following. As soon as I turned the lights on in my room, she scanned left and right to make sure nothing suspicious was in there. Not until I let her lie down in my own bedroom did she start to settle, though still very wary.

"I... I still have work to do. If I don't, Dad will..."

"Go to sleep, Lermarn. You're talking too much already." I covered her mouth with my hand to stop the nonsense.

"I'm scared... Khun Phleng, I'm scared." Finally, the little one burst into tears. I pulled her into a tight hug, letting her cry against me.

"They choked me... I almost died." Hearing that made my blood boil even more. I held her tightly until she stopped crying.

When I pulled away, she was still sobbing a bit but much calmer.

"No one is going to do anything to you."

"..."

"If they dare show up in my place, let them try!"

My tone wasn't exactly gentle, which made those big round eyes look at me in astonishment. Earlier, I had already hired a herd of muscular security guards to help ensure our safety. If those junkies could break through that wall of muscle, I'd be impressed.

"I'm sorry about that night, Ler," I wiped her tears with my finger. "Please trust me again. Tonight, sleep well. I'll be holding you like this all night." I gave her a sweet smile, and Lermarn buried her face into me again and quickly fell asleep once more.

Once I was sure she was sound asleep, I quietly got up to shower and freshen up. I planned to come back and cuddle Lermarn like I promised, but I couldn't help sitting and watching her from afar again.

I was supposed to be her last hope, yet I completely let her down.

"Khun Phleng... where are you?" Lermarn, still asleep, raised her hand in the air. That made me quickly slide back under the blanket and hug her. She must have been talking in her sleep, because as soon as I hugged her, she turned to lie on her side with her back to me. So I hugged her loosely from behind instead. Once I was sure she was completely still, I reached over and turned off the bedside lamp. [Special Talk: Phlengphin END]

...

"A sting operation!?"

"Yes."

Right now, I, Khun Phleng, her chief of security, and four police officers who came to see me were all sitting in the hotel's lounge, wearing serious expressions. The police came here to investigate further about my father.

"Mark—we've been investigating his drug trafficking case already. But we just haven't found solid evidence to arrest him yet. So we think using the upcoming drop-off—happening in two days—as both evidence and an opportunity to arrest him might work."

"Haven't found evidence? Or you just never intended to arrest him in the first place?"

I lightly slapped Khun Phleng's leg to signal her to stop when I saw the tall woman taking jabs at the officers. The police looked visibly uncomfortable when she said that. But it's true. I still couldn't get over how cold they were to me when I came to ask for help—as if it wasn't their job or something.

"So Mark will be there, secretly watching the drug exchange by Lermarn, correct?"

"Yes. My father will be watching me from afar."

"Then..."

The police continued questioning and asked about the drop-off locations where I was supposed to meet the drug couriers and customers. After that, they excused themselves, saying they'd go plan out the operation to arrest my father and would return to speak with us again tomorrow.

"Can't we delay the operation? Lermarn still isn't well. The drug deal is in three days—she could just not show up, and that's it. So what if her dad gets mad?"

"If we don't make the arrest now, I think Mark will catch on. Just the fact that Lermarn was hospitalized and is now staying at this hotel instead of her condo—if Mark's observing her at all, he'd know right away someone's helping her."

Khun Phleng let out an irritated sigh upon hearing that. Once the police left, I began to yawn—the questioning had started since 7 a.m. After everything settled, I followed the tall woman back up to our hotel room.

Since waking up, we hadn't really had a proper conversation...

"I've ordered breakfast to be delivered to the room. After you eat, go rest," Khun Phleng said as she closed her laptop and picked up her shoulder bag. I guessed she was heading out to take care of work.

I didn't hesitate to run up and hug her from behind. The tall woman, who was just about to step out, froze in place.

"I missed you, Khun Phleng."

"Mm."

"Are you still mad at me?"

"A little. Are you still going to keep secrets from me from now on?"

"No, I won't..."

"Not just won't, you mustn't!" Khun Phleng turned to firmly emphasize that. Her face had a shadow of stress and worry that made me feel uneasy.

"Understood."

Hearing me say that, the tall woman threw her bag onto the nearby sofa and pulled me into a tight embrace.

"Finish your breakfast. Take your medicine. And get some sleep. Got it?" she whispered softly into my ear, gently stroking my hair.

"I'm just going to a quick meeting. I'll be back in two hours."

"Okay."

Khun Phleng pulled back and gently tilted my face up to meet her gaze.

"If I come back and find you still sitting up or walking around..."

"I'll ravish you."

"..."

"Got it?"

I'm this sick and she's still bringing it back to bedroom talk?

Unbelievable, Khun Phleng!

# Chapter 20: Settle It Once and for All

Because my girlfriend takes such good care of me, eventually my fever gradually went down until it returned to normal. I called P'Vee to ask for leave from work, but she cut me off before I could say anything, telling me not to come back until the matter with my dad was resolved. I was even more confused—how did she know what had happened? Eventually, I found out that Khun Kwang and Khun Phleng had already discussed my situation. Everyone at the office wished me a speedy recovery and hoped I could return to work soon.

So today I had absolutely nothing to do. Khun Phleng had gone out for meetings and wouldn't be back until evening. I thought about doing something to repay her for all she had done. I called Khun Jean and asked her to help me get ingredients for cooking. Not long after, the hotel staff brought up a load of vegetables and condiments to my room.

Khun Phleng had once said she missed eating Pad Thai at that one restaurant, but going out together now wasn't an option—we might both end up getting dragged off and killed.

So I'll cook it myself. Hehe.

Click!

The sound of the door and the keypad unlocking rang out—Khun Phleng was back!

"You're home, darling!" I ran to hug her. She furrowed her brows in surprise. Of course—every time she came into the room before, she'd find me passed out on the bed.

"Why do you seem so strange today?"

"Well, I'm all better now. Are you hungry?"

"A little."

"Come here." I took her hand and led her to the kitchen. Her eyes widened when she saw the large plate of Pad Thai, beautifully arranged on the counter. There was also some Thai dessert beside it—the same one she once said she loved, back when we went for Pad Thai and then grabbed sweets afterward. I didn't really know the exact recipe. This was honestly my first attempt at making a proper meal.

After looking for a while, she turned to me, as if to ask if I had made it myself. I nodded.

"You remembered I wanted Pad Thai?"

"I remember you said you missed that restaurant. I could've just had someone go buy it for you, but that wouldn't really count as a surprise, would it?"

"So I made it myself."

"Simple."

"Then I'm eating now."

She then walked over to put down her suit jacket and bag before eagerly sitting down to eat like a child having candy.

"Ah, delicious and refreshing."

Seeing her face light up after the first bite of noodles, I guessed the flavor must've been close enough to the restaurant's. I had spent quite a while searching for recipes, after all.

"Open up," she said, offering me a forkful of Pad Thai with a smile. Seeing her more relaxed made me happy.

"Coming home from work to this—can't complain," she said sweetly before getting juice from the fridge and pouring it into two glasses, one for each of us.

"You know what you're acting like right now?"

"What?" I was playing on my phone and looked up, confused. She smiled a bit but didn't say anything.

"Like what?"

"A wife."

Spit!

I nearly sprayed juice everywhere. Thankfully, I caught it with a tissue in time—but I still couldn't stop coughing.

"What? Being my wife's not a good thing?"

"N-No, it's just... we're just dating, aren't we?"

Talking about the cute and pink-hued side of our relationship made me blush. I always get a bit embarrassed talking about romance—unlike her, who just kept grinning.

"Who said we're dating? We're not anymore."

"Huh?"

"We broke up, remember? You had secrets from me." Her face turned from playful to serious and cold.

"Who wants to date someone full of secrets, right?"

"..."

At first, I thought she was joking. But she was serious.

"Okay. I understand." I nodded in acknowledgment. I wasn't going to walk away. Honestly, I deserved to be dumped. Who wants a partner who hides things and causes constant trouble?

"I was just kidding. Don't cry," she said when she saw my eyes start to well up. She reached out to gently pat my head, then went back to eating the Pad Thai with clear enjoyment.

What a harsh joke. But I guess I deserved it.

Seeing her chewing happily like this probably meant my cooking wasn't bad, huh?

...

"The police are coming tomorrow morning to go over the arrest plan for your dad," Khun Phleng said as we were tidying up the kitchen and washing the dishes together. "Yes, I know."

"Are you okay?"

"What do you mean?" I looked at her, confused. Her eyes were full of sympathy and concern. She rinsed the soap from her hands, dried them, and looked at me directly.

"I mean... your dad might get shot by the police or go to jail..."

"Oh," I replied, finally understanding.

"Honestly, I don't really know much about your relationship with him. You don't talk about him much. Are you okay? I'm really worried about this."

"Well..." I didn't know how to respond. It was hard to explain. If I had to be honest, I was attached to my dad in the way that people in the same household are. But when it comes to the love between a father and a daughter—he and I didn't really have that kind of relationship.

"It's hard to answer," I said with a faint smile.

"He's never given me love or warmth. If another person would be crying their eyes out about their dad being arrested—because they love and worry about their dad—well, my dad has never made me feel that way..." I didn't know if what I was saying was cruel or ungrateful, but I couldn't pretend to feel something I didn't—especially about him.

"It might sound unfilial. Maybe I'm a terrible daughter. But looking at it another way, if I let him continue, more innocent people would suffer. I still remember the boy who was beaten by his men. He was just a kid. He should've had a future. But he lost everything—because of my dad alone."

I said this with trembling hands, full of pain. "I did the right thing. I don't regret it."

Khun Phleng hugged me tightly. I hugged her back, soaking in as much of her warmth as I could.

...

The next day, the same police team returned to go over the plan with me. They explained everything I needed to prepare.

The plan wasn't complicated. The police were divided into three main teams. The first team would tail my dad from his place to where he was going to watch me work. The second team would intercept the drug dealer

—I just needed to receive the goods as usual, and they'd quietly arrest him.

The third team would ambush the customer who came to pick up the drugs. After that, both the first and third teams would move in simultaneously to arrest both my dad and the customer. I just had to act natural and follow the plan. The rest was the police's job.

"Yes, I won't forget." Not long after the officers left, my dad called again to remind me about tomorrow's job. Khun Phleng sat beside me, quietly listening in.

"Why aren't you at work?"

"How did you know I didn't go?"

"I sent someone to watch your office. They said you've taken leave."

"I'm sick. Of course I'd take time off."

"Sick and not even going out to buy food?"

He'd sent someone to watch my condo too. Probably saw I hadn't left the room to get food like I usually did and got suspicious. "I've got a fridge and kitchen now, remember?"

"That's your problem. Just don't forget tomorrow."

"Okay."

"He's been watching you this whole time?" Khun Phleng frowned as I hung up. This was the first time she heard me talking to my dad directly.

"Pretty much. Always from a distance."

"Distance? He's got people at your office and condo! Damn it."

"Khun Phleng..." I gently hugged her waist. I didn't want her to be in a bad mood.

"I'm just worried. I'll have to keep a super close eye on you tomorrow."

"Oh..." Her words reminded me of something very important I needed to bring up.

"Khun Phleng, I need to make an agreement with you."

"What is it?"

I hesitated, then made her stand and look me in the eye.

"Tomorrow, during the big operation... I need you to stay here at the hotel." "What!? Why? No. I'm going with you."

"It's dangerous. I don't want you risking your life for me. Please stay here," I said more firmly than ever. She didn't say anything back, but frowned deeply, clearly confused. I reached for her hand and held it tightly.

"I have already caused you a lot of trouble and distress, Khun Phleng. That's enough. If you go, I won't be able to focus on work because I'll be worried something might happen to you during the commotion."

"But I want to see you, Le. I'm worried about my girlfriend. Is that so wrong?"

I couldn't help but smile warmly, touched that she was so concerned about me. But this was something I couldn't give in to her on.

"You're not wrong, Khun Phleng. Not wrong at all. I'm the one at fault for dragging you into this. So the thing I have to be responsible for, more than anything else, is your safety."

"But..."

"Please. This time I am speaking to you directly, no beating around the bush, no secrets. Please do as I ask."

"..."

"I wouldn't be able to go on living or forgive myself if anything happened to you, Khun Phleng."

I pressed my tone with seriousness to show how much I meant what I said. Khun Phleng looked visibly upset. She turned her face away and let out a frustrated huff before nodding lightly in reluctant agreement.

"Fine. I'll wait here."

"Thank you."

"But you have to call me the second everything is over!"

The taller woman lifted her finger and ordered firmly, and I quickly nodded in agreement.

"Immediately! Even if the police ask you to do this or that afterward, forget it. Call me first. Understand?"

"Got it. I'll call right away. Just wait for my call."

I promised and buried my face into her embrace. Khun Phleng hugged me back begrudgingly.

"Don't break your promise. And don't let me hear that there are pretty girls hanging around the rendezvous point either."

"I know already!"

"You're the cutest, Khun Phleng."

"Once this is over, I'll make you pay me back good and proper."

Then the taller one squinted at me with a teasing, suggestive look. I gave her a light punch but didn't scold her—after all, my misdeeds were too many for me to claim I didn't deserve punishment.

That settled one worry about Khun Phleng. I knew she kept her promises, so I didn't have to fear for her safety. That night, she brought a pillow and slept with me in the same room again after we had been in separate rooms for two nights. She kissed me until my lips were sore. I ended up having to comfort her instead, saying everything would be okay and to stay calm. Eventually, she fell asleep first but didn't let go of me, keeping me wrapped in her arms so I wouldn't sleep away from her again.

Please let everything go well tomorrow...

...

"Here, the stuff to deliver."

A medium-sized brown bag was handed to me. I gave the money I had prepared to the agent as I was supposed to. After checking it quickly, the man nodded. "Thanks."

"I'm off then."

I said only that, then took the bag and headed to my parked car, driving away.

Luckily, I had taken driving lessons before—otherwise, this would've been way more difficult.

I drove out to the main road toward the client. After a while, I saw a pickup truck that looked familiar. It must have been my father's truck. The second police team was probably already arresting the agent I had received the package from. Now came the final step—the scariest, most dangerous one.

I kept driving until I reached the meeting point—an entrance road to an abandoned village. I parked my car a bit away from the spot and walked there with the bag.

There stood a woman, probably in her mid-thirties. A skinny, younger man stood nearby. Judging by his appearance, he was likely a drug user.

"Are you our client?" I asked, and she nodded with a suspicious look. The man was twitchy and jittery.

Are all drug dealers like this?

"Here's your stuff."

I held up the bag and opened it, showing the plastic-sealed packs inside. Both the woman and the man's eyes lit up. I noticed plainclothes officers approaching from behind, but I had to keep playing my role.

"Hand over the money first, and it's all yours."

"Alright."

She turned and took something from her waist bag. As soon as the stack of bills came out and touched the air, a nearby officer revealed himself.

"Hey." He raised an eyebrow at the woman. She looked stunned, not recognizing him as a cop in plain clothes. The skinny man had already been grabbed by two other officers. "Wha—what is this..."

"You're under arrest. It's over."

The money was snatched from her hands, and another officer took the drug bag from mine.

"I can't let you take these drugs," I said briefly. The woman looked at me in shock—clearly not expecting I was a snitch. I could see her begging for help, but I couldn't do anything for her.

"Suspect has a gun! Suspect has a gun!"

Suddenly, a voice shouted from the other side of the street. I turned and saw officers scuffling with a black pickup truck—my father's truck—trying to stop it. Officers outside the cars aimed their guns at him.

"Dad..." I muttered. One officer near me pushed me to move.

"Let's get out of here. Go."

I moved with the group leading the suspects away. Then gunshots rang out, followed by an engine roaring to life.

"Find cover!"

Someone yelled after the police probably fired at the tires. I couldn't help but turn back to look—after all, he was still my father, even if we'd already cut ties.

Then I saw the truck veer around the police cars and drive straight at me.

"You ungrateful child!"

A police officer grabbed me out of the way just in time. The truck crashed violently into the village entrance wall.

"Run! Get out of here!"

I didn't need to be told—I was already doing that. I saw Dad's face drenched in sweat, glaring at me with hatred. I ran as fast as I could, police officers chasing after me. Gunshots still rang out behind us.

"You think you can escape me?!"

I didn't know what was happening behind me—I just focused on running and hiding. Then I heard an engine roar even louder and closer.

"Go hide in that house! Inside, quick!"

The police officer guided me into another entrance of the village. I heard tires screeching again.

"Stop right there!"

I turned down another path, thinking I was safe. But the same truck appeared, now chased closely by police vehicles. It came straight for me, and I barely dove out of the way.

"Stop, Dad!" I shouted, but it didn't stop him. He reversed and turned toward me again. I ran, but eventually stumbled and hit the ground.

A police car collided with his to stop the attack—just inches from hitting me.

I looked at my leg—it was already injured. I'd dodged, but not enough. The truck's front must've hit my leg, and it went numb.

I tried crawling away, afraid that if I stood up, Dad would kill me. Police officers rushed over and dragged me to safety. It seemed like it was all over, but it wasn't.

"Die!"

Dad's truck came at us again. We jumped, but not in time. The truck clipped me hard, slamming me into the ground again.

Another police car crashed violently into his truck, dragging it away from me and the injured officer.

The front of Dad's car was a wreck. The police car pressed hard to stop it from escaping. Others tried to pry the door open and pull Dad out.

I saw his cruel eyes one last time before I was taken to another police car that had just arrived.

My leg must've been broken. I couldn't walk and felt sudden pain.

It all happened so fast.

I smelled blood—metallic, disgusting.

The gunshots and engines were replaced by shouting and police commands telling Dad to stay still.

I tried to watch from the dirty ground.

Dad was shot in the shoulder and being dragged out.

Pain began to flood my body. I tried to keep my eyes open, scared I wouldn't wake up if I closed them. But I lost the battle.

Darkness and silence took over.

...

I woke up to a sound like a computer.

I opened my eyes and found myself in a white room.

Only the bedside light was on.

Tubes surrounded me.

I looked at my left arm—set in a cast.

On the other side, I saw Khun Phleng face-down beside me.

Khun Kwang was also there, head resting on the bed.

How did those two end up together like this?

"Um..."

"Le, you're awake? Yay!"

Khun Phleng woke up first, hugging and kissing my cheeks three or four times. Khun Kwang gave her a jealous side-eye.

"How do you feel? Still hurt anywhere?"

"A little... What happened to me?"

"Your left arm is broken. You'll have to rely on your right arm for now. As for your leg... luckily, just heavy bruising, no major injury. Other than that, you've got quite a few bruises. You were out for two full days."

"Really?!"

"Waking up and speaking fluently like this makes me feel relieved. For the past two days watching over you, I had to talk with Khun Phleng only."

Khun Phleng, hearing that, rolled her eyes a little. I guessed that deep down, these two probably had a bit of a rivalry going on, huh?

"I want to go to the bathroom," I spoke up. Of course, both Khun Kwang and Khun Phleng rushed toward me immediately.

"Come on, we'll help support you."

"I'll do it myself."

"..."

"I'm a man. I can support better than a woman. What if you don't have enough strength and Le falls and hits her head again?"

Khun Kwang raised his eyebrows at Khun Phleng triumphantly. The tall woman turned to me as if to ask, "Aren't you going to say anything?" But I could only give a weak smile. The thing is, I really need to pee right now, Khun Phleng. My main goal at this moment is a toilet bowl. I'm sorry, darling.

"Ugh, the smell of love. Gross." Khun Kwang turned his face away in frustration upon seeing me holding hands with Khun Phleng after I came out of the bathroom. Honestly, I felt pretty uncomfortable too, sitting with Khun Phleng in front of Khun Kwang like this. The last time I met him, we talked about my relationship with Khun Phleng. I still remembered the tense tone in his voice.

"To be honest, I was shocked."

"You go rest, Phleng. I can take care of Le."

Hearing the other complain, Khun Phleng turned to dismiss him and came back to sit and rub my hand against her cheek playfully.

"Khun Kwang."

"Hmm?"

"I'm sorry if you felt bad." I said it with difficulty.

I looked at the clock in the room and saw it was already 10 p.m. Before I woke up, had these two had any rest at all? But chasing one of them home wouldn't be nice. Khun Phleng was my girlfriend. Khun Kwang was my boss. And both were kindly watching over me.

"I kind of understand now. Forget it." Khun Kwang sighed. Though he looked casual, he didn't leave. So I turned the topic to Khun Phleng instead. "And what about the police? What happened after?"

"Your father is safe, but he's already in jail. He'll have to fight in court a lot. But from any angle, he'll lose. He has so many charges." Khun Phleng started telling me. The police would likely come to interview me about the case later, probably after I get discharged from the hospital.

"Dad was the one who drove into me. I can't believe he'd go that far." Saying it made me feel pretty heartbroken. I understood that Dad was angry at being betrayed. But to go so far as to try to kill me with a car — isn't that too much?

Tears started to fall, and I quickly wiped them away because I didn't want the two of them to see. But it turned out both Khun Phleng and Khun Kwang were staring at me with sympathy in their eyes.

"Le still has me. I'm here now." Khun Phleng gently stroked my arm as comfort.

"Me too."

The tall woman glared at the handsome man sitting beside me, but Khun Kwang just shrugged, unbothered.

"You used to live in America, so you must be fluent in English. Want to switch jobs and become my secretary?"

"No! Working where she is now is just fine."

I hadn't even responded yet, and Khun Phleng already rejected the offer on my behalf. Probably afraid I'd get closer to Khun Kwang. "If Le switches to work directly with you, I'll make her quit."

"I won't let her quit." Khun Kwang raised his eyebrows in a teasing, annoying way at Khun Phleng, whose face darkened instantly. The two looked ready to start another round of fighting while I sat in the middle like a referee. So I quickly changed the subject.

"Khun Kwang knows everything about me?"

"At that time, for your safety, Khun Phleng had to tell me."

"And... will I still have my job?"

"Why would you think I'd fire you?"

"Well... I feel like I cause trouble. I'm a burden..."

"You still did your job assisting P'Vee just fine. Besides, this was an unavoidable situation. I won't fire you."

"And what about us... you and me, Khun Kwang?"

"Hmm?"

Apparently, Khun Phleng didn't like the phrasing I used and jumped in, but I sent her a look that said, "Now's not the time to overthink." So the tall girl pretended not to hear and let me talk things through with Khun Kwang first.

"Do you feel disgusted that I'm dating a woman?"

"Then date me instead."

"Khun Kwang! / Hey, you!"

Khun Kwang laughed, amused at my weary expression. Meanwhile, Khun Phleng was boiling mad like a green volcano. He seemed delighted to see her irritated.

"We're still friends, after all. If Le is happy dating someone, then I'm happy too." After saying that, Khun Kwang stood up and grabbed his suit jacket.

"I'd better leave before someone here slams my head into a wall."

"Thank you, Khun Kwang. I'll get back to work as soon as I can."

"Don't push yourself. Bye." Khun Kwang turned to say goodbye to Khun Phleng, who only nodded slightly in response.

