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Prologue

Do you believe in life's timing?

The blooming moments, the good times that will come to everyone-just waiting for the right time, something like that.

I never believed in that crap. As far back as I can remember, my life's timing has been nothing but hell-rocky, full of ups and downs, some nights at rock bottom, some days filled with hope, only to be deceived into thinking things might get better before being slammed down again. Over and over, until I sometimes have to ask myself why people live in hell even before they die.

At the moment the vase smashed against my head, I wasn't thinking about any of that. I only registered the impact and the sharp, immediate pain. My body staggered and collapsed onto the floor. Warm blood streamed down my forehead and into my eyes. The world blurred—not that I was even processing what I was seeing. My head throbbed, dazed, until I heard a commotion at the door, followed by loud, panicked voices. Even when they rushed in to help me up and take me to the hospital, I was still in a daze.

And now, as I sit on a plastic chair in neat rows at the hospital's emergency department, I'm still dizzy. Blood still seeps from my wound. A man stands nearby, keeping watch—probably to prevent me and my attacker from going at it again. I glance at him, then slowly trail my eyes upward from the hem of his black trousers, up his long legs, to his broad chest in a light-colored dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. A suit jacket is draped over one shoulder.

To cop...

Honestly, I didn't expect him to help me. Not that he actually intended to, anyway. He was just attending a wedding at a fancy hotel in one of Bangkok's upscale areas. But just because an area is "nice" doesn't mean only good things happen there. And that's how he got tangled up in an assault case inside a hotel room-completely by accident.

Blood trickles out again. Damn, it hurts.

I press the cloth in my hand against my wound, trying to stop the blood from dripping onto my pants. My shirt? Whatever. But my pants? They're my favorite. Ripped just right, revealing just enough-sexy in all the best ways.

"Here, use this."

The cop steps closer, holding out a fresh towel to replace my already blood-soaked cloth.

"Didn't you hear me?"

His tone turns sharp when I don't reach for it.

He sits beside me and pulls my hand down before gently pressing the soft, clean towel against my head wound. Carefully, almost tenderly. I freeze. His actions stir a mess of emotions-surprise, confusion, and something I can't quite place. It's been so long since I felt this... kindness. I turn to look at him.

His face is strikingly handsome-sharp features, neatly arched brows, large eyes with a slight upward slant at the corners, a straight nose, and well-shaped lips. He looks back when he notices me staring. His expression remains neutral-not smiling, but not scowling either.

I've met plenty of good-looking men with terrible personalities. Looks don't faze me. But this time, it is different.

There's something in his eyes that tells me we're alike. That we both hide something deep within-something we don't want anyone to uncover.

A prostitute and a cop could never be the same.

And yet, I can't stop how I feel. I can't even look away. I just stare into his eyes, my heart dropping into my stomach, only to bounce back up and start hammering like it's trying to break free.

Right then, I knew—I had fallen into something. My heart was pounding so hard I was afraid the whole hospital could hear it. My attacker was still shouting at me from across the room, accusing me of deceiving him, of framing him, calling me promiscuous and every insult he could think of. Did I care? Not in the slightest. All I could think about was that stupid idea of life's timing.

That someday, something good would finally come along.

What a cruel joke. Not funny at all.

I fell in love with a cop on the night I was about to sell myself.

Chapter 1: Wayu

"Alright, so tonight, everyone finishes their part of the work. Tomorrow afternoon, we'll meet at Lapang's house to finalize the model."

The voice belonged to Mint, my project groupmate. We were sitting under the Faculty of Architecture building. Our group consisted of three people: me, Mint, and Lapang. We were working on a design project for a conference center, and now we were in the final stretch. This meant heavy doses of coffee and sleeping only when absolutely necessary-unless we wanted to crash and burn.

"Okay," Lapang and I replied in unison.

"Wayu, are you catching a ride with us?" Mint asked.

"No, it's fine," I declined. "I'll stop by the library to work for a bit. The air conditioning is nice there."

"My house has AC too, you know. Why not come to my place?" Lapang moved closer and slung an arm over my shoulder.

"Your house is all the way in Bang Na. Why would I go there?" I pushed him away. "You just want me to help you with your work, don't you? Do it yourself. I'm not helping."

Lapang made a disappointed face, while Mint looked at me, shook her head, and smirked before raising a finger and saying firmly,

"Tomorrow at 1 p.m., don't be late."

"Got it," Lapang replied in a playful tone.

We went our separate ways. I cut across the lawn toward the road. The university library wasn't far from the architecture building—just a short walk past a few other faculty buildings. I liked working at the library or co-working spaces because they were quiet and peaceful, with few distractions. Plus, the air conditioning was a big bonus. My house didn't have AC, and even with a fan, it wasn't as cool. The library was perfect.

I worked for a long time, almost until the library was about to close, before finally stopping. It was time to head home and continue working there. I shut down my laptop, stretched to relieve the stiffness in my shoulders, and then my eyes met those of a guy sitting across from me. He had been smiling at me for a while now. I had noticed him glancing over earlier. The color of his shirt indicated he was from the Faculty of Engineering.

I stood up and started packing my things. Just as I was about to put my mouse into my bag, it slipped from my hand, fell to the floor, and broke apart. The guy stood up, picked up the battery that had rolled near his chair, and handed it to me.

"Thank you," I said.

He glanced at my table, which was cluttered with my laptop, charger, headphones, and a stack of books on Western architecture.

"Need any help?" He asked.

Cutting the model...

I almost blurted that out but was afraid he might actually offer to help. So, I mumbled, "No, it's fine," and gave him a smile before walking away. Honestly, I was a little disappointed. He was good-looking-fair-skinned, tall, and fit-exactly my type. But I was really busy right now. The project was due next Monday.

My house was located deep inside a small alley off the main road. The entrance of the alley had a bustling evening market that stayed open until late at night. The atmosphere was lively at this hour, with people returning home from work. I chose to walk home instead of taking a motorcycle taxi from the alley entrance, figuring it was a good way to get some exercise.

As I turned into the narrow alley-my house was almost at the very end-I saw Waii, my younger sister, leaning against the wall with a bored expression. She was still in her school uniform, though she had untucked her shirt.

"Waii, why are you standing here?" I asked as I walked over. "Did you smoke or something? Why does it smell weird?"

"I didn't smoke," Waii said, frowning. "Mom and dad are fighting again. It's annoying, so I came outside."

"What are they fighting about this time?"

"The same old thing. Mom caught dad sleeping with another woman. Not the same one as before—this time it's someone from Khon Kaen or Saraburi. I couldn't stand listening to it anymore."

I sighed heavily. This wasn't the first time dad had cheated and been caught by mom. It had happened many times before.

"Have you eaten yet?"

Waii shook her head. "I don't have any money."

I pulled out my phone to check my bank balance. There was just enough left for maybe two more meals. I turned to Waii and said,

"Let's go eat noodles at Aunt Nong's place."

The two of us walked toward the alley entrance. Waii untied the white ribbon from her ponytail and stuffed it into her skirt pocket, letting her long, shiny black hair cascade down her back.

My sister was beautiful. She had big, bright, cat-like eyes, thick lashes, an oval face, and a pretty mouth—like an expensive princess doll you'd see in a shop. Everyone said she and I looked a lot alike, which annoyed Waii a bit because she didn't like being compared to a guy, even though she was undeniably cute. As for me, I didn't want to look like a princess doll either—not even a prince doll.

But what set Waii apart from being a princess was her behavior. She was stubborn, hot-tempered, argumentative, and rebellious, constantly breaking rules and causing headaches for both our family and her school. But to me,

she was still my little sister. No matter how difficult she was, I saw it as just a phase of being a teenager.

When we got to the noodle shop and ordered our food, I asked,

"Did you get your grades yet?"

Waii was in 11th grade now, and it was time for her to start seriously thinking about her future.

"Yeah."

"How'd you do?"

"I failed four subjects."

"What?! Four subjects?" I was shocked. "How did you fail that many?"

Waii put down her chopsticks, annoyed.

"Are you my brother or my dad? Stop nagging. If I failed, I'll fix it. I'll handle it myself."

I looked at her, feeling concerned but knowing that if I pushed too hard, she'd just resist more. So, I tried to keep my tone gentle.

"I'm asking because I care. If there's anything you need help with, let me know."

"It's fine. I'll handle it," Waii cut me off.

After we finished eating, Waii and I walked home together. As soon as we opened the door and stepped inside, we froze at the sight of the house.

Dad's clothes were scattered all over the floor and furniture, as if they'd been thrown around. A chair was knocked over, a bowl of curry had spilled on the dining table and dripped onto the floor, and the sofa was wet—

probably from someone throwing a glass at someone else, as shards of broken glass were scattered everywhere.

I turned toward my parents' bedroom. The door was slightly ajar, and dad's angry shouts competed with mom's crying.

"Who would want to come home to this?!"

"Fine! If you don't want to come back, then don't! Go live with that woman!"

"If I really leave, do you think you can manage without me? Huh?!"

Waii stepped over the broken glass and slammed her bedroom door shut. I wanted to go to my room, put on my headphones, and blast some music too, but the state of the house was too much. So, I started cleaning up, with the sound of my parents' arguing in the background.

This was why I often spent my time at the library or coffee shops. The house was small and didn't have AC, which was bearable, but this kind of environment was mentally draining.

My dad was a salesman who sold tools and traveled to different provinces every month. He was a flirt and loved to party. My mom was a housewife. The two of them fought constantly—over money, over women, over everything. They could only get along for a few days before the arguments started again. Sometimes I wondered how they ever loved each other enough to have me and Waii. Where did that love go? All I saw now were two people hurling insults at each other like they hated each other with every fiber of their being.

The next morning, when I stepped out of my room, I saw mom sitting on the sofa watching TV. The dining table was set with crispy pork cracklings dipped in sauce, fresh vegetables, and sweet-and-sour spare ribs stir-fry. The house was spotless, a clear sign that the war between my parents had temporarily ceased.

"You're up? Come eat if you're hungry. I'll heat up the chicken soup for you," mom said softly when she noticed me.

"It's fine, I'll do it myself."

I went into the kitchen, reheated the food, and brought it to the table. Then, I noticed mom's face.

"Mom..." I stared at the left side of her cheek, where a clear bruise was visible.

"Oh, it's nothing, don't worry about it," mom waved me off. "By the way, here's your allowance for the week. Your dad just gave it to me."

She placed the money on the table and went back to watching TV as if nothing had happened. This was a common scene, like watching a rerun of a drama series-fighting, yelling, even physical altercations, only to sit together the next day as if nothing had happened. Is this what married life is supposed to be like? I felt exhausted and helpless just thinking about it.

"Mom, has Waii left?"

"She went to school right after breakfast," mom replied.

"I'm planning to stay at a friend's place for three or four days to work on a group project. It's due next week."

"Alright, go ahead. Don't worry about me and Waii. Your dad's home this week."

Hearing that made me even more uneasy.

I could only think it in my heart, not daring to speak it out loud and ruin the mood.

"Mom, could you keep an eye on Waii's studies?"

"I always do. She'll tell me if anything's wrong."

"Did she tell you she failed four subjects this time?"

"Huh... what?" Mom was momentarily speechless.

"Mom, can you please pay more attention to her?"

"Why are you shouting? Your dad's still sleeping," mom frowned impatiently. "Fine, I'll ask her when she gets back. You go do your thing."

That afternoon, I went to Lapang's house with Mint to work on our model project. His place was spacious, and they had a housekeeper to handle meals, which made things much easier. I ended up staying over. As for Mint, if we finished our tasks before midnight, he'd drive home.

We finally completed the project on time. Though everyone was exhausted, the final presentation turned out well. Thanks to our thorough preparation, we passed without a hitch.

"Let's skip the celebration today. I'm too tired," Mint said as he helped load the model into his car after the presentation.

"What about you?" Lapang turned to me.

"Look at me. Do I look like I'm in any state to go?" I replied helplessly.

"Ugh, you guys are no fun," Lapang complained.

As we loaded the model into Mint's car parked by the teaching building, I noticed a familiar figure passing through the corridor between the buildings. It was the guy who had helped me pick up my mouse parts in the library. He glanced at me, then was pulled away by his friends, laughing and chatting.

"A friend of yours?" Mint asked.

"No, just someone I ran into at the library."

"Oho, you were staring so hard you might've twisted your neck. Why not just shout a confession?" Lapang nudged me with his elbow. "Handsome guys really are something else, huh?"

"Did you exchange contact info?" Mint continued.

"When would I have had the time? After finishing the group project, I still have individual assignments to catch up on. I'm just glad to get some extra sleep."

"True," they both agreed immediately. At this point, the only thing that mattered was sleep and rest.

"Close the car door already. Let's go home. I'm about to fall asleep standing," Lapang urged, even though he had just suggested going to a bar.

When I got home that day, I took a shower and collapsed into bed, sleeping like a log until the next afternoon.

When I walked out of my room, I saw mom lying on the sofa, leisurely watching funny videos on her phone with a relaxed smile on her face.

"You're up? Are you hungry? There's green curry chicken in the pot. I figured you were exhausted after sleeping from yesterday till now, so I didn't wake you," mom asked softly as I approached.

I sat down on the sofa next to mom.

"I just handed in the project yesterday, and I don't have classes today, so I slept in. Is dad up?"

"Your dad left for work early this morning."

I nodded. Dad was going out of town for work this week.

"So... what about that new woman?"

Mom pursed her lips, a smug expression on her face.

"I already called her using your dad's phone and gave her a piece of my mind. I even threatened to show up at her workplace and humiliate her if she dares to mess with someone else's husband again."

"What did dad say?"

"He promised to cut ties with her."

I nodded. "I hope he means it."

"If your dad said it, he'll do it."

Sure, cut ties with this one and find the next.

Just as I was about to wash my face to clear my head, I noticed a small cup on the coffee table with some clear liquid still in it. Even without smelling it, I could guess it was alcohol. I asked,

"Mom, are you drinking now?"

"Just a little, not much. It's like medicine," mom said casually. "Helps regulate my energy. By the way, I'm going to the store at the end of the alley later. Do you need anything?"

"No."

After mom left, I took a shower and went back to my room to finish up some work. With some light music playing, I felt calm and comfortable, as if all the troubles had drifted away. For a moment, I thought about the guy I met at the library and at the faculty yesterday, and I couldn't help but smile.

Hmm... if I see him again, should I give him my contact info?

However, this peace didn't last as long as I'd hoped. A few days later, I got a call from Waii's homeroom teacher. She said she'd tried to reach mom multiple times but couldn't get through, and eventually, mom had even hung up on her.

This wasn't the first time. The teacher mentioned that Waii had repeatedly broken school rules, and despite multiple warnings, there had been no improvement. This time, the school insisted on meeting with a parent and demanded that someone come in by 1 p.m. that afternoon, or Waii would be temporarily suspended. I agreed to go to the school to handle it and hurried back to the classroom to grab my bag.

"Lapang, I have to leave early. Cover for me during the afternoon roll call, and let me know if there's any homework."

"What's wrong?" Lapang asked.

"Family stuff."

"Alright, go ahead. Let me know if you need anything."

When I arrived at the school, I realized Waii's mistakes weren't just acts of rebellion or minor rule-breaking. Previously, Waii had skipped classes, and the school had sent warning letters to our parents. But this time, it was more serious. She had arranged for a group of bikers to pick her up after school, which not only frightened other students but also angered parents, who complained to the school and demanded action.

I sat there listening to the teacher spend an hour detailing Waii's various misbehaviors. I was also asked to sign a guarantee that if anything like this happened again, Waii would be expelled.

On the way home, I tried to control my emotions and not lash out at Waii. But as soon as I got home and saw mom still lying carelessly on the sofa, I couldn't hold back.

"Mom, why didn't you answer Waii's homeroom teacher's calls?"

"I was at the neighbor's house discussing something. I didn't hear it."

"What could be more important than answering the teacher's call?"

I couldn't help but shout, then turned to Waii.

"Waii, what are you thinking? Why aren't you focusing on your studies? You need to be careful about the friends you make, or you'll ruin your own future! How can you be so careless about your life?"

Waii's face darkened, and she retorted with frustration,

"What gives you the right to say my friends are bad? Can you judge them just based on what you see?"

"They're bikers who cause trouble in the neighborhood and smoke in groups near the school. How can people like that be good?"

"So all bikers are bad? Why generalize? There are bad people among the police, soldiers, and teachers too. Why can't there be good people among bikers?"

Before she could finish, dad's voice came from the doorway.

"Hey! What's all this shouting? The neighbors can hear you!"

When dad found out what had happened, he grabbed a plastic hanger from beside the ironing board and started hitting Waii, venting his anger while yelling. Waii cried and apologized, trying to block the blows, but dad's rage didn't subside. He kept hitting her until she collapsed on the floor and curled up in a corner of the room. Mom and I rushed to stop him, but in the process, we also got hit many times.

I pulled Waii into her room while mom stayed outside trying to calm dad down. Waii sat on the bed, sobbing uncontrollably, her body covered in bright red marks from the hanger.

"I don't want to live in this house anymore," she cried.

Even though I knew she had done wrong, I couldn't bear to see her like this. I took out some ointment and applied it to her wounds. When she had calmed down a bit, I spoke.

"If you don't want dad to get so angry, you need to make sure something like this doesn't happen again. I don't want to see you get hurt like this either."

Waii didn't argue back or show any resentment. I continued,

"As for making friends, I hope you'll be more careful and not get yourself into trouble. You're already in your second year of high school. If you can hold on for another year, you'll get into university. Then, you'll have more freedom to do what you want. But for now, I hope you'll focus on your studies and graduate smoothly. Can you do that?"

Waii was silent for a while, then whispered, "I'll try."

After that day, Waii didn't cause any major problems at school, and I felt a little more at ease. But recently, I've also had a lot of schoolwork to deal with, and final exams were looming.

Then one day, when I came home from university, I saw Waii sitting weakly on the sofa, her face pale, with a small basin at her feet. Mom sat beside her, crying and scolding her nonstop.

"Mom, what's going on?" I asked in panic.

"Waii's pregnant!"

"What?"

"She's pregnant! That's why she's been vomiting," mom shouted angrily.

I was stunned, standing there watching Waii shift uncomfortably, looking like she was about to throw up. Mom, while holding the basin, cried and scolded Waii, calling her promiscuous and shameless, saying dad would definitely beat her to death when he found out. Even as Waii was nauseous, she mustered the strength to retort, saying that promiscuity was inherited.

Dad was indeed furious, but he didn't kill her. Because she was pregnant, he just slapped her hard, making her mouth bleed, and then ordered her to get an abortion. That day, I had to take my sister to get the procedure done, my emotions too complex to put into words. I felt a mix of sadness, anger, and shame, unable to look the doctors and nurses in the eye, who probably pitied us. I felt like I had become a bad person, someone at the bottom of the societal value pyramid. It felt like just opening my eyes was causing trouble for society.

When the doctor told me that Waii's pregnancy was too far along to safely terminate, my mind went blank.

In the end, Waii gave birth to a little boy, pale-skinned and looking exactly like the man who got her pregnant. Oh, did I forget to mention? That guy disappeared as soon as he found out Waii was pregnant, completely irresponsible, and even moved to another province.

At first, I was relieved that Waii couldn't go through with the abortion. But I forgot how cruel it is to bring a child into a world with no support or security. It's not just cruel to the child, but also to those of us who have to bear the responsibility.

The first to escape this tragedy was Waii. She left with a man she had just met, claiming she wanted to start a new life. No matter how hard I tried to persuade her to come back, even for the sake of the child, she refused, saying she never wanted to be a mom. If forced to return, she would just keep running away until she left this family for good.

Now, the family consists of me, mom, my less-than-one-year-old nephew, and a dad who despises his own grandson. We're crammed into a small house, and every day is filled with exhausting challenges.

For others, home might be a paradise, but for me, it's definitely not.

My nephew grows every day, and while mom takes care of him, she's not very attentive. Dad seems increasingly fed up with this family situation and has started using work trips to escape reality. But the problem is, the household expenses don't decrease just because dad's away.

This is the turning point in my life, leading me down a path I never expected.

And this is just the beginning...

Chapter 2: Krit

"Krit, you came down just in time. Rose is here to see you."

A tall, handsome young man walked down the stairs to the first floor. He was wearing a T-shirt and sports shorts, with a white towel draped around his neck to wipe off sweat. Despite his simple attire, his sunny and radiant demeanor made him stand out.

Seeing the girl sitting in the living room with his parents, Krit smiled slightly.

"You didn't call ahead to say you were coming. Where have you been this time?"

"I just visited an old client in Nakhon Pathom. His son wants to buy a house in a project in Bangkok, so I brought some pomelos for Uncle and Auntie. Wow, even when you're just going for a run, you still look so handsome, Lieutenant Krit?" Rose teased.

"Handsome? I've always dressed like this," Krit replied with a laugh, brushing the sweat-dampened hair from his forehead. His well-defined features, fair skin, and slightly upturned eyes clearly showed his Chinese heritage.

"So you're saying you were born this handsome, huh? Quite the self-praiser."

Krit sat down on a chair in the living room, while Rose sat across from him. Krit's parents sat side by side on the sofa. Krit's dad, Phithak, was the police chief set to retire next year, while his mom, Pimjit, several years younger than his dad, was an accomplished piano teacher and the principal of a music school.

"Rose, stay for dinner," Police Major General Phithak invited.

"Sorry, Uncle, I have a client meeting tonight. The client only has time in the evening, so I won't be able to join you and Auntie for dinner today."

"You're working so hard. When do you even have time to rest?" Pimjit asked with concern.

"I enjoy working, and I want to put in the effort while I still have the passion. But I'll make sure to take care of myself too."

"Work should be taken seriously. You can't be half-hearted about it," Police Major General Phithak said in a steady tone.

Krit glanced subtly at his dad's face. His dad was usually a man of few words and serious demeanor. However, whenever he saw Rose, he always had more smiles and words to share. Rose wasn't exactly Krit's childhood friend, but they had known each other since high school, attended the same university, and naturally kept in touch even after they started their careers. Krit's parents also adored Rose.

Krit's mom, Pimjit, had a gentle personality, and her demeanor and speech exuded elegance. She deeply respected and cared for her husband. Police Major General Phithak, on the other hand, was a serious and diligent man. Though he loved his family deeply, he wasn't good at expressing his emotions. He rarely showed affection through physical touch or words. Instead, he demonstrated his love by working hard to provide a stable and comfortable life for his family.

From a young age, Krit had almost never experienced the word "lack." His life was always filled with "abundance." Everything in his life was smooth, and every path carefully arranged for him was enviable. Whether it was education or hobbies, his family provided unconditionally, whether it was necessities or luxuries. If Krit wanted something, his dad would always nod in approval.

'Well done, keep it up.'

This was what his dad often said when Krit accomplished something challenging. Krit understood that his dad's strictness and high expectations were expressions of his love.

However, there was one thing Krit had always longed for but rarely received-something as simple as a hug from his dad. Krit could hardly remember the last time his dad had hugged him, perhaps when he was around ten years old. As he grew older, such moments almost never happened. Even when he graduated from the Faculty of Law and successfully became a police officer, making his parents proud, his dad only patted him on the shoulder and looked at him with pride in his eyes. Despite this, Krit still felt a sense of fulfillment in his achievements because he had lived up to his family's expectations.

"Uncle, Auntie, would you like to try the pomelos?" Rose asked. "I'll peel and segment them. I guarantee they're sweet and delicious. Otherwise, I wouldn't have brought them for you."

"Sure, I'll help," Pimjit said with a smile.

The two got up and walked to the kitchen together. Rose overheard Police Major General Phithak and Krit discussing a recent high-profile case and chuckled, turning to Pimjit.

"The two handsome men are still talking about work even after they're off duty."

"That's just how they are. I'm used to it."

"Uncle must really love his job. He still seems so passionate about it. I thought most civil servants close to retirement would take it easy, just waiting for their retirement to come."

"Most people are like that, but not him," Pimjit said, shaking her head with a helpless smile.

After peeling and arranging the pomelos on a plate, the two prepared to return to the living room. As they passed the restroom, Rose noticed a family photo hanging on the wall. In the photo, Police Major General Phithak was dressed in a neat police uniform, standing shoulder to shoulder with Krit, who was also in uniform, while Pimjit stood beside them.

"Every time I see this photo, I can't help but take a second look. Uncle must be so proud that Krit followed in his footsteps," Rose said.

"He's fulfilled all our expectations. It was really hard for us to have Krit; we almost gave up. When he was born and turned out to be a boy, his dad was overjoyed. And Krit has never let us down. He's always been hardworking and ambitious, excelling in both character and academics since he was a child."

Krit heard the cheerful laughter of his mom and Rose as they chatted. When the two returned to the living room, Krit smiled and asked Rose,

"What were you and mom talking about just now? I heard you mention me. Were you gossiping about me?"

"No, I wasn't gossiping. I just said you look especially handsome in your uniform, and even more so when you take photos with Uncle."

"You say that because you don't know how hard it is to iron these uniforms."

"Do you iron your own clothes?" Rose asked, somewhat surprised.

"I have the housekeeper do it. But when it comes to dad's uniform, mom always irons it herself," Krit replied frankly.

"Really, Auntie?" Rose turned to Pimjit for confirmation.

"It's true. That's the only set of clothes I iron personally, because your uncle specifically asked me to."

Rose nodded before speaking in a tone of admiration.

"Such a meaningful uniform should naturally be taken care of by someone important. That's so romantic."

"Rose, have you ever thought about trying to iron clothes yourself?" Police Major General Phithak asked.

"Uh... I don't like ironing."

The atmosphere froze for a moment, and Krit quickly tried to lighten the mood.

"Dad, she doesn't know how to iron. I remember back in university, during a faculty event, a friend asked Rose to help iron the clothes for the parade. In the end, the back of the shirt had a burn mark in the shape of an iron, and the friend had no choice but to wear it like that."

"Krit, how could you expose me like that!" Rose laughed. "I haven't improved much since then. Work keeps me even busier than school did, so I just send my clothes to the dry cleaner now."

"Hmm... Young women today work just as hard as men, so household chores naturally take a backseat," Police Major General Phithak said. "But married life requires clear division of responsibilities. It's a sad house where the hen crows louder than the cock. Otherwise, the couple will lose their way and won't know how to move forward. You'll understand when you start a family how important mutual respect is."

"Okay, I'll remember that," Rose replied with a forced smile.

"Oh, I almost forgot," Rose said, pulling a pink envelope from her bag. "Nina is getting married next month. She asked me to give you this invitation. Let's go together. The wedding theme is the bride's lucky birthday color—blue."

Krit took the envelope and opened the invitation inside. Seeing this, his mom teased,

"You're always receiving other people's wedding invitations. When will you send out your own?"

"Mom..."

Krit sighed helplessly. He knew that his mom had always envisioned Rose as his bride, despite him telling his parents multiple times that they were

just friends. But it wasn't surprising that they didn't believe him—after all, Rose was the only woman he had ever brought home.

"If you meet the right person, don't drag it out. You're already twenty-seven. I want to hold a grandchild, and your dad isn't getting any younger."

Rose listened without commenting. After chatting for a while longer, she said her goodbyes and left. Krit walked her to the door, where her car was parked outside.

Once they were out of earshot of the family, Krit said,

"How about we just pick a wedding date?"

Rose giggled.

"I've actually thought about it. Your parents look like they can't wait to send out our wedding invitations tomorrow."

"You don't know this, but dad went to look at a house the other day, just a street over. The owner is planning to sell because they're moving abroad. Mom secretly told me that dad even asked about it, thinking I might be interested. The house isn't big, but it's perfect for a newlywed couple."

"How much is it?"

"If I remember correctly, it's twenty-eight million baht."

"Wow, are you paying in cash or taking out a loan? If it's a loan, you have to apply at my bank. I'll get you the best interest rate." Rose quickly pointed at herself. "If you go to another bank, that's betrayal, and I'll cut ties with you!" Rose joked.

"How much do you think a police lieutenant makes?" Krit laughed. "A loan is probably out of the question. Dad will probably buy it himself, maybe to leave it for his future grandchild."

"Grandchild?"

"Mmm. Want to see what kind of daughter-in-law my dad envisions? Just take out your compact mirror and take a look."

"Oh wow, I actually wouldn't mind becoming the police chief's daughter-in-law, but let's wait until you stop staring at men's butts first. Besides, I'm not really in... well, this kind of state right now." Rose's voice trailed off.

"What state?"

Rose bit her lip and let out a soft sigh.

"For someone like me, an asexual, finding someone willing to marry is really difficult. Maybe even impossible."

"Why be so pessimistic? I'm sure there's someone out there for you."

"Who? Name one person."

"Uh..."

"See?" Rose playfully nudged Krit's shoulder and then laughed. "See you at Nina's wedding. Don't forget to wear something blue."

After Rose left, Krit picked up his car keys and his ever-present gym bag, tossing it into the car. He drove out onto the street, heading towards his usual gym.

Krit loved working out and often spent hours at the gym. He would start with running on the treadmill, followed by weightlifting and other strength training. If he had time, he would end his workout with a sauna session.

Today was no different. After finishing his workout, he grabbed a towel and walked into the sauna. There were already a few people inside, so Krit chose a spot in the corner and sat down. He rarely initiated conversations, preferring to sit quietly until he felt like leaving.

"Doesn't feel hot enough. Let's turn it up a notch." A man across from him stood up as he spoke.

Krit didn't even glance at his face, only noticing his well-proportioned physique. His gaze unintentionally lingered on the curves of the man's back and waist, and he swallowed hard. The man's smooth skin glistened with sweat, and the heat in the sauna seemed to intensify. Krit leaned back against the wall and closing his eyes.

Later, when Krit returned home, he found his parents sitting in the living room watching TV.

"Still watching TV?" He asked casually. "I thought you guys had already gone upstairs to rest."

"I'm following this drama," his mom replied. "It's about the conflict between traditional beliefs and science. It's quite interesting, so I got your dad to watch it with me."

The TV screen switched to a news report about Pride Month events happening in several provinces across the country, showing LGBTQ+ individuals marching in colorful parades.

"These people have no shame. Disgusting," Police Major General Phithak muttered.

"They just want recognition," Krit's mom responded.

"Isn't it disgraceful for men to marry other men? Parading around like this, don't they ever think about their parents?"

"Maybe their parents have no choice but to accept it. What else can they do?"

"I just can't understand how anyone could accept something like this. And to think they even promote it like it's a good thing—it's corrupting society."

Police Major General Phithak shook his head, his voice filled with disgust and contempt.

"I'd rather my child be dead than have to suffer the humiliation of knowing he turned into one of these freaks!"

Krit turned away and walked upstairs. Once inside his room, he shut the door. The polite smile he had worn in front of his parents disappeared instantly.

He placed his bag in the corner of the room and went to take a shower. After changing into fresh clothes, he sat down on his bed, debating whether to listen to music or watch something on his computer. But his mind kept replaying the scenes from the gym, distracting him.

Krit shifted to lean back against the stacked pillows at the head of the bed. He recalled the sight of men sweating as they worked out, the beads of sweat rolling down their muscles, the distinctly masculine scent of hormones in the air, and the sweltering heat of the sauna. It all sent a wave of heat surging through him... Krit tensed up. He picked up his phone and opened a dating app, scrolling slowly through the profiles. The screen was filled with men boldly displaying their bodies.

But then, he heard his parents' footsteps passing by his door. They were still discussing the TV show. Panic shot through him, and he quickly turned off the screen, flipping his phone face down onto the bed. This reaction had become second nature whenever his dad was nearby.

Only after his parents' voices faded and he heard their bedroom door close did he finally exhale in relief. But a memory from the past suddenly resurfaced.

It was one evening during his middle school years. Police Major General Phithak had come to pick him up from his all-boys school. As their car drove past the school's soccer field, they saw a group of high schoolers gathered around, excitedly cheering for the players. Their expressions and actions revealed an undeniable admiration for the same sex.

'Disgusting!' Police Major General Phithak spoke in a tone of hatred and disgust, then turns to glare at Krit. 'Don't you dare end up like them, you hear me? If you ever turn out like that, I'll kill you. Understand?'

Krit's heart pounded wildly. He nodded frantically, staring straight ahead, too afraid to turn his head or make eye contact with his dad.

Even after all these years, Krit still vividly remembered the tone and expression his dad had used that day.

Krit let out a heavy sigh and closed the photo of the young man he had been looking at in the app before tossing his phone to a corner of the bed. The fire of desire that had burned in his eyes earlier had faded, replaced by emptiness. He let himself fall back onto the bed, lying on his back, eyes shutting as frustration and unease continued to weigh on his heart.

Chapter 3: "Decent" Work

Under the relentless twists of fate, I had no choice but to put my studies on hold and embark on the road to job hunting. My dad's company was struggling more and more, forced to lay off employees, while those who remained had to increase their personal sales performance just to earn meager commissions. The company could no longer afford to pay all its employees.

My dad used to be the sole breadwinner, and while we managed to scrape by from month to month, there were times when we struggled financially. Still, we found ways to get through. As for me, I took on part-time jobs and freelance report writing whenever I could to help ease the family's burden. But now, things have changed. My dad has to push harder to increase sales, even though the economy is pulling everything downward. I've seen news about many factories shutting down lately, so the fact that he still has a job is already a blessing—even if it's not enough to support the family.

I fought hard to stay in school, but as my coursework became more demanding and required more of my time, combined with the growing financial struggles at home, I ultimately reached a breaking point.

"If you don't start working to help out, the family won't make it. You can go back to school once the economy improves."

That was what my dad said when I told him I was dropping out to work. His words seemed comforting on the surface, but they only filled me with despair. It was like hearing, "The law of cause and effect is always fair"—a phrase that only deepened my hopelessness. The underlying message was clear: aside from praying, we had nothing else to rely on.

I found a job as a waiter at a steakhouse on Asok Street. Finding employment with only a high school diploma was difficult, but I managed to pass the interview quickly thanks to my English skills. The restaurant especially valued employees who were fluent in English or Chinese.

The customers were a mix of locals and foreigners. The work was exhausting, and my shifts ended late at night. Every day, I would come

home and collapse into bed, having no other choice. Though the pay was low, I could at least look forward to earning some tips from customers.

Everyone knows that poverty is painful. My first paycheck was almost entirely swallowed up by two months of overdue rent. It was then that I truly understood the phrase, "money slips through your fingers." The feeling was indescribable—watching my hard-earned wages vanish in an instant, as if they had never existed.

After three months of working, we barely managed to pay the rent on time—but only for that month. As for the future, I didn't dare to have any expectations because my dad's income remained unpredictable. We still lived as frugally as possible.

"I don't think Singto should keep drinking formula anymore. It's too expensive—he can grow up just fine eating regular food."

One day, as I was about to leave for work, my mom sat with Singto on her lap, feeding him. Though he was small, he was developing normally. I walked over and stroked his head. He let out a joyful giggle and tried to grab my hand.

"Let me hold him for a bit," I said, spreading my arms.

Singto wriggled out of my mom's embrace and threw himself at me. I quickly caught him and planted a big kiss on his cheek, making him laugh even louder.

Becoming an uncle at twenty still felt surreal to me. I hadn't fully adjusted to this role, so I chose to call myself by my name rather than "uncle." Looking at Singto, a wave of sorrow washed over me. He was born into a family that had almost nothing—not even baby formula was within reach.

"I'll work hard and earn money to buy formula for you," I told him before handing him back to my mom.

I headed out to work with a heavy heart. I can't let things go on like this. I have to find more work because, right now, my mom and Singto have

almost no one else to rely on but me. My dad's company had just gone through a second round of layoffs—who knew when his turn would come? Since the steakhouse operated from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m., I decided I would go to the market tomorrow and see if there were any jobs available during the morning hours.

Fortunately, the restaurant was exceptionally busy that day, leaving me with no time to dwell on my worries. I was constantly moving between the kitchen and customers' tables without a moment's rest. On top of that, there was a live band performing, which meant I had to be extra careful not to bump into customers who suddenly got up to dance. Despite my best efforts, accidents were sometimes unavoidable.

As I cleared the plates and glasses from a recently vacated table and placed them on my tray, a male customer at the adjacent table suddenly stood up and stepped backward without looking.

"Oh!"

He bumped into me, causing the stacked glasses to crash onto the floor, shattering into pieces.

"I'm sorry,"

I apologized immediately, even though it wasn't my fault. The other waiters rushed over to help.

"Sir, did any of the glass cut you?" I asked with concern.

He shook his head before cursing under his breath when he saw that the sleeve of his jacket was stained with orange juice. Anxiety gnawed at me—I was afraid he would blame me for the accident.

However, the man simply smiled and said,

"Sorry, I didn't notice just now."

His words felt like a weight had been lifted off my chest. I couldn't afford to take on any more misfortune—my life was already battered enough as it was.

"You should wash it off quickly. If you leave it for too long, it might not come out," I suggested.

He hurried off to the restroom, and I rushed to the kitchen to grab a clean cloth and some soap before following him.

When I arrived, I saw him rinsing his sleeve under the tap. I handed him a bottle of hand soap but then changed my mind.

"How about I help you wash it?"

I offered. It was my way of thanking him for not blaming me for the accident. He took off his juice-stained jacket and handed it to me. I took it, passing him a clean towel to dry his soaked arm.

I quickly rubbed the stain, and in no time, the customer's jacket was as good as new. He seemed satisfied and asked,

"Do you pool tips here, or do you keep them individually?"

"We pool them," I replied.

"In that case, I'd rather just tip you directly. I made a lot of money yesterday, so I'm in a good mood today."

He handed me two thousand baht. Seeing my hesitation, he simply placed the money into my hand. I froze. Without warning, tears welled up and spilled down my cheeks.

"Whoa!" He exclaimed, surprised, as if he couldn't believe someone would cry over a tip.

"Thank you," I hurriedly wiped my tears away—it must have been awkward for him, too, having someone suddenly break down in front of him like that.

"I'm sorry... It's just... Do you know how much this amount means to me right now? It could change my life." As I spoke, I felt the tears threatening to fall again.

"Two thousand baht is a lot, but I don't think it's enough to completely change someone's life."

He chuckled. If I had that much money to casually tip someone, I probably would have laughed too.

"This money is enough to buy several months' worth of baby formula for my nephew. I was just worrying about it, and then you came along at the perfect time."

He studied me for a moment.

"If it's that tough, why don't you find a job that pays more? With your looks, you have plenty of options."

"I need money urgently. Any place that hires me quickly, I have to take it. I don't have the luxury to choose."

He scanned me from head to toe before speaking.

"My workplace is hiring right now. Interested? The pay is definitely better than being a waiter."

"What kind of job?"

At this point, I finally noticed that he was well-dressed and had good looks too.

Seeing my wary expression, he laughed.

"It's an honest job—unless you choose to make it otherwise."

He took out a business card and handed it to me. I reached for it and widened my eyes when I saw the name of the place printed on it.

"It's a bar host." He said. "What's your name?"

"Wayu. And you?"

"Henry."

I glanced at him and joked, "Wow... even your name is handsome."

"Actually, my real name is Hong. Henry is just my work name."

"Hong sounds handsome too."

"Taking two thousand baht and suddenly you're all sweet-talking me, huh? So, are you interested or not?"

"Very interested," I replied. Though I didn't fully understand the job, when you're cornered in life, you either take a leap of faith or give up.

"Then don't waste time. The sooner you go for the interview, the better your chances."

"Thank you, bro."

With Hong's recommendation, I stepped into the neon-lit nightlife of Bangkok's Silom Road—a world of flashing lights, indulgence, and extravagance, so vastly different from my own reality. That day, I nervously attended my interview. I happened to meet another applicant—a tall, muscular man with a sun-kissed complexion that made me feel inferior in comparison. The person interviewing us was Mr. Fei, the manager. My heart pounded. I had never imagined myself taking this path. The interview wasn't just a conversation; it also assessed appearance, physique, charm, and the ability to attract customers.

When Mr. Fei finally announced that I was hired, I was overjoyed—I could've jumped for joy. He explained the rules in detail: the job operated on a fifteen-day payment cycle, with wages paid a week after each cycle ended. I gathered my courage and asked the most pressing question on my mind.

"I don't have to... be with customers, right?"

"You mean sexually?"

"Yes."

"We strictly prohibit any form of sex work inside the establishment. But if someone makes arrangements outside, that's their own business."

I walked out of there feeling hopeful. My income would come from customers ordering drinks for me. Here, each drink was priced at three hundred baht, and after commission deductions, I'd get around two hundred per drink. That was a high rate compared to the wages I had been earning before.

Thinking about it made my throat dry, so I stopped by a convenience store to grab a drink. That's when I ran into the guy who had applied for the job at the same time as me. He had finished his interview before me and had already left.

When he saw me, he nodded and asked,

"Did you get the job?"

"I did," I replied. "But I want to wrap up things with my current job first, so I'll start in a week. What about you?"

"I'm starting the day after tomorrow," he said, raising an eyebrow.

Later, I found out his name was Thai, from Khon Kaen. He wasn't conventionally handsome, but he exuded a rugged masculinity. He had only been in Bangkok for a week, solely for this job.