"At first I thought he was all polite and proper. Turns out, he's just another annoying man." After Khun Kwang left, Khun Phleng started complaining and shot me a glare. "Why did you have to say 'us'? The 'us' should be me and you!" Then she pointed between herself and me, pouting.

So cute, my girlfriend.

"Sorry. I couldn't think of better words. If not, I wouldn't have been able to settle things with him."

"Ugh."

"Once I'm fully recovered, want to go food-hopping again?"

"No."

"Don't lie. I know you really want to go."

"I don't want to eat in that area anymore." Her cranky tone, clearly not joking anymore, made my heart sink. Was she really that upset about me talking to Khun Kwang?

"Then what do you want to eat or do?"

"I want to eat you."

"..."

"On the hospital bed."

Then Khun Phleng started unbuttoning her shirt slowly and gave me a creepy smile.

Should I press the nurse call button and have them drag my girlfriend out of here?

# Chapter 21: Office Room

"Mm..." I couldn't move much because of my injuries and was now being silenced by Phleng's warm lips. The tall woman pulled me into an embrace, but couldn't get too close because of my arm in a cast. We kissed for a long while, our tongues gently dancing together in longing.

We had been facing so much trouble lately that we hardly had time to be affectionate.

"This is a hospital," I reminded the person in front of me, who was now moving down to my neck, stirring me up inside.

"There's no one here right now. Just a little bit, please," Phleng whispered and bit softly at my exposed shoulder, which peeked out from the hospital gown that was slipping off more and more.

Everything was heating up, and I was starting to give in to her encouragement, but then—click—the sound of the door opening stopped us. We quickly broke apart. I hurried to adjust my gown to cover my neck properly, afraid the nurse might suspect anything, while Phleng sat pouting in disappointment over the interrupted moment.

That was really bad timing, Phleng.

The nurse came in to change my IV and check my wounds before leaving. We could've resumed, but it probably wasn't appropriate. I was still sore and couldn't handle too much. So Phleng just stayed and chatted with me until late at night, when we both drifted off to sleep together.

....

[Special Talk: Phlengphin]

Lermarn is going to be discharged from the hospital tomorrow. Today, I had tasks and work lined up all day, so I told her I'd visit in the evening once everything was wrapped up. She didn't mind and even suggested I just come see her tomorrow instead, to save the trouble of driving back and forth.

After what happened with her father, Lermarn seemed to grow up quite a bit. She started being more straightforward with me. Since she had to stay in the hospital for several days and I made time to be with her almost every day, we began to understand each other better, talk more, and share things the other deserved to know.

Lermarn apologized to me over and over for hiding the truth about Nara. But I no longer held that against her. From now on, I believe she'll make the right decisions, more mature ones.

It's tough growing up alone without anyone to guide or teach you how to live. I don't want to blame all of Lermarn's strange behaviors or her irrational moments during our fights solely on her. If she had a good role model or someone to guide her from the beginning, things wouldn't have turned out this way.

In truth, I didn't have that much work today. But I had one task I wanted to complete before telling Lermarn about it—because I was afraid she might worry if she knew beforehand.

I came to visit her father in prison.

After checking in with the guards and going through a body search, they led me to the visitation room. I waited for almost ten minutes before Lermarn's father, whom I knew by his English name, Mark, was brought in. He had bruises all over and looked exhausted. His right shoulder was bandaged, partially visible through the prison uniform.

When he saw me, he froze, staring awkwardly. That was expected—this man had caused more than enough chaos in our lives, directly and indirectly. Seeing Mark brought back a wave of anger in me, but I kept my composure. I couldn't lose control.

The room we met in was divided by a glass wall. There was no phone to speak through like in the movies. We had to raise our voices to talk to each other.

"Are you here to rub it in?" Mark glanced at me, defeated.

I crossed my arms and looked at him with pity. "Wouldn't be wrong to say so. I just wanted to see your face after not seeing it for five years."

"You little bitch," he muttered through gritted teeth.

"Word is, you're sentenced for life now. Weren't you supposed to get the death penalty at first?"

"Mind your own damn business! Where is Lermarn?!"

"Don't ask about her. She's no longer your daughter."

"That brat betrayed me! You're in on it too, aren't you?!" Mark lashed out until the guard behind him gave him a warning glance, and he calmed down.

"Yes. She didn't mean to tell me at first. But because you went too far and people couldn't stand it anymore, we had to take you down."

"If I ever get out of here, I'll make you pay. Watch your back! Tell that brat of mine too!"

"Oh, I'll definitely tell her. But you're never getting out to see the light of day."

"It's not that hard to get out."

Mark must still be deluded by the influence he once had—his connections, money, and fake power that he thought would last forever. It's time someone taught him what real pain feels like.

"You forget, you had money before. But now you don't. I do." I leaned in closer, letting him see the fury in my eyes. "And I have enough power to keep you rotting in here until you die."

"What can you do?"

His voice trembled. He must have some idea of what I'm capable of.

"Jared died because of you."

"..."

"Lermarn ended up in the hospital. She has nightmares every night. She got hurt—because of you."

"..."

"Not to mention all the innocent people—the drugged-up kids whose lives you destroyed."

Mark still didn't want to back down. Probably no one had dared confront him like this before, which is why he was now seething.

"Lermarn was your own daughter, yet you abandoned her. You're truly a despicable human being." I raised my voice even more, but since we already had to yell through the glass, no guards tried to stop me.

"You seem to know my daughter very well. What are you to her?" Mark smirked, curious. But I wasn't afraid. He could wonder all he wanted. I planned to reveal everything between me and Lermarn anyway.

"I love your daughter."

Mark's smirk vanished. He stared at me, stunned. I, on the other hand, was very pleased with his reaction.

"Shocking, huh? I couldn't believe we'd meet again like this either. But it's true."

"You... you..."

"I—LOVE—YOUR—DAUGHTER," I said slowly, clearly. "And you will

never hurt her again. I swear on that."

"You freak!" Mark screamed furiously.

In the end, the guards dragged him away for his violent outburst. He kept yelling and cursing until he was completely gone, his voice fading away with the distance.

That was exactly what I wanted.

Go ahead, lose your mind, Mark.

Choke on your rage and die with it.

You deserve every bit of what you did to the person I love.

[Special Talk: Phlengphin END]

...

Around 8 PM, Phleng came to visit me at the hospital. In truth, I actually wanted her to go rest instead, since I was going to be discharged tomorrow anyway. We'd be seeing each other soon enough. There was no need to meet every single day, especially when I knew how much work she had on her plate right now. She might get sick too. But she insisted stubbornly that she would come no matter what.

"Working?" Phleng dragged a chair to sit next to the bed and asked.

I had called P'Vee earlier to see if there was anything I could help with during this time. At first, my boss wouldn't allow it, but I kept insisting, so P'Vee finally agreed and assigned me some work I could do from here.

"Yes, I'm helping P'Vee with some tasks I can do from here."

"Today, I also went to visit your dad."

As soon as Phleng said that, my face fell instantly. I closed my laptop and placed it on the dining table nearby, then turned to speak with her directly.

"Why didn't you tell me first?"

"I thought you might worry if I told you beforehand, so I figured it'd be better to say it after I went."

"Well..." That reason completely shut me up.

"So what did you talk to my dad about?"

"I threatened him a little."

"Threatened?"

"Well, I didn't want to do it, but I had to let him know that if he tries anything shady again, someone will be watching him," Phleng said, then looked at me to gauge my reaction—whether I'd be upset or not.

"Are you mad at me for doing that?"

"No, not at all." I quickly shook my head to ease her worries. On the contrary, I actually agreed with what she did. "Someone has to teach my dad a lesson. I know it may not seem like a nice thing for me to say, but if we just let him be, he'll keep bringing trouble. A little intimidation might be a good thing."

"You're so sweet," Phleng leaned over the bedrail so she could get closer and kiss me more easily. I reached out with my good hand—the one not in a cast—to touch her slightly flushed cheek with love. Phleng kissed me, then pulled away, then kissed me again and again, as if she wanted to tease me until I couldn't handle it anymore.

"By the way..."

"Hm?"

"After this, can I go visit my dad?"

"...?" Phleng stopped kissing and looked into my eyes with confusion. "Why would you?"

"I'm not going to sit there crying and begging for love from him or anything. I just want to occasionally check if he's doing okay."

"..."

"He only has me left now, after all."

"You're way too kind," Phleng muttered shortly, her face tensing up at me. But it's true—anyone else would've turned their back on someone like my dad by now. He's caused so much trouble for others. But I'm not like that.

"I promise I'll only go once in a long while. But definitely not now. You just went and dropped a bomb on him. If I visit now, he'll probably just lash out at me again anyway." I tried reasoning with her and persuading her with all kinds of words. Eventually, Phleng sighed, clearly not pleased, but nodded anyway.

"Fine."

"Yay!"

I shouted and reflexively tried to raise both my hands, but I couldn't because of the cast. My girlfriend, who was watching my antics, narrowed her eyes suspiciously like she was scheming something.

"Looks like someone's getting pretty squirmy today."

"Well, it is getting better. Or do you want me to lie there looking like a corpse again?"

"Nooo. I was just thinking of something, that's all." She said that, then got up and went into the bathroom. I just watched her, confused, then looked down at my cast and wondered what she was up to.

....

Two months passed. My bones had started healing into place. In about a month, they'd no longer be an obstacle in my life. I'd been resting at the same condo the whole time—not moving anywhere. At first, Phleng tried to drag me to stay with her in the penthouse of her hotel, but I refused. My girlfriend was furious. But it's not like I was in that bad of a condition. I wanted to be as independent as possible. Still, I did stay over at her place sometimes. Or sometimes she'd drive over and sleep at my place. We both knew we missed each other if we stayed apart for too long.

Everything was beginning to settle into a new normal. I planned to visit my dad sometime next month. A new thing that completely caught me off guard was that P'Vee was about to resign! And the person stepping up as the new chief producer was... me.

While I was taking time off to heal, P'Vee had been considering a career change. Since I already knew the company's workflow and structure very well, she decided to pass the position on to me. She'd already talked it over with Khun Kwang. At first, I didn't feel ready, but when the opportunity presented itself, I knew I had to grab it. That also meant, though, that the moment my arm healed, the flood of work would hit me hard.

"How's your arm, Khun Lermarn?"

Khun Jean greeted me as I arrived at the door to Phleng's office. Today, we had a date planned—watching a DVD movie and eating popcorn in Phleng's room at night. It was our kind of low-key date, something we both loved. We didn't have to go out, and we still got to spend romantic time together. It was just as good as any fancy date.

"It's getting better. Is Phleng ready for me to go in?" I gestured toward the office door.

When Khun Jean nodded, I knocked on the door and walked in. Phleng was sitting at her desk writing something. When she saw me, she immediately stopped and came over.

"You can keep working. I'll wait on the sofa," I tried to push her back to her desk. I didn't want her to lose focus because of me.

"Nope, I've got something to show you." Phleng walked past me and whispered something to Khun Jean outside for a moment. Then she came back to help me put down my backpack on the sofa, took my hand, and led me to sit on her lap at her desk. She closed the work folder on her computer and opened up a video clip instead.

The video in question was a presentation clip showcasing the concept of a room, presumably a new type of room that was either still under construction or already completed—I wasn't sure. When I turned to look at Khun Phleng with a questioning expression, she simply raised her eyebrows at me and said nothing. So I didn't ask anything and turned back to watch the video.

It showed a completely redesigned style of room, with a natural jungle vibe —very tropical. The rooms were designed in three types: standard, VIP, and pool villa with a private pool. All were decorated to allow airflow from outside while maintaining privacy. At the same time, they carried an air of luxury and elegance. I noticed the background of the room was by the sea, so I guessed that these rooms would probably be used in the hotel branch by the beach.

The video played until the end, then faded to black before a message appeared:

**Welcome to Lermarn Space.**

I turned to look at Khun Phleng, surprised when I saw my name in it. She smiled and pressed a button to pause the video.

"We designed this room for Ler."

"W-What do you mean?" I asked, my voice trembling with emotion.

Khun Phleng chuckled softly and playfully ruffled my hair.

"The hotel we took over had really old and run-down rooms, so we had to tear them down and completely rebuild. I helped design them with the architect, and I decided I'd name the rooms there *Lermarn*."

She mumbled as her cheeks grew increasingly red. She must've been just as shy as I was—it must've taken her a lot to say something that sweet.

"Khun Phleng..." I turned and hugged her tightly. "Why are you so sweet? I feel unworthy of this."

"Why would you feel that way?"

"Because... I don't have anything good to offer. And this... this is..." I pointed at the video still playing on the computer screen. "I don't deserve this."

"Why not? *Lermarn* has a nice meaning. Using it for the room sounds lovely, don't you think?"

I couldn't argue with that. When I decided to change my name, I spent three whole days searching and checking dictionaries to find one that suited me.

"I'm not arguing with that... but you didn't have to go this far. I don't even know how to repay you."

"You *really* want to repay me, huh?"

Her warm gaze suddenly shifted into something teasing and sultry, and she pulled me into an even tighter embrace.

Did my girlfriend just go out to talk to the secretary just to have a chance to do this?

So cunning!

"But my arm is still not healed, you know."

"That's why we're doing this. All you have to do is just maintain your balance."

"Khun Pleng... mmm." The tall person popped their face out from behind and grabbed my face, kissing me passionately. The two hands that were behind reached under my shirt, while the other side pulled the shirt down from my shoulder in a daring manner.

"This is sexier than not wearing anything at all, right?"

My bra clasp was undone and it fell into my shirt that was loose. Then, cold hands began to caress my skin hungrily before slowly starting to unhook my pants.

"Every moment..."

I complied easily, and the person behind me pulled my pants down to my feet after unzipping and undoing the clasp.

"Khun Pleng, that's nice..." I accidentally moaned as the other person used their fingertips to pinch a weak spot near my chest. I tried hard to maintain my balance because, at this moment, I wanted to lean my face against the desk. But Khun Pleng pressed me to lean against her body behind me instead. One hand, now warming up, quickly moved down under my underwear.

"Ah... slow down a bit," I requested, feeling the rising temperature in my body along with her fingertips invading rapidly without waiting for me to adjust.

"Do you like it?"

"Yes... like it. Right there."

I gasped and kicked off the pants that were preventing me from spreading my legs wide. Once I cleared the way, Khun Pleng flicked her fingertips slowly as if teasing me.

"Go faster, don't slow down," I turned to command. Khun Pleng chuckled knowingly, as if she understood that I would be frustrated with this teasing. So much flair!

Everything began to speed up. I gripped the desk tightly with my nails in a surge of emotion. My hips and body moved rhythmically, no different from Khun Pleng's, until the climax began to approach. I stood up abruptly. Seeing me rise, Khun Pleng quickly followed suit while continuing to flick her fingers inside me and pressing me close against her body, caressing me persistently.

"Does it feel good?"

"Ah... more," I couldn't respond properly and reached out to grab a handful of her hair behind me desperately. I buried my face into her neck, drained of energy.

I tensed and shuddered strongly as I reached the peak, leaning back against Khun Pleng's shoulder. I wanted to scream but feared people outside would hear. My body trembled uncontrollably twice before being supported back into Khun Pleng's lap.

Now, I was sitting slumped against her neck with long arms wrapped around me to keep me from falling off the chair. My clothes were all disheveled; my pants weren't even on.

Damn it! Tonight we're supposed to watch a movie together in an atmosphere so conducive to... everything.

Will I survive this?

# Chapter 22: Mr. Kumpha

I felt like Khun Phleng was about to get back at me for making her help solve the problem with my dad earlier—on top of me having secrets from her. From now on, it's payback time, with interest, and I had no choice but to accept my fate.

After our first time together in the office, I quickly got dressed and went to sit on the sofa, curling my shoulders in while waiting for my girlfriend to finish her work. As for Khun Phleng, she kept sending me those lustful glances every five minutes. I had to solve that problem by lying down and covering myself with a blanket to hide from that burning gaze before my heart raced more than it already had. I never imagined my girlfriend would actually dare to seduce me right in the office like that.

From now on, I'll never look at Khun Phleng's desk the same way again. Damn it!

"Ler's going to take a shower first, okay?"

I told Khun Phleng, who was placing snacks and drinks in front of the TV.

"Make sure to get really clean, and smell good too."

"I always shower thoroughly, you know."

I teased back on purpose—of course I knew what she really meant. If she keeps messing around with me like that and I end up with a fractured bone again, there'll definitely be a problem, Phlengphin!

Will we even get to finish the DVD we bought?

...

Once we both finished showering, Khun Phleng played the movie we had bought on the giant TV screen. I wrapped myself in a blanket from the bedroom to keep warm from the air conditioner blowing down. The tall one then shifted over to sit right next to me on the sofa, wrapping a loose arm around me from behind. I only just noticed that the drink in her hand was a fruit juice mixed with alcohol.

"Khun Phleng, can you drink alcohol?"

I asked curiously, since I'd never seen my girlfriend drink anything alcoholic before. She usually just had coffee or caffeinated drinks mixed with hot milk in the morning.

"I have before, but I've got a low tolerance, so I try to avoid it."

"Aww, that means if I invite you to drink, it's a no-go then."

"I can drink. Last time you drank, you kissed me so hard my lips swelled up. If we drink again, there might be something even spicier."

She winked at me and took two big gulps from the bottle of fruit drink in her hand—then made a funny grimace. I remember drinks like that being sweet. Or did they change the flavor to something sour now?

"Nope, better not. I might end up doing something bad again."

"What do you mean by 'something bad'?"

"..."

"Am I imagining things, or is your face redder than before?"

I snatched the bottle my girlfriend was sipping from to look at the label.

It said it contained ten percent alcohol. But why is your face *that* red, Phleng?

"So... handsome,"

The tall girl pointed at the movie's lead actor on the TV with a body swaying unsteadily from side to side.

I leaned in to sniff the drink.

Sure enough, it had a faint alcoholic smell.

"Phleng, why is the smell this strong? It's like pure alcohol." I turned to ask suspiciously.

Phleng, whose eyes were starting to droop, pointed toward the kitchen counter.

I followed the direction she was pointing to and saw a premium imported liquor bottle standing proudly on the counter. Nearby was its box, opened and left there.

"We added that in,"

Phleng now pointed to the bottle in my hand instead. Her voice was slurred.

"Phleng, you're already a lightweight. Why did you add it?"

I cried out in shock and quickly tried to get the fruit-alcohol drink away from her.

But just as I leaned down to put the bottle on the floor behind the sofa, Phleng suddenly collapsed on top of me.

"Le..."

"Phleng! My arm's going to crack again if you're not careful!" I scolded her in panic.

It takes time for bones to heal, damn it. Here she goes being reckless again.

"I'm sorry..."

The tall girl looked downcast even though she was still lying on top of me on the huge sofa.

I realized I'd spoken a bit too loudly, so I gently stroked her cheek, guiding her to look up and meet my gaze.

"I was a bit loud. I'm sorry."

That was all I said.

Now the only sound in the room was the movie's soundtrack.

The two of us slowly leaned closer.

I couldn't deny it—Phleng, when she's tipsy like this, is really sexy.

Especially those beautiful eyes that were slightly drooping.

And in the end, we kissed. The most passionate kiss.

Phleng easily took off the oversized T-shirt she was wearing—which was mine.

The cool air from the AC, blowing right above us, made me arch my body toward her for warmth.

Her lips roamed across the upper part of my body, biting here and there, While her hands slowly pulled my panties off and tossed them to the floor. The light from the TV landed perfectly on my body, making me feel a little shy.

"I'm going to devour you, Le... as intensely as I can."

Phleng bit her own lip on purpose so I'd see,

Then lifted my hips and buried her face into my sensitive area without warning.

"Ah... Phleng!"

I scolded her again as she caught me off guard.

But while she kissed, sucked, and swirled her tongue passionately, I held onto her hair as if for dear life.

"Ha... hah..."

I came quickly because of her relentless assault.

Phleng moved up from between my legs to my face. I felt like all my shame had disappeared, Yet I still couldn't help but feel shy.

So I covered my face with my hands.

Phleng leaned down, brushing my hands aside with her face.

Her nose exhaled softly against my skin and neck, teasing me.

"Le, you're so beautiful..."

I turned my face away as she admired my body.

"You're not talking to me at all," She kissed me gently.

Her fingers started wandering across my body, touching mischievously. She lifted me up, placing me on her lap, straddling her.

"Still want me to eat you?"

"..."

I still didn't answer, just held onto her shoulders.

"If you don't answer, I'll sulk,"

Her tone got a little firmer,

Making me purse my lips and look her in the eyes—unable to resist her sexiness.

"If you want to eat, then eat."

And in the end, we didn't watch the movie at all.

It was just left playing in the background... Setting the mood.

...

The movie had auto-played twice. It was already past 2 a.m. After we went at it passionately and drained all our energy, we finally got up and put our clothes back on. Khun Phleng's face, which was red from the alcohol before, now turned flushed from exertion and sweat.

As for me, I avoided looking at her out of embarrassment over what we'd just done. Earlier, Khun Phleng didn't let me rest at all. And impressively, even while we were tangled up together, she still took care to be gentle with my left arm, making sure it didn't get worse or fractured further.

"Want some water?" The tall woman offered me a glass from the fridge after all the sweating we'd done.

"Thank you."

I gulped down the water eagerly, parched and worn out. Khun Phleng took the empty glass and put it away, then came right back to cuddle up next to me again.

"Look at you, all sweaty... but you still smell so good," she murmured as she buried her face in the crook of my neck, sniffing playfully.

"You have to walk back to your place tomorrow. Think you'll be able to make it?"

"..." I didn't respond, and Khun Phleng pulled back and looked into my face.

"Le..."

"Yes?"

"What do you think... about us moving in together?"

"..."

"Our relationship's already pretty clear, isn't it? Wouldn't it be easier if we lived together for real?"

"Would that really be a good idea?"

"Why do you think it wouldn't be?"

"I don't know... I just think some space between us can be good sometimes..."

"But you know we miss each other even after just a couple of days. Wouldn't it be nice to see each other every day?"

"Can I think about it a bit?"

"Don't you love me anymore?"

"That's not it at all!" I quickly replied. "It's just... I've always lived alone. I'm used to it. Suddenly moving in with you feels... well..."

"There's no reason not to!" she cut me off before I could finish.

"Please listen to me first..."

"..."

"And moving is a big deal. Even though I just live in a small condo, I'd like to think it through first."

I'm not wealthy. If I move in with her and we break up later, that's going to be a huge mess. Also, I really value my personal space. Even when I broke my arm, I insisted on staying in my own place rather than bothering her. So moving in together? I just need a little more time.

"I'll give you an answer later, okay?"

"Alright..." Khun Phleng looked a bit sulky. She turned and went to sit at the far end of the couch.

So I have to console her, huh?

Since I'm the one who made this awkward, I guess I should be the one to fix it.

"Darling..."

I walked over and sat on her lap, wrapping my good arm around her neck.

"Come on, don't pout like that..."