"I'm going to be the top host here," Thai declared with confidence. "Just wait and see."

On my first day at work, everything felt new and exciting. I had been to bars with friends before, but it's not like this, especially now that my role had shifted from customer to server.

Luckily, there was Hong, who taught me some work tips during his free time. And then there was Thai, who acted like my mentor. Yes, Thai, a guy from Khon Kaen who had started working five days before me. We seemed to hit it off. Maybe it was because we were both trying to break free from our current struggles and longed to change our circumstances.

My advantage was my appearance, so I paid extra attention to maintaining a good look and hairstyle, spritzing on a light fragrance, and wearing a clean white shirt and a pair of trousers to present a fresh and handsome image. Thai, on the other hand, had the advantage of a great physique, and he preferred to show off his abs, going for a runway model style. The top PR guys here were Sky and Mr. Richy. Not only were they handsome and charismatic, but they also had a refined demeanor, dressed impeccably, and used high-end items that turned heads wherever they went. In comparison, Hong was mid-tier but still quite popular.

What I didn't expect was that my first customer would be a man. Hong had mentioned that dealing with male and female customers would be different, and I happened to encounter this situation. The man caught me off guard when he suddenly grabbed my crotch. I was so startled that I let out a sound, but luckily, it turned into something funny because the customer knew it was my first day, and their table was a group out for fun and laughter.

When Hong found out about this, he laughed and taught me how to avoid such situations and how to handle customers who wanted to take things further.

"If you don't want customers taking advantage of you, you need to reject them clearly but politely. If you're unsure, ask the sales team for help, or you'll get into trouble."

On my first day, I earned the equivalent of four drinks. But my biggest problem was that I couldn't bring myself to look customers in the eye—I

always felt shy. I wanted to come across as approachable, but my body was stiff, my speech felt off, and even the words I said sounded strange to me.

After a week, I began to understand that being a male host at a bar was far from as easy and carefree as it seemed on the surface. It required attention to every tiny detail and an extremely disciplined self-management. Especially under the influence of alcohol—even though not every drink offered by customers had to be consumed. To reach the top and become an industry leader was even more challenging. It wasn't just about social skills; it was an art of understanding human nature: reading minds and responding precisely to every unspoken desire. These skills could only be truly grasped and mastered after countless encounters with reality's sharp edges.

At first, I had held some prejudice against this job, thinking it must be filled with sex, drugs, and wild indulgence. However, when I truly stepped into this bizarre world, I found that reality was far more complex than I had imagined. It was undeniable that those shadows existed, especially drugs—they were like dust in the air, seemingly within reach, even casually handed out in the corners of the bar like pieces of gum. Yet, I chose to keep my distance, doing my best to hold onto the last boundaries of my heart in this hazy nightscape.

What shocked me the most was that many customers didn't come solely for physical gratification. Yes, some did, but more people came here seeking a place to breathe, to discuss business, or to temporarily escape the pressures of reality. They wanted someone to listen, someone to care, and just that kind of companionship could make them briefly forget their loneliness.

Our duty was to capture their needs with keen insight and delicate emotions, fulfilling those deep-seated desires. If you couldn't understand this, it would be hard to go far on this path. When I look at Sky, Mr. Richy, Hong, or others who could effortlessly win countless drink orders every night, I feel that they are good. They have something special that can conquer customers' hearts with clever words and warm smiles. Not everyone can do that.

Just as I was trying to adapt to this job, some unsettling ripples emerged at home. I found out that mom liked to go to our aunt's house, two streets away, to play cards. I know that mom doesn't have the money to go play cards with them. What bothered me more was that she took little Singto with her.

"I just bring some cigarettes to sell and earn a little money to support my grandson," mom explained, leaving me feeling helpless.

"But Singto is so young. Is it really okay to take him to such a smoke-filled place?" I tried to persuade her.

"What else am I supposed to do? Stay home all day with just Singto? Do you think I'm not lonely? Why don't you try taking care of a child all day?"

Mom raised her voice. Whenever she started using rough language, it meant she was ready to escalate things into a full-blown argument.

Her retort made me think deeply. I realized that, as a participant in nightlife, my schedule was completely opposite to mom's. When she was awake, I was asleep; when I left for work, she and Singto were getting ready for bed. In this fragmented time, her loneliness seemed inevitable. My dad's indifference, my busy schedule, and her narrow social circle all forced her to seek another way to dispel her solitude.

Thinking of this, my tone softened unconsciously.

"Mom, how about this? If you really want to stop by and sell cigarettes at the card game, can you do it only on my days off? Leave Singto at home with me first. But on the days I have to work outside, please don't take him there."

Seeing my softened attitude, mom also seemed to soften up.

"Oh, I know," mom snorted.

I can only rely on my nephew as my encouragement to keep fighting, to have a better quality of life.

Working in a host bar has both bright and dark sides. I try to stay on the bright side—or at least somewhere in between, leaning toward the light as much as possible. I avoid getting involved with drugs or gambling in any form. I don't undermine anyone, step on anyone's toes, or cause conflicts at work. My focus is on improving myself and doing the best I can in this job.

Tonight, I was assigned to accompany three male guests at a table, one of whom was none other than the bar's frequent patron—the renowned producer, Mr. Oat. He would always call the top PR guys like Sky or Richy to come and take care of him. Today, he had brought along two colleagues, both men, who are co-workers in his new project, Mr. Chain and Mr. Tai.

"Isn't Mr. Oat a regular customer of Sky?" I whispered to another host who was chosen along with me.

"Yeah, but Sky has been booked for drinks all night."

I nodded in understanding. This happened to Sky often—customers would book him for drinks, keeping him at their table until the bar closed. As a result, he wouldn't be making rounds like the others. At most, he would briefly greet a few customers before returning to his designated table.

Since Sky had already been booked and Richy was on leave, it fell to me and another bar host to serve Mr. Oat. After sitting for a while, Sky came to greet Mr. Oat at the table.

Let me tell you—Sky's skills are on another level. His tone of voice and the way he speaks are truly masterful. He knows how to be affectionate without seeming overly clingy, making it feel like he genuinely cares about the customer. Before leaving the table, Sky discreetly told me,

"Mr. Oat is an important customer of mine. Take care of him for me tonight, okay?"

So, I tried to relax and do my best to take care of him. I wanted Mr. Oat to be satisfied and not feel like I was too far below Sky's level—so much so that he'd regret calling me to sit with him tonight. Luckily, Mr. Oat was generous and not the type of customer to make things uncomfortable. That made my work tonight smooth and even enjoyable. Mr. Shane was reserved, while Mr. Tai had hands so quick that even an octopus would be impressed. Fortunately, the host sitting next to him was an experienced pro—sometimes dodging, sometimes playing along, turning it all into lighthearted fun.

That night, I went home feeling more encouraged than when I had left. I wanted to give myself a little praise—I did great. And I hoped that everything in my life would keep moving toward better days.

Two days later, when I went to work as usual, I heard that Hong had been hospitalized. Thai was the one who told me.

"What happened to Hong?" I asked, both worried and shocked.

"His appendix burst. He was taken to the hospital in the evening."

"Is it serious?"

"I don't know, but I don't think it'll be too bad. He's in the hands of doctors now—they should be able to help."

I had no idea how dangerous an appendectomy was or how long it would take to recover. But Thai and I talked about visiting Hong together once he was well enough to receive visitors.

That night, however, when I finished work and got home at 4 a.m., I saw that the lights in the house were still on. When I opened the door and stepped inside, I found my mom sitting on the floor in the living room. The place was a mess—things were scattered everywhere, chairs overturned. One side of her forehead was swollen, with a small cut that was bleeding slightly.

"Mom! What happened? Who did this to you?"

"Wayu!" Mom was frantic, her hair disheveled, her voice trembling. "Take your nephew and get out of here now! Those people... they threatened to sell Singto as a beggar!"

"What?! Who are these people?"

My hands went ice cold as I listened to the truth from mom's own mouth. She cried as she spoke, confessing that she had taken out a loan from an underground lender—part of it to cover expenses, but the rest... she had gambled away in a card game.

"How much do you owe them?"

"I borrowed twenty-five thousand... but with interest, it's now... seventy thousand baht."

"Seventy thousand?!" My knees nearly gave out.

"They said they'll be back in three days. They told me to have the money ready... or else something will happen to my grandson."

I sank to the floor, still in shock over what I had just heard. Mom was crying as she tried to pack Singto's clothes into a bag, insisting I take him away to safety. But where the hell was I supposed to find seventy thousand baht in just three days? Even if I had a whole month, I wouldn't be able to come up with that kind of money. I had only been working for less than two weeks—I hadn't even received my first paycheck yet.

Why does my life keep throwing this kind of shit at me? Just when I think things are about to get better, they crash and burn all over again. It's like one fucked-up thing after another keeps coming at me without end. Did I kill someone in my past life? Is that why I'm paying for it this badly now?

But you know what? Even in a situation like this, I was still trying to find a way out—no matter how narrow or hopeless it seemed.

I told my mom, "Mom, I'm not taking Singto and running while leaving you here to face them alone."

"Why, Wayu? If I run away too, they'll kill us for sure! They even know where your dad works. Our whole family will be in danger!"

"We're already in danger," I said, looking directly at her. My tears spilled down my cheeks—anger, sorrow, disappointment all mixed together.

"Tomorrow, I'll go to work and figure out a way to get the money."

The next day, as soon as I arrived at the bar, I went straight to Mr. Fei, the manager. But my hopes were immediately crushed when he told me that the bar had a strict policy against salary advances or employee loans under any circumstances. It was the same thing he had told me on the very first day I applied for the job.

"Wayu, you know the rules. No salary advances, and no lending money." His tone left no room for negotiation.

"In the end, I had no idea who to turn to. I had only been working here for a few days, and the people at the bar didn't know me well enough to trust me with a loan—except for Thai."

"My wife has a gold ring weighing one salung. I'll borrow it and sell it for you first," he said.

I looked at Thai, so moved that I couldn't speak. He wanted to help me even though he had nothing himself. But a single salung of gold wouldn't make much of a difference.

"Let me think about it first. You go get ready to work the tables. I'll join you later," I told him.

After Thai left, I went to sit alone in a corner, trying to figure out what to do next. So this is what it feels like to be completely trapped. I buried my face

in my hands, feeling like I was about to cry. But then, I heard someone speak.

"Wayu, What's wrong? Why are you sitting here alone?"

I looked up. The "high and mighty" Sky was frowning at me in confusion.

To my surprise, this "star" of the bar—someone I thought a newcomer like me could never reach—extended a helping hand when I was at my lowest.

"Would you take an outside gig?"

Sky asked after hearing about my predicament.

His question stunned me, but I didn't dare refuse this one and only chance.

Sky continued, "Remember Mr. Shane? The guy who came with Mr. Oat the other day?"

"I remember."

"Well, he was interested in you that night. But the sales staff told him you don't take private bookings, so he didn't push further. Mr. Shane likes fresh-faced, college-boy types—the natural, innocent, and inexperienced look."

I swallowed hard. "I've never taken an outside gig like that. You know, I've only been a bar host for less than two weeks as you can see... I..."

"Why overthink it? Everyone else does it. Some hosts even enjoy deals like this, especially when it's with attractive customers. Or is it that you're uncomfortable because Mr. Shane is a man?"

"No, that's not the reason."

In truth, I wasn't comfortable doing this with customers of any gender.

"Sky, can you talk to him for me first?"

"Wait here."

Sky raised his hand and stepped away to talk in a quieter spot. After a while, he returned to me.

"I told him that you're really new to this and have never taken a job like this before. So, Mr. Shane is offering thirty thousand baht—for a party at a hotel and, well... you know. It starts at 7 p.m. and ends no later than 2 a.m."

"Thirty thousand?" My eyes widened at the number, my heartbeat quickening. "What do I have to do? But I won't touch drugs—no meth, no substances like that. I won't go near any of it."

"He won't force you into that. But he did say there will be props involved."

"What kind of props?"

"Like leather outfits, cat ears, skirts, high heels... role-playing stuff."

"Role-playing? You mean... I have to wear those, or he does?"

"Does it matter?"

"Uh... actually... actually, it doesn't."

"Deal or not? I need to give him an answer."

I pressed my lips tightly together, my mind in turmoil, unsure how to handle this. The wave of problems hitting me was overwhelming, making me feel more foolish and impulsive than usual. In the end, I made up my mind and answered.

"Alright. But... can you negotiate it up to thirty-five thousand baht? Please try."

I clenched my fists. Desperation had stripped away my clarity and rationality. If everything went as planned, I could at least pay off half the

debt collectors' demands. That might buy my mom some time. As for the remaining amount, I would work hard to earn it.

Sky spoke to Mr. Shane for just a moment before turning back to me.

"Mr. Shane agreed. I gave him your contact information, but don't let anyone else know about this, and make sure to keep it confidential for the customer. If you weren't truly desperate, I wouldn't have helped you."

I nodded. I didn't want anyone to know either. I didn't even want to do this. After Sky left, I went to the restroom, splashed water on my face, and prepared for my shift that night.

Looking at my reflection in the mirror, my eyes were dull and lifeless, as if I couldn't believe what I was about to do. I was about to go from a mere host to someone selling his body. I had never imagined I would end up like this. That I would sell myself... for money.

Eventually, this moment still arrived. My heart pounded violently as I walked down the hallway on the fourth floor of the hotel, heading toward the location Mr. Shane had designated. I glanced at the time on my phone, silently wishing it could freeze in this instant, but I knew that was impossible.

It's okay, Wayu. Just this once. You'll never do it again.

From yesterday until now, I had repeated this phrase to myself over and over. As I reached the door of Room 1414, I took a deep breath, trying to suppress all the fear, moral conflict, and emotions that might make me turn and flee. Then, I raised my hand and knocked on the door.

Mr. Shane was the one who opened it.

"Hello, Mr. Shane," I greeted him.

"Wayu, you're right on time."

He smiled and greeted me, his tone calm, but the way he looked at me was filled with an expectant desire, like someone who knew happiness was just within reach.

Suppressing my nervousness, I stepped inside. The room had a large sofa in the center, next to a glass wall that overlooked the city's nightscape and the starry sky. My gaze shifted to a side door—one that led to the bedroom. My heart beat even faster, knowing that soon, I would step through that door and be with him.

Mr. Shane embraced me from behind, his face pressing against my neck as he kissed me.

"You smell nice. Did you just shower?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Then have a seat and wait for me. I'll take a quick shower. You can have some beer to relax."

I walked over and sat on the sofa. He turned on the TV with the remote, gave me another kiss on the cheek, and then headed toward the bathroom adjacent to the bedroom.

Soon, I heard the sound of running water from the shower. Trying to ease my nerves, I opened a bottle of beer and took a sip, staring at the screen without actually processing what was playing. After a while, I heard what sounded like a phone ringing. Mr. Shane's phone was sitting in the corner of the sofa.

I didn't touch it, letting it ring until it stopped on its own. But then it rang again. By the fourth time, I finally decided to get up and check if he had finished showering. That was when my eyes landed on an open suitcase at the foot of the bed.

What I saw inside was not black leather outfits or high heels like I had expected.

There were many items—sex toys, handcuffs, ropes, a gag with a strap, oversized dildos—the kind that, if inserted, would tear a person apart with pain. And there wasn't just one. Goosebumps covered my entire body. Then I saw a small knife, along with even more things I couldn't begin to comprehend.

No way... Were these things meant to be used on me?

Before I could think further, Mr. Shane stepped out of the bathroom. I immediately confronted him.

"What's with all this stuff? Why did you bring these?"

He walked toward me slowly, lazily wrapping his arms around me before whispering in my ear,

"These are specially prepared for you, Wayu. Just tell me which one you want to try first. Sky said that Wayu doesn't usually use these stuffs but you are willing to try."

I shoved him away.

"No! That's not what I agreed to! Sky told me you would only use things like leather outfits, cat ears, and blindfolds!"

"Who would pay thirty-five thousand baht just to play with cat ears?!" Mr. Shane's voice rose, clearly unhappy with my reaction.

At that moment, there was a knock at the door. I turned quickly.

"Who is that? Did you order room service?"

I was startled when Mr. Shane grabbed my arm and said,

"The other guy, like we agreed—three people. You can use any toys, just make sure there are no marks outside of the covered areas. I've already laid out the conditions. Sky said you agreed."

His gaze sent chills down my spine. My eyes darted back to the items in the suitcase, and a suffocating fear enveloped me.

No. I couldn't do this. Being with two men, mixed with all these bizarre props—I absolutely couldn't accept it!

The knocking continued, followed by someone calling Mr. Shane's name. My heart pounded so hard it felt like it would burst out of my chest. If that person outside came in, I would be plunged into a living nightmare tonight!

In an instant, I made up my mind. I wrenched my arm free and sprinted toward the door, determined to escape before the person outside could grab me.

"Hey! Are you really gonna cheat me this easily?"

He chased after me and caught hold of me. I struggled with all my strength, crashing against the wall in the process. A framed picture fell from the wall, shattering on the ground. He tried to pin me down, but I fought back desperately. We both tumbled to the floor. Panicked beyond reason, I gathered every ounce of strength and kicked him hard. He fell backward, his head slamming into the glass coffee table beside the sofa.

"You little-!"

He roared in anger. I turned to look and saw him clutching his face. His forehead and brow bone had split open. Blood streamed down one side of his face, covering half of it.

Right now, Mr. Shane looks terrifying. He stands up and glares at me with a furious expression. I scramble to my feet as fast as I can.

That bastard is bigger than me. If he grabs me again, I'll be the one who gets hurt more!

"Help!" I run toward the door, shouting at the top of my lungs so that the people in the neighboring rooms and anyone outside can hear me.

"Somebody help me!"

I'm almost at the door when my collar is yanked back, throwing me off balance. That pulls us into another struggle. He's stronger, but I fight back, aiming my punches at the spot where he's already injured. I don't think about whether it'll make him even angrier—until the moment that vase comes smashing down onto my head.

Chapter 4: The Right Person, The Wrong Time?

After the blow to my head, I can barely register anything other than the searing pain that spreads instantly, followed by a dull, disorienting haze. I stagger, crashing into the cabinet by the wall before collapsing onto the floor. My consciousness nearly slips away. Warm liquid trickles from the torn skin, dripping down over my eyes. My vision blurs. I remain still, unable to move, until I hear a loud crash at the door, followed by a commotion of shouting voices. I have no idea who's who. The sounds reach my ears, but my mind can barely process anything.

Until someone came close and touched me.

"I'm a police officer," he spoke to me in a daze.

After that, I was quickly taken to the hospital—along with Mr. Shane. Even though we were both injured, he still found the energy to sit across from me in the emergency room, shouting insults my way. I couldn't even argue back. My mind was still dazed from everything that had happened. All I could do was press a cloth against my wound, trying to stop the blood that kept seeping out.

"Take this." The police officer who had first found me handed me a small white towel, like a soft comfort replacing the bloodstained handkerchief I had once clutched.

Lieutenant Krit... I vaguely heard his name as he introduced himself to the nurse. From the hotel to the hospital, I hardly ever looked at his face, only knowing that he was the one who went to stop the incident because I heard a loud noise like people arguing and people calling for help.

Earlier, I saw him pacing around the nurse's station, coordinating with the local police. I glanced at him from a distance. He wasn't wearing a police uniform but was dressed in a suit, as if he had just come from a formal event. He had an impressive physique—tall with long legs and broad, squared shoulders. His voice was deep, clear, and commanding.

"Didn't you hear me?"

He snorted at me before slumping down in the chair next to me.

I couldn't help but lift my eyes to look at him. My heart raced, and I quickly shifted my gaze away. Lieutenant Krit touched my arm, signaling me to lower it to my side, then gently pressed a towel against my wound.

"Don't move." He said when I moved my head away.

To my surprise, his tone was remarkably pleasant. Given my attire and current state, as well as the harsh and vulgar words that Mr. Shane had hurled at me, it showed that I was involved with the other party in a sexual way, to the point of prostitution. However, Lieutenant Krit did not show any contempt. On the contrary... he acted as if I was just an injured person who deserved sympathy.

I caught a faint whiff of aftershave from him. Lieutenant Krit had rolled up the sleeves of his dress shirt to his elbows, revealing his strong forearms. The skin on his arms was slightly darker than the skin on his neck. His well-tailored suit jacket lay casually draped over his lap. With a gentle touch, he reached down and wiped the bloodstain from my forehead.

At that moment, I found myself looking at his face again—so close that I could see every detail with perfect clarity. Lieutenant Krit's skin was fair and smooth, his sharp, narrow eyes holding an intensity that was hard to ignore. His nose was straight and well-defined, and the deep groove above his upper lip accentuated its delicate curve, resembling the bow of Cupid himself.

People always feel the weight of being watched. Lieutenant Krit turned his gaze to me, and in that close exchange, my heartbeat suddenly quickened, my breath caught in my throat.

His striking features were undeniable, but I saw beyond them. There was something deep, something enigmatic hidden within his eyes—an indescribable pull that made me sink into them, reluctant to look away.

"Does it still hurt?" He asked softly.

"Yes." I murmured in response, just realizing that I had been staring into his eyes for too long.

I sat there quietly, allowing Lieutenant Krit to carefully wipe away the blood from my wounds. His warm touch felt like a delicate veil wrapping around me. In that moment, the world seemed to fall into silence; all the noise faded into the distance, leaving only the rhythmic thudding of my heartbeat. Side by side, we sat together, and a gentle warmth seeped into my chest, flowing slowly into the softest part of my heart.

Throughout the past few months, with everything crashing into my life, including the years I spent taking care of my younger sister, my mom, and even my nephew, I had long forgotten what it felt like to be cared for. No one had looked after me or even considered my feelings for a long time. This deeply affected my heart in a way I had never imagined. His thoughtful actions made me feel as though I, too, was a life of value, deserving of tenderness and care.

His tenderness filled the emptiness in my heart, and I only just realized how important it was to me. He and I shouldn't have met under these circumstances. It would have been better if we had brushed past each other somewhere, with one of us accidentally bumping into the other, and then we simply smiled at each other.

But in my shattered world, romance was nothing more than a distant illusion. Krit had only stepped in to fulfill his duty, yet before I knew it, I had already started falling for him.

Meanwhile, Mr. Shane kept making noise, calling his friends to come to the hospital, but I didn't call anyone, even though my own phone was still in my hand. I didn't want to pass on the trouble to anyone. I had put myself in this position, seeking trouble on my own. Even though I was scared and distressed because I didn't know what charges I might face—prostitution? Assault? Would I end up in jail?

After a while, a nurse called me into the examination room. The doctor carefully inspected my wounds, asking about symptoms and arranging for further tests where necessary. Fortunately, the vase was made of glazed ceramic, not thick crystal glass. Otherwise, I probably wouldn't have just ended up with stitches and observation.

When I was finally discharged, I had to accompany Mr. Shane to the police station. Lieutenant Krit was also present as a witness, testifying to the cause and course of the chaos.

Unexpectedly, Mr. Shane had backpedaled. Even though he had been yelling at me at the hospital, calling me a promiscuous person who slept with anyone, prostitution and buying sex are crimes committed by both parties. Mr. Shane had a reputation and social standing to protect. In the end, the whole thing was framed as a roleplay between a couple with a taste for violence, which had gone too far and turned into a messy situation. Mr. Shane would take full responsibility and cover all the damages. I felt nauseous hearing it, but I decided to go along with it. It seemed better than dragging the case on and letting it escalate into something even worse.

Hours of turmoil passed, and I found myself right back where I started. With stitches in my head and uncertainty in my heart, I stood at the entrance of the police station, lost. Tonight's events had left me bewildered, unsure of where to go next.

Lieutenant Krit walked out after me. When he saw that I was still standing there, dazed, he walked over to me.

"How will you go back?" He asked.

I looked up at him in confusion, murmuring, "What...?"

Lieutenant Krit paused for a moment before sighing. My condition must have been pitiful enough for him to say something.

"Where do you live? I'll take you home."

Lieutenant Krit drove me home after that. Along the way, we exchanged a few words. I told him I worked at a host bar, but I left out the details of how I had gotten myself tangled up in the mess that led to tonight's events. I don't know... Technically, it shouldn't matter what he thinks of me—we might never see each other again. And yet, for some reason, I cared.

The car came to a stop in front of my house. I was surprised to see the lights still on, even though it was already so late. A sense of unease crept over me. Without wasting a second, I hurried out of the car, worried that something might have happened inside. Lieutenant Krit stepped out right after me.

Just then, the door opened. My mom stepped out.

"Wow."

My mom seemed fine and was even holding Singto in her arms. I exhaled softly in relief.

"Mom, why are you still up so late? And why are you holding Singto?"

Hearing my voice, Singto turned his round little face from my mom's shoulder and immediately turned to look at me. His little arms reached out, asking me to hold it while making soft, innocent sounds.

"Actually, I saw the car stop outside and looked out the window to see it was you. Singto happened to wake up, so I carried him out to greet you." When mom saw I was with someone else, she asked, "Oh? Who's this with you?"

"Lieutenant Krit, this is my mom." I introduced, then turned to her and said, "Mom, this is Lieutenant Krit. He was kind enough to bring me home."

Upon hearing that I had arrived with a police officer, my mom stiffened the moment she realized I had come home with a police officer. Then, when she noticed the wound on my forehead, her worry turned into full-blown panic.

"Wayu, what on earth happened to you?"

Actually, I could tell my mom the truth right then, so she would realize how much trouble she had caused others. But since Lieutenant Krit was here, he shouldn't be dragged into my family's troubles. So, I wove a simpler story on the spot. I reached out and took Singto into my arms.

"It's nothing, Mom. Just a fight at the bar—some customers got into an argument, and I was caught in the middle. Luckily, Lieutenant Krit happened to be there. He stepped in and helped break it up, then took me to the hospital to get stitches. Everything's fine now."

Hearing this, my mom quickly thanked Lieutenant Krit and invited him to come inside to sit and have some water. After saying that, she hurriedly walked back into the house to prepare a glass of water for him. I then told him.

"You don't have to go in. It's already late now, you should get some rest," I said, as I could tell he wanted to decline. "I'll talk to mom myself."

Lieutenant Krit gave a nod. His gaze shifting to Singto in my arms and then asked.

"Is it just the three of you in your home?"

"Yes, it's mostly like that. My dad often works in other provinces and isn't home much, so it's just me, my mom, and my nephew, as you can see."

Singto stared wide-eyed at Lieutenant Krit, probably unfamiliar with the sound of his voice. Seeing this, Krit gave him a small smile.

"What's your nephew's name?"

"His name is Singto," I answered softly.

"Singto." Lieutenant Krit reached out to touch the tiny fist in my arms before looking past me. "Your mom came out and called. Take Singto inside and put him to bed. If he stays out too long, he might get sick."

When mom realized that Lieutenant Krit was about to leave, she looked disappointed. I quickly cut in, saying that he had errands to run. Then, I handed Singto to mom so she could take it inside, so that she wouldn't pressure Lieutenant Krit and make him feel uncomfortable.

"I'm truly sorry for all the trouble I've caused you today." I said.

"This is my duty as a police officer," he said calmly. "Go inside. It'll be morning in a few hours."

"Yes," I replied in a low voice. "Thank you so much for going out of your way to drive me home."

"If I hadn't driven you, would you have just stood outside the police station like that?"

"I... I'm not sure. I was confused, just feeling stuck."

"Well, go get some rest. Things will be better tomorrow."

"Thank you."

He let out a soft "hmm" before walking back to the car. I watched his back and felt a pang in my chest. The events of today were so awful that I didn't even want to think about or talk about them anymore, now or in the future. It was a memory I wished I could erase. But Lieutenant Krit was the only good thing that stood out amidst all that chaos and destruction.

"Lieutenant Krit..." I called out before I even realized what I was going to say to him.

He turned around and asked, "Is something wrong?"

"I... I just really wanted to thank you."

He smiled right then, a smile that seemed to set the world back into motion. Like a tree budding anew after a long winter, stretching its tender green leaves toward the light, reviving with hope and life.

"You already thanked me," Lieutenant Krit replied.

I smiled back at him, a smile that probably didn't look very bright, but it was the first smile of the day. I wished he could stay a little longer, to become a fleeting solace for my restless heart. But I couldn't find a reason strong enough to keep him here. So, I reluctantly spoke up.

"Lieutenant Krit, you should go. I won't bother you anymore. If you stay, you'll probably end up offering alms to the monks in the morning. Drive safe."

I watched as his car gradually disappeared into the night, its taillights growing smaller until they finally vanished around the corner. The only thing left was the dim streetlamp swaying quietly in the dark.

"Lieutenant Krit..."

I could only whisper his name under my breath, sighing softly into the stillness.

When I stepped inside, I found my mom sitting on the sofa, holding Singto, who had already fallen asleep.

"Wayu, how are you feeling? Does it still hurt?" She asked with concern.

Although I was still angry with mom, her question softened something in my heart. I sat down next to her and leaned over to kiss Singto's head before answering,

"I took a painkiller."

"Those people are unbelievable, getting into fights at the bar and messing up business. Absolutely disgraceful."

"Mom, I earned thirty-five thousand baht." I interrupted her complaints, unwilling to listen any further. "I'll pay them back tomorrow."

Her eyes widened in shock. "Wayu, where did you get that money?"

"I borrowed it from the manager. He agreed to lend it this once, and I have to work off what I owe him. If I get into trouble like this again, he will fire me."

I looked directly into her face and said,

"Mom, listen to me. I'm really exhausted now. I don't know how much longer I can keep going. If you can't help, at least stop getting involved with those loan sharks. You've seen how ruthless they can be. Please, for Singto's sake."

Mom made a grimace. "I'm scared now. I won't touch those things again."

The next afternoon, I received a call from Thai first, followed closely by one from Hong. It turned out that the incident between me and Mr. Shane had already spread throughout the entire bar. Which wasn't really surprising, since Mr. Shane was a friend of our VIP customer, Mr. Oat, the news quickly reached our manager, Mr. Fei.

"What did Mr. Fei say?" I asked anxiously.

"That's exactly why I'm calling," Thai replied. "Mr. Fei asked me to tell you that as soon as you're feeling better, you should go see him immediately."

"Shit... I'm screwed." I couldn't help but curse.

"What the hell actually happened? I don't believe what that guy Sky said. I want to hear it from you directly."

So, I told him everything. At first, he seemed angry that I made those decisions without telling him, but in the end, once he found out what I had gone through, his anger quickly turned into pure outrage.

"I knew it. Sky is completely untrustworthy."

"Yeah... I just never thought he'd go this far. Why would he do this? What did I ever do to him?"

It turned out that Hong was the one who answered my question. Less than half an hour after I had ended my conversation with Thai, he rang me up. clearly unable to wait after hearing the news. He had just returned home from the hospital, but the moment he found out about the situation, he reached out immediately.

"He meant to trip you up. There's no way this happened by accident. It was obvious you have potential, so he wants to hold you back. If customers can take you away that easily, your value drops instantly. Some customers might only want you once, and then never look at you again. Plus... I think he's jealous. He doesn't want you to become Mr. Oat's new favorite instead of him."

"Mr. Oat? What are you talking about? How could I possibly compare to Sky?"

Hong chuckled softly in his throat. "Who knows? The future is unpredictable."

"But did he really have to go this far?"

"In this industry, you have to be careful. Don't trust people so easily."

I will carry Hong's words with me to the grave. I was a fool—too quick to trust. The problems crashing down on me had blinded me to the obvious. I should've questioned why Mr. Shane was willing to pay so much just to spend the night with an ordinary host, without any bizarre conditions attached. But I didn't. That was my mistake. And Sky? That bastard had a hand in this too.

The next evening, I went to the host bar before it opened to meet with Mr. Fei as he had instructed. Thai was worried about me, so he came along as well. The moment I saw Sky, rage surged through my veins.

It turned out that we found Sky there—clearly, Mr. Fei had invited him as well. The moment I saw Sky, rage surged through my veins. He was the one who had nearly thrown me into the hands of two predators. I stormed up to him and yelled at him.

"How could you do this?"

"What did I do?" Sky shot back, his tone dripping with sarcasm.

"You made a deal with Mr. Shane behind my back. You set me up!"

"And why did you agree to it? You wanted to sell yourself, wasn't I the one helping you all along? Didn't you come to me first?"

My anger snapped. I lunged at him. Sky barely had time to react before he stumbled backward, crashing onto the floor.

"Hey! Wayu!"

Thai rushed forward, trying to stop me.

But by then, I was past reason. Though Sky and I were of similar build, at that moment, I was fueled entirely by fury. I straddled him, fists clenched, ready to land a blow.

"Not the face!" Sky yelled, shielding himself with his arms. "Please! Don't hit my face!"

Hearing that made me hesitate. Sky is a top-tier host. His face was his most valuable asset—his entire career depended on it.

SMACK!

"DP-!"

A sharp cry cut through the air. Sky clutched his cheek.

"You bastard! You actually hit my face?!"

I was stunned into silence before turning to look at the owner of that punch. It wasn't me who threw it—it was Thai.

"I'm not even good at punching, and you're already whining like a damn dog," Thai sneered.

In the end, Thai and I were both called in to see Mr. Fei together. I can honestly say that at that moment, I thought it was over—I was sure I was about to be fired. And Thai, too.

But you know, sometimes life throws surprises at you. After everything that happened, I told Mr. Fei the whole truth, just as it was. I didn't care what kind of story Sky had spun before this—my truth was simple, and I had nothing to hide.

"If I told you to apologize to Sky, would you?" Mr. Fei asked.

"Absolutely not," I answered without hesitation.

"Me neither," Thai added firmly.

Mr. Fei sighed, looking between us.

"Then don't let this happen again. Avoid trouble if you can. And if you can't—quit. Don't bring personal matters into business."

"Ha..." Thai and I exchanged nervous glances.

"Mr. Fei... you're not firing us?" I asked cautiously.

"Are you planning to resign?"

"No... No!" Thai and I answered in unison.

"Then get back to work. Stop standing around."

Staff can be replaced, but the business must continue. Personal matters should be left behind. If we want to continue working, we have to be able to coexist.

The nightlife industry mostly runs on money. I wanted to say it outright—no matter how much you despise someone, even if you can't stand the sight of them, even their shadow, at the end of the day, Sky and I still worked in the same place. Because life goes on, and living requires money.

Thai had half of his earnings for the past two weeks docked as punishment for punching Sky. Mr. Fei considered it damage to the business, so he deducted the amount without hesitation. But Thai told me it was worth it—he'd even pay extra for another swing at Sky if given the chance. That made me laugh, even though the situation should have been serious. Still, I had already made up my mind—I was going to return that money to him.

I took four days off before returning to work. Some of my colleagues playfully teased me about my past entanglement with Sky, but for the most part, no one paid much attention to it. I focused on getting myself back into work mode. This job is what I chose, and I'm determined to move myself to a better position.

Before long, things returned to normal. Hong returned to work a day after me. I was happy to see that he was strong and as charming as ever. As for me, I started getting called to sit at tables by customers more frequently than I did on my first few days at work.

"Hey, what are you daydreaming about over here?"

Thai walked up to me while I was sitting outside taking a break.

"Nothing, just lost in thought," I turned to look at Thai, feeling like I couldn't hold it in any longer. "Thai, do you remember that lieutenant I mentioned before? The one who helped me get away from Mr. Shane?"

"Oh, yeah—the really handsome guy?"

"How do you know he's handsome?"

"Oh please, Wayu, you've brought him up at least a dozen times. Of course I remember."

"Right... it's him. Actually, I've been wanting to find him and properly thank him for saving me that day."

"Is that so?"

"Why are you smiling like that?"

"You like him, don't you?"

"I never said that!"

Thai laughed because my voice had gone up a pitch, making it obvious I was hiding something.

"You sure have high aspirations."

"High aspirations? What do you mean?"

"You know the saying—military wives count their bottles, and police wives count their cash."

I couldn't help but laugh.

"What nonsense! I just want to buy him a gift to express my gratitude, nothing more. I have no plans to marry him."

"Then... what exactly do you want to be to him?"

I shook my head in exasperation, refusing to answer his question. Who would dare think that far? He's a cop, and I'm just a host at a bar. Our worlds don't overlap—unless, of course, it's because I'm getting arrested.

"If I suddenly showed up to see him, do you think he'd mind?"

I bit my lip, feeling anxious. It had been almost a week since he drove me home. I had memorized his name, rank, and department as easily as I knew my own name, but... had he already forgotten about me? No, police officers have excellent memories.

"Don't overthink it," Thai reassured me. "You didn't cause him any trouble. What's the problem? And if you're not expecting anything other than to thank him for his kindness, then there's nothing to be afraid of."

"Yeah... I guess you're right." I still hesitated.

"Or maybe... deep down, you're hoping for something more?"

I looked at Thai—he could probably tell what was running through my mind. He gave me a soft smile and said,

"If you don't expect anything, you won't be disappointed. But if it were me, disappointment would be a small price to pay compared to never knowing whether I had a chance or not. I can handle the pain of disappointment, but I can't accept regretting that I never took the risk when I still had the chance. I don't want to look back later and wish I had done something when it's already too late."

His words made me think. I pressed my palms together in a prayer-like gesture and said...

"Thank you, Mr. Thai."

Two days later, I stood under a tree in the parking lot near the staircase leading up to the Crime Suppression Division, holding a spunbond fabric bag in my hand. At first, I had planned to buy a fruit basket to thank Lieutenant Krit, but after thinking it over, it seemed more like something done out of courtesy. I wanted to show more thoughtfulness than that.

After receiving my first paycheck, I carefully planned my expenses. I set aside the money I would use for my personal daily expenses and separated

the part for my family. Then, I headed straight to the supermarket to buy things for him instead. I made sure to carefully choose every item, whether it was coffee, juice, cookies, or other snacks that I hoped he would like.

I checked my phone for the time. It was long past the usual hours for getting off work, but there was still no sign of Lieutenant Krit. Just as I lifted my head to glance toward the entrance again, I saw Lieutenant Krit's tall figure walking out of the door. He walked down the stairs toward his car, which was parked on one side. I quickly followed behind.

"Lieutenant Krit!" I called out softly just as he reached for his car door.

He turned around, and when he saw that it was me, he spoke up.

"Oh? What brings you here?"

I stepped closer to Lieutenant Krit, feeling a wave of relief—he still remembered me. But as I stood before him, taking in his face at close range, my heartbeat quickened. I had already thought he was striking the first time we met, but now, seeing him in his police uniform, he looked even more dignified, more captivating. Throughout the past week, I had thought about him every single day. Actually, not just every day—I thought about him almost every minute I was awake. Some nights, I even dreamed about him.

"I was just passing by..." I started to say but immediately realized how unconvincing that sounded. I quickly corrected myself, "Actually, I came to see you on purpose. I wanted to thank you for what you did that day. This is a small gift for you."

I handed him a spunbond fabric bag, only to realize a second too late that it was bright orange-yellow—almost like I was about to make a monk offering. Honestly, the stuff inside wasn't far off either. But it was too late to take it back now.

"You didn't have to. This is just part of my duty. Protecting the public is a police officer's responsibility. How's your injury?" He asked.

"Much better," I answered quickly, inwardly delighted that he cared enough to ask. "Officer-uh, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Krit chuckled. The sound was light, but it nearly ripped my soul right out of my body. He was so handsome it made my vision blur.

"Pick one," he said softly.

"Then... can I call you 'Krit'?"

Oh, wow. I wanted to smack myself. But it was already too late—I had said it. Why was my mouth so quick to move before my brain? Was it his fault for shaking me up so much that I couldn't even think straight?

But he didn't seem to mind. He simply gave me a quick glance before teasing,

"Of course. You're still young, aren't you? Just twenty?"

His words made my heart sink immediately. He must already know my age. That day we met at the hotel and then at the hospital, he knew a lot of things about me, including the fact that I went to the hotel to have sex with that guy, Mr. Shane. Suddenly, the feeling of being inferior and insecure crept in and took hold of my heart.

"What were you about to say earlier?" He asked.

"I... I was going to ask where you were headed next. Originally, I wanted to invite you to dinner as a thank-you, but if you're busy, that's okay too."

"I have things to take care of today. Still working."

A pang of disappointment hit me—I hadn't expected him to turn me down so directly.

"Police work doesn't exactly follow a fixed schedule," he added.

"Oh..." I dragged out the sound, unsure how to respond to the sudden silence.

"What's wrong? Thinking too much again?" He frowned.

"I just thought... maybe you'd feel like... this whole thing is inappropriate."

"Inappropriate?"

"I mean... I'm a host at a bar. After what happened the other day, you might think it's... inconvenient to associate with me."

"I'm a police officer, after all. I face things like this every day. And as for professions—people started off with different circumstances, with different necessities in life. Not everyone judged things so easily."

"But... I don't know if you'd think I was selling myself. I never truly chose this path, and I had never experienced anything like that before. That day, it almost happened... but in the end, it didn't."

"You know, what you just said sounds an awful lot like a confession to the police."

"W-what? No! No, that's not what I meant!" I panicked, hastily denying it, my voice laced with anxiety.