"I'm not pouting."

"Liar. You're so bad at hiding it." I laughed, amused at her sulky little act. I paused the movie with the remote, then pulled off my shirt again.

Her face tightened at the sight of my bare upper body, still tempting her. If she could resist now, that'd be impressive.

"Let's do it one more time..." I whispered into the CEO's ear, "This time with no interruptions at all."

And so I let her have her way with me again—maybe once, maybe twice— in exchange for making that pouty face disappear.

...

"Thanks, Le." P'Vee shut the car's trunk after we finished loading all her desk items into boxes and putting them in the back. Jay and I had been helping out. Today was P'Vee's last working day. Tomorrow, I'd be taking over her responsibilities completely. My arm was fully healed now, and I was back to work at 100%.

Honestly, the transition wasn't too huge. P'Vee and I had been taking turns handling tasks for a while anyway. But from now on, I'd be carrying more weight until a new assistant producer joins to help.

"Don't forget the farewell party tonight! It's gonna be flashy."

"Is the whole office going?"

"Of course! But we're also having an after-party—boys and girls separate. That's the real fun part."

"Why the separation? Can't we all just celebrate together?"

"Oh, we will! But there'll be special segments so everyone gets to enjoy their own kind of fun."

P'Vee said with a wink before walking back into the building. I was about to follow her when someone tapped my shoulder. I turned and saw Kwang, tall and charming, standing behind me.

"Hey, Le. Your arm's all better, right?"

"All better. Hehe."

"Mind if I ask you something? That assistant producer position you've been recruiting for—any applicants yet?"

"There've been a couple. But I haven't had time to interview anyone yet."

"I see... I have a favor to ask."

Kwang took me up to the floor where his and other departments' private offices were. He led me into a small guest room where a young man was already waiting. He was dressed casually in a student uniform. When he saw us, he stood up.

"This is Kumpha, my cousin. He's in his third year, communications major."

"Hi there," the young man said with a slight bow. Kumpha resembled Kwang a bit but had a softer, more delicate appearance, almost like a Chinese idol.

I smiled back politely and turned to Kwang, a bit confused.

"Kumpha needs a two-month internship. I was wondering if you could take him in—maybe as an assistant producer intern?"

"Oh... you mean to help with my position?" I hesitated. I was hoping to get a full-time staff member for that role. If I trained Kumpha, I'd just have to go through the whole process again with someone new once he left. Interns are only temporary, after all—not ideal.

"Could I talk to you privately, Kwang?"

"Sure." He looked pleased I was taking it seriously. We stepped outside for a moment. Once we were out of earshot, he sighed heavily.

"You don't want to take in my cousin, huh?"

"Umm..."

"No need to sugarcoat it. Honestly, I don't want to take him in either." Kwang rolled his eyes toward the guest room. "He's totally spoiled. His mom—my aunt—begged me to help. Kid doesn't even bother applying to other places. Lazy as hell. So now I'm stuck."

He looked really stressed out, and honestly, I kind of felt sorry for him.

"I'll take him," I said. "Just for two months."

"You sure? I don't want him to be a burden to you."

"It's okay. I can handle a little extra work. Consider it payback for all the help you gave me when I was in trouble."

I gave him an encouraging smile, and he looked relieved.

So in the end, Kumpha was brought into my office. I gave him an overview of the job and showed him the weekly schedule. I noticed he kept glancing at me strangely, but I didn't think too much of it. Maybe he was just nervous to work with a real producer. Who knows.

....

Today, the whole day at the office was filled with the atmosphere of saying goodbye to P'Vee—clearing up and sorting out the work she would be handing over to me. We also had our final casual chats with colleagues from other departments. Khun Kwang even allowed all of us office folks to leave half an hour earlier to throw a farewell party for P'Vee.

"Did you tell Khun Phleng that you're coming to the party with us?" P'Vee asked as she came over to my desk.

"I already told her. Why, P'Vee?" I couldn't help asking because her expression looked like something was off. But P'Vee didn't say anything and just walked away to chat with the others.

As she walked off to mingle, Kumpha came and blocked my path.

"You guys are going to a party today?"

"Yeah. That lady—she used to be our producer. Today is her last day, so we're throwing a farewell party."

"Then I'll come too."

"Huh!?"

I looked at him, confused, but Kumpha just raised an eyebrow at me.

"Why are you coming? Wouldn't it be awkward? You don't even know anyone there."

I shared my opinion while heading to the pantry to grab a drink. Kumpha followed close behind.

"But I know you, don't I?"

"..."

Why is this guy raising an eyebrow and smiling charmingly at me?

I call that smile a "charming smile" because Khun Phleng also likes to flash that same smile at me whenever she teases me and I start to get annoyed. The moment she smiles like that, I can't stay mad—it just evaporates.

"Come if you want." I shrugged. If he ends up uncomfortable, he'll probably just leave early on his own.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"Why?"

"Because I think I like you."

Preeed!

I was sipping my coffee and ended up choking on it, having to wipe my mouth with tissue and chase it down with water immediately.

"What did you just say?"

"I said I think I like you. Like, you're cute. You're beautiful."

And now I couldn't look at Kumpha the same way ever again. I call this guy "this brat" because I just can't deal with how irresponsible he is. I give him simple tasks to do, but he ends up working while scrolling Facebook. It takes him three hours to get it done. Jay, one of the senior staff, saw how careless he was and scolded him. But he just brushed it off like nothing. I even messaged Khun Kwang to report him. She only replied that I should just be patient, because there's not much he can do either.

So I messaged Khun Phleng to tell her that if we meet, I've got some serious venting to do! Then I quickly put my head down and got back to finishing my work.

...

"Alright! Let's celebrate!"

We're now in a giant karaoke room. The farewell party was attended by me, P'Jay, Ball, Kumpha, and nearly ten other male and female coworkers. It was the biggest gathering since I've started working here.

Kumpha kept looking at me non-stop, so I pretended he was invisible—not even worth acknowledging.

"Lermarn, my little demon heir!"

The atmosphere was cheerful and full of laughter. P'Vee topped up my soda and alcohol until it spilled over. Her red cheeks showed she was really drunk.

"P'Vee, are you drinking too much? Won't it be hard getting home?"

"My husband's picking me up, so let's go wild tonight!"

She then grabbed the mic, dancing and shaking her hips in front of the screen while singing along with another male coworker.

I had already decided not to drink too much tonight. Khun Phleng doesn't like it when I drink. Every time I do, something always happens. So tonight, I planned to keep it light.

When I glanced at Kumpha, I saw him being surrounded by older female coworkers, who were pouring him drinks and giggling flirtatiously. He may not be as handsome as Khun Kwang, but he has that "cute oppa" vibe that draws women in easily.

"Would Kumpha like to sing a solo?"

P'Vee, now barely standing, handed him the mic. He smiled and took it. Naturally, everyone cheered loudly when he got up.

"I want to dedicate this song to the girl who gave me love at first sight."

"Wowww / Woohooo!"

He said that and looked right at me with a grin he probably thought was his most charming.

Ugh. I feel sick...

*I wonder how many flowers you've had to grow up around*

*To own a smile as beautiful as this*

*You made me unable to love anyone else again*

*That moment when you met me, it made... it made...*

He sang "When You Smile" by Polycat while staring straight at me. My coworkers nudged me to smile back at him as the lyrics suggested, but nope —I just raised my drink and took a sip instead.

...

"Let's play a game!"

After over an hour of singing and dancing, P'Vee suggested a game, thanks to the alcohol. And that was the start of my headache.

"We'll draw lots for pairs. After that, play rock-paper-scissors three rounds. The loser of the first two rounds drinks. On the third round, the loser has to do whatever the winner says!"

I groaned in protest. Even if I win the first two, if I lose the third, I'm doomed. Who knows what weird command I'll get.

"Can the winner really order anything?" Kumpha asked with a mischievous grin.

"Anything at all," P'Vee replied cheerfully.

He smiled in satisfaction. I silently prayed not to be paired with him...

But of course, we often get what we don't want.

I got paired with Kumpha.

I was the only one in the room frowning. Kumpha was grinning ear to ear.

The rock-paper-scissors matches were full of laughter. The men who lost often had to take off clothing piece by piece until they were left in boxers. The women got prank punishments—lipstick scribbles, embarrassing truths, or heavy straight shots.

Then came our turn.

"Rock, paper, scissors!"

I threw rock. Kumpha threw paper.

"Damn it!" I swore and downed my drink as required.

"Rock, paper, scissors!"

I threw paper. Kumpha threw rock.

"Heh." That irresponsible brat didn't even care about losing. He just gulped down his drink like a champ. The room cheered.

Final round. The dangerous one. I gulped and braced myself.

"Rock, paper, scissors!"

Disaster... I threw scissors. He threw rock.

I lost.

Of course, the loser has no right to refuse. I glared at him with narrowed eyes as he thoughtfully stroked his chin.

Then he said,

"I want a kiss from you."

This little brat!

# Chapter 23: Our Couple Life

I was speechless at what Kumpha had just asked me to do. I looked over at Phi Vee for help, but my boss, who had lost a rock-paper-scissors match and got lipstick drawn around his eyes like a drunken panda, was already passed out on the sofa.

"Kiss! Kiss!" the other employees were loudly cheering me on. Phi Jay had gone to the bathroom ages ago and still hadn't returned—could've helped me a bit here.

"Can I do something else? I'm not okay with this," I said seriously. But Kumpha just shrugged indifferently.

"The loser has to follow the winner's command, right?"

"Just kiss him already, Le. I kissed Titong just now too," one of the male employees who is actually transgender said. Well, he's practically a woman anyway. That Titong person is also his close friend, so it's fine for them to kiss!

"A kiss on the cheek then, but near the mouth," Kumpha offered a new deal.

From my earlier uncomfortable expression, now I looked downright pissed. But people around kept cheering relentlessly.

Since no one knew I already had a girlfriend, they probably thought it wouldn't matter if I kissed Kumpha.

While I was about to refuse, suddenly one of our drunken coworkers pushed my head towards Kumpha's face. In the end, my lips barely brushed the corner of the VIP intern's mouth, and I quickly pulled away.

"What?! That was it? I didn't even feel anything!"

"You should be grateful you even got that much! I have a boyfriend, okay? Don't make me feel worse about you than I already do!" I shouted, making the room fall dead silent. Phi Vee, who heard my shout, even jolted awake.

"Who was it?! Who pushed Le's head just now?!"

"What, Le has a boyfriend? I had no idea."

"Yeah, me neither." The others all looked at me curiously. I shot a warning glare at Kumpha and scanned the room since one of them had pushed my head earlier.

"Let's keep playing the game. I already did what the winner wanted," I sighed in frustration and tried to signal everyone to stop staring. Maybe it was because I never told anyone explicitly—I only told Phi Vee, Phi Jay, and Khun Kwang about Phleng. Usually, at our office, when someone is in a relationship, it becomes common gossip.

Kumpha didn't look at me again, but he was clearly sulking and kept poking at his lips with his tongue.

Because I didn't want to ruin the party mood even further, after karaoke, we planned to go to an afterparty. I initially wanted to excuse myself and go rest, but I ended up tagging along with Phi Vee. Kumpha the Annoying got a call from his family to go home, so he had to part ways with us after we left the karaoke place.

I had no idea what kind of place we were going next. Khun Phleng started texting me, asking when I would be back since it was getting late. I replied that I didn't know, but I'd stay for just another hour before heading home—I was already exhausted from working all day.

"Is your boyfriend's name Robert, Le?"

"Wow, so he's a foreigner then? You've gotta introduce him to us sometime!"

"Heh..." I had been so busy lately that I hadn't gotten around to changing my boyfriend's LINE name to something cute and sweet instead of that cold "Robert."

Our car stopped in an area full of night entertainment venues and massage parlors. I was starting to feel uneasy. What was Phi Vee planning?

We walked into a tall building. The hallway was quite dark and creepy. I stuck close behind one of the female coworkers the entire way. Suddenly, Phi Jay and the other guys were led into one room, while we women were taken to another. Upon entering, I saw a medium-sized room with dining tables for eating and drinking. On the other side of the room—there was a stage with a... pole.

It wasn't what I thought, was it?

Before I could finish that thought, a group of men wearing only underwear burst out from behind the stage and started dancing seductively, swinging their bulging "little elephants" right in front of us. The other women screamed in delight, overwhelmed by the army of six-pack abs invading our room. I sat there blinking, mouth agape, and turned to Phi Vee, who was laughing gleefully at her surprise plan.

"Dance harder, sweeties! I'll tip you!"

"Phi Vee, where's Phi Jay?!"

"Oh, the guys are in another room with big-boobed girls."

So this was Phi Vee's big surprise. The men were with busty dancers in the next room, and we got to enjoy nearly naked male dancers.

If Phleng found out I was in a place like this, I'd be dead!

"Um... I'm feeling uncomfortable. I'll head back first," I whispered to Phi Vee.

"Hey, Le's leaving already! Let's take a selfie first!" Phi Vee announced and waved the dancers over to join us for the photo.

"I can't be in the picture, Phi Vee! Phleng will kill me!"

"Haha, it's fine!" Phi Vee, drunk out of her mind, ignored me. I tried to break free from her headlock, but one of the dancers came and hugged me.

I'm doomed!

One of the women extended the selfie stick to its full length and started posing.

"Come on, take a picture with us!"

"I can't!"

"Okay! One, two..."

After helplessly appearing in the shot, I rushed out of that half-nude dancer room and called a taxi back to my place. To prove my innocence, I quickly called Phleng to tell her I was heading home. "Back so late. What've you been up to?"

"Phi Vee took me to see half-naked men."

"..."

"Please don't be mad, Phleng. I'm begging you!"

"But I couldn't stand it, so I left early."

"Alright then," she sounded displeased, but at least I'd explained.

"So where are you now?"

"On the way home."

"I'm free tomorrow evening. There's a hotel buffet. Come eat with me."

"Okay! I'll bring clothes to sleep over too!"

"What'd you do before going to see half-naked men?"

I thought I was changing the subject already!

"Sang karaoke. Drank a bit."

"That all?"

"Yep."

I gave her that simple answer. I didn't tell her about that idiot Kumpha—no point starting drama.

....

"Irresponsible, loudmouth, a womanizer, flirty, utterly disgusting!" I stood yelling at Mr. Kumpha, to the wall in Khun Phleng's office in complete exasperation, after I told her all about Kumpha's behavior today. I turned with a furious look only to see my girlfriend wasn't even listening—she was still typing nonstop on her keyboard.

"You're not even listening!"

"Ah, sorry, sorry! I got caught up in typing. Come here." Khun Phleng closed her screen and opened her arms to receive me. As I walked toward her, she pulled me onto her lap.

"Calm down, little one." She gently massaged my temples, like she always did when I was stressed. So I leaned against her, completely drained—not physically, but emotionally, thanks to Kumpha.

"Do you want to eat something sweet or something special today?"

"I want to eat Thunder Dome," I said, referring to the giant set of ice cream cups from the hotel, which can hold six or seven scoops of various flavors, loaded with whipped cream, and topped with whatever you like. I'd seen foreign kids eating it in the dining area downstairs. Maybe something cold and sweet could help cool me down. "Right now."

"I'll get it for you." She reached for the phone and ordered the ice cream set directly from the head chef for me. Having a girlfriend who's the CEO of a hotel isn't so bad after all.

"Having a girlfriend who owns a hotel has its perks," I said after letting her finish some work. Then I led her to sit together on the couch, made her sit first, and straddled her lap.

"Of course. I'm beautiful. I'm rich. Everyone wants me."

"And kind too." Normally I'd roll my eyes at that, but she was so sweet today I let it slide.

"I even ordered you ice cream. Give me a reward."

"What do you want?"

"I want something sweet... like a kiss."

Then we kissed without needing to say another word. Khun Phleng pulled my hips to sit even closer on her lap, while I wrapped my arms around her neck. Her cool hands slipped under my shirt and started fiddling with the clasp of my bra.

"Let's go do it in the bedroom," I whispered.

"But I want to do it now."

She protested, nibbling gently on my neck and teasing around my ear, making my whole body stir.

"The ice cream is here! Oh my!" Khun Jean, who was carrying the tray of ice cream, opened the door and quickly shut it again in a panic.

"See? I told you we should go to the bedroom," I quickly got up and pulled away. Khun Phleng grumbled in frustration, left the room for a moment, then returned with my giant ice cream bowl.

"Where's Jean?"

"Nothing to worry about. Eat." She placed the dessert in front of me on the coffee table, still looking a little annoyed. I scooped a bite of whipped cream and whispered in her ear.

"I'll make it up to you tonight."

"You better."

"You're the worst!" I scolded playfully as she returned to her work, leaving me with the ice cream to soothe my frustration.

....

After dinner, we headed back to our room to rest. Khun Phleng went to shower first while I quietly continued working on my laptop. Once she finished, I quickly went in to shower too—I felt sticky and also wanted to cuddle before bed.

I even shampooed my hair to smell nice and feel relaxed.

When I came out, I saw Khun Phleng standing with her back to me, seemingly looking at something on her phone. I didn't think much of it— maybe she was reading something important. I walked up and hugged her from behind, only to realize she was holding my phone, and on the screen was a photo of me... with my mouth touching the corner of Kumpha's mouth.

Oh my god! Where did this picture come from?!

"What does this mean?" Khun Phleng turned around with a furious face. I quickly pulled away and blocked her path to explain.

"I can explain. Please listen to me." I was visibly panicked and grabbed her hands tightly.

She wouldn't look at me—her face red and shaking. She was furious.

I snatched my phone back to check where the picture came from.

It turned out it came from our office group chat. One of the seniors who went to the party last night had taken tons of photos—nearly twenty— including a close-up shot of a guy's crotch at the end.

"The notifications kept popping up, so I checked it," she said coldly, giving me goosebumps. "Explain!"

She snapped at me when I didn't speak fast enough.

"It was a game," I started explaining everything—how a drunk senior named Vee came up with the game, the rules, and why I didn't tell her about it last night. Khun Phleng listened silently, still obviously upset. This is something I love about her—she tries not to let jealousy override her reasoning. I could tell she was angry, but she still let me explain.

"Which bastard made you kneel and go find him?"

"I don't know. It was really dark."

"So in the end, you still kept it from me. Didn't you say no more secrets between us?"

"But it was just a silly thing! I already scolded Kumpha and I didn't really kiss him. Most importantly, I don't have any feelings for that kid. Please don't take it so seriously."

She said nothing and walked away. I watched her, feeling exhausted. In the end, she still didn't really understand me.

I realized then that we're not on the same page. Khun Phleng wants me to tell her everything, but to me, not every little thing matters. I didn't want to clutter her mind or upset her over trivial things that could lead to a fight. Maybe I really do need to change, or else this relationship won't last.

I wanted to talk to her again, but when I walked to her room, I found the door locked.

I looked down at my phone in frustration, also annoyed with the senior who shared the pictures. Even if I wasn't dating Khun Phleng, this kind of photo could still have serious consequences. What if Kumpha's parents saw it? I could be fired. Khun Kwang wouldn't be able to help me—he wasn't there and I didn't want him to find out either. Thankfully, he wasn't in the group chat.

I messaged the seniors, begging them to delete the pictures and told them I was in the middle of a serious fight with my girlfriend. They all apologized profusely.

"Khun Phleng," I knocked softly. Soon she opened the door, and I started apologizing immediately. "I understand now. From now on, no matter what, I'll tell you everything. Please don't be mad."

"Let's just go to bed. I'm tired," she lied and went to pick up the bag she'd left on the couch. Before the fight, she was talking about sexy time with me. Tired? Yeah, right.

"Come on, this mood sucks. I've already apologized."

"I said I'm tired!" she raised her voice, making me flinch. She walked to my room, grabbed her pillow, and I could tell she was planning to sleep in her own room.

"You're sleeping separately? I won't allow that! Sleep with me, please."

Sleeping in separate rooms already? If this were a married couple, that would be the first sign of divorce.

"I want to sleep in my room." She insisted. I tried to grab the pillow from her.

"If you really do that, I'll sleep right in front of your room!"

"Suit yourself."

Click!

She actually slammed the door in my face.

Ugh! Khun Phleng, how could you be so heartless?!

Still, to show my love and sincerity, I dragged my pillow and blanket to sleep right in front of her room.

The air-con in the living room was freezing. I turned it off, shut the lights, dragged the fan from my bedroom, and lay on the floor right there.

I looked like a servant sleeping outside a master's sickroom or something. I couldn't sleep easily—this wasn't a place meant for sleeping. There wasn't even a mat to lay under me. I played on my phone for a while, noticing the light still shining under her door. She hadn't gone to sleep yet.

About an hour later, I finally dozed off.

...

The floor is ridiculously hard. If it wasn't because I love her, I wouldn't be doing this. It's been two hours since I fell asleep, but I've woken up several times because of the discomfort. I'm starting to feel like maybe I'm doing something really stupid. It's not like Khun Phleng even realizes that I'm actually sleeping out here in front of her room like I said I would.

I got up to go to the bathroom. When I walked back, I saw Khun Phleng standing at the doorway with the door open. Her hair still looked neat, not like someone who had just woken up in the middle of the night. Look at me —my condition is like a mess. That means she hadn't actually gone to bed earlier either?

"What are you doing, Le?"

"Sleeping in front of the door, like I said I would." I pouted at her and pointed clearly to the blanket and pillow at my feet.

"So you've been out here the whole time?"

"Yes." I answered briefly and scratched my messy head. "I did it so you'd see that I really feel guilty."

"Doing something so stupid!"

"You can scold me however you want." I brushed her off and waited for her to go back into the room so I could keep sleeping.

"Come here." The tall woman grabbed the collar of my sleep shirt and pulled me into the bedroom, slamming the door shut behind us.

...

I was undressed by the taller woman until I was completely naked. Khun Phleng pushed me down onto the bed, then began to trail kisses all over my body down to my stomach. I didn't resist at all because the atmosphere was just too intoxicating.

Her lips nipped gently at my belly before she looked up and spoke in a tight tone.

"I'm still not over being angry, you know."

"I..."

"I told you to tell me everything, but you still won't. How stubborn can you be?"

It was the first time I'd ever heard Khun Phleng say "wah" (a somewhat manly/slangy way to end a sentence in Thai).

So manly. It made me fall in love even more.

But still, I lost all sense of thought when Khun Phleng took off all her own clothes. The two of us were completely naked in a room with the air conditioner set at 22 degrees.

Cold... I really needed some warmth.

Khun Phleng started kissing me again. Our lips moved fiercely against each other's, neither of us giving in.

Her cold hands caressed and claimed every inch of my body—biting, sucking, leaving red marks. So many that I could feel she was trying to mark me as hers as much as possible.

"You're not allowed to kiss anyone else. Not even touching the corner of someone's mouth."

"I... I know... more..."

I arched my back as she went deeper inside me.

"You belong to me and me alone."

We were both panting against each other as our bodies continued to move. I dug my nails into her back and gave a soft kiss to her sexy chin.

"You belong to me and me alone too, Khun Phleng."

# Chapter 24: Undercurrent

So many marks! Damn it!

I woke up in the morning with bruises all over my body, and Khun Phleng —who was supposed to be sleeping next to me—was nowhere to be found. Our clothes were scattered all over the room.

I could hear Khun Phleng's sweet voice from outside, like she was talking to someone. So I took that moment, being alone, to get my completely naked body out from under the blanket to find something to wear.

But before I could manage that, the tall woman opened the door to the room, and I had to jump back under the blanket again.

Khun Phleng saw what I had just done and let out a small smirk. She was wearing a navy blue bathrobe, her head and face still damp. She was holding a phone, which meant she had just finished showering and stepped out to answer a call.

"Why are you embarrassed? I've already seen everything," Khun Phleng said, sitting down beside me on the bed and fixing the pillows that had been tossed around.

"I'm still embarrassed anyway," I muttered. "Why didn't you wake me up when you got up? What time is it now?"

"It's ten o'clock. Well, it's Saturday, and you were sleeping like a rock. I didn't want to wake you."

"Khun Phleng, honestly..." I gave in to her reasoning completely and picked up a pillow to lightly smack her. "Weren't you a little too rough last night? Look at my condition. I can't wear any wide-neck shirts now."

I stretched my neck to show her the evidence of her deeds. There were marks on my neck, collarbone, even my shoulder. I'd have to cover them up with foundation and couldn't wear scoop-neck or wide-collar shirts for a while.

"If I went easy on you, how could that be called punishment?"

Her retort made my face heat up.

"And I'm still not over being mad."

"Oh come on, still?"

"Can't help it. I'll only stop being mad when you change that particular behavior."

What Khun Phleng was asking for made me sigh. But since we were sitting and talking like this, I decided to explain my own perspective to her.

"Khun Phleng, if I told you everything—every little thing—it'd become something annoying in your life."

"So you can't do what I asked, huh?"

"No, it's not that. I just wanted to explain my side of things to you."

"Why do you care if it becomes annoying? I'm the one who asked you to tell me everything. I have to take responsibility for what I asked, right?" "..."

"I want my partner to tell me everything. That's all. Even if it's annoying, even if it's something trivial or irritating—it doesn't matter. I just don't want us to have secrets between us. That's really all."

I was starting to understand her a little better...

Maybe I had overthought things.

"I just want to be closer to you, that's all. If we keep secrets from each other, how can we be friends in everything?" Khun Phleng asked. Her kind and gentle words made me feel guilty for my own thoughts.

"I'll try, okay? I promise." I finally said. Khun Phleng smiled softly, pleased that I finally gave a reasonable answer—not like the emotional apology from the night before.

"Oh, and I have something sudden to tell you."

"Huh?!"

"This evening, I have to fly to America."

"What?!" I shouted, and Khun Phleng's face immediately fell.

"Why? Why so suddenly?"

"I have to go meet an executive. Andy, the chairman of MD Department Store in America—he was once interested in doing business with us. We talked a long time ago, but neither of us ever had the time. Then, just now while you were still asleep, he suddenly called me. We finally had a chance to talk. He's free the day after tomorrow, so I want to go discuss things with him. That's why I have to fly out." "How long will you be gone?"

"Maybe two weeks or more."

"Two weeks?!"

"We can still video call, can't we?" Khun Phleng got flustered when she saw how displeased I looked. "I mean, after the talk with Andy, I have to attend the gala for signing a new industry contract with his department store chain. And I might need to stay a bit longer to wrap up more work."

"Ugh..." I looked into her eyes, clearly unhappy. But since it was work, I couldn't really say anything.

"But... I can go, right?"

I frowned in confusion and turned to look at her for asking such an ambiguous question.

"How could I possibly stop you? It's work, right?" I replied, puzzled. Khun Phleng looked kind of scared of me—maybe she was just being considerate.

"Well, I'll go pack my stuff then," she said before walking out of the room, leaving me to sigh alone.

I got up, picked up the clothes from the floor and put them on, then quietly went to shower. When I came out, I sat and checked some work stuff on my phone. There were still documents that Phi Vee left for me to finish, and they weren't quite done yet. And there was also the budget for a new client that I hadn't wrapped up either.

Maybe I should just head into the office and get some work done...

Once I was dressed in a simple casual outfit, I stepped out of the bedroom and saw Khun Phleng already dressed, busily packing her suitcase in the closet room.

"I'm heading back now," I said, knocking on the wall to get her attention.

"Huh? Where are you going? Stay a little longer. I'm not flying until this evening," she said, leaving her suitcase and walking over to me.

"I'm thinking of working at the office for a bit. Now that I'm a lead producer, the workload is heavier too," I mumbled my reply. "You're mad because I suddenly have to fly to America, right?"

Well... I didn't like it much.

"It's work. I won't stop you, Khun Phleng. What time is your flight?"

"Boarding's around 6:30 PM."

"Then I'll call you before you board, okay?" I forced a smile so she wouldn't worry.

Truth is, I really hated the idea of being apart when we still hadn't fully resolved everything between us.

...

And then Khun Phleng flew off to America.

I had just gotten off the phone with her after she entered the gate to board the plane. Khun Jean went too. When I came down from the hotel this morning, I ran into her, and she told me that her girlfriend had been whining, not wanting her to go either. Same situation as mine—totally in sync.

It would be a while before I could contact Khun Phleng again, since the flight to America isn't short. So the next morning, I went to the place I had planned to visit all along.

To visit my father...

The moment he was brought into the visiting room by the guards, I was shocked by how he looked.

He had gotten a lot thinner. He used to be average—neither fat nor skinny —but now I could clearly see his sunken cheeks. He looked frail, not healthy like before.

When he saw me, he sat down on the other side of the thick glass pane. I smiled as a greeting, but his face remained expressionless.

"Hey, Dad."

"..."

"Say something to me. I came all the way to visit you."

He moved his lips as if he was about to say something, so I pretended to cup my ear to show that I was listening, trying to encourage him to open up.

"Why did you come?"

"Just to visit. My arm just healed. I was recovering before, so I couldn't come."

"I see."

"Are you okay, Dad?"

"No," he said clearly, then slowly raised his head to look at me directly.

"This place is hell. A living hell... I'm going to die here for sure."

"Come on now." I tried to comfort him as he started sobbing heavily. I was shocked, because I never expected to see my father crying like that. He had always been a harsh and rude man.

"You came to rub it in my face, didn't you, Nara?"

"I did not! I just came to visit," I replied, feeling a bit hurt.

"These scumbags in here... they beat me up. I haven't been able to sleep for many nights—months even." He looked like he had been holding it in for a long time. I had to find some way to get him to open up and feel more comfortable around me.

"Why don't you tell me what it's like in here? The good stuff or the bad— anything. Just talk to me, Dad." I leaned in a bit closer to the glass, trying to show him how sincerely I wanted to hear.

"Why would you want to know?" he shot back, but I could see a flicker of joy in his eyes—joy that someone actually cared. Even someone like him. "Come on, just talk to me. There's nothing else to chat about. Tell me." And then Dad began to tell me about his life in prison. At first, his tone was dull and hesitant, like he was unsure about talking to me. But as I started responding, asking things here and there, he gradually got more lively.

"So you really are dating that... um, Khun Phleng?" After the prison talk, it was my turn, and this was probably the bombshell Khun Phleng had dropped during her last visit to him.

"If I say yes, are you going to yell at me like always?" I raised an eyebrow smugly, since Dad was surrounded by stern-looking guards. If he started getting aggressive, it wouldn't look good.

"Can I even yell? Look around, Nara." He raised his finger and twirled it around, gesturing at the room. "So? Yes or no?"

"Yes. We've been together for quite a while now."

"Heh! Must be nice. She's loaded."

"I'm not dating her for the money, Dad," I said firmly, locking eyes with him. "I love her. I've loved her for a long time."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever. You can date whoever you want. It's weird, but whatever." He forced a smile and brushed off my sappy words.

"Visiting time's up."

I looked at my watch, and one of the guards behind him nodded, giving me the signal.

"Could you visit more often?" Dad looked up at me as I stood, his eyes full of longing and hope. I looked back, torn, but I had to stay strong.

It took a lot of sacrifice for me to finally have a peaceful and happy life. I can't just do whatever I want anymore.

"I know I've been horrible to you. Ever since you were little, I never took care of you properly. But I think I've started to realize things now. I want you to come visit more often."

"..."

"Can you?"

"I promised Khun Phleng I'd only come occasionally," I answered. His face darkened, just like I'd expected.

"Khun Phleng has sacrificed a lot for me—taking care of me, protecting me when I had no one. I can't be selfish like before. I have to keep my promise."

Hearing that, Dad lowered his head. No yelling. No shouting—unlike what I expected.

"I understand."

"But if I talk to her again and she agrees to let me come more often, I'll try," I added, not too harsh, but not too soft either. He still had that edge to him, still tense. I couldn't let my guard down with him just yet.

And finally, the day came when I'd get to see my beloved girlfriend on TV. The gala event for the signing Khun Phleng had mentioned was being broadcast live. Before this, we only managed to video call on some nights when we were free. But this time, I'd get to spy on her all on my own. Hehe. I should snap some pics and tease her with them later.

Khun Phleng, in a sleek silver strapless dress that ended just above the knees, strutted through the event. Even though I'd seen her dressed up beautifully countless times, I still couldn't help but gape at how stunning she looked. On TV, you could clearly see all the male businessmen and photographers turning their heads to follow her.

Back off, people. That's my girl!

But then everything that had me smiling came crashing down.

Out of nowhere, a man with European features, ridiculously handsome and clearly older than Khun Phleng, walked up and offered his arm for her to take.

And she actually took it!

He leaned in and smiled sweetly, right next to her flawless cheek, before the two of them giggled and posed for photos. He gently rubbed her hand—the one looped through his arm. Was he trying to calm her nerves or just getting touchy in a sneaky way?

Who are you, you damn foreigner?!

...

During the entire two-hour live broadcast, I sat frozen in front of the TV, my mouth sore and my hand tightly gripping the remote. If it had been something soft or just a piece of paper, it would have been crushed in my grip by now. That man stuck to taking care of Khun Phleng throughout the event—putting his arm around her, chatting and giggling together on camera. The way he looked at my girlfriend was too deep and intense for people who just met to look at each other like that. Khun Phleng didn't hold back either. At times, she casually leaned her hand on that guy's broad shoulder in a cheerful and very public manner.

Until the event ended—or at least, I think it ended. I wasn't sure if it really did, since once the signing ceremony on stage was over, the television station cut the broadcast. But the actual event probably didn't wrap up that quickly.

Who is that guy, and why is he that close to Khun Phleng?

The last time we video-called each other was three nights ago. She didn't say a single word about having an escort for the event—or about any man showing up at all.

I waited anxiously for another two hours. Two hours full of assumptions and guesses that the event was probably over. Calling her now would just seem desperate and rude. So I might as well just wait.

I waited until I dozed off on the couch, only to be startled awake five hours later by a phone call.

"Hey, sorry. I didn't check my phone at all. I was just talking with a bunch of the big shots."

"And where are you now?"

I tried to keep my tone calm and not lash out in any way. I didn't want to sound like a jealous fool, even though I was screaming inside.

"Just got back to my room at the hotel. I'm about to go shower."

"Really? You looked so beautiful today. I was stunned watching you."

"You watched the live broadcast?" Her voice faltered for a moment like she suddenly got worried about something.

"Yes. You told me about it during our last video call. I missed you, so of course I had to watch."

"I completely forgot I mentioned it."

"That's okay. So... can I ask you something?"

"Mhm."

Her voice was softer now. Was she hiding something?

"Who was the guy you were escorting at the event?"

Then she went quiet, refusing to answer. That's okay. I could give her time to come up with a good answer. But that also meant the answer probably wasn't going to be 100% honest.

"His name is Sean... he's a chef at a five-star hotel around Washington. He used to work in Thailand too."

"I see."

I answered shortly, unsure of what else to say.

"Before the actual event, some VIP guests were randomly paired up to walk in together for media photos. I happened to draw Sean, so we had to go in together. Were you... jealous?"

"Just... a little curious." I didn't want to say I was super jealous—it didn't sound good. But if you asked how I really felt, yes... I was jealous. "You looked really close to him. Did you know each other before?"

"Yeah... sort of."

"I see."

"Actually, he's my ex."

At that moment, it felt like someone splashed boiling water straight into my face.

"Remember when I told you I used to date someone after I came back to Thailand? That someone was Sean."

"Oh..." I could hear my own voice trembling slightly.

My girlfriend just went to an event... escorted by her ex-boyfriend.

"But I don't feel anything for him anymore. Actually, I never even really loved him. You don't have to worry about me getting back together with him."

She probably noticed how quiet I had gotten and rushed to explain. Honestly, I was a bit concerned about old flames rekindling. But I trusted her quite a lot. What really bothered me was their behavior at the event.

"I'm not worried about you getting back together. I'm worried about how close you were acting with him."

"..."

"You can't say I don't understand American culture. I've lived there too. But was it really necessary to be that physically close?"

My tone was slightly accusing. Since we agreed to be open with each other, I wanted to share exactly how I felt.

"It was just the vibe of the event. Sean's naturally playful—he likes whispering and joking. I wasn't thinking anything of it."

"You and Sean might not think much of it, but I didn't feel comfortable."

"Don't overthink it."

"..."

"It was just an event. He was my escort. If I'd acted cold toward him, that wouldn't have looked good either."

"You should have been more mindful. You didn't like it when Khun Kwang kissed me. You should keep your distance too."

"..." She fell silent when I threw her own logic back at her.

"I'll be more careful next time."

"Honestly, at first, I was only worried about the physical touch. But once you told me he's your ex... I can't just be worried about that one thing anymore."

"..."

"You should've seen how he looked at you at the event. It was very intense."

"I wouldn't know. I was watching the MCs on stage. I didn't look him in the eye."

"I just letting you know. It's really late over there. You should get some rest."

"Okay..."

I felt a pang in my chest that she didn't try to stop me from hanging up or ask me to keep talking. But it was super late over there, and she must've been exhausted from having to smile and hold her poise all night. I didn't want to bother her more.

Even though I wasn't feeling at ease at all after this conversation.

# Chapter 25: Paranoia

"You've been drinking coffee a lot lately," Khun Kwang remarked as he walked over to make hot water in the office kitchen and saw me scooping instant coffee into my cup for the third time that day. "I remember you're not really into caffeine."

"Yeah, I'm not hooked, but I guess I have to be now."

I shrugged helplessly at Khun Kwang. Work was hectic, my relationship problems hadn't cleared up, and my girlfriend was on the other side of the world. If my health were to deteriorate again, it would probably be this time.

"Is something bothering you?"

"Just a little. I had a fight with Khun Phleng."

"About?"

Since Khun Kwang had known about our relationship for a long time and I was quite close with him, I decided to tell him what had happened. By the time I finished telling the story, tears were starting to well up at the corners of my eyes. It had been nearly three days now since Phleng and I last talked.

"Don't break up."

"What?!" I was caught off guard by the sentence Khun Kwang suddenly blurted out.

"Time will prove whether your love with Phleng is strong enough. I want you to stay strong."

"I'm trying, but this is the first time we've been apart for this long. And then there's that ex-boyfriend of hers. I can't just sit still and not feel anything."

"I understand. But this is exactly the kind of moment that lets us show our value as a partner. Phleng will probably love you even more if you help her focus and work smoothly."

"I'm not whining at her or anything, Khun Kwang. I just don't feel comfortable seeing her all touchy-feely with her ex. Someone as beautiful as Phleng... Who knows, maybe that guy wants to get back together with her." I grumbled helplessly.

"Well, don't overthink it. You've been with her for a while now. You should know her well enough."

"A while, but not that long."

"That's true, but I mean in terms of trust."

"..."

"I know you're worried deep down, but try trusting her this once."

"I do trust Phleng."

"Then don't bring up anything that might stress her out right now. She's probably really busy with work. Sometimes when we run into people from our past, we might slip up a bit."

"Yeah, I forgot about that."

"First loves are like this—stumbling a bit more than usual."

"Really? Do first-time lovers always go through this?" I asked naively.

"It's like a new experience. You haven't done it before, so you have to try, make mistakes, argue a bit. Eventually, you'll figure out how to make each other feel at ease."

Khun Kwang's advice helped calm me down a bit. Sure, I had known Phleng for a long time, but looking closely, since we started dating, we hadn't really studied each other's personalities that deeply. There were still lots of things we needed to adjust to.

I wanted to call her, but when I checked the time difference between Thailand and America, I figured my girlfriend must be fast asleep by now.

...

"Fought with your girlfriend?" I had barely walked back into the office when I ran into Kumpha.

"Where'd you hear that?"

"I was heading to the bathroom just now and overheard you talking with Khun Kwang."

"How rude."

"What's rude? You're the ones talking out in the open."

Should I just sign the university form to fail this intern for good? Might not be a bad idea...

"So where's your girlfriend? Let me see what she looks like. Is she as handsome as me? Come on, come on."

"You done with the assignment I gave you?" I changed the subject and held out my hand to demand the VIP intern's report. Kumpha sighed as I deflected the topic again and turned to grab the thick stack of papers to place in my hand.

"Good. I'll go through it now."

"Well then, what about your girlfriend? Where is she?"

"Can you not butt in? This is work time. Don't you know how to separate things?"

"Or maybe you don't have a girlfriend in the first place. I'm still single, you know. If you dated me, I promise I'd tell my mommy to give you a special bonus—just for you."

He tried to whisper, but I could hear clearly what was on his mind. So I smacked him on the head with the thick stack of paper in my hand.

"Don't insult me like that. You and I aren't even close. Stop pestering me, will you?"

"Fine, go ahead and scold me. I'll tell my mommy! Want to get fired? Be my guest!"

"Go ahead and tell her. I'll also send a report to your university about your behavior. Don't expect to pass your internship!"

Kumpha and I stared each other down, neither willing to back down. Around us, Jay and others in the office were peeking nervously from their desks. Not many people here dared confront or scold Kumpha, because he was the owner's son. At first, I thought like that too, but with the way he disrespected me and tried to use money to lure me—I wasn't going to be nice anymore.

"I'm not giving up."

"That's your problem."

"I really like you, you know. You should feel honored."

I rolled my eyes at his self-obsession, but in the end, the troublesome intern backed off and returned to his desk. I gave him a warning look before turning back to focus on my work.

...

I had to fight with my own girlfriend, and now I have to do an elephant duel with a child — the other company owner? I'm exhausted! As soon as I got to my room, I flopped down on the bed, completely worn out. But lying down was pointless, because although my body was tired from the trip back to the room, my mind and eyelids were wide open, ready to absorb everything — thanks to all that coffee. If I wasn't awake now, that would be unbelievable.

I turned on the TV in the living room to liven up the atmosphere a bit, then went to check the fridge to see if there was anything I could whip up for dinner.

While I was making a simple clear tom yum soup, I heard the host of some show introducing a special guest.

"Please welcome Mr. Sean, former top chef of Hotel C!"

Was it the same Sean — my arch-rival in love? I stepped away from the stove to glance at the TV.

It was him! That sharp handsome face — unmistakable.

Just seeing his face annoyed me! Switching to cartoons would be more uplifting.

I went to grab the remote to change the channel, but I paused when the host's first question wasn't about food, but instead...

"Many people are interested in you because you're the only young handsome chef who's ranked among the hottest guys of the year in several Thai magazines. So the question everyone wants to know is about your love life!"

So we're not talking food now, but love life?

I tossed the remote onto the sofa and went to turn the stove down, while secretly eavesdropping on Sean's conversation. If he's talking about his love life, Khun Phleng will definitely come up!

"Yes, I'm currently single, no one special," Sean replied with a smooth smile.

"You said currently? So that means you've had a girlfriend before, right?" "Yes, we dated about a year or two ago. She was the most important person to me."

Now this is getting interesting. Sounds like she left quite an impression on him.

"Not really," he replied. "There was nothing flashy about the memories between us. She was simple, didn't like parties, preferred peace and quiet. We broke up because I kept asking her to do too much."

Simple, didn't like parties, enjoyed quiet... Who else could it be but Phleng?

"That's unfortunate."

"At first, I didn't regret breaking up at all. But not long after, I realized I'd lost something really good."

"So you still think about her?"

"You could say that. Even now, I still think of her. If I could go back in time to before we broke up, I'd try harder to adjust to her, not demand so much."

He looked genuinely regretful while giving the interview. Hmph! Of course you'd regret it. Where else are you going to find someone beautiful, tall, warm, and nurturing like her, Sean?

"So if it were possible, would you want to get back together with her?"

Sean didn't answer right away. He looked pensive, exuding charm. Others might be swooning, but as his love rival — it was infuriating!

"Yes. If I could, I'd want her back."

Oh, crap...

...

[Special Talk: Phlengphin]

Headache! Headache!

My flight back to see my girlfriend — I mean, back to Thailand — was originally scheduled for two days ago. But because of unresolved issues with the hotel I took over, I still haven't been able to return.

The misunderstanding between me and Lermarn still hasn't been cleared up. By now, the little one is probably sulking and feeling terrible.

I didn't expect to be randomly paired to walk the red carpet with my exboyfriend either. I still remember Sean's beaming face that night. He kept whispering to me that he missed me, even though he treated me so badly when we dated — always demanding this and that, trying to turn me into some flashy socialite he liked.

I have no excuse for what happened that night with Lermarn because I know I messed up. But there's one thing I haven't told her. The night she called asking about Sean, I was exhausted — especially from wearing that tight strapless dress I hated. It was suffocating. When I got back to my room to rest, she called again. I was thrown off.

I drank...

I drank before attending the event because Sean had hurt me deeply in the past. Deep enough that I might manage to look at him now, but pretending to smile all night would be impossible. There were also important business people at the event I had to interact with. Seeing Sean would've definitely ruined my mood. Worse, if I had snapped at him publicly, it would've looked bad.

Jeen, who knew the situation, suggested I have a drink before going — just enough to mellow me out.

And it really worked. Sean and I ended up sticking together like glue. Anyone watching would've thought we were a couple. Once Sean saw how close I was acting with him, like we had no past issues, he kept pushing — calling, asking me out, everything.

So annoying!

"Miss Phleng?" Jeen, who was staying in the room next to mine, peeked in nervously. It was already 10 p.m. What now!?

I had just cleared some work so I could finally call Lermarn.

"Yes?"

"Sean is here to see you."

"Oh no, nope, tell him no."

"That might be hard now... He's already waiting in the hotel's guest lounge."

"...."

In the end, I had to change from my pajamas into casual clothes and go down to see Sean. He was already waiting. When I opened the private lounge door — there was my ex-boyfriend.

"Hey, Phleng."

"It's late. I need to rest."

"I know. But I missed you."

"That's your problem. I'm really tired." I turned away, clearly annoyed by his usual flirty behavior.

"Want to go out for a drink? I know a good place."