"Relax, I was just messing with you. I won't arrest you. But the fact that you're saying these things means you know right from wrong. In the future, if you come across something you shouldn't do... just don't do it."

"Y-yes..." I lowered my gaze, feeling bad about the wrong decision I had made back then. His scolding was well deserved. "I won't do it again."

He let out a quiet hum, then added,

"By the way, I wasn't finished earlier. I'm quite busy today, but tomorrow, I'll be free the entire day."

My head shot up instantly. "You mean...?"

"I'll be free all day tomorrow. If you're available... would you like to meet up?"

"Yes! Of course, I'm free," I agreed immediately. "I usually start work at ten, but tomorrow happens to be my day off. Can I get your Line, Krit? I'll send you the location of the place so you can see if it's okay."

"Sure." He agreed without hesitation.

That night, I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling in my room, lost in a dreamy daze. Honestly, I wasn't even sure how I got home—I felt as if I were floating on air, wrapped up in the haze of this unexpected encounter.

Lieutenant Krit... Krit, the guy warmer than a microwave, had added me on LINE. And tomorrow, I would get to see him again.

A smile stretched across my face, unstoppable, as my mind replayed our conversation over and over again.

I wonder... if someone smiles for too long, does it mess up their facial muscles? Like, could it warp them so badly they can't go back to normal? No, I can't have that. I can't show up looking lopsided in front of someone I like.

I slapped my cheeks lightly and tried my best to keep a straight face.

Ugh... where did mom keep the rubber bands for the garbage bags? I need to use one to snap myself to stop smiling already!

Chapter 5: First Date with First Love

The next afternoon, Krit was sitting in an Italian restaurant in a shopping mall in the Phrom Phong area. He looked at Wayu, who was seated across from him, scanning the menu. Today, Wayu wore a dress shirt and long pants without any ripped details like the first day they met. His appearance was that of a well-groomed, fresh-faced young man.

But no matter how seductively Wayu dressed, to Krit, he was still just a kid. His fair, smooth face, short layered hair grazing his nape, and the youthful softness of his cheeks made that clear. His lips were beautifully shaped, his long lashes curled into delicate fans, and his sharp yet elegant features had a mesmerizing quality. But what truly drew the eye—what held one's gaze for far longer than it should—were those large, glistening eyes, brimming with an almost irresistible allure.

"What do you usually order?" Wayu looked up and asked. "I have no idea what's good here. This is my first time at this restaurant."

"Order whatever you like. It's on me."

"Uh... I was the one who invited you to thank you, not for you to treat me."

Krit smiled. He had no intention of letting Wayu pay for this meal.

"What do you usually like to eat?"

"Crispy pork, but it looks like they don't have it here."

"Then how about trying this instead? The sea bass steak? Or if you prefer beef, you can go for the Wagyu steak. Or maybe pasta?"

"I'll go with the sea bass steak if you say it's good. And should we order a pizza to share?"

Krit nodded and added sourdough bread with Parma ham as an appetizer for Wayu.

"Would you like something to drink?" Krit asked.

"Just water. I already drink alcohol every night at work, so I want to take a break. No need to increase the alcohol level in my blood. Do you come here often?"

"Sometimes. It's convenient and not as crowded as Siam."

"I'm glad you brought me here. If I came alone, I wouldn't have chosen this place. I'd probably end up eating noodles instead—not the ones upstairs in the food court, but somewhere outside the mall."

Krit hummed in response. To be honest, he hadn't planned on coming today, but yesterday, when he initially refused Wayu's invitation, the look on the younger man's face had made it seem as if his world was about to collapse. So, Krit eventually agreed, thinking of it as guiding a lost kid back onto a steadier path.

Last night, after Wayu messaged him about choosing a place, they went back and forth for a while. Eventually, the younger man switched from calling him "Lieutenant Krit" to "Krit." As for the restaurant choice, Wayu finally texted, 'I'll let you decide.' So, Krit picked a spot in a mall, thinking it would be easy for Wayu to reach via the Skytrain.

"How's work going?" Krit asked.

"It's okay. Actually, I've only been working at the bar for about a month. At first, I was so awkward when I had to stand there and let customers choose me, but now I've gotten used to it. I also know what to do now."

"And what's that?"

"Just smile. What else?"

"What kind of smile?"

"Like this."

Wayu gave him an exaggeratedly fake smile, like a child forced to smile in a school photo.

"Come on, do it properly."

Wayu smiled again.

Krit observed him. This guy had a beautiful smile. His eyes sparkled when he smiled, making his face glow. But it wasn't naive innocence—it was something more knowing.

"That's better," Krit said.

"Just 'better'? I thought you'd be so charmed you'd start throwing money at me."

"I'm not a customer."

"Wouldn't mind if you were. Just kidding."

Krit shook his head. Though they had only just met, their conversations flowed easily, as if despite their differences, there was something that connected them.

"How's your job going, Krit? Must be pretty stressful." Wayu asked as he reached out to grab a slice of pizza from the tray. He hadn't buttoned the top button of his shirt, revealing his smooth, fair chest that could be seen faintly whenever he moved.

Krit glanced at it, feeling an itch in his fingers to reach out and button it up, but he knew the younger man wasn't a child that needed such fussing. Wayu had a mix of youthful charm and mature sensuality—a combination that probably worked well for his profession.

"Anything involving danger or life and death requires seriousness. But someone has to deal with it." Krit replied.

"You should stop by my bar sometime, Krit. Relax a little. Buy me four or five drinks, and I'll chat with you all night. Just kidding. You can just come to listen to music. Some customers like that."

Their conversation flowed effortlessly, making them open up more about personal matters. Krit learned that Wayu had been studying architecture but had to drop out to work and support himself and his family.

"Do you regret having to drop out?"

"A lot," Wayu admitted, looking downcast. "But it was necessary. I wasn't in a position to balance both."

Krit nodded in understanding and sympathy. He always felt a special kind of empathy for people who had to abandon their chosen paths due to life's circumstances.

"Once things settle down, think about going back to school."

"I'd like to, but I don't want to get my hopes up too much. I have to survive first. I also have my mom and nephew to take care of. But if possible, I'd love to go back and finish my degree, become an architect. I just don't know if I'll ever manage it."

"You will," Krit assured him. "Even with a head injury, you still got up to fight back—went as far as trying to punch him. So I'm sure you can handle everything else too."

"Krit, you're surprisingly good at encouragement." Wayu laughed.

Krit looked at the other man, who was now smiling brightly at him—not lost and desolate like he had been at the police station that day. A wave of fondness washed over Krit. Some people only had a brief window to experience their youth before being forced to grow up.

"How's Singto doing?"

Krit asked about Wayu's nephew. He still remembered the little boy in Wayu's arms that day—his small, innocent face and those wide, curious eyes staring up at him.

"He's doing great. Eating more every day. Right now, I'm trying to teach him to pronounce words more clearly."

"You've basically taken on the role of a dad at such a young age."

"Yeah. It's exhausting, but I don't mind. There's happiness in the exhaustion. It's fulfilling to watch him grow and learn new things little by little. Do you like kids, Krit?"

"I do. But I don't have any to take care of."

"Well, you can borrow mine anytime. I don't mind."

"Hmm."

When Krit asked about the boy's mom, Wayu's face fell. He admitted that his younger sister hadn't been in touch much lately, which worried him. Krit asked for her name and a picture, and when he saw it, he noted how similar the siblings looked. Their sharp, striking features were almost identical. Krit then probed a little further about the man Waii had run away with, in case he could help in some way.

After that, the conversation shifted to lighter topics. They talked about their favorite sports and music. When Krit mentioned his love for indie rock, Wayu gave him a thumbs up and teased that he was a police officer with good taste. But when Wayu revealed that his favorite cartoon character was a square sponge that likes to do messy things that make him nauseous, even though it is a dishwashing sponge, Krit laughed and teased back that the other one was a teenager with strange taste.

The two of them were chatting happily until they heard a soft knock on the glass wall next to their table. When Krit turned, he saw Rose.

"What are you doing around here?"

Krit asked as she walked over to their table.

"I was shopping with some friends, and we're going to see a movie later. Are you here on an errand, or just for a meal?"

"Just having a meal. Want to join us?"

Rose sat down, but her eyes were locked onto Krit's, clearly curious about his companion.

"Wayu, this is Rose—my friend," Krit introduced. "Rose, this is Wayu. He needed a little help with something the other day, so we met up today."

"Oh, really..." Rose dragged out her words before turning to smile at Wayu, who respectfully greeted her with a wai. "Nice to meet you, Wayu."

"Likewise," Wayu replied with a smile. "Rose, why don't you eat with us? Krit was raving about how good the food here is, and honestly, I think it really is great."

"No, thanks. My friends are waiting. I just stopped by the restroom and happened to see Krit, so I came to say hi," Rose said before turning back to Krit. "Are you guys heading anywhere after this? Want to catch a movie with us?"

"I'm guessing it's a romance movie," Krit said.

"Nope, it's a murder mystery. But if you want to switch to a romance, I'm fine with that."

Before Krit could answer, Wayu's phone rang. He checked the caller ID and excused himself to take the call outside. As soon as he left, Rose leaned in toward Krit.

"Are you two dating?"

"What?"

"Don't play dumb. When I looked in from outside and saw you sitting here, I thought you were filming a romance drama—staring into each other's eyes, smiling all sweet. The atmosphere was all sparkly like you were wrapped in a soft-focus filter. And he's cute, you know. How did you two meet? Is he a good person? Have you been talking for long?"

"Why are you asking so many questions?" Krit laughed.

"Because I'm curious! I haven't seen you date anyone in ages."

"You're overthinking it. There's nothing going on."

"Are you sure about that? Because I think he might have feelings for you," Rose teased, eyes twinkling mischievously. "He's totally your type—tall, fair-skinned, adorable, with a gorgeous smile. It'd be weird if you weren't interested."

Krit shook his head. "No."

Rose's teasing demeanor shifted to annoyance mixed with frustration.

"Why? Are you still not over Pete?"

"Why bring that up?"

"I don't want to say it, but I just feel like..." Rose raised her hand, holding back her words. "How many years has it been, Krit? It's time to move on. Pete isn't worthy of your love. He betrayed you."

Krit fell silent, saying nothing. Seeing his reaction, Rose realized she had struck a nerve.

"Sorry. I just want you to be happy."

She reached out and gently touched the back of his hand. Krit gave her a small smile, showing he wasn't upset. Before they could continue the conversation, Wayu returned. Rose quickly changed the subject.

"Oh, Krit, you should take Wayu to our regular spot that we like one day," she said before turning to Wayu. "There's a café in Sathorn that has a variety of delicious brunch options, and the atmosphere is really nice. We should try it together sometime."

Wayu smiled but said nothing. He wasn't even sure if he'd get another excuse to ask Krit out again. This time, Krit had only agreed because he framed it as a thank-you.

After chatting for a little while longer, Rose excused herself to meet up with her friends. Once she was gone, Wayu commented,

"Rose is really cheerful and friendly. And she's beautiful too."

"She's always been like that, ever since university."

"You guys have known each other that long?"

"Actually, we've been friends since high school, but we got closer when we went to the same university, just in different faculties."

Wayu was momentarily stunned. Then, he murmured,

"That's nice."

After finishing their main courses, Krit suggested ordering dessert.

"The desserts here are famous. Want to try one? They should be delicious."

Wayu opened the menu. "Everything looks so good. Krit, any recommendations?"

"I have no idea."

"Huh?"

"I don't really like sweets, so I never order them. But I think you should try something."

As Wayu browsed the menu, Krit's phone, which was resting on the table, began to ring. He picked it up and answered. As the conversation went on, his expression grew more serious.

Wayu kept his head down, his eyes scanning the dessert menu while his ears still listened. Krit barely responded with anything more than "Mm, yes," or "Probably not," until the end of the conversation.

"Okay. I'll be there."

Wayu froze. When Krit hung up, he asked,

"Do you have to go?"

"Yeah. Something came up. Sorry, we didn't even get to order dessert."

"That's okay." Wayu waved it off. "We can do it another time."

Will there be another time?

Krit put away his phone and insisted on paying for the meal.

"I'll only accept your thanks," Krit said. "Stay strong, Wayu. I know you're someone who strives for the best. Don't choose a path you'll regret later."

Wayu lowered his gaze, biting his lip. He didn't want to part ways with Krit just yet. Even though they had already spent a long time talking and Krit had a sudden urgent matter to attend to, he still wished they could have a little more time together. He wanted to hear that deep voice continue speaking about this and that—it made him feel warm inside, even if Krit was only talking casually without any hidden meaning.

But Wayu knew he shouldn't take up more of Krit's time. Besides... after meeting Rose, there were things he wasn't so sure about anymore.

As they stepped out of the restaurant together, Krit turned to ask,

"You're taking the Skytrain home, right?"

"Yes," Wayu nodded, flashing a smile.

Krit observed Wayu quietly. The other person had that look again, looking at him and smiling like that. Those big eyes, clear as shadows, yet seemed to be coated with dew. It was as if they were trying to appear strong and self-reliant, even though he wanted to say, "Don't leave me here." Krit wanted to reach out and pat his head in comfort, but then thought better of it.

"You're starting work tomorrow, right? Take care of yourself," Krit said.

"Yes," Wayu replied. "Thank you for coming with me today."

They exchanged smiles before parting ways, each heading toward their own separate lives—only able to meet in fleeting moments like this.

After that, Krit became preoccupied with his work. His current case involved human trafficking, and his team was closing in on its source. It was shaping up to be a high-profile case, one that was drawing public scrutiny due to the influential figures involved. That evening, Krit finally returned home. After greeting his parents, he headed upstairs to his room.

Once he had showered and changed, he sank onto the sofa by the window, planning to turn on the TV and catch up on the news. But his mind drifted back to what Rose had said to him earlier that afternoon at the restaurant.

'Pete doesn't deserve your love, Krit. He betrayed you.'

'Betrayed.' That word only applied when it came from someone you trusted.

Krit got up and walked to the bookshelf against the wall. He pulled out an old English textbook from his university days. Flipping through the pages, he found two banknotes tucked inside.

Pete...

Krit's first love had begun in an English class. Pete was a student from the countryside who had come to study in Bangkok. They met in a shared class that included students from multiple faculties. When there was a group project that required a video presentation, Krit, Pete, and Rose formed a team. Pete loved being in front of the camera. He was good-looking, quick-witted, and naturally charismatic, making their project both engaging and enjoyable.

Not long after working together, Pete invited Krit to start a YouTube channel with him. Krit agreed immediately—he loved working behind the scenes, enjoyed the creative challenge, and found excitement in producing content. He took on the role of videographer and content creator, while Pete was the on-screen personality.

Their channel focused on lifestyle content—food, travel around Bangkok, and trendy challenges of the time. Since Pete's family wasn't well-off, Krit willingly covered the costs of filming equipment and production.

He had never been happier. This was a side of life he would never get to pursue as a real career, no matter how much he loved it. Krit was destined to study law and follow in his dad's footsteps as a police officer. This YouTube channel was his only chance to do something he truly enjoyed. Krit never put his own name in the video credits. He kept his involvement as a quiet source of personal pride.

As their channel gained traction, Pete became more well-known as a content creator, and their relationship deepened. Eventually, they became a couple.

'I love you, Krit. I feel so lucky to have met you.'

'I'm the lucky one,'

But no matter how happy their love made him, Krit had to keep it a secret from his family. He never brought Pete home and was careful when talking

to him on the phone, even in his own room. The only place he could truly be himself was when he was with Pete in his apartment.

Their YouTube channel started earning revenue. The first payment was three thousand baht, and Pete split it in half.

'I know you don't need the money, Krit. But this is the first income we made together, from something we built together. You have to take it and keep it as a memento.'

Krit accepted the money and tucked the two 1,500-baht notes into his English textbook from that semester.

'It's a pity that you won't appear on camera. If you did, our views would skyrocket—you're handsome!' Pete teased, tapping Krit's cheek.

'It's Pete who's handsome.'

'Yeah, I'm the handsome guy with a handsome boyfriend.'

Pete had leaned in to kiss Krit's chin before smiling playfully. Krit pulled him into a hug, brushing his lips gently over Pete's before trailing his hands down to Pete's waist. Another kiss followed, deeper this time. Pete melted into his touch. Krit pulled off his own shirt, then Pete's, gently pushing him onto the sofa as he hovered above him.

'I wish we could always be like this,' Pete whispered.

Krit's future was set—he would become a police officer. There was no other path for him. Pete, on the other hand, dreamed of working in entertainment. He wanted his own travel show, where he would host famous guests and create unique experiences every episode. But to achieve that point, Pete needed to become even more famous.

One day, Pete brought up an opportunity.

'I'm going to audition for a role in a new series. It's a BL series.'

'You want to be an actor?' Krit asked.

'I love being on camera. Whether it's as a content creator or an actor, I don't mind. And this is my chance. You won't stop me, right? You'll support me?'

Krit did more than Pete asked. He didn't just offer moral support; Krit paid for Pete's acting classes and supported him in every way he could. Since Krit himself couldn't follow a path in entertainment, Pete's dream became his dream as well.

Pete landed a supporting role in the BL series. They were both thrilled. What Krit didn't anticipate was the contract. Pete had to sign a three-year agreement that prohibited him from having a romantic partner.

'Krit, you understand, right? This is a rare opportunity.'

'So... we have to keep our relationship a secret for three years?'

'No... Krit. I won't secretly do something like that.'

Krit was stunned. He couldn't believe the words coming out of Pete's mouth. The word love had turned into something like that—something Pete no longer wanted.

And that was the end of them.

Pete continued chasing his dreams without Krit in his life. Meanwhile, Krit kept those two 1,500-baht bills inside his old textbook. He never took that textbook off the bookshelf again. Pete remained a bittersweet memory—his first and only love.

A message notification on his phone pulled him back to the present.

Krit shifted and glanced at the phone on the table beside the sofa. The message had been sent by Wayu.

'The food was delicious today. Thank you.'

Before Krit could do anything, the second message followed just a few seconds later.

'Goodnight, Krit.'

Krit let the messages sit on the screen until it dimmed. With a quiet sigh, he returned the textbook to its place on the bookshelf.

Chapter 6: Every Problem Has a Solution

I think I might be heartbroken.

Actually, it started with something completely opposite. I had gone out to eat with Krit at a cozy homemade-style restaurant that was absolutely made for a midday meal. The food was delicious—every bite felt like heaven. Maybe it was because of the person sitting across from me.

Krit was always handsome every time I saw him, but that day, he was exceptionally so. He looked effortlessly elegant, even though he was just wearing a black short-sleeved shirt and long pants. Maybe it was his demeanor—calm, seemingly hard to approach, yet incredibly captivating. I didn't know where to look. His muscular arms peeking out from his sleeves, his strong neck, his fair and clear skin, his sharp and piercing eyes, or his kissable lips. Not to mention his soft, soothing voice when he spoke.

'Want to order anything else?'

'Is Krit on the menu?' (In reality, I just shook my head and smiled at him.)

'The desserts here are famous. Want to try one? They should be delicious.'

'Are they as good as you?' (In reality, I just stared intently at the menu and didn't say anything.)

Ugh... I'm daydreaming again. It's repetitive, but I can't help it.

It's been several days since I had that meal with Krit. It's a good memory. I keep thinking about his face, his voice, his smile. It was the kind of smile that was subtle but incredibly charming. His eyes were beautiful and full of energy. My limbs turned weak every time he looked at me. I had to force myself to focus on the food and the conversation, or else I would've melted right in front of him. Everything felt so perfect, like a dream—until Rose walked in.

That's when I started playing the role of the sorrowful, complaining, and jealous protagonist.

It's not that Rose isn't nice. She's actually very sweet, beautiful, and well-spoken. But I have one tiny issue (okay, a huge issue) with her: she and Krit seem incredibly close. It's like she's in his safe zone—a special space I've never been able to access.

Or are Krit and Rose dating?

This question has been tormenting me. I'm so scared of the answer that I didn't dare ask that day if Rose was Krit's girlfriend. My cowardice in facing the truth has left me overthinking and upset every day since.

"Wayu, I'm tired for you. When are you going to stop sighing? I'm starting to feel heartbroken for you, even though I sleep hugging my wife every night," Thai finally spoke up after listening to me sigh repeatedly.

"Do you think Krit and Rose are dating?" I asked.

"I don't know. They might just be friends."

"But they've been close since high school, through university, and even now at work. They seem really connected."

"Don't you have friends from high school too?"

"But they hold hands."

"Hmm, good point. That's something to think about."

"Hey! Friends can hold hands too, you know. Don't be so old-fashioned."

"Ugh! Wayu, what do you want?"

"I don't know. I'm confused."

"I think you need to ask him directly. That way, you'll know what to do—whether to keep going or just let it go."

"I want to keep going."

Thai muttered that he had a headache before standing up.

"Hey, where are you going?" I grabbed his arm.

"To get some paracetamol. How else am I supposed to keep talking to you?"

That night, after talking with Thai and finishing my work, I still couldn't stop thinking about it. Before this, I had been worried that Krit might only like women and not men.

But now, I've had to step even further back because if Krit already has someone, I'll have to withdraw completely. I come from a family where my dad has been unfaithful to my mom almost constantly. I've seen the damage it causes every time they fight. I don't want to be the third person in someone else's relationship.

But why is love so hard to control? It's overflowing, almost spilling out of my eyes and mouth. I can't sleep. I spent hours lying in bed, rereading our old chats and staring at Krit's phone number. Eventually, I got up and made a playlist to calm my restless heart.

Sigh...

Have you ever felt like every love song was written for you? Even the heartbreak ones?

I finished making the playlist just as the sky started to brighten. Looking at the song titles, I felt so deeply connected to them—like I had poured out everything in my heart into different parts of the lyrics. Deep, sweet, sorrowful. Because I love him one-sidedly. But even so, I'm happy. I made a bold decision and sent the playlist to Krit. My heart pounded as I hit share, but if I didn't send it, I felt like I'd suffocate from holding it in.

'I thought these songs were relaxing to listen to. They might not be your usual style, but maybe you can listen to them on stressful days to unwind.'

It was a carefully crafted message—not too much, not too little, just right for someone who wishes well for another. After sending it to Krit, I lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

That same day, when I went to work at the host bar and met up with Thai, I showed him the playlist.

"These songs are nice. The lyrics are meaningful too," Thai said.

"Yeah, I put a lot of thought into it. It took me hours. I sent it to him because I couldn't sleep otherwise."

"What time did you finally sleep?"

"Around seven or eight in the morning. I could hear the neighbors waking up to cook breakfast. But I slept well. Do you think Krit will figure out that I like him?"

"No," Thai said. "If he doesn't figure it out, he's an idiot! You picked eight songs, and seven of them are love songs. Plus, you sent it before 8 a.m. He probably won't notice, right?"

"Is it that obvious?" I look awkward.

"All that's left now is to propose."

"What do I do? I already sent it."

"Don't do anything else until you're sure he's single. Unless you don't care and just want to know if he's affected by you at all."

We could only talk for a short while before Thai and I had to get ready for work. Tonight was particularly busy since it was a Saturday. I was assigned to entertain a group of customers in the VIP section—guests who were there to celebrate a birthday.

I actually enjoy this kind of work. The customers are focused on drinking and having fun playing games. There's some physical interaction, but it's more playful than anything, not crossing the line into harassment. The downside is having to drink a lot and come up with ways to keep the customers entertained, but the upside is that I get to have fun with them too.

As time passed and it was almost closing time, I realized that I hadn't taken out my phone to check anything. When I saw that there was a message from Krit, my heart started racing. He had replied quite a while ago.

"Thai, Krit replied!" I nudged Thai excitedly.

"What did he say?"

I handed him my phone.

"Thanks." Thai read the message and turned to look at me. "You sent it at 7 a.m., and he replied at midnight. And all he wrote was 'Thanks.' You're still happy about that?"

"So, what do you expect me to hope for? Just the fact that he replied like this already makes me feel relieved that he didn't block me for sending him a love song. Or do you want him to text me back saying, 'You're silly'?"

"That would be pretty sincere of him," Thai laughed. "I really want to see for myself how handsome this Lieutenant Krit of yours is, to make you this lovesick."

"So handsome that just standing there breathing makes me faint," I said, pressing my phone to my heart.

Thai shook his head in exasperation at my nonsense.

"I want you to get what you want, but if you're not meant for him, I hope you get hurt as little as possible."

I didn't expect much. Even if Rose was really Krit's girlfriend, I wouldn't abandon the good feelings I have for him. I'd just step back, keep him in a place where I can give him love and goodwill without crossing any lines. If I can't be in his heart, then being by his side is enough.

It sounds pitiful, but what more can I do?

The next afternoon, I woke up earlier than usual because I wanted to go buy some new clothes. It's not like I had extra money to splurge or anything—it was for work. I've been wearing the same clothes so often that they've become dull. Being a bar host requires a certain appearance, so I had to invest in this for better returns in the future.

I bought clothes at a mix of cheap and expensive prices, balancing them out. It's all about how you mix and match. You don't need to go overboard; just something that looks tasteful and fits well with others. As for high-end branded clothes and accessories, let the top guys like Richy and Sky wear them. I'm not bold enough to compare myself to their level yet.

When I got back home, I heard people shouting and my nephew crying loudly. I hurried inside.

"What's going on? Again?" I said, seeing the mess everywhere. My parents were arguing again, and Singto was sitting on the floor crying in front of the TV.

"Yeah! Your dad's at it again. He can't even take care of one wife, yet he still goes after another woman!"

I stood there, watching my parents yell at each other amidst the chaos, and I felt like I didn't want to witness the collapse of my own family. I picked up Singto from the floor and took him out of the house right then.

I carried Singto to the convenience store near our house, bought a carton of milk for Singto and some juice and bread for myself, then sat on the chairs outside the store because I didn't know where else to go. Luckily, it was evening, so the weather wasn't as hot as it had been in the afternoon.

I sat there, watching people pass by, eating my bread without really tasting it. Even though I tried to tell myself not to let my emotions sink, my heart felt heavy and gloomy.

Why does suffering always find us, while happiness only visits briefly before leaving? How do people who seem happy all the time do it? Are their lives really smooth all the time, or are they just trying not to drown in their sorrows?

I let out a deep sigh and sat still, letting time wash away my unease. After a while, Singto fell asleep in my arms. I looked at my nephew's face, his soft cheeks and tiny pink lips, and couldn't help but smile. I kissed his cheek and comforted myself, thinking that even if we had nowhere to go, at least we still had each other.

When I got back home, I saw my mom sitting absentmindedly at the dining table. I didn't see my dad in the house, so I asked,

"Where's dad?"

"He's gone."

"Gone where? He just came back home three days ago."

"How should I know?"

"He'll probably come back late tonight."

I took Singto to his room to sleep and then came out to clean up the mess on the floor. I didn't want to complain any more than this. If this had happened in the past, I would've been so depressed I couldn't function. But now, I have Singto and my job to hold onto. Even though the environment is chaotic, at least I still have some income, and we won't starve.

Mom was still sitting in the same spot, with a glass and a nearly empty bottle of liquor on the table. She poured it into a glass until the last drop and then drank it. I wanted to stop her, but I knew I couldn't at a time like this, so I said something else instead.

"Are you hungry, Mom? I'll make something for you to eat."

"I'm not hungry... just tired."

"Then go rest. When you wake up, I'll have food ready for you. Sleep for a bit, and you'll feel better."

Mom shook her head, her face devoid of warmth or happiness.

"It won't get better, Wayu."

It has to get better...

I thought that to myself as I quietly cleaned up. Mom buried her face on the table and didn't say anything else.

In truth, I should've looked deeper into mom's eyes that day and realized that everything had pushed her to a breaking point. Mom and I aren't the same. I can still see a future because I have work to do. Even though the path was rough, with potholes and traps, deep down I knew that even if I had to stumble and crawl on the ground just to survive, I would do it.

But mom's present felt empty and bleak, so much so that she couldn't see any hope for the future. She drifted through each day with an attitude of indifference—taking happiness when it came but dismissing pain when it followed. Maybe it was true that every problem had a solution, and I couldn't even blame her for choosing to sit still and wait for things to fix themselves. But she had found another way out.

Everyone's way out is different, but I never thought mom would choose this one.

One evening, I had to return home to pick up something I had forgotten. I remember it was around almost five in the afternoon. I didn't call to let mom know I'd be coming back at this time.

When I opened the door, I saw Singto fast asleep in his crib near the sofa where we usually watch TV. The door to mom's bedroom was slightly ajar,

and I could hear her talking inside. I thought dad must have just come home.

I gently brushed Singto's cheek before heading to my parents' bedroom to pay respects to dad and ask if he wanted anything when I got back from work tonight. I pushed the door open wider as I spoke.

"When did you get back, Dad? I didn't see your car parked outside."

I froze in the doorway when I saw clearly what was inside the room.

A strange man was lying on my parents' bed, with my mom resting her head on his chest. Even though they were covered with a blanket, it was obvious they were both naked.

"Wayu!" Mom jolted up in shock and quickly pulled a piece of cloth over her chest. Her face was deathly pale as she stared at me.

I stood there, frozen in shock, until my brain finally processed what I had just seen. I immediately turned around and strode out of the TV room, heading straight outside. My heart pounded harder than ever before. What I had witnessed left no doubt about what mom was doing.

Mom was having an affair!

Mom brought a man into our house to sleep with him!

My mind was buzzing with those thoughts. My palms were icy cold while my heart raced. I didn't even know how I made it out to the street outside. My mind was in complete disarray, uncontrollable, and all I could do was keep walking forward without knowing where I was going.

How could mom do something like that?

I kept asking myself, unable to believe it. That was my mom—the woman who had raised and cared for me since I was born. Even if she wasn't perfect in the eyes of others, she was always good and noble enough for me. But what I saw shattered the image of her in my heart into pieces.

I wandered aimlessly like a madman, crossing streets, boarding subways without any sense of direction, just knowing I had to escape from the reality chasing me. I only came to my senses when I found myself standing on a sidewalk by a large park. It was a green space in the middle of the city, surrounded by tall buildings. In the distance were a convention center and the subway station I had just walked out of.

I didn't even know what brought me here. I just walked and switched subway lines until I ended up here. I stepped into the park. At this time, people were jogging and cycling along the paths around the large pond. The water reflected the trees and surrounding skyscrapers like a mirror.

I kept walking until I sat down on a bench by the pond. This area wasn't too crowded. My mind was in turmoil, and I had to squeeze my hands to stop them from shaking. I felt like I was about to explode, like I was going to break down in some way. Frantically, I pulled out my phone and made a call. As soon as the other person answered, I stammered.

"Krit, I... I can't take it. My mom..."

"Wayu, what's wrong? Take it slow."

"My mom... she brought a man to sleep with him at home." The words were so bitter that tears fell.

Krit was silent for a few seconds before speaking.

"Where are you now? I'll come find you."

A while later, he arrived. When he saw me sitting hunched on the bench, he quickly walked over.

"Wow."

His voice made me want to reach out and grab his arm, to pull him into a hug and lean on him for support. But what I actually did was just look at him without moving. Krit sat down beside me.

"What happened? Do you want to tell me?"

"I..." I couldn't speak. My mouth and throat were trembling, and it felt like a hard lump was stuck in my throat.

Krit gently reached out his hand and touched the back of my hand.

"It's okay. Take your time. I'm not going anywhere."

His words were like a key unlocking something inside me. I poured out my words like a flood, telling him everything, venting as much as one person could. All the pain, frustration, anger, and resentment that the world kept throwing at me endlessly, as if it wanted me to die right there.

Krit listened quietly without interrupting, just acknowledging and letting me vent as much as I needed. And finally, I circled back to the issue with mom.

"Krit... I'm hurt. I hate..."

I couldn't finish the sentence before tears welled up. They streamed down my cheeks. Krit leaned toward me and looked into my face. He opened his arms and spoke softly.

"Come here... come."

I leaned into his embrace, burying my face against his broad shoulder. Krit held me and comforted me with gentle strokes. My tears poured out uncontrollably. I had never cried like this since I grew up.

Time passed until the sobs subsided, leaving only the sound of light sniffles. I pulled away and wiped my tears.

"Feeling better?" He asked.

I nodded. Krit reached out and wiped the remaining tear stains from my cheeks.

"If you're not ready to move yet, just sit a little longer. I'll stay with you."

His voice gave me a sense of stability and reliability.

I sat there with Krit, and we started talking with reason instead of emotion. He didn't lecture or preach at that moment but let me think and reflect on my own.

Until the sky, tinged with the reddish glow of the setting sun, faded into a deep blue. Evening turned into night, and the streetlights began to flicker on one by one. We still sat together.

I wasn't exploding with emotion anymore. We just talked with cooler heads, even though the pain was still there. The evening breeze carried the mist from the fountain in the pond, brushing against us.

"I don't know what to do next. How can I face mom again?"

"No matter how you feel, she's still your mom," Krit said, turning to look at me. His eyes showed a deep understanding, not just superficial. "We can't change our parents."

I didn't respond, letting the silence heal the wounds. What he said was true. We can't choose our parents, just as they can't choose for us to be something they might not like. Acceptance might be the path we have to take, but it doesn't mean it won't hurt.

The air grew cooler. Krit took off his jacket and draped it over my shoulders. His warmth made my heart calm, as if I wasn't alone in this world.

We sat side by side on the bench in the park under a starless sky, surrounded by the towering buildings and sprawling structures of the city. It was a small warmth that emerged amidst the vast loneliness, but it was strong and gentle enough to keep us going.

"Thank you, Krit," I said.

"Let's go get dessert sometime. Bring Singto along."

"Okay."

I smiled at him, a smile still streaked with tear stains on my cheeks. But I hoped it was enough to convey all the gratitude in my heart.

Chapter 7: Old Flame, New Story

The life of a city dweller doesn't depend on the rising or setting of the sun. While many are resting from the exhaustion of work, the nightlife of some is just beginning.

Krit had just returned home. He headed straight to his bedroom, massaging his neck due to exhaustion. He took off his police uniform and placed the insignia, two stars on each shoulder, on the top shelf of the closet. He then noticed a brownish-black stain on the sleeve of his shirt, running from his shoulder to his elbow. It was from today's duty, where his team and the local police had worked together to raid a SIM box operation in a building in Pathum Thani province to dismantle a call center gang network.

Krit smiled faintly, recalling a conversation between Rose and his mom about how his mom always insisted on ironing his dad's uniform herself, no matter how many years had passed. His dad had requested it, and his mom was happy to oblige. Rose would never be thrilled about having to iron his shirt like that.

Truthfully, Krit wouldn't ask for something like that. It wasn't that he wasn't proud of his honorable uniform, but he'd rather spend that time doing something else with his loved one. As for the laundry, he'd leave it to the housekeeper.

Then Krit thought of Wayu. Just the other day, Wayu had called him in a complete breakdown. Krit could still recall the trembling voice, barely forming coherent words, and the tears streaming endlessly from those glassy, crystal-clear eyes. It was a moment of such fragility that Krit feared Wayu might shatter into pieces. He had held him carefully, supporting him with the utmost gentleness. The delicate back in his embrace and the soft touch of Wayu's cheek resting against his shoulder only deepened Krit's resolve—he had to protect him, to keep him from truly falling apart.

Krit sympathized with Wayu. It seemed like Wayu kept getting hit by one misfortune after another, just as he was about to move forward, only to be pulled back down again. Krit glanced at the time on his phone. It was 9:45 p.m. Wayu was probably getting ready for work at the bar now, but Krit

wasn't sure if the incident from the other day had left Wayu too shaken to focus. Krit sent a message.

'How are you? Did you go to work today?'

Wayu replied almost immediately.

'I'm changing clothes in the dressing room right now.'

'Feeling better?'

A moment later, a sad cartoon sticker popped up in the chat, followed by a message.

'I can't face mom. I don't want to see her or hear any explanations.'

'Take it easy. If you're not ready to talk, just avoid it for now.'

'Okay. I'll return your jacket within this week, Krit.'

Krit typed, *'No rush, it's fine,'* but then he changed his mind. He deleted the message and wrote a new one.

'Okay. See you then.'

'See you then, Krit.'

Krit grabbed a towel and walked into the bathroom. He admired Wayu's resilience. Wayu was like a small tree trying to stand firm in a storm. Life wasn't easy, but there was no choice but to keep fighting.

A while later, Krit stepped out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist. His strong chest still had a few droplets of water clinging to it. He used a smaller towel to dry his damp hair before glancing at his phone on the edge of the bed. There was a message on the screen. When Krit picked it up, he saw it was from Wayu.

'Thank you. I'm glad I had you with me on a day when I had no one else. I'm sorry for troubling you, but you were the only one I thought of.'

But the message was canceled and resent, this time shortened to just:

'Thank you.'

Krit remained still, his sharp eyes hidden with a sense of hesitation. He was conflicted, yet deeply satisfied at the same time. He could tell that Wayu liked him. Every gesture Wayu made wasn't hard for Krit to read. Even though Wayu tried to hide and control it, it always showed in Wayu's eyes whenever the other looked at his eyes and smiled.

And now, the phrase *"you were the only one I thought of"* almost completely revealed Wayu's feelings. Krit didn't dislike the emotions Wayu had for him, but he was still unsure. He wasn't sure if he should fully accept those feelings and respond in kind or if he should step back and maintain some distance.

The indecisiveness frustrated Krit. He liked many things about Wayu—his looks, his personality. Wayu was adorable, charming, and easy to be around. But it wasn't just that. Love wasn't simple for Krit. He didn't want to act on a fleeting emotion only to regret it later.

Krit distracted himself with other thoughts. He put his phone down and turned on some music instead.

Three days later, Wayu asked to meet Krit to return his jacket. Krit agreed because he also wanted to see Wayu. He was still concerned about Wayu's mental state and hoped it had improved.

Krit stepped from the scorching heat outside into the cool, refreshing air of a café decorated in clean, creamy white tones. The atmosphere was brightened by small flower vases and the aroma of coffee. He had arranged to meet Wayu here, a café located in the building opposite the police headquarters where Krit worked.

Wayu was already waiting inside. He had chosen a table by the window, tucked away in a quiet corner. Krit walked straight toward him. Wayu was leaning slightly back in his seat, gazing out the window. Krit's lips curved up just a little—without him even realizing it.

The scene looked like something out of an art gallery. A tall, slender young man sat alone, his fair face lost in thought as he stared out the window, with a single white lily in a vase beside him. It was so captivating that it was hard to tell whether the beauty came from the lily or the person.

"Wayu," Krit called softly as he approached.

Wayu turned, and upon seeing Krit, he smiled, though his eyes still held a trace of sadness. Krit wanted to reach out and stroke Wayu's soft hair, to let him rest his head in Krit's palm like an affectionate cat. But all Krit could do was sit down across from him and ask,

"How are you? Are you okay?"

Wayu sighed softly, his face filled with frustration.

"Not okay. I can barely stand to see mom. She seems like she wants to talk to me, but I don't want to look at her or make eye contact. I just want to take Singto and run far away."

"Where would you go?"

"I can't go anywhere. I know that. Working night shifts like this, someone has to take care of Singto when I'm not around."

Krit studied Wayu's face. It was still beautiful, but his eyes betrayed his exhaustion, likely from emotional fatigue.

"Did you sleep well last night?"

"Not really. I kept waking up."

"You need to take care of yourself. Try to eat well and get enough sleep. If you get sick, it'll only make things worse."

Wayu nodded understandingly, looking at Krit with gratitude.

"There aren't many people who care about me. Right now, it's just you and Thai who keep asking how I'm doing."

Wayu turned to pick up the folded jacket beside him and handed it to Krit. It was the jacket Krit had draped over his shoulders that day.

"Here's your jacket, Krit. I washed it properly. Thank you."

Krit nodded and reached out to take it. He noticed another shirt folded beside Wayu—a black dress shirt with a logo and embroidered lettering on one side of the chest. Krit immediately recognized it as the uniform from the host bar where Wayu worked.

"Are you going to work now? It's only 4 p.m.," Krit asked.

"I have a dance rehearsal for the floor show today, so I came out early. Staying at home just stresses me out more."

"Hmm," Krit pondered. "What kind of dance?"

"Don't imagine anything wild, Krit," Wayu quickly interjected. "It's not a strip-down-to-your-underwear kind of dance. It's not that sexy. I dance in a boy group style."

"I didn't say anything," Krit said, laughing.

"You didn't have to. I know what you're thinking," Wayu said, giving him a knowing look. "There might be a little shirt-opening to show off some abs, but the clothes stay on."

"You have abs too?"

"A little. I'm working on it. Why are you making that face? Don't believe me?"

"Then I'll drop by to watch tonight. I mean, to watch the dance, not your abs. Why would I want to see baby abs?" Krit said, feeling glad that Wayu had temporarily stepped away from his sadness and shifted his focus to something more lively.

"No, not today," Wayu quickly objected. "I'm still learning. I don't want you to see me yet."

"But you're performing for so many customers already. Why be shy now?"

"It's because you'll be watching that I'm shy."

"What's with that..."