"What do you want from me, Sean?" I asked bluntly, already exhausted. Seeing that I wasn't interested, Sean finally got to the point.

"I want another chance."

"I can't give you that."

"You know what I mean, right?"

"Sean... was there ever anything else between us?"

Right then, my phone buzzed. It was a message from Lermarn saying she'd be free to talk in an hour.

I accidentally smiled — completely forgetting Sean was standing right there.

"What are you smiling at? Who messaged you? Your new boyfriend?"

"Go home, Sean. I'm heading back to Thailand soon anyway."

"What about us? That night we walked the red carpet — you looked happy to be with me." Sean's tone was almost hurt, which made me laugh. Just one drink and two people totally misunderstood me!

"If we still have feelings for each other, I want to try again," he said, looking serious.

"That's nice, Sean. But I already have someone new."

I said it straight. Sean stared at me for a moment before forcing a bitter smile.

"Really?"

"Yes. We've been together a while. I love her a lot. I don't want to hurt her."

"Wow," Sean chuckled. "You never talked like that when we were dating."

"Because I didn't love you."

Sean looked stunned by my blunt rejection. But it had to be done, or he'd keep chasing me.

"You pressured me so much back then. I felt suffocated. That image still lingers. I can't go back to you."

"But I've changed. I know I messed up trying to change you. I realize that now. Can we try again?"

Before we could continue, Lermarn texted again. But before I could read it, Sean interrupted.

"Another message from your 'boyfriend'?"

"Want to see it?"

"Sure."

I teased — but Sean actually grabbed my phone and read it!

"Give it back!"

"I'll be waiting, just let me know when you can call." Sean read Lermarn's message word by word. He peeked at me, then scrolled to the previous message. "Sure! I only have a meeting today, so I should be free in about an hour."

"Give it back already!" I snatched the phone, not wanting him to see more.

"Your 'boyfriend' is really cutesy — saying 'ka' and everything."

"Uh..."

Of course I say 'ka.' I am a woman...

"His name's Bruce? So he's a foreigner like me?"

"..."

"Got any photos? I want to see if he's as buff as I am."

Just Bruce's arm is thicker than both of your legs, Sean...

Thanks to the name Bruce, I finally managed to shake Sean off. We agreed to just be friends. Sean even asked to see a picture of Bruce, but I quickly claimed I didn't like taking photos with my partner. But if he really saw Bruce... he'd be looking at a beautiful, fair-skinned woman with long black hair instead.

[Special Talk: Phloengphin END]

...

"Is that so? So you've already cleared things up, then."

I let out a long sigh after talking on the phone with Khun Phleng, and she told me that Sean had asked to get back together and she had turned him down. She also explained that she was drunk before entering the gala event.

Last night I was still worried about Sean's interview on TV. But the next day, Khun Phleng called me to clear things up. I feel so much better now. Yay!

"Feeling better now?"

"Yes, it's good now. Since we cleared things up, I'm okay again."

"I'm sorry I didn't explain things properly that night at the gala. I was exhausted. I've never been to such a huge party before. You understand me, right?"

"I do. Especially because you're someone who likes to stay quiet. Being in the middle of a huge crowd like that—if it were me, I wouldn't feel comfortable either."

"Were you really that scared that I'd fall for someone else?"

"Of course I was."

"Why though? Don't you trust me?" Her tone was playful, not too serious. "You're the only one for me, always. Don't be afraid."

"It's natural to be afraid. Don't forget— many things have changed, okay?" "..."

"Your looks, your career, your status—all of them are different now. Most importantly, you're no longer the person who used to just stay home five years ago." I started explaining the thoughts I'd been keeping to myself for a long time—that dating someone like Khun Phleng, who had so many differences from me, made this relationship hard to maintain.

"Before, you stayed home, had just Jared, the housekeeper, and me. If we'd dated back then, I wouldn't have worried. But now, you see the world. You meet people every day—people who are nice, wealthy, good-looking. Or people who are way smarter than me. Sometimes I can't help but think, what if you really do meet someone better than me and fall for them? I'd have no choice but to accept it."

"..."

"Look at Sean. He's good-looking and socially prominent. Maybe you two weren't compatible before, but now you're in the same social circles because of work. Maybe your personalities have changed too. It's possible that if you two met again now, things might actually work out between you."

"..."

"That's all. That's what makes me worry."

"Why do you have to think for me like that?"

"..."

"Why do you have to think so far ahead? Can't we just live in the present— just be in this relationship as it is now?" Her voice had grown tense, and it made me feel worse.

"I was just trying to explain how I feel. I never planned to break up with you."

"Neither do I! So stop worrying about stupid stuff like me having someone else. Even if I meet a thousand more people, super handsome guys, or sexy girls by the millions—I'm still with you!" Her voice was sharp, but her words were so sweet they made me blush.

"Okay, I get it."

"Stop overthinking already. If you keep it up, I'll really drag you to go meditate with the nuns."

"Nooo, please no! I hate meditating. It's so uncomfortable!"

"Hmph."

"Are you sulking at me, Khun Phleng?"

"I'm not sulking! I'm just annoyed!"

Well, that's basically sulking...

"I'll be back in Thailand in less than a week. It's really busy right now. Don't overthink. Don't over-imagine. And when I message you, reply fast. Got it?"

"Yes, hubby!"

"Le..."

"What's wrong?" Suddenly, Khun Phleng, who had been grumbling just a moment ago, paused.

"Did you just call me hubby...?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I love it. I'm blushing."

"..."

"That's all. I'm going to sleep. I'm sleepy!"

"S-sweet dreams, Khun Phleng."

"Change it to 'sweet dreams, hubby.'"

"Sweet dreams, hubby." I said it like she wanted, still confused.

"That's all. Bye!"

So... we've made up, right?

# Chapter 26: The Sea

The sea, the seaaa!

My office sisters and I ran into the clear blue water, laughing and playing around. For these four days, our company is having a seminar on an island in southern Thailand. The entire plan was arranged by Khun Kwang. Actually, we all know very well that the seminar is just an excuse. The truth is, Khun Kwang wanted to bring us here to relieve stress. And it was a very good idea.

"Le looks great in that swimsuit! Look at me, I'm full of cellulite, ugh,"

One of the older sisters teased me while I was in my swimsuit. Honestly, I was covering up as much as possible. I had a bikini on underneath but wore a long-sleeved UV shirt over it.

"You look just fine, P'Aim,"

I teased her back.

Then us girls under Khun Kwang's wing played in the water, squealing in joy. But I stopped smiling when I looked up at the second-floor balcony of the hotel's lounge area and saw Kumpha, who had insisted on tagging along, drinking beer and staring at us non-stop.

"There's little Kumpha! Kumpha! Want to come play with us?"

The girls waved at him. He smiled awkwardly and just waved back.

"Looks like Kumpha really likes you, Le. He keeps staring."

"But I can't like someone like him. Too young. No sense of responsibility,"

I replied with a dry laugh and decided to take off the UV shirt and put it on a beach chair. Since I'm already here, might as well get some sun and sea salt. Lots of foreigners are walking around in bikinis too.

Male tourists passing by kept staring at me. Like they've never seen a woman in a bikini before!

"You ladies seem to be having fun."

Khun Kwang, in a colorful Hawaiian shirt unbuttoned all the way showing his sexy six-pack, and wearing blue board shorts, greeted us. I smiled sweetly at him, while the other office sisters drooled over his body.

"Khun Kwang, end-of-year bonus can be less, but please do this kind of trip every year! I love it,"

"Yeah! With our salaries, there's no way we'd afford a luxurious hotel with such a beautiful beach."

"Well, I was going to ask my dad to increase this year's bonus, but now I guess I'll have to cancel with accounting,"

Khun Kwang stroked his chin and teased us. Of course, we immediately begged him not to.

After spending about an hour in the salty sea, I suggested we move to the hotel's swimming pool, which everyone eagerly agreed to. Since this island was recently opened to tourism, it's not yet widely known. It felt like our company was the only group staying at the hotel—super private.

Khun Kwang, once invited, stripped off his shirt to show his fit body and jumped in with us. Kumpha didn't want to be outdone, so he joined too. I figured this was a time for relaxation, so I didn't let any tension or bad blood show on my face.

"Let's play monkey-in-the-middle!"

"Yeah!"

"Khun Kwang and Kumpha, you guys join too!"

"Okay, I'll compete with Kwang, bring it on!"

Kumpha threw down the challenge, and Khun Kwang raised an eyebrow and nodded confidently. Then he dove under water and lifted one of our colleagues onto his shoulders.

"Wah! What are you doing, Khun Kwang?!"

"Shoulder ride! It's more fun this way—we need more height."

"Oh yeah? Then... P'Le! Get on!"

"Huh!?"

Suddenly, Kumpha pulled me up onto his shoulders.

I almost yelled at him, but the game started before I could protest. So my irritation turned into excitement. And we all turned into monkeys scrambling for the ball like our lives depended on it.

...

Two hours later

We came out of the water wrapped in hotel towels, exhausted, then agreed to meet later for a seafood barbecue party at 6 PM. I had around two hours to shower and relax. I really didn't want to go back to Bangkok. Damn it.

As I walked through the hotel lobby and into the hallway that led to our rooms, wrapped in a towel and slightly shivering from the sea breeze, I noticed a familiar figure walking slowly away toward a balcony.

She was walking too slowly. Before I realized it, I had already reached out and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Khun Jean!?"

"Whoa!"

Jean was startled when I caught up to her, looking guilty like she'd just been caught doing something wrong.

I looked at Jean, who was smiling awkwardly like she was hiding something.

"If Jean is here, then that must mean... Khun Phleng is here too, isn't she!?"

My voice rose instinctively as I looked around for the long legs and familiar back of someone I knew.

"No, no, she's not here, Le. I'm just here on vacation too. Khun Phleng gave me permission to come back to Thailand a bit early,"

Jean said with a nervous laugh.

"Is that so?"

I squinted suspiciously at her. She couldn't fool me. "I don't believe it. Phleng's super busy right now. Letting her key assistant take vacation at a time like this is... weird."

"Oh come on, Le. I'm here with my girlfriend. Wanna meet her? You can be the witness that I really am on vacation,"

Jean said, as if about to take me to meet her, but I held back.

"No thanks. I'll just go shower."

"Alright, then."

"By the way, since you're back early... what flight is Phleng on, exactly? I asked her yesterday and she still didn't know what time she'd be arriving in Thailand."

"Oh... I think it's this Wednesday, around 2 PM? If I remember right,"

Jean replied, eyes wide with innocence, showing no signs of guilt. So I had to let go of my suspicions.

"Well, it was nice seeing you again."

"Yeah... you too."

"We're having a beachside seafood party tonight, you should come join us!"

"Aww, thanks!"

Jean gave her usual shy smile and quickly walked away.

Maybe there's really nothing going on. Jean didn't seem suspicious when she was about to take me to meet her girlfriend. Maybe she really is here to relax.

Only Phleng's whereabouts remained a mystery. I probably won't see her until I'm back from this trip.

Still, it's strange. She's so busy lately, and she's supposed to return to Thailand in a few days. So why would she let her key assistant take vacation now? The timing seems off...

The seafood barbecue party started. But what was more plentiful than the raw seafood was, of course, the alcohol. Lots and lots of booze.

Kumpha was sitting with us at the table. I didn't drink, though—I knew he might take advantage again.

"Just one drink, Le. I'll make it light for you."

"No thanks, I don't really feel like drinking."

"Oh, come on. There are so many other girls here, nothing will happen."

"..."

...

And then I finally gave in to my own drunkenness. I was already on my third glass. At the same time, I tried to protect myself by sitting as far away from Kumpha as possible. Even though that guy kept sneaking glances at me from time to time.

I looked toward the path leading to the beach on the other side of the hotel and saw Jean walking arm-in-arm with another woman, heading down to the beach for a stroll. Must be her girlfriend. They looked like they were in love. How nice. Probably here for a real vacation. I was thinking nonsense again. How could I have been so suspicious of Jean?

"Lermarn, girl, look at your face!" One of the ladies held up a compact mirror so I could see myself. At this point, I was completely under the influence of alcohol. My face was as red as a ripe ivy gourd—beyond recovery. But this time, I wasn't acting out. I just sat quietly, mourning my own state.

No, I still had some sense left. And I was keeping a close eye on Kumpha. If he made any move, I would run back to my room immediately and not give him another chance to take advantage of me.

"I'm... drunk," I finally said, laying my head down on the table, feeling a bit queasy from drinking too much.

"Here, have some grilled squid," P'Aim offered a piece from the grill. As soon as there was food, I opened my mouth and chomped. She offered another, I chomped again. One more—chomp. And so on.

Until eventually...

I was stuffed.

"Urgh!"

"Ahh! Lermarn is throwing up!"

I stood up and turned my face away to vomit away from the group.

After a moment, a large hand pulled me up to stop me from collapsing onto the vomit-covered floor.

"Have some sweet drink, it'll help get rid of the bitter taste." Then a glass of pure sugary drink was offered to me. I hadn't even looked at who helped me yet. But since the person ended with "krub" (a polite male speech particle), I assumed it must be Khun Kwang...

Yeah, right!

I looked up and saw Kumpha right in front of me.

"Wow, Kumpha is taking such good care of Lermarn. So sweet!"

"Of course, I have to take care of the ladies!"

He's lying... Just wants to take advantage of me again. Not this time.

"Let me go," I said while everyone was laughing and cheering me and Kumpha on, with Khun Kwang sitting silently with his arms crossed. I pulled my arm away from Kumpha's grasp.

This guy always uses the support and cheers of the crowd as a chance to get handsy. Not happening anymore.

"What? But you're drunk, P'Ler. Whoa, why are you hugging me?" he joked loudly.

"Woohoo!"

He moved to steady me, but in truth, he was pulling me into his arms, making it look like I was the one hugging him. Once I steadied myself, I did the most self-endangering thing possible.

Smack!

What had been a lively crowd fell silent the moment I slapped Kumpha across the face. Even Khun Kwang widened his eyes in shock and stood up.

Kumpha held his cheek and looked at me furiously.

"You slapped me!?"

"Of course I did! You harassed me, didn't you?"

"Wow, you've got guts!" Kumpha did something shocking. He raised his hand and shoved my head, making me fall. But Khun Kwang was quicker. He caught me before I hit the ground.

"What the hell, Kumpha!?"

"She slapped me first! Acting all hard to get. I thought she was cute so I played around a bit, and now she's acting all high and mighty!" Kumpha pointed at me and cursed repeatedly.

Khun Kwang took me to a nearby woman to help me sit. I didn't respond to anything. Just let him rant.

"Stop it, Kumpha! Why are you so rude? I'm telling your mom!"

"Go ahead! She'll take my side! I'm the landlord's son, you know!"

"..." Mr. Kwang looked stunned, like he'd never seen this side of Kumpha before. He stared at his cousin, speechless.

"Oh, you think you're so rich? I didn't even make a fuss when you yelled at me at that last party!" Kumpha lunged toward me, but Mr. Kwang shoved him back several steps.

"What party!? What are you talking about? Why don't I know about this?" Mr. Kwang looked around at everyone for answers, but no one dared to say anything with the main aggressor still ranting.

"You mean the farewell party for P'Vee, where you had Lermarn play a game, and when she lost, you told her to kiss you?"

The voice that I instantly recognized came from above. All of us, including Kumpha, turned to look.

A tall, slender woman descended from the hotel's upper balcony.

I was so drunk my vision was blurry. But when she came close, brushed my hair aside, and looked into my eyes— It was you, Phleng.

"Drunk again. You'll be punished."

Everyone around looked confused at her sudden arrival. Except for Khun Kwang, who didn't seem surprised. Of course, he knew she was coming for me.

"Who the hell are you?"

Bold of you, Kumpha. Not only did you not know who Phleng was, but you also dared to speak so aggressively. I looked at Khun Kwang for help, but he wasn't looking back—just watching Kumpha with a thoughtful, worried gaze.

"I came to take my girlfriend back to her room."

"Who's your girlfriend?"

"This one. Or should I say wife instead?"

That was it. I immediately shushed Phleng out of embarrassment, but she gave me a stern look instead. Her words stirred up the entire drinking circle into murmurs and whispers.

"Hahaha! You're Ler's girlfriend? You're both women! Haha!"

"Enough, Kumpha. Or you'll be sorry," Khun Kwang finally spoke up, but couldn't stop Kumpha's madness.

"Oh, come on, Kwang. So she's a lesbian? Secretly into Ler like me, but she wouldn't give you a chance, so now you're claiming her? Bold, I like it!"

"If you don't shut up right now, Kumpha, you'll regret it in the future!" Khun Kwang's thunderous voice finally silenced Kumpha, who stared at his cousin in disbelief.

"As for that game where you told her to kiss you—yeah, we're going to have a long talk about that." Khun Kwang's cold and sharp voice put Kumpha in his place. He turned to Phleng and nodded as if to say, "I've got this." Then the tall woman pulled me out of the arms of the woman who'd been supporting me.

"Excuse us, everyone," I bowed to the group, all of whom were now staring at me and Phleng like they couldn't believe what was happening. Then I was led away.

Once we were out of sight, I threw my arms around Phleng and buried my face in her shoulder and neck, feeling so relieved.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming back?"

"I wanted to surprise you. But it looks like I got surprised instead."

"Sorry, Phleng." I mumbled and was promptly taken to a room that wasn't mine.

As soon as I got in, I collapsed onto the bed in exhaustion. I was about to get under the covers when Phleng pulled me back up and dragged me to the bathroom.

"Take a shower. You reek of alcohol."

Then she stripped me.

"I'm embarrassed..."

"I've seen it all. What are you embarrassed about? Come on, in you go." Phleng helped me into the tub, ran warm water, and even brushed my teeth for me.

Am I... helpless or what?

"I could've just showered tomorrow morning."

"Nope. Has to be now."

I was confused by her, but whatever.

Once everything was set, the tall woman left me to finish bathing alone. So I took the chance to clean up quickly so I could come out smelling good for her.

Because the clothes were in the other room, I had to wear a bathrobe and walk to face my girlfriend, who was sitting on the bed with a serious look while typing on her laptop. But as soon as she saw that I had finished showering, she folded it and put it away on the table next to the bed.

"Why didn't you tell me you were back... hmm!"

I was about to pout affectionately, but Phleng pulled me into a kiss and untied the belt around my waist.

The robe fell to the floor before I, wearing absolutely nothing, was wrapped around the waist by her long arms and pulled down flat onto the bed.

"What's going on? You're going to do it right away?" I gasped when the tall woman bit the sensitive spot at the top of my chest without giving me any time to prepare. Phleng lifted her head and locked eyes with me.

"I came all the way to the island for you. Aren't you happy?"

"Of course I'm happy, but I wasn't ready!"

"You almost got harassed by that little brat. From now on, no more drinking, okay?"

"Oh come on..."

"I don't care. I missed you too much. Let me love you, alright?"

My face burned when Phleng used the word "love" in that way. She unbuttoned her shirt, eyes smoldering as they looked at me, making me melt under her.

...

"Is this why you told me to take a shower?" I asked, voice hoarse, as I sat on her lap while she sniffed and nipped all over my upper body. Her bare hand caressed my lower body until I was intoxicated by her touch.

"You smelled like alcohol," she looked up and started to slip her fingers inside, making my body arch and tense up, but I welcomed it anyway. "You even puked. I can't kiss someone who just threw up."

"You just ruined the mood! You jerk, Phleng!"

And so we let the storm of passion that had been bottled up for nearly a month explode freely as we wanted. The room was icy cold, but both of us were drenched in sweat from the intense physical exertion.

"Ph... Phleng..." I wrapped my arms around her neck, moaning uncontrollably while my lower body arched up to match the movement of her fingers.

"I missed you so much."

"I missed you too."

It was 3 a.m. when we finally lay side by side after taking turns on top of each other multiple rounds. Phleng pulled the blanket over me before scooting closer. I looked at her face, full of longing. Finally, she was back.

"What are you smiling at?" Phleng asked when she saw me just staring at her with a grin I couldn't wipe off.

"I missed you. It's been almost a month since I got to cuddle you." I snuggled into her arms, whining sweetly.

"When I was over there, I used a body pillow instead of you."

"You didn't do stuff to that pillow, did you?"

"I couldn't. It doesn't make sounds."

"You jerk!"

"That guy yelling at you earlier, was that Kumpha?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Nothing. Just want to remember his face. If he whines tomorrow, I'll scold him real good." Phleng's scary tone made me feel strangely safe. If she was by my side, I didn't have to be afraid of anything.

"Are you cold? Can you sleep?"

She asked when she noticed I was slightly shivering because my bare back was directly under the air conditioner.

"Are we going to sleep now?"

"Hm?"

"I kinda want to go one more round."

"Oh? Sure." And with that, she leaned into the crook of my neck again, but I pushed her away and flipped myself on top instead. Phleng looked stunned and clumsy with the sudden switch but didn't resist. So cute. Whose girlfriend is this?

"This time, I'll take the lead."

"What!?"

"You came back without saying anything. Claimed you missed me and all. I'm not letting you off the hook that easily."

"What the— I took a boat to come here, you know? Got seasick and all..." I didn't let her finish. I leaned down to kiss her deeply.

My hand touched her sensitive lower part playfully, making her flinch and meet my eyes as I moved down to her perky chest.

"We're not sleeping tonight, huh?"

...

The sunlight filtering through the curtains made me open my eyes groggily, body sore. I turned and saw that Phleng wasn't next to me, but the sound of water from the bathroom told me where she was.

My body was full of fresh hickeys again, for the first time in nearly a month. Phleng loved to leave marks. But honestly, when emotions peak, we both lose control. I'm no better.

"So many marks..." I held my breath as I stared wide-eyed at Phleng walking out of the bathroom in only black lingerie.

She had just as many marks as I did.

"Good thing I brought a shirt. Otherwise, I'd be in trouble."

"You caused trouble for me too." I lowered the blanket just enough to show the hickeys on my collarbone and chest.

"Wow, let me take a closer look." She pounced on me, using her sexy body to pin me down.

"Nooo, Phleng! I haven't even brushed my teeth yet!" I playfully tried to escape, and she loved it.

"This is better. Smells real. I like it."

"Idiot."

"Go shower, then let's eat together." She gently pulled me out of bed. I looked around for something to cover myself but couldn't find anything, so I turned to her for help.

"Just go like this. Naked. Don't be shy."

"Phleng!"

...

[Special Talk: Phlengphin]

Flashing back...

"The hotel is called The Paradise. Just opened about a year ago," Khun Jean handed me a brief about the hotel where Lermarn was staying.

I had my return date to Thailand confirmed but didn't tell Lermarn. I wanted to surprise her at her condo. But turns out, she had to go on a work seminar on a newly opened island park.

"Who's going with her?"

"Oh, here's the list," Jean handed me the list of hotel guests from her company.

Kumpha's name was on it...

I was worried.

"Jean, can you return to Thailand ahead of me?"

"Huh?" Jean looked puzzled. "But we're heading back soon anyway. Why ahead?"

"I want you to keep an eye on something."

And so, Jean became my eyes and ears on that island. I couldn't let Lermarn be alone with Kumpha, even if Khun Kwang was there too. I didn't trust it. I told Jean to secretly watch her and even take photos. She brought her girlfriend along to pretend they were vacationing together, just in case Lermarn saw her. As for me, I booked a flight and boat to follow the next day.

**Genie :** Lermarn is playing in the sea with her coworkers.

I had just landed back in Thailand and dug my nails into the sofa when Jean sent me a photo of Lermarn in a cute bikini, running along the beach surrounded by other women.

Why is she dressed like that!

That's the problem with Lermarn. She never knows how cute and attractive she really is. Fair, smooth skin, naturally red lips, a perfect figure. But she never compliments herself or realizes how many guys are eyeing her. Whenever we go to malls, I get annoyed because guys always stare. Some even stare at both of us. I usually have to glare back.

And look at that bikini!

Only I should be allowed to see her in that!

**Robert:** Still swimming?

**Genie:** Now they're in the pool.

Oh, thank goodness...

**Genie:** Playing in the pool now.

What the—!

**Robert:** Send me a pic.

And I screamed when the photo showed Lermarn riding on a guy's shoulders in the pool. I couldn't see who he was.

I grabbed my phone and called someone from work to help me go deal with her.

"Book me a flight to Krabi and a private speedboat. NOW!"

...

Back to present

"So you really stalked me, huh?" Lermarn glared at me while we were getting dressed for breakfast.

"I was worried."

"So Khun Jean being at the hotel too means..."

"I sent her."

"You are so sneaky!"

"If I weren't, how would I know you were doing this?" I showed her the photo of her on a guy's shoulders. She went quiet.

"Your spy didn't even get my face in the photo! If they had, you'd know I didn't want to be on Kumpha's shoulders!"

"But you were anyway."

"...Fine. I'm sorry." She drooped her shoulders, clearly guilty. I stared at her fondly.

"And wearing a bikini like that on the beach — aren't you worried guys are ogling you?"

"..."

"Don't you know how hot your body is?"

"I'm not hot..." she muttered, trying to walk away. I pulled her back and kissed her deeply.

"Morning already! No more of that!"

I playfully started unbuttoning her shirt one button at a time. She quickly grabbed both my hands to stop me.

"Phleng! Are you stripping me again!?"

"So you'll know how hot you are."

"Stop! No!"

# Chapter 27: The Ring

Looks like Lermarn is afraid I'll drain all her energy again in the morning. I was just teasing. Just last night, we both messed around with each other so much. I buttoned her shirt as usual before pulling her into my arms.

"We're going to try to adjust a lot, okay?"

"Hm!?" I suddenly changed the topic, so Lermarn pulled away from my body and looked at me in surprise. "So, that fight we had in America—it's over, right?"

"Do you want it to be over? Or do you want to keep fighting?"

"Nooo."

"Then let's just end it," I smiled again to ease her mind. "We know that we ourselves have to adjust to you too. It can't be just you adjusting to us."

"You don't have to adjust anything," she said. "Just taking care of me like this every day is more than enough."

"Nope, that's a different matter. Taking care of you—that's a duty of a girlfriend like me anyway, isn't it?" I countered her. The little one looked up at me with wide eyes, fully focused on what I was about to say next.

"I'm talking about the personality clashes between the two of us."

"Okay."

"It's just that we're both still new at being in a relationship," I started to get into the topic, though I felt it sounded too formal so I waved my hand to dismiss it. "Let's start over. From now on, if you're upset about something, just tell me like you did. I'll listen to you more and we'll clear things up quickly. No dragging things out, alright?"

"Alright. And you, too—if there's something I do that you don't like, tell me directly. If you're tired and not ready to explain, just say so, so I know."

"Well, there's one thing already."

"What is it?"

"Drinking alcohol."

"Oh." Lermarn responded to my request with a little exclamation. "I don't drink anymore—not now and probably not for a long time. Every time I drink, there's always trouble. I don't even feel like going near alcohol anymore."

"Drinking when it's just the two of us is fine. It's kind of exciting," I teased her again, raising my hand as if to pounce. Lermarn pretended to run away but stayed right where she was.

"Is there anything else we haven't cleared up yet?"

"Oh, and the thing about being afraid I'll find someone better..."

I reached out and held her small hand in mine, giving it a little squeeze while looking into her eyes to show the sincerity I wanted to convey.

"Can you trust me?"

"..."

"I know that the way I work in the business world makes you worry that I might fall for someone else. But right now, I love you. We love each other. Please trust me—I won't look at anyone else."

"Aww... That's really sweet." Lermarn turned her face away in embarrassment. I knew the words were cheesy, but I had to say them. "Besides, I'm not looking for someone attractive or anything like that. I just want someone who's with me and understands me."

"..."

"And I think that person is you."

"I know..." Lermarn mumbled. Her beautiful face blushed slightly. Seeing her nod faintly made me feel warm inside.

"It's true, though. Even behind your back, I see tons of handsome and pretty people—but I'm not interested."

"Ah-ha! So, you have been looking, haven't you?" The little one immediately caught me red-handed, but I just shrugged it off.

"You're so adorable. I love this side of you the most," Lermarn cupped my face and leaned in close. We loosely embraced like that for a while. "You don't have to worry I'll be with someone else either. I don't think I could find another sweet, kindhearted girlfriend like you again."

"Kindhearted? That's all?"

"Kind, cute, beautiful, cool, stylish, generous, and rich—enough for you, sweetheart?"

She said those compliments and used the pet name I liked without realizing it.

"I don't know, but that was super sweet. I'll give you a reward."

"What kind of reward?"

"You'll find out tonight—I'll use my body to show you."

"Wasn't last night enough?"

"As I recall, I was done, but someone wanted to keep going, didn't they?" "You're so bad. So dirty. How did you become like this? Five years ago, you were so proper and shy."

"Well, I was blind then. I didn't realize how sexy and delicious someone around here was."

The little one gave my chest a light push to retaliate and made a move to grab her purse, but I stopped her by wrapping an arm around her waist.

"Not done yet. There's one more thing."

"What now?" Lermarn looked at me with a pouty face. She had so many misdeeds to clear up and still made that puppy-dog face?

"About moving in with me."

"Oh..."

"So, will you move in or not?"

She still didn't answer and looked down, deep in thought.

"Haven't decided yet? It's okay, I'll give you ti—"

"I will."

"Huh!?"

"I'll move in with you."

I looked at her, not quite believing it. Just now, she looked like she was still thinking—then suddenly she agreed.

"You're not doing it just to please me, right? I want it to be your real choice."

"I'm not just trying to please you. At first, I really did want to live alone like always. But after you went to work in America and we had to be apart, I started to feel different. I don't want to be away from you anymore." "Really?"

"Mm-hmm. Let's live together." The sweet-faced girl smiled at me to confirm her decision. My heart swelled up with happiness.

I pulled her into a kiss, completely forgetting we were supposed to go eat breakfast.

"Say you love me. You don't say it that often."

"Jeez, saying it too much gets boring, you know?"

"But if you never say it, the one waiting to hear it feels disappointed."

I pouted playfully, and of course, Lermarn didn't resist. She smiled sweetly at me and wrapped her arms around my waist. Her face snuggled close to mine lovingly.

"I love you, Phleng."

[Special Talk: Phlengphin END]

...

Three years later

"Le, I missed you so much!..."

The voice of P'Vee, dressed in maternity clothes, waddled her way toward me in the banquet hall. I quickly had to stop this mother of two before all that moving around might endanger the baby in her belly.

"P'Vee, please sit down. Otherwise, the little one might be in trouble."

"Ugh, I can't wait to give birth, you know? It's so uncomfortable I could die."

"You shouldn't say things like that, P'Vee," I carefully led her to a table in the wedding reception.

"By the way, this wedding of Khun Kwang's is really something, huh?

Totally fitting for a media empire heir. There are reporters everywhere."

P'Vee looked around in awe at the wedding atmosphere before stopping her gaze on me, sitting across from her.

"You're no slouch either, Le. Looking this gorgeous—are you trying to upstage the bride?"

"Come on, I have a girlfriend already."

Right now, we were at the wedding of Khun Kwang, my older brother and dear friend. Going back two years ago, after everything settled back to normal, Khun Kwang, who had already gotten over me, ended up finding love with a beautiful news anchor by chance. They dated for over two years and finally decided to tie the knot. I was attending as a guest on the groom's side.

"Where's Khun Phleng? Didn't come with you?"

"She helped sponsor the wedding but couldn't make it due to an urgent meeting."

"But hey, sometimes it's not a bad thing if she doesn't show up. She's already ridiculously beautiful as it is—if she had done full makeup and hair today, the bride might've taken issue!" P'Vee and I laughed and chatted like old times, until the ceremony started.

Besides the bride and groom's families, many of the guests were celebrities and major players in the media industry.

I no longer worked at Khun Kwang's company and had switched from advertising to drama production instead. Now, I worked as a production controller for a famous drama production company.

Khumpha also came to the wedding because he's a close relative of Khun Kwang. When he saw me, he nodded slightly in greeting before leading his girlfriend to their table. Three years ago, after what he did to me, Khun Kwang removed him from my internship team. He had to repeat his internship for another year without any help from family. It was the perfect way to reform him. Since then, he had changed completely. I heard he was currently working as Khun Kwang's assistant, learning the ropes of the real working world.

As for my father, he had quit drugs for good and wasn't as aggressive as he used to be. I noticed he was trying to behave, staying disciplined under the prison's regulations, hoping to reduce his sentence. I visited him about once or twice a month. Khun Phleng wasn't too thrilled, but she didn't object either, since he was still my father.

"Le, how have you been?" Khun Kwang, looking dashing in his groom's suit, approached with Khun Kae, the bride.

"Wow, Khun Kwang, this wedding is so beautiful. I'm so jealous of Kae," I turned to chat with Kae as well. They looked perfect together.

"If Le ever has good news of her own, you better tell us right away," said Kae playfully, causing me to freeze as P'Vee teased me instantly.

"That blush says you do want to get married, huh Le?"

"P'Vee! What are you saying?!"

"Just get married already. Don't care what anyone thinks."

"She's right. Kae and I support you. You two have been together for three years now."

"This is your wedding, not mine! Why are we talking about me?" I quickly changed the subject, feeling awkward.

After the event, I helped P'Vee waddle her way to her husband's car in the parking lot. A while later, the driver Khun Phleng sent came to pick me up at the hotel.

Now, I was living with Khun Phleng full-time. In the three years we'd been together, our relationship had grown by leaps and bounds. We were getting older, and both our careers were full-on corporate jobs. Sometimes, we even pulled all-nighters together.

We cared and understood each other more, while still giving each other space. If I was busy, she wouldn't disturb me. If she was swamped with work, I let her be. When one of us needed support, we'd just turn to each other for comfort and care.

Khun Phleng once took me to visit Jared's grave. I brought flowers and promised in front of the gravestone that I would take care of her in his place. I wished his soul peace, promising that as long as I was around, Khun Phleng would never be alone.

When I arrived home, I opened the door to find no one in the living room.

She must've already gone to bed, I thought. Her meeting had ended at 9 PM, and now it was 11. The lights were off except for the kitchen.

I went into the walk-in closet to remove my earrings and necklace, not wanting to make too much noise and risk waking her.

But while I was struggling with my earrings, a cold hand wrapped around my waist from behind.

"You scared me," I turned to find Phleng, dressed in a t-shirt and shorts for bed, smiling at me. "Aren't you asleep yet?"

"I wanted to stay up and wait for my wife."

"Just admit you can't sleep when I'm not here," I teased, putting away my jewelry. When I turned to face her, she leaned down and buried her face in my neck, softly biting my shoulder.

"You look so beautiful today."

"Well, it's a wedding. I had to bring my A-game," I said while resting my hands on her shoulders as she continued to nuzzle my neck.

"I want to do something else."

I closed my eyes and smiled. Of course she'd say that. I wasn't surprised— there was one time when she came home from a high-profile wedding, wearing a black dress with striking red lipstick. I couldn't resist suggesting we "do something else," either.

"Can I shower first? I don't feel very fresh."

"If you shower, your makeup will be gone. I want to do it now."

"You perv... Just give me ten minutes. I'll come find you in the room." I gently pressed my finger to her lips.

"Nope. Now."

She pushed me gently against the wardrobe wall, then turned me around. I felt the zipper of my dress being pulled down slowly, followed by her cold hands easing it lower.

"Phleng, h-here? Really?" I asked, since we'd never done anything like that in the dressing room. She didn't respond. Instead, her cold hand snaked around to the front, gently teasing my most sensitive spot. Her lips trailed kisses from the back of my neck down to my shoulders.

"Ah... mmm..."

"Changing the scenery isn't so bad, right?"

...

I cast a sideways glance at the shameless person beside me, accusingly, as we were both putting our clothes back on. At first, I had planned to resist, but after experiencing the effects of Khun Phleng's breath and foreplay techniques, I ended up going along with it anyway.

"So, how was the wedding? How was Khun Kwang? Did you run into anyone?" Khun Phleng asked while helping me grab a fresh towel from the cabinet.

"The wedding was beautiful. I was stunned just looking at it. But then again, Khun Kwang's family is super rich, so it's no surprise it was extravagant."

"I heard Khun Vee was there too. How was she?"

"She's heavily pregnant now—almost due. When the baby comes, I'll probably have to go give the baby a welcome gift," I said absentmindedly, about to head to the bathroom, but then I remembered something else.

"Khun Phleng..."

"Hmm?"

"P'Vee and Khun Kwang were teasing me about getting married," I said jokingly. Khun Phleng looked surprised.

"Married?"

"Yeah, but they were just joking around. Even Khun Kae joined in." I was about to shut the bathroom door, but Khun Phleng used her hand to stop me.

"So, are you going to?"

"Huh?"

"I mean, marry me."

"You're silly. I'm going to take a shower."

Because she asked with that oddly smiling face, I thought she was joking and didn't say anything. I shut the bathroom door.

...

"Cut!"

"Sorry! Mwah!" The beautiful model in a sexy, open-back black dress ran into the bathroom, followed by the sound of vomiting.

We were at a resort in the south of Thailand, shooting a fashion set for the New Year calendar. This was a special gig the production house asked me to supervise, even though I usually only work on dramas. But now we had a major crisis.

The key model I hired had sudden food poisoning.

"Crap. What do we do now?" One of the photography team complained. When they looked up at the sky, they saw dark clouds gathering—meaning rain might fall.

The sun was blazing, and now rain? Really?

"This is bad."

Khun James, the handsome male model hired to pose with my model, walked up wearing an unbuttoned shirt, showing off his muscular chest.

His look had a hint of flirtation. Was he trying to hit on me?

I wasn't trying to flatter myself, but still, I couldn't help thinking it.

"Check on Sai. How bad is it? Can she still pose? Just three or four more shots would be enough."

I instructed the model care team, who were pale-faced. They went into the bathroom and shortly after, a shout came.

"She fainted on the toilet!"

Perfect.

"Why doesn't Khun Lermarn pose in Sai's place?" said Khun James.

"..."

Everyone turned to look at me instantly. Some even scanned me up and down, like evaluating my body.

"Heh... that's ridiculous."

I smiled nervously, but then the makeup artist nodded in agreement.

"Yes! P'Ler could totally do it. Her figure's great. Even prettier than Sai. It'll definitely turn out amazing."

"Right? I think so too. Looks like she's about the same size. I'll turn her into a goddess. Come on, get changed!" Suddenly, a strapless red dress was shoved into my hands.

"Wait, what is going on here? I'm not doing this!" I shook my head as the makeup and wardrobe team pushed me toward the bathroom to change.

"You'll look gorgeous, P'Ler! Trust us!"

...

What was I doing? Besides keeping the shoot running smoothly, I had to step in as a substitute model? The team was watching me pose with James, looking all pleased.

What were they so happy about? I was dying of embarrassment.

"You're gorgeous! With a capital G!"

"Forget working behind the scenes—go front and center instead, P'Ler! You'll be a hit!"

"Stop it already, you guys!" I scolded my team, who were staring at me and James nonstop.

If Khun Phleng saw me hugging a ripped male model like this, she'd kill me.

"You're really beautiful, you know?"

Khun James whispered in a sexy tone. If I were single, I might've melted.

But now? Not happening.

"I think I want to ask you out."

"Male model, lean toward the female model a bit," the photographer called.

Oh no. Khun James leaned in close as instructed, his light blue eyes gazing at me with heat and seduction. Cheers erupted from the team.

Just wait—I'm docking everyone's pay!

...

"Yes, don't worry." I was on the phone, reporting to the agency by the private pool at the VIP room, feeling totally drained. At least the company booked us nice rooms to make up for working out of town. That helped a bit.

"Tomorrow we'll wrap up and I'll bring all the final shots for review."

"Okay. But if you're stepping in as a model like that, do we have to pay you model rates?"

The agency joked. I should've asked for cellulite retouching on my thighs instead.

"I'm good, thank you. Just worry about Sai. She's still passed out in her room."

"Next time we need better catering. You must be exhausted too. It was boiling hot today."

"Yes, but everything's fine. No worries."

"Thanks again. See you at the meeting the day after tomorrow at ten."

"Will do." I hung up and sighed deeply.

"What's with all the sighing?"

Ah!

Suddenly, someone's voice and warm breath hit the back of my neck. Shocked, I fell backward into the pool—and pulled the mystery person in with me.

"What the heck!" I surfaced, still shaken. My phone floated pathetically nearby.

I looked around and saw Khun Phleng, soaked and surfacing not far from me.

"Khun Phleng!" I shouted in frustration. Another badly timed surprise.

But she didn't hear me. She was diving underwater, probably looking for her phone. Great—if it's broken, at least we're both in the same boat.

"Good timing. I got groped by the model again today. Maybe this is karma for being too pretty—everywhere I go, people try to hit on me. Good thing I yelled at him once, or else—"

I rambled on, but when I looked again, she was swimming around underwater, not paying me any attention.

Could've just told me you wanted to swim...

"What are you doing, Khun Phleng?" Just as she surfaced and slicked her wet hair back, I asked before she could dive again.

"Shh!" She glared at me and dived once more, swimming around me.

Then I noticed a small black object underwater not far from me. I dove down to get it and tapped her to get her attention.

"Here's your phone. No need to keep looking."

"I wasn't looking for my phone!" she snapped, panicked. I flinched. She looked really worried and was about to dive again, but I grabbed her collar.

"Then what are you looking for? I'll help."

"The ring... the ring!"

"What?" I gasped at the answer. She didn't elaborate and pushed me aside to dive again, but I grabbed her arm.

"What ring?"

"The engagement ring for you! I don't know where it went!" she looked like she was about to cry, then dove again. I stood frozen.

Once I snapped out of it, I dove in to help search.

How did things turn out like this?

Eventually, she surfaced again, soaked but joyful, like she'd found a treasure. I came up too.

"Found it! Thought it was gone down the drain."

I looked at her face and the small ring—white gold, with a diamond— feeling overwhelmed, like my heart was clutched and warmed at once.

Khun Phleng, realizing what she'd let slip, awkwardly approached with the ring.

"Le..."

"Don't... don't say anything."

No! A soaked proposal like this wasn't my dream scenario. What do I do!?

No, wait—it's not about being wet or not.

I'm just extremely flustered! So flustered I don't know what to do!

"Why not?" she asked, eyes pleading like a kitten.

Ugh, she knew my weakness. I always caved to those eyes.

"You don't want to marry me?"

"No! I mean... I do!"

"Then let's get married."

"..."

Well... a proposal like this is kind of thrilling.

"Still not answering? Taking so long..."

She clasped my hand underwater.

"Yes... let's get married."

At that, she pulled me into a hug. Her long arms wrapped tightly around me.

I hugged her back, overjoyed.

We leaned in toward each other, the mood perfect—but then...

Knock knock knock!

"..." I and Khun Phleng looked at the door with annoyance. I looked at my lover, then back at the door, confused about what I should do first.

"Lermarn, are you there?"

It was James' voice.

I turned to the other side and saw Khun Phleng looking extremely displeased.

I think I just came up with a good plan.

I grabbed the ring from the tall person's hand and slowly put it on the ring finger of my left hand. It fits perfectly.

Khun Phleng looked at my action with some confusion. I got out of the pool, grabbed a towel to wrap myself in, and then walked to open the door with the aura of a queen. James, when he saw my face, gave me a sweet smile.

"What is it?"

"I wanted to invite you to have breakfast together. What do you say if—" "I can't."

"Huh?"

"I'm married."

Then I lifted my left hand with the white gold ring adorned with a small diamond and posed my wrist like a Greek-Roman statue.

Since I'm not single anymore, I must give my last flourish beautifully.

"But this afternoon you weren't wearing a ring..." James looked at the ring on my finger in surprise. I guess when we were doing a photoshoot earlier, he must have been secretly inspecting my body silently to know I wasn't wearing a ring before.

"But I'm wearing one now. Good night."

Then I immediately shut the door in the handsome model's face. After dealing with that problem, I turned to face the tall person who had just come out of the pool as well.

"Sassy... ruthless," Khun Phleng said, praising me after secretly watching the whole scene, with a satisfied smirk at the corner of her mouth.

"Well, we're married now. I can't let anyone else flirt with me anymore, right?" I hugged the person in front of me with love and excitement.

So it wasn't a dream, right? Khun Phleng really proposed to me.

"Of course. You're really my wife now. Get ready for a heavy-duty every night," Khun Phleng pulled me close and whispered softly in my ear. I smiled shyly and turned away in embarrassment.

"You too, Khun Phleng. Will someone else come and flirt with you again? I'm a bit paranoid."

"Don't worry." Then the tall person raised her left hand to show me a white gold ring with a diamond of the same carat as mine. "We're married now. Can't let anyone else flirt with us, right?"

She intentionally repeated my words and raised an eyebrow at me.

Unlike me, who suddenly became emotional and burst out crying.

"Huh? Why are you crying, darling?" Khun Phleng saw me crying and immediately pulled me into a hug, gently swaying back and forth.

"You've done so much for me, Khun Phleng," I said while sobbing. "The ring... it must be so expensive, right?"

I gently held her face close out of love. Seeing my tear-streaked face, Khun Phleng just laughed.

"Come on now, it's just a wedding ring. For someone like me, getting an even bigger diamond isn't a problem at all."

"Still..."

"Stop crying and let's plan how our wedding should be," the tall person turned me around, hugging me from behind, pretending to tiptoe around the room to comfort me.

"Let's not make it too flashy, okay? Just a quiet ceremony with only important people," I suggested.

"And where would you like to have it?"

"Maybe we don't even need a ceremony. Just wear the rings. No need to tailor a wedding dress either. It's a waste of money. We could use the money to travel instead," I proposed another idea that just came to mind. But when I turned to look, I saw Khun Phleng making a sulky face as if she didn't like it.