Krit leaned back in his chair, shaking his head. Wayu smiled shyly. The two looked at each other as a love song Wayu had once sent to Krit played in the background. Wayu's cheeks flushed slightly, and Krit watched him with a smile.

But then, as if they both realized the atmosphere and conversation were getting a little strange, Krit cleared his throat softly and adjusted his expression to normal. Wayu averted his gaze, biting his lip before reaching for his coffee cup to take a sip.

Why does he have to bite his lip like that?

Krit grumbled internally. There was nothing wrong with Wayu's actions, but they bothered him. Krit didn't want his feelings to sway any further. He reminded himself that this café was near the police headquarters where he worked.

After chatting for a while longer until they finished their coffee, the two walked out of the café together.

"Are you heading back to work, Krit?" Wayu asked.

"Yeah. How about you?"

"I'll take a motorbike taxi or a cab," Wayu paused for a moment as if thinking about something, then decided to speak. "Krit, I want to thank you for everything you've done for me since the first day we met until now. I don't know how to express my gratitude. You've been so kind to me in ways I never thought I'd experience. It really means a lot to me. I just want you to know that."

"You're praising me so much it sounds like we'll never see each other again."

"It's just..." Wayu hesitated.

"It's okay. You don't have to explain. Just call me if you need anything," Krit said gently.

Wayu tilted his head and looked at Krit uncertainly.

"Can I really call you?"

"Why wouldn't you be able to?"

"Well... I'm concerned about Rose," Wayu said, avoiding eye contact.

"What does Rose have to do with this?" Krit frowned.

"I mean... I'm not sure if you and Rose are a couple. If I keep bothering you, I'd feel bad for Rose."

"Rose and I are just friends."

"Friends?" Wayu repeated softly.

"Hmm, we've been friends since day one, and not once have we ever thought about dating each other."

Wayu smiled. The weariness in his eyes faded, replaced by a glimmer of hope.

"Well then, if I call and bother you often, you better not complain. I'll take it as you giving me permission. Just don't block my number later."

"As long as you don't make me change my number to escape you."

"I can't promise that."

"Okay. Take care of yourself."

"Yes, Krit."

Wayu stepped back, lingering hesitantly as if he didn't want to leave. But in the end, he had to make the decision. Wayu walked toward the parking lot to head out to the main road, while Krit turned the other way, crossing the open plaza to the building at the back.

Wayu walked slowly through the parking lot, feeling as if he were floating. Krit's words echoed in his head. Krit wasn't dating Rose and had even opened the door for Wayu to keep talking to him. Was this permission for Wayu to get closer to Krit? His cheeks burned, and he lightly patted them, smiling to himself. Then he took a step and spun around as if dancing, unable to contain his happiness.

The warmth of hope that lifted Wayu's spirits left him so elated that he didn't even notice the sleek black supercar parked in the lot,—nor the person still sitting inside. From behind the dark-tinted window, a pair of eyes silently observed him, taking in every detail of his expression.

While their meeting had eased Wayu's sadness, Krit himself felt lighter as well. He recalled the look on Wayu's face when he had clarified that he wasn't dating Rose—how the younger man had been hanging on to his every word, trying hard to hide his anticipation. But Krit had seen through it. It had taken every bit of restraint not to let a grin slip. Wayu had his unintentionally amusing moments, ones that Krit found oddly endearing, and that put him in a good mood, too.

But there was one thing Krit hadn't told Wayu. He had managed to track down a lead on Wayu's younger sister, Waii. According to the information he received, she was now living in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya province with the boyfriend she had run away with. What worried Krit, however, was the man's history—he had a record of assault. That was why Krit decided to keep this from Wayu for now. He didn't want to burden him with more distress. Those sorrowful eyes flashed through his mind, strengthening his resolve to drive to that province himself and confirm the truth before saying anything.

Krit had only walked a short distance from the café when he heard someone call his name.

"Chalk."

Krit turned his head and froze for a moment. A tall man was walking straight toward him, his striking figure impossible to ignore. He had flawless skin, a well-proportioned physique, and an air of effortless charisma. Just one glance, and it was obvious—this was someone from the entertainment industry, a model or an actor. Even the sunglasses he wore couldn't fully conceal how good-looking he was.

As he reached Krit, he removed his sunglasses, flashing a smile.

"Still remember me, don't you? Hope you haven't forgotten me."

That was impossible.

Krit's gaze settled on his ex-boyfriend. He felt a sudden emptiness in his chest when he encountered someone he hadn't expected.

Pete had changed quite a bit since their university days. His skin had become lighter, and his aura now radiated the unmistakable glow of a celebrity. But the one thing that hadn't changed was his beautiful smile and the sparkling, mischievous glint in his eyes that had once captured Krit's heart completely.

"What are you doing here?"

"Wow, it's been years, and that's all I get? What's with the lifeless greeting?"

Krit didn't respond. He just stared at Pete silently.

"You've gotten even more handsome, Krit. You've been doing well, right?"

Pete's voice was so smooth and gentle that it felt completely sincere.

"Yeah."

Krit gave a short reply, still wary of what Pete wanted.

"The guy just now—is he your new boyfriend? The pale, pretty one you were talking to in front of the café?"

Krit's eyes darkened instantly.

"How long have you been watching?"

"Long enough to tell there's definitely something going on between you two. What's his name? He looks good. Cute, too. But..." Pete paused, a knowing smirk playing on his lips. "Doesn't he look a little too much like me? Years have passed, and your type is still the same."

"What are you talking about? He's not my boyfriend. So... you don't actually have any reason to be here, do you?" Krit had no patience for small talk.

"Relax. I was just joking. Fine, I'm sorry." Pete raised his hands in mock surrender. "I actually came to ask for your help."

"What?"

"I have a problem."

Pete let out a heavy sigh, his expression shifting into something far more serious.

He had recently partnered with a few entertainment industry friends to open a nightclub. The business was booming, but a problem arose when a group of customers used drugs in one of the VIP rooms and were caught in a raid. Pete was about to face a closure order for drug use at his establishment, something he couldn't allow to happen because it would damage his reputation as an actor and TV host, as well as affect his contracts with production companies.

When Pete finished explaining, Krit shook his head in disbelief.

"After all these years, you suddenly show up asking for my help? Don't you think that's a bit shameless?"

"You knew that I had my reasons for cutting off contact back then."

"And those reasons don't matter anymore?"

"Are you saying you won't help me?"

"Help you how? This isn't my department. It's not something I handle."

"Don't talk like this industry is every man for himself, Krit. You look out for each other. You're friends, you're colleagues—if you really wanted to help, why wouldn't you?"

Krit met Pete's gaze directly.

"There's nothing between us anymore. Why drag me into this and force a connection that doesn't exist? Whatever mess you've made, deal with it yourself."

"You won't even consider it? Not even for the sake of what we had?"

"And what exactly did we have?"

Krit let out a dry laugh.

"A disposable relationship? Something you use and throw away?"

"We shared a bed, didn't we?"

"Enough, Pete." Krit forced himself to stay composed. "Think about your own reputation for once. You're an actor with millions of fans. Pulling something like this—it's not a good look."

"I'm so glad. You finally said my name." Pete smiled. "So, Krit... what do you want in return?"

"What are you talking about?"

"If you help me, I'll return the favor however you like. Do you want us to go back to how we were... or do you just want... a night together?"

Krit stared at him, stunned by the audacity. Then, he scoffed.

"Tell me, is this how you got ahead in the industry?"

"I've never done it before. But I wouldn't mind doing it with you."

They locked eyes. Krit leaned in closer and said,

"Find someone else to help you."

Then, without another word, he turned and walked away, never once glancing back.

Pete let out a soft sigh. He watched the tall figure walk away, not intending of chasing after him—not yet. Pete adjusted his sunglasses and put them back on, then walked back to his car leisurely, the very same black supercar that Wayu had unknowingly walked past earlier.

He opened the door and sat in the car. If Krit wanted it this way, that was fine. After all, they would still have to talk again since Krit's phone number was still the same. Pete whistled softly. Some things just needed a little more time to achieve better results.

Right now, he had an entirely different plan for Krit.

Chapter 8: If You Are Curious, Just Ask Him

'Krit, why don't you stop by my bar tonight? We're doing a "handsome chef" theme-you have to see it for yourself.'

'Send me a picture first.'

Seeing Krit's reply, I immediately opened my phone's gallery and scrolled through the photos I had just taken with my friends.

Tonight, we were all dressed in chef outfits-white shirts with aprons tied around our waists-reminiscent of a certain foreign drama where the female lead moves to Paris for work. The sleeves were rolled high above the elbows, showing off the definition in our arms. I picked the best-looking shot and sent it to Krit.

Not even ten seconds later, he replied.

'Let me know when you're actually holding a pan and a spatula cooking something, then I'll consider it.'

I laughed so much that Thai, who was sitting next to me, turned and teased me.

"You're in such a good mood today, Wayu. Smiling non-stop. Love must be in the air, huh?"

I tried to suppress my grin but wasn't very successful.

"What love are you talking about? I'm just chatting with Krit, that's all. Nothing's going on."

"Pfft! Yeah right. Like I'd believe you." Thai snickered. "You were sulking like a lost puppy that day. Think Krit even knows you like him?" He mocked the last sentence before reaching out to cup my face, turning it toward him. "Hey... have you gotten hotter or what?"

"I started taking supplements and got some skin treatments at the clinic Hong recommended. You didn't go?"

"I did, but why don't I look as good as you?"

"Well, do I have a body as fit as yours?"

"Yeah, this one's hard to deny."

Thai flexed his biceps playfully, showing off. His physique had always been impressive, but now? He looked at least five, maybe even eight times hotter. Especially when he strutted down the runway-shirt off, chest and abs on full display under the lights. Beyond just looks, Thai had a natural way with customers. He treated them well, knew exactly how to charm, and had an effortless magnetism that drew people in. At this rate, it wouldn't be long before he reached the very top.

Honestly, both of us had come a long way since we first started working here. In just two months, we had improved our looks and increased our earnings significantly. Sometimes, when I looked in the mirror, I barely recognized myself-it was like I had transformed from a plain cocoon into a vibrant butterfly overnight. But that was just appearances. Financially, things were incomparable to before. I had already cleared all my mom's debts by my second month-faster than I had ever imagined.

Now, I set aside a portion of my earnings to take better care of myself, which was necessary in this line of work. Even so, I struggled to spend money freely. Growing up in a financially tight household, I was used to scrimping and saving. Even after making more money, I still found it hard to break that habit. It nearly killed me to pay for a new outfit and a new pair of shoes that cost more than my dad's monthly salary.

The reason? I had started maintaining contact with customers for off-hour bookings. Sometimes, they wanted me to accompany them for dinner, take photos together at fancy cafés, or go wherever they wanted. I couldn't exactly show up in shabby clothes at upscale places, could I? I had to maintain my customers' image, too.

Even though I accepted these off-hour bookings, I still stuck to my original principles-being a companion, someone to talk to and take care of them. Nothing beyond that. No sex involved. I always made that clear with customers before accepting any requests. I've really learned my lesson from last time, when my own carelessness landed me in the hospital and a police station.

I sent a bunny sticker blowing a heart-shaped kiss to Krit before putting my phone away and getting ready for work. It might have seemed like a joke, just playful teasing, but honestly, I was flirting on purpose. I didn't care-if Krit kept replying, then I'd take it as him giving me a chance.

...Hopefully, I wouldn't end up heartbroken.

That night, I met someone I never expected our paths would cross again.

I was on the floor when the drink auction for each host began. The atmosphere was lively, with PR staff hyping up the crowd over the microphone to get them to bid more. The bidding started at three drinks, with each drink priced at three hundred baht.

When it was my turn, host number 48, someone placed an opening bid of five drinks, which was a good start. I thanked them and threw a smile their way, but I also made sure to flash my best smile to the other tables as well in case anyone else wanted to compete.

"Ten drinks," the sales staff managing the front table called out.

"Fourteen drinks," a table at the back countered.

"Sixteen drinks."

The auction was heating up. Each time the bid increased, the crowd clapped and cheered.

"Twenty drinks."

"Twenty-two drinks." The front table continued bidding fiercely.

When no one countered, the PR staff started the final countdown.

"Twenty-two drinks, going once."

"Twenty-two drinks, going twice."

I smiled at the group of lively female customers who placed the last bid. The woman who bid for me had long hair and dimples, exuding a playful office-lady vibe.

But then, a voice from the back table cut through the noise.

"Thirty drinks!"

The countdown announcement for thirty drinks came swiftly.

"Thirty drinks, first call!"

"Thirty drinks, second call!"

"Round three for table 212! Number 48, let's go!"

Cheers erupted from the people at that table. I smiled widely and thanked them with a wai before walking off the floor and heading to the back table, where I'd be taking care of them tonight. They came as a group of five, both women and men, all seemingly around my age. Two hosts had already joined them before I arrived.

As I got closer, one of the customers immediately caught my attention. He looked familiar-like I had seen him somewhere before-but I couldn't quite place him. When I reached the table, I was directed to sit beside him. That's when I found out that he was the one who had bid thirty drinks on me-a rather generous amount.

"Hello, I'm Wayu," I introduced myself. He had sharp features, fair skin, and mischievous charm, but was also in a good mood.

"Do you remember me? Didn't think I'd run into you here."

His words made me look at him in surprise.

Before I could respond, he continued,

"We met at the university library and again outside the architecture building. I smiled at you both times."

My eyes widened in recognition. Him! The engineering student who had helped me pick up my things at the library and whom I'd locked eyes with when loading a model into my friend's car. My heart skipped a beat-I hadn't expected to see him here.

"Of course, I remember," I quickly said. "What's your name?"

"Mind."

"Is this your first time here? I don't think I've seen you before."

"Yeah, first time. If I'd known you were here, I would've come ages ago," he replied with a grin. "I wanted to ask your name back then, but I never saw you again."

"Oh, I dropped out of school and started working here. Is there anything special you'd like me to take care of tonight, Mind?"

"Can I get a boyfriend experience?"

His friends immediately burst into cheers and teasing remarks. Mind's face turned red, but he shot back,

"I have the right to choose, okay?"

I smiled at him before replying, "Sure. Darling, did you have a tiring day at school? Have you eaten yet?"

"Not yet, baby."

Mind's friends were heckling and teasing me this time. I had chosen the word "Darling" for him because it sounded sweet but not overly cutesy. However, Mind called me "Baby," which was undeniably adorable.

Not long after, they called over two more hosts to join the table, ensuring that everyone had someone to pour drinks for them. I turned to Mind with a smile and then asked.

"What would you like to eat, darling? Want to check the menu?"

"Can you order for me, baby?" He asked, his tone playful.

"Okay, how about some French fries?"

"I don't know... I'd rather take a bite out of you."

With that, he grabbed my hand and pretended to nibble on my fingertip. I quickly pulled my hand away.

"Behave, darling. If you bite me, I might just bite you back," I teased, laughing as I casually looped my arm around his. That way, I had better control over his hands while making him feel like I was the one initiating the closeness.

"Here, have a candy first. What flavor do you like?"

"Strawberry."

I picked up a strawberry-flavored candy from the table, unwrapped it, and held it out for him. But instead of taking it, he simply opened his mouth, waiting for me to feed him.

The atmosphere grew even livelier as we started playing drinking games. I got tricked into drinking quite a lot of alcohol.

Architecture students typically couldn't hold their liquor as well as engineering students, but by now, I was a trained host-no engineering student could outdrink me. I'm just kidding, though. Honestly, even

handling this group alone was enough to make me crawl home to puke afterward.

At one point, we played a game where we had to pass a piece of tissue paper around the table using only our mouths. With each pass, the tissue got smaller and smaller. When it was Mind's turn, he deliberately let the paper drop, trying to use it as an excuse to kiss me instead. I saw through the trick immediately-I had been on both ends of it before. So, I dodged and put up my hand just in time.

His friends burst into laughter as Mind missed his mark. Not giving up, he grabbed my shoulders to keep me from escaping and pretended to plant kisses on both sides of my face. Of course, he wasn't actually kissing me-just playing along for fun.

After a while, he started looking genuinely tipsy. I let him lean against my shoulder.

"You smell so good, baby," he murmured.

Well, of course.

Wearing a nice fragrance was part of the job. Looking after my appearance-my physique, skin, hair, scent, words, and even small physical touches-was all necessary. Experience taught me how to gauge the right level of intimacy for each customer.

"Can I rest my head on your lap?"

I grabbed a small cushion, placed it on my lap, and adjusted my posture so he could lie down comfortably.

"Better now?" I asked, resting a hand on his chest.

"I think I'm falling for you, baby," Mind whispered, pressing a kiss to my hand before holding it close.

I lowered my gaze and smiled at him, not pulling my hand away since he wasn't being too touchy or out of line. If anything, he was kind of cute. Normally, he acted all tough, but once he got drunk, he turned clingy-like a big cat curling up in someone's lap and dozing off.

That night, I stayed with Mind until the bar closed. Before leaving, he told me he'd definitely be back to see me again. We exchanged contacts-after all, it was natural for hosts and customers to want to reconnect for another night.

That night, I got home around four in the morning. After taking a shower, I lay on my bed, listening to music while rereading my chat history with Krit. I ended up smiling to myself like an idiot.

Would Krit have feelings for me?

I kept asking myself the same question over and over again, but I never got a clear answer. I knew he didn't dislike me. In fact, it wasn't just that-he might even like me a little. The only question was whether it was the same kind of liking and whether it was enough. I had no idea if he was bisexual, pansexual, or something else, but I was certain that he wasn't against relationships between men.

How did I know?

Well, people like me can tell when someone's eyes say it loud and clear.

I was probably in the "talking stage" with Krit. But the truth was, being in the talking stage meant not having any status at all. I knew it was shaky, uncertain, and fragile, but I was still happy with it... Sigh.

I went back to reread our chat again, even though I already had every single line memorized. If this were a test, I'd definitely get an A-even if the professor set the passing grade at a hundred percent.

"Krit, do you miss me?"

I whispered at his profile picture, wishing I could say those words to his face someday. But right now, he was probably fast asleep while I was here, missing him and fantasizing about him all on my own. It felt so good but hurt so bad at the same time. I leaned back, hugged my pillow, and sighed, staring out the window. I wanted to gaze far away, to see the wide sky, just like that day when I hugged Krit and buried my face in his shoulder, crying.

"Sweet dreams, Krit."

I touched my lips lightly and pressed my fingers against his picture, whispering to the early morning breeze, hoping my words would reach him-whether he would ever know or not.

Then, I fell asleep and didn't wake up until two in the afternoon.

The moment I opened my eyes, I grabbed my phone, checking if Krit had sent me any messages. Turned out, the first message I got today wasn't from him-it was from Mind, the engineering student who came to the host bar last night.

He had messaged me since eleven in the morning. I chuckled, thinking he probably had to wake up early for class.

The first message read:

'Babe, are you awake?'

The second one followed:

'Next week, I'm going to see you again. And don't even think about sitting at another table-I'm booking the whole place so you have to sit with me.'

I replied:

'Let me know which day you're coming, so I don't take a day off. Study hard, okay?'

I thought about the word "darling" that I used for Mind. Actually, whether it was darling, honey, baby, or any other sweet nickname my customers and I used for each other, they were all just playful and affectionate-but they never made my heart waver. Seeing customers every day had forced me to build walls around myself from the very beginning. I made sure I would never cross those walls for anyone.

The only wall I wanted to climb over was the one between me and Krit. And every time he looked at me and spoke to me, I felt myself wavering-whether he meant to make me feel that way or not.

As I was still in my daily love-struck mode, not even having gotten up to shower yet, my phone suddenly rang. I widened my eyes when I saw the caller ID. I stared at it over and over again, thinking I might be hallucinating.

Damn, psychic powers really do exist. Krit was calling me!

I picked up immediately.

"Krit, is something wrong?"

"Are you at home right now, Wayu?"

"Yeah, I am." I answered, noticing that his voice sounded a little off.

"I'll come by the house later, but for now, I want you to talk to someone first."

Then, I heard a very familiar voice coming from the phone.

"Wayu, it's Waii."

"Waii?" I gasped in shock, completely caught off guard. "Where are you? What's going on? Why are you with Krit?"

"I'm in Ayutthaya." Waii's voice was barely a whisper. "Krit is taking me home. I want to go home."

Her voice sounded like she was about to cry. That was when Krit took over the call again.

"Don't panic just yet, okay? Waii is with me now, and nothing too serious happened. I followed up on the information you gave me and finally found her here. I'm taking her home. I'll explain everything when we get there."

"Okay."

I replied, my heart still pounding.

Less than two hours later, Krit's car pulled up in front of my house. I rushed to the door, with mom following behind me.

"Water!"

I hurried toward my younger sister. Waii looked thinner than before, her face pale and lacking the brightness it once had.

I grabbed Waii's arms and was shocked. There were bruises on her pale arms. Not just on her arms, but also around her neck.

"What the hell happened?" I turned to Krit, speaking quickly. "Why is Waii with you?"

After that, Krit then told us everything. He had tracked Waii down to Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. The man who took Waii away was named Ken- someone with a history of assault and theft. Krit followed their trail until he found them living in a run-down rental house. He tried to see Waii, but Waii's boyfriend wouldn't allow it. Sensing something was wrong, Krit forced his way in and discovered that Waii had been locked inside a room. In the end, he got Waii out and brought her home.

I listened, feeling my chest tighten with anger and guilt. My sibling had been going through all that, and I had no idea.

"Thank you so much, officer, for bringing my daughter back." Mom clasped her hands together and thanked Krit after hearing about what had happened.

"No need to thank me." Krit quickly said. "It's a police officer's duty to protect the people. Besides, I know Wayu."

"Thank you, Krit. If you hadn't gone looking for Waii and found her, she probably wouldn't have come back by now. I don't even know how to thank you enough."

Krit gave a small smile and nodded without saying anything. After a while, he excused himself and left.

Once he was gone, Waii told us everything that had happened these past few months. She had wanted to leave Ken a long time ago, but the guy wouldn't let her. At first, things were sweet, like any new couple. But eventually, Ken started cheating-sleeping with other women. Then, he became paranoid, accusing Waii of cheating too. Their fights got worse, and eventually, he started hitting Waii. In the end, he took Waii's phone away and wouldn't let her go anywhere unless he was with her.

Hearing all this, my heart ached. I had imagined scolding Waii when she finally came home, but now, seeing her like this, I couldn't bring myself to say anything harsh. She had only been on this earth for seventeen years. She had made mistakes, but she was still my little sister.

"Stay home. You don't have to go anywhere anymore." I reached out and patted his head.

Waii nodded, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Now, Singto is learning to talk, but he can't pronounce anything clearly," I said.

Singto, who was sitting on mom's lap, turned to look when he heard his name. His small lips parted as he tried to speak, but the sounds were barely recognizable as words.

"There you go, did you hear that?"

Waii smiled as tears streamed down.

"Mm... I heard it."

After that, Waii put her things in mom's room because her old room had turned into a storage room. It had once been a small storage nook, later converted into a tiny bedroom that could only fit a mattress. The only things Waii brought back were a few sets of clothes. This week, since dad is still working out of town, Waii will probably sleep with mom and Singto on her bed for now.

I waited until Waii finished taking a shower and changing clothes, then took Waii out to eat at a food shop on the main road, not far from the entrance of our alley. I ordered a variety of dishes, I wanted my younger sibling to enjoy all the things we had once longed to eat but could never afford.

"Eat more, you've gotten so thin," I said. Waii looked much more worn out. Her once smooth, radiant skin now looked dull and rough. Waii's face still held traces of its original beauty, but it seemed lifeless.

"You're not angry with me, are you?"

"Yeah," I replied. "But I can forgive you. I'm just glad you're safe back home."

Waii didn't say anything more, just nodded quietly.

I scooped some food onto Waii's plate.

"Eat up. A shrimp this big wasn't something we could easily afford back then."

Waii looked up and smiled at me.

"Are you working at a bar? I heard Krit say that."

"Yeah, I've been working there for a few months now, that's how I've managed to save up some money."

"Krit is a good guy, huh? How did you meet him?"

I smiled. "It's a long story. I'll tell you about it some other time."

After finishing our meal, we walked home together. On the way, I subtly asked Waii if she had thought about what she wanted to do next. Deep down, I hoped she would go back to school. Now that I had a job and a steady income, I could support her financially. Even if she enrolled in the non-formal education system, at least she would earn a high school diploma. Plus, she would get to spend more time with Singto, who hadn't had the chance to be close to his biological mom for quite some time.

Waii hesitated. She had just returned, so I didn't want to pressure her too much. I told her it was fine-she could take her time to think about it. For now, she could stay home with mom and Singto, and once she felt more at ease, we could discuss it again.

Apart from thinking about Waii's future, I had another issue to settle with mom. When we got home, Waii took Singto into mom's room to play. Taking this opportunity, I walked into the kitchen, where mom was boiling eggs for her grandson.

"Mom," I called out.

She flinched slightly and turned to face me, her eyes filled with discomfort. We had barely spoken since that incident.

"Wayuu..."

Mom's voice was faint, like someone who knew they had done something wrong. Her eyes darted around as if she was thinking of an excuse.

"If you're going to explain about that day, don't bother. I don't want to hear it. I just want to know if you've stopped seeing him."

Mom froze. I had never spoken to her so harshly before, but she needed to understand how deeply her actions had wounded me.

"I've stopped," she replied in a small voice.

"Don't do it again,"

I said, pressing my lips together. The image of mom lying with her lover on dad's bed flashed in my mind, and the pain was indescribable. There were a million things I wanted to say, but they got stuck in my throat. I could only stare at her.

"I won't do it again. I swear. But, Wayu, please don't tell your dad or Waii."

"How could I? Our family is already in shambles. I don't want to see dad beating you half to death or going after that man. But if you do it again, you'll never see me again."

With that, I walked away, not waiting to hear what she had to say. Even now, I still can't come to terms with what she had done—just as I harbored a deep-seated resentment toward my dad, who acted as if he didn't want to know or take responsibility for what was happening to us.

That night, when I went to work and met Thai, I told him how Krit had helped find Waii and bring her home.

"Your cop is seriously amazing," Thai said, giving me a thumbs-up after I finished my story.

"Yeah, I'm really grateful to him. He's helped me so many times already—first with that whole Mr. Shane situation at the hotel, then when I lost it over my family problems, and now with Waii."

"So now you're totally head over heels for him, huh?"

"Not that much," I dragged out my words, but honestly... yeah, that much.

"Or maybe..." Thai narrowed his eyes. "What if Krit actually likes you?"

"Hey! Don't give me hope like that!"

"Huh? Think about it-he's been going out of his way for you. If it were me, I wouldn't do all that unless I liked someone."

"But what if he's just a good person? Maybe he's just compassionate."

Thai pretended to think for a moment. "Well, then you've got to blame your own fate. You met a good person, but he just doesn't feel the same way."

"Wait, are you trying to encourage me or crush my hopes? It's like you're patting my back one moment and then slapping my head the next!"

Thai laughed. "I didn't mean it like that. Don't overthink it. If he's going to love you, he'll love you even if you do nothing."

"Yeah, that doesn't make me feel better at all."

I shook my head, then remembered I had something I wanted to ask him about.

"Thai, I might have to find a new place to live."

"Why?"

"My sister is back home now, but there's no room for her. Our house is too small. It used to be manageable, but now with my nephew there too-who's at that super active age-it's getting crowded."

"What does your dad think about this?"

"I'm asking you before I even talk to him."

Thai went quiet for a moment, thinking it over.

"How about moving out and letting your sister take your room for now? You can figure out the next steps later. That's way easier than moving the whole family at once."

"That's a good idea."

He was right. Moving out with my entire family would be a huge undertaking, but if I just moved out by myself, it'd be much simpler. Before, I never even considered this because I felt responsible for taking turns with mom to take care of Singto. But now that Waii was back, and she didn't seem to have any immediate plans, it would be good for her to spend more time with Singto.

"Interested in moving to my condo?" Thai suggested. "It's convenient for work, the neighbors are nice, it's quiet, and there's a gym downstairs. I can even help you bulk up!"

I laughed at how he was hard-selling it, like he was the condo owner. Actually, I had been to Thai's condo before, earlier this month. Back then, he was moving out of his old, cramped rental in a crowded neighborhood to a condo with better security. So, I went to help him move his things to the new place.

Thai explained that he had done it for his girlfriend, who often stayed home alone while he worked nights. His girlfriend was a sweet, kind person who had been with him through thick and thin. Now that Thai had a more stable income, he wanted to give her a better life.

"I'm interested," I admitted. His condo was in a much better location than my house, making commuting easier. And honestly, just thinking about getting a full night's sleep without being woken up in the middle of the day by the loud noises all around me was already a dream.

"Alright! I'll ask the condo management if there are any vacant units," Thai said eagerly.

"Yeah, let me know."

Thai agreed. I did a rough mental calculation in case I actually went through with moving. Rent and deposits weren't much of a concern when we were making thousands a night-maybe not every night, but enough that I didn't have to worry about food, rent, or other expenses.

While making money became easier, finding time to sleep and taking care of my health became a challenge that had to be traded off. It's a bit ironically funny that I take care of our health by eating nutritious food and exercising, but then wreck my body every night by drinking alcohol.

"Nice bracelet," Thai suddenly pointed to my wrist. "Did you just buy it?"

"No, a customer gave it to me."

"Who?"

"Grace-the businesswoman."

"Oh, the one who always has a driver drop her off?"

"Yeah."

Grace was one of my regulars. A while back, I had accompanied her on a day trip to Bang Saen, driving her there and back. She was a single woman who devoted most of her time to work and wasn't interested in serious relationships. She liked me because I could hold conversations about anything-from random topics to business.

The second time we met, after a meal at a Japanese restaurant inside a high-end hotel on Sukhumvit, which was connected to a shopping mall filled with boutiques selling branded items, she asked:

'Do you like wearing accessories, like bracelets, watches, or things like that?'

'I don't dislike them, I just don't wear them.'

And then she pulled me into a boutique and picked out a bracelet worth two hundred thousand baht for me. It wasn't expensive for her, but it was too much for me. I tried to choose a cheaper one out of politeness, but she insisted.

'Take this one. It looks great on you. Just wear it when you go out with me.'

So, I accepted it and finally understood why the top hosts-Sky and Richie, and the like-always wore expensive clothes and accessories. Part of it was because sometimes the people we went out with were influential in society or held high-ranking jobs, unlike us who were more low-profile. When dining together at places like omakase or fine dining restaurants, we also had to look presentable to match the status of those we were sharing the table with.

After making sure I looked good, Thai and I headed out to start our shift. The bar was lively tonight-not as packed as last night when we had to set up standing tables, but nearly every table was full. The band was playing song songs I liked, which felt like a good sign for the night.

Then came the highlight of the night-the host drink auction.

I stepped onto the floor, with lights shining down to showcase each host's appearance. Amid the lively music and flashing lights at the tables of customers enjoying their night, I scanned the bar, offering a small sweet smile here and there, leaving lingering glances with a few people to spark their interest.

Then, the PR announced my number.

"Number 48, Table 114-starting bid at thirty drinks!"

My heart started pounding. A bid starting at thirty drinks wasn't something that happened often for me. Since I started working here, the highest bid I had ever received was fifty drinks, and the one who placed that bid was Grace. A small hope flickered inside me-maybe tonight, I'd have a chance to match that record.

I immediately turned to look at the customer at that table, but before I could even enhance my smile to be more dazzling, another announcement came through.

"One hundred drinks! Table V2!"

The sudden spike in numbers caused a buzz of excitement. I nearly threw my arms up and ran around the floor shouting, but I had to keep my cool. Instead, I turned toward that side and flashed my sweetest smile. The energy in the room became even more electric-bidding a hundred drinks wasn't something that happened every night. Some hosts had worked here for years without ever having a customer spend that much.

The announcement confirming the hundred-drink bid was repeated three times. No one else countered.

With a bright smile, I made my way to the table, determined to give my absolute best service tonight-the kind that would make my customer go home and dream about me long after the night was over.

There were four people seated at the table. As I stood there, waiting to see who I'd be sitting next to, my gaze caught on one of them. He was a man wearing a cap, its brim pulled low as if he was trying to obscure part of his face. And when he finally looked up, I was stunned.

If Mind surprised me the other day, then today was a full-blown shock.

The man sitting there was Pete, a star from a wildly popular BL series. His neutral expression made him seem a bit aloof, maybe even arrogant. But the moment he smiled, it was like every spotlight in the room had turned to him alone. He was effortlessly handsome, and his smile was absolutely stunning.

"Wayu, go sit next to Pete," someone instructed.

A strange nervousness settled in me, even though I was used to seeing celebrities frequent this place. But there was something about Pete-something in his eyes-that made me feel different. I took a seat beside him and introduced myself.

They had chosen several other hosts to join them at the table. I started chatting with Pete to build familiarity. The closer I looked, the more I felt that he had an undeniable charm-his face, his voice, his entire presence.

While the others drank and played games in high spirits, Pete never overstepped any boundaries. He only rested an arm loosely over my shoulder, occasionally turning to smile and chat with me.

Then someone suggested playing a game where we had to hold hands and stare into each other's eyes. The first to blink would lose and be punished by having to take however many shots the winner decided. That was when he did something I never saw coming.

It was a classic game that often led to playful, physical teasing. Players would try to distract their opponent, like leaning in so close that their noses nearly touched, making it look like they were about to kiss. But Pete took it a step further. Just as I was focused, wondering if he would blink first, he suddenly released the hand we were holding and gripped my upper arm instead. Then, in one swift move, he leaned in and pressed a quick kiss to my lips.

The whole table erupted in cheers. A fake-out kiss where the other person couldn't dodge in time was always a hilarious move. Pete turned to look at me, his tone casual.

"Hope you don't mind."

How could I even protest? It was already done.

I went along with it, joking that I'd get my revenge, which only made his friends laugh even harder.

A while later, Pete leaned in closer and whispered,

"If I invite you to my room, how much would it cost?"

I took a deep breath and steadied myself. This wasn't the first time a customer had asked me to stay the night. As always, I handled it the same way-by turning them down as tactfully as I could.

I smiled and responded, "I'm sorry, Pete. You're very handsome, but I don't take those kinds of requests. However, I can take care of you in other ways."

"You mean you don't sleep with customers at all?"

"That's right," I said, maintaining my smile, hoping he would respect my stance.

Pete studied me, his gaze sharp and unreadable. He didn't seem tipsy at all-his eyes held something else, something I couldn't quite decipher. Intense. Piercing.

"Why? Saving yourself for Lieutenant Krit?"

I froze, stunned. My mind scrambled to process how those words had come out of his mouth, here and now.

"You... know Lieutenant Krit?"

He smirked. His voice wasn't exactly threatening, but there was something about it that made me wary-smooth, yet laced with amusement.

"If you want to know, just go ask him yourself."

Chapter 9: Are You Ready? Ask Your Heart

Krit stood inside his walk-in closet, which also housed his dressing table. He ran his fingers through the front of his hair to keep it from falling too much over his forehead, though he didn't put much effort into styling it. Today, he had a meeting with a group of old university friends.

Just as Krit was about to grab his car keys and head out, he received a message on his phone from Wayu.

'Krit, I have something to ask. Last night, I met a customer who said he knows you—someone named Pete, an actor. Do you really know him?'

Krit stared at the message in surprise. Before he could even type a response, another message came in. His eyes widened when he saw that this one wasn't from Wayu but from Pete.

'Krit, I have something to show off.'

'Wayu is really cute. Just seeing him makes me want him. But damn, he plays hard to get. Guess his boyfriend must be strict.'

Pete attached a photo along with the message. It was taken on a long sofa in some bar. Krit narrowed his eyes. In the photo, two men were sitting together—one of them gripping the other's arm while kissing him on the lips. The angle made it hard to see one of their faces clearly, but Krit could tell that the man was Pete. As for the other person, whose face was much clearer—it was Wayu!

'By the way, does your dad know about you and Wayu?'

A flash of anger flickered in Krit's eyes. Did Pete even realize what he was doing? That guy could mess with his head all he wanted, but this...this was crossing the line.

How did Pete even know that Wayu worked there? Krit thought back to the day Pete had come to see him at work. He had seen Krit talking to Wayu in front of the café, but that was just for a brief moment. Then it hit him—on that day, Wayu had been carrying the uniform he needed for work. When he walked away, he had draped it over his arm. Pete must have noticed the logo and the bar's name, which led him straight there.

Krit gritted his teeth, his mind racing. He needed to hear the full story from Wayu's own mouth. Without hesitation, he called him, but the call went unanswered. Stepping out of his dressing room, Krit hesitated, debating what to do next.

Just then, his phone rang. Seeing that it was Rose, he answered the call.

"Krit, are you home this evening?" Rose greeted him in a cheerful tone. "I was thinking of stopping by your place. I need to discuss something with your mom."

"I'm heading out. Probably won't be home." Krit replied.

"Really? That's a shame. I was going to invite you to dinner. Your mom is so lovely—she even referred a client to me! One of the parents from her music school, actually. Getting this case really made my day."

"Hmm. Good for you."

"Hey, why do you sound so weird? Is something wrong?"

"Just a little."

"Work problems?"

"No."

"Then tell me."

Krit briefly explained the situation—how Pete had come to him for help and then tracked Wayu down at the bar. Rose was furious.

"That bastard Pete! Just how low can he go? He's got some nerve pulling this crap. Krit, don't help him with his case. Let him rot in jail."

"The charges aren't serious enough to put him away for life."

"I don't care. I just want his reputation ruined so no one will hire him again. I hated him ever since he dumped you just so you wouldn't be an obstacle in his climb to fame. So, what are you going to do now?"

"I need to talk to Wayu first."

"What's going on with you and him?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you like him?"

Krit didn't answer.

"Your silence means yes. Or... it means yes, but you're not ready to say it."

"Why do both options mean the same thing?"

"Listen, Krit, I don't know if Wayu is the right person for you, but I don't want you stuck in the past anymore. I want you to open your heart, to give yourself a real chance at love. You need to break free from the mud you've been trapped in. Nothing heals the wounds of old love like a new one."

"That was deep... except for the 'trapped in the mud' part."

Rose laughed, despite the serious conversation.

"Well, if you're still thinking about helping Pete because you have lingering feelings for him, then go ahead—wallow in the mud with the buffaloes."

"Alright, I'll talk to you later. I have things to take care of."

After hanging up on Rose, Krit tried calling Wayu again, but there was still no answer. Making a quick decision, he canceled all his plans for the evening and sent Wayu a message, telling him he was coming over. He told him to wait and not to go anywhere.

With that, Krit drove straight to Wayu's house. His expression was dark with frustration. He was furious that Pete had tried to use his dad as leverage against him. That was a line Pete had no right to cross. Sure, Pete had broken his heart—but at the very least, he should have left some level of trust intact.

...And then, there was the matter of Wayu.

Krit's brows knitted together as he thought about the photo Pete had sent. The dimly lit surroundings were bathed in scattered hues of colorful lights, but the image was clear—those two were kissing. He wanted to shake it from his mind, to erase it completely, but it clung to him, gnawing at his thoughts, refusing to let go.

As Krit turned into Wayu's street, he spotted him already waiting outside. Wayu wasn't wearing his usual bright smile. Instead, he looked troubled, as if something weighed heavily on his mind. Krit pulled up, rolled down the window, and spoke.

"Get in."

Once Wayu got into the car, Krit drove off toward the main road.

"Where are we going?" Wayu asked.

Instead of answering, Krit handed Wayu his phone. The screen displayed the photo of Wayu and Pete kissing. Wayu stared at it in shock.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I... uh..."

"And why did you let him kiss you like that?!" Krit snapped, his voice laced with irritation.

"I didn't let him!" Wayu shot back instantly. "I know people look down on my job, even though it's honest work. But I thought you'd be the one person who understood me the most. Why would you ask me that?"

He turned his face away, staring out the window, lips pressed tightly together as if holding back emotions.

Krit let out a heavy sigh. He knew he was taking his frustration out on Wayu.

"I'm sorry. I've been stressed about a lot of things lately."

"So, what exactly is going on between you and Pete? Why did he call me over and say something like that?"

"We used to date. He's my ex."

Wayu was momentarily stunned before answering, his voice tinged with unease.

"I see."

"See what?"

"You guys must have had a bad breakup."

"Why do you think that?"

"I was right, wasn't I?"

Krit was at a loss for words. His silence was enough of an answer.

Wayu stared ahead, his suspicions confirmed. Krit and Pete had once been lovers. And now, it seemed, they still weren't entirely over each other—

otherwise, this ridiculous situation wouldn't have happened. Why was he always the one left disappointed?

"Can I be honest with you?" Wayu asked, his voice clearly tinged with sadness.

Wayu turned to look at Krit.

"Are you jealous of him? Is that why you got so upset and drove all the way here to confront me like this? If you want to know the details of what happened, I'll tell you. That's all he did. It was just a drinking game. He kissed me for less than two seconds. But now, I'm really hurt that you're so jealous of him that you came here to yell at me. If you still have feelings for him, why don't you just talk it out properly? Why am I the one stuck in the middle between you and him? I'm not some kind of test for anyone!"