"You're looking down on me. I'm Phleng Phin, Phleng Phin who's filthy rich!"

"And I'm Lermarn, Lermarn who's still working paycheck to paycheck!" I retorted equally.

Earlier, Khun Phleng even offered me a credit card to use as I please. Whatever I wanted to buy, just go ahead, since we had already committed to each other. My girlfriend was generous enough to offer me monthly spending money without a second thought. But I declined. I still had my own hands and feet. I'd rather earn my own money.

"Talking back like that? You need to be punished." The bridge of her tall nose brushed lightly against my cheek as she stopped walking. I turned to look ahead and found we were standing in front of the bathroom.

"Come take a shower together." Then my body lifted off the floor as Khun Phleng wrapped her arms around my waist and carried me inside the bathroom with her.

"What are you doing, Khun Phleng?" I shouted as she began to easily remove my wet clothes one piece at a time.

"Showering. And also testing the honeymoon night while we're at it."

"You seem to care more about the honeymoon night than the wedding ceremony itself, huh?"

I couldn't help but tease her, my knees going weak as her beautiful face leaned in and gently bit my ear.

Her tongue slipped into my mouth, ravishing me with heat. From shivering due to my soaked clothes, now my body was warm all over.

Khun Phleng pulled away from our kiss. Her dark eyes locked deeply with mine. The tip of her nose pressed against my face.

"I love you, Le."

"I love you too, Khun Phleng."

# Chapter : Special Episode (1) Fatty Twelve

I still couldn't believe it had actually happened—I married Khun Phleng. And not just anywhere, but all the way here in America, the very place where everything between us first began. We had our wedding in a small church near Khun Phleng's old home—the same house I once lived in while taking care of her years ago. It was a modest ceremony, just as we wanted. No big crowd, just the people who had been through thick and thin with us along this winding path of love.

I had been worried that some might not make it due to the high cost of flying from Thailand to the U.S. But Khun Phleng, being the generous soul she is, surprised me by buying premium tickets for everyone.

All our guests had to bring was a dress and their luggage.

No one has a bigger heart than my wife.

The only one who truly couldn't be there was my dad. He's still serving his sentence. Before flying to Washington, Khun Phleng and I went to visit him to share the news.

"So you two finally tied the knot, huh?" My dad smirked and turned his gaze toward Khun Phleng. "Take care of my daughter, alright? Don't let me down."

"Of course."

"I wish you could be there, Dad... but—"

"I'm better off here. Don't wanna return to my old haunt anyway. You take care of yourself."

"Give me your blessing, please? Your little girl's getting married!" I teased.

He let out a dry laugh and acted like he wasn't going to say anything. But we waited. And eventually, he gave in.

"Just be happy, alright? Don't fight too often. When in doubt, talk it out. I don't really get your kind of love, but I'm glad to see you both happy."

It may have sounded like a typical blessing, but coming from a man as rough around the edges as my father, it meant the world to me.

"You two really made it, huh? I never imagined I'd see you both in wedding dresses." Khun Kwang greeted me alongside his wife, Khun Kae. His sleek black suit only enhanced his natural charm.

"I didn't think we'd get here either."

"Congratulations, Khun Le," said Khun Kae with a warm smile, arm linked with her husband's.

"Thank you. So how's married life treating you? Has he been straying at all?" I teased.

Khun Kwang looked flustered, but Khun Kae laughed cheerfully.

"Not at all. He's as steady as they come. We're even trying for a baby— should be good news soon."

"Well, be sure to let me know! I want to be the first to welcome the little one."

...

After the wedding, came the moment Khun Phleng had been looking forward to more than even me—the wedding night.

Our honeymoon suite? None other than our old house. Though it had been closed up for some time, someone had been keeping it clean. Khun Phleng said she once considered renting it out but got too busy to follow through.

Now that it was ours again, she planned to renovate it into our second home in Washington.

While waiting for her to finish her shower, I wandered through the house, reminiscing. Everything looked well-kept thanks to regular professional cleaning. The memories flowed—helping her to the bathroom, making hot cocoa while she worked or read, helping Jared cook meals for her.

"What are you thinking about?" Strong arms wrapped around me from behind. Her fresh soap scent made my heart skip.

"Nothing. Just looking around."

Once she was done, it was my turn to shower.

And then... it would be time for...

I glanced back nervously. She looked way too excited for this. Her teasing, flirty eyes made me weak, and I quickly fled to the bathroom.

"We'll be waiting," she winked as she flopped onto the king-size bed in our newly revived bedroom, bouncing playfully. When I turned to look, she gave me that suggestive look again.

This wasn't even our first time. Why was I so nervous?

We'd already changed out of our wedding dresses—they weren't exactly convenient. I grabbed the clothes I'd prepared and stepped into the bathroom.

I stared at my reflection in the mirror, hardly able to believe I was really married. My fingers brushed the white gold ring on my left hand. I couldn't explain the mix of joy and deep emotion it gave me.

No time for sentimentality. Someone's waiting on the bed out there.

I stripped, ready to lather myself up for that long-awaited intimacy. Tonight, I was going to let her touch and tease to her heart's content. It sounded kind of fun, actually.

But fate had other plans.

Just as I slipped off my underwear, I noticed something I hadn't expected at all.

My period had arrived.

...

It was the worst timing. I showered quickly and got dressed, trying not to overthink it. When I came out, Khun Phleng was still on the bed, phone in hand. She looked up and smiled.

"Khun Phleng..."

"Yes, darling?" Before I could explain, she pulled me down onto the bed and kissed me hungrily. Her hands explored under my nightshirt with no hesitation.

"I've waited so long for this," she whispered sweetly.

I wanted to give in. I really did. But it just wasn't possible. I gently pushed her away. She looked confused. Everything had gone so perfectly—why was I hesitating?

"Khun Phleng..."

"What is it?" "I got my period."

...

Yeah. Totally out of the blue. I had completely forgotten it was due. And now? My body was a stormy red sea.

When she found out we wouldn't be doing anything steamy that night, Khun Phleng did what anyone would do—she pouted and grumbled. But true to her nature, she composed herself quickly. If she were a guy, maybe she would've just bulldozed her way through, period or not. But we were both women—we understood these things. She even brought me painkillers, knowing cramps were just around the corner.

Instead of passion, we ended up spending the night chatting, playing mobile games, and, when she couldn't resist anymore, she gave me a kiss that was just enough. We curled up together and fell asleep, happy and warm.

...

Two weeks had passed since the wedding. We were still in Washington because Khun Phleng had work to finish. I was enjoying my vacation time, but...

Married life? Smooth and sweet?

Not quite.

After the wedding, Khun Phleng dove headfirst into work like a machine. Daytime in the office. Nighttime, passed out cold from exhaustion. Every time I asked what was going on, she just brushed it off, saying the situation was complicated and I wouldn't understand.

Excuse me!?

What is happening to my honeymoon?

"Khun Phleng?"

"..."

"Khun Phleng?"

"..."

"KHUN PHLENG!"

"Ah! Huh!?"

I sighed heavily. I had to shout just to get her attention. She dropped her keyboard and turned to face me. I was red-faced and fuming.

"It's Sunday, you know. Spend time with me!"

"Just a bit more... almost done."

"You said exactly the same thing three days ago."

"..."

"I'm sulking. Full-on sulk."

I stormed out of her home office and flopped onto the bed upstairs. She'd come after me soon—no way would she let me stay mad.

But as I lay there waiting, eyes closed...

My phone rang.

I picked it up.

It was someone from her company calling.

....

[Special Talk: Phlengphin]

I admit that I didn't intend for our newlywed life to crumble because of work. But it was really out of my control. The economy hasn't exactly been great lately, and the hotel business has been affected as well. I'm not the kind of person who likes to leave my subordinates or junior positions to deal with company issues alone—especially when it comes to financial matters and the expenses our hotels have to bear. So, I ended up getting involved, giving advice, helping to manage and oversee the team, until I lost track of time and days.

Actually, over the past couple of days, many of the issues have started to clear up, but there are still a lot of tasks I need to finish. That's why I had to keep pushing through work, forgetting that I had just gotten a wife.

And now... she's already pouting and sulking.

I planned to surprise Lermarn again by taking her on a honeymoon—maybe to an island or a country with beautiful scenery. I thought I'd book a private villa where we could just stay in all day and night... or go out shopping, taking photos, just doing whatever we felt like at the time.

I turned off the computer and the lights in my office—honestly, I was pretty exhausted. A little rest wouldn't hurt.

I went upstairs to find Lermarn in the bedroom. As I opened the door, I saw the little one sitting at the edge of the bed, talking on the phone in a serious tone. The sound of my footsteps made her turn to look at me, and she held up a hand as a signal to let her finish the call. I didn't mind and walked into the bathroom for a bit. When I came back out, she had just finished her call.

"I have to go back to Thailand."

"Why?"

"There's a problem with the drama production I was supposed to oversee. They called me and begged me to come back and sort things out." Her voice was deflated. Her expression was so sad I couldn't help but pull her into a loose hug. As soon as my arm wrapped around her, she rested her head on my shoulder.

"I don't want to go back yet."

"It's okay. It's work."

"But this is supposed to be our break. I don't wanna work yet!" she whined like a child, snuggling against my arm.

"Are you coming back with me, Khun Phleng?"

"I can't."

"...figured." She probably expected it already. When I had to turn her down, she made a loud noise of frustration.

"But I'll follow you as soon as I can," I tilted her chin up and kissed her soft pink cheek. "I'll finish everything here quickly so we can be together again."

"Alright, but don't overwork yourself, okay? I was being silly just now. I'm sorry."

"I forgot I had a wife too." As soon as she heard me say that, she pouted in irritation. I couldn't help but laugh at how childish she looked and pulled her closer into a tighter hug.

"We'll go on our honeymoon later, okay?"

"That's right! I totally forgot—we got married, so we have to go on a honeymoon!" Lermarn gasped, making me want to take the little one on a trip right then and there.

"Hang in there. I'll catch up to you soon."

...

And so, Lermarn flew back to Thailand before I did. The house, which used to be full of her giggles and bubbly energy, had now returned to being silent and empty. I couldn't stand it. Not at all.

In the end, I packed my things and went to stay at the hotel office in Washington. I couldn't bear the loneliness. I used to be someone who was totally fine living alone, but ever since Lermarn entered my life... I became someone who couldn't handle being alone anymore.

Almost a week passed. We kept in touch through video calls from time to time. Right now, the little one is out filming her drama almost every day. Honestly, both of us were swamped with work.

I was worried that she might be lonely without me. But... maybe not anymore.

"Is that... a cat?"

"Yes! Do you remember the kitten we rescued back at my old condo?"

"I remember..."

"When I thought of her, I followed up with the clinic we left her at, to see where she ended up. Turns out, the owner who took her in is moving and put her up for adoption. No one has claimed her yet. Can I adopt her, Khun Phleng?"

"...you really want to?"

"Of course I do! I saw the latest photo—she's all chubby and pudgy like a little piglet!"

"...hmm."

"Please, Khun Phleng? We can raise her like our baby!"

"Our baby... is a cat?"

And a fat one at that. I was sure Lermarn would absolutely dote on it.

Why did I feel like I was about to be replaced in her heart? Don't be silly, Phlengphin. You're too old for such childish thoughts.

"If you want to, go ahead. I'll spoil you."

"Yay! I love you so much! I'll go pick her up right now!"

And with that, she ended the call, squealing in delight. She didn't even sound that sweet when we were flirting.

She's just a four-legged, whiskered animal—but somehow manages to make my wife happier than I can. This is getting out of hand.

...

And just like I suspected, from the moment Lermarn adopted "Twelve," every time I video-called her, that fat cat would either walk across the screen or sit on her phone, making the screen go black. Instead of scolding it, the little one just laughed hysterically at how annoyed I was.

Now we had to split our cuddle time—half of it went to that chubby cat.

The name "Twelve" came from our wedding date—and coincidentally, it was also the date Lermarn picked her up.

Now that I've returned to Thailand, I still don't want to be a slave to that cat the way Lermarn is. But I'll never forget how, the moment I opened the door after getting back from the airport, Twelve was already sitting at the entrance as if she knew another servant had arrived.

She was cute... plump... totally squeezable.

No! Phlengphin, keep your cool! That chubby thing is going to steal your wife's affection!

"Lermarn, where did all the tuna cans go?" I asked as I searched the kitchen for breakfast.

"Oh, Twelve ate them all!"

"What!?"

"She eats a lot, Khun Phleng! She finished the stash we saved for her. I'll go out and buy more, okay?" Then she walked right past me, carrying Twelve, chatting sweetly with the cat in front of the TV.

I crept up behind her, glaring daggers at the cat and raising my hand like I was going to swat her. That fat little thing knew the drill—she immediately let out a loud meow, and Lermarn had to jiggle her to calm her down.

Such a drama queen...

"You little fatty..." I muttered under my breath, completely helpless.

...

What is this feeling...

It's suffocating, unbearably heavy. I couldn't even open my eyes. Everything was completely dark—I couldn't see anything at all. I just kept shifting my torso restlessly, struggling for air, feeling like my whole body had gone numb and lifeless.

Is this sleep paralysis? I'd heard this word from hotel staff when they talked about ghosts that liked to haunt hotel rooms. They said the feeling when those things came to scare you was like this—unable to breathe, unable to move, and completely overwhelmed.

Has my room always been haunted...? Then why did it only start showing signs now?

"Help... someone," I whimpered, hoping someone would pull me out of this. My arms started flailing wildly until I felt something soft and furry.

Then I finally woke up.

"You fatty!"

I cried out as my eyes locked with Sib-sorng (Twelve) at an uncomfortably close range. Our faces were less than half a foot apart. Twelve stared at me, purring in the back of its throat. Lermarn once told me that meant the cat was happy. And right now, it was sitting right on my chest.

"Get off me!" I shoved it away and panted for breath after being smothered for who knows how long. How much does Twelve weigh?! It was sitting on my chest—I should be thankful I didn't suffocate.

"What's wrong, Khun Phleng?"

Lermarn, who was lying beside me, mumbled groggily. When the little one opened her eyes and saw Twelve, she casually used one arm to scoop the cat up and turn over to cuddle it, leaving me alone, gasping for air on the bed.

Wait a second?! She woke up, cuddled the cat, then went back to sleep?!

What about me?!

...

I ended up fleeing to work in the study room instead of staying with them in bed on a Sunday. Why? Because I was sulking. She only cared about the cat and not me. I know, it's childish. But now I get how Lermarn feels whenever I get buried in work and forget to give her attention.

So this is what it feels like.

"Khun Phleng, come back and watch a movie with me," Lermarn called me from the bedroom with a pitiful tone after I'd been working for half a day. "No. If you want to watch something, go watch it with Twelve."

"Twelve can't talk, though. I want someone to chat with. Please come back..."

"Nope. You only care about the cat, not me. That's all."

And then I hung up. That was my first childish, dramatic attempt at demanding attention in our entire relationship.

Kind of embarrassing when I think about it.

...

"Khun Phleng, Khun Lermarn is here to see you," one of the staff peeked in during the evening to inform me. I nodded, and she stepped aside to let Lermarn walk into the office.

"What? You didn't bring Twelve with you?"

"Are you jealous of me and the cat?" she pouted when she heard my sarcasm.

"Not even a little."

"I came to make up with you. Don't be mad, okay?"

She sat down on my lap and wrapped her arms around my neck. "Let's go back to our room."

"No. I'm in the zone right now. I want to keep working," I replied, turning back to my computer screen. But then, everything went dark. Something soft and silky covered my eyes.

"What's this?" I asked, trying to remove the blindfold, but a pair of small furry hands grabbed mine, and mischievous lips started teasing my neck.

"If words won't work, I'll just make it up to you this way."

"..."

"Why don't we reenact how we met, right here, right now?"

Lermarn pulled me up and pushed me against the edge of the desk. My legs were spread, and her small body slid in between. I couldn't see anything with the blindfold on—and clearly, she wanted it that way.

"Back when we met, you couldn't see anything either, right? Let's..."

She trailed off on purpose, letting my imagination fill in the blanks. Her warm hands unbuttoned my shirt, then pressed my back against the desk. I could feel her breathing against my chest, followed by soft kisses and teasing bites. Her hands roamed my waist and upper body. I bit my lip to stop myself from making noise or breathing too heavily, but the desire surging through me was too much to bear.

"Does making up like this work, Khun Phleng?"

"..."

"If you don't answer, I'll stop. I'll go back to our room for real."

"Y-Yes... it works..."

I finally gave in, voice raspy. I could hear her soft, delighted laughter. I laughed along like someone who'd been completely defeated and let Lermarn take the lead, doing whatever she pleased with my body.

In the end, I just couldn't resist her, huh?

# Chapter : Special Episode (2) The Story of Those Five Months

"Twelve, stop shaking!"

I sat watching Lermarn struggle to scrub Twelve's body with cat bathing foam through the slightly ajar bathroom door, feeling happy.

Every time I think about it, it still feels like a dream—that Lermarn and I found our way back to each other, fell in love again, and finally decided to get married. It's like a miracle, or you could call it a magical story of two people who once lived together for just five months, separated for five years, and then found their way back to spend their lives together forever.

The happiness I feel now makes me think back to those short five months, the five months that Lermarn, back then called "Nara," and I spent living together.

Everything seemed to point to the idea that throughout the time we were apart, Lermarn was the one who had feelings for me first, and I only fell in love with her afterward.

But that wasn't true. Everything had already started before that.

...

"Khun Phlengpin likes strong-flavored food. When preparing meals, we need to make sure to put in enough spices and seasonings, okay?"

"Such a delicate face but likes spicy food? I thought you'd prefer bland things. You seem so bland in general."

I couldn't help but laugh at that while sitting quietly in one corner of the kitchen. Then Lermarn —who, back then, was "Nara"—got scolded by Jared for being too blunt and lacking manners.

"Don't be so harsh on Nara, Jared. Hurry up and finish cooking—we're hungry."

I decided to speak up and hurry Jared along to end the lecture. Nara, after being scolded, went quiet and didn't speak again. I started to feel uneasy, afraid she might feel uncomfortable and run off. I reached my hand out blindly and called for her, then decided:

"Nara."

"Yes?"

"Take me to the dining table, please."

"Okay."

Then I felt a tug on my arm as someone helped me up from the low kitchen chair. Nara guided me to hook my arm through hers like always and slowly led me out of the kitchen.

"Are you mad at Jared?" I asked as she sat me down at the dining table. I heard her sigh slightly, as if she were emotionally conflicted.

"A little. But it was my fault—I can't really say anything."

"Don't worry about Jared too much. Just take your time adjusting naturally." "Okay."

"I understand. A sighted person living with a blind person in the same house —it takes a lot of adjustment. You can't expect everything to go perfectly in just a day or two."

I smiled a little, hoping to help her feel better.

"In that case, I'll be more careful with what I say. If there's anything you're not happy with, just let me know, so I can adjust."

It seemed to work. Nara went quiet for a bit, then replied in a more composed tone. I understood that it wasn't easy for her to adapt her habits and personality to suit my way of living and the others in the house. Especially for someone who grew up without love, warmth, or proper guidance—Nara had a lot to learn.

...

"Nara, where's my toothbrush?" I asked while feeling around for it.

Normally, the housekeeper would put it next to the faucet on the right side —same place every morning and night. But ever since Nara took over that duty, my toothbrush was never in the same spot again.

"Sorry. I put it in the wrong place again. Here it is."

Then I heard footsteps coming into the bathroom and felt a cool hand guide my hand to grip the toothbrush that was being pressed against my fingers.

"Wasn't it hard studying in school, being blind?"

After finishing up in the bathroom, Nara helped me walk back and sit on the bed, getting ready for sleep.

"It was sometimes. But I had friends at school who helped me, so I got through it."

"Being blind is tough. You can't see anything. Don't you feel frustrated?"

"Frustrated? More like I feel... disadvantaged."

"Is that so?"

"It's because people who can see—they can look at the faces of the people they love. They can see all the beautiful things in the world, or see whatever they want just by opening their eyes."

"..."

"You probably can't relate, Nara. You have eyes that can see. But for me, sight is the easiest way to experience beauty."

"..."

"You don't have to touch, don't have to fumble, don't have to search. Just look, and it's there."

"..."

"All the colors—pink, red, green, blue, orange. Jared said there are even light and dark shades of each color. And shapes, and faces. I really want to know what a good-looking person looks like. What makes someone 'goodlooking'? And what does someone who's not good-looking look like?"

"Come here."

Suddenly, my hand was pulled to touch something soft. It was soft and smooth. After a moment, I realized—it was someone's face. Nara's face.

"What's this?"

"Letting you touch the face of a beautiful person."

Her words made me burst out laughing right then.

"The nose has to be high like this, lips shaped like a bow, big eyes, and not too much forehead, okay?"

While she talked, Nara guided my hand playfully across the features of her face.

"You just made that up, didn't you? Saying your nose is high and your forehead isn't big?"

"Are you saying I'm not pretty? Hmph."

"No, no."

"In the future, if someone else tells you they're beautiful, don't believe them, okay? A truly beautiful face has to have features like Nara's only."

"Oh really?"

"But I'll make one exception. Because this person is way prettier than I am."

"Who?"

"You, of course."

*Thump thump*

*Thump thump...*

And that was the first time my heart ever beat out of rhythm.

Maybe it was normal for someone who was being complimented. People around me were always my subordinates. None of them ever dared joke or flirt with me. Only Nara dared to tease and talk playfully all day long.

Since childhood, no one ever told me what I looked like. If I was pretty, cute—anything. My parents, who passed away, might have praised me, but I don't remember. Because words like "beautiful," "cute," and all the physical compliments don't exist in the dictionary of a blind person like me. I never knew what those things looked like.

When Nara said that to me, my heart started pounding in a way it never had before. And the one who said it just giggled and continued talking, completely unaware that she had just made my heart flutter for the very first time.

...

"Awesome... ah... sssiiigh..."

"Ahem."

Nara's bizarre moaning sounds caused Jared to clear his throat awkwardly. The three of us were eating spicy tom yum noodles in the dining room. It seemed that someone who grew up with processed foods and flavorless drinks like Nara would always be overwhelmed with joy whenever she got to eat something freshly cooked with real herbs and natural ingredients.

Jared had reported to me that the skill Nara had developed the fastest since moving into the house was cooking. She could now make whatever she wanted to eat—something that was never an option in her previous life, where she had no freedom to choose what to eat at all.

"It's that delicious?"

"Oh, it's amazing, Khun Phleng! Can I have another bowl, Jared?"

"That was the last one. This is your third bowl already."

"Aww."

I chuckled softly as Nara grumbled like a greedy little child.

"Jared, I'll go back to work now."

I stood up from my chair. There were still many tasks to take care of today. Ever since my parents passed away and left behind several hotels for me to inherit, I've had to work twice as hard to keep everything they built alive. I was fortunate to have grown up in a good environment, with many of my parents' friends lending a hand and with Jared helping to manage things.