"It's not like that."

"Just pull over, Krit."

"How can I pull over here?"

"I can get back on my own. If you care about me at all, just pull over. I really can't handle talking to you right now."

"Wayu, I told you, it's not like that. There's something between him and me that needs to be settled. Once it's resolved, I'll explain everything to you."

"Krit, I'm begging you," Wayu's voice trembled. "If you don't pull over, I'll open the door and get out myself."

Krit turned to look and saw that the tip of Wayu's nose was pink, as if he was on the verge of tears. Krit let out a heavy sigh. If he didn't pull over, Wayu might really open the door and step out, just as he said.

Krit slowly maneuvered the car to the side of the road and parked.

"Wayu, don't overthink things, okay? Just wait until I settle things with him. Once it's over, we'll talk."

Wayu didn't respond. He stepped out of the car and turned to look at Krit, his eyes filled with such sadness that it made Krit's heart ache. Both of them seemed to have something heavy on their minds but didn't voice it. Wayu closed the car door and took a step back, then turned away from Krit and walked back the way they had come.

Krit watched Wayu's slender figure in the rearview mirror. He was both angry and guilty for making Wayu feel this way. He needed to resolve things with Pete as quickly as possible. The young man grabbed his phone and dialed Pete's number. The other end picked up after just a few rings.

"I was wondering when you'd call,"

Pete's voice sounded relaxed, as if he had been waiting.

"Let's meet and talk," Krit said.

"Right now?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"The usual place. The fortieth floor."

"Okay, see you in an hour. I was just thinking about enjoying the river view anyway."

Krit arrived at the meeting spot first. It was a rooftop restaurant on the fortieth floor of a hotel in the Sathorn district, offering a 360-degree view. The time was sunset, and the atmosphere was beautiful and romantic. Krit sat at a corner table overlooking the winding Chao Phraya River below.

Before long, Pete walked in. When he saw Krit waiting, a handsome smile spread across his face.

"It's been a while. The view here is still as beautiful as ever. Krit, you really know how to pick a place to relive old memories," Pete said as he sat down.

They had come here on dates years ago, back when they had just realized their feelings for each other.

"I remember how sweet the vodka tasted that day."

"Why are you messing with Wayu?"

"You're really ruining the mood."

Pete grumbled under his breath. He brushed a strand of hair from his forehead, blown by the wind, before responding.

"If I hadn't stirred things up, would you have come running to me this quickly? Was the photo I sent beautiful?"

"Wayu has nothing to do with this. Don't involve him again. And do you really think blackmailing a police officer is smart?"

"If it were anyone else, it'd be downright stupid to pull something like this on you—the son of a high-ranking police officer." Pete leaned forward, resting his chin on his hand. "But this is me, the one you once loved."

"Oh, wow... unbelievable. Did you really think this through before saying that? Just because we used to love each other, does that mean we have to keep cleaning up after each other for the rest of our lives? Have you forgotten who left whom?"

"What if we remove the word 'used to'? What if Pete wants to come back..."

"Stop! Don't say anymore," Krit interrupted sharply, his voice firm. "I'll handle the favor you asked for, but this is the only time I'll help. After this, we don't need to see each other again. Delete my number. This isn't a request."

Krit's tone wasn't loud or aggressive, but it was serious and resolute, leaving no room for jokes. Pete looked into Krit's eyes, his lips curling into a mocking smile.

"That hurts. Calling me out here to talk like this, in the place where we used to have such good memories."

"Get used to it. It might hurt at first, but eventually, you'll go numb. Oh, and there's something I want you to take back with you."

Krit took two banknotes from his shirt pocket. They were smooth yet aged from being kept inside a book for years. He placed them on the table in front of Pete.

"This was the first money we earned together. I kept it as a keepsake because it was a good memory. But now, I think it's better to let it go."

"So, not only have you never forgiven me, but now you must hate me even more."

"Disappointed, actually," Krit shook his head. "Even more than when I was abandoned. And I keep wondering what was wrong with me back then—why I couldn't see the truth and ended up falling for someone like you."

Pete turned his face away, gazing into the distance. The confidence he had shown earlier seemed to have faded.

"Okay, I deserve that. After one betrayal, and now I came back to blackmail you—twice. If I were in your shoes, I'd be furious too. But I want to tell you something, Krit."

Pete took a deep breath before continuing.

"The truth is, I could've asked someone else for help. But I came to you. The first reason was that I missed you—I wanted to see you again. The second was... I wanted to know if I still had a chance."

Krit was stunned by his words.

"But now I know I don't. That Wayu guy... I wasn't actually trying to hurt him. I was just jealous that he gets to have your love. But honestly, deep down, I kind of pity him. Because there's no future for him with you."

"That's going too far."

"Is it? Back when we broke up, you probably saw yourself as the victim—the one who was abandoned. But you never really tried to make our love last, did you? You treated me like I was never a part of your life, kept me a secret from everyone. You never even let me meet your parents—not even as a friend."

"We were still in school back then, Pete. What did you expect?"

"And if it were now, would it be any different? No, right? So how long am I supposed to wait? My whole life? Until your dad d..."

"Pete!"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say it like that." Pete lowered his head, his hands, which had once been loosely clasped, now tightening together in regret for speaking out of turn. "I'm really sorry."

"Let's part ways here," Krit said. "Let's not create any more bad memories for each other."

"...Okay." Pete nodded.

Krit stood up, his anger completely gone, leaving only a sense of weariness. Just as he was about to step away, Pete spoke up.

"I loved you back then, Krit. But not enough to throw away my future for you. I'm sorry for hurting you that day, but if I could go back in time, I'd still do the same thing."

Krit stepped out. The view from here was beautiful, illuminated by the evening lights after sunset. The winding course of the large river could still

be seen, snaking through the tall skyscrapers. They had only parted ways, allowing their first love to flow away like the river, never to return.

As Krit drove away, he recalled Rose's earlier words, fearing that he might help Pete out of lingering feelings. He admitted that he did have some ties to Pete—but not in the way that would ever lead to reconciliation. Pete hadn't been in his heart for a long time. It was empty, like an unused room with the door tightly shut.

But now, Krit realized he had begun to open that door again—for someone else. It had been happening for a while, but he had refused to acknowledge it. Pete's interference in his life wasn't just a nuisance—it had stirred something deeper.

The moment Krit saw the photo Pete sent, he was almost beside himself with anger. At first, he told himself it was because Pete had threatened him regarding his dad, but that wasn't the whole truth. Krit had managed to control that feeling and wouldn't let Pete control him. But it was the part involving Wayu that made his heart burn with heat, like fire.

There was no denying it anymore. Krit cared about Wayu—far more than he had realized. And now, he could no longer escape his own feelings.

Without hesitation, he changed his route, steering toward Silom. It would take some time before he reached the host bar where Wayu worked, but he still wanted to go.

Krit parked along the roadside across from the host bar. His gaze drifted into the alley, alive with lights and people. Wayu was probably in there, getting ready for work. He was a night person, living on the edge—flirting with a world of shadows and uncertainty. But somehow, Krit felt like his own life was even darker. Wayu was like a light in comparison. A small smile played on Krit's lips. It was almost ridiculous—driving all the way here just to look at a building.

That night, after Krit returned home, he sank into the armchair in his bedroom and played the playlist Wayu had once sent him. This time, the

songs felt different. The lyrics, the melodies—they were beautiful, meaningful, and made him want to listen to them again and again.

Krit picked up his phone and opened their chat. The last thing Wayu had sent before he had asked about Pete was a sticker—a bunny blowing a tiny heart-shaped kiss. His gaze softened.

He called Wayu, but the call went unanswered—not surprising, considering Wayu was working. Normally, Krit would just send a text. But this time, he left a voice message instead.

"Wayu, I'm sorry about today. I've settled everything now, and I want to talk—to make things clear. Let me know when you're ready... because I am."

Chapter 10: Hold Me for a Good Night's Dream

What does he see me as?

That was the first question I asked myself after getting out of Krit's car. I was furious—deeply hurt. I never imagined I'd find myself in a situation like this.

I walked briskly along the sidewalk, barely aware of my surroundings. My mind was a storm of emotions, none of them positive.

I am nothing to Krit... never was.

The answer was clear, sharp, and painful enough to make my eyes burn. From the very first day we met until now, he never once showed any intention of forming a special bond with me. It was always just me—I was the one who wanted to be close to him, who wanted him to be part of my life. But Krit never gave me any special place in his. He was involved with me only because of work, just like the countless other people who passed through his life every single day. My existence was just another fleeting matter in his world.

I was the one who wouldn't let him simply walk past. I held on. It was my one-sided desire that brought me here. I wanted to blame him for everything. He never told me to stop. He never told me he loved someone else. He let me dream about him, even though he knew I would never have a place in his heart. Pity was the cruelest trap. The kindness he showed me—it was the kindest form of cruelty. But in the end, I should blame myself the most.

I was so overwhelmed that I had to stop walking, turning to face the wall so no one would see the tears threatening to fall. I bit my lip and clenched my teeth, trying to hold them back. Crying on the side of the street was pathetic, and I didn't want to be that kind of person.

Pete... the one who holds Krit's heart. How could I ever compare?
Everything he is, I could never be.

From intense anger mixed with sadness and resentment, now... I didn't even know what I was feeling anymore. Suddenly, I felt as if I had shrunk into something small and insignificant, like I no longer mattered to anyone.

I pressed my hand against the wall, forcing myself to keep it together. As much as it hurt—as much as I wanted to just sit down and cry—I refused to let myself fall apart. No way. I had fought through too much to stand on my own like this. I had to value that more.

I sniffed and forced myself to lift my head. I'd be fine. I had to keep moving forward, no matter how I felt inside. The happiness and warmth I once had with Krit would stay in my heart—unchanging, untouched, just left as it was. He didn't have to love me, and we didn't have to love each other.

That night, I went to work at the bar as usual, but everything felt gloomier than before. I looked at myself in the mirror. My clothes, my hair, my face—everything looked fine. But my eyes... my eyes looked so sad. That wasn't okay. It annoyed me so much that I turned to Thai and asked,

"Thai, what's good about me?"

Thai gave me a puzzled look.

"What are you on about?"

"I just want to know. Can't you answer me?" I snapped a little.

"Fine, I'll answer. No need to snap at me." Thai huffed. "You're handsome, you're cute, you make a killer crispy pork basil stir-fry, and..." He paused, thinking. "You've got good manners—my wife said you always lift the toilet seat when you use the bathroom in my condo."

"If you were gay, would you like me?"

"What the hell kind of question is that?"

"Just answer."

"If you let me top, then yeah, sure."

"What kind of useless answer is that?"

Frustrated, I stomped off, but I could still hear Thai yelling behind me.

"Next time, just write the answer you want first, so I can say what you like, Wayu!"

I stepped out of the staff room and walked past the tables in the bar. There weren't many customers yet—it was only a little past 10 p.m. I headed toward the waiting lounge outside, a spacious hall near the entrance. At the front, by the first-floor doorway, stood the reception counter. Further inside, long black leather sofas lined both sides of the inner entrance. I walked over to one that was still empty.

"Waiting for a customer?"

A coworker asked as he saw me sitting there. Most customers preferred to sit on the other side of the sofa—waiting for friends or scrolling on their phones—since it was larger and closer to the bathroom. That left this side mostly for hosts waiting to meet their customers.

"Yeah," I replied with a small smile.

When he walked away, I leaned back against the couch, resting my head on the backrest.

I had to get a grip-right now. I needed to pull myself away from this fixation on Krit. If he didn't see me, if he wanted someone as flawless and high-class as Pete, that was his problem. Why should I care? I was just being myself. If someone didn't like me, so what? As long as I liked myself, that was enough.

I took a deep breath, straightened up. I'd sit here for a bit, then head back inside. But then my eyes landed on someone walking toward me.

Sky and another coworker were chatting happily as they walked. When he saw me sitting there, he paused. This was his usual waiting spot, where he greeted customers as soon as they stepped out of their cars. Tonight, someone must have booked a drinking session with him in advance.

We locked eyes. Neither of us looked away. Sky's expression was loud and clear—Get lost, Wayu. I stared right back, saying with my eyes, I'm sitting right here. If you don't like it, that's your problem.

The moment he saw me acting like that, he knew something was off. Today wasn't the day to mess with me. Sky shook his head and walked away.

I didn't sit there long—just enough to make sure I was ready to switch into work mode. Once I felt in the right headspace, I stood up, adjusting my shirt and necklace. Just as I lifted my head, I locked eyes with a group of customers walking in. One of them gasped and quickly covered their mouth. Guess I was their type.

I nodded and smiled. The whole group squealed. I walked past them, confident I had secured a customer for the night.

And I was right. Within minutes, I was called over to entertain them. I smiled, ready to give it my all. Soon, the bar was packed with people out for the night. When the music started, the atmosphere came alive—flashing lights, drinks flowing, upbeat songs that had everyone singing and dancing along with the band. I was right there with them. I was both a dancer and a drinker, and this was my element—dancing while clinking glasses, fully in my zone.

The customer I was with was sexy, cute, and playful. So, I danced close—holding her from behind, letting her lean into me. Glasses clinked, cheeks brushed, and anything went—arms draped over my shoulders, kisses on my neck, whatever she wanted. I let loose, no holding back. If the customer was having fun, then I was too. After an hour, I excused myself—I had to get ready for the dance performance.

I walked into the host dressing room, where a few others were already getting ready. The shows varied each night. Sometimes, another group of

hosts would take the stage-muscular, sexy, shirtless, flexing their bodies while putting on an intensely seductive performance.

But my group had a different style-offering variety. We had a cool, boy-band vibe. We kept our clothes on... mostly. Just enough teasing to keep things interesting. We danced as a group of five, each of us bringing something unique—handsome, stylish, seductive. The whole package.

"Ready?" the staff asked.

"Yes," we answered.

Then he pointed at my neck.

"Did you do that on purpose?"

I glanced in the mirror and burst out laughing. A bright red lipstick mark was smeared across my neck. I was wearing a wide-neck white t-shirt, and when I pulled the collar down, I could see the smudge ran from my collarbone all the way up to my jawline, just shy of my lips.

"Not on purpose," I grabbed a tissue to wipe it off. But then, I changed my mind. I let it stay.

We stepped onto the floor just as the lights went out. When the music started, bright lights shone down on us. As we began to dance, the audience below danced and sang along. The heavy beats made my blood pump faster, my heart race. Screams rang out periodically as each host took turns lifting their shirts to reveal their chests, abs, tattoos, or rolling their hips hard to the rhythm of the song.

As we reached the end of the song, we usually finished with a cool or sexy pose. Tonight, it was my turn to be in the center. Just as I spun and stepped forward, I pulled my shirt over my head, letting it slide down to my wrists before dropping to my knees, spreading my legs apart. My wrists were held together in front of me as if they were bound. I flicked my hair, tilted my head slightly, and gazed at the audience.

The screams were deafening. The combination of the kiss marks on my neck and my posture made it look like I was both willing and forced into submission. I accepted the reaction with a smile before getting up and putting my shirt back on.

As I walked back toward the dressing room, my friends immediately teased me, asking who had left those marks, saying I stole the show and was spicier than mala seasoning. Only Thai wagged his finger, motioning for me to follow him to the locker area.

"You got something to say, just say it," Thai said.

"What?"

"That performance just now."

"Oh, you didn't like it? Everyone else did. A good show needs inner emotion, you know."

"I don't think that was 'inner emotion.' It felt more like you were being sarcastic."

Thai stepped closer, placing a hand against the locker, blocking me from looking away or walking off.

"Talk," he ordered.

With no way out, I ended up confessing everything—the situation between me, Krit, and Pete. When I finished, Thai let out a long hiss through his teeth.

"Damn... that hurts. So, what's next?"

"I stop," I shrugged. "This is as far as it goes."

"Are you sure?"

"I've already made up my mind."

"Yeah, if someone doesn't love us, we don't have to love them back." Thai gave my shoulder a light pat. "Tonight, you drink all you want. I got you."

"That was the plan." I grinned. "It's my turn now. I've carried your drunk ass home plenty of times."

He threw an arm around my shoulders. "Come on... let's go do the job we love."

As we walked out together, I asked,

"Thai, so do you actually wanna sleep with me or not?"

"Wow."

"Yes?"

"Go f*** yourself."

I burst out laughing. With our arms slung around each other's shoulders, we walked out together.

After the show, there was another round of drink auctions for the hosts. The moment I stepped onto the floor, I was called up. The bidding was intense, purely a battle of money, with no one backing down. From an initial bid of ten drinks, I had no idea how many drinks were bid for me, and I didn't care. I just wanted to go all out tonight.

Let me tell you—I was ready to entertain in every way. Whatever the customers wanted, I could be. Best friend? Boyfriend? Big brother? Little brother? Husband? Wife? You name it. Just one thing—please, no sob stories tonight. Not only was I in no state to comfort anyone, but I might just drag them to go settle things with whoever made them cry.

After midnight, the bar switched to EDM. The hazy buzz, flashing lights, and pounding beats made the night even more fun. But for some reason, I kept losing at rock-paper-scissors with the customers. I lost count of how

many shots I took—not that it mattered. Ever since I started this job, my alcohol tolerance had improved a lot, and I figured I could handle it.

That was until a customer dared me to chug an entire bottle on the floor in exchange for another two hundred drinks. That's when I realized I couldn't handle it after all. The moment I stepped down and returned to my table, it wasn't long before everything went black.

I woke up in my own bed, in my own room, wearing nothing but my boxers.

The last thing I remembered was telling a customer, "I'm sorry, I can't drink anymore," before stumbling into the dressing room. That was it. That was where my memory ended.

I pushed myself up into a sitting position and pulled open the curtain beside my bed, only to shut it immediately—the light was too much for my eyes. My head was pounding.

What time was it?

I dragged myself out of bed and staggered toward the door. When I opened it, I saw Waii sitting on the floor near the TV, playing a game on an iPad with Singto. The moment Waii noticed me standing in the doorway, she spoke up.

"I'm using your old iPad, okay? It was just sitting there."

"Yes, sure, go ahead." I said, unable to hold back a smile as I watched Singto tap at the jumping frog on the screen, trying to mimic its croak. "Do you want a new one? For Singto, so he can watch stuff or play learning games for toddlers."

"Nah, this one works fine." Waii replied. "Oh, by the way, that friend of yours—Thai, or whatever his name is—he said to call him the moment you wake up."

"Okay," I answered in a hoarse voice, tilting my head against the doorframe and closing my eyes. I still felt a bit lightheaded.

"You okay?" Waii asked. "You look like sh*t."

"I'll live. Last night was rough."

"Do you need anything? Want me to go buy you some ginger tea?"

"I'm good. I'll just have coffee."

I made my way to the kitchen, boiled some water, and sat down at the dining table, pouring myself a glass of water. I had been so wasted last night. I couldn't remember anything that happened after I went into the dressing room. I didn't even know when Thai brought me home.

After finishing my glass of water, I got up to make some coffee and carried it back to my room. I should probably call Thai. Sitting at the edge of my bed, I took a sip, hoping it would help with the hangover, while searching for my phone. It should've been on the table or in the pocket of the pants I wore last night.

Before I could go check the laundry basket, my eyes landed on something near my pillow—a blue plastic bag, tightly wrapped around something.

Curious, I set my coffee cup on the table and picked up the package to open it. But as soon as I untied the plastic bag, I found another layer tightly wrapped inside...

What the hell?

I untied the knot—only to find another layer... and another... and another... and another!

What the hell is this!?

I kept unraveling it until I reached the final layer—a clear plastic bag, sealed tightly with a rubber band. On the bag, there was a message written:

'Call me. From... Thai, your dad.'

Thai, you bastard!

That little devil had wrapped my phone in multiple layers, securing it with a rubber band as if it were some kind of precious relic. The moment I got my phone back, I immediately called to curse him out.

"What the fuck, Thai? What the hell did you do?"

"I was limiting your phone access, duh."

"For what reason!?" I nearly shouted, but my throat was still sore and dry, making my voice sound horrible.

"To give you time to sober up before reading whatever messages people sent you.'

"What messages?"

"I didn't mean to read them," Thai quickly defended himself. "But when I was taking you home, I took your phone out to give it back to you, and then a message flashed on the screen. And since I can read Thai, I saw that your dear Lieutenant Krit had sent you a message."

"He's not my 'dear' anything." My face stiffened.

"Oh, really? Then which idiot called him? Rambling on about how sorry I was, this and that. If you already love someone else, why give me false hope?" Thai said, his tone dripping with smugness at the end.

My eyes widened, and my hangover nearly vanished on the spot.

"Thai, I'm not joking."

"Neither am I."

"Are you serious? Oh, fuck..." Panic hit me.

What the hell did I do!?

"Yeah, you fucked up big time. If I hadn't snatched your phone away first, it could've been even worse. Oh, and by the way, you bit my arm, asshole."

"What else did I say?"

"Aren't you gonna ask if I'm okay first?"

"Are you okay, Thai? I'm sorry. I'll put medicine on it for you later."

"No need," Thai replied with a pout. "I have a wife, you know. You should focus on fixing your own mess first. Last night, you didn't get to say much—I got there just in time to hear you talking, so I quickly grabbed your phone and told him you were too drunk and that I was taking you home. Then, a little later, I saw his message pop up on your phone."

I rubbed my temples. "Damn it... I'm so confused right now, Thai."

"Here's the thing, no matter what you reply to him, I want you to calm down and think it through before you respond. And one more thing—are you still coming to the condo today?"

"Huh?"

Thai sighed. "You need to sign the lease today, remember?"

"Oh, right. I'll take a shower and head out soon."

"Cool."

After hanging up, I sat staring at my phone, Thai's words echoing in my head.

'Your dear Lieutenant Krit had sent you a message.'

I tried to calm my nerves and pressed my finger on the screen to read it.

My heart pounded when I saw the latest message from Krit, sent last night.

'Wayu, we need to talk. I'll come to see you at home tomorrow.'

It was his message after I had drunkenly called him and rambled like an idiot. I clutched my hair in frustration.

I was pathetic.

A loser.

A complete, utter fool.

But no matter how humiliating it was, I had to face reality. I scrolled up to read the earlier messages and frowned when I saw that he had sent me a voice message. I pressed play, and my heart started racing uncontrollably the moment I heard his voice.

"Wayu, I'm sorry about today. I've cleared everything up, and I want us to talk things through properly. Let me know when you're ready... because I'm ready."

I jumped to my feet, threw my phone onto the bed, and took a step back.

What the hell is this? What does Krit mean by this?

'Because I'm ready.'

'Because I'm ready.'

'Because I'm ready...!'

What does Krit mean? Ready for what? And what am I supposed to be ready for!?

I couldn't handle it.

I was too confused to process anything. I grabbed a towel and left the room. I needed to cool down—both my body and my mind.

After coming out of the bathroom, I felt a little better. The half hour I spent in there gave me time to reflect and think things through. I realized I had overreacted. Whatever Krit meant by "ready"—whether it was to end things completely or to find a way to stay on good terms—I just had to prepare myself to accept it. He wasn't "downgrading" my status because he had never given me one in the first place.

That stung.

I re-read Krit's last message. He said he'd come to see me at home, but that wouldn't be possible since I had plans today. That was actually good—I needed more time to process everything. I typed out my reply.

'Krit, I'm not free today. Let's talk another time.'

That sounded mature enough. Hopefully, it would make up for my embarrassing drunk call last night. I added another message.

'I'm sorry about last night. I was really drunk and just rambling. Please don't take it seriously.'

After hitting send, I got up to leave for Thai's condo, but then my heart nearly jumped out of my chest—Krit had already read my messages. Before I could react, my phone rang.

I flinched, nearly dropping it. My nerves were shot, but I answered.

"Hello, Krit."

"How are you feeling? You were pretty drunk last night." His voice was deep and gentle.

"I'm better now," I forced myself to sound steady.

"Can we talk in person?"

"I really can't today. I have to sign a lease—I'm moving into the same condo as my friend. I'll be moving in tomorrow."

"I'll help you move."

"No, it's fine. I don't have much stuff. I can fit everything in a taxi—I don't want to trouble you."

He went silent for a moment.

"Wayu, we need to talk. I want to do it face to face."

His voice made me feel completely helpless. Was he really not going to give me any time at all? Just a little more—was that too much to ask? But then again, how long could I keep avoiding him? Sooner or later, we'd have to clear things up. I decided to respond.

"Alright. Tomorrow evening, after I'm done moving in, I'll come see you."

After finishing my conversation with Krit, I quickly called Thai to report.

"Thai, Krit asked to talk to me. I'm going to go clear things up with him."

"You mean meet him in person?"

"Yeah."

"Wayu, didn't you say you hate being the third wheel in someone else's relationship? But what you're about to do is the exact opposite of what you said."

"I'm not doing that. I just think we're both adults now. Back when I called him, begging him to come see me when I was at my lowest, he helped me. So why can't I try to talk things out with him properly now? If we can't be anything more, at least we can still be like siblings."

"You're such a saint."

"I'm about to cry my eyes out here."

"Okay, I'll root for you. Heartbreak can be healed. Trust me."

The next day, I went to Thai's condo again—which I now had to call my condo. Today, I officially moved in. My essential belongings were packed into just two suitcases and a single box, nothing too excessive.

I stood in the middle of the room and looked around. It was a studio with a living area, a small kitchen, and a separate bedroom. It was more spacious than anywhere I had ever lived before. Best of all, my room was on the same floor as Thai.

The room was still a bit messy since I hadn't finished unpacking, and I still needed to buy a few more essentials. As I was taking clothes out of my suitcase, I heard a knock on the door. When I opened it, it was Thai.

"Yo, done unpacking yet?" He asked. "I'm heading downstairs to grab some food, so I thought I'd stop by to check on you. Need me to pick up anything?"

"Not yet. Come in."

I pushed the door open wider to let Thai in, but he just stood there, scanning me from head to toe.

"Damn, you look good."

He gave me a once-over, eyes narrowing.

"I always do."

Thai stepped closer and leaned in, sniffing the air around me.

"Not just good—you're all showered, smelling nice, and your face is smooth and clear, like a baby's bottom. So tell me, are you meeting Krit to break up with him or to make him regret losing you?"

Thai playfully brushed his hand over the open collar of my shirt, even though it's normal for me to leave the top buttons undone.

"He's probably regretting it, huh? Look at his ex's face. He's ten times hotter than me," I said.

"Nah, I think you're way cuter than that Pete guy."

I sighed and patted his shoulder.

"Thanks, Thai. I really appreciate you, my friend."

"So, aren't you leaving yet? Didn't you say you had plans with him this evening?"

"I'm waiting for the dining table. I told the furniture store to deliver it at 2 p.m., but they said their truck got into an accident and they had to switch vehicles. So I'm still waiting."

As soon as I said that, I started to feel anxious. It was almost time for my meeting with Krit. Even though the meeting spot wasn't far from the condo, the delivery truck still hadn't arrived.

"I'm definitely going to be late. I should call and let him know."

I took out my phone and called Krit. When he answered, I said,

"Krit, I'm going to be a little late. I ordered a dining set, and they just informed me that the delivery will be delayed. But it should be here soon."

"Then I'll come pick you up. I'm already on my way. Where's your condo?"

"Uh... you're coming here?"

"Send me the location."

After I sent him the location, Krit arrived a while later.

"Thai, Krit's here. I'm going down to meet him," I told Thai. Our condo required a keycard to access the upper floors.

"I'll come with you," Thai said.

Thai and I went downstairs together. As we stepped out of the elevator and walked through the lobby, I saw Krit getting out of his car through the glass doors.

Today, Krit was wearing a black shirt and long pants. He looked so devastatingly handsome that my knees almost gave out. His broad shoulders, long legs, and overall demeanor made Thai exclaim,

"Damn... is this your Krit? He's ridiculously good-looking. Now I understand why you've been acting like your world's ending."

I bit my lip, unsure how to respond. Seeing him like this made my heart feel weightless. I could hardly believe he was the one who broke my heart.

"You okay?"

Thai asked, looking at me with concern.

"I told you I've moved on. I'm fine."

"Stay strong, man," Thai said.

I walked out to greet Krit. Once inside, I introduced him to Thai. Before we could head up to my unit, the furniture delivery truck arrived with the table and chairs.

"The room came with a wardrobe and a bed, but no dining table, so I ordered one," I explained to Krit.

"Then I'll help you assemble the table first before we head out."

"Okay," I replied awkwardly.

Thai rolled his eyes, but I pretended not to notice.

We took the elevator upstairs with Thai and Krit. After the delivery guys brought in the boxes of furniture, Thai went out to buy some food.

"It's a bit messy. I haven't finished unpacking yet," I told Krit.

He looked around the room. I felt a little embarrassed about the clothes piled at the edge of the bed and the boxes that were still half-unpacked. Now, there were even more boxes from the furniture store.

"It's cozy," he said.

"You really don't have to stay and help with the table. We can just go."

"It won't take long. Are you in a hurry?"

"Not really."

"Then let's get started."

We both worked on unpacking the boxes, taking out the wooden tabletop, the metal frame, the legs, and two chairs.

Krit rolled up his sleeves above his elbows for easier movement. He glanced at the assembly instructions and started with the metal frame that would support the tabletop.

"You're really good at this," I said.

"I'm used to it," he replied with a small smile.

I smiled back. The air between us felt awkward, like we both had something on our minds but were trying to act normal—even though nothing felt normal.

We worked together to assemble the four pieces of the frame into the base for the tabletop. Throughout the process, we didn't talk much, even though I'm usually chatty around him. Krit used a wrench to tighten the screws into

the metal frame, while I quietly handed him the washers and screws. Once the frame was done, I turned to the table legs on the floor.

"Be careful," Krit said, quickly reaching out to grab the leg as I handed it to him. The tip of it barely grazed my cheek. "Did it hit your face?"

"No, it didn't."

He set it back down on the floor, then moved closer to me and touched my face, tilting my cheek to check. My heart raced. His fingertips felt electric against my skin, and he smelled amazing—fresh, like he'd just walked out of a rainforest. I wanted to move closer to catch more of his scent, but I could only think about it.

When he saw there was no mark, he pulled his hand away.

"Good thing it didn't hit you."

I looked at him longingly, not wanting him to move away. He was so close, yet still out of reach.

"What's wrong?"

Krit asked when he saw my expression. His voice was so gentle, and it made me feel even weaker.

What does it mean to move on?

Because right now, I'm completely shaken. I don't want to lose him, but I don't know what to do. And what we're doing right now is torturing me. When I reached the point where I couldn't hold it in anymore, I blurted out,

"Why are you doing this, Krit?"

"Doing what?"

"Being so nice to me when you don't feel anything for me," I said, knowing I was losing control but unable to stop. "Do you want to see me go crazy?"

Krit stared at me, his eyes filled with a thousand unspoken meanings I couldn't decipher.

"Why do you think I came here, Wayu?"

"I don't know," I answered immediately, my chest filled with turmoil. "Maybe to remind me of my place so I don't get the wrong idea. Or to tell me that you and Pete are together and that I should stay away because your boyfriend isn't happy."

"It's not like that," Krit shook his head and let out a heavy sigh.

"Then what is it?"

"Listen, Pete and I really did love each other once, but that was a long time ago. That day when you stopped by the police headquarters to return my clothes, Pete happened to be there too. He was in trouble because his business was about to be shut down, so he came to ask for my help. He didn't want to lose his reputation. Then, when he coincidentally saw you, he did what he did."

"Did you end up helping him?"

"I did," Krit replied firmly.

My heart sank, but before I could overthink it, Krit continued.

"After you got out of my car that day, I went to see Pete. We agreed that I would handle the situation for him in exchange for a mutual understanding that we would never go back to how things were. There's nothing between us now. We're just each other's past. Pete won't bother you again. I can guarantee that. That's all there is to it. I've told you everything."

I was stunned, unable to speak. Krit didn't pressure me or rush me. We sat together in silence for a while before I finally spoke.

"I understand."

"What do you understand?" He asked softly.

"You didn't mean to make me feel bad."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't it?"

"It's more than that," Krit said, moving closer. "That day, Wayu, you were upset with me, weren't you? When Pete caused a scene, and I went after him, leaving you behind without any explanation."

Just hearing this brought tears to my eyes. I bit my lip, unable to speak because my chest felt tight. Back then, I was so hurt that I thought I had to let him go.

"I'm sorry," Krit said, his voice incredibly gentle.

Tears rolled down my cheeks. I wiped them away roughly with the back of my hand.

"Krit, do you know? It wasn't just that day. I've been overthinking all along. I never knew what was on your mind—how you saw me, what I was to you. It was never clear. But still, I stubbornly held on to hope. I've never met anyone as gentle with me as you are. You're so kind, do you know that? Since the first day we met, there hasn't been a single day I haven't thought about you. But I never knew if I was good enough, if I was hoping for too much. And then with Pete in the picture, it only made things worse. I never even imagined I could be this heartbroken."

I poured my heart out, but it still didn't feel like enough. I looked at Krit's face. I had to tell him everything in my heart, especially the most important thing. I had to confess to him, no matter the outcome.

"But do you believe that I'm willing to risk getting hurt even more? Now I realize I've never been clear with you either. I've just been sulking and overthinking on my own, without ever telling you once that I lo..."

My words were cut off as Krit leaned in and sealed my lips with his!

I froze, my heart pounding so hard it felt like it might explode. Krit was kissing me. Someone tell me this isn't a dream!

Krit didn't push further. He just pressed his lips against mine gently until he finally pulled away, and I let out a soft whisper.

"Krit..."

"I wanted to be the one to say it first," Krit said, holding my arms and looking deeply into my eyes. "I love you, Wayu."

His voice was steady, and the look in his eyes confirmed the sincerity of his words.

I could only stare at him in shock. This was what I had been waiting for all along—words from his mouth that expressed his feelings for me.

Krit loved me. He said he loved me.

Shock gave way to something else—a deep, overwhelming warmth that swelled in my chest, too much to hold back.

"I love you too, Krit," I said, leaning in to kiss his lips. There was no hesitation in me.

When I pulled back, I smiled at him through my tears. I didn't mean to cry, but the tears just fell on their own.

"Even if I said it after you, it doesn't mean my love is any less than yours."

Krit nodded. He wiped my tears before pulling me into a tight embrace.

"I'm sorry for making you wait so long."

I buried my face in his chest, hugging him back just as tightly. Krit's chest was warm, just like his actions. I pressed my cheek against him, listening to

the sound of his heartbeat. I never knew it could feel this good—the embrace and heartbeat of someone you love.

"I'm so happy," I said.

Krit touched my chin, tilting my face up to look at him.

"I'm happy too."

We smiled at each other. Krit gently brushed my cheek before leaning down to kiss my lips again.

I was more than willing, closing my eyes as his lips met mine. His lips were soft and warm, and my body felt light from his kiss. We kissed amidst the clutter of things around us, but believe me, it was incredibly sweet-gentle and intoxicating, like kissing on a cloud of beer foam.

We stayed there, cuddling. We didn't need to assemble the table and chairs. As long as Krit was with me, I didn't need anything else. I was so happy I didn't want to move, wanting to stay in his arms like this all day.

"I thought I'd never hear those words from you," I told him. "I was even preparing myself for heartbreak."

Krit kissed the top of my head.

"It took time. If I wasn't sure, I wouldn't have said it."

"You didn't fall for me the first time we met like I did with you, did you?"

"I did, but it was more like fondness and sympathy. I didn't think of it in that way."

"Cupid's aim is terrible. The arrow only hit me," I complained. "So when did you start liking me, Krit?"

"I don't know. It just happened. Maybe I fell for you without realizing it."

His answer made me so happy. I tilted my head up to kiss his cheek and smiled at him. Krit looked at me and said,

"Why are you smiling so sweetly?"

"Don't you like it?"

"I love it, but I'm starting to get possessive."

"Don't be too possessive. I smile at other people, but it's not the same as when I smile at you. Because I only love you."

Krit hummed in his throat. "Why are you so clingy?"

He wrapped his strong arms around me tightly, then leaned down to playfully nuzzle me like he was teasing a child. But coincidentally, I wasn't that small, and when I squirmed, it caused him to fall onto the floor with me.

Now I was lying on my back with Krit half on top of me, one elbow propped on the floor while his leg draped over mine. It was the perfect position for another kiss.

It seemed he felt the same. Krit leaned in and kissed me, a slow, lingering kiss—teasing, exploring, familiarizing itself with my lips, my tongue, my emotions. Gentle and intoxicating. It was so easy to lose myself in it. Who was to blame? Me, for being so easily swayed? Or him, for being such a damn good kisser? When I opened my eyes, I spoke.

"I love this. I'm so weak right now." I wasn't joking, my voice was as light as if I were floating.

"Are we still going out later?"

"What do you mean? Are you hungry?"

Krit smiled, his eyes sweet and glistening. "Not for food... for something else."

I almost crawled onto a plate and waited for him to eat me, but I wanted to tease him a little more. I reached out to touch his lips, lightly tracing them to provoke him.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean... this." He grabbed my hand and pinned it to the floor beside my head. Krit shifted his body over mine, pressing me down before biting my lip and then sealing it with a kiss.

This kiss wasn't gentle anymore. It was deep and invasive, both demanding and arousing. Krit didn't just kiss me; his palm gripped my arm tightly as he pressed our bodies together.

My emotions surged rapidly. I moaned while still being kissed, my hand clutching his shirt tightly. By the time he pulled away, I was almost out of breath.

"Krit..." I murmured, my voice weak and breathless. I half-opened my eyes to look at him.

"Yes, what is it?" He didn't just ask; he leaned down to nuzzle my neck, his nose brushing against my jawline and the hollow of my neck. Instead of answering, all I could give him was a soft, unsteady moan.

I was completely lost, his warm and mischievous lips kissing wherever they touched, sending waves of heat through me. Under my ear, down my neck, and across my chest—my cheeks burned, and my blood rushed so much that I was sure my face and body were completely red.

My body was so aroused that I had to respond. I slid my hands around his broad back, hugging him tightly, wanting to touch him too. I slipped my hands under his shirt, running them over his firm muscles from his back down to his waist, almost feeling the heat of his skin under my palms. I shivered slightly as he moved my collar aside, exposing more of my chest, and leaned down to suck on it while his fingers teased my nipple.

A wave of pleasure shot through me, spreading quickly. My emotions were spiraling out of control, and I knew I wouldn't be able to hold back much longer. I gently pushed his shoulder and asked,

"Krit... are you going to do it?"

"Can I? Do you want to, Wayu?"

It was the kind of question that deserved at least a moment's thought before answering. But I couldn't keep playing hard to get—not when just looking into his eyes was already undoing me. Because this was Krit, the person I had longed for, the one I wanted by my side, just as he was now. And in this moment, I was utterly undone. There was only one answer I could give. I nodded.

"Mhm."

Krit smiled, his eyes sparkling with satisfaction. I was so embarrassed but also annoyed. Krit scooped me up and carried me to the bedroom, laying me down gently on the freshly made bed with its clean, fragrant sheets.

"New bedsheets?" He asked.

"Yes, I just put them on this afternoon. They haven't been used yet."

"Then let's use them together now."

I was embarrassed by his words but let out a soft sound of agreement. Krit moved to stand by the bed and began to undress.

I took a deep breath as I took in his body in full view. His chest was firm, his abs well-defined, and his V-line carved from his waist down to his pubic bone. The size of that part of him was impressive, sending a jolt of heat through my lower abdomen.

He's really... something. He must know how good he looks to be showing off like this... and it's working.

Krit moved closer and began to undress me as well. I sat up to cooperate, and when my shirt came off, I said,

"Wait a second."

Krit looked at me, raising an eyebrow slightly as if wondering what I was going to do.

I moved to sit on the edge of the bed, holding his waist and looking up at him.

"I've imagined doing this with you before."

I leaned in, pressing a soft kiss to the skin just above his lower abdomen, near the thick hair that trailed downward. Then, I slowly kissed my way up, leaving a trail of kisses along his stomach. He tensed slightly when I gently nipped at his abs, and I licked my way up to his chest, circling his nipple before suck on it.

I knew he liked it because I heard a low groan rumble from his throat. Krit slid his hand to the back of my head, guiding me to do the same to his other nipple. I obliged willingly, eager to taste every part of him with my lips and tongue. My hands traveled down to his hips, feeling the firm muscles beneath my fingers. A tight ache pooled in my lower abdomen.

When I pulled away, I looked up at him and smiled, my lips still wet.

"You imagined something this explicit?" Krit asked, pretending to scold me, but I could tell he was very pleased. He cupped my cheek with one hand before smiling at the corner of his mouth. "Did you think you were the only one imagining things?"

My eyes widened. Krit pushed me back onto the bed and pulled off my pants from the feet. He looked over my naked body, his gaze filled with unbridled desire. I felt a wave of heat wash over me under his gaze.

"How did you imagine me?" I asked, my voice slightly unsteady, a mix of nervousness and curiosity laced in my tone.

"I'll show you."

What happened next went far beyond anything I had imagined. It felt like he was devouring me. His hands roamed my body, mapping every inch of me with his lips and tongue. My nipples were wet and swollen, and red marks dotted my stomach and thighs. Faint bite marks lingered on my shoulder and the curve of my buttocks, sending shudders through me whenever he touched them. His fingers teased, and his tongue traced even the sensitive crevice between my cheeks.

By now, I had no control over myself. I moaned and begged him to enter me. Krit moved away to tear open a condom wrapper, his fingers slick with lube moving at my entrance, which was now slightly stretched and softened.

I lay on my stomach, my eyes closed and lips pressed tightly together as he pushed in, trying to relax, but it still hurt from the size stretching me to the limit. It wasn't easy. He moved several times before he was fully inside.

"Krit... ah, go easy," I said in a weak voice.

He was gentle at first but soon became more intense. He thrust in and out of me, his large hand gripping my waist, controlling my movements as he pushed into me. With each thrust, my sanity almost slipped away, and I moaned his name.

"Krit... ahhh..."

I knew I wouldn't last much longer. But since it felt so good, I couldn't hold back. My body moved with his rhythm, my face burning. In a few more thrusts, I was sure I'd come.

But then Krit pulled out, the sudden friction making me cry out loudly.

"Ah...!"

I collapsed and buried my face into the bed, my body trembling with pent-up emotions. In my heart, I was begging him to continue, but it was too overwhelming to speak.

Krit flipped me onto my back, spreading my legs and moving between them. The sight was so arousing that I had to close my eyes and turn my head away, but Krit grabbed my chin with a firm hand and forced me to look at him.

"Look at me."

His words were polite, but his actions were raw and unrestrained, fully exposing his deepest desires. He slid his hands under my knees, pressing my thighs almost to my chest, and focused his strength at my entrance. He looked into my eyes and thrust in hard, pushing all the way in one go. I moaned loudly, warm droplets spilling onto my lower abdomen.

Krit moved with full force, my hips lifting to meet his thrusts. The sound of our bodies slapping together was loud and rapid. Soon, my entrance clenched tightly as I reached my peak. Krit kept thrusting in and out until I heard a deep groan from his throat as he released inside me.

We stayed cuddled together on the bed afterward, even as the sky outside the window darkened. Krit held me tightly against his chest, kissing my cheeks and lips repeatedly. I did the same, as if we were both satisfied yet still craving each other's touch.

"Krit, don't you want to go out to eat anymore?" I asked.

"And you? Don't you have to work?"

"I took the day off to organize the room."

"That's good."

"Then why are you smiling like that?" I was annoyed by his smile now. It was... flirtatious and scheming, like he was planning to have me again.

"Like what? Are you imagining things?" He dragged his words as if defending himself.

"Really? Well, that's good, because I'm not letting you have another round."

"Is that so?"

"Mhm."

"I don't believe you."

With that, he moved to nuzzle my chest and stomach. I squirmed because it tickled, until I had to beg him to stop because I couldn't take it anymore. We lay on our backs side by side under the blanket that covered us up to our waists. Krit turned to ask me,

"Can I stay over tonight?"

"If you do, I won't finish organizing the room," I teased, because I'd never seen him plead like this, and it was adorable.

"I won't be a bother. How about this? I'll take care of the packing myself. You just sit on the bed and point to where you want me to put things."

I laughed. "You'd go that far?"

"I'd do anything. Just tell me."

Krit leaned in to press a kiss to my forehead before lying back down beside me. We talked about ordering food to the room instead of eating out. Krit suggested getting some kitchenware so we could cook together whenever he came over.

"You're planning to come here often, huh?" I said, pretending not to believe him.

"That depends on whether the room's owner allows it."

"That depends on what role you're coming in as," I said half-jokingly, though my heart pounded in my chest. It was a risky thing to say.

"What else could it be? It has to be as your boyfriend," he said, tapping my nose. "This is your police boyfriend."

He lifted a finger and tapped his chest. "And this... is the cutest top host in the country."

"Krit, you're exaggerating," I pretended to complain, pushing him away, though I was actually blushing and thrilled.

He said I was his boyfriend. Oh my... I wanted to shout it to the world.

Krit pulled me into his arms again.

"Tonight, I'll hold you all night so you can sleep well. Okay?"

"Don't complain if your arm goes numb, and don't let go," I said, snuggling into his chest. His arms were so warm, filled with a sense of stability and security. I wanted to stay like this with him forever, no matter what it cost.

My beloved Krit, the one who holds all my love in his heart. I believe he's worth it. I smiled to myself without him seeing, completely confident that I would sleep well tonight.

Because whether in dreams or reality, he's mine.

Chapter 11: The More Secret, the More Allure

What time is it...?

I groggily opened my eyes. The unfamiliar surroundings and the soft yellow light from the bedside lamp on the other side reminded me that this wasn't my usual bedroom but the condo I had just moved into.

"You're awake?"

A deep voice beside me made me turn to look.

"Krit," I smiled, still drowsy.

He was sitting against the headboard next to me, seemingly playing on his phone. It felt surreal to see him sitting here, on the same bed as me. It was a dream I never dared to dream, yet it had come true. I moved closer and slid my hand around his waist.

"Why are you up, Krit? What time is it?"

"5:30 a.m."

"Go back to sleep," I mumbled. We had only fallen asleep around 3 a.m. Don't ask what we were doing until 3 or 4 in the morning—it definitely wasn't rock-paper-scissors.

"I have to leave soon."

His words snapped me awake. I stared at him in shock, only now noticing that Krit was already dressed. I rubbed my eyes and sat up, unsure how to feel. Just moments ago, I was so happy to wake up and see him beside me. But the moment he said he was leaving, a wave of sadness washed over me.

"I have work today. If I leave too late, I'll be late," Krit said. "I just wanted to let you know so you wouldn't think I just left without saying anything."

My heart melted when I heard that. I suddenly felt envious of myself...

Find yourself a man who truly cares about your feelings.

I pulled his hand to my lips and kissed it, then pressed it against my cheek.

"I don't want you to leave."

He gently shook my head.

"Having a police officer as a boyfriend means you have to get used to unpredictable schedules. Sometimes, if something comes up, I can't control my time. Even on holidays, I can't take long vacations like others."

Police Boyfriend 101, huh? I need to ace this subject. I nodded vigorously, my cheeks almost splitting from trying to hold back a smile.

"I understand, Krit. Don't worry."

"Go back to sleep. I'll head out on my own."

He kissed my cheek before getting up.

I moved to get up too.

"Let me walk you to the elevator. My boyfriend is too handsome to be left alone. Someone might snatch him on the way."

We walked out of the room together. When we reached the elevator, that sense of longing hit me again. I asked,

"When will I see you again?"

He paused to think.

"What time do you start work?"

"Around 9 p.m."

"Then how about I pick you up for dinner this evening and drop you off afterward?"

"Really?" My eyes lit up.

My overly excited expression made Krit chuckle.

"Why would I lie?"

He pinched my cheek.

"Get ready. I'll call when I'm here."

"See you this evening."

I waved goodbye, smiling at him.

After Krit left, I walked back to my room. Part of me wanted to give him my room keycard, but I was afraid it might be too forward. He said we were boyfriends, but shouldn't we wait a bit longer? It hadn't even been twenty-four hours yet. What if he changed his mind by the twenty-fifth hour? My heart would shatter into pieces.

I went back to bed and hugged the pillow Krit had used last night. His scent still lingered. It wasn't just his scent—his touch was etched in my heart too. I knew I was falling for him... hard. But what could I do? I didn't want to hold back. Loving someone so much that it hurt—this was what it felt like. I buried my face in the pillow and closed my eyes.

When I woke up again, it was already 3 p.m. I got up, showered, and got dressed. As I was putting on my clothes, I glanced at the mirror. Lately, I'd been strict with my diet and exercise, so my muscles were looking good. It wasn't obvious with clothes on, but if I took my shirt off, it was a different

story—especially my arms and abs. I smirked when I saw the kiss marks on my chest and lower abdomen that Krit had left.

After getting dressed, I decided to go downstairs to buy some drinks to stock the fridge. As I opened my door, I saw Thai coming out of his room at the same time.

"Hey, you disappeared all night," Thai greeted me first. "I was just about to knock on your door to check if you were still alive or if you'd been murdered and stuffed in a closet."

I smiled at him.

"I just woke up."

Thai walked over, crossing his arms and scanning my body. I was wearing an oversized T-shirt and long pants, and I'd used concealer to cover the red marks near my collar. So, I met his gaze calmly.

"How was last night? Is your chastity still intact?"

I burst out laughing.

"What the hell, Thai... What kind of question is that?"

"Well, answer me."

"Nothing happened. He just left this morning."

"Damn..."

Thai drawled, his eyes sparkling mischievously.

"What kind of 'furniture assembly' requires an overnight stay? More like assembling each other, huh? So, how was it? Was Officer Krit as delicious as you'd hoped?"

"What are you talking about? We just held hands and slept."

"Pfft! Like I'd believe that. I was going to ask you to grab some food, but I guess I don't need to anymore. You look so damn satisfied—you're probably still too full."

"I can't go anyway. My boyfriend's picking me up soon."

"Boyfriend?"

"Yeah, we're officially together now," I said, raising an eyebrow.

Thai grinned widely. He grabbed me in a headlock and ruffled my hair.

"You sly dog. What did you do to make him fall for you like that?"

"A few moves here and there," I laughed. "Easy now, you'll mess up my hair."

That evening, Krit picked me up right on time.

"I'll be down in a minute," I said cheerfully over the phone.

When I got to the lobby, I glanced through the glass wall toward the parking lot. Krit's car was parked outside, but he wasn't standing by it. He was waiting inside the car. I quickly checked my reflection in the mirror near the exit before stepping outside.

"Did you wait long, Krit?" I greeted him as I opened the car door, then widened my eyes when I saw a massive bouquet of roses on the passenger seat. It was so big it took up the entire seat and spilled over to the side.

"Is this... for someone?" I pointed at the bouquet.

"It's for you."

I smiled so wide my cheeks almost hurt from trying to contain my emotions. He's so romantic. I'd never received anything like this before. The bouquet

of roses was a deep red, and I pressed my nose against the velvety petals, feeling utterly overwhelmed.

"Thank you," I said, feeling shy but more delighted than anything. "I'll put these in my room first. I don't want to take them to work—someone might touch them."

Krit nodded with a smile. I leaned in to kiss his cheek before hauling the bouquet upstairs to my room.

After that, Krit drove us to a restaurant near Sathorn. It was a house tucked away in a small alley—almost like a hidden gem. The place was enclosed by high walls, and the only sign of its existence was a tiny nameplate, no bigger than a palm, affixed to the entrance.

Inside, the atmosphere was amazing. It was a mix of a restaurant and a bar, with live jazz music. There weren't many tables, and some corners were quite private.

"This place is so nice," I said as we sat down. "How did you find it? If it were me, I'd walk past it every day and never know it was a restaurant."

"I stumbled upon it two years ago and kept coming back. Usually after work, when I just want to relax, listen to some music, have a drink, and then head home."

"Do you come alone?" I asked, half-teasing but genuinely curious.

"Alone," he replied with a faint smile. "But now I have someone to come with."

I felt a wave of giddiness wash over me. My heart raced as I looked at him.

My boyfriend is so handsome—sharp nose, big expressive eyes, and full, kissable lips. His broad shoulders are perfect for leaning on. And right now, he's sitting here, looking straight into my eyes and smiling just for me.

"I love you, Krit."

He raised an eyebrow.

"Why the sudden confession?"

"I just felt like saying it."

"Hmm... That's good."

I could tell he was pleased. With our age gap, he probably saw me as the kind of kid who just speaks his mind without hesitation—unlike him, who thinks things through before saying anything.

"This morning, you had me enroll in 'Police Boyfriend Basics.' Now, how about we take a look at 'Host Boyfriend 101'?"

"Is this subject hard to pass?"

"Honestly, this should be easy because I'm already biased and want to keep him. But first, I need to know... are you really okay with my job, Krit?"

"I thought about it for a long time, but in the end, I just like Wayu too much. So, there's really no other answer. If I love you, I have to understand every part of your life. And it's not just about me understanding you—it has to go both ways."

"That's fair."

"What else?"

I bit my knuckle.

"I don't want you coming to the bar while I'm working... and I don't want you watching the live stream either."

"Why?"

"Even if you try to understand, I don't think you could handle actually seeing me hug other people. You might be fine if it's a woman, but

sometimes my customers are men. Things can slip in a drunken moment. I try to be careful—if they play tricks, I play them right back. But still, I don't want you to have to put up with that."

"Okay."

"And then there's the off-site work. I take on some jobs with customers I get along with—going out for meals or doing other activities. No sex, just hanging out as friends."

"What kind of activities?"

"Like playing sports or attending events, things like that."

"In that case, you have to tell me everything. No secrets between us. Deal?"

"Deal," I nodded. "Do you have anything else to add?"

"Why is today's lesson so intense?"

I laughed. "I want to be with you for a long time, Krit. I don't want to be just a temporary boyfriend for a few days. That's why I want to talk about everything upfront."

Krit ran his finger along the stem of his glass, his sharp eyes locked on me as if deep in thought. I took a sip of water, feeling slightly nervous and dying to know what was on his mind.

"I can't be open about our relationship. At least not right now," Krit said. "This isn't about you. The problem is on my side."

I was stunned. "What about in the future?"

"I don't know when."

"Thanks for being honest with me."

Later, I found out that his family had been in the police force since his dad's generation. Krit's dad was a high-ranking officer, and his family was well-off but very strict and traditional. I could tell Krit didn't like talking about his family much. He had once considered pursuing a different career, but the only path he was allowed to take was becoming a police officer.

"If all of this is meant to scare me, it's not working. I grew up with patience. Why wouldn't I be able to wait? It was so hard for me to get to this point with you. I won't give up, no matter how long I have to wait. I believe it'll be worth it."

Krit looked at me and smiled softly.

"You're so determined. It's adorable. You deserve a reward."

"What kind of reward?" I bit my lip, giving him a sweet yet challenging smile.

"Any kind."

His eyes were filled with sweetness and desire. Just looking at him made my stomach flutter.

I subtly nudged his leg under the table and whispered,

"I can't wait."

But in the end, nothing happened that night. He dropped me off at work and then drove home, while I spent the whole night with butterflies in my stomach, only to have to channel it into work instead. It was a little frustrating, but what could I do? We had different schedules and lived in separate places. If this kept up, I'd probably have to find a workaround—like some steamy late-night calls with him instead... I really can't take it.

Three days later, I handed him my room keycard when he came to my condo.

"A reward for the impressive bouquet of flowers," I said.

Krit almost carried me over his shoulder to the elevator. We spent the entire evening together until 4 a.m., as if the world were ending tomorrow and we had to make the most of every last minute.

When I woke up, I saw him lying on his side, watching me. Krit wasn't dressed yet; he was shirtless under the blanket that covered him up to his waist. This was what early birds got to see—such a treat. I smiled sleepily at him.

"You're up early today," Krit said, stroking my head.

"I wasn't drunk last night. Knowing I'd get to be with you, I didn't want to drink."

"Actually, I kind of like you when you're a little tipsy."

"What about when I'm sober?"

"Adorable."

"And when I'm drunk?"

"Tempting..."

"Krit!" I pushed his chest. "You're being cheeky."

"Oops!"

Krit exclaimed when his arm accidentally knocked over the necklace I had left on the pillow last night. We had been in a bit of a hurry, so I hadn't put it away.

"Krit, can you put that in the bedside table drawer for me?"

"Do you like jewelry? You have quite a collection," he said as he opened the drawer and found a jewelry box inside, along with several other small boxes from various brands.

"It's for styling. Most of the branded pieces were gifts from clients."

"That's kind of annoying to hear."

"What's with that?" I laughed as he placed the necklace inside and made a displeased face. "Don't get jealous of clients."

"Is there anything else you want? A condo, maybe?"

"Krit," I punched his arm lightly. "No, thanks."

"Sathorn or Phrom Phong? Pick one."

"Will you be waiting for me in bed every night when I get back? If so, even if it's just a wooden shack with cardboard walls under an overpass, I'd still be happy."

"That's practically homeless. Perfect if we adopt a stray dog too. At night, we can listen to the sound of motorbikes revving together."

We both laughed. I turned to Krit and wrapped my arms around him. He pulled me closer, his hand on my waist.

"I just want you. I want to be with you," I whispered.

After that, my life felt like a honeymoon. We spent more time together. Some days, Krit would come to see me after work. Other times, he'd drop me off at the bar, but he never parked right in front of the building. He'd stop a little before or after the entrance. Don't forget—we were keeping our relationship a secret.

But the more you try to suppress something, the more it builds up. The more you hide it, the more alluring it becomes. So, we ended up finding every possible opportunity to be intimate. Our sweet honeymoon started to feel like burning honey because it was so intense. I was crazy about him, but I wasn't sure who was crazier—me or him. Whenever we met, he'd look at me for just two minutes before pouncing.

But it wasn't just about sex. Some days, I'd wake up to the delicious smell of Krit's cooking. Other times, we'd hit the condo's gym together, grab a meal with Rose, or pick up Singto from my mom's house and take him to the beach—sometimes Bang Saen, sometimes a little farther. I'd strap Singto to Krit in a baby carrier, half-expecting him to complain, but he actually loved it. He looked like the hottest young dad ever—cool, effortless, and somehow even hotter than the Thai sun itself.

But often, we just wanted to spend time alone together. On the rare occasions our days off aligned, Krit would drive us out of the city—sometimes to the mountains, sometimes to the sea.

I was ridiculously happy—never thought I'd have days like these. I loved lying back on a beach chair with Krit by my side, rubbing sunscreen onto me. Sometimes, we'd swim in the hotel pool, and for fun, we'd secretly guess how many other gay guys were in there, excluding ourselves. I had a great body—or at least, that's what my boyfriend insisted. He said I was effortlessly hot, charming in a way I didn't even realize.

Sometimes, Krit would let me swim while he watched quietly from a chair, assessing how many men around the pool wanted to get in my pants. After I got out and went to shower, he'd follow me and finish me off in the bathroom.

Our love life was exciting, intense, and full of color, but it wasn't just that. We shared so much—our pasts, our struggles, the kind of future we wanted to build. He was my lover, my best friend, and the one person I could completely lean on.

But there was one thing that bothered me. I noticed Krit never got intimate with me while wearing his police uniform. Whenever he came to see me, he'd change into casual clothes first. If he was in a hurry and didn't have time to change, he'd go straight to the bedroom, hang up his uniform, and only then come to hug and kiss me.

I could tell he was avoiding it. Maybe he revered the uniform too much to let it be "tainted" in that way. Sigh... as if a police officer couldn't have sex. This really irked me. Honestly, I should cooperate and protect it (from

myself) like I should, but the thing is—I wasn't that well-behaved. Having a boyfriend in uniform but never getting to be with him in uniform felt like such a waste.

One day, after he got off work and was driving home, I called and pretended I was taking a shower but heard strange noises in my room—like someone had broken in. I told him I was too scared to come out. When Krit arrived, he found nothing, of course. What would there even be?

After checking that everything was normal, Krit went to the kitchen to grab a drink from the fridge. When he turned around, he saw me sitting on the dining table—not the chair. I was wearing a white robe that only reached my knees, slightly damp from the shower. Even my hair was still wet.

I opened the robe to show him my chest and asked if getting my nipples pierced would be sexy. As I spoke, I subtly spread my legs.

He saw right through me—it was all a setup. I had staged everything to lure him into my condo. Krit started to undress, but I grabbed his collar, pulled him in for a kiss, and pushed him onto the chair. Then I knelt between his legs.

"I promise I'll swallow every drop. Not a single drop will stain your uniform."

It was the most intense oral sex I'd ever given. He tangled his fingers in my hair, controlling me completely, as if angry that I had played this trick on him. I swallowed everything, but some still dripped down my chin, which I wiped away and licked clean as promised. But Krit still seemed unsatisfied.

He pulled me up, bent me over the table, lifted my robe above my waist, and ordered me to spread my legs like he was punishing me. My bare bottom was exposed to him. Krit spanked me hard and took me right there on the dining table—the one we had assembled together—until I was completely spent, my body rocking in rhythm with his until he finished again.

"Who's going to clean the table?" I asked weakly, still bent over, as I saw the liquid dripping onto the floor.

"Whoever made the mess cleans it."

Despite his words, he pulled me up and let me lean against him before shaking his head.

"Next time, let me change out of my uniform first. I don't really like this."

My waist was almost broken, and he still said he didn't like it? But it didn't matter. Mission accomplished. I gave him a sweet smile.

"Okay... I won't do it again."

Not only was my love life thriving, but my career was also soaring. By now, I had climbed to the same level as Sky. There was no point in our rivalry anymore—after all, I had become Mr. Fei's favorite too. It felt like walking on a soft carpet strewn with rose petals. Sure, there were thorns here and there, but it was still better than stumbling over jagged rocks.

Everything was going so smoothly it almost felt like a dream—until one day, during a routine phone call with Krit after I woke up, I felt like I had stepped on a thorn.

"Oh, Krit, this Saturday I have a customer in the afternoon. After that, I'll head straight to work. We'll see each other when I get back, okay?"

"Male or female customer?"

"Male. His name's Mind. He's around my age."

I paused for a moment before deciding to explain further, as we had agreed not to keep secrets.

"We've seen each other around campus before but never really knew each other since we were in different faculties. Then he came to the bar and saw me, so he became a customer."

"Where are you going?"

"He invited me to go bowling. After that, we'll probably grab something to eat before parting ways."

"I can't imagine why a guy his age would pay another guy to hang out unless he's hoping for something."

"Are you worried? Don't overthink it. We're going to public places, not private parties or anything like that. Trust me, okay?"

He made a sound of acknowledgment, but I could tell he wasn't exactly thrilled.

When Saturday came, I met Mind at the agreed-upon location.

"You look handsome today, darling," I said as I got into his car.

"You look handsome too—handsome in a pretty way, baby," he smiled sweetly. "Can you call me Mind today?"

That was unusual. Normally, he insisted on the "boyfriend experience," so I always called him "darling." But it wasn't a problem. I accommodated customer requests as they came.

"Sure, Mind," I replied.

Mind took me bowling as planned. I knew how to play, but I wasn't particularly good—whereas he was great at it. So, he taught me some tricks. Honestly, he probably just wanted an excuse to hug me a little, which I didn't mind since he wasn't pushy about it. If anything, it felt more like we were close friends with a hint of romance.

After bowling, we went to a restaurant in a mall for dinner. By the time we finished, four hours had passed, just as we had agreed. Mind and I walked out together.

"Can we take a quick walk over there?" He pointed to a small garden on the rooftop, a spot where you could enjoy a high view of the city.

"Sure."

When we got there, Mind asked,

"What do you think of me?"

I was a bit surprised by the question but answered honestly.

"You're cool, have a great body, fun to talk to, and can hold your liquor. It's always fun hanging out with you."

"Do you like me?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, if I asked you to be my boyfriend, would you say yes?" His ears turned red as soon as he finished speaking.

"Uh... do you like me?"

"Yeah. I've wanted to flirt with you since the first time we met." His face was starting to turn red too.

He was actually really cute and seemed sincere, but I wasn't in a position to accept. I hesitated, and Mind misinterpreted my silence.

He quickly added,

"I'm not asking you out because I know you don't sell yourself, so I came up with this plan instead. I really like you. If you're worried about me having issues with your job, we can leave that out. I've thought about it a lot. I'll accept everything about you."

"It's not that. I already have someone I like, and we're in a serious relationship."

He looked shocked for a moment but quickly seemed to understand. He sighed heavily and smiled awkwardly.

"Confessed and got rejected right away."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize. You didn't do anything wrong. It's my fault for not checking first."

"I still felt bad. I should be making my customers feel comfortable, not have them apologizing to me instead."

"Your work hours are over now, right? Can we just be friends talking?"

"We can be friends, but I can't be your "special someone." I want to be honest with my boyfriend—I don't want to do anything behind his back."

"Ugh, I'm so jealous of that guy," Mind joked, throwing a pretend punch. I laughed along with him.

After parting ways with Mind that night, I went to work at the bar as usual. I decided that once I got back to the condo, I would tell Krit about what had happened.

Around midnight, Mind showed up at the bar because he and his friends had reserved a table earlier. When Mind saw me, he walked over with his usual cheerful smile and said,

"Even though you broke my heart, we can still be drinking buddies, right?"

"Of course," I replied.

He smiled. "Then today, no boyfriend vibes. Let's just go with friend vibes."

"Okay, but let's make it around 2 a.m. I'm tied up with another table right now."

At 2 a.m., I went to sit at Mind's table with his group of friends. But I had only been sitting there for about half an hour when my phone started buzzing incessantly. I pulled it out and saw that it was Krit calling. I quickly

excused myself because he never called me during work hours unless it was urgent.

It turned out Krit was calling to check where I was since I had gone out with a stranger earlier and hadn't contacted him since.

"Everything's fine with the person you went out with today, right?" Krit asked.

I hesitated but decided to tell him the truth—that Mind had asked me to be his boyfriend today. Before I could even get to the part where I rejected him, Krit immediately interjected,

"He confessed his love just like that?!"

"Uh... Krit, don't get worked up. I already turned him down. I made it clear that I have a boyfriend and would never do anything behind his back. He understood and didn't push further."

"And where is that guy now? Is he at the bar?"

His voice was calm, but it sent chills down my spine.

"Krit, what are you planning? Asking like this makes me nervous."

"I'm not going to do anything to him. I'm just asking."

I glanced over at the table where Mind was sitting. I could've lied to Krit, but I didn't want to.

"He's here, but nothing's going on. I'll head back to the condo as soon as my shift ends."

"Then turn on the camera for me."

Oh no... I'm in trouble now. But I couldn't refuse, or Krit would overthink it. I hadn't done anything wrong, so there was nothing to be afraid of... right?

I decided to turn on the camera as he asked.

"Which one is he?"

"The guy in the dark gray shirt at that table—the one who looks a bit scruffy," I said, turning the phone in that direction. "Thai's sitting at the same table too, so don't worry. He's just out with friends like always—nothing special."

"Hmm."

"You're not going to do anything, right?"

"Are you afraid I'll go after him? I already said I won't," he said sternly. "Go back to work."

"Krit, trust me. I only love you. I'll hurry back, okay?"

After hanging up, I let out a relieved sigh, my heart pounding. I made up my mind right then—if Mind asked me to go out with him again, I'd refuse. But honestly, I doubt he'll ask anymore.

However, it turned out I had breathed a sigh of relief too soon.

When the bar closed, I walked outside and was about to call a motorcycle taxi. At that moment, Mind and his friend also walked out.

He had parked his car in the lot on the side. Suddenly, a car drove straight toward us. My eyes nearly popped out of their sockets when I realized it was Krit's car!

Krit screeched to a halt right in front of the parking lot entrance, not caring if he was blocking anyone. Mind and his friend turned to look. I quickly rushed over to Krit's car. He stepped out, grabbed my arm, and pushed me against the car.

He kissed me right there, in front of Mind and his friend, on the sidewalk with people walking by.

Krit kissed me deeply, making it clear that our relationship was anything but superficial. Even though I was shocked by his actions, I couldn't help but melt, my knees going weak. When he finished, Krit opened the car door, pushed me inside, then walked around to the driver's side and sped off.

It was the most nerve-wracking car ride of my life. Krit was completely silent. The only thing he said to me during the entire drive was, "We'll talk at home."

He didn't even raise his voice, but I stayed quiet, not daring to say a word.

When we got to the condo and stepped inside, closing the door behind us, before we could even make it to the living room sofa, Krit grabbed me and kissed me again. He crushed my lips and slid his tongue in, his thick hand moving down to grip my butt and squeeze. He kissed me so intensely that I could barely breathe, forcing me to tilt my head to escape. But Krit cupped my cheeks and turned my face back to his, kissing me again. My heart raced wildly at his fierce emotions.

"Krit... ah!"

I gasped as he kissed along my neck, then bit my shoulder. Instinctively, I pushed against his chest, but Krit shoved me back against the wall. He trailed kisses down my throat and over my chest, yanking my shirt open until the buttons popped off. His hands kneaded my chest—his grip was rough, almost painful, yet it sent my senses into overdrive.

"Krit... uh... wait," I let out a sound as he tugged my zipper down. We should've made it to the sofa first—this was too close to the door. I was afraid someone might hear us.

But Krit didn't listen. He spun me around, pressing me against the wall as he pulled my pants lower. He guided my hand to my own front, and a shiver ran through me when he nipped at my earlobe and whispered,

"Make it hard."

It already was.

But I did as he said, slowly stroking myself. Krit kissed my back, trailing down to my waist and hips. I shivered as he gently bit my buttock, his hand sliding between my thighs. A drop of clear liquid dripped onto my hand as Krit slid his finger into my tight entrance.

By this point, I had no resistance left. I let him do whatever he wanted to me. I trembled as Krit pushed inside, his hardness shocking in its intensity.

"Krit... uh..."

The sound of his hips slapping against mine was loud and rhythmic, so forceful that my body jerked. I braced one arm against the wall to keep my forehead from hitting it, while faint voices of people chatting outside near the elevator reached my ears. I wanted to stifle my moans but couldn't.

In the moment I released, tears streamed down the corners of my eyes. It was a pleasure that was both painful and satisfying.

Afterward, Krit gently guided me to the bathroom. He lifted me onto the counter, then walked over to turn on the faucet for the bathtub. I leaned against the mirror, watching him mix soap into the warm water. Once the tub was full, Krit came back to me.

"Let me bathe you," he said softly, his voice as gentle as the bubbles floating on the water's surface.

We soaked in the tub together. Krit ran his hands over my skin, washing me gently. His touch was so soft, so soothing, that I leaned into him, resting my head against his broad shoulder.

"I love you, Wayu," he kissed my cheek.

I closed my eyes and whispered back,

"I love you too, Krit."

Chapter 12: Possessive and Protective

Krit sat watching Wayu, who was sound asleep on the bed. His face was smooth and flawless, his long, thick eyelashes curled beautifully. Krit wanted to lean down and kiss those lips, still red and swollen from last night's rough kisses, but he didn't want to wake him.

His gaze drifted past the gaps in the blinds to the outside window. The warm morning sunlight filtered through the clouds, casting a glow on the building across the street. It was still too early to wake the man beside him.

Last night, he had been too rough with Wayu—at the door, in the bathtub, all the way to the bed. Wayu must be exhausted. Krit ran a hand through his hair and leaned his head against the headboard. He knew he had let his emotions take over, but he simply couldn't let the matter slide.

That guy... that Mind or whatever his name was. Krit could tell he was different from Wayu's other customers. Maybe because they had met back when Wayu was still in university. If Wayu's life hadn't taken such a turn, maybe the two of them would have fallen in love back then.

The thought scorched Krit's heart. He admitted he was jealous. Even though the idea of Wayu leaving him for the other man was nearly impossible—Wayu loved him deeply, and he knew that well—if he and Wayu had never met, things might have turned out differently.

"Damn it..." Krit muttered, annoyed at himself for overthinking things.

His movement stirred the person next to him. Wayu blinked his eyes open, still drowsy.

"Krit..." he murmured, reaching out to hug him.

Krit stroked his silky hair, his knuckles grazing Wayu's cheek lightly.

"Still sleepy?"

"I'm waking up," Wayu mumbled, shifting to rest his head on Krit's lap.

Krit looked down at him.

"You're not mad at me about last night?"

"No."

"Why not? I wasn't exactly being good to you."

"Well, you weren't," Wayu admitted, opening his eyes. "You really scared me."

"I'm sorry."

"But I'm not mad. In fact, I'm happy that you were there... that you openly acted like I was yours. Because... you've never done that before. Sometimes, I even wondered if you were proud to have me as your boyfriend, if you ever wanted to show me off. Because I want to show you off so badly. I want everyone to know that you're mine."

Wayu's blunt words made Krit smile. He was incredibly fond of him and understood that those feelings stemmed from a love so deep that it sometimes made Wayu insecure.

"You still think you're not good enough?"

Wayu was silent for a moment before he sat up, leaning against the headboard beside Krit.

"It's not that I think I'm not good enough... but think about it. Ever since you met me, you've been caught up in so much trouble. I feel guilty for dragging you into all this—family issues, problems I created, even what happened last night. It feels like I'm always making things difficult for you."

"No... That's not right. I chose to be part of your life from the start. I never regretted it, not even for a second. And as for last night, that wasn't your fault. I was the one who made a big deal out of it."

"Well, you were jealous," Wayu pointed out. "And when I get jealous, I'm just as bad."

Krit let out a weary smile. Wayu lowered his gaze, fidgeting with his hands in his lap.

"As for my job... I know people don't see it in a good light. Some even look down on it. But it allows me to stand on my own. I've never looked down on it myself. I've never made this much money before in my life. But one day, I'll leave it behind. This was never the path I wanted. I've always wanted to be an architect, and that hasn't changed."

Krit reached out, placing his hand over Wayu's. He gave the back of Wayu's hand a light pat, offering silent encouragement.

"You're strong, Wayu. No matter what path you choose, I know you'll succeed. I'll be here to support you until you do."

"Thank you."

"But if you ever want my support in other ways, not just encouragement, I'd be more than happy to help."

"What do you mean? Are you saying you want to take care of me?"

Krit pulled Wayu's hand to his lips and kissed it.

"Would that be so bad?"

"Just be my boyfriend. That's more than enough. But if there's ever something I do want from you, I'll let you know when the time comes."

"You could just tell me now."

"You're so stubborn."

"Hm? But..."

"I feel like you already make me so happy that I don't even know what else to ask for." Wayu pulled Krit's hand to his lips, returning the kiss. "Thank you for always being there for me when I'm at my weakest. And I'm sorry for always making you worry. I promise I'll try to make everything better—myself, and us. I'll make you proud of me one day."

"I'm already proud of you."

They exchanged smiles before Wayu added,

"But that doesn't mean you're off the hook for last night. I'm happy you got jealous, but you do know that I'm definitely going to get an earful from Mr. Fei, right? For not handling my personal matters properly and letting my boyfriend stir up a scene. Slamming on the car brakes so loud it hurt everyone's ears, then standing there kissing me in front of clients... when I'm supposed to be one of the top hosts. That's bad for business, you know."

"Uh..."

"You have to make it up to me," Wayu said with a mock-serious expression.

"How?"

"You have to take me to Chiang Mai. A full Northern Thai feast. And I want to stand on that black iron bridge. I forgot the name—the one over the Ping River. The night view there is beautiful; I saw pictures. And you have to stand on that bridge and shout that you love me."

"Do I have to do the last part?"

"Or I won't forgive you."

"Oof... headache." Krit pressed his fingers to his temples. "Okay... fine."

"Promise?" Wayu gave him a doubtful look. "You're only agreeing because you think we probably won't go, aren't you? Maybe even hoping we won't go at all."

"You really don't trust me, huh?" Krit wrapped his arms around Wayu and playfully swung him side to side. "So, what do you want for breakfast?"

"I want breakfast made by you. Three slices of toast, two fried eggs, crispy bacon, and coffee."

"You're ordering like I'm your personal chef." Krit pinched his cheek. "Alright, but after breakfast, shower and get dressed. You're coming out with me—I have something to do."

"Mm... okay. Where are we going?"

Krit's answer lay in a shopping mall on Sukhumvit Road. Wayu turned to him when he led him to a boutique of a French brand renowned for its jewelry and watches.

"Here? What are you buying?" Wayu asked.

"I'm buying something for you."

The other person froze. "What?"

"I want to give you something small to keep with you."

"That's not necessary, Krit. I already told you—I just want you. I don't want anything else from you."

"I don't feel great about it, though. Some random people are buying you things, but there's nothing from me."

Wayu started chuckling. "Why are you competing with my customers? Just by standing there, you're already number one in my heart."

"I just want you to have something from me to wear to work. That way, when you see it, you'll think of me."

"To remind me of you? Or to remind me that I already have a boyfriend?"

Krit smiled but didn't answer.

"You're sneaky," Wayu muttered, but he let Krit have his way without any more protest.

They walked inside together. Wayu was surprised when Krit started looking at earrings for him instead of rings or necklaces. But no matter what it was, as long as it was from Krit, it would be special to him.

"Do you like these?" Krit asked.

They were earrings shaped like a tiger's head in side profile. Its eyes were tiny gemstones, and its nose tip was made of black onyx.

"Why did you choose these?"

"I think you're kind of like a cat. But bigger. A black panther should work as a stand-in."

When the salesperson took them out for a closer look, Wayu held them up to his ear. They really did suit him, just as Krit said.

"They're nice." Wayu admired himself in the mirror. "How much are they?"

"This pair is two hundreds fourteen thousand baht," the salesperson said.

"They're made of yellow gold, tsavorite garnet, and onyx."

Wayu turned to Krit and shook his head.

"Krit, I can't wear two-hundred-thousand-baht earrings to work. They're easy to lose, and on some nights, if I dance or drink too much, what do I do then?"

"It means you should take good care of them."

"You mean the earrings or me?"

"If you lose the earrings, you can always buy new ones."

Wayu looked at Krit in silence. That sentence alone touched him deeply. He smiled before speaking.

"You win."

"You can check out other pairs too, in case you find one you like more."

They browsed together until they found a pair that especially caught Wayu's eye. The design struck a balance between elegance and edginess. A small, shimmering white gemstone sat at the center, framed in a square setting. Diagonal lines divided the frame—one half in sleek black lacquer, the other adorned with tiny, glistening white diamonds.

"They're white gold with brilliant-cut diamonds," the salesperson explained.

Wayu turned to Krit. "Diamonds, huh?"

"There's also lacquer. See that black part?" Krit said, then turned to the salesperson. "Please don't tell him the price."

"Krit..."

"Just try them on first. You can decide after."

Wayu did as Krit asked. Krit watched in satisfaction—Wayu's features were already striking, but now he looked even sexier.

"I think we should get these," Krit decided, handing his credit card to the salesperson.

"Krit, are they very expensive?"

Krit shook his head.

"Not really. Just about three hundred baht."

"That's not true," Wayu laughed.

When they walked out of the boutique, Krit turned to Wayu.

"Shall we go now?"

"Go where?"

"Chiang Mai.

"Huh...?"

"I already promised this morning, didn't I? Chiang Mai is practically around the corner—just a one-hour flight and we're there."

About three hours later, they were in a car driving out of Chiang Mai Airport toward the city, with Krit behind the wheel. Wayu gazed at the lush green mountains that stretched endlessly beyond the airport.

"I can't believe you actually brought me to Chiang Mai," Wayu said, rolling down the window and sticking his head out to breathe in the fresh air. "If I said I wanted you to shout your love for me at San Francisco Bay, would you take me there too?"

"That one's a bit harder to do in a day," Krit laughed. "Let's get something to eat first. After that, you can tell me where you want to go next. Then tonight, we'll go to that bridge you wanted to visit."

Krit drove along the road where the moat encircles Chiang Mai's ancient city in a square layout. Wayu started listing all the places he wanted to visit, until Krit shook his head and said he'd have to file for leave and Wayu would have to quit his job if they wanted to cover everything on that list.

They spent hours eating and sightseeing around Chiang Mai's most interesting spots. As the sun sank toward the horizon, they finally pulled over near the black iron bridge spanning the Ping River from east to west.

Wayu stepped onto the sturdy iron bridge. It was called Khua Lek-'khua' meaning bridge in the local dialect. It was a single-lane bridge for vehicles, with pedestrian walkways on both sides. Krit and Wayu strolled leisurely, the cool breeze carrying the scent of trees and grass from the riverbanks.

They stopped in the middle of the bridge, admiring the view. The lights along the towering metal framework flickered on, forming gentle, arching rectangles that stretched the length of the bridge.

"It's beautiful," Wayu murmured, leaning against the railing, gazing at the river that flowed endlessly into the distance. This same water would weave through cities and mountains until it reached the mouth of the Chao Phraya River.

Krit reached out to brush aside a stray lock of Wayu's hair that had fallen over his eyes in the wind. His fingertips traced the smooth curve of Wayu's forehead as he asked,

"You like it?"

Wayu nodded, his cheeks tinted with a soft pink, his bright eyes gleaming.

"Now it's time for the important part," Wayu said, turning to Krit.

"You're serious about this?"

"Mhm. It's no big deal—nobody here knows us." Wayu pointed to the far end of the bridge, near The Chiangmai Christian School. "I'll wait over there, and you go back to the bridge's entrance. Then, shout that you love me loud enough for me to hear."

Krit let out a low groan.

Wayu laughed at his suffering expression.

"And once I hear you, I'll run straight into your arms right here."

"...Alright. That's worth it."

Wayu chuckled before turning away. They walked in opposite directions, moving from the middle of the bridge toward their designated spots. Once Wayu reached his end, he stopped. The distance was just far enough that they could still see each other, but any words would be too faint to hear unless shouted.

Wayu stood facing the river, resting his elbows on the bridge railing, waiting to hear Krit's voice. Minutes passed with only the sound of the wind and the slow-moving traffic behind him, a common sight in this area, especially in the late afternoon and evening.