But soon, I planned to shut down several of the hotel branches— downsizing the business so I could manage it all more personally and not rely so much on others.

"You have to work today too? But it's Sunday," Nara asked.

"Being a business owner doesn't come with days off," I answered as I picked up my cane and tapped it on the floor.

"But the other night, you worked until past midnight, didn't you? At least rest for one day to let your body recover," she insisted.

"I agree," Jared chimed in, backing up Nara for once, which was rare, as he usually acted more like her schoolteacher than her ally. "You've been staying up later than usual a lot lately."

"Why don't we go for a walk at the nearby park? I'll take you myself," Nara suggested.

"..."

"You barely ever go outside unless it's for a meeting. You should get some fresh air."

...

And so I found myself standing in the park with Nara. I had been here several times before, but not in a long while. With a tight schedule and Jared being the silent type who never chatted while guiding me, the experience didn't differ much from staying indoors.

Nara took my hand and slowly led me forward. But we had only taken a few steps when I tripped over something at my feet and fell to the ground.

"Khun Phleng! I'm so sorry," she cried as she rushed to pull me up and hugged me tight. "I forgot to mention the uneven pavement. Are you hurt?"

"It's okay. Not too bad."

"Damn it... I keep forgetting to describe things properly," I heard her scolding herself in frustration. I reached out and gently patted her to calm her down.

"I'm okay. Stop being so hard on yourself."

"Okay. I'll give really detailed directions from now on."

"..."

"At 30 degrees ahead, there's a boy playing soccer running west. Ten degrees to the side, there's a couple sitting on the grass. About two meters ahead are four small stones scattered on the path. Four meters to the left is a pile of fallen leaves..."

"That's too detailed. Now I'm just confused."

"Giggles"

"Are you messing with me?" I scolded when I heard the laughter from beside me, from the one still holding my hand as we walked.

"Just a little. Don't be mad."

"..."

"I really want to know, when you were in school and they made you dissect frogs or soft things like that, how did you—ah! Khun Phleng!"

Apparently, Nara still had a lot to learn about guiding a blind person. Our pleasant walk had to be cut short as I now sat nursing a bleeding knee from falling on the pavement after tripping again.

"Ow..." I groaned at the stinging pain from the wound on my knee.

"I'm so sorry..." Her voice turned small and guilty. "I made you get hurt again. Jared's gonna scold me to death when we get back."

"Next time, be more careful," I said bluntly. When guiding a blind person, the most important thing is being their eyes. The guide needs to describe everything clearly. If they're not thorough or attentive, this is what happens —what I just went through.

"When you go to meetings or work, don't you ever fall?" she asked.

"I walk those paths over and over. I know them well, so I rarely stumble."

"So that means you don't really go out much, huh? Since you always have to be careful."

"Pretty much. But I did try once. At school, we went on a camp up in the mountains. I asked the teachers to let me join."

"And?"

"I drowned."

"What!?"

"One of my dreams has always been to jump into the water with my friends. I didn't know they were planning to prank me. On the last day of the camp, one friend led me to the edge of a bridge over a pond and said we'd all jump together on the count of three. But when they counted to three, I was the only one who jumped."

"..."

"They all laughed at me while I thrashed around in the water—I can't swim. Luckily, a teacher jumped in and saved me."

"Why would your friends do that? They should have taken care of you. Did they get punished?"

"I don't really remember, but they all got reprimanded. I was so angry. Angry that they left me struggling in the water alone. But what made me angrier..."

"..."

"...was that they laughed at me."

"..."

"They used my disability, my biggest insecurity, and turned the thing I wanted most—to be part of them—into a joke."

"..."

"After that, I never dared go into a pool again."

I thought of that day and pressed my lips together in pain. Even though it was an event I only heard, the sound of laughter that my friends intentionally directed at me—while I was down there in the water all alone —made me feel so ashamed I wished I could just sink and never come back up again.

"That's awful," Nara's voice finally rose after a long silence between us. "So that's why... you can't go very far."

"Mm..."

"I used to think that people who don't dare step out of their comfort zone are just cowards who don't want to experience real life—people who won't take on challenges, or try new things. But after getting to know a blind person like you, Phleng... maybe those people aren't always cowards after all. Everyone has their own necessary reasons."

"..."

"But stepping out of your comfort zone for a blind person like you... it really is hard, right?"

Nara seemed to turn her face toward me as she spoke, and laughed, because I heard her voice more clearly than before. Was I imagining it, or was the person sitting next to me actually looking down on me?

So you think someone like me doesn't dare to do reckless things? Sure, I'm blind—but that doesn't mean I'm a coward who won't take risks!

"It's not that hard," I snapped, standing up. "I'll show you."

"What are you going to do?" Nara asked, her voice now clearly beside my ear, meaning she had stood up too.

"I'm going to walk home by myself—no cane, no one guiding me. How's that for a challenge?"

As soon as I finished speaking, I tossed my cane down, hearing it hit the ground with a thud, and I started walking away immediately.

I bumped into people left and right, totally unable to get my bearings. Some people I ran into complained out loud, but I didn't stop to listen. I kept walking forward. The anger still simmered in my chest. So Nara thought I was weak? I'd show her I could do plenty.

The stinging pain in my knee continued to bother me. I could feel a warm liquid flowing—probably blood.

"Phleng!"

Nara's voice called after me from behind. In the end, I switched from walking to running. Running blindly. I ran even though everything in my vision was pitch black. There was a faint light in the distance, but I couldn't see anything.

I tripped several times on uneven ground, bumped into many people, but kept pulling myself up and running forward.

Until finally, a hand grabbed my arm and held me back, stopping me from running any further.

"Phleng, stop already! Ugh—" Nara gasped heavily. "You run fast, seriously."

"Let me go."

"No! If I let go, how would you get home?"

"Well, why'd you go and insult me then?! See? I showed you. I even run faster than you! See?"

"Okay, okay! I saw! Let's go home together now, please don't run off again."

With that, Nara gently pushed me to walk together in another direction. I could still hear her heavy breathing near my ear. Did I really run that fast?

"I'm sorry," she finally said.

The one holding me up eventually apologized.

"I didn't mean to look down on you at all, Phleng. Can you forgive me?"

"..."

"I'll run around this whole park however many times you want as punishment—just please forgive me. I really didn't mean it!"

"..."

"From now on, I'll think more before I speak, okay?" Her pleading, flustered voice made it easy for me to feel that she was sincerely sorry. I smiled slightly, already softening.

"Fine. I forgive you."

"Yay!" Then Nara forgot herself and let go of my hand again.

I sighed and waved my hand as a signal to the careless girl again before my hand was quickly grabbed back into hers.

"Then... Phleng, do you want to go swimming with me?"

"..."

"Facing your own fears is also a kind of challenge, right? Want to try?"

"But..."

"I promise I won't let you float alone in the water ever again. I'm actually a really good swimmer, believe it or not. Doesn't seem like it fits me, right?" She laughed at herself as she finished.

"..."

"Come on—let's go swimming together, okay?" Nara's voice became more and more coaxing. I stood there thinking for a moment before finally answering.

"Alright."

"Yay! You agreed!"

Suddenly, a body crashed into me with a hug so tight I nearly fell over again. I heard a mumbled "Yay yay" right in my ear. In that moment, a thought flashed through my mind, just as Nara hugged me.

If we can't connect through sight... then I'll use another kind of touch.

I wanted to see Nara's face, but that was beyond me. Still, I could do something else.

I remembered that after people finish running, they usually sweat—and have a distinct body scent, right?

I slowly wrapped my arm around Nara in return, rested my chin on her small shoulder, turned my face slightly into the crook of her neck, and inhaled her scent.

It probably sounds like a creepy thing to do—smelling someone's body scent with a feeling of fascination. But for someone like me who can't see...

It's the only way I can truly sense Nara.

# Chapter : Special Episode (3) The Last Touch

We're now at a swimming pool. It even has a diving tower. I'm already changed into a swimsuit and am sitting gently kicking my legs by the poolside, while Nara — judging from the splash just now — has probably already jumped in and is swimming.

After a while, a cold and wet hand touched my leg. The touch, colder than usual, made me jerk in surprise.

"Ha ha ha, it's me, Nara,"

That sweet little voice calmed my nerves. I hadn't touched a swimming pool or any natural water source for more than ten years. So, this was the first time since that embarrassing incident at camp that I let my body touch water again.

"Are you scared? This pool's deeper than I thought. But for diving, it has to be like this."

"H-how deep is it?"

"No matter how deep it is, I can handle it. And there's a lifeguard here too, don't worry," she said, while stroking my leg gently as if to comfort me.

I sat there thinking about what to do next. Since I couldn't see, I couldn't just jump in blindly. Then suddenly, a cold finger brushed over my stomach and quickly pulled back.

"W-what was that?"

"You've got such a nice figure."

"...."

"For someone who doesn't go out much, you even have a light six-pack. Impressive."

"You've seen that I exercise."

I responded proudly. Like I said, being blind doesn't mean I can't do what other people do — exercising included. We can do it without going to a gym. But for someone like me, it's a bit special since I had to hire a personal trainer to teach me the basic moves at first. Once I learned them, all I had to do was stick to a daily routine.

That cold finger brushing my stomach earlier really tickled me a bit.

"Ready to jump yet?"

After we had swum in the shallow area for a while, Nara asked me.

"You can just jump from the pool edge if you want. No need to climb the diving board."

"...."

I considered her suggestion silently.

We came all the way to the pool — just jumping from the edge wouldn't be much different from walking into the water normally.

"It's okay. I'll jump from the diving board."

...

Then Nara helped guide me up to the springboard, and afterward, she returned to the pool to wait below as promised.

"When you jump down, I'll be right here waiting. Don't be scared."

"I promise — the moment you jump, you'll meet me."

"...."

My caretaker shouted up from below, knowing well that this moment was what scared me the most — the fear of jumping in and finding no one waiting under the water, like what had happened to me when I was a kid.

*'The blind girl jumped in! Ha ha ha!'*

That voice of the ringleader of the group back then echoed in my head, followed by the laughter of all the other kids. I pursed my lips and took two more steps forward, just like Nara had told me — when I'm ready, take two more steps, and then jump on the third.

In the end, I decided to forget that shameful memory, even for a moment, and threw myself off the springboard.

Gravity pulled me down to the water's surface in less than ten seconds. The moment my body touched the water, a pair of arms came around me, holding me up so I wouldn't be left submerged longer than I feared.

"See? The moment you jumped, you found me."

The giggle of the girl holding me made my heart flutter unexpectedly. The waves caused by our movement made Nara stumble, accidentally pressing her face against my cheek. And because she had to support both me and herself, her arms hugged me tighter — so close that I could feel her body pressed completely against mine with no space between us.

"You're not scared, right, Phleng?"

That whisper in my ear made my heart race again — the second time already...

...

Apparently, my body didn't adjust well to the new challenge. The night after we got back from swimming, I developed a high fever. It stirred the whole house into a panic because I'm usually healthy and rarely get sick.

"Her fever's up again?" I heard Nara say as several people walked into the room. What time was it?

I reached out my trembling hand to feel for the talking watch on the nightstand — it was 3 AM. Earlier, Jared had come in to check my temperature while I was half-asleep and then stormed out, probably waking everyone up. That must be why Nara came to check on me now.

"Phleng, you should go to the hospital."

"...."

"This fever's too high. You need a doctor."

"I want to stay home," I replied weakly. Then a small hand touched my forehead.

"With that groggy voice, it sounds like a cold."

"...."

"I really think we should go to the hospital, Phleng."

Hearing that — from Nara, who was my last hope of being stubborn and staying home — made me sigh in defeat. I hated hospitals. Hated the smell of alcohol and disinfectant that lingered everywhere. Just thinking about it gave me chills.

"But it's 3 AM, and you're still probably exhausted. You haven't slept much either. Let me sponge you off first — it might lower your fever a bit. We'll go to the hospital in the morning, okay?"

"Alright."

I agreed, not really having much choice. Then those small hands gently pushed me back to lie on the bed.

"I'll take care of everything. Jared, go get some rest."

"Alright, if you need anything, call me."

The sound of multiple footsteps faded, leaving just me and Nara in the room.

"Take your shirt off."

"You say that like it's no big deal," I chuckled.

"This isn't the first time. You change in front of me all the time."

"Well, this time's different..."

"I don't have any naughty thoughts about you, Phleng — even if you have such a sexy and tempting figure."

"...."

"Why is your face redder now? Is your fever going up even more?"

...

Eventually, Nara managed to get me to take my shirt off. It seemed like the little one could sense that I was more embarrassed than usual. Since I was still able to take care of myself to some extent, she only took on the task of mixing warm water for me and occasionally re-soaking the towel in warm water whenever the one I was using to wipe my body turned cold and pale.

Normally, I wasn't someone who got shy. And whenever Nara had seen me change clothes before, I always had a bra on to cover myself. But this time was different... I had to be completely naked.

"You can't reach your back, can you, Phleng? Let me do it for you," she suddenly said. Then the towel in my hand was snatched away. I tried wrapping a blanket around myself because I didn't want Nara to see too much of my body. Meanwhile, my caretaker used the warm, damp towel to gently wipe my back.

Perhaps it was because I wasn't used to being touched by someone else. Having Nara touch me like that made me tremble even more, and I kept shifting and squirming until she had to hold me steady.

"You're shaking so much. Are you cold? Hang in there, okay?"

Of course, I had no choice but to endure it just as she said. After the wiping was done, a delicate finger touched my arm just as I was about to put on my shirt again, making me jolt in surprise.

"Why are you so jumpy? You're not usually like this. Is it because of the fever?"

This time, Nara pulled me into a hug and placed her free hand on my forehead. The warmth of her body as she embraced me met my feverishly hot skin. But to me — someone overwhelmed by the fever — it felt freezing cold.

I couldn't help but gently grab Nara's arm and lightly stroke it. She probably didn't realize what I was doing and likely thought I was simply hugging her back, seeking warmth and comfort.

But no... I just wanted to touch her.

"Let me wipe your face a bit more. Maybe it'll make you feel fresher. Your face is really red," Nara said, then began dabbing my face again with a towel. She used her cold fingertips to wipe away the beads of water left on my face. I could tell she was very close. Her warm breath brushed against my skin, close enough for me to feel it.

My heart was beating wildly — so wildly I couldn't even catch its rhythm anymore.

What exactly was this feeling?

I remembered reading in romantic novels that being near someone you love makes your heart pound rapidly. You get nervous, and your behavior becomes strange and uncontrollable.

Was this what it was like? Was this how I felt with Nara now?

"Phleng..."

While I was lost in thought, Nara took my wrist and gently played with it, then slowly guided me to lie back on the bed. My heart was pounding so hard.

"You could hear it, huh..."

"My hand accidentally brushed against your left chest when I was wiping you just now," she said.

Oh god...

...

"I think I like Nara."

"What did you just say?" Jared blurted out in shock after I told him my theory about my racing heartbeat.

"Falling for someone at a time like this? She's about to go back to Thailand!"

Jared's voice sounded anxious and taken aback.

Yes... earlier, Nara had come to ask for a divorce. She told me she wanted to go back to Thailand and start over. And as for me — someone who had been trying to understand my own feelings toward her day after day — I suddenly found myself at a loss.

But in the end, I let her go. And we only had two days left to be together before Nara would spread her wings and leave me.

I chose to spend those last two days as simply as possible. Nara and I went through our daily routines together, just like before. She took care of me, and I behaved as usual in the role of her employer... and her fake spouse.

Even though I had the chance to confess my love to her, I didn't do it.

...

"I'll find a way to make her stay," Jared offered, after discovering my feelings. The night before Nara was set to leave, he opened my door and found me sitting alone, crying.

"Don't!" I raised my voice, firmly stopping him.

"But you're hurting... I can't stand to see you in pain."

"Jared..."

He looked at me with a pained expression, no different from my own. As the longtime butler of my family, Jared had watched me grow up in a perfect home. Except for my blindness, I had everything: a good education, wealth, and an abundance of love from my parents. My life lacked nothing. I had never cried — not once — because everything in my life had always been whole.

The only time Jared had ever seen me cry was the day my parents passed away.

This was the second time.

He couldn't bear to see it.

"I'm crying because I feel a sense of loss. We've been together for five months, and suddenly she's going far, far away. Who wouldn't cry, Jared?" I said, wiping my tears with my hand. "Nara's dreamed of having a life of her own for a long time. This is her golden opportunity to do what she's always wanted. We have no right to stop her."

"Why don't we have the right? You paid her father a fortune. We do have the right to make her stay."

"But I don't want to make her stay."

"..."

"If she wants to leave and we stop her, she'll end up living with us in misery. Over time, I'm afraid Nara would come to hate me. I don't want that day to ever come."

"But—"

"Just... let it be. Do everything like normal. I'm okay."

What I said was the absolute truth. Letting Nara go while she still thought of me as a good boss — that was the best outcome.

If someone doesn't want to stay anymore, there's no point in clinging to them.

And I'd only just recently realized my feelings for Nara. I believed that things which had only just begun were easier to walk away from than something you'd been tied to for a long time.

So... I could still heal my own heart. I could still handle this.

From now on, I'd have to start a new life too.

There are still many challenges waiting. That's what I kept telling myself.

...

"Woke up to use the bathroom?"

"Just came to wash my face and brush my teeth. You had to come say goodbye to me, right, Nara?"

I spoke knowingly and walked to sit at the edge of the bed. It was early morning—the day Nara would be flying back to Thailand.

"I really wishes you could come see me off at the airport," she said, sounding regretful. Honestly, I could've gone, but I knew it would only cause unnecessary trouble. Airports were always crowded and chaotic. So last night, I lied to Nara and told her I had errands to do and couldn't make it, suggesting it would be better to say our goodbyes at home.

"Once you're back in Thailand, don't go messing around with gangs or anything again," I reached out to find her nearby and gently caressed her face.

"I know already."

We chatted idly for a bit until we heard the bedroom door open and Jared's voice called out.

"The car to the airport is here."

"We burned that fake marriage certificate already," I reminded her again, just to ease her mind.

"Thank you for everything. I will never forget this kindness for the rest of my life."

"Just be happy with your life. Now that you're free, fly as far as you can, alright?"

And then I took that tiny moment left to me and tried to touch her as much as I could. I pulled her in for a tight hug, breathing in her sweet scent as much as possible. If I were someone with sight, we would've looked into each other's eyes, kissed, and embraced to say goodbye. We'd have stared at each other until one vanished from view.

But for me, this was all I could do.

"Goodbye, Nara." "Goodbye, Khun Phleng."

...

After Nara returned to Thailand, I forced myself to stop talking about her altogether. I had already planned how to erase her from my life. The moment Nara shut the front door behind her to leave for the airport, I ordered Jared and the maids to clear out everything of hers left in the house —every single thing. Nothing must remain. I was far more ruthless than I expected myself to be. But the memories—no matter how cruel I was to my own heart—my mind kept storing Nara in every corner. And Jared noticed.

"I'll hire a private investigator to see how she's doing."

"No need."

"Why not?"

"Let her live her own life. If we go snooping around, we'd be no better than creeps." I tried to joke, but no one laughed.

"But you miss her. If we knew how she's doing, if she's lacking anything, maybe we could help her secretly."

"Someone like Nara can take care of herself just fine," I smiled confidently. "We have our own lives to manage too, Jared. If we keep watching her like this, when will we ever truly let go?"

"..."

"Our story with Nara—it ended already."

Yes, it ended back then. But five years later, everything began again, continuing on to this very day—the day Nara and I found ourselves lying next to each other once more. Even though she had changed and become "Lermarn," I still found myself thinking of her as "Nara" now and then.

I opened my eyes in bed, feeling something wiggling and poking at my face. When I looked, I saw Lermarn lying on her side, poking my face playfully with her finger. When she saw me turn to look at her, the sweetfaced little woman gave me a soft smile.

"You're awake?"

"Yep," I smiled back. But before she could even see my smile, Fatty Twelve jumped up, waddling across between us to sit plumply at the head of the bed, his chubby belly completely blocking my face. What a perfect little brat, that cat.

"You had a fever last night. I helped wipe you down. Once you were dressed, you just passed right out."

"Is that so?"

"Didn't even realize, did you? From now on, you need to ease up on the coffee, okay? You drink too much and sleep late every night—no wonder you got sick."

"Mmhm." I didn't pay her warning much mind. Actually, the thought of her wiping me down last night made me remember something from eight years ago.

"Why are you smiling like that? You look creepy." Maybe I was too caught up in my memory, because I started smiling to myself, and Lermarn frowned at me suspiciously.

"I was remembering eight years ago. Remember when I had a fever because we went swimming together, and you had to wipe me down?"

"Mmm." Lermarn looked up at the ceiling, thinking for a moment before exclaiming, "Oh, I remember! Back then, you got all flustered for no reason. It was just wiping down, geez."

"..."

"You kept squirming. Your body was burning up too."

"Well, of course I squirmed. I liked you then."

"What!? You did?" At first, Lermarn seemed to go along with it, but then her eyes widened in shock. "You liked me back then?!"

"Well..."

I mumbled and turned away, knowing full well she'd crawl over and press for answers.

And of course, she did. I hadn't even fully turned over before she grabbed my shoulder and spun me back around.

"Hold on! What do you mean? You were so quiet and withdrawn back then. What is this? You liked me?!"

I noticed a pink blush creeping up her face, like she was embarrassed to learn the truth now. So cute.

"Of course I did."

"Then why didn't you say anything?"

"Say what? That I liked you? That's not something you can just blurt out, darling."

"You never told me before." Lermarn pouted at me.

"Well, it was ages ago. And after you went back to Thailand, I forced myself to forget you."

"Wow... why were you so cruel to yourself? Maybe if you had told me back then, I wouldn't have left Thailand at all."

"But you really wanted to go back. During the job interview, you told me you wanted a life of your own. And back then, I was completely blind. If I had asked you to stay, it would've just been a burden. It might've made you hate me."

"..."

"But don't worry—I didn't wallow that much. Back then, I secretly stole as many sniffs of your scent as I could."

"So all that time you kept hovering near me... it was to smell me?!" Lermarn hugged herself the moment I confessed my hidden behavior.

"Not just smell. I wanted to touch you, too."

"You perv!"

"I was blind! What else was I supposed to do? There weren't many options!"

"You're scary, Khun Phleng! I don't want to be near you anymore." And with that, Lermarn turned away from me and even reached out to scoop up Fatty Twelve to snuggle with—just the two of them.

So cruel, huh? I won't give up that easily.

I slowly crept toward my tasty little prey, grabbed her small shoulder, and nestled my face into the crook of her neck.

"Khun Phleng, stop! I haven't even showered or brushed my teeth yet!"

"That's the best part—more scent. I love it."

"Gross! You can see now, stop sniffing me already! Twelve, help Mommy!"

"Meow..."

"Auntie's gonna eat Mommy. Even if you cry, she won't stop."

**(The End)**