Just then, Wayu heard someone calling him nearby. When he turned, he saw a man on a motorcycle pulling up close. As soon as the man caught Wayu's gaze, he spoke.

"Hey there, handsome guy standing over here," the motorcyclist pointed to the other side of the bridge. "That guy over there says he loves you."

As soon as he finished speaking, the motorcyclist rode off with a smile.

Wayu turned at once and saw Krit handing money to a tuk-tuk driver while speaking and gesturing in his direction.

"Hey, kid!"

A woman's voice called out nearby. When Wayu turned, he saw a group of young women rolling down their car window and leaning out to speak to him in unison.

"Krit says he loves you, Wayu!"

Wayu's face turned red. He glanced back at Krit, who was watching him with a smile.

His heartbeat quickened. Step by step, he started walking toward Krit. Some cars passing by slowed down, their passengers calling out the same message—Krit loves him.

From walking, he began to run. The wind rushed past him as he ran toward Krit, who opened his arms when Wayu was almost there. And just before they embraced, Krit spoke.

"I love you, Wayu."

Wayu threw himself into Krit's arms, and Krit held him tight. They clung to each other on the bridge, surrounded by twinkling lights.

"I love you too, Krit," Wayu murmured. He hadn't expected Krit to do something like this—it was beyond anything he had imagined. He was deeply touched. This was the right man for him, and he would never let go of this embrace.

"Aren't you embarrassed at all, doing something like this?" Wayu mumbled into Krit's chest, his voice muffled by the tight hug.

They loosened their embrace, gazing into each other's eyes before laughing. The way they looked at each other was full of the emotions of two people deeply in love. Wayu pressed his knuckle between his brows to stop the tears from welling up.

"We still have some time. Want to take a walk over there?" Krit pointed toward the riverside walkway.

They strolled along the path, chatting, until they reached a set of stairs leading down to the riverbank. The view was strikingly beautiful from this angle—the bridge and city buildings flanking the river created a picturesque scene.

"I never thought you'd do something like this," Wayu said. "How much did you spend, by the way? The cars, the bicycles, the tuk-tuks, the motorcycles..."

"Everything I had," Krit replied.

Wayu chuckled, his eyes filled with gratitude.

"Thank you."

Krit reached out and gently ruffled Wayu's soft hair, enjoying the feel of the silky strands. His hand drifted to Wayu's ear for a brief touch before he pulled away.

Wayu touched his earring and spoke.

"At first, I thought you'd give me a ring or a necklace, but you got me earrings instead. But I love them."

"I had a reason for choosing these earrings," Krit explained. "First, earrings come in pairs. Even if they're separate, they still belong together. And second, I like their meaning—they symbolize courage. That suits you, Wayu."

"You know, when you gave me these earrings, I felt so happy. It made me love you so much that I don't even know where the feeling ends. Not because they're expensive, but because you told me that lost things can always be replaced but me... you wanted me to take care of myself, right?"

"Mhm... because there's only one Wayu."

"I wish I could give you something too. But you probably wouldn't accept it."

"You've already given me plenty."

"Then let's do this. I'll make you a grass ring."

Wayu moved to pluck a blade of wild grass growing by the riverbank and wove it into a ring. He slipped it onto Krit's ring finger.

"Take good care of it, okay?"

"I will," Krit said, bringing the ring to his lips for a kiss before smiling at him.

That night, they took the last flight back to Bangkok together. The plane soared into the sky, leaving behind the sparkling city lights and dark mountain silhouettes as part of a cherished memory. Wayu leaned against Krit's shoulder, and beneath the blanket, their fingers intertwined, hearts brimming with happiness.

When they arrived at the airport, Krit drove Wayu back to his condo. He stayed for hours, holding the warm, soft body adorned with nothing but those earrings, listening to the sweet, breathy moans that came with the deep sensations he gave.

"Drive safe, officer. And don't zone out thinking about your boyfriend too much," Wayu teased, rising on tiptoe to press a quick kiss to Krit's chin before leaving.

Krit arrived home just as dawn was breaking. As he stepped inside, he found his dad sitting at the dining table with a cup of coffee, while his mom brewed tea nearby. Police Major General Phithak and his wife had a habit of waking up at the crack of dawn.

"Krit, you're back," his mom greeted when she saw him. "You've been coming home at sunrise a lot lately. Where have you been staying?"

Phithak chuckled lightly.

"Why keep pestering him? If he wants to talk, he will. Krit, your mom's starting to suspect that you're not coming home much because you're staying over at some woman's place."

"Honey!" Krit's mom playfully smacked her husband's arm.

"You don't need to worry," Phithak continued. "A man should have some experience with women. He can handle himself. Right, Krit?"

Krit forced a weak smile, neither confirming nor denying anything as he quietly headed upstairs. But even as he climbed, he could still hear his

parents talking. His mom was worried he might get a girl pregnant before marriage, while his dad brushed it off, saying that if she got pregnant, it'd be great—they could finally have the wedding. It is not that big of a deal.

Once inside his bedroom, Krit let out a heavy sigh and tossed his car keys onto the table without a second thought. The happiness that had once warmed his heart had now drained away.

Krit stepped onto the marble balcony, its surface cool from the early morning air. He leaned against a pillar, eyes drifting toward the horizon. The sky was slowly brightening with the first light of dawn, the world vast and open—he could go anywhere, be as free as he pleased. And yet, he felt suffocated, trapped in a cage without walls.

The only time he truly felt free, the only place where he could completely be himself...

Was in that small space, where he was with Wayu.

Chapter 13: There Are No Secrets in This World

"Thank you so much, Rose. I really like the latest project you just showed me. The security system is great, the atmosphere looks nice, and the entrance is spacious. It's also not too far from here. What do you think, dear?"

Pimjit, Krit's mom, turned to ask her husband, who was sitting beside her. The three of them were looking at various housing projects in Bangkok on Rose's laptop—several of which were under her management.

"It's up to you," Police Major General Phithak replied flatly.

Pimjit smiled at Rose as she turned back to her.

"See, Like dad, like son, Rose."

"If you and uncle would like to visit any of the projects in person, just let me know. I'll take you there myself."

"I'd rather you go with Krit. I want him to help us choose."

"Uh..."

Rose hesitated and glanced over at Krit, silently asking for help.

Krit was standing on the front porch, intently spraying mist from a water bottle onto the small cacti arranged in several pots on the table outside. Normally, Krit never bothered with these plants; taking care of them was his mom's passion, not his.

When Krit pretended not to hear the conversation, Rose shut her laptop and smiled at Pimjit.

"I'll check with Krit later to see when he's free, Auntie. It'll probably take an entire day to tour the projects. But for now, I'll borrow him for a quick coffee run."

"Go ahead, Rose."

"Are you ready, Krit? Let's go."

After bidding farewell to Krit's parents, Rose stood up.

When Krit finally turned around, Rose secretly glared at him, making sure his parents did not see.

Krit smiled knowingly. Of course, he understood the real reason his parents had asked Rose to come over under the pretense of discussing real estate. They were not merely interested in purchasing property to keep; they wanted him and Rose to tour houses together, nudging them toward planning a future as a couple. And the house they were using as an excuse would no doubt end up being their marital home.

"You totally left me to fend for myself in there," Rose whispered as she pinched Krit's waist while they walked to the car.

"Ouch! Take it easy! Otherwise, my mom will think her future daughter-in-law is abusing her son."

"Krit, tell your parents straight up that we could never be a couple."

"I have told them so many times my mouth is about to split to my ears, but they refuse to listen. Lately, it has only gotten worse," Krit said, shaking his head.

"And why is that?" Rose said sarcastically. "Where do you go every day after leaving the house... Hmm? Definitely not to see me."

"Well... yeah."

"I'm jealous."

"If you're jealous, then hurry up and find someone too."

"I might. Maybe very soon."

"Really?" Krit turned to look at Rose.

"Yeah. I've been talking to someone for a while now. I think this might be the one. Honestly, she's the closest 'right' that I've ever found. She understands who I am."

"What's her name?"

"Praew."

"A woman?"

"Yeah."

"Bring her to meet me sometime." Krit smiled warmly. "I'd like to know her."

"I'll see. If she really is the one... maybe we take a trip together. You and Wayu, me and Praew."

"Wayu would be over the moon."

"How's he doing these days?"

"Getting more popular by the day. It's driving me crazy."

Rose laughed in satisfaction.

"That is what you get for dating someone so popular. You just have to deal with it. Why not ask him to quit the job so you will not have to worry about anyone trying to hit on your boyfriend?"

"Of course, I want him to quit, to go back to school and finish his degree. I want to take care of him too. But I know he won't agree. Wayu wants to stand on his own two feet."

"So instead, you secretly interfere with his job," Rose said with an amused shake of her head. "How many times have you sent people to book him for the entire night just so he would not have to entertain other customers?"

Krit had no defense. He really had done that. He had asked Rose to arrange for trustworthy friends to book Wayu for the night—without actually drinking—while Krit covered all the expenses.

"I just want him to have a break sometimes. Drinking alcohol every night isn't good for his health."

Rose glanced at Krit.

"You really love him, don't you?"

"Yeah. I want to be with him every day."

Krit's eyes softened at the thought of Wayu. His bond with him grew deeper every day. Wayu was talkative and thoughtful, sometimes a little stubborn. He seemed easily sulky but was willing to listen to reason. He clung to Krit like a cat, always wanting his hugs. But when he got angry, he burned like fire. Krit loved everything about him—so much so that Wayu had become his everyday happiness.

"And what about your parents?" Rose's voice lowered. "Will you tell them? Or will you keep it a secret forever?"

"Someday, I want them to meet him," Krit replied. "I'm still figuring out how to make it happen. Introducing him as my boyfriend is out of the question—it would be a disaster, the kind with no chance for a do—over. I will probably have to ease him in slowly, blending him into my friend group whenever I get the chance, so my parents become familiar with him first, as a junior or a friend of a friend."

"That sounds really difficult," Rose sighed. "Won't that take years?"

"I don't want it to take that long, but I have no choice. You know what my dad is like—how deeply ingrained his beliefs are. Changing his mindset to

accept something like this is nearly impossible. A year or two won't be enough. I want us to start on the right foot, not as enemies from the get-go. I'm hoping that if he gets to know Wayu first, he might grow fond of him."

"I feel bad for Wayu... and for you."

"Yeah," Krit's expression grew serious. "But this situation requires patience. I want to spend my life with him—not just have him be a passing moment. That's why I'm looking for the best possible way. I can't afford to take a reckless risk and fail. We have to take it step by step."

"You think he won't give up before then?"

"He won't. As long as I love him, Wayu won't give up."

"You two really have faith in each other." Rose reached out and gently squeezed Krit's hand. "I hope this time, your love goes well."

"Thanks. I'm hoping for that too."

"So, are you seeing him tonight? Are you going to use our coffee trip as an excuse to disappear all night?" Rose squinted at him.

"I'd love to," Krit said with a sly smile. "I have not seen him in three days. But my mom asked me to run errands tonight, so I will have to wait. Any longer, and I will not be able to take it."

"Ugh, you're so lovesick," Rose pouted.

Even though that was his intention, it seemed that on the following day, Krit was so swamped with work that he barely had a moment to spare. He was so caught up with his tasks that he didn't even have time to check Wayu's messages.

"How's it going? Any new leads on Master Por?"

A firm hand landed on Krit's shoulder—Inspector Athip.

"Not yet, sir. We suspect he's hiding out with one of his former wives, but there's been no progress," Krit replied.

Krit was part of the Crime Prevention and Suppression Unit, which was currently engaged in a large-scale operation targeting call center scam networks across multiple provinces, working in collaboration with local police. Previously, Krit had been part of the raid team that busted a SIM box operation in Pathum Thani, successfully crippling a key component of the scam syndicate and seizing a significant amount of evidence—amounting to financial damages in the hundreds of millions of baht.

But that was only the beginning. The network spanned multiple provinces, and the investigation had now reached the key masterminds behind the operation. One of them was Master Por, a powerful businessman believed to be preparing to flee the country. The other was Pawarit, commonly known as Ice-C, the son of a prominent politician. Unlike Master Por, Ice-C was still freely moving about in society, showing no signs of concern. His reputation was notorious—cases of assault, forced drug use, and sexual misconduct surrounded him—yet he had managed to evade justice every single time.

"We're monitoring both escape routes," another officer from the team reported. "The airport and the Aranyaprathet border. The lieutenant has already coordinated with immigration."

"Don't let Master Por slip through. As for Ice-C, it's just a matter of waiting for him to slip up," Inspector Athip said firmly.

This was a complex case, spanning multiple jurisdictions and involving influential figures. It required meticulous planning. Krit was so consumed with work that it was nearly 2 p.m. by the time he finally got a chance to step away.

Krit headed downstairs to the break room, where a beverage station and equipment for brewing tea and coffee were set up. Leaning against the counter as he waited for the water in the coffee pot to boil, he pulled out his phone.

Wayu had messaged him since before noon. He would never call Krit during work hours, knowing it might interrupt him while he was on duty or out in the field.

Krit called Wayu.

"Krit!" Wayu greeted him cheerfully.

"It's not even 2 p.m. yet. Why are you up so early?"

"I'm heading out soon, so I woke up early."

"Work? Which customer?" Krit frowned. He still wasn't too thrilled whenever Wayu took on side jobs.

"It's nothing like that. I'm going out with Waii to do some shopping."

"Oh... Have fun, then."

"I miss you, Krit. Is work keeping you busy?"

"Yeah. No idea why it's been this hectic all week."

"I haven't seen you in four days... I'm so lonely," Wayu whined.

"If you're feeling lonely, just listen to some music. You've got eight songs in your playlist, after all."

"You mean the playlist I sent you back then, which basically gave away that I liked you?" Wayu laughed. "I made a playlist of eight songs at the time, with seven of them being love songs. Too bad the last one turned out to be a breakup song."

"I'd say they were all love songs. Heartbreak is still love, isn't it? Otherwise, why would the lyrics say that just thinking about those memories makes you happy?"

"I've listened to them so many times, I'm tired of them."

"I still listen to them."

The other end of the line went silent for a moment before Wayu spoke again, his voice softer and slightly trembling toward the end.

"Why do you keep making me fall for you even more?"

"Aww, don't get all sentimental on me. Don't cry now. Alright, I'll come see you in the next couple of days. I miss you like crazy too."

"Okay... See you soon, Krit. Muah."

The sound of a kiss coming from the phone made Krit smile. Wayu always had a way of teasing him and lifting his spirits. Talking to Wayu or even just exchanging messages had become a source of comfort and joy—an integral part of Krit's daily life.

After that, Krit went back upstairs to continue working. But before he could even sit down, Inspector Aship suddenly pushed open the office door and barked out an urgent order.

"We've located Bank! Move quickly—he just entered the warehouse."

This was another case under the team's jurisdiction. The suspect was part of a stolen vehicle trafficking ring, which resold stolen cars through social media platforms.

Krit set the coffee cup down on the table without taking a sip and hurried out with his team.

While Krit was out on duty, Police Major General Phithak sat in a meeting room with another operations team working on a case that Krit was not involved in. It was a meeting to report the progress of a money laundering case, in which the suspect was a foreign businessman who had been missing for almost two months.

"We obtained additional evidence from a surveillance camera, sir. It was recorded last month."

The CCTV footage was projected onto the screen. It was recorded from the sidewalk in an alley located in a nightlife district on Silom Road at around 4 a.m. People were still walking back and forth. Under the streetlights, the suspect wore a cap, seemingly to obscure his face, as he walked along the sidewalk with two other men.

"Is there a clearer shot of his face?" Phithak asked.

"Uh... there's another angle from a dashcam of a parked car in that area, sir."

"Play it."

The footage on the screen showed the opposite side of the street in the alley. The suspect was walking with two other men. From this angle, his face was much clearer.

Phithak froze, his eyes widening as he noticed something in the background where the suspect was walking past a car. Krit's car. It was parked right in front of a host bar named Moonlit. And what was even worse was that Krit was passionately kissing another young man.

Their body language clearly conveyed a mutual sexual desire. Then, Krit opened the car door, pushed the young man inside, and drove off.

Phithak stared at the image of his son in shock. The meeting room fell into a dead silence. No one even dared to breathe.

Krit arrived home in the evening. His shirt was stained with oil, and his face bore the fresh wounds of a struggle—injuries from arresting a suspect who had resisted.

Krit walked through the spacious living room and into the interior, where one side was a family lounge for relaxation.

"Why is it so quiet in here?"

Krit asked, puzzled, as he noticed his parents sitting together on the sofa without even turning on the TV.

He stepped into the room, passing by a sturdy, waist-high wooden cabinet pressed against the wall. Inside were various plaques commemorating different achievements. On top of the cabinet sat several framed photos, capturing moments from Krit's childhood to adulthood. Above them all, a large family portrait hung prominently on the wall.

But then, Krit hesitated. Something was off.

His mom sat beside his dad with a pale face, her hands tightly clasped together in her lap. His dad was staring at him with an expression that sent a strange sense of dread through Krit's chest.

"Did something happen?"

Before Krit could even finish his sentence, Phithak suddenly stood up, grabbed a stack of papers from the table, and hurled them at his face. Krit flinched in shock.

"What I should be asking is—what the hell is going on?! Why would you do something like this?!" Phithak roared.

"Honey, please calm down," Krit's mom pleaded, trembling, as she reached out to touch her husband's arm.

Krit bent down and picked up the scattered papers. His heart clenched. His palms turned ice-cold with shock.

It was a photo. A photo of him and Wayu—kissing. In the parking lot. On the day he had stormed into Wayu's workplace out of jealousy.

Krit's face drained of color. He slowly looked up at his dad. The look in Phithak's eyes shattered his heart into pieces. It was filled with disappointment. Disgust. Revulsion.

Never in his life had his dad looked at him like that before.

"Do you have an excuse? Are you going to deny that it's you?!" Phithak barked.

Krit glanced at the photo in his hand. There was no room for denial. Everything was clear. Krit forced the words out.

"That's me."

SMACK!

Phithak's heavy palm struck his son's face hard enough to make his head snap to the side. Blood welled up on Krit's lip from the impact.

"Krit!" his mom cried out, horrified. Her husband had never done anything like this to their son before. "Honey, please, don't do this."

"Didn't you hear what he just said?! This is nothing compared to what he deserves!"

Krit stood frozen. He didn't even raise a hand to wipe the blood from the corner of his lip, which had split from the force of his dad's slap.

"Please, don't hurt him," his mom pleaded desperately.

"And what about what he's done? Has he ever thought about who he's hurting? Or is his head filled with nothing but filth that decent people wouldn't even consider? Has he ever thought about how I felt when I saw those photos in the meeting room?! In front of a table full of subordinates?! Now the whole department is gossiping about how Krit is a..." Phithak's face twisted with disgust, struggling to even say the word. "a damn pervert!"

The way his dad spoke made Krit feel as if his chest had been crushed.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

"That's all you have to say?!" Phithak roared, his anger boiling over.

"Krit, tell your dad it was for work," his mom pleaded through trembling lips. "It was a misunderstanding! You were only there for work!"

"Stop! Don't you think I know exactly what cases Krit has been working on? Not a single one requires him to go sleep with male prostitutes!"

Krit listened, his jaw clenched tightly. He met his dad's gaze, knowing that what he was about to say would cut through his parents' hearts like a knife. But it was the truth. With a heavy heart, he forced the words out.

"That's not true, Dad. He's not a prostitute. He just works at a bar. It's an honest job. His dignity isn't any lower than mine or anyone else's. He's my partner. I love men. I'm gay."

Thud!

Krit stumbled backward, crashing into the cabinet as his dad's fist connected with his body. Framed pictures toppled over, shattering against the marble floor. Glass shards scattered everywhere.

His mom screamed and rushed to stop her husband from hitting him again. Blood dripped onto the floor from Krit's wounds.

Krit pushed himself up and met his dad's eyes again. His voice was steady, despite the agony tearing him apart inside.

"I take full responsibility for my actions, and I know I've disgraced you. It's my fault and mine alone. You can punish me however you want. But as for the fact that I'm attracted to the same sex, even if you beat me to death like you once said, it won't change the truth."

"What the hell do you mean by that?! Are you seriously planning to continue being a freak for the whole world to mock?!"

"And why does my life have to depend on other people's approval, Dad? Just because it's not the ideal marriage or family you or others envision, why does it have to be seen as abnormal and unacceptable? He's my

partner. We're not bothering or hurting anyone. So tell me, is it me who's unnatural, or is it the world?"

"Krit! Don't talk to your dad like that!" his mom cried, panicked.

"You ungrateful brat!"

Krit's dad lunged forward, while his mom desperately tried to hold him back, her face streaked with tears. Phithak's rage erupted in a way that had never been seen before in this household.

"Ahh!"

Krit's mom screamed as she lost her balance and fell, her hand landing on shards of broken glass. Blood pooled from her delicate palm. Both Krit and his dad rushed to her, but Phithak shoved Krit away forcefully and cradled his wife himself.

Phithak pointed at his son's face, his anger blazing.

"Do you even have a heart, Krit?! Look at your mom! Do you see her tears?! I've spent thirty years with her, and I've never made her suffer like this! Do you realize how terrible your actions are?! You've broken her heart! Shamed me! Disgraced our family name! You're the biggest disappointment of my life! You used to know right from wrong, to be responsible—but what have you become now?! I don't even know if you're still my son!"

Krit's mom sobbed as if her heart would shatter, while his dad seethed with rage over something he couldn't accept. The scene before Krit crushed his heart. It felt like he was destroying his own family, tearing it apart simply by being who he was.

"You need to stop," Phithak's voice was like a death sentence. "Think about your mom! If you keep this up, do you want her to watch me shoot you? Shoot that little whore? Or put a bullet in my own head?!"

Chapter 14: Only a Memory

At last, the Crime Suppression Division officers, working with local police, successfully raided and arrested Master Por. He was caught while trying to flee across the Aranyaprathet border into Cambodia. The case was now in the interrogation phase, where authorities were determining whether he would implicate anyone else.

Exhausted, Krit returned home. The past several days had drained him—physically from his responsibilities at work and emotionally from the turmoil weighing on his mind. The burden pressed down on him so heavily that he couldn't shake it off.

The atmosphere at home remained tense and oppressive. His dad hadn't spoken to him at all, while his mom was drowning in sorrow, tormented by the strained dad-son relationship. His dad refused to back down, seeing the situation as a disgrace—something utterly unforgivable.

Krit felt trapped. He had searched for a way forward, but every path was dark and led to a dead end. The chance to slowly bring Wayu into his family, as he had once planned, was slipping away. The future he had envisioned—one that he was willing to wait and fight for—now seemed to crumble before his eyes.

He could never cut ties with his parents—it wasn't something he could bring himself to do. He had been raised to be filial, to appreciate everything his family had given him. He knew his mom loved him deeply and would sacrifice anything for him. His dad, though not as outwardly gentle, had spent his life prioritizing Krit's well-being, ensuring he had the best of everything. Krit was their only son, the center of their world, carrying the full weight of their expectations.

But everyone's definition of "best" was different.

Krit ascended the stairs to his room. Just as he was about to open the door, he heard his parents' voices from their bedroom. He hesitated. They were arguing—about him.

Throughout their decades-long marriage, Krit could hardly recall them ever fighting. They had minor disagreements, but they were always resolved quickly with reasoned discussions. But now, both of them seemed to be drowning in misery.

Krit pressed his lips together, his heart aching. He was the one who had placed his parents in this emotional hell.

"Stop making excuses for him! I should be the one asking you—how did you raise him to become like this?!"

His dad's voice boomed, clear and angry. His mom, in contrast, was barely audible through her quiet sobs.

"I will not let him disgrace our family's honor. He must stop. If he continues down this shameful path, I will destroy both him and that prostitute he calls his lover!"

Krit stepped into his room and shut the door. He was exhausted, both physically and mentally. The world was vast, yet he felt trapped in an invisible cage, just as he had every day before. But now, the walls seemed to be closing in, suffocating him.

He walked over to the table in his dressing room and pulled open a drawer. Inside was a box where he kept valuables he only used on special occasions. Among the expensive watches lay a simple wildflower ring. It had dried to a brittle brown, yet it still held its shape.

Krit picked it up gently, pressing a soft kiss to it before slipping it onto his ring finger.

Not long after, Krit got into his car and drove off, not knowing where he was going. He just needed to be somewhere, anywhere, that could dull the pain, even if only for a moment.

A notification sounded from his phone, signaling a new message. A quick glance told him it was from Wayu.

'Krit, I miss you. You're still busy with work as always, right?'

For the past week, Krit had distanced himself from Wayu, telling him he was too swamped with work to talk or visit the condo. Wayu had tried to understand, just as he always did.

Another message followed.

'Take care of yourself, okay? Get plenty of rest.'

'I miss you so much, but I can wait. Just make sure you bring me a big bouquet of roses to make up for it.'

'I love you the most, Krit.'

He drove aimlessly through the evening rush-hour traffic. By the time he snapped out of his thoughts, he found himself beside a long stretch of iron fencing that ran parallel to the sidewalk. Beyond it lay a vast green park, its pristine lake reflecting the sky and the towering buildings around it.

It was the park where he had once comforted Wayu, on the day his heart had been crushed by family troubles.

Krit pulled into the parking lot and stepped onto the wide path circling the lake, which was flanked by a bike lane. Though many people were out exercising, the lake's vastness made the path feel open, leaving enough space for solitude.

Eventually, he reached the same bench where he had once sat with Wayu. The scenery remained just as peaceful and beautiful, surrounded by nature's quiet embrace. Yet, inside, Krit felt nothing but the weight of his troubles pressing down on him. His face was tense as he sat down, his gaze drifting over the still water, clear as glass.

Memories of that day with Wayu flooded his mind, vivid in every detail—the words, the way Wayu had carried himself. Krit could still hear the soft sobs

breaking through his sentences, still feel the warmth of Wayu's cheek against his skin when he had comforted him. The dampness of his tears clinging to thick, curled lashes. The light, familiar scent. The warmth of his body.

A small, wistful smile played on Krit's lips, but his eyes darkened with sorrow.

Happiness can be just as agonizing as sorrow when one can no longer possess it. Though they differ in meaning, both can weigh just as heavily on the heart.

Krit thought back to the moment they first met. That day, Wayu had been injured from an assault at the hotel. But what Krit saw went beyond just the physical wounds. Beneath the provocative clothing and alluring appearance, he saw a delicate young man, scarred in ways unseen.

Wayu had been like a lost child who had stumbled into a pit filled with traps. Krit had managed to catch his hand in time and pull him out of that abyss. He still remembered the emptiness in Wayu's eyes and the silent plea in every gesture, begging him not to let go. It was a plea Krit couldn't ignore. At the time, he hadn't even known that the owner of those beautiful, tear-laden eyes would later become the person he wanted to hold the most.

Wayu was his happiness, like a gentle breeze carrying love and warmth into Krit's heart. There were so many things about Wayu that captivated him. He loved that small yet resilient heart, fighting fiercely for itself and for those it loved. Sometimes, Krit couldn't help but wonder what star had aligned his fate so perfectly—to bring Wayu into his life and let him call someone so precious his own.

The ringing of a bicycle bell sounded from behind.

When Krit turned, he saw two young children pedaling past on their tricycles. He gave them a small smile, and the children waved at him before riding away. He then took out his phone and scrolled through the photos stored inside. There were pictures of him holding Wayu's little nephew against his chest, others of the three of them together. Every single photo

was filled with light, so vibrant and full of life that it seemed impossible for anyone in them to ever experience pain or sorrow.

Each photo was a time capsule of memories. Krit flipped through them. Most had been sent by Wayu, or sometimes, Wayu would snatch Krit's phone to capture moments himself. There were beautiful scenic shots from their trips together, pictures of them smiling at each other, making silly faces, or even candid shots that Wayu had secretly taken when Krit wasn't paying attention. When confronted, Wayu would always playfully insist he just couldn't help himself—Krit was simply too handsome. Wayu always smiled so brightly when taking pictures, though perhaps, it was because Krit was always nearby.

Then, Krit reached the photo he had taken in secret, the one where Wayu had no idea he was being watched. In it, Wayu stood on a black steel bridge, gazing out over the water, waiting for Krit to finally say those words of love. The sun was setting then, casting a golden glow over his face, the interplay of light and shadow making him breathtaking. A faint smile lingered on his lips. Just looking at the photo made Krit's heart swell with warmth.

But did their love still hold any meaning now? When it was beginning to bring Wayu more suffering than joy?

Krit asked himself, his heart heavy with pain. He knew that if he stubbornly held on to Wayu, everything would only spiral downward. His dad would stop at nothing to tear them apart, no matter what it took.

And if they tried to hold onto their love while staying apart—loving but never being together—how would that be any better for Wayu? Krit could only foresee his suffering, enduring a life of uncertainty with no clear future ahead.

Krit remained seated there for a long time, lost in thought, until the sky darkened and the park became enveloped in shadows. People were beginning to leave as closing time approached.

Finally, he stood up, exhaling a deep sigh. The city lights were so bright that the stars above had vanished from sight. He turned to glance at the bench one last time, his gaze now steady.

Back then, when Wayu had been so broken he was on the verge of shattering, Krit had held him close, protecting his fragile heart. But now... he was about to let it fall to the ground, abandoned, like something meaningless.

His jaw clenched so tightly that the muscle stood out sharply. He needed to end this, quickly. Wayu would be heartbroken now, but he would eventually move on. No matter how much it hurt, it was still better than being trapped in a hopeless situation with no future in sight.

That night, Krit drove down Silom Road, heading toward Wayu's workplace. It was 11 p.m. — Wayu would still be working.

Krit parked by the sidewalk, some distance from the entrance, and stared through the window at the brightly lit building. The host bar's name was prominently displayed above the entrance. By the staircase, a group of people stood chatting and smoking, their laughter drifting through the air.

Then, someone stepped out of the bar.

Krit narrowed his eyes slightly. He recognized the man immediately—it was Mind, the engineering student who had once confessed his feelings to Wayu and asked to be his boyfriend. Mind stood outside, engrossed in a phone call, unaware that someone was watching him.

For a brief moment, jealousy flared in Krit's chest. But then another emotion rose in its place—one that made him realize a painful truth.

If Mind was still pursuing Wayu, what did it matter? Compared to him, Mind was a far better option. Even if it wasn't Mind, but someone else entirely, Krit would still be the worst choice for Wayu.

Krit waited until Mind went back inside before pulling out his phone and dialing Wayu's number. He picked up almost immediately.

"Krit?" Wayu's voice was filled with excitement. "It's really you? I thought I was imagining things because I missed you so much."

"Can you come out for a bit?"

"Huh?" Wayu sounded confused. "You mean right now?"

"Yes. I'm out front, parked where I used to drop you off."

"Okay! I'll be right there."

Moments later, Krit saw Wayu step out. Tonight, he looked stunning. Tall and slender, his face held a captivating blend of masculinity and beauty—so effortlessly alluring, it made people want to draw closer. Krit felt a hollow ache in his chest as he watched him.

When Wayu spotted Krit's car, his face lit up with joy, and he hurried over.

"Krit, I missed you so much!"

The words came the moment he opened the car door. But before he could get inside, Krit extended a keycard toward him.

Wayu took the item and looked at it in confusion. It was the key card that granted access to his condo.

"What is this?"

"I'm giving it back because I won't be visiting anymore."

"What do you mean, Krit?"

"If I'm not going there again, there's no reason for me to keep it."

"I still don't understand."

Wayu moved to sit inside the car, his face filled with confusion and the need for an explanation.

Krit let out a deep sigh.

"I've disappeared for weeks like this, and you never once suspected something was wrong?" Krit turned to look directly at Wayu, his voice steady. "I want to break up. I want this to end here. I won't be taking care of you anymore. From now on, take care of yourself."

It took a moment for Wayu to fully process Krit's words.

"What is this, Krit? What happened that made you say this to me? Just a few days ago, we were fine."

"Exchanging a few messages isn't what I'd call 'fine.' And I'm tired of playing the role of the bar host's young lover. There are plenty of people in this world—it's not just me. Go find someone else."

Wayu's eyes widened. He stared at Krit in disbelief at what he had just heard.

"Krit... what are you saying?"

"Are you getting out of the car or not? I'm leaving."

"I won't!" Wayu's voice hardened. "Not unless you explain to me what the hell is going on. I won't get out until I understand."

"It's over between us. I want to end it here."

"Why?"

"Because I've had enough... I don't want this anymore. Why is that so hard for you to understand?"

"That's not true."

"Get a grip, Wayu," Krit said sharply. "Do you really think we're suited to be together? We had our happiness for a while—that should have been enough. I'm sorry if I gave you false hope, but this is as far as it goes."

"You're telling me you don't love me anymore, Krit?"

Krit remained silent. Why was Wayu so stubborn?

"Why aren't you answering?"

Wayu pressed, his voice shaking with emotion, yet he refused to back down.

"If it's true, then look me in the eye and say it!"

Krit clenched his jaw. He could lie to Wayu about a lot of things, but this—this was the one thing he couldn't say.

"Get out," Krit ordered, his voice firm.

When Wayu refused to budge, Krit stepped out of the car, walked around to Wayu's side, and opened the door.

"Get out," he repeated.

"No," Wayu locked eyes with him. "If you want me to leave, then clarify what you just said. Otherwise, you'll have to drag me out yourself."

Krit grabbed Wayu's arm and forcibly pulled him out of the car, despite Wayu struggling with all his strength. Krit swung him, making him lose his balance and crash into a trash bin by the sidewalk. Then, Krit quickly got back into the car and locked the doors.

"Krit!" Wayu scrambled to his feet and ran to the window, pressing his palms against the glass. "Open the door! Talk to me! Don't leave like this!"

Krit started the car. Wayu still refused to give up, chasing after the moving vehicle and pounding his fists against the window.

"Krit! No, no, no, don't do this!"

Krit stepped on the gas, accelerating until Wayu could no longer keep up. Wayu kept shouting his name over and over. Krit glanced at the side mirror and saw Wayu still running, still chasing after him. Pedestrians on the sidewalk turned to look as Wayu collided with people, stumbled, and fell—only to get back up and keep going. The sight made Krit's heart ache. He couldn't hold it in any longer. With a low growl, he slammed his fist against the steering wheel, again and again, like a man on the verge of breaking.

After that, Krit cut off all contact with Wayu. Even though Wayu kept sending messages throughout the night, Krit didn't leave any room for hesitation. His decision was final.

By the following afternoon, Krit received a call from Rose. He stepped outside to take the call, making sure no one could overhear.

"Krit, what the hell happened?" That was the first thing Rose said.

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about you and Wayu! He called me, saying you just suddenly broke up with him at the bar!"

"Yeah. We broke up for real."

"What happened? I don't get it. The last time we talked, you still seemed to love him so much. How did things change in just a few days?"

Krit let out a heavy sigh before explaining everything to Rose. She was silent for a long moment after hearing the whole story.

"Krit..." Her voice was soft. "Are you okay?"

"No."

"Do you want me to come see you?"

"Don't. I don't feel like talking to anyone right now."

"But are you sure this is the right way to handle it? Not telling Wayu the truth?"

"How could I?" Krit's voice was sharp, heavy with emotions teetering on the edge of explosion. "Tell him so he can wait? If Wayu knew the truth, he'd never let go, Rose. And then what? I can't take care of him, can't make him happy, but I'd still keep him by my side just to watch him suffer every single day? What kind of love is that?"

"I just... I just didn't want things to end like this," Rose's voice trembled.

"I didn't want it either," Krit admitted. "But it already has."

"So you're really just going to disappear from Wayu's life?"

"Yeah."

"If you think it's better for Wayu to believe you're just a heartless bastard, then tell me, does that make it better for you too?"

Not at all.

Krit didn't answer.

Being the one to say the words—to tell Wayu it was over, that he didn't want him anymore—was like stabbing himself with every sentence.

Behind the hardened facade he wore, Krit was falling apart.

He had tried to keep everything in place as best as he could under the circumstances. The things that mattered most—his dad, his mom, Wayu—Krit always placed himself last.

"Don't call me for a while, Rose," Krit said, ending the conversation. "I don't want to talk about this."

After hanging up, Krit walked back into the building. His face was tense, his emotions sinking deeper into a darkness that felt like it was consuming him. Krit shook his head and pressed his fingers against his temples.

This wasn't good for his work.

Krit forced himself to rein it in. He had to pull himself together. Fast.

A few hours later, Krit received orders from his superior to raid a mansion in the Min Buri district.

Following the arrest of Master Por earlier, Master Por confessed and provided additional information that tonight, Ice-C would be hosting a secret party at that very mansion. It was an exclusive event, inviting only VVIP guests—most of whom held high social status and were well-respected figures. Many were public personalities. Every guest, regardless of gender, would be dressed only in underwear. The party was filled with illegal activities, from drug use to the trafficking and coercion of individuals, allowing special guests to commit sexual assault.

Beyond gathering sufficient evidence to charge Ice-C with various crimes he had previously evaded, Master Por also revealed that Ice-C possessed a mobile phone containing critical data-evidence that could implicate him in human trafficking and fraud operations linked to call center scams.

As soon as the police raided the scene, chaos erupted among the partygoers. Just as Master Por had described, every person in attendance was indeed dressed only in their underwear.

"Freeze! Police! Don't move!"

Some scrambled to grab nearby objects to cover themselves, while others attempted to flee—only to be captured moments later. Among those detained were doctors, direct sales entrepreneurs, actors, record label owners, news anchors, and life coaches. They were all rounded up and made to sit together in the downstairs hall.

The mansion was vast, with numerous rooms, requiring officers to spread out for a thorough search. Krit and his team proceeded to check the upper floors, discovering three individuals hiding behind the sofa in the lounge.

As they were escorting those people downstairs, Krit suddenly heard a faint whimper coming from another section of the mansion.

Gripping his gun tightly, he cautiously approached the source of the sound. It came from another room connected to the lounge. The space was designed as a home theater, with a massive TV screen mounted on the wall and a large curved sofa set atop a carpet in the center.

In the dim light, Krit saw the figure of a young girl lying on the sofa. She wore a short, lacy slip that barely reached her thighs. As he stepped closer, he recognized her—one of the members of a newly debuted girl group, barely three months into their career. Bruises marked her skin, and fresh wounds marred her neck and chest.

Krit immediately reported that he had found an injured individual. He walked closer to scan the room to ensure no one else was hiding before turning his attention back to the girl.

She lay breathing weakly, her consciousness only half present. A syringe lay on the floor nearby, while the table was littered with drugs and used condoms. Krit clenched his jaw upon noticing the bloodstains on the girl's inner thighs. What had she been through? The depravity of these people was beyond comprehension—luring an underage girl into their sickening party to be used as their plaything.

"Miss, I'm a police officer," Krit spoke gently.

The girl's eyelids fluttered open, a faint sound bubbling in her throat as if she wanted to say something. Krit leaned in to listen.

But then, her hazy gaze widened in terror, looking past him.

A cold dread shot through Krit's spine. He whipped around, gun raised...

But he was too late.

Ice-C had been hiding inside a built-in closet. He kicked the door open and fired.

Krit pulled the trigger at the same moment.

Gunshots rang out in rapid succession.

A sharp impact struck Krit's neck, chest, and left arm.

Chapter 15: The Most Important Thing

Even now, I still can't bring myself to believe what Krit said.

He broke up with me, and it hurt like hell. No matter the reason—whether it made sense or was completely ridiculous—it still hurt. But the reason I couldn't accept it at all was that it clashed with everything I felt. I know people can fall out of love, but there should be some kind of warning, a sign that our relationship was falling apart. Not a sudden, clean cut—like sleeping peacefully and then waking up in shock to the sound of cats fighting, only to realize it was all just a dream.

'I won't be taking care of you anymore, Wayu. From now on, take care of yourself.'

Tell me, if he didn't care, why would he say something like that? I may not be the smartest person in the world. Sometimes, I do stupid things. But for this, let me be stupid another day.

Maybe it looks like I'm being stubborn—chasing after someone who dumped me. Dumped me for real. Left me standing there like an idiot, running after his car like a lunatic. I'm devastated. I've never begged anyone like this before. But I refuse to let things stay so unclear. Krit owes me a real explanation. Or, if he's found someone else, then just say it. But I want proof—who is he? Krit's a cop, isn't he? Bring me the evidence, and let's settle this properly.

"Wayu, are you okay?" Thai asked as we sat together in the dressing room.

"Like hell I am," I snapped back immediately.

"Damn, you're feisty today. If you're this pissed, why even come to work?"

"If I stay home alone, I'll just overthink. At least working keeps me from going crazy."

"Well, right now, your face looks like you're carrying the weight of the world. Try smiling a bit. I just saw Mind earlier. He'll probably call for you soon."

"Can you take my place instead?"

"Damn, everyone else is so protective of their regular customers, and here you are, just giving yours away. Why? I think Mind is cute, playful, a bit of a tease. Why don't you like him?"

"I have a boyfriend."

"But didn't he dum..."

He clamped his mouth shut just in time. Good thing, too, because if he had finished that sentence, I would've smacked him with the tissue box.

Seeing my dark glare, Thai quickly got up.

"Okay, I'll go put myself out there and let Mind decide. Shit, I'm not even the cutesy, flirtatious type like you. No idea if he'll even pick me."

Thai walked out, and I let out a deep sigh before collapsing face-down on the table, turning toward the wall. I wasn't talking to anyone. Not that anyone dared to approach me—I was in a foul mood. And now that the whole club knew I'd been dumped right on the side of the road, I was sure plenty of people were enjoying it. Even if they didn't know who Krit was, anyone who resented me must've been thrilled. I worked my way up to being the top of the club, but in the end, even that wasn't enough—he still didn't want me.

Whatever. I didn't care about them.

I pulled out my phone, sighing again when nothing changed. Krit still refused to talk to me. It was driving me crazy, so much so that I finally called Rose earlier this afternoon.

Turns out, even Rose had no clue about this. And they were best friends. She promised to ask Krit what was really going on, but even now, I hadn't heard anything from her.

So... was Krit really planning to leave me for good?

That thought alone was so painful it made me want to cry right there. Krit was the warmest, kindest person I'd ever met. Everything he did for me meant so much. I never realized love could bring so much hope and happiness until I met him. His tenderness, his embrace—strong and secure—his touch, his kisses, his soft voice, his smile when he looked at me... Krit was like a dream come to life.

How was I supposed to accept this?

That night, I worked on autopilot. My body moved, but my mind was somewhere else. Everything around me blurred into background noise—just images and sounds, stripped of any emotion. It was like watching a movie play out, except I was acting in it. Just another meaningless night.

Until Rose called.

It was around 2 a.m. I was so surprised that I immediately stood up and walked away from the music so I could hear her better.

"Wayu, listen to me carefully and try to stay calm," Rose's voice was shaking uncontrollably. "Krit was shot."

I dropped everything and ran.

On the way to the hospital, I learned that what happened to Krit had become a nationwide headline. My hands trembled as I scrolled through the news. The police had raided a mansion, and the suspect—a politician's son—was caught at an illegal private party filled with drugs and all sorts of crimes. The suspect had been shot and arrested in a room where drugs were being used, and sexual assault was taking place. A female idol had been lured there against her will, and a cop had been critically wounded while trying to save her.

I arrived at the hospital and rushed straight to the waiting area outside the operating room on the second floor. Rose was already there, looking deeply worried.

"Rose, where's Krit?"

I called out the moment I stepped off the stairs.

"Wayu," Rose stood up, "He's in surgery. We don't know anything yet."

Before I could even reach her, a man sitting nearby stood up as well. He fixed me with a piercing, furious glare.

"Why are you here?" His deep, authoritative voice cut through the air. "Get out. This is a hospital, not a brothel."

I flinched, staring at him in shock. Then, my eyes darted to Rose and in that moment, I knew. She didn't even have to say it. This was Krit's dad. Tall, imposing, with sharp, intense eyes—so much like Krit's, but lacking his warmth. Beside him sat an older woman, her refined posture and attire making it clear—this had to be Krit's mom.

"I... I'm not..."

"I don't care what you call yourself," Krit's dad cut me off. "I don't want someone like you near my son. Leave. Now."

I was too stunned to respond, just standing there, speechless. His anger only grew.

"Are you leaving on your own, or do I have to drag you out myself?"

He took a step toward me. Rose and Krit's mom hurried to intervene.

"Uncle, please..."

"Honey, don't!"

Krit's dad grabbed me by the collar and dragged me toward the stairs. Rose and Krit's mom screamed for him to stop, but he didn't care. Without hesitation, he hurled me down the stairs. I barely managed to grab the railing in time—if I hadn't, I would've tumbled all the way down.

"Honey, please, stop! We can't make a scene here. Krit is still in surgery!" Krit's mom pleaded.

"And whose fault is that?!" He pointed straight at me, his voice seething with rage. "If it weren't for that damn prostitute, Krit wouldn't have been distracted! He wouldn't have gotten himself shot!"

Krit's mom burst into tears. Rose immediately went to comfort her, then looked at me and subtly gestured for me to leave.

I took the hint and walked away, heading down to the hospital's main lobby, where rows of chairs lined the waiting area.

I waited anxiously right there. It was quite some time before Rose came down to see me.

"How is Krit?" I asked immediately.

"He's still in surgery," Rose replied.

"How much longer will it take?"

"No one knows."

"But Krit will be okay, right?"

"I hope so."

Rose's voice was barely above a whisper.

I clenched my hands together. Sitting here helplessly, waiting to hear whether the person I love would live or die, was pure agony. All I could do was pray for his safety, unable to do anything more.

"The man I just met... was that Krit's dad?"

"Mmm."

"Why did he talk to me like that?"

And then, I learned from Rose that Krit's dad had discovered the truth about us. It had come to light in the worst possible way—humiliating and devastating. He was furious, so much so that he struck Krit in front of his wife. He swore that even if he were to die, he would never accept this.

"So this is why Krit broke up with me, isn't it?"

My voice trembled, filled with both anger and pain. I was angry at everything—including Krit.

Why did he do this? Did he think I was that weak? Even if we couldn't be together, even if all I could do was love him from afar, I still wanted to choose to love him. His reasoning may have been more practical, more grounded in reality, but why didn't he ask me—just once—if I wanted to break up with him? If I wanted to move on and love someone else while he suffered alone? Just the thought of him watching me do that shattered my heart.

I was heartbroken that things had come to this. Even if his family refused to accept us, Krit shouldn't have had to bear it all alone.

Now I understood why, from the very first moment we met, I felt like we had something in common. What I saw in Krit's eyes that day was the same loneliness I carried within me. He grew up in a seemingly perfect family, yet he had to suppress and hide parts of himself to maintain that illusion. When the people who should care about your feelings don't, it feels as if you're completely alone in the world.

I buried my face in my hands and wept.

Hours later, the doctor finally came out and informed Krit's family that, although they had successfully removed the bullet, Krit remained in a coma. There was no telling when—or if—he would wake up.

I listened to Rose relay the news, feeling numb. My hands and feet turned ice-cold, while Krit's mom fainted on the spot in front of the doctor.

After that day, my world was never the same.

I visited Krit at the hospital every single day, barely eating or sleeping. I secretly asked the nurses or Rose about his condition, always careful to avoid running into his dad. He truly despised me. His words were brutal—every sentence laced with contempt. No matter how much I tried to steel myself against it, it still hurt.

If it had been anyone else, I would have fought back. I would have lashed out with words just as sharp, leaving no room for him to breathe. But this was Krit's dad. He was someone Krit loved. No matter how much he cursed me, I couldn't bring myself to hate him.

Time dragged on, from the first week into the second, with no sign of improvement. Krit remained unconscious, and my mental state deteriorated day by day. At night, I worked. During the day, I stayed at the hospital, watching over him from a distance, always avoiding his dad. If I did run into him and couldn't slip away in time, I would quickly bow and make myself scarce before he could explode. To him, I was probably like a ghost lingering at the edge of his vision—an unwelcome presence that refused to disappear.

I became so exhausted that I lost the will to work. Eventually, I started taking more days off until I had to step away from my job entirely. Drinking with customers at night and rushing to the hospital by day—it was too much for my body to handle.

Two full weeks passed, and the tension only grew heavier. Krit's parents, Rose, and I continued keeping vigil by his side, but he showed no signs of waking up. Every day, I saw the same sight—someone sitting beside his bed, their face etched with sorrow. Sometimes, that person was me.

Today, with his parents not yet at the hospital, I went to see Krit. I sat beside him in silence, watching his unmoving form.

His eyelids remained shut. His chest rose and fell faintly, a sign that he was still alive, yet he couldn't get up. He couldn't even open his eyes to look at me.

I had read somewhere that coma patients might regain consciousness more quickly if their loved ones engaged with them—through touch, conversation, or even playing familiar music. So I pulled out my phone and selected the playlist I had once shared with Krit.

Soft, melodic notes filled the air—a song both of us knew well. The familiar tune warmed my heart and made me think of all the moments we had shared.

"Krit, do you remember this song?" I whispered. "I spent so long choosing this one before I sent it to you."

I swallowed hard, my voice barely steady. "I miss your voice so much. Please... wake up and talk to me."

I held Krit's hand. His was larger than mine, still warm with life. My voice wavered as emotions surged within me.

"You promised you'd always be there for me. We still have so many things we wanted to do together. I even promised you I'd try to make things better for us. And one day, if I can, I'll go back, finish my degree, and become an architect. You have to be there to see that day."

I pressed my cheek against his hand. I wanted a future with him. I wanted us to be part of each other's lives—not just a memory.

"You once said that if I ever wanted to ask you for something, I should just say it. Well... I'm asking now. Wake up, Krit. Please. I won't ask for anything else."

Watching someone you love lie motionless, knowing there's nothing you can do, not even knowing if your hope will come true—it was a slow, agonizing destruction. No matter how strong you tried to be, at some point, you would break. And soon, I would witness that breaking right before my eyes.

One evening, as I arrived at the hospital like usual, I saw a male nurse pushing a wheelchair through the entrance. Krit's mom sat in it, looking frail, while his dad walked briskly alongside her.

I watched, puzzled. She looked weaker than ever, murmuring nonstop to herself. I had never seen her like this before. No matter how much grief she carried over the past days, she had always sat silently by Krit's bedside, her expression solemn. Even when her husband lashed out in frustration, she never reacted.

But now, she was sobbing uncontrollably, barely holding herself together.

"Does your pride matter more than your son's life? Answer me!" Her voice was loud enough that people turned to look.

I had never seen Krit's dad's expression like this before. His face was dark, his jaw clenched as he stared at his wife, who was wailing through her tears.

"Don't blame him for who he is! He's our son! If every good thing about him comes from you, then consider every flaw to have come from me." She beat her chest with her fists. "Don't blame him, blame me instead!"

The male nurse wheeled her past me, but I didn't follow. It didn't feel right to interfere at that moment. Instead, I went up to Krit's room. Not long after, Rose arrived at the hospital and went to check on his mom.

I stepped out to wait in the hall, which was the passage leading to Krit's room, until his dad and Rose arrived. When the nurse informed them that Krit was still unconscious, his dad pressed his lips together tightly and muttered,

"You're my own son, and yet... how much more disappointment must you bring me?"

In that moment, my patience truly snapped. Whether he said it out of stress or sorrow didn't matter—I stepped toward him without hesitation.

"Why would you say something like that?"

Krit's dad flinched, staring at me as if he couldn't believe I had the audacity to speak up. But I couldn't stop myself anymore.

"Wayu," Rose tried to pull me back by the arm.

"I won't stand here and listen to you talk about Krit like that—not even if you're his dad. He's done everything he can to keep the people around him from getting hurt, and after all that, you still call him a disappointment?"

Tears spilled down my cheeks. I wiped them away hastily and met his dad's eyes.

"I don't know if Krit still matters to you... but he matters to me."

The next day, I returned to the hospital. I ran into Rose, who had brought a fruit basket to visit Krit's mom. She was on a phone call with a client, holding the basket in one hand. When she saw me, she gestured for me to take it from her.

"Take this to auntie's room for me," she whispered before turning back to her conversation.

I hesitated for a moment, glancing at her, but she remained focused on her call. It was probably an important client or a pressing issue that needed solving.

I took the elevator to the upper floors, where Krit's mom was staying in a private hospital room. Rose had told me that Krit's mom had collapsed at home the other day, likely due to exhaustion—both physically and emotionally—from several consecutive days of insufficient rest.

When I reached the room, I hesitated for a moment before carefully pushing the door open just a little and peeking inside.

Krit's mom was asleep on the bed, an IV drip attached to her arm. I tiptoed into the room, making sure not to make any noise. After placing the fruit basket on the bedside table, I quietly stepped back.

"Dear..."

Her voice startled me. She had opened her eyes and was calling out.

"Uh... Are you asking for Rose? I'll go get her," I said quickly.

"No, I meant you."

I wasn't sure what to do, so I stepped closer to her bed. Seeing her up close, I could tell just how much Krit resembled his mom. She must have been a stunning woman in her youth. Though Krit's eyes were shaped more like his dad's—long and narrow—his were sharper and more intense. But his nose, lips, and overall features, he had inherited from his mom.

"How is Krit? Has he woken up yet?"

"Not yet," I answered.

She fell silent for a moment before asking in a quiet voice,

"What's your name?"

"Wayu," I replied.

"It means 'wind,'" she murmured. Then she looked at me and asked, "Do you love Krit?"

"Yes," I answered honestly. I could only pray that she wasn't like his dad—that she wouldn't ask me to stop loving him. Because I couldn't.

"Is he good to you?"

The question surprised me a little, but it also gave me a sense of relief.

"Krit is very good to me. He... he's gentle, though he doesn't always show it directly. He seems serious, but he's incredibly kind."

"That's just how he is."

Warmth spread through my chest. It was no surprise that Krit had grown into the person he was.

She asked me to adjust the bed so she could sit up more comfortably.

"Do you need anything else, Auntie?" I asked after helping her.

She looked at me, and then tears began streaming down her pale face.

"I just want Krit to wake up."

A sharp pain gripped my chest. Without thinking, I reached out and held her frail hand.

"I do too."

Her tears fell onto the back of my hand. I swallowed hard, forcing myself not to cry. She was here, fragile and vulnerable. If Krit couldn't be here to take care of her, then I would do it in his place.

"Don't lose hope, Auntie," I tried to steady my voice, keeping it from trembling. "We can't let ourselves fall into despair. Krit will be okay. He will come back to us. He's the most responsible person I've ever met. No matter how much pain or hardship he's in, if he knew we were sitting here, suffering and worrying about him like this, he wouldn't let it stay this way for long. Auntie, what religion do you follow?"

"I'm Christian."

I pulled a chair closer to the bed and sat down. Then, I reached out to hold her hand again.

"Then let's pray together. I'm Buddhist, but we can both pray for Krit to recover."

Wayu didn't know that at that moment, Police Major General Phithak was standing at the door, watching. His face was grim, full of turmoil.

This was the boy he could barely stand to look at. The boy who had tainted his son's reputation. Even though he now knew that Wayu hadn't been selling his body—that he had only worked at a host bar—the disgust in his heart came not from the profession but from the very nature of what Wayu was.

Deviant. Perverse.

Phithak clenched his jaw so tightly that the muscles stood out. The word cut deep into his own heart. He had spent his life rejecting this—had sworn never to accept people like this. Yet, it had happened in his own family.

He watched as Wayu sat beside his wife, caring for her as if she were his own elder.

Throughout Krit's hospitalization, Wayu had been here constantly—just like Rose, Krit's closest friend. Rose had devoted herself to visiting and looking after Krit, and Phithak had looked at her with admiration and affection. But when it came to Wayu, he had only ever met him with hatred and open disdain.

That night, Phithak went home alone. The house was quiet and empty. He climbed the grand staircase to the upper floor and stopped in front of Krit's room.

When he pushed open the door, everything inside remained as it had been on the last day Krit was home. But something new had been placed on the bed.

Stepping closer, he saw that they were baby keepsakes from the hospital—the ones they had received on the day they brought their newborn son home. Tiny mittens and socks, a small pillowcase with Krit's newborn

footprints stamped on it, a card wishing him a happy, healthy life, and a Polaroid photo of himself holding baby Krit in his arms while his wife stood beside him.

A memory surfaced—the day his wife had collapsed and been rushed to the hospital.

That evening, he had come home to find the light in Krit's room still on. When he entered, he saw his wife sitting on Krit's bed, surrounded by his childhood belongings.

When she saw him, she turned, her eyes red and swollen from crying.

'Look at this,' she had said, picking up the tiny pillowcase. 'Do you remember how happy we were the day he was born? We waited for this child for so long—we almost lost hope.'

Phithak had been stunned. He had immediately sensed that she wasn't in a stable state of mind.

'Krit is strong-willed and kind. He's always tried to make us proud.'

Tears streamed down her pale cheeks as she looked at him, her eyes filled with heartbreak. When she finally spoke, her words came in a rush—raw, angry, and choked with sobs.

'He grew up to be a good person—someone selfless, someone who takes care of us. He's as good as a person can be. So why can't you just see that? Why does it have to matter that he's gay? It's not hurting anyone! What do honor and reputation even mean if we lose him because of it?'

Pimjit had clutched the tiny pillowcase to her chest, sobbing so hard that she had fainted right in front of him.

Phithak let out a deep, weary sigh. He sat down on Krit's bed, in the same spot where his wife had sat that night. His eyes were hollow and dark.

What could be more important, more meaningful, than spending each day with the ones we love?

His stubbornness, his unwavering pride—it had done nothing but tear his family apart. He had thought he had lost his son because of what he was. But now, it seemed he was about to lose both of the most important people in his life.

The once-strong and dignified shoulders of Police Major General Phithak slumped.

Now, he finally understood what truly mattered in life. But it might already be too late—he wasn't sure if he'd ever get the chance to make things right.

...

...

Twenty-one days after Krit was shot, he finally woke from his coma.

Chapter 16: The Time to Listen to Love Songs

Finally, the period of torment for all of us came to an end when Krit regained consciousness.

I had never felt such overwhelming joy in my life. For the past three weeks, it had been as if I were trapped in a never-ending nightmare, uncertain whether I would ever escape or be condemned to suffer forever. But when I saw Krit, lying in his hospital bed, offering us a weak yet genuine smile, it was as if all the pain and fear of the past weeks had been wiped away.

The gloomy world I had been living in brightened once again, like the good old days when we were still in love and Krit hadn't broken up with me. Even though our relationship would undoubtedly remain a major issue for his family, nothing else mattered as much as the fact that we were both alive and could continue fighting for it together—whether we ultimately won or lost.

The day Krit woke up, we were all overjoyed. I jumped up and hugged Rose tightly, while his mom burst into tears—this time, tears of relief. I was so overjoyed that I didn't even realize I had followed his family into the room until I saw his dad staring at me with a sharp, piercing gaze. My whole body went rigid. My mind blanked, unsure whether to step back or stand my ground.

But then, to my surprise, Krit's dad turned away without scolding me or kicking me out of the room. Rose and I exchanged astonished glances. It was a miracle no one had expected to witness. Thanks to Krit's recovery, the war had been put on hold.

The doctor explained that while Krit was out of his coma, he would still need time to recover before returning to his normal life. Hearing that, I felt a wave of relief. I quietly slipped out of the room, wanting to give this moment entirely to Krit's family.

I waited until his parents left the room before seizing the opportunity to sneak in. At that moment, it was just Krit and me in the room. Finally, we were alone together.

I sat down beside Krit's bed, looking at him but unable to find my voice. I was too overwhelmed. He looked thinner, frailer than before, but his eyes still held that same warmth-steady, reassuring, just as I remembered.

Krit reached out and gently stroked my head. "I'm sorry."

Those were the first words he said to me after surviving death. I almost burst into tears but managed to hold them back.

"No," I shook my head. "You don't have to apologize to me. I understand why you did what you did, why you broke up with me. As long as you're safe, I'm just happy."

"Mom said you came to see me every day."

"Yes," I smiled at him. "Your mom is so kind and lovely, just like you. As for your dad... well, he's a bit strict. Actually, very strict. But it's okay. I understand."

"Why are you so good?"

"If I'm this good, you have to cherish me even more. Don't abandon me or break up with me again, okay? Because no matter what happens, I'll never let go of you."

Krit smiled softly. I took his hand and pressed it against my cheek.

"I'm so glad you're going to recover. When I heard you'd been shot, I was in shock. I don't even know how I made it to the hospital."

From the police raid and arrests that day, the criminals were now being prosecuted. It was a high-profile case that captured the nation's attention. Not only did they gather evidence to bring down the influential and famous

perpetrators, but they also helped many victims find justice from this vicious cycle.

Amid the public praise for the police force, Krit's bravery became a symbol of selfless sacrifice. When the gunman had emerged and aimed at him, Krit had made a split-second decision-not to dodge, but to fire back, because he knew that if he moved, the young woman lying on the sofa behind him would have taken the bullets instead.

"Do you know that almost the entire country was praying for your safety?" I told him. "By now, your desk must be overflowing with gifts and baskets. The parents of that idol even made offerings at a shrine. If you hadn't shielded their daughter, their family might have suffered an even greater loss."

"Really?"

"Krit, you're amazing. I've been watching the news every day, and everyone keeps talking about your bravery. But if I had a choice, I'd rather you be a little less amazing. Better yet, I wish you hadn't been shot at all. Not that I wanted that girl to get hurt, but... I just don't want anyone to have to suffer like this."

"Maybe it's because I had a lucky charm with me that I made it through."

"What lucky charm?"

Krit pointed to the table beside his hospital bed.

"Wayu, open that drawer and take out my phone for me."

I did as he said. Inside the drawer was Krit's phone and a wallet containing various cards. I took out his phone.

"Take off the case," Krit instructed.

I removed the phone case and was stunned by what I saw inside. Most people might keep a card or a banknote behind their phone case, but what Krit kept was neither of those things.

It was the grass ring I had made for him during our trip to Chiang Mai together.

Now dried and turned brown, in my eyes, it was the most beautiful and valuable ring. Perhaps because someone had treasured it so much.

"How long have you been keeping it like this?" I asked, my voice trembling.

"Since the moment I thought I had to let you go."

"You never stopped loving me, did you?"

"Never."

I looked up at him. Have you ever seen love in someone's eyes? The kind that makes you feel valued and cherished? It warms your heart and makes you want to love yourself and them even more.

I shifted closer to Krit and hugged him. Even though I had to be careful not to touch his wounds, it was still the warmest hug for both of us.

"You've lost weight. Have you not been eating well? Or not sleeping enough?"

Just as I was feeling emotional, I almost laughed out loud. He had been in a coma for three weeks and had lost a lot of weight, yet here he was, commenting on how thin I looked.

"I'll eat more at the next meal," I said with a smile.

After a while, when the nurse came in to check on Krit, I quietly stepped out and wandered to a fast-food place near the hospital for a quick meal. To my surprise, I actually enjoyed my burger. For days, I had forced myself to eat without ever tasting the food, without feeling hunger. It was only now

that I truly understood why people wished others good meals and restful sleep—it was a reflection of both physical and emotional well-being.

After eating, I returned to Krit's room. I gently pushed the door open, thinking he might be asleep, but I froze when I saw the broad back of Krit's dad standing by the bed.

"Don't worry about anything else. Focus on recovering before going back to work," Krit's dad said in a deep, serious voice, even when speaking to his son who was still in a hospital bed.

"As for that... I have only one son. No matter who you are, you will always be my son."

I slowly closed the door behind me, then stepped back, leaning against the wall. For the first time in a long while, the world didn't seem so cruel.

On the day Krit was discharged from the hospital, I lingered near a large pillar by the patient drop-off area, watching as he got into his family's car. I wanted to go up to him, to say goodbye properly, but I was afraid that if his dad saw me, it would ruin the moment. So I stayed where I was. This was enough. We would talk later. We had time—time to nurture and strengthen what we had.

But as everyone knows, the timing of my life often comes in strange ways. I had blended seamlessly with the pillar, but suddenly, my phone rang loudly in my pocket. It turned out that Krit's family couldn't find his phone and had called it to locate it.

Everyone turned to look at me. I had forgotten I had his phone with me. With the evidence in hand, I had no choice but to step out and return it to its owner.

I didn't dare make eye contact with Krit's dad, not even for a second. I walked straight over and handed the phone back to Krit, stiff as a robot. Even without looking, I could feel the intensity of his dad's gaze. But just as I turned to bow and leave, Krit's dad spoke up.

"Thank you... for taking care of Krit these past few weeks."

I looked up instinctively and locked eyes with Krit's dad.

Have you ever seen a face so stern, so devoid of a smile—every muscle tense with restraint—yet still forcing out those words? Words of gratitude for what I had done for his son.

My heart melted in that moment.

I quickly shook my head, my voice rushing out as I bowed.

"It's no trouble at all. I didn't mind. I was happy to do it. And... I'm sorry if I ever overstepped or did anything wrong. I won't do it again."

A smile appeared on Krit's and his mom's faces. His mom smiled warmly, while Krit looked like he was holding back a laugh. I wasn't in the mood to pout at him because I was too busy feeling grateful to his dad.

As the car drove away, I waved goodbye to Krit, who was looking out the window. My heart was so full that it felt like it might burst. I realized that things weren't as hopeless as I had feared. There was still a small glimmer of hope to hold onto.

Hope, even if it's as faint as the light from a matchstick, gives us the strength to face whatever challenges lie ahead. I believe that Krit and I will do our best to build a future together.

I took a deep breath and looked up at the sky. It felt more beautiful than ever, a deep, vibrant blue with wisps of clouds. But in reality, it might have been the same as any other day. What had changed was the way I saw the world.

I took out my Bluetooth earbuds and played the playlist I had made for Krit on my phone. A gentle breeze carried a coolness under the bright sunlight. I smiled and walked away, accompanied by the love song that had just begun.

Epilogue: Two Years Later

"Krit, how's your day going?"

I asked as I took the chance to slip out and call Krit in front of the classroom before the professor arrived.

"I just dropped Singto off at home. Now, I'm on my way to pick you up," he reported.

I smiled to myself. Today, Krit volunteered to pick Singto up from nursery since Waii had an exam, and I finished class late. So, he came to pick me up at the university so we could head back to the condo together.

"Thank you, Captain. With you taking care of the people like this, the country is sure to thrive!"

I teased him. After the incident where Krit was shot in the line of duty, he was later promoted to Police Captain. As for me, I finally returned to university to study in the Faculty of Architecture, just as I had planned. By the time I graduate and start working, Krit might already be a Police Inspector. Hmm... an inspector and an architect—sounds like a perfect match. Maybe I should start practicing calling him Inspector Krit from today.

"And what does the citizen have to offer as a token of appreciation?" He asked.

"Well... I could cook dinner for you? Or maybe give you a massage?"

"I've had your cooking before. I'll take the massage instead."

"Such a smart choice, huh? If you get here before my class ends, just park at the usual spot, okay? I'll come find you."

After hanging up, I returned to the classroom.

Over the past two years, a lot had happened for both Krit and me. I managed to save enough money to buy a house for my family—a small

home on a fifty-square-wah plot of land in the suburbs. It was my greatest pride. Every single baht came from my hard work during the year I spent working at the host bar. But it came at a cost—I started visiting the doctor more often for stomach ulcers, to the point where they warned me to cut back on alcohol.

But I kept drinking anyway. I pushed myself until I finally had enough money to buy the house, set aside funds for both my and Waii's education, and even opened a small coffee shop in one corner of the house for my mom and Waii to manage together. Since Waii had enrolled in a non-formal education program, she had the time to help run the business, and I fully supported her, stepping in whenever I could.

Even so, I still refused to quit working at the host bar. I had lived in poverty for as long as I could remember and never wanted to go back to that life. As long as I could still make money from this job, I was determined to push it to the limit—until I ended up being rushed to the hospital with a gastric hemorrhage.

Being a host was a fast way to make money, but it came at the cost of my body—like selling my soul to the devil, except I was auctioning off my organs piece by piece. First, my stomach. Then, my liver. And eventually, the rest would follow.

Krit completely lost it. He gave me an ultimatum—quit the job and work as an assistant manager at his mom's music school instead. And since I already had enough savings for my education, I should take this chance to return to my architecture studies like I had always wanted.

On top of that, Krit insisted that I move out of the condo I was staying in and live in a different condo he had bought as an investment. That way, I wouldn't have to worry about finding a place closer to the university, since my family home was too far out of town.

Everything made perfect sense—until the moment I had to move into the new condo. Krit called it a long-term investment, saying property values would rise over time. He said he was just letting me stay there for now. But if that were the case, why was the ownership under my name?

In the end, I accepted his kindness and support. Having gone through the ordeal of Krit being injured and falling into a coma, I had come to truly understand what it felt like to watch someone you love suffer. I didn't want him to spend his nights worrying about me—whether I was drinking too much, whether my body was breaking down from the way I was living.

And so, my life became that of an ordinary university student. I woke up early for classes, worked part-time at the music school, and well, ahem, had a ridiculously handsome boyfriend who picked me up from campus regularly.

That evening, after class ended, I left the room and headed downstairs. Krit was probably already waiting in the parking lot. As I stepped down the stairs in front of the building, someone called out to me.

"Wow!"

I turned to look. It was one of my juniors, a member of my project group. Since I had taken time off from school, all my classmates now were technically my juniors.

"Thanks a lot for stepping in earlier. I totally blanked on that zoning law," he said, handing me a lollipop. "Here, take this as a thank-you for now. I'll treat you to a meal next time!"

"Hey, no need! This is more than enough." I took the lollipop by the stick. He had just made a small mistake while presenting on the required distance between buildings and the main road according to the law.

"Alright, thanks again, Wayu!" He waved before heading off.

I slipped the lollipop into my back pocket and continued walking to the faculty's parking lot, where we had agreed to meet.

Krit was already there, leaning against the car while talking on the phone. He was still in his police uniform, having gone straight from work to pick up Singto and drop him off before coming here.

My heart pounded. He was tall, handsome, and had an undeniable presence. No matter which part of him I looked at, my pulse quickened. Dangerous. If we weren't already together, I'd do everything I could to win him over. But if he made the first move... I'd play hard to get—just a little—before giving in. Because honestly, there was no way I could resist him.

"Who are you here to pick up, Captain?" I called out as he put his phone away after ending the call.

"Just picking up a student and taking him home safely," Krit replied smoothly, opening the car door for me.

I thanked him and got in. Once he was seated inside as well, I turned to ask,

"So, do I have to give you that massage today?"

Krit's eyes gleamed mischievously, and my chest tightened with anticipation. I knew I had just provoked him, and I was definitely about to pay for it. But I just couldn't help myself.

We arrived at the condo around 9 p.m. My unit was on the 38th floor, offering a full, breathtaking view of the city skyline.

"Do you want to order food first, Krit?" I asked as we entered the room.

I walked past the hallway into the main area, which was divided into different sections—a workspace, a large sofa in the living room, and beyond that, my bedroom. On the opposite side, past the living area, was the dining table and a long kitchen counter against the wall. A large marble-topped kitchen island stood slightly apart, serving as a food preparation space.

I made my way to the fridge, grabbed a bottle of water, and took a sip. Since we had come back late, cooking didn't seem like an option tonight. I was about to open my food delivery app when I turned to ask Krit again—only to realize he hadn't answered me.

That was when he suddenly pressed up behind me.

"Put your hands on the wall. Now," he ordered.

"What..."

I didn't even finish my sentence before he grabbed my arms and placed them against the wall. Then, he kicked my ankles apart.

"Why are you frisking me? I don't have anything illegal on me," I protested.

"Are you sure?"

Krit moved in so close that I could feel his breath against my ear. His hands moved over my chest, arms, and torso. I just realized that getting searched by a cop could make my heart race like this—it was strangely thrilling.

Then, he slid his hands down to my waist, stepping in even closer, nearly embracing me. I shivered slightly as his warm, soft lips brushed against my ear before trailing slowly down my neck. That was my weak spot. What the hell was he doing? What kind of search is this, sending a shiver all the way to my fingertips? Would any other cop search a suspect like this?

His hands traveled lower, down to my hips...

I didn't want to get arrested, but... Hmm. Maybe just this once. Yeah... right there... I kind of liked it.

And then... he pulled a lollipop out of my pocket. Holding it up to my face, he let me get a good look at it.

I stared at it like it was an alien lollipop, mysteriously placed in my pocket without me noticing.

"Anything you want to say?" He asked.

"Uh..."

Oh, for fuck's sake.

It wasn't just a regular strawberry lollipop—I only noticed now that the wrapper had handwriting on it: 'Wayu,' along with a doodle of a smiling face with heart-shaped eyes.

Why the hell didn't that junior just give me a plain lollipop?!

I glanced up at Krit. He was the perfect man in every way, and I could hardly find anything to criticize—looks, personality, career, status. There was just one exception...

He was insanely jealous.

"What's this?" He asked.

"A... a lollipop."

"I can see that. What I want to know is how you got it. Who gave it to you? And why does it have this stupid smiley face with heart eyes?"

"It's from a junior. I helped him a little with his presentation, so he gave me this."

"Then why were you acting all sneaky about it?"

"Uh..."

His voice immediately became more serious.

"I don't mind if people flirt with you, but hiding things from me? That's not okay."

Not mind, my ass.

The way he had dragged me into a kiss in the middle of Silom Road just because he was jealous of Mind was still burned into my memory. That's

why I never brought up small, meaningless things that didn't even bother me—no need to give him a reason to get annoyed for nothing.

"So, does this mean people hit on you every single day?" He pointed a finger at me, demanding an answer.

"It's not like that!"

I mean... sometimes there was a two- or three-day gap.

"Do you think I'm some kind of celebrity, getting hit on twenty-four seven? I'm not that hot."

"You've been caught red-handed, and you're still going to deny it?"

"I just..."

CLICK

I froze as he locked a pair of handcuffs around my wrists. I lifted my hands to stare at them in shock.

"What the hell, Krit?!"

"Arresting a suspect who refuses to confess," he said smoothly.

"Come on, don't play like this. Unlock them," I pleaded.

Krit took a stepped back, crossed his arms, and spoke with a neutral expression.

"If you can satisfy me, I'll unlock them."

"What do you want me to do?"

He smirked, then leaned against the kitchen counter, issuing his command.

"Unbutton your shirt. All of it."

I stared at him.

We were now in the spacious room in the kitchen area, with him standing by the long counter while I was by the large kitchen island. Beyond that, there was a large window and a set of sofas where you could sit and look out at the city view outside.

"You're not going to do it?" He raised an eyebrow. "Then I won't unlock you."

Fine.

I reached for my shirt buttons. Meanwhile, Krit unwrapped the lollipop he had taken from me. It was the kind with a stick and a round strawberry-flavored candy on top. He tossed the wrapper into the trash, put the lollipop in his mouth, and watched me undo my buttons one by one, from the top to the very last one. My shirt hung open, exposing my chest and abs.

"This is all I can do," I said. "I can't take it off with these cuffs on."

"Then take off your pants."

Gosh, officer. Go big or go home, eh?

But judging by his expression, he wasn't backing down. So, I had no choice but to do as he said. It wasn't easy since my wrist was still handcuffed. I unzipped my pants and took them off, sliding them down to my feet.

Now, I was standing there, half-naked, with Krit watching me. He took the lollipop out of his mouth, his gaze sweeping slowly over my legs before settling on the middle of my body. The corner of his mouth curved up slightly before his eyes met mine again.

Our gazes locked. His eyes burned with clear, unfiltered desire. Heat rushed to my face, and my stomach clenched at just the way he looked at me.

Krit stepped closer, still holding the lollipop. My heart pounded as he pressed up against me, his palm sliding over my chest and lower-trailing past my navel, fingers brushing the thin trail of hair leading downward. A wave of tingling heat spread through my body.

I tilted my head back, parting my lips as a soft moan escaped.

Krit looked at me with satisfaction. He traced the moist red lollipop across my lips, and when I opened my mouth to take it in, he pulled it away and tossed it into the sink.

He captured my lips in a deep, lingering kiss, so intense that the taste of strawberry filled my senses. It lasted until we were nearly breathless, but neither of us wanted to stop.

When he finally pulled away, we both gasped for air. I licked my lips lightly, savoring the lingering sweetness. Krit's eyes darkened as he leaned in and kissed me again—this time rougher, more intense, igniting something deeper within me. Then, he knelt down, sliding his hands between my thighs and pressing soft kisses onto the sensitive skin. His thumb caressed my inner thigh, sending shivers through me as heat pooled at my core.

Krit trailed kisses upward, his lips brushing against the fine hairs on my skin. My toes curled, my body reacting instinctively to his touch. His hand moved to cup my backside, kneading the flesh before his fingers slipped into the narrow space between, pressing precisely where he knew I would react instantly.

"Krit..." I breathed out, my voice a mix of words and desperate moans.

Krit stood up and lifted me effortlessly, my legs instinctively wrapping around his waist. I wrapped my arms around his broad shoulders, my hands still bound in handcuffs. But he didn't carry me to the bedroom. He set me down on the kitchen counter and took me right there.

I didn't even register the cool marble against my skin. My entire body was burning, surrendering completely to him. I could only bite down on his muscular shoulder when he pushed into me.

He moved with an unrelenting rhythm, as if he had been holding back for far too long. I moaned, overwhelmed by the mix of pleasure and intensity, my hands unable to touch myself as he drove into me. The deep, rhythmic sound of skin meeting skin echoed through the kitchen, sweat dripping from his body onto my stomach. And finally, he thrust in deep one last time before releasing completely.

Afterward, we showered and ordered food, opting to eat at a different dining table because honestly, it was a little embarrassing to eat in the same place we had just messed up.

"This Sunday, let's go have dinner at my parents' place," Krit said.

"Alright," I nodded. "Should we buy a fish? Last time, your dad mentioned he wanted steamed fish with plums. And let's bring a coconut cake for your mom too."

Over the past two years, not only had my relationship with Krit grown deeper, but my relationship with his dad had also made some progress—though at a turtle's pace. In the beginning, Krit's dad could barely stand to be in the same room with me for more than fifteen minutes. But we both made an effort.

It wasn't easy to change someone's deeply ingrained beliefs, but I kept trying. I was fighting against his resistance while also cheering him on in my heart. Slowly, I had started to break the ice with him. We could have small conversations—nothing too smooth or easy like with Krit's mom, but still, it was something. I put my sincerity on full display. Krit's dad was an experienced man who had seen a lot in life. I believed he could see for himself what kind of person I was and whether my feelings for his son were genuine.

Krit and I had dinner at his family's house once a month.

Two years had passed, and this was all I had achieved—one family dinner per month. Did I ever feel discouraged? Look at my boyfriend. Handsome, sporty, kind, and insanely good in bed. What was there to be discouraged

about? I must have built temples or saved the nation in my past life to have landed Krit as my boyfriend.

After dinner, we lounged on the couch, watching a series together. I sprawled against Krit, feeling utterly content just being with him. Simple moments like these—just the two of us, relaxed and at ease—were all I ever wanted.

"Weren't you going to give me a massage?" Krit reminded me.

"Of course," I said, shifting away from leaning against Krit. He had taken care of me in so many ways, so even doing the little things for him was something I was more than happy to do.

Krit lay face down, and I started massaging his shoulders first, then moved to his back. He seemed to really enjoy it, letting out soft moans whenever I hit the right spots.

As I kneaded his muscles, I couldn't help but admire his body. Krit was ridiculously fit—broad shoulders, firm biceps, and a sculpted back that tapered down to a strong waist.

"You have an amazing body," I blurted out without thinking.

"You like it?" He turned his head slightly to look at me.

"Of course I do. And not just your body—I like everything about you."

Krit tilted his head more towards me. When I saw his smile, I immediately knew I had walked right into a trap. Krit propped himself up, grabbed my arm, and spoke in a smooth, low voice.

"Let me massage you now."

"Um... Just a regular massage, right?" I eyed him suspiciously.

"Yeah, of course. Why are you so paranoid? We just did it. Who would be in a rush to go again?"

"Okay, fine. A massage from you actually sounds nice."

So we switched places. I lay face down, and Krit started massaging me in return. His touch was firm but soothing. I closed my eyes, letting him work over my body with care.

Let me tell you something—never trust a cop's words too easily.

Nobody got to finish the series that night. It played in the background while other sounds took over. Krit's version of a "massage" was definitely not an official Thai massage technique. His hands were firm, and his "session" lasted a very, very long time. My entire body was rocked under his touch.

By the time we were done, it was nearly 3 a.m. I was beyond exhausted, completely drained of energy. Krit had to carry me to bed and gently tuck me under the blanket.

"Get some rest," he murmured, pressing a soft kiss on my forehead.

I was really annoyed, but I was too tired to hit him. Krit moved to lie beside me and loosely wrapped his arm around me from behind.

"You're really worn out, huh? Sorry... I just missed you. It's been five days."

"It's fine. I can handle it," I mumbled. "But next time, you don't have to save up five days' worth of energy and unleash it all in one night. Feel free to spread it out over the next day too."

He chuckled and kissed my cheek. I closed my eyes, already drifting off to sleep. Krit seemed to get drowsy as well, switching off the light before pulling me closer again.

"Oh, wait... damn, I just remembered I forgot to do laundry," I muttered in the darkness.

"I'll do it tomorrow."

"Thanks."

Two minutes passed, then I spoke again.

"I didn't set an alarm. I have a part-time job tomorrow. Can't wake up late."

"Okay, I'll set it for you." Krit groggily sat up, rubbed his eyes, and grabbed his phone to set the alarm before lying back down.

Not even thirty seconds later, I spoke again.

"Did we turn off the bathroom light?"

"Wayu, please go to sleep," Krit groaned.

I laughed, even though I was so drowsy my eyes could barely stay open. Krit turned me to face him and pulled me close, holding me snugly against his chest.

"If you say one more word, I'm going for another round," he warned, whispering against my ear.

I stifled my laughter and instead pressed a soft kiss to his lips. He kissed me back, hugging me even tighter.

Smiling to myself, I nestled against his warm chest and fell asleep in his embrace